

{Excerpts from pages 669-682 of The Pine Knoll Story, an unpublished book draft written in late 20th cent. by my cousin Janet Nichols Derouin, who transcribed old letters and diaries of our ancestors.}

Symbols used to identify authors:

1. Mary Holyoke Ward Nichols
2. her daughter Mary Ward Nichols
- A. her son Andrew Nichols
- M. granddaughter May (Mary Eliot Nichols, age 10 in 1880)
- [...] Commentary by Janet
- * footnotes and explanations by Janet
- {...} Edits by me, Sandy Nichols Ward, February 2018

"THE DEAD ARE LIKE THE STARS BY DAY"

{**March 1880**} [Mary Holyoke Ward Nichols was nearing the time when she would become permanently bed-ridden with that pain in her side that we have heard more and more about since the September of 1879.

The quotation I have used as the heading for this last segment of her life is from something she requested to be read to her. I find it a hauntingly beautiful line and ... never remember having heard it before. {Poem & hymn "The dead are like the stars by day" by 'Quaker poet' Bernard Barton, born in London 1794. See end of this document.}

I have Andrew's diary for 1880 but he makes no entries until the eighteenth of March... His entries will be marked with an A. and you will notice that he has even less regard for punctuation than his daughter {10-year old May, writing in her first diary}

2.

March 2. Mother got up to breakfast but complained of a pain in her side in the forenoon. ... she had no dinner & went to bed this afternoon, had sickness of the stomach & threw, but was not relieved until night. ...

3. ... Mother better but weak, did not get up. ... Mrs. E. Putnam staid with mother. ... Susie was in & John staid with mother.

1.

5. Andrew in to breakfast & dinner. Mrs. Ward sick with Influenza. Susan up there today. M. Jenks in & sat with me while Mary went down to the Atheneum.

2.

9. Mother not so well. * Went to see Dr. Mack about mother.

[* M.H.W.N. had improved and been downstairs for most of each day since the fifth.]

10. Mother better.

1.

12. Dr. Mack called. I better. *

[* This is her last diary entry.]

2.

12. Mother comfortable. Dr. Mack in this afternoon. ...

13. Andrew & son Andrew dined here. Mother not well. Susie in twice.
Robert in this eve.

15. Mother had a very sick day, could keep nothing on her stomach.

16. Very snowy, stormy day all day. Mother had a comfortable night & took a little nourishment, took milk & lime water. ...
Mrs. S. Osgood sent jelly.

17. Mother more comfortable. Dr. Mack in, Susie here & is going to stay tonight.
Mother signed her name 3 times.

18. Mother comfortable but takes very little nourishment, mostly milk & lime water.

A.

19. ... Mother had a very bad turn at about 6 P M

2.

19. Mrs. Jacobs here to iron. Mother not quite as well. Dr. Mack in. Mr. Israel in & brought grapes. Mother had an ill turn at half past six while she was out on the lounge.* Sent for Dr. Mack. Mr. Israel came. Dr. Mack went for Fannie Kniles to stay the night with mother.

[*The chaise lounge in her bed chamber. They must have gotten her up to rearrange her bed.]

[Mary was really in need of Susie's help each day now, because there was a steady stream of relations and friends, who either made a call or just came to the door to inquire about the invalid, on and after the eighteenth.

Mary made no mention of Andrew Junior's graduation when she made her diary entry on that day, and I can understand under the circumstances.

What a terribly difficult time for Andrew and Lizzie to be tied up with their firstborn's special day, to say nothing of the bitter disappointment that young Andrew's Aunt Mary and Grandmother Nichols would have felt, not being able to witness his graduation.

One tends to wish that the Summer Street contingent could have been there, because Andrew Junior must have looked quite splendid. According to his Grandmother Nichols' expense account she gave him ten dollars "towards his suit." That was a

princely sum in those days and, added to whatever other expenses were incurred, it should have assured that his attire was the very last word.

Andrew Junior and his grandmother were of one mind when it came to appearances and I'm sure she wanted him to be dressed in a way that would befit a young man who was her beloved husband's namesake. The thing about this that strikes me funny is that neither Doctor Nichols or his son, who happened to be young Andrew's father, ever gave a thought to, or a care about, what they wore.]

2.

