

## Aurin F. Hill Papers

1887-1930

8 boxes (6 linear ft.)

Call no.: MS 579



[About SCUA](#)

[SCUA home](#)

[Credo digital](#)

[Scope](#)

[Inventory](#)

[Admin info](#)

[Download](#)

[xml version](#)

[print version \(pdf\)](#)



[Read collection overview](#)

The self-styled "insane architect" Aurin F. Hill (b. 1853) was a free thinking carpenter and architect in Boston who waged a concerted campaign for his vision of social reform at the turn of the twentieth century. A Spiritualist, social radical, and union man, Hill carried the torch for issues ranging from the nationalization of railroads and corporations to civil rights and women's rights, and joined in opposition to vaccination, Comstockery and censorship, capital punishment, and lynching. A writing medium, married to the Spiritual evangelist Izetta Sears-Hill, he became President of the National Spiritual Alliance in 1915, a Spiritualist organization based in Lake Pleasant, Mass.

Esoteric, rambling, and often difficult to follow, the Hill papers provide profound insight into the eclectic mind of an important Boston Spiritualist and labor activist at the turn of the twentieth century. Whether written as a diary or scattered notes, a

scrapbook, essays, or letters to the editor, Hill's writings cover a wide range of topics, from spirit influence to labor law, from his confinements for insanity to police strikes, hypnotism, reincarnation, and housing. More than just a reflection of one man's psychology, the collection reveals much about broader social attitudes toward gender and race, sexuality, urban life, politics, and religion, and the collection is a particularly important resource for the history of the American Spiritualist movement between 1890 and 1920.

See similar SCUA collections:

Labor

Massachusetts (East)

Massachusetts (West)

Photographs

Religion

Spiritual change

## Background on Aurin F. Hill

Roaming the intellectual hinterlands at the turn of the twentieth century, Aurin F. Hill was a free thinker, a carpenter and labor activist, a building inspector, unemployed worker, a Spiritualist, and a self-styled "insane architect" of Boston. Born in Wakefield, N.H., in 1853, Hill landed in Boston in the mid-1880s and found employment as a laborer making improvements to the Charles River Basin, later operating as a draftsman, carpenter, and architect. Already inclined toward progressive or even radical views, he enlisted in the union movement with the Knights of Labor, and over the course of the next decade, he claims both to have helped organized Local 33 of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters of Joiners of America and to have led the campaign for an eight hour day as Secretary to a Committee of the Boston Central Labor Union.

In his activism as in his personal life, Hill stood out, his dreams more expansive than his position in the social order. Like many radicalized workingmen, he railed against class privilege and the various centers of social power, from the organized church to the police, politicians, capitalists, and industrialists, and he transformed his rage into an idiosyncratic form of action. The year 1890, he wrote, was a turning point. Thrust by the financial downturn into three years of unemployment, Hill concluded that "there was no God in the whole earth" and dedicated himself to the people of Boston. Starting with a campaign to bring a World's Fair to the city, he went on to carry the torch for issues large and small: the nationalization of railroads and corporations, civil rights, and women's rights, as well as opposition to vaccination, Comstockery and censorship, capital punishment, and lynching.

Although he worked with a variety of organizations, Hill waged his reformist campaigns largely through a series of letters to the editors of both the liberal and mainstream press. From a cramped hallway apartment at 13 Isabella Street -- described as "chair less and in cold weather cheerless" -- he dreamed of becoming known as a writer, even, as he wrote, "if I have to sleep in a smaller room and eat more bread and beans" (Old Maid, 1894). Taking as a motto the free thinker's phrase, "I am my own God until I find a better man," Hill also began to delve deeply into the most progressive religion of the day, Spiritualism, developing himself as a writing medium. Throughout the remainder of his life, he communed regularly with Indian spirits such as Red Jacket, White Flower, and Tecumseh, from whom he received counsel and comfort, and insight into the inner workings of the city and American society.

As the nation recovered from the depression of 1893, Hill landed employment with the city of Boston, though his precise title and position are difficult to confirm. Having tried to establish himself as an architect as early as 1889, he claimed association with the city Building Inspector's office and with the Bathing Department of the Board of Health. Even as he found financial stability, however, he remained zealous in pursuit of universal reform, zealous enough to earn the title (in his own mind, at least) of "the insane architect." Insanity was the operative word. Hill was confined to an asylum at least twice (1891 and 1901), winning release on both occasions through the intervention of his friend and fellow Spiritualist medium, Izzetta (Etta) Sears.



