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 (1871-1947) 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.

SEE 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 and boarding in Boston.

#15  1857

Visits to synagogue and among Jewish friends; 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

#17  1859

friends and fiance

lectures given by

(1796-1859);

Teacher in the Jewish School; attended

visits; wedding day on 7 August. Continued teaching

#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
description of
trip to Washington, D.C., with detailed

campments; references to troop
boarding house expenses
Activities in boarding house and with "Home Wanderers." References to war reports, Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865).

1865
for Little

assassination of
Lectures attended

1866
Barclay
chores,
Forbes' new

1867
attended

1868
installations;
activities;
end of volume

1869-1870
raised for "Home

1870
latter at
renovations

1871

1872
lectures attended

Box 2, Octavo Volume:

1873
travels to
friends

1874
Gertrude M.
for the
Mr. Forbes

activities; organized fund raiser for "Home for the Friendless" in Springfield

Activities in charitable and church work, the
the Olivet Church in Springfield. Kitchen
in their home

Church work and church society meetings; near towns; marital problems of several

The Forbes become guardians of Dorcas Hitchcock (1871- ), a resident of "Home Friendless" and daughter of a prison inmate.

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 activities; Daily social activities and charitable raising of Gertrude Hitchcock Forbes

#34 1876 Philadelphia Social and charitable activities, visit to Centennial Exposition in September

#35-36 1877-1878 renovations Social and charitable activities; house renovations

#37 1879 Department Store; Grand opening of Forbes and Wallace School Board Olivet Church Discipline Meetings, Sunday Friendless”; Meetings, work with women’s "Home for the troubles with Irish; telephone installed in home

#38 1880 travels in area Daily social and charitable activities, Susan Forbes' illnesses and treatments; "Fatherland Farm” in Byfield Mass.;

#39 1881 purchase of assassination of James Abram Garfield (1831-1881)

#40 1882 "Fatherland Farms,” Beginning of extensive renovations at Mr. Forbes where Susan Forbes spent each summer while 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 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, installation of hot water heat

#55  1897
Trip to Washington, D.C. as a delegate to the convention; details of her financial stock, payments from Andrew Brabner Wallace; problems and disputes over wages and abilities; difficulties with the installation of gas light, continuing through 1898

#56  1898
A few references to Spanish-American War; problems 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 investments; horse-breeding and racing; 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; 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
1904 Daily social and financial activities; managing the Farm

1905 Trip to Washington, D.C. as a delegate to the D.A.R. Convention

1906 Trip to California, Washington State, Oregon

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