Isaac Sharpless Papers, 1876-1987

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Biographical background

Isaac Sharpless (1848-1920) was the president of Haverford College from 1887 until his resignation in 1917. He was the son of Aaron and Susanna (Forsythe) Sharpless and was born in Birmingham Township, Chester Co., Pa. In 1876 he married Lydia Trimble Cope. Sharpless taught at Westtown Boarding School from 1867-68 and 1873-75. He taught mathematics and astronomy at Haverford College from 1875-84. In 1884 he was named Dean of the faculty and in 1887 he was named president of the College. During his tenure as president, the College saw improvements in the areas of enrollment, academic standards, endowments and facilities.

(source for biographical information see: DQB)

Using Links

In order to aid navigation within this finding aid, links have been provided at the beginning of each box description: to the table of contents, collection summary and to all other boxes in the collection.

Links to images

The following list brings together all of the image links found throughout this finding aid.

Page 1 of Haverford College commencement speech by Pres. Isaac Sharpless, 1911 outlining changes at the college during its existence and improvements still to be made. 3 p., typed, with notations with note at top of p. 1 "Misc. articles, Commencement, 1911" Page 2 | Page 3

Photograph of Isaac Sharpless by F. Gutekunst, [ca. 19??] [from the estate of Rufus M. Jones, 1951] (approximately 17K)

Photograph of Isaac Sharpless and family on his 28th wedding anniversary [copy print of ca. 1904 photo, gift.] (approximately 58K)

Summary of collection

Letters, letterbook, photographs, portraits, illustrations, clippings, essays, addresses, lectures, passports, misc. printed items, academic hood.

Letters (1894-1918) written by Sharpless, chiefly addressed to Henry Tatnall Brown (ca. 1871-1938), discuss Sharpless' theological views, various writing projects, and the Friends Historical Society. Collection includes letterbook (1884-1900) kept by Sharpless while Dean of faculty and President of the College and letters addressed to Sharpless on such topics as the occasion of his inauguration (1887), his resignation in 1917 (1916-1917) and threatened resignations (1892, 1915).

Collection includes sympathy letters to Lydia Sharpless on the death of her husband in 1920, tributes to Isaac Sharpless, certificate and passports of Sharpless, clippings of editorials by Sharpless appearing in "The Westonian" (1909-1910). Collection contains Sharpless' unpublished manuscripts on George Keith (1638-1716), Andrew Ellcott (1754-1820), and Friends and slavery as well as various other articles and addresses by Sharpless on topics relating to education and Friends' history and lectures on Quakerism given by Sharpless at Berkeley, Ca. in 1909.

Collection also contains photographs of Sharpless and the Sharpless family as well as photographs of his birthplace and memorial tablet unveiled there in 1930 and a Haverford College calendar for 1987 "The Sharpless Years, 1887-1917."

Arrangement and description of collection

The following links will link back to the Table of contents, Summary, etc. and were put before the beginning of individual boxes in the descriptive part of the finding aid.

Box 1: Letters | Table of contents | Summary | Box 1 | Box 2 | Box 3 | Box 4 | Box 5

Letters written by Isaac Sharpless
1. Letterbook of Isaac Sharpless, 1884-1900
letterpress book of Sharpless while he was Dean and President of the College
503 p. [380 p. used]
(gift of Helen Sharpless, 1950)

2. Letters of Isaac Sharpless, 1894-1918
(53 items: ALS, TLS)
chiefly addressed to Henry Tatnall Brown, also a few to Daniel Smiley (1905), Friends Historical Society (1911), John W. Spaeth, Jr. (1913), Asa S. Wing (1916, authorization for Sharpless to visit England in search of potential faculty)
letters discuss:
- theological views of Sharpless
- wishes to resign as president of Friends' Historical Society
- Friends' Historical Society business
- Brown's son at Haverford
- his writing projects

3. "Letters written to Public Ledger on trip round the world, 1913"
envelope labeled as above contains 5 clippings of Sharpless' letters published in newspaper

