

Worcester Historical Museum

30 Elm Street
Worcester, MA

Archives
1980.98

John Nourse Diary
Collection

Processed by Forrest Wright
November 2007

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Series		Page	Box
	Collection Information	3	
	Historical/Biographical Notes	4	
	Scope and Content	4	
	Series Description	5	
1	Diary for 1869	6	1
2	Diary for 1879	7	1
3	Diary for 1880	8	1
4	Diary for 1881	9	1
5	Diary for 1886	10	1
6	Diary for 1893	11	1
7	Diary for 1894	12	1
8	Diary for 1895	13	1
9	Diary for 1896	14	1
10	Diary for 1897	15	1
11	Diary for 1899	16	1
12	Diary for 1900	17	1
13	Diary for 1902	18	1
14	Diary for 1905	19	1
15	Diary for 1908	20	1
16	Diary for 1912	21	1
17	Diary for 1914	22	1
18	Diary for 1915	23	1

Collection Information

Abstract : This collections contains 18 diaries left behind by the hard-working and resigned John F. Nourse (1841-1916). Arriving in Worcester in 1869 Nourse began keeping diaries, making entries sporadically over the next 46 years. While rarely recording those subjects historians love to read (such as his inner emotions or his opinion on important contemporary events), Nourse does provide the reader an insight into the daily life and financial considerations of lower-middle class Worcester residents during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries.

Finding Aid: Finding Aid in print form is available in the Repository.

Preferred Citation: Worcester Historical Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Provenance: Found in Archives

MARC Access: Collection is cataloged in MARC under the following subject headings

Historical/Biographical Notes

When John F. Nourse (1841-1916) moved to Worcester in a January of 1869 the city was entering its “golden age” of industry, putting it on the map of attractive urban destinations. This may have proved a compelling reason for Nourse to leave his small town of Sterling (just a dozen miles or so north of Worcester), as the city’s burgeoning job-market would have more likely provided a life of economic prosperity for the young man. Yet Nourse never indulges the reader the precise reason why he decided to settle in the up-and-coming city, thus any guess is merely speculation. What we do know is that in January of 1869 Nourse started “moving into the new shop,” and then “took possession” of a house on 6 Quincy Street in April of that same year.

From this point on Nourse continued to work in the “shop” for a number of years, providing for his family of a wife and two daughters. As a means to supplement the income made from his job (which may not have been enough to support a family) Nourse sold homemade butter, rented rooms from his house, and painted the homes of his acquaintances. Tracking the money made from these side-projects, as well as other financial records such as loans or purchases were of utmost importance to Nourse and this was reflected in his diaries. Other events such as trips to visit his parents in Sterling, the deaths of loved ones, and his involvement with the church and the local jail were also recorded, however with little elaboration.

Scope and Content

This collection contains 18 diaries left behind by the hard-working and resigned John F. Nourse (1841-1916). Arriving in Worcester in 1869 Nourse began keeping diaries, making entries sporadically over the next 46 years. While rarely recording on those subjects historians love to read (such as his inner emotions or opinions on important contemporary events), Nourse does provide the reader an insight into the daily life and financial considerations of lower-middle class Worcester residents during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries.

Series Description

Series 1: Diary for 1869

Series 2: Diary for 1879

Series 3: Diary for 1880

Series 4: Diary for 1881

Series 5: Diary for 1886

Series 6: Diary for 1893

Series 7: Diary for 1894

Series 8: Diary for 1895

Series 9: Diary for 1896

Series 10: Diary for 1897

Series 11: Diary for 1899

Series 12: Diary for 1900

Series 13: Diary for 1902

Series 14: Diary for 1905

Series 15: Diary for 1908

Series 16: Diary for 1912

Series 17: Diary for 1914

Series 18: Diary for 1915

Nourse Diary Collection
1980.98
Series 1, Diary for 1869

By the first day of the New Year 1869 John Nourse was already getting ready to start his new life in Worcester. However in the process of “moving into the new shop” on January 1st Nourse hurt his foot badly, which kept him out of work for close to a week. This may have been the only unfortunate incident that happened to Nourse over the entire year as he “took possession” of a home on 6 Quincy Street, the residence he would keep his entire life. Entries in the diary this year were sporadic and mostly consisted of financial notes, such as loans and the use of his stables (he charged \$1 a week for this service). Nourse also makes mention of his desire to attend church on a more full-time basis.

Nourse Diary Collection
1980.98
Series 2, Diary for 1879

It is not known why there is a gap of ten years between this diary and Nourse's last, however it is clear that by this point in his life had had settled and was doing fairly well. He had been married at some point along the way to a woman named Ella Cornish and also had a young daughter named Mimmie. Nourse was also putting away money in a savings account in this year of a couple hundred dollars at a time.

Nourse Diary Collection
1980.98
Series 3, Diary for 1880

In this year Nourse has his second daughter Gertrude, on the same day as his birthday, January 28th. Among the financial records he kept throughout the year Nourse also makes mention of many trips to Sterling, where his parents lived.

Nourse Diary Collection
1980.98
Series 4, Diary for 1881

This diary contains financial records as well as some accounts of Nourse's work schedule. The state of Nourse's finances must have been favorable this year as he purchased a piano on February 2nd, and was paying for his daughter Mimmie's music lessons.

