

SPRAGUE, JOHN TITCOMB (1810–1878) COLLECTION

Location: Vault – V.R.1.1.1

Date Span: circa 1861-1865

Scope/Contents: One 9x12 box containing two CDV (carte de visite) photographic images of Civil War Brevet Brigadier General John Titcomb Sprague and a biographical note about Sprague supplied by the donor. The images are presumably Civil War era (1861-1865), though it is possible they were taken and used as calling cards after the end of the war.

Historical note on cartes de visite (from the American Museum of Photography, at <http://www.photographymuseum.com/histsw.htm>): These photographs – small albumen prints mounted on thicker paper cards 2-1/2 by 4 inches – were wildly popular and made for decades in countries around the world. The format was an international standard; for the first time, relatives and friends could exchange portraits, knowing they would find a place in the recipient's family album-- whether that album was located in Brooklyn, Berlin or Brazil. In addition, unlike earlier photographs made with such processes as the daguerreotype and ambrotype, cartes de visite could be sent through the mail without the need for a bulky case and fragile cover-glass. Their small size also made them relatively inexpensive, and they became so widespread that by 1863 Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes would write, "Card portraits, as everybody knows, have become the social currency, the 'green-backs' of civilization." The standard size format was patented by Parisian photographer André Adolphe Eugène Disdéri in 1854. Through the use of a sliding plate holder and a camera with four lenses, eight negatives could be taken by Disdéri's method on a single 8" x 10" glass plate. That allowed eight prints to be made every time the negative was printed, which made production costs less expensive.

Biographical Note (from *The Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association, at <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fsp30>): John T. Sprague was born in Newburyport, Massachusetts, on July 3, 1810. He was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps on October 17, 1834, and in the fall of 1836 he directed the removal of a final band of Creek Indians from Tallassee, Alabama, to the trans-Mississippi lands allotted to them. The next year Sprague resigned his commission as a marine and became a second lieutenant in the Fifth United States Infantry, where he served from July 3, 1837, to July 7, 1838, at which time he transferred to the Eighth Infantry. He was promoted to first lieutenant on May 1, 1839, and was sent to Florida as an aide to brevet Maj. Gen. Alexander Macomb, who had been charged with bringing the interminable Second Seminole War to an end. When Col. William Jenkins Worth brought his Eighth Infantry to Florida in 1840, Sprague, as regimental adjutant not only became Worth's aide, but eventually married his oldest daughter, Mary. Sprague was brevetted captain on March 15, 1842, for meritorious conduct in the Seminole campaign and was promoted to that rank on September 21, 1846. During the Mexican War Sprague remained in Florida in charge of Indian Affairs and served as commanding officer at Fort Brook. He was brevetted to the rank of major on May 30, 1848, for meritorious conduct in the Florida War. During Sprague's long tour in Florida, he became sympathetic to the Seminoles. His book on the Second Seminole War, published in 1848, was the only full-scale history of that seven-year conflict for more than a century and is still an indispensable source.

Sprague arrived in Texas with elements of the Eighth Infantry in January 1849, in charge of subsistence. In January 1850 he asked for field duty and was given temporary command of Fort Inge on the Leona

River. There he was to assume command of a government wagon train that was to follow the road to El Paso that had been laid out by Lt. Col. Joseph E. Johnston the year before. Sprague, with E Company, Eighth Infantry, left Fort Inge on July 1, 1850, and joined the train that had already reached Las Moras Spring. Sprague took command of the train, which consisted of 340 wagons, 4,000 animals of all kinds, 450 citizens, and 175 soldiers. Because of its large size and owing to the scarcity of water and grass along the route, Sprague divided the train into two component groups, led by Nathaniel C. Lewis and Benjamin F. Coons. Although Indians were continuously sighted, the train was not attacked but did suffer from the heat and want of water before arriving at El Paso on September 16. On May 18, 1852, Sprague was detached from E Company at Fort McKavett, Texas, and was sent East on general recruiting service. In June 1855 he was sent back to the Southwest, where he served in both Texas and New Mexico Territory. In New Mexico he saw service against the Navajo, Apache, and Comanche Indians between the Rio Grande and the Sacramento Mountains. Before leaving New Mexico in August 1858 he received a "vote of thanks" from the Territorial Legislature in a joint resolution for his services and was commended to the President of the United States for promotion.

Between 1858 and 1861 Sprague took a three-year leave of absence from the army, during which time he promoted a silver mining venture in southeastern New Mexico. In January 1861 Sprague was again ordered to Texas. He arrived in New Orleans about March 6 and was subsequently pursued to Texas for openly expressing Union sentiments and denouncing the Secession Convention then sitting in that city. Upon his arrival in San Antonio, he was prevented from rejoining his regiment at Fort Bliss and was arrested by a Committee of Public Safety. On April 23, 1861, Sprague was paroled by Confederate authorities and left Texas for New York. In June he presented a paper entitled "The Treachery in Texas" to the New York Historical Society. His monograph was the first detailed account of events leading to the federal exodus and was a scathing denunciation of the Confederate's treatment of United States officers and soldiers serving in Texas during the take-over.

Sprague was placed on active duty in Albany, New York, as United States mustering and disbursing officer and superintendent of the General Recruiting Service. Although he was elected by the citizens of Albany to command the 113th Regiment of New York Volunteers and appointed colonel by Governor Morgan, the appointment was disapproved by the Secretary of War. This disappointment was mitigated somewhat when Sprague was selected to be adjutant general for the state of New York, a position he held from August 1861 to January 1865. Following the Civil War Sprague returned to Florida, the site of his glory days as a young officer. There he commanded the Seventh Infantry Regiment until April 1869. He retired on December 15, 1870, and died in New York City on September 6, 1878.

Inventory:

Item 1: Civil War era CDV image of Civil War Brevet Brigadier General John Titcomb Sprague bearing on back the photographer mark of S. J. Thompson Co. Photographers, Albany, NY. Approximately 2.5 x 4 inches; subject photographed standing, cropped at knee.

Item 2: Civil War era CDV image of Civil War Brevet Brigadier General John Titcomb Sprague. Approximately 2.5 x 4 inches; subject photographed sitting, cropped at waist. No photographer's mark.

Item 3: Biographical note about Sprague and historical note about CDV images provided by donor, presumably from the seller of the images. 8 ½ x 11 sheet of typed paper enclosed in clear, plastic sleeve and bearing an item number of v8127.

Item 4: Print from Frohne's Historic Military online store provided and included in collection by the Julia Tutwiler Library's archives librarian. Two pages of 8 ½ x 11 paper, stapled, on which is a typed biography of Sprague and information regarding another copy of the same CDV image as described in Item 2 above. The Frohne's item is provided for further information about our own copy.