Aurin Hill and Etta Sears-Hill, ca.1928

Hill's experiences with the authorities did little to dissuade him, and during the 1890s, his radicalism may have increased. Having been imprisoned himself, he became keenly interested in the issues surrounding prisons and insane asylums, but he also took up radical positions on marriage, divorce, sexuality, social equality, race, and freedom of the press as well as more exotic ideas such as flat earth theory. Informed by Spiritualist and phrenological philosophy, his view of reform was holistically integrated, his observations on city life and social ideals intermingling. While visiting a jail in 1893, he wrote a passage that suggests his characteristic flow of thought:

"I was surprised to find the jail such a good one. There are some worse hospitals and jails in Massachusetts in 1893. The bed bugs are only the spirits of departed libertines. Two flies had sexual satisfaction on the dinner in front of me as I at[e] my dinner at Hotel Honey today..." (Red Jacket, 1893).

A dreamlike quality permeates Hill's writing about the urban environment, the lines between reality and imagination blurring on occasion. On an excursion in 1894, for example, Hill wrote:

"Woman by look and word tell me they love me, there appears to be a homogeneity of the love sense organ about us. Yesterday I went to Hingham by boat and coach. A young girl dressed in white threw glances of regard at me even when young men about her age was near her. She had freckles on her face, but she had clear eyes and a clean skin. Something comes and tells me she was the she God of flies as the Great Spirit of flies claims those people who have freckles on their faces as belonging to the Fly kingdom of animal existence on this earth. I walked along Chinese part of Harrison Avenue when I returned to Boston and saw a young child in a place of danger. I went to tell the child to get away from danger and I saw the child was mixed Chinese and some other people. I did not decide the other race mark but said the spirit of Confucius should guard the child from danger and the child started as if to leave the most dangerous spot. I did not speak aloud nor whisper to the child. I only thought and the child was changed to a spot of safety." (Spirit Combine, 1894).

Literal dreams were critical to Hill's life. Never shy about his own significance, he wrote that "Nations may remember me and wonder at my force. The pen is mightier than the word or sword. Dynamite is less severe in its work than mind." His dreams, however, were the true social dynamite: "A whore beset me in my dreams, though the sight of her secrets did not affect my mind nor body; for in my dream I smiled at her desire to show me her secrets without cost to me. Women have as good a right to ventilate their secrets as cats and dogs, horses or cattle. We may soon expect an order from some person that the secrets of dogs and cats may be enveloped in cotton or wood, or wool." (Spirit Combine, 1894).

Hill attained a measure of prominence in Spiritualist circles in the new century. His spiritual stock rose when he led opposition to an effort by the Commonwealth to license clairvoyants in 1905, and his marriage to his long-time friend and Spiritual lecturer, Etta Sears, brought him more connections. When the National Spiritual Alliance (TNSA) broke away from the New England Spiritualist Campmeeting Association in Lake Pleasant, Mass., in 1913, Hill became a leading voice. One of the organization's founders, Hill succeeded G. Taber Thompson as president of the TNSA, serving in that capacity for two years.

Hill's later life is somewhat harder to delineate. His passion for spirit communication clearly continued, and he and his wife continued to summer at Lake Pleasant. Etta remained active as a spiritual evangelist almost to the time of her death in 1928, and Hill continued to write spirit-influenced letters to public officials as late as 1930, remaining in the progressive camp until the end.

## Scope of collection

Esoteric, rambling, and often difficult to follow, the Hill papers provide profound insight into the eclectic mind of an important Boston Spiritualist and labor activist at the turn of the twentieth century. Whether written as a diary or scattered notes, a scrapbook, essays, or letters to the editor, Hill's writings cover a wide range of topics, from spirit influence to labor law, from his confinements for insanity to police strikes, hypnotism, reincarnation, and housing. More than just a reflection of one man's psychology, the collection reveals much about broader social attitudes toward gender and race, sexuality, urban life, politics, and religion, and the collection is a particularly important resource for the history of the American Spiritualist movement between 1890 and 1920.

Much of the Hill collection defies accurate description. An indefatigable diarist, essayist, and writer of letters, Hill's writing is dense and forms a free flowing stream of consciousness. Although a few essays are relatively coherent and tightly focused, the majority are far from it. The diaries do indeed include standard diary-like entries, but they may also incorporate essays, rants, and letters and they are often interspersed with prints, newspaper clippings, advertising cards, labels and wrappers, or other pieces of ephemera. Even the essays that bear formal titles ramble through a succession of topics and they too include letters, spirit communications, records of dreams and visions, and other items that may (or may not) bear an obvious connection to the putative topic.

The highlights of the collection include the extensive records of Hill's spirit communications and records of his dreams and visions (both is sleep and awake). There are, as well, two notebooks associated with the early years of the National Spiritual Alliance, recording transactions and events relating to that organization, along with several letters and notes stemming from Hill's activities as President.