Letters addressed to Isaac Sharpless

4. Inauguration as President of Haverford College, 1887
(ca. 41 items: ALS, TLS, clippings, invitations, cards)
includes:
- printed invitation to the inauguration, 5 mo. 19th, 1887 (3 copies, 1 is gift of W.A. Battey, 1943)
- program card for inauguration (2 copies)
- newspaper clipping on inauguration [1887]
- 40 letters in response to invitations (R.S.V.P., congratulations)
letters are from:
- Margaretta S. Alsop, Haverford College, 4/5/1887 [ALS]
- James B. Angell, Univ. of Michigan, May 16, 1887 [ALS]
- Charles H. Banes, 5/19/1887 [ALS]
- Arthur Beardsley, Swarthmore, 4 mo. 6, 1887 [ALS]
- Edward Brook, Phila., May 14, 1887 [ALS]
- Eliza B. Chase, Haverford College, 4/4/1887 [ALS]
- [ ] Du [Parry? Rainy?], Phila., [1887] [ALS]
- Philip Dunn, Trenton, N.J., 5 mo. 20, 1887 [ALS]
- Timothy Dwight, Yale Univ., May 16, 1887 [ALS]
- William Penn Evans, Pasadena, Ca., 4/13/1887 [ALS]
- J.B. Everhart, West Chester, Pa., May 19, 1887 [ALS]
- [ ] Fetterolf, Girard College, May 18, 1887 [ALS]
- Murrell E. Gates, New Brunswick, 5/19/1887 [Telegram]
- D.C. Gilman, Baltimore, May 14, 1887 [ALS]
- Francis B. Gummere, New Bedford, Ma., 4/6/1887 [ALS]
- Helen B. Harris, Haverford, 4/7/1887 [ALS]
- George B. Johnson, West Chester, Pa., 4/12/1887 [TLS]
- Francis T. King, Baltimore, 3/6/1887 [ALS]
- Eliza B. Kirkbride, [Phila.], April 24, 1887 [ALS]
- [James G. Mason] Knox, Lafayette College, Easton, Pa., May 18, 1887 [ALS]
- Albert R. Leeds, Hoboken, N.J., 5/14/1887 [ALS]
- Dr. McCosh, Princeton, N.J., May 14, 1887 [AL?]
- Edward H. Magill, Swarthmore College, 4/7 and 5/19/1887 [2 ALS]
- Faculty of William College, Williamstown, Ma., May 18, 1887 [signed by E.P. Morris, secy.] [ALS]
- Thomas Newlin, Spiceland Academy, Indiana, 4/12/1887 [ALS]
- T. Chaikley Palmer, Phila., 4/7/1887 [ALS]
- C. Stuart Patterson, Phila., May 14, 1887 [ALS]
- Provost of Univ. of Pa. [M.A. Pepper], 5/16 and 5/19/1887 [AL, ALS, 2 items]
- George Morris Philips, West Chester, Pa., 4/6/1887 [ALS]
- James E. Rhoads, Bryn Mawr, 4 mo. 6, 1887 [ALS]
- Joseph Rhoads, Jr., Wilmington, Del., 4 mo. 8, 1887 [ALS]
- Clarkson Sheppard, Media, 5 mo. 19, 1887 [ALS]
- W.F. Smith, Barnesville, Ohio, April 23, 1887 [ALS]
- James Casey Thomas, [New York, N.Y.], 5/18/1887 [ALS]
- Joseph Walton, Moorestown, N.J., 5/14/1887 [ALS]
- Joseph Wharton, Phila., 5 mo. 17, 1887 [AL?]
- James Whitall, Phila., 5 mo. 26, 1887 [ALS]
- [James] Wood, Rochester, 5 mo. 19, 1887 [ALS]
- W.H. Zelley, Marlton, N.J., 4/6/1887 [ALS]

