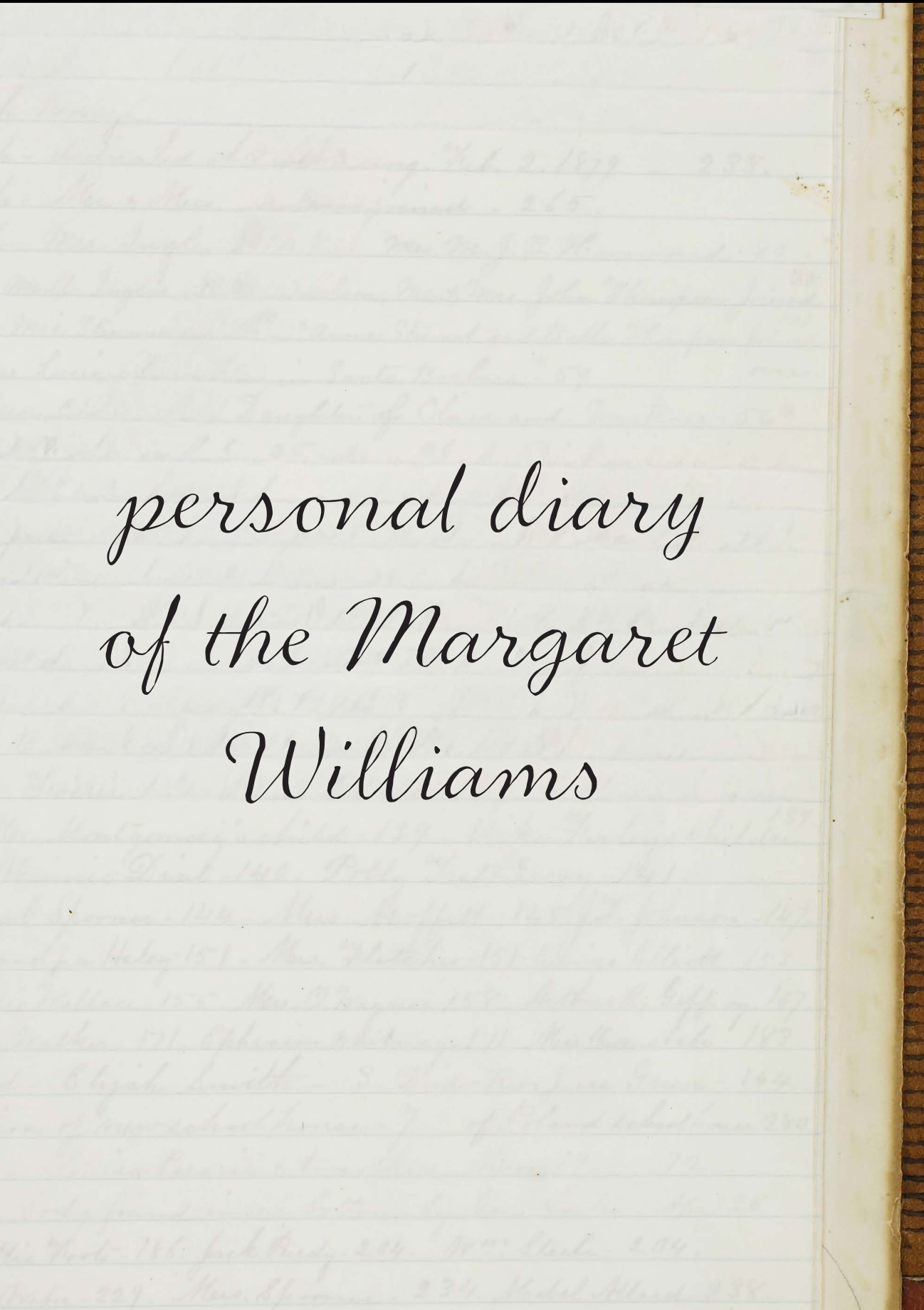


Methods of cataloguing

WHAT WOMEN WANT TO KNOW?

By adding narrative to the collection, I tried to make the set more personal.

Obviously, the set is limited in perspective and reinforces the bias towards women, and, therefore, through monologue-style descriptions I tried to inject fictional worries and anxieties of the American woman of the 20th century.



July 26th 1990

Lemon and Salt for the Sink (and the Soul)

I clean the kitchen on Sunday afternoons. I cut a lemon, pour salt over it, and scrub until metal smells like brightness.

It's supposed to remove rust, but I swear it lifts something heavier. The act of scrubbing becomes a ritual — an exorcism of the week.

You'll learn that cleaning is never just cleaning. It's a way to make the world briefly obedient. File this under Domestic Alchemy, tag: temporary order.

There's a stain of lemon juice on the next page, I left it as proof.



Domestic Alchemy



Aug 2nd 1990

The Red Lipstick for Courage

Bought it when I had my first job interview. Still use it for every confrontation — meetings, arguments, heartbreaks.

It stains cups, masks, pillows. It claims to be long-lasting; it lies, but beautifully. Once I read that Cleopatra mixed crushed insects for pigment. I think of her each time I reapply — how survival is always a performance.

Disguise Systems

July 21st 1990

Cream for the Face, Cream for the Nerves

The face cream is used morning and night. It says "anti-ageing," but it really means "don't disappear." I pat it under my eyes while the kettle boils. The same motion I use to comfort you when you cry — circular, rhythmic, convincing.

