

The Nicholas Gesner Diary

Facts about the Diary

In 1898, Palisades historian Winthrop S. Gilman (1839-1923) received from Mrs. Julia Denike 55 small "cahiers" (Gesner called them "Momentoes"), each 6 3/8 by 7 7/8 inches, some with 4 leaves, others with 16 or 20, or even more. He had four boxes made for them. The article in his book *The Story of the Ferry* (1903), with more than 30 pages of excerpts, shows the careful study he gave to them. He turned the diary over to the Palisades Library. In the 1950s, the library received two more cahiers that had originally been left out of the collection given to Gilman. In 1958, the Palisades Historical Committee had the diary copied and enlarged with the help of the New York Public Library. A few years later, the whole diary was put on microfilm. That first copy is no longer usable, and the diary is being copied again in the year 2001.

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by Alice Munro Haagensen

Nicholas Gesner (1765-1858) of "Rockland," now Palisades, kept a diary in the first half of the 19th century, from 1829 to 1850, telling in detail about what he did and what happened around him. In spite of certain faults, Gesner was an exceptional man. Besides being an active farmer, he was a schoolteacher, surveyor and lawyer for his neighbors. He bought books regularly, and he commented on many matters of interest to present day readers. Although the diary is available only in the Palisades Library and its crabbed handwriting and many abbreviations have never been fully transcribed, it has been used by several historical and sociological researchers. Carl Nordstrom, in *Frontier Elements in a Hudson River Village* (actually Nyack), quotes Gesner in detail throughout his book. Joan Geismar, in *The Archaeology of Social Disintegration in Skunk Hollow: A Nineteenth-Century Rural Black Community*, often uses Gesner, a near neighbor of Skunk Hollow, to supplement what she learned from exploration, deeds, censuses and other official records. How the diary was saved for posterity is told in *The Story of the Ferry* by Winthrop Sargent Gilman, who lived in Palisades from 1861 till his death in 1923 and gathered a remarkable collection of historical material about the small hamlet:

When Mrs. William Sparks (daughter of the "Sally" of the "Diary," i.e., granddaughter of Nicholas Gesner) removed from Palisades a few years since, she brought in a wagon to Mrs. [Julia] Denike's house, a large quantity of books and papers belonging to her grandfather. During all of one day she occupied herself in burning them. Many numbers of the "Diary" were destroyed at this time, since, to quote her words, there "was no use in keeping them around." Finally she turned to Mrs. Denike, saying, "I will not have time to burn them all, but you can burn the rest." After her departure Mrs. Denike did continue to destroy the papers, but her mother, the late Mrs. Abraham Post ... remonstrated, saying, "I wish you would not burn the Diaries, for I

knew many of the people mentioned in them, and I like to hear about them." No more were burned after this. During the preparation of this paper, in 1898, the "Diary" was presented by Mrs. Denike to Winthrop S. Gilman, and by him to the Palisades Library.

In the 1950s, I often talked to Mrs. Adeline Van Blarcom, the daughter of Julia Denike, about her memories of Palisades. One day I learned that a couple of the "cahiers," Mr. Gilman's name for the separate parts of the diary, which Gesner called "Momentoes," had been withheld by her mother, undoubtedly because they referred to an old scandal. Eventually they were handed over to the Palisades Library to be added to the rest of the diary.

Mr. Gilman's first cahier was dated October 3, 1830, but he assumed that there had been many before this. One of the two from Mrs. Van Blarcom was dated April 25, 1829; however, the cover might be interpreted as being the first. It reads: "The following is a Memento [sic], or Memorial, without any Design of Debt or Credit or charge or demand." (As one reads on, one will be better able to judge the accuracy of this disclaimer.)

Polly Concklin

At first glance, the diary seems to be a straightforward account of a farmer's life, with constant weather bulletins and an emphasis on church affairs, interspersed with cryptic references and abbreviations; but as one reads on, they begin to make more and more sense. Suddenly there is a jolt, and one almost finds oneself in a Victorian novel, full of intense feeling, religious fervor and dramatic scenes.