5. Letters to Sharpless upon his threatened resignations, 1892, 1915
(12 items: ALS, TLS)
letters are from:
- Edward Bettle, Phila., 10 mo. 10th, 1892 [ALS]
- [ ] Brown, Phila., 6 mo. 8, 1892 [ALS]
- Richard Cadbury, Phila., 10 mo. 10, 1892 [ALS]
Letters to Isaac Sharpless, upon his resignation (1917), 1916-1917
(42 items: AL, ALS, TLS)

letters are from:
- Mary F. Babitt, Nov. 3, 1916 [ALS]
- William A. Blair, Winston-Salem, N.C., Apr. 14, 1917 [ALS]
- Beta Rho Sigma of Haverford College, Feb. 9, 1917 [AL]
- John S. Bradway [for Class of 1911], Phila., Jan. 9, 1917 [TLS]
- S.K. Brecht, Phila., Nov. 23, 1916 [TLS]
- M.G. Brumbaugh, Harrisburg, Nov. 22, 1916 [ALS]
- Cornelius J. Claussen, Omaha, Jan. 25, 1917 [TLS]
- William S. Crowder, Germantown, Jan. 30, 1917 [ALS]
- Franklin A. [Dakin], Haverford, June 28, 1917 [ALS]
- [H.A. Domincovick?], Germantown, Nov. 23, 1916 [TLS]
- William T. Ellis, Swarthmore, 11/22/1916 [ALS]
- Founders Club of Haverford College, Jan. 31, 1917 [signed by Hugh E. MacKinstry, secy.] [TLS]
- Willis Hatfield Hazard [New England Mutual Life], Boston, Nov. 28, 1916 [includes copy of Harvard Crimson containing editorial on IS] [TLS]
- F.A. Henderson, Geneva, N.Y., Nov. 27, 1916 [includes newspaper clipping from N.Y. Post on resignation of IS] [TLS]
- Anthony A. Hirst, Phila., Nov. 23, 1916 [ALS]
- J. Wetherill Hutton, Barnesville, Ohio, 11/24/1916 [ALS]
- Howard Cooper Johnson, Phila., Nov. 22, 1916 [TLS]
- W.W. Keen, Phila., Nov. 24, 1916 [TLS]
- Alfred Collins Maule, Bryn Mawr, Nov. 22, 1916 [ALS]
- Francis N. Maxfield, Phila., Dec. 4, 1916 [ALS]
- Thomas Newlin, Guilford College, N.C., Dec. 5, 1916 [TLS]
- George Morris Philips, West Chester, Pa., Nov. 27, 1916 [TLS]
- Augustus T. Murray, Stanford Univ., Cal., 1/14/1917 [ALS]
- Frances E. Pope, Cleveland, Dec. 17, 1916 [ALS]
- Rush Rees, Univ. of Rochester, Feb. 5, 1917 [TLS]
- [Legh W.?] Reid, Haverford, Nov. 1, 1916 [ALS]
- Percival Roberts, Jr., Narberth, 11/23/1916 [ALS]
- [T.J. Rome?], Atlantic City, Nov. 23, 1916 [TLS]
- New England Alumni Association, Boston, Dec. 5, 1916 [signed by secy. [ ] Spencer] [ALS]
- Albert H. Stone, Swarthmore, Nov. 24, 1916 [ALS]
- Joseph Swain, Swarthmore College, 11th mo. 24, 1916 [TLS]
- Charles F. Thwing, Cleveland, Nov. 27, 1916 [ALS]
- J. Kent Worthington, Indianapolis, Nov. 28, 1916 [TLS]
- Ethel S.J. Wright, Phila., 11/23/1916 [ALS]
- Gifford King Wright, Sewickley, 1/28/1917 [ALS]

