

Introduction to the Pendleton Diaries

Dr. Nathaniel Pendleton was a physician serving the residents of Gouldsboro, Maine from the mid-1830s until his death in 1877. He documented his daily activities and financial transactions in a “pocket diary” for an unknown number of years. Twenty-one diaries have been preserved and protected by six generations of descendants.

In August 2021, the Pendleton descendants graciously offered to have the existing fragile diaries scanned by the Gouldsboro Historical Society. The resulting PDF files are only available on the Digital Archive. The Gouldsboro Historical Society does not have physical access to the diaries.

An index by year is in progress.

The set begins in 1852 and ends in 1874. The location of the 1857 diary is unknown. Dr. Pendleton kept 1872 and 1873 in the same diary. The 1874 diary is a collection of loose pages, and is not complete.

Context in 1852

Nathaniel Pendleton (1803 – 1877) and his wife, Eunice Grover Pendleton (1805 – 1891) moved from Islesboro, Maine to Winter Harbor in the mid-1830's with five children under the age of nine. They lived in a salt-box style house near the end of the Inner Harbor.

In addition to his medical duties, Dr. Pendleton was actively involved in land acquisition, shipping and fishing businesses, ownership of several vessels including the *Henrietta*, *Oolong*, and *Mary Jane*, as well as serving as a justice of the peace and post master.

Dr. Pendleton was 48 years old when he began the 1852 diary. Eunice was 46. They had been married for 28 years and were building a new house away from the harbor. They were financially prosperous unlike most of their neighbors.

They experienced tremendous grief after they moved to Winter Harbor. Two of their five children died in 1835. Eight more children were born between 1836 and 1845. Five died as infants, two as toddlers. Martin drowned at age 12 in 1847. All were buried near the house on the harbor. [The 1852 diary describes the removal of the children from the harbor house graveyard to a new graveyard prepared by Dr. Pendleton behind the new house. The contract for their tombstones appears on the front inside cover.]

Only three biological children were living in 1852. Solomon was 26 years old, married, and the father of a three-year-old son. Francena was 23 years old, married, and pregnant with her first child. Roderic was nine years old. Adopted son, Charles William, was ten years old.

Content

The diaries document everyday life in Gouldsboro, Maine from the perspective of the local doctor. His “calls” to ill patients at all hours of the day and night reveal the challenges he encountered including traveling between villages (few people were treated at his house), the ability to diagnose illnesses, and limited medicinal treatments. His struggle to contain the diphtheria epidemic of 1862 is heroic and heartbreaking. Fees are noted but payment is often delayed or bartered. It is interesting to note that Dr. Pendleton does not typically discount his fees for family members, even his own daughter.

As in most small towns of the era, families intermarried so many of the people identified in the diaries are related to the Pendletons. Eunice's parents and most of her siblings lived nearby. Dr. Pendleton had three brothers and a sister living in Gouldsboro.

Pendleton documents his numerous business activities especially related to shipping and fishing. The early 1850s include the details of building a grand house, barn, and family graveyard. His abilities as a contractor, carpenter, and gardener are notable.

Revelations about his personal life are typically controlled. However, he is overwhelmed with emotion after the death of his son Solomon (25 August 1855), the death of granddaughter Cora "Little Sis" (3 March 1853), and the death of grandson Hilliard (7 Feb 1872). References to his wife and daughter are limited but his sons, particularly Solomon's seafaring activities, are well-documented. He attends Sunday "meetings" somewhat regularly. He and Eunice attend the singing school, pick berries, and visit friends and family together.

Challenges

Dr. Pendleton's handwriting is often challenging to decipher and the language may be unfamiliar to the modern reader. For example, child birth is referred to as "puerperal." He refers to most women, including his own daughter, as "Mrs. Husband's Name" as was the custom. Many of the men appear with only a last name which is problematic for identifying Bickfords, Guptills, and Sargents. Newborn babies are rarely named. Illnesses and medicines are rarely identified.

Opportunities for Research

These diaries provide countless opportunities for future research. They serve as a primary source for births, deaths, funerals, and marriages in Gouldsboro. The diaries provide insight into transportation, businesses, and medical practices of the era as well as the daily lives of the people of Gouldsboro. Analysis of the diphtheria epidemic would be fascinating.