The Hart Nichols Collection
1730-1930
A Selection of Family Records and Artifacts
This collection of family records and artifacts is from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. The women in the Hart and Nichols families were responsible for saving and preserving the family’s rich history. The range of topics that can be found in the collection include farming, religion, slavery, women’s issues, the Gold Rush of 1849, and the Civil War.

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Rev. Seth Hart (1763-1832)  Gideon Nichols (1782-1825)
The Harts

The Reverend Seth Hart, originally from Berlin, Connecticut, arrived in Hempstead, New York in 1800. He became the rector of St. George’s Church and lived in the rectory with his wife Ruth “Ruthy” (Hall) Hart. He remained in that position for twenty-nine years until his retirement.

Rev. Seth Hart (1763-1832)  Ruth (Hall) Hart (1770-1841)
Rev. Seth and Ruth Hart had seven children but only five survived childhood. The eldest William Henry followed his father into the clergy while their fourth eldest son Benjamin Hall went to sea until his marriage to Elizabeth Nichols.

Rev. William Henry Hart (1790-1852)
Ambrose Gustavus Hart (1792-1816)
Hannah Burnham Hart (1797-1798)
Henry William Hart (1799-1813)
Elizabeth Ann (Hart) Clowes (1809-1840)
Benjamin Hall Hart (1811-1875)
Edmund Hall Hart (1813-1838)
The Nichols

Gideon Nichols was born to a merchant family in Hempstead, New York. He was an industrious man and owned real estate properties in Hempstead and New York City. He served in the local militia during the War of 1812 and was a Brigade Quarter Master and Judge Advocate for the 22nd Brigade Infantry.

He married a Hempstead woman named Elizabeth Smyth in 1802. Elizabeth was the daughter of Abigail Lefferts (1755-1828) of Hempstead and Captain John Ferdinand Dalziel Stuart Smyth (1745-1814), a British soldier.

Gideon Nichols (1782-1825)  
Elizabeth (Smyth) Nichols (1780-1858)
Gideon lived on his farm in Hempstead with his wife and six children.

The children survived childhood but unfortunately, Elizabeth was dealt a blow in 1825. Her husband, eldest son Walter, and eldest daughter Mary Amelia were taken from her by typhus fever. Sadly, misfortune continued to plague the family when Elizabeth and Louisa, her youngest daughter, went deaf.

Happiness did not elude the Nichols entirely. Daughter Elizabeth married the Rev. Seth Hart’s son, Benjamin Hall Hart.

Walter Nichols (1804-1825)
Mary Amelia Nichols (1807-1825)
Gideon Smyth Nichols (1810-1894)
Elizabeth Nichols (1812-1897)
Louisa Adelia Nichols (1818-1892)
Rev. Edwin Augustus Nichols (1821-1888)
Gideon Smyth Nichols, the eldest brother to Elizabeth, was industrious like his father. Gideon was a ‘Forty-niner’, a successful merchant, and farmer. His home in Hempstead was a large prosperous farm that included a mill and a pond.

As an avid walker he had a touch of wanderlust. In 1831, Gideon travelled the northeastern part of the United States and up into Halifax, Canada. He wrote to his mother regularly, and provided her detailed descriptions of his adventures and the environment.
In 1831, he travelled to Havana, Cuba via Key West, Florida.

Below left and center: Passport. Below right: letter to mother.
In 1849, Gideon headed west to try his hand at mining for gold. He wrote often to his family back in New York about his experiences crossing the country on foot and traversing rivers and streams to reach California. Many letters were addressed from Sacramento City, Mormon Island, and Salmon Falls, California.

He detailed his everyday activities in a diary.
In 1871, approximately one hundred twenty-five acres of his farm was subjected to eminent domain by the Brooklyn Water Works. He lost his house, the mill, and pond. He was paid $25,000 for the acreage despite his claims it was worth more.
On February 17, 1837, Benjamin wrote Mrs. Elizabeth (Smyth) Nichols for her daughter Elizabeth’s hand in marriage. They married on October 18, 1837.
On January 26, 1838, Benjamin purchased a farm in LaGrange, Dutchess County, New York for $6,000 from Henry Conklin.
While Benjamin was developing his little farm named “Heartsease” into one of New York State’s finest commercial apple orchards, Elizabeth was busy maintaining the household and looking after their seven children.

Mary Amelia Hart (1838-1932)
Edmund Hall Hart (1839-1898)
Walter Nichols Hart (1842-1884)
Ambrose Burnham Hart (1844-1909)
Louisa Abigail (Hart) Hubbard (1846-1918)
Elizabeth Emily Hart (1848-1933)
William Hall Hart (1853-1934)
The Civil War
Benjamin Hall Hart and his wife Elizabeth saw their two boys join the Union army.

**Walter Nichols Hart** (1842-1884)
Enlisted 9/23/1863 - Poughkeepsie
18th New York Cavalry, Company G
Private
Appointed: Corporal, 10/13/1863
Mustered out: 5/31/1866 Victoria, Tx.

**Ambrose Burnham Hart** (1844-1909)
Enrolled 7/30/1862 – Poughkeepsie
128th New York Infantry, Company D
Corporal
Promoted: Sergeant, 2/18/1863
Promoted: 1st Sergeant, 7/18/1863
Promoted: 1st Lieutenant, 7/23/1863
Wounded in action: 9/19/1864 Winchester, Va.
Mustered: 1st Lieutenant & Adjutant, 12/22/1864
Mustered out: 7/12/1865 Savannah, Ga.
A Visual Civil War

Though both Walter and Ambrose Hart wrote letters home to the family, it was Walter’s sketches that brought the war to life.
After the Civil War, Benjamin Hall Hart and his sons, Walter and Ambrose, ventured south to Florida. Ambrose Burnham Hart made his way to Lake City where he partnered with Col. Samuel B. Thompson, and established a successful saw and ginning mill. Benjamin Hall Hart and Walter Nichols Hart went to Federal Point and established orange groves.
19th Century Snow Birds

It was common for members of the Hart and Nichols families to venture south to escape the harsh winter months in the north. Once there they helped run the farm and worked the citrus groves.
The Women

The ladies were as industrious as the men in the family. Domestically, they ran the household by cooking, cleaning, sewing, aiding the sick, and raising the children. They were keepers of the family historical record; were prolific letter writers; and were very talented artists.

Recipe: Loaf cake, c1788-c1841
Ruth (Hall) Hart

Recipe: Tomatoe Catsup, c1788-c1841
Ruth (Hall) Hart

Recipe: Beer, c1788-c1841
Ruth (Hall) Hart
Drawings and Watercolors

Ink wash on paper

Artist: Louisa Abigail (Hart) Hubbard, *Sailboat and building*, 1857
Pencil on paper


Artist: Mary van Nostrand. *Pink Cabbage Rose*, c1818 Watercolor on paper
Artist: Unknown possibly Elizabeth Ann (Hart) Clowes.
Flowers, June 17, 1821
Water color on paper
Water color on paper
Water color on paper (practice sheet)
Oil on board
Period Fashion

Top Hat, c1870-c1890

Silk Bonnet, c1880
White Leather Shoes, c1837

Worn by Elizabeth (Nichols) Hart (part of her wedding ensemble)
Black Silk Gown, c1830

In December of 1927, Edith Louisa Hubbard modelled this black silk satin gown, lace fichu, and assorted ornaments belonging to her great grandmother, Ruth (Hall) Hart.
The Hart and Nichols collection is located in the Special Collections Department at Hofstra University. It can be accessed by appointment. The department is located in the Joan & Donald E. Axinn Library, Room 032. Please call (516) 463-6411 for an appointment or additional information.