20. Mother quite sick. Dr. Mack in. Andrew & A. jr. here to dine. Mary Shea here. A jr. graduated yesterday at the High School in Danvers. Mrs. Mac Bride here & watched. Susie here.

A.

21. Snow. We did not go out for the day Very bad traveling Longed to go to Mother

2.

21. Mother not so well. Susie here. Dr. Mack, Mr. Israel, Mrs. Osgood, Mrs. Putnam & Nellie Stanley in. Mother wanted me to read the 15th chap. of John. * Fannie Kniles watches tonight. Susie here.

[* This was a logical and comforting choice, familiar to us all. It is the part where Christ comforts his disciples with words such as "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you," and so forth and so on.]

A.

22. Fair all day I went to Salem at 7.15 A M Found that Mother had changed for the worst from Saturday Went up to Peabody at 9 1/2 & surveyed Dr. Osborn's land in Peabody Was to Salem at Noon sent for wife she came at 2 P M with Nellie & went home at 5 with Andrew in train I wrote Mother's will & she signed it at 8 P M

2.

22. Andrew was down this morn. & Lizzie came this afternoon. Andrew is going to stay here tonight. Mother signed her will this eve. Mrs. Mc Bride watched.

A.

23. Fair all day Andrew drove down with John, May & Willie & wife Mother was glad to see them they all went Home at 4 1/2

2.

23. Mother not so well. A new girl came. Fannie watched.

24. Mother not quite as well. Mrs. Mc Bride comes tonight to stay night & day for the present.

A.

25. At Mother's got up at 4 1/2 Mother had an easy night but weaker

Rev. F. Israel made a prayer in morning Wife came down at 9 I went home at Noon To Mr. Swan's then to Mr. Martin's ... Came back at 3 1/2 Robert came in in evening

2.

25. Mother a little feeble, she saw Mr. Israel.

A.

26. Up at 6 Mother quiet Saw Miss Jenks got Soda & Lime Water
Wife came down at ... Wife went Home at 5:55

2.

26. Mother more feeble, saw Miss Jenks a moment. Mrs. F. Cox sent wine.
Mrs. Lewis Nichols sent snow drops.

27. I got up at 4 Mother wanted to see Mary Went for cider at 7 Drew plan for
Dr. Osborn's Peabody land Andrew drove wife & Baby Margie & Nellie down
Mother saw "Grandma's Blessed Baby" Andrew drove home in a great storm *

[* Andrew Jr. took them home. "Grandma's blessed baby" was Margaret Appleton.]

A.

28. Mother called us to her twice. Said "Almost there" *
Wanted me to place \$15. in the S. Bank for Baby

[* I assume in reference to dying.]

2.

28. Easter Sunday. Mother was as comfortable as she was yesterday. A jr. drove
his mother down & she is to stay here. Lewis drove down. Robert & Charles saw
mother. Susie was here last night & went home to dine. Mrs. J. Osgood brought
flowers fr. the church & Easter cards.

29. Mother had a comfortable day & is about the same as she was yesterday; is
very bright & so earnest & willing to die. Mother saw Mrs. Putnam a few
minutes. E. Emmerton sent orange blossoms. Mrs. Jacobs here. Eben Berry called.

30. Mother about the same as yesterday; had sickness of the stomach this
afternoon & evening; she saw Mrs. Osgood. C. Rea & Mrs. E. Cox in with jelly.
Mrs. Geo. West sent jelly* & Miss Lander bread. Susie here last night. ...

[* These jellies were not preserves, but perishable foods, and I can't imagine how Mary
could have used them up at the rate they were pouring in.]

A.

31. ... We all sang to Mother

2.

31. Andrew down, came by cars. She takes wine jelly & coffee.

A.

April 1. Andrew & John came down in the train John sang to her

2.

April 1. Miss Osgood, Miss Lander, Miss Chadwick & Mrs. Geo. West have all sent Jelly. Mr. Israel in. Mrs. Brown sent grapes & strawberries. A. jr. & John down & mother saw John & had him sing.

[Had John sing? Concerning Andrew and Mary's last entries, John did have a choir boy face that was framed by a wreath of curls, but this is the first I have ever heard of his singing ability.

