

**T. Martin Trippe Journals**  
**1865-1871**  
**Mss.598.2.T73**

American Philosophical Society  
2002  
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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	American Philosophical Society
<b>Creator</b>	Trippe, T. Martin, b. ca.1848
<b>Title</b>	T. Martin Trippe Journals
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1865-1871
<b>Call number</b>	Mss.598.2.T73
<b>Extent</b>	2.0 Volume(s) 655 p.
<b>Extent</b>	2 vols. (655p.)
<b>Location</b>	LH-MV-E-10
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Container</b>	1-2
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>T. Martin Trippe was an avid amateur ornithologist from Orange, New Jersey, who spent the majority of his free time as a teenager and young man exploring the woods and observing, shooting, and collecting birds. After graduating from New York University with a degree in engineering in 1869, Trippe worked in various positions for the Iowa Central, Northern Pacific, and Albia, Knoxville, and Des Moines Railroads, continuing to devote his spare time in the interests of ornithology.</p> <p>The two surviving volumes of Trippe's journals document his ornithological and natural historical observations between 1865 and 1871, including meticulously detailed records of the avifauna (and to lesser degree other fauna) in central New Jersey, central Iowa, and</p>

southern Minnesota. They include detailed, and Trippe provided year-end taxonomic and meteorological indexes for 1869, 1870, and 1871.

**Preferred Citation**

Cite as: T. Martin Trippe Journals, American Philosophical Society.

## Background note

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"And now, as the old year is dying, I will just write one thing more; -- I am going to devote my whole life to the birds, -- in short I am going to be what Audubon was, -- an ornithologist." (1(5):60) An idealistic young man from Orange, N.J., T. Martin Trippe became entranced early in life, and by the age of seventeen, he had begun to assemble a meticulous record of observations on the local avifauna and flora and the beginnings of a private cabinet of natural history.

Raised in comfortable circumstances in Orange, N.J., Trippe began educating himself in natural history at fourteen, commencing his first ornithological journal in the following year, 1863. Relishing his time traipsing through the woods, recording birds he had seen (or killed), he did not stint on the formal study of nature, building a small library on the subject as time and finances permitted. Killing, dissecting, and mounting dozens of birds, he also collected eggs, and apparently made efforts to keep live birds in a cage, including a broad-winged buzzard (*Buteo pennsylvanicus*) that he had shot but not quite killed. The heart of his scientific activities, however, was his carefully recorded observations on seasonal arrivals and departures, and his notes on disparate aspects of avian biology and behavior, including songs, nesting behavior, habitat, feeding behavior, and abundance.

Trippe grew restless in seeking to expand his expertise in natural history, believing that "the popular works are good for nothing," and were either insufficiently detailed or inaccurate, while "the scientific ones are too costly to buy except for rich men" (1(2):20). Yet by the time he entered college in 1866, his library boasted works by DeKay, Giraud, Wilson, and Nuttall on ornithology, several books on ichthyology and "three or four" on botany. On March 20, 1869, he acquired an early edition of Charles Darwin's *Variation of Animals and Plants Under Domestication*, enjoying it thoroughly, though not quite accepting the argument from natural selection (2:20). "Darwin has *almost* converted me," he wrote,

As a book of *facts* it is unrivaled... He arranges these facts with precision; they come up one after another, like bodies of troops charging upon a battery; and at the end of the battle so deep is the impression that they have made upon the candid reader, so irresistible is their collected strength, that he cannot but confess, that the author has carried his point, and that one of the least of his theories must be true.... I cannot but think that he has established beyond all manner of reasonable doubt, that many of what we call species are derived from other so-called species; i.e. that some species that are universally received by the best naturalists, are nothing more than other equally established species, in other stages of development. How far this transmutation may go on, I cannot pretend to say; but I see no reason why, if the one fact is admitted and admitted it *must be*, the theory does not follow as a matter of course.

The conclusions which Darwin draws on the subjects of Inheritance, Reversion, Selection, etc., do not entirely meet my assent. I cannot undertake, just at present, to state what my reasons are, for disagreeing with him; for that would require some study of the subjects, now a little rusty from inattention... (2:64-65).

Worst of all, Trippe lamented the gradual elimination of nature from his surroundings:

Trippe's hopes for his western experience were subjected to a quick dose of reality. Hired, as he believed, only because he was recommended by the President of the company, Trippe was clearly underemployed, and passed his free time in studying and reading natural history. But like Orange, Oskaloosa proved to be a "mongrel" place that could not satisfy his hopes. "I am on the outskirts of civilization here;" he wrote, "yet I am not quite far enough west to suit my fancy, either. It is 250 miles to the real wilderness; and in the real wilderness, I long to be. The Wild Turkey, the Deer, and the Wolf still linger here, but it is a rare thing to catch a sight of them, and a few years more will see them exterminated." (2:196).

