Woman's Existence "Difficult" during Gay Nineties Even in Elite Circles: The Jessie Campbell Nave Diaries

Jessie Campbell Nave enjoyed all the advantages that wealth and position could provide just over a century ago: fine clothes, personal possessions, social position. She traveled almost incessantly, both in America and abroad, enjoying the finest accommodations and entertainments. When she was at home, servants attended her. She was blessed with an extended coterie of loving friends and family. Like most women of her era, however, she also knew the hardship of bearing children at a time when medical care was primitive by modern standards.

A pair of diaries recently acquired by the West Virginia Collection provide a remarkable glimpse into this articulate socialite's world. The volumes were written during 1891 and 1892 when their author was in her mid twenties.

Born in Wheeling on November 7, 1867, Jessica C. Campbell was the daughter of Wheeling newspaper and political mogul Archibald W. Campbell (1833-1899) and the grand niece of Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), founder of Bethany College. She was just 23 years old when she married William H. Nave (1843-1924), a wealthy Missouri lawyer and merchant more than twice her age. A graduate of Bethany, Mr. Nave developed a close relationship with the Campbell family while attending the college before his future wife was born. He and Miss Campbell met while visiting Campbell family relations in Alabama. To say that the couple enjoyed a whirlwind romance would not be an overstatement. They announced their engagement only one week after meeting for the first time on May 3, 1890. They celebrated their June marriage with a three-month European vacation.

The diaries commence after the couple's return from their honeymoon. Daily entries plot their activities for the next two years, including sojourns to family properties in Missouri, Alabama, and Bethany, excursions to assorted American cities, and a second trip to Europe.

The account commences on January 1, 1891 at which point the Naves were situated in Kansas City. Jessie's entries for the next two weeks describe a gay existence of socializing, dining and shopping with nightly visits to the theater or some other amusement.

In mid-January, the pair departed for "Ingleside" plantation, Lawrence County, Alabama, where their wedding had taken place six months earlier. Along the way they spent several days each in St. Louis and Louisville where they enjoyed more theatrical and culinary delights. The couple reached their destination on January 21.
Despite her excitement upon arriving, Jessie quickly found life at Ingleside to be decidedly boring in comparison to the peripatetic existence she had enjoyed during the previous seven months.

[Friday, February 6, 1891 Ingleside, Alabama]

There is hardly reason why I should keep a diary these days, for one day is so like another that except for the change in the weather, one account would do for all. These two old grandmas, Aunt Selina Campbell & Mother Barclay, live all to themselves most of the day in their room, reading religious newspapers, their Bibles and exchanging exhortations. "Old age is dark and unlovely!" and is out of the world while yet it is here! It is difficult to grow old gracefully, but is it easy to die young?

In addition to monotony and perpetually "dreary" weather, the diaries reveal that Jessie had much trouble sleeping and suffered with constant indigestion and occasional bouts of melancholy. It eventually becomes clear that she is expecting a child.

In addition to "constitutional" walks and occasional shopping excursions, the diarist reported spending most of her time reading ("David Copperfield," "Monte Cristo," Sue's "Mysteries of Paris") and sewing, at which she was evidently very accomplished.

In late March, the Naves departed Alabama for Bethany where they had decided to rent a house for a period of one year. Following a ten-day stopover in Cincinnati, they reached Wheeling on the morning of April 6. After breakfast and a visit with Jessie's father, they pressed on to Wellsburg that afternoon. Though Jessie was fatigued and ill, they decided to complete the final leg of their journey to Bethany that evening with what proved to be an arduous and snowy surrey ride.

A "warm welcome" and a "blazing hearth" greeted the couple upon their arrival. Yet, Jessie's relief upon reaching her "haven of rest" proved to be very short lived.

[Tuesday, April 7, 1891 Bethany, West Virginia]

Written up a week after the date. Today has been momentous in my life's history - and after enduring the pangs of motherhood, I am still childless. The hope I have cherished for seven months and that seemed so near fulfillment has faded away and I can only sigh and long for the little life that never came into the world. They tell me it was a boy, perfectly formed and Cousin Mary and Cousin Dessie both said it had eyes like my husband's, full and long. Ah, to think I could not have my first dear little baby! That I never even looked into its face. It seems so hard!