When I think back to the death of Hitty, and we now experience another demise through Mary's entries, it makes me feel that the Victorians really went out in style. There is something rather grand about those death-bed scenarios and wonderful audiences one could command from the bed chamber. Imagine feeling no guilt about those you had no wish to see at the moment, because you knew full well they would be graciously entertained, brought up to date on your condition, and given suitable refreshment by your immediate family in the comfort of the sitting room.

This seems so civilized and far removed from the terribly clinical and generic hospital setting of today. If we could still have the best of both worlds, I guess it would come down to the prohibitive cost of doing it "the old fashioned way." No doubt it wouldn't work very well without the "chambers" on a different floor and a nurse, a live-in "girl" and a "daily" to take care of incidentals, like preparing the tea tray.]

A.

2. Mother said Good Morning My Dear Son I thought I saw your Father ...

2.

2. Beautiful day. Mother very weak this morn. was quite faint last night. Susie was in the chamber with the nurse. Dr. Mack, Mr. Israel, Miss Jenks, Mrs. Neal, Mrs. Putnam & Cousin Sarah Berry called. Mother had a comfortable day. Mrs. Osgood & Fannie Kniles* in. Mr. Osgood, Robert, Charles & Lizzie called.

[* She was the every other night nurse before Mrs. MacBride moved in.]

A.

3. I went to Danvers at 9.30 & returned at 10 ½ Mother much brighter spoke about Father Mr. Israel saw her and repeated the Lord's Prayer

2.

3. Raining. Mother bright this morning but had a faint turn last night. Repeated Mr. Ware's hymn "To prayer &c." Mother saw Mr. Israel at half past two o'clock, he repeated the Lord's prayer. She was very bright until six o'clock when she was faint for a long time. Has taken no nourishment since the 1st.

A.

4. Mother saw Miss Jenks & Robert Osgood in A M and Andrew John & Josh in P M Wife staid in Chamber

2.

4. ... Mother had a very poor night but brightened up a good deal this morning. Dr. Mack came & she saw Miss Jenks a moment, also Robert, A. jr., John & Josh; about four o'clock was faint. Wanted read "The saints above &c" & "The dead are like the stars by day." Has taken cider & ice.

5. Pleasant, very warm. Mother had a very comfortable night but is feebler. Lizzie was in the room with her at night. Mrs. J. Osgood sent roses, Mrs. A. Brown, roses mother wanted to hear "My redeemer lives." Very quiet all day. Has taken ice & brandy & gum water.

6. Mother was a good deal exhausted in the night but very bright in the morning, had a comfortable day. Saw Dr. Mack & Charles Holyoke Florence & Dot called but F. did not see her. Andy here. Mrs. Hoffman sent flowers. Robert brought Jacqueminot roses. She repeated the Lord's prayer about eight o'clock in the eve.

April 7. Mother had a good night, was very quiet & slept a good deal all day. Dr. Mack here in the afternoon. Mother had nausea at six P.M. & again at ten o'clock, took only ice & brandy & gum water all day. Florence brought Jacqueminot roses & other flowers & Robert brought J. roses.

A.

8. I read Mr. Sewall's letter * & carried a Rose to Mrs Brown

[* Sewall was the minister who had been such a great friend of Dr. Andrew Nichols and invited him to take his pulpit from time to time. After the doctor's death he was always kind and something a mentor to Andrew.]

2.

8. Mother had a comfortable night. This morn wanted cocoa & I gave it to her, but she threw it up directly. Had a comfortable afternoon & night. Spoke of the hymn "Come ye rich & come ye poor &c." Fast day. She spoke of hearing Channing preach & seeing him before her.* No one in outside of the family but Dr. Mack & Mr. Israel.

[* William Ellery Channing was another giant in the history of religion in America. Born in 1780 and a graduate of Harvard College, he became pastor of the Federal Street Congregational Church in Boston and his ideas would have had great appeal for Doctor Andrew and Mary Ward Nichols. He was another of the great orators and a free thinker for his time; delivering such powerful sermons against war, slavery and Calvinism he was known as "the apostle of Unitarianism." His anti Calvinist oratory had been an early inspiration to Oliver Wendell Holmes, who later in life addressed that disturbing subject in his novel, "Elsie Venner."]