It costs too much. But on the days I skip it, I see the world's small punishments — the colleague's glance, the mirror's silence.

I catalogue this under Necessary Maintenance, subcategory Hope in a Jar.

My dearest girl,

I began this diary when I realised that women collect not only things but also methods — the quiet systems that keep a life together. Our shelves are lined not just with creams and recipes but with habits, instructions, and inherited gestures.

I wanted to leave you something more than advice. Think of this as a catalogue of my own small discoveries — things that have kept me clean, fed, and sometimes even whole. It isn't perfect. Some entries are stains, others are miracles. Take what you need, and make your own system one day.

Flip forward to page twelve for the proof.



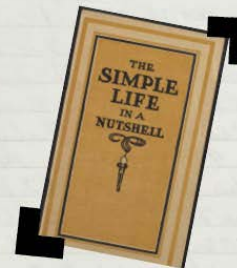
Necessary Maintenance

September 20th 1990

Recipe for Stillness

Ingredients:
1 quiet room
2 minutes of breathing
3 thoughts you refuse to chase

Method: Sit until your mind stops marketing to you. Listen until you hear your own voice again. This is the hardest recipe to master. It spoils easily.



I left a crease there. I wanted you to notice.

Emotional Utilities

The woman in that book looks calmer than I ever felt...



Sep 29th 1990

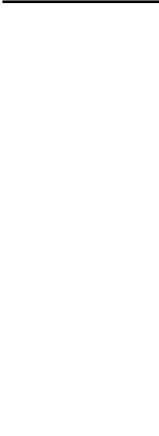
Laundry Day Philosophy

The washing machine hums like a low prayer. I separate colours carefully — not from habit, but because order feels like safety. Sometimes I add vinegar to remove the smell of defeat. Sometimes I forget. Each cycle is an invisible labour: you clean the clothes, but also the evidence of living.

Repetition as Redemption

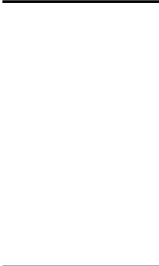
REFLECTIONS

Working with the diary format is a powerful tool to subvert traditional attitude towards the catalogue as a vessel of sometimes irrelevant to our experiences information. By transforming the pieces of Digital Collection into cohesive narration from a fictional character — in my case, it's a middle-aged woman, newlywed, who recently had her first daughter, precious being of hers — in the format of the diary, the viewer/reader starts experiencing information in the new light.



catalogues can be irrelevant

The creation of intimacy is a effective tool in piecing together the scattered shatters of data, this not only makes the storytelling believable, but also evokes strong emotions and feelings —something, that's beyond the capacity of a cold catalogue.



intimacy in storytelling

DIARY = STORYTELLING

CHANGE OF THE FORMAT

Keep the diary format, however, place it in the fictional archival publication vessel

Through creation of fictional publication that “explores” women’s diaries I wanted to achieve a few things:

1) Make the story plausible and credible so people could really empathize with the character

2) Use fiction as a tool of critique. If the archive is messy, incomplete and subject to interpretation, then how can we trust “official” narratives?

3) Establish context of the work and set a lens through which I processed the collection material.

Wholesale Dept. Edward Hines Lumber Co. Retail Dept. Canal 0349
Tel. Franklin 2580 Bankers Building CHICAGO, ILL. Tel. Canal 0349

Mercury Hits Lowest Mark Of Winter Season, Bringing More Grief For Motorists

Sunday, January 12, 1936
12 Days Past

Maximum Of 14 Degrees Is Recorded In Early Morning Hours; Two Inches Of Snow Falls.

While Battle Creek congratulated itself on having missed the cold wave predicted for the week-end the blast swept in with a vengeance—at least 48 hours late. It was the coldest night of the coldest season in nearly a quarter of a century. The mercury dug down to the 14-below-zero mark, two degrees below the season's previous high. It lost 19 degrees between the last official reading of the evening, taken at No. 3 fire station at 9 o'clock, and the first reading at 7:30 this morning. By 8 o'clock it had risen one degree and by noon the firemen reported the official reading at three below.

Trains, Buses Delayed. The cold had its customary effect on transportation, delaying trains and buses to some extent and the cold wave was accompanied by some wind and there was a little drifting. Roads which have been opened with much persistent effort during the last two weeks remained open, although pavements were reported slippery with thin layers of packed snow.

Two county plows broke down on the roads Monday night, further delaying the work of clearing the highways in the more isolated sections. The differential gear was torn from one of the plows at work in the northwest corner of the county, near the Kalamazoo county line, and the plow remained on the road all night. Another damaged plow was brought in from Pennfield.

HOURLY TEMPERATURES.

