



## Guide to the William Gray Nowell Papers, 1876-1914

### Administrative Information

**Title and Dates:**

William Gray Nowell Papers, 1876-1914

**Repository:**

New Hampshire Historical Society

30 Park Street

Concord, NH 03301

603-228-6688

<http://www.nhhistory.org/>

**Collection Number:**

2012.057

**Author of Finding Aid:**

Joanne P. Jones

**Creator:**

Nowell, William Gray, 1838-1929

**Language:**

English

**Extent:**

1 box

**Abstract:**

A minister and teacher by profession, William Gray Nowell is best-remembered today for the work he did planning and building trails in the White Mountains of New Hampshire in the late 1800s. These papers shed light on the work Nowell did on Mt. Adams and other peaks in 1876 and on his stays at the Log Cabin in the early 1900s. They also provide fascinating insights into Nowell and the meticulous manner in which he recorded his activities and observations.

## Access and Use

### **Acquisition Information and Provenance:**

The William Gray Nowell Papers were donated to the New Hampshire Historical Society in August 2012 by Rita Latham of Concord, NH. She is the granddaughter of the Poors, the family in Hooksett with whom Nowell lived in his later years. The records were held by her family until they were donated to the Society.

### **Processing Information:**

This collection was processed by Joanne Jones in Nov. and Dec. 2012. The finding aid was written by Joanne Jones in Jan. and Feb. 2013. This finding aid follows the standards set-forth by *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*.

### **Access Restrictions:**

Available for research

### **Location:**

The collection is housed at the New Hampshire Historical Society in Concord, New Hampshire.

### **Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements:**

The journal kept by Nowell in 1876 is in fragile condition and should be handled with great care.

### **Copyright/Conditions Governing Use:**

For permission to reproduce or publish materials from this collection, please contact the New Hampshire Historical Society. Researchers are responsible for following all copyright and intellectual property laws.

### **Preferred Citation:**

William Gray Nowell Papers, 2012.057. New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, NH. Date Accessed.

## Collection Overview

### **Biographical Information:**

William Gray Nowell was born in Portsmouth, NH in August 1838. He attended Portsmouth High School and graduated in 1859 from Bowdoin College in Maine. After attending Harvard Divinity School from 1859 to 1862, he served as a Unitarian Universalist minister for about seven years at churches in Illinois, Massachusetts, and Maine. He then changed careers and went into education, working as a teacher and administrator from 1870 to 1902 at schools in Maine, Massachusetts, Delaware, and New York State.

In 1864, Nowell married Harriet Putnam Hill of Portsmouth, with whom he had two children, Fred and Grace. Beginning in the 1870's, Nowell began to spend his summers in the Randolph, NH area, where he was an avid "tramper" (hiker) and became

active in the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC), serving as the Club's first Councillor of Improvements. In 1875, Nowell and Charles E. Lowe began the cutting of Lowe's Path up Mt. Adams and completed work on that trail the following year. Nowell was also actively involved in the planning and construction of several other trails in the White Mountains, including the trail from Mt. Moriah to Carter Dome. In the late 1880s, Nowell built a log cabin about 2 ½ miles up Lowe's Path on the site of an old AMC Camp and spent many summers there between 1890 and 1907.

In his later years, Nowell lived in Boston, MA and in Hooksett, NH, where he boarded with the Samuel Poor family. He died there on Feb. 9, 1929 at the age of 90.

### **Collection Scope and Content Note:**

Although a small collection, the William Gray Nowell Papers offer a unique look at the early years of trail development and tramping in the White Mountains as well as life at a high-mountain cabin. They also provide fascinating insights into Nowell and the meticulous manner in which he recorded his activities and observations. The two most important items in the collection are the journal Nowell kept in the summer of 1876 and the Log Cabin Register for the years 1903 to 1907.

