

Charles Morris Cobb (1835-1903)
Diaries, 1850-1862
MSA 480

Introduction

The 33 diaries of fiddler, musician, band leader, band teacher, and mechanic Charles Morris Cobb (1835-1903) of Woodstock, Vermont, document his life and contain social observations during the period 1850-1862. The collection was donated by Mrs. Elbert Arnold of Northampton, Massachusetts, on September 8, 1964. Mrs. Arnold purchased the diaries when the Cobb house in Woodstock was sold in the 1930's. The collection is housed in one archival flip top box and consumes .25 linear feet of shelf space. It was formally housed in MSC-200.

Biographical Sketch

Charles Morris Cobb, the only son of Gaius P. and Lucia Cobb was born on December 20, 1835 in Woodstock, Vermont. Both Gaius and Lucia Cobb were musically inclined; Gaius played the flute, fife and drum and Lucia played the melodeon (reed organ) and sang. Gaius Cobb was a skilled shoemaker and the son of a fairly successful farmer. After his father's death, Gaius used his share of the estate to buy a small farm but proved a poor farmer and generally lost money farming. The farm was sold in 1854 after which Gaius worked at the A. W. Whitney machine shop in West Woodstock for awhile. The Cobb family's situation could most often be characterized as hand-to-mouth living with shoemaking and beekeeping as the chief sources of income.

Charles Morris Cobb worked primarily as a musician. He sang and played the violin, string bass, clarinet, Bb and Eb cornet, accordion, melodeon, alto, tenor, and bass horn and was familiar with the piano, fife, flute and drum. Beginning in 1857, Charles also worked as a band teacher for various local bands. Additionally, he worked as a machinist in the A. W. Whitney machine shop in West Woodstock from 1859 to 1870, when Mr. Whitney moved the shop to Smithville, New Jersey. However, Charles identified his occupation as "Musician (spare hand in Machine Shop)" in the 1900 U.S. census. From a young age, Charles' father, Gaius, encouraged him to learn to play music and, despite the family's poor finances, spent money on instruments, singing and dancing schools, and performing opportunities. By January 1849, Charles was fiddling at informal kitchen dances, and, by 1852, he had begun playing on brass instruments. In the fall of 1852, Gaius paid a fee of \$20 to allow Charles to join the newly formed Woodstock Cornet Band where he initially played the Alto horn but later also performed with other brass instruments.

In 1854, Charles briefly relocated to Lowell, Massachusetts, after his uncle, Charles Raymond, wrote that he could find Charles work there. While in Lowell, Charles joined the Lowell Brass Band and worked in the shop of Hezekiah B. Smith for a brief time before returning to Woodstock. From 1855-1863, Charles either formed or joined a dance band to perform in Vermont each winter. Charles also spent some time touring as

a musician with other bands in this period. For example, he joined the Boston Brass Band in 1858 but paid a substitute to play for him in Cobb's Quadrille Band while he was touring.

Charles continued to work as a performing musician and band teacher throughout his life with Woodstock remaining his home base, although he still toured occasionally and made some return trips to Lowell where he played with the Lowell Brass Band. For the most part, however, the Woodstock Cornet Band remained the chief focus of Charles' performing life. Over the course of his affiliation with the Woodstock Cornet Band, he served as a performer, music director and teacher.

On September 9, 1867, Charles married Lucy J. Shaw of Northfield, Vermont. Lucy died in 1876, about a week after their 9th wedding anniversary. Charles and Lucy had two children, Charles J. Cobb and Ada Cobb. After Lucy's death, Charles remarried to the widow, Mrs. Eunice Thomas, in 1877. Charles Morris Cobb died on March 7, 1903, in the house where he was born, leaving behind an estate that included 400 or more acres.

Scope and Content

This collection consists of 33 diaries, kept by Charles Morris Cobb (1835-1903), spanning the years 1850 to 1862, with the bulk of material written between 1851 and 1854. Each diary was assigned a sequential number and continuous page numbering by Cobb. Portions of Cobb's earlier writing from 1848 and 1849 were inserted and copied into the diaries, which Cobb consistently referred to as a journal. Subsequently, there are some discrepancies in chronology in the journal, the most notable of which is Cobb's insertion of an earlier written diary, beginning April 17, 1850, and ending May 19, 1850, as No. 14 extra 2d. Other earlier dated writings also appear interspersed in the journal. From 1851-1853, the journal consists of almost daily entries. However, beginning in 1854, entries become much less frequent, usually with gaps of a month or more between, and each of the final four journal volumes covers a period of two years.