# Inventory

---

Boston Central Labor Union: 8 hour day campaign

1899

Box 1

Boston Young Men's Christian Union: Membership card

1898 Nov. 15

Box 1

Correspondence

1898-1901

Box 1

Eddy, Mary Baker (notes)

ca.1912

Box 1

Ephemera (calling cards, flyers)

ca.1899-1901

Box 1

Genealogy of Aurin F. Hill

1901

Box 1

Hill, Aurin F.: Diaries

1892-1922

11 folders

Hill, Aurin F.: Diary

1874

Marbled Memo book

Box X

Hill, Aurin F.: Diary

1892

Marbled Memo book

Box 2

Hill, Aurin F.: Diary

1892 June

Marbled Memo book

Box 2

Hill, Aurin F.: Diary (with letters to the editor)

1892 Sept.-Oct.

Young America Tablet

Box X

Hill, Aurin F.: Diary: "Property of United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America Union 33 of Boston, Mass. Presented to Aurin F. Hill by Ways and Means Committee..."

1895

Memo book

Box 2

Hill, Aurin F.: Diary: "This is the Property of Aurin F. Hill, Supt. of the Board of Health, Bathing Department for the City of Boston..."

1897 Dec. 31-1898 Mar. 5

Memo book

Box 2

Hill, Aurin F.: Diary

1899

Memo book

Box 2

Hill, Aurin F.: Diary

1899 Mat

Memo book

Box 2

Hill, Aurin F.: Diary

1901

Loose leaf

Box 2  
Hill, Aurin F.: Diary: "Good thoughts"  
1902-1903  
Loose leaf

Box 2  
Hill, Aurin F.: Diary  
1916  
Steno notebook

Box 2  
Hill, Aurin F.: Diary: "History of myself"  
1920  
Loose leaf

Box 2  
Hill, Aurin F.: Diary  
1922  
Memo book

Box 2  
Hill, Aurin F.: Essays and writings  
1892-1922  
Hill, Aurin F.: Age of Judgment  
1895  
6 folders

Box 1  
Hill, Aurin F.: Bathing  
1898

Box X  
Blueflower's Book, presented at Worcester, Mass... witness: Little Girl  
1893 Oct.

Box 5  
Hill, Aurin F.: Causes of storms  
1899 Mar. 29-Apr. 13

Box 1  
In "Dragon Exercise book," bound in red cloth. Book also includes letters or essays on prostitution and marriage, dreams, wages, unemployment, Spiritualism and religion, etc.

Hill, Aurin F.: Closed for repairs... Franklin's Picture or A. F. H. on the War Parth age 21 -- Boston -- Boston Massachusetts... As I have seen it  
1892 Dec. 1

Box 1  
In "Young America Tablet," bound in paper with chromolithographed cover. Includes letters to the editor, essays, and notes on Spiritualism and Indian spirits, Boston, urban life, labor and work, and more.

Hill, Aurin F.: Description of a Journey to New York  
1885 Oct. 15

Box 1  
Hill, Aurin F.: Elysian Fields of the Egyptians -- The earth is flat -- Heaven and Hell  
1905-1907  
Memo book

Box 3  
Hill, Aurin F.: For Blue Flower, a spirit  
1894  
"Notes"

Box X  
Hill, Aurin F.: God-Satan. I am my own God until I find a better man  
1901  
Memo book

Box 3  
Hill, Aurin F.: Great revelation  
1927

Box 3

Hill, Aurin F.: Hindoo hypnotism

1903 March

Loose leaf

Box 3

Hill, Aurin F.: Hypnotism: What is it?

1898

Memo book

Box 3

Hill, Aurin F.: Imagination, by imagination

1894

Bound vol.

Box 6

Hill, Aurin F.: The insane architect

1895

Memo book

Box 3

Hill, Aurin F.: King David the Israelite reincarnated

1897

Memo book

Box 3

Hill, Aurin F.: Leading articles

ca.1899

Loose leaf scrapbook

Box 3

Hill, Aurin F.: Ledger A

1911-1913

Bound volume

Box 3

Hill, Aurin F.: My first lie, or demonology

1922

Exercise book

Box 3

Hill, Aurin F.: My monument

1897

Exercise book

Box 3

Hill, Aurin F.: Old Maid

1894

Scrapbook

Box 4

In notebook with printed cover "Brownies at the Columbian Exposition." Extended discussion of old maids, women, social reform, marriage, seances, letters to the editor and to public officials. every other page laid in with comic art, newsclippings, trade cards, advertisements,

Hill, Aurin F.: Red Jacket -- Rebellion

1893

Memo book

Box 4

In paper bound volume with printed cover "The Old Guard." Revelations from the spirit of Red Jacket. In reverse direction: Hill's rebellion against the Smead Warming and Ventilating Company, visits to jail

Hill, Aurin F.: A short genealogical account... of the early settlers of Eliot

ca.1895

Memo book

Box 4

Hill, Aurin F.: Spirit combine

1894

Memo book

Box 4

Spirit of Aristotle. "Why am I beset by spirit to write for them? The Women side of my anatomy has just given me a signal of danger... The person or persons who telepath to me may not be in my native country, nor ever have seen the land named America. Unseen forces are more forceful than those we see, unless it be water. We do not see mond nor wind, though some people may have been sight and with the eye see what others may think of with mind."

