

**Winfrid Alden Stearns Papers**  
**1871-1906**  
**Mss.SMs.Coll.1**

American Philosophical Society  
2007  
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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	American Philosophical Society
<b>Creator</b>	Stearns, Winfrid Alden, 1852-1909
<b>Title</b>	Winfrid Alden Stearns Papers
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1871-1906
<b>Call number</b>	Mss.SMs.Coll.1
<b>Extent</b>	0.5 Linear feet 95 items
<b>Location</b>	LH-B-34-3
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>Winfrid Alden Stearns (1852-1909) was an amateur naturalist, ornithologist, and ethnologist who corresponded with several prominent experts in the natural sciences. Among his works were a collaboration with surgeon and naturalist Elliot Coues, <i>New England Bird Life</i> (1881-1883) and the self-published <i>A Manual of Ornithology</i> (1895) that was heavily criticized by university-trained naturalists.</p> <p>The collection consists of original letters with details about Stearns' publications, specimen donations, and ornithological work from 1871 to 1906. There are letters concerning his editorial collaboration with Coues and others, Stearn's works, and Stearns' travels to Newfoundland. Of particular interest are two letters from Charles Bendire accusing Stearns of inaccurate classification of specimens and poor proofreading of his manuscripts. (Both Stearns and Bendire worked with Coues.) The collection contains a picture of the museum Stearns curated in the 1880's.</p>

**Preferred Citation**

Cite as: Winfrid Alden Stearns Papers, American Philosophical Society.

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## Background note

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Winfrid Alden Stearns (1852-1909) was an amateur naturalist, ornithologist, and ethnologist who corresponded with several prominent experts in the natural sciences. Among his works were a collaboration with surgeon and naturalist Elliot Coues, *New England Bird Life* (1881-1883) and the self-published *A Manual of Ornithology* (1895) that was heavily criticized by university-trained naturalists.

Stearns was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts to William Augustus Stearns and Rebecca Alden Frazar Stearns. Stearn's father (1805 - 1876) was the fourth president of Amherst College, serving from 1854 to 1876. A graduate of Andover Theological Seminary in 1831, William Stearns also had a law degree, received in 1862. He was a descendant of Isaac Stearns, who arrived in America with Governor Winthrop in 1630, and a member of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Winfrid Stearns's mother died when he was a young boy, shortly after the family's move to Amherst. Stearns was one of six children; he had two brothers and three sisters. His sisters married in their father's faith to other ministers, but Winfrid and his brothers eschewed the religion of their parents.

The oldest brother, William French Stearns (1834-1874), became a business owner, trader, and traveler. Among William French's friends and acquaintances was the African explorer and humanitarian Dr. David Livingstone. William French delivered mail from Livingstone to the *New York Herald*, and appeared in the reporting of the Livingstone - Stanley controversy.

Winfrid's other brother, Frazar Augustus Stearns (1840-1862), was killed in battle at New Bern, March 14th, 1862 in the Civil War.

Winfrid Stearns graduated from Amherst College in 1876, the year of his father's death. Stearns was cited by his college fraternity as having been variously a manager of *The Salem Press*, an author, connected for three years with the scientific department of Massachusetts State Agriculture College (also in Amherst) and as curator of its Agricultural Museum. Stearns was employed as a compositor (typesetter) by the F. W. Putnam & Co. publishing in 1879. He later was a compositor at Riverside Press in Cambridge, continuing to work there after obtaining the position of curator at Massachusetts Agricultural College in Cambridge in 1886.

Stearns was fascinated with natural science from a young age. Noted as a boy for having several collections of birds eggs and a printing press, Stearns published a juvenile newspaper entitled *The Young American* in the attic of the family house during the 1860's. During his college years, he collected specimens of local fauna. He also began to correspond with noted professionals such as Spencer Fullerton Baird, then the Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. Stearns supplemented his income following college by collecting and shipping specimens to museums and other institutions, including the Smithsonian.

Stearns's career following college was a long search for professional acceptance. Stearns planned to begin publishing his works before graduation from Amherst, but lack of funds and of support from the academic community delayed the publication of his first book, *New England Bird Life*, until 1881. Stearns belonged to some of the first ornithological organizations in America, such as the Nuttall Ornithological Club and

the American Ornithologists' Union. Much of the correspondence in the collection relates in some way to these two organizations. Stearns was essentially a gifted amateur. Although his work was often heavily criticized for its lack of authenticity, veracity, and professionalism, at least one title *Labrador; A Sketch of its Peoples, Its Industries and Its Natural History*, was deemed sufficiently acceptable to be reviewed by leading popular periodicals of the time, including *The Nation* and *The Saturday Evening Post*.