One learns that Gesner had an obsessive interest in his widowed niece by marriage, Mary Quidor Concklin, or "Pol. Conck," usually referred to in the diary by what can only be described as a squiggle. This obsession filled his life for the first two years of the diary and caused quarrels with his children and her children, not to mention frequent flare-ups with Polly herself

Apparently Polly had found herself in financial trouble after her husband Jacob died in 1811, and Gesner came to the rescue. Perhaps dating from this time, he seemed to have a hold on her and expected her to give him meals, make his shirts, wash and mend his clothes, and supply who knows what other services. This was true even though he was ostensibly living at home with his wife Gracy Post and often entertaining relatives and friends.

In spite of his protest on the cover, the first part of the diary, long withheld, includes an account of the many days Polly spent away from home, visiting relatives or working as a midwife—even that seems to have been a grievance to Nicholas—and of the few scanty meals she gave him. When she was at home, he complained that there always seemed to be a visiting relative dividing her attention, even if it sometimes was only one of her young grandsons. Nicholas Gesner, who was there several times a day, must have been a disturbing presence, whether censorious or a bit too friendly.

The relationship between Nicholas and Polly, as described in the diary, is hard to define. In their many arguments Polly accuses Nicholas of "jawing, jawing, jawing," and says she will let no one tell her what to do. According to Nicholas, he answers her calmly and reasonably but writes passionately about her "miserable

lyes" and "most bitter temper." Then when he returns to her house, usually a short time later, his description of his reception is often an ambiguous "friendly."

There is not much of sociological interest in the first two years of the diary, but the intense attention focused on a small group of neighboring families makes for a particularly detailed background which gives interest and meaning to many later entries.

Gesner's daily descriptions of the weather serve to set the scene, as is done in an old-fashioned novel. They also bring Gesner to life as the man described by the Denikes, who lived next door. They remembered his "coming to the front door .. to observe the weather just before retiring." They also recalled that he "used to have a bandanna handkerchief over his head at meetings" (Gilman, *Palisades Notes*, page 180).

Polly's Family

Polly Concklin lived on a lane west of Closter Road in the old John Gesner house "o.ho." in the diary. Her husband Jacob, whose mother was Nicholas Gesner's sister Elizabeth, had bought the house from his father. Most of the action described by Gesner took place while she lived there. In 1832, she moved out and not long after, it was torn down.

Three of Polly's daughters and one son lived nearby on parcels of land inherited from their grandfather, Jacob Concklin. Their houses are all just over the state line in what is now Rockleigh, New Jersey. They have been studied in detail by Reginald McMahan, a Bergen County historian who made plentiful use of the Gesner diary. Although Polly's husband had left the old house to the youngest son, Nicholas, he preferred to live elsewhere as did his brother Jacob.

Polly's daughter Elizabeth Dubois—"Bets," or "Bs" in the diary—especially disapproved of her mother's relations with Gesner and often sent her young son, Ephraim, to stay with Polly, as a "guardian," Gesner once said angrily. There is said to be a ghost in the Dubois house, a severe-looking woman in black. Perhaps this is Bets, still disapproving.

Another daughter, Mary Anne, married Albert "Obb" Cooper, of a nearby large Dutch family, who are chiefly remembered nowadays for their unusual nicknames. Obb's brother James was called "Cose," Cose's wife was "Wynchy," his daughter, "Tyney," and his sister Hanna, "Nautchy" or "Naut." Cose and Obb often worked for Gesner on his farm.

The third daughter, Phebe Van Wickel, "Pe" in the diary, and her husband, Richard, lived across the road from the other two. It was to her house that Polly went for refuge when the situation with Nicholas became intolerable.

The son, John Gesner Concklin, "J.G.C." in the diary, who lived next door to Phebe, was a bitter enemy of Gesner. One time, on June 20, 1832, when Cose and Obb Cooper were hauling a load of dung for Nicholas on a right-of-way across the Concklin property, J.G. forcibly stopped them and struck Cose with a club. Nicholas heard the quarrel and approached. He wrote later:

Above all provoking abusive and scandalous abuses this was the most daring, malicious and hell like of all ever I saw or heard and where a persons life seemed More in Danger with his club than this. his eyes sparkled with the most hellish looks that I ever was acquainted with.

According to Gesner's account, his own reply was almost saintly. When he in turn was threatened by Concklin, who "swore the bitterest oaths ever heard," he picked up the dung fork in self-defense, but soon put it down and turned away with a mild protest.

