

New Jersey State Normal School Diaries Collection, 1855-1920

Collection number: TCNJ008

Collection title: New Jersey State Normal School Diaries Collection

Dates: 1855-1920, 1955-2024 (with gaps)

Creator/Collector(s): Mary Jane Sergeant Larison, Ida Totten Hunt, Rosena Craig Foster Whitlock, and Reba (Rebecca) Gasn

Extent: .5 linear foot (1 box)

Repository: Archives and Special Collections, R. Barbara Gitenstein Library, The College of New Jersey, PO Box 7718, Ewing, NJ 08628-0718

Abstract: Four diaries from students and novice teachers from the New Jersey State Normal School documenting their experiences at school and first year of teaching in the years 1855, 1883, 1910, and 1920. And accompanying transcripts.

Language(s): English

Accession numbers: 1953.01 Sergeant Larison, 2020.05 Totten Hunt, 2024.05 Foster Whitlock, 2003.02 Gasn

Acquisition information: The Reba Gasn diary was a gift of Donna Jordan in June 2003; the Rosena Foster diary was a gift of her granddaughter Susan Whitlock in March 2024; and the donor of the Totten diary is unknown at this time.

Accruals: None.

Processing information: The Larison and Foster diaries were originally part of the legacy collection "Scrapbooks and Diaries," which was re-processed into three separate collections: Mildred Bard Charlesworth Pepper Collection, Scrapbooks Collection, and Diaries Collection (with the addition of the Hunt and Gasn diaries). The New Jersey State Normal School in Trenton Diaries Collection was processed by Kerin Shellenbarger in March 2024. The project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services IMLS grant number ST-252518-OMS-22.

Condition/conservation notes: The Sergeant Larison diary has an intact, but loosening binding that is held partially in place by black buckram tape, some of the endpapers are detached or loose, and some of the writing in pencil is faded. The Totten Hunt diary is a soft-cover notebook with lined pages and is in very good condition. The Foster Whitlock diary is in good condition with stable binding, though there are some stains, faded spots, and small losses

on the hard cover, and inside on some entries the ink has faded. The Gasn diary has a brittle and detached cover with scotch tape on the spine, and the first signature is becoming detached, but the rest of the textblock is intact.

Publication information: The Larison diary appears in *TCNJ Magazine*, Winter, 2016. Portions are published in the *State Signal* newspaper March 18, 1955, April 1, 1955, and May 27, 1955, as well as the book: *Country doctor, Cornelius Wilson Larison of Ringoes, Hunterdon County, New Jersey, 1837-1910; physician, farmer, educator, author, editor, publisher and exponent of phonetic spelling*, by Harry B. Weiss.

Access restrictions: This collection is open for research.

Physical access restrictions: The items in this collection may be used by patrons who abide by the Archives and Special Collections Use Policy of the R. Barbara Gitenstein Library at TCNJ.

Technical access restrictions: The collection is in the process of being digitized and is available for viewing in the library on a provided computer, or on:
<https://atom.tcnj.edu/index.php/New-Jersey-State-Normal-School-Diaries-Collection>
The diaries are being transcribed and transcriptions will be made available beginning in Fall 2025.

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Preferred citation: TCNJ008 New Jersey State Normal School Diaries Collection, The College of New Jersey, R. Barbara Gitenstein Library: Archives and Special Collections.

Related collections: Additional personal diaries are found in 002 Clara Wolverton, and 003 Mildred Bard Charlesworth Pepper

Separated material: This collection was originally part of the legacy collection "Scrapbooks and Diaries" which has now been divided into three collections, with the scrapbooks and Mildred Bard Charlesworth Pepper materials removed to their own collections. The Larison diary transcript has several circulation copies in the Gitenstein Library General Collection, LD3780.N79 A359,
https://tcnj.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01COLLNJ_INST/921vpg/alma992513333405191

Published descriptions: <https://atom.tcnj.edu/index.php/New-Jersey-State-Normal-School-Diaries-Collection>

Location of originals: Room 410, Archives and Special Collections, Gitenstein Library, TCNJ

