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Descriptive Summary

Repository: Archives of the Arnold Arboretum, Harvard University
Call No.: III EJP
Location: Archives
Title: Ernest Jesse Palmer (1875-1962) papers, 1911-1987
Date(s): 1911-1987
Creator: Palmer, Ernest Jesse
Quantity: 12 linear inches
Abstract: In 1901, Ernest Jesse Palmer began his lengthy association with Charles Sprague Sargent and the Arnold Arboretum. He remained a "collector-at-large" for the next twenty years, working not only for the Arboretum, but beginning in 1913 for Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis as well. In 1921 Sargent offered Palmer a position at the Arboretum's as a "collector-botanist" and he moved to Massachusetts to become, and remain, a member of the staff for the next twenty-six years.

Note: Access to Finding Aid record in Hollis Classic or Hollis.
Preferred Citation: Ernest Jesse Palmer papers. Archives of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University.

Acquisition Information

Provenance: This collection was transferred from the Arnold Arboretum's departmental holdings to the Arboretum's Archives in 1986 when the Archive was established.
Processing: 2006; revised 2007, Joshua Lascel; 2009, Larissa Glasser; 2012 Sheila Connor

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Biographical Note

Ernest Jesse Palmer was born in Leicester, England on April 8, 1875, the son of Amos and Annie Palmer. The Palmers and their two children, Ernest and Louise, immigrated to the United States in 1878, first living in Warrensburg, Missouri then settling in Webb City when Palmer was fourteen years old. Palmer's formal education was interrupted when he was obliged to leave high school and seek employment, but he continued to pursue his education on a part-time basis at the Webb City Baptist College where he studied English, history, mathematics, economics, and poetry as well as Latin and Greek.

In 1900, while still enrolled as a student and, in his words “focused on natural history with a particular interest in geology,” he read *A list of the trees, shrubs and vines of Missouri* by Benjamin Franklin Bush (1858-1937). B.F. Bush was also collecting specimens for the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis and had just begun to do so for the Arnold Arboretum for Charles Sprague Sargent (1841-1927) the Arboretum’s first director, who was specifically interested in obtaining collections of the genus *Crateagus*.

In the introduction to *A List of Trees* Bush requested “teachers, farmers and horticulturists do all they can to further this by corresponding with the undersigned, and sending twigs, leaves, flowers and fruit of every woody plant that they desire to learn the name of...” Palmer sent Bush his unknown plants and was urged by Bush to send more. Palmer’s lifelong friendship with Bush and his association with the Arnold Arboretum began the following spring when Palmer began accompanying Bush “Whenever possible...as his eager assistant, guide and pupil.” Palmer remained a “collector-at-large” for the next twenty years, working not only for the Arboretum, but beginning in 1913 for Missouri Botanical Garden as well. In 1921, Sargent offered Palmer a position at the Arboretum's as a “collector-botanist” and he moved to Massachusetts to become, and remain - with the exception of the year following Sargent’s death in 1927 -a member of the staff for the next twenty-six years.

During his career at the Arboretum, not only was Palmer a consummate plant collector who managed to make a trip almost every year and a skilled taxonomist who published extensively in the *Journal of the Arnold Arboretum*, he also wrote regularly for *The Bulletin of Popular Information*, the predecessor to *Arnoldia*. His articles ranged from his interest in ferns, the flora of the southwest, especially Missouri, *Crateagus* and *Quercus*, to the historic and economic use of plants. Of special note is his *The Spontaneous Flora of the Arnold Arboretum* (1930) and its *Supplement* (1935) both published in the *Journal*. In both works Palmer applied his collecting and taxonomic abilities with his knowledge of natural history, geology, soils, archaeology, and fauna to describe a flora which appeared in the Arboretum naturally and write an insightful interpretation of the landscape itself.
Palmer was also instrumental in the creation of the Arnold Arboretum's collection of early Native American artifacts, a venture he described in 1934 in "Indian Relics of the Arnold Arboretum" as “Beginning with a chance find several years ago I became interested in looking for Indian evidences here, and a persistent search carried on at odd times in walks through the Arboretum has resulted in the building up of an interesting little collection.”