The hourly temperatures for this morning were as follows:

7:00	13 below
7:30	14 below
8:00	12 below
9:00	10 below
10:00	7 below
11:00	4 below
12:00	3 below
1 p. m.	1 below

Wholesale Dept. Edward Hines Lumber Co. Retail Dept. Canal 0349
Tel. Franklin 2580 Bankers Building CHICAGO, ILL. Tel. Canal 0349

Tuesday, January 14, 1936
14 Days Past

Wednesday, January 15, 1936
15 Days Past

Honoring Birthday. Miss Betty Jane Eick of 113 Jericho road entertained 14 of her friends in honor of her twentieth birthday Tuesday evening. A supper was served at 5 o'clock and games were played for the diversion of the evening, prizes being won by Betty Jayne Bentley, Bobby Schwelker, Flora Wells, Mary Jane Thiesen and Phyllis Farr. Betty was the recipient of many nice gifts from the group which included Maxine Mead, Flora Wells, Virginia Palmer, Virginia Thiesen, Mary Jane Thiesen, Georgia Thiesen, Catherine Schwelker, Betty Jayne Bentley, Lavonne Bacrill, Phyllis Farr, Beverly Jefferson, Robert Schwelker and Catherine Palmer.

Feb 18 1936

It was a beautiful day but very cold. The party went off just fine. Marie played and all the children sang. The party broke up at 8:15.

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Tel. Franklin 2580 Bankers Building CHICAGO, ILL. Tel. Canal 0349

Thursday, January 16, 1936
16 Days Past

Notes by Notables

- The causes of averesting are merry and various. They include:
 - The generous father
 - The fond mother
 - The genial host
 - The good cook
 - The persuasive grocer
 - The attentive waiter
 - The business luncheon
 - The public banquet
 - The idle life.

—Clarence W. Lieb.

View of business section of Burns, Oregon (Population 2,500), county seat of Harney County, containing 10,000 square feet of one-story mercantile buildings, all lines of merchandise, paved streets, sidewalks, water, electric lights, telephone wires, and beautiful modern homes.

FEBRUARY 1931

Sunday 8 Watched for Uncle Frank, took a bath, read Sun. papers, slept nearly all P.M.

Monday 9 Didn't do anything except read and listen to the radio.

Tuesday 10 Uncle Frank's birthday. Read the paper & Mc Call's, listened to the radio.

Wednesday 11 Started to embroider scarf ends, read the paper, listened to the radio.

FEBRUARY 1931

Thursday 12 Listened to radio and read all evening.

Friday 13 Listened to radio and read.

Saturday 14 Mildred Case's birthday 1899. Put on scarf, went down street, read, listened to radio, and embroidered.

MEMORANDUM

Wholesale Dept. Edward Hines Lumber Co. Retail Dept. Canal 0349
Tel. Franklin 2580 Bankers Building CHICAGO, ILL. Tel. Canal 0349

