

Chicago Academy of Sciences / Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum
ARCHIVES – FINDING AID

Collection Title: Robert Kennicott Papers

Creator: Kennicott, Robert (1835-1866)

Dates: 1860-1861

Language: English

Extent: 0.08 Linear Feet (1 manuscript box)

Level of Description: Folder Level

Repository: Museum Collections and Archives, Chicago Academy of Sciences /Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, Chicago, Illinois.

Access Conditions: Open for research.

Ownership and Literary Rights: The Robert Kennicott Papers are the physical property of the Chicago Academy of Sciences. Access is provided to materials in the collection for non-commercial educational and research purposes. Copyright may belong to the authors or their legal heirs or assigns. For permission to publish or reproduce any materials from this collection, contact the CAS/PNNM Collections Department.

Citation: Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: [item], [folder], [box], Robert Kennicott Papers, Chicago Academy of Sciences / Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum.

Acquisition Information: Origination of these papers is unclear. Kennicott was a founding member, curator, and director of the Academy until his death in 1866 and the collections include numerous specimens and artifacts collected by him. May be related to accessions 1874.37, 1937.1, 5238, or 5257.

Processor and Date: Amber K. King, October 2010

Processing Note: These items found intermixed with photocopied materials from other archival repositories and handwritten notes from Ron Vasile, a previous employee at the Academy. These are all of the original materials found within the archival holdings to date.

Biographical Sketch: Robert Kennicott was born on November 13, 1835 in New Orleans, Louisiana. His parents, Dr. John A. and Mary Kennicott moved soon after to Northfield, Illinois. His father was a practicing doctor but was also a noted horticulturist, finally giving up his medical practice to pursue his horticultural interests full-time. With the help of his father and his father's friends and acquaintances, Robert Kennicott was encouraged to explore the natural world around him. While his health at first limited these pursuits, but by the age of thirteen, Kennicott began to grow stronger and furthered this through the aid of athletic exercises.

Robert decided against the typical classical education due to his health issues and instead learned from the expertise of other naturalists. In 1852, he left the Chicago area to stay in Cleveland and study with the noted naturalist Dr. Kirtland. It was Kirtland who encouraged Kennicott to develop a relationship with those working at the Smithsonian Institution and Kennicott formed a particular bond with Professor S.F. Baird. After Cleveland, Kennicott returned home to Illinois and began studying various fish and reptiles. In 1854, Kennicott continued his scientific training by traveling to Racine to study under Dr. Hoy, the noted ornithologist. In 1855, Kennicott participated in a Natural History Survey of Illinois sponsored by the Illinois Central Railroad Company. In 1856, he began to publish his scientific explorations and working with others, founded the Chicago Academy of Sciences, to which he contributed his efforts at obtaining subscriptions and adding to the collection through his own collecting trips. He was appointed director of this institution in 1857. That same year, he began work to establish a museum of natural science at Northwestern University.

In 1859, Kennicott started on a three year exploration of the Arctic North America, sponsored by the Smithsonian and the Hudson Bay Company. In 1865 he set out on an expedition to explore the possibility an overland route to Europe via Alaska and Siberia for the Western Union Telegraph Company and to collect specimens for both the Smithsonian and the Chicago Academy of Sciences while en route. This was his last trip, Kennicott died on May 12, 1866. The specimens that Kennicott collected for the Chicago Academy of Sciences were destroyed ultimately by the Great Fire of 1871. The Academy still has specimens collected by Kennicott, obtained through transfers from the Smithsonian after the fire to replenish to the collection or from specimens originally deposited with Northwestern University and transferred later to the Academy.

Scope and Content: The items in this collection are few, but more documents may be found as the rest of the collection is processed. At this time we only have two documents comprising this collection, one is a letter and the other a receipt.

Related Resources: Many other archival repositories contain materials including the Smithsonian and The Grove National Historic Landmark.

Series Description:

Series 1: Professional Life (1860-1861)

The two items in this series consist of one letter and a receipt. The letter is from Robert Kennicott to Frank W. Reilly, written from Great Slave Lake. This letter dates from his first trip to the Arctic North America. The receipt is for proceedings ordered from the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia.

Series 2: Collecting (undated)

This series contains materials related to specimens collected by Kennicott. The two lists in this series are of Malacology specimens, namely, "Marine Shells" and "Crustacea."

Container List:

Box 1			
Series 1: Professional Life (1860-1861)			
	1	Letter – Robert Kennicott to Frank W. Reilly	June 23, 1860
	2	Receipt – Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia	January 1, 1861
Series 2: Collecting (undated)			
	3	Specimen Lists – Malacology	undated