



Guide to the Sarah Low Papers, 1844-1880

Administrative Information

Title and Dates:

Sarah Low Papers, 1844-1880

Repository:

New Hampshire Historical Society

30 Park Street

Concord, NH 03301

603-228-6688

<http://www.nhhistory.org/>

Collection Number:

1965.010

Author of Finding Aid:

Lauren H. Wolley; revised by Thomas E. Camden; and reformatted by Korrena Cowing

Creator:

Low, Sarah, 1830-1913

Language:

The materials in this collection are in English. One letter is in French.

Extent:

1 box ; 0.33 linear feet

Abstract:

The Sarah Low Papers, 1844-1880, contain personal correspondence from Low to her relatives describing her activities as a volunteer nurse during the American Civil War, as well as a journal, medical reports, notes, receipts, and clippings. Her letters, some of which were published in New Hampshire and Massachusetts newspapers, focus on her daily routine as a nurse at Union Hotel Hospital and Armory Square Hospital in Washington, DC. Low wrote in detail about her nursing responsibilities as well as operations performed, cures for infection and disease, sanitary conditions of war hospitals, patients, battles, excursions, social events, and politics.

Access and Use

Acquisition Information and Provenance:

The Sarah Low Papers were made available to the public through Miss Elizabeth Frost and Mrs. Winifred Stonemetz on April 22, 1965.

Processing Information:

This collection was processed by an unknown person at an unknown date. The finding aid was written by Lauren H. Wolley in October 1979, revised by Thomas E. Camden in March 1983, and reformatted by Korrena Cowing in April 2020. This finding aid follows the standards set forth by *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*.

Access Restrictions:

Available for research.

Location:

The collection is housed at the New Hampshire Historical Society in Concord, New Hampshire.

Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements:

The materials in this collection are paper based and have no special technical requirements for use.

Copyright/Conditions Governing Use:

For permission to reproduce or publish materials from this collection, please contact the New Hampshire Historical Society. Users are responsible for following all copyright and intellectual property laws.

Preferred Citation:

Item title, Sarah Low Papers, 1965.010. New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, NH. Date accessed.

Collection Overview

Biographical Information:

Sarah Low (1830-1913)

Sarah Low was born in South Berwick, ME, on February 2, 1830, the daughter of Nathaniel and Mary Ann (Hale) Low. In 1833, her family moved to Dover, NH. Little is known of Sarah's early years. As a young woman in 1858, she wrote a book entitled "May Daie" and 900 copies were published through the Graefenburg Company in New York City. Sarah wrote several newspaper articles during and after the Civil War under the pen name of Rachel Rollins. Her articles closely paralleled letters written to her family describing war conditions.

When Sarah returned to New Hampshire after the war, she brought back with her a dog named General and a black war orphan named John, who she apparently raised. The remainder of Sarah's life cannot be determined through letters written to friends and relatives.

Sarah Low died on December 14, 1913 in Andover, MA, and was buried in Pine Hill Cemetery, Dover, NH.

Dorothea Lynde Dix (1802-1887)

Dorothea Dix was appointed superintendent of nurses on June 10, 1861. Those with whom she worked closely thought her to be “deficient in the power of organization and inexperienced in the details of hospital management.” Her criticisms of people visiting the war hospitals and demands that volunteer nurses be dismissed, incited disputes with hospital administrators regarding her nursing duties. In 1863, her position was sharply undercut when the Surgeon General was also granted the power to appoint nurses; emphasizing that nurses were subordinate to medical officers.

Dr. Willard Bliss (1825-1889)

At the outbreak of war, Dr. Bliss was commissioned surgeon of the Third Michigan Volunteers. In 1861, he became a division surgeon and remained attached to the staff of General Philip Kearny until he was ordered onto hospital duty in Washington, DC. At this time, he became superintendent for the construction of Armory Square Hospital and served as the surgeon-in-chief. After the war, Dr. Bliss remained connected with the Board of Health in Washington where he became widely known as champion of a South American cancer cure (Conduango) which later proved valueless. He was called upon when President Garfield was assassinated.

