

## Special Collections and University Archives

UMass Amherst Libraries 

### Benjamin Hoag Papers

1901-1915 (*Bulk:* 1907-1914)

3 boxes (4.5 linear foot)

Call no.: MS 710



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Born at Ancram, N.Y., the merchant Benjamin Hoag (1865-1932) lived most of his life in Stephentown, N.Y., near the Massachusetts border. In 1900, he was listed as a dealer in bicycles, but by 1910, he was operating a broader retail trade in dry goods and grains. At the same time, he conducted a thriving trade in ornithological and oological supplies, announcing in journals such as *The Oologist* that he sold "books, periodicals, tools, supplies, eggs" as well as "fine line fish tackle and rods." He also appears to have run a magazine subscription agency, offering everything from the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Good Housekeeping*, to professional journals like the *Condor Magazine*.

The Hoag collection consists of 1,345 letters, mostly incoming, and over 800 pieces receipts, ephemeral items, and other

documents, relating to both Hoag's oological and magazine businesses. Concentrated between 1901 and 1914, the collection offers a rich documentation of the oological trade in the years shortly before it was outlawed in 1918.

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## Ornithology

### Background on Benjamin Hoag

Responding to the fascination with oology at the turn of the twentieth century, Benjamin Hoag of Stephentown, New York, operated a small, but successful business collecting and selling the eggs of wild birds. Hoag was born on March 14, 1865 in Ancram, New York, to Orr and Martha Hunt Hoag. He had one brother, Charles. Coming from a family of farmers, and never straying far from Stephentown, Hoag made his living as a merchant, operating several concerns.

By 1905, Hoag struck out on his own in the business world, establishing a dealership in bicycles, but from shortly thereafter through the 1930s, he was generally listed as a dry goods merchant and grocer. On the side, he plied his trade as a mail-order oologist, specializing in the collecting and study of bird eggs, and selling specimens, oology tools and equipment, and magazine subscriptions as well. His business foundered with passage of the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, which banned collecting, ownership, or transportation of the eggs of eight families of migratory birds.

On October 26, 1899, Hoag married Gertrude Atwater, 12 years his junior, in Sand Lake, New York. The couple had no children, but their nieces lived with them between 1920 and 1930. Hoag passed away in Stephentown at age 67 on September 9, 1932. He was survived by his wife, Gertrude. The couple are buried in Stephentown's Garfield Cemetery.

### Scope of collection

The Hoag collection is comprised primarily of letters addressed to a professional oologist from 1907-1914, with the majority of letters relating to his business selling bird eggs and collecting supplies. Although the significance is not entirely clear, there is a high concentration of letters from the first three months of each year -- mostly requests for subscription renewals -- with more letters received in the winter months than the summer and fall. Hoag maintained a fairly consistent clientele over the years, and many of the letters are friendly and conversational in tone, although there are a few sharp-edged requests for fulfillment of delayed orders, sometimes months past due. The collection includes two unopened letters and several undated ones.

The collection also has deposit slips from deposits (1911-1917) made by Hoag. His oology business was forced to dissolve in 1918 due to enactment of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act enactment of federal legislation protecting birds, and consequently there are no letters, deposits, or requests after this date. Finally, there are two pamphlets in the collection, and handful of receipts for items purchased by Hoag, including clothing and oology tools..

### Inventory

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Correspondence

1901-1906

Box 1: 1

Correspondence

1907 Jan-Feb

Box 1: 2

Correspondence

1907 March

Box 1: 3

Correspondence

1907 April

Box 1: 4

Correspondence

1907 May

Box 1: 5

Correspondence

1907 June

Box 1: 6

Correspondence

1907 Jul-Aug

Box 1: 7

Correspondence

1907 Sep-Oct

Box 1: 8

Correspondence  
1907 November  
Box 1: 9  
Correspondence  
1907 December  
Box 1: 10  
Correspondence  
1908 January  
Box 1: 11  
Correspondence  
1908 February  
Box 1: 12  
Correspondence  
1908 March  
Box 1: 13  
Correspondence  
1908 Apr-May  
Box 1: 14  
Correspondence  
1908 Jun-Sep  
Box 1: 15  
Correspondence  
1908 Oct-Dec  
Box 2: 1  
Correspondence  
1909 Jan-Feb  
Box 2: 2  
Correspondence  
1909 March  
Box 2: 3  
Correspondence  
1909 Apr-Jul  
Box 2: 4  
Correspondence  
1909 Aug-Nov  
Box 2: 5  
Correspondence  
1909 December  
Box 2: 6  
Correspondence  
1910 January  
Box 2: 7  
Correspondence  
1910 Feb-Mar  
Box 2: 8  
Correspondence  
1910 Apr-May  
Box 2: 9  
Correspondence  
1910 Jun-Sep  
Box 2: 10  
Correspondence  
1910 Oct-Dec  
Box 2: 11  
Correspondence  
1911 Jan-Feb  
Box 2: 12  
Correspondence  
1911 Mar-Apr

Box 2: 13  
Correspondence  
1911 May-Dec  
Box 3: 1  
Correspondence  
1912 Jan-Feb  
Box 3: 2  
Correspondence  
1912 Mar-Apr  
Box 3: 3  
Correspondence  
1912 May-Sep  
Box 3: 4  
Correspondence  
1912 Oct-Dec  
Box 3: 5  
Correspondence  
1913 Jan-Mar  
Box 3: 6  
Correspondence  
1913 Apr-Jun  
Box 3: 7  
Correspondence  
1913 Jul-Dec  
Box 3: 8  
Correspondence  
1914 Jan-Mar  
Box 3: 9  
Correspondence  
1914 Apr-Jun  
Box 3: 10  
Correspondence  
1914 Jul-Dec  
Box 3: 11  
Correspondence  
1915  
Box 3: 12  
Deposits  
1911-1917  
Box 3: 13  
Envelopes and Unopened Letters  
1906-1914  
Box 3: 14  
Receipts, Pamphlets and Undated Letters  
1905-1915  
Box 3: 15

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## Administrative information

### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Provenance

Acquired from Michael Brown, April 2011 (2011-045).

### Processing Information

Processed by Robin Panariti, Mar. 2020.

### Language:

English

### Copyright and Use ([More information](#))

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## Search terms

### Subjects

Birds--Eggs

Egg trade--New York (State\_

### Genres and formats

Correspondence

Receipts (Financial records)

### Link to similar SCUA collections

#### Ornithology



Special Collections & University Archives

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