DeForest C. Jarvis, M.D. (1881-1966)  
Folk Remedy Papers, 1956  
MSA 372:1

Introduction

This collection consists of 21 letters written around 1956 from Dr. DeForest C. Jarvis to J. Alfred “Fred” Healy (1883-1977), both of Barre, Vermont, concerning folk remedies. The collection was given to the Vermont Historical Society by Fred Healy’s son, James, in 2003 (ms. accession no. 2003.14). The collection is housed in one folder in an archival flip-top box.

Biographical Sketch

DeForest Clinton Jarvis was born on March 15, 1881, in Plattsburgh, New York. Although born out of state, he claimed to be a fifth generation Vermonter through his mother, Abbie Gena Vincent. After receiving his M.D. from the University of Vermont Medical College in 1904, he specialized in otolaryngology (ear, nose and throat) in his Barre, Vermont, practice. In 1908, he married Pearl Maeferd Macomber, born in Iowa but with Vermont roots. Their only child, Sylvia Abbie Jarvis, was born on June 29, 1914 in Barre. In his practice, Dr. Jarvis treated a rural population, many of whom relied on folk remedies. Jarvis set about learning these remedies and evaluating them. Once convinced of their effectiveness, he shared information about them with his medical colleagues through newsletters. In 1958, Holt and Company published Jarvis’ book, *Folk Medicine: A Vermont Doctor’s Guide to Good Health*, with a 1960 sequel on folk remedies and arthritis. Millions of copies were sold nationwide. Jarvis was known best for his belief in a mixture of apple cider vinegar, honey and water as an effective tonic to maintain health and fight disease. The medical community was not cordial to his views and often refuted them in publication. Despite the fame resulting from book sales, Jarvis continued serving his medical patients in Barre and promoted his remedies whenever possible. By the time he died in Barre on August 18, 1966, at the age of 85, Dr. Jarvis was a well-known, respected and beloved figure in the Barre community.

The letters in this collection were sent to Fred Healy. Healy was superintendent and consultant for Jones Brothers Granite Company in Barre, Vermont. He was said to have been a crusader for dust control in the granite industry. Dr. Jarvis is credited with being one of the first to recognize the threat of granite dust to workers’ health. As a crusader in this field, he wrote articles about the health dangers and was made an honorary member of the Granite Cutters’ International Association for this work. Perhaps this common interest brought the two together. Healy’s son states that Fred and Dr. Jarvis would get together and have long talks, presumably followed up by Jarvis’ letters on folk remedies and health.

Scope and Content
This collection consists primarily of 21 letters Dr. Jarvis wrote to Fred Healy from the period around March to October, 1956. The letters, which read much like essays, are prescriptive and didactic in nature and lack personal content. Some of Jarvis' ideas were ahead of their time, anticipating the popularity of “alternative” therapies. The letters include such topics as the importance of adhering to one’s own ‘racial’ diet, the medicinal value of honey and vinegar, using witch-hazel as a cure for diarrhea, the effects of diet in primitive peoples and animals, the use of insulin and iodine in cerebral hemorrhage, using cider vinegar as a cure for milk fever in cows, exploring disease at the cellular level, the effect of chlorine in drinking water, and the reasons to avoid citrus. In one of his letters, Dr. Jarvis describes his personal eating habits – with a surprising fondness for canned goods.

The collection also contains a list entitled, “Signs of a Lack of Potassium in the Human Body” and a short treatise that Fred Healy called “Corn - Not Wheat”, both written by Dr. Jarvis.

Related Collections and Materials

Dr. Jarvis’ book, *Folk Medicine: A Vermont Doctor’s Guide to Good Health*, may be found in the VHS collection at 616 J298f. His book, *Arthritis and Folk Medicine*, may be found in the VHS collection at 616 J298a. A collection of letters he sent to former members of the Barre Junior Symphony Orchestra during World War II can be found in MSA 372: 2-5.

A photographic portrait of Dr. Jarvis by Barre banker and amateur photographer George E. Milne can be found in FB-74.

The J. Alfred Healy Papers can be found in the manuscript collection of the Aldrich Library in Barre, Vermont.

Inventory

MSA 372:1 Letters and papers:
Letters, March-October, 1956, and undated;
Essay with handwritten title, “Corn – Not Wheat”;
List entitled “Signs of a Lack of Potassium in the Human Body”.

Marge Garfield
December 2006
jarvishealy.doc