

**“Committed to Memory”: Gender, Literary Engagement, and
Commemorative Practice, 1780-1920**

by

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Dedication

For my family and my teachers

Acknowledgments

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Abstract

Committed to Memory examines how white women in nineteenth-century New England used everyday objects and stories to engage with the past and to forge social boundaries in their present. The project first reestablishes the close links among acts of reading, writing, and remembering in the early American Republic and highlights the constitutive place of material artifacts within those cultural practices. In particular, I delineate the social authority that educated white women exercised among and enhanced through commemorative activities. The work then traces the feminization and belittlement of material artifacts, especially those associated with domestic spaces, at the hands of emerging academic conventions at the beginning of the twentieth century. *Committed to Memory* argues that in labeling these artifacts, sites, and practices as marginal to the historical enterprise, scholars have obscured both the lasting significance of these materials and the contexts of privilege in which they originally circulated.

This dissertation draws together typical textual sources, such as diaries, letters, and printed publications, with less conventional artifacts of material culture, including needlework samplers, friendship albums, and inscriptions carved into the physical architecture of houses. In this project, the “literary” extends far beyond canons or specific genres to writing to encompass the presence of text in many forms, and the “historical” transcends the boundaries of scholarly monographs and paper-based archives to include the development of museum collections, house museums, and state historical societies.

Specific sites explored in the project include the Old Manse in Concord, Massachusetts; the Wadsworth-Longfellow House and Maine Historical Society in Portland, Maine; the Dorothy Quincy Homestead outside of Boston; Mary Balch's school and the Rhode Island Historical Society in Providence; the Litchfield Female Academy in Connecticut; and the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Among the variety of individuals and groups studied are the families who resided in homes later associated with prominent authors Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, including the Emerson family, the Ripley family, the Wadsworth family, and the Longfellow family; Providence residents Julia Bowen, Rebecca Carter Jenckes, and Mary Balch; educator Sarah Pierce and her Litchfield Female Academy students; antiquarians Hannah Mather Crocker, Isaiah Thomas, and Christopher Columbus Baldwin; lineal organizations, such as the Daughters of the American Revolution and the National Society of Colonial Dames in America; and amateur historians and collectors Eva Johnston Coe, Ethel Stanwood Bolton, Emily Noyes Vanderpoel, Jane Loring Gray, Anne Longfellow Pierce, and Nathan Gould.

Committed to Memory demonstrates that educated white women in early national and antebellum New England deployed a full array of material artifacts to draw lines of belonging and exclusion on the basis of race, lineage, and learning. At the end of the century, their descendants – in social and cultural, if not lineal terms – continued to assign historical significance to artifacts and spaces of domestic life. Their work, however, untethered sets of artifacts from the localized, distinctly literary contexts of their making and attached them instead to broader narratives about the Anglo-American origins and progress of the United States. Ultimately, the scholarly distinction among objects and venues of historical knowledge has created a blinding and a silencing: it has kept from view the material complexities of female

literary engagement and authorship in the early United States, while simultaneously allowing the narratives about gender, nation, and belonging embedded in those objects to stand uncontextualized.

Introduction

Two women, a windowpane, and four lines of verse. The women: Sarah Kemble Knight and Hannah Mather Crocker, two Bostonians who resided in the same house at the opening and closing, respectively, of the eighteenth century. Each was recognized in her lifetime for her intellect, her writing, and her connection to prominent men. In 1676, Knight's father Thomas Kemble, a merchant, built the house in Boston's North End that Crocker's family later occupied. Knight, who was well-known for her skill in transcribing legal documents, resided there in childhood, and later widowhood, until the 1710s, when she moved to her daughter and son-in-law's home in Connecticut.¹ Crocker, a direct descendant of the trifecta of Reverends Richard, Increase, and Cotton Mather, and on her mother's side, the niece of a colonial governor, was born in 1752. She spent the later part of her life publishing moral essays and enshrining her family's intellectual and social legacies in a number of New England's leading historical collections.² The windowpane Crocker remembered from her childhood. It had been in the house since Knight's time, and etched onto its glass were four lines of verse that Knight had written upon her arrival home from a four-month journey in 1704. Though saved when the windows were reglazed in the 1760s, the precious pane was destroyed in the upheaval of Boston's occupation by the British in 1775.

In 1825, Hannah Mather Crocker recorded this history in manuscript form for her friend and fellow antiquarian Isaiah Thomas. The journal Knight had kept during her 1704 travels had

¹ Sargent Bush, Jr., "Sarah Kemble Knight, 1666-1727," *Legacy* 12, no. 2 (1995), 112-120.

² Hannah Mather Crocker, *Reminiscences and Traditions of Old Boston*, eds. Eileen Hunt Botting and Sarah Houser (Boston: New England Historic and Genealogical Society, 2011), xiv-xvi.

just appeared in print for the first time, and Crocker was already at work on a history of Boston in which the diarist, her adventures, and their shared residence would feature. In her memo, Crocker revealed that the lines of verse, unlike the windowpane, had not been lost but “committed to memory”:

*Through many toils and many frights
Now I've returned poor Sarah Knights
Over great rocks and many stones,
God has preserv'd from fractur'd Bones.*

Isaiah Thomas, in turn, affixed Crocker's recollection to the end papers of the printed *Journals of Madam Knight*. Printed diary and manuscript history, the remembered windowpane and its verse nested within, together entered the collection of the American Antiquarian Society that October.³

Compare these figures, objects, and memories from 1825 with the appearance of the same four lines of verse in a scholarly anthology of early New England poetry published in 1943. By then, Sarah Knight's travel journal had circulated in print for over a century and had emerged as a key source on colonial social customs. Drawing from the newest edition of the work, published in 1935, along with a biography of the author printed by a Boston historical society, scholar Harold S. Jantz of Princeton prepared his entry for Knight. She was one of five named women to appear in his 113-page bibliography.⁴

Jantz listed six poems – “verses of a lady,” as he referred to them – under Knight's name, five from the printed journal and one of four lines that was recorded in the biography. Of this last poem, he noted: “scratched on a pane of glass in the old Knight mansion, later occupied by

³ Hannah Mather Crocker, mss. note in *The Journals of Madam Knight, and the Rev. Mr. Buckminster* (New York: Wilder and Campbell, 1825), American Antiquarian Society (hereafter AAS); Isaiah Thomas donation, Oct. 27, 1825, Donations, 1813-1829, Folio vol. 17.1, American Antiquarian Society Records, AAS; Crocker, *Reminiscences and Traditions*.

⁴ *The Journal of Madam Knight, With an Introductory Note by George P. Winship* (New York: P. Smith, 1935); Anson Titus, “Madam Sarah Knight, Her Diary and Her Times, 1666-1726,” *The Bostonian Society Publications* 9 (Boston: Old State House, 1912): 101-128; Harold S. Jantz, “The First Century of New England Verse,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 53, no 2 (Oct. 1943): 395-508.

Samuel Mather. The lines were later rehearsed by Mather to Isaiah Thomas, who recorded them.”⁵ Leaving aside for a moment the erasure of Hannah Mather Crocker’s essential role in remembering and recording the lines, the inclusion of the windowpane poem was notable. The rest of the bibliography indexed verses that originated and circulated on paper. For Jantz, the windowpane stood out as “the strangest kind of manuscript in our literary annals,” the notion of writing on glass as curiously alien as Knight’s “remarkable combination of Romanticism a century too soon and of echoes of old nursery rhymes [...] out of the deep past.”⁶

What Hannah Mather Crocker and other white women in New England committed to memory in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, scholars like Harold Jantz had committed to memory in a very different sense by the middle of the twentieth. Crocker’s recollection of Knight was a history grounded in domestic space and household objects, conferred across generations in stories told, witnessed, remembered, and written.⁷ Her dedication to the practice of memory encompassed texts, objects, and spaces; poetry and prose; changes in household and civic life; and familial and institutional repositories.

Crocker had no place in the history Jantz purveyed. Professional history anchored in universities gathered momentum in the late nineteenth century, with the establishment of the first graduate seminar in the field at Johns Hopkins University in 1880, the founding of a professional organization, the American Historical Association (AHA), in 1884, and the launch of its attendant scholarly journal, the *American Historical Review*, a decade later in 1895. Although amateur historians participated in the AHA and its governance well into the 1920s, by the time Jantz was writing in the early 1940s, AHA presidents overwhelmingly held both doctoral degrees

⁵ Jantz, “First Century of New England Verse,” 327, 442.

⁶ Jantz, “First Century of New England Verse,” 328, 327.

⁷ On the imbrication of domestic space, material objects, and memory among a group of Philadelphia women writers, see Susan Stabile, *Memory’s Daughters: The Material Culture of Remembrance in Eighteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

and academic appointments.⁸ For professionals in the academy in Jantz's era, history rested on archival documents, specialized topics, scholarly literature, and the validation of fellow academics. By and large the actors in this history were white men, and to the extent that white women or people of color appeared, they were treated, often condescendingly, as exceptions.⁹ A similar reorganization and revaluation had taken place in the field of literature, where critics deemed many works by women too sentimental, too superficial, or too derivative to merit inclusion in the canon.¹⁰ The knowledge Crocker had recorded, for instance, did appear in her absence, but in a transmuted form that emphasized Knight's femininity and the strangeness of her writing's tone and form. In these erasures and narrow framings, scholars excised from history and consigned to memory the objects, spaces, and stories by which everyday people engaged with the past.

In these acts of validation and dismissal, scholars in effect drew a gendered distinction between history, that which can be studied to extend knowledge, and memory, that which at best decorates the past, and at worst, distorts it. "Professionalism," historian Bonnie Smith notes, "is

⁸ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 47-49.

⁹ John Higham, "The Construction of American History," in *Writing American History: Essays on Modern Scholarship*, 105-117 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1970), 114; Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 47-60; Bonnie Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), esp. 103-129; Julie Des Jardines, *Women and the Historical Enterprise in America: Gender, Race, and the Politics of Memory, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 13-51. While not disputing the overall trajectory of professional history, the rest of Des Jardines's book shows that white and African American women historians working at the margins of the profession in the first half of the twentieth century pioneered methodological strategies, such as 'history from below' or using multiple lens of analysis, that academic historians adopted in the post-war decades.

¹⁰ Publication in print likewise became a more telling feature of literary merit than in prior centuries, when works circulated in manuscript might yet be considered "published." Paul Lauter, "Caste, Class, and Canon," 1981, in *Feminisms Redux: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, eds. Robyn Warhol-Down and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 70-91; Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), esp. 186-202; David D. Hall, *Ways of Writing: The Practice and Politics of Text-Making in Seventeenth Century New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 29-80.

a relationship dependent on discredited voices and devalued narratives.”¹¹ In this case, gender served as a powerful arbiter: femininity cloaked the voices and narratives – as well as their attendant sources and spaces of circulation – that professional scholars discredited. This process heightened the gendered divides perceived to exist between particular spaces (public and private), forms of narration (in print and with objects), and practices of memory (‘men narrate, women curate’¹²). In setting apart from historical study antiquarians like Crocker, narratives of domestic life, and objects like etched windowpanes, these distinctions created a fragmented picture of American cultural life from earlier centuries.

The professionalization movement not only imposed hierarchies upon different forms of knowledge but also separated them into distinct specializations. Where once there were the encompassing categories of “antiquarianism” or history, there emerged natural history, archaeology, art history, bibliography, and so on, each with distinct lines of inquiry and methods.¹³ Under this rubric, an etched windowpane like Knight’s, for example, might be studied as an architectural element devoid of literary context, or, as it was in Jantz’s volume, a literary work whose architectural placement was beside the point. Another mark against amateurs was their willingness to build narratives across these emerging disciplinary distinctions. To discuss art in one breath and poetry in the next, to narrate history in too literary a tone, or to

¹¹ Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 10.

¹² In his landmark article “History and the Study of Memory,” David Glassberg, likely picking up on the gendered processes this dissertation traces, observed, “It seems in the U.S. that men narrate history as a succession of events, whereas women curate history as a web of objects and places.” Roundtable responses to the article from David Lowenthal and Michael Kammen took up Glassberg’s statement as a settled, static fact. Kammen disputed it by naming men who had served as early curators at Williamsburg and Valley Forge – curation, it seemed, was masculine terrain too – while Lowenthal declared that “economic shifts and modern feminism began to rectify gender inequities” in historical practice. David Glassberg, “History and the Study of Memory,” *Public Historian* 18, no. 2 (Spring 1996), 22; Michael Kammen, “Public History and the Uses of Memory,” *Public Historian* 19, no. 2 (Spring 1997), 51; David Lowenthal, “History and Memory,” *Public Historian* 19, no. 2 (Spring 1997), 38-39.

¹³ Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 151-152; Ian Tyrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 25-40.

incorporate “heterogeneous materials” indiscriminately into a single study indicated the intellectual tepidness of one’s work.¹⁴

Scholarly communities still live with the consequences of this shift towards professionalism and specialization. Its echoes can be discerned in the fraught treatment “domestic” subjects (and sources) received from white feminist historians seeking legitimacy within the academy for themselves and for the field of women’s history in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁵ Its repercussions sound in both the reticence of academic historians to pursue artifacts of material culture and their readiness to associate those artifacts with marginal groups for whom the preferred channel of study, paper-based documents, is limited or unavailable.¹⁶ Its reverberations ripple through the notion, still virulent in many academic settings, that public history is less rigorous, less reliable, and less valuable than traditional scholarship.¹⁷ These professional undercurrents in no small part have inspired this project. The chapters that follow historicize their emergence and mark their gendered character.

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¹⁴ Smith, *The Gender of History*, 160-172, esp. 168-169.

¹⁵ In their efforts to work within, then overcome the prevailing logic of “separate spheres,” these thinkers obscured the privileges middle-class white women had exercised within household spaces and through the ideology of domesticity. Linda K. Kerber “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” *Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (June 1988): 9-39; Leila J. Rupp et al, “Women’s History in the New Millennium: A Retrospective Analysis of Barbara Welter’s ‘The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860,’” *Journal of Women’s History* 14, no. 1 (2002): 149-173.

¹⁶ Leora Auslander, “Beyond Words,” *American Historical Review* 110, no. 4 (Oct. 2005): 1015-1016; John Styles and Amanda Vickery, eds. *Gender, Taste, & Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830* (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, Distributed by Yale University Press, 2006), 21.

¹⁷ For a recent articulation on this issue by the heads of the discipline’s leading professional body for academic historians, see Anthony T. Grafton and James Grossman, “No More Plan B: A Very Modest Proposal for Graduate Programs in History,” *Perspectives on History* 49, no. 7 (Oct. 2011), <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/october-2011/no-more-plan-b#>. The rhetoric in this piece and follow-up initiatives by the AHA advanced the case for stronger career diversity for professional historians, rather than a change in the discipline’s relationship to those engaging with the past without professional training. The latter has been a focal point of conversation in public history circles in recent years. Compare AHA’s online materials related to the “Career Diversity for Historians” initiative with the National Council for Public History’s series on “pulling back the curtain” of historical work. “Career Diversity for Historians,” <https://www.historians.org/jobs-and-professional-development/career-diversity-for-historians>; “Pulling Back the Curtain Series,” June 23-August 13, 2014, *History@Work: The NCPH Blog*, <http://ncph.org/history-at-work/tag/pulling-back-the-curtain/>.

Committed to Memory examines how the materials, producers, and practices of history change in resonance over time and what ideas about gender have to do with those changes. Specifically, it sets together bookending moments of the nineteenth century to contrast the two paradigms of “committing to memory” outlined above, focusing on the physical objects and spaces of white women’s reading and writing to do so. For the first paradigm, the dissertation reestablishes the close links among acts of reading, writing, and remembering in the early American Republic and highlights the constitutive place of material artifacts within those cultural practices. In exploring the second paradigm, I focus on the materially-grounded acts of memory that continued to flourish among white women in the late-nineteenth century. The defining features of their work – their concern for artifacts and spaces of domestic life, their evocation of the sentimental, and their willingness to entertain as authentic traditions passed down through generations – together became a foil against which academic professionals set their own conventions of historical significance, objectivity, and accuracy. In other words, I narrate the emergence of professionalism not within the walls of the academy, but among the everyday historical practices those walls sought to preclude.

This project draws together typical textual sources, such as diaries, letters, and printed publications, with less conventional artifacts of material culture, including needlework samplers, friendship albums, and texts carved into the physical architecture of houses. In addition to paper-based archives, I locate and examine acts of historical engagement in museum collections, historic houses, and local commemorative events. Taken together, these sources illuminate, in the words of architectural and material culture historian Bernard Herman, how “people anchored their lives in the material world.”¹⁸ Spaces and objects caught up in the routines of everyday life

¹⁸ Bernard L. Herman, *Town House: Architecture and Material Life in the Early American City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 1.

in the past capture a range of social relationships and contests of meaning: more than bystanders to the “real” history that unfolds on paper, they carry traces of their making, use, and preservation that are ripe for examination and interpretation.¹⁹

In this dissertation, the “literary” extends far beyond canons or specific genres of writing to encompass the presence of text in many forms. As a broad cohort of scholars has noted, late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century literary activity drew together oral, scribal, and printed forms of communication.²⁰ Individual and collective forms of this activity, moreover, operated complementarily: what one heard in sermon or oration one might record in manuscript or later buy in print; these written texts, in turn, might inspire solitary reflection or be read aloud and discussed in the midst of an evening’s conversation with friends. Rather than depicting these forms of literary engagement in a hierarchal progression, in which scribal writing follows from, improves, and displaces oral narration, and printed texts do likewise to manuscripts, this approach has illuminated not just the persistence of scribal and oral cultures in the age of print, but also the mutually-constitutive roles each form played in the practices of readers and writers.²¹ Literary engagement also drew from, mingled with, and influenced social identities and material privileges. In the early Republic, one’s work to craft a friendship album, to translate classical

¹⁹ Robert Blair St. George, ed. *Material Culture in America, 1600-1860* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 4, 7; Styles and Vickery, *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture*, 21-22; Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 22, 41-43.

²⁰ Robert Gross and Mary Kelley, eds. *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*, A History of the Book in America, Vol. 2 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Candy Gunther Brown, *The Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading in America, 1789-1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Carolyn Eastman, *A Nation of Speechifiers: Making an American Public after the Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

²¹ Mary Kelley, ““Talents Committed to Your Care”: Reading and Writing Radical Abolitionism in Antebellum America,” *New England Quarterly* 88.1 (Mar. 2015), 39; D.F. McKenzie, “Speech-Manuscript-Print,” in *Making Meaning: ‘Printers of the Mind’ and other Essays*, ed. Peter D. McDonald and Michael Suarez, S.J. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 237-58; Sandra Gustafson, “The Emerging Media of Early America,” in *Cultural Narratives: Textualities and Performance in American Culture before 1900*, ed. Sandra Gustafson and Caroline F. Sloat (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 341-65.

verse, to converse in a reading circle, or to print a newspaper could, depending on one's social position, uphold or contest prevailing ideas about gender, class, and race.²²

Likewise, here the “historical” transcends the boundaries of scholarly monographs and paper-based archives. Scholars of public memory have demonstrated that narratives about the past come in many forms and are subject to change over time. Whose stories are preserved and told, through what means, and with what objectives offer insights into the priorities and politics of commemoration in a given context.²³ In this regard, the elements of the past that are downplayed or left out of historical narratives are as revealing as those that are foregrounded.²⁴ Changes to the form and function of public monuments, local historical societies, family record-keeping, museums, and heritage tourists sites, no less than those in academic historiography, illuminate evolving, often competing understandings of the American past and of its purpose in the present.²⁵ *Committed to Memory* shows that gender has played a decisive role since the late

²² Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 120-147; Kelley, ““Talents Committed to Your Care””; Caroline Winterer, *The Mirror of Antiquity: American Women and the Classical Tradition, 1750-1900* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African-American Literary Societies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Phillip H. Round, *Removable Type: Histories of the Book in Indian Country* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

²³ Work in this vein that has influenced my thinking includes Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999); Max Page and Randall Mason, eds. *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Seth C. Bruggeman, *Here, George Washington Was Born: Memory, Material Culture, and the Public History of a National Monument* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008); Michael C. Batinski, *Pastkeepers in a Small Place: Five Centuries in Deerfield, Massachusetts* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004); Charlene Mires, *Independence Hall in American Memory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); J. Samaine Lockwood, *Archives of Desire: The Queer Historical Work of New England Regionalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

²⁴ Numerous scholars of memory have addressed this point, but powerful evocations of its consequences include Kenneth E. Foote, *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997); David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press); Tiya Miles, *The House on Diamond Hill: A Cherokee Plantation Story* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

²⁵ David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 6-9.

nineteenth century in distinguishing what materials merit academic study and what forms of historical engagement command respect.

While reclaiming white women in early and late nineteenth-century New England as actors in the production of history, my project brings renewed attention to the markers of race, class, and nationality in which they were invested and to which the narratives they produced about family, community, and intellectual life contributed. In this, I take the lead from feminist scholars who see gender itself as a historical process, constantly defined and refined in conjunction with other facets of identity.²⁶ As thinkers from Judith Butler to Jeanne Boydston have theorized, gender is made, sustained, and reshaped through a constellation of daily practices, performances, and ideologies. The gendered subject, then, is not a predetermined, unified whole but operates in a perpetual state of becoming.²⁷ This dissertation's exploration of changing cultural practices, then, also marks out changes over the course of the nineteenth century in what objects, activities, and settings white Americans used to refine the parameters of womanhood.

Although New England serves as the geographic focus of *Committed to Memory*, the project is less a regional study than a study of regionalism. New Englanders long have portrayed their region as the wellspring of American literary, culture, and values. Rather than take that claim at face value, this project, similar to work undertaken by scholars including Dona Brown

²⁶ Women of color feminists advanced much of this work, not only to highlight the narrow focus of women's history on white women but also to illuminate the unspoken politics of identity at play within feminism and the profession of history. Barbara J. Fields, "“Categories of Analysis”?: Not in My Book," in *Viewpoints: Excerpts from the ACLS Conference on the Humanities in the 1990s*, American Council of Learned Societies Occasional Papers Series 10 (1989), 29-34; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African American Women's History and the Meta-Language of Race," *Signs* 17 (1992), 251-274; Elsa Barkley Brown, "“What Has Happened Here”: The Politics of Difference in Women's History and Feminist Politics," *Feminist Studies* 18, no. 2 (1992), 295-312.

²⁷ Judith Butler, "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire," in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 1-34, and "From Interiority to Gender Performatives," in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 361-368; Jeanne Boydston, "Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis," *Gender and History* 20, no. 3 (2008), 558-583.

and Joseph Conforti, explores what figures, stories, and rhetoric New Englanders used in positioning their region as the epitome of the nation itself.²⁸

The picture of the early nineteenth century life that emerges as a result of this methodological approach shows educated white women in urban and village settings around New England actively engaging with the past in their day-to-day activity as readers and writers. They traced the genealogies of the original white settlers of their towns and kept local vital statistics; they followed the adult lives of former schoolmates in the pages of their friendship albums; they visited and told stories about their families' ancestral homes; they stitched poetic memorials to dead loved ones with linen and silk. They did so as students and as teachers, as single women and married, as heads of households and as dependents, leaning on the privileges of lineage and learning to shape how and by whom these varied articles would be encountered and remembered.

This aspect of the project contributes to the burgeoning literature examining how public memory helped to form the boundaries of citizenship and civic participation in the early United States, and especially in New England. *Committed to Memory* joins these scholars in demonstrating the active, power-laden character of history-making in the early Republic and antebellum periods, and pushes at the long-standing notion that "tradition" and commemoration emerged in a meaningful way in the United States only after the Civil War.²⁹ Joanne Pope Melish, Jean O'Brien, and Margot Minardi have demonstrated that white New Englanders actively used commemorative practices – of history-writing and of monument-building – to project the idea of a "historically free, white New England" in the first half of the nineteenth

²⁸ Dona Brown, *Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995); Joseph A. Conforti, *Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity from the Pilgrims to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

²⁹ For instance, the period before 1870 functions as a prehistory in Michael Kammen's influential *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

century.³⁰ This dissertation demonstrates that memories recorded in manuscript form, family ties inscribed in domestic architecture, and articles of clothing donated to early museum collections anchored these narratives in the practices of literary sociability and in the material world of taste.

In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, amateur historians continued to use material objects and domestic spaces to convey and to record ideas about the past. Members of lineal organizations collected, catalogued, and exhibited pieces of needlework, local historians documented window etchings, and house museum associations preserved (and reimagined) the domestic spaces in which these artifacts were found.³¹ They viewed these materials as critical conveyers of historical knowledge, and they exercised their sense of social authority in the present in laying claim to their meaning. Their acts of preservation untethered sets of artifacts from the localized, distinctly literary contexts of their making and attached them instead to broader narratives about the Anglo-American origins and progress of the United States.

In these new formulations the rhetoric of domesticity displaced the literary associations of, among other artifacts, ornamental needlework. As Marla Miller and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich have compellingly demonstrated, late-nineteenth century ideas about “American homespun” erased the nuances of expertise and labor that existed among needlecraft practitioners earlier in the country’s history.³² Such narratives flattened complex household artifacts, forms of labor,

³⁰ Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and “Race” in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 210 (quote); Jean O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Margot Minardi, *Making Slavery History: Abolitionism and the Politics of Memory in Massachusetts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

³¹ Ethel Stanwood Bolton and Eva Johnston Coe, *American Samplers* (Boston: Massachusetts Society of Colonial Dames in America, 1921); [Emily Hoffman Gilman Noyes], *A Family History in Letters and Documents, 1667-1837...* (St. Paul, MN: Privately printed, 1919); West, *Domesticating History*, esp. 39-91.

³² As both scholars narrate, these ideas collapsed time and textile. The Revolution-era United States comes to stand in for the entire colonial period, while different types of needlework – quilting, embroidery, dress-making – which required varying levels of skill and very likely would have been produced by different types of people – groups of women, elite girls in school, and professional artisans, respectively – are presented as the handiwork of individual, middling-to-elite white women. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stores in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Verso, 2002); Marla Miller, *The Needle’s Eye: Women and Work in the Age of*

and records of social position into a singular mold of domesticity and of womanhood. In setting ornamental network among other artifacts of literary practice – including architectural inscriptions, friendship albums, and the domestic spaces where reading and writing took place – this project expands on Miller and Ulrich’s findings.

Committed to Memory locates the consequences of these domesticated histories not only in the skewed images of early American needlework and womanhood that circulate in public memory but also in the reticence of academic professionals to deal seriously with material culture and everyday forms of historical engagement. The late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century accumulation of feminine associations – from “amateur” and “fanciful” to “schoolgirl art” and “quaint relics” – that grew within and around the work of everyday historians masked the webs of social belonging and exclusion embedded in their accounts of the past. The mechanism of gender, as a set of evolving cultural conventions applied to particular actors and objects, helped to create a seemingly neutral and universal vision of American womanhood.

Summary of Chapters

The chapters proceed recursively, tracing the same rough chronology of the long nineteenth century with different materials in distinct settings around New England. This organizational structure allows for the intricate reconstitution of specific artifacts within the context of their making and shows concretely the literary, social, and spatial resonances they carried. These accumulating narratives also capture the pervasiveness and the nuance with which the twentieth century’s emerging history professionals consigned to memory artifacts of material culture, those who preserved them, and the spaces in which they did so.

Revolution (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), and *Betsy Ross and the Making of America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2010).

The first two chapters recover a range of literary practices that flourished beyond the page in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Chapter 1 examines a previously uncollected body of texts made on the windows and walls of houses. Unlike other architectural markings, including those now considered graffiti, these domestic inscriptions, as I classify them, reflected everyday activities of reading and writing, the spatial politics of households, and the consolidation, through architecture, of social ties. Their long-term treatment exemplifies the gendered distinctions this project highlights. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, examples of the practice that could be associated, however tenuously, with the genius or patriotism of famous men became prized features of historic houses that attracted public notice. Those without such associations became evidence of superficial courtship rituals or of mindless graffiti. Whatever their disparate popular resonances, domestic inscriptions have escaped the notice of scholars of U.S. literary culture.

Chapter 2 takes a body of sources well-studied in the field of American decorative arts, the needlework samplers of early national Providence, Rhode Island, and resituates them among the books, diaries, and notes of their makers. The seamless transitions these young women exercised across ink and stitch, literary genres, and the physical spaces of their growing port city epitomize scholar Catherine Kelly's conception of the new nation's "republic of taste."³³ Works of needle and pen together mapped the constellation of sites, sensibilities, and social boundaries the young women who made them would thread in their daily excursions around Providence. Remembered later in isolation, samplers became markers of youthful hands and the youthful nation. As with domestic inscriptions, ready narratives about Anglo-American heritage and domesticity eclipsed samplers' ties to reading, writing, and spatial authority.

³³ Catherine E. Kelly, *Republic of Taste: Art, Politics, and Everyday Life in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

The next two chapters continue in this vein of looking beyond paper, but their analytic focus tilts more decidedly towards acts of memory. Chapters 1 and 2 demonstrate the enriched understandings made possible by broadening the “what” of historical studies of literary culture. Chapters 3 and 4 apply those findings to two arenas that long have preoccupied feminist explorations of women’s intellectual life – domestic space and educational ventures – to recover the everyday practices of memory embedded there in the early nineteenth century. These chapters demonstrate how hierarchies of public and private, of printed authorship and scribal writing, and of serious and ornamental learning that emerged in the late nineteenth century obscured the fluid practices that had come before.

The third chapter focuses on the Wadsworth-Longfellow house in Portland, Maine and captures the changing character of commemorative activities in domestic space. For the Wadsworth sisters, who resided there in the late-eighteenth century, the house figured as a site of intermingled reading and remembering. Much like the coterie of Philadelphia women Susan Stabile has deftly analyzed, the Wadsworth sisters used the spaces and objects of the domestic interior to organize their sentiments, their writing, and their memories of absent friends.³⁴ Mapped through their testimony, the spatial distinctions that mattered were not those of public and private so much as those of household labor and literary sociability. By the late nineteenth century, the residence’s connection to world-renowned author Henry Wadsworth Longfellow became its most prominent feature. With its formal opening to the public in 1901, the material and narrative orientation of the Wadsworth-Longfellow house came to revolve around “the Poet” and the history of his budding authorial talents.

Chapter 4 turns to women’s education and focuses on the historical engagement of Sarah Pierce and her students at the Litchfield Female Academy in Connecticut. Sarah Pierce’s

³⁴ Susan Stabile, *Memory’s Daughters*, 14, 30-31.

commitment to history manifested in her curriculum and the four-volume textbook she authored, as scholars long have recognized. But it also could be found in more ‘ornamental’ sources, including a small manuscript volume of family histories she titled “Grandmother’s Tales,” and in the friendship albums of her students. This chapter, as in the ones preceding it, also highlights the historical work undertaken by white women in the final decade of the nineteenth century to preserve the artifacts of Litchfield Female Academy and the legacy of Sarah Pierce. The efforts of these women, which relied on existing social networks defined by race, class, and education, produced an archive of documents and objects, as well as a two-volume history of the school. Though taken up only piecemeal at the time, this work laid the foundation for future scholarship on Litchfield, its educational institutions, and female education in the new Republic.

The final chapter examines the constitutive role women’s historical work played in the nation’s first institutions for collecting and preserving the past. Scholarship on how historical societies and local commemorations contributed to U.S. nation-building in the period before the Civil War has blossomed in recent years, but how women participated in these enterprises remains an underdeveloped element of the story.³⁵ Here I focus on the American Antiquarian Society (AAS), an institution founded in 1812 to collect, preserve, and spread knowledge about all aspects of the North American past. In its early decades of activity, AAS drew heavily on the physical and social infrastructure of domestic spaces and readily accepted into its collections material, as well as textual, artifacts. Though its leadership and elected members remained exclusively male, white women shaped the scope of the institution as donors, visitors, and

³⁵ Michael A. McDonnell et al, eds. *Remembering the Revolution: Memory, History and Nation Making from Independence to the Civil War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013); François Weil, *Family Trees: The History of Genealogy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Whitney A. Martinko, “Byes Versus Boston: Historic Houses, Urban Development, and the Public Good in an Improving City,” *Massachusetts Historical Review* 18 (2016), 119-151; Alea Henle, “The Widow’s Mite: Hannah Mather Crocker and the Mather Libraries,” *Information and Culture* 48, no. 3 (July 2013), 323-343.

correspondents. Beginning in the 1880s, AAS's mission and scope as a learned society pivoted towards the emerging professional conventions of the academy. Stripping away its material objects collections and the public touchstone of its museum, AAS disowned those parts of the institution that women had most profoundly shaped.

Committed to Memory brings to light evidence of authorship on linen and glass, not just on paper, and recovers historical work in museum exhibitions and historic houses, not just in academic settings. Collectively, its chapters chart a transition from fluid to fragmented practices over the long nineteenth century, in which the feminization of particular materials and spaces served as an animating force. Seamless movements characterized the cultural life and commemorative work of educated white women in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Their agile transitions among physical spaces, different forms of writing and remembering, and a repertoire of cultural practices reflected spatial, social, and intellectual authority. By the turn of the twentieth century, historical work among professionals, and, to a lesser degree, amateurs, rested on acts of separation and stratification. Discrete, specialized lines of inquiry, documentary sources on paper, and methodical, scientific interpretation defined emerging academic conventions. While amateur historians still took up the household objects and domestic spaces so central to white women's earlier acts of reading, writing, and remembering, their work, too, siphoned off the literary, intellectual connotations of these materials and replaced them with ready narratives of sentimentalism and domesticity.

In labeling these artifacts, sites, and practices as marginal to the historical enterprise, scholars have obscured both the lasting significance of these materials and the contexts of privilege in which they originally circulated. For instance, the sampler that hung on a parlor wall in Providence in the 1790s and depicted a public building was not just an feminine ornament but

a statement of shared taste and belonging in a particular place; when it appeared a century later among other artifacts in an exhibition of “colonial relics,” it did not merely decorate the past but declare it as the purview of educated Anglo-Americans and their descendants. Ultimately, the scholarly distinction among objects and venues of historical knowledge has created a blinding and a silencing. It has kept from view the material complexities of female literary engagement and authorship in the early United States, while simultaneously allowing the narratives about gender, nation, and belonging embedded in those objects to stand uncontextualized.

Chapter 1

The Writing on the Wall: Domestic Inscription in New England

In the spring of 1834, house workers repairing a wooden building in Boston made a notable discovery. Etched into one of the structure's windowpanes were several inscriptions dating back to the 1780s. The finding merited a short notice in one of the city papers, in which the printers reproduced the window text, maintaining the original orthography, in full (fig. 1.1).

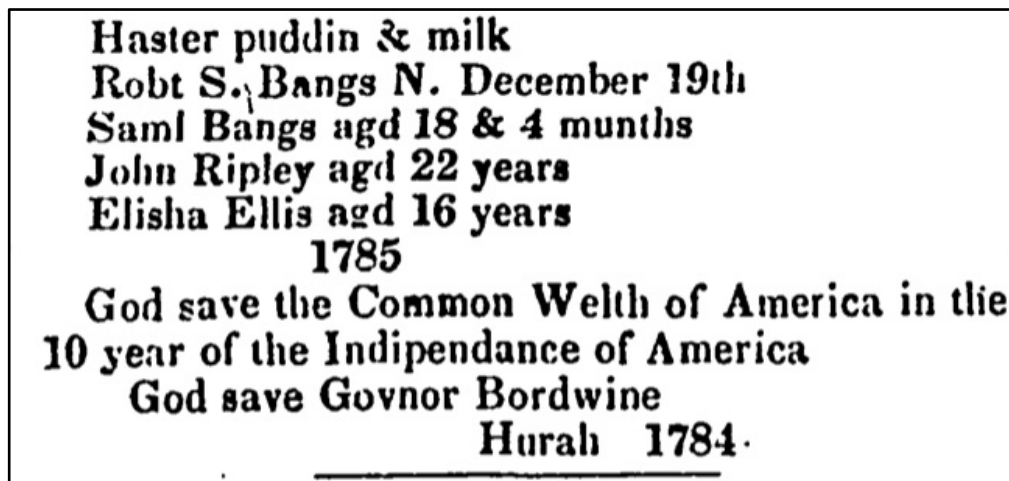


Figure 1.1. Newspaper notice of inscriptions, *Saturday Morning Transcript* (Boston), May 17, 1834. America's Historical Newspapers.

No other commentary appended the report, but the direct allusions to the era of American independence would have resonated with readers. Elsewhere on the page was a notice about the orator for that summer's anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and an update on the efforts to finally complete the Bunker Hill Monument, with a new call for funds from those that “glory in the name of YANKEE.”¹

¹ “Municipal,” “Bunker Hill Monument,” and “The Sons of New England,” in *Saturday Morning Transcript* (Boston), May 17, 1834, AHN.

Likewise, the matter-of-fact treatment of the fifty-year-old inscriptions may well have reflected antebellum readers' familiarity, in print and in their material lives, with the phenomenon of window etching. The practice of architectural inscription – the marking of the physical features of a building outside its time of construction – had roots in Elizabethan England.² By the antebellum period, inscription was well-entrenched in the United States and could be found in both printed and material forms. In addition to pieces describing colonial or Revolutionary-era inscriptions associated with well-known figures or places, readers might encounter references to inscriptions in short fiction and verse.³ American newspapers and periodicals had featured such work since at least the 1760s. In the handful of years surrounding the house workers' find in Boston, literary references to window inscriptions ranged from anthology printings of poet William Leggett's sentimental "Lines Written on a Pane of Glass in the House of a Friend," to satire-laced pieces rife with gendered banter.⁴ Meanwhile, the era's everyday writers continued to take to real glass as well, signing names and inscribing verse into the windows – or walls – of homes, inns, school buildings, and work spaces.

In the mid-1830s United States, then, one might encounter window inscriptions as historical artifacts, literary devices, and an ongoing phenomenon. Texts coexisted and moved among printed, handwritten, and architecturally-emplaced forms. Their content might reflect sentimental feelings, ties among close friends or kin, belonging in a larger body politic, or some combination thereof. Dwelling spaces, in particular, figured as prominent sites for inscriptions.

Accounting for etchings on windows and writing on walls pushes the contours of late-eighteenth

² Juliet Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts in Early Modern England* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 29-72.

³ "History of Methodism on Long Island," *Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion's Herald*, Jan. 9, 1829, p. 13, ProQuest American Periodicals (hereafter APS); "Reminiscences of Ballston and Saratoga Springs: There is Nothing Constant but Change," *The Knickerbocker; or New York Monthly Magazine* (Aug. 1835), 96, APS.

⁴ See printings of William Leggett's poem in *The Critic. A Weekly Review of Literature, Fine Arts, and the Drama*, Jan. 17, 1829, p. 188, APS, and *The New York Book of Poetry* (New York: George Dearborn, 1837), 138. For works deploying gendered banter for amusement, see "Soft Lips," *Boston Traveler*, Dec. 18, 1827, AHN, and "Chronicles of the City of Gotham," *New-York Morning Herald*, Jun. 26, 1830, AHN.

and early-nineteenth century literary culture beyond the page, while also affirming much of what scholars have noted about that culture's currents of transatlantic connection, intertextuality, and sociality. Simply put, architectural inscriptions – especially those in houses – were an integral part of early American literary culture.

Today these artifacts exist beyond the margins of scholarly examinations of early American reading and writing. One is more likely to encounter window etchings on a tour of a historic house than in the pages of a monograph. Those aware of the existence of these artifacts are not literary historians, but preservation specialists and volunteers at historic sites. And while mentions of the practice do exist in sources found in paper-based archives, a researcher finds them by chance, not by finding aid or index. With a few notable exceptions, the phenomenon of marking architecture with text has been oversimplified in popular memory, while being overlooked almost entirely in academic circles. Where inscriptions can be associated with a well-known literary or historical figure, they often are interpreted as distinctive or even as “original writing.”⁵ Where such associations cannot be made, by contrast, inscriptions fall into the less celebrated categories of graffiti – a phenomenon with which we still live, but may disparage – or of bygone curiosities – outmoded rituals beyond which we may be pleased to have progressed.

We can best understand these markings in homes as domestic inscriptions, acts of writing in which the production of text and of place worked in tandem. Archaeologists, anthropologists, and cultural geographers assert that inscription is the meeting of “people and place,” the making of signs in the natural or built environment to mark physical, political, or cultural exclusion and

⁵ See the comment of a recent visitor to the Old Manse, once the home of writer Nathaniel Hawthorne, on a popular travel website: “...It was wonderful to see the original writings of Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne that each engraved on the window panes...it almost felt as though they were still there.” Jon H., Review of the Old Manse, Concord, MA, 9 Sept. 2015. Trip Advisor. Accessed 6 March 2016. <www.tripadvisor.com/attraction_review-g60901-d104834-Reviews-The_Old_Manse-Concord_Massachusetts.html>.

belonging.⁶ Different types of inscription carry different features, and the meaning given to those features – and therefore to the reading of the inscription itself – can change with temporal or social context.⁷ Most simply defined, domestic inscriptions are texts produced by writing on or carving into the physical fabric of houses. The “domestic” part of the label signals an important specification. The inscriptions collected and examined here all come from living spaces that would eventually stand as emblematic of “domesticity”: dwellings for white, middling- to elite families in the northern United States.

As artifacts inseparable from the material spaces of their making and remembering, this particular subset of architectural inscriptions illuminates how the ideology of domesticity obscured what Bernard Herman describes as the contested and contingent “enactment of everyday relationships” that take place in living spaces.⁸ Unlike builders’ marks or the records of laborers set into service spaces, domestic inscriptions emerged from everyday practices of leisured sociability, often in household spaces associated with reading, reflection, or conversation. Like other material features in middling and elite homes in the late-eighteenth and

⁶ Bruno David and Meredith Wilson, eds., *Inscribed Landscapes: Marking and Making Place* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), vii (Preface); Jeff Oliver and Tim Neal, eds., *Wild Signs: Graffiti in Archaeology and History. Studies in Contemporary and Historical Archaeology 6* (BAR International Series 2074, 2010), 1-2; Troy Lovata and Elizabeth Olton, *Understanding Graffiti: Multidisciplinary Studies from Prehistory to the Present* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2015), 12.

⁷ Graffiti in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, for instance, traditionally is characterized by markings made in public (typically urban) spaces, often illicitly and anonymously, and usually to convey sentiments ranging from the mundane (‘So-and-so was here’) to subversive (‘Fuck the police’). Civic officials and private property owners may view such markings as vandalism, while their makers and everyday viewers may emphasize their artistic, social, or political expression. For a classic take on the transgressive aspects of this practice, see Robert G. Reisner, *Graffiti: Two Thousand Years of Wall Writing* (New York: Cowles Books Company, Inc., 1971). More recent studies of graffiti, including Lovata and Olton’s 2015 collection of scholarship emphasizes the need for “more inclusive working definitions of its forms” (11-16).

Approaching graffiti from a historical perspective, Christina Lupton has noted that writing on public property only became illegal in Great Britain at the end of the eighteenth century, and Juliet Fleming stresses that the term ‘graffiti’ was not circulating in the English language until the mid-nineteenth century. Christina Lupton, *Knowing Books: The Consciousness of Mediation in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 131; Juliet Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts in Early Modern England* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 40.

⁸ Bernard L. Herman, *Town House: Architecture and Material Life in the Early American City, 1780-1830* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia by the University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 2.

early-nineteenth centuries, these marks jointly reflected spatial, social, and literary privilege.⁹ As the nineteenth century unfolded, invocations of “domestic” increasingly signaled an idealized realm characterized as private, feminine, and decorative. As numerous feminist scholars have asserted, this rhetoric justified a host of political, social, and material exclusions on the basis of race, class, and national origin; it also masked ongoing contestations over the cultural meaning of womanhood, the family, and the American home.¹⁰ The changing resonance of domestic inscriptions – from deliberate records of literary engagement and spatial authority, to historical symbols of feminine fancy or masculine genius – signals the changing meanings of domestic space itself.

The first half of this chapter defines the practice and parameters of domestic inscription in the United States. I begin by outlining the archive of examples I have compiled and their distinguishing features. I then dwell on the peak era of domestic inscription-making in the United States (roughly 1770-1830), charting its appearance in printed and manuscript forms and its similarities to the records of kin and friendship kept in family bibles and albums. In the second half of the chapter, I trace the mentions these artifacts received in local and family histories at the turn of the twentieth century and show the emerging distinction made between inscriptions produced by recognized authors and anonymous writers. These historical circumstances have rendered thinking about these artifacts localized and fragmentary, even into the present.

⁹ Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1992); Bernard L. Herman, *Town House*, 33-76, esp. 38-39.

¹⁰ Scholarly literature in this vein is vast, but work especially influential to my thinking includes Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 197-230; Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 179-221; Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 141-172.

These artifacts compel us to situate specific acts of reading and writing within the very fabric of domestic architecture, intimately linking the currents of place-making in space and self-fashioning with texts that scholars have long studied independently. Windows and walls, like the pages of commonplace books or albums, were spaces for readers to mark their engagement with novels, poetry, and the sentiments of their social circle. By examining these literary artifacts within their material setting in houses, we come to new understandings of how space and social position together influenced reading and writing. The authority to inscribe, in other words, worked in tandem with the authority to inhabit a space in a particular way.

In reconstituting the connection between these artifacts and other forms of reading and writing in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, I assert that domestic inscription was integral to early American literary culture. Over time, however, the links that fused these artifacts with other forms of literary expression would be lost, replaced with allusions to romance or to a singular author's genius. Over the course of the nineteenth century, domestic inscriptions moved from being objects for *literary* consumption, created and read alongside other literary forms, to objects for a narrowly-construed type of *historical* consumption. Gendered presumptions about authorship, literary production, and historical knowledge have dictated how these objects and the spaces where they have been kept are encountered, read, and remembered.

Constituting an Archive and Defining its Artifacts

To put text on window glass is to demand that the readers of that text look *at* a surface that they otherwise would look *through*. Depending on the angle and intensity of the light coming through the window, etchings can be rendered nearly indiscernible. To catch the text, whether with the eye or a camera lens, one must peer intently and sometimes quite close-up.

One may even need to move to the edge of the window frame or tilt the head rather than view the glass straight on. Reading window etchings requires body movements distinct from those of holding and reading a book and those of looking out a window.

