

John F. Seebler journals (offered by Charles Apfelbaum) assessment:

Condition: Good. The leather covers are flexible and mostly intact, and the paper is not too brittle. The bindings are solid, and none of the pages are falling out or loose. Overall good preservation. The handwriting is not easily legible, but it isn't impossible by 19th century standards. All of the writing, however, is in pencil, which does little to improve the readability - it has smudged over the years, and a small number of pages are virtually illegible because of this. The 1899 journal is much more difficult to read than the 1886 one, especially since many of the interesting parts are written in a pale blue pencil instead of a black one.

Content: These are two journals written by John F. Seebler, a settler in Walla Walla, Washington.

The first covers the year 1886, when Mr. Seebler was apparently building his house in Walla Walla. The content of this journal is extremely routine, containing short entries (none over half a page, and they are small pages) for each day of the year. Most simply contain a statement of the work done that day ("Worked on the foundation all day," or "Home all day."), an accounting of any items purchased and their costs, and any other expenditures or income. Frequent short notes on the weather conditions ("Stormy," "Rained," etc.). Otherwise very little of interest for a researcher - the only notable events were one tooth extraction for which Mr. Seebler got very drunk, and the subsequent entries for the rest of the week record that he was "Very sick from an overdose of beer and brandy." One time he records his reluctance to pay compound interest, though he says that straight interest is acceptable. Other than those entries, the journal is totally routine. Mr. Seebler seems to have been a solid family man, working hard supporting his family and doting on his children (he does mention them in quite a few entries, relating where they spent the day and their activities). The printed front matter of the journal contains standard almanac-style materials that could be found in many 19th century publications - quotes from Shakespeare, calendars, weather tables, interest tables, etc. The back of the journal contains lists of accounts by month, and effectively condenses those figures found in the text of the journal entries.

The second covers the year 1899, when Mr. Seebler was intermittently prospecting for gold in the mountains - his location during this activity is usually difficult to determine. The content in this journal is generally much more interesting than the other journal. His entries are significantly longer, and give accounts of everyday life in the gold camps - he spent more of his time hunting, fishing (he caught and ate an amazing amount of fish - sometimes consuming as many as 10 in a day), trading with other prospectors, baking bread, reading the bible, praying, and engaging in many other activities rather than actually mining, which really seems to have only occupied a few of his days on each trip. His accounts describe how "very blue" he felt much of the time, though this seemed to alternate with his periods of high hopes for "rich claims." Early on in the year, he wrote of his intention to go home and work for a wage during the summer instead of mining, but Mr. Seebler went home in April, and by June was headed back to the mountains. He continually pined for home and for his children when he was away, but didn't stay at home for long when he returned. Mr. Seebler was apparently a fairly religious man, and there is repeated reference to being 'in God's hands now' whenever the situation became difficult or he felt particularly 'blue.' I had the impression of a man who had become compulsive in his attempts to strike it big, and could no longer focus on the slow everyday rou-

tine of his previous life as a farm worker. While he seemingly couldn't change his actions, these major changes were difficult for him to live with, and he became depressed most of the time. The writing is much more difficult to read, especially in the interesting entries - writing in the mining camps was probably much more difficult than at home in Walla Walla, and he used an unfortunately light blue pencil for much of the journal. Some of the interesting events described include his discovery of a copper vein near Paradise during the summer (apparently a very exciting event), the sickness and subsequent death of his daughter(?) Rhoda during the fall (he came home to find her ill, and stayed home long enough to bury her), and the apparently unexpected (by him) engagement of another daughter while he was away prospecting - he only found out about it when she told him in a letter. Another interestingly modern recurring theme are the references to his attempts to quit smoking - though for Mr. Seebler this was, of course, for religious reasons.

Recommendations: My initial feeling was that I would recommend against purchasing these potential acquisitions at the offered price - the 1886 journal is frankly of negligible historical value, and the difficulty in reading the 1899 journal combined with the cost makes it difficult to justify making a case for for this single item. However, after thinking the matter over some more, these items taken together do embody an interesting and coherent historical argument. They show the changes wrought in the life of an average and otherwise undistinguished man who became caught up in the 'Gold Fever' of the late 1890s. The very contrast between the activities and lifestyles represented in the two journals is illustrative of the massive societal changes that the gold rush brought with it, and they also demonstrate that this effect was powerful in Washington State - not just in the Yukon. Certainly interpreting the writing is challenging, but on reflection it is no more so than many other documents from the period that I encountered during previous research. Seen in this light, it may make sense to purchase these journals, and write a finding aid not that explains the contrast in these terms.

I will be interested to hear which of these assessments makes sense to you, given the conservative budget for acquisitions.