

**Richard Parnell Notebook**  
**1839-1840**  
**Mss.597.P24n**

American Philosophical Society  
2003  
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## Summary Information

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| <b>Repository</b>       | American Philosophical Society                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Creator</b>          | Parnell, Richard,1810-1882.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Title</b>            | Richard Parnell Notebook                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Date [inclusive]</b> | 1839-1840                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Call number</b>      | Mss.597.P24n                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Extent</b>           | 1.0 Volume(s) 261 p.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Extent</b>           | 1 vol., 261p.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Location</b>         | LH-MV-E-16                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Language</b>         | English                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Container</b>        | 1                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Abstract</b>         | <p>In 1839-1840, the ichthyologist Richard Parnell left London for a collecting expedition to Jamaica and a tour of museum collections in the United States. An authority on both fishes and grasses, Parnell published two noted works as a young man, his <i>Prize Essay on the Natural and Economical History of the Fishes Marine, Fluviate, and Lacustrine, of the River District of the Firth of Forth</i> (Edinburgh: Neill and Co., 1838) and <i>The Grasses of Britain</i>, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1842-1845). He appears, however, to have abandoned publication in 1845, although he continued collecting for many years.</p> <p>The notebook kept by Richard Parnell during his voyage to the West Indies and United States in 1839-1840 contains little narrative, but dozens of pencil and watercolor sketches of the marine life that absorbed his</p> |

interest, primarily fishes. Most sketches are accompanied by brief notes on the anatomy of the fish, sometimes with close-ups of fin structures, air bladders, or the digestive tract and stomach. Although collecting localities are seldom recorded, the majority of specimens seem to have been collected in Jamaica, with at least a few observed in vitro at the New York Museum.

**Preferred Citation**

Cite as: Richard Parnell Notebook, American Philosophical Society.

## Background note

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In 1839-1840, the ichthyologist Richard Parnell left London for a collecting expedition to Jamaica and a tour of museum collections in the United States. An authority on both fishes and grasses, Parnell published two noted works as a young man, his *Prize Essay on the Natural and Economical History of the Fishes Marine, Fluvial, and Lacustrine, of the River District of the Firth of Forth* (Edinburgh: Neill and Co., 1838) and *The Grasses of Britain* (Edinburgh: Neill and Co., 1838). He appears, however, to have abandoned publication in 1845, although he continued collecting for many years.

Parnell's collections of fishes are now housed in the National Museums of Scotland in Edinburgh and the British Museum of Natural History in London, while his herbaria are scattered in a number of museums. Parnell died in 1882.

## Scope & content

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The notebook kept by Richard Parnell during his voyage to the West Indies and United States in 1839-1840 contains little narrative, but dozens of pencil and watercolor sketches of the marine life that absorbed his interest, primarily fishes. Most sketches are accompanied by brief notes on the anatomy of the fish, sometimes with close-ups of fin structures, air bladders, or the digestive tract and stomach. Although collecting localities are seldom recorded, the majority of specimens seem to have been collected in Jamaica, with at least a few observed in vitro at the New York Museum.

The majority of sketches, rough, but serviceable, appear to have been made by Parnell, however Parnell included two fine watercolors done by Edward Bancroft in 1830 and one sketch of sailfish made by a Jamaican, William Griffith, in 1834. In addition to the fish, there are rough pencil sketches of the coast line at Montserrat, of the entrance to the Mississippi River, of a bat, the head of an alligator, and a rather dramatic watercolor of a Portuguese Man of War jellyfish. One of Parnell's calling cards is inserted loose into the volume.

## Administrative Information

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### Publication Information

American Philosophical Society 2003

## Provenance

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### Acquisition Information

Acquired from Francis Edwards, 1974.

### Processing Information

Recatalogued by rsc, 2004.

## Related Materials

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### Related Material

The APS also holds the papers of the mid-Victorian British ichthyologist Jonathan Couch (B C831) and his American counterpart Jacob Stauffer (B St15).

The papers of William Thornton Innes (B In6) document American ichthyology and aquariums in the period just after the turn of the twentieth century.

## Indexing Terms

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### Corporate Name(s)

- New York Museum

### Genre(s)

- Art

- Pencil works
- Travel Narratives and Journals
- Watercolors

### Personal Name(s)

- Bancroft, Edward
- Griffith, William

### Subject(s)

- Fishes--Jamaica
- Ichthyology--Jamaica
- Natural History
- Science and Technology

## Other Descriptive Information

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The Richard Parnell Notebook is a travel journal Parnell kept as he traveled in the Caribbean and United States from 1839-1840. The book contains many watercolor sketches of sea life.

## Bibliography

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Swinney, G. N. and A Wheeler, "'One of a bye-gone time'. Richard Parnell (1810-82) and his fish collections," *Journal of the History of Collections* 12 (2000): 203-219.