



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Samuel Bemis Collection Donated to Conway Public Library

Conway, NH – February 3, 2015 – Ed Butler and Les Schoof, owners of The Notchland Inn, recently donated a large collection of archival materials to the Henney History Room of the Conway Public Library. The papers include thousands of pages that document the life, interests and activities of Dr. Samuel A. Bemis who lived from around 1793 to 1881. They have been wonderfully preserved over the years at the Notchland Inn, a grand stone mansion built by Dr Bemis in Crawford Notch. The Inn now serves visitors to the White Mountains as it has for many years.

Dr. Samuel Bemis’s obituary reported “He was ninety years old, and very eccentric.” In her biographical article on him, Catherine Campbell referred to him as a “Renaissance Yankee.” He certainly was eclectic in his interests and taste as this unique collection of primary sources documents.

He was America’s first photographer and produced the earliest known accurate sketch and photograph of the Old Man of the Mountain. His cameras and photographs can be found in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Getty Museum, George Eastman House and private collections. The newly donated papers include detailed records for three-hundred-fifty daguerreotype exposures.

His day job was as a dentist in Boston but he also worked in several other trades and crafts as well as businesses. Early in his career he made clocks and watches. Some of his watch papers are in the collection of the American Antiquarian Society and some of his tools are in the Henry Ford Museum in Detroit.

The papers include a wide variety of materials including letters, sketches, invoices, receipts and diaries.

Subjects include dentistry, art collecting, inventions, fly fishing, fine dining, wine, literature, politics, finance and business, railroad construction, road construction (especially of the Tenth Mountain Turnpike - the road through Crawford Notch, tourism, ice house management techniques, timber thieves, weather, genealogy, fruit farming, quarrying, bird study, Christmas gifts, etc.

Henney History Room volunteers Lee Pollock and Rena Hoyt have spent hundreds of hours doing a rough initial inventory of the collection and have scanned some of the highlights. The Conway Public Library hopes to properly process the collection into acid free boxes and sleeves, catalog, microfilm, and digitize the entire collection to make it more easily accessible to the public.

Thanks again to Ed Butler and Les Schoof, owners of The Notchland Inn, for this wonderful donation.

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