Thursday, February 27, 1936
58 Days Past

Friday, Feb 28, 1936
59 Days Past

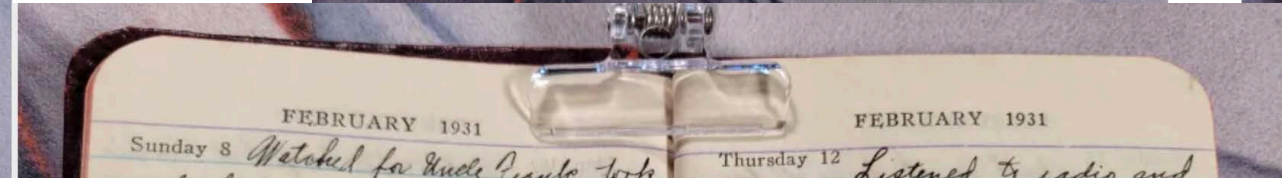
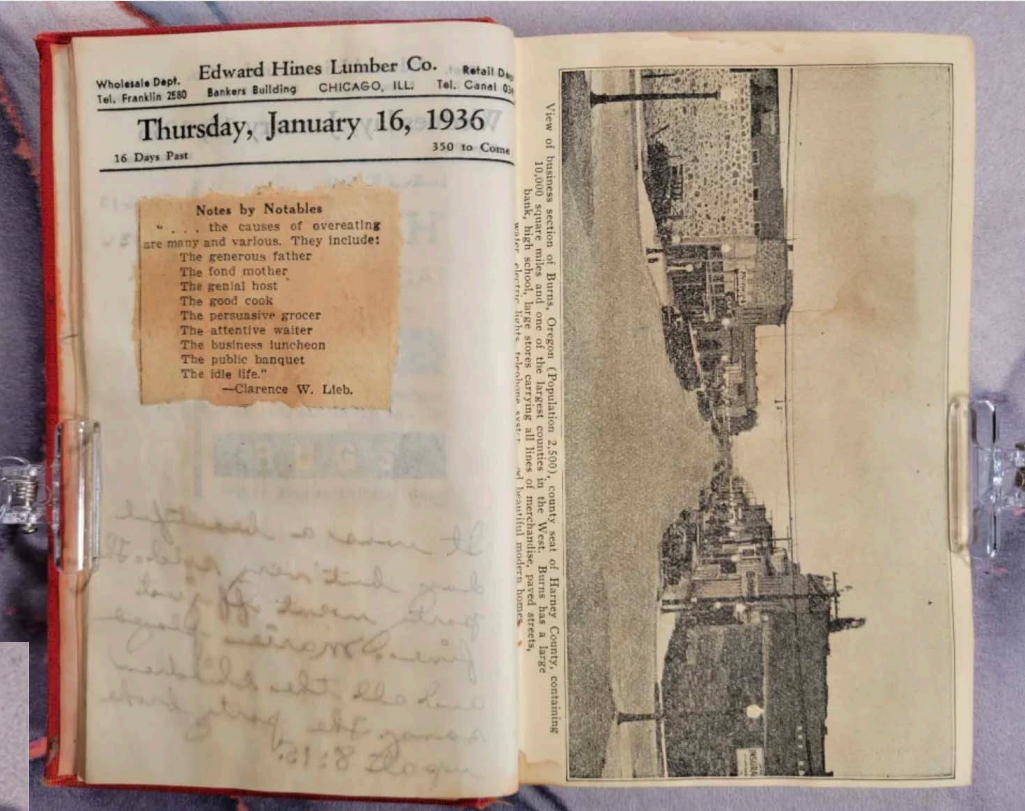
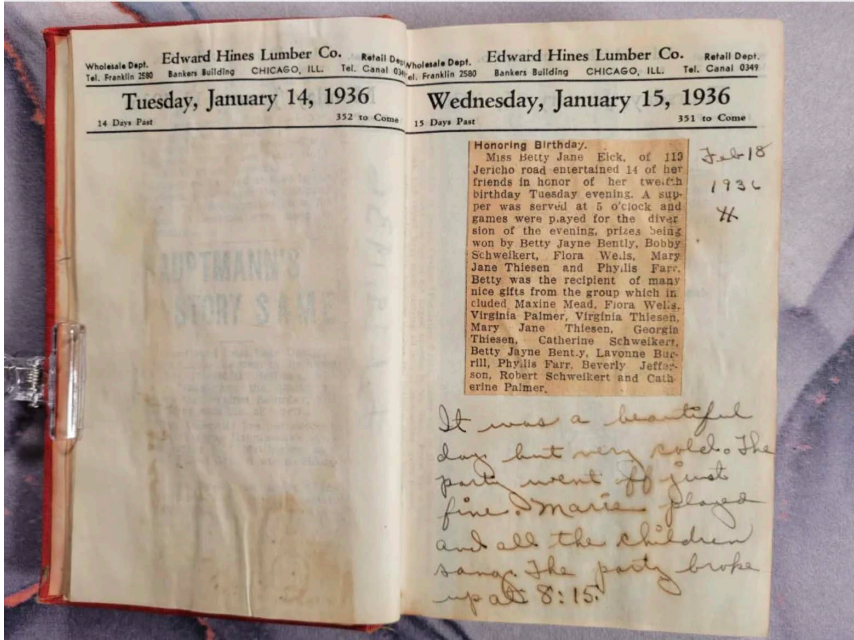
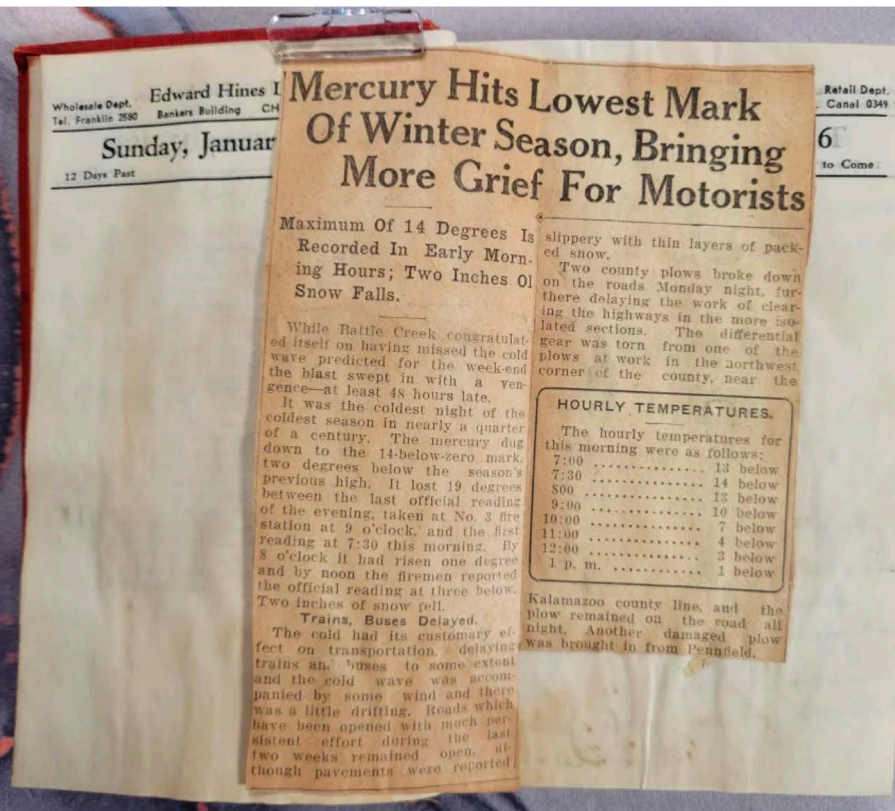
Mother and Father's Wedding Anniversary. They were married 23 years ago to-day. It is a regular blizzard out doors and quite slippery where the people have not cleared off their sidewalks. We are going to have chicken for supper and sponge cake with lemon filling and pink frosting.

