

# ALBANY INSTITUTE OF HISTORY & ART

## A Guide to the Dana Natural History Society Collection

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### Summary Information

**Repository**

Albany Institute of History & Art Library

**Creator**

Unidentified

**Title**

Dana Natural History Society Collection

**Identifier**

MG 125

**Date**

1871-1996

**Physical Description**

8 boxes

**Physical Location**

The materials are located onsite in the Museum.

**Language of the Material**

English

**Abstract**

On November 21, 1868, under the guidance of Dr. Ebell, sixty-two people, mostly teachers, alumni, and students from the Albany Female Academy (known today as the Albany Academy for Girls) met in the school to form the Albany Chapter of the Dana Natural History Society. The Society was named in honor of Dr. James Dwight Dana a famous geologist, mineralogist, and zoologist from Yale College.

This collection contains materials such as newspaper clippings, member written articles, histories, documents from meetings and proceedings, scrapbooks, photographs, letters, awards, and other ephemera.

## **Preferred Citation**

Preferred citation for this material is as follows:

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## **Immediate Source of Acquisition**

Accession: # LIB.2007.056

Accession Source/Date: Gift of Eleanor E. Turner, 2007; Anna E. Koster, Mariou Raymond, & Edith B. Ogden, 1981; and Mrs. Charles J. Grace, 1961

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## **Processing Information**

Processed by L. Moosmann, August 2011; finding aid updated by H. Cox, June 2021.

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## **Biographical/Historical**

In 1868, Dr. Adrian J. Ebell, a student at Albany Medical College was asked to give a lecture to the students of the Albany Female Academy on natural history. The lectures

given by Dr. Ebell received such enthusiasm that Dr. Ebell suggested interested parties form a group to further their knowledge of natural science. On November 21, 1868, under the guidance of Dr. Ebell, sixty-two people, mostly teachers, alumni, and students from the Albany Female Academy (known today as the Albany Academy for Girls) met in the school to form the Albany Chapter of the Dana Natural History Society. The Society was named in honor of Dr. James Dwight Dana a famous geologist, mineralogist, and zoologist from Yale College.

Dr. Ebell claimed to have formed other such societies at other institutions in the hopes of creating an affiliated network. There is evidence that similar societies may have been formed in Ohio and at Ripley College in Poultney, Vermont. However, many of these groups disbanded quickly after their organization. By 1876, the Albany chapter was the only society of its kind left. "Albany Chapter" was subsequently dropped from its name in 1888 and the title "Dana Natural History of Albany" was adapted.

The goal of the Dana Society was "to awaken in ourselves and others a growing interest in the study of natural sciences, both their practical and scientific bearing" and "to collect for our own use a cabinet and library." While the interest and maintenance of the Society's library and cabinet varied over the years, their collection included many unique items. In 1887, the society was honored to receive a collection of 104 marine vertebrates from the Smithsonian Institute of Washington D.C. This gift was often noted by the society as their "most valued collection."

In addition to these goals, the Dana Society distinguished itself as a women's organization. While men were allowed honorary membership, all financial and executive decisions were to be made by women. The Society met the first week of each month. During which time two papers were presented on topics relating to biology, zoology, botany, or geology. The subject of one of the papers was often assigned and discussed in a previous meeting. The locations of these meeting places in Albany changed over the years, and included such institutions as the Albany Female Academy, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Women's Club, the Harmanus Bleecker Library, and the Albany Institute of History & Art.

In addition to monthly meetings, the Society also coordinated various educational events and lectures often with cooperation of the Albany Institute (before it merged with History & Art) and the Troy Scientific Society. Some of these events were known as "Field Days." A "Field Day" consisted of a one or two day trip to an outdoor location. The first field day held exclusively for the Dana Society took place in October 1872 at the Bash Bish Falls in the Berkshires. To supplement its meetings and outings, the Dana Society also hosted talks by professors, scientists, and state officials.

Each year the Society celebrated two public events; the Society's anniversary and Guest Day (sometimes these events occurred on the same day). During the anniversary celebration, the Society awarded honorary memberships to those in the natural science community, and guest speakers from various fields of natural science were invited to speak. The anniversary ceremony also included the recitation of papers written by society

members and tributes to departed members. Most events also included a display of the “Dana coffee pot” a beloved relic that was used by Dana on field trips and excursions dating back to the 1920s. Musical entertainment and refreshments were often provided.

