

American Antiquarian Society

Manuscript Collections

Name of collection:

Forbes, Susan E. Parsons Brown, Mrs. Alexander
Barclay, Diaries, 1841-1908

Location:

Mss. boxes "P"

Size of collection:

3 mss. boxes (66 volumes)

N.U.C.M.C. number:

RLIN id:

Sources of information on collection:

For a biography of Susan Forbes, see AAS Newsclippings File; see also, New England Historical and Genealogical Register, vol. 50 (1896), p. 64. American Women's Diaries [microfilm]: New England. New York, N.Y.: Readex Film Products, [1984?].

Related manuscript collection: Parsons Family Papers, 1736-1835.

Source of collection:

Gift of Mrs. J. W. Philbrick, 1934

Collection description:

Susan E. Parsons Brown Forbes (1824-1910) was born on a farm in Epsom, N.H., the daughter of William Brown (1797-1887) and Lucretia Billings Gray Brown (1785-1875). In 1843 she worked in the Middlesex Woolen Mills in Lowell, Mass., and in 1845 commenced teaching in various school systems, including a Jewish School in Boston, Mass. It was while she was boarding in Boston in 1857 that she met Alexander Barclay Forbes (1836-1903), a Scottish immigrant and, later, founder of Forbes and Wallace Department Stores in Springfield, Mass. They were married in 1859 and seven years later moved to Springfield. The Forbes' adopted Dorcas Gertrude M. Hitchcock (1871-) in 1874, and in 1881 they purchased "Fatherland Farms" in Byfield, Mass., the colonial home of Susan Forbes' ancestors. Mrs. Forbes spent each summer supervising renovations at the Farm until the retirement of her husband in 1895, when they moved permanently to Byfield. Susan Forbes was an active member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, as well as various charitable organizations.

This collection consists of 66 diaries, 1841 to 1908, kept by Susan E. Parsons Brown Forbes. They contain daily entries, brief at first but longer as the years progress, concerning her social and occupational activities e.g., mill-

work, teaching, running a boarding house after her marriage; visits paid and received; attendance at lectures, concerts, and socials; shopping and sightseeing trips (e.g., Washington, D.C. and California); household chores, and problems with servants. The end of each volume contains extensive financial accounts as well as lists of letters sent and received.

Much information is provided concerning the renovations performed at "Fatherland Farm"; her work with church and charitable organizations, such as the "Home for the Friendless" in Springfield; her activities with the D.A.R.; family illnesses

February 19, 2010

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Collection description (continued):

and medical treatments; and her own unhappiness occasioned by marital discord during the mid-1880s. There are occasional references to national and world political events, such as during the Civil War. The diaries also contain entries pertaining to Susan Forbes' complete assumption of her husband's financial affairs, especially investments, following his retirement in 1895 due to poor health. Due to her own failing health, the diaries for 1907 and 1908 were kept for her by various companions e.g., Mrs. M. E. Guthrie (-).

The earliest volumes were frequently interleaved in almanacs. The 1884 diary contains a letter written in that year by Gertrude Forbes to her adoptive parents.

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Susan E. Parsons Brown Forbes (Mrs. Alexander Barclay),
Diaries, 1841-1908

Contents List

Box 1, Octavo Volume:

1 1841-1842 School teacher in Pittsfield, N.H.; social activities

2 1843 Worked in Lawrence section of Middlesex Woolen Mills in Lowell, Mass. References to amount paid for boarding and salary received

[no volume for 1844]

3 1845 Attended singing school in Epsom, N.H. Daily activities, household chores, resumption of teaching in Pittsfield, travel to nearby towns

4 1846 Teacher in Pittsfield, N.H. Visits to Epsom and daily social activities

5 1847 Teacher in Georgetown, Mass.

6-9 1848-1851 Teacher in Pittsfield and Deerfield, N.H. References to maple sugar "tapping"; visits home in Epsom

#10 1852 Teacher in Mardentown, N.H.

#11 1853 Social activities, lectures attended

#12 1854 Teacher in Marlboro, N.H.

#13 1855 Social activities, lectures by Theodore Parker (1810-1860); Know-Nothings; visits by colporteurs, and travels to nearby towns

#14 1856 Employed by Remick's Department Store in Boston, Mass.;

lectures attended teacher in the Jewish School in Boston;

#15 1857 Teacher in the Jewish School and boarding in
Boston.
Visits to synagogue and among Jewish friends;
meetings
and friendship with Alexander Barclay Forbes,
who also resided at boarding house. Their
engagement in December

#16 1858 Teacher in the Jewish School; lectures
attended with friends and fiance

#17 1859 Teacher in the Jewish School; attended
lectures given by Wendell Phillips (1811-1884) and Horace Mann
(1796-1859);
visits; wedding day on 7 August. Continued
teaching after marriage

#18 1860 Attended lectures, Shaker dance in New
Hampshire;
housekeeping expenses at end of volume

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Contents List (cont.)

