

**Asa Fitz collected papers,
1840-1878 (inclusive)**

SC201

Watertown Free Public Library, Watertown, MA

Summary

Collection name: Asa Fitz collected papers, 1840-1878 (inclusive)

Collection number: SC201

Repository: Watertown Free Public Library (Watertown, Massachusetts)

Creator: Fitz, Asa, 1810-1878 (creator)

Fitz, Charles F., Sr., 1835-1917 (creator and collector)

Fitz family

Extent: 0.22 cubic feet (7 items in 1 clamshell box)

Language: English

Source of acquisition: Unknown. Donated to WFPL in or before 1982 with other Fitz Family collections.

Processing information: The source of this collection is unknown. It was catalogued under the number HIST 929.2 FITZ 1840-1878. Local History Librarian Kay Gardner-Westcott created an inventory with item-level descriptions. Archivist Julia Grabianowski processed this collection in 2019, drawing on these descriptions. Finding aid revised by Caroline Littlewood in 2021.

Conditions governing access: This collection can be used and scanned in Local History Room, Watertown Free Public Library. Copyright Watertown Free Public Library.

Preferred citation: Asa Fitz collected papers, SC201, Watertown Free Public Library Local History Collection, Watertown, Mass.

Biographical Note

Asa Fitz (1810-1878) (née Fitts) was a hymn writer, music teacher and publisher who has been credited with introducing singing curricula to public schools.

Born in 1810 to Samuel and Sarah (Towle) Fitts, he spent his formative years in Candia, New Hampshire and the surrounding area. In 1831, he married Susan Burroughs. Asa and

Susan had children Ellen Eliza (1835-1886), Charles Frederick (1835-1917), and Susan (1839-1871).

Fitz moved to Massachusetts in the late 1830s. He wrote and published his first work, *The Scholar's First Lessons in Music*, in 1839. Several other songbooks for children followed, including *My Little Singing Book* (1840), *The Vestry Singing Book* (1841), *American School Song Book* (1843), *Public School Singing Book* (1848), *American School Hymn Book* (1854), and *The Exercise Song Book* (1856). Fitz also edited the periodical *Musical Reporter* (1841) and the weekly *Scholar's Penny Gazette* from 1848 to 1850 and produced musical ephemera, such as exhibition charts and song cards.

In his books and lessons, Fitz advocated for singing instruction in public schools that was universally accessible, morally and spiritually sound, and enjoyable. Many of Fitz's songbooks contained teacher guides, meant to train educators in musical instruction. Fitz also taught his methods of instruction at teachers' institutes across the state. He visited many of the schools using his materials to promote his particular system of musical notation, which he described in the book *School Songs for the Million!* (1850).

Later in life, Fitz became interested in spiritualism and simple living. He resided in a structure built near the top of Prospect Hill in Waltham, Massachusetts, where he farmed and received occasional visitors. He was known by some as the "Waltham Hermit."

Fitz passed away at the age of 67 in Watertown, Massachusetts in 1878. He was survived by his two children, Ellen Fitz and Charles F. Fitz.

Scope and Content Note

This collection contains materials documenting Asa Fitz's life and professional interests and work. It includes newspaper obituaries and small published books and written material.

The newspaper obituaries are from local publications and describe his community presence during his later years and his earlier notable professional and creative accomplishments. Published music and educational materials include but are not limited to songbooks and material on teaching. Two of the songbooks contain Asa Fitz's hymns. Also included is a multiplication table set to his music. The remaining materials represent his diverse interests and the work of his contemporaries.

Organization and Arrangement

This collection has been arranged into two series:

Series I. Life and Legacy Papers, 1878

Series II. Teaching and Music Materials, 1840-1859

Series List

Series I: Life and Legacy Papers, 1878 (3 items in 1 Folder)

Scope and Content: This series contains materials that document Asa Fitz's personal and professional life. Included are two obituaries from local newspapers and a letter from his son Charles F. Fitz after Asa Fitz's death. The letter discusses Asa Fitz's life and ancestry.

Organization and Arrangement: Materials have been arranged by item type and have been stored in protective sleeves.

--- Letter from Charles F. Fitz to Mr. Allen, September 8, 1878.

----Newspaper Obituary #1: *The Late Asa Fitz*, 1878.

--- Newspaper Obituary #2: *Mr. Asa Fitz*, 1878.

Series II: Teaching and Music Materials, 1840-1859 (4 items)

Scope and Content Note: This series contains materials that are relevant to Asa Fitz's career in music education. Included is his own published work and work from which he drew inspiration.

Organization and Arrangement: Items are stored individually in protective sleeves and have been arranged alphabetically by author and then by date of publication.

--- Copy of *The Log Cabin & Hard Cider Melodies: A Collection of Popular and Patriotic Songs*, Published in Boston by Charles Adams, 1840.

--- Copy of *American School Hymn Book*, by Asa Fitz. Published in Boston by Crosby, Nichols & Co. Inscribed to Susie W. Forbes, Northborough, Massachusetts, 1859.

--- A Copy of *the "Fitz's School Tables, No. 1. Multiplication, addition, subtraction, and division tables "set to music by Asa Fitz,"* undated.

--- Copy of *An Almanac Containing an Account of the Celestial Motions, Aspects, &c For the year of the Christian Empire, 1691,* by Henry Newman, Philomath. Published in Hartford, CT. by Ira Webster, 1843.

Access Points

PEOPLE:

Fitz, Asa, 1810-1878

Fitz family

CORPORATE NAMES:

Crosby, Nichols, and Company

SUBJECTS:

Educational Change

Music--Instruction and study

Musical notation--history

Obituaries

Songbooks

PLACES:

Waltham (Mass.)

Watertown (Mass.)