Publication note:

Biographical information/Organizational history:

Mary Jane Sergeant Larison, class of February 1859; diary 1855-1857

Mary Jane Sergeant was born August 24, 1837, to Gershom Craven Sergeant and Charity Ann Howell Sergeant in Raritan Township, near Flemington, Hunterdon County, New Jersey. She was in the first class of the New Jersey State Normal School, beginning October 1855, when classes were held in Trenton City Hall before the new school building opened in the next term in 1856. Her first teaching experience was in Lambertville School in 1857-1858, before graduating from the Normal School in February 1859. Afterward, she taught in Copper Hill School in Raritan Township. On March 26, 1863, she married Dr. Cornelius Wilson Larison, also an educator, as well as a physician and proponent of phonetic spelling. He founded the Seminary at Ringoes and the Academy of Science and Arts at Ringoes where Mary taught mathematics and other subjects from the 1870s to early 1900s. They had two children: Mary "Polly" L. (Blackwell), and Benjamin. Mary Jane died on April 17, 1917. Her daughter, Mary Blackwell, donated her diary to then Trenton State College during the Centennial celebrations of 1955, where it was transcribed and portions were published in *The Signal* newspaper.

Ida Frances Totten Hunt, diary 1883

Ida Frances Totten was born February 21, 1861, to Benjamin Totten and Harriet Monks Totten in Sussex County, New Jersey. She attended Andover Academy, then possibly a Normal School. According to her diary, in the autumn of 1883 she was placed in a teaching position in Greenville (now called Greendell) School, in Green Township, Sussex County, about 5 miles from her home in Andover. But her contract extended to the following term and it is not known whether she taught again or continued with her education. On April 4, 1894, she married Fred Mortimer Hunt, who was a New Jersey State Normal School in Trenton class of 1889 graduate, and also one of the first editors of the *Signal* newspaper. The pair likely met while he was a principal at Andover School in Sussex County and she was likely living at or near her home. They had several children, though only two lived to adulthood (Leroy and Helen), and made their home in Spring Lake, Monmouth County, where Fred taught before becoming a clerk. Ida died in her mid-40s on October 27, 1907, and was buried in Andover alongside Fred who died in 1928.

Rosena Craig Foster Whitlock, class of 1910; diary 1910

Rosena Craig Foster was born September 2, 1890, to Samuel P. Foster, founder of a local bank and editor of the *Elmer Times* Newspaper, and Fannie Bateman Foster, in Elmer, Salem County, New Jersey. She attended Bridgeton High School, then New Jersey State Normal School in Trenton where she studied Music and Manual Training. According to the school's *Grade Books and Reports, Volume III*, her grades were favorable and her final evaluation read:

"Has teaching power. Individualizes well and manages a primary grade well. Lacks ease in speaking, but has a sweet voice." In the spring of 1910, she completed her student teaching in Millville, New Jersey, and graduated in June 1910. According to family history provided by her granddaughter, she was assigned to work at Lafayette Elementary School (to teach music, dressmaking, and shop), in Highland Park, New Jersey, along with her Normal School classmate Mary Celia Whitlock (1891-1977), with whom she shared an apartment. During this time, she met Mary's brother Frank Boudinot Whitlock, a banker, whom she married on May 28, 1913, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. They had four children and made their home in Highland Park, where Rosena lived for over 70 years. After her marriage, she stopped teaching, but volunteered through much of her life, including for the Red Cross during WWII and local and national chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution. She died at age 99 on March 5, 1990.