Jessie's diary entries of the following days reveal that she suffered the dejection, reflection, and pain (eased by morphine) that one might expect during the aftermath of such a traumatic event. All things considered, her recovery was remarkable. She tested her legs and her will only seven days later.

[Tuesday, April 14, 1891 Bethany, West Virginia]

Just a week ago today! Yet how long it seems already since I knew my baby was lost to me! All the dear little clothes must be folded and laid away — but I must not repine for I have gotten thro' the ordeal so well and hope that I may have my child again! How proud & glad my dear husband would have been. Cousin Dessie says she can't give me more than this year to have that "grand-child" of hers! Out-doors is very tempting as I lie here & watch the sunlight on the grass!

The Naves had come to Bethany to start a family. Though Jessie at first lamented having made a year-long commitment when their plans were foiled, as time passed, she felt increasingly at home in the small community where she was surrounded by loving friends and family. Soon she was busying herself with setting up and furnishing her home and hosting a never ending stream of houseguests and dinner parties.

Furnishing and decorating the house proved to be an ongoing process. Jessie and "Pick" (her nickname for Mr. Nave) drove to Wellsburg to buy a stove on May 8. The couple's "freight," shipped from "Ingleside," Alabama, including china and other furnishings, arrived three days later, being in transit for more than a month. On May 14, the pair enjoyed a "perfectly lovely" three and a half hour buggy ride "over the Valley Road" to Wheeling where they spent in excess of $200 on a table and linen. "How much money does it take to go to housekeeping!" Jessie pondered.
Jessie’s entries for the next few months provide a thorough record of her world, her thoughts and her relationships. She comments daily on the weather in Bethany and frequently reports its effect on local agriculture. There are occasional comments regarding community events in Bethany — the death of a Bethany College vice president (donations were required for his burial expenses), commencement activities, Fourth of July observances, and so forth. Mostly, however, the entries report the comings and goings of, and social gatherings with friends and loved-ones.

Only rarely does the author comment on matters of business. She records her husband’s comings and goings often, but rarely mentions his purpose. Her comments regarding family finances are largely limited to reporting what things cost, noting loans made by her husband to relatives, and marveling at just how quickly money can disappear! (While vacationing abroad the following summer, “Pick” went to the bank one morning — the second time in three days — and “drew out $950,” a sum equivalent to $22,000 today. “It is surprising how even that sum melts away,” Jessie mused.)

Jessie mentions the household’s African American servants, George, Hannah, and “Mary Dink” (presumably husband, wife and child), on a great many occasions. Her comments regarding the three are of interest considering her family heritage. She clearly appreciated their many contributions to her existence, but her assessment of the quality of their work, their capabilities and their character was mixed. She was fond enough of them to spend many hours sewing bed sheets for them and often bought them gifts during her frequent shopping sprees. While vacationing in Europe in 1892, she took the time to write personal letters to both Hannah and Mary (aged 9-10). In many instances, however, her diary reveals a sharply condescending attitude that seems more akin to Southern gentility than what one might expect from a member of this branch of the Campbell clan. Upon returning home from extended travels on one occasion, for example, Jessie writes: “The darkies all seemed pleased to see us home once more. Poor, ignorant silly creatures!”

Diary entries made during the fall of 1891 reveal that Mrs. Nave was expecting once again by October. In spite of, or perhaps because of her condition, they decided to embark upon a “long contemplated trip” to New York City in November. Departing Bethany at 2 p.m. on November 20, they caught a 5 p.m. Wellsburg train to Pittsburgh, and from there, an 8 p.m. “sleeper” to New York.

Arriving in mid-morning, the Naves spent the next two weeks living the high life. They dined repeatedly at Delmonicos, shopped at Tiffany’s and other select stores and attended nightly amusements including theater on Broadway, opera in the “Casino,” the symphony in Carnegie Hall, a horse show in Madison Square Garden.

Returning home on December 4, Jessie’s methodical 1891 entries suddenly cease on December 16. A final entry for the year, dated December 20, reveals the reason:

[Sunday, December 20, 1891 Bethany, West Virginia]

On this day at a quarter to five o’clock, was born to us, our precious baby girl whom I called Lucy McCord Nave, after my dear husband’s mother, whom he lost when he was ten years old. The pain was terrible, but only what every mother willingly goes through with for the sake of being blessed with a sweet pure baby! “Pick” has been almost wild!