Domestic inscriptions, like many of the sources foregrounded in this project, are sources that scholars have found easier to look straight through than to intently study. Our notions of windows and walls as architecture and of texts as things on paper have rendered writings on the built environment nearly invisible. When we treat writing that appeared on material other than paper as mere graffiti, one scholar of early modern England has remarked, we “understate the social range of the practices of literacy.”¹¹ Not unlike the tilt of the head or angling of the body to read etchings on glass, one must adopt potentially unfamiliar methodological postures to recover these artifacts: there is no straight-on view of an archive to be had.

This work is one of the first attempts to capture the broad patterns of the making, the content, and the preservation of domestic inscriptions in the United States.¹² I have sought to gather both historical examples – physical inscriptions produced in specific spaces, extant or not – as well as literary references – the use of inscriptions as a rhetorical device in prose or verse. The historical examples demonstrate the material reality of this practice, while the literary references indicate that the act of making inscriptions for readerly purposes was widespread enough to be drawn upon within other cultural productions.

The body of domestic inscriptions drawn together and analyzed here comes from an unconventional set – and sequence – of research sites. My first exposure came in the course of a

¹¹ In the context of Elizabethan England, paper was rare, so those wishing to make text turned – with chalk, charcoal, or etching implements – to windows, walls, and furniture. Juliet Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts in Early Modern England* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 9.

¹² At select historic sites, preservation specialists have documented inscriptions in the form of National Register and National Historic Landmark forms, Historic American Building surveys, and unpublished historic structures reports for decades. Parallel to the present work, Michael Emmons of the University of Delaware is preparing a dissertation to capture the wide variety of architectural inscriptions made in the Mid-Atlantic region in the eighteenth century.

public history project conducted with the staff of a historic site in greater Philadelphia; like many viewers, I found the window etchings there a curious quirk of the house rather than evidence of any larger pattern. After stumbling over additional mentions of inscriptions by chance in a traditional manuscript collection, I began a more intensive search, visiting historic houses, poring over preservation documents, communicating with historic site staff, and crafting the right combination of keywords to produce relevant results from digital search engines (as one might imagine, searching “window AND writing” in a database of early American newspapers creates a needle in a haystack situation). Out of this approach, family and local histories published between the 1880s and 1920s proved especially fruitful in their mentions of inscription. Besides pointing me towards additional historical examples, they became sources through which to analyze the changing resonance of these artifacts at the turn of the twentieth century.¹³

As of this writing, I have identified over fifty physical examples of domestic inscription from New England, and a larger body of over a hundred examples of architectural inscription in the United States.¹⁴ These overall findings indicate some general patterns of making, as well as the obstacles in classifying these artifacts. Temporally, the domestic inscriptions I have identified in New England stretch from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, with the bulk of examples having been made between 1770 and 1830. For inscriptions on windowpanes, this timing corresponds to the expanding size, number, and quality of glass windows in middle-class

¹³ In reading these sources, I am mindful to separate the basic details of an inscription from the interpretation surrounding it and to apply each component to distinct parts of my interpretation. In other words, I trust these sources to faithfully have recorded the text of an inscription and its location, but I do not replicate claims from these sources about the maker’s intentions or the meanings of the artifacts; the former information I have used to discern the contours of domestic inscription in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the latter as evidence of how they were being understood at the turn of the twentieth.

¹⁴ These findings reflect the primary focus of my search – New England is the geographic anchor of this dissertation – but make clear an equally important point: this practice was not confined to the region. In this initial survey, I have uncovered a concentration of examples along the eastern seaboard, from Maine to Georgia, but also have turned up evidence of the practice in Midwestern states. My work thus far has been intensive, but not exhaustive; what regional particularities and variations exist await future research.

homes and the concurrent emergence of the American glass-making industry.¹⁵ While Americans did not stop marking the architectures of their houses – many of us may have experiences of charting a child’s growing height on a particular wall or door-frame – the way that public rhetoric about inscriptions changed in the middle of the nineteenth century made historical examples of the practice more legible than ongoing ones.

The types of sources, written and material, from which I have identified examples of domestic inscriptions privilege artifacts made and preserved in the houses of elites. Printed local and family histories from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries emphasized the most elaborate structures in a given community, and the buildings that have been transformed into public historic sites since that era tend to be those associated with the wealthy. Even in the broader architectural landscape, the largest, most elaborate houses of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries survive disproportionately to the humbler structures in which most of the population lived.¹⁶ In this regard, too, my choice of the qualifier “domestic” is meant to underline the historic power of that category to normalize the experiences of elite inhabitants in elite spaces and to obliterate – discursively and materially – other forms of dwelling in those spaces or elsewhere.

Although I draw on examples of domestic inscription from around New England throughout, I focus on three sites in particular: the Gilman Garrison House in Exeter, New Hampshire, the Old Manse in Concord, Massachusetts, and the Wadsworth-Longfellow House in

¹⁵ Kenneth M. Wilson, “Window Glass in America,” in *Building Early America: Contributions towards the History of a Great Industry*, ed. Charles E. Peterson (Radnor, PA: Chilton Book Company, 1976), 156-158.

¹⁶ Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 110-111; Edward A. Chappell, “Housing a Nation: The Transformation of Living Standards in Early America,” in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, eds. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University of Virginia Press, 1994), 176-178, 182. For a case study recovering the predominance of single-story dwellings in central Massachusetts, see Myron O. Stachiw and Nora Pat Small, “Tradition and Transformation: Rural Society and Architectural Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts,” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 3 (1989), 135-148.

Portland, Maine. Each site features multiple inscriptions from the late-eighteenth or early-nineteenth century, and those inscriptions, in turn, received notice in various history outlets at the turn of the twentieth century. Over the course of the twentieth century, moreover, each site transformed from private residence to house museum, making it possible to read these extant artifacts within both their original material surroundings and their current interpretation.

Domestic Inscription as Emplaced Literary Practice (ca. 1770-1830)

Literary references smatter the landscape of extant examples of domestic inscriptions, and likewise references to these sorts of inscription show up in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century literary works. Readers used architecture to mark their engagement with printed texts, and writers used their material familiarity with inscriptions as a starting premise for works on the page. Domestic inscriptions, in other words, did not exist apart from other forms of literary expression. The intertextuality of the era – the ways that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century readers excerpted pieces of writing from many sources and recombined them in albums, commonplace books, or the margins of printed volumes¹⁷ – extended to these architectural spaces.

The lines etched into one of the second-story windowpanes at the Quincy Homestead near Boston (fig. 1.2), for instance, come directly from an eighteenth-century novel. The

¹⁷ Steven Colclough, “Recovering the Reader: Commonplace Books and Diaries as Sources of Reading Experience,” *Publishing History* 44 (1998), 7-21; Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, *Everyday Ideas: Socioliterary Experience among Antebellum New Englanders* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 31-36; Mary Louise Kete, *Sentimental Collaborations: Mourning and Middle-Class Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 19-30.



Figure 1.2. Dorothy Quincy Homestead exterior, 2017. Photograph by Kate Silbert

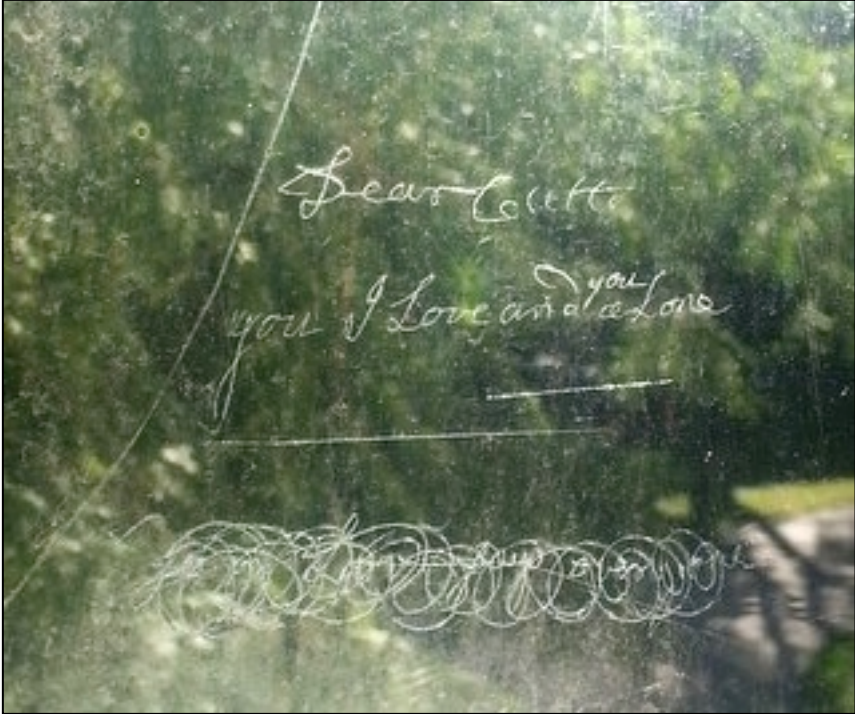


Figure 1.3. Quincy Homestead window inscriptions. Massachusetts Society of Colonial Dames in America

scratched declaration “You I love and you alone,” echoes the opening of a scene in Daniel Defoe’s popular work *Moll Flanders*, in which the title character and her lover write back-and-forth to each other on the window glass.¹⁸ The second line of this fictional exchange, in which Moll replies to her lover’s opening statement, “and in love so says everyone,” also remains extant on the Quincy mansion window, though it has been scribbled over (fig 1.3).¹⁹ In the novel, Moll’s lover grows impatient with the “tedious writing on the Glass” and seizes pen and ink to continue their impassioned exchange with more facile instruments.²⁰ It was not just any piece of printed text the Quincy writers chose to copy onto glass; the maker – or makers – of the Quincy inscriptions (they are unsigned and undated) self-consciously recreated the inscriptions in glass narrated in the printed pages of Defoe’s work.

Perhaps they thought the window a more appropriate place of transcription than paper, or perhaps they wanted to experiment with the challenge of writing on glass. In the eighteenth century, well-composed script enhanced the memory and enabled well-composed thoughts; neat penmanship reflected the attainment of a high level of literacy.²¹ As Susan Stabile has documented, writing manuals of the period dictated minute instructions about how women should position their bodies, hands, and minds while writing, such that the resulting “script records her distinctive mark or imprint.”²² For those practiced in using a quill to apply ink to paper on a desk or table, taking up an instrument not normally used for writing, such as a ring, and pressing it into the surface of the window glass would have demanded a set of

¹⁸ Daniel Defoe, *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, &c....* (London, [1722]), 91-92. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale.

¹⁹ Defoe, 91; Window inscription, 2nd floor, Dorothy Quincy Homestead, Massachusetts Society of Colonial Dames in America.

²⁰ Defoe, 92.

²¹ Susan M. Stabile, *Memory’s Daughters: The Material Culture of Remembrance in Eighteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 81-83. For an evocative description of the material preparation involved in preparing to write with ink and quill, see Stabile, *Memory’s Daughters*, 76-77.

²² Stabile, *Memory’s Daughters*, 87-109. Quote on 109.

unaccustomed, and likely awkward, hand positions and movements. When clear, evenly lettered lines of text appear on windows – or the solid vertical surface of walls, paneling, or window frames – they indicate the sustained attention and careful hand of their makers.

Domestic inscription makers transcribed existing texts and composed new ones fluidly, yet the architectural settings they used also emplaced those texts, uniting the embodied acts of writing and of occupying a particular moment in space and time. An 1805 inscription in a house in Milton, Massachusetts, drew from a commonly quoted source, William Shakespeare. In one of the upstairs bedrooms, Nancy Sumner copied out and signed lines from *Romeo and Juliet*, “Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, / Peace in thy breast; / Would I were sleep and peace / So sweet to rest.”²³ Her daughter Betsey’s name and the date accompanied the inscription as well. As readers transposed lines into commonplace books and albums, whether from printed volumes or other scribal sources, they extracted texts from one narrative context and inserted them into another, often reshaping the meaning of an individual text and the larger collection they were crafting. Transcribers enacted their alterations, comment Ronald and Mary Zboray, “often with other people at hand and in mind.”²⁴ In this case, Nancy Sumner paired text on sleep with the physical context of a resting place. We might wonder if the space of the bed-chamber brought to mind the lines of Shakespeare or whether the bard’s text brought to mind particular experiences of the bed-chamber. Whether space suggested text or text suggested space, the lines became a way to read the bedroom (this is a place for peaceful rest), while the space gave an immediate, bodily dimension to the entreaty of the text (this entreaty for peaceful rest applies to *this* place and *these* occupants).

²³ I have not been able to determine the present-day status of this structure or its inscriptions. Albert Kendall Teele, *The History of Milton, Mass., 1640 to 1887* (Boston, 1884), 167n.

²⁴ Zboray and Zboray, *Everyday Ideas*, 47.

The physical surroundings of domestic inscriptions are what we might call architectural paratext. Developed in reaction to literary studies that isolated the main body of a text from its physical make-up as a book object, history of the book scholars have asserted that paratext – those features of a work nested around the main body of text (title pages, publisher’s notes, indexes, fly-leaf advertisements, marginalia, and so on) – profoundly shapes how a text is encountered, read, and remembered.²⁵ In expanding our purview to include texts inscribed in material artifacts, the scope of our paratext likewise extends to include considerations of the social production of space and the meaning of architectural forms and functions.²⁶ While these surrounding elements may not “belong” to the text itself, they “ensure the text’s presence in the world,” materially and discursively.²⁷ Moreover, demonstrates Marla Miller, examining the documentary record and household space together reveals “a grid encompassing multiple perspectives, a site in which different sorts of women were subject to different rules and given to different behaviors.”²⁸ The domestic architecture into which inscriptions were placed, in other words, was neither neutral nor monolithic space.

The type of surface used for domestic inscription – the glass of a window, the wood of a casement or panel, the plaster of a wall – combined with the function of that particular architectural element to influence how one encountered its message. Particularly those inscriptions that remain embedded in the fabric of architecture, as we will see at the Wadsworth-Longfellow House, the Gilman Garrison House, and the Old Manse, provide new insights into

²⁵ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), esp. 1-14.

²⁶ Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), 22, 41-43; Robert Blair St. George, “Reading Spaces in Eighteenth-Century New England,” in *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830*, eds. John Styles and Amanda Vickery (New Haven: The Yale Center for British Art, Distributed by Yale University Press, 2006), 102.

²⁷ Genette, *Paratexts*, 1.

²⁸ Marla R. Miller, “Labor and Liberty in the Age of Refinement: Gender, Class, and the Built Environment,” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 10 (2005), 17.

the transmission of texts and the constant renegotiation of their meaning among readers. At these sites, the shifting make-up of the household, the inheritance of property, and the transformation of private residence into public museum, rather than the physical circulation of the text itself, altered the content and meaning of these literary artifacts.

Intertextuality in Architecture: The Wadsworth-Longfellow House

This form of intertextuality, which blended emplaced bodily experience and text, appears extensively at the Wadsworth-Longfellow house in Portland, Maine. The extant domestic inscriptions there are in three distinct places and come in varying degrees of legibility. In the back hall of the first floor are eight almost completely faded “wall medallions” – small inked circles, with text of some sort written within – distributed somewhat unevenly across the top half of a plaster and grained woodwork wall. These date between the 1830s and 1850s and come from multiple hands. A floor above, pressed into the plaster of the back stairhall, is a small handprint and the signature of Eliza Wadsworth, who occupied the house when it was first built and died in 1802 at the age of twenty-one (fig 1.4). Finally, one of the window frames on the third-floor is filled with signatures, poetry, and extemporaneous reflections, dated from the late 1830s to the 1880s (fig. 1.5). Some, though definitely not all, of the wall medallions and window frame writings may have been the work of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, but unlike many of his family members, he neither signed nor initialed any of the inscriptions.

As with other domestic inscriptions, the wall medallions and window frame pieces readily drew from texts and sayings circulating elsewhere on paper. “How dear to me the hour when day-light dies, / And sunbeams melt along the silent sea,” began an eight-line inscription of



Figure 1.4. Eliza Wadsworth signature in plaster, Wadsworth-Longfellow House. Maine Historical Society

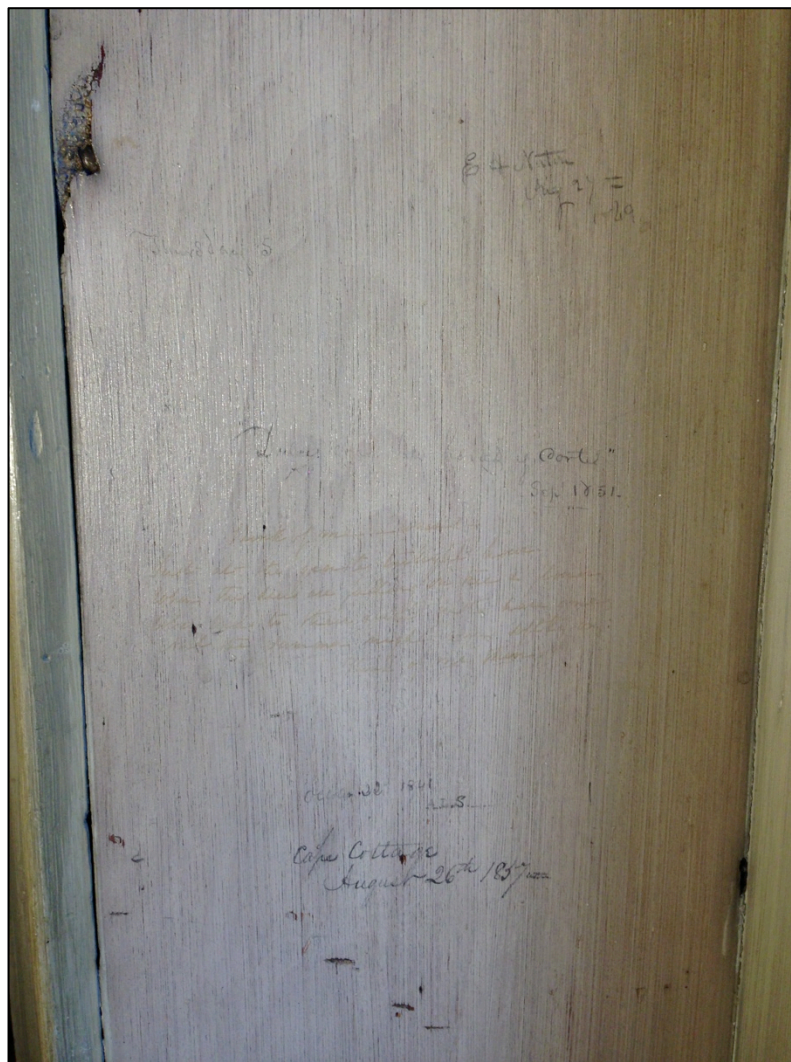


Figure 1.5. Casement inscriptions, 1830s-1880s, third floor, Wadsworth-Longfellow House. Maine Historical Society

verse on the window frame attributed by the transcriber to poet Thomas Moore.²⁹ In this instance, the transcriber marked lines of a well-known British author whose works could be found on paper elsewhere in the Longfellow home, in stanzas Anne Longfellow (later Pierce) copied into her commonplace book in 1822 and in printed sheet music that might have been played on the piano downstairs.³⁰ In this instance, the writer marked them on a window that offered an expansive view of sea, sky, and sunset. In this sense, even as these inscriptions echo patterns found in other literary artifacts, they represent something more than a commonplace book expanded from paper to plaster, from page to window frame. For much of the house's existence, the west-facing windows of the third floor offered a broad vista of the ocean and, farther off, the White Mountains.³¹ A number of the inscriptions on the window frame mark the time of their making with references to twilight or sunset, suggesting an evocation of Moore's lines that blurred literary, visual, and embodied experiences.

The Wadsworth-Longfellow inscriptions were intertextual in that they drew from writings that appeared on paper, but they also were intertextual in and among themselves. Lines that appeared in one inscription reappear in part or in full elsewhere on the window casement or wall downstairs. The final two lines from the Moore passage mentioned above recurred in an

²⁹ Moore published *Irish Melodies* in ten volumes and a supplement between 1808 and 1834. Casement inscription, third floor, Wadsworth-Longfellow House, Maine Historical Society; Thomas Moore, "How dear to me when day-light dies," *Irish Melodies* (Philadelphia: Published by M. Carey, 1815).

³⁰ Anne Longfellow copied a passage of Moore's *Lalla Rookh* (1817) into her commonplace book, while a version of his poem "Why does azure deck the sky" set to music is extant in the family's book collection. Ann[e] Longfellow poetry notebook, Box 1, Folder 9, Wadsworth-Longfellow Papers, Collection 1606, Maine Historical Society; *Why Does Azure Deck the Sky: A Favourite Ballad Sung by Mr. Webster at his Concert at New York* (Music score; Boston: G. Graupner, [180-]), Book 201, Wadsworth Longfellow House book collection, Maine Historical Society.

³¹ Portland experienced a devastating fire in 1866, from which the Wadsworth Longfellow house barely escaped. Over the rebuilding process, nearby structures would come to dwarf the house and obstruct the panoramic vista referenced by the inscriptions. Like other U.S. cities with waterfronts, Portland also undertook large-scale engineering projects in the mid-nineteenth-century to reshape the shoreline of the Back Cove and to create more land space downtown. Nathan Goold, *The Wadsworth-Longfellow House: Its History and Its Occupants* (Portland: Lakeside Printing Company, 1908), 28; Joseph Conforti, ed. *Creating Portland: History and Place in Northern New England* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2005), xv-xvii; John F. Bauman, *Gateway to Vacationland: The Making of Portland, Maine* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 55-56, 127-132.

inscription just below the longer transcription of eight lines. In this second inscription, dated “Thursday eveng July 7th 1836,” the maker prefaced the poetry with a personal description of the vista beheld: “The most gorgeous bright-hued sunset I ever saw – sky and water seem bathed in gold.” This sight, perhaps in tandem with the presence of the lines above, evoked and made immediate Moore’s words, “I long to tread that golden path of rays / And think ‘twould lead to some bright isle of rest” (fig. 1.6). Another pair of inscriptions on the window casement record

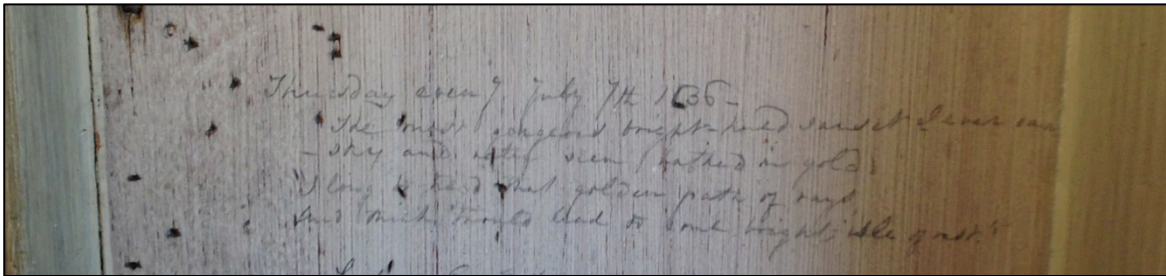


Figure 1.6. Poetry transcriptions in window casement, 1836, Wadsworth-Longfellow House. Maine Historical Society

passages from a poem that begins “Sweet were the hours, and short as sweet, / Which Lady, I have passed with thee.”³² The first version, four lines in English, dates to August 1838; the second, just the first line, translated to Spanish, dates to September 1851. Finally, one of the nearly-unreadable wall medallions downstairs contains a couple of legible words in Spanish that match those upstairs. The intertextual nature of these inscriptions renders some of the most faded among them more decipherable.

Family Bibles, Family Windows: The Gilmans in Beverly and Exeter

Many domestic inscriptions in the United States marked family relationships and the shifting occupants of households. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,

³² Casement inscription, 3rd floor, Wadsworth-Longfellow House; Wall inscriptions, 1st floor, Wadsworth-Longfellow house. My thanks to Maine Historical Society curator John Mayer for sharing research notes on the wall medallions with me.

genealogical information could be found within the page of family Bibles, in the calligraphy of a family register, or in the stitches of a needlework piece.³³ Domestic inscriptions conveying family information – lists of children, marks of names and ages, or records of marriages – likewise reflect this broader genealogical impulse.

Rather than graffiti on glass or plaster, these groupings of names signified lines in kin anchored in place and in the specific architecture of a home. In July 1770, siblings Robert Hale Ives and Rebecca Ives Gilman recorded their names and ages in the south window of the dining room in their maternal grandfather Robert Hale’s residence in coastal Beverly, Massachusetts. They had moved to the house with their widowed mother years earlier and received much of their education there.³⁴ A pane of glass formerly in the home of Elizabeth Donnell and David Wilcox, who lived the seaside community of York, Maine, in the early nineteenth century, features the names of their children. Further north in Portland, members of the Shepley family signed a second-floor window of their residence.³⁵

The markings twenty-year-old Hannah Robbins made in 1788 in a second-floor window of what is now known as the Gilman Garrison House in Exeter, New Hampshire, further reflect the genealogical dimensions of domestic inscriptions. Robbins herself grew up in Plymouth, Massachusetts, but was soon to marry Benjamin Ives Gilman of Exeter. He was the son of the Rebecca Ives Gilman who marked her name on glass in Beverly. On the windowpane of her

³³ François Weil, *Family Trees: A History of Genealogy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), esp. 42-77. For the variety of forms genealogical engagement took in New England, see D. Brenton Simons and Peter Benes, eds. *The Art of Family: Genealogical Artifacts in New England* (Boston: New England Historical and Genealogical Society, 2002).

³⁴ The site is now known as the John Hale Farm and in the possession of the Beverly Historical Society. The inscriptions remain extant. Charles P. Noyes, *Noyes-Gilman Ancestry...* (St. Paul, MN: Printed for the Author by the Gilliss Press, New York, 1907), 255.

³⁵ Windowpane, Object 2010.019, Old York Historical Society, York, ME. For reference to the Shepley markings, see the entry for 156 State Street in “Historic Places in Portland” Series 3, Folder 1, Frances Wilson Peabody Papers, Maine Women Writers Collection, University of New England.

grandmother Jane Prince Gilman's house, she etched, in immaculate script, three family marriage records, followed by her own name:

Hon'le Peter Gilman Esq. + Mrs.
Jane Prince were married Sept'er 1761 –
Chandler Robbins + Jane Prince
were married October 1761 –
Thomas Cary and Debrah Prince
were married September 1782

Hannah Robbins April 9th 1788³⁶

Maternal lines of kin link these three entries to each other and to Robbins as the writer. The first record was the marriage of Hannah's widowed grandmother, the second that of her own parents, and the third the union of her mother's sister. "Genealogical consciousness," argues historian Karin Wulf, "was a bedrock of British American culture," a way to navigate financial and legal matters, to express family ties, and, implicitly, to uphold the authority of lineage itself.³⁷ Hannah Robbins's inscription, though, marked into the physical structure of "real" property the female lines of kin usually effaced by both marriage customs and legal transfers of property. These records remained embedded in the architecture of the Gilman house long after the property had passed out of Gilman family hands and after Hannah Robbins herself had married and joined with her husband in the migration of white New Englanders into the settler spaces of the Midwest.³⁸

³⁶ The first record was the marriage of Hannah's widowed grandmother Jane Prince (1714-1795) to Peter Gilman (1703/4-1788), the second the marriage of her parents Jane Prince (1740-1800) and Chandler Robbins (1738-1799), and the third of her mother's sister Deborah Prince (1744-1821) to Thomas Cary (1745-1808). Window inscription, Gilman Garrison House, Exeter, NH, Historic New England.

³⁷ Wulf's work highlights the application of genealogical knowledge to practical legal matters, including property inheritance, conferring birth legitimacy, and, for enslaved African Americans, manumission. Karin Wulf, "Bible, King, and Common Law: Genealogical Literacies and Family History Practices in British America," *Early American Studies* (Fall 2012): 467-502, quote on 501.

³⁸ Later residents of the house continued in its tradition of inscription-making. I have not yet been able to complete a survey of all of the inscriptions at the site. Noyes, *Noyes-Gilman Ancestry*, 206-211.

Domestic inscriptions of this sort were not “movables,” the portable household objects given in lieu of physical property that women’s history scholars classically have associated with female lines of inheritance.³⁹ These artifacts did not physically change location the way bed and table linens, storage chests, silverware, or Bibles might. Rather, the make-up of a household changed while the inscriptions remained in place. Like household linens and samplers onto which women stitched their names, however, embedded in these artifacts are claims to belonging in a household. A young woman working her name into these objects, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has remarked, “might imagine growing up to be a movable, but not an invisible.”⁴⁰

The signature of Ruth Hooper Dalton, once in a windowpane of the Dalton house in Newburyport, Massachusetts, suggests a similar pattern. Descendants attributed the signature to Ruth Hooper, who married Tristram Dalton, a prominent merchant and politician, in 1758, but the name also belonged to one of the couple’s daughters, born in 1769.⁴¹ Either woman might have used the window to mark her position within the space of the Dalton residence. Ruth Hooper, newly moved into her husband’s home and newly carrying his name, may have signed the window to declare her position as mistress of a household that included enslaved laborers.⁴² For the daughter Ruth Hooper Dalton, the inscription might have been more akin to Hannah Robbins’s, a marking in the house of her upbringing and with the name of her birth that would remain after she took on her role as a “movable” in marriage in 1789. Whether mother or daughter made the inscription, however, she did so as a dependent of Tristram Dalton. Indeed, often it was occupants, not owners, of a particular site who made inscriptions there. Domestic

³⁹ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Age of Homespun*, 111, 129-131.

⁴⁰ Ulrich, “Creating Lineages,” in *The Art of Family: Genealogical Artifacts in New England* (Boston: NEHGS, 2002), 9.

⁴¹ Mary H. Northernd, *Historic Homes of New England* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1914), 192; Charles Henry Pope and Thomas Hooper, compilers, *Hooper Genealogy* (Boston: Published by Charles H. Pope, 1908), 109.

⁴² Northend, *Historic Homes*, 195, 199; Susan M. Harvey, “Slavery in Massachusetts: A Descendent of Early Settlers Investigates the Connections in Newburyport, Massachusetts,” (Master’s thesis, Fitchburg State University, 2011), 76-77, http://www.academia.edu/6190048/Susan_M._Harvey_The_Slave_Trade_and_Massachusetts.

inscriptions are entries in an alternative history of houses and their descent, an account not centered on building contracts, deeds, and property inheritance, but on occupants, everyday life, and affective ties.

Albums in Architecture: The Old Manse before 1830

The Old Manse in Concord, Massachusetts, contains inscriptions that today are among the most well-known to scholars and members of the general public. While renting the house in the 1840s, Nathaniel Hawthorne and his wife Sophia marked several windowpanes on the first and second floors (figs. 1.7 and 1.8).⁴³ Hawthorne also memorialized the house in print. The name by which the site has been known since the late nineteenth century comes from the title of his short story collection, *Mosses from an Old Manse*, published in 1846. For decades before the Hawthorne's arrival, however, members of the Emerson and Ripley families, male and female, had made their own marks in the residence. The oldest inscriptions in the house are concentrated within the third floor's best room, a space that Hawthorne would christen as the "Saint's Chamber" in *Mosses*.⁴⁴ These artifacts date from 1780 to 1829 and fall into two spatial clusters along gendered lines, with men from the Emerson family creating a chain of markings on the wooden panel to the left of the fireplace and women in the extended Emerson-Ripley family circle co-opting the plaster wall of the adjacent closet.

⁴³ In contrast to most domestic inscriptions in the United States, scholarly and public knowledge of these window etchings is widespread, and includes Joan W. Goodwin, *The Remarkable Mrs. Ripley: The Life of Sarah Alden Bradford Ripley* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 327; Renée Bergland, "The Puritan Eyeball, or, Sexing the Transcendent," in *The Puritan Origins of American Sex: Religion, Sexuality, and National Identity in American Literature*, ed. Tracy Fessenden, Nicholas F. Radel, and Magdalena J. Zaborowska (New York: Routledge, 2001), 101; Susan Cheever, *American Bloomsbury: Louisa May Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry David Thoreau: Their Lives, Their Loves, Their Work* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 86-87; Brenda Wineapple, *Hawthorne: A Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 172, 180; Polly M. Rettig, "The Old Manse," National Historic Landmark Designation, United States Department of the Interior: National Park Service, 1961, revised, 1977. Mentions of the Hawthorne etchings also appear prominently within the Old Manse's Wikipedia entry and frequently within visitor reviews of the site on Trip Advisor.

⁴⁴ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Mosses from an Old Manse* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1846), 14.



Figure 1.7. Old Manse exterior, 2015. Photograph by Kate Silbert

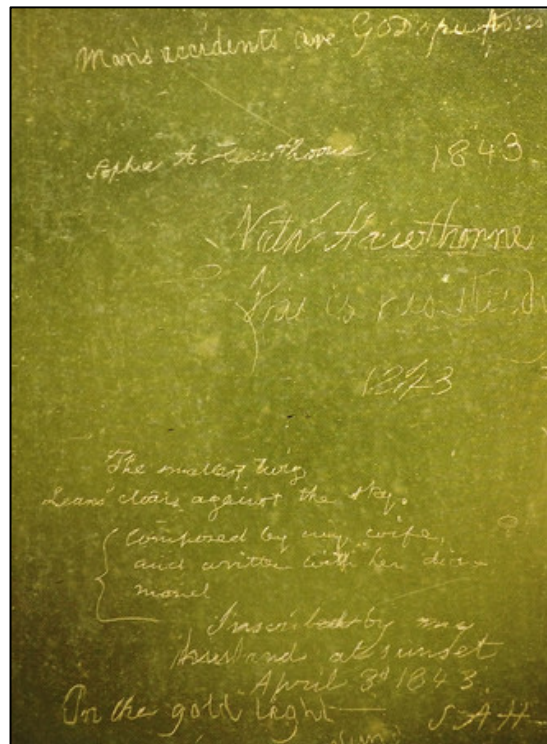


Figure 1.8. Window marked by Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne, Old Manse.
Trustees of the Reservation

The earliest extant inscription came from the hand of eleven-year-old William Emerson, son of the William Emerson who first occupied the house and later the father of Ralph Waldo Emerson. He wrote in ink on the wooden panel to the left of the fireplace in third-floor's best room: "Began Greek Jany 26 1780."⁴⁵ What William Emerson wrote and where he chose to write it doubly inscribed his projected future as a learned minister. The setting was important: not only was the house itself built as a manse for the town minister, but the Emerson family, and the Ripley family after them, frequently used this third-floor chamber to accommodate visiting clergymen (figs. 1.9 and 1.10). The wood paneling and fireplace in this chamber were the most elaborate architectural features of the third-floor; they represented the apex of status in that part

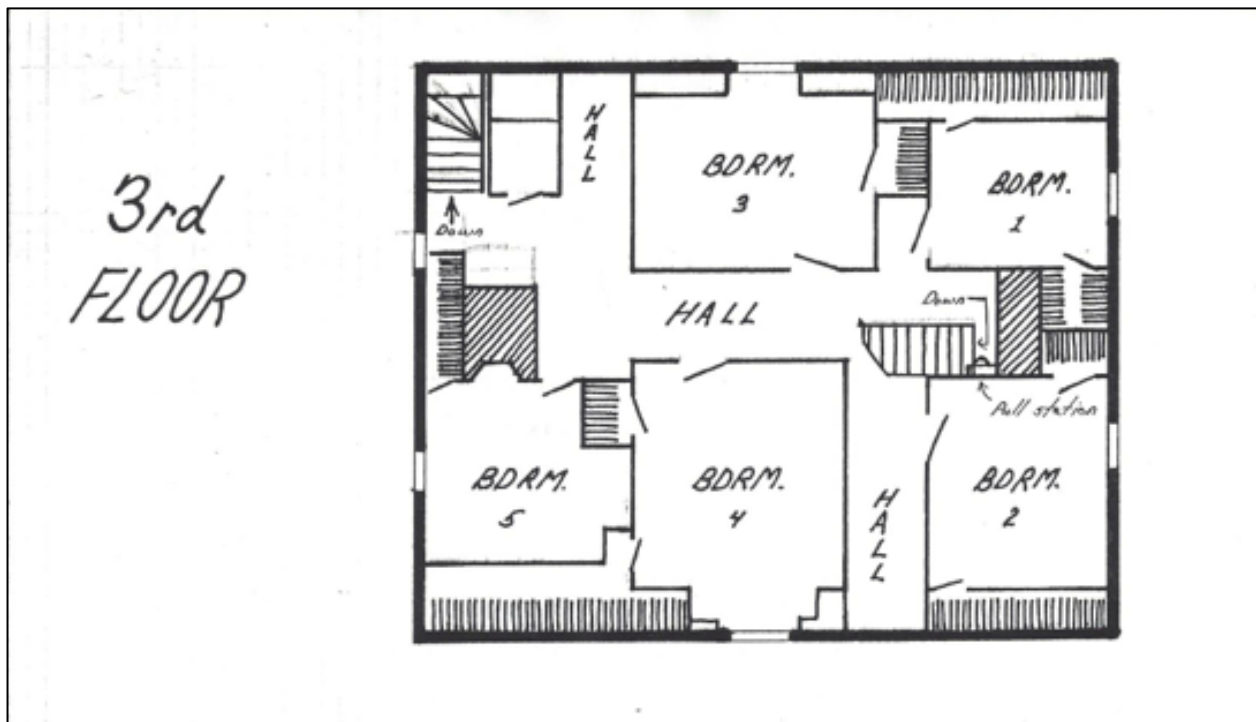


Figure 1.9. Floorplan of the third floor of the Old Manse. Trustees of the Reservation

⁴⁵ Fireplace panel inscription, 1780, 3rd floor, Old Manse, Trustees of the Reservation.



Figure 1.10. Fireplace and paneling in the Saint's Chamber, Old Manse. Trustees of the Reservation

of the house. A working knowledge of Greek – and Latin – was a prerequisite for both college and ecclesiastical study.⁴⁶ At the time of Emerson's marking, these subjects also marked distinctly masculine forms of knowledge; only select female academies, which had yet to emerge at the time of Emerson's inscription, would include classical language instruction into their curriculum, and they would only do so in the 1820s.⁴⁷ William Emerson's brief words, then, established the fireplace panel as a setting for masculine knowledge and records.

⁴⁶ Kevin M. Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular: Lifestyles of the Colonial Elite," in *Of Consuming Interest*, 21; Dean Grodzins and Leon Jackson, "Colleges and Print Culture," in *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*, eds. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley, *A History of the Book in America*, Vol. 2 (Chapel Hill: Published in Association with the American Antiquarian Society, by the University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 319.

⁴⁷ Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 86-89.

In the closet space just adjacent to the left side of the fireplace (fig. 1.11), women in the extended Emerson-Ripley family circle set their own tributes into the site's architecture in the first two and a half decades of the nineteenth century. Besides William Emerson's initial and



Figure 1.11. Closet of the Saint's Chamber, Old Manse. Trustees of the Reservation

solitary declaration on the fireplace, these messages, often reflecting social ties among women, are the oldest markings in the house. They are also, by virtue of their material composition, among the most difficult to decipher. In the two hundred years since their making, the penciled letters have smudged, and the plaster wall onto which they were written has cracked to the contours of the chimney bricks underneath (fig 1.12). Some of the material conditions that now render these artifacts so difficult to recover, however, are those that initially rendered the closet a favorable space for their making.

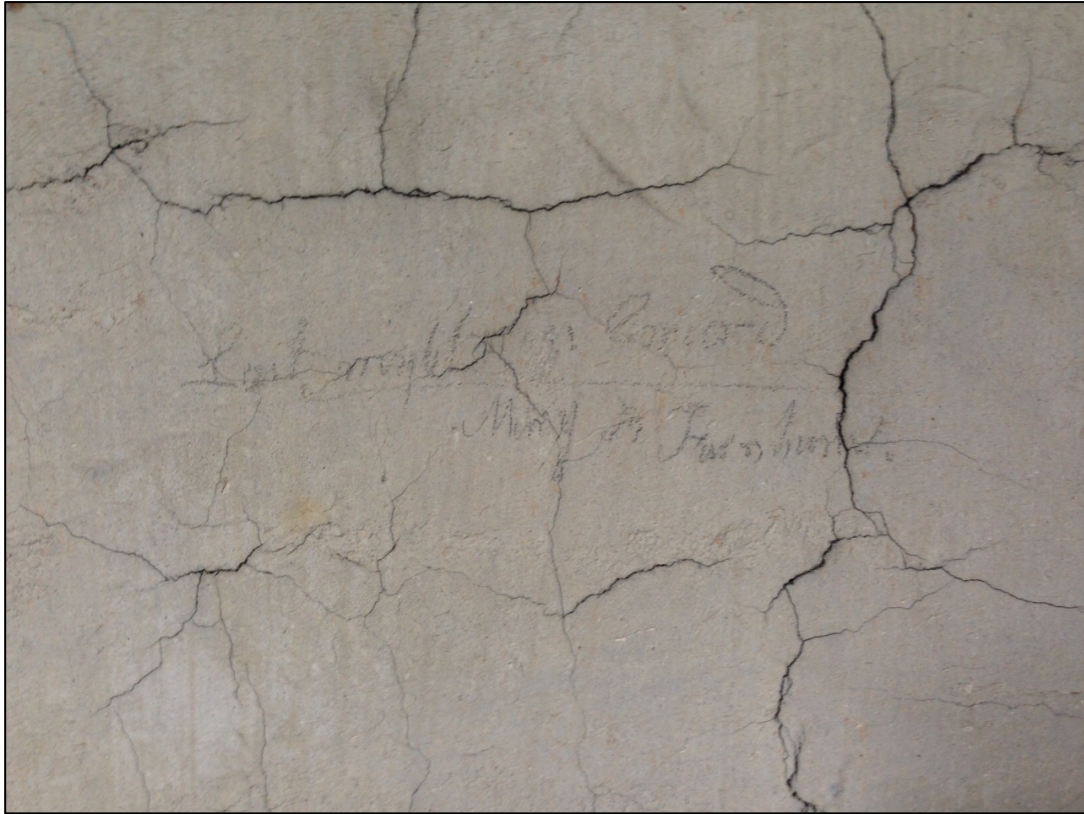


Figure 1.12. Inscriptions on closet plaster, early nineteenth century, Old Manse. Trustees of the Reservation

Closets in eighteenth-century homes functioned not only as storage spaces, as we think of them operating today, but also as sites of literary activity. As Robert Blair St. George has noted, bedchambers and closets often appeared in eighteenth-century literature as “spaces of intimacy where the autonomous self is rescued and liberated to read and write.”⁴⁸ Hawthorne would write of the Old Manse closet as “convenient for an oratory,” an extension of the clerical space of the larger chamber, in which “a young man might inspire himself with solemn enthusiasm, and cherish saintly dreams.”⁴⁹ Documentary evidence from the eighteenth century indeed indicates

⁴⁸ Robert Blair St. George, “Reading Spaces in Eighteenth-Century New England,” in John Styles and Amanda Vickery, eds. *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830* (New Haven: The Yale Center for British Art, distributed by Yale University Press, 2006), 91.

⁴⁹ Hawthorne, *Mosses*, 14.

that New England ministers used closets for study, prayer, and keeping books; built-in shelves, though not evident at the Old Manse, frequently featured in these spaces.⁵⁰

For young women residing at the Old Manse in the early nineteenth century, as for other literary women of their era, the space offered a trifecta of conditions conducive to solitary literary activity: light, warmth, and quiet. A small, west-facing window allowed in the afternoon sunlight, the bricks underneath the plaster emanated heat in cooler months, and the third-floor setting was at a remove from the clamor of kitchen labor or parlor socializing below. Prolific essayist, playwright, and women's rights advocate Judith Sargent Murray treasured the small chamber built next to the chimney of her bedroom; she referred to this space in her Gloucester, Massachusetts home as "my lov'd retreat, my little sheltering place."⁵¹ Abigail Adams expressed similar sentiments while relishing the luxury of a writing closet with a window on a visit to her aunt. "I do not covet my Neighbours Goods, but I should like to be the owner of such conveniences," she confessed.⁵² As chapter three will explore further, much reading and writing within domestic spaces in this period took social, and even collaborative, forms, but certain occasions made solitary literary pursuits desirable; for young women in particular, the material conditions to undertake such activity often proved elusive.⁵³

When young women in the Ripley family marked the closet space, they marked time and distance away from routine domestic labor. Sarah Ripley, a half-sister to the William Emerson

⁵⁰ St. George, "Reading Spaces," 92-94.

⁵¹ Judith Sargent Murray, "Lines Written in My Closet, 1782," reproduced in Tammy Mills, "'Lines Written in my Closet': Volume One of Judith Sargent Murray's Poetry Manuscripts" (PhD diss., Georgia State University, 2006), 344. See also "To Cleora, Written in her Closet," reproduced in Mills, 331. The Sargent House Museum now deploys a copy of these lines on the writing desk as part of its interpretation of the closet; the original manuscript is among Murray's papers at the Mississippi State Archives.

⁵² Abigail Adams to John Adams, 29 August 1776 [electronic edition], *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archives*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>.

⁵³ Karen Lipsedge, drawing primarily on English sources, underlines the importance of these spaces to young women in the middling classes: "Since the private closet was the only truly private room in the domestic interior, it was the ideal place in which to perform these solitary and personal types of activity." Lipsedge, "'Enter into Thy Closet': Women, Closet Culture, and the Eighteenth-Century Novel," in Styles and Vickery, 107-122, quote 110.

who wrote on the fireplace panel, signed her name in the closet space on October 3, 1802, when she was twenty-one years old.⁵⁴ As the only daughter of Phebe Emerson and Ezra Ripley, with older half-sisters who had married or moved away from Concord, a hefty share of household responsibilities rested on her shoulders. Years later, when replying to a letter to her half-sister Mary Moody Emerson, she explained her delay in writing, “the days too are so short, that the crowd of cares which fill up our house, [...] are so clamourous, that one is apt to go to sleep when they are all quieted.”⁵⁵

“Last night in Concord,” wrote and underlined Mary B. Farnham, before signing her name underneath, in one of two inscriptions she made in the closet before her death in 1816 at the age of twenty-four.⁵⁶ She was the niece of the William Emerson who initiated the writing on the fireplace panel and would have been anticipating the return to her parents’ residence in Newburyport, where the duty of being the eldest daughter in a family of ten children awaited.⁵⁷ Given this prospect, one can imagine why the tucked-away space of the closet may have lent itself to such a simple statement. Mary Farnham seems especially to have valued the time spent at the Old Manse with her aunt Sarah Ripley, who was just eleven years her senior. Her other marking, to which she appended her initials and the date of August 24, 1806, addressed her “aunt Sarah.” The phrase is now partially illegible, but appears to read “Love [...] and be happy” (fig. 1.13).⁵⁸

The final two of these early closet inscriptions, which each date to 1820, echo Mary Farnham’s affectionate wishes to Sarah Ripley. One of these markings, addressed to “Miss

⁵⁴ Closet inscription, 1802, 3rd floor, Old Manse.