Reba [Rebecca] Gasn, class of 1920; diary 1919-1920

Rebecca Gasn, who went by "Reba" was born September 3, 1899, to Russian Jewish immigrants Jacob Gasn and Annie Eisner Gasn, in Monmouth County, New Jersey. Her older siblings were Louis (1888-1917), Samuel (1890-1942), and Sadie or Sayde Blidner (1894-1958); and her younger sisters were Rachel "Rae" Blum (1900-1943) and Miriam "Mona" Weiden (1901-1982). She graduated from Neptune High School in 1918, then attended New Jersey State Normal School at Trenton in 1919. There she was active in Theta Phi which was "a society, which stands for the enjoyment of the Great Out of Doors," according to the May 1920 issue of *The Signal* student newspaper, as well as the Camera Club, Glee Club, and Young Men's - Young Women's Hebrew Association. Her younger sister Miriam, who later went by "Mona," also attended the Normal School during Reba's second year. She served as a student teacher at Trenton Junction (later Fisk) School in Ewing, then graduated in 1920. Shortly thereafter, she taught the "special class" (Special Education) at the Normal School for about a year. Afterward, she taught "special class" in Atlantic City, and at Monmouth Public Schools, including Belmar, for several decades. She outlived all of her siblings and died on January 25, 1989, in Neptune, New Jersey.

Scope and Content notes:

Content warning: Gasn's diary refers to students in special education classes in derogatory terms.

These four diaries describe the lives and activities of women at the New Jersey State Normal School. They also document their first teaching experiences from the school's earliest days in 1855 to 1920, when the enrollment and curriculum had significantly expanded and the school would soon become a college.

It is not known whether or not, or where, Ida Totten might have attended a Normal School or received teacher training, but in the fall term of 1883, she began a diary to record her first experience of teaching in Greenville (now called Greendell) School, in Sussex County. She described her frustrations with named children in her class and the challenges of disciplining them, as well as her activities at home on the weekends, including attending temperance

meetings and church. The final pages of the diary are from May 1884 and contain notes from Page's *Theory and Practice of Teaching*, so perhaps she was continuing her teaching education, or had not yet graduated (if she did).

The format of Reba Gasn's diary has two years on a single page: entries for 1919 are written on the top of the page, and 1920 is on the bottom; the two years are often also delineated by black and blue ink. She documented her day-to-day life in school, her hobbies, social life, meals enjoyed (and not), and activities with family and friends on breaks at home near the shore. She also writes of anti-semitism she experienced in Trenton, as well as her many illnesses.

The diary of Mary Jane Sergeant Larison has a typewritten transcription from 1955 (at the time of the school's Centennial) and has been re-transcribed by Alison Matthews in 2024. The transcript of the diary of Rosena Craig Foster Whitlock was written and annotated by her granddaughter Susan Whitlock in 2008. The diary of Ida Totten Hunt was transcribed by Allison Belcher in 2024, and the transcript of the Gasn diary will be available in the coming years.

Organization and arrangement:

The four diaries are arranged chronologically with their transcripts, when present, in one box.

Subject headings:

Personal Names

Gasn, Reba, 1899-1989
Hunt, Ida Totten, 1861-1907
Larison, Mary Jane Sergeant, 1837-1917
Whitlock, Rosena Foster, 1890-1990

Corporate Names

New Jersey State Normal School (Trenton, N.J.)
New Jersey State Normal School in Trenton (N.J.)

Genres

Diaries
Transcripts

Locations:

Elmer (N.J.)
Trenton (N.J.)
Belmar (N.J.)
New Jersey--Sussex County

Other Subjects:

Education
Students
Students--Social life and customs

Teachers
Teachers Colleges--New Jersey
Teaching

Container list:

Box 1

Folder 1	Diary of Mary Jane Sergeant Larison	1855-1856
Folder 2	Legacy transcript of diary of Mary Jane Sergeant Larison	c. 1955
Folder 3	Transcript of diary of Mary Jane Sergeant Larison	2024
Folder 4	Diary of Ida Totten Hunt	1883
Folder 5	Transcript of diary of Ida Totten Hunt	2024
Folder 6	Diary of Rosena Craig Foster Whitlock	1910
Folder 7	Tickets removed from diary of Rosena Craig Foster Whitlock	c. 1910
Folder 8	Photo postcard of Rosena Craig Foster Whitlock	c. 1910
Folder 9	Transcript of Diary of Rosena Craig Foster Whitlock by her granddaughter Susan Whitlock	c. 2008
Folder 10	Diary of Reba Gasn	1919-1920
Folder 11	[to come: transcript of diary of Reba Gasn]	