Wholesale Dept. Edward Hines Lumber Co. Retail Dept. Canal 0349
Tel. Franklin 2580 Bankers Building CHICAGO, ILL. Tel. Canal 0349

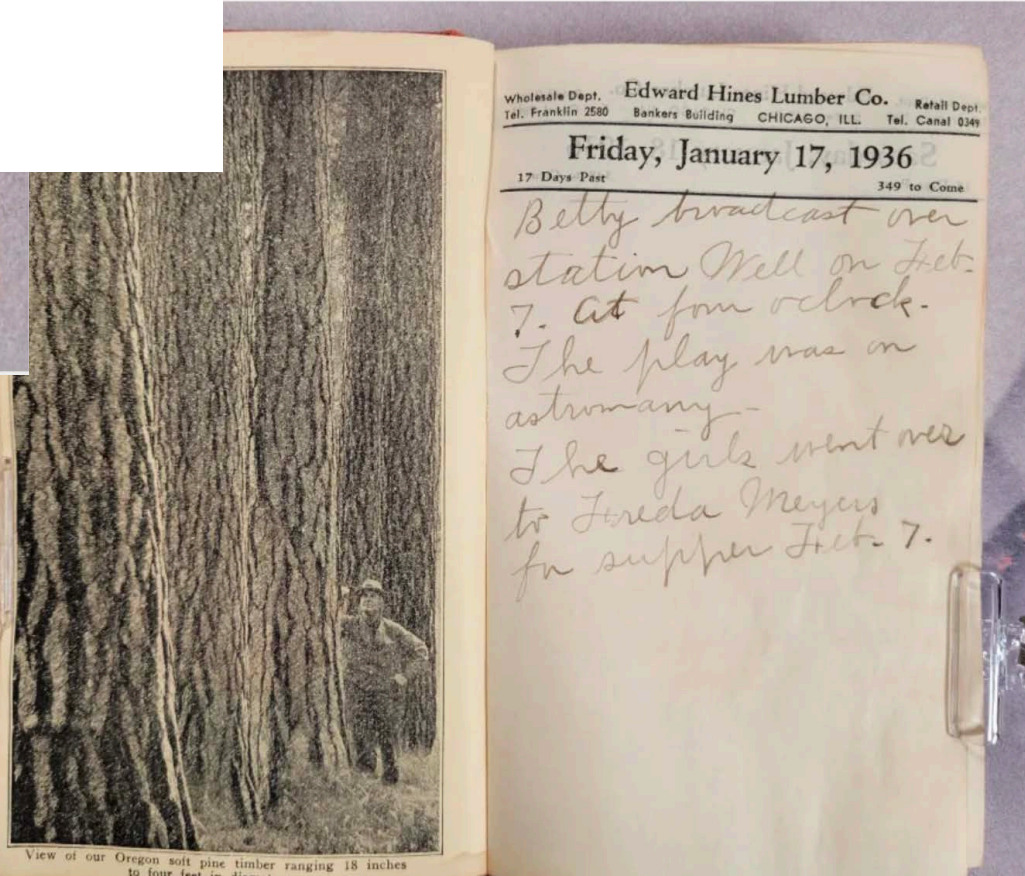
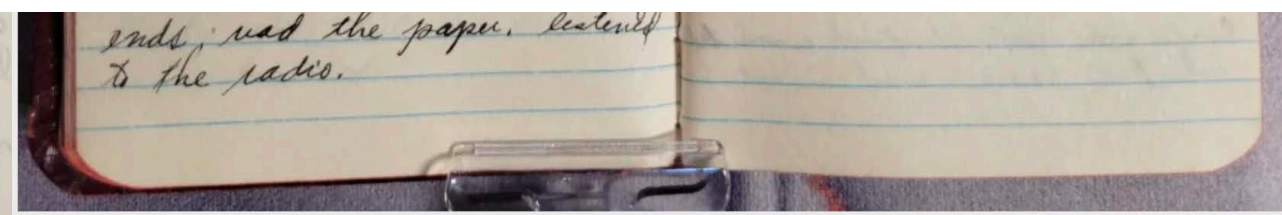
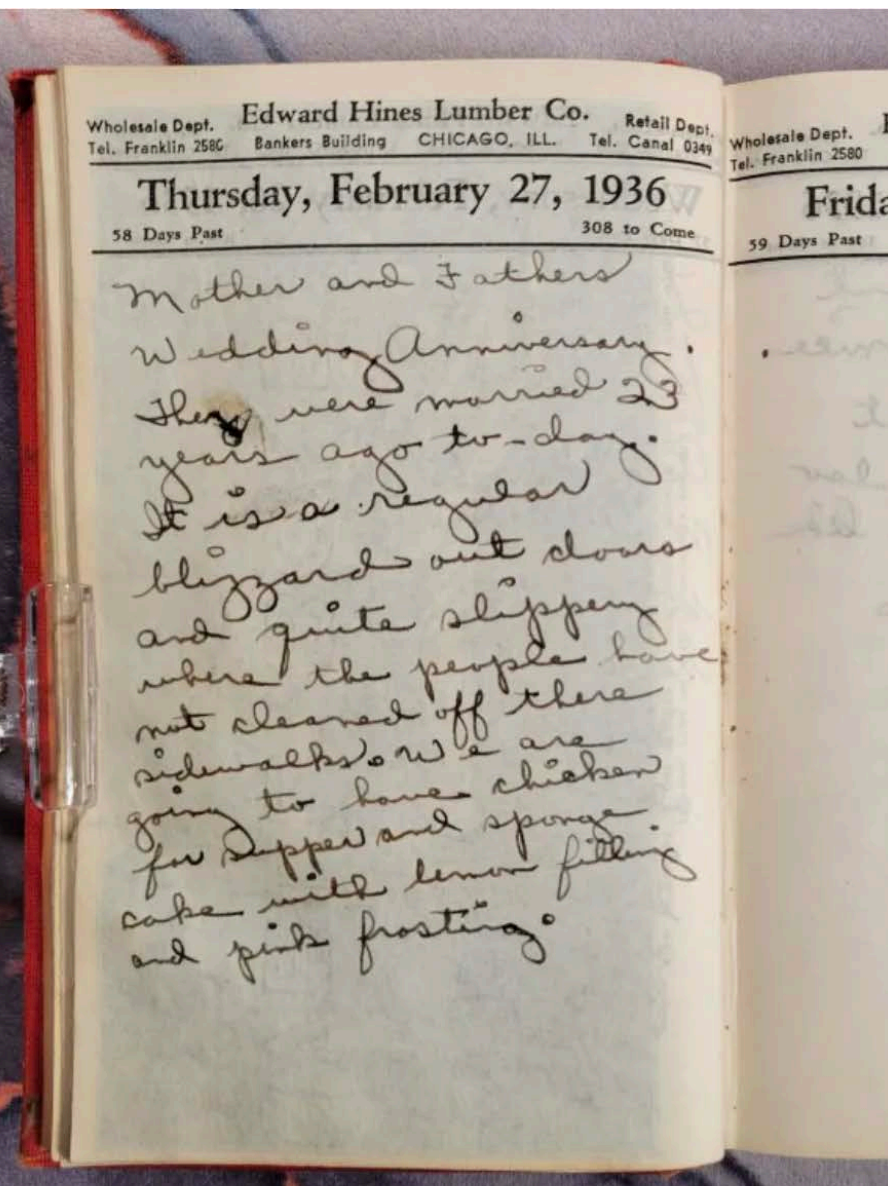
Friday, January 17, 1936
17 Days Past