⁵⁵ Sarah Ripley, Concord, to Mary Moody Emerson, Boston, 4 Dec. 1820. Emerson Family Correspondence, ca. 1725-1900 (MS Am 1280.226), Houghton Library, Harvard University. Accessed Online 23 March 2016.

⁵⁶ Closet inscription, 1806, 3rd floor, Old Manse.

⁵⁷ Mary Bliss Farnham (1792-1816) was the second of ten children born to Hannah Bliss Emerson (1770-1807) and William Farnham (d. 1829) of Newburyport, Massachusetts. Mary Farnham’s mother Hannah was a daughter of Phebe Bliss and the first William Emerson to live in the Old Manse.

⁵⁸ Closet inscription, 1806, 3rd floor, Old Manse.



Figure 1.13. Inscriptions by Mary Farnham to Sarah Ripley, 1806, Old Manse. Trustees of the Reservation

Ripley,” inquired, “Will you think of your friend / When she is absent from you.” The writer continued two more lines, which are now inscrutable, before signing her name, which appears to start with “E,” and the date, in which the year is most clear. The final closet inscription, possibly by the same writer, provides injunction where the other made inquiry: the lines entreat “My Dear Miss Ripley,” when reading the words on the wall, to “Recall to / memory your Elizabeth / who wishes you happy.”⁵⁹

Domestic inscriptions elsewhere further indicate that writers deemed windows and walls suitable means through which to convey sentiment. In 1901, a chronicle of Hartford, Connecticut recorded lines left on an attic window at the Olcott-Rowley house. In 1773, a writer had left these lines of farewell to Anne Bunce, whose name also appeared on the window: “Since

⁵⁹ Closet inscription, c. 1820, 3rd floor, Old Manse.

I must go, 'tis my lot. Pray let me now regret. The pleasures of Hartford I do reluctantly resign, since I must leave my dear Anne behind.”⁶⁰ Anne Bunce signed the window again in 1792, suggesting that, as at the Old Manse, inscription sites were ones of return, rereading, and further recording.⁶¹ Further afield in Philadelphia, Deborah Norris Logan wrote in her diary of encountering the names of her husband’s aunts, who had lived in her home decades before, etched into the window of a bedroom. The glass, “fragile as it is,” she lamented, “has outlasted their fragile existences.”⁶²

Together, these inscriptions quite clearly reflect the form and sentiments of entries women (and men) were writing into friendship albums of the period. These parallels can help to fill in – if not in exact words, then in effect – what cracks in plaster have effaced. “What a treasure is an Album!” the writer exclaimed at the beginning of a characteristic entry in one such volume. She continued, drawing links between the acts of writing, reading, and remembering:

“- - - And after we shall
be seperated far and long from each other and
in some lonely hour you cast your eye upon these
few lines will you not remember her who placed
them here. - - - ”⁶³

Other common album entries carried repeating entreaties to “forget me not” and “remember me,” often set into lines of verse, and evoked past hours and departed friends.⁶⁴ On paper and plaster, the act of encountering and then reading a friend’s familiar handwriting – “When this you see /

⁶⁰ *Commemorative Biographical Record of Hartford County, Connecticut* (Vol. 1; Chicago: J.H. Beers & Co., 1901), 309. I have not yet been able to identify Anne Bunce in relation to the Olcott family.

⁶¹ *Commemorative Record of Hartford*, 309.

⁶² Deborah Norris Logan diary, quoted in Stabile, 44-45. Stabile indicates that Logan’s diary also mentioned a longer inscription made by Charles Read, a cousin of the young women.

⁶³ Entry by Marietta M. Hosford, Canton, Connecticut, Feb 18, 1833, in *Mary Beach Album*. Hosford and Beach likely were classmates at Westfield Academy. Bindings Coll. D. No. 061, AAS. See also the opening entries of Emily Clark’s *Album*, compiled in and around Concord, NH, beginning in 1827. Bindings Coll. D No. 019, AAS, and Maria Seger’s album, Bindings Coll. D. No 070, AAS. For similar sentiments in a young man’s album, see William A. Bannister album, Bindings Coll D. No. 020, AAS. I have found no conclusive evidence that Hosford’s entry was already circulating in print.

⁶⁴ Entry headed “Remember Me,” signed Mary, in *Emily Clark Album*, Bindings Coll. D. No. 019, AAS.

Remember me,” went one concise version – was meant to animate memories of their very person.⁶⁵

If albums were a means of maintaining memory and keeping alive ties among friends across time and distance, the inscriptions among women at the Old Manse indicate that the material features of houses could be deployed to do the same. Their markings spread across the plaster wall covering the chimney, much the way entries in an album might spread unpredictable among the leaves rather than fall into a neat succession of pages. As in an album, those invited to contribute bore close ties to one another; the makers of unsigned or initialed entries, while anonymous to modern-day viewers, were legible to their original recipients.⁶⁶ The wall, unlike a bound volume of many separate pages, allowed for a mural-like array of the social web the inscriptions reflected.

Men in the Emerson family produced the remaining Old Manse inscriptions created before the Hawthornes’ arrival. Instead of adding to the collection of markings on the closet wall, these male descendants of William Emerson chose to extend the trail of words he had on the fireplace panel of the main chamber (fig. 1.14.). They did so, moreover, as ownership of the house passed to the Ripley family, their relatives by marriage.⁶⁷ “Visited this room + read the / above of W.E. July 15, 1824,” William Emerson’s son and namesake added underneath the first inscription. The following year, which witnessed the death of family matriarch Phebe Bliss Emerson Ripley, her grandson Ralph Waldo Emerson appended the date and his initials to his

⁶⁵ Unsigned entry in James Wood [Orra Wood Louis] album, dated New Haven, Sunday June 23, 1849. Bindings Coll. D. No. 012, AAS. Most of the entries in the album are from the late 1820s. AAS attributes this album to James Wood, the uncle of the primary user, Orra Wood Louis, and the person who seems to have gifted her the volume. See also Elizabeth D. White entry in Mary Beach album, Bindings Coll D. No. 061, AAS.

⁶⁶ Catherine La Courreye Blecki, “Reading *Moore’s Book*: Manuscripts vs. Print Culture and the Development of Early American Literature,” in *Milcah Martha Moore’s Book: A Commonplace Book from Revolutionary America*, eds. Catherine La Courreye Blecki and Karin A. Wulf (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 77-79.

⁶⁷ Phebe Bliss Emerson, widow of the first William Emerson, married Rev. Ezra Ripley in 1780; their son Samuel Ripley inherited the house, after which it passed to his widow and their daughters.

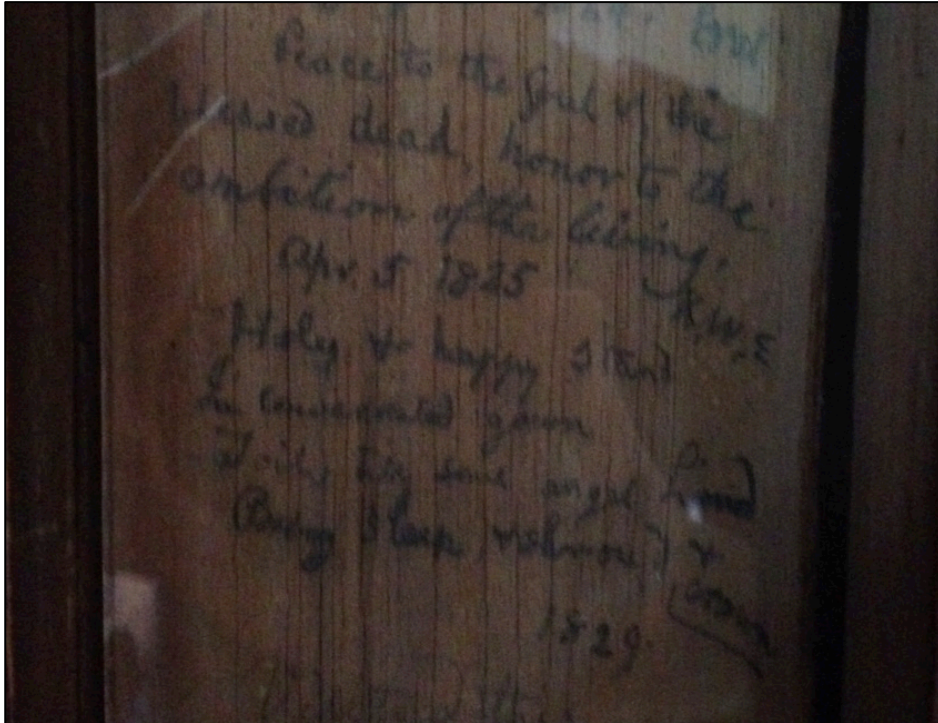


Figure 1.14. Inscriptions on the fireplace paneling, 1824-1829, Saint's Chamber, Old Manse. Trustees of the Reservation

new entry on the panel, “Peace to the Soul of the / blessed dead, honor to the / ambitions of the living.” A final entry from before 1830, dating to the year of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s ordination as a Congregationalist minister and attributed to him, brought William Emerson’s initial clerical projection full circle: “Holy + happy stand / In consecrated gown / Toil till some angel hand / Bring sleep + shroud + crown.”⁶⁸ On the fireplace panel, entry followed entry in neat chronological and spatial progression, further underlining the patrilineal descent being conveyed. These markings sharpened the gendered distinctions between the space of the panel and closet, a pattern that Emerson and Ripley descendants would amplify when making new inscriptions in the nineteenth century’s final decades.

⁶⁸ Fireplace panel inscriptions, 1824-1829, 3rd floor, Old Manse.

Circulating Inscription in Manuscript and Print

From the colonial era well into the antebellum period, mentions of inscription in literary works existed alongside physical instances of the practice. These examples in manuscript and print highlight once more how seamlessly the phenomenon of inscription operated within early American literary culture. Writers readily drew upon the practice as a starting premise for works of poetry or within scenes of fiction, and readers included such pieces in the assembly of their commonplace books and albums. In other words, inscriptions appeared in the types of sources that scholars already have asserted were central to nineteenth-century practices of reading, writing, and sociability. The gendered rhetoric embedded in many of these pieces, moreover, contributed to the recasting of domestic inscription as feminized, fanciful objects at the turn of the twentieth century.

Elizabeth Bradlee of Massachusetts inserted the following into her commonplace book in the 1820s:

Lines written by a Lady on a Window

~

The power of love shall never wound my heart
Though he assails it with his fiercest dart

Answer by a Gentleman

The lady has her resolution spoke
Yet, writes on glass in hopes it may be broke⁶⁹

Elsewhere in the volume, Bradlee and other transcribers excerpted from authors and texts many readers of the era knew well: Johan Zimmerman on solitude and the pleasure of books, Bernard Barton on affection and memory, Lydia Sigourney on human error, Edward Everett on the literary heritage of America, and a local poet's hymn for the dedication of a new church.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Bradlee commonplace book, 1820-1828, Mss. Octavo Vols. B, AAS.

⁷⁰ Kete, *Sentimental Collaborations*, 24-28; Cassandra A. Good, *Founding Friendships: Friendships between Men and Women in the Early American Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 154-155.

Shakespeare and Moore, writers whose work Nancy Sumner and the Wadsworth-Longfellow circle saw fit to transcribe on glass and window-frame, likewise made appearances on the pages of Bradlee's book.⁷¹

Other poems with characteristics similar to the one Bradlee copied circulated widely in newspapers and periodicals on both sides of the Atlantic in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century. Between 1815 and 1825, some version of the lines she transcribed appeared in nine U.S. newspapers, published as far north as Salem, Massachusetts, and as far south as Charleston, South Carolina.⁷² While this ten-year span marked the peak circulation of this particular text, the poem enjoyed remarkable longevity: the *Boston Chronicle* published the lines as early as 1769, Georgia's *Augusta Chronicle* circulated them on the eve of the Civil War, and they popped up in a San Francisco publication in the late 1880s.⁷³ Another verse with a similar premise – an exchange of wit between a man and woman – circulated broadly along the Atlantic seaboard from the late 1840s to early 1860s before experiencing a resurgence in popularity in Western newspapers in the Reconstruction era.⁷⁴ In publications spanning more than a century and reflecting the transformation of colonial British America into the United States, followed by the expansion of that nation across the North American continent, references to inscription appeared apace.

Heterosocial exchange, ranging in tone from light-hearted banter to sharper barbs, was central to many of the printed iterations of inscription. In the window-writing scene in *Moll*

⁷¹ Elizabeth Bradlee commonplace book, 1820-1828, Mss. Octavo Vols. B, AAS.

⁷² Data gathered from America's Historical Newspapers. See, "A Lady wrote on a pane of glass in a window," in *Salem Observer* (Salem, MA), Aug. 20, 1825, and *Charleston Courier*, June 6, 1825.

⁷³ "A Tale," *The Boston Chronicle*, Feb. 27-Mar. 2, 1769, AHN; "Honeymoon," *The Augusta Chronicle* (Augusta, GA), May 27, 1859, AHN; "Wit and Wisdom," *San Francisco Bulletin* (Sept. 29, 1888), Supplement, AHN.

⁷⁴ An early version of this piece went: "A lady wrote with a diamond, on a pane of glass / God did at first make man upright, but he / to which a gentleman added / Most surely would continue so, but she –". *Emancipator and Republican* (Boston, MA), June 7, 1849, AHN; *Alexandria Gazette* (Alexandria, VA), June 17, 1849, AHN; *Portland Weekly Advertiser* (Portland, ME), Sept. 7, 1858, AHN; *Idaho Statesman* (Boise, ID), July 14, 1866, AHN; *Weekly Journal Miner* (Prescott, AZ), Nov. 6, 1874, AHN.

Flanders, the female protagonist uses the protracted, silent labor of inscription, first on glass and then on paper, to receive multiple assurances of her suitor's affection before disclosing her own poverty.⁷⁵ In the piece Elizabeth Bradlee copied, by contrast, a woman's poetic declaration is outdone by a man's responding wit. At surface, the exchange is playful, yet it comes at the female speaker's expense: the projected breaking of glass implies not only the fragility of her word but also the physical piercing of her maiden body. An older version of the poem came with a third couplet that made these physical elements more explicit: "Your Virgin Vows on Glass you make, / Which *warmth* will *melt*, or *force* will *break*."⁷⁶ In another long-circulating piece, a "lady of fashion" inscribes on a pane of glass that a certain government figure – initially an English Lord, later a member of Congress – "has the softest lips that ever pressed those of beauty." Soon after, continues the tale, a clever male figure – in early versions the stock character Foote, in later ones simply a journalist – comes along and adds, "Then as like as two chips, / Are his *head* and his lips."⁷⁷ The characters and setting of the exchange proved remarkably flexible across time and place of publication, because the central joke of a soft-headed politician being taken in by a beautiful, loose-lipped woman remained constant.

A smaller subset of inscriptions in print reflected closer ties to sentimental poetry, a genre that also could be found in readers' albums and commonplace books. Actual domestic inscriptions produced in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century more often reflected the tone of these works than that of the witty exchanges popular in newspapers. From the late 1820s to the 1840s, New York writer and critic William Leggett's "Lines Written on a Pane of Glass in the House of a Friend" appeared in periodicals and anthologies. The speaker of the poem, not

⁷⁵ Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, 91-92.

⁷⁶ "A Tale," *The Boston Chronicle*, Feb. 27-Mar. 2, 1769, AHN (emphasis in original).

⁷⁷ "Soft Lips," *Boston Traveler*, Dec. 18, 1827, AHN; [No Title], *Jackson Citizen* (Jackson, MI), Dec. 27, 1870, AHN.

unlike the women writing on the Old Manse wall, hoped the lines, “when I away shall pass, / May thought of me recall.”⁷⁸ In Britain, well-known Romantic poets gained a reputation for scratching verse into the windows and onto the walls of inns and taverns; accounts of such activity by Scottish bard Robert Burns, many of which reproduced the resulting verse, circulated in U.S. newspapers from the time of the poet’s lifetime to the end of the nineteenth century.⁷⁹ Compilers of Burns’s works included his windowpane poems into printed editions, thus incorporating them into the author’s canon.⁸⁰ When composed by a known author, text in architecture could be transposed to print and made legible as literature. The treatment of Burns’s windowpane poetry was an early instance of a pattern that would accelerate after the mid-nineteenth century.

Domestic Inscription in Memory: Mid-Century and Beyond

When the Ripley family resumed full-time residence of the Old Manse in 1846, they arrived home to a surprise: their renters, the Hawthornes, had scratched words and signed their names on windows on the first and second floors. Prior to their tenancy, inscription in the house had occurred in and around the Saint’s Chamber on the third floor, and not on costly glass. Indeed, Sarah Alden Bradford Ripley, the wife of Phebe and Ezra Ripley’s son Samuel, recalled particular distress.⁸¹ Little did she know at the time, but Nathaniel Hawthorne would go on to

⁷⁸ See *The Critic: A Weekly Review of Literature, Fine Arts, and the Drama, Vol. 1*, ed. William Leggett (New York, 1829), 189; *The New York Book of Poetry* (New York, 1837), 138; *The Gems of American Poetry* (New York, 1840), 138.

⁷⁹ *Massachusetts Centinel*, Jan. 6, 1790, AHN; *Daily Georgian* (Savannah), July 3, 1828, AHN; “Scottish Humor,” *New York Times*, June 18, 1871, ProQuest Historical Newspapers (hereafter ProQuest); “Scottish Wit,” *Pomeroy’s Democrat* (New York), July 1, 1871, ProQuest; “Anecdotes,” *New Haven Register*, Dec. 6, 1897, AHN.

⁸⁰ Some of these works appeared in print within a decade and a half of the author’s death; later editions would include additional window verses. See, by comparison, *The Poetical Works of Robert Burns...* (Philadelphia, 1807), 158-159, 188, Readex: Early American Imprints (hereafter EAI), and *The Works of Robert Burns; Containing His Life....* (New York, 1839), 37, 48, 58, 68.

⁸¹ Goodwin, *Remarkable Mrs. Ripley*, 327.

great literary prestige, and together his writings in print and on glass would determine much of the site's public resonance from the late nineteenth century on through the twentieth. The year the Ripleys arrived home, Hawthorne's story collection *Mosses from an Old Manse* presented readers with a version of the house draped in dim Puritan orthodoxy; the third-floor inscriptions became, in his treatment, the "brief records and speculations" of "holy men."⁸² Whatever physical space the women in the family had claimed in marking the closet, Hawthorne rhetorically redecorated the chamber as masculine, ecclesiastical territory.

The author's death in the spring of 1864 proved a tipping point in how both house and inscriptions would be remembered. The day of his funeral in Concord, cuttings of apple blossoms from the Old Manse orchard festooned his casket, and crowds of mourners came not to the Wayside, the site where he had resided since the mid-1850s, but to the Old Manse, the house he had rented and written about as a newlywed in search of literary fame. Sarah Alden Bradford Ripley and her family received these visitors and showed them the inscriptions the deceased author had written about, as well as those he had made with his wife on glass. She recounted "the old revolutionary tale," the story of how the Emerson family had witnessed the famous skirmish at the North Bridge through the very panes of glass on which the Hawthornes later had written. Reflecting on the occasion in a letter to her daughter, Ripley found her previous derision replaced with admiration. "Patriotism and genius were triumphant," she declared. "I shall henceforth guard every pane of the old cracked glass as a precious relic devoted to genius."⁸³

Sarah Ripley's initial disappointment and later reappraisal of the Hawthorne markings capture a larger shift in how people encountered and perceived domestic inscriptions in the United States. Beginning around the Civil War, public notices of domestic inscription pivoted

⁸² Hawthorne, *Mosses from an Old Manse*, 14.

⁸³ Sarah Alden Bradford Ripley (SABR) to Sophy Ripley Thayer, 24 May 1864, SABR Papers, Schlesinger Library. My thanks to the staff of the Schlesinger Library for making digital copies of these materials available to me.

away from everyday literary practice, even though residents and visitors continued to mark their presence in domestic spaces with signatures, poetry, or pictures. Instead, characterizations of the phenomenon gravitated towards well-known authors and historical events on the one hand and towards distinctly unliterary practices, such as graffiti-making and courtship rituals, on the other. As Michele Foucault and Roger Chartier each have theorized, the “figure of the author” long has served to make distinctions among texts, text producers, and acts of text production.⁸⁴ As literary works came to be produced for a public market of consumers rather than patrons, the prominence of the author became a literal selling point, authenticating the text as an original work of genius and rendering it worthy of consumption.⁸⁵ Foucault and Chartier’s primary concerns were ideological transformations that took place between the advent of print and the emergence of the market economy, but as the latter points out, the exact function and power of the author varies by context.⁸⁶

In the late-nineteenth-century realm under discussion here, that authorial presence – reflected in the process of selecting some texts as originating with an author and elevating them above others – extended into the physical spaces of author’s homes. On the one hand, authors heightened the visibility of domestic inscriptions, not to mention the notability of the spaces themselves as marketable tourist destinations. But that new visibility came with a concomitant lens: space and inscription alike would be read through the author’s experiences, published writing, and perceived singularity. As Lawrence Buell suggested a generation ago, and scholars like Hilary Irish Lowe have explored more recently, authors’ homes powerfully contributed to

⁸⁴ Michele Foucault, “What is An Author?” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), 101-120; Roger Chartier, “The Figures of the Author,” *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Stanford University Press, 1994), 25-59.

⁸⁵ Chartier, 37-39.

⁸⁶ Chartier, 59.

their canonization.⁸⁷ Such a shift particularly distorted women's prior inscription-making, replacing the literary sensibilities of their markings with fanciful affect or effacing their participation entirely.

Even though the inscriptions themselves highlighted famous, usually male, figures, those who collected the markings represented a broader spectrum of white New Englanders. Everyday readers and writers had made inscriptions in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century; everyday historians documented and preserved them at the turn of the twentieth century. They did so with text, images, and oral history. In the 1890s, a group of women in Litchfield, Connecticut with connections to the town's former female academy actively gathered and preserved artifacts related to the founder, Sarah Pierce, and her former students. In the course of that work, Elizabeth R. Child transcribed for local historian Emily Noyes Vanderpoel several student names of "found written on the side of a dormer window in Dr. Daniel Sheldon's Attic."⁸⁸ An elderly resident of Whately, Massachusetts, Sophia Smith Bartlett, remembered a window inscription made by a captured British officer in "a large red house," that also had served as an inn. The site was torn down when "she was but a young girl," but her memories "of seeing the name on the pane of glass and of hearing her parents relate the fact of these British prisoners being quartered at the old hotel" remained.⁸⁹ Because Smith Bartlett was born in 1790, years after the town's wartime experience, the inscription, combined with her parents' stories,

⁸⁷ Susann Bishop, "The Allure of American Authors' Homes: Surveying Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Literary Guides," in *From Page to Place: American Literary Tourism and the Afterlives of Authors*, eds. Jennifer Harris and Hilary Iris Lowe (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2017), 205-226, esp. 207-208; Lawrence Buell, cited in Hilary Iris Lowe, *Mark Twain's Homes and Literary Tourism* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2012), 9-10.

⁸⁸ Elizabeth R. Child, to Emily Noyes Vanderpoel, 3 Nov. 1896, Series 4, Folder 7, Litchfield Female Academy Collection, Litchfield Historical Society.

⁸⁹ James M. Crafts, *History of the Town of Whately, Mass...* (Printed for the Town, 1899), 113, 219.

had conveyed to her the town's Revolution-era history. She, in turn, passed knowledge of them along to town historian James Crafts before her death in 1876.⁹⁰

These and other exchanges demonstrate that those interested in studying the past found domestic inscriptions to be useful tools. For those deciphering the development of a site's architecture, inscriptions provided telling chronological information. One guide to historic structures in Cambridge, Massachusetts dated the refurbishing of a particular room based on an inscription in the plaster above the fireplace, while the compiler of a Portsmouth, New Hampshire history noted the discrepancy between the oral tradition of a certain house being built "soon after the Revolution" but bearing a window pane inscribed: "Built by Edward Parry in 1800."⁹¹ Others deployed inscriptions to validate the connection between a particular site and a well-known historical figure. Residents of Portsmouth, for instance, regularly called upon the legacy of John Paul Jones when speaking of their city's contribution to the American Revolution. Jones's tenure in Portsmouth was brief and rather uneventful, but those memorializing him later could assert that his name "inscribed by himself, may still be seen on a window pane" to authenticate his presence there.⁹²

Descendants of inscription makers, or residents of sites with inscriptions, also took increasing pains to preserve them. Nathaniel Hawthorne's maternal relatives, the Mannings, had

⁹⁰ For genealogical information on Bartlett, see Crafts, *History of Whately*, 388.

⁹¹ Domestic and other architectural inscriptions continue to be used by historic preservation officials to date buildings or their features, as in the recent National Register of Historic Places documentation of the Allen-West house in Barrington, Rhode Island, where a register of snowfalls in 1771 on the back of a removable panel in the parlor gives evidence of the site's pre-Revolution construction. *Historic Guide to Cambridge, Compiled by Members of the Hannah Winthrop Chapter, National Society, DAR 2nd ed.* (Cambridge: s.n., 1907), 152; C.S. Gurney, *Portsmouth, Historic and Picturesque* (Portsmouth, NH: C.S. Gurney, 1902), 82; "Allen-West House," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (United States Department of the Interior: National Park Service, 2013).

⁹² At a commemorative ceremony in 1903, Senator George Hoar of deployed a similar tactic regarding the connection of Continental Army general Joseph Warren to Worcester, Massachusetts. "History and Poetry of Portsmouth," *Portsmouth Journal of Literature and Politics*, 13 Dec. 1873, AHN; Col. Timothy Bigelow Chapter, D.A.R., *The First School House in Worcester: Dedicatory Exercises at the Unveiling of the Tablet, May 23, 1903...* (Worcester, MA: The Commonwealth Press, 1903), 18.

by the 1890s removed a pane of glass from the family home in Salem where the author, as a young man, had signed his name. “There is nothing in Salem,” a descendant asserted in an article on the Manning residence, “more closely connected with Hawthorne’s early life than the mementoes of this old house.”⁹³ Successors of Josiah Quincy and Ruth Hooper Dalton did likewise, setting aside as notable those architectural elements they had marked.⁹⁴ In these cases, domestic inscriptions, as at the time of their making and early viewing, signified spatial privilege. By the late nineteenth century, however, the privilege conveyed was one of inheritance and longevity. Pulled out of everyday architecture and recontextualized as objects for special display, however, these artifacts marked something new: the long-standing gentility of their owners. Though removed from their embedded, architectural settings, these objects remained nested within the domestic interiors in which they had originated.

Other acts of preservation reclaimed the inscriptions of ancestors from sites that had become undesirable and then ensconced them anew in a different setting of domestic respectability. In 1889, for instance, a Boston newspaper noted that a pane of glass with an inscription by a Lydia Greenleaf dated 1796, “has lately been carefully removed, framed, and is in the possession of her son.” The structure holding Greenleaf’s inscription was located in Boston’s North End, the oldest section of the city and a neighborhood that since the mid-nineteenth century housed many of its immigrants; when an architect described the building in 1880, he noted “a number of rambling tenements extending up the back yard.”⁹⁵ Just blocks away, preservationists began an active campaign in 1900 to “save” the Paul Revere house from

⁹³ T.F. Hunt, *Visitor’s Guide to Salem* (Salem, MA: Essex Institute, 1897), 159; Elizabeth Manning, “Boyhood Home of Hawthorne,” *Wide Awake* (Nov. 1891), 502.

⁹⁴ “The Colonel Josiah Quincy Homestead, Wollaston, Quincy, Mass.,” *Old-Time New England* (Jan. 1938), 85; Mary H. Northend, *Historic Homes of New England* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1914), 192.

⁹⁵ “Notes and Queries,” *Boston Evening Transcript* (Jan. 26, 1889); “The Illustrations,” *American Architect and Building News* 7 (Apr. 1880), 178, APS.

its “degraded” status as a tenement and cigar factory. Restored to its colonial appearance, reformers argued, the site might inspire the neighborhood’s predominantly Italian residents to emulate Yankee traditions of “loyalty, simplicity, and daily pride.”⁹⁶ For Greenleaf’s son, too, there was little of worth to be lost in altering the existing architecture of a building and much to be gained in repossessing a piece of family history.

The materiality of domestic inscriptions, as well as their physical surroundings, then, continued to shape how they were encountered and interpreted at the end of the nineteenth century. In addition to inscriptions themselves being moved, broader changes to domestic interiors could shape their visibility. Window glass remained costly to replace for much of the nineteenth century, while those with means subjected their walls to successive trends in decoration.⁹⁷ Words scratched onto glass were less easily covered than those on the surface of a wall that might be papered or painted. (Inscriptions pressed into wall plaster, however, might be uncovered years or decades later.) Glass, on the other hand, breaks more readily than plaster or wood, as a number of the notices about the preservation of window inscriptions reflected. In Hartford, high winds shattered the attic windows in which Ann Bunce’s inscriptions were etched. Though the “two precious panes” were in fragments, the current residents preserved the pieces and saw them “restored as complete as possible.”⁹⁸

The venues in which these shifts were taking place, moreover, had lasting effects on how domestic inscriptions would be perceived by scholars in the academy. In print, references to domestic inscriptions in this era came primarily in local and family histories, both genres of

⁹⁶ James M. Lindgren, *Preserving Historic New England: Preservation, Progressivism, and the Remaking of Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 36-41; Curtis Guild, Jr., quoted in Lindgren, 39.

⁹⁷ Myron O. Stachiw, “The Color of Change: A Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts House,” in *Paint in America: The Colors of Historic Buildings* (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1994), 128-137; Elizabeth Donaghy Garrett, *At Home: The American Family, 1750-1850* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1990), 55.

⁹⁸ *Commemorative Biographical Record of Hartford*, 309.

historical writing that were growing more prevalent beginning in the nineteenth century and especially after the U.S. Centennial in 1876. Short-form versions of these genres also frequently appeared in the burgeoning periodical business. Finally, domestic inscriptions continued to be encountered and read in physical spaces, particularly as sites with compelling historical associations opened to visitors. Each of these printed and material sites of historical engagement fell outside the parameters of academic history.

The Rise of Authors:

Whatever Sarah Ripley attested on the day of Nathaniel Hawthorne's funeral, the Old Manse's patriotic and intellectual legacies did not always sit together easily in the final decades of the nineteenth century. In these years, the house functioned neither as a merely private residence nor as a fully public shrine. The hybrid use of the site contributed to the contest of its historical meaning, as members of the public and family members accessed and assigned significance to different parts of the house. Family members leaned on their long tenure of residency at the Old Manse to assert the historical importance of the site. They accentuated those features of the house that demonstrated the generational inheritance of property, honor, and intellect. Members of the general public and the journalists who wrote for them, by contrast, anchored the site's significance in the figures and stories they knew from print, specifically from the writings of Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Visitors and journalists continued to flock to the Old Manse in the years following Hawthorne's death. After 1867, when Sarah Alden Bradford Ripley died, Elizabeth Bradford Ripley, an unmarried daughter in the family became the primary occupant of the house and stood centrally as the site's gatekeeper and caretaker. As early as 1871, a newspaper reporter from

Cincinnati described arriving at the site, “interested with it chiefly, of course, as the temporary home of Hawthorne,” and being greeted by “an elderly maiden of the same family, Miss Ripley,” who allowed him “to look through the lower portion of the house.”⁹⁹ Another reporter speculated five years later that “hundreds of people” had ventured to the house because of “its connection with Hawthorne.”¹⁰⁰

On the third floor, meanwhile, the fireplace panel and closet remained spaces for marking family connections and histories. The remaining three inscriptions on the fireplace panel date to the 1880s and demonstrated the investment of the Emerson and Ripley descendants in deepening the site’s association with the family’s Anglo-American ancestry and the American Revolution (fig. 1.15). Upholding the gendered division of the fireplace and closet inscriptions established

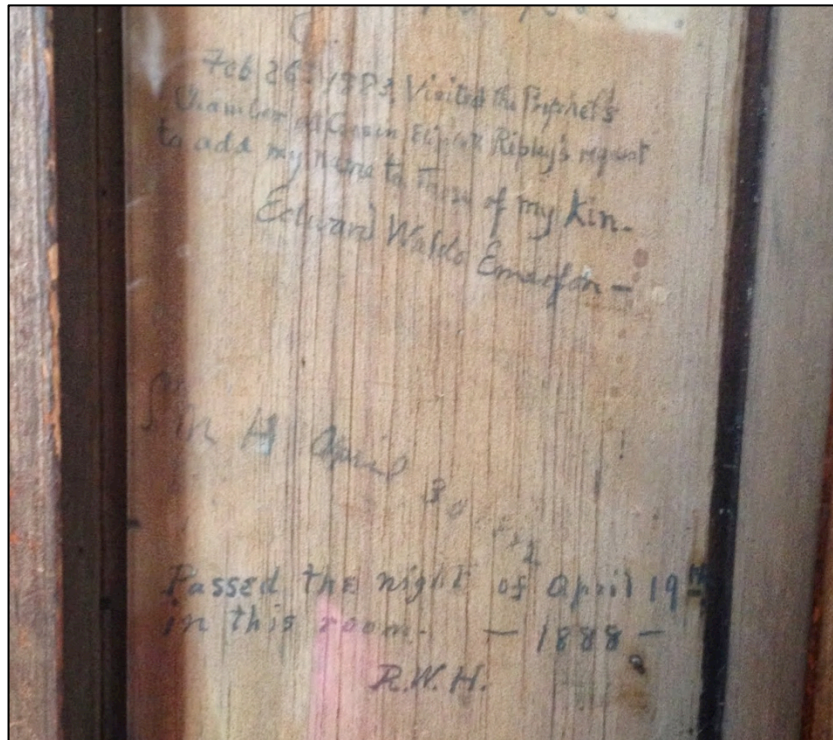


Figure 1.15. Late-nineteenth century additions to fireplace panel, Old Manse. Trustees of the Reservation

⁹⁹ “In the Philosopher’s Den,” *Detroit Free Press*, Jan. 8, 1871, ProQuest.

¹⁰⁰ “Nathaniel Hawthorne’s ‘Old Manse,’” *Louisville Courier Journal* (Louisville, KY), Feb. 1, 1876, ProQuest.

in the first half of the nineteenth century, Elizabeth Ripley orchestrated but did not herself produce any of these new entries. “Visited the Prophet’s Chamber at Cousin Elizabeth Ripley’s request,” inscribed Ralph Waldo Emerson’s nephew Edward in February, 1883, “to add my name to those of my kin.” Another writer, R.W.H., connected the line of Emerson inscriptions to the house’s proximity to the Old North Bridge and the anniversary of its battles: “Passed the night of April 19th in this room – 1888 – .” A final, unsigned entry from this decade merely records, “Visited this room, July 18th 1884.” Elizabeth Ripley did, however, make her own mark among the missives of her female ancestors, writing her initials in large letters squarely in the middle of the closet wall in 1873 (fig. 1.16).¹⁰¹

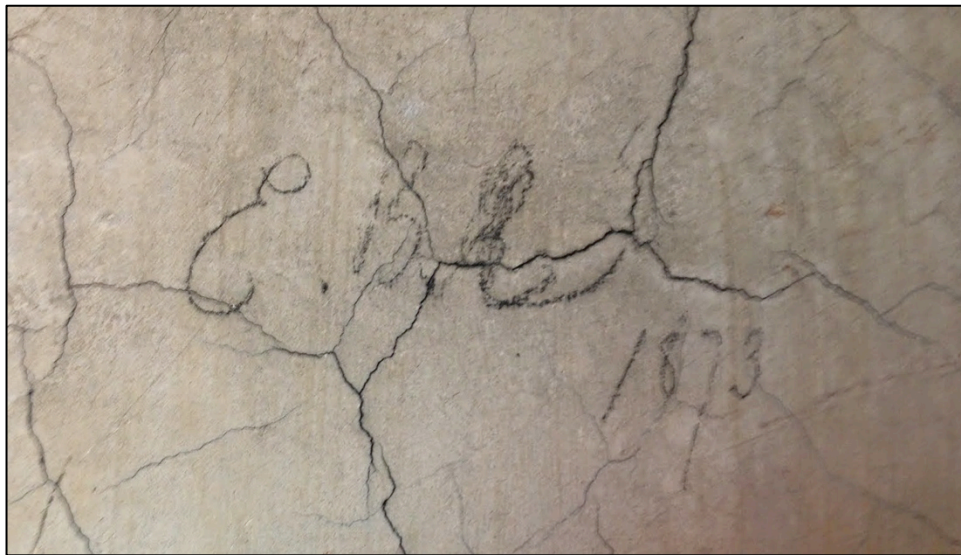


Figure 1.16. Elizabeth Bradford Ripley inscription in closet, 1873, Old Manse. Trustees of the Reservation

Newspaper reports played on the friction about the site’s significance perceived to exist between family members and visitors. In 1891, writers for the *Chicago Tribune* who had visited several Concord landmarks for a features piece suggested that the “dear old lady” who had

¹⁰¹ Fireplace panel inscriptions, 1883-1888, 3rd floor, The Old Manse; Closet inscription, 1873, 3rd floor, Old Manse.

rebuffed them at the door of the Old Manse had “become a little snappish and soured, it may be, because of the many visitors to the house.” Though she asserted, according to their report, that neither Hawthorne nor Emerson had anything to do with the site, “we know,” wrote the authors of the piece, otherwise. They did not refer to Elizabeth Ripley by name, but if indeed, she were the “dear old lady” whose manner and poor memory the reporters were willing to forgive, she had received visitors at the house for more than two decades and would die within the year.¹⁰² Several years later, an unnamed Phoenix, Arizona, lawyer, shared in the *Arizona Republican* a conversation he had passed with Sophia Thayer, a Ripley descendant. He had referred to the site as “Hawthorne’s Old Manse,” to which she responded that “she always heard that name for the house with a great deal of impatience,” since her family had owned it since before the Revolution and Hawthorne had only lived there, as a renter, for four years.¹⁰³

The gendered elements of the site’s competing legacies came to the fore in these two articles. In each, a woman from within the Old Manse family circle stubbornly objected to the public characterization of the site as authorial terrain. By asserting the primacy of the family’s legacy within the house, each came off as out of touch with what the rest of the public knew and accepted. Elizabeth Ripley fit the mold of the eccentric New England spinster gone batty, while Sophia Thayer assumed the role of pouting coquette.¹⁰⁴ For readers, these archetypes likely inspired pity or condescension, but neither credibility nor historical authority. The family’s

¹⁰² Rena A. Michaels, “Shadowed by the Pine: An October Ramble Through Sleepy Old Concord,” *Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 18, 1891, ProQuest.

¹⁰³ “Hawthorne’s Old Manse: A Fact Regarding the House Not Generally Known,” *Arizona Republican* (Phoenix, AZ), May 10, 1903, ProQuest..

¹⁰⁴ J. Samaine Lockwood’s recent work points to the persisting association among literary scholars of the figure of the New England spinster with ‘barren’ regionalist writing. Lockwood, by contrast, argues that unmarried women, both as authors of and as protagonists within New England regionalist works, engaged in “intimate historicism”: they “posited a relationship between the intimate desires and generative labors of the unmarried New England woman and her membership in a historicized, regionally specific community.” J. Samaine Lockwood, *Archives of Desire: The Queer Historical Work of New England Regionalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 11.

history within the home – its witness to the Revolutionary conflict, its generational legacies, its pride in residential longevity – correlates to suspect feminine figures, while the site’s author-centered histories, viable *for* public circulation and validated *through* their public recognition, come from the masculine voices of the journalist and newspaper.

This reorientation around an author at the expense of a longer history and broader circle of historical actors occurred at the Wadsworth-Longfellow house, too. There, the fluid mixing on the walls of literary texts from many hands and sources narrowed when the house opened to the public at the turn of the twentieth century. By that time, the residence was best known as the boyhood home of Anne’s brother, world-renowned poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and soon the inscriptions followed suit in their close association with him. The household’s shared literary practice came to be known as the work of a singular author.

The third-floor room containing the casement inscriptions, which had for a time been the chamber in which Henry and his brothers slept, became known as the “Boys’ Room” and was redecorated accordingly. By 1902, an “old trundle bed” had been added to the items on display, and soon followed an old map of the United States to grace the wall.¹⁰⁵ In short order, newspaper descriptions naturalized these artifacts within the space and in connection to the future poet. “Here may still be seen the trundle bed where he slept and the little school desk upon which [he] tried his new jackknives,” narrated an article reprinted from the *New York Tribune*. “On the window casement remain specimens of the handwriting of the Longfellow boys.”¹⁰⁶ In this telling, the window casement inscriptions, produced long after Henry and his

¹⁰⁵ “Longfellow Mansion Opened this Afternoon,” *Portland Express*, June 20, 1902, in Nathan Goold, comp., Longfellow House scrapbook, Collection 1950, Maine Historical Society (hereafter Coll. 1950).

¹⁰⁶ Nathan Goold, the site’s first curator repeated this association in a published guide of the site. Of the Boy’s Room, he wrote, “It contains the old trundle-bed and the writings of the children on the casing of the window, with many articles of much interest. Here Longfellow probably wrote his first poem.” “Longfellow Relics,” n.p., in Coll. 1950; Goold, *The Wadsworth-Longfellow House, Longfellow’s Home, Portland, Maine: Its History and Its Occupants* (Portland: Lakeside Printing. Company, 1908), 28.

brothers were young and reflective of close familiarity with English poetry and Spanish translation, became childhood scribblings. Another article juxtaposed the “several lines of stanzas, protected now by a glass covering to show the original handwriting” with the window on the first floor where “the poet sat, when he wrote one of his best-known works, “The Rainy Day.”¹⁰⁷ Here, in the absence of any other attribution, the lines of stanzas in the Boys’ Room seemed to presage Henry’s talents as the poet who wrote “The Rainy Day” downstairs. Both narratives, of childhood amusement and of budding poet, effaced the actual makers and chronology of the inscriptions.

Longfellow’s authorial status also proved to have shaping power over inscriptions he did not personally make and found in spaces in which he never resided. Soon after Longfellow visited the former Red Horse Tavern in Sudbury, Massachusetts in the fall of 1862, he learned of an eighteenth-century window inscription there. He wrote to Abigail Eaton, a caretaker of the site, to ask if she would copy the verses he had heard about “or any names and dates written on the windows.”¹⁰⁸ Longfellow was certainly no stranger to domestic inscription, given the rich tradition of the practice among his family members and his own established interest in the practice.¹⁰⁹ In the late 1840s, he had documented a 1778 inscription in the home of a neighbor on Tory Row in Cambridge; his sketch of the writing appeared as an illustration in a pictorial history of the Revolution published in 1860.¹¹⁰ Eaton complied, sending the four-line piece inscribed in 1774 by William Molineaux, Jr., of Boston. Within the year, Longfellow had wrapped an allusion to the artifact within the prelude section of his *Tales of a Wayside Inn*:

¹⁰⁷ “Rear of Wadsworth Longfellow Home and Library, Now Building,” *Portland Telegram*, July 19, 1903, in Coll. 1950.

¹⁰⁸ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to Abigail Eaton, 4 Nov. 1862, quoted in Mrs. C. Van D. Chenoweth, “The Landlord of the Wayside Inn,” *New England Magazine* 10, no. 3 (May 1894), 267.

¹⁰⁹ In addition to the inscriptions at the Wadsworth-Longfellow house, the second floor of the author’s home in Cambridge, Massachusetts features several inscriptions made on the windows by his children.

¹¹⁰ Benson John Lossing, *Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution...* (New York, 1860), 1: 557-558.

“Flashing on the window-pane / Emblazoned with its light and shade, / The jovial rhymes that still remain.”¹¹¹

What began as historical documentation transformed into an author’s literary sensibility, clouding where actual inscription ended and imagined artifact began. By the 1890s, commentators writing about the site – rechristened, notably, from the Red Horse Tavern to The Wayside Inn to reflect the popularity of Longfellow’s work – elevated the poet’s “elegant metre” above Molineaux’s original verses.¹¹² In a talk given to members of the Society of Colonial Wars at the inn in 1897, Samuel Bent remarked simply, that Longfellow “did not attempt to dignify this rhyme by transferring it to the “Prelude” of his “Tales...” Yet Bent also noted that the pane with Molineaux’s text, though gone from the window, was still preserved (perhaps framed within the very space where he spoke). The artifact, he continued, was “almost the only thing save the bare walls which takes us to the good old days of the Red Horse Tavern.”¹¹³ In Bent’s narrative, both original artifact and poetic allusion had a place within the site’s history, but their purposes were distinct. Molineaux’s preserved invitation served as a material reminder of the past, a prompt to imagine the site’s former days. Longfellow’s verse, on the other hand, authoritatively and poetically narrated those days and their history.

The Romance of Revolution and Decline of Readers:

Inscriptions with connections to the American Revolution or its heroic figures were among the earliest to be noted in newspaper articles and printed histories, as we saw in the 1834

¹¹¹ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Tales of a Wayside Inn* (Boston, 1863), 4.

¹¹² Chenoweth, “The Landlord of the Wayside Inn,” 268.

