

Holmes Family
Diaries, 1892-1929 (bulk : 1892-1916)
MSA 484-485

Introduction

The collection consists primarily of the diaries of James H. Holmes, Jr. (b. 1879) and his wife, Myrtle “Mertie” (Gallup) Holmes (b. 1882), of Plainfield, Moretown, and Montpelier, Vermont, during the years 1892–1916. Among other jobs, James worked as a shipping clerk at Charles H. Cross & Son Bakery and as a school janitor in Montpelier. The diaries were purchased from Paula DeFeyer of Holland, Michigan, by the Vermont Historical Society in 2008 (ms. acc. no. 2008.4). The collection is housed in two archival flip top boxes and consumes .75 linear feet of shelf space.

Biographical Sketch

James Henry Holmes, Jr. (b. 1879), the son of James Henry Holmes (1833-1907) and Esther Maria (Deavitt) Holmes (1854-1925), was born on March 27, 1879, in New York. The oldest of six, he had three brothers and two sisters, Henry, Charles, Eugene, Phebe and Susan, who are all mentioned regularly in the diaries. Although the 1880 U.S. Census shows Holmes senior, Esther, and James junior living in New York City, the family soon moved to Essex County, New Jersey, where James junior’s brothers and sisters were born. From the diaries it appears that James Henry Holmes senior left Esther sometime between January 1893 and October 1894. After his parents separated, James, his mother, Esther, and his five siblings, moved from Caldwell, New Jersey, to Esther’s hometown of Moretown, Vermont. According to the diaries, the family arrived in Vermont from New Jersey on April 20, 1894.

James and his siblings finished school while living in Moretown and Waterbury. During this time, the family’s situation seems to have been somewhat precarious and dependent on odd jobs and the support of the extended family. From the diaries, it appears James and his siblings hired out as labor to various people. In the period from 1894–1901, James worked a variety of short term jobs for a succession of employers, most frequently mentioned among them Holden Haseltine and James’ uncles, Luke J. Roberts, John J. Deavitt and Daniel P. Deavitt, whose company, the Roberts & Deavitt Bros., is described in an 1883-1884 business directory of Waterbury as manufacturers “of spruce, hemlock and hard wood lumber, clapboards and shingles, props, dry-house, planing and dressing-mills” in Colbyville, a village of Waterbury. Other employers mentioned in James’ diaries from 1894-1901 include: Walter Haseltine, Dan Hayden, J. W. Egan, John Parker, Charles Stone, S. C. Wheeler, and the towns of Moretown and Middlesex. James served mostly as unskilled labor for his employers during this period. He worked on a variety of jobs that ranged from farm work to construction, including some bridge work on the Narrows Bridge and the Rock Bridge in Moretown. For a more complete list of James’ employers from 1894 to 1901 see folder 0.

On January 14, 1901, James’ younger brother, Henry D. Holmes (b. 1882) began work for the Charles H. Cross & Son Bakery in Montpelier. In October of that same

year, James relocated to Montpelier where he boarded with Henry and also began working at Cross starting October 19. Initially, James' duties at Cross included running the bread cart, delivering orders and occasionally working in the candy room or doing odd jobs. As of December 3, 1903, however, Henry was promoted to bookkeeper and James took his place in the company's shipping department.

Also in 1903, James met Myrtle "Mertie" Gallup (b. 1882) of Plainfield. The daughter and oldest child of Hoyt Ransom Gallup (1851-1920) and Lizzie (Glidden) Gallup (1861-1915), Mertie had two brothers, Charles Henry Gallup (b. 1885) and Harry M. Gallup (b. 1888), and one sister, Leila M. Gallup (b. 1892). James' first mention of Mertie in his diaries occurs on August 28, 1903, when the two apparently attended a band concert together. On September 19, 1903, Mertie's twenty-first birthday, James writes that he asked her to become his wife. James and Mertie were married in Plainfield on December 31, 1903. James and Mertie had three children who lived to adulthood, (Maurice) Wendell (b. 1905), Pearl (1912-2008), and Myra (b. 1916) Holmes. Additionally, in 1910, the couple's infant son, George Holmes, died on December 30 at 29 days old.