In the journal, Nowell records the many ascents he made of Mt. Adams in 1876 during which work was done on Lowe's Path and measurements were taken. He also describes ascents he made of other White Mt. peaks and makes note of the first Field Meeting of the Appalachian Mountain Club in North Conway in July 1876. Interspersed throughout the journal are panoramic sketches Nowell made from various summits and other locations; tables detailing meteorological and trail data; random notes Nowell made on art, zoology, and geology and mineralogy; and a list of camping and tramping equipment.

In the register for the Log Cabin, entries record the arrivals and departures of visitors to the Cabin and the hiking routes they took to/from the Cabin. Some of these entries are written by Nowell, some by other individuals. Particularly interesting are those written by Nowell, who made lengthy stays at the Cabin between 1904 and 1907, during which he recorded weather conditions, wildlife he observed (especially bunnies!), excursions he made from the Cabin, trail work he did, and visitors to the Cabin. Once again meteorological tables kept by Nowell are interspersed throughout the register, as well as brief summaries (e.g., on p. 67) of the history of the Log Cabin, the opening of Lowe's Path, and the naming of various features. Nowell also lists "The Teacher's Eleven Commandments" (p. 88) and transcribes a letter he received from Frances F. (Mrs. Grover) Cleveland, who visited the Cabin in Aug. 1906 (p. 95). Throughout the register, Nowell's love of the Log Cabin and the mountains can clearly be seen.

### **Arrangement:**

The William Gray Nowell Papers, 1876, 1903-1907, 1914, are organized by type of material.

### **Contents List**

Folder 1      Background material (added by author of finding aid; not part of the Nowell collection)

- Folder 2      Miscellaneous Documents (6 items)  
 --Biographical sketch of Nowell (stops with 1909)  
 --Letter from Mrs. William R. Hedge (Nowell's niece) to Mrs. Poor,  
 February 24, [no year]  
 --Letter from James A. Howe (or Horne?) (Belmont, MA) to Caleb  
 Saunders (Lawrence, MA), February 18, 1914 [connection of letter to  
 Nowell not clear; possibly Howe was a  
 Bowdoin classmate of Nowell's]  
 --Recipe for Log Cabin Muffins  
 --Paper with notes re: Gordon Lowe's phone number and 2 Randolph  
 books  
 --Postcard of Ravine House
- Folder 3      Photographs (photos of Nowell, Log Cabin, Cascade Camp, mountain  
 scenes)
- Folder 4      Photographs (photos of mountain scenes, house in Portsmouth)

**Envelopes:**

- Envelope 1    (2 items) Journal; Pocket Notebook (in which Nowell recorded  
 temperature and barometric pressure data for 1904 and 1905)
- Envelope 2    Log Cabin Register

**Subject Terms**

**People:**

Nowell, Harriet  
 Nowell, Fred  
 Nowell, Grace  
 Lowe, Charles E.  
 Lowe, Leon P.  
 Lowe, T.S.  
 Pickering, Edward C.  
 Edmands, J. Rayner  
 Stearns, Charles M.  
 Stearns, Myron M.  
 Stearns, Alice  
 Other members of the Stearns family

**Organizations:**

Appalachian Mountain Club

**Locations:**

Mt. Adams, NH  
 Mt. Madison, NH  
 Mt. Jefferson, NH  
 Mt. Washington, NH

Nowell's Peak, NH  
Carter Dome, NH  
Boy Mt., NH  
Gray Knob, NH  
Spur Cabin, NH

### Related Materials

Hudson, Judith Maddock, *Peaks & Paths: A Century of the Randolph Mountain Club*.  
917.78a2/R193h

Waterman, Laura and Guy, *Forest and Crag*. 917.4/W328f

*Appalachia*, vol.1 (1876-1878). 796.05/A646

(has Nowell's Spring 1876 and Autumn 1876 Councillor of Improvements  
reports, which describe the work Nowell did on Lowe's Path in 1876)

Appalachian Mountain Club, *Map of Northern Slope of Madison, Adams and Jefferson*,  
1906. 912.778a2/N874

*Ralph C. Larrabee Collection*, M2009.041, S2008.026 (has photographs taken by  
Larrabee of the Northern Presidentials)