¹¹³ Samuel Arthur Bent, “The Wayside Inn, Its History and Literature: An Address Delivered before the Society of Colonial Wars at the Wayside Inn, Sudbury, Massachusetts, June 17, 1897,” (Boston, 1897), 22.

example with which the chapter opened.¹¹⁴ In the decade and a half *before* the nation's 1876 Centennial, notices circulated of New England markings allegedly made by military leaders John Paul Jones, Josiah Quincy, and George Washington, in addition to the patriotic messages of anonymous figures.¹¹⁵ In many cases, the circumstances of the making of these inscriptions remained murky, but such uncertainties did not inhibit many observers from eagerly using them to assert the heroism, honor, and gentility of the Revolutionary generation. "There is no pretension that any one living [...] now was a witness of the act," one journalist admitted about an inscription at a Connecticut tavern said to have been made by George Washington. "But it certainly was cut by somebody," and it continued to serve "as a precious relic and as a claim upon public patronage and immortality."¹¹⁶ In the hands of popular historian Samuel Drake, the record Josiah Quincy made in an upper-story window of his home outside Boston – documented elsewhere as "10 October 1775 General Gage sails for England with a fair wind" – provided evidence of his dedication as a military man "to drive the British fleet to sea or sink it to the bottom of the harbor."¹¹⁷

The growing connection between inscriptions and famous figures from the era of Independence helped to sever the link between inscription and fiction at the Edmund Quincy Mansion. There, the unattributed but explicit reference to *Moll Flanders* would be replaced with an inferred but uncorroborated connection to the site's most famous visitor, Declaration of Independence signer John Hancock. He and other civic luminaries visited the Quincys at the homestead before 1762, when debt drove Edmund Quincy IV to mortgage the property and to

¹¹⁴ *Saturday Morning Transcript* (Boston, MA), May 17, 1834, AHN.

¹¹⁵ Lossing, *Pictorial Field-Book*, 1: 557-558; *Portsmouth Journal of Literature and Politics*, Apr. 26, 1862, AHN; Samuel Drake, "The Quincy Mansion," *Appleton's Journal* (Aug. 7, 1875), 162; *Norwich Aurora* (Norwich, CT), Jul. 11, 1876, AHN.

¹¹⁶ *Norwich Aurora* (Norwich, CT), Jul. 11, 1876, AHN.

¹¹⁷ Drake, "The Quincy Mansion"; "The Colonel Josiah Quincy Homestead, Wollaston, Quincy, Mass.," *Old-Time New England* (Jan. 1938), 85.

move his family elsewhere. One of the daughters of the Quincy family, Dorothy, married John Hancock a little over a decade later, in 1775.¹¹⁸ By the early twentieth century, viewers of the inscription “You I love and you alone” came to read the line as an expressive tribute to Dorothy Quincy composed by John Hancock, conveniently skipping the scribbled out line below.¹¹⁹

Another windowpane in the house features the etched initials “J.H.,” which lent credibility to this new reading of the *Moll Flanders* reference.¹²⁰ In the overlooking of the second line, later readers not only lost the literary connotation of the inscription, but they also eclipsed the heterosocial authorship suggested by it.

Instead of a literary exchange between a female protagonist and her lover reproduced by one or more readers of a novel, the new interpretation centered on the unidirectional declaration of love by a patriotic hero. While it is not impossible that John Hancock and Dorothy Quincy reproduced the *Moll Flanders* exchange together – Defoe’s novel had been published in 1722, decades before their marriage and the Quincy family’s leave-taking of the house – the point here is that the idea of romantic love directed from a civic hero to his patriot bride became more legible to viewers of the Quincy inscription than the notion of a literary exchange reenacted on glass. Since the antebellum period, much of the historical memory surrounding the American Revolution had worked to soften the bitterness of the conflict and to instead emphasize the shared gentility of its leaders.¹²¹ These readily-available narratives profoundly shaped the

¹¹⁸ Myron Stachiw, “Quincy Homestead,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, National Historic Landmark Designation, United States Department of the Interior: National Parks Service, 2005, 17, 13-14.

¹¹⁹ Mary H. Northend, *Historic Homes of New England* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1914), 250.

¹²⁰ Stachiw, “Quincy Homestead,” National Historic Landmark Designation, 11.

¹²¹ Recent work on the making of Revolutionary memory before the Civil War emphasizes that forming a consolidation narrative of independence, nation-building, and unification out of the bloodshed and competing loyalties of the Revolution took tremendous work and remained subject to contestation. Michael A. McDonnell et al, eds. *Remembering the Revolution: Memory, History, and Nation Making from Independence to the Civil War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013).

reading of inscriptions tied even tangentially to that era and occluded from view the longer-standing, distinctly literary culture from which they initially arose.¹²²

Similar overlays of courtly romance also came to shroud over eighteenth-century inscriptions, particularly those made by women. Polly Lawton's signature on a window in Newport, Rhode Island, for instance, came to evoke "the gay French period" of the early 1780s and its "dances by moonlight."¹²³ Such an interpretation effaced the economic deprivation Newport suffered during the Revolutionary War and also rendered Lawton's mark as an act of playful flirtation directed at a French military officer. Accounts of a window signature made by Baroness Riedesel, the wife of a British officer who was kept under house arrest in Cambridge from 1777 to 1778 leaned on similar softening rhetoric. To Samuel A. Drake, the mark was "a souvenir of her sojourn," while in another telling described the inscription as "a memorial to the gay young prisoner" and the entertainments she had hosted during her confinement.¹²⁴ These sorts of narratives also heightened the association between inscriptions and non-literary activities: to emerging professional historians, mentions of "dances by moonlight" indicated frivolous attention on the part of amateurs to a superficial element of the past.

In the hands of family historians, the line of maternal kin Hannah Robbins set into the Gilman Garrison house underwent a similar pivot towards romance. "A story is told," went one of the twentieth-century accounts of her inscriptions, "of a lover's quarrel" between Benjamin Gilman and "his "amiable Hannah."'" As the narrative continued, Benjamin Gilman remained

¹²² A similar transformation in meaning occurred with the Shakespearean inscription Nancy Sumner had made. In an 1887 town history, the lines in the bedroom of the Milton home wishing peace and rest to the occupants within were interpreted as "the outpourings of a mother's heart." Here, the distinctly maternal connotations of domesticity served to explain the inscription. Teele, *History of Milton*, 167n.

¹²³ Henry Alden Mills, "Editor's Easy Chair," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 61 (Sept. 1880), 630; Katherine M. Abbot, *Old Paths and Legends of New England* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), 434.

¹²⁴ Samuel A. Drake, *Historic Mansions and Highways around Boston* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1899), 314; *Historic Guide to Cambridge, Compiled by Members of the Hannah Winthrop Chapter, National Society, DAR* (2nd ed., Cambridge: s.n., 1907), 106.

the primary actor. “He went early in the morning to her window, probably in the old home, and threw pebbles at it until the fair occupant looked out and the quarrel was made up.” The short tale concluded, “It is said that Tirzy Brooks, the old housekeeper, was the peacemaker.”¹²⁵ Even though Hannah Robbins signed and dated the inscription she made of her three female relatives’ marriages, in this narrative, she became the most passive of the actors. The content of her marking was beside the point; the elements that mattered in this story – and that served as explanation for the inscription – were Benjamin Gilman’s persistence, Tirzy Brooks’s faithfulness, and Hannah Robbins’s softened heart.

In this particular narrative, the use of the faithful servant trope – in the figure of “Tirzy Brooks, the old housekeeper” – demonstrates how domestic inscriptions continued, in memory, to further narratives about free, white New England. Joanne Pope Melish notes that one of the symbolic rewritings of the region’s history of slaveholding and ongoing racial discrimination rested on narratives of “certain exemplary people of color”: their deep goodness – often expressed as willing submission to white owners or employers – indicated the benign nature of New England enslavement and their exceptional behavior demonstrated, by contrast, the supposed degradation of the larger free black population.¹²⁶ By the time Hannah Robbins’s descendants were writing in the first decade of the twentieth century, moreover, the national rhetoric of the Confederacy’s Lost Cause – of slavery as “a kind of golden age of race relations, built on intimate bonds between blacks and whites,” in historian Kirk Savage’s words – was well

¹²⁵ Robbins’s inscriptions also served the more straightforward purpose of corroborating genealogical information contained elsewhere in the volume. Charles P. Noyes, *Noyes-Gilman Ancestry...* (St. Paul, MN: Printed for the Author by the Gilliss Press, New York, 1907), 206.

¹²⁶ Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and “Race” in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 183-184; Margot Minardi, *Making Slavery History: Abolition and the Politics of Memory in Massachusetts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 36-38, 129-131.

entrenched.¹²⁷ In this case, the racialized cues in the narrative – including the derivation of the name Tirzah as “Tirzy” – came with a twist. Census records and a town history indicate that Tirzah Brooks was white and born around 1755.¹²⁸ Brooks’s historical whiteness, set against her rhetorical representation as “faithful servant,” shows the elastic potential of local memory to further a pervasive, racialized narrative trope.

Finally, beginning in the 1870s, and accelerating in the 1890s, the humorous exchanges among stock characters about writing on windows evolved in ways that heightened the emerging non-literary connotations of inscriptions. These newspaper accounts, while not strictly historical, contributed to the reclassification of actual architectural markings as either graffiti or superficial products of courtship. One new exchange involved a boy scratching a windowpane and a companion who warns him there are certain acts “you can’t rub out.”¹²⁹ To seek to make such a lasting mark was to indulge in boyish – or feminine – whim, rather than to engage in a man’s deliberation. The other new premise rested on the notion that, “A girl always tests her first engagement ring by trying to write her name on a pane of glass.” When a character expresses suspicion about his fiancé’s history, his punch-line explanation is “I gave her a ring a week ago and she hasn’t tried to write her name [...] yet.”¹³⁰ The humor came, as in the pieces from a

¹²⁷ Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 157-159, quote on 157; David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001), 259-264.

¹²⁸ Tirzah James married Samuel Brooks of Exeter, a widow, in 1794; he died in 1807, and she in 1831 in Philadelphia. A later Gilman family history named her as a housekeeper in Col. Peter Gilman’s family until her marriage in 1794. This follow-up work, notably, did not incorporate the story of the lover’s quarrel into its mention of the Gilman windowpane. 1810 U.S. census, Rockingham County, New Hampshire, population schedule, Exeter, p. 242, Tirzah Brooks; digital image, HeritageQuest Online, <https://www.ancestryheritagequest.com/HQA>; Charles H. Bell, *History of the Town of Exeter* (Exeter, NH, 1888), 5; Emily Hoffman Gilman Noyes, *A Family History in Letters and Documents, 1667-1837, Concerning the Forefathers of Winthrop Sargent Gilman and His Wife Abia Swift Lippincott* (St. Paul, MN: Privately Printed, 1919), 1:188, 161.

¹²⁹ “Can’t Rub it Out,” *Weekly Rescue* (Sacramento, CA), Sept. 14, 1876, AHN.

¹³⁰ The association of domestic inscriptions with the testing of engagement rings persist, particularly, my initial survey suggests, at historic plantation sites in the southern United States. While there is some evidence to suggest such a historical tradition of marking windows at the time of engagement within particular families – more than twenty women in the Carter family have marked the windows of Shirley Plantation since the 1750s – my overall

century earlier, at the absent woman's expense, but with an important modification. The joke no longer was the futility of a maiden making a poetic vow on glass. Now, the female figure's reticence to test her ring on glass – itself a gesture that stressed feminine vanity and materialism – became evidence of her tarnished history.

Collectively, these late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century interpretations of domestic inscriptions severed the ties between these artifacts and everyday literary practice. Individual inscriptions became notable beyond the walls of their making by their association to authors known first and known better in print. By the same principle, those occupying or visiting sites with ties to authors, civic heroes, or famous events turned first to these referents to explain the presence and meanings of architectural markings. In cases where such associations were not readily available, narratives of courtship and childish graffiti filled the gap.

Conclusion: Cracks and Clutter

The inscriptions women in the Ripley family made in the closet of the Old Manse in the first decades of the nineteenth century today are difficult to decipher. In addition to the cracks in the plaster that fracture their pencil markings, a plethora of newer inscriptions, most of which were added by visitors after the house opened for formal tours in 1934, also clutter the wall.¹³¹ These new features overshadow the faded markings of two centuries ago. These markings – primarily names and dates – might readily register as graffiti, an illicit marring of a space not one's own. Yet they too inscribe a particular encounter with the place of the Old Manse. The twentieth-century inscriptions highlight the changing function of the site, from family residence

findings point to the association between inscriptions and engagement as a product of the late nineteenth century. *Evening News* (San Jose, CA), 7 Feb. 1907, AHN; "Suspicious," *Detroit Free Press*, Jun. 17, 1892, ProQuest.

¹³¹ The Old Manse officially opened for formal tours in 1934, and by August 1936, an estimated 11,000-12,000 people had visited. "'Old Manse' Open Again This Season," *Boston Globe*, Aug. 9, 1936, ProQuest.

to public museum, and the altered status of the closet, from treasured, intimate enclosure to a space perceived as unimportant and unobtrusive enough – unlike the adjacent fireplace panel inscribed by famous men – for touring visitors to mark. Indeed, the majority of these more recent inscriptions cluster just past the opening to the closet, tucked alongside the doorframe (fig. 1.17). Were one to look only this far into the room, or scan the records only briefly, one might presume all the closet markings are from these casual visitors of the last century.



Figure 1.17. Twentieth-century visitors' markings in the closet, Old Manse. Trustees of the Reservation

More broadly, the legibility of domestic inscriptions to scholars suffers from metaphorical cracks and clutter. The cracks include disciplinary divides that separate studies of architecture from those of literature, as well as archival ones separating historical structures and paper documents. Perhaps more profoundly, the absence of comprehensive work on these artifacts has left individual examples of the practice isolated from other examples. Left with only localized fragments of a larger practice, contemporary observers, whether historic site staff, tourists, or academic scholars, may be tempted to view individual examples of domestic inscription as singular marks of genius or unexplainable quirks. The clutter obscures these markings from view with the overlays of later interpretation: with assumptions about graffiti and illicit behavior, with notions about productive writing taking place in print, and with flattened notions of the textured spatial politics of domestic space. Rather than peer intently beyond the cracks and clutter, scholars have left these artifacts to the realm of memory.

In the early Republic and antebellum period, domestic inscriptions shared many characteristics with other forms of literary engagement. They were frequently intertextual; they were inherently social, in reflecting the meeting of many readers; they invited rereading and additions; they evoked sentiment to mark family and friendship. The spatial qualities of domestic inscriptions, on the other hand, add to our understanding of reading and writing. Their placement in parlors, bedchambers, and writing closets highlighted the divisions between spaces of household labor and those of literary engagement and sociability.

Chapter 2

Divided Hours to Divided Objects

In the spring of 1786, eleven-year-old Abigail Martin began to work a sampler at Mary Balch's school in Providence, Rhode Island. Like other students of Mary Balch, she adorned her work with prominent civic buildings and frolicking people alongside the floral motifs and aphoristic phrases common in late-eighteenth-century embroidery (fig. 2.1). The finished product, which she marked "Nabby Martin's Work. 1786," was a 15-by-10¾-inch piece of linen covered in delicate stitches of silk thread. "To Colleges and School ye Youths repair," the navy letters on a sky-blue banner across the top of the piece advised, "Improve each precious Moment while youre [sic] there."¹ To illustrate this point, she centered a clear rendering of the College of Rhode Island's edifice – complete with stitches to create the appearance of brickwork – underneath and surrounded it with a background of lush green satin stitches and figures of animals, ladies, and trees.² The true centerpiece of Abigail's sampler, however, was the image of the State House that she placed under the even larger declaration, "Let Virtue be a Guide to thee." Architectural intricacies and moral directives aside, Abigail exhibited sophisticated stitchwork in the blending of color she executed in the two columns of floral designs framing the central image as well as in the details - striped fabrics, shoe buckles, and facial features - adorning the ten human figures spread across the sampler. Color and texture, text and image,

¹ Abigail apparently ran out of room for the "re" of "there." She instead placed them above the "the."

² Satin stitches are set closely together to solidly cover an area with thread. For depictions and descriptions of different stitches, see the glossary of Susan Burrows Swan, *Plain & Fancy, American Women and Their Needlework, 1700-1850* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), 221-232.



Figure 2.1. Abigail Martin sampler, 1786. Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

allusions to nature, and symbols of republican virtue combined to create an elegant representation of Abigail's dexterity with the needle and emerging sense of taste.³

A little over a decade later in 1799, nineteen-year-old Julia Bowen – who would go on to marry Abigail Martin's younger brother Joseph in 1803 – recorded in her journal the flurry of literary and social activity that crowded her days in Providence. On April 1st, having arisen “as usual” at half past eight, Julia and her friend Rebecca Power “spent the morning in writing a little Geograph[y] & reading the History of England.” Despite their scholarly intentions, they “pass'd the remainder of the morning and afternoon in riotous laughter,” before taking tea and going out with several other female friends to have their fortunes told. Unfortunately, after their “long, fatiguing walk” they were disappointed “to find the Old Lady gone into the Country.” Julia and her companions then returned to town by way of a married friend's house, where she stopped to pick up her pocketbook. There, the young ladies found two male acquaintances “seated in close conference with each his paper, which we endeavour'd to wrest from them, but in vain.” Next, they called on Julia's cousin Caleb, who joined them for a walk and to accompany home one of her friends, whom the diarist playfully referred to as “the Major.” After this “mighty pleasant walk,” she and Rebecca finally retired at half-past ten.⁴

The literary practices of Abigail Martin, Julia Bowen, and their peers moved among genres, material forms, and the very streets of the city. Works of pen and needle intermingled in the reading and writing habits of these young women and contributed to their social interactions. As another sampler verse of the era delineated, “how blest the maid” who let her time “the book,

³ Betty Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee: Needlework in the Education of Rhode Island Women, 1730-1830* (Rhode Island Historical Society, 1983), 112-117; 120; Abigail (Nabby) Martin sampler, 17.361, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design (hereafter RISD).

⁴ Julia Bowen (Martin) diary, 1 Apr. 1799, Martin Family Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society (hereafter RIHS).

the needle, and the pen divide.”⁵ These were readers on the move, engaging in a dynamic process of crossing between: texts crossing between ink and stitch, readers crossing between genres, sociability crossing between intimate and public settings, and most critically, young women sampling among these practices and spaces.

In these acts of sampling, whether with needle or pen, Abigail Martin and Julia Bowen recorded their cultivation of taste in early national Providence. The era was one of transition locally, in terms economic, institutional, and cultural. As Rhode Island’s other chief port, Newport, struggled to recover from physical and financial ruin in the wake of a three-year British occupation during the Revolution, profit and prestige swayed north to Providence’s merchant families. New institutions, including the College of Rhode Island (renamed Brown University in 1804), and expanded infrastructure demonstrated this local flourishing in material terms. With 6,380 inhabitants in 1790, Providence remained a large town rather than a full-fledged city, but it was one of the ten most populous communities in the new Republic.⁶

The activities of educated white women in early national Providence also illuminate a shift between eighteenth-century practices of civility and the early-nineteenth-century emergence of a distinctly American culture of taste. Scholars such as David Shields have characterized civility as a set of discursive practices grounded in politeness, gentility, and wit. Elites on both sides of the British Atlantic built intellectual and cultural affinities out of shared expressions of dress and gesture, feeling and fraternity, sorority and sociability.⁷ However, in Shields’s hands, men had much freer rein in moving among the various sites of sociability and civility; women

⁵ Rebekah S. Munro sampler, c. 1792, depicted in Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee*, 146.

⁶ Jane Lancaster, ““By the Pens of Females”: Girls’ Diaries from Rhode Island, 1788-1821,” *Rhode Island History* 57, no. 3 (Aug. 1999), 60; Peter J. Coleman, *The Transformation of Rhode Island 1790-1860* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1963), 20; John Hutchins Cady, *The Civic and Architectural Development of Providence, 1636-1950* (Providence, RI: The Book Shop, 1957), 43-44, 57-58.

⁷ David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

participated in the relatively-confined settings of the tea table, the assembly, and the salon.⁸ Setting needlework and literary artifacts like journals side by side opens for exploration a different body of “sites” among which young women actively moved in cultivating, rehearsing, and exercising taste, itself an outgrowth of these older forms of elite social interaction.

As Catherine Kelly eloquently has shown, the exercise of taste entailed a flow of texts, objects, and practices: one’s reading on the beauties of nature in an elegantly-bound printed volume might inform how one viewed a vista encountered on a walk, which, in turn, one might feelingly interpret and record in graceful script in a letter to a friend.⁹ The manners, character, and knowledge that the elite young women of Providence developed in stitching a sampler or in reading with a friend might then be enacted at the tea table, during promenades around town, or in a contest of wits with their male counterparts. Taste – this way of looking, consuming, reading, and recording – created affinities and conferred cultural capital among women and men whose literary practices, social interactions, and material lives upheld the political and aesthetic values of the new Republic.¹⁰

Tracing the circuits of elite young women through Providence, this chapter first documents the physical mobility at the heart of their engagement with the republic of taste. Through their diaries, invitations, and needlework, they mapped and moved through a diverse terrain of intimate, institutional, and racialized spaces. This movement through physical space was reflected in the movement across material forms and genres these young women exercised as readers and writers. As with physical samplers, in which a variety of stitches of different lengths, shapes, and colors conveys a legible overall picture, the variety of practices in which

⁸ Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters*, 12-54.

⁹ Catherine E. Kelly, *Republic of Taste: Art, Politics, and Everyday Life in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 10-11.

¹⁰ Kelly, *Republic of Taste*, 4-7.

young women engaged – in needlework, at the tea table, or in a commonplace book – made up the “single, integrated project” of producing and projecting a discernible figure of polite femininity.¹¹ Young women demonstrated their attainment of those qualities not only within the social conventions and expectations of each setting but also in their ability to seamlessly transition *among* them. In addition to the cultural capital to be gained as a participant in the republic of taste, these practices shaped one’s bearings within a particular social geography, and the markings of needle and pen alike recorded one’s belonging within it. In the early Republic, needlework was intimately tied to other textual practices and to physical spaces.

By the end of the nineteenth century, samplers contributed to a different unifying project: the primacy of Anglo-American heritage within the fabric of the United States. Descendants of sampler makers, members of lineal organizations, and decorative arts enthusiasts increasingly attached needlework to a narrative of national development that emphasized simple origins, cultural progress, and democratic respectability. Accordingly, the features of note in these artifacts changed, as did the material settings of their display. At the time of their making, these pieces resulted from hours divided among different forms of literary practice and reflected one’s grasp of the fluid practices of taste; samplers ended the nineteenth century as objects divorced from the intellectual and social terrain in which they earlier had been embedded. With their links to a dynamic, transatlantic culture of literary engagement unraveled, samplers became, in the words of one early twentieth century author, the “prim little conventionalized ornament[s]” produced by the young maidens of an infant country.¹² They newly served as objects through and against which to measure the unfolding of the nation’s progress from wilderness to Republic.

¹¹ Catherine E. Kelly, “Reading and The Problem of Accomplishment,” in *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, eds. Heidi Brayman Hackel and Catherine E. Kelly (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 130.

¹² George L. Miner, “Rhode Island Samplers,” *Rhode Island Historical Society Collections* 8, no. 2 (Apr., 1920), 45.

The Providence Landscape of Samplers and Sampling

Let's situate ourselves in early national Providence using the places noted by Abigail Martin's sampler and Julia Bowen's diary entry. When read together, the daily life illuminated in these artifacts is one of commanding mobility through different spaces around Providence, ranging from formal institutions to lowly dwellings. Only indisposition, unpleasant weather, or the monumental task of quilting seemed to keep Julia Bowen tethered to her home. Scholars already have characterized the cultural practice of taste, and civility before it, as fluid and diverse in terms of genres, social activities, and, to a lesser degree, participants.¹³ The experiences captured in the needlework of Mary Balch's students and Providence's diarists suggest that we should also consider the variety brought to the world of polite letters by movement through the material spaces of city streets.

For these elite young women and their friends, daily life in Providence revolved around "the Neck," a hilly strip of land situated between the Great Salt Cove and the Seekonk River, in what is now the East Side of the city (fig. 2.2). It was here that Providence's key commercial and civic leaders clustered their businesses and residences in the eighteenth century. Many of the prominent merchant families in Providence increased their prosperity in the final decades of the eighteenth century, first with privateering efforts during the Revolutionary War, and afterwards by reanimating commercial exchanges – mostly in connection to the slave trade – with the Caribbean and down the Atlantic seaboard. The most enterprising among them also forged new trade relationships as far away as China.¹⁴

¹³ Kelly, *Republic of Taste*, 4-7; Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters*, 12-13.

¹⁴ The historical scholarship on the city of Providence in the colonial and early national periods is sparse; most of the work that does exist chiefly consists of basic demographic, economic, or genealogical information. For a more analytical study of women and society in New England ports, though not specifically in reference to Providence, see Elaine Forman Crane, *Ebb Tide in New England: Women, Seaports, and Social Change 1630-1800* (Boston: Northeastern Press, 1998). Cady, *Civic and Architectural Development*, 47-51, 57-58.

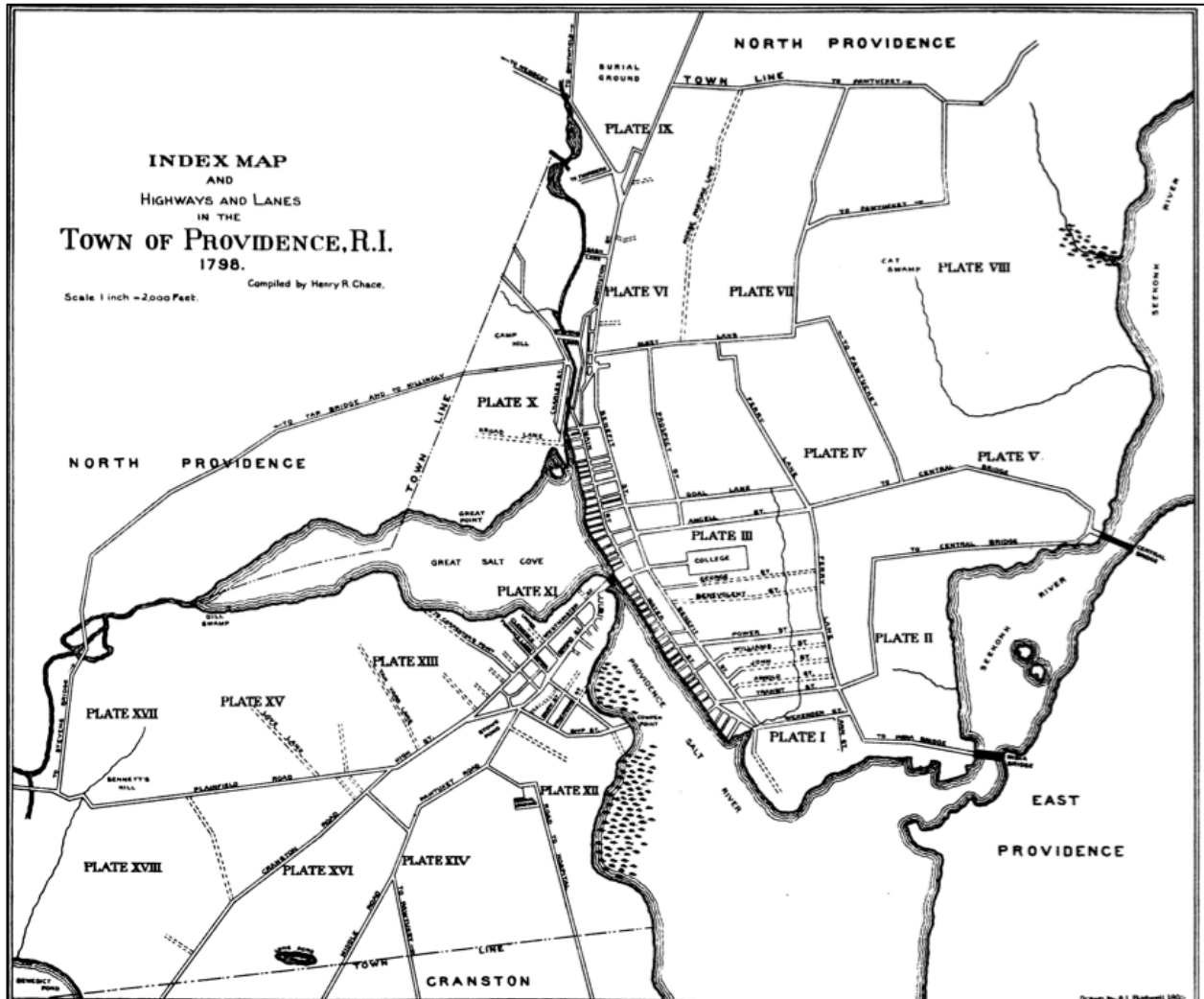


Figure 2.2. Index Map of Providence, from Henry R. Chace, *Owners and Occupants of the Lots, Houses, and Shops in the Town of Providence, Rhode Island in 1798* (1914)

In tandem with this expanding trade, the city acquired new institutions and infrastructure that reflected the growing prestige of its commercial leaders. These developments included new bridges to facilitate movement in and out of the city’s traditional center, additional wharves to accommodate burgeoning shipping interests, and the state’s first industrial factories. Over the course of the 1790s alone, the city gained its first customs house, bank, and insurance

company.¹⁵ Farmland on the outskirts of town gradually became developed into neighborhood plots, as enterprising merchants transformed formerly residential areas closer to the waterfront into more strictly commercial districts. Property values in the city tripled between the end of the Revolutionary War and the beginning of the nineteenth century, while the population grew by twenty percent just between 1790 and 1800.¹⁶

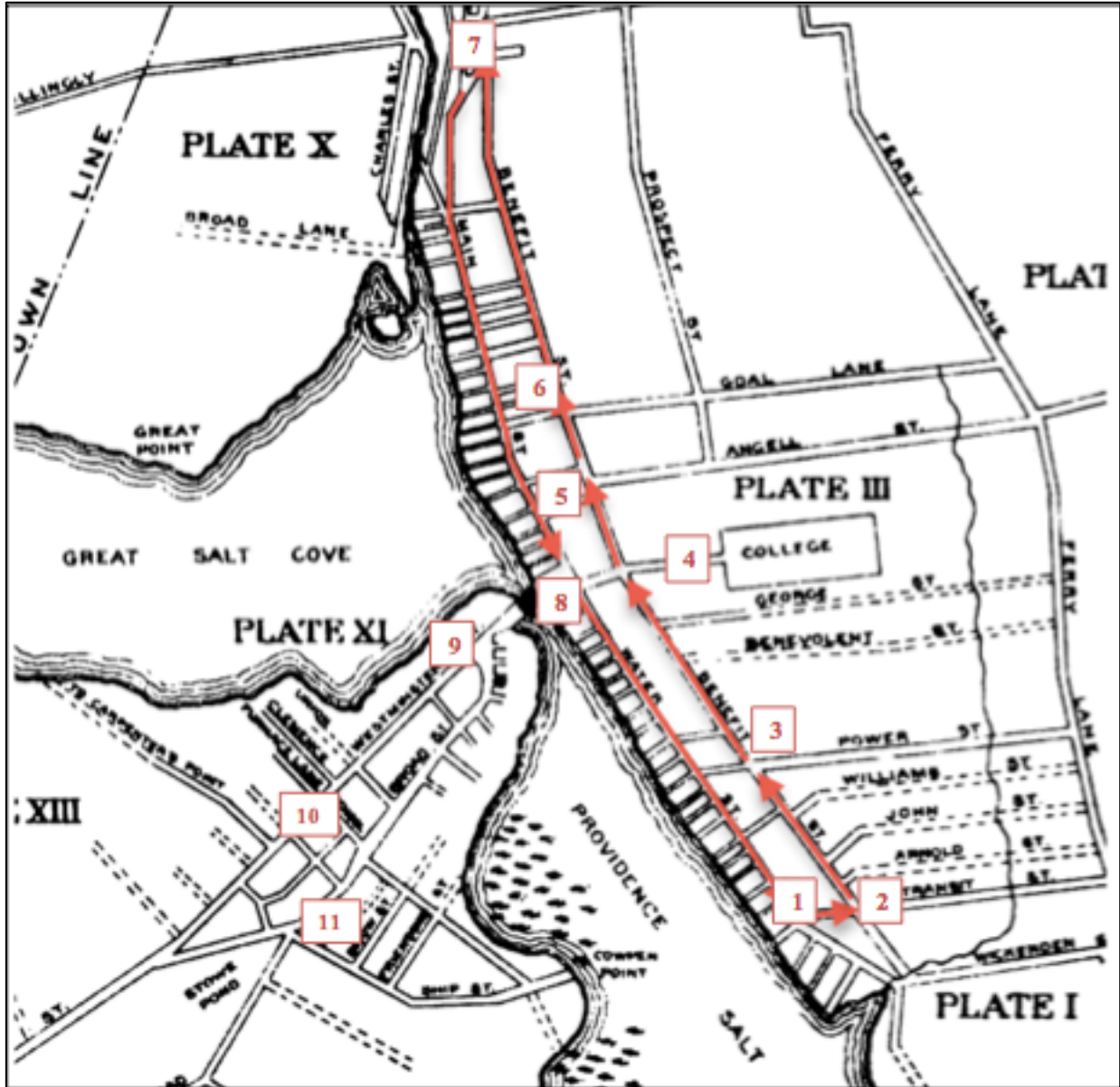
In the spring of 1799, Julia Bowen, her stepmother, and her younger siblings were residing close to the Power family towards the south end of the Neck, near today's Transit Street.¹⁷ When she ventured from home in the afternoon with friends, they walked up the hill to Benefit Street, also known at the time as "the back street," gathered more friends and made their way to the fortuneteller's (fig. 2.3). Proceeding along the back street, the young women first would have passed the elaborate residences of a number of the city's wealthiest merchants: Julia's uncle, John Innes Clark; his partner in business, Joseph Nightingale; and perhaps most famously, John Brown. All three men had constructed lavish three-story homes on Benefit with

¹⁵ Before the Revolution, all trade vessels coming into Rhode Island had to go through the customs house in Newport; the establishment of a customs house in Providence in 1791 marked the southern port's crumbling monopoly on the state's maritime trade. Cady, *Civic and Architectural Development*, 57, 62.

¹⁶ John Hutchins Cady, "The Development of the Neck: A Chronicle of the East Side of Providence (concluded)," *Rhode Island History* 4, no. 2 (Apr. 1945), 37; Coleman, 225.

¹⁷ The diary makes clear that the family's normal residence was being leased while Julia's father Ephraim Bowen Jr. and brother William engaged in a commercial maritime expedition. Frequent references to members of the Power family in conjunction with mentions of locking up the house for the night, receiving visitors, or domestic chores, have shaped my sense of where Julia and her family were living. See entries of 3 Apr., 24 Apr., 30 Apr., 9 May, 4 July 1799. Reconstructing the movements of Julia Bowen and her compatriots through the city has required extensive triangulating between genealogies, local histories, and the diary itself. Deciphering locations affiliated with male heads of households – "Uncle Billy's" refers to the residence of William Bowen on Market Square – has been easier than those associated with the diarist's female friends, to whom she frequently referred either by first name alone or by cognomen. To figure out where "The Major's" home was, for instance, one must decipher from the diary's context clues that the Major was most likely Mary B. Howell, then consult a genealogy to connect Mary B. Howell to her father David, and finally locate David Howell's residence on Benefit Street. I remain uncertain about some identities and locations, but I have identified enough of Bowen's close companions and their residences to be confident in providing a characteristic description of her circuits.

Invaluable sources in this endeavor have been Henry R. Chace, *Owners and Occupants of the Lots, Houses and Shops in the Town of Providence Rhode Island in 1798* (Providence: Printed by Livermore & Knight Co., 1914); Henry R. Chace, "A Descriptive List of all the Houses in the Compact Part of the Town of Providence, RI, 1779," Box 1, Folder 22, Henry R. Chace Papers, RIHS; Clarkson A. Collins, 3rd, ed., "Pictures of Providence in the Past, 1790-1890: The Reminiscences of Walter R. Danforth," *Rhode Island History* 10.1-11.2 (Jan. 1951-Apr. 1952); and *Representative Men and Old Families of Rhode Island*, 3 vols. (Chicago: J.H. Beers & Co., 1908).



Key:		
1: Power Residence	5: First Baptist Church	9: Todd's Bookstore
2: The Back Street	6: State House	10: Providence Theater
3: John Brown Residence	7: Mary Balch's School	11: New Light Meetinghouse
4: College of RI	8: Market Square/Great Bridge	

Figure 2.3. Julia Bowen's circuit around Providence, 1799. Base image from Chace, *Owners and Occupants* (1914), Index map.

their China trade profits; when George Washington visited the city as part of his inaugural tour in 1790, both the Clarks and the Browns entertained him in their mansions.¹⁸

Continuing north, Julia and her friends next would have passed the College of Rhode Island and several of the city's largest churches. The college had relocated to Providence in 1770 after several years of aggressive bidding by other towns to host the colony's premier site of higher education.¹⁹ The construction of a brick edifice began soon after, with the labor of at least four enslaved African Americans contributing to the project.²⁰ Standing atop a hill that soon bore its name, the completed college building commanded a sweeping view of the harbor and central market district and was itself, with seventeen windows on each of the façade's four stories, an impressive sight to behold (fig 2.4).²¹ When Abigail Martin and other students of



Figure 2.4. Edifice of the College of Rhode Island, now University Hall, Brown University, 2015, Photograph by Kate Silbert

¹⁸ Thomas Michie, ““Lavish Expenditure, Defeated Purpose”: Providence’s China Trade Mansions,” in *Global Trade and Visual Arts in Federal New England*, ed. Patricia Johnson and Caroline Frank (Lebanon, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2014, 171-182), 172-174.

¹⁹ Reuben Aldridge Guild, *Early History of Brown University* (1897; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1980).

²⁰ Robert P. Emlen, “Slave Labor at the College Edifice: Building Brown University’s University Hall in 1700,” *Rhode Island History* 66, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 36-45.

²¹ Cady, *Civic and Architectural Development*, 44.



Figure 2.5. Detail of the College of Rhode Island on Loann Smith's sampler, 1785. Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design.

Mary Balch reproduced the edifice on their samplers in the decade that followed, their precision with these architectural details made the building as unmistakable on linen as it was prominent in the landscape (fig 2.5). Though they did not stop at the college that day, Julia and her companions occasionally attended prayers and orations there. The institution's formal exhibitions and commencement ceremonies served as important gatherings of the city's elite men and women.²² Another female diarist of the era, who was visiting from Philadelphia, recorded her pleasure in seeing the college's library – where, she wrote, “we were suffered to tumble over the books till we were tired” – as well as in witnessing a demonstration of some of the institution's scientific instruments.²³

Prominent churches along the back street included the First Congregational Church, and, still standing between Waterman and Thomas Streets, the Baptist Meeting House. These towering structures, completed in 1795 and 1775, respectively, supplanted earlier, less elaborate gathering spaces and echoed church designs in Boston and London.²⁴ As emblems of the

²² Julia Bowen diary, 21 Apr. 1799, Martin Family Papers; Rebecca Carter diary, 20 Aug. 1794, 31 Dec. 1794, Box 7, Carter-Danforth Papers, RIHS; James Tallmadge to Rebecca Carter, 19 Apr. [1797], Box 2, Folder 21, Carter-Danforth Papers; College of Rhode Island exhibition ticket for Miss R. Carter, 1794, Box 1, Folder 16, Carter Family Papers, John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

²³ Susan Lear diary, 4 June 1788, quoted in Lancaster, 66-67.

²⁴ Local planners adapted from Englishman John Gibbs's *Book of Architecture* to construct the Baptist church's façade, while the layout of First Congregational Church drew from St. Paul's Church in London as well as the Hollis Street Church in Boston, designed by Charles Bulfinch. Cady, *Civic and Architectural Development*, 50, 67-68.

community's piety and cosmopolitanism both, these structures, too, appeared in detailed form on Providence needlework in the 1790s. A year after the Congregationalists dedicated their new meetinghouse on Benevolent Street, Polly Spurr captured its impressive double spires and clock face on a substantial 17 ³/₁₆-by-16 ³/₄-inch sampler that was one of the first visual records of the building (fig. 2.6).²⁵ Repeating a pattern fellow Mary Balch student Susan Smith had used for



Figure 2.6. Polly Spurr sampler, 1796, featuring the First Congregational Church of Providence. Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

²⁵ Polly Spurr sampler (1796), 49.368, RISD.

her depiction of the Baptist church a few years prior, Spurr set her name in large letters at the foot of the building's front steps.²⁶ Though most frequently in attendance at St. John's Chapel, the Episcopal church, Julia Bowen moved among various houses of worship in town and knew, inside and out, the religious edifices her peers stitched on linen. Over three months in 1799, for instance, she attended a wedding at the Quaker meetinghouse, services at the Episcopal, Baptist, and New Light churches, and an Independence Day oration at the First Congregational Church.²⁷ As houses of worship and sites of community gathering, these spaces – depicted or visited – reflected social bonds as well as religious devotion.

At the corner of Benefit and Powder House Lane (now Court Street), the back entrance of the State House awaited the passing party of young women. This brick structure, with its impressive central tower, was completed in 1762, four years after the previous building burned down.²⁸ Abigail Martin was among the first of Mary Balch's students to depict the reconstructed building on her sampler, though a string of others would do so between 1786 and 1799. A close friend of Julia Bowen, Rebecca Carter, went so far as to label the rendition of the building that she stitched in 1788 (fig. 2.7). Though she narrowed the building from five bays to three, local viewers readily would have recognized the hipped roof, balustrade, and central tower.²⁹ As of 1764, the collection of the city's library company, established in 1753, could be found in the State House's council chamber. Indeed, most libraries of the era found room to operate within

²⁶ Susan Smith sampler (1794), depicted in Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee*, 128. Other examples incorporating these buildings include work by Amey Randall (1793), Mary Tillinghast (1796), Abby Bishop (1796), and a generation later, Sarah F. Sweet (c. 1818). Depicted in Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee*, 128-133.

²⁷ Julia Bowen diary, 2 May 1799, 19 May 1799, 26 May 1799, 2 June 1799, 16 June 1799, 4 July 1799, Martin Family Papers. Providence's New Light church, now Beneficent Congregational Church, was formed by disaffected members of First Congregational Church in 1743; Bowen often referred to the church via its ministers, Joseph Snow, its founder, and John Wilson. She referred to the First Congregational Church, also known as the Benevolent Congregational society, as the Presbyterian Meeting House. Compare her record of hearing Jonathan Maxcy speak at the Presbyterian Meeting House on July 4, 1799, with the published title of his oration from that day. Jonathan Maxcy, *An Oration Delivered in the First Congregational Meeting-House, in Providence, on the Fourth of July, 1799* (Providence: John Carter, Jr., 1799), Readex: America's Historical Imprints (hereafter AHI).

²⁸ Cady, *Civic and Architectural Development*, 37-39.

²⁹ Cady, *Civic and Architectural Development*, 38.

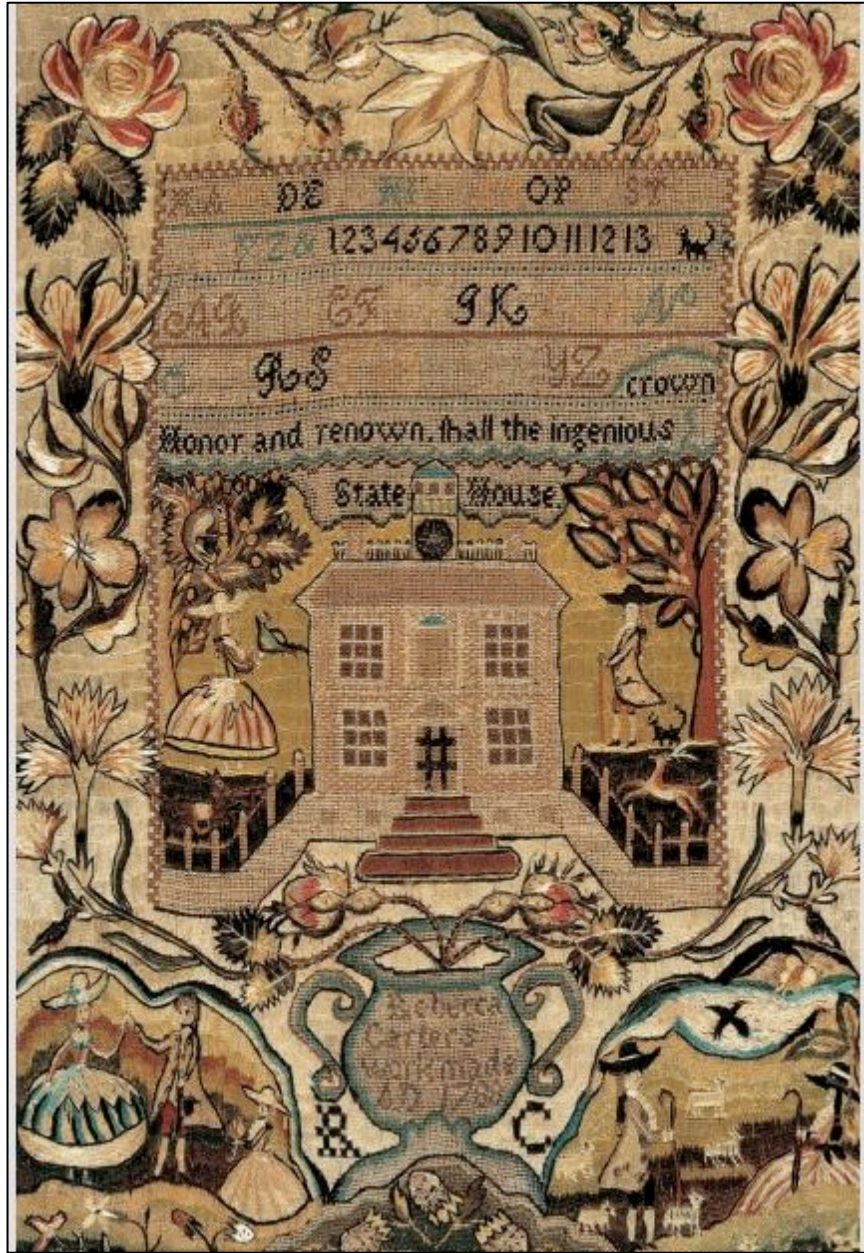


Figure 2.7. Rebecca Carter sampler, 1788, with depiction of State House. American Folk Art Museum (New York)

other spaces, including churches, schools, or, as in this case, a civic building.³⁰ Original subscribers to this circulating library included both of Julia Bowen's grandfathers, as well as the male relatives of a number of her friends. The initial collection chiefly consisted of works in theology, history, philosophy, and poetry but also included anthologies, such as *The Ladies' Library*, and periodicals, such as *The Tatler*.³¹

In their unsuccessful venture to find the fortuneteller, Julia and her companions likely proceeded to the end of the back street, where it rejoined Constitution Street, and there reached a cluster of businesses at the far northern end of the city. Walter Danforth, the writer of a mid-nineteenth-century reminiscence of early national Providence, associated this part of town specifically with young women's commercial consumption.³² In this neighborhood could be found John Whipple's dry goods shop, where Julia purchased shoes and ribbon; Samuel Thurber's paper goods store, where she found materials for decorating a bonnet; and Mary Balch's school, where a number of her peers had completed samplers.³³

Educator Mary Balch's family had moved to Providence from Newport at the same time that the College of Rhode Island and the colony's economic prowess were swaying north in the 1770s. Mary and her mother Sarah Rogers Balch brought with them needlework expertise acquired in Newport, where girls had stitched samplers since the 1720s, and soon opened a

³⁰ Joseph Le Roy Harrison, *The Providence Athenaeum, 1753-1911* (Providence: s.n., 1911), 14; Thomas Augst and Kenneth Carpenter, eds., *Institutions of Reading: The Social Life of Libraries in the United States* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 7.