In 1971, Dr. Dena Ferran Dincauze, then Assistant Curator of North American Archaeology at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology of Harvard University, published “Prehistoric Land Use in the Arnold Arboretum” in Arnoldia adding contextual content based on the prehistoric archaeology of eastern and central New England to Palmer’s collection. The collection was first displayed in 1945 in a glass case in the vestibule of the Hunnewell Administration Building. Several of the pieces were incorporated in an interpretive large-scale model of the Arboretum in 1996. This collection, supplemented by occasional finds made by Alfred J. Fordham (1911-2000), former Arboretum Plant Propagator, is now housed in the Archives. See Archives VIII A. Arnold Arboretum Collection of Native American Artifacts.

Thought by his colleagues to be a confirmed bachelor, Palmer surprised them all in 1930 when he married Elizabeth McDougal, a bacteriologist at the Massachusetts State Laboratory, which is located alongside the Arboretum. The couple, and their three children, Ernest Macdougal, Grace Elizabeth, and Theodore Windle, lived on the grounds of the Arboretum in the farm house at 1090 Centre Street, Jamaica Plain. In 1958, Elizabeth Palmer gathered the fruits of her husband’s lifelong love of poetry and published seventy-six of his poems in Gathered Leaves, Green, Gold and Sere. In the introduction, Palmer credited “a beautiful shapely sugar maple tree that stood in front of our old farmhouse home in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts” as his inspiration for his poem “The Maple Tree.”
Palmer reportedly officially collected specimens from every state the lower 48, save two. Approximately half are held by the Arnold Arboretum at the Harvard University Herbaria on the Cambridge campus. Many of his Arboretum trips were supported by Joy Morton, a friend of Sargent and founder of the Morton Arboretum in Lisle, Ohio, and its herbarium holds approximately 5,000 his specimens. In 1962, Palmer donated more than half of his 69,000 lifetime collected specimens to the University of Missouri Herbarium. The University of Missouri awards an annual scholarship in Palmer's name, which is rotated between the Department of Geology and the Division of Biological Sciences for students in the fields of paleontology and systematic biology.

Palmer at “Camp McGuire,” Davis Mountains, Texas, June 15, 1926. The camp was likely named for the ranch forman who had given Palmer permission to set up his tent and botanize.

After his retirement in 1947, the Palmers returned to his home at 321 South Main Street in Webb City and his collecting trips, his interest in *Crateagus* and *Quercus*, and his work, in association with Julian Steyermark, on the flora of the region continued uninterrupted. In 1963, *The Flora of Missouri by Steyermark* and dedicated to Palmer, was published. Ernest Jesse Palmer died on February 25, 1962 at 87 years of age.


The archivist wishes to acknowledge and thank Theodore W. Palmer, *Professor Emeritus of Mathematics, University of Oregon* for the additional information he provided about his father and the use of images from his family’s collection. As proof that the samara seldom wings its way far from the tree, beginning in 1973 as a founding member, Theodore Palmer has actively been involved in all aspects of the Mount Pisgah Arboretum, a 209 acre site within the Howard Buford Recreation Area in Eugene, Oregon.
Scope and Content
The Palmer collection contains correspondence, field notes, drawings, and photographs. The correspondence ranges from 1911 to 1957, with the 1911 to 1919 correspondence comprised almost entirely of letters between Palmer and Charles S. Sargent. A listing of correspondence between Palmer and Sargent from the years 1907-1920 is available online at the Arnold Arboretum Correspondence Index.

Arrangement
The Ernest Jesse Palmer collection is arranged in 5 series:

**Series I:** Biography
**Series II:** Correspondence
**Series III:** Field Notebooks and Drawings
**Series IV:** Publications
**Series V:** Photographs

Container List

**Box 1**

**Series I: Biography**

**Folder 1: Publications.**

**2: Photographs.**
One 8”x10” print of Palmer taken at his home in Webb City, Missouri in 1959 at age 84 with two additional cropped versions of same. Note on sleeve of 7”x5” print reads: Portrait of Ernest Jesse palmer taken in 1959 at Webb City Missouri negative loaned by Mrs. Palmer. Prints made 6-14-62 by H.H. [Heman Howard] negative returned.