Polly's two other sons came often to visit her, much to Gesner's annoyance. Nicholas was a gunsmith. According to McMahon, he worked in New York City in the summer and Georgetown, South Carolina in the winter. Gesner seems to have had amicable relations with him, as he did with Jacob, except when he had been drinking. Jacob's visits were a mixed pleasure to his mother because his wife Elmira was always making trouble. At one time there was a real scandal. Gesner described it on April 1, 1831:

P[he]b[e] came down. She Ja[cob] Concklin] & Elmira had high Conversation Ab[out] Rich[ar]d Van Winklers attempt on the Body and Chastity of s[ai]d Elmira, who said that he made an attempt on her in the house and Running A Round the stove. She fled out Doors and hid behind the Apple Brush back of little house. That Rich[ar]d Came and looking for her, he went to Nicholas Barrack. with that she Ran into the house Again. locked the Door That Rich[ar]d came to the Door and forced it open &c.

When, later, Jacob died suddenly, Gesner gave a lurid account on October 2, 1832 under the heading "Jacob Concklin Dead. But how did he come Dead. Elmira his unlawful Wife a Stinking Beast."

This Day we Had correct information that Jacob Concklin Died, being ill abt 3 only Hours. Died yesterday about 9 ock [o'clock] A.M. It is also Related that Elmira his unlawful wife a few Days Ago While Ja[cob] Conck[li]n was up at Rockland Went to be Married again. The Carriage overset & She broke her arm which interrupted this Beastly Woman from performing this act. Applied to a Doctor, who knew her Design (it is said) told her she must go somewhere else he would not set it &c. This is now Reported. But the poor mortified Man is Dead supposed with the Cholera. But circumstances present to the Mind the question. Dont you think perhap a Dosse [sic] of Laudanum or poison has been taken or Given him. This man was the most deplorable victim of Mortifying affection for a Beastly woman & an [?] Strumpet (so said) that ever was &c She proved a total destruction to him, his [?], his constitution by drinking and harassing him sold his property last May. and she had consumed nearly all. He was married to her & she had a husband living & no divorce a stinking beast.

Gesner's Family

Nicholas Gesner lived over the New Jersey state line in New York on Closter Road in a beautiful old house, still standing. There is in front a very old white-oak tree, which is said to have been planted by his wife Gracy when she was a little girl.

Poor Gracy, one wonders what she was doing while her husband was scandalizing the neighborhood! One imagines her to be a faithful, dumpy little woman, probably a poor cook, and not very bright. She is on record as asserting herself once, in connection with a meeting of the "class," a small group of fervent Methodists who met during the week in various houses to pray together. When it came time to meet at the Gesners, Gracy refused to allow Polly to enter her house. At the next meeting Nicholas was taken to task for "breaking up the class." He replied indignantly that far from doing so, he had offered to leave Gracy and go to live with their daughter, Sally Lawrence, so the class could all meet at the Lawrences'.

Sally was married to Jonathan Lawrence, son of Jonathan Lawrence, Jr., the village's Revolutionary War hero, and great-grandson of the Jonathan Lawrence who had owned the historic Big House and most of the land in the center of Rockland (Palisades) [see *South of the Mountains*, April-June 1977 for more on Jonathan Lawrence, Jr.]. They lived either in the Big House or in a house on the west side of the present Route 9W. Either place was large enough so that they could put up most of the many visiting Methodist preachers, who then often held services in the house. (Nicholas sometimes housed the preacher's horse and wagon.)

Sally and Jonathan didn't seem to get involved in the family scandal at all. Gracy often stayed with them, and often she and Nicholas, Sally and "Jon. Law" would go to church services together. There was a pleasant interlude on September 15, 1831 when Nicholas took their little daughter Mary crabbing in the river.

Gesner's son Herbert lived in a house on the corner where the Palisades Library now is and had a cobbler shop there. His father thought he charged too much. He wrote on April 18, 1842, "At Herbert's one half sole and apiece for a welt. 1 shilling. (Its too much) unpaid." Next day he wrote, "I mended my shoe." (Gilman remembered the cobbler shop being there still in the 1860s).

His other son Jacob was sometimes critical of his father for his treatment of Gracy. Nicholas described one conversation on June 6, 1832, after Gracy's hens had scratched up a few hundred of the corn hills Nicholas had just planted:

Ja[co]b Ges[ne]r Abused me very much about the fowls, the destroyed Corn because I found fault with his Mother not being ambitious in trying to help get the fowl. Stayd out late last n[igh]t instead of coming home soon to help catch them. I told him I had not Abused his Mother. I asked and seriously requested him to tell me what I had done, that if I had done anything wrong I was willing to acknowledge it & that I wished to know. He ans[were]d I was not worth talking to further.