On June 25, 1904, James writes that he bought a second hand camera from Mr. A. G. Stone. Following this purchase, he learned to develop and print pictures, for a time becoming fairly enthusiastic. By July 25, 1904, James and Mertie were looking into getting her a job from Mr. Herbert W. Shores at Blanchard's Studio, and, on August 3, Mertie wrote that she had begun work there as an apprentice. This job lasted until the end of the year, after which Mertie did not work outside of the home. Prior to her marriage, Mertie worked for Mr. & Mrs. William Jackson of Barre from May of 1901 to January 25, 1902 and for Mr. & Mrs. William Pollard of Montpelier later in 1902.

James joined the Modern Woodmen of America in 1906 and, as of December 14, 1906, was elected escort. On January 10, 1908, he wrote that he "was installed as banker for the coming year" and, on December 11, 1908, that he "was elected manager for 3 year." In the spring of 1910, James also joined the Independent Order of Odd Fellows.

From 1904-1916, James and Mertie lived in Montpelier but moved several times, beginning in 1904 when they moved from 19 Liberty Street to a house on 22 Cliff Street. On October 10, 1904, Mertie wrote that they met with a Mr. & Mrs. Caustic at "Uncle Jeff's office and drew writings for their house 22 Cliff St." In 1907, James writes that "we deeded our home to Mr. & Mrs. M.G. Molaney" on August 15. Shortly thereafter, James and Mertie moved to 57 ½ Elm Street, where their landlord was a Mr. Lanier. While at 57 ½ Elm, the couple supplemented their income by renting a room to boarders. In early November of 1910, James and Mertie moved again to a tenement in the Opera House Block.

James continued as a shipping clerk at Cross until at least the end of 1911, but sometime between 1912 and 1914 left the company's employ. On July 20 of 1914, James began a new job working as a school janitor, a position he continued in until at least 1918.

In addition to his own news, James' diaries frequently comment on the activities of close family members. For brief biographical sketches of those family members repeatedly mentioned in the diaries see folder 0.

Scope and Content

This collection consists of 30 diaries, kept by James Henry Holmes, Jr., his wife, Myrtle "Mertie" (Gallup) Holmes and her younger sister, Leila Gallup (b. 1892) predominantly for the period from 1892–1916. Mertie and Leila grew up in Plainfield, Vermont. James was born in New York and lived in New Jersey for several years, until, at age fifteen, he and his family moved to Moretown, Vermont. After James and Mertie were married, they lived in Montpelier, Vermont. The diaries of both James and Mertie span from their adolescence into their early 30s. During this time, James worked, beginning in 1901, as a shipping clerk at Cross Bakery in Montpelier and later as a school janitor.

Seventeen of the diaries were written by James Henry Holmes, Jr. between 1892 and 1911, with the years 1893, 1895, and 1897 excluded. Ten were written by Mertie (Gallup) Holmes between 1897 and 1916. Mertie's diaries contain greater gaps than James'; the years from 1903-1906, 1908-1910, 1911-1913 and 1915 are missing from the sequence of her ten diaries. However, some overlap exists between the diaries of James and Mertie in the years, 1904 and 1905. During this time, the couple appears to have shared the same diary. Identification information provided in the 1904 and 1905 diaries lists the owners as Mr. & Mrs. James H. Holmes. Both of these diaries are begun in James' hand and have been placed with his diaries but also contain some entries authored by Mertie. In the 1904 diary, entries are predominantly written by Mertie with James' writing appearing infrequently for stretches of a few days. Conversely, the 1905 diary is mostly in James' handwriting with the occasional entry written by Mertie. The 1906 diary also includes an identification statement implying that it belongs to both Mr. & Mrs. J. H. Holmes; however, all entries appear to be written by James. The final three diaries in the collection were written by Mertie's younger sister, Leila Gallup, in the years, 1907, 1910, and 1929. All the diaries, with the exception of a short notebook kept by James containing entries from October 18 to December 31, 1894, were commercially printed, usually by the Standard Diary Company.

The diaries of both James and Mertie reflect the work and social life of the couple. The amount of space allotted for daily entries varies from diary to diary but is generally brief. Both James and Mertie wrote predominantly in this section of the diaries.