Libraries in private homes made up another important subset of these institutions in the colonial period and early Republic. In Providence, John and Abigail Francis and Samuel Arnold kept records specifically to track the circulation of their personal book collections in the 1790s and between 1803 and 1823, respectively. See "Catalogue of Books Belonging to A. & J. Francis," [photocopy of original owned by Henry A. Brown], Francis Family Papers, RIHS; Samuel Arnold's library, Samuel Arnold Papers, RIHS.

³¹ Harrison, *Providence Athenaeum*, 9; *Catalogue of all the Books belonging to the Providence Library* (Providence: Printed and sold by Waterman and Russell, 1768), AHI.

³² Collins, ed., "Pictures of Providence in the Past," (Jan. 1951), 12-13.

³³ Julia Bowen diary, 13 Apr. 1799, 29 May 1799, 15 June 1799, Martin Family Papers; Chace, *Owners and Occupants*, 8, 23; W.R. Staples, "Sketch of the Rise of Straw Braiding, for Ladies' Hats and Bonnets," in *Transactions of the Rhode Island Society for the Encouragement of Domestic Industry in the Year 1858* (Providence, 1859), 158.

school together.³⁴ Two of the distinctive needlework styles that came to be associated with Rhode Island, and which appear in samplers that Providence girls stitched in the final decades of the eighteenth century, emerged in Newport in the 1760s and 1770s: the “frolicking people” and the “elegant house” motifs (fig. 2.8). Consistent with other academies for young ladies in the



Figure 2.8. Frolicking people and elegant house motifs on Sarah Tuel sampler, 1781, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

early national period, the Balches provided instruction in “Reading, Orthography, Grammar, Writing, Arithmetic, Geography, with the Use of the Globes, [and] History and Composition, especially the Epistolary Style” alongside the ornamental skills of “Drawing, Painting, Embroidery, with all the Varieties of plain, fancy and elegant Needle Work.”³⁵ At its peak

³⁴ Newport girls likely completed samplers under the direction of teachers who received their training in Boston or in England. The earliest group of samplers produced in Newport actually predate the first ones completed in Boston and Philadelphia. Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, I: 173-178.

³⁵ Balch advertisement in *Providence Gazette*, 1809, quoted in Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee*, 108.

enrollment in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Mary Balch's academy attracted sixty to eighty students a year, including fifteen to twenty pupils who boarded at the school.³⁶

One of Providence's emerging black neighborhoods, later known as Hard Scrabble, fringed this part of town. Parallel to the state's era of gradual emancipation, Providence transformed from a town "vertically zoned," in which enslaved and free laborers lived in the cellars, attics, or outbuilding spaces of their white owners, to one "horizontally zoned," in which laboring people, black and white, resided at an increasing distance from those who employed them.³⁷ As early as 1798, a number of free black households could be found on small lots hugging the west side of the Mossashuck River, near the slaughterhouses, tanyards, and city work house on Charles Street. On the east side of the river, close to the junction of the back street with Constitution Street, another cluster of free black residences stood along Olney Lane (fig. 2.9).³⁸ When white mobs unleashed violence against Providence's black community later in the antebellum era, it was here they targeted their destruction.³⁹

Julia Bowen's quest for fortunetelling brought her into this increasingly racialized section of Providence with some frequency. In the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, African Americans and American Indians dominated the profession of fortunetelling, while

³⁶ Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee*, 101.

³⁷ John Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730-1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 359.

³⁸ Reconstructing a spatial picture of Providence's free black community in the early Republic is difficult, in part because sources from the era effaced black households. Those who prepared the city's first directory in 1824, for instance, summarily excluded black residences; as John Wood Sweet writes, such an erasure made people of color "absent from the conceptual townscape." To identify and locate black households in the northern section of the city from the era of Julia Bowen's diary, I have compared data from the 1800 federal census with the 1798 tax list information compiled in Chace's *Owners and Occupants*. Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 356-357.

³⁹ Joanne Pope Melish notes, in addition, that free black residents in Providence had suffered property destruction at the hands of white mobs since at least the 1780s. Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 353-356; Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 204-205, 128.

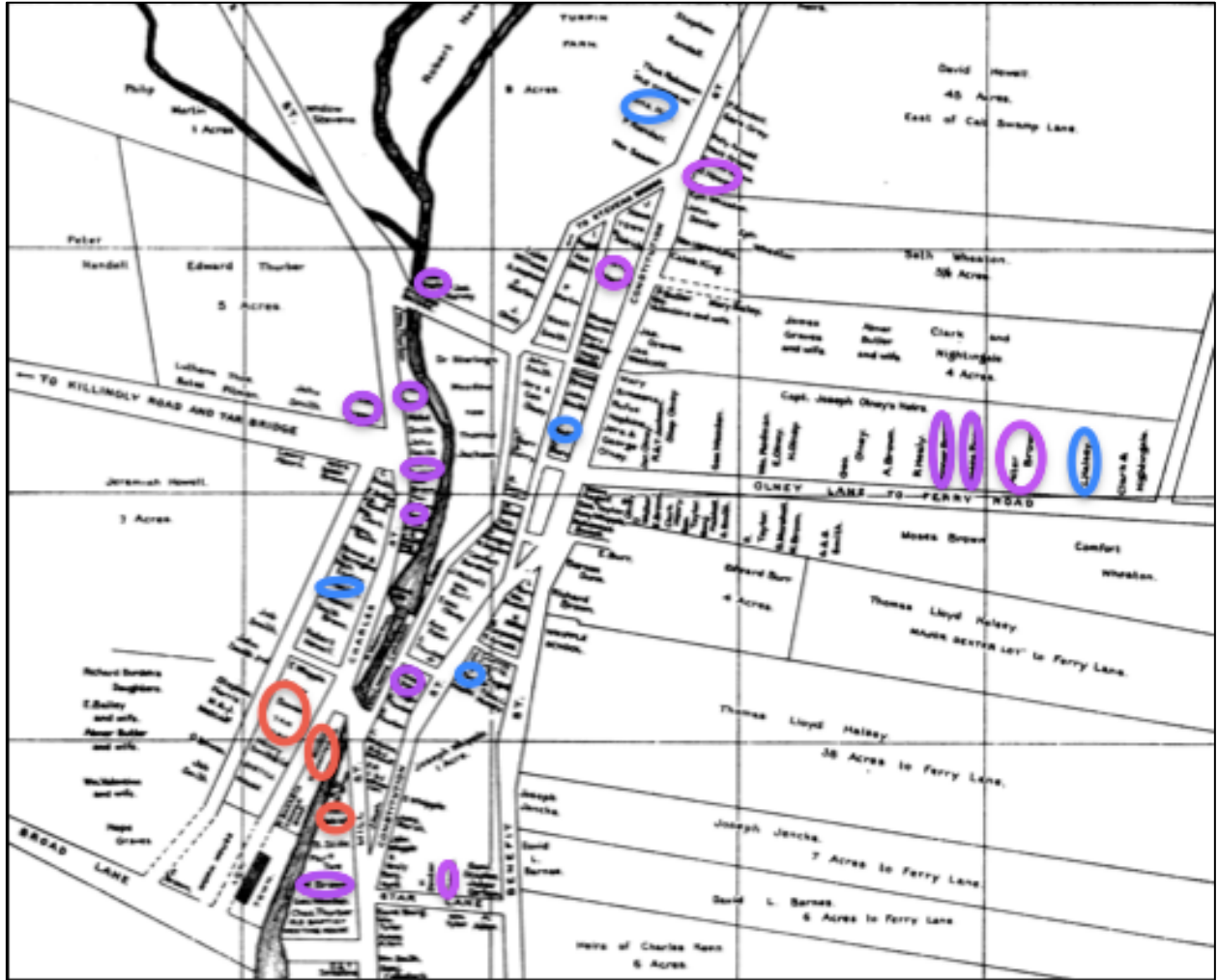


Figure 2.9. Distribution of free black households (purple), houses in poor repair (blue), and tanyards and slaughterhouses (red) in northern Providence, c. 1800. Base image from Chace, *Owners and Occupants* (1914), Plate 6

unmarried white women and men, as well as sailors, made up most of the customers.⁴⁰ As Peter Benes has noted, most of those trading in the magical arts carried on a transient existence, moving among marginal residential enclaves located in the outer reaches of established

⁴⁰ Peter Benes notes that nearly one-half of the eighty people he has identified as trading in magical arts in New England before 1850 were of African American, Native American, or mixed descent. For the period after 1800, the proportion of fortunetellers with these social backgrounds jumped to eighty percent. Peter Benes, "Fortunetellers, Wise-Men, and Magical Healers in New England, 1644-1850," in *Wonders of the Invisible World: 1600-1900*, ed. Peter Benes, Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife Annual Proceedings (Boston: Boston University Press, 1995), 127-128.

communities: areas, in other words, like the emerging Hard Scrabble.⁴¹ Bowen's diary offers fleeting glimpses of the racial and class politics that operated within these spaces. First, she and her peers sought this form of entertainment frequently and with a sense of entitlement. On this particular occasion, Bowen stressed frustration to have ventured so far to find "the old Lady" absent, rather than at hand to entertain her party. When the diarist and a friend "trudged" back a few days later, they found a handful of other young women already there, and several more "came bouncing in" shortly after.⁴² Bowen and her companions also manifested their sense of command over these transactions in terms of pay. On an evening outing to a fortuneteller's, she reported one friend "came away without paying the old Hag"; when the two returned for the friend to "pay her debt," they were affronted when a man "came out of another room and commanded we depart immediately."⁴³ In contrast to the freedom with which Bowen and her friends typically moved in and out of these spaces, the activities and behavior of black residents within their own residences and neighborhoods attracted intense, and sometimes hostile, scrutiny from Providence's white civic leaders.⁴⁴

The diary is vague on the route Julia Bowen and her friends used for their return trip to the southern end of the Neck, but since a few male companions joined them, they may have followed the main street down past the Great Bridge and through the city's Market Square. This thoroughfare, older and more congested than the back street above, would have taken them past a number of the city's other booksellers, printers, and news agents, not to mention a coffeehouse, several taverns, and wharves.⁴⁵ One of the most successful book trade firms here was the printing, binding, and bookselling venture owned and operated by John Carter, whose daughter

⁴¹ Benes, "Fortunetellers," 128; Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 360.

⁴² Julia Bowen diary, 1 Apr. 1799, 5 Apr. 1799, Martin Family Papers.

⁴³ Julia Bowen diary, 13 Apr. 1799, 22 Apr. 1799, Martin Family Papers.

⁴⁴ Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 126-130.

⁴⁵ Collins, ed., "Pictures of Providence in the Past," *Rhode Island History* 10.3 (July 1951), 88-96.

Rebecca recorded her experience of the city with a diary and a plethora of social notes, in addition to the sampler of the state house. After fifteen years of running the business on the ground floor of their family home on Meeting Street, John Carter, in partnership with William Wilkinson, relocated to the more commercial Market Square.⁴⁶ In the 1790s, Carter and Wilkinson advertised for sale children's books, medical texts, bibles, and songbooks, as well as paper goods, writing materials, and blank diplomas for students graduating from the local college.⁴⁷ In addition, Carter published the *Providence Gazette*, one of five newspapers printed in the city at some point during that decade.⁴⁸

Across the Great Bridge could be found more shops, the city's theater, and the New Light church, each of which Julia Bowen patronized on other occasions. At Todd's bookstore on Westminster Street she sought schoolbooks and at another store, ribbon for the "uniforms" she and her friends designed to wear for Independence Day.⁴⁹ The Providence Theater had opened on the corner of Westminster and Mathewson (then School) Streets in 1795, a colonial ban on theatrical performances having been overturned.⁵⁰ Even when she herself did not attend the theater, Julia recorded in her diary what performances were given. Having read one morning Matthew Lewis's play *The Castle Spectre*, which was to be performed the same evening, she declared in her journal, "I must go."⁵¹ Beginning in the early nineteenth century, the city's downtown would shift west across the Providence River to this area.⁵²

⁴⁶ *The Atlas of the Rhode Island Book Trade in the Eighteenth Century* (hereafter *Atlas of RI Book Trade*), a digital humanities project sponsored by the Rhode Island Historical Society and Brown University, maps the rise and decline of those businesses that catered to the literary taste of Providence's residents in the second half of the eighteenth century. Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee*, 122; John Carter, 1772-1793, Carter and Wilkinson, 1793-1799, *Atlas of the RI Book Trade*, www.rihs.org/atlas.

⁴⁷ *Providence Gazette*, 15 Mar. 1794, and 6 Sept. 1794. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers (hereafter AHN).

⁴⁸ Data from *Atlas of the RI Book Trade*.

⁴⁹ Julia Bowen diary, 3 June 1799, 2 July 1799, Martin Family Papers.

⁵⁰ Cady, *Civic and Architectural Development*, 60.

⁵¹ Bowen diary, 12 July 1799, Martin Family Papers.

⁵² Cady, *Civic and Architectural Development*, 71-72.

Having relieved themselves of their attending beaux once arriving home, Julia Bowen and Rebecca Power “retired at half-past 10,” their circuit of Providence complete for the day. Although the Neck served as a social anchor for Providence elites, they also took advantage of the surrounding farmland and seascape for country retreats and afternoon jaunts. Family and trade connections gave many merchants – and, on occasion, their female relatives – reason to travel regularly to other large port cities on the Atlantic seaboard.⁵³ Although young women from these families traveled less frequently and widely than did their fathers, brothers, and husbands, their movement within and across Providence was constant.

Julia Bowen and her peers traversed the civic, financial, and intellectual heart of the city as they traveled among each other’s homes, their schools, and commercial establishments. For these elite young women, sentiment and sociability wound through the very streets of Providence, in and out of parlors and pews, bookstores and fortunetelling tables, schoolroom and theater. Their movements illuminate the gendered, raced, and classed geography of this early national port, and suggest that for these young women, the ability to navigate these varied spaces was an important marker of their taste. Marks on samplers, too, often linked the individual female makers to a larger community: in addition to inscribing their names in the canvas, many young women also included their place of residence or birth.⁵⁴ Among Providence samplers, this textual statement of place connected the maker of the sampler to the natural and built landscape she depicted. In most Balch school samplers, for instance, floral motifs, human frolickers, and built structures combined to project a locally-grounded sense of place that encompassed

⁵³ Several of the largest merchant families built country houses near Providence, usually along Narragansett Bay. Lancaster, 65.

⁵⁴ One of the most popular verses to place on samplers before 1830 was a variation of “Hannah Weeks is my name / New England is my nation / Greenland is my dwelling-place / And Christ is my salvation.” Ethel Stanwood Bolton and Eva Johnston Coe, *American Samplers* (Boston: Massachusetts Society of the Colonial Dames in America, 1921; Reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1973), 248.

Providence's civic, educational, and religious institutions, domestic spaces and relationships, and a pastoral landscape.

To return momentarily to Abigail Martin's sampler (fig. 2.1), one might note the distinct presence of human figures, male and female, peopling the rich greens of the natural backdrop as well as the institutions of learning and civic belonging – the College of Rhode Island and the State House – that she included in the piece. The juxtaposition of people and institutions in the sampler demonstrates the complexity and contradictions embedded in young women's sociability in the early Republic. "To Colleges and Schools ye Youths repair / Improve each precious Moment while youre there," the far top of the sampler declares over the meticulous depiction of University Hall. Yet the closest approximation to "youths" represented here are the two solitary female figures mirroring each other on either side of the top third of the piece; the young male scholars for whom the edifice existed and to whom Martin presumably directed her moral statement remain absent (fig. 2.10). The remaining eight figures in the piece, by contrast, all are



Figure 2.10. Detail of Abigail Martin sampler, 1786, featuring College of Rhode Island. Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

paired in male-female couples. Figuratively and literally, as sampler characters and sampler producers, the young women remain outside this institution of higher education, but present and close enough to know its features and extol its virtues.

In a similar fashion, text, human figures, and architecture combine in the center of the sampler to mark the complex nature of gendered relationships to civic institutions. As with the college's edifice above it, a detailed reproduction of the State House sits under a large banner of stitched text: "Let Virtue be A Guide to thee." A distinguished-looking man and an elaborately-dressed lady stand flanking the structure and practically matching it in height (fig. 2.11). This

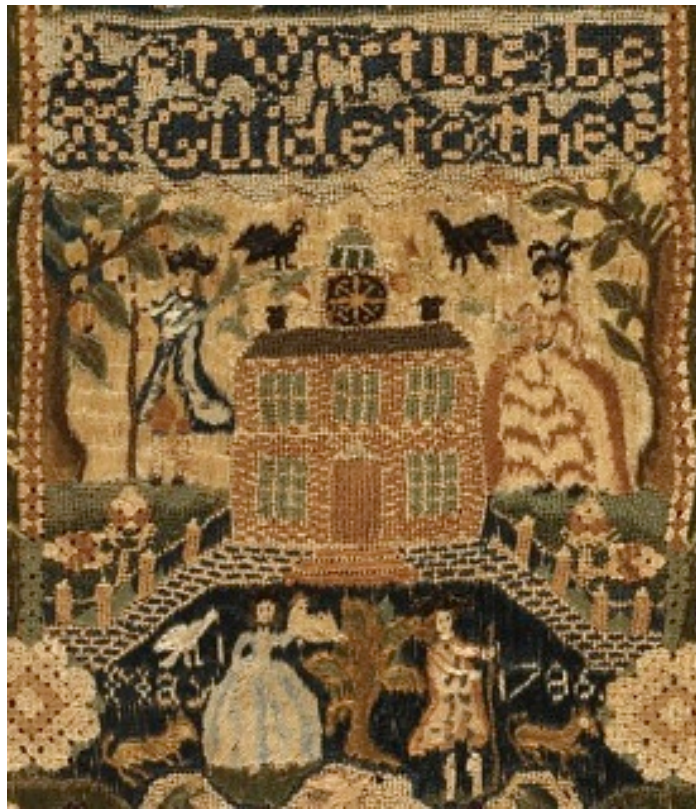


Figure 2.11. Detail of centerpiece of Abigail Martin sampler, 1786, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

visual array evokes no distinct recipient of Abigail Martin's reminder to abide by the moral wisdom of virtue: the address could be intended for this couple, the elected representatives of the State House, the wider body politic, or Martin herself, the maker.

The ambiguity created by the sampler's colliding visuals and text reflects the precarious political position of middle-class and elite white women in the Early Republic: barred from the ballot (except in the temporary case of single, propertied women in New Jersey), women still proved visibly central to the first decades of the American republican experiment. In public spaces, they marched in parades celebrating the Constitution's ratification, engaged with political topics in periodicals as readers and writers, or expressed republican simplicity in their modes of dress.⁵⁵ By the same token, male politicians and public thinkers – both male and female – marked women's existing domestic roles as wives and mothers with new civic significance.⁵⁶ Private and public virtue, and their importance to both family and national life, blurred both in Nabby Martin's sampler and in public discourse. Together, the social relationships, textual moral directives, and built structures featured in this and similar embroidered pieces recorded the maker's sociability: through it, she asserted her authority about and belonging in an idealized, harmonious community united by shared virtue and feeling.

Embroidery produced by Balch school students provided some of the earliest visual depictions of Providence's most important buildings, including the city court house, the State House, the College of Rhode Island's edifice and president's house, the First Baptist Meeting

⁵⁵ On women's public political participation in the first decades of the American republic, see Susan Branson, *These Fiery Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), Rosemarie Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 1997), and Kate Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

⁵⁶ Writing from the period blended Enlightenment thought (particularly from the Scottish moralists), the affective aspects of Protestantism, and the increasing currency of cultured sentiment to stress mutuality, common interest, and virtue as the grounding principles of American domestic and civic life. See Ruth H. Bloch, "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in the Early Republic," *Signs* 13.1 (Autumn 1987), 47-53, Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (1980; repr., New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 13-32, and Sheila Skemp, *First Lady of Letters: Judith Sargent Murray and the Struggle for Female Independence*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

House, and the First Congregational Church.⁵⁷ Rather than merely depicting civic and educational structures from which women were excluded, the daily movements of Julia Bowen and her peers indicate that as educated white women, they had reason to be among and within those spaces on a regular basis. The sites depicted on Balch school samplers, all concentrated at the heart of the Neck between the main street and back street, formed the backbone of Julia Bowen's circuits. When girls stitched these structures into linen at age nine or ten, they not only were emulating the pleasing aesthetics of the buildings but also mapping the spatial and social anchors among which they would circulate as they entered adolescence and adulthood.⁵⁸

Everyday Acts of Crossing Between

Within this spatial terrain, young women's exercise of taste moved across genres and material forms. Both samplers and manuscript materials that young women in Providence produced in the early national period typically integrated into a single material object different texts, genres, and symbols. In this environment, bits of text moved between printed, manuscript, and stitched form. Texts and textiles, like their makers, circulated around the city, often in the hands of domestic laborers. These acts of crossing between, then, illuminate not only the varied activities and artifacts reflective of the republic of taste, but also the unmarked labor that facilitated those practices.

Julia Bowen's taste for books and manner of reading varied widely. Some of the pieces she explored, such as Plutarch's *Lives* or David Hume's multi-volume *History of England*, could

⁵⁷ In the case of the Congregational church, which was destroyed by arson in 1814, exquisitely worked samplers like that produced by Polly Spurr have provided some of the most detailed documentation of the former structure. Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee*, 113-115; 130.

⁵⁸ On samplers as acts of emulation, see Kelly, *Republic of Taste*, 44-45; William Hunting Howell, *The Arts of Dependence in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 133-139, 155. I concur with Howell's point that pieces of ornamental needlework are artifacts that indicate "individuality [was] less at a premium than membership" in a broader community of taste (139).

be found in the respected collections of the Providence Library Company or the College of Rhode Island.⁵⁹ To these types of scholarly books she usually devoted steady attention over the course of several weeks or months.⁶⁰ Through these efforts, Julia continued in the intellectual practices she likely had undertaken during her years of formal education.⁶¹ To a critical observer at the time, some of Julia's other reading would have merited disdain, but she resourcefully employed even this less respectable literature for her own ends. On the occasion of not being able to attend an evening party, a gothic novel like Regina Maria Roche's *Clermont*, provided solace because it was a means "to forget myself" and her "uneasiness of mind."⁶² Even though her friend Rebecca Power did attend the party in question, when she returned at nine, the two girls sat rapt "till 12 finishing *Clermont*."⁶³ As she devoured the three volumes of the novel over two days, Julia had turned to it for both solitary and social enjoyment.

In similar fashion, Rebecca Carter's reading choices provided, by turns, entrees into and escapes from social engagements. The day after procuring a British epistolary novel, *The Cottage*, Carter went about her regular social calls until arriving at a friend's where a "strange gentleman" was expected. "I did not chuse to stay," she recorded succinctly. Instead, she

⁵⁹ Some of these volumes she seemed to acquire from family members and friends, through the same informal exchange that Rebecca Carter used and Abigail Francis oversaw. Others, like the *Gazetteer* presented to her by one of her aunts, she noted as "a valuable acquisition to my little library." *Catalogue of the Providence Library* (1768); *Catalogue of Books Belonging to the Library of Rhode-Island College* (Providence, Printed by J. Carter, 1793), AHI; Julia Bowen diary, 10 Apr. 1799, Martin Family Papers.

⁶⁰ She mentioned reading Hume on seven occasions between April and August; she appears to have taken up *Plutarch's Lives* after finishing *The History of England* in August. Julia Bowen diary, Martin Family Papers.

⁶¹ Julia's education likely began in Providence, but she eventually attended Mr. Woodbridge's school in Medford, Massachusetts, with a number of other young ladies from her hometown. Julia Bowen diary, 1 Aug. 1799, Martin Family Papers, RIHS; Julia Bowen to Rebecca Carter, 12 June 1792, Shepley Papers, Vol. 8, RIHS.

⁶² *Clermont* is one of the "horrid" gothic novels that the vapid character, Isabella Thorpe, recommends to her innocent friend, Catherine Morland, in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. Julia Bowen diary, 2 Apr. 1799, Martin Family Papers. On *Clermont* and Austen, see Robert K. Black, "The Sadleir-Black Gothic Collection" Address before the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, May 12, 1949 (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Library, 1949).

⁶³ Julia Bowen diary, 2 Apr. 1799, Martin Family Papers.

“return’d to sisters & read all the Eve.”⁶⁴ Several months later, as some of the first performances on the Providence stage took place, Carter could be found attending the theater and reading plays at home. After “reading in a little play book” for an evening and a morning, she found her friend Abigail Dexter, and together they sought out one of the young gentleman in their acquaintance who had attended the theater the previous evening.⁶⁵

The writing of these young women also alternated between playfulness and solemnity. On one occasion, Julia Bowen derisively parodied the tendency of sentimental writers to exaggerate average circumstances. “What a subject for a Poet!” she exclaimed, in regard to the simple act of a friend leaving the house to step into the garden. “O that some famous one had been present, to hand the important event down to futurity.”⁶⁶ In the same entry, however, she herself fell into exaggerated language as she reported the injury of being harangued in the street by a woman she perceived to be a prostitute earlier that day.⁶⁷ This close juxtaposition of contrasts arose again when she took to transcribing poetry, instead of composing full entries of her own, in late May. The first excerpt she included in her journal came from another gothic novel, Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*. In addition to inscribing the piece into her diary, she endeavored over the next several days to memorize a few verses of the poem. In her very next entry, however, she drew on more respectable fare, quoting at length from the “Spring” section of the Scottish poet James Thomson’s *The Seasons*. As she explained, “by quoting the Beautiful

⁶⁴ Rebecca Carter diary, 19-20 Apr. 1794, Carter-Danforth Papers.

⁶⁵ Rebecca Carter diary, 8 Sept. 1794, 10 Sept. 1794, 9-10 Oct. 1794, Carter-Danforth Papers.

⁶⁶ Julia Bowen diary, 6 Apr. 1799, Martin Family Papers.

⁶⁷ “Such an insult from our own sex is too dreadful, from the other it is as bad as it can be,” she penned furiously, before reasoning that “a Female must be inspired by something Infernal to degrade herself” and inquiring whether “God [will] permit such a sickness to reside in his Earth.” On a different occasion later in the summer, she drew together a verse from the book of Job with a famous line from Voltaire’s novel *Candide* to forge through the heartache she was suffering. Julia Bowen diary, 6 Apr. 1799, 1 Aug. 1799, Martin Family Papers.

Thompson [sic] I can best express myself.”⁶⁸ Here, as in samplers, reproducing the familiar lines of an established author simultaneously marked Julia’s personal character, her sense of feeling, and thus her participation in the republic of taste.

Rebecca and Julia also spread books through their social network. Abigail Chace solicited from Rebecca Carter “a book that will help pass away the Evening,” before naming her friend’s copy of *Elegant Extracts*, a popular compilation of British belles lettres pieces, as her preferred loan.⁶⁹ On another occasion Hannah Burrough wrote that the books sent by Carter had made another friend “so wondrously Interested” that “she hardly allows herself time to eat or Sleep.”⁷⁰ Having run into Julia Bowen at a mutual friend’s one afternoon, Sarah Cooke walked home with her to gather books the former had promised to loan; from there the two made their way to a shop where Julia paid for the hair of a beau to be set into a ring and Sarah had her teeth filed.⁷¹ Even Rebecca’s brief diary entries reflected this social element of literary engagement: “Carried a book to up to A. Dexter. Alice + Mary there,” she wrote on one occasion.⁷² Sharing a book became the grounds for sharing a spontaneous social engagement.

Even after their formal needlework training concluded, Rebecca Carter and Julia Bowen undertook sewing projects with social objectives in mind. The small tokens of friendship, usually handkerchiefs, that they produced were far less elaborate than samplers but all the more able to be dispersed. Rebecca kept track of the handkerchiefs she had sewn and distributed among her social circle almost as diligently as she recorded her engagements for teas and private

⁶⁸ Thomson’s work was ubiquitous in early American cultural artifacts. A different excerpt of “Spring” appeared in June 1, 1799 edition of *The Providence Gazette* and the poet’s words, as well as depictions of images from the illustrated edition of the text, also ended up on early national samplers. Julia Bowen diary, 22 May 1799, 23 May 1799, Martin Family Papers; Bolton and Coe, *American Samplers*, 270; Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee*, 238-239.

⁶⁹ Abigail Chace to Rebecca Carter, n.d. Box 2, Folder 21, Carter-Danforth Papers.

⁷⁰ Hannah [Burrough] to Rebecca Carter, n.d. Box 6, Folder 5, Carter-Danforth Papers, (emphasis in original).

⁷¹ Julia Bowen diary, 3 May 1799, Martin Family Papers.

⁷² Rebecca Carter diary, 27 May 1794, Carter-Danforth Papers.

parties.⁷³ Julia was busy at the end of June 1799 preparing cockades for her female friends to wear for the procession planned for the city's Independence Day festivities.⁷⁴ In this instance, Julia's needle skills signaled a relationship between her local social circle and her involvement in the new nation's emerging civic identity.

Samplers moved through the city too, but on a limited circuit among home, school, and, when a family could afford it, framer. Rebecca Carter's older sister Ann brought an unfinished sampler home from school in Newport in the late 1770s. Nearly a decade later, Rebecca took the piece from their home to Mary Balch's first school building at the foot of Constitution Hill. Upon its completion, her father arranged for local craftsman John Carlile to frame it; his workshop was located on one of the large wharves on the southeast side of the city. Finally, the finished product returned to the Carter residence (fig. 2.12).⁷⁵ As with other framed needlework, Rebecca Carter's work likely hung prominently in her family's parlor, where visitors might admire it. "Whatever they depicted," comments Catherine Kelly, "these images were created explicitly for display."⁷⁶ The practices surrounding the production of needlework prompted interactions between family members, teacher, and student, and with the merchants and craftsmen who provided the materials at the outset or the skills to mount and frame the finished product, respectively.

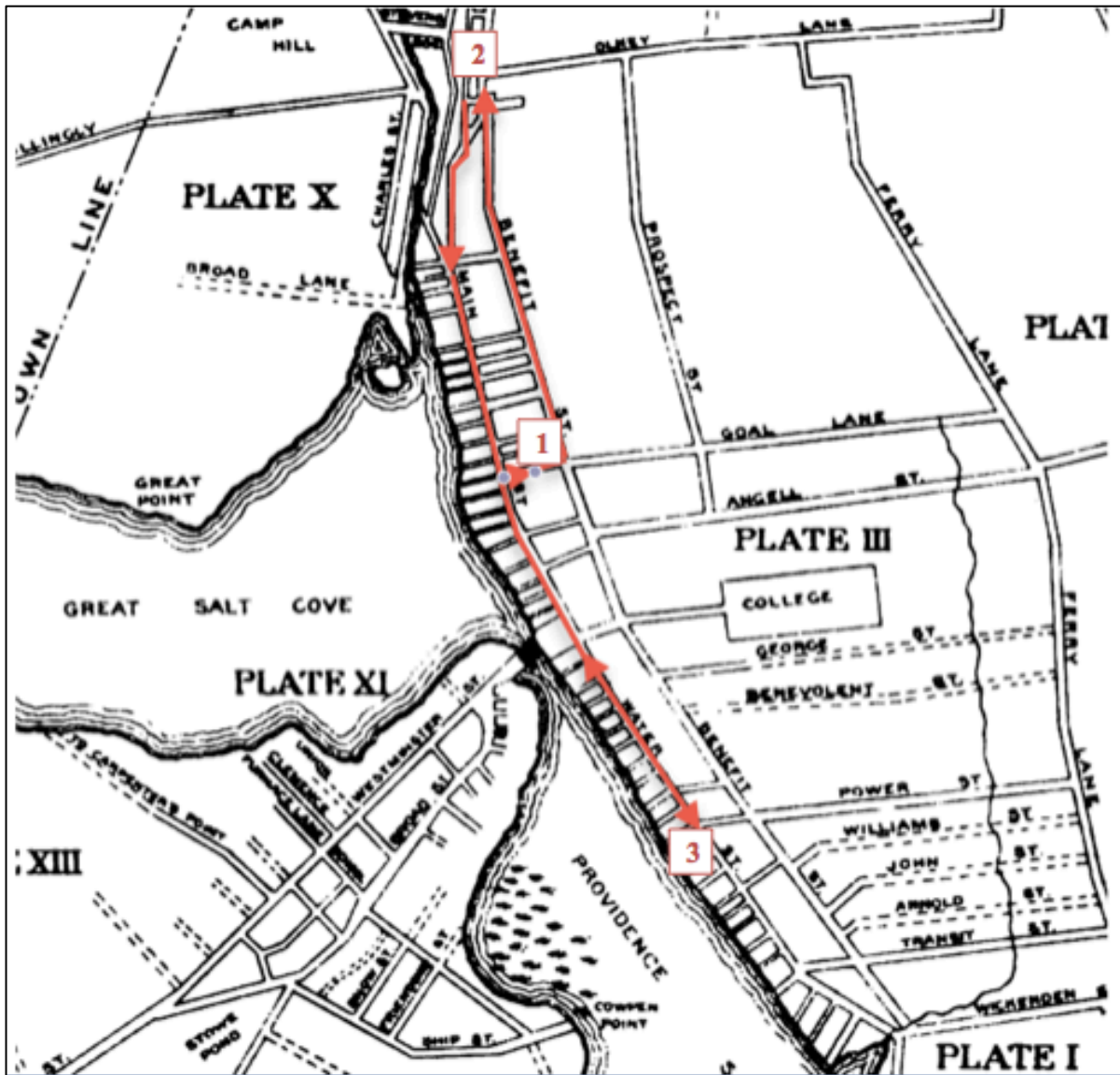
In Providence, elite young women's exercise of taste rested not only on their own expansive movement around the city but also on the movement they could command from others. In the notes, invitations, and other records they exchanged are brief, but striking glimpses of how servants – some of whom may have still been enslaved, given the terms of

⁷³ Rebecca Carter diary, 14-16 Apr. 1794, 18-19 July 1794, Carter-Danforth Papers.

⁷⁴ Julia Bowen Martin diary, 3 July 1799. Martin Family Papers.

⁷⁵ Rebecca Carter Jenckes inscription, 1825, on reverse of Rebecca Carter sampler, 2013.1.47, American Folk Art Museum (New York); Chace, *Owners and Occupants*, 8, 11.

⁷⁶ Kelly, *Republic of Taste*, 45.



Key:		
1: Carter Residence	2: Mary Balch's School	3: John Carlile's Framing Shop

Figure 2.12. Rebecca Carter's sampler on the move, c. 1788. Base image from Chace, *Owners and Occupants* (1914), Index map

Rhode Island's gradual emancipation laws – facilitated those exchanges. When friends of Rebecca Carter wrote to inquire about upcoming social engagements, for instance, they might request her to reply “by the return of the boy” or to “give me an answer by the Bearer.”⁷⁷ Although Julia Bowen regularly traversed Providence on foot, she also could depend on her friends to send a chaise driven by a servant when such transportation was desirable.⁷⁸ So embedded were household laborers in these everyday exchanges that a letter recipient might know who it was from by the identity of the bearer: when Rebecca Carter Jenckes – by then married – sent Baptist minister Stephen Gano a book in 1806, he apologized for his delay in sending thanks because “not seeing the servant myself, my family were not able to acquaint me with the friend who so obligingly loaned them.”⁷⁹ These unnamed servants, however elided by the written record, were known to the elite men and women who relied on them. Their labor enabled the flow of practices, objects, and people at the heart of the republic of taste, either by freeing young women from household responsibilities or by physically conveying invitations, parcels, and people through a city's streets.

Fluidity characterized the make-up of texts and of objects in this context, too. In the 1780s and 90s, Providence's newspapers featured a poetry corner in the back pages of most editions. Typically surrounded by advertisements and public notices, these pieces ranged in content from patriotic hymns and solemn religious verses to sentimental poetry and bawdier fare extracted from theater pieces.⁸⁰ Sometimes the editors of the paper specifically addressed these

⁷⁷ Ann Eliza Clark to Rebecca Carter, n.d., [Hannah Burrough] to Rebecca Carter, n.d., Box 2, Folder 21, Carter-Danforth Papers.

⁷⁸ Julia Bowen diary, 27 June 1799, Martin Family Papers.

⁷⁹ Stephen Gano to Rebecca Carter Jenckes, 14 Oct. 1806, Box 6, Folder 4, Carter-Danforth Papers.

⁸⁰ A good sampling of the variety of pieces can be found in the eight editions of the *Providence Gazette* that were issued in May and June, 1799.

pieces to female readers, as the sponsors of the *United States Chronicle* did in their June 4, 1789 edition. The six-line piece was titled “Lines for a young Lady’s Sampler”:

How blest the maid whom circling years improve,
Her God the object of her warmest love;
Whose useful hours, successive as they glide,
The book, the needle, and the pen divide;
Who sees her parents’ heart exult with joy,
And the fond tear stand sparkling in their eye.⁸¹

Sometime in the next few years, Rebekah Munro stitched these same lines onto her sampler.⁸²

However, in the act of moving from printed form in the newspaper into the threadwork on Rebekah’s composition, the poem acquired new contextual surroundings and meaning. Instead of heading a column of advertisements, the lines form the centerpiece of Rebekah’s sampler (fig. 2.13). A floral border frames the piece as a whole, while two landscapes featuring a couple

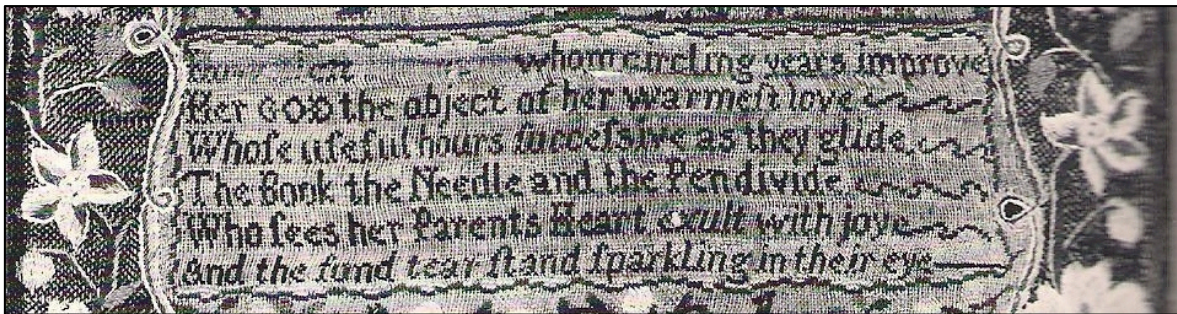


Figure 2.13. Detail of Rebeckah Munro sampler, c. 1792, depicted in Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee*, 146

surrounded by animals and flowers split the two pieces of text on the canvas. Moreover, the poem that had appeared in the newspaper was not the only text Rebekah included on the sampler. She headed the piece with a shorter phrase that appeared on other Providence samplers from the

⁸¹ Unsurprisingly, since many eighteenth-century newspaper editors readily reprinted material from other papers and periodicals, these verses also appeared in the spring of 1789 in the *Massachusetts Magazine* 1, no. 3 (Mar. 1789). Betty Ring’s work alerted me to this earlier printing. *United States Chronicle* (Providence, RI), June 4, 1789, AHN; Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee*, 252.

⁸² Rebekah S. Munro sampler, c. 1792, in Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee*, 146.

1780s and 1790s: “With Sheba’s queen ye American fair, / To adorn your mind bend all your care” (fig. 2.14).⁸³



Figure 2.14. Rebeckah Munro sampler, c. 1792, depicted in Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee*, 146

⁸³ Rebeckah S. Munro sampler, c. 1792, in Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee*, 146. For similar pieces, see Abijah Hall and Nabby (Abigail) Dexter’s samplers, depicted in Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee*, 138-139.

In the printed version, the lines dictating how young women should improve are nested between those conveying the admiration of heavenly and earthly parents. By incorporating the additional directive to devote one's care to improving the mind, Rebekah's sampler established greater balance between the active work young women might pursue in shaping their character and the praises they would receive in return. Including both of these pieces of text, moreover, altered the visual content of the piece by leaving less room on the canvas for visual symbols; Rebekah's sampler featured only couples and landscape, unlike other pieces completed around the same time that contained houses or public buildings.

Although not every set of text that appeared on eighteenth-century samplers originated in an existing piece of writing, scholars have noted a cadre of predominantly English authors whose words frequently ended up embroidered on canvas.⁸⁴ As Catherine Kelly has remarked, the maxims and proverbs that appeared on samplers pulled from the same pool of authors – Isaac Watts, Alexander Pope, Thomas Cowper, John Bunyan, and James Thomson – whom young women were encouraged to read and whose sayings often filled their journals or commonplace books. By incorporating lines from these common texts, sampler makers publically marked their affiliation with a larger transatlantic community of letters, not unlike a young man at the College of Rhode Island might have done in employing an extract from his commonplace book in a debate.⁸⁵ Also, by using texts already in circulation for their samplers, young women invited the viewers of their embroidery to recognize these unattributed sayings and thereby to demonstrate their fluency in taste.

In other instances, stitch-work took on the appearance of ink, as the lines of dedication on Ann Barton's embroidery did in 1800 (fig. 2.15). Pieces of mourning embroidery tended to be

⁸⁴ Ring, *Let Virtue be a Guide to Thee*, 248-254.

⁸⁵ Kelly, *Republic of Taste*, 45.



Figure 2.15. Ann Barton mourning embroidery, 1800, Rhode Island Historical Society

completed on silk, rather than linen, and were usually strictly pictorial. Both mourning and pictorial embroidery became more common in the late 1790s. Changing materials and forms contributed to the changing look of text, and these impressions of silk increasingly mirrored those in print. Typically the pieces depicted a gravestone and weeping willow, and sometimes female mourners dressed and veiled in black. If any text appeared, it was stitched to mimic the appearance of pen ink or engraved stone, rather than in the bulkier letters typical of samplers. The silk satin of the canvas, which was more expensive than one of linen, also provided a pristine background for thin lines and fine detailing. Likewise, the satin stitches used to fill in large areas of pictorial embroideries required more sophistication than the simple tent stitches

used for linen embroideries.⁸⁶ The stitches making the words on Barton's piece are so fine that unless one notes the small indentations where the needle pricked the silk, the text looks like the work of a pen (fig. 2.16). This nimble writing with stitches became a hallmark of Mary Balch's



Figure 2.16. Detail of Ann Barton mourning embroidery, 1800, Rhode Island Historical Society

school in the turn to mourning and pictorial embroidery. Whereas those in other schools *did* mark the monuments and urns of their pieces with ink, Balch's students instead made them with fine black silk.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, 1:20-22; Pamela A. Parmal, *Women's Work: Embroidery in Colonial Boston* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2012), 83.

⁸⁷ Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee*, 158.

At first glance, it may seem as though the shift to mourning embroidery represented a move away from the communal and civic ties conveyed in the State House, college, and church samplers. Although scholars have argued that pieces of mourning embroidery chiefly served as decorative commemorations rather than as aids to the grieving process, the pieces memorialized relationships with a blend of text and image.⁸⁸ The visual style of mourning embroidery produced in Rhode Island and elsewhere across the new nation, moreover, owed much to the circulation of popular prints memorializing the recently-deceased George Washington.⁸⁹ In these pieces, then, nationally-circulating neoclassical imagery blended with a local instructor's direction and the individual maker's personalized memorial to a deceased friend or family member. Another early nineteenth-century shift in samplers, towards making family registers the primary subject matter, furthered the links between acts of needlework and acts of commemoration.⁹⁰

Social ties mediated and influenced the needlework and the literary practices of young women. Such mediation might involve the physical sharing of books and embroidery patterns or the symbolic guidance of governing taste and access to particular texts, spaces, and practices. The work of needle and pen young women produced signified and further cultivated their membership in a community of elites within and beyond Providence. Thus, although scholars have read needlework pieces, like other written texts, as markers of self, the selves that these young women were crafting relied upon and remained animated by these relational processes and circulating practices of sociability.

⁸⁸ Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, 1:21.

⁸⁹ Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee*, 158-159; Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, 1: 20-21.

⁹⁰ Peter Benes, "Decorated New England Family Registers, 1770 to 1850," in *The Art of Family: Genealogical Artifacts in New England*, eds. D. Brenton Simons and Peter Benes (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, distributed by Northeastern University Press, 2002), 13-16; François Weil, *Family Trees: A History of Genealogy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 52-53.

Samplers Crossed into Memory:

Historical knowledge of Mary Balch and the needlework produced by her students was circulated in families and conveyed across generations throughout the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The first efforts to mark samplers as historical artifacts, as objects for containing and conveying memories of the past, originated with sampler makers themselves. Much of what we know about Rebecca Carter's sampler, for instance, comes from a written history she commenced in the 1820s and upon which her descendants elaborated in later decades. Although samplers and embroidery continued to feature prominently in women's education well into the antebellum period, they would enter a long state of dormancy by the middle of the nineteenth century.⁹¹ In Rebecca Carter Jenckes's hands, a sampler was both an object to be memorialized and one *through* which to memorialize. With her memories and the line of inheritance she intended attached to it, the piece would encapsulate a broader history of familial, intellectual, and social status.

On a warm June morning in 1825, Jenckes composed a lengthy memorandum about the work she had completed thirty-seven years earlier. We know from her annotations that she made the record in at least two sittings, elaborating in the second bit of text information she had referenced only briefly or omitted in the first. She attached the paper of memories directly to the back of her sampler's frame, taking steps to ensure that the information she recorded would remain connected to the work. In so doing, she fused a stitched record with a scribal one, producing a complex artifact of material and memory.