One can feel Jacob's exasperation. When he married Elizabeth, or Bets, Cooper on October 15, 1831, Nicholas didn't go—probably was not invited—but described the wedding in detail:

Jacob Gesner went to Get Married abt 2 ock PM. with Bets Cooper and was Married. Started from Old Coopers (at John Willse's) I think or expect that the Revd Mr Cole Tappan married them. from thence to Slote had supper at Ab[raha]m Sarvents, had 3 Waggons besides his namely, David Mann (of Geo Mann) and peggy Riker (of Ja[cob] Riker) the Groomsman and Bridesmaid—and George Law[ren]ce & Eliza Willse—and Abraham Post (son of Ja[cob] Post) and Naut Cooper. The Married Couple Returned to Old Coopers in N[igh]t. N.B. they had each Couple a one horse Waggon-A Beautiful Day.

The first phase of the diary ended in February 1832 when Polly moved in with Phebe, and Gesner's relationship with her was abruptly ended. On February 25, Gesner wrote, in part (there are five closely written pages in the diary giving his side and explaining how blameless he was):

There is a mis[erab]l[e] malicious and wicked talk in the neighborhood. The Report Runs that M[ary] C[oncklin] has said that she left Old house and w[en]t to Pe that I should come no more there that she had told me to keep away ... Pe bade me to come there no more to Make the people talk about her Mother who had moved th[ere] with her father [old Peter Quidor] it must be Remem[bere]d that M Conck told me the same Day (I think) that... she had thought to move the Old Man her father to Pe that there was 2 or 3 who had given her Notice to be Ready to attend their wives as midwife and if she should be called it would not do to leave the old man th[ere] alone, the Brook high, &c She moved him and also s[ai]d she would be there a few Days herself &c Now the report in circulation is that she had to leave Old Ho that I would be coming and I would not stay away.

They seem to have had only one more real conversation after the move, on March 15, when Polly tried to explain, saying that "she was so beat and so struck, and so mortified that she didn't know what to do." After that Gesner saw her only in passing, generally in the company of Richard Van Wickel. Polly and her father must have crowded the house uncomfortably. The Van Wickels had at least one and probably three children at the time, and Reginald McMahan describes the house as "a small tall narrow dwelling, consisting of a hallway, one large room with fireplace and brick chimney, and stairs leading to a garret of two rooms." Old Peter Quidor died about a month later. Polly lived until 1838. Nicholas Gesner wrote:

Jan. 6. Mary Concklin (daughter of old Peter Quidor and the widow of Jacob Concklin) died this afternoon about 2 o'clock. Her death seems to have been unexpected.

Jan. 7. Mary Concklin Buried this afternoon about 4 o'clock, near SunSet; I not there. A Respectable Burying. A large number. They never gave word to Nicholas Concklin (her son) of her death, which was unexpected; but hurried her into the grave in the Burying ground of John Gesner of Rockland.

Her burial was almost the last in the small Gesner-Concklin Burying Ground on the Gesner property, and hers is now one of only three stones still standing. One wonders why the grave is outside the low wall of the burying ground, although there was room for one more grave inside. Perhaps she had killed herself, life being too hard for the poor woman, and was not allowed to be buried in consecrated ground.

The Methodist Church

After Polly moved out of the old house, Gesner turned more of his attention to church matters. There were two rival branches of the new Methodist Church in the small village of Rockland. One, the Methodist Episcopal Church, or Old Side, had the advantage of a well-to-do adherent, Moses Taylor. He lived over the border in New Jersey but devoted his resources to helping the church in Rockland. He helped them build first a small building north of the Big House on the road to Sparkill, then, in 1859, the large impressive one across the road, which is now the antique shop, Yonder Hill Dwellers.

The other branch, the Reform Methodists, held its own for some time with the help of Nicholas Gesner's determination, pious intensity and power of invective. It even succeeded in building, in about 1850, a small "steepleless church" near where the present post office is, called Gesner Hall. For a long time, however, the Reform Methodists met in private houses or at the schoolhouse in New Landing, today's Piermont. Visiting preachers would ride the circuit and, in between their visits, the devoted church members would meet together in "classes" to pray, confess and reinforce their deep religious feelings. They believed that without constant religious struggle they would fall from grace.

