

Fuller, Agnes Gordon (Higginson), 1838-1924
Diary, vols. 1-5, 1855-1860; vols. 6-51, 1875-June 14, 1924
Deerfield; Boston area, Mass., 1855-1924

51 vols. manuscript 8.5 to 17.5 cm
Fuller-Higginson Family Papers, Papers of Agnes Gordon Higginson Fuller, Boxes 19-21.
Sheldon II: 170

Note: An extraordinary record of the life of an active intelligent woman, commenced at the age of 16 in 1855 and continued (with the exception of the 1860s) until her death in 1924 at the age of 85. The 1850s period provides a record of social life in Deerfield, particularly the romantic and recreational activities of young people; also education, clothing, family life (sewing, reading, etc.) Includes accounts of balls at the Pocumtuck House; dancing at Stillwater; trips to Mt. Sugarloaf, the Whately Glen, and “up to the rock”; skating; quilting parties; lectures in Greenfield; plays; tableaux; and the local Shakespearian Club. Because of family connections Miss Higginson (she married George Fuller in 1861) also had entrée to literary society in Boston and Cambridge. She took tea with the Emersons, dined with Thoreau and walked with him to Walden Pond; there is also a brief but very good description of a Christmas Eve in Deerfield spent with William Makepeace Thackeray. Descriptions of social events in Deerfield are nicely drawn—“Mr. Bartlett played the organ diabolically.” The 1850s period also includes lists of her reading material and records the developing romance with George Fuller. The 1870s period is largely an account of farming and domestic life in Deerfield, includes information on farm labor (also a succession of housekeepers), home economics, farm techniques and crops (particularly cranberries and tobacco). Records George Fuller’s artistic efforts and his growing reputation in Boston, and describes his relationship with the Champneys, Mrs. Yale, and Madeline Y. Wynne. The 1880s period records the great artistic acclaim for George Fuller (the reaction, e.g., to “Winifred Dysart,”) and describes his major exhibition at Williams and Everett’s Gallery, March 10, 1884. Also describes the Memorial Exhibition and subsequent auction, including the response of some Deerfield people to the exhibition. Fuller’s death and funeral are described in the diary by his son, Robert. The 1880s also include a highly detailed account of summer recreational activity in Deerfield; child rearing and play; farming at the bars; a finely drawn portrait of the domestic life of the surviving Fuller family, particularly of Spencer and Arthur. (Also mentions Winthrop Tyler Arms quite frequently.) The 1890s period describes Deerfield society vividly, the Summer school; local literary society lectures on theosophy of Ibsen; personalities such as the Sheldons, the Allen sisters, C. Alice Baker, and Emma L. Coleman. The 1890-91 diaries provide an account of a trip to Europe with a fine description of life in Dresden. Towards the end of the decade Agnes lived briefly with C. Alice Baker in Cambridge. The 1900s period begins a more general focus on Boston, with Deerfield as a summer and (often) an autumn residence. Agnes moved easily among Boston’s social elite and the diary includes encounters with William Dean Howells, Phillips Brooks, John Singer Sargent, Isabella Stuart Gardner, and very frequently with her uncle, Thomas Wentworth Higginson; also artistic and theatrical events are described – an evening at the theater with Ellen Terry, Maud Adams, Pavlova, or Kriesler in concert. In 1906, Arthur sketched Ethel Barrymore (Sept. 9). Throughout this period, there is continuing information on the career of Spencer, Robert, and Henry Fuller and their separate artistic achievements. Various vacation and health resorts are described including Lake Saranac, Essex at Lake Champlain, Jamestown, R.I., and McMahan’s

Island near Bath, Maine. Descriptions of summers in Deerfield include the Arts and Crafts Revival, “Old Home Week” in 1901, and the Blue and White Society. The 1910s period includes a moving description of a display of Spencer Fuller’s work at the “Crafts barn” in Deerfield, shortly after his death; also mentions Mary Williams Fuller’s “The Colonel’s Conspiracy.” A short story about Deerfield (February 15, 1911) is described – Arthur Fuller’s “Trail-Top-Inn” venture. Agnes Fuller remains aware of wider social issues and events such as women’s suffrage, until her death, and her comment often involve a personal, historical perspective, e.g., April 2, 1917: “A Pacifist in Washington hits Senator Lodge in the face and is knocked down by him like antebellum days.” The last years of the diary reflect the characteristic medical and personal concerns of an older woman.

Some interesting quotes:

1. Feb. 27, 1885. Spencer Fuller attended a “cooking class at Mary Allen’s at Wapping.”
2. Jan. 22, 1886. On Luther J.B. Lincoln. “He is cataloguing the Memorial Hall collection for Mr. Sheldon.”
3. Sept. 11, 1895. “We had a family group taken by Miss Mary Allen.”
4. Sept. 28, 1911. “Mary (Fuller) is finding untold treasures of old documents in Williams house.” (Including a 1707 letter concerning Eunice Williams).
5. April 15, 1915. “Mr. Crothers approves of Billy Sunday – singular taste.”
6. 1915 Memorandum. “We have bought the old Hitchcock House and lot with barn studio of Annie Putnam for \$900.”
7. Nov. 7, 1916. “Called on the Sheldon’s, took Mr. Sheldon an old Town Warrant...he is a wonder—almost 98 years old.”

Place location of individual diaries:

1855-1857	Deerfield
1858-1860	Deerfield and Boston area
1875-1880	Deerfield
1881-1883	Deerfield and Belmont
1884	Deerfield and Brookline
1885-1887	Deerfield
1888	Deerfield and Magnolia
1889-1890	Deerfield
1891	Dresden, Germany, and Paris, France
1892-1894	Boston and Deerfield
1895	Deerfield
1896	Jamaica Plain and Deerfield
1897-1898	Boston and Deerfield
1899	Boston, Deerfield, McMahon’s Island, Me., Cambridge
1901	Boston area and Deerfield
1902-1904	Cambridge and Deerfield
1905	Boston area and Deerfield
1906-1907	Cambridge and Magnolia
1908	Cambridge, Magnolia, Deerfield and Pelham, N.Y.

1909 Pelham, N.Y., Deerfield and Cambridge
1910-1923 Cambridge and Deerfield
1924 Cambridge