Letters to Isaac Sharpless, misc., 1902-1919
(8 items: ALS, TLS)

letters are from:
- American Academy of Political and Social Science, Phila., Jan. 24, 1913 [signed by L.S. Rowe, president, on the 25th anniversary of Sharpless' connection with Haverford] [TLS]
- T. Wistar Brown, Villa Nova, 11 mo. 3 and 23, 1908 [2 ALS]
- Samuel Milliken, Phila., 10/6/1914 [encloses clipping on William Penn] [ALS]
- Timothy Nicholson, Richmond, Ind., 5/9/1918 [memories of Haverford] [ALS]
- Robert W. Rogers, Madison, N.J., March 30, 1918 [remarks on "Story of a small college" by Sharpless] [ALS]
- William Cameron Sproul [Governor of Pa.], Harrisburg, Nov. 22, 1919 [appt. of Sharpless to Commission on Constitutional Amendment and Revision] [TLS]

Letters addressed to Lydia Cope Sharpless

Letters of sympathy to Mrs. Sharpless, 1920
(17 items: TLS, ALS, photograph)
letters are from:
  • Thomas K. Brown, Westtown, 1 mo. 16, 1920 [ALS]
  • William Wrighten Fisher, Feb. 12, 1920 [includes resolution from Board of Directors of the Main Line Citizens Association] [ALS]
  • Edward Grubb, Croydon, Feb. 10, 1920 [ALS]
  • Richard M. Guumere, Haverford, 1/19/1920 [ALS]
  • Rendel Harris, Manchester, 2/1/1920 [ALS]
  • L.L. Hobbs, Guilford College, N.C., Jan. 22, 1920 [ALS]
  • Henry Mendenhall Hobbs, [1920] [ALS]
  • Herbert Hoover, Washington, D.C., Jan. 23, 1920 [TLS]
  • Japan Friends' Mission, 30 Koun cho, Mita, Shiba, Tokyo, Japan, First month 29th, 1920 to Lydia C. Sharpless and family [signed by Gilbert Bowles, Herbert V. Nicholson] [TLS]
  • Morris E. Leeds, Germantown, 1/22/1920 [ALS]
  • Frederic Palmer, "Sunday" [1920] [ALS]
  • Charles Perry, Orlando, Fla., Jan. 23, 1920 [ALS]
  • Henry S. Pratt, Leipzig, Feb. 9, 1920 [ALS]
  • Edward A. Steiner, Jan. 25, 1920 [ALS]
  • Asa S. Wing, Moorestown, N.J., 1 mo. 17, 1920 [ALS]
also includes:
  photograph of grave of Isaac Sharpless, Haverford Meeting ground [gift of Helen Sharpless, 1950]

Box 2: Writings of Isaac Sharpless | Table of contents | Summary | Box 1 | Box 2 | Box 3 | Box 4 | Box 5

1. Editorials and articles from "The Westonian" by Isaac Sharpless, 1896, 1909-1910
  (ca. 20 items: clippings - loose pages removed from the periodical)
titles are:
  • 1896
    • "Address to the Alumni"
  • 1909
    • "Are we liberal enough?"
    • "Intelligent loyalty"
    • "Without haste and without rest"
    • "Calvinist and Friends"
    • "II. Calvinists and Friends"
    • "Friends as moral reformers"
    • "Education to fit for the duties of life"
    • "Play for men who work"
    • "The problem with men teachers"
  • 1910
    • "The effect of the Revolutionary War upon education of Friends"
    • "The good or the best"
    • "Another mission of the Friends' school"
    • "College religion"
    • "The virile virtues"
    • "The need of a Friendly periodical"
    • "An Apostolic succession"
    • "Enthusiasm, wise and otherwise"
    • "Friends' education in colonial times"
    • "The changes of the centuries"
also:
  [undated]
  remarks by Lydia Cope Sharpless on teaching

2. Misc. printed items
  (ca. 7 items: book adv., book plate, report, clippings)
  includes:
  • adv. for "Pennsbury series of modern Quaker books" edited by Sharpless
  • bookplate of Sharpless
  • note to Sharpless from Joseph Parrish, Oct. 10, 1889 with clipping of Swarthmore - Haverford football game
  • "Report of Isaac Sharpless, President of Haverford College, made to the Instruction Committee of Westtown Boarding School, respecting an inspection of the working of the school" [ca. 1891-1894?]
  • "Early Quaker legislation in Pennsylvania," by Isaac Sharpless, from The American Friend, 1 mo. 21, 1897 [clipping]
  • "Biblical instruction in public schools," by Isaac Sharpless, from The Bible Student, [1897] [clipping]
  • "Isaac Sharpless" from the Evening Telegraph, Sept. 13, 1916 [newspaper clipping]