Jenckes memorialized first and foremost the assemblage of people involved in the sampler's making: her sister Ann, who had commenced the piece in Newport under the direction of Abigail Wilkinson in the late 1770s; "the Honorable Nicholas Brown," whom her sister later

⁹¹ Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, 1: 14, 24-25.

had married; teacher Mary Balch, under whose instruction she herself had completed the work; her father, John Carter, who was “much pleased” with the piece; and John Carlile, the man whom her father commissioned to frame it.⁹² Rebecca Carter Jenckes entwined family, education, and consumption in her inscription. Though her name and initials marked the front, her memories on the back situated the needlework within a wider circle of respectability. It was work from the hands of two young women, to be sure. But the additional family members, educators, and craftspeople she recalled and named on the back demonstrated that she and her sister came from the right sort of family, learned from the right sort of teachers, performed the right kind of consumption, and married the right sort of man. The needlework represented more than a refined education – it marked as well lineage, taste, and marriageability.

As much as the piece was about the Carter family’s legacy, it also captured a broader local history. The timing of the inscription corresponded with the conclusion of needlework instructor Mary Balch’s forty-year career. Circumstances at Mary Balch’s academy, like those in the lives of her former students, had evolved since the final decade of the eighteenth century. Notably, Balch relocated her school to the Neck’s George Street in 1801. The change moved the school away from the racially and economically mixed northern end of town and resituated it in close proximity to the College of Rhode Island and to the elaborate residences of the city’s elites.⁹³ Balch also encountered increasing competition from other instructors in the first decades of the nineteenth century as enthusiasm for female academies, and educational opportunities in general, grew.⁹⁴ Concurrent with these changes, the style of samplers shifted to make mourning

⁹² Rebecca Carter Jenckes inscription, 1825, on reverse of Rebecca Carter sampler, 2013.1.47, American Folk Art Museum (New York). My thanks to Chief Registrar and Director of Exhibition Production Ann-Marie Reilly for photographing the inscription for me.

⁹³ Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee*, 101.

⁹⁴ Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee*, 97-112. Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America’s Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 66-111.

and other pictorial embroidery, typically stitched and painted on silk, more popular than the interactive mélange of civic buildings, verse, flowers, and frolickers common on the pieces girls such as Abigail Martin and Rebecca Carter had produced in the previous decades. “Miss Balch is still living,” Jenckes remarked in an addendum to the inscription, “but infirm and in a poor state of health.”⁹⁵ Around this time, Balch likely turned over the direction of her school to her adopted daughter, Eliza Walker, who would continue to run the academy on George Street for about a decade after Balch’s death in 1831.⁹⁶

Appropriately, Jenckes inserted a line of eighteenth-century poetry among her memories. In so doing, she sustained the practice of sampling among different forms of literary engagement within the space of a single page. The brief text, from Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts*, might just as readily have found a place on the front of the sampler or in the pages of the diary she had kept in the 1790s. Indeed, the line appeared in *Elegant Extracts*, the prized volume of British prose and verse that circulated among Rebecca Carter and her friends in that decade.⁹⁷ Her personal recollections co-mingled with her readerly memory of Young’s verse as she committed both to paper. In Jencke’s hands, Young’s century-old text – “That life if long, which answers lifes [sic] great end” – signified a set of specific lives. The words also imbued anew those people she memorialized with the markers of eighteenth-century sensibility.

⁹⁵ Rebecca Carter sampler inscription, American Folk Art Museum.

⁹⁶ Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee*, 111-112.

⁹⁷ *Elegant Extracts*, compiled by Vicesimus Knox, went through many editions in prose and in verse in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, so it is difficult to know precisely which version Rebecca Carter owned. Her father John Carter advertised the work for sale in three volumes in 1795. Young’s writing was available to American readers in many forms in the late-eighteenth century, so Rebecca Carter turned Rebecca Jenckes may also have encountered the phrase in a newspaper, another anthology, or an independent volume of Young’s verse. The reference to “Night Thoughts” she added to the sampler inscription appears in *Elegant Extracts: or, Useful and Entertaining Pieces of Poetry, Selected for the Improvement of Young Persons* (London, 1801), 139; Abigail Chace to Rebecca Carter, n.d., Carter-Danforth Papers; *Providence Gazette*, Aug. 1, 1795, AHN.

Jenckes addressed the memorandum to her two absent sons, her only surviving children.⁹⁸ At the time, one was in Marietta, Ohio, and the other was completing his education in New York City. She specified that she intended for her younger son, who carried his deceased father's name, to inherit the sampler and its history. In addition, she wished him "to preserve it in remembrance of his Aunt, and of his affectionate Mother."⁹⁹ Without a daughter in whom to entrust the piece, Rebecca Carter Jenckes could have selected a niece or other distant family relative to inherit the artifact of her education. Instead, she charged her sons with preserving the memory and material objects of their female relatives. With her combination of narrative and directives, Jenckes marked her sampler as both a distinctly female artifact and as one meant to descend through a traditional patrilineal line; preserving the piece in a direct family line mattered more than having it preserved by someone of the same gender as its makers. Though household textiles were among the family articles most typical for a female descendant to inherit in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, samplers and other forms of ornamental needlework were textiles apart. As Jenckes's memorandum reflected, samplers signified qualities that were not singularly feminine, including family legacies of education, taste, and belonging in a broader community.¹⁰⁰

In the decades to follow, Jenckes's descendants continued to use the memorialization space that she had initiated on the back of her sampler (fig. 2.17). Two weeks after his mother's death in 1837, Amos T. Jenckes opened the paper on the back of the frame and noted the precise timing of her passing. "She would have been 59 years August 22 1837," he added. In inheriting the sampler, so too he inherited the responsibility of family record keeping. Forty-six years later

⁹⁸ Francis Carter Jenckes (b. 1803) was living in Marietta, Ohio, while Amos Throop Jenckes Jr. (1809-1882), the namesake of his deceased father, was residing in New York City.

⁹⁹ Rebecca Carter sampler inscription, American Folk Art Museum.

¹⁰⁰ Marla R. Miller, *The Needle's Eye: Women and Work in the Age of Revolution* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 96-101.

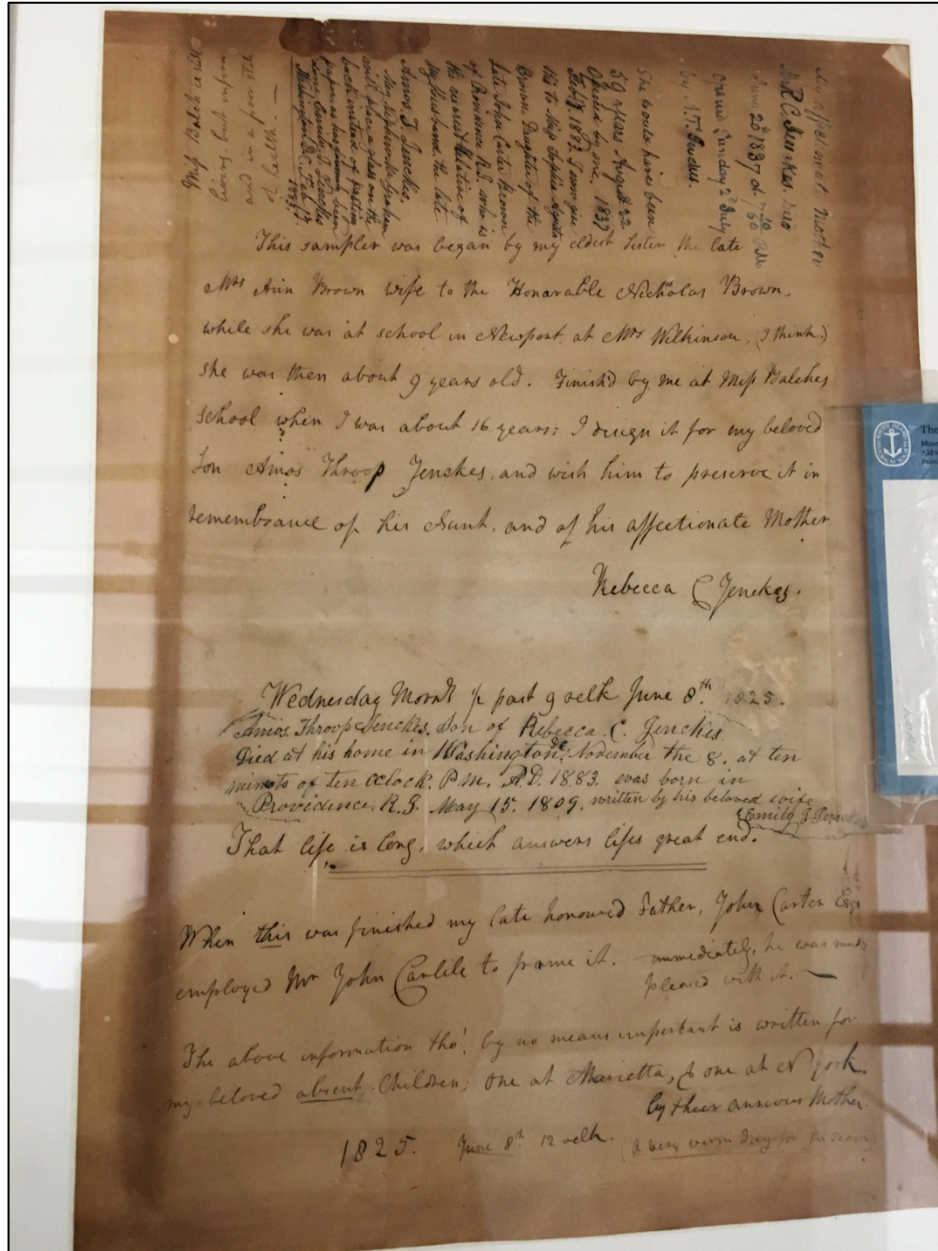


Figure 2.17. Inscriptions by Rebecca Carter Jenckes and family members, American Folk Art Museum

in 1883, his wife Emily Jenckes was the one taking up pen to mark family passages. She sandwiched a notice of his death snugly between his mother’s two initial inscriptions and provided a separate directive about the future of the sampler at the top of the page. The piece

went to Amos T. Jenckes's nearest living relative, Sophia Augusta Brown, and a piece of glass was added to the back of the frame to protect the half-century of memories inscribed there.¹⁰¹

Here was a piece of needlework that functioned as a family record across generations, even though the make-up of the stitches on the front ostensibly had little to do with genealogy. As with domestic inscriptions, what was immediately visible to the casual viewer – the visually-striking embroidery of the front – differed from what was reserved for those with more intimate access to the artifact – the historical narrative attached to the back. It is impossible to know if Rebecca Carter Jenckes intended such a function for the piece of paper she attached to the back of her sampler in 1825, but it is likewise hard to imagine the piece having taken on such a role without her initiation.¹⁰² In this instance, the consistency of the record-keeping through the line of descent enhanced the long-term monetary value of the object: transferred to the antiques market, family record became the artifact's provenance.

Within other families, too, sampler makers shared information about their work and Mary Balch. Sometimes this recording of history was the initiative of the sampler maker, and sometimes it occurred at the behest of her descendants. Before her death in 1887, Anna F. Herreshoff of Providence composed a memorandum of her memories of Miss Balch's school. She listed the names of the scholars and teachers she remembered from her time at the school in the early 1810s, though Balch herself was not one of them. While Herreshoff declared to the recipient, "I do not know why you feel interested about Miss Balch's school," the niece or nephew who solicited it marked the paper "To be saved."¹⁰³ Maria Eliza Wardwell, a descendant

¹⁰¹ Rebecca Carter sampler inscription, American Folk Art Museum.

¹⁰² By the same token, these linked factors set samplers at a remove from twentieth-century academic conventions, which emphasized scholarly neutrality built on a rational, unsentimental approach to sources and a perceived insulation from market forces. Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 7-8.

¹⁰³ "Memories of Miss Balch's School," Box 4, Folder 15, Herreshoff-Lewis Family Papers, RIHS.

of a student born in 1790, remembered that her great-grandmother often had spoken about “her pleasant school life” and that she continued to possess “several specimens” of the “elaborately taught” needlework she produced then.¹⁰⁴ Alice Taylor Clarke’s daughter similarly recalled that her mother had sought to impart Mary Balch’s teachings to her from an early age.¹⁰⁵ Memories about samplers and sampler makers, actively transmitted in these family circles for decades, began to circulate more broadly in the final quarter of the nineteenth century. At that point, Wardwell and Clarke’s memories appeared in the *Providence Journal* alongside those of several other former Balch students and descendants, and the needlework pieces they described started to appear in loan exhibitions and permanent institutional collections.

“Rhode Island Samplers” on the National Stage:

The poem that had appeared in the *Providence Gazette* and on Rebeckah Munro’s sampler in the early national period resurfaced in print in 1876, this time in an article describing the “New England Log House” display near the Woman’s Building of the U.S. Centennial exhibition in Philadelphia. A sampler featuring that verse – its maker unnamed – joined pot-hooks and kettles, flax-wheels and cradles, powder horns and engravings in a “typical, primitive New England home” that the article’s writer deemed “the most entirely American centennial memorial on the ground.” The needlework became just one of many artifacts indexing “Ye Olden Time,” its verse an indication of “the limits of sampler education” from which American women had progressed.¹⁰⁶ As exhibition organizers displayed samplers in these new

¹⁰⁴ Betty Ring’s work alerted me to these newspaper reminiscences. “Miss Balch’s School,” *Providence Daily Journal*, July 4, 1883. For genealogical information on the sampler maker Sydney Smith Angell and her descendants, see *Representative Men and Old Families of Rhode Island*, 3: 2139.

¹⁰⁵ “Miss Balch’s School Again,” *Providence Daily Journal*, July 24, 1883.

¹⁰⁶ S.L.M., “The New England Log House,” *The New Century for Woman* (Philadelphia: Published by the Women’s Centennial Committee, 1876), 67-68.

surroundings, they flattened the particular circumstances of their making into broader narratives of womanhood, education, and Anglo-American culture.¹⁰⁷

In the decades following the U.S. Centennial, exhibitions were just one place through which historical consciousness about samplers grew and evolved. In the final quarter of the nineteenth century, American needlework appeared in loan exhibitions of “colonial and revolutionary relics,” in reminiscences found in the pages of published family and local histories, and as objects within the collections of museums.¹⁰⁸ White women, many of them descendants of those who had produced samplers in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, spearheaded much of this work through new organizations that fused historical engagement and Anglo-American lineage. In Rhode Island, these groups included the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), which established a chapter in Providence in January 1892, and a branch, founded in 1891, of what is now the National Society of Colonial Dames in America (NSCDA).

In Rhode Island, the circulation of samplers as historical artifacts for public consumption commenced with short-term exhibitions in the 1870s. Residents of the state brought out family samplers for a centennial celebration in 1875, and Providence hosted a charity exhibition that

¹⁰⁷ Marla Miller’s work on needlewomen in western Massachusetts and on Betsy Ross powerfully captures the way this flattening work particularly effaced the expertise and experiences of laboring women by setting their work in the hands of the elite women who produced ornamental needlework. Miller, *The Needle’s Eye*, 211-231, and *Betsy Ross and the Making of America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2010), esp. 360-361.

¹⁰⁸ For examples related to Rhode Island samplers, see *Report of the Committee of the Loan Exhibition of Colonial and Revolutionary Relics, Presented to the Gaspee Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, May, 1892* (Providence: E.L. Freeman & Son, 1892); Alice Morse Earle, *Child Life in Colonial Days* (New York, 1899), 334; Amelia E. Russell, *Home Life of the Brook Farm Association, with a Short Biographical Sketch* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1900), xiii; Ann Barton’s mourning embroidery (1800) almost certainly entered the Rhode Island Historical Society collections in the 1890s. The piece was a bequest of Rev. George Cushman, who died in 1890. Other bequests from him to the society appeared in *Proceedings of the Rhode Island Historical Society, 1892-93* (Providence: Printed for the Society, 1893), 55. Barton’s work is one of about two-dozen embroidered pieces in the RIHS collection with an “1840” accession number. Typically, this indicates the date of accession, but with regard to this set of objects, the accession number appears to have been assigned retroactively and arbitrarily.

The earliest instance I have identified of American needlework entering an institutional repository is the 1841 acquisition by the American Antiquarian Society of an eighteenth-century embroidered picture from the Chandler family. The piece was purchased from the estate of deceased AAS Council member (and Chandler descendant) Nathaniel Paine. *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, 1812-1849* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1912), 416.

included specimens of both “ancient and modern” needlework in 1879.¹⁰⁹ Similar events, hosted in smaller towns, likely took place in these decades as well, but without the broad publicity – and therefore current archival accessibility – that larger exhibitions commanded. For example, thanks to Betty Ring’s detailed research, we know that Elizabeth Scott’s 1741 Newport sampler appeared during the 250th anniversary of the city of Taunton, Massachusetts, in June 1889.¹¹⁰ Short displays continued after 1900, with Newport and Providence incorporating exhibitions of colonial artifacts into their Old Home Week celebrations in the first decade and a half of the new century.¹¹¹ Larger and more publicized than the earlier events was a loan exhibition organized by Providence’s local DAR chapter in 1892. Within four months of their establishment, women from the Gaspee Chapter succeeded in gathering over 1,100 items from 250 lenders for display within the rooms of the Rhode Island Historical Society. The three-day event, extended to five as the original 1,500 tickets quickly evaporated, was intended to raise money for the nascent chapter and to create “a quickening of historical, antiquarian and patriotic interest.”¹¹² As scholar Robert Emlen has noted, however, the exhibition also demonstrated the superiority of American ancestry in an era of heavy industrialization and rapid immigration in Rhode Island.¹¹³

These events, for which local residents loaned items out of their personal collections, likely were modeled on the historical components of the fairs used to raised money for the U.S. Sanitary Commission during the Civil War. The make-up and aesthetics of these events

¹⁰⁹ Robert Emlen, “Colonial Relics, Nativism, and the DAR Loan Exhibition of 1892,” in *New England Collectors and Collections*, ed. Peter Benes, Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife Annual Proceedings 29 (Boston: Boston University, 2006), 171; “Miss Balch’s School,” *Providence Daily Journal*, July 10, 1883.

¹¹⁰ Robert Emlen documents a similar anniversary exhibition occurred in Bristol, Rhode Island, in 1880. Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee*, 66; Emlen, “Colonial Relics,” 171.

¹¹¹ “Exhibition of Colonial Relics at the Rhode Island Historical Society Old Home Week, July 29 to August 13, 1907,” *Proceedings of the Rhode Island Historical Society 1907-1908* (Providence: Printed for the Society, 1910), 41-45. *Loan Exhibition of Antiques and Heirlooms under the Auspices of the Newport Historical Society* (Newport: Mercury Publishing Company, 1911).

¹¹² Emlen, “Colonial Relics,” 171, 184; *Report of the Committee of the Loan Exhibition of Colonial and Revolutionary Relics, Presented to the Gaspee Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, May, 1892* (Providence: E.L. Freeman & Son, Printers to the State, 1892), 14-15.

¹¹³ Emlen, “Colonial Relics.”

projected the unity and progress of the nation.¹¹⁴ Those same organizing principles marked a national history directed by and for Anglo-Americans and a national present intended for their descendants and those willing to assimilate to their values. When organizers included samplers in these settings, they made early American needlework part of these narratives.

Exhibitions placed samplers among the pastiche of objects that symbolized the origins of American civilization. The presence of needlework within museum displays situated these artifacts within a new visual vocabulary. Scholarship by Robert Emlen, Carolyn Strange, and others has stressed the physical associations members of lineal groups sought to create between themselves and their ancestors, whether by hereditary ties or by heirlooms.¹¹⁵ What samplers once had conveyed about individual families – cultural taste, feminine graces, and social prestige – they now asserted for the larger Anglo-American family. The rooms of historical societies and art museums functioned as the parlor of this family, the space into which outsiders might be invited on the condition of their adherence to its rituals and decorum. As in private residences in the late-eighteenth century, the “family” of the DAR and Colonial Dames reserved more intimate spaces – their members’ homes, their chapter houses, their performance spaces – for those of the right racial, religious, ethnic, and educational background.¹¹⁶ Spatial associations and their attendant social rituals, I assert, mattered here too.

This activity transformed the physical surroundings of these objects as surely as it repackaged their meaning for new audiences. Although samplers had been associated with

¹¹⁴ Beverly Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies: The History of the American Fundraising Fair* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 73-77; Frances M. Clarke, “Old Fashioned Tea Parties: Revolutionary Memory in Civil War Sanitary Fairs,” in *Remembering the Revolution: Memory, History, and Nation-Making from Independence to the Civil War*, ed. Michael A. McDonnell et al (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 295.

¹¹⁵ Emlen, “Colonial Relics,” esp. 186; Carolyn Strange, “Sisterhood of Blood: The Will to Descend and the Formation of the Daughters of the American Revolution,” *Journal of Women’s History* 26.3 (Fall 2014), 105-128.

¹¹⁶ The DAR’s refusal to let contralto Marian Anderson perform at Constitution Hall in 1939 is the most notorious example of this spatial gatekeeping. For a brief account of the incident in relation to the larger exclusionary politics of the DAR, see Francesca Morgan, *Women and Patriotism in Jim Crow America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 153-156.

femininity since the early modern period, their emerging status as relics within the origin story of the United States recast their gendered associations. Such a recasting expanded the significance of samplers as a body of objects while simultaneously diminishing the social circumstances of their making. These objects long had been emblems of status and lineage within families, but now they took on the added valence of signifying the colonial roots of American culture itself. Samplers and other “domestic” artifacts became the archival help-meets of the paper records documenting the nation’s history, the feminine complement to a patriotic story of masculine heroics. Even as Progressive-era changes rocked the ideology of separate spheres, American historians of all levels continued to rely on the notion of gender complementarity within their historical work.

Written reminiscences of samplers and their makers did with words what exhibits did with objects: they recontextualized Providence needlework from the early national period within a longer and larger story of Anglo-American origins. These pieces also set into relief the youthful, feminine connotations samplers carried within that broader history. In the preface of Amelia Russell’s memoir of reform work with the Brook Farm Association, her nieces and nephews detailed the “very pious sampler” she made at Mary Balch’s school, where she began her schooling, though “how much she learned there,” the writer could not say.¹¹⁷ Alice Morse Earle, a prolific historian of early American life, wrote of samplers as one of the “fruits” of the “careful lessons” of colonial girlhood, artifacts that “speak down through the century of the little, useful, willing hands that worked them.”¹¹⁸ While Earle, ever attuned to the significance of

¹¹⁷At the bottom of this page in the copy of the work digitized on the Hathi Digital Trust, from the Harvard University Library, a former owner added a margin note indicating that his or her “Grandma Nancy was also a pupil of Miss Balch,” at the time that Lafayette was received with a procession in Providence. Amelia E. Russell, *Home Life of the Brook Farm Association, With a Short Biographical Sketch* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1900), xiii.

¹¹⁸Earle, *Customs and Fashions in Old New England* (New York: C. Scribner, 1893), 30; Earle, *Colonial Dames and Goodwives* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1895), 230.232, quote on 231.

material culture in illuminating the past, highlighted the historical resources embedded in such artifacts – both the genealogical details and depictions of earlier forms of dress – her tone in describing “gorgeous flowers and strange buildings, [...] birds that perched as large as cows, and roses that were larger than either” heightened the impression that the images were comedic and childish.¹¹⁹

The series of reminiscences that appeared in the *Providence Daily Journal* in the summer of 1883 – after the city’s first exhibitions of colonial objects but before large numbers of samplers arrived in institutional collections – highlighted this dual recoding at work. A writer for the paper had invited readers to share information about Mary Balch’s school and other early ventures in female education in June. In the six weeks that followed, numerous letters from readers, as well as a follow-up article by the original journalist, appeared within the *Journal’s* columns. Former Balch students or their descendants recounted varied experiences at the school: homesickness and holidays, backless benches and rules of etiquette, and patriotic processions for Washington and Lafayette.¹²⁰ But all of them highlighted the strong reputation, past and present, of the school’s needlework instruction. “She possesses a specimen of her own handiwork,” commented a descendant writing on behalf of her mother, adding that its stitches would be a fine model for “many modern Kensington needlewomen.”¹²¹ Sidney B. Angell’s great-granddaughter seconded that needlework at Miss Balch’s school was “elaborately taught.”¹²² At the city’s recent loan exhibitions, another contributor asserted, “the most excellent specimens were loaned

¹¹⁹ Earle, *Colonial Dames and Goodwives*, 231; Earle, *Home Life in Colonial Days* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1893), 268. Susan Reynolds Williams recently has brought renewed attention to Earle’s extensive work as a historian, which had been overlooked for decades because of Earle’s status as a self-trained scholar and the ‘popular’ focus of her work on women, everyday life, and material culture. Williams, *Alice Morse Earle and the Domestic History of Early America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013).

¹²⁰ F.B.F., “Miss Balch’s School,” *Providence Daily Journal*, June 29, 1883; L.D.B., “Miss Balch’s School,” *Providence Daily Journal*, July 10, 1883, p. 4; M.E.W., “Miss Balch’s School,” *Providence Daily Journal*, July 4, 1883.

¹²¹ F.B.F., “Miss Balch’s School,” *Providence Daily Journal*, June 29, 1883.

¹²² M.E.W., “Miss Balch’s School,” *Providence Daily Journal*, July 4, 1883.

by those who had been pupils of Miss Balch.”¹²³ Still, she remarked, “Miss Balch gave as much attention to the useful as to the ornamental; she was thorough in all she taught.”¹²⁴

The visual and written coalesced in the Rhode Island Historical Society’s 1920 exhibition of samplers and in Eva Johnston Coe and Ethel Stanwood Bolton’s landmark 1921 survey of American needlework. With an exclusive focus on needlework, each project marked a departure from earlier displays of “colonial relics” in which samplers made up just one sort of artifact among many. With the status of samplers as objects evoking early America secured, organizers of these new endeavors turned to gather more information about sampler design, materials, and makers. Their findings – in both content and form – set needlework squarely into the realm of American decorative arts and shaped how samplers from Rhode Island and elsewhere would be perceived for much of the twentieth century.

For a month in the spring of 1920, the Rhode Island Historical Society hosted an exhibition of 300 pieces of needlework. While the show included examples of English embroidery and worked completed in schools outside New England, most of the pieces had local origins and came from local donors. Organizers proclaimed it was “the largest and most representative gathering of Samplers of one locality ever assembled.”¹²⁵ Out of the show and its associated events came the first formal attempts to distinguish the defining features of samplers produced in Rhode Island. George L. Miner, who with his wife had contributed several objects to the show, gave a public lecture on the subject, which highlighted “workmanship, color, style and design.”¹²⁶ Ethel Stanwood Bolton, already at work on a comprehensive survey of American samplers with other members of the Massachusetts Society of Colonial Dames, also spoke as

¹²³ L.D.B., “Miss Balch’s School,” *Providence Daily Journal*, July 10, 1883.

¹²⁴ L.D.B., “Miss Balch’s School,” *Providence Daily Journal*, July 10, 1883.

¹²⁵ Miner, “Rhode Island Samplers,” 41.

¹²⁶ “Historical Society Hears About American Samplers,” *Providence Journal*, March 13, 1920, Sec. 2.

part of the evening's program. Miner formalized his findings through an article in the historical society's research journal, *Rhode Island Collections* (now *Rhode Island History*).¹²⁷ Whereas memories of Mary Balch's school had predominated in earlier reminiscences of Providence needlework, now "Rhode Island samplers" – Miner's title – served as the primary subject of study.

The landscape of needlework collections in Rhode Island had changed by the time RIHS undertook its loan exhibit in 1920. By that time, institutions, in addition to individuals, served important roles as lenders. In the decade preceding the show, the Rhode Island School of Design took in twenty samplers, most of which had been produced and descended within local families. Nabby Martin's sampler, with which this chapter opened, was among those received.¹²⁸ By then, Rhode Island samplers could also be found in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, though these pieces were not part of the 1920 display.¹²⁹ RIHS itself possessed a handful of samplers, including two pieces that were incorporated into the society's museum of state history by 1916. Ann Barton's mourning embroidery, with its ink-like stitches, and a piece by Catherine Comstock hung on the wall near cases meant to "illustrate the household and daily life of Rhode Islanders from the Revolution to the Civil War."¹³⁰ Some artifacts on paper were part of the museum too, though these tended to relate to nationally-known individuals and to be found separately, in the portrait gallery.¹³¹ The 1920 sampler show also brought additional

¹²⁷ Miner, "Rhode Island Samplers."

¹²⁸ Data compiled from RISD online object records. Abigail (Nabby) Martin sampler, 17.361, RISD.

¹²⁹ Two Rhode Island samplers made in the 1790s entered the Met's collection in early 1910s. Elizabeth Easton sampler, 13.69.12, Metropolitan Museum of Art, <http://metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/14048>; Patty Coggeshall sampler, 14.26, Metropolitan Museum of Art, <http://metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/14049>.

¹³⁰ *Museum Illustrating the History of the State* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1916), 25.

¹³¹ *Museum of the State*, 7, 19, 30.

pieces into RIHS's permanent collection, as a number of those who loaned needlework for the exhibition decided to gift them to the society.¹³²

The RIHS exhibition was one of several state-based ventures that fed directly into the national survey of needlework captured by Ethel Stanwood Bolton, Eva Johnston Coe, and their Colonial Dames colleagues. Coe, a daughter of one of the founding members of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, possessed a substantial collection of needlework, fifty-four examples of which ended up featured in *American Samplers*.¹³³ Ethel Stanwood Bolton of Boston had graduated from Wellesley College in 1894 and produced several local histories before taking up the needlework survey; her husband Charles K. Bolton served as the librarian of the Boston Athenaeum.¹³⁴ Historic preservation and research were founding objectives of the Colonial Dames. The sampler survey undertaken by Bolton and Coe under the auspices of the Massachusetts branch well fit the charge from the society's constitution "to collect and preserve manuscripts, traditions, relics, and mementos of by-gone days" as a means "to diffuse health and intelligent information concerning the past, to create a popular interest in our Colonial history, [and] to stimulate a spirit of true patriotism and a genuine love of country."¹³⁵

Mobilizing their network of state chapters, the Dames compiled data on almost 2,500 pieces of needlework over the course of five years. The resulting work included individual entries on 2,461 samplers divided chronologically by century and then organized alphabetically

¹³² "Notes," *Rhode Island Historical Society Collections* 13, no. 2 (Apr. 1920), 54-55.

¹³³ "Rites for Mrs. Henry Coe," *New York Times*, March 22, 1941, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Bolton and Coe, *American Samplers*.

¹³⁴ Biographical information on Bolton drawn from Bolton-Stanwood Family Papers Finding Aid, American Antiquarian Society, http://www.americanantiquarian.org/Findingaids/bolton_stanwood_family.pdf; Ethel Stanwood Bolton 1886 Gem Tintype Photo Album, Online Exhibit, Brookline Historical Society, <http://www.brooklinehistoricalsociety.org/archives/listPhotos.asp?mainList=archives&subList=BoltonBookTN>.

¹³⁵ *The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America: Its Beginnings, Its Purpose, and A Record of its Work, 1891-1913* (Printed for the Society, 1913), 12-13.

by maker. The vast majority of these entries – around three-fourths of them – listed women as the owners. Among the remaining pieces, individually named men owned about 325, museums and other institutions held 150, just over 70 could be found in antiques shops, galleries, or the records of recent auctions, and the rest left owners unnamed.¹³⁶ In addition to a preface and introduction on their motivation and methods, Bolton and Coe included a chapter on each of the three centuries covered; an appendix of the verses included on samplers, sorted by date and with an explanatory preface by a retired professor of literature; a chapter and list of the schools and schoolmistresses known through the needlework; brief comments on the materials, designs, and stitches used; a section on embroidered coats of arms; and, most notably, 128 illustrations.

Rhode Island samplers occupied prominent places within Bolton and Coe's work. A portion of Lydia Ann Temple's sampler, worked in 1821 and donated by a descendant to the Rhode Island School of Design in 1919, served as the primary image on the book's title page (fig. 2.19).¹³⁷ In an example of the disaggregating of the decorative and literary elements of samplers, the Bolton and Coe version included only the top two-thirds of the piece, leaving out the six lines from British poet Anna Barbauld's "An Address to the Deity" that Temple had stitched at the bottom (fig. 2.20).¹³⁸ The text that remained, three alphabets and the maker's signature draped in a floral border, exemplified the more elementary terms in which the twentieth-century documenters portrayed samplers.

The samplers associated with Mary Balch's school received similar treatment. On the one hand, they earned praise for their "sense of color, form, and design."¹³⁹ On the other hand, the authors painted them as limited in intellectual content, reflecting only "as good an education

¹³⁶ Data compiled from Bolton and Coe, *American Samplers*, 9, 29-89, 121-246.

¹³⁷ Lydia Ann Temple sampler, 19.223, RISD, http://rismuseum.org/art_design/objects/11808_sampler.

¹³⁸ [Anna Laetitia Barbauld], "An Address to the Deity," in *Poems* (London, 1773), 125.

¹³⁹ Bolton and Coe, *American Samplers*, 369.

AMERICAN SAMPLERS

BY

ETHEL STANWOOD BOLTON
and EVA JOHNSTON COE



THE MASSACHUSETTS SOCIETY OF THE
COLONIAL DAMES OF AMERICA . . . 1921

Folklore

Figure 2.18. Title page depiction of Lydia Ann Temple's sampler, Ethel Stanwood Bolton & Eva J. Coe, *American Samplers* (1922), *HathiTrust*



Figure 2.19. Lydia Ann Temple sampler, 1821, with poetry by Anna Laetitia Barbauld. Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

as the times considered necessary.”¹⁴⁰ Balch’s own depiction evolved in step with the changing character of her school. Repeating the language that accompanied RIHS’s exhibition in 1920, Bolton and Coe most frequently referred to the Providence teacher as “Miss Polly Balch.” The researchers conceded that this title, along with “Marm Balch” was one by which she was “known later,” but just how much later remained vague.¹⁴¹ Neither Rebecca Carter Jenckes in her sampler’s inscription nor those submitting reminiscences to the Providence newspaper in the 1880s had referred to their former instructor that way; they universally referred to her first as “Miss Balch” and occasionally as “Miss Mary Balch.” The educator’s new monikers aligned Balch more squarely with the dame schools of the colonial era than the female academies of the early Republic and antebellum period, casually reducing her teaching to rudiments.

Bolton and Coe highlighted the Providence samplers that depicted public buildings and credited “old “Marm” Balch’s Select Female Academy” for inaugurating that particular visual trend.¹⁴² George Miner, notably, had made a different choice when writing about the historical society’s exhibition of samplers two years earlier: he had highlighted a series of Balch school embroideries that featured floral motifs and baskets of fruit.¹⁴³ His selections projected the pastoral, rather than public emblems of Rhode Island samplers, further underlining the decorative, feminine light in which he cast them. The editors of *American Samplers* celebrated the Balch samplers of public buildings – “that most interesting series of pictures,” as Bolton put it – while still condescending to the youthful, ornamental nature of their production.

Collectively, their characterizations implied a remove between sampler makers, the material world they inhabited, and the buildings they depicted: structures unidentifiable to later

¹⁴⁰ Bolton and Coe, *American Samplers*, 370.

¹⁴¹ Miner, “Rhode Island Samplers,” 49; Bolton and Coe, *American Samplers*, 367-370.

¹⁴² Bolton and Coe, *American Samplers*, 102.

¹⁴³ Miner, “Rhode Island Samplers,” 49.

viewers seemed potentially more fanciful than real, and details of known buildings rendered in unexpected ways reflected passing whims rather than aesthetic choices. The depictions were “lovely,” but much of the architecture proved “curiously modified to suit the whim of the maker.” Maria Hopping’s undertaking of the First Baptist church involved a “rather ungainly arch,” while the renderings “the girls” made of the state house were “far less sure” than those of other buildings.¹⁴⁴ Lacking labels and a “sufficient resemblance to the original,” the editors lamented, many buildings were likely “real structures and not merely flights of fancy,” but could not be identified.¹⁴⁵

The volume’s appendix on sampler verse captured both the meticulous collecting behind the project and the degree to which the practice of literary sampling – of drawing readily on different bits of verse and recombining them – had become opaque to late-nineteenth century observers. For this portion of *American Samplers*, the editors compiled 800 short texts thematically and then by date of first documented appearance. In keeping with the Dames’s nationalist orientation, those lines deemed “in praise of patriotism” came first, even though verses on most of the other subjects – nature, friendship, and sorrow, to name a few – predominated.¹⁴⁶ Each piece of verse had a corresponding number; these numerical designations, in turn, accompanied the individual entries on samplers in the book’s earlier sections. The line “To colleges and schools, ye youths repair” on Abigail Martin’s sampler, for instance, became verse 97 under the theme “in praise of learning”; her additional charge, “Let virtue be a guide to thee,” was left unremarked in the piece’s entry but could be found with other

¹⁴⁴ Bolton and Coe, *American Samplers*, 102, 367.

¹⁴⁵ Bolton and Coe, *American Samplers*, 22, 102.

¹⁴⁶ The anthology listed 159 verses on death and sorrow, for example, and only seven on patriotism. Bolton and Coe, *American Samplers*, 255-256, 278-297.

lines “in praise of the virtues” in the anthology.¹⁴⁷ The detailed cross-references established concretely what Alice Morse Earle could only speculate anecdotally two decades earlier: there were patterns in the verses set into samplers, as surely as there was among their visual imagery.¹⁴⁸

For those working on *American Samplers*, the lines repeated over and over in samplers were disappointing evidence of unoriginality, while the variety of lines a single sampler might contain left them perplexed.¹⁴⁹ Both assessments came across clearly in the text introducing the anthology section of the volume. Here, the editors summoned the authenticating expertise of Barrett Wendell, professor emeritus of English at Harvard University and husband of Edith Greenough Wendell, president of the Massachusetts Society of Colonial Dames. Professor Wendell’s appraisal wavered between blistering condescension and New England exceptionalism. “Not many,” he stated about the sampler verses, “display any memorable degree of literary culture,” but, as he admitted his comments were cursory, “some of them might be traced by study to higher origin than I have happened to detect.”¹⁵⁰ Like other “Yankee” records from prior centuries, including commencement addresses, gravestones, and sermons, he found in sampler verses evidence of “an atmosphere of stingingly priggish formalism,” characterized by “unintelligence” and “lukewarm sentimentality,” and yet one that “bred a race earnest, strong, and [...] pure of heart.”¹⁵¹

For her part, Bolton scoured eighteenth-century literature for sources of sampler verse, identifying lines from Isaac Watts, Alexander Pope, Edward Young, Oliver Goldsmith, and other

¹⁴⁷ Bolton and Coe, *American Samplers*, 62, 268, 333.

¹⁴⁸ Earle, *Child Life in Colonial Days* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1899), 331-332.

¹⁴⁹ George Miner expressed similar statements in his work on Rhode Island samplers. “One can but question the entire original of many of the verses,” he wrote, before adding his sense that “the little needleworkers were somewhat coerced to express sentiments of older guiding minds.” Miner, “Rhode Island Samplers,” 48.

¹⁵⁰ Barrett Wendell, quoted in Bolton and Coe, *American Samplers*, 249.

¹⁵¹ Barrett Wendell, quoted in Bolton and Coe, *American Samplers*, 252.

well-known British authors along the way. Frustrated by the “stumbling blocks” of paraphrases, variations in spelling, and the combination of texts from multiple sources, she ultimately concluded, “A girl in those days thought nothing of blending Pope and Edward Young in one uneasy whole.”¹⁵² The acts of sampling that made unifying wholes in the lives of Julia Bowen, Rebecca Carter, or their peers had, for those observing their work more than a century later, become haphazard, uneasy ones. As twentieth-century observers marked idiosyncrasies in samplers, they accentuated the divide between the ornamental and the intellectual. “Fortunate it was for the little workers of pious inscriptions,” clucked George Miner, “that good morals did not depend on good grammar.”¹⁵³

The material and discursive settings into which white women and men set samplers in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, whether it was the primitive surroundings of the reimagined “New England log house” or the diminutive language of “Marms” and “little workers,” stripped away the particularities of their making and their makers. The omnipresence of fine embroidery in these acts of remembrance and revival, moreover, overshadowed the experiences of women who plied the needle for a livelihood. The era’s current of commemoration, argues Marla Miller, “celebrated the ornamental aspects of needlework, romanticized the tedious, and effaced the remunerative.”¹⁵⁴ The rhetoric of “Rhode Island samplers” clouded the privilege – spatial, social, and literary – on which Providence’s ornamental needlework long had rested.

¹⁵² Bolton and Coe, *American Samplers*, 253.

¹⁵³ Miner, “Rhode Island Samplers,” 48.

¹⁵⁴ Miller, *The Needle’s Eye*, 212.

Conclusion:

Over the course of the twentieth century, needlework's presence continued to expand in museum collections, decorative arts scholarship, popular depictions of the colonial era, and on the antiques market. Hundreds of samplers made in Providence and other towns in Rhode Island now belong in institutions as close to the place of their making as the Rhode Island School of Design's museum on Benefit Street and as far removed as Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Houston, Texas. From the late 1970s until the end of her prolific career, the late collector and decorative arts specialist Betty Ring tracked down, documented, and analyzed samplers across the country; her work has done much to demonstrate the technical and aesthetic complexity of these artifacts, to recuperate the instructors and schools responsible for them, and to refocus broader scholarly attention on this critical aspect of women's education in the early United States.¹⁵⁵ The outpouring of recent regional studies of needlework, usually produced in tandem with museum exhibitions but now also evident in digital humanities projects, demonstrates the continuing public and scholarly interest in these textiles.¹⁵⁶

For historians of women and the early Republic in the academy, the newly diminutive and decorative associations needlework incurred in the early twentieth century proved more cumbersome. When pioneering women's historian Linda Kerber incorporated needlework into her landmark *Women of the Republic*, the stitches served to illustrate the limits of women's education in the new nation. Under a two-page spread of an elaborate sampler depicting a

¹⁵⁵ As this chapter's citations make clear, Ring's research from the 1980s on Rhode Island needlework, done in conjunction with an exhibit sponsored by the Rhode Island Historical Society, is still a cornerstone work in the field. Ring, *Let Virtue Be a Guide to Thee*; Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, 2 vols.

¹⁵⁶ A partial list of recent work includes Sue Stuebaker, *Ohio is My Dwelling Place: School Girl Embroidery 1803-1850* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2002); Gloria Seaman Allen, *A Maryland Sampling: Girlhood Embroidery 1738-1860* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 2007); Susan P. Schoelwer, *Connecticut Needlework: Women, Art, and Family, 1740-1840* (Hartford, CT: Connecticut Historical Society, 2010); Parmal, *Women's Work*; The Sampler Archive: Information and Images of Historic American Girlhood Embroideries, <http://samplerarchive.org/index.php>.

Harvard college building, Kerber wryly commented, “The woman who made this picture used needlework, a typically female medium, to depict an institution that excluded her.”¹⁵⁷ The “typically female” medium of the needlework stood at odds with the implicitly masculine realm of the college.

How might Julia Bowen have viewed such a piece in the 1790s? Were the depicted edifice the College of Rhode Island instead of Harvard, we can imagine her catching a glimpse of the framed work as she stopped at a friend’s house to drop off a book or to pick up a companion for a fortune-telling expedition. As her day’s movements continued, she likely passed the depicted structure itself and perhaps contemplated its features. She may, too, have anticipated the next occasion she would have to visit it or remembered her most recent conversation with one of the young men who studied there. How would Rebecca Carter Jenckes have memorialized such an artifact in the 1820s? The inscriptions on her own sampler suggest she would have focused not on her exclusion from the college’s curriculum but rather on the prominent educational and social affinities she, as maker, possessed.

¹⁵⁷ Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 186-187.

Chapter 3

Recollecting Readers to Preserving Authors

In September 1800, Eliza Wadsworth found herself encountering the past within the walls of an uninhabited house in rural Maine. She was visiting the inland settlement of Hiram, the site of her father Peleg Wadsworth's large farm estate, which her eldest brother Charles tended. During the trip, she kept a detailed record of her days in the form of a letter addressed to her sisters, Zilpah and Lucia, who had remained at home in coastal Portland, and to the close friends with whom she requested they share it. Her account on this occasion began with a solitary walk. Coming upon the humble structure, she confided, "I had curiosity to enter." She peeled back the overgrown vegetation around the door, and found herself enclosed in a small entry. "A board was placed against the door that opened into the room, and seemed to say Don't come," she continued, "but after pe[e]ping through the crack and finding all still, I ventured."¹

At that point, she became both visitor and interpreter, describing the features of the space as well as her feelings in encountering it. "I stood a moment to convince myself no one lived there, for here were several old chairs placed in order round the room," she reported. She examined the bedstead of "curious workmanship," found by surprise her own face in the reflection of an old looking glass, and speculated about the purpose of a shelf beside the fireplace. From these material artifacts at her fingertips, she moved to imagine the former residents. "Here once lived a family with seven or eight children, some of them were born here,"

¹ Eliza Wadsworth to [Zilpah and Lucia Wadsworth and friends], 1 Sept. 1800, Box 13, Folder 14, Eliza Wadsworth Papers, Wadsworth-Longfellow Family Papers, Longfellow House-Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site (hereafter EW Papers and LNHS).

she reflected. In inserting herself into the physical space of the abandoned dwelling, Eliza Wadsworth inserted herself into the history she imagined it contained. “I had some curious conversation with myself in this house, and left it,” she concluded.²

Just over a century later, Nathan Goold, a local preservationist and member of the Maine Historical Society, wrote of the touchstones to the past to be found in the former home of Eliza Wadsworth and her family in Portland. In 1901, the historical society assumed ownership of the property, following the death of Zilpah Wadsworth Longfellow’s daughter Anne Longfellow Pierce. By that point, the residence on Congress Street was best known as the boyhood home of Zilpah’s son and Anne’s brother, the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. “Here his first, and some of his later, literary work was done,” Goold wrote in tribute of the site’s influence on the internationally-celebrated writer. “It was here, in this home, he lingered by the bedside of his loved and honored father.” Later, Goold reasserted the close link between the home and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s work: “Here are his own rooms, where visions, glimmering upon his thought at night, during laborious days were written out in sentences of “airy gold” by his patient hand.”³ The history enthusiast enjoined Portland’s residents to pay tribute to their most famous son by protecting the site that had nurtured his genius, imagination, and literary production.