Stearns continually sought employment compatible with his scientific pursuits and strove to have his work published. In 1882, he sought work at Ward's Natural Science Establishment, a major supply house for scientific institutions, but declined an offer because of the low salary and fears the position would impinge on his writing. He sought employment with Wards again in 1883, but was not considered. In continual search of employment, he volunteered to give his collections of hard-won specimens to the Massachusetts College of Agriculture (now the University of Massachusetts), as well as his services, in order to promote himself as a curator of a proposed museum at the college in 1884-1885. In his attempts to bolster his credit in order to finance his publishing career, he cited the pending appointment as one he already had. Word of this resulted in his summary dismissal from consideration for the position. Stearns also attempted to publish his own journal, "The Massachusetts Bulletin of Natural History," for which he solicited subscriptions, and which was roundly criticized by C. Hart Merriam (former president of the Nuttall Ornithological Club) of the American Ornithological Union, for the use of unverified opinion cited as fact. Stearns also traveled around Newfoundland at least three times to collect specimens, observe the inhabitants, and gather material for later books.

Stearns' last known residence and place of possible employment was Atlanta, Georgia. A version of one of his last works, *A Manual of Ornithology* (1895) was published by Atlanta University Press.

## Scope & content

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The Winfrid Alden Stearns Papers are comprised primarily of correspondence between Stearns and several noted early experts in the natural sciences, zoology, and ornithology.

Most of the letters describe his attempts to forward his ornithological findings, respond to queries regarding collecting birds eggs, discuss searches for employment, or concern publishing endeavors. Some correspondence from the 1870s is with Spencer Fullerton Baird and with Elliott Coues, who often served as Stearns' volunteer editor. Two letters from the 1890's include Charles Bendire's editorial commentary on Stearn's *Bird Life in Labrador*.

Of the 95 items in the collection, over eleven are to Elliott Coues, and four relate to Spencer Fullerton Baird. Most correspondents appear only once. There are a handful of letters to and from the Nuttall Ornithological Club or the American Ornithological Union. There are a few encouraging letters from Baird in the early years of Stearns' and a few acrimonious letters from reviewers in the later half of the collection. Of interest are letters from 1874 in which Stearns accuses Professor Wilder of stealing a specimen of a new fish species from him, as well as Bendire's scathing criticism from 1896 of Stearn's writing abilities

Among the correspondents other than Coues and Baird are Charles Bendire, William Brewster, James Hall, Ferdinand Vandever Hayden, William Temple Hornaday, Robert Ridgway, George Dexter Robinson, and Henry Augustus Ward.

## Administrative Information

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### Publication Information

American Philosophical Society 2007

## Provenance

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### Acquisition Information

This collection was purchased in 1990.

### Processing Information

Catalogued by Mark Harwell, 2007.

## Related Materials

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### Related Material

Related manuscript collections: The William Augustus Stearns Papers at the Amherst College Archives and Special Collections. Amherst, Massachusetts and the Elliott Coues Papers (Record Unit 7344) at the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

## Indexing Terms

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### Personal Name(s)

- Baird, Spencer Fullerton, 1823-1887
- Bendire, Charles Emil, 1836-1897
- Brewster, William, 1851-1919
- Coues, Elliott, 1842-1899
- Hall, James
- Hayden, F. V., (Ferdinand Vandever), 1829-1887
- Hornaday, William T. , (William Temple), 1854-1937
- Ridgway, Robert, 1850-1929



- Robinson, George D., (George Dexter), 1834-1896
- Ward, Henry Augustus, 1834-1906

## Subject(s)

- Birds--North America
- Natural History--North America
- Naturalist
- Ornithologist
- Ornithology--North America

## Bibliography

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Bennet, Norman R., *Livingstone's Letters to William F. Stearns* in *African Historical Studies*. v. 1, no.2, (1968), 243-254.

Cushing, Christopher, ed. *The Congregational Quarterly*, v. XIX (1877) 523.

*Around a Village Green: Sketches of Life in Amherst* [database on-line]. Provo, UT: The Generations Network, Inc., 2005. Original publication: Mary Adele Allen. *Around a Village Green: Sketches of Life in Amherst*. Northampton, Mass.: Kraushar Press, 1939.

*Massachusetts City Directories*[database on-line] (Provo, UT, The Generations Network, Inc., 2001; 2005)

*The Sixth Decennial Catalogue of The CHI PSI Fraternity, 1902* (1902), 413-414.

