

Guide to the Belle Cowdry Collection

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COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

This collection contains daily accounts by Ithaca resident Belle Cowdry (1838-1922), written during the early years of the Civil War. The Civil War (April 12, 1861-April 9, 1865) was not mentioned in the diaries, despite deep concern in Tompkins County over slavery and preserving the Union. Belle was the daughter of Adam S. Cowdry (the 33rd President of Ithaca) and Mary Frances Riley. The two extant diaries (1858-1863) are reflections on self-improvement and daily routines (creek baptisms, funerals, sleigh rides, female friendships, suitors and shopping) and her studies at the Ithaca Academy and her unfulfilled wish to further her education at the Albany Female Academy. Belle studied Latin, Geometry and Algebra. She read widely, including the Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli. Also documented are her search and grief over her missing brother, Charles (Charlie) E. Cowdry who wandered the world and may have died in Australia. Newspaper clippings describe her later life living as a recluse in her home at 408 E State Street. Belle never married. She became a mysterious figure who gardened, kept parrots and other birds, and collected items of potential value such as buttons and crockery. She also engaged in charitable pursuits and was a trustee at the Ithaca City Hospital. Her residence became the Argos Inn in 2013.

CONTAINER LIST

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