9. Mother very bright & comfortable but feeble. Mr. Israel made a prayer in her chamber; she also saw Mrs. Putnam. Took gum tea in small quantities through the

day & ice & brandy. Miss E. Lander in. Did not talk much today. Spoke of its being Johnnie's birthday. * [*John's fourteenth birthday.] Had a poor evening.

2.

April 10. Was very feeble last night but wakeful & bright, heard the robin sing for the first time this morning: is still taking a very little tea. Mrs. Cole brought mother some beautiful flowers. She had nausea at one o'clock but a very comfortable day & evening.

A.

11. Mother had an oppressed turn at 4 A M & Mrs McBride away for the night

2.

11. Mother had oppression at the chest about five this morning. It lasted until half past six. Had a comfortable forenoon. Dr. Mack says she grows more feeble every day: takes tea occasionally. Saw Robert. She enjoyed the robins this morn. Comfortable day but nausea in the eve.

A.

12. Mother heard Robins

2.

12. Mother had a comfortable night, was very quiet & is so this morn. Grows more feeble & more quiet: had nausea at eight o'clock. Spoke to me of things she wanted given to certain ones, also of the dark day.

13. Mother had a wakeful night but quiet. Spoke to Andrew of the dark day & seemed very bright, slept a good deal in the day. Rev. George Osgood of Cohasset called to enquire about mother. She had a restless evening. Said "I know that My Redeemer lives" & "Not my will but theirs be done."

A.

14. I staid at Home ... Mother very weak

2.

14. Mother had a quiet night but wakeful, sleepy this morn. Mrs. Cox brought violets. She has had a quiet day, sleeping a good deal. Spoke to me of Vermont & Mass. Railroad *: sent A. jr. to Miss Jenks with the violets, took cocoa.

[* Mary Holyoke Ward Nichols may have been physically feeble, but she wasn't feeble of mind. She not only sent her grandson to her friend with violets but she talked to her daughter about some railroad stock. In the back of Mary's diary she made the following notation about that conversation: "Mother has said she would like to have me keep the Vermont & Mass. R.R. as that was bought with Grandpa Holyoke's money & she did like her grandpa." Of course "grandpa" was Dr. Edward Augustus Holyoke, who she had lived with in his last years and where she first met her future husband, Dr. Andrew Nichols.]

A.

April 15. I finished Dr Osborn's Summer St. Salem job and carried up Plan & Deed at 2 P M Went to No 20 Andrew St.* in the Horse cars then back to Mother's at 5 Mother failed very fast spoke to me at 8 1/2 and died at 8:40

[*The Stanley house, where the younger children were staying. Andrew would have stopped by to check on how the children were faring and to update the household on the gravity of his mother's condition.]

2.

15. Mother had a very quiet night & very feeble this morn, but bright & quiet in the afternoon. Said over & over "It isn't possible it is all over." Grew very sick about four o'clock & grew sicker, or rather was dying & drew her last breath at 20 minutes of nine in the eve. Her breath grew shorter & shorter & then stopped without a struggle.

[In view of what the doctors were able to diagnose at that time I was consumed with curiosity as to the official cause of her death. I found that she officially died of something we have heard about many times in her diaries, cholera morbus. That term is so archaic it can't be found in the current books on physical illnesses. Cholera is a catch-all word for any disease that causes severe gastrointestinal symptoms.]

M.

16. staid at home all day Grandma died at 9 o clock had a pair of new boots* [*No doubt to wear to the funeral.]

A.

16. I went to Danvers (Home) at 6.28 A M got things & rode down with Andrew by the Plains to Peabody went to Cemetery & then Salem

2.

16. Miss Pulsifer here about our bonnets.* [*Funeral bonnets for Mary and Lizzie.]

M.

17. Saturday. I went the funnel I saw Grandma I and Josh and John went to the funeral it was first funeral I went to

A.

17. Cloudy, Spit Snow & some rain N E Mother's Funeral at 3 1/2 and was buried next east to Father in the Monumental Cemetery, Peabody

2.

17. Mother's funeral took place this afternoon at half past three, it was around six o'clock when we returned from Peabody. The 3 boys drove home. Andrew & his wife here. Mr. Israel was in this eve. It was a quiet funeral & we liked Mr. Israel's remarks.

