

THE ISAAC BASSETT PAPERS
A Manuscript Collection

The Isaac Bassett Papers consist of approximately ten linear feet of holographic material and newspaper clippings describing the United States Senate, the House of Representatives, the Capitol Building, the city of Washington and many historical events of the 19th century.

Much of the material in this collection was written by Isaac Bassett, an employee of the Senate from 1831, until his death on December 18, 1895. Bassett was born in Washington on August 4, 1819, his father having earlier moved to work at the Capitol.

At the age of twelve, Isaac Bassett was appointed a page by Senator Daniel Webster. Only the second page to be assigned to the Senate, Bassett was later promoted to messenger, and before the Civil War was appointed assistant doorkeeper of the Senate. Throughout most of his career, Bassett worked in the Senate Chamber, where he attended to the needs of the Members and earned the reputation as the indispensable Senate employee.

Sometime after his 60th birthday, Captain Bassett (as he was frequently referred to) began to record his observations of day-to-day life in the Senate. Although written during the 1880's and 1890's, the recollections cover incidents and events from as early as 1832. According to several newspaper accounts, Bassett originally hoped to publish these writings, "at the close of his half century of service." (Isaac Bassett Papers, Box 10, p. 5) However, later newspaper articles note that Bassett planned to have his book published posthumously. One circa 1893 account records: "Two or three decades ago Bassett conceived the idea of publishing a book about the Senators, and began taking copious notes. He began to write them out." The article continues: "One of his friends told me the other day that when the old man died the book would

be immediately published; that it is completed up to date, and could be sent to press any day. I asked why he did not publish it now and reap some of the benefits of it.

"'Because,' replied the friend, 'if he were to print it now, it would probably result in his dismissal from his place and make him trouble.'

"Then it is personal?"

"Very personal. It deals of that portion of the lives of public men that all of us want to cover with charity and darkness. There are a large number of Representatives mentioned in the manuscript, and the publication will be an interesting one." (Isaac Bassett Papers, Book IV, p. 13)

The remaining material in the Bassett Papers constituting a quarter of the collection are 19th century newspaper articles. The clippings cover a variety of topics, including discussions of Senate debates in the Chamber, descriptions of Senators, House Members, the Capitol Building and the city of Washington, as well as issues and historical events. Over half of the newspaper articles are dated and identified. Most of the clippings give Bassett's direct observations.

It should be noted that, although Bassett wrote many of the sketches and accounts in this collection, other individuals were involved in editing the material. Different styles of handwriting are thus evident throughout the papers, as portions originally written by Bassett have been revised and rewritten.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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