Collection Scope and Content Note:

The Sarah Low Papers, 1844-1880, contain personal correspondence from Sarah to her relatives describing her activities as a volunteer nurse during the Civil War. Her letters, some of which were published in the New Hampshire and Massachusetts newspapers, focus on her daily routine as a nurse at Union Hotel Hospital, Georgetown, and Armory Square Hospital, Washington, DC. Sarah wrote in colorful detail about her nursing responsibilities as well as operations being performed, cures for infection and disease, sanitary conditions of war hospitals, patients, battles, excursions throughout the countryside, social events, and politics in Washington.

Among Sarah’s earlier letters are various accounts of Nurse Dorothea Dix, superintendent of army nurses during the Civil War and renowned crusader for the mentally ill. Nurse Dix, in charge of hiring trained nurses, believed volunteer nurses unprofessional and resented their presence. In an effort to rid of Sarah, Nurse Dix reported her on at least one occasion for neglect of duty. Several detailed letters during the years 1862-1863 relate Sarah’s encounters with Nurse Dix.

Shortly after her arrival in Washington, Sarah was transferred to Armory Square Hospital where she remained until 1866. She and other volunteer staff were welcomed warmly and supported by Dr. Willard Bliss, surgeon-in-chief of Armory Square and superintendent of construction on the “model” hospital. Sarah’s change in attitude is strongly reflected in all letters written home after her transfer.

Of equal interest are several letters written during the winter of 1864, depicting Sarah’s spare moments in a nearby Freedman’s Village. Sarah shared political views and social customs with freedmen and their families while teaching them to read and write.

In April of 1864, Sarah was invited to a reception given by President Lincoln and a year later she attended his wake and funeral procession. Both events are described in detail.

Other materials in this collection include an 1862 journal, medical and diet reports, receipts, patient notes, and clippings.

Arrangement:

The Sarah Low papers are arranged by type, then chronologically.

Contents List

Box 1

Folder 1	Correspondence, 1844-1862
Folder 2	Correspondence, 1863 January-June
Folder 3	Correspondence, 1863 July-December
Folder 4	Correspondence, 1864 January-February
Folder 5	Correspondence, 1864 March-June
Folder 6	Correspondence, 1864 July-December
Folder 7	Correspondence, 1865 January-May
Folder 8	Correspondence, 1865 June-December
Folder 9	Correspondence, 1866-1880
Folder 10	Correspondence, undated
Folder 11	Journal, 1862 August-September
Folder 12	Medical and diet reports, 1864-1865
Folder 13	Miscellaneous receipts, 1863-1865
Folder 14	Miscellaneous notes from patients, orders, etc., 1864
Folder 15	Miscellaneous printed items, clippings, etc., undated

Subject Terms

People:

Bliss, Willard, 1825-1889
Dix, Dorothea Lynde, 1802-1887
Hale, John Parker, 1806-1873
Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865
Low, Mary Ann, 1798-1882
Low, Sarah, 1830-1913
Lowell, Anna
Worthing, Helen, 1837-1904

Organizations:

Armory Square Hospital (Washington, D.C.)
Union Hotel Hospital

Subjects:

African Americans
Correspondence

Slavery

United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865

United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Hospitals

United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Medical care

Locations:

Dover, NH

Washington, DC

Occupations:

Nurses

Soldiers

Related Materials

Archives

Frost and Sawyer Family Papers, 1986.041

Sarah Low Collection, 2013.033

Sarah Low portrait, S 1992.519.03

Sarah Low portrait, S 1992.519.04

Sarah Low portrait, S 1992.519.05

Sarah Low portrait, S 1992.519.06

Museum

The museum has the lap desk given to Sarah Low by the former patients and military staff from Armory Hospital in 1864. The desk contained the album which contained the photographs in this collection. 2013.012.01

The museum has a watercolor painting of the nurses' station at Armory Hospital done by a patient. 2013.012.02