Dr. Arthur Nichols with his wife, daughter Margaret and his six grandchildren

Wreathed in clouds of cigar smoke, Dr. Arthur Nichols encouraged his grandchildren to memorize nonsense rhymes, including the one above, and to sing along as he played the Chickering grand piano at Mastlands, the Nichols' summer home in Cornish, New Hampshire. That his grandchildren adored him is evident from the museum's oral histories. His grandson William Shurcliff recalls his beloved grandfather immersed in a favorite book and seated in his black Morris chair in the dining room above at Mastlands and the forays into the 200 acres at Mastlands to "tidy up." With a dump cart drawn by a Nichols horse, Whitey, and the help of two hired hands, Arthur and his grandchildren went out to fell dead trees and bring back the firewood for the fifteen room house.

Arthur Howard Nichols was a tall, handsome man with deep family roots in New Hampshire soil and a Boston childhood. The only surviving child of John Perkins Nichols and Mary Ann (Clarke) Nichols, he graduated from Harvard College in 1862, completed Harvard Medical School in 1866, and studied in Paris, Vienna and Berlin from the autumn of 1866 to mid-1868. Although a serious young man, ambitious and hard-working, he possessed a large portion of youthful insouciance. He wrote to his mother, "I never knew what a well-fitting, handsome boot was till I saw those I had made here. No more American trash for me." The boots were only part of his expanding wardrobe. "My expenditures in London for clothing and boots were quite large," he advised his parents, "but I think you will call them judicious." He bought three suits, six pairs of boots, two pairs of "elegant slippers," silk scarves "enough to last a lifetime," and 18 linen shirts. He forgot to mention one item, perhaps intentionally. Writing from Vienna the next autumn, he remembered, "I don't know whether I ever told you that last winter, finding the weather so cold, and my thin cloak insufficient, I ordered an elegant dark-blue chinchilla overcoat, which I take care to wear as little as possible."

When he returned to Boston in 1868, he rented from his old friend, Collins Warren, the Warren mansion at 130 Warren Street, Roxbury, and began his medical practice. He married Elizabeth Fisher Homer, one of three daughters of a prominent Roxbury family on November 11, 1869. Rose Standish Nichols was their first child, born January 11, 1872. Marian Clarke Nichols was born in 1874 and the Nichols' last child, Margaret Homer Nichols, the mother of the six Nichols grandchildren, was born in 1879. Dr. Nichols moved his family to the 1804 red brick townhouse at 55 Mount Vernon Street in 1885, where he saw patients in his new examining room. He was for several decades "the summer doctor" at Rye Beach, New Hampshire, where the Nichols family summered until they purchased their home in Cornish. He also served as a medical consultant and expert witness for various New England railroads. Dr. Nichols belonged to several medical societies and wrote two short papers for the Massachusetts Board of Health, one of them entitled "Cherbon (Anthrax) in Massachusetts".

Arthur Nichols loved music. His letters from Vienna contain accounts of the concerts he attended by Josef and Johann Strauss. He rented "an excellent (grand) piano for $3.00 a month" and took lessons. He reported to his mother "I get along finely on the piano, and practice about 4 hours a day. It all comes very easy to me."

He was also devoted to the art of handbell ringing. His grandson recalls that Dr. Nichols loved the tunes played on the Old North Church bells near his childhood home on Stillman Street and translated these early memories into a life-long enthusiasm for the intricacies of handbell and tower-bell ringing. The Old North Church neighborhood also piqued his...
NEW MEMBER UPDATE
Welcome!
It’s always a pleasure to welcome new members: Judith B. Bracken, Mary R. Dunn, Julie A. Enders, Bernardo Fruciano & Peter Van Den Noort, Jean M. Kennett, Erna Larson, Arthur Shurcliff, Charles Shurcliff, and Grace Sterling Stowell.

ARTHUR NICHOLS
Continued from page 3
interest in Paul Revere’s bells and he published, in 1904 and 1911, two monographs on Revere’s dogged attempts to cast superior-voiced bells. Two additional monographs detail “The Bells of Harvard College” and “Christ Church Bells”.

A complex, multifaceted man, sometimes demanding, but always interesting, emerges from the pages of Arthur Nichols’ elegantly written letters. A devout animal lover, he fed the pigeons on Beacon Hill and built a dove-cote and bird houses in Cornish. He loved cats and dogs. Much to his wife’s dismay, he occasionally shared his office with the household feline, and for most of his life he had a dog or two around, often adopted on a whim. The young Nichols daughters had pets, usually large dogs, and enjoyed summer jaunts in a dog cart their father had constructed for them. Arthur Nichols collected flags and had custom flag-staffs built for both of the Nichols homes. He proudly proclaimed that he was the only Boston home-owner who had a double flag pole on his roof.

Dr. Nichols frequently expressed his passionate enthusiasm for good food. He once chortled to Elizabeth, in Paris at the time, “We have struck this time an ideal cook. Yesterday it was lobster croquettes for lunch that commanded general commendation, and this morning the brown, crisp buckwheat cakes were such as one mentally longs for but rarely encounters.” He had bad news for his wife, however. The ideal cook was leaving before his “dear Lizzie” returned from Paris.

Arthur Nichols’ letters reveal his delight with the Nichols family home on Beacon Hill, which they referred to as “the Bulfinch house,” his vast pride in his three daughters, and his love and devotion for his wife, Elizabeth. When he died at eighty-three years of age, his obituary hailed him as “one of the best known physicians of his time” and reported that he had gone back to Roxbury to “visit some property of his in Mt. Pleasant Avenue” when he “suffocated from heart disease”. It was the cold morning of January 9, 1923.

Arthur Howard Nichols, M. D. 1840-1923

SPRING FÊTE
A Delightful Evening
Many new revelers joined old friends of the Nichols House at this year’s annual Spring Fête. The highlight of the celebration, which took place at the Prescott House on Beacon Street, was the reading of excerpts from letters between Rose Standish Nichols and her mother Elizabeth. June Hutchinson, President of the Board of Governors, researched and prepared the excerpts. The readings were elegantly presented by Mary Fran Townsend and her daughter Elizabeth.

ANNUAL APPEAL 2005
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