In his daily entries, James sometimes employed shorthand and only rarely included punctuation. As such, James' daily entries roughly summarize what he did each day, focusing primarily on his work and social activities. During the period from 1901-1911, when James was working at Cross Bakery, his diary entries frequently included details about his work and coworkers there. Other topics discussed in James' diaries include: family and neighborhood news, household chores, Modern Woodmen of

America and Independent Order of Odd Fellows meetings and other leisure activities. James also recorded information pertaining to deaths, funerals, births, weddings, and fires in the community, sometimes including time of death as well as any unusual or noteworthy circumstances surrounding the death. Several violent deaths and suicides are mentioned. For lists of deaths, fires, births, and weddings mentioned in James' diaries see folder 0. Mertie's diary entries also describe her daily routine as well as details of James' and her children's lives but are generally briefer and more narrow in scope than James' entries. Both James and Mertie included a quick mention of the weather as part of their daily diary entries. Some excerpts from the diaries may be found in folder 0.

In addition to daily entries most of the diaries in this collection were produced with space provided for memoranda, cash accounts, addresses, calls, and letters. Although the bulk of the writing done in each diary is in the form of daily entries, both James and Mertie frequently made use of the memoranda and cash account sections. The kind of information recorded in the memoranda sections varied somewhat depending on the writer. Both copied some correspondence, particularly the full text of letters which they sent, into these sections. Particularly prolific of these were the letters copied into the 1904 diary. Of note, James' 1902 diary includes a letter to the U. S. Health and Accident Company in Saginaw, Michigan, in which he argued that the company had not paid a claim he had made on his policy in full. Some examples of these letters are included with the diary excerpts in folder 0. Mertie used the cash account section in her 1910 diary to record dates, names and rent received from the couple's boarders; James noted similar information in the address section of his 1909 and 1910 diaries. Other addresses were also recorded in many of both James and Mertie's diaries. Mertie made infrequent use of the sections to record the times and dates of calls and letters received.

James' diaries also include some small newspaper clippings which have been glued or otherwise affixed to specific diary pages, usually on or near the day with which they are associated. These clippings are very brief; often announcements of some kind and most frequently have some relation to a member of James' family. Notable examples include an announcement of Eugene Holmes departure to work in a mine in Deadwick, California, in 1903 and birth and death announcements for James and Mertie's infant son, George, in 1910.

Leila Gallup's diaries contain information on her daily activities, particularly visits she made, as well as brief entries relating to the weather. The earliest two diaries were written while Leila was still attending school, while the latest diary (1929) was written while Leila was living with her oldest brother, Charles.

Inventory

- MSA 484:1 James H. Holmes, Jr. diaries, 1892, January 1 – December 31
_____, 1894, October 15 – December 31
_____, 1896, January 1 – November 1
:2 _____, 1898, January 1 – December 31

- _____, 1899, _____
 _____, 1900, _____
 :3 _____, 1901, _____
 _____, 1902, January 1 – August 6, 1902
 _____, 1903, January 1 – December 31
 :4 _____, 1904, _____
 _____, 1905, _____
 _____, 1906, January 1 – December 30,
 :5 _____, 1907, January 1 – December 3
 _____, 1908, January 1 – December 31
 _____, 1909, _____
 :6 _____, 1910, _____
 _____, 1911, _____
 Mertie Gallup, 1897, January 1 – December 31
 :7 _____, 1898, _____
 _____, 1899, _____
 _____, 1900, _____
 MSA 485:1 _____, 1901, _____
 _____, 1902, _____
 Mertie Gallup Holmes, 1907, January 1 – November 21
 :2 _____, 1910, January 1 – December 1
 _____, 1914, January 1 – December 31
 _____, 1916, January 1 – September 26
 :3 Leila Gallup, 1907, January 1 – May 5
 _____, 1910, January 1 – December 31
 _____, 1929, _____
 :4 Copies of newspaper clippings
 :5 Receipt, taken from James' 1896 diary, dated 1896
 :6 Receipts, taken from James' 1902 diary, dated 1901-1902
 :7 Letter to Mertie from her mother, Lizzie (Glidden) Gallup, dated
 1900
 :8 Photographs, Charles F. Holmes and unknown woman
 :9 Realia, taken from James' 1902 diary, Mertie's 1897, 1898, and
 1916 diaries, and Leila's 1910 diary
 :10 East Montpelier Church Fair program, taken from Mertie's 1897
 diary

Gail Wiese
 January 2009
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