In 1888, the Dana Society was invited to become a member of the International Geological Congress. When the Congress met on September 17, 1888, The Dana Society was the only women’s scientific society from America represented. While the Society’s chosen delegate, Miss Lucy A. Plympton (Principal of the Albany Female Academy) was the only female delegate in attendance.

In 1893, the Dana Society applied directly to the World’s Fair and was invited to display as one of the oldest women’s scientific societies. A “Folio” of Dana Society’s most important documents was created and displayed at the fair. This “Folio” was later displayed at the Paris Exposition in 1900 where the Society received a bronze medal. The medal and “Folio” were exhibited at the 1900 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York and the 1939 World’s Fair in New York City.

Following Arbor Day in 1900, the Dana Society decided to plant trees in an “unsightly plot” known as Delaware Square on Delaware Avenue. The Society received approval from the mayor to improve the area and rename it “Dana Park.” After the creation of the park, the Society sought to create a memorial to their namesake Dr. James Dana who had died in 1895. Three years later on April 27, 1903 the Dana Fountain was erected and was unveiled on Arbor Day. The fountain was designed by Flint & Company Architects of Albany, New York, and contained sculptures of fossils and shells that were created from sketches by State Geologist, Dr. F.H. Merrill. The fountain later became the Society’s “Field Day” rallying point.

Throughout its history the Dana Society continually expressed its passion and interest in the natural world. After the Society proposed that a “Bird Day” be observed in the city schools, on April 2, 1915, “Bird Day” was observed throughout the state. State Bird Day was then observed annually for several years until becoming incorporated into Arbor Day, and other environment events. The Dana Society continued to celebrate “Bird Day” until voting to discontinue the annual event in 1947.

The Dana Society continued to write papers, support causes, and hold events up through the 1980’s. The Society officially disbanded in the late 1990’s.

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## **Scope and Contents**

The collection is organized into two series. The first series uses the original organization from the Dana Natural History Society’s own archivists. A photocopy of the original folder is available in each acid-free folder. The second series organizes the rest of the collection by related subjects like, Dana Park, field days, and anniversaries, or by material such as newspaper clippings and photographs. Items within these subject or

material sections are then in chronological order. All items with unknown dates are located at the end of each section.

This collection contains materials regarding the Dana Natural History Society such as newspaper clippings, member written articles, histories, documents from meetings and proceedings, scrapbooks, photographs, letters, awards, and other ephemera from its inception in 1868 to its cessation in the early 1990's.

Separated curatorial items are held by the Curatorial Department and are available upon request.

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Articles and magazine clippings collected for research by Dana undated		33
Articles concerning James Dana and the History of the Dana Society: “Dana Natural History Society,” transcribed from History of Albany County and Schenectady County, 1886; “Historical Sketch of the Dana Natural History Society by Miss Janet McNaughton,” reprinted from the <i>Albany Argus</i> , 1876; “James Dwight Dana (a brief historical sketch),” by David E. Jensen		34
Correspondence Transcribed copy of letter from the Paris Exposition to Dana Society awarding them the bronze medal (see curatorial for medal), 18 August 1900; Letter from Mary B. Church in the Florida Sanitarium to Mrs. Selkirk in Albany, New York, Church informs Selkirk on the progress of her illness, her time spent in the Florida Sanitarium, and the death of John S. Burroughs, 31 March 1922; Letter from Mary B. Church in the Florida Sanitarium to the members of the Dana Natural History Society in Albany, New York, Church sends her love to her fellow members and recounts the news of her tumor and impending death, 15 April 1923; Letter from Mrs. James S. Larson (corresponding secretary) to Mrs. Harry Raymond, Larson thanks Mrs. Raymond and her husband for compiling “The History of the Dana Natural History Society Vol. II,” 9 June 1940; Letter to Mrs. John Davis Hatch from Dana Natural History Society, invitation to attend Annual Tea, 26 February 1945; Postcard to Mr. & Mrs. John Davis Hatch from Sarah D. Masten (corresponding secretary), invitation to Annual Tea, 23 February 1947; Christmas cards designed by Alice Pauline Schafer, circa 1949 Postcard to Mrs. Frank H. McLaughlin from Mrs. Charles E. Betts (corresponding secretary), invitation to talk given by Mrs. Grace Hudowalski, 28 March 1966		35
Drafts of a letter to the editor of <i>The Albany Medical Nexus</i> written by Edith B. Ogden and signed by Mrs. Mary E. Van Oostenbrugge; Three copies of the published letter on page 4 of <i>The Albany Medical Nexus</i> , Volume IX, No. 4, 30 January 1987		36
Treasurer’s ledgers, circa 1948-1968	5	1
Receipts and financial notes, 1967, 1968, 1972, 1973		2
Dana Society Attendance record, 1930-1957; Note by Mrs. Shorey keeper of attendance record, circa November 1956-1957		3
Notes, announcements, forms and certificates regarding Dana Natural History Society Science Awards for 6, 7, 8 grade students at Bethlehem Central Middle School, 1981, 1982, 1986		4
Pressed Alpine Flowers presented to the Dana Natural History Society by Mrs. W.W. Crannell, February 1888		5

