

## The Reuben Wells Diary

### Background

Reuben Field Wells was born on 13 February 1880, the son of Daniel White Wells and Hannah Belden Wells. Many may recognize the names of Daniel White Wells and Reuben Field Wells, as they are the authors of the book "1660-1910: A History of Hatfield, in Three Parts" [1910, F.C.H Gibbons, Springfield, MA., publisher].

At the time of his birth in Hatfield the Daniel W. Wells family resided in the house located at what is today 30 Main St.



Note: An original door from this house, when it was a tavern, is in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts [White Tavern Door](#). Daniel Wells sold it for \$200 in 1916.

Reuben's father Daniel was a very prominent member of the community. He was a farmer; a member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives for two terms; a charter member and trustee of Smith Academy, serving as president of the board of trustees for 15 years; a board member of Smith Charities, serving as president for 25 years; a director of the First National Bank of Northampton; a deacon of the Hatfield Congregational Church for 44 years where he also taught Sunday School; a member of the Hatfield Historical Association; and at various times, a Hatfield town officer, including selectman and treasurer of the water commission board. He was a veteran of the Civil War and an avid student of history and genealogy. This interest in history would transcend to his son Reuben.

## The Diary

Reuben Wells' diary covers four months, from 1 January 1894-13 April 1894. It's unknown what caused Reuben to write this diary. Was it a school assignment, or inspired by a suggestion from a family member or friend? Whatever the reason, the diary provides insight into the life of a youngster in Hatfield in the 1890's. In some ways, it is also a coming of age diary. It begins when Reuben is thirteen, a student at Smith Academy and ends shortly after he turns fourteen.



1892 Smith Academy Photo: Reuben is the young man in the center holding his new bike.

The diary has several sections: a journal section of daily activities; a section on books read; a Civil War veterans roll section; and a section that appears to be the beginnings of a ledger of some sort. The journal daily activities and books read sections are clear, but the other two are not. The veteran's roll is particularly curious since few of the names listed appear to match those who actually served in the identified units. A question is whether they might be the names of people participating in a reenactment for a parade perhaps.

Most of the weekday entries in the diary's journal section are what you might expect a teenage boy living in a farming town to write: the weather; the temperature; how many eggs the hens laid-or didn't lay; books read; the schoolwork done; and bedtime. Sunday entries typically mention attending church and the topic of the sermon; visiting family and friends; and reading different Christian periodicals.

There are several journal entries that show Reuben becoming a young man and is not just a child. These include:

- Reuben frequently mentions, on his own initiative, visiting his widowed Aunt Celia and doing tasks for her, such as shoveling her walkways.

- Reuben records writing a letter to Palmer Cox, the Canadian author of “The Brownies” children’s books and receiving a reply. The implication of the exchange is that Reuben questioned Mr. Cox about including an African-American in his drawings. Mr. Cox replied he could not.
- Reuben records making the decision to accept his good friend Josiah Woods’ invitation that they officially join the church together. They are examined and both accepted into the church on 14 February, the day after Reuben’s 14<sup>th</sup> birthday.

There are still many journal entries in the diary with which any child of Hatfield, maybe even today, can identify. These include skating on ponds and rivers, cross-country skiing, playing marbles. The longest entry in the diary, and the one which is most expressive and delightful, is the 16 January 1894 entry where Reuben describes a snowball fight between two groups of his friends. Reuben was on a team with two other boys; the other team had four boys. The diary goes into great detail about the breastworks they built, the chunks of snow and ice thrown, the charges each side made, etc. Per Reuben’s diary, if you got hit in the eye and cried that was called “being killed.” Reuben concludes this snowball fight entry with: “There wasn’t much fighting after that because it was so dark. Nobody won and the troops were all good friends. The two dead ones had gone home. Everybody was wet both from perspiration and melted snow!!!!!!! It was lots of fun.”

### **Reuben Wells. The Man**

While Reuben Wells may have ended his diary after only four months, he would go on to write much more. Reuben graduated from Smith Academy in 1897 and from Amherst College in 1901. One of his Amherst classmates was Calvin Coolidge, who would go on to be President of the United States.



In 1902, Reuben completed a year's study program as a special student at the Bridgewater Normal School (now Bridgewater State University) where he served as Editor-In-Chief of the yearbook. He then taught at the South Jersey Institute. He wrote the following entry to the Bridgewater Normal School alumni book: "I have this year occupied the position of Professor of Science and French in the South Jersey Institute, a large, co-educational school in Bridgeton, N.J. Keeping a set of healthy, vigorous boys in order in the halls at night makes me sympathize with Mr. Bradford."

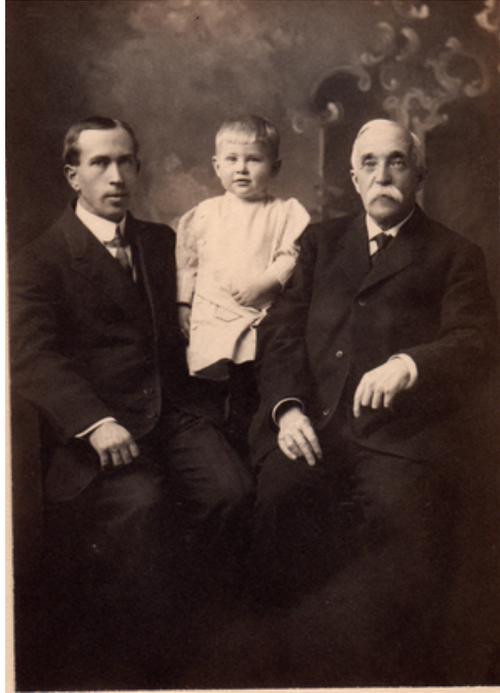
Reuben returned to Hatfield in June 1903 and became involved in farming and life in the community. The Reuben Wells 1894 diary has many entries about his raising hens and collecting eggs. During his time as a farmer in Hatfield as an adult, there was an interesting anecdote about Reuben and his sale of eggs to Mr. and Mrs. Calvin Coolidge. According to an article in the Vermont Phoenix (Brattleboro, VT, 13 Mar 1926):