Eliza Wadsworth and Nathan Goold each wrote of vivid encounters with the past to be found within the walls of houses. They underlined the way domestic spaces held together associations of people, objects, and stories across time, and the resulting wonder to be felt in their midst. Yet Wadsworth and Goold also wrote out of distinct circumstances and with strikingly different purposes and audiences. Eliza Wadsworth’s solitary encounter of discovery

² Eliza Wadsworth to [Zilpah and Lucia Wadsworth and friends], 1 Sept. 1800, Box 13, Folder 14, EW Papers.

³ “The Longfellow House: An Appeal by the Maine Historical Society,” *Portland Press*, Aug. 18, 1901, in Nathan Goold, comp., Wadsworth-Longfellow House scrapbook, Wadsworth-Longfellow Family Papers (hereafter Coll. 1606), Maine Historical Society (hereafter MHS).

came decades before the first formal efforts to preserve historic houses in the United States, while Nathan Goold's piece, circulated in a Portland newspaper, came in an era of growth and professionalization for that movement.⁴ The testimony of Eliza Wadsworth revealed the potential, even in the early Republic, that domestic spaces and artifacts other than one's own held to spark curiosity, to evoke past eras and people, and to locate oneself – if only in the dim reflection of a mirror – in the present. In recording her experience for her sisters, her companions, and her future self, moreover, she embedded her encounter within a practice of shared reading and remembering. Goold's account, on the other hand, directed readers towards a past fixed clearly on a well-known literary figure. In his telling, the well-established significance of "the Poet" made the significance of the house self-evident. The site's material features, in turn, further illuminated Longfellow's poetic eloquence.

This chapter maps acts of reading, writing, and remembering within the physical space of the Wadsworth-Longfellow house across a century of change, first through the experiences of the Wadsworth sisters and then through the priorities of those who worked in the second half of the nineteenth century to make the site a public memorial to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and his family. Buildings, argues Charlene Mires, serve as "depositories," "conduits," and "filters" of the past, their physical structures and cultural meanings working together to aid or impede memory.⁵ When owners and inhabitants make choices of what to alter and what to preserve as a structure ages, they indicate more than the changing functions of a site: they also reveal what

⁴ Eliza Wadsworth's account also precedes other manuscript histories of domestic spaces, including those that Deborah Norris Logan composed in the late 1820s and early 1830s, which Susan Stabile eloquently has analyzed. Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), 5-14, 47-50; Susan Stabile, *Memory's Daughters: The Material Culture of Remembrance in Eighteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 1-8, 228-234.

⁵ Charlene Mires, *Independence Hall in American Memory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), x-xi.

aspects of its history they value and seek to carry forward.⁶ In the case of the Wadsworth-Longfellow house, changes in the site's household structure, furnishings, and primary use illuminate a gendered shift over the course of the nineteenth century in the relationship of domestic space to both literary production and historical engagement.

The particular evolution and archival resources of the Wadsworth-Longfellow house furnish the opportunity to examine, under a single roof, the transition from intimate, family cultures of remembrance to the cultural politics of a house museum. Susan Stabile, tracing the commemorative practices of a coterie of elite Philadelphia women in the eighteenth century, stresses their focus on the particular, material, lived experiences of the domestic spaces they inhabited.⁷ In Stabile's formulation, this distinctly feminine culture of remembrance was displaced by an antebellum tide of public memory that emphasized male actors, civic progress, and national coherence.⁸ Patricia West's work picks up where Stabile concludes. She and other scholars of house museums assert that domesticity's posture of "rhetorical neutrality" hid from view the active political agendas that groups of white women, and later professional men as well as African American preservationists, invested in these sites. The overtly domestic quality of these spaces, however widely reimagined, advanced, rather than counteracted, narratives of national belonging.⁹ The commemorative trajectory of the Wadsworth-Longfellow house, in spanning one culture of remembrance to another, shows clearly how ideas about domesticity remapped domestic space, and how notions of authorship eclipsed broader forms of literary practice.

⁶ Mires, *Independence Hall in American Memory*, xi-xii.

⁷ Stabile, *Memory's Daughters*, esp. 3, 13-14.

⁸ In her context of study, moreover, this transformation took physical, not just discursive, form: she powerfully employs Deborah Norris Logan's account of the dismantling of her longtime home and its replacement with the Second Bank of the United States. Stabile, *Memory's Daughters*, 1-6.

⁹ West, *Domesticating History*, 162.

Like the women Stabile has documented, the Wadsworth sisters engaged in literary activity, primarily in the form of scribal correspondence, that emplaced their sentiments, conversations, and memories within particular spaces of their home. Situated and associative, the material grounding of their correspondence heightened bonds among people, places, and objects. The role of the correspondence in fostering these associations became even more pronounced over time, as the reading and re-reading of letters prompted shared recollections. Their accounts illuminate “domestic architecture as lived rather than built space,” and provide a nuanced picture of how and where women’s reading and writing unfolded on a daily basis.¹⁰ The writing of Eliza and Zilpah Wadsworth marked the fluidity of the literary and the commemorative in their everyday activities, as well as the porous, contingent quality of public and private spaces within their home.

Before the Wadsworth-Longfellow house opened as a museum operated by the Maine Historical Society, family members continued to ground intimate memories in the site but also began to project its future public legacy. Anne L. Pierce took on decades of preservation activity that encompassed memories, documents, objects, and buildings. Though scholars have a tendency to compartmentalize these historical materials, for Pierce, all were critical containers for her family’s history of intellectual and material refinement. While she has received the most attention for the work tied to the Wadsworth-Longfellow house and the artifacts therein, her efforts in fact furnished material for scholars working with traditional text-based archives as well. As space and writing were inseparable in the correspondence of the Wadsworth sisters, so too, for Pierce, was the preservation of home and paper. Whereas her female predecessors had prized those spaces and memories of the house most evocative of their personal relationships,

¹⁰ Stabile, *Memory’s Daughters*, 30.

though, Pierce highlighted family histories and artifacts with an obvious connection to nationally-recognized figures or events.

Space, object, and text continued to work together as the Wadsworth-Longfellow house became a museum open to the public in the first decade of the twentieth century. As at other house museums, the Wadsworth-Longfellow house functioned as sites in which white New Englanders used physical and textual touchstones to create, circulate, and preserve historical narratives about nation and belonging, emphasizing their own claims to particular ancestries, material possessions, and social practices. The “domestic” aspects of the space remained critical, even as the primary referents shifted to a male author, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and to national stories. Still, when members of the public visited the house in the first decade of the twentieth century, they entered space with different material and discursive features than the Wadsworth sisters, or even Anne L. Pierce, had known.

When the Maine Historical Society took on ownership of the Wadsworth-Longfellow house at the turn of the twentieth century, one of the earliest updates they undertook was to wire the site for electricity. In doing so, the MHS committee responsible ensured that the old fixtures – gas lamps, candlesticks, and chandeliers – remained intact, so as not to disrupt the old feel too severely. They simultaneously made those objects newly suitable to the site’s transformed need to provide well-lit exhibit spaces for visitors.¹¹ Likewise, we might fruitfully think of the century-long evolution of commemoration in the Wadsworth-Longfellow house as a process of rewiring, rather than replacing, the site’s existing features. Updates and changes were couched within an existing domestic frame: the remapped space and recoded meaning of activities with that frame show accumulating ideas about domesticity, authorship, and history at work. The

¹¹ “The Longfellow House,” *Portland Press* Oct. 13, 1902, in Nathan Goold, comp., *Wadsworth-Longfellow House scrapbook*, Collection 1950, MHS.

obscured legacy of women's writing at the Wadsworth-Longfellow house was not the product of its initial domestic production or content, but of the shadow of authorship and of domesticity later cast over it.

The Wadsworth Sisters Write (in) the Wadsworth House



Figure 3.1. Wadsworth-Longfellow House exterior, Maine Historical Society

At the time of the Wadsworth sisters' adolescence in the 1790s, their home was a two-story brick structure with four rooms on each floor divided by a central hall (figs. 3.1 and 3.2). On both floors, the two front rooms were larger than those at the back. The home's two staircases followed a similar hierarchy, with a large central stair in the front hall, and a more compact service staircase connecting the kitchen in the back right of the first story to the second-floor back hall. A space that their father Peleg Wadsworth used as a store adjoined the front

WADSWORTH-LONGFELLOW HOUSE.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>No. 1. The Parlor.
 No. 2. The Den or Dining Room.
 No. 3. The Kitchen and Workroom.
 No. 4. The Living Room.
 No. 5. The Little Room.
 No. 6. The Mother's Room.
 No. 7. Mrs. Pierce's Room.
 No. 8. The Children's Room.</p> | <p>No. 9. The Guests' Chamber.
 No. 10. The Poet's Room.
 No. 11. Storeroom.
 No. 12. The Boys' Room.
 No. 13. Chamber.
 No. 14. The Linen Room.
 No. 15. Lucia Wadsworth's Room.
 No. 16. Woodshed.</p> |
|---|--|

The Woodshed shown on this plan has been removed.

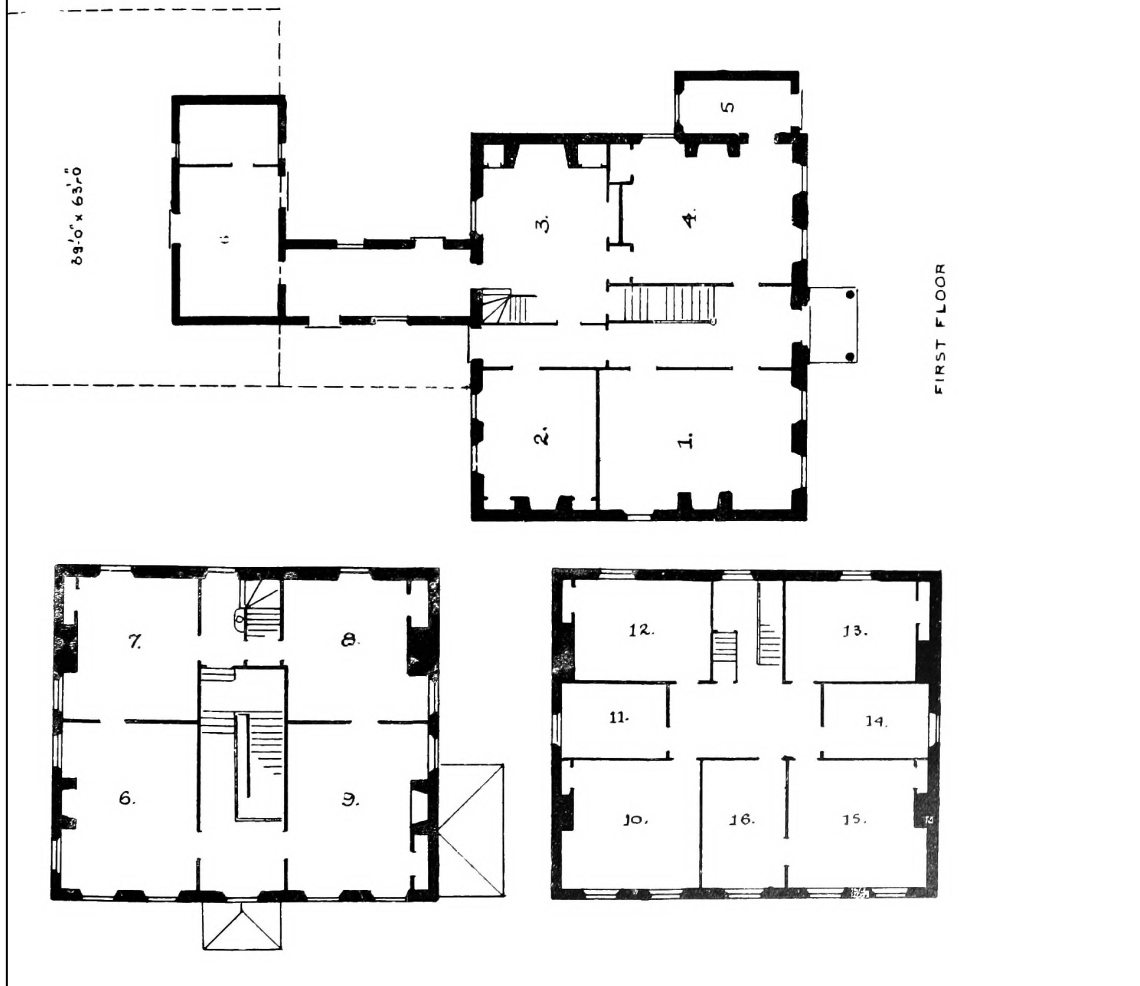


Figure 3.2. Plans of first floor (top), second floor (bottom left), and third floor (bottom right) of Wadsworth-Longfellow House, depicted in Gould, *The Wadsworth-Longfellow House* (1908), 39

right corner of the house, while a single-story service ell extended back from the kitchen. In front of the house, a small yard with a gate set off the residence from the street. Behind the house, a garden ran down the hill towards the edge of the lot. After a chimney fire damaged the existing attic space in 1814, the Longfellow family (by then the primary occupants) added a third story of seven smaller chambers to the house.¹²

Many of these features are in keeping with what scholars have charted about the physical transformations that took place in American homes between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. As houses expanded in size, so too did they expand in their elaboration: particular rooms came to carry distinct functions, and private spaces within the home increasingly were set off from public ones.¹³ Spatial and architectural cues provided material manifestations both of these changes and of cultural norms regarding gender, race, and social power.¹⁴ The correspondence of the Wadsworth sisters reflects these broad changes but also demonstrates how fluid the particular functions and meanings of many specific domestic spaces remained. As Robert St. George has indicated, growing spatial distinctions based on gender,

¹² Nathan Goold, *The Wadsworth-Longfellow House, Longfellow's Home, Portland, Maine: Its History and Its Occupants* (Portland: Lakeside Printing Company, 1908), 28, 39; MHS Curator John Mayer, personal communication with author, Aug. 2014.

¹³ Literature has played an important role as a source-base in this work, with many scholars mining the pages of nineteenth-century fiction for insights on the material make-up of early American homes, but how Americans made use of that material make-up, particularly in their everyday activities as readers and writers, has received less attention. Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (1992; repr. New York: Vintage Books, 1993); Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (1982; repr. Chapel Hill: Omohundro/UNC Press, 1999), 302-307; Jane Nylander, *Our Own Snug Fireside: Images of the New England Home, 1760-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 3-6; Karen Lipsedge, "'Enter into Thy Closet': Women, Closet Culture, and the Eighteenth-Century English Novel," in *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830*, ed. John Styles and Amanda Vickery, 107-122 (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, distributed by Yale University Press, 2006).

¹⁴ Robert Blair St. George, "Introduction," in *Material Life in America, 1600-1860*, 3-13, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988); Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 18-57; As Isaac writes, "Incised upon a society's living space appears a text for the inhabitants [...] of social relations in their world" (19).

including the division of public and private, may have appeared more rigid in texts than they were when figured into actual physical space.¹⁵

The material, spatial, and social dimensions of writing operated fluidly in the letters Zilpah and Eliza Wadsworth wrote to their cousin Nancy Doane in Boston, or to each other. For several years, the three cousins, all close to each other in age, engaged in a vibrant correspondence, punctuated by visits together in the two port cities they inhabited. “Betsy and myself [...] are sitting tete a tete by our chamber fire,” wrote Zilpah on one occasion. “There is just room between us for you Nancy, we have each an arm chair and here is a third at the service of your ladyship. Come my dear,” she beckoned to Boston, “take your seat.” Although they imagined some of the details, the vivid, intimate setting the sisters described to Nancy was one for conversation transposed to correspondence. Besides sometimes recording for Nancy the conversation passing among those in the room as they wrote, the Wadsworth sisters also wrote out imagined dialogue with their Boston cousin.¹⁶ Space, moreover, reflected sentiment: their conversation may have played out on paper, but some of the thoughts conveyed, Eliza expected, “would be as secret as if said to you alone in our chamber at twelve o’clock at night.”¹⁷ This was the danger, the sisters acknowledged, of writing “as freely as we would talk”: while they might imagine Nancy in the room while they wrote, and she, in turn, might envision herself with them as she read, their chamber conversation in fact traversed far less intimate settings on its journey from Portland to Boston.¹⁸

The sisters’ rich descriptions of spaces within their home – settings with which Nancy would have been familiar from her visits – invoked both memory and imagination to picture that

¹⁵ Robert Blair St. George, “Reading Spaces in New England.” in Styles and Vickery, 81-105.

¹⁶ Eliza Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, [ca. 1799], Box 13, Folder 14, EW Papers.

¹⁷ Eliza Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, [ca. 1799], Box 13, Folder 14, EW Papers.

¹⁸ Eliza Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 5 Aug. 1800, Box 21, Folder 26, Zilpah Wadsworth Longfellow Papers, Wadsworth-Longfellow Family Papers, LNHS (hereafter ZWL Papers).

distance erased and Nancy's physical presence achieved. The form and content of their correspondence demonstrates how conversation and writing might seamlessly flow together, and how such interworking modes of communication, when anchored by shared spatial references, might be deployed by intimate friends to surmount their separation. The emplaced quality of the writing also makes the letters a detailed record of everyday life in the Wadsworth-Longfellow house. In Eliza and Zilpah's attempts to converse with Nancy across space, they provided snapshots of where, when, and how reading and writing took place in an eighteenth-century domestic space.

Until the onset of Eliza Wadsworth's long, and ultimately terminal, illness in 1800, the most common space in and about which the sisters wrote was the most public: the parlor.¹⁹ The room, which contained the family's piano, was one of reading, writing, "telling stories and making observations," playing table games, doing needlework, and making music.²⁰ Eliza kept her materials for writing and letters-in-progress in a pile under her music on the piano (and on one occasion misplaced an epistle to Nancy and worried that she inadvertently had "lent [it] for a new tune"), reflecting in terms of physical storage the fluidity with which the sisters engaged in these varied activities.²¹ Sometimes these activities remained confined to the family, as on an autumn evening in 1796 when Zilpah remarked to Nancy that "Papa says I am writing an

¹⁹ The Wadsworth house featured two parlor spaces, both at the front of the house on the first floor. It seems the one to which the sisters most frequently referred was that on the right side. After spending an hour conversing with friends in the shop, which abutted the front right corner of the house, Zilpah described being scolded by her mother for neither bringing the company in nor taking her work with her as she passed back *through* the room; Zilpah Wadsworth journal, 8 June 1799, Box 21, Folder 14, ZWL Papers. A month later, she spoke of Mr. Wait coming in for a visit – presumably to the typical space in which the family received guests – and then requesting to speak with Zilpah and Eliza in "the drawing room," Zilpah Wadsworth journal, July 1799, Box 21, Folder 14, ZWL Papers. Zilpah later referred to the other room downstairs, in which Eliza died, as the "largest parlor, unfrequented by the family." Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 1 Sept. 1802, Box 21, Folder 29, ZWL Papers. On the distinctions between drawing rooms and sitting rooms, see Nylander, *Our Own Snug Fireside*, 253-255.

²⁰ Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 16 Oct. 1796, [4 Nov. 1796], and 12 Nov. 1796, all Box 21, Folder 21, ZWL Papers; Zilpah Wadsworth journal, May 1799, Box 21, Folder 14, ZWL Papers; Eliza Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, [25 Nov. 1799], Box 13, Folder 19, EW Papers.

²¹ Eliza Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, [25 Nov. 1799] and 23 Mar. 1799, Box 13, Folder 19, EW Papers.

unconscionable letter, for I have been writing a[ll] the evening, [...] while Papa Mama & Lucia read, no[w] they are all gone to bed and here I am writing yet.”²² More often, the sisters commented on the string of friends and acquaintances they entertained for “a very sociable hour,” in which several of these activities might take place at once.²³

This very sociability, however, often stood at odds with the socializing the sisters wished to engage in their correspondence with their cousin. “In the room where the family are,” Eliza asserted to Nancy during a bout of severe March weather that was keeping the household in close quarters near the fire, “I can not write, unless they are silent.” The temptation to listen to their conversation or observe their activity disrupted her focus in ways that left physical traces in her letter: “I find it so difficult to collect and arrange my thoughts, that I cannot ~~but~~ write but slowly and with little ~~but~~ pleasure. See how confused I am now, Zilpah is singing, Lucia is dancing, Mama is talking [...], and my poor weak head is not able to bear all this and think ~~clearly~~ too.”²⁴ Zilpah likewise had complained just a month earlier of a young printer “come to see Mama for news,” who “keeps such a talking that I cannot write.” Despite her best efforts to detach herself from their conversation, she recorded for Nancy the contours of their talk on “politics, scandal &c.” and added her own conclusion on the matter, that it was wrong “for people to make their own concerns the topic of a newspaper quarrel.”²⁵ The formulation of printed news for public consumption bled into Zilpah’s private scribal conversation with Nancy because of the shared space in which the two activities concurrently unfolded.

Company also disrupted writing by obliging the sisters’ polite hospitality. On a December evening during which Zilpah sat recording for Nancy the conversation passing in the

²² Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 16 Oct. 1796, Box 21, Folder 21, ZWL Papers.

²³ Zilpah Wadsworth journal, 21 May 1799, Box 21, Folder 14, ZWL Papers.

²⁴ Eliza Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 23 Mar. 1799, Box 13, Folder 19, EW Papers.

²⁵ Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane [Feb. 1799], Box 21, Folder 25, ZWL Papers.

back room among her, Eliza, and Stephen Longfellow, younger sister Lucia burst onto the scene – and, in Zilpah’s narrative style, it was quite literally a scene, with lines of dialogue from each speaker, punctuated by the stage-like description “Here Lucia enters” – to beg off continuing to entertain a visitor “for she has the teeth ach[e] and a cold and cannot talk to him.”²⁶

Unfortunately for Zilpah – and her reader Nancy – here the scene concluded. Similarly, Zilpah left off writing a May 1802 letter to Nancy because an acquaintance, Mr. Abbot, arrived and “there is no one here to entertain him but my ladyship.” Some time later, having been joined in her duties by her mother and Eliza, she resumed to “write a line now & then by stealth.”²⁷ While such accounts uphold Robert St. George’s assertion that women’s literary activity was “erratic and always fragmentary,” given the disruptive quality of domestic responsibilities, they also capture how literary and social practices flowed together in daily life.²⁸

The parlor, as the primary room in which the family received visitors, was as much a site of epistolary exchange as production. Returning home after several days in the country, Zilpah noted her delight to find a letter from Nancy waiting on the table there.²⁹ Because the sisters relied on private conveyances to carry their correspondence back and forth from Boston, parlor visitors and letter bearers were often one in the same. When young men came to call, they often extended offers to convey letters, and in at least one instance, a stranger used such an offer to become acquainted with the Wadsworth family.³⁰ “Here is our little neighbor,” Zilpah reported to Nancy one evening about the friend of her younger sister, “come in to see if we have a letter from Lucia.”³¹ Letter writing, letter conveying, and social visits worked in tandem.

²⁶ Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 22 Nov. 1801 (Dec. 31), Box 21, Folder 28, ZWL Papers.

²⁷ Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 5 May 1802, Box 21, Folder 29, ZWL Papers.

²⁸ St. George, “Reading Spaces,” 89.

²⁹ Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 1 Feb. [1800 or 1801], Box 21, Folder 28, ZWL Papers.

³⁰ Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 9 Oct. 1796, Box 21, Folder 21; Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 10 Feb. 1799, Box 21, Folder 25; Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 2 Jan. 1801, Box 21, Folder 28, ZWL Papers.

³¹ Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 18 Feb. [1801], Box 21, Folder 28, ZWL Papers.

The back left room on the first floor was one of the spaces where this more intimate literary activity took place. Eliza recalled that during one of Nancy's stays with them in Portland, they had spent a particular morning reading and conversing on "Washington's legacy" and the works of British writer Frances Burney.³² Zilpah, too, associated the space with Nancy's visits, as "the room in which we used to read, to digress, & to return but to digress again." She called this atmosphere to mind the evening she wrote from the same room, in company of Eliza and Stephen Longfellow, to invite Nancy to "pass an hour" and "take your seat among us." The prospect from the room was less pleasant in that winter season than what Nancy had experienced in the summer, she admitted, but "We make it very pleasant [...] by admitting two or three friends."³³ In keeping with the room's atmosphere of intimacy, and in mark of Nancy's privilege to that intimacy, Zilpah spent the rest of the letter recording the close friends' conversation. Although this space appeared far less often in the sisters' letters than did the parlor, its importance as a site of intensive literary activity and intimate social engagement resonated each time Zilpah or Eliza mentioned it.

Instead of public and private, which existed in greater or lesser degrees in different parts of the house at different times of day, a more telling spatial distinction in the Wadsworth sisters' writing was that of household labor and genteel sociability. The service space of the kitchen typically appeared only by allusion, as when Eliza mentioned that she was housekeeper for the week and had to leave her morning writing to tend to breakfast matters or when Zilpah noted that Stephen Longfellow had graciously carried away the breakfast table for her. Eliza recollected to

³² [Eliza Wadsworth] to Nancy Doane, [1 Aug. 1800], Box 21, Folder 28, ZWL Papers.

³³ Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 22 Nov. 1801, Box 21, Folder 28, ZWL Papers.

Nancy another afternoon in which the young people had commandeered the space to dance.³⁴

Zilpah marked the space as one extreme of the socializing spectrum in longingly commenting to Nancy, “Oh how I wish I could join you sometimes at the kitchen fire or at the card table, *no matter where* so that I could but see you.”³⁵ One might be tempted to interpret the kitchen fire as a site of retirement, in contrast to the superficial, or even duplicitous, socializing of the card table, but the Wadsworth sisters never spoke of the kitchen as a site of relaxed company, and indeed, hardly referred to the space at all. Rather, the kitchen fire, like the card table, inhibited conversation, not with feigned manners, but with the fatigue of work; Zilpah’s willingness to join Nancy in either spot underlined her desperation to “but see” her cousin.

Likewise, paid household laborers remained largely invisible in the sisters’ correspondence. According to census records, the Wadsworth household included one free person of color in 1790, and ten years later a free white woman between the ages of 26 and 44 who was not a member of the immediate family.³⁶ Zilpah and Eliza, however, typically commented on household labor only in cases of lack or absence. Zilpah once remarked on her difficulty in delivering a letter at night to the man that was to carry it to Boston with her brother Harry gone to bed and “not a boy under my command,” while Eliza lamented to a friend in 1802 that the family “unhappily [...] have no maid at present.”³⁷ Marla Miller notes that additions and renovations to New England homes in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, beyond separating working spaces from leisured ones, “erected intangible barriers” between household

³⁴ Zilpah Wadsworth journal, [July 1799], Box 21, Folder 14, ZWL Papers; Eliza Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 15 May 1799, Box 13, Folder 19, EW Papers; [Eliza Wadsworth] to Nancy Doane, [1 Aug. 1800], Box 21, Folder 28, ZWL Papers.

³⁵ Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 16 Oct. 1796, Box 21, Folder 21, ZWL Papers (emphasis added).

³⁶ 1790 U.S. Census, Cumberland County, Maine, population schedule, Portland, Page 195, Peleg Wadsworth household; digital image, Heritage Quest Online, accessed 11 Feb. 2015, www.ancestryheritagequest.com/HQA; 1800 U.S. Census, Cumberland County, Maine, population schedule, Portland, Page 262, Peleg Wadsworth household; digital image, Heritage Quest Online, accessed 11 Feb. 2015, www.ancestryheritagequest.com/HQA.

³⁷ Eliza Wadsworth to Mrs. Robbins, 18 Apr. 1802, Box 13, Folder 16, EW Papers.

servants and those who employed them.³⁸ The Wadsworth sisters replicated this physical distance in the spatial situating of their writing. Because they did not write in or about service spaces, the Wadsworth sisters effectively wrote paid laborers out of their household.

Windows and doorways also figured prominently in the sisters' literary record. As architectural features in which interior and exterior meet, these threshold spaces challenge the simplistic labels of public and private typically assigned to particular rooms within houses. Doorways accommodated conversations that interior spaces for socializing typically did not. When time was short but the desire for communication earnest, the sisters could be found standing at a friends' doorway "talking very fast"; when the evening was fair and the house "a prison," the front entry was Zilpah's preferred space – conveniently away from her mother's eyes – for talking with Stephen Longfellow.³⁹ At the Wadsworth house, the shop space on the front right side of the first floor also functioned as a threshold between the core of the house and the outside world, where the sisters might attract desired company and enjoy a bit of separation from the rest of the family. Eliza and Zilpah spent "an agreeable hour" conversing with Stephen Longfellow there one afternoon, only to be scolded by their mother that they neither had "taken their work" with them nor "asked our company in."⁴⁰

In the summer of 1799, the front steps of the house provided the space for a showing of communal patriotism. Earlier that spring, the Wadsworth sisters joined forty other young women in contributing funds to make a standard banner for Portland's First Company of Federal Volunteers. They procured silk, commissioned a painter, and spent a day in late May knotting

³⁸ Marla R. Miller, "Labor and Liberty in the Age of Refinement: Gender, Class, and the Built Environment," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 10 (2005), 15-31, 21 (quote).

³⁹ Zilpah Wadsworth journal, 13 June 1799, Box 21, Folder 14, ZWL Papers.

⁴⁰ Zilpah Wadsworth journal, 12 June 1799, Box 21, Folder 14, ZWL Papers.

fringe in the Wadsworth house parlor.⁴¹ After much deliberation, the group overwhelmingly voted for Zilpah Wadsworth to make the formal presentation to the militia; with much coaxing, her reluctance, as she later commented to Nancy, “was not banished by overcome.”⁴² She prepared and revised a short address – Eliza found the first draft lacking in “effusion of the moment” – and spent the evenings leading up to the presentation practicing. With the standard in hand, routine movements in and out of the house, felt conspicuous and awkward. “We ran in,” Zilpah recorded, and “shut the door,” when someone walked by as they rehearsed.⁴³

The standard altered the relationship between Zilpah Wadsworth and the space just outside her home. The act of holding and processing with it put her person on public display in a way her normal movements down her steps, in her yard, or even on the streets did not. In many New England towns, militia training exercises and reviews served as semiannual displays of communal pride and patriotism.⁴⁴ On the afternoon of the presentation, the front yard of the Wadsworth house became a space of spectacle. Music played, the uniformed volunteers paraded to the front of the house, and spectators crowded the windows of the surrounding residences and the street. Zilpah, dressed “plain as possible,” followed the rest of the young women out the door and made her pronouncement to the receiving officer.⁴⁵ Because the event had cheered and inspired the militia troops, she concluded to Nancy months after fact, “It was not so disagreeable in reality as in idea,” but the distress of having her name “handed about so publicly & in the

⁴¹ Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 25 Apr. 1799, Box 21, Folder 25, ZWL Papers; Eliza Wadsworth letter fragment, 1799, Box 13, Folder 14, EW Papers; Zilpah Wadsworth Journal, 23 May 1799, Box 21, Folder 14, ZWL Papers.

⁴² Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, Sept. 1799, Box 21, Folder 25, ZWL Papers.

⁴³ Zilpah Wadsworth journal, 22 June 1799, Box 21, Folder 14, ZWL Papers.

⁴⁴ Nylander, *Our Own Snug Fireside*, 232-233.

⁴⁵ Zilpah Wadsworth journal fragment, [25 June 1799], Box 23, Folder 15, ZWL Papers.

newspapers” lingered.⁴⁶ Ultimately, it was not the entering of public space, but the entering of public speculation that Zilpah found uncomfortable.

Depending on the circumstances, the Wadsworth sisters gravitated towards windows to achieve greater privacy or more access to public space. In the midst of a large evening party, whether at the Wadsworth house or elsewhere, Zilpah and a close friend might break off from the bulk of the company to sit in a window and share more intimate conversation.⁴⁷ On another occasion, disappointed that Stephen Longfellow had failed to call, she drifted from the company surrounding Eliza at the piano to sit in a window and look out at the moon.⁴⁸ Part of her intention may have been solitude, but she deployed the same tactic of positioning herself in a window to make sure she would see Stephen and attract his attention if he passed in the street.⁴⁹ She likewise made sure to catch his eye through the door to his law office any time she and her friends strolled past.⁵⁰

Windows could disrupt the distinction between lower and upper floors of a house, in contrast to what scholars have emphasized about the sharpening division between the public quality of entertaining spaces downstairs and private rooms upstairs.⁵¹ One afternoon a few days after she had presented the standard, Zilpah was sewing in the window of an upstairs chamber when Mr. Symmes, one of the “Portland beaux” who appeared in the sisters’ correspondence, paused below to ask what she thought of a particular account, probably in the newspaper, of the

⁴⁶ Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, Sept. 1799, Box 21, Folder 25, ZWL Papers.

⁴⁷ Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 25 Apr. 1799, Box 21, Folder 25, ZWL Papers; Zilpah Wadsworth journal, 22 May 1799, Box 21, Folder 14, ZWL Papers.

⁴⁸ Zilpah Wadsworth journal [May 1799], Box 21, Folder 14, ZWL Papers.

⁴⁹ Zilpah Wadsworth journal, [May 1799], Box 21, Folder 14, ZWL Papers.

⁵⁰ Zilpah Wadsworth journal, 13 June 1799, Box 21, Folder 14, ZWL Papers.

⁵¹ St. George, “Reading Spaces,” 91; Jessica Kross, “Mansions, Men, Women, and the Creation of Multiple Publics in Eighteenth-Century British North America,” *Journal of Social History* 33, No. 2 (Winter 1999), 399-400, 402. For Kross, the elaboration of household spaces created opportunities for all-male socializing within domestic space and lessened women’s access to such activities, and therefore to public life. Much of the evidence foregrounded in this dissertation – in which educated white young women liberally exercised access to spaces inside homes and around cities – suggests otherwise.

proceedings. Soon, Stephen Longfellow happened by, and Zilpah invited him to join the conversation: “I told him I had something to say to him. He came and stood under the trees with Symmes. I told him I ha[d] heard a lady say she was offended with him.” At that point, Mr. Symmes went inside. “L. begged I would tell him, I told him I would if he would come in. I went down, Betsy was playing to Mr. Symmes.”⁵²

Although she was upstairs and working at her sewing, Zilpah’s position in an open window facing the street made room for impromptu company and heterosocial conversation, to the extent that she could practically hail Stephen Longfellow as he passed in the street. Coming just a few days after the standard presentation, moreover, the interaction shows her restored comfort in seeking company beyond the walls of the house. She could talk to Symmes and Longfellow out the window and still command a sense of propriety. At the same time, the visit of both gentlemen came to fruition only when Zilpah persuaded them to come inside to the conventional entertaining space of the parlor. A few years later, Zilpah’s writing revealed again that a conversation born between the window and street might blossom into a formal visit, though in this case, she was less eager to provide such an opportunity. “Here is Mr. Symmes again,” she commented to Nancy, “he has passed my window half a dozen times since I have been writing. I imagine he wants to see the letter.”⁵³

The rest of the upstairs of the Wadsworth house figured, by turns, as a site of retreat and confinement. “I have left company below,” Zilpah confided to Nancy in a November 1796 letter, “and have stolen away to finish this.”⁵⁴ On another occasion, having suspended writing a letter to Nancy when the bell for dinner rang, Eliza later retreated back upstairs afterwards to

⁵² Zilpah Wadsworth journal, [27 June 1799], Box 21, Folder 14, ZWL Papers.

⁵³ Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 5 Aug. 1803, Box 21, Folder 30, ZWL Papers.

⁵⁴ Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 12 Nov. 1796, Box 21, Folder 21, ZWL Papers; Zilpah Wadsworth journal, 18 May 1799, Box 21, Folder 14, ZWL Papers.

continue their “conversation” in earnest while her siblings played backgammon and made music below.⁵⁵ In the winter months, however, such retreat was short-lived, and the cold of the upstairs rooms, where a fire was not regularly kept, drove the sisters back to the warmth of the parlor.⁵⁶ Bedchambers also appeared in the sisters’ correspondence as privileged sites for sharing secrets and deepening bonds.⁵⁷ According to Eliza, who instructed Nancy to “take this enormous packet to your chamber, and read it at your intervals of leisure,” they were also appropriate spaces for perusing each other’s letters, highlighting again the way correspondence among the intimate friends created a virtual conversation.⁵⁸ If one sought company or to go out, however, the obligation to be upstairs, as Zilpah experienced in the spring of 1799 when her mother remained confined to her chamber recovering from an illness, was enough to bring on tears.⁵⁹

The Wadsworth sisters pursued literary activity in many rooms in the Wadsworth house, often in the company of other family members and in the midst other household social practices. They had preferred, but not designated, writing spaces. In part, they could not always command the conditions of quiet, warmth, and uninterrupted time that scholars frequently tie to solitary literary engagement.⁶⁰ But their testimony also suggests they sought out different spatial conditions for different modes of writing, similar to the way that forms of conversation might shift depending on if one were sitting in the parlor, talking at a window, or nestled in a bed-chamber. Mapping the domestic literary spaces of the Wadsworth sisters suggests that it was not

⁵⁵ Eliza Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, [ca. 1799], Box 13, Folder 14, EW Papers.

⁵⁶ Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 27 Nov. 1796, Box 21, Folder 21, ZWL Papers; Eliza Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 23 May 1799, Box 13, Folder 19, EW Papers.

⁵⁷ Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 3 Dec. 1796, Box 21, Folder 21, ZWL Papers; Zilpah Wadsworth journal [June 1799], Box 21, Folder 14, ZWL Papers; Eliza Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, [ca. 1799], Box 13, Folder 4, EW Papers.

⁵⁸ Eliza Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, [ca. 1799], Box 13, Folder 14, EW Papers.

⁵⁹ Zilpah Wadsworth journal, [14 May 1799], Box 21, Folder 14, ZWL Papers.

⁶⁰ St. George, “Reading Spaces,” 84.

the public-private axis that determined if reading and writing was more or less likely, but rather the line separating manual labor from the practice of sociability.

Domestic Space as Depository:

Recollection, too, influenced the functions and meanings that different parts of the house carried for the Wadsworth sisters. They portrayed their home not just as a site of literary production and epistolary conversation, but also as a rich repository of memories and the objects that evoked them. Zilpah admitted in the opening of one letter to Nancy that she had no way to convey the letter, but “I have got a sheet of paper [...] of the size you like best and to tell the truth, seeing the paper made me think of you. Thinking of you made me wish to talk to you a little, so I seated myself in the first window and began to write.”⁶¹ The material cue of the paper stirred her memories of an absent friend; the desire for social interaction, in turn, moved her into the physical space of the window to take up the act of writing. These acts, inseparable from those of their reading and writing, anchored histories of personal and public significance in domestic space.

Broader currents of commemoration flowed in and out of the Wadsworth-Longfellow house at the turn of the nineteenth century. On the occasion of presenting the standard, for example, Zilpah spoke of the emblems of liberty it depicted and charged the assembled volunteers, “Let it ever recal[l] to your minds the assurance of our best wishes for your success.”⁶² Less than a year later, both sisters devotedly followed the national outpourings of grief at the death of George Washington. Eliza wrote to their father, serving in Congress in

⁶¹ Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 25 Apr. 1799, Box 21, Folder 25, ZWL Papers.

⁶² Zilpah Wadsworth diary fragment, 24 June 1799, Box 23, Folder 15, ZWL Papers.

Philadelphia, requesting a copy of the funeral proceedings published there. In addition to this printed memento, she hoped “more than anything” for “a scrap of General Washington’s hand writing” or a lock of his hair.⁶³ The specificity of these last two requests – of tokens that had originated from physical contact with Washington – reflected Eliza Wadsworth’s fluency in a national culture of remembrance that prized tangible connection, association, and affective response.⁶⁴

Several months later, a packet arrived from Philadelphia, with a note from Peleg Wadsworth giving Eliza leave to “unfold the secret” within: a lock of the deceased president’s hair, along with letters exchanged between Philadelphia and Mount Vernon showing it was Eliza’s own “charming letter,” forwarded by her father, that “induced Mrs. Washington to comply with the request.”⁶⁵ Eliza was breathless in her thanks. Should her virtue ever falter, Eliza wrote assuredly in reply, she would open the papers and look to the two fathers whose characters were held there. Echoing Zilpah’s charge in giving the Standard, Eliza affirmed that a material token could prompt recollection and a renewed dedication to one’s principles.⁶⁶ Eliza also deemed the lock of George Washington’s hair an object for public circulation. “How shall I duly honor this relic?” she wondered. “I want to give thousands who have never had the

⁶³ Eliza Wadsworth to Peleg Wadsworth, 19 Jan. 1800, typescript, Box 13, Folder 32, EW Papers. Harriet L. Bradley, a Longfellow family friend, completed a typescript set of the correspondence around 1898. The originals of this correspondence are held by the Maine Historical Society and available for view on the Maine Memory Network: <<https://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/191/page/450/display>>.

⁶⁴ Teresa Barnett, *Sacred Relics: Pieces of the Past in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 60-61; Helen Sheumaker, *Love Entwined: The Curious History of Hairwork in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 22, 27-28.

⁶⁵ Peleg Wadsworth to Eliza Wadsworth, 24 Apr. 1800, and Tobias Lear to Peleg Wadsworth, 5 Apr. 1800, typescript, Box 13, Folder 32, EW Papers.

⁶⁶ Eliza Wadsworth to Peleg Wadsworth, 24 Apr. 1800, typescript, Box 13, Folder 32, EW Papers.

happiness of seeing General Washington the satisfaction of viewing this lock.”⁶⁷ In response, her father playfully cautioned her not to “give it all away, hair by hair.”⁶⁸

As Eliza’s health worsened, she made provisions for the future preservation and circulation of the relic. In a bequest attributed to her, she outlined her wishes: while she left it in the immediate care of her sister Zilpah, to preserve it in the family “while it can be safe,” she further stipulated, “Some years hence it may be thought invaluable at the Museum at Bowdoin College; or if Maine is a separate [sic] state, and patriotism would fully estimate its worth, I had rather it would be preserved among its treasures.”⁶⁹ At twenty-two years of age, Eliza Wadsworth envisioned herself (and her sister Zilpah) as caretakers, and eventually benefactors, of an object with broad, civic importance. She imagined this future, moreover, in an era in which institutions in the United States for preserving the past were only beginning to emerge.⁷⁰ Such was the grip of George Washington’s legacy on American culture, to be sure, but also such was the possibility in the early Republic for young women of Eliza Wadsworth’s social position to engage with the past on public, institutional terms.⁷¹

Eliza’s long final illness in the spring and summer of 1802 disrupted routines around the Wadsworth house. Zilpah became the primary correspondent to Nancy, and apologized for long

⁶⁷ Eliza Wadsworth to Peleg Wadsworth, 24 Apr. 1800, typescript, Box 13, Folder 32, EW Papers.

⁶⁸ Peleg Wadsworth to Eliza Wadsworth, 3 May 1800, typescript, Box 13, Folder 32, EW Papers.

⁶⁹ Elements of the bequest seem to conflict with the chronology of her death versus that of Bowdoin’s museum. Eliza Wadsworth died August 1, 1802; Bowdoin college’s first students matriculated a month later, and the gift by James Bowdoin III that founded the college’s museum and library collection took place in 1811. Eliza Wadsworth, undated note in Elizabeth Wadsworth Correspondence, Collection S-1247, MHS. Accessed via Maine Memory Network, <https://www.mainememory.net/artifact/8953>; Nehemiah Cleaveland, *History of Bowdoin College, With Biographical Sketches of its Graduates* (Boston, 1882), 8-9.

⁷⁰ The Maine Historical Society, for instance, was established in 1822, two decades after Wadsworth’s death. H.G. Jones, ed. *Historical Consciousness in the Early Republic: The Origins of State Historical Societies, Museums, and Collections, 1791-1861* (Chapel Hill: North Caroliniana Society, Inc., 1995), 29.

⁷¹ For two broad studies of the evolving idea of George Washington in American culture and public memory, see Karal Ann Marling, *George Washington Slept Here: Colonial Revivals and American Culture, 1876-1976* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), and Seth Bruggeman, *Here, George Washington was Born: Memory, Material Culture, and the Public History of a National Monument* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008), esp. 46-47.

gaps in communication. “I find that like many other things this letter writing is very uncertain,” she lamented in July, shortly before leaving off writing for a week. When she took up her pen again, she wrote in the knowledge the end was near.⁷² Eliza died in the night on August 1. When Nancy Doane heard of Eliza’s death, she wrote her surviving cousin, encouraging her to “Leave Portland,” and its daily reminders of all she had lost.⁷³ “Ah, no!” Zilpah retorted in her reply, “It is not true that ‘memory destroys every ray of comfort.’ Far from it, ‘tis in this house only, in this room where she died, that I can taste any.” Nancy would need to come to the Wadsworth house in Portland if she sought mutual comfort. “It is here I can recollect her most perfectly,” Zilpah continued. “And can I leave this room? Here too I call to mind her sentiments pure & just, her rules of conduct unerringly good; and tis here I make my supplications to my heavenly father that I may successfully imitate her many virtues.”⁷⁴ Out of Nancy’s first entreaty to leave Portland, Zilpah drew a more intimate geography of memory, grief, and comfort, one centered on specific spaces within the family home.

The nexus of home, memory, and absence Zilpah described to Nancy in the weeks following her sister’s death was not unlike the account Eliza had left of her encounter in the abandoned house in Hiram. For each Wadsworth, the material setting in which she found herself evoked those, whether intimately known or unfamiliar, who had departed. Fittingly, in an era in which childbirth, sickness, and death typically occurred in the home, each sister situated major familial life passages – the birth of children and the death of a sister – within her sense of the space.⁷⁵ In dwelling on the memories deposited in domestic space, moreover, each sister also encountered a reflection of herself. Eliza quite literally found her own face reflected back to her

⁷² Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 21 July 1802, Box 21, Folder 29, ZWL Papers.

⁷³ Nancy Doane to Zilpah Wadsworth, 11 Aug. 1802, Box 23, Folder 30, ZWL Papers.

⁷⁴ Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 1 Sept. 1802, Box 21, Folder 29, ZWL Papers.

⁷⁵ Nylander, *Our Own Snug Fireside*, 27-29, 36-41.

by a mirror but also, as she remarked, engaged in “some curious conversation” with herself.⁷⁶ Zilpah’s recollections of Eliza provided both a sense of comfort and a model of “sentiments pure & just” towards which to aim her own conduct.⁷⁷ Finally, each sister recorded her encounter with the past in her correspondence, extending her sense of history to others.

