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# GEN MS 19 Fitts Family Collection Finding Aid

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**FITTS FAMILY COLLECTION  
GEN MS 19**

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**By  
Daniel Draper**

**Portland, Maine  
July 2007**

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## **Administrative Information**

Provenance: Donated to Special Collections in 2004 by Beatrice Fitts, Florence MA. The material belonged first to Bertha Rice Fitts, 1894 alumna, then to her daughter, Beatrice Fitts.

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Cite as: Fitts Family Collection, Special Collections, University of Southern Maine Libraries.

Restrictions on access: None

## **Biographical Note**

Bertha Francis Rice was born on July 15, 1870 in Waterford, Maine, the daughter of Charles and Elizabeth (Greene) Rice. Often she walked 2 miles to school in North Waterford, knitting stockings on the way or memorizing poems that she would recite for church and family occasions.

She graduated from Douglas Seminary in Waterford, a high school for local and "away" girls. She taught in the local one room schools in Waterford and Norway Center. At the latter, a cousin, who knew someone on the school committee, took her position away from her. It was then that she decided to go to the new Gorham Normal School "so no one would be able to take a school away from her again." It must have been a wrenching decision to leave family and friends and venture alone 50 miles on the train to Gorham where she knew no one except Sarah Warren, a distant relative.

She attended Gorham Normal School without her father's blessing: "No need to traipse off to that school. Stay here. Marry and settle down." However, her mother gave her encouragement by saying, "How much richer all our lives will be for all she will bring back to us." Her brother helped finance her second year at Gorham by advancing \$100, which she later repaid.

Bertha Rice graduated from Gorham Normal School in 1894. She was in the standard 2 year program in elementary education. She started at Gorham in 1891, but was sick after that first year. She used up all her savings for the second year on doctors' bills. She returned the following year, to board with Sarah Warren, who lived south of the center of town in a big colonial house just beyond the cemetery.

Upon graduation she was offered the position of Master's Assistant and teacher of the eighth grade at the newly opened Forest Street Grammar School in Westbrook, Maine, where her principal was Charles E. Cobb. Later, he and his wife founded the summer

camps Wyonegonic and Winona in Denmark, Maine, both of which are still operating as well known camps. Her friendship with the Cobbs was life-long.

The superintendent of schools in Quincy, Massachusetts heard of her work and traveled to Westbrook to observe her teaching. He offered her a position as Master's Assistant and teacher in grade eight in one of the larger grammar schools near the center of the town. She accepted the position. At that time the Boston school system was highly regarded and she had her eyes on advancing.

While she was teaching in Quincy, she boarded with a widow, Mrs. Calvin Fitts, who had 3 grown sons. One of them, Arthur Fitts, proposed marriage. They were married at her home in Waterford, Maine on October 25, 1899, and lived all of their married life in Quincy. They had 2 daughters.

Bertha was very much interested in the Southern Branch of the Gorham Alumni Association and held the offices of president and secretary of the Boston Branch. Then she was chosen to be the coordinator who held the organization together as the officers changed. She held that position for many years.

It was only illness that prevented her from attending her 50<sup>th</sup> reunion at Gorham in 1944. Bertha made many life-long friends at Gorham and her memories of her days there were precious. One time she stopped to call on one of her former Gorham teachers, Miss Stone, who lived in Gorham. When she was invited in to see Miss Stone, Mrs. Fitts asked that her name not be given. As soon as Miss Stone heard her voice, she said, "Well, Bertha Rice, hello."

### Description of the Papers

The Fitts Family Collection consists primarily of individual photographs of faculty and students at Gorham State Teachers College, taken between 1882 and 1894. Also included are photos of Gorham School buildings (1894), Bertha Fitts and her family (1896, 1911) and a GNS Alumni Massachusetts Branch announcement for 1945.

Box	Folder	Description	Date
1	1	Photographs: Viola M. White (-----Oct. 1925); teacher of Botany, Drawing, Geography Inez Stone – teacher (Inez M. Rowe) M. F. Caswell – teacher	1882-85 1888-1920
	2	Photographs: Fannie E. Milliken (Mrs. Howard G. Wakefield) Annie Haskell Hall ( -----June 11, 1962)	1892 1893

Box	Folder	Description	Date
1	3	Photograph : Laura Roberts	1893
	4	Photograph : Ella Clarke (Mrs. Morrill)	1894
	5	Photograph : Gorham School buildings	1894
	6	Photographs : Bertha Fitts' Family	1896, 1911
	7	GNS Alumni Massachusetts Branch	1945