![Hunnewell Building](image)

**Series II: Correspondence**
Letters from Palmer to Charles Sprague Sargent primarily regarding plants, collecting trips, sending plant, nut, fruit, and seed samples, and plant and locale descriptions.

**Folder 1:** Correspondence from E.J. Palmer to C.S. Sargent, 1911-1912
- Parker, IL. May 31, 1911.
- Webb City, MO. August 20, 1912.
- Webb City, MO. September 26, 1912.

2: Correspondence from E.J. Palmer to C.S. Sargent, 1913
- Eureka Springs, AR. September 19, 1913.
- Eureka Springs, AR. September 28, 1913.
- Eureka Springs, AR. September 29, 1913.
- Webb City, MO. October 9, 1913.
- Galena, MO. October 17, 1913.
- Webb City, MO. March 10, 1913.
- Webb City, MO. March 31, 1913.
- Webb City, MO. June 3, 1913.
- Webb City, MO. June 20, 1913.
- Noel, MO. September 1, 1913.
- Noel, MO. September 6, 1913.
- Webb City, MO. September 15, 1913.
3: Correspondence, from E.J. Palmer to C.S. Sargent, 1914

- Wharton, TX. March 2, 1914.
- Wharton, TX. March 8, 1914.
- Columbia, TX. March 23, 1914.
- Williamsville, MO. March 30, 1914.
- Columbia, TX. April 4, 1914.
- Livingston, TX. April 12, 1914.
- Marshall, TX. April 19, 1914.
- Fulton, AR. April 26, 1914.
- Noel, MO. May 1, 1914.
- Webb City, MO. May 7, 1914.
- Eureka Springs, AR. May 16, 1914.
- Cotter, AR. June 22, 1914.
- Corning, AR. June 23, 1914.
- Webb City, MO. August 20, 1914.
- Tishomingo, OK. September 11, 1914.
- Eagle Lake, TX. September 18, 1914.
- Wharton, TX. September 21, 1914.
- Webb City, MO. November 3, 1914.

4: Correspondence, from E.J. Palmer to C.S. Sargent, 1915-1916

- from C. S. Sargent (Jamaica Plain, MA) to Palmer (Webb City, MO). February 15, 1915.


- Natchitoches, LA. April 20, 1915.
- Natchitoches, LA. May 8, 1915.
- Liberty, TX. May 21, 1915.
- Corsicana, TX. May 31, 1915.
- Natchitoches, LA. June 10, 1915.
- Fulton, AR. June 17, 1915.
- Fayetteville, AR. July 8, 1915.
- Hugo, OK. July 18, 1915.
- St. Louis, MO. August 1, 1915.
- Webb City, MO. August 17, 1915.
- Burton, AR. September 3, 1915.
- Natchitoches, LA. September 30, 1915.
- Webb City, MO. October 31, 1915.

5: Correspondence from E.J. Palmer to C.S. Sargent, 1917
- Webb City, MO. February 28, 1917
- Brownwood, TX. March 31, 1917
- [Sabine?], TX. April 11, 1917
- Palestine, TX. May 27, 1917
- [Armadillo?], TX. July 7, 1917
- Mina, AR. July 28, 1917
- Webb City, MO. August 27, 1917
- Houston, TX. September 14, 1917
- San Marcos, TX. September 27, 1917
- 321 S. Allen St. [Webb City, MO] November 2, 1917

6: Correspondence from E.J. Palmer to C.S. Sargent, 1918
- Webb City, MO. February 1, 1918
- Palestine, TX. March 24, 1918
- Webb City, MO. July 2, 1918
- Webb City, MO. August 3, 1918.
- Webb City, MO. August 19, 1918
- Webb City, MO. September 12, 1918
- [St. Louis, MO]. December 31, 1918
7: Correspondence from E.J. Palmer to C.S. Sargent, 1919-1920

