

Fearing Burr Journals, 1840-1897 and Undated

Repository: Hingham Historical Society
Accession #: 1
Creator(s): Fearing Burr
Quantity: 15 Nonstandard Boxes
Processed By: Jennifer Williams. Finding aid completed in January of 2017.
Access: Open for research.
Related Materials:

Provenance

This collection was created by Fearing Burr between the years of 1840 and 1897 as well as by an unidentified individual at an unknown date. It was most likely gifted to the Hingham Historical Society by a member of the family of one of Burr's siblings, as he had no children of his own.

Biography

Fearing Burr was born on December 11, 1815 to Fearing and Emma (Jacob) Burr. He was the oldest of four surviving children, having two sisters and one brother: Meriel, Peter, and Margaret. He grew up in Hingham, Mass. on the large family homestead at 289 Main Street, where he spent a great deal of time learning how to conduct horticultural and agricultural activities. These early experiences helped him to develop a lifelong passion for these endeavors, which he would pursue in earnest.

As a young man Fearing became more active in the family store located at 285 Main Street, which sold foodstuffs, confectioneries, as well as household wares. He not only served as clerk and cashier, but would also frequently travel to Boston in order to replenish the store's supplies. Although a substantial number of the items sold in the store were obtained this way, many of the foodstuffs were grown on the family estate. Every year Fearing worked with his father, brother, and several hired hands to plant and harvest large crops of produce, including grapes, apples, currants, and beans. They were diligent in their efforts to cultivate hardy products that would be appealing to Hingham residents.

At some point between 1840 and 1852 Fearing went into business with his cousin, Matthew H. Burr. The business was named M & F Burr, Seedsmen of Boston, and focused on developing and selling seeds internationally to farmers, businesses, and horticulturists. Fearing served as copartner for approximately twelve years, during which time he developed positive relationships with prominent horticulturalists throughout the Americas and Europe as well as cultivated a reputation as an expert seedsman.

In the late 1850s Fearing used his extensive knowledge of horticulture and agriculture to begin writing his first book, entitled *The Field and Vegetable Gardens of America*, which was 674 pages in length. It was published in 1865 and provided detailed descriptions of over one-thousand plants, including their uses and tips for successful cultivation. The volume solidified Fearing's reputation as an expert horticulturist, becoming a very influential and frequently cited tome.

Fearing Burr was also extremely active in local and regional organizations. In 1852 he was elected a life member of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society and often visited its headquarters in Boston when he traveled to the city. He also participated in the Society's yearly exhibitions, judging both fruits and vegetables as well as exhibiting his own produce. He received several medals throughout the years for his exemplary samples of corn, beans, and other foodstuffs. He also wrote horticultural columns for local and regional newspapers.

In 1858 Fearing Burr worked with several other individuals to found the Hingham Agricultural and Horticultural Society, serving on the governing board as well as participating in its many events and exhibitions. His other activities in Hingham including serving on the Hingham Public Library Board of Trustees, participating in the Croquet and Ombre Clubs, serving as a fireman for the local engine company, as well as serving as a Sunday School Teacher for the First Parish Church.

Fearing was a very close friend of George Lincoln, with the two often meeting for meals and social gatherings. They were both very interested in history and would often discuss all aspects of Hingham's history from its founding to the 19th century. In the mid-1860s the two began working on a history of Hingham residents' participation in the Civil War. They spent several years researching and writing this volume, which was entitled *The Town of Hingham in the Late Civil War*.

Published in 1876, the volume included lists and descriptions of the various regiments in which Hingham men served, biographies of Hingham soldiers, descriptions of the battles in which these residents fought, and the activities of men and women who supported the war from home. The volume was extremely popular and is still regarded as an important historical resource.

Fearing also spent many years working with George Lincoln to research and write a new history of Hingham. The two men worked with several other individuals to create genealogies for many of Hingham's important families as well as write chapters relating to various aspects of the town's history. The book, entitled *History of the Town of Hingham, Massachusetts*, was published in 1893 and has become one of the most useful volumes for researchers looking to learn more about Hingham.

Fearing Burr was well-liked throughout Hingham. He was well-known for his conversation and debate skills, enthusiasm for reading, and dedication to the subjects on which he was passionate. He was a lifelong member of the First Parish Church and often served on its committees and governing bodies. He never married, living with his brothers and sisters on the family homestead until his death from apoplexy on October 4, 1897.

