



The New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives Division

Guide to the

John T. Smith diaries

1884-1894

MssCol 22960

Compiled by Susan P. Waide, 2014

Summary

Creator: Smith, John T. (John Thomas), 1868-1938

Title: John T. Smith diaries

Date: 1884-1894

Size: 1.59 linear feet (1 box, 4 volumes)

Source: Purchased from Richard MacPherson, 2014

Abstract: John T. (John Thomas) Smith (1868-1938), was the son of confectioner Edward Smith (born Edward Colgan) and Anne Grady Smith. He lived his entire life at 154 Greenwich Street in Manhattan, also the site of the family's main candy store. The family's increasing wealth derived from the candy business and real estate holdings in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Washington, D.C. The John T. Smith diaries, 1884-1894 (in 10 volumes), document the daily activities and thoughts of an energetic and alert young New Yorker, presenting a panorama of New York City life at a time of great urban expansion and social change.

Preferred citation: John T. Smith diaries, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

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Creator History

John T. (John Thomas) Smith (1868-1938), was the son of confectioner Edward Smith (born Edward Colgan) and Anne Grady Smith. He lived his entire life at 154 Greenwich Street in Manhattan, also the site of the family's main candy store. The family's increasing wealth derived from the candy business and real estate holdings in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Washington, D.C. The Smiths, an Irish-American family, were parishioners of St. Peter's Church. Anne, the Smith's only daughter, joined the Sisters of Mercy. John T. Smith died May 21, 1938, days after his investiture as a Papal Chamberlain for his support of Catholic institutions.

Scope and Content Note

The John T. Smith diaries, 1884-1894 (in 10 volumes), document the daily activities and thoughts of an energetic and alert young New Yorker, presenting a panorama of New York City life at a time of great urban expansion and social change.

The diaries date 1884 Jan 1-1890 Oct 28; 1892 Jun 15-1893 Jun 15; and 1894 Mar 7-Dec 31, ranging from his school days at the De La Salle Institute and Manhattan College, to the sharing of business responsibilities with his brothers Edward and George after their father's death in 1890. A volume entitled "Sojourns," 1884-1889, contains extended entries devoted to summer excursions to Asbury Park, New Jersey; Patchogue, Long Island and elsewhere; and to Washington, D.C. to attend the presidential inauguration of Benjamin Harrison (1889). Trips noted in the diaries include a train trip through the South to attend the Sullivan-Corbett heavyweight championship in New Orleans (1892), and a stormy voyage to Bermuda (1893).

In addition to describing his family life, his various health problems, and the books he has read, diary entries show Smith's great love of amateur and professional sports (particularly baseball and boxing) and performing arts (including drama, burlesque and opera), and his travels near and far to attend such events. An avid walker, he documents his walking and transit routes throughout the metropolitan area, and any incidents and sights along the way. His diaries witness the City's rapid growth on the eve of its consolidation in 1898, the change from horse cars to cable cars, the gradual spread of electric lighting, and the introduction of Edison's kinetoscope (1894 Apr 14). There are brief notes on broader topics such as political corruption, women's rights, the flu pandemic in 1890, social unrest, and the economic impact of the Panic of 1893. Photographs of John T. Smith pasted in the 1892-1893 diary and diary entries indicate a family interest in popular photography. Some diaries contain address lists and cash accounts.

Key Terms

Subjects

Baseball -- United States -- 19th century
Boxing -- United States -- 19th century
Catholics -- United States
Irish Americans
Performing arts -- New York (State) -- New York -- 19th century
Sports -- New York (State) -- New York -- 19th century
Theater -- New York (State) -- New York -- 19th century
Voyages and travels -- 19th century

Geographic Names

Bermuda Islands -- Description and travel -- 19th century
Long Island (N.Y.) -- Description and travel -- 19th century
New Jersey -- Description and travel -- 19th century
New York (N.Y.) -- Description and travel -- 19th century
New York (N.Y.) -- Religious life and customs -- 19th century
New York (N.Y.) -- Social life and customs -- 19th century
United States -- Description and travel -- 19th century
United States -- History -- 1865-1898
Washington (D.C.) -- Description and travel -- 19th century

Occupations

Confectioners
Merchants
Philanthropists

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Diaries
Photographs

Names

Smith, John T. (John Thomas), 1868-1938
Smith family

Container List

- b. 1 1884-1889 (6 volumes)
- v. 1 1890
- v. 2 1892-1893
- v. 3 1894
- v. 4 Sojourns 1884-1889