

John and Lydia Morris estate papers

01

**Finding aid prepared by Celia Caust-Ellenbogen and Faith Charlton through the
Historical Society of Pennsylvania's Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small
Archival Repositories.**

Last updated on August 23, 2013.

Morris Arboretum Archives

Table of Contents

Summary Information.....	3
Biography/History.....	3
Scope and Contents.....	4
Administrative Information.....	5
Related Materials	5
Controlled Access Headings.....	6

Summary Information

Repository	Morris Arboretum Archives
Creator	Morris, Lydia Thompson, 1849-1932
Title	John and Lydia Morris estate papers
Call number	01
Date [bulk]	1886-1932
Date [inclusive]	1854-1932
Extent	9.5 linear feet
Language	English
Abstract	<p>The land that is now the Morris Arboretum at the University of Pennsylvania, the official Arboretum of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, was previously the private estate of Quaker siblings John Thompson Morris (1847-1915) and Lydia Thompson Morris (1849-1932). The John and Lydia Morris estate papers, 1854-1932, consist of the siblings' papers primarily relating to the adjacent lands they donated to form the Arboretum--Compton and Bloomfield estates. The collection includes financial ledgers, receipts, correspondence, and other primary-source documents, as well as secondary-source copies of Morris family documents held elsewhere and articles on the Morris family.</p>

Biography/History

"The Morris Arboretum of the University of Pennsylvania began in 1887 as 'Compton,' the summer home of Quaker siblings John and Lydia Morris. [Eventually, with the purchase of Bloomfield Farm in 1913, the property encompassed more than 166 acres.] The I.P. Morris Company, an iron-manufacturing firm founded by their father and later run by John Morris, was a source of family wealth.

"The land the Morrises purchased in Chestnut Hill was barren, with poor soil that drained too quickly; but with diligent care they surrounded their home with a landscape and plant collection devoted to beauty and knowledge. 'Two Lines,' a sculpture by George Rickey marks the former mansion site. The Widener Visitor Center was formerly the carriage house.

"John was a noted plantsman and community leader who explored the new world of knowledge available to Victorians. John and Lydia traveled widely in America, Asia, and Europe bringing ideas, artwork, crafts and plants back to Compton. They shared a love of history and art, and established a tradition of placing sculpture in the garden that continues today. The Morrises were active in civic affairs and preservation, and believed in the power of education. It was their earnest hope to be judged 'worthy stewards.'

"John and Lydia Morris laid plans for a school and laboratory at Compton devoted to horticulture and botany. Through the stewardship and vision of the Quaker family, Compton became the Morris Arboretum of the University of Pennsylvania in 1932. Listed on The National Register of Historic Places, it is an interdisciplinary resource center for the University, and is recognized as the official arboretum of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Science, art, and humanities are pursued through a variety of research, teaching, and outreach programs that link the Arboretum to a worldwide effort to nurture the earth's forests, fields and landscapes."

Bibliography:

Quoted text from: Morris Arboretum of the University of Pennsylvania. "History of the Morris Arboretum." Accessed January 24, 2013.

http://www.business-services.upenn.edu/arboretum/about_history.shtml.

Scope and Contents

This collection consists of papers of John and Lydia Morris, primarily relating to the lands Lydia donated upon her death in 1932 to form the Morris Arboretum at the University of Pennsylvania--Compton and Bloomfield estates.

The bulk of this collection relates directly to the finances and administration of the Compton estate, purchased in 1887, and the adjacent Bloomfield estate, purchased in 1913. These include volumes of "Bloomfield Farm/Compton Estate Year Books," 1922-1930 (mostly maintained by John Tonkin, Head Gardener), describing daily weather and activities of workers. There are also account books of Dr. Frank Gould, a landscape engineer and architect who helped the Morris siblings design several features of the Arboretum, from about 1900-1920. Time books listing employees' hours date from 1917-1932. Additional Bloomfield/Compton records include correspondence and receipts from contractors, correspondence and information about plant sources, and expense records. Of special interest are three Bloomfield Farm diaries with clippings, 1914-1915, with information about contemporary agricultural science and prominent botanists and gardens from the time. Another highlight is correspondence with Charles Sprague Sargeant, a dendrologist who helped plan the landscape of the arboretum.

This collection also contains a smaller amount of John and Lydia Morris papers not directly related to the operation of Compton and Bloomfield. These include income/disbursement records of their other

investments; household account ledgers; one childhood photograph; printed catalogs of the Morris siblings' books and estate holdings; and a three-volume "Catalog of Articles of Interest Belonging to John T. and Lydia T. Morris," detailing antiques and objects in their estate. There is also a ledger from John and Lydia's mother, Rebecca T. Morris, dating from 1869-1890.

Finally, this collection includes some secondary materials on the Morris family, principally copies of Morris family documents held elsewhere, articles on the Morris family, and unpublished research and genealogy on the Morris family.

Administrative Information

Morris Arboretum Archives

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Sponsor

This preliminary finding aid was created as part of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories. The HCI-PSAR project was made possible by a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Access Restrictions

Contact Morris Arboretum Archives for information about accessing this collection.

Processing Information Note

Summary descriptive information on this collection was compiled in 2012-2014 as part of a project conducted by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania to make better known and more accessible the largely hidden collections of small, primarily volunteer run repositories in the Philadelphia area. The Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories (HCI-PSAR) was funded by a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

This is a preliminary finding aid. No physical processing, rehousing, reorganizing, or folder listing was accomplished during the HCI-PSAR project.

In some cases, more detailed inventories or finding aids may be available on-site at the repository where this collection is held; please contact Morris Arboretum Archives directly for more information.

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials Note

Hagley Museum and Library: Morris family papers, 1684-1935, collection 0721.

Historical Society of Pennsylvania: Louise Kellner diaries, 1889-1903, collection Am.0905.

Historical Society of Pennsylvania: Morris family papers, 1695-1965, collection 2000B.

Historical Society of Pennsylvania: Thompson family papers, 1607-1936, collection 654.

Independence National Historical Park Archives: Morris family papers, 1741-1989, collection INDE 101264.

Controlled Access Headings

CORPORATE NAME(S)

- University of Pennsylvania. Morris Arboretum

GEOGRAPHIC NAME(S)

- Chestnut Hill (Philadelphia, Pa.)
- Montgomery County (Pa.)
- Philadelphia (Pa.)
- Springfield (Montgomery County, Pa. : Township)

PERSONAL NAME(S)

- Morris, John Thompson, 1847-1915
- Morris, Lydia Thompson, 1849-1932

SUBJECT(S)

- Agriculture
- Arboretums
- Botany
- Gardens, Victorian
- Landscape architecture

- Landscape gardening
- Quakers