Commencing on New Year’s Day, 1892, diary number two begins on a sad note.

[Friday, January 1, 1892 Bethany, West Virginia]

At about five o’clock this morning, our dear little baby breathed its last. She had suffered for the last week and yesterday I felt my hopes fade away as I listened to her pained helpless cries. The doctor came last night and did what he could do to soothe the precious little sufferer, but I knew there was nothing anyone could do to save her.

[Saturday, January 2, 1892, Bethany, West Virginia]

Today my sweet darling, my little angel, was laid to rest on the hillside in the old family graveyard, beside my father’s sister, who died when a child. Only my dear husband, Alex [Campbell] and Mr. [William] Cowens went with the little body. Alex carried the small white casket in his arms – and when the soft, pure white snow fell on the new mound of earth, my husband laid a wreath of smylax at the foot of the grave. A mother for eleven days! and yet, how long have I seem to have known what it is to love and yearn over the sweet, frail little life that has gone out forever now. What a tender blossom she was – oh!, too tender for a world like this.

The Naves spent most of 1892 traveling. After a trip to Lexington, Kentucky in February and a week in New York in late March, they sailed for Italy in April. Landing in Genoa after an eleven day passage, they spent a month touring Italian museums and ruins before moving on through Austria to Germany. Passing several weeks each in Munich and Heidelberg, Jessie began feeling the now well known effects of early pregnancy in June. Moving on to the renowned spa at Baden, Switzerland, despite the opulence of her lifestyle, Jessie found herself struggling with the morning sickness and melancholy for third time in just two years of marriage.
[Wednesday, June 15, 1892 Baden, Switzerland]

Today I tried the world famous Fredrichsbad.... I hope the baths will benefit me. My first one I have not particularly enjoyed. The fact is I am not well and somehow I do not seem to prosper. I look at everything under the influence of my weakness “as thro’ the glass darkly!”... A woman’s lot is one of endurance, patience and fortitude. I am glad to be a woman and yet the role is very difficult.

The Naves remained in Switzerland for more than a month, before proceeding to what proved to be less satisfactory spas at Homburg and Wiesbaden. Passing through Brussels, they concluded their European tour with a three week stay in London.

Returning to Bethany on September 9, Jessie appears to have been in good spirits and good health for the next several weeks. Mysteriously, her methodical entries become increasing sporadic and concise as the fall progresses. A sole entry for a three week period surrounding October 19 states simply “6 months” [pregnant]. Similar entries mark the seventh month on November 20 and the eighth on December 20. The latter entry is appended with the following note:

Snow and cold. This day a year ago at 15 minutes of five o’clock in the evening, my little baby was born - just to live her brief life of 10 days! And now I am living in the hourly expectation of another birth. God help me!

Following a two day lapse, daily entries for the ensuing week describe a joyous holiday season replete with all the customary trimmings and an abundance of gifts for all including little “Mary Dink” who “enjoyed her presents in quiet ecstasy.”

A final entry, penned by “Pick,” concludes the volume:

[Monday, January 2, 1893 Bethany, West Virginia]

At 5 p.m. this morning, when the thermometre indicated 5 degrees below zero, the little girl was born, a perfect Infant in form and features. Dr. R.E. Jones and Mrs. Ann Malden - the nurse, were present at her birth and so was I. The mother passed thro’ the severe ordeal with great courage and fortitude.

Seven years later, in December 1900, the Wheeling Intelligencer published a lengthy article about a lavish new residence constructed in Bethany by “Colonel” and Mrs. William H. Nave who had recently returned to Bethany after a period of residence in St. Louis. Dubbing the home as an “architectural achievement,” the long essay concluded:

“In this beautiful home - one of the finest in West Virginia - Colonel and Mrs. Nave will dispense the charming hospitality for which they are known by a large circle of friends in Wheeling, St. Joseph, Mo., New York and St. Louis, and not the least charming member of the family will be little Miss Jessie Campbell Nave, the daughter of the house, an exquisite rosebud of rare promise, the idol of her parents and whose very presence is as a ray of sunshine.”