According to the diary, there was animosity between the two groups. Gesner writes that "Moses Taylor etc." were "circulating their venom against Reform." On January 21, 1835, he writes:

The barefaced impertinence practiced by the greater part of the Old Side, this seeming Sanctity under all their Wicked Strategems &c are truly despicable.

In the cahier dated June 3, 1832, Gesner replies to certain criticisms of his attitude by milder members of his class by a rather confusing explanation:

[He] never said anything about the Doctrines they Preached exclusive of the Church government, nor had any Design to be understood any further than that much which bore on Resemblance thereto in Aristocratic and Absolute power.

At both churches the services were full of excitement. On September 27, 1833, Gesner writes of a Reform preacher: "He is a great singer. He is considerable noisy in his devotion." Of the Old Side he writes on November 5, 1834:

Methodist Episcopal meeting I have been informed was attended with Great shoutings. A.V Sturr, their local preacher and present School master in District No. 1. He is among the people pulling and haling [sic] a few young people into the altar. Jesse

Trenchard's wife fell. The whooping and screaming in the Meeting House was never equalled in this place.

He describes a camp meeting lasting from September 18 to September 24, 1832, which took place on George Mann's property west of the village and north of what is now Oak Tree Road. There were usually two or three hundred attending, but on the 23rd there were more than a thousand.

Members and mourners and many others, experience related in an extraordinary manner. God with us a blessed time, singing and praising God. A farewell sorrowful parting with tears. May it be long remembered.

Not everyone in the village was a Methodist, however. Gesner reports a discussion with Herbert Lawrence, Jonathan's older half-brother, on August 22, 1832:

I & Herbt Law[ren]ce. Argument on the Way of Salvation. It appears he supported the idea that what Christ had suffered on the Cross &c was nothing to Man's Salvation, that Christ was only a Man, possessing more of the Divine nature than any other Man, that Christ was only an example to us, that what he suffered on the Cross was nothing to us, and that it was only Christ within us &C, & further there will be no Resurrection of the Body, that Man was not conceived in Sin and brought forth in iniquity, that the Spirit which was given to every Man was all that was Necessary. Follow its Dictates.

Remarkably, Gesner makes no comment in the diary on these iconoclastic sentiments.

The Brower Concern

After Polly and his church, one of Gesner's absorbing interests was what he called "The Brower Concern." His mother Famiche Brower was supposed to have been a direct descendant of Anneke Jans, whose granddaughter married Jacobus Brower. Anneke Jans was a reputed illegitimate descendant of William the Silent of Holland and in the 17th century had owned 62 acres in downtown New York, including the site where Trinity Church was built. The property was bought from her, taken over by the king of England and ended up in the possession of the church. Her descendants never acknowledged the legality of the process.

At least 12 of the interconnected families in Rockland (Palisades) were among the thousands of descendants of Anneke Jans. Every so often a lawyer would take up the case and circularize the ever-growing group of seekers after fortune. One such case was in process in the 1830s; and Gesner often went to New York City to consult with lawyers and other interested parties, backed financially by many of his relatives in the village. Like many others before and after, this case failed, benefiting only the lawyers. The practice was ended by the disbarment in 1913 of the latest lawyer to circularize the descendants with the aim of bringing another suit.

No doubt the prospect of royal descent and possible riches provided rosy dreams for Gesner and his neighbors, but unfortunately they never had a chance of

materializing. Recent studies have proved that Anneke Jans had no connection with the Dutch royal family and that Famiche Brower was descended only from a brother of the Jacobus Brower who married Anneke Jans's granddaughter.

Even if these facts had not come out, a writer, Munsell, who narrated the Anneke Jans story in 1870, wrote, "It has been calculated that if their ancient farm in New York, now in possession of Trinity Church, and supposed to be worth several millions, was recovered and equally apportioned among all who claim to be descendants of Anneke Jans, it would give them about twenty shilling apiece."

Jack Earnest

Although in the early years Gesner's first interest was in keeping an eye on Polly Concklin and later in continually reaffirming his religion and seeking fortune through "The Brower Concern," he also noticed and commented on what went on around him in his vicinity and in the world. The diary is a wonderful resource for anyone studying almost any aspect of that period of Rockland County history.