#19 1861 References to troop mobilization, early
battles of Civil War; began running boarding house at 6
Waverly Place in Boston

#20 1862 Daily activities; operating boarding house;
references to Emancipation Proclamation

#21 1863 Operating boarding house; daily visits

#22 1864 Trip to Washington, D.C., with detailed
description of the White House, etc.; references to troop
encampments;

boarding house expenses

#23 1865 Activities in boarding house and with "Home
for Little Wanderers." References to war reports,
assassination of Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865).
Lectures attended

#24 1866 Move to Springfield, Mass., where Alexander
Barclay Forbes established department store. Daily
chores, visits, troubles with Irish servants in the
Forbes' new boarding house

#25 1867 Daily activities in Springfield; lectures
attended

#26 1868 Purchased house at auction on State Street in
Springfield. Cost of house and repairs,
installations; medical problems and treatments; daily social
activities; detailed mortgage arrangement at
end of volume

#27-28 1869-1870 Daily social activities; organized fund-
raiser for "Home for the Friendless" in Springfield

#29 1871 Activities in charitable and church work, the
latter at the Olivet Church in Springfield. Kitchen
renovations in their home

#30 1872 Daily social and charitable activities,
lectures attended

Box 2, Octavo Volume:

#31 1873 Church work and church society meetings;
travels to nearby towns; marital problems of several
friends

#32 1874 The Forbes become guardians of Dorcas
Gertrude M. Hitchcock (1871-), a resident of "Home
for the Friendless" and daughter of a prison inmate.
Mr. Forbes assumed new partner, Andrew Brabner

Wallace (1842-) ; organization of new
store, Foster and Wallace; daily
social activities

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Contents List (cont.)

- #33 1875 Daily social activities and charitable
activities; raising of Gertrude Hitchcock Forbes
- #34 1876 Social and charitable activities, visit to
Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in September
- #35-36 1877-1878 Social and charitable activities; house
renovations
- #37 1879 Grand opening of Forbes and Wallace
Department Store; Olivet Church Discipline Meetings, Sunday
School Board Meetings, work with women's "Home for the
Friendless"; troubles with Irish; telephone installed in
home
- #38 1880 Daily social and charitable activities,
travels in area
- #39 1881 Susan Forbes' illnesses and treatments;
purchase of "Fatherland Farm" in Byfield Mass.;
assassination of James Abram Garfield (1831-1881)
- #40 1882 Beginning of extensive renovations at
"Fatherland Farms," where Susan Forbes spent each summer while
Mr. Forbes remained in Springfield
- #41-44 1883-1886 Renovations at "Fatherland Farm"; four-year

marital		difficulties caused by Mr. Forbes'
infidelity. Volume		#42 contains letter written by Gertrude to
her adoptive		parents
#45	1887	Trip to New York, lectures attended, illness
and death		of her father, William Brown, in Epsom, N.H.
#46	1888	Daily social and charitable activities,
renovations at		"Fatherland Farm"
#47	1889	Severe illness, subsequent daily activities
#48	1890	Horse-breeding at "Fatherland Farms";
occasional entries		in horse races
#49	1891	Horse-breeding, hiring and firing of servants
at the Farm		
#50	1892	Trip to Washington, D.C., tour of the city,
especially		the Capitol Building, White House; meetings
with various		dignitaries
#51	1893	Trip to California by train, with
descriptions of		scenery, cities, etc.

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Contents List (cont.)

Box 3, Octavo Volume:

#52	1894	Continuing renovations at "Fatherland Farms"
#53	1895	Activities in the Daughters of the American
Revolution;		Mr. Forbes' retirement from Forbes and

Wallace and		permanent move to Byfield
#54	1896	D.A.R. activities, renovations at the Farm,
e.g.,		installation of hot water heat
#55	1897	Trip to Washington, D.C. as a delegate to the
D.A.R.		convention; details of her financial
dealings, e.g.,		stock, payments from Andrew Brabner Wallace;
servant		problems and disputes over wages and
abilities; dif-		ficulties with the installation of gas light,
con-		tinuing through 1898
#56	1898	A few references to Spanish-American War;
continued pro-		blems with servants; plans for the wedding of
Gertrude		to Charles William Leavitt (-), of
Portland, Me.		
#57	1899	A few references to events in Cuba; financial
activities,		investments; horse-breeding and racing;
illness and		hysterectomy of Gertrude
#58	1900	Trip to California, with descriptive
passages; Mr.		Forbes' progressive physical problems
#59	1901	Daily activities at the Farm, Susan Forbes'
financial		dealings, e.g., aid to Dummer Academy;
lectures attended;		assassination of William
McKinley (1843-1901), train trip		to Summerville,
S.C.		
#60	1902	References to several world events; illness
of Mr.		Forbes, servant difficulties, charitable
endeavors		
#61	1903	Death of Alexander Barclay Forbes after a
series of		strokes; visits of friends, relatives;
managing the Farm		

#62	1904	Daily social and financial activities; managing the Farm
#63	1905	Trip to Washington, D.C. as a delegate to the D.A.R. Con- vention
#64	1906	Trip to California, Washington State, Oregon
#65-66	1907-1908	Diaries kept by companions, e.g., Mrs. M. E. Guthrie (-), for Susan Forbes, who was bedridden. Mention of visitors, state of her health