The journal, in part, reflects Charles Morris Cobb's identity as an avid musician. Details of his musical education, opinions, and career as both a performer on multiple instruments and band teacher are discussed as well as musical composition and theory. Music has also been inserted into the format of the journal. For example, in journal volumes 18 and 19, music for Catel's Harmony appears in an inserted "Weekly Journal of Music" and in journals 24 and 25, there appear several volumes of Cobb's "Musician's Own," which contain dance tunes and music.

Other topics discussed in the journal include: mundane details of daily life (family and neighborhood news, farm chores, machine shop work, leisure activities, etc.), literary and social commentary, and politics (local and national election results and calculations). In terms of national politics, the presidential election of 1852 was of particular interest to Cobb. Sketches, memorandum, copies of letters, ball announcements, and pages and tables from published books have been inserted or copied into the journal. Regular

mention is made of Charles Morris Cobb's mother and father, Gaius and Lucia Cobb, and of two uncles, Henry Cobb and Charles Raymond (related by marriage).

Largely, the journal records details of Charles Morris Cobb's daily life in a traditional diary format, however, also interspersed into the journal are hand-written pseudo-periodicals, written by Cobb. These include the "LIBRARY AND JOURNAL OF STUDIES," "The Review," "The Recorder of 1849, Weekly," "The New Weekly Experiment," "THE COLLECTOR & RECORDER" and "The Vermont Collection" among others. Some variation in focus, format and tone exists between these pseudo-periodicals. The "LIBRARY AND JOURNAL OF STUDIES" is focused on music whereas "The Vermont Collection" is a miscellany and the others primarily mimic a newspaper format with news ranging from the household and neighborhood (e.g. "Home Affairs" in "The Review") to the governmental (e.g. election results) level.

Publications Note

Cobb's journals were transcribed by Michael McKernan in 1988 and an index created to them by Kathryn Wendling in 1991. The transcript and index are in 3 volumes in the VHS collection at 920 C633c. In the transcript, the No. 14 extra 2d journal volume from 1850 and the No. 1 journal volume are referred to as Cobb Journal 1 and 1A respectively. A copy of the transcript on CD is located in Folder 0.

In 1987, McKernan wrote an essay entitled, "A Musical Life in Vermont: Charles Morris Cobb, 1835-1903," in fulfillment of a Cate Fellowship granted by the Vermont Historical Society. It may be found in the VHS collection at *X B C633m.

Related Collections

Cobb's remarkable manuscript book of band and dance music scores and words, the *Universal Musician*, may be found in the VHS collection at *XMS 780.8 C633 and Microfilm 16.

His book, published by Elm Tree Press of Woodstock, *Song verses, legends, ballads and other sketches in rhyme*, is in the VHS collection at *811 C633s.

A music score for "The gallant Union soldier boys : Song and chorus for Memorial Day and Grand Army reunions," with words by Milo A. Everest of Addison, Vt., and music by Charles Morris Cobb, may be found at Music 784.606 C633. A music score for "Sliding down the hill," by the same authors, may be found at Music 784.306 Ev24.

In 2005, Kevin T. Dann of Woodstock was given \$300 "to support preliminary research and rehearsal of a two-act musical drama based on Charles Morris Cobb, a 19th century fiddler and band leader from West Woodstock" by the Vermont Arts Council. The Vermont Historical Society does not have a copy of this musical.