Point Breeze Mansion and the William H. Nave Family, 1904.
Colonel Nave lived to enjoy his mansion and his daughter for only another year after this photo was taken. Jessie survived not only Mr. Nave but two more husbands as well before passing away in 1932. She and her only daughter, Jessica Campbell Nave, continued to reside in Point Breeze until her death in 1932. Several years later, young Jessie sold the property to Bethany College and moved to Switzerland.

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Davis Galleries Showcase Early Statehood Treasures, Depression Era Photography

The Regional History Collection’s James Hornor Davis Family Galleries have been busy since the Collection’s new Wise Library facility opened to the public in 2002. To date, the galleries have hosted more than a dozen exhibits, drawn mostly from the West Virginia Collection’s vast and unparalleled holdings. Offerings installed this spring are of special interest.

Abraham Lincoln and West Virginia

Located in Davis Family Gallery 1, Abraham Lincoln and West Virginia provides visitors with an opportunity to examine a wide assortment of documents and artifacts relating to the turbulent times during which the nation’s thirty-fifth state was born. The exhibit is part of an array of events taking place this year at WVU connected with America’s 16th president, including the opening of Lincoln Hall, and the 2007 Festival of Ideas, which focuses on Lincoln as man, myth, martyr and American hero.

Visitors are likely to find viewing this exhibit to be a learning experience. For example, by reading Morgantown’s Virginia Weekly Star newspaper, they will discover that the United States almost never had a President Lincoln. On display is an August 30, 1860 front page containing reports on the forthcoming election. Campaign coverage in Morgantown, like elsewhere in Virginia, focused mostly on Stephen Douglas and John Breckinridge, noting, however, that ‘a vote for Breckinridge is a vote for Lincoln.’

Lincoln won the election with only 39.8 percent of the popular vote, soon finding himself in the midst of a Civil War and with a growing list of enemies. Dr. Achilles Dew sent a letter (also on display) to the nation’s leader warning about possible assassination attempts. “Neither eat nor drink with pretended friends,” Dew advised.

Francis Pierpont, governor of the “loyal” Virginia government set up in Wheeling after Virginia seceded, gained a favorable view about Lincoln from their encounters. A document by Pierpont in the exhibit praises how “Lincoln’s frank, open manner put everyone at ease in his presence.” Also drawn from Pierpont’s papers are eight original Western Union telegrams recording the negotiations between generals Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee on the day the Confederate Army surrendered. Forwarded to Pierpont by U.S. Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, the telegrams reveal, in Lee and Grant’s own words, the official end of the Civil War.

Artifacts featured in the exhibit include an assortment of weapons, accoutrements and other personal items owned by (West) Virginians who held opposing views. General Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson and Colonel Miles Dahmer fought with the Confederacy, while their neighbors, generals Joseph Lightburn and Thomas Harris, sided with the Union. A diary by U.S. Senator Waitman T. Willey, who fathered the legislation which created West Virginia, is exhibited beside an oil portrait of the senator that still bears “wounds” inflicted upon it by Confederate raiders in Morgantown in 1863.

Also represented is the artwork of David Hunter Strother (1816-1888). Famous across America for his illustrated articles in Harper’s Monthly, Strother covered John Brown’s raid at Harpers Ferry for his publisher’s famous weekly edition. On display are six original drawings showing events surrounding Brown’s trial, including his hanging on Dec. 2, 1859.

According to Director John Cuthbert, “One could go to museums in Washington, DC, or any major city and not see original drawings comparable to these. They are among the finest historical documents concerning John Brown’s raid in existence.”

The Omar Project: “Not a Simple Story”

The Omar Project, located in Davis Gallery 2, presents a selection of twenty black and white photographs depicting everyday life in the coal mining community of Omar, Logan County. The photographs were taken in 1935 and 1938 by two photographers, Ben Shahn and Marion Post Wolcott, who were employed by the federal government’s Farm Security Administration. Part of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Works Progress Administration, the goal of the FSA photography project was to document life in America in general, and the ravages of the Great Depression in particular. The project was conducted between 1938 and 1945 and yielded more than 160,000 photographs, including approximately 2,000 West Virginia images taken by fifteen photographers.
Ben Shahn (1898-1969) was one of 20th century America's leading social realist artists. Born in Russia, he immigrated to Brooklyn with his socialist, artist parents in 1904. Shahn's early artistic efforts rested in depicting the hustle and bustle, and social inequalities of existence in lower and midtown Manhattan. His WPA work focused primarily on the rural South and Midwest, including several locations in West Virginia. Also a noted painter, at least one of Shahn's paintings, Hunger, now in a Japanese art museum, was based directly on a photograph taken in Omar.