Scope and Content Note

This collection is composed of fifteen bound volumes used as daily journals by Fearing Burr between the years of 1840 and 1897. It also includes an undated partial index of the first volume which created by an unknown individual. The journals detail Fearing's daily activities, such as running the family store, planting and harvesting crops on the family estate, spending time with friends, and writing several historical and horticultural books. Fearing also discusses his opinions on religious and political matters, his participation in clubs and organizations, as well as the activities of his close family. Finally, the journals also contain information regarding events of regional and national importance, including Civil War battles, elections, and holiday celebrations.

Arrangement

This collection has been arranged into the following series:

- Series I. Fearing Burr Journals and Index, 1840-1897 and Undated

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This series is composed of fifteen personal journals created by Fearing Burr between 1840 and 1897 as well as an undated partial index created by an unknown person. The index is organized by date and provides a list of events discussed in the journals between 1840 and 1845, including the ministers who preached at Old Ship Church, Fearing's participation in local politics, and his recreational activities. The journal entries in the fifteen volumes focus on all aspects of Fearing Burr's daily life. While the earlier entries are only one or two lines in length, Fearing's descriptions become more detailed in later years.

The journals describe Fearing's efforts to choose, grow, and harvest many different types of produce which were not only eaten by the Burr family, but also sold at their store. The entries also provide detailed accounts of Fearing's experiments in growing new crops and improving his yield. While writing about these endeavors he would often include information regarding the types of animals – including birds and frogs – that he could hear and see during different seasons.

The volumes also include a great deal of information about Fearing's business endeavors. His entries often include details about his trips into Boston to purchase or sell goods for the store, as well as the time he spent working in the store. In many cases he describes the types of goods he purchases/sells as well as anecdotes regarding working in a retail business. His entries often discuss how the business changed over the course of his life, how well certain products are selling, and how crop yields affect the produce available at the store.

Fearing also provides detailed descriptions of his social and recreational activities. As a dedicated member of several clubs – including the Croquet Club, Ombre Club, and Monday Night Club – he often discusses their activities and gatherings. He also describes his participation in the governing bodies, committees, and annual exhibitions of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society and Hingham Agricultural and Horticultural Society. Many of Fearing's friends participated in these groups as well, but he would also visit with them at home, in Boston, during holiday celebrations, and at the beach. The individuals mentioned most frequently include George and Solomon Lincoln, Demerick Marble, Hawkes Fearing, Isaac Sprague, and Ebed L. Ripley.

Fearing also spends a great deal of time discussing his civic and religious endeavors. As a member of the local fire engine company, he describes every fire in Hingham with great detail. He includes such information as how the fire began, who was affected, the amount of damage caused, and the time needed to put it out. He also describes his duties as a Hingham Public Library Trustee, First Parish Church Committee member, and Sunday School Teacher. His descriptions include purchasing books for the library, planning Sunday School events, and participating in First Parish Church holiday celebrations. Finally, he also provides a great deal of information regarding his participation in Town Meeting as well as the Whig and Republican political parties.

Fearing also provides information regarding his interest in Hingham's history and weather. In the 1870s he describes spending a great deal of time collaborating with George Lincoln to research, write, and publish the volume entitled *Town of Hingham in the Late Civil War*. He also writes about his contributions to the 1893 town history entitled *History of the Town of Hingham, Massachusetts*. Some of his research is included in his final journal, which contains lists of land grants given to early settlers according to last name. On the subject of weather, most journals contain a monthly and yearly overview, including precipitation amounts and types, temperatures, and humidity levels. Fearing also included newspaper clippings discussing important weather events, summaries of recent weather patterns, and substantial weather changes.

Finally, several of the journals contain memoranda and lists related to Fearing Burr's activities in their final pages. While these notes vary by journal, some of the information provided by Fearing Burr includes lists of fires and the dates they took place; notes regarding the town's

history and features; tables of animal sightings during different seasons; and lists of dates the Strawberry Festival was held during different years. There are also small pieces of paper with information regarding the history of the town, the deaths of local residents, methods of preserving fruit, and the Burr family genealogy. While most of these notes appear to be written by Fearing Burr, there are also notes and indexes written by other persons. Several of the journals have handwritten notes in the margins which correspond to partial indexes written in the final pages, and there are also other handwritten comments related to Burr's life and career. It is unknown who made these additions to the journals.

Note: All loose papers have been removed from the journals and placed in folders within the same box as the associated journal.