Betty broadcast over station Well on Feb. 7. at four o'clock. The play was on astronomy. The girls went over to Jereda Meyers for supper Feb. 7.

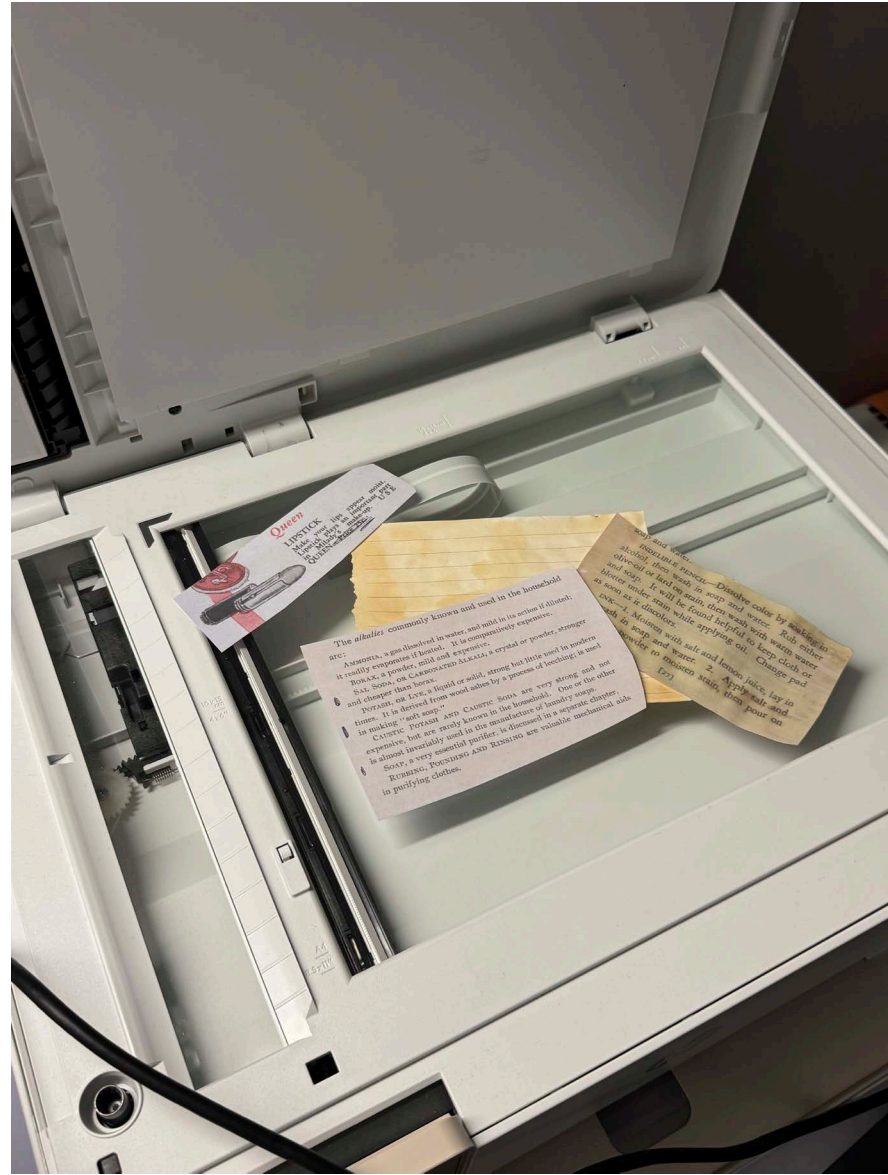
View of our Oregon soft pine timber ranging 18 inches to four feet in diameter.