## Winfrid Alden Stearns Papers

## Collection Inventory

<b>Winfrid Alden Stearns Papers</b>	<b>1871-1906</b>	<b>.5 linear ft. Box 1</b>
<b>Stearns, Winfrid Alden, 1852-1909</b> ALS to Spencer Fullerton Baird  Letterbook copy	1871 June 6	2 p.
<b>Stearns, Winfrid Alden, 1852-1909</b> ALS to Spencer Fullerton Baird  Letterbook copy	1871 June 21	1 p.
<b>Hudson, A. J</b> ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns	1871 August 10	1 p.
<b>Stearns, Winfrid Alden, 1852-1909</b> ALS to Spencer Fullerton Baird  Letterbook copy	1871 August 21	3 p.
<b>Stearns, Winfrid Alden, 1852-1909</b> ALS to Elliott Ladd Coues  Letterbook copy	1871 December 30	3 p.
<b>Stearns, Winfrid Alden, 1852-1909</b> ALS to Elliott Ladd Coues  Letterbook copy	1872 January 11	2 p.
<b>Stearns, Winfrid Alden, 1852-1909</b> ALS to Spencer Fullerton Baird  Letterbook copy	1872 January 19	2 p.
<b>Stearns, Winfrid Alden, 1852-1909</b>	1872 January 20	4 p.

## Winfrid Alden Stearns Papers

ALS to Elliott Ladd Coues

Letterbook copy

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<b>Stearns, Winfrid Alden, 1852-1909</b>	1872 January 31	2 p.
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ALS to Elliott Ladd Coues

Letterbook copy

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<b>Brickmore, Albert S</b>	1872 February 7	3 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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<b>Stearns, Winfrid Alden, 1852-1909</b>	1872 February 9	2 p.
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ALS to Elliott Ladd Coues

Letterbook copy

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<b>Brewster, William, 1851-1919</b>	1872 February 11	4 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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<b>Stearns, Winfrid Alden, 1852-1909</b>	1872 February 24	1 p.
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ALS to My Dear Sir

Letterbook copy

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<b>Suffert, E</b>	1872 March 2	2 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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<b>Lewis, James</b>	1872 April 15	1 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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<b>Stearns, Winfrid Alden, 1852-1909</b>	1872 June 13	4 p.
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ALS to Elliott Ladd Coues

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<b>Brickmore, Albert S</b>	1873 March 31	1 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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<b>de Pourtales, Louis Francois</b>	1873 December 16	1 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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<b>Stearns, Winfrid Alden, 1852-1909</b>	1874 April 25	2 p.
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## Winfrid Alden Stearns Papers

ALS to David Starr Jordan

Letterbook copy

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<b>Stearns, Winfrid Alden, 1852-1909</b>	1874 April 28	2 p.
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ALS to Burt Green Wilder

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<b>Wilder, Burt Green</b>	1874 May 8	2 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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<b>Wilder, Burt Green</b>	1874 May 8	
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

On back of WAS to Burt Green Wilder, 1874 April 28. Responds to Stearns' accusation that he stole a specimen (and accompanying credit) for a new species of fish Stearns had found and named.

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<b>Jordan, David Starr</b>	1874 May 8	3 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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<b>Wilder, Burt Green</b>	1874 May 18	3 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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<b>Pomeroy, W. M</b>	1874 June 27	1 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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<b>Stearns, Winfrid Alden, 1852-1909</b>	1875 May 7	4 p.
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ALS to Elliott Ladd Coues

Letterbook copy

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<b>Stearns, Winfrid Alden, 1852-1909</b>	1875 May 22	1 p.
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ALS to Elliot Ladd Coues

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<b>Stearns, Winfrid Alden, 1852-1909</b>	1875 June 10	3 p.
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ALS to Elliott Ladd Coues

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<b>Stearns, Winfrid Alden, 1852-1909</b>	1875 June 10	6 p.
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ALS to Elliott Ladd Coues

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<b>Brewster, William, 1851-1919</b>	1875 October 4	2 p.
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## Winfrid Alden Stearns Papers

ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns		
<b>Jones, J. Mathew</b>	1875 October 7	1 p.
ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns		
<b>Williams, Henry Shaler</b>	1876 May 17	1 p.
ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns		
<b>Hayden, F. V., (Ferdinand Vanderveer), 1829-1887</b>	1876 June 2	2 p.
ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns		
<b>Lee &amp; Shepard [Publishers and Booksellers].</b>	1880 February 10	1 p.
ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns		
<b>Willard, S. L</b>	1881 January 22	2 p.
ALS to "Friend Wade" [Winfrid Alden Stearns]		
<b>Stearns, Winfrid Alden, 1852-1909</b>	1881 October 6	5 p.
ALS to Elliot Ladd Coues		
Letterbook copy		
<b>Stearns, Winfrid Alden, 1852-1909</b>	1881 October 8	1 p.
ALS to Elliott Ladd Coues		
Letterbook copy		
<b>American Field publishing company.</b>	1881 December 3	1 p.
ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns		
<b>Stockbridge, Levi</b>	1881 December 22	1 p.
ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns		
<b>Jessup, H. G</b>	1882 March 15	3 p.
ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns		
<b>Gerard, W. R</b>	1882 March 29	1 p.

## Winfrid Alden Stearns Papers

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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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**Wheatland, Henry** 1882 April 1 3 p.

ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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**Riley, Charles V., (Charles Valentine),** 1882 May 9 1 p.  
**1843-1895**

ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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**Austin, E. P** 1882 May 11 3 p.

ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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**Mann, B. Pickman, (Benjamin Pickman),** 1882 June 16 1 p.  
**1848-1926**

ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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**Gold, Theodore Sedgwick** 1882 July 2 1 p.

ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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**Hall, James** 1882 December 22 2 p.

ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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**Ward, Henry A.ugustus** 1882 December 31 2 p.

ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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**Grinnell, James S** 1883 January 4 2 p.

ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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**Ward, Henry Augustus** 1883 January 14 5 p.

ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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**Farnham, C. H** 1883 January 18 1 p.

ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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**Verrill, Addison Emory** 1883 February 28 3 p.

ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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**Wilder, Marshall P** 1883 March 23 2 p.

ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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## Winfrid Alden Stearns Papers

<b>Ridgway, Robert, 1850-1929</b> ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns	1883 September 17	2 p.
<b>Allen, Joseph Antisell</b> ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns	1883 September 22	2 p.
<b>Russell, John G</b> ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns	1883 October 3	2 p.
<b>Allen, Joseph Antisell</b> ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns	1883 October 14	2 p.
<b>Mann, B. Pickman, (Benjamin Pickman), 1848-1926</b> ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns	1883 October 15	3 p.
<b>Editor, New England Homestead.</b> ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns	1883 November 10	1 p.
<b>Gray, Arthur F.</b> ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns	1883 November 11	1 p.
<b>Hall, James</b> ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns	1883 December 3	1 p.
<b>Bean, Tarleton Hoffman</b> ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns	1883 December 22	1 p.
<b>Hall, James</b> ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns	1884 January 15	1 p.
<b>Sage, John H</b> ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns	1884 February 6	2 p.
<b>Grinnell, James S</b> ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns	1884 February 28	1 p.
<b>Robinson, George D., (George Dexter), 1834-1896</b>	1884 March 26	2 p.

## Winfrid Alden Stearns Papers

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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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<b>Merriam, C. Hart, (Clinton Hart), 1855-1942</b>	1884 April 7	2 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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<b>Sanborn, Francis Gegory</b>	1884 April 26	1 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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<b>Colburn, W. W</b>	1884 April 29	1 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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<b>Lintner, J. A</b>	1884 May 8	1 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

Postcard

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<b>Stoddard, John T</b>	1884 June 7	1 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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<b>Hornaday, William T. , (William Temple), 1854-1937</b>	1884 October 27	1 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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<b>Shaler, Nathaniel Southgate , 1841-1906</b>	1884 January 28	2 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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<b>Hall, James</b>	1885 May 14	1 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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<b>Garrison, Wendell Phillips</b>	1885 July 31	1 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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<b>Jackson, James</b>	1885 July 31	2 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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<b>Ward, Henry Augustus</b>	1885 December 12	1 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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<b>Stearns, Winfrid Alden, 1852-1909</b>	1885 December 19	1 p.
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## Winfrid Alden Stearns Papers

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 ALS to George Noyes
 

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<b>Noyes, George</b>	1885 December 22	1 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns		
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<b>Russell, John Edwards</b>	1885 December 22	1 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns		
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<b>Ware, Benjamin P</b>	1885 December 22	2 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns		
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<b>Grinnell, James S</b>	1885 December 23	1 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns		
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<b>Coan, T. Munson</b>	1886 March 13	1 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns		
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<b>Pillsbury, J. H</b>	1886 March 29	2 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns		
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<b>Lintner, J. A</b>	1886 April 14	1 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns		
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<b>Fernald, Charles Henry</b>	1886 June 14	1 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns		
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<b>Nickerson, George Y</b>	1887 June 14	1 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns		
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<b>Allen, J. A</b>	1887 September 25	2 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns		
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<b>Grinnell, James S</b>	1888 January 25	1 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns		
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<b>Bendire, Charles Emil, 1836-1897</b>	1894 January 29	1 p.
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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns		
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<b>Bendire, Charles Emil, 1836-1897</b>	1896 January 7	4 p.
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## Winfrid Alden Stearns Papers

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ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns

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<b>Young, C. J</b>	1906 January 17	2 p.
ALS to Charles F. Jeruiey?		

Possibly unrelated or extraneous to collection.

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<b>Coues, Elliott, 1842-1899</b>	d.d.	1 p.
ALS to Winfrid Alden Stearns		

Fragment.

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<b>Stearns, Winfrid Alden, 1852-1909</b>	n.d.	1 p.
ALS to unknown		

Letterbook copy. Fragment.

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Museum interior, reproduction silver print nineteenth century photograph.	n.d.	1 photo print
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Photograph of interior of purported Stearns museum.

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