- St. Louis, MO. January 26, 1919.
- from C. S. Sargent (Jamaica Plain, MA) to Palmer. March 3, 1919. **NOTE:** This is original of letter copied into Charles Sprague Sargent’s correspondence. This item is missing pages 2 and 3. The copy is fully intact, and is located in IB CSS, Series II, Box 9 (1917-1923), p. 392-394. Click here for Records of Charles Sprague Sargent, 1893-1927 (inclusive): A Finding Aid.
- Caruthersville, MO. April 12, 1919.
- Cairo, IL. April 20, 1919.
- Cairo, IL. April 30, 1919.
- [Campbell Hill?], IL. May 20, 1919.
- Shawneetown, IL. June 20, 1919.
- 321 So. Allen St., Webb City, MO. July 10, 1919.
- 321 So. Allen St., Webb City, MO. July 19, 1919.
- 321 So. Allen St., Webb City, MO. August 17, 1919.
- 321 So. Allen St., Webb City, MO. September 6, 1919.
- Fulton, AR. September 9, 1919.
- Cairo, IL. September 20, 1919.
- Cairo, IL. September 30, 1919.
- Cairo, IL. October 1, 1919.
- Elizabethtown, IL. October 11, 1919.
- 321 South Allen St., Webb City, MO. December 31, 1919.

**Please Note:** In addition to these original letters, Stephanie (SvIva) Barry Sutton acquired photocopies of Palmer correspondence principally from the Missouri Botanic Garden, when Ms. Sutton was researching C.S. Sargent’s life for her biography *Charles Sprague Sargent and the Arnold Arboretum*. This photocopied material, which consists of approximately 335 letters in three file folders, is filed following folder 7 for the convenience of researchers. Individuals wishing to use quotes, or publish excerpts from any of these letters must request permission from the appropriate archive or individual copyright holder.
Respondents: Professor J.G. Jack, Alfred Rehder, Mrs. Gilman, Dr. Ivan M. Johnston, Mrs. Clemmens

- from Palmer, 321 So. Allen St., Webb City, MO to J.G. Jack, Walpole, MA. April 9, 1928.
- from Palmer, Orlando, FL to Alfred Rehder, Jamaica Plain, MA. March 31, 1931.
- from Palmer, Gainesville, FL to Alfred Rehder, Jamaica Plain, MA. April 6, 1931.
- from Palmer, Tallahassee, FL to Alfred Rehder, Jamaica Plain, MA. April 10, 1931.
- from Palmer, Elba, AL to Alfred Rehder, Jamaica Plain, MA. April 14, 1931.
- from Palmer, 321 So. Allen St., Webb City, MO to Alfred Rehder, Jamaica Plain, MA. May 11, 1931.
- [verso] from Rehder, Jamaica Plain, MA to Palmer, 321 So. Allen St., Webb City, MO. May 14, 1931.
- from Palmer, Branson, MO to Alfred Rehder, Jamaica Plain, MA. June 4, 1931.
- from Palmer, Webb City, MO to Mrs. Clemmens, June 9, 1950 [July 13, Botanic Museum].
- from Palmer, Webb City, MO to Dr. Ivan M. Johnston, Arnold Arboretum, Jamaica Plain, MA. August 23, 1957.
- from Palmer, Webb City, MO to Dr. Ivan M. Johnston, Arnold Arboretum, [Jamaica Plain, MA]. September 23, 1957.

Series III: Field Notebooks and Drawings
Folder
2: Notes, n.d.
3: Specimen Sketches – Crataegus, n.d. (Below)
**Series IV: Publications**  
**Folder**


**Box 2**  
**Series V: Photographs**

The majority of Palmer’s images reside in the Arboretum’s historic photograph collection filed by genus and species. This collection consists of approximately 250 photographs that document Palmer’s travels in the western United States. Most of the images are landscape views rather than images of specific genera. There are also a small number of views in the Arnold Arboretum in Jamaica Plain Massachusetts.