- Embrace imperfection and realism.
- Add contextual details to reflect the period.
- Include everyday, unrelated entries.
- Fill pages with doodles, marks, and signs of use.
- Experiment with physical fabrication and ephemera.
- Show daily routines and small moments.
- Focus more on emotions than events.



EXPERIMENTING WITH MATERIALS



first one limb a few seconds, then the other. All the muscles of the body may be exercised in this way.

32. Deep breathing aids digestion, encourages the liver and bowel action, develops the lungs, and purifies the blood. The only directions needed are: Hold the chest high and breathe deep as you can ten or twenty times every hour, or oftener. The best "breath" gymnastics are swimming, hill or stair climbing, and rapid walking or running. Always breathe through the nose.

33. In walking, always hold the chest high and carry it well to the front. Swing the arms moderately, and walk fast enough to hasten the breathing a little. Nine miles walking a day at the rate of three miles an hour is the necessary amount for the average adult. Most housekeepers and laborers do

Queen
LIPSTICK
Make your lips appear moist. Lipstick plays an important part in Milady's make-up. USE QUEEN. Price 25c.

The alkalis commonly known and used in the household are:

- AMMONIA, a gas dissolved in water, and mild in its action if diluted; it readily evaporates if heated. It is comparatively expensive.
- BORAX, a powder, mild and expensive.
- SAL SODA, OR CARBONATED ALKALI, a crystal or powder, stronger and cheaper than borax.
- POTASH, OR LYE, a liquid or solid, strong but little used in modern times. It is derived from wood ashes by a process of leeching; is used in making "soft soap."
- CAUSTIC POTASH AND CAUSTIC SODA are very strong and not expensive, but are rarely known in the household. One or the other is almost invariably used in the manufacture of laundry soaps.
- SOAP, a very essential purifier, is discussed in a separate chapter.
- RUBBING, POUNDING AND RINSING are valuable mechanical aids in purifying clothes.

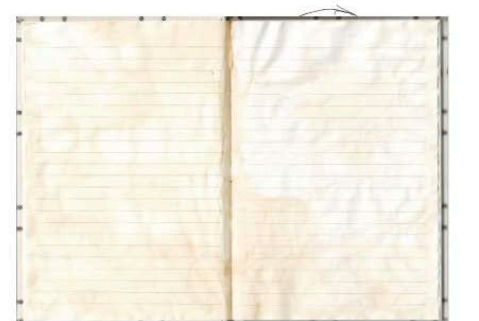
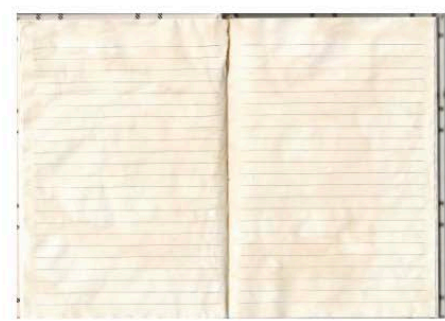
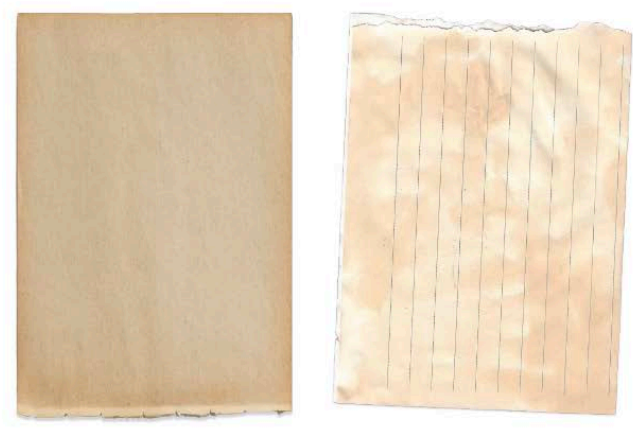
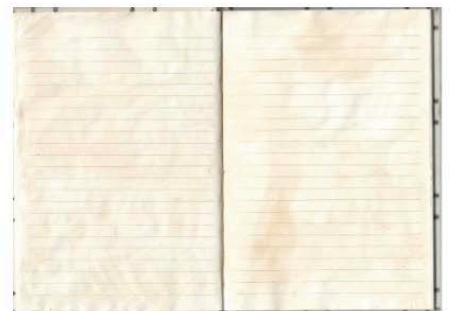
Woodbury's Facial Cream
(For use during the day)

soap and water.

INDELIBLE PENCIL—Dissolve color by soaking in alcohol, then wash in soap and water. Rub olive-oil or lard on stain, then wash with warm water and soap. It will be found helpful to keep blotter under stain while applying oil. Change blotter as soon as it discolors.

INK—1. Moisten with salt and lemon juice, lay in sun, wash in soap and water. 2. Apply salt and lemon as a powder to moisten stain, then pour on

[27]



CREATING CONTENTS

Sunday, March 15, 1931

Mother came over with lemon cake. Edna spilled milk, and Mother scolded her before I could speak. I said nothing — I never do.

