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Sawin-Young Family Papers

1863-1969

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At the turn of the twentieth century, Albert Sawin and his wife Elizabeth (nee Young) lived on Taylor Street in Holyoke, Massachusetts, with their three children, Allan, Ralph, and Alice. Elizabeth's brother, also named Allan, traveled in the west during the 1880s, looking for work in Arizona, Utah, and Montana.

The bulk of the Sawin-Young Family Papers consists of letters exchanged between Elizabeth "Lizzie" Sawin, her sisters, and Jennie

Young of nearby Easthampton. Later letters were addressed to Beatrice Sawin at Wheaton College from her father Walter E. Sawin, who contributed to the design for the Holyoke dam. The photograph album (1901) kept by Alice E. Sawin features images of the interior and exterior of the family's home, as well as candid shots of family and friends and photographs of excursions to nearby Mt. Tom and the grounds of Northfield School.

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Background

The Sawin and Young families of the Pioneer Valley in Massachusetts were united by the marriage of Elizabeth Young and Albert E. Sawin in February 1864, and in the course of the next generation, the families grew very close. At the time of the wedding, Elizabeth (called Lizzie by her family) had four siblings -- Agnes, Jane (Jennie), Sarah, and Allan -- and her father James Young, a recent emigrant from Scotland, was residing in Englewood, New Jersey.

For many working class males in the 1860s, work options often amounted to little more than joining the military, becoming a miner, or a railroad worker. Finding none of these appealing, Allan Young decided to try his luck in 'the free land' of the western states, a place where he imagined one could find fortune, and perhaps settle down to raise a family. Once he arrived in the West in the 1870s, however, he lived a wandering life, moving from Montana to Arizona, California to Idaho, Nevada, and Utah, and soon realized that he was not going to 'strike gold.' Suddenly Holyoke, Massachusetts, seemed very far away. The 'black sheep' of his family, Allan was a light-hearted and adventurous young man, but evidently thoughtful, and throughout his separation from his family, he relied heavily on his sister Sarah during hardship.

Scope of collection

The Sawin-Young Family Papers contains a small number of letters and photographs documenting the lives and relationships of two families from Holyoke, Mass., during the years 1863 to 1924. The 18 letters, two postcards, newspaper article, and photographs provide insight into the close bonds forged between the Sawins and Youngs. The majority of letters in this collection were exchanged between siblings Elizabeth, Jane, Sarah, and Allan Young between 1863 and 1884, with the photographs documenting later generations. A highlight of the collection is a photograph album, ca.1901, kept by Alice E. Sawin that depicts family, friends, and the Sawin household in Holyoke.

The correspondence is almost exclusively personal in nature, with topics ranging from a father's inquiry into his daughter's life at college to letters revealing a man's life in the American West during the 1880s. Although the lives represented are ordinary in every sense, they can be revealing, with each writer and each recipient seeming to have a distinct personality and distinct feeling at the moment of exchange. The decisions they make, the letters they send, and the pictures they take offer a deeper glance into American life in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

In his letters home to his sister Sarah, 1881-1884, three letters each from Montana and Utah, Allan Young displayed his feelings about life out west as he moved from state to state and job to job, and how much he missed home, and the letters also shed light on the Young family dynamics and the personalities of the sisters. Lizzie, for example, comes across as dominant personality, even controlling. The quieter Jane exchanged a number of letters with Lizzie between 1863 and 1865, trading gossip about their towns and chatting about their most recent dinner parties, their clothes, or simple day to day activities. Sarah later married Charles Tower, while Agnes married a Mr. Wright. The collection also includes letters from James Young (the father) to Jane and Sarah, and a letter from Robert Young to James which hints at the still-close relationship they still held with family in Scotland.

The collection includes a few items pertaining to a later generation, including several photographs, some postcards, and a letter to Beatrice Sawin (1894-1979), living the marvelous life of a 19 year-old student at Wheaton College, and causing her father, Walter E. Sawin, concern about her priorities in her studies. Walter Sawin was an engineer on the Holyoke Dam.



Beatrice Sawin, ca.1901

The Sawins and Youngs were an ordinary, middle class Massachusetts family, but their dynamic personalities and adventures shine through. The photographs and photo album put faces to names, and help piece together the story of these two families, the places they traveled, the houses they lived in, and the people and things they liked.

Inventory

Letters

Letters: The Friend Next Door (letter to Beatrice Sawin)

1913

Postcards (to Beatrice Sawin)

ca.1913

Letters: Sawin, Beatrice: Newspaper clipping

1969

Letters: Sawin W. E.

1913

Letters: Young, Allan

1865-1884

7 items

Letters: Young, James

1864

2 items

Letters: Young, Lizzie

1863-1865

6 items

Letters: Young, Robert

1864

Photographs

Photograph: Unidentified middle aged women

Photograph: Unidentified young woman taken in Holyoke

Photograph: Devil's Den, Gettysburg, Pa. Glossy collodion printing out photo of group of three unidentified men and two women posed at Devil's Den, Gettysburg Battlefield. Photo by J.I. Mumper

ca.1895

Photograph: House and visitor wearing early American dress.

ca.1915

Photographs: Sawin, Alice E., Photograph album

ca.1901

Images of home in Holyoke, dressing up in early American attire, outings to Mount Tom and Northfield School, family and friends. Includes photographs in a variety of processes, including glossy and matte printing out papers, cyanotypes, real photo postcards, and developing out prints.

Photograph: Sawin, Beatrice

ca.1915-1921

3 photographs

Portraits by Bachrach (dated 1921); Katherine E. McClellan, Northampton; and Brown Studio, Springfield, Mass.

Photograph: Sawin(?) children. Young girl and infant brother. Photo by W.J. Cady -- 109 Dwight St. Holyoke Mass.

ca.1900

Photograph: Ulis I, Cherry, Reeve, Eleanor, Phoebe

ca.1950

Photograph: Unidentified man. "Edith and Jane Sawin" written on verso. Photo by J.E. Prowler

1910

Photograph: Unidentified woman

ca.1910

2 photographs

Photograph: Wedding portrait of young woman. Photo by Waters, Holyoke

ca.1910

Photograph: Young family (mother, father, and their two children, possibly Elizabeth and Arthur Young)

ca.1915

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Gift of C.K. Dexter Haven, October 2007.

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English

Copyright and Use (More information)

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Search terms

Subjects

Family--Massachusetts--Holyoke.

Holyoke (Mass.)--History.

Montana--Description and travel.

Utah--Description and travel.

Contributors

Sawin, Alice E.

Sawin, Beatrice.

Sawin family.

Young, Elizabeth.

Young, Allan.

Young family.

Genres and formats

Letters (Correspondence).

Photographs.

Link to similar SCUA collections

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Massachusetts (West)

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