

James Ferdinand Fiske Diaries, 1857-186

Contents List

Octavo Volumes

Vol. 1: Diary, 1857.

Vol. 2: Diary, 1858.

Vol. 3: Diary, 1859.

Vol. 4: Diary, 1860.

J. F. Fiske of Holliston, Massachusetts, Diaries, 1856-1860. 4 vols.

1. Diary, 1857. Pocket-diary (2½"x4") kept in Diary and Memorandum for 1857 (New York, n.d.). 128pp.

Fiske records local obituaries, seasonal activities, weather, lyceum programs, fires, concerts, crimes, town-meetings, auctions. Heard a number of speakers including Reverend Theodore Parker, Judge Russell of Boston, etc. Family and farm news. Activities at school (Jan 2: "Dr. Nutting commenced a series of lectures on Physiology, subject today The Skull and Face."). Jan 27: "Attended a temperance meeting this evening. Lecture by Rev. Edwin Thompson, but few there." Nice local details (Feb 5: "Andrews & Thompson & Co were moving into their store today"; Feb 6: "There were 3 courts held in town hall today. William Hawes, Timothy Shays, and Dennis Mahoney were tried for selling liquor," etc.) Visiting dramatic troupe, concerts and ball-games held on the common; Framingham Cattle Show; parade of the fire engine company; political meetings; American Party holds torchlight procession and parade, Nov 2. Church meetings, speakers, sermon topics. Oct 29: "Rained all the forenoon, but did not any the afternoon. ... Gen. B. Z. Butler lectured to the Democrats tonight. The Band played for the lecture too [sic] night. They formed a procession and marched up to Mr. Elridge Parris' and escorted the speaker to the hall. It was filled to overflowing. He spoke at some length upon the financial crisis and all together it was an able lecture."

There are several references to Fiske's life at school, to recitations, "experiments with the microscope." Fiske had several part-time jobs, such as assisting a surveyor, but he lived at home and principally worked on his father's farm. There are numerous references to that life, ploughing, planting, fetching wood, the cows falling through the barn floor, etc. Mar 14: "Mr. Hooker's horse died last night at Mr. Anson White's, the great horse doctor at Medway Village. He feels bad."

2. Diary, Jan 5 - Oct 27, 1858. 3"x6", 118pp., with cover and first-page (containing Jan 1 through part of Jan 5) missing. End-cover present.

Public examination of school pupils; local obituaries; concerts (including one by the Mendelssohn Quintet of Boston); auctions; crime; visits; family and farm news. Fiske family takes in a boarder. J. F. Fiske accompanies his grandfather (a doctor) on some house-calls, leading to occasional adventure (Aug 5: "Went with Grandfather up to see old Seth Baily in Hopkinton. He came out of his hut half crazy with an axe and threatened to kill us, but as soon as he found out it was the Dr. he cooled down. It is an awful place and he had nothing on but a shirt and an old vest.") Here, as in the other volumes, the strong forte is area news. Jan 15: "There was a nigger performance tonight at the Town Hall." Feb 19: "There was a great supper up to the Winthrop House given by The Engine No. 2 Company. Father and I went . . . ." Mar 24: "Professor Flagg with his medicine to sell was in town tonight and sang and talked . . . ." April 16: "Went down to a prayer meeting in Benj. Batcheler's Boot Shop." News of the Holliston Debating Club, of which Fiske served as Treasurer. Appearances in town of "the wild men of Borneo" and a blind musician (May 19: "I went around [town] with the blind man in the afternoon and he gave me 2 tickets [for his concert that night].")

May 26: "Frank and I went to Milford this afternoon. There was a Military Parade. The Worcester City Guards were there and a band from Worcester. The military of Milford [and] the 4 engine companys were also out so that they had quite a time. The Military from Worcester had on great high shaggy hats and they looked quite savage. They all had a great dinner at Felton's Hotel. They are going to have a great Ball to close up with. The Guards came in [an] Omibums [sic] from Worcester. They have got two new fire engines at Milford made so that they can throw two streams each. They are quite good looking. I never saw so many folks at Milford at one time in my life."

May 31: "Our Ball Club have gone to Boston to play a match game against the Olympic Club of that City. Any one can go down and back for 1.00 thus saving 60 cents," etc. July 31: "There was a row up to Bragville amongst an Irish picnic and the Police got pretty well banged up." Aug 17, a demonstration on the laying of the trans-Atlantic cable ("The news of the successfull [sic] laying of the Atlantic Telegraph Cable was received this morning and all the bells were rung at night. A gentleman from Boston was up and put a lot of fire works up. A balloon was sent up. Fire Balls [also] . . ."). Also, a revealing personal item (June 19: "Washed me all over for the first time this year.").