Sunday, March 15, 1931

Church bells early. My hat didn't fit right, but I wore it anyway.

Monday, March 9, 1931

The radio was faint tonight. I turned the knob but could only hear the hum. Edna fell asleep with her hand on my arm.

Wednesday, March 11, 1931

Boiled the linens again. The smell of soap lingers long after they're dry.

Tuesday, October 2, 1900

Cold this morning. The stove smoked before it caught. I held my hands close and watched the first curl of heat rise — a thin ghost, almost delicate.

Thursday, October 4, 1900

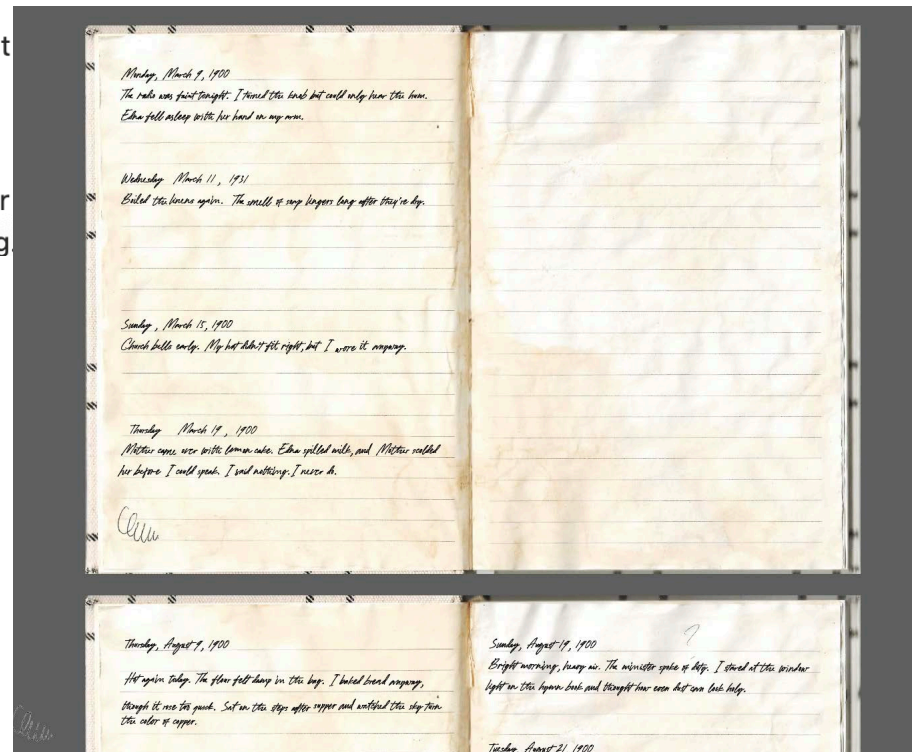
A new booklet came in the post — *The Simple Life in a Nutshell*. It said a woman's heart should be as orderly as her pantry. I arranged the shelves again but my thoughts stayed in disarray.

Sunday, October 7, 1900

Wore my blue dress to church. The fabric has faded at said nothing about it — he rarely does.

Wednesday, October 10, 1900

Rain all day. The roof dripped in one steady place near listened while I wrote. It sounded almost like breathing.



Repository	Name	Age
https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/what-women-want-to-know/catalog/171-990148171480203941_RADSCHL:104207697	A skin you love to touch	[between 1
https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/what-women-want-to-know/catalog/171-990141123160203941_RADSCHL:104210205	A cleaner house by 12 o'clock	1930
https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/what-women-want-to-know/catalog/171-990150937370203941	A complete beauty treatment	[between 1
https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/what-women-want-to-know/catalog/171-990140123140203941_RADSCHL:104203456	The simple life in a nutshell ; rules for "right living"	1921
https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/what-women-want-to-know/catalog/171-990141057960203941_RADSCHL:104229882	Hints for housewives; cleans, scrubs, scours, polishes	1915
https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/what-women-want-to-know/catalog/171-990118226870203941	This new freedom	1928

Women's Diaries: Catalogue of Private Histories

This project began with a close examination of early 20th-century American women's diaries —small, private books that held entire worlds within their pages. Written during a time when the domesticated female role defined much of social life, these diaries often existed at the fragile intersection between self-expression and self-policing. Women's personal writing was rarely neutral: it moved between duty and desire, between confession and restraint.

As the statement "*the personal is political*" reminds us, the smallest gestures of daily life—laundry, childbirth, friendship, illness—can reveal the same mechanisms of power that govern public institutions. In their quiet insistence on recording private experience, these diaries perform an act of reclamation. What was once dismissed as trivial now reads as political evidence, emotional data, and testimony to survival.

Purpose and Method

The collection presented here was compiled and annotated by a team of archivists and researchers working to recover under-examined female narratives from the early twentieth century. The goal of this ongoing initiative is to catalogue these diaries within their historical and cultural frameworks, drawing attention to how women translated prescribed ideals into lived experience.

Each diary has been studied not only for its autobiographical value but also for its relationship to surrounding systems of representation — periodical publications



NARRATIVE

1

The publication begins with explanation of significance of women's diaries in history

2

Tells about the purpose of collecting histories to create a better understanding of systems of representation in early 20th century.

3

Provides outline of the character's history

4

Scans of the diary

5

Retracing the references mentioned in the diary

6

References