This series consists of 3 image collections:

- 41 photographs of miscellaneous topics from an album titled “Photographs”
- 191 photographs from an album labeled “Miscellaneous photographs taken in the western United States from 1922”
- 31 loose photographic prints of the Arnold Arboretum from a folder labeled “Vistas”

**Folder**

1: Photographic Album (1919-1924), 18 x 28.5 cm. (disbound). 41 black and white prints (10.5 x 8 cm.) The images are annotated in Palmer’s hand with place names and dates and were taken between 1919 and 1924. Although arranged in no discernible order, the photographs document buildings, landscapes, trees, and cultural topics in eight states: Arkansas, Massachusetts, Missouri, Oklahoma, Illinois, Iowa, Rhode Island, Texas, and Washington D.C. Nine of the 41 images were taken in the Arnold Arboretum, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts. Originally the photographs were housed in an 18 x 28.5 cm commercially produced photograph album. The album consisted of 50 leaves bound with a black cloth cover with rope tie and an embossed cover titled: “Photographs.” The photographs were mounted on acidic black paper using photo tabs. In 2006, the photographs, which were arranged on 8 leaves, were numbered sequentially and the album was photocopied and disassembled. The images were put in Mylar sleeves that were numbered according to their original sequence.

![Photograph](image_url)

**Photograph List**

2. Desert Plants – Missouri Botanical Garden, St. Louis, Mo. – Apr. 3, 1924.
6. Arnold Arboretum – March 1924.
13. Limestone bluffs – Brownwood, Texas – Oct. 31, 1924
15. Larches – Arnold Arboretum.

17. Pioneer log house built of Cypress logs about 1835 – Oct. 4, 1919. (Above)
19. Arkansas State Capitol – Little Rock, Ark. – April 8, 1922.
22. *Betula nigra*, banks of Center Creek – near Webb City, Mo. – April 19, 1924.

24. Mississippi River Bridge – Hannibal, Mo. – Sept. 1922. (Above)
25. Unlabeled photo of trees in swamp.
30. *Quercus texana* – Brownwood, Texas – Nov. 1, 1924.
34. Cambridge, Mass.

37. In the Gold Hills, near Shawneetown Ill. – Oct. 1919. (Above)
40. *Celtis occidentalis* var. *Canina* #26227 (a) – Sedalia Mo. – Sept. 30, 1924.


2A, 2B, 2C, 2D, 2E: Photographic Album (1917 – 1928), 26 x 34 cm. (disbound). Contains 191 black and white prints from 1917 – 1928, ranging in size from 7.5 x 9.5 cm. to 10 x 12.5 cm. The images document various plant-growth habits and their adjacent geographical conditions; however landscape shots of mountains, swamps and plains are included as well. Pictures taken in Arkansas, Missouri, Texas and Oklahoma predominate the album, although images can also be found from South Dakota, Michigan, Kansas, Illinois, Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, South Carolina, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Quebec, Canada. 2 shots are from the Arnold Arboretum, Jamaica Plain, MA. Originally the photographs were housed in a 26 x 34 cm. commercially produced photograph album (Sawaco Photograph Album #3341" Samuel Ward Manufacturing Company, Boston, MA, USA., [SEE BOX 3]). The album consisted of 50 leaves bound with a black cloth cover with rope tie and an embossed cover, titled: “Photographs.” The photographs were mounted on acidic black paper using photo tabs and were inscribed with the image titles below the photo in white ink. In 2007, the album was photocopied and disassembled and the photographs, which were arranged on 39 leaves, were removed. The disassembled album was kept (See box 3) and the images were sleeved in Mylar and numbered according to their original sequence in the album. Inscribed on the first leaf was: Ernest J. Palmer Photographs/Miscellaneous photographs taken in the western United States from 1922 –/and other miscellaneous photographs.

**Photograph List:**
There are two numbers on the Mylar sleeves. The first number reflects the photocopied page of the album in which it was originally found [see album photocopy in Box 2, folder 2A]. The second number is the sequential image number.