3. Addresses (folder 1)
  (4 items: from estate of Isaac Sharpless)
  • "The importance of the atmosphere of a college" with notation "Guilford College, 5/28/1912" on p. 1 [25 p., typed, with notations]
  • "The Friends' theory of worship and guidance" with notation "Isaac Sharpless' address" on p. 1 [17 p., typed, with notations]
  • "Physical training and college games" "1888" on p. 1 [53 p., holograph, in pencil]
  • "Culture derived from science" [56 p. (incomplete?), holograph] 4. Addresses (folder 2)
  (4 items: from estate of Isaac Sharpless)
"Adult schools" [26 p., holograph]
"The future of the small college" with notation "Baltimore, Dec. 1, 1894, Association of Colleges and Preparative Schools, Middle states and Maryland" [34 p., holograph]
"The function of the secondary school" [33 p., holograph]
"The college and the university" (partially written on Haverford College stationery dated "1896") [32 p., holograph]

4. Addresses (folder 3)
(2 items: from estate of Isaac Sharpless)
- "College responsibility for morals" [29 p., typed, with notations]
- "The education of peace men" [9 p., typed, with notations]

5. "Irishmen"
30 p., holograph, bound at edge with ribbon (from estate of Isaac Sharpless)

6. Lectures delivered at Berkeley, California, in 1909
(6 items: from estate of Isaac Sharpless)
lecture titles are:
- "Quakerism and government" [52 p., typed, with notations]
- "Quakerism and moral reform" [49 p., typed, with notations]
- "Quakerism and education" [50 p., typed, with notations]
- "Quakerism and creed" [55 p., typed and holograph]
also:
program card "Lectures by Isaac Sharpless" listing above lectures and dates given
typed copy of account from 1778 dinner party for General Assembly of Pa.

7. "Conscription in America"
[6] p., holograph, signed by Isaac Sharpless with notation on p. 1 "about Sept. 3, 1919" and on back of p. 6 "From the files of the American Friends Service Committee"

Box 3: Writings of Isaac Sharpless

1. Andrew Ellicott (1754-1820)
128 p., typed, with notations (from estate of Isaac Sharpless)
biographical sketch of Andrew Ellicott

2. John Fothergill (1712-1780)
11 p., typed, with notations (from estate of Isaac Sharpless)
biographical sketch of John Fothergill

3. Francis B. Gummere
4 p., typed
a tribute to Francis B. Gummere, [he died in 1919]

4. George Keith (1638-1716)
267 p., holograph
[on cover sheet] "Abstracts of tracts written by George Keith which throw light on the course of events or on George Keith's thought. Abstracts of replies to Keith. By Isaac Sharpless"

5. "Life of David Rittenhouse"
7 p., holograph (from the estate of Isaac Sharpless)
also: typed transcript of a published [where?] article adapted from the above ms., with a note by a Melvin Gingerich

6. Commencement, 1911
Page 1 of Haverford College commencement speech by Pres. Isaac Sharpless, 1911 outlining changes at the college during its existence and improvements still to be made. 3 p., typed, with notations with note at top of p. 1 "Misc. articles, Commencement, 1911"

7. "Report to the Board of Managers, 1892"
[25] p., holograph (from the estate of Isaac Sharpless)

Box 4: Writings, photographs, portraits, etc.

Writings of Isaac Sharpless, con't.