3. Diary, Oct 28, 1858 - Feb 20, 1859. 3"x4½", 85pp., missing some pages at the front but none of the text of the diary.

Debating club activities; elections; church and society news; a railroad accident; exhibit of a "Panorama of Italy," a "Parorama of the American Revolution." Local fires, in which Fiske's youthful enthusiasm sometimes carries him away from the tragic aspects involved (Nov 10: "There was a fire up to Metcalf's Station this afternoon about 4½ o'clock. It was a barn belonging to Clarke Travis, Esq. It was entirely destroyed. All the Engines were there . . . . The companys all had the crackers cheese and coffee they could eat and drink. Had a first rate time.") Jan 5: "There was a real Chinaman from China came into town to sell tea coffee, &c. at Mr. Moses' store. He is dressed in native costume."

Local society and news.

4. Diary, Nov 16, 1859 - Dec 10, 1860. 3½"x6", 148 pp., without covers and with a loose back-page. [Feb 21 - Nov 15, 1859 not located.]

Fires, temperance meetings, crimes, auctions, opera performance; church meetings (at one of which "Mr. Pend spoke . . . and so affected Sarah Travis . . . that she fainted or had a fit."). Farm and family news.

Fiske's horizons seem to broaden in this last year before the War. This greening was no doubt encouraged by his taking charge of the Meeting-house. The keys to this center of the community meant a great deal of sweeping, washing, fire-making and lamp-lighting, but it also brought him into contact with almost everything of a social nature in the town. Joined the Sons of Temperance, Holliston Division (gives password information); curious items of long-lost intelligence (Jan 16: "Went to the Parish Meeting this afternoon. They have fixed the location of the privy in the cellar." Mar 12: "There is a considerable fuss about the Elm Tree in front of the Winthrop House. Francis Cutler wants it cut down but the selectmen do not so they have placed Mr. Hubbard there to keep it while they have gone to the Judge to

get an injunction. Hubbard stopped Geo Daniels, and Warren Wheller was so bad they had to put him into the lock-up. There has been a great crowd around in the rain and also great excitement. . . ."; collections for Kansas.

Sept, makes short visit to Boston, Mt. Auburn, Charlestown State Prison.

An important amount of information on organizations meeting in 1860. Jan 22: "In the evening the vestry was crowded to hear a lecture from a Hungarian exile who came to this country with Kossuth and is preparing to return as Missionary and Physician. A collection was taken up to defray his expenses." Sept 17 (a somewhat representative entry): "Pleasant. The Sons [of Temperance] had a lecture in the Town Hall this evening by Judge Russell of Boston which was very interesting indeed. It was public so that the house was crowded. Carried round town the [hand]bills of the Panorama of New York City. Got a horse shod this morning." Progress of the Republican Party, listing their many meetings (he never missed meetings of any type as he had to clean up after they were over) in the summer and fall of 1860. Sept 19: "The Republicans had a caucus this evening to make arrangements for the reception of the Hon. Anson Burlingame next Saturday." Sept 22: "Worked on the torches all the forenoon. Had the Ashland Brass Band and a cavalcade of horses, torchlight procession, &c. Escorted Mr. Burlingame to the Hotel. . . . The Hall was never so full as tonight. The Lecture was splendid. . . . The Hopkinton Wide Awakes 150 in number came down."

Oct, 1860, the organization and demonstrations of a Wide-Awake Company in Holliston. Their activities. Bell and Everett meetings, speech by George Hilliard of Boston. Hon. Henry Walker of Boston speaks to Wide-Awake rally. "Biggest time ever . . . every thing went off nicely. Illuminated our house and it looked well. A general illumination all over town. . . so great an affair in town." Nov 5: "Republican caucus tonight and nominated Cyrus Houghton for Representative. Wide Awakes escort citizens to his residence to inform [him] of his nomination and to hear a speech of acceptance."

There was also some interesting information on a teacher's conduct. Dec 20, '59: "Last Thursday the Teacher of District No 4 punished a boy so severely with a poker in his hand that he is arrested and his trial is to come off Wednesday." Dec 21: "School did not keep today on account of the court. . . . The trial commenced at 9 o'clock and was not concluded till 6 $\frac{1}{2}$  o'clock. He was fined \$10 and costs of the prosecution. Esty was on the Teacher's side and Wakefield of Hopkinton on Sherman's side. The hall and gallerys were crowded all day and there were a great many ladys out. The decision was not at all satisfactory to the principal citizens so they had a meeting at the seminary in which most of the prominent citizens participated. . . ."

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