Joan Geismar, for example, making a study of Skunk Hollow, the settlement of free blacks on the "mountain" south and east of the village, was able to find several pertinent quotations, in particular the interesting account on November 19, 1841 of the life of Jack Earnest, one of the first settlers:

Last Night Jack Earnest at Home laid himself before the fire probably in his sleep his clothes took fire got outdoors, and before he could get his clothes off was mortally burnt Was ab[out] 71 years old and was born in My fathers house, a Slave I bought him of My father John Gisner [sic] when he was about 23 year-old for £80 [which] is 200 dollars as I ever was opposed to slavery, I told him after he had served me 7 or 8 years I would set him free...But after he had been with me one year or thereabouts my brotherinlaw Jacob Concklin By flattery and persuasion, promising him a piece of ground to Raise Some potatoes & Broom-corn for himself that Jack was overpersuaded; promised him to set him free after 7 or 8 years I told Jack how Concklin would Serve him, being acquainted with Cs disposition as a Miser ... Concklin detained him untill [sic] he had stay'd 14 years instead of 7 or 8. Now Jack being determined to stay no longer, twitting C that I had told him how he (Concklin) would serve him, Concluded to let him go on Condition Jack would secure him One hundred Dollars!!! ... After he left Concklin ... acquired for himself a Nice little property by hard Industry the Surname Earnest was Attached to him Because he was in great Earnest when purchasing some land in the Mountain.

Gesner's Economy

Carl Nordstrom, on his part, found enough indications in the diary of Gesner's way of life to characterize him as a frontiersman, independent, resourceful, self-sufficient. (The only frontier characteristic lacking was isolation. Gesner lived in a close complex of related families.) He describes in *Frontier Elements in a Hudson River Village* how Gesner supported himself

“Nicholas Gesner was primarily a farmer. He devoted part of his efforts to subsistence production and the remainder to a cash crop which he sent to New York City ... Among the crops Gesner produced for sale in New York were apples, raspberries, currants, and potatoes. He also gathered nuts and cut firewood. [He also is on record as sending flowers, chickens and lamb] ... In addition to his farming, Gesner served as surveyor, schoolteacher, and sometime lawyer for his neighbors. In his youth he had been a boatbuilder Gesner was also active politically ... During the War of 1812 he ... eventually rose to the rank of Colonel ... the Gesner farm of the 1830s operated on a mixed currency basis involving both cash and barter.”

Nordstrom analyzes Gesner's accounts for the months of July to September 1834, when they happened to be comparatively complete, and finds that for the three months his reported income was \$6.41 and his expenses \$13.52. What Nordstrom neglects to mention, although it is of interest to those living in the vicinity today, is his taxes. For his 30 acres of farming land in New Jersey he paid taxes in 1830 of 90 cents; but they went way up in 1832:

Jersey Collector came to collect taxes. I was taxed for 30 acres of land \$3.20,—and old Campbell in Closter for 30 acres \$1.17—I think it was 15 or 17 cents,—look at it I did not now pay it.

Diseases and Injuries

The diary contains interesting information on many subjects, not only facts from a conscientious observer but striking or pertinent stories. One interested in the medical history of the time, for instance, can find references to cholera in New York City and even in Piermont, smallpox in a small house near the waterfall south of the landing and how the villagers rallied to help, and many indispositions in his neighbors and himself and how they were treated.

He describes on June 19, 1832 how his son Herbert was injured:

Some years ago by a bank and large Rock falling on him near Snedens Landing, and mortification, first the loss of his foot. Then the ankle off, and perhaps a year afterwards by reason of not healing and intolerable misery increasing Again, he was obliged to go down to New York in the first of the winter and had his leg taken off just below his knee, I, Nich[ola]s Ges[ne]r his father, was present. Dr. Mott, surgeon [no doubt the famous Dr. Valentine Mott, the Professor of Surgery at the College of Physicians and Surgeons] with 8 or 9 young students present.

