

Archives and Special Collections

Dickinson College

Carlisle, PA

COLLECTION REGISTER

Name: **Gilbert, Zenanah (1784-?)** **MC 1998.9**

Material: Diaries (1805-1898)

Volume: 0.25 linear feet (1 Document Box and 1 Oversized Folder)

Donation: Gift of Jon Thiem, 1975

Usage: These materials have been donated without restrictions on usage.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Zenanah Gilbert was born January 31, 1784. Her father was Thomas Gilbert, Sr., and she was one of nine children. The family resided in Rome, New York and apparently ran a guest house for which they had a constant stream of patrons. Little else is known about Zenanah, save what she reveals about herself through her diary.

The other subject of this collection is Dora Gilbert Tompkins of Knoxville, Illinois. Her relationship to Zenanah Gilbert is unknown, but may very well have been her granddaughter. Her diary begins on July 15, 1897 and continues through March 4, 1898. Little is known about Dora, but her diary reveals that she was a school teacher.

COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

This collection is composed primarily of the diaries of Zenanah Gilbert and Dora Gilbert Tompkins. The diary of Zenanah Gilbert begins in 1805 and ends in 1809. The diary of Dora Gilbert Tompkins begins in 1897 and ends in 1898. It can be assumed that Zenanah and Dora were approximately the same age when they kept their respective diaries, but on the opposite ends of the nineteenth century. It is interesting to compare their daily lives and observe how the expectations of women and roles they played changed over the course of a century.

Folder number one contains the diary of Zenanah Gilbert which describes the life of a young woman during the early nineteenth century. In her diary, Zenanah describes days of sewing, spinning, cooking, going to church, and daily visits with friends, neighbors, relatives, and "beaux." She describes enjoyable walks with her sisters and girlfriends as well as fishing trips and sleigh rides, and is always diligent in noting a new snowfall or the full moon. However, she also describes bouts of depression when she spends time alone at home. Besides daily activities, she records cases of illness within her family, as it seems they were often

plagued with ague, headache, and fainting spells. In 1808 Zenanah describes a week-long round trip from her home in Rome to Schenectady, including the perilous crossing of the Hudson River and an awkward encounter with the Dutch-speaking settlers. Passages of the diary's text are written in a code of Zenanah's own creation. A transcription of the diary, which is contained in folder number two, includes the coded sections in their deciphered form. A copy of the cipher for this code can be found with the collection description.

Folder number three contains the diary of Dora Gilbert Tompkins, presumably a relative of Zenanah, who wrote toward the end of the nineteenth century. Dora was a school teacher and describes preparing private lessons in Greek, Latin, and German for her pupils. She eventually received a position at the Knox Conservatory in Galesburg, Illinois. At the Conservatory she taught Junior and Middle Preparatory English while attending courses on Anglo-Saxon history and literature, including Shakespeare, Byron, Wordsworth, and Whitman. Her days were especially busy as she had to study for her own classes and correct the work of her students. In her spare time she enjoyed riding her bicycle, attending church and prayer meetings, the history club, music lessons, and other social activities in her community. Of historical interest, on February 25, 1898 she related the news that the U.S. Warship *Maine* had been blown up, and she feared war with Spain.

Folder number four, included among the Miscellaneous Materials, contains a handwriting sample from Henry S. Chaffer, presented to Mary B. Chaffer of Knoxville, IL. Folder number five contains a tile painted with the Gilbert family crest.

An oversized folder containing four remnant pieces of a handwritten Gilbert family pedigree chart is included as OC 1998.9. This chart has been transcribed and can be found with the collection register.

COLLECTION INVENTORY

BOX 1 - MC 1998.9

DIARIES

- Folder 01) Diary of Zenanah Gilbert - 1805-1809
- Folder 02) Transcribed copy of the diary of Zenanah Gilbert
- Folder 03) Diary of Dora Gilbert Tompkins - 1897-1898

MISCELLANEOUS MATERIALS

- Folder 04) Handwriting sample of Henry S. Chaffer
- Folder 05) Painted tile of Gilbert Family crest

OVERSIZED - OC 1998.9

CHARTS

- "Gilbert Pedigree" family genealogy chart

This collection register was prepared by Sarah W. Dunham, December 1998.