Trippe garnered an opportunity to work as a transit man with the Northern Pacific Railroad in April, 1870, and spent five months working in the wilds of western Minnesota, delighting in the new climate and the new fauna. In October, however, he was discharged, and with his eyesight failing, he moved to Saint Paul, reliant, he wrote, only upon his own resources for the first time in his life. After several months of unemployment, by using connections he had made during his work with the Iowa Central, he secured a position with the Albia, Knoxville, and Des Moines Railroad, and returned to Oskaloosa. Trippe's whereabouts after December 1871 are unknown.

## Scope & content

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Martin Trippe's surviving scientific journals are all that remain to document the activities of an enthusiastic amateur ornithologist from New Jersey. Kept with an almost religious zeal for six years straddling the date of Trippe's graduation from New York University in 1869, the journals offer a glimpse into the mental world of a mid-Victorian amateur scientist and insight into the transformations in natural historical research and practice.

A clear and agile writer, Trippe was an extraordinarily eager naturalist and meticulous recorder, and his notes provide excellent documentation on the avifauna of central New Jersey, south central Iowa, and southern Minnesota in the years immediately following the Civil War, with sometimes extensive notes on the species, their dates of arrival and departure, their habits, habitat preference, and behavior. On occasion, he turns comparative, setting his observations off against those of more established naturalists, commenting critically upon Darwin, comparing Agassiz, Allen, and Audubon, and imagining how the environment has changed over the recent years, either through human intervention or environmental dynamism.

Trippe's ornithology is leavened with discussions of the mammalian fauna, the climate (particularly in Iowa and Minnesota), geography, the Indian and white populations, and other miscellaneous scientific matters. At the end of the years 1869, 1870, and 1871, he provided a convenient summary table of meteorological observations for the year, the dates of arrivals and departures of bird species, and miscellaneous observations.

Trippe was extremely ambitious in his scientific aims, faithful to his records, and his use of both scientific and popular names marks him both as a relatively advanced student of birds. He began keeping his scientific journal in August 1865, writing in unbound fascicles, and later sewing them into bindings. The first volume, covering the years 1865-66, consists of one 25-page and four 60-page fascicles, each with separate enumeration; the second volume contains several fascicles with a single, continuous enumeration.

It is clear from the context of some his comments that other, earlier volumes might once have existed, but were lost in the fire that destroyed his family home in 1869. Originally, Trippe notes, his records ran as far back as 1862; the first attempt at a journal beginning in January 1863, but all records before August 1865 were either lost or destroyed. The volume for 1867-1868 survived the fire, but appears subsequently to have been lost. Those journals that did survive were soaked by firefighters in the blaze, and the warped and waterstained boards have subsequently been removed, and the journals rebound by the APS Conservation Department.

Laid into one of the volumes is a decorative band with the inscription, "Dear Willie."

## Arrangement

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**Vol 1:** 25, 60, 60, 60, 60p. (265p.), August 19, 1865-October 4, 1866

**Vol. 2:** 415p., January 30, 1869-December 28, 1871

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## **Administrative Information**

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### **Publication Information**

American Philosophical Society 2002

## **Provenance**

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### **Acquisition Information**

The Trippe Journals were acquired by the APS in April 1999 (1999-469ms).

### **Processing Information**

Catalogued by rsc, 2001.

## **Indexing Terms**

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### **Corporate Name(s)**

- Northern Pacific Railroad
- Saint Paul Academy of Science (St. Paul, Minn.)

### **Geographic Name(s)**

- Iowa--Description and travel
- Long Island (N.Y.)--Description and travel
- Mauch Chunk (Pa.)--Description and travel
- Minnesota--Description and travel
- Niagara Falls (N.Y. and Ont.)--Description and travel
- Orange (N.J.)--Description and travel

- Saint Paul (Minn.)--Description and travel

### **Personal Name(s)**

- Darwin, Charles, 1809-1882
- Miller, Hugh, 1802-1856

### **Subject(s)**

- Auroras.
- Birds--Classification
- Birds--Migration
- Bogs--Minnesota
- Brothers--Death
- Chippewa Indians
- Christmas
- Darwin, Charles Robert, 1809-1882. Variation of animals and plants under domestication
- Deluge
- Evolution (Biology)
- Fathers--Death
- Fertilizer
- Fires--New Jersey
- Fish showers
- Lakes--Minnesota
- Mammals--New Jersey
- Meteorology--Observations
- Natural history--Iowa
- Natural history--New Jersey
- Natural history--New York (State)--Long Island
- New Jersey--Description and travel
- Ornithology--Iowa
- Ornithology--Minnesota
- Ornithology--New Jersey
- Plagiarism
- Rabbits
- Railroads
- Railroads--Iowa
- Thunderstorms
- Unemployment

## Other Descriptive Information

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The Trippe journals were rebound in August 1999. The original boards were removed and are housed separately under the same call number.