Album of pressed Alpine Flowers collected by Elizabeth B. Kirkbride in 1889; Letter from Elizabeth B. Kirkbride to Mrs. W. Irving Zietler, Kirbride gives her books of pressed flowers to the Dana Society, 26 November 1966		6
Various Ephemera Dana Natural History Society Reception object tag; House for Sale form for home of Mr. H.D. Schafer; “Zoological Donations to the New York State Museum for Members of the Dana Natural History,” 2 February 1943; Map of Greenville, Coxsackie, Cairo, Catskill counties in New York State, “Round Top June 1990 North-South Lake State Campsite” inscribed in pen		7
Notes and labels left by Dana Archivists/Librarians; Notes left by Dana Archivists/Librarians regarding the collection; Labels made of objects in the collection that could not be located or have been found loose; Appears to be a chart identifying people in a photo, found loose photo unknown		8
Slide directories related to items in folders 10 and 11 See Chronicle II for information about Kodachrome slides that were gifted to the Dana Society in 1944		9
Gem Jr. Wooden Box of Kodachrome Slides, most labeled, c.1942 (Folder refers to box and its contents not actual folder)		10
Green Box of Kodachrome Slides, most labeled, 1941-1942 (Folder refers to box and its contents not actual folder)		11
Oversize Items Recording Secretary’s Book No. 3., red with “Dana Natural History Society’ in gold on binding, 1894-1917; Blue Scrapbook contains newspaper clippings and photographs from 1938-1991 arranged in chronological order (date of creation and creator unknown); Black Scrapbook (unbound & tied) contains newspaper clippings, photographs, and ephemera 1922-1963. Note: pages M1-M18 retain original order, other pages were found loose and organized chronologically	6	
The “Dana Folio,” bound with wooden cover, contains information of the organization up to 1893 including histories, field days, lists of officers, speakers, and events, etc. Prepared for exhibition at the World’s Fair in Chicago 1893, shown at subsequent exhibitions; Universal Exposition Paris 1900, Pan-American Exposition Buffalo 1900, New York World’s Fair 1939	7	
“The Dana Chronicle Vol. I,” bound with a wooden cover, contains information on the organization up to 1940 including histories, field days, lists of officers, speakers, and events, etc. Originally prepared for		

1939 World's Fair but was used, became a collected history, Mrs. Harry Raymond prepared the Chronicle and finished it in 1941		
"The Dana Chronicle Vol. II," with wooden cover, contains information on the organization from 1940 to 1950 including histories, field days, lists of officers, speakers, and events, etc. Prepared by Mrs. Harry Raymond	8	
Bird Day Posters from 1937-1942 & Folder. Folder contains Bird Day Flyer, transcribed newspaper clipping about Bird Day from April 1942, memo about Bird Day Lecture that was sent to schools January 1927, and a copy of a Report sent to the Nation Audubon Society that discusses Bird Day October 1921		
Bird Day Posters, 1943-1946		
Moss Exhibit containing various samples of moss and an illustrated moss life cycle author and undated		
"The Family Tree of the Flowers," largely printed paragraph author and undated		