Marion Post Wolcott (1910-1990) worked as a photographer for a Philadelphia newspaper before joining the Farm Security Administration’s photography team in 1938. During the next three years she produced several thousand photographs, including some of the project’s finest, before resigning in 1941 to raise a family on a Virginia farm. Retiring from the world of professional photography, her work was largely forgotten until its breadth and quality was rediscovered and hailed by historians several decades later.

Shahn and Wolcott’s photographs of Omar provide an insightful look at a rural industrial West Virginia community that was possibly typical in the state’s southern coalfields. Given the activist bent of both photographers, it is likely that these images are an accurate portrayal of the town rather than a “sanitized” view. Selected by exhibit organizer Betty Rivard, the images focus largely on the residents of Omar, at work and play, as well as upon the town’s general sense of place. As a group, the photos suggests that Omar and its inhabitants were not unlike people and communities found elsewhere throughout America. The exhibit is supported by grant assistance from the Coalfields Convention and Visitors Bureau, the West Virginia Humanities Council, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

West Virginia History OnView Tops 20,000 Mark!

The West Virginia Collection’s digital photographs collection is reaching new heights in both its size and its popularity. Project staff recently added the 20,000th image to the database which is now visited by approximately 1,000 internet visitors from around the world each day. Many visitors have offered welcome feedback regarding the identification of images depicting people or places with which they are familiar. Some, like Johnny Greene of Beckley, WV have offered the donation of photographs to augment our holdings. This photograph of the hotel and grounds of the Red Sulphur Springs, a fashionable Monroe County resort from approximately 1820 to 1920, is but one of two dozen images donated by Mr. Greene.

Selected Recent Accessions:


Civil War records of the U.S. military hospital at Clarysville, Maryland, recording activities of Assistant Surgeon Samuel B. West. Includes appointment letter, “Special Orders No. 74,” for Samuel B. West dated July 25, 1864. There are approximately 800 “Bed Cards” and 165 larger and more detailed “Medical Descriptive Lists.” The “Bed Cards” contain the name, age, place of birth, marital status, residence, address of wife or nearest relative, rank, regiment, date admitted into hospital, diagnosis, where or how wounded, nature of missile or weapon, treatment, and result with date. “Medical Descriptive Lists” contain name, age, rank, Company, Regiment, disease or injury, admission date, disposition (return to duty, death, or other), name of attending medical officer (Samuel B. West), treatment, and detailed remarks regarding progress of treatment. There are also:
ten letters to and from Samuel B. West regarding medical record requests for pension applications, 1867-1883; a guide to Washington, D.C., 1869; undated train schedule and map for Philadelphia and New York area; handbill regarding admission of "colored physicians" to membership in the American Medical Association; and a two page statement regarding transgressions of soldiers upon civilians.


Civil War records of the 87th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry documenting the western Virginia campaign of 1862, including copies of originals and transcripts. Correspondence includes facsimiles of original letters written by Josiah Diehl, William Hartman (Company H), Joseph Helker (Company K), Thomas Crowl/Crowel (Company H), Charles E. Skelly, Jack Skelly, Jacob Diehl, John Warner, Johnston Skelly, Peter Warren (Company F), and James W. Latimer. There are also 17 transcripts of letters to editors of various newspapers from soldiers of the 87th Infantry. Locations referenced in the collection include: Camp McKimm in Baltimore, Maryland; Camp Jessie in New Creek, Hampshire County, Virginia; Camp Hay in Clarksburg, Harrison County, Virginia; Buckhannon, Upshur County, Virginia; Fort Fuller, New Creek, Virginia; Beverly, Randolph County, Virginia; Elkwater, Randolph County, Virginia; Harpers Ferry, Virginia; Petersburg, Virginia; and York, Pennsylvania. Includes facsimiles of excerpts from the diary of Captain Solomon Myers of Company E (June 21st-October 24th, 1862) and a chronology/timeline of the activities of the 87th in West Virginia from June 22, 1862 through December 24, 1862.