[When Mary Eliot grew up and had more space to write, than in the confines of that tiny diary, she recalled her grandmother's funeral. It is a very interesting recollection and as I have said before, at that time funerals were always held at the home of the deceased, unless the person was of such great importance that space became a problem. The casket was kept in the best parlor until after the funeral service, when it was carried to the cemetery. This was a tradition that was continued at Pine Knoll.

Until the middle of the twentieth century the body could be prepared and laid out in the home and I clearly remember the first time this custom was changed. Sometime in the nineteen-fifties the undertaker the family had used for years would no longer prepare a family member for burial at Pine Knoll. This meant moving the body to the funeral parlor, where it was embalmed and returned to the house in the coffin.

By that time the Mary Eliot of our story had become the matriarch of the family and strict keeper of family traditions. She took violent issue with this change, and was finally mollified, but not the least bit happy, when told that there was a new health ordinance in Danvers that required a body to be prepared in a funeral home because of the chemicals involved.

The reasoning behind Mary Eliot's objection was a life long conviction, instilled in her by her parents and senior relations, that the deceased had a right to expect to have their remains in the uninterrupted care of their loved ones until they were formally committed to God and buried.

The following is what May wrote at a later date about her grandmother, M. H. W. N.

Once only did I sleep at 34 Summer Street and it was when I was ten. I was to sleep on the couch in grandma's room and was put to bed but did not go to sleep. I was still awake when grandma went to bed. She always wore a lace cap and had brown hair parted in the middle. To my surprise she stepped to the bureau and took off that hair. (Mama's didn't come off.) Then I saw she had beautiful soft white hair.

The next spring I was to see her lying in her coffin and she didn't look natural without her brown hair.

[I am at a loss as to why Mary wasn't sensitive enough to her mother's vanity to see to it that she was laid out with her wig on.]

On April 17, 1880, The Salem Observer ran a rather lengthy obituary as follows:

Our obituary column announces the decease of Mrs. Mary Holyoke Nichols, an estimable lady of Salem, who had attained the advanced age of fourscore, wanting a few days, having been born in this city on the second day of May, 1800. She was connected with many of the old and leading families of this city and vicinity. Her father, Joshua Ward, was descended from Miles Ward, who was here in 1636, and during this interval of time many honored names of this family have been enrolled in the records of this city. Her mother was the daughter of the venerable Dr. Edward Augustus Holyoke, whose 100th birthday was duly commemorated by the physicians of Massachusetts, in August, 1829, and who was the patron and active member of the various literary and scientific societies of this city, and for many years at the head of the medical profession in this city and state. Mrs. Nichols was married in 1833 to Dr. Nichols, another well known citizen of this vicinity, a valued physician in that part of Danvers now Peabody, and distinguished as a naturalist, especially for his intimate knowledge of the plants of this vicinity. Mrs. Nichols was a lady of great culture and refinement. She was zealously devoted to the First Church in Salem, in which she was a member for more than fifty years. She was also actively connected with the various institutions which are devoted to the relief of the sick and needy. She will be greatly missed by those with whom she was accustomed to meet in social and other relations of society.

[Mary Holyoke Ward Nichols, that proud little matriarch, had finally relinquished the purse strings and died as she had lived, with tremendous dignity. She was the last of her generation of Wards and the lives of each and every one of her descendents would be greatly changed by her passing. Personally I shall miss her comments, accurate observations and exceptionally fine penmanship.

We have now read of her departure for the great beyond, where she was hopefully reunited with the husband she adored, and her earthly remains had been laid to rest to the east of the good doctor and to the east or west of three of their children. I admit to not having checked that out.]

The dead are like the stars by day

by Bernard Barton (b. London 1784)

The dead are like the stars by day,
Withdrawn from mortal eye,
Yet holding unperceived their way
Through the unclouded sky.

By them, through holy hope and love,
We feel, in hours serene,
Connected with a world above,
Immortal and unseen.

For death his sacred seal hath set
On bright and bygone hours;
And they we mourn are with us yet,
Are more than ever ours;—

Ours, by the pledge of love and faith,
By hopes of heaven on high;
By trust, triumphant over death,
In immortality.

Source: A Book of Hymns for Public and Private Devotion (15th ed.) #353
Ticknor and Fields, Boston, 1866

<https://hymnary.org/hymnal/BHPPD866>