Then there is the account on June 21, 1836 of Gracy's bizarre ailment:

Gracy is much troubled with the animal on her Stomach and throat, is quite Sick—seems all that can be done cannot destroy it ne year and more is elapsed with this Plague in her Stomach, frequently and quickly fly's up in her throat, almost chokes her. Harsh medicine sends it down a Moment; but starts up again as though it would flee from the severity of the Stuff taken—large portions of the spirits of turpentine has been taken; Doctors

medicine and every harsh attempt to destroy it has hitherto failed.
[It has been suggested that this may have been hiatus hernia.]

Boating

Gesner's diary contains many references to boat building, boat trips to New York and boats. In general, he describes one trip to New York on May 11, 1831, which started in a schooner and ended in a steamboat:

W[en]t New York from ho[me] ab[out] 9 or 10 ock to'clock] ..
W[en]t with John Willse & Geo Quidor from Snedens [In the margin he adds, "Gracy w(en)t too."] a Violent South Wind. first Single Reef. Then Double Reef. just below [?1 the Leech Rope or Mainsal Broke and tore the Sail Amazing. There was a terrible Swell -We got in near West Shore. where it was more Calm. The Rockland Steam boat came near Along. They Attended to our Signal took from the Schooner Abt 15 passengers. and Got in abt 4 ock R.M. John and George Got in the same n[igh]t late &c.

He was present at a couple of incidents showing the intense rivalry between steamboats on the Hudson. On May 28, 1831, after a trip to New York to see about "The Brower Concern," he wrote:

B[ac]k from N York abt 3 ock to Snedens at first start the 2 Steam Boats *Orange* [from Nyack, captained by the hotheaded Isaac Smith] & *Rockland* [from Piermont] Crowded Against each other and Jambed Yawl Boat all to pieces. The *Rockland* was outside The *Orange* was better than 12 ft clear of Dock and instantly past the end of Dock.

In 1837, he reports that the *Arrow* from Nyack, captained by that same Isaac Smith, ran at the *Warren* from Haverstraw with the intention of ramming her amidships:

Went on board the Arrow State Prison Dock ... Arrow ran up on the Warren ... Side by Side, Arrow next east Shore Running no other course but parallel with the Shore at sufficient distant off ... The Arrow in which I was on board, crowded towards the Warren who continued directly forward. Then the Arrow slacked her motion and Rounded against the Warren aft of her center, carryed her Stern Around and brought the Warren Across her bow of Arrow touching hard ... This excited a lamentable outcry on Board the Warren. The moment appeared perilous, however the Warrens bow was partly forced down the river the Arrow passed by her Stern and proceeded. Capt. Isaac Smith of the Arrow pretended that the Capt of the Warren intended to crowd him on the Shore I told Smith that he had done wrong to Hazzard so many that I was an Eye Witness Some hotheaded men on board said they would have run her over if they could. I answered, would you endanger the lives of 150 or 200 person, &c.

The Revolutionary War

The occasion of the visit of Nicholas's older brother Abraham and his daughter Maria from Nova Scotia in July 1834 started him on reminiscences of the Revolutionary War:

N.B. It may not be improper here to note that our Father and Mother, namely John Gesner and Famiche Gesner (Brower) wished to remain neutral in the war of the revolution. refused to sign the Association dreading consequences, was called a tory but truly he was a peaceable man in every Respect—threatenments were made, and his sons grown up were Menaced to be taken and brought to New England and confined in dungeons (or mines), violence was used in many places and with many. Father Gesner, now abt 52 or 53 years old, admonished his sons, Jacob, Isaac, Henry, and Abraham to take opportunity & go to New York now in possession of the English. With some others after Father Gesner had admonished them to be good boys, went off with an open Small Pettiauger belonging to Dennis Sneden who went also from Snedens, &c.

Nicholas, being a boy of 11 at the time, stayed at home with his parents. He goes on to describe what happened to his brothers after that. Father Gesner sent them to an acquaintance, one Bayard. Isaac found work as a tailor, but the other three went to Staten Island and cut wood for one dollar a day. Eventually they were enrolled in a regiment commanded by Colonel Bayard. They served as guards at Powles Hook and Hoboken and were later taken to Halifax, Nova Scotia, like so many other Loyalists. Henry and Abraham settled there, acquired large farms and had 12 children each.

With all that has been written about Gesner's diary, the surface has hardly been scratched. Gilman, McMahon, Nordstrom, Geismar and perhaps others may have skimmed through the whole 21 years of the diary; but only the first two or three years have been transcribed. Who knows what treasures may turn up when the whole diary is studied.