Nourse Diary Collection
1980.98
Series 5, Diary for 1886

Once again there is a gap in Nourse's diaries, this time for five years. Whatever the reason may be, at the beginning of this year Nourse was making diary entries almost everyday. The subject of these entries was typically accounts of the weather, or his new active role in the Salem St. Church. However by March the entries became less frequent, concerning mostly his finances.

Nourse Diary Collection
1980.98
Series 6, Diary for 1893

After an unexplained gap of seven years Nourse begins his entries of the year discussing his role in the Salem St. Church. Nourse often attended the after-church meetings, and on occasion (as he records in his diary) led them. Entries in this year's diary are particularly sporadic, recording only on finances, the weather, and his work schedule (typically 8-10 hours a day).

Nourse Diary Collection
1980.98
Series 7, Diary for 1894

Much like last year's diary entries by Nourse are few and far between. There is some discussion of the Salem St. Church attempting to find a new preacher, as well as Nourse's attempt at painting scenery.

Nourse Diary Collection
1980.98
Series 8, Diary for 1895

In this diary Nourse mentions his February battle with rheumatism, which kept him from church but not from work. By mid-March this bout was over and Nourse became further involved with the Salem St. Church. Throughout this year the church attempted to find new pastors while Nourse himself became heavily involved in Sunday school there.

Nourse Diary Collection
1980.98
Series 9, Diary for 1896

There were quite a few changes to John Nourse's life throughout the year of 1896. Firstly Nourse had to switch churches as Salem St. closed, prompting him to begin attending the Union St. Church. Despite the change this did not hasten Nourse's commitment to Christianity as remained heavily involved in church works and their Sunday school program. Also during this year Nourse's wife died. She passed at the age of 51, being buried at Hope Cemetery, lot #4107. Always mindful of his money, Nourse mentions that the burial lot had cost him \$190. The death of his wife must have left Nourse quite lonely, and this was not helped by his daughter Mimmie's decision to marry during this year. After the marriage Mimmie moved with her husband to New York.

Nourse Diary Collection
1980.98
Series 10, Diary for 1897

In this diary Nourse wrote very little, save some mentioning of paying off loans and how many hours he worked in a given day. Nourse also makes note of a trip he made to visit Mimmie in Brooklyn.

Nourse Diary Collection
1980.98
Series 11, Diary for 1899

Throughout the span of the first 10 journals Nourse has made countless references to visiting his parents in Sterling, Mass. This clearly reflects a close relationship with his parents. Thus the year 1899 must have been very difficult on Nourse as both of them passed away within three weeks of each other. On December 2nd his father passed away after falling suddenly sick the day before. This was followed by his mother's death on December 19th. Both parents must have been fairly old as John himself was 58 at this point. Their deaths may have been the cause of Nourse's decision to leave a poem on the final page of this diary. He had not done anything like that before or since.

Nourse Diary Collection
1980.98
Series 12, Diary for 1900

This year Nourse was devoted primarily to taking care of his Dad's estate as well as getting back involved with the church after some time away. Both of these goals were accomplished as Nourse sold his father's home on July 21st, and by the end of the year had been leading meetings at the Union St. Church.

Nourse Diary Collection
1980.98
Series 13, Diary for 1902

This year Nourse's life may have been looking up as he married a Ms. Eben Fuller from Clinton, Mass., who moved in with him on November 20th. Also of note this year is that Nourse began to use gas to heat his house and cook.

Nourse Diary Collection
1980.98
Series 14, Diary for 1905

Entries by Nourse this year were very sparse. Over the summer of 1905 Nourse mentions that he began painting houses for a few dollars a day.

Nourse Diary Collection
1980.98
Series 15, Diary for 1908

At this point in his life Nourse was in his late 60's and most likely looking to give something back to the city he had lived in since he was a young man. This included volunteering his time at the local jail to work with criminals on some-sort of rehabilitation process. Nourse continued to work with inmates for the rest of his life, and in some cases was successful with his work. Additionally Nourse mentions spending time at the "Old Ladies Home." Also of note Nourse records that on November 3rd he voted for Taft for president. This was Nourse's only mentioning of an important historical event during his lifetime.

Nourse Diary Collection
1980.98
Series 16, Diary for 1912

According to the entries of 1912 Nourse continued to volunteer his time with the inmates of Summer St. jail for the past four years. It is clear that Nourse has had some impact on the inmates as he mentions giving a Mr. Frank Brown a suit to wear after his release. Additionally during this year Nourse became involved in the organization of The Christian Herald, a newspaper published by his church on Union St. Also of note, Nourse had a telephone installed on October 31st of this year.

Nourse Diary Collection
1980.98
Series 17, Diary for 1914

Most of the entries in this diary focus on Nourse's jail volunteering. It is assumed that in order to continue spending time with these inmates Nourse must have received some encouragement by them. This encouragement is reflected in his March 1st entry, stating "much interest shown by some of the men in what I am doing for them."

Nourse Diary Collection
1980.98
Series 18, Diary for 1915

This year Nourse continued his work at the jail, making specific mention of helping Frank Lowe by giving him a coat for \$1.50. Nourse mentions another inmate, a Mr. Henry, whom he states "goes home tonight a new man." Nourse also helped the inmates keep themselves busy by providing stage entertainment for Christmas, which he mentions attending on Dec. 25th.