**2A:**

1. *Acer leucoderme*. Gulpha, Ark. May 15, 1924. [a]
5. *Carya* pecan. May 18, 1924.
29. *Crataegus #24646*. Galena, Mo. May 1, 1924.
30. *Crataegus #24646*. Galena, Mo. May 1, 1924.
34. *Salix # 25223 Joplin*, Mo. May 31, 1924.
2B:


44. Dry Plains Flora (*Quercus virginiana*, *Prosopis juliflora*, etc.) Brownwood, Texas. Nov. 1, 1924.
58. *Xolisma mariana*. Malvern, Ark. May 27, 1926. [a]
63. *Juniperus virginiana*, etc. Rhyolite bluffs, Fredericktown, Mo. Sept 7, 1926.
64. *Quercus alba + Cornus florida*. Cole Camp, Mo. May 12, 1926.
75. Mt. Livermore, Davis Mts., Tex. (Pinus ponderosa, Quercus grisea, etc.) June 12, 1926.

2C:
77. Quercus grisea, Q. hypoleuca, Pinus ponderosa, Juniperus pachyphlaea, etc. Banks of Limpia Canyon, Davis Mts., Tex. June 12, 1926.
78. Quercus grisea. (a) Davis Mts., Tex. June 11, 1926.
79. Quercus grisea. (b) Davis Mts., Tex. June 11, 1926.
86. Penstemon ambiguoos. #34011. Big Spring, Tex. May 17, 1928.
96. Pinus ponderosa n. side of Mt. Livermore, Davis Mts., Texas. April 22, 1928.
98. Sleet on trees and shrubs near top of Mt. Livermore. Davis Mts., Texas. April 22, 1928.
100. *Quercus shumardii* with *Rhododendron* - Fulton, Arkansas. Apr. 19, 1922.
101. Big Creek, Page, Okla. April 11, 1922.
104. Spring River, Carthage, Missouri, April 21, 1922.
110. *Amlanchier canadensis*. E. of Livonia, Mo. July 2, 1933. [a]
111. *Amlanchier canadensis*. E. of Livonia, Mo. July 2, 1933. [b]
134. *Taxodium distichum*, west of Wolf Island, Mississippi Co., Mo. July 11, 1933. [a]
135. *Taxodium distichum*, west of Wolf Island, Mississippi Co., Mo. July 11, 1933. [b]
137. *Quercus stellata* var. *rufesans* Ellis Co., Okla. July 25, 1933. [a]
143. View in Boston Mts. 15 miles south of Jasper, Ark. Aug. 2, 1933. [a]
144. View in Boston Mts. 15 miles south of Jasper, Ark. Aug. 2, 1933. [b]
188. *Acacia amentacea*.

3: Arnold Arboretum Vistas (1922), Contains 31 black and white prints of views of the Arnold Arboretum, Jamaica Plain, MA from 1922 – 1947. Many are labeled by Palmer on verso. The bulk of the photos cover particular habits of shrubs and trees, however many also reveal the larger landscape of the Arboretum including exterior shots of the Arboretum’s Hunnewell Administration Building.

**Photograph List**
1. [Front of Administration Building, Spring.]
2. Front of Administration Building, Arnold Arboretum.
5. [Ground Plane View of Meadow grasses.]
6. [Front of Hunnewell Building in Spring.]
7. Miss Ishi Hachi and Dr. Nakai. Arnold Arboretum.
8. [Winter Scene of Heavy Snowfall on Evergreens.]


15. *Syringa americusis japonica*, Arnold Arboretum, June 1936. (Above)


25. AA 6-29-1925.

27. Arnold Arboretum. July 20, 1924. (Above)

29. [View of Pond and water plants.]
31. Hydrangea quercifolia. AA 8-1-1922.

4: Arnold Arboretum Views contain 10 black and white prints of views of the Arnold Arboretum, Jamaica Plain, MA from 1922 – 1929. This collection was donated to the Archives by Ernest Palmer’s son Theodore W. Palmer in September of 2014. Many are labeled with the date and place, although some are not identified.

Photograph List
2. [Arboretum view in Winter]
3. [Arboretum view in Winter]
5. [View of Pond and water plants.] August 1928.
6. [View of Pond and water plants.] August 1928.
10. Arnold Arboretum. (D.W. Weis?) Oct. 1929

**Box 3**

Photographic Album, 26 x 34 cm. (original disbound, item kept for collection context). Originally displayed photographs in Box 2, folders 2 A-E.