Two ledgers owned by farmer and merchant William W. Fike of Grant and Tucker Counties, W. Va. Includes general store account ledger for Dobbins, Grant County, W. Va. for years 1903-1904 listing inventory transactions such as candy, coal, coffee, dry goods, eggs, flour, fruit, furniture, hard ware, lumber, meat, medicine, postage, produce, shoes, snuff, sugar, syrup, tobacco, and wheat; includes farm expenses as well. Also includes customer day book for years 1899-1917 listing names, dates, and items purchased.


Letters and greeting cards received by Harold Lee Frankhauser of Parkersburg, West Virginia in 1942-1946 while serving the U.S. Navy in a medical detachment on the USS Chilton (APA-38) during World War II. The letters are from family and friends in Parkersburg, friends in the armed forces, and girl friends, reflecting a diverse range of home front experiences. There is an extensive series of letters from Lillian Tosker of New York, whom Harold Frankhauser married, which include numerous references to sentiment, as well as aspects of daily city life, such as transportation, employment, and entertainment. There are references to popular culture in the letters, including movies, big bands, vocalists, and sporting events. There are two photographs that include, presumably, Harold L. Frankhauser with his parents. Harold L. Frankhauser was born in West Virginia on May 20, 1921.


Photographs (166 items) featuring Hester Luetta Harr, a West Virginia University student and patient at the West Virginia State Tuberculosis Sanitarium in Preston County, West Virginia, during the late 1920s, including candid portraits of patients and staff. Also includes pictures of her brother Guy Harr and others who appear to be friends and fellow students from West Virginia University in Morgantown, West Virginia. There are also several views of the Cheat River, a photographic group portrait of the Terra-Alta Fire Department, and a 1926-1927 WVU Student Handbook owned by Guy Harr. Includes a total of 166 photographs. [Includes 76 photographs that are scanned to be made available online; the other 90 photographs are unscanned.]


Typescripts, newspaper clippings, and correspondence relating to the American Legion and soldiers of Raleigh County in World War I, World War II, and the Korean War. Typescripts include compiled lists of prisoners of war, casualties, wounded, and those who died of disease. Also includes typescripts, handwritten notes, newspaper clippings, programs, pamphlets, and brochures regarding the churches of Raleigh County and related organizations. Organizations include the Beckley Ministerial Association, the Beckley Institute, Mt. Zion Baptist, First Baptist, B'nai B'rith, Mount Tabor Baptist, First Methodist, First Christian, Church of God, St. Francis de Sales, St. Stephens Episcopal, Methodist Episcopal, the Salvation Army, and other Raleigh County churches. Also includes a 1908 souvenir booklet for the Beckley Public School, with two photographs.

Transcript of "Trips from Ohio to New Germany in Preston County, Virginia 1826, 1833, 1835; Journal entries taken from the Tagebuch [Diary] of David Simon, Boardman Township, Mahoning County, Ohio; translated from the German original with an introduction and indexes by Margaret Miller Simon." The journal entries record the travel experiences of David Simon from Mahoning County, Ohio to Washington, Pennsylvania and New Germany in Preston County near present-day Aurora; includes a record of relatives visited, including the Simon, Reinhart, Stemple, and Easterday (Ostertag) families. Also includes copies of selected pages of David Simon's original manuscript journal in its original German.


Newspaper clippings, photographs, and correspondence relating to Grace E. Waters and the Bartlett family. The correspondence from the Bartletts to their favorite teacher spans from 1971 to 1989. The photographs include four of the Bartlett family. There is a photograph (8 x 10 in.) of Grace E. Waters and General D. J. Joe Bartlett of the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve at the U.S. House of Representatives on the occasion of a ceremony honoring the General; also includes related newspaper clipping for this event. There is a 1972 newspaper clipping and 1973 invitation to honor the Cherry Blossom Festival Princess (in Ohio), Linda Bartlett. There are also three newspaper clippings written in honor of Black History Month 1994.


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