1. "Friends and slavery"
145 p., holograph (from the estate of Isaac Sharpless)
Photographs, portraits, etc.:

2. Isaac Sharpless, portrait with signature

3. Portraits
(18 items: photographs, illustrations)
includes:
- photograph of Isaac Sharpless, print made from glass negative, Feb. 1956 by Haverford Press Bureau
- 6 photographs of portrait by M.H. Kevorkian, 1917 of Isaac Sharpless [1 gift of Mary A.G. Williams, 1951]
- photograph of Isaac Sharpless taken by J. Barclay Wentson, class of 1917
- 4 illustrations of above photograph
- photograph of Isaac Sharpless by F. Gutekunst, April 1885 [gift of Helen Sharpless, 1950]
- illustration of above photograph
- photograph of Isaac Sharpless by F. Gutekunst, [ca. 19??] [gift of Helen Sharpless, 1950]
- photograph of Isaac Sharpless, (standing on porch) [gift of Helen Sharpless, 1950]

- Photograph of Isaac Sharpless by F. Gutekunst, [ca. 19??] [from the estate of Rufus M. Jones, 1951] (approximately 17K)
4. Birthplace of Isaac Sharpless
   (12 items: photographs, negatives, clipping, typed report)
   includes:
   - 3 photographs of house (Birmingham Twp., Chester Co.)
   - 5 photographs of memorial tablet placed there in 1930 by Friends Historical Association
   - photograph of Meeting of Friends Historical Association at Birmingham Meeting House, May 24, 1930
   - newspaper clipping describing ceremony [Haverford News, 6/7/1930]
   - visit of Rayner W. Kelsey and Albert Cook Myers to interview siblings of Isaac Sharpless in 1929 [2 p., typed copy]

5. Home of Isaac Sharpless at Haverford and Sharpless Hall
   (5 items: illustrations, photographs)
   includes:
   - illustration of house [gift of estate of Marriott C. Morris, 1950]
   - 3 photographs of house, ca. 1882?, 1883, 1917 [gift of Helen Sharpless, 1950]
   - photograph of Sharpless Hall, 1917 [gift of Helen Sharpless, 1950]

Box 5: Misc. Sharpless papers, etc.

1. Printed items
   includes:
   - Advertisement for "Quaker Biographies" from Friends' Book Store, 302 Arch St., Phila. with portrait of Isaac Sharpless on cover
   - "The Sharpless Years, 1887-1917" Haverford College calendar for 1987

2. Everett Society certificate, 1876
   (1 item)

3. Passports, 1887, 1891, 1913, 1916
   (6 items)

4. Tributes to Isaac Sharpless
   (ca. 13 items: reprint, clippings, minutes, TDS, TLS, articles, newspaper)
   includes:
   - reprint from the Bulletin of Friends' Historical Society, of Phila., vol. 9, no. 3, May 1920 "Isaac Sharpless, 1848-1920"
   - minute of the faculty of Haverford College, 3rd mo. 18, 1920 [1 p., typed]
   - "Extract from the minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Managers held first month 31, 1920" [2 p., typed, signed by Morris E. Leeds]
   - "Resolution on the death of President Isaac Sharpless, passed by the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees of the University of Pittsburgh, at the meeting on January 20, 1920" [1 p., typed, signed]
   - Class of 1887 signed note of appreciation to Isaac Sharpless on his resignation in 1917 [note is on back of program of their 30th anniversary dinner, 6/14/1917]
   - "President Sharpless of Haverford College to retire at the end of this academic year" [3 p., typed]
   - letter from the Decennial Class, 1902, dated June 5th, 1912, requesting Isaac Sharpless to visit them at their meeting [4 p., typed, with "cut outs" of signatures of class members pasted on]
   - "Remarks made at the funeral of Isaac Sharpless. Haverford Meeting House, 1st month, 19th, 1920" [10 p., typed]
   - "Isaac Sharpless" [3 p., typed]
   - TDS, from the faculty of Haverford College, undated, expressing their wish that Sharpless not resign as President [1 p., typed and signed by 33 faculty]
   - "Haverford News" Vol. XI, no. 21, January 20, 1920, with article on life of Sharpless [2 copies]

5. Academic hood [with protective fabric case]
   fabric [black wool? lined with red silk?] [gift of Mrs. Frederic C. Sharpless, Jan. 1971]