Inventory

- MSA 450:1 No. 1 1851, February 23 – March 1
 :2 No. 2 _____, March 4 – March 18
 No. 3 _____, March 18 – April 8
 No. 4 _____, April 8 – May 3
 :3 No. 5 _____, May 3 – June 13
 No. 6 _____, June 13 – June 24
 No. 7 _____, June 29 – July 24
 :4 No. 8 _____, July 27 – August 17
 No. 9 _____, August 19 – September 24
 No. 10 _____, September 26 – October 30
 1850, December 7 – December 12
 :5 No. 11 1851, October 30 – December 31
 No. 12 1851-1852, December 31 – February 26
 No. 13 1852, February 26 – April 5
 :6 No. 14 _____, April 5 – May 30
 No. 14 Extra 2d
 1850, April 17 – May 19
 P. 63, “The Recorder” of 1849, Weekly, Saturday
 January 6, 1849
 Pp. 65-69, “The Review,” No. 1, August 11, 1850
 Pp. 75-78, “The Recorder,” No. 21, Extra 2, October 7,
 1849
 P. 79, “LIBRARY AND JOURNAL OF STUDIES
 INTERSPERSED WITH ORIGINAL
 COMPOSITIONS”
 No. 15 1852, June 3 – August 5
 :7 No. 16 _____, August 6 – September 18
 Pp. 635-638, “The Vermont Collection,” No. 6 Extra,
 July 8, 1849
 Pp. 632-633 from the “New Weekly Experiment,” No.
 2, June 16, 1850
 Inserted between pp. 640-641, Democratic nominee
 information for presidential election of 1852
 Inserted between pp. 640-641, commercially printed
 Map of Vermont
 Pp. 643-646, “LIBRARY AND JOURNAL OF
 STUDIES, A Treatise on Harmony”
 No. 17 _____, September 18 – November 12
 No. 18 _____, November 12 – December 12
 Inserted between pp. 714-715, “Weekly Journal of
 Music,” Vol. 100, No. 7, Catel’s Harmony

- Inserted between pp. 718-719, "Weekly Journal of Music," Vol. 100, No. 8, Catel's Harmony Continued
- Inserted between pp. 722-723, "Weekly Journal of Music," Vol. 100, No. 9, Catel's Harmony Continued
- 1850, March 31, journal entry inserted between pp. 728-729
- 1852, December 12, journal entry inserted between pp. 728-729
- Inserted between pp. 734-735, out of sequence recollections and preprinted tables
- :8 No. 19 1852-1853, December 12 – January 23
P. 753, "Weekly Journal of Music," Vol. 1, No. 4, Catel's Harmony Continued
- Inserted between pp. 788-789, a memoranda
- No. 20 1853, January 27 – March 9
Inserted between pp. 796-797, Meteorological tables from *The Vermont Almanac, Pocket Memorandum, and Statistical Register, for the year 1847*
- Inserted between pp. 824-825, preprinted government of Vermont tables for 1850
- No. 21 _____, March 11 – April 29
- :9 No. 22 _____, April 29 – June 5
Inserted between pp. 900-901, preprinted government of Vermont tables for 1844
- No. 23 _____, June 7 – July 11
Inserted between pp. 944-945, preprinted government of the United States tables for 1850
- No. 24 _____, July 12 – September 8
Inserted between pp. 956-957, "Musician's Own," No. X and No. V, 2 half-size volumes of dance tunes and music
- Inserted between pp. 960-961, "Musician's Own," No. II and No. XI, 2 half-size volumes of dance tunes and music
- :10 No. 25 _____, September 9 – October 3
Inserted between pp. 992-993, "THE COLLECTOR & RECORDER," Number 12 –1849
- Inserted between pp. 1004-1005, "Musician's Own," No. XIII and No. XII, 2 half-size volumes of dance tunes and music
- No. 26 _____, October 4 – November 21
- No. 27 1853-1854, November 21 – January 14
Inserted between pp. 1092-1093, "The Vermont Collection," No. 4 Extra, July 1, 1849
- :11 No. 28 1854, June 25 – November 1

- No. 29 1854-1856, November 5 – August 15
Dog license from the town of Woodstock, dated April 1, 1879
Between pp. 1171-1174, stitching removed to allow access to correspondence written by C.M. Cobb but never mailed
- No. 30 1856-1858, August 28 – March 23
- :12 No. 31 1850-1860, March 23 - May 1
Inserted between pp. 1236-1237, letter dated Woodstock July 19, 18[88?] to “Friend Cobb” from O [? ?] Marsh
- No. 32 1860-1862, November 17 – November 9
Between 1264-1265, Dedication Ball announcement in Barton, Vt., Thursday, Feb. 11, 1858
Between 1265-1266, Christmas Ball announcement in Tunbridge, Tuesday Eve, December 27, 1859
Between 1266-1267, Grand Inauguration Ball announcement in Bethel, Tuesday Eve, March 6, 1860
P. 1284, Social Ball announcement in Waits River, Vt., Tuesday Eve, December 17, 1861
P. 1288, Old and Young Folk’s Ball announcement in East Corinth, Vermont, Wednesday Eve, December 18, 1861
Between 1288-1289, Cotillon Party announcement in Bethel, Vt., Wednesday Eve, Dec. 25, 1861
Between 1289-1290, Cotillon Party announcement in West Randolph, Vt., Friday Eve, February 21, 1862

Gail Wiese
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