Hill, Aurin F.: Spirit of Theodore Parker

1894

Memo book

Box 4

References to Coxey's army, unemployment, rants against Jews, police, businessmen, religion, marriage, and politicians.

Hill, Aurin F.: Squaw Longnail on a trail

1902

Loose leaf

Box 5

Hill, Aurin F.: Stray bullet

1899

Loose leaf

Box 5

Hill, Aurin F.: Tecumtha

1893

Memo book

Box 5

Worcester

1893

The Beverwyck Blotter tablet

Box 5

Hill, Aurin F.: Works of nature

1898

Box X

Hill, Aurin F.: Writings

1899

Loose leaf

Box 5

Hill, Aurin F.: Writings

1919

Loose leaf

Box 5

Hill, Aurin F.: Scrapbooks and notebooks

1877-1906

Hill, Aurin F.: Architectural scrapbook

1877-1885

OS 1

Plans and perspective views for domestic architecture, including house exteriors and interiors, mostly clipped from architectural magazines.

Hill, Aurin F.: Scrapbook

1899-1902

OS 2

"No. 2" written on front end paper. Newspaper clippings on Spiritualism and hypnotism, insanity (and Hill's hospitalization for insanity), letters to the editor, articles written under Hill's suggestion, the American Press Writers Association, labor activism, and the Carpenters' Union.

Hill, Aurin F.: Scrapbook

1905-1906

OS 3

"No. 4" written on front end paper. Newspaper clippings and ephemera on Spiritualism, many from Spiritualist publications, municipal (public) ownership of corporations.

Hill, Aurin F.: Untitled notebook

1893

Memo book

Box 5

Scrapbook (disbound)

1899

Box 5

Hill, Clara E.

1887 July 1

Box 5

On Hill family genealogy

Hill, James W.

1901

Box 5

Hill, James W.: Estate controversy

1920

Box 5

Legal voters in the town of Wakefield, New Hampshire

1922

Scrapbook

Box 5

Metropolitan Institute of Science

1906

Box 5

Message to President Woodrow Wilson regarding the war in Europe, transmitted through Hill, writing medium.

Lincoln, Abraham (spirit)

1915 Feb. 18

Box 5

Message to President Woodrow Wilson regarding the war in Europe, transmitted through Hill, writing medium.

National Spiritual Alliance

1917-1920

Notebook

Box 5

National Spiritual Alliance scrapbook

1915-1920

Scrapbook

Box 5

New York Institute of Science

1899- 1900

Box 5

Photographs

ca.1890-1928

3 items

Box 5

Prisons and imprisonment

1891-1892

Box 5

Materials on Hill's arrest and imprisonment on (apparent) charges of being insane, and related essay on "The Bastilles of America."

Savage, Minot J.: Four great questions. Boston: George H. Ellis

1891

Box 5

Sears-Hill, Izetta B.: Correspondence

1893

Box 5

Sears-Hill, Izetta B.: Ephemera

1907-1908

Box 5

Sears-Hill, Izetta B. (spirit)



1929

Box 5

Shirley, Ralph: The Angel Warriors at Mons

ca.1916

Box 5

Society for the Prevention of Premature Encoffinment, Burial or Cremation: Report of the Secretary

1907

Box 5

United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners: Ephemera

1896-1900

Box 5

---

## Administrative information

### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Provenance

Gift of David James, 2008.

### Processing Information

Processed by Dexter Haven, 2009.

### Related Material

For additional material related to the history of Spiritualism in Massachusetts and Lake Pleasant see:

Louise Shattuck Papers (MS 563)

### Language:

English

### Copyright and Use (More information )

*Cite as:* Aurin F. Hill Papers (MS 579). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

## Search terms

### Subjects

Carpenters--Labor unions.

Hypnotism.

Labor unions--Massachusetts.

Reincarnation.

Spiritualism.

United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners.

### Contributors

Hill, Aurin F. [[main entry](#)]

Hill, Aurin F.

Hill, James W.

Sears-Hill, Izetta B.

National Spiritual Alliance.

### Genres and formats

Diaries--Massachusetts.

Scrapbooks.

Spirit writings.

### Link to similar SCUA collections

Labor

Massachusetts (East)

Massachusetts (West)

Photographs

Religion

Spiritual change



Special Collections & University Archives  
University Libraries : UMass Amherst  
154 Hicks Way : Amherst, Mass. 01003-9275  
Ph. 413-545-7282 (545-SCUA)



2020Site PoliciesAccessibility