"At the time in mind, Mr. Coolidge was a law clerk in Northampton; Wells an amateur market gardener in Hatfield. The college and fraternity link led Wells to seek out the Coolidges as customers, and for a long time he served them regularly with the product of his hennery. He usually carried the eggs from Hatfield to Northampton in his pockets, without disaster, and emptied said pockets at Mrs. Coolidge's kitchen door, counting out the eggs one by one to the future mistress of the White House. Wells kept but few mature hens. They were mostly pullets, and the eggs ran small. But Mrs. Coolidge never raised objection, and paid the price. There came, however, the day of reckoning. Wells made an occasional practice of stopping at the law office to see Mr. Coolidge. These visits were not very lively affairs, but had Amherst college chat in common. On one particularly quiet day Wells had dropped in, and talked, or tried to talk, but Mr. Coolidge seemed to have something on his mind. Finally Wells and the future president walked out to the street together, and when they reached the open air Mr. Coolidge broke the spell.

'By the way, Reuben', he said, in his characteristic drawl, 'what do you keep in your hen house? Robins?'

It was enough said. Wells saw that the Coolidges thereafter had the pick of his largest eggs."

While still a farmer in Hatfield, in 1905 Reuben Wells married Addie Beatrice Fiske of Huntington. Miss Fiske had attended Mt. Holyoke College and was a proof reader for the Daily Hampshire Gazette at the time of their marriage. In 1907, Reuben and Beatrice had a son, David Field Wells.



Reuben, David, and Daniel Wells

While in Hatfield Reuben began writing on a broader scale. In 1907, he wrote a lengthy article on “Hatfield’s Old Cemetery: Where the Early Settlers Lie, Some Quaint Descriptions” that appeared in the Springfield Sunday Republican (Springfield, MA., Sunday, 24 Feb 1907, Issue 24, P.12) Then, with his father Daniel Wells, Reuben wrote the 500+ page history of Hatfield “ 1660-1910: A History of Hatfield, in Three Parts.” The book consists of:

- Part I:” an account of the development of the social and industrial life of the town from its first settlement.”
- Part II:” the houses and homes of Hatfield, with personal reminiscences of the men and women who have lived there during the last one hundred years; brief historical accounts of the religious societies and of Smith Academy; statistical tables, etc.”
- Part III: “genealogies of the families of the first settlers.”

In 1912, Reuben relocated to White River Junction, VT where he served as editor of The Landmark, a weekly newspaper. His family remained in Hatfield, but they travelled back and forth between the two locations. Eventually, Reuben returned to Hatfield.

Besides writing, Reuben’s creative energies included acting in local theater and plays in both Northampton and Hatfield. For example, in 1916, he acted in the play “The Three Hats” staged in the Smith Academy auditorium. One of the other cast members was Miss Marion Billings, whom some in Hatfield may still remember. He even engaged his son in acting in local productions.



David Wells as Laertes; Reuben Wells as Polonius

In 1922 not long after his father died, Reuben and his family moved to Vermont permanently. Reuben became a reporter at the state capital in Montpelier. For several years, he provided daily dispatches to the Burlington Free Press, the Barre Times, and other papers. It was during this time in Vermont that Reuben resumed his writing for pleasure. He authored two boys' books that incorporated historical themes. They are: "With Caesar's Legions" [Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Co., Boston, MA, 1923] and "On Land and Sea with Caesar, or Following the Eagles." [Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Co., Boston, MA, 1926.]<sup>1</sup>

Sadly, Reuben Wells died in 1938 in Vermont. The Rutland Daily Herald (Rutland, VT, 16 April 1938, p.8) wrote the following about Reuben Wells:

"News editors on several Vermont newspapers may pause to say something kindly about Reuben F. Wells, for 15 years correspondent at Montpelier, representing this newspaper a part of that time.

Wells literally died on the job, having sent out part of his daily news grist on the very day when a heart ailment carried him off.

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<sup>1</sup> For an online copy of "With Caesar's Legions," [click here](#). You will need to have a Google Account and login to that account to access the ebook version of "With Caesar's Legions." For an online copy of "On Land and Sea with Caesar, or Following the Eagles" [click here](#). No login is required for this book.

He was not only a faithful and hard-working correspondent but he had at least two very good boys' books to his credit: 'With Caesar's Legions' and 'On Land and Sea with Caesar.'

These books interestingly follow the fortunes of two young Romans who followed the great Julius into Gaul and helped to conquer it.

No attempt is made in the Wells books to assume a form of the language that has been dead for centuries. He tells his stories simply, interestingly and in a very good narrative style.

Wells was much more of a writer than his daily grind of Capital City news indicated and he stood high with members of Montpelier's very exclusive and occasionally literary 'Club' of which he was a member."

Reuben Field Wells is buried in the Main Street cemetery in Hatfield, the same cemetery in which his parents Daniel White Wells and Hannah Belden Wells are buried.