Indeed, it was correspondence Zilpah sought as solace in the wake of Eliza’s death, and she wrote to Nancy requesting to borrow the pages of letters her sister had sent over the years. Nancy was happy to oblige; she herself had employed hours rereading them, and attested to consolation she found within: “Her body is dead, but the effusions of her mind will live forever with her friends.”⁷⁸ In the months that followed, the two cousins kept Eliza’s memory alive by sharing, copying, and rereading her writing. The conversational tone of the letters and familiar curves of the handwriting became only more poignant in her absence. “Betsy’s letters were as though she herself spoke,” Zilpah reflected in October. When she returned them the following April, she wrote that copying them made her “feel her heavenly sentiments impressed on my heart.”⁷⁹ Eliza’s correspondence, and the reflections Zilpah and Nancy shared about it in the wake of her death, expanded everyday artifacts of writing into aids to grief, tokens of memory, and guides to emulate.

As decades passed, these records became a means to invoke anew the memories embedded in the Wadsworth-Longfellow house. In 1823, Nancy Doane Wells, married and living in East Hartford, Connecticut, briefly resumed her long-dormant correspondence with her cousin Zilpah. Over the course of the previous winter, she had “engaged many hours in re-perusing the letters” she had received from Zilpah and her family decades earlier. “They contain

⁷⁶ Eliza Wadsworth to [Zilpah and Lucia Wadsworth and friends], 1 Sept. 1800, Box 13, Folder 14, EW Papers.

⁷⁷ Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 1 Sept. 1802, Box 21, Folder 29, ZWL Papers.

⁷⁸ Nancy Doane to Zilpah Wadsworth, 15 Aug. 1802, Box 23, Folder 20, ZWL Papers.

⁷⁹ Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 1 Oct. 1802, Box 21, Folder 29, and 21 Apr. 1803, Box 21, Folder 30, ZWL Papers.

its history,” she commented, as well as “many circumstances of my own history...which had passed entirely from my memory.” Nancy marked how the cousins’ earlier written exchange was situated within time and space. She quoted at length from a vivid “family picture” Zilpah had composed as part of a letter in 1797, reflecting it back to her cousin a quarter century later. Nancy’s letter to Zilpah returned in memory to the space of their correspondence, which had lagged since the birth of Zilpah’s first child in 1806, *and* to the space of the Wadsworth house, which the cousins had woven so intricately into their letters. If Zilpah received and read Nancy’s letter in the sitting room, she could have called to mind the very scene she had recorded so many years before: her mother in a chair by the fire, Betsy at the piano, younger siblings hanging on the back of a chair or stepping about on the floor, and brothers Harry and Charles sitting beside her, one with a book, the other with “his pen dropt from his hand” as he listened to the music.⁸⁰ Reflecting on the lapse of time but the continuity of scene within the Wadsworth turned Longfellow house, Nancy remarked, “How you know how your mother felt, and in a few years perhaps your daughter will know how you feel.”⁸¹

One of Zilpah Longfellow’s daughters, Anne, did become the inheritor of this remembered scene, though she never had children of her own. Widowed in her mid-twenties, she returned to the family house on Congress Street, and as her parents and unmarried aunt Lucia aged, she gradually assumed primary responsibility for housekeeping and memory-keeping alike. In the meantime, her brother Henry, already a published author and professor at Harvard, took up possession of a more tangible heirloom. In 1849, apparently with his mother’s blessing, he inherited the lock of Washington’s hair that Eliza Wadsworth had intended for a public

⁸⁰ Nancy Doane Wells to Zilpah Wadsworth Longfellow, 15 May 1823, Box 23, Folder 20, ZWL Papers.

⁸¹ Nancy Doane Wells to Zilpah Wadsworth Longfellow, 15 May 1823, Box 23, Folder 20, ZWL Papers.

repository. The elaborately engraved locket into which he set the hair bore Eliza's name, as well as that of Mrs. Washington, and also his own (fig. 3.3).⁸²



Figure 3.3. Locket holding George Washington's hair, 1850, Maine Historical Society for the Maine Memory Network

Anne L. Pierce & The Shifting Memorial Landscape:

Anne L. Pierce undertook decades of historical work on behalf of her family and their public legacy. Some of those efforts commenced as early as the late 1840s, when an aging Zilpah Wadsworth Longfellow informally bequeathed to her daughter various scraps from the old family letters she was destroying. Decades later, Pierce would copy from and cite these and other pieces of family correspondence in compiling information for relatives or for those

⁸² "Washington's Hair," Box 13, Folder 34, EW Papers. This line of descent has proven consequential in how scholars discuss the Wadsworth family's Washington relic. One recent narrative about the artifact erased Eliza Wadsworth's active role in the matter entirely, characterizing the lock of hair instead as an heirloom passed from Peleg Wadsworth to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Barnett, *Sacred Relics*, 22.

biographers of her brother Henry whose work she sanctioned.⁸³ She continued to gather and disperse pieces of family history until close to the time of her death in 1901. Besides the span of time over which she presided as caretaker of her family's history, the scope of Anne L. Pierce's work – as collector, curator, researcher, and benefactor – demonstrated the range of activity amateur historical practice could entail in the late nineteenth century.⁸⁴ Her bequest of property to the Maine Historical Society marked but one act of many to preserve her family's legacy in the midst of a rapidly changing Portland landscape. Decisions that Anne L. Pierce made about the content and presentation of the family's history profoundly shaped the space of public commemoration the Wadsworth-Longfellow house was to become.

Family papers that have ended up in institutional archives bear the marks – usually made with a purple pencil – of having first passed through the hands of Anne L. Pierce. Many of these inscriptions noted the original sender, recipient, and date of correspondence, marks which would have aided in the sequencing or compartmentalizing of the multitude of individual documents. Other annotations demonstrate that Pierce was assessing and seeking to provide explanation within the pieces as she read them. On one letter among the papers of one of Eliza and Zilpah Wadsworth's brothers, she scrawled in large letters, "To be burned??" perhaps because in it he had conveyed to his sisters a mildly suggestive comment from another young man.⁸⁵ She likewise flagged items of particular interest, including family milestones or events and figures

⁸³ Anne L. Pierce to George Washington Greene, 17 Mar. 1879, Box 27, Folder 1, Anne Longfellow Pierce Papers, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Papers, LNHS (hereafter ALP Papers).

⁸⁴ Bonnie Smith notes that the "panoramic" quality of late-nineteenth century amateur histories by women conflicted with the narrowing range of subjects, methods, and genres pursued by male professionals. Both amateurs and professionals in this era, however, sought to record "precise information." Unlike the women Smith's work foregrounds, Pierce never engaged in formal publication. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 159, 160-172.

⁸⁵ John Wadsworth to sister, 15 Nov. 1797, Box 13, Folder 37, John Wadsworth Papers, Wadsworth-Longfellow Family Papers, LNHS.

she deemed to be of broader, even national, significance (fig. 3.4).⁸⁶ On a fragment of Eliza Wadsworth's writing, for instance, she underlined references to "Washington's march" and "Yankee Doodle."⁸⁷ Pierce also speculated on the dates of various letters within her aunt Lucia Wadsworth's correspondence when the writers had not included a year, and specified that the "two children" mentioned in one 1820 letter were "Ellen & Sam," her own siblings.⁸⁸

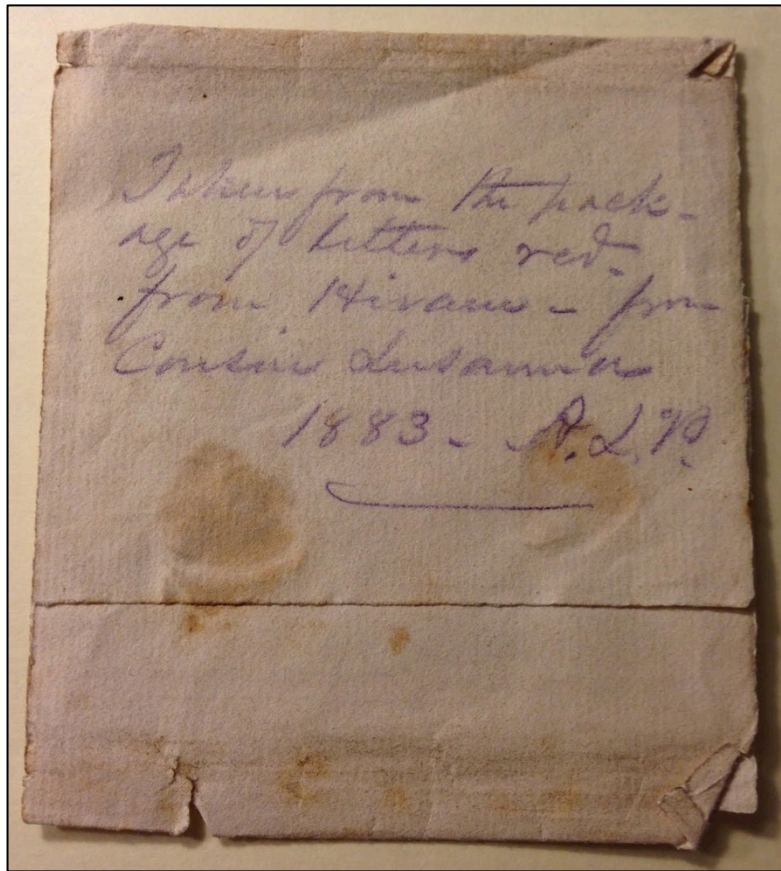


Figure 3.4. Annotations by Anne L. Pierce on family papers, Maine Historical Society

⁸⁶ For annotations by Pierce regarding Henry Wadsworth's naval career, Lucia Wadsworth's declaration she would never marry, and a visit of Peleg Wadsworth to Mount Vernon, respectively, see Zilpah Wadsworth to Nancy Doane, 4 Aug. 1799, Box 21, Folder 25, ZWL Papers; Zilpah Wadsworth Longfellow to Nancy Doane, 17 Apr. 1804, Box 21, Folder 31, ZWL Papers; Peleg Wadsworth to Elizabeth Bartlett Wadsworth, 14 May 1802, Box 11, Folder 13, Peleg Wadsworth Papers, Wadsworth-Longfellow Family Papers, LNHS.

⁸⁷ Eliza Wadsworth letter fragment, ca. 1799-1800, Box 13, Folder 14, EW Papers.

⁸⁸ See Lucia Wadsworth to Mary P. Fessendon, 29 May [1811?], Box 14, Folder 1, Lucia Wadsworth Papers, Wadsworth-Longfellow Family Papers, LNHS (hereafter LW Papers); Lucia Wadsworth to Alexander Wadsworth, 24 June 1820, Box 14, Folder 4, LW Papers.

The family documents Pierce deemed significant enough to copy in full highlight the degree to which she found the family histories most worthy of preservation were those with an obvious connection to national figures or events. She pursued this course with the correspondence related to the lock of George Washington's hair and with Zilpah Wadsworth's accounts of presenting the standard to the Federal volunteers.⁸⁹ Zilpah's 1799 journal, which is the source Pierce used to reconstruct the latter event, today exists in fragments: many of the pages still bound together have portions cut out, and some of these pieces now are housed in other folders among her papers. Just when the fragmentation occurred, and at whose hands, is unclear.⁹⁰ Whatever the case, Pierce's resulting narrative of the standard involved copying those passages of the diary she deemed significant and excluding those she found too quotidian.⁹¹ Her focused account, whether a careful reconstruction or a willful breaking apart, isolated the event from Zilpah's everyday experiences, creating a neater division of public and private worlds than the Wadsworth sisters had inhabited.

In pursuit of these more publicly-legible events, Pierce looked to historical records of note from beyond her own home. In 1883, she borrowed from her cousin Lusanna Wadsworth Hubbard a set of letters their grandfather Peleg Wadsworth had written while serving in Congress. Hubbard later wrote to Nathan Gould that the correspondence had circulated to other family members, including Pierce's siblings Alexander and Mary, and that one 1805 letter had

⁸⁹ Copies of Correspondence re: Gift of George Washington's Lock of Hair, Box 13, Folder 32, EW Papers; [Anne L. Pierce], Account of Presentation of the Standard, 1876, Box 21, Folder 25, ZWL Papers.

⁹⁰ Zilpah Longfellow cut up and destroyed family papers on other occasions, and Pierce's narrative of selective pieces of the diary suggests she had reason to do so in this instance. Pierce mentioned her mother's practice of cutting up letters in her letter to George W. Greene, 17 Mar. 1879, ALP Papers. Zilpah Wadsworth journal, 1799, Box 21, Folder 14, ZWL Papers; Zilpah Wadsworth journal fragments, Box 23, Folder 15, ZWL Papers.

⁹¹ Anne L. Pierce, Notes re: Presentation of Standard to First Company of Federal Volunteers, ca. 1875, Box 23, Folder 38, ZWL Papers.

been forwarded to the Western Historical Society in Cincinnati as early as the 1850s.⁹²

Likewise, in addition to copying extant family papers about the presentation of the standard, Pierce consulted the record book of the militia group itself.⁹³ Such work corroborated her mother's own testimony of the event, including the words of her speech, and suggests that Pierce recognized that such external sources could heighten the authority of the narrative that had circulated within the family. Later family members would follow suit, making further typescript copies of eighteenth-century manuscript texts Pierce had copied by hand.⁹⁴

Out of her extensive reading, Pierce positioned herself as an authority on the history of the Wadsworth and Longfellow families and of Portland. Her knowledge proved an attractive resource to other historians and biographers. When Nathan Goold and other male historians prepared published pieces on the Wadsworth brothers' naval careers or on Zilpah's presentation of the Standard, they drew from epochs in the family's history that Pierce already had identified, documented, and made readily available.⁹⁵ Memoranda were another way Pierce organized particular chapters and figures in the family's past. One such memo combined family memory about her grandfather Judge Stephen Longfellow, information Pierce copied from "a letter of yesterday," and material she had read in a text by Portland historian William Willis; this compilation of primary and secondary research she then copied and forwarded to Henry Burrage, who was preparing to deliver an address on the history of the Longfellow family as part of the Maine Historical Society's celebration of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 75th birthday in

⁹² Mrs. [Lusanna Wadsworth] Hubbard, to Nathan Goold, 11 June 1903, with enclosed notes dated 1853 and 1883, Box 2, Folder 2, Wadsworth Family Correspondence, Collection 16, MHS.

⁹³ [Anne L. Pierce], Account of Presentation of the Standard, 1876, Box 21, Folder 25, ZWL Papers.

⁹⁴ See, for instance, Harriet L. Bradley's typescript copies of the correspondence related to George Washington's lock of hair in Box 13, Folder 32, EW Papers.

⁹⁵ William Goold, "General Peleg Wadsworth, and the Maternal Ancestry of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow," in *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Seventy-Fifth Birthday. Proceedings of the Maine Historical Society, February 27, 1882* (Portland: Hoyt, Fogg, and Donham, 1882), 52-80, esp. 75-78; Nathan Goold, "Portland's Naval Heroes," n.p., 5 May 1898, and "The Longfellow House – Its History and Its Occupants," *Portland Sunday Times*, 8 Apr. 1900, in Wadsworth-Longfellow House scrapbook, Coll. 1606, MHS.

1882.⁹⁶ Where Pierce thought her own memory or information incomplete, she could list other individuals and organizations that might fill in the gaps.⁹⁷

Pierce, then, exercised a considerable amount of control over the flow and content of the information scholars and members of the general public received about her brother Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and their family. Moreover, she was sowing the seeds of his memorialization as a great American author from an esteemed Portland family with a rich history of patriotism even before his death. In 1879, she candidly recorded her recollections of his childhood in Portland at the request of her nephew and historian George Washington Greene, begging his leave when she drifted into her own memories, wishing she “could have talked this all over with you,” and hoping to find more details for him in some of her mother’s old letters.⁹⁸ She likewise forwarded material and advised her brother Samuel Longfellow as he prepared a biography of their brother, which appeared in print in 1886.⁹⁹ To George Lowell Austin, another prospective biographer whose intentions she found suspect, she proved less cooperative.¹⁰⁰

Pierce’s remarks to her nephew George Washington Greene are important for another reason. Embedded in these recollections, which were more extensive and candid than the few

⁹⁶ At times, Burrage, who became a prolific writer of Maine history and eventually served as the president of the Maine Historical Society, drew word-for-word on the notes Pierce had provided, but he made no mention of her assistance in his address. Anne L. Pierce’s Notes on the Wadsworth-Longfellow Family, n.d., Box 28, Folder 7, ALP Papers; Henry S. Burrage, “Henry W. Longfellow and His Paternal Ancestry,” in *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Seventy-Fifth Birthday. Proceedings of the Maine Historical Society, February 27, 1882* (Portland: Hoyt, Fogg, and Donham, 1882), 29-51.

⁹⁷ Anne L. Pierce’s Notes on the Wadsworth-Longfellow Family, n.d., Box 28, Folder 7, ALP Papers. This folder contains several undated and untitled memos, covering Longfellow ancestors, early schools in Portland, the debate over where Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was born, and the Wadsworth family provenance of a picture frame. Where one memo ends and another begins is sometimes difficult to discern, so I have cited the entire folder.

⁹⁸ “Recollections of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Youth,” n.d., Box 27, Folder 23, ALP Papers. This document is an undated draft of the letter Pierce sent to Greene in 1879 cited above.

⁹⁹ Anne L. Pierce to Samuel Longfellow, ca. 1883, Box 6, Folder 10, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Papers, LNHS; Samuel Longfellow, *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1886).

¹⁰⁰ George Lowell Austin to Anne L. Pierce, 12 Apr. 1882, 20 Apr. 1882, and George L. Austin to George Washington Greene, 5 Apr. 1882, enclosed in George Washington Greene to Anne L. Pierce, 7 Apr. 1882, Box 27, Folder 17, ALP Papers. See also her sarcastic comment to her sister about her “polite friend” Austin in Anne L. Pierce to Mary L. Greenleaf, 27 June 1882, in Box 27, Folder 2, ALP Papers.

others that remain extant, were statements that distinguished her family from Portland's working-class and non-Anglo American populations. Particularly striking was her description of her brother's brief experience attending one of the city's public schools, where "the noise of the school, and the dirt of the boys," not to mention "his seat between some black boys, or n----- as they called them then," proved unbearable.¹⁰¹ Pierce's remarks to Greene made explicit social distinctions that she and other writers only implied elsewhere. By the middle of the nineteenth century, notes Kathleen Brown, those in Pierce's position "enacted much of their power and privilege through judgments of other people's filth, moral turpitude, and disorder."¹⁰² The accusations of dirt and disorder that white New Englanders aimed at free black communities, moreover, worked to erase the region's history of slavery and to mark people of color living there as "anomalous and disturbing."¹⁰³

For the most part, those who memorialized the Wadsworth-Longfellow family and their home in the late nineteenth century asserted the racial and social superiority of white, native-born Americans by association: their natural place among Portland's elite derived from their refinement, humility, and sensibility; it manifested in their advanced education, military service, and civic participation.¹⁰⁴ In contrast to the laudatory narratives of the Wadsworths and Longfellows, those who labored within their families or lived on the margins of Portland society merited little or no remark. Replicating the documentary silences of her mother and aunt, Pierce's plentiful annotations and memorandum indicate no interest in the domestic laborers who

¹⁰¹ Pierce spelled out in its entirety the racial slur in the draft version held in Box 27, Folder 23. Anne L. Pierce to George Washington Greene, 17 March 1879, Box 27, Folder 1, ALP Papers.

¹⁰² Kathleen E. Brown, *Foul Bodies: Cleanliness in Early America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 283.

¹⁰³ Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 210, 214-215.

¹⁰⁴ On the late-nineteenth century coalescence of genealogical practice and scientific racism, see François Weil, *Family Trees: A History of Genealogy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 112-142; Carolyn Strange, "Sisterhood of Blood: The Will to Descend and the Formation of the Daughters of the American Revolution," *Journal of Women's History* 26, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 105-128.

worked for the Wadsworth and Longfellow households over their 115-year tenure in the house. Their absence from the history signified the memorializers' belief in their absence from the body politic.¹⁰⁵ Pierce's recollections to Greene, on the other hand, made this exclusion explicit and still managed to displace any responsibility for such a division onto those left outside. The racial slur she used was something "they used to call them," disowning her own involvement in such vulgarities even as she committed the word to paper.

The myth of a "historically free, white New England" extended beyond histories on paper;¹⁰⁶ it was also something to preserve in material objects and physical spaces. Shortly after their exercises in celebration of the poet Longfellow's 75th birthday, members of the Maine Historical Society quietly approached his sister about preserving the poet's childhood home.¹⁰⁷ Pierce later recounted that she already had formed a desire to donate the house to the historical society and had sought and received her brother Henry's approval for such a plan.¹⁰⁸ As the cityscape surrounding the house had grown more commercialized (fig. 3.5), she had deflected propositions by developers seeking, in the words of a newspaper reporter, "to buy and raze the mansion in order to locate on its site a hotel kitchen or a mark-down bazaar."¹⁰⁹ MHS, meanwhile, had recently moved its operations to Portland from its original site at Bowdoin

¹⁰⁵ Margot Minardi argues that the opposite condition of slavery, which is predicated on 'social death' is not just emancipation, but incorporation into a social community. In particular, she points to the authority to "enact history," or the "to ensure that what they did was recognized, narrated, and commemorated" as marking social belonging. By the same logic, those who Pierce and other white New Englanders left out of their historical narratives indicate whom they believed did not belong. *Making Slavery History: Abolitionism and the Politics of Memory in Massachusetts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 9.

¹⁰⁶ The phrase is Joanne Pope Melish's. *Disowning Slavery*, 210.

¹⁰⁷ That Pierce kept detailed records of her communications during the negotiation process, including copies of the letters she had sent, illustrates her care and acumen. [Anne L. Pierce], Notes on Correspondence with MHS, ca. 1882, Box 27, Folder 34, ALP Papers; Maine Historical Society to Anne L. Pierce, 6 Oct. 1882, Box 27, Folder 34, ALP Papers.

¹⁰⁸ [Copy], Anne L. Pierce to [James Bradbury], 19 May 1887, Box 27, Folder 34, ALP Papers.

¹⁰⁹ Holman F. Day, "The Longfellow House," *Lewiston Journal*, 24 June 1893. My thanks to John Mayer for allowing me to consult a photocopy for this piece. A clipping of the original is in Box 6, Folder 7, Alexander Wadsworth Longfellow Family Papers, 1730-1950, LNHS.



Figure 3.5. The Portland cityscape and the Wadsworth-Longfellow house, c. 1890, Maine Historical Society for the Maine Memory Network

College and was eager to secure a building that might become the permanent home of its cabinet and library.¹¹⁰

The negotiations over the property's future extended over the next eleven years and exposed the conflicting priorities of Anne L. Pierce and the historical society. MHS wanted to move forward immediately and publicly, while Pierce that insisted the house stay “wholly and entirely” in her possession for the present and that the matter remain private.¹¹¹ She found particularly distasteful the potential for the matter to end up in the papers, as a subject for public speculation. “Save me from that – ” she commanded James Bradbury, a trusted friend and MHS

¹¹⁰ *Collections and Proceedings of the Maine History Society*, Second Series, Vol. 4 (Portland: Published by the Society, 1893), 111-112. Report of the Committee to Take into Consideration the Gift of the Wadsworth-Longfellow House to the Maine Historical Society, June 1901, Container C3, Records of the Maine Historical Society, Collection 110, MHS.

¹¹¹ [Copy], Anne L. Pierce to Dr. Gilman, 6 Nov. 1882, Box 27, Folder 34, ALP Papers.

member.¹¹² When the historical society, in conjunction with Portland's Memorial Statue Association, sought to erect a bronze statue of the poet in the front yard of the house, Pierce responded in no uncertain terms that no statue would be placed there "so long as I am its occupant."¹¹³ Pierce also worried privately that MHS would damage the integrity of the house by dividing the lot into parcels and taking advantage of the high prices for downtown property.¹¹⁴ Using trusted male allies and relatives to assert her position, Pierce eventually got MHS to agree to terms that would preserve the site, intact, as a memorial to the Wadsworth and Longfellow families after her death. The two parties finalized their agreement in 1893. In an ironic twist of fate – or in a revealing glimpse of gender dynamics – MHS prepared an acknowledgment of the gift for Pierce almost immediately but through an apparent miscommunication failed to deliver it to her for a full year.¹¹⁵

In the handful of years before her death, Pierce continued to prepare to hand over the family's legacy to a more public institution. As news of the planned bequest emerged in 1893, she fielded requests for information about and access to the house from journalists, extended relatives, and MHS members.¹¹⁶ Contrary to the wish she earlier had expressed, thorough coverage of the deal, as well as Nathan Goold's series on the history of the Wadsworth and Longfellow families, appeared in the Portland papers in these years as well. She made meticulous notes about family furnishings, including designations about where those pieces that she donated with the house should be placed. Some of these notes also included bits of

¹¹² [Copy], Anne L. Pierce to James L. Bradbury, 19 May 1887, Box 27, Folder 34, ALP Papers.

¹¹³ [Copy], Anne L. Pierce to Dr. Gilman, 6 Nov. 1882, Box 27, Folder 34, ALP Papers.

¹¹⁴ [Anne L. Pierce], Notes regarding bequests, n.d., Box 28, Folder 1, ALP Papers.

¹¹⁵ H. W. Bryant to Anne L. Pierce, 25 June 1894, with enclosure of James Baxter et al to Anne L. Pierce, 22 June 1893, Box 27, Folder 34, ALP Papers.

¹¹⁶ Day, "The Longfellow House"; W.C. Ginn to Anne L. Pierce, 30 Nov. 1895, Box 28, Folder 5, ALP Papers; Nathan Goold, "Portland Old and New," *Portland Transcript* Dec. 14, 1898, in Nathan Goold, comp., Longfellow House scrapbook, Collection 1950, MHS. MHS holds three scrapbooks of newspaper clippings and ephemera related to the society's interest in the Wadsworth-Longfellow house and its former residents. Nathan Goold prepared at least two of them (Coll. 1606 and Coll. 1950), and likely started the third (Coll. 1952).

information about the provenance, use, or importance of the piece. In an early list headed “Give with the house,” she noted that the portrait of George Washington was “to hang on in the drawing room,” while specifying the importance of a desk as the one “on which he [Henry Wadsworth Longfellow] wrote the *Rainy Day*.”¹¹⁷ One of her final acts at last fulfilled the request that Eliza Wadsworth made nearly a century earlier. In March 1900, Anne L. Pierce donated the lock of George Washington’s hair, along with the original papers documenting the gift, to the Maine Historical Society.¹¹⁸

Anne Longfellow Pierce died in January 1901. According to the agreement she had outlined with the Maine Historical Society (MHS) a little less than a decade prior, the organization would have six months to decide whether to formally accept the terms of her gift of the Wadsworth-Longfellow house, including that the residence be maintained as a memorial to her family and that a new, fireproof library be constructed on-site. Upon penalty of forfeiting the deed, MHS was to occupy the premises only for “appropriate purposes” – its own work and that of “other societies of a similar character” – for at least fifty years. A half-century prohibition also applied to building any other structures on the lot within 100 feet of Congress Street.¹¹⁹ At their annual meeting on June 26, 1901, the all-male membership of the MHS voted unanimously to undertake the stewardship of the Wadsworth-Longfellow house.

The Wadsworth-Longfellow House as Author’s Home

When members of the public visited the Wadsworth-Longfellow house in the first decade of the twentieth century, they entered remapped space. Within its walls, the spatial divisions of

¹¹⁷ [Anne L. Pierce], Notes about furniture, n.d., Box 28, Folder 1, ALP Papers.

¹¹⁸ Anne L. Pierce donation, Mar. 1900, Catalogue of the Cabinet Relics and Curiosities from All Parts of the World Presented to the Maine Historical Society, Coll. 110. My thanks to Jamie Kingman Rice for making this and other accession volumes available to me.

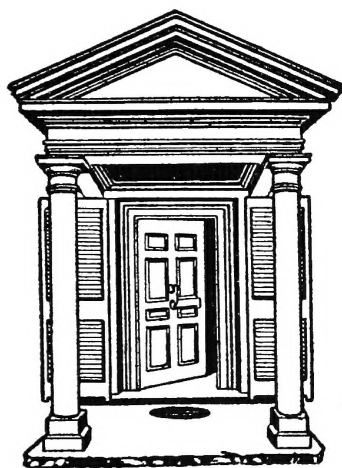
¹¹⁹ *Proceedings of the Maine Historical Society, Nov. 1899 to Dec. 1901*, 44-46.

public and private, and of “literary” and non-literary parts of the house had shifted. In their correspondence with Nancy Doane, the Wadsworth sisters had highlighted those spaces in the house most conducive to various forms of sociability: the formal entertaining space of the parlor, the more intimate setting of the back room, and the windows, with their ability to enclose or reveal. As the house transformed into a place of public historical engagement, preservationist Nathan Goold and the site’s volunteer guides instead upheld those features associated with the figures and events they sought to memorialize. “There are Three Periods,” one headline about the chronology of the Wadsworth-Longfellow house declared: “General Wadsworth’s time [...], the Longfellow family residence [...], and last the time of the poet.”¹²⁰ The most recent fifty years, during which time women from multiple generations of the family were the primary occupants of the house, was excised from this timeline. As the crossed icons of pen and sword on the cover of the site’s guidebook made patently clear, the house and its material artifacts now would stand primarily for the civic greatness of particular male members of the family (fig 3.8).

The new focal points of the house were those spaces that most vividly evoked Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poetry. Although Anne L. Pierce’s original directives had stipulated only that the front two rooms downstairs – the parlor and sitting room that the Wadsworth and Longfellow families long had used to entertain visitors – be preserved in their existing condition and open to the public, Goold and the guides put care into setting up and promoting exhibits in more remote spaces in the house. The back room on the first floor, from which the Wadsworth sisters had recorded on paper their playful dialogue with Stephen Longfellow for their cousin,

¹²⁰ “There are Three Periods,” n.p., in Longfellow House and Maine Historical Society scrapbook, Collection 1952, MHS.

The
Wadsworth-Longfellow
House



Longfellow's Old Home

By Nathan Gould.



Figure 3.6. Cover of Nathan Gould, *The Wadsworth-Longfellow House* (1908)

became “the Rainy Day Room,” the chamber in which Henry Wadsworth Longfellow had composed his well-known poem (about solitary musing no less) of the same name.¹²¹ Although the room sometimes also received the label of “Dining Room,” its table, one newspaper article reminded readers, was the one “at which Longfellow used to eat.”¹²² In a reversal of the architectural hierarchy originally enacted in the house, the two rooms on the third floor in which the poet had slept, in the first as a child and in the other during his visits to Portland as an adult, likewise became well-highlighted spaces despite their small size and bare finish. The grandeur of the “Boys’ Room” and “Poet’s Room” instead came from the vistas – of mountains and ocean, respectively – appearing out the windows and recorded in Longfellow’s poetry.¹²³

Although the parlor and the sitting room offered a more general memorialization of the Wadsworth and Longfellow families, with some of the oldest and best family furniture still on display, those spaces, too, reflected a hierarchy of commemoration, in which nationally-recognized male figures received prominent place. As domestic space was remapped, so too were domestic objects. Anne L. Pierce, and later, her niece Alice Longfellow, outlined the specific paintings that should remain hanging in the parlor, the most formal room in the house: an oil painting of George Washington, flanked by smaller pictures of Henry and his Bowdoin classmate Nathaniel Hawthorne, was stationed over the mantelpiece, while larger portraits of the poet and his father, Stephen Longfellow, hung on the back and facing walls (fig. 3.7). A painting depicting Henry Longfellow’s poem *Evangeline* completed the collection of the room’s large pictures. In effect, national, literary, and lineal patriarchs encircled the room. Across the hall in

¹²¹ Untitled clipping, *Eastern Argus* (Portland, ME), ca. 1901, Coll. 1952.

¹²² “Longfellow Relics,” n.p., Coll. 1950.

¹²³ Nathan Goold, *The Wadsworth-Longfellow House, Longfellow’s Home, Portland, Maine: Its History and Its Occupants* (Portland: Lakeside Printing Company, 1908), 28. This edition of Goold’s pamphlet expanded upon the first, published by the Maine Historical Society in 1905.



Figure 3.7. Portraits of civic and intellectual leaders in the Wadsworth-Longfellow house parlor, c. 1902, Maine Historical Society for the Maine Memory Network

the sitting room, by contrast, a portrait of Anne L. Pierce hung over the mantel, with silhouettes of her parents and grandparents set underneath. Even there, however, “the poet’s favorite chair and corner” received more notice in print than did the family portraits.¹²⁴

The other telling shift brought about by the opening of the house to the public was the newly-emerged significance of the kitchen. Instead of a space of labor and laborers to keep

¹²⁴ “List of Articles deposited with the Maine Historical Society by Members of the Longfellow Family,” Box 28, Folder 2, ALP Papers; “No. 2 Aunt Anne’s List,” Anne L. Pierce Lists for Disposition of Items from the Wadsworth-Longfellow House, Collection S-6132, MHS; Goold, *Wadsworth-Longfellow House*, 16-19; “Longfellow Relics,” Coll. 1950; “The Longfellow House – Its History and its Occupants,” *Portland Sunday Times* Apr. 8, 1900, Coll. 1606.

invisible at the back of the house, the kitchen became a tour highlight in spite of bearing relatively few direct links to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Indeed, Goold used the kitchen as the central inspiration for an entire features article on the house in 1902, and visitors could purchase souvenir photographs of both the large fireplace and the china cupboard (fig. 3.8).¹²⁵

“Olde-tyme” kitchen displays dominated the early period rooms that white

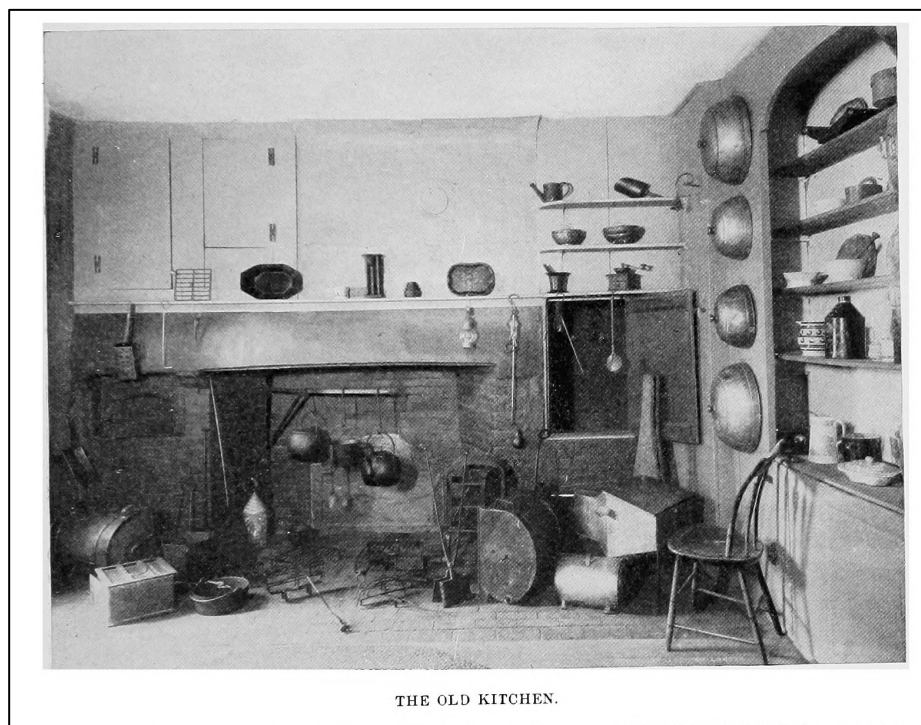


Figure 3.8. The Wadsworth-Longfellow kitchen on display, c. 1902, in Goold, *The Wadsworth-Longfellow House* (1908), 21

women organized for the Civil War’s sanitary fairs and the Centennial; by the end of the century, they used a visual script of open fireplaces, pot-hooks, antique pewter and china, and spinning wheels to assert the simplicity, piety, and hospitality of their ancestors.¹²⁶ According to Goold, the objects in the kitchen, from the fireplace that Anne L. Pierce refused to have bricked up and

¹²⁵ MHS commissioned Portland’s Lamson Studio to take professional photographs of the interior in 1902. “An Old Time Kitchen” *Portland Sunday Times*, July 6, 1902, in Coll. 1950.

¹²⁶ Rodris Roth, “The New England, or “Olde Tyme,” Kitchen Exhibit at Nineteenth-Century Fairs,” in *The Colonial Revival in America*, ed. Alan Axelrod (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985), 159-183; West, *Domesticating History*, 39-41.

replaced with a gas stove to the various old cooking utensils whose antiquated functions eluded modern eyes, conveyed “tales of the good cheer of bygone days.”¹²⁷ The kitchen embodied a past both broader and vaguer than that preserved elsewhere in the house. Its hearth was “the pride of the cook,” “the delight of the little folks,” and a tribute to “the venerable women across the state who tabooed the modern range.”¹²⁸ The past in the Wadsworth-Longfellow kitchen was faceless and feminized.

As with the kitchen, the interpretation of the second floor chambers, and later, the remaining ones on the third floor, relied upon a broader memorialization of the past. On the early floor plan distributed to visitors, these rooms were the ones most directly associated with female members of the family. In 1902, “Mother’s Room,” the left front room in which Zilpah Wadsworth Longfellow slept for many years, had on display two cases of old clothing – “costumes” – a piece of old bed-hanging, a decorative fireboard, a doll’s bed, and a work basket.¹²⁹ In other words, feminized objects – many of which reflected the domestic art of needlecraft – heightened the maternal association the space was meant to convey. “Here,” wrote Nathan Gould, “the bureau drawers are filled with embroidered caps worn by the Wadsworth and Longfellow babies [...] done in the days when women were skilled in all the arts of the housewife.”¹³⁰ The second floor also differed from the rooms below and above in that the MHS installed in them museum exhibit cases for displaying objects as early as 1902. While Zilpah Longfellow’s former room contained fabric pieces, Anne L. Pierce’s former room, at the back left, had bookshelves lined with small wooden artifacts. The room across the hall displayed

¹²⁷ “An Old Time Kitchen,” Coll. 1950.

¹²⁸ “An Old Time Kitchen,” Coll. 1950.

¹²⁹ Notes on Longfellow House Rooms, Fritz Jordan Papers, 1901, Container C45, Coll. 110; “List of Articles,” ALP Papers.

¹³⁰ “An Old Time Kitchen,” Coll. 1950.

various articles reflective of the military careers of General Peleg Wadsworth and his sons Henry and Alexander.¹³¹ A room on the third floor was devoted to “specimens of old wallpaper.”¹³²

Meanwhile, objects that never before had resided in the house arrived from extended branches of the Wadsworth and Longfellow families and from members of the general public. In 1902, for instance, Alice Longfellow sent the piano her parents had purchased in 1843 for “the Craigie,” their home in Cambridge, to Portland to be displayed in the parlor; once displayed there, it evoked both her father, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and stood in for an earlier Wadsworth family instrument, by then long removed, which was said to have been the first piano brought to Portland.¹³³ Smaller objects, including a variety of kitchen utensils and some of General Peleg Wadsworth’s military accessories, arrived from more distant Wadsworth and Longfellow relatives still living in Maine. Still other members of the public donated objects that extended the general associations to the families or to Portland: the wife of a local artist donated an oil painting of old sea captain’s graves in the city’s East cemetery; a memorial association in Germantown, Pennsylvania, sent a picture of the church that Samuel Longfellow (Anne and Henry’s brother) had served as a minister; the Curtis Publishing Company of Philadelphia (whose founder, a native son of Portland, toured the house several times within the first few years of its opening) commissioned seven artistic illustrations depicting notable scenes from some of Longfellow’s most famous poems.¹³⁴ Perhaps most tellingly, portraits of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow abounded. By July 1905, forty separate portraits had entered the house collection.¹³⁵

¹³¹ “List of Articles,” ALP Papers.

¹³² “List of Articles,” ALP Papers.

¹³³ “The Longfellow House,” May 28, 1903, coll. 1950; Goold, *Wadsworth-Longfellow House*, 26.

¹³⁴ Notebook, ca. 1905, Box 1, Folder 24, Coll. 1606; Untitled clipping, *Portland Press*, July 8, 1903, Coll. 1950; “The Longfellow House,” *Portland Press*, June 29, 1903, Coll. 1950; “The Longfellow House,” *Portland Press*, Oct. 6, 1902, Coll. 1950.

¹³⁵ “The Longfellow House,” *Portland Press*, July 3, 1905, Coll. 1950.

Interpretive measures, such as the labeling of specific rooms of the house or of objects, compartmentalized and rendered static the functions and primary users of different spaces. Nowhere was this more evident than in the Boy's room on the third floor, where members of the Longfellow family had for decades made domestic inscriptions on a window casement. As chapter 1 outlined, the association of this space with Longfellow's childhood effaced these varied makers and the emplaced literary experiences they marked. Changes to the material layout of the room amplified the space's associations to childhood in general and to "the Poet's" boyhood specifically (fig. 3.9). Even as MHS took steps both to preserve the casement writings



Figure 3.9. Furnishings of childhood in the Boys' Room, c. 1902, Maine Historical Society for the Maine Memory Network

with a protective glass cover and to make their text available to visitors with an accompanying transcription, the overwhelming narrative of the room remained Longfellow's boyhood.¹³⁶ Yet the surrounding furnishings – a trundle bed, a case of toys, school books, and a desk “upon

¹³⁶ Ella M. Bangs, “An Historic Mansion,” *New England Magazine* 33 (Feb. 1903), 712.

which the youthful Longfellow tried his jackknives” – enclosed the inscriptions in a scene of youth.¹³⁷

As of 1902, Goold had also interspersed a series of informational placards around the house. Some of these signs labeled rooms and objects, reinforcing the new spatial divisions of the house, while others reproduced excerpts of Samuel Longfellow’s biography of his famous brother Henry or of that famous brother’s poetry. Some of these signs are visible in the professional photos of the interior commissioned that year and later sold as souvenirs. One extant signboard still in the MHS collections marked “Longfellow’s Old Room” as “always used by him on his visits to his old home.”¹³⁸ Another placard used in that space quoted from Longfellow’s poem “The Lighthouse,” which he had written, according to the sign, while “looking from these windows.”¹³⁹ The placards, like the narration of many of the rooms, continually directed visitors to make connections between the objects on view and the poet. Even the utilitarian fire buckets in the stairhall had a placard linking them to “the house where and when Longfellow was born in 1807.”¹⁴⁰

The placards did more than provide labels for objects: they captured the degree to which early tours of the house were meant as historical *and* literary experiences. Although the “Rainy Day” room’s placard labeled the space as “The Den, or the Old Dining Room,” the presence of a second sign just below about the “Rainy Day” desk, at which visitors were invited to sit and add their names to the large bound register, made the association of the space to Longfellow’s poem clear (fig. 3.10).¹⁴¹ On at least one occasion, the setting inspired a visitor to recite the “Rainy

¹³⁷ “Longfellow Relics,” Coll. 1950; “An Old Time Kitchen,” Coll. 1950.

¹³⁸ Uncatalogued materials, Wadsworth-Longfellow House, photographed by author, 21 Aug. 2014.

¹³⁹ “An Old Time Kitchen,” Coll. 1950.

¹⁴⁰ Uncatalogued materials, Wadsworth-Longfellow House, photographed by author, 21. Aug. 2014; “Longfellow Mansion Opened this Afternoon,” June 20, 1902, *Portland Express*, Coll. 1950.

¹⁴¹ The Lamson studio images taken in 1902 appeared in Goold, *Wadsworth-Longfellow House* (1908), as well as Ella Bangs “An Historic Mansion” (1903).



Figure 3.10. Interpretive signs of the Den and “Rainy Day” desk, c. 1902, Maine Historical Society for the Maine Memory Network

Day” from memory as she recorded her signature.¹⁴² Personal associations continued to be conveyed by the objects, too: a ninety-five-year-old visitor who had known Longfellow in his youth passed room to room, “loving touching the articles in each.”¹⁴³ Visitors came to the house to better know and remember a well-loved author, but also to mark their own experiences of reading and remembering his poems. Not unlike the way that seeing Nancy’s favorite paper had inspired Zilpah to write her a letter, the act of seeing Henry Longfellow’s favorite chair and rooms evidently prompted viewers to pursue his printed works. A newspaper editor in New Jersey wrote to Gould in November 1902 that local booksellers and music dealers had found avid

¹⁴² “Longfellow House: Some of the People Who Have Called during the Past Summer,” n.p., Coll. 1952.

¹⁴³ “Some of the People Who Have Called,” Coll. 1952.

customers among those who had vacationed in Maine and visited the Longfellow house over the summer.¹⁴⁴

The additions made to these rooms also reveal the degree to which furniture *in situ* alone was not enough to “tell the story” of the Wadsworth-Longfellow house and its former occupants. Indeed, the objects and framing devices – floorplans, labels, and placards, as well as pianos, portraits, and firebuckets – that the MHS introduced into the house offer telling insights into which narratives they intended the house to convey. To impress upon visitors the national significance of the site, the early interpreters drew upon broader narratives of American independence and domestic industry, using objects with familiar historical or patriotic connotations, such as an early U.S. flag, military equipment, pot hooks in the fireplace, and a spinning wheel as cues. As in the local historical pageants and other commemorative activities of the era, the hodgepodge cohered around the idea of a harmonious, orderly past governed, socially and politically, by native-born white Americans.¹⁴⁵ The “symbolic order” projected by these artifacts preserved an element of the “social order” that white New Englanders saw receding.¹⁴⁶

Although the messages conveyed by the objects and rooms of the house shifted to highlight the nationally-resonant achievements of individual men in the family, commemorative work among women continued to feature at the site on a regular basis. As with other historic house museums, women were critical to MHS’s venture throughout, not only in initiating the

¹⁴⁴ George Wilfred Pearce to Nathan Goold, 3 Nov. 1902, Wadsworth-Longfellow House correspondence, 1882-1912, Container C17, Coll. 110.

¹⁴⁵ West, *Domesticating History*, 87-89; David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 279-290; Carolyn Strange, “Sisterhood of Blood: The Will to Descend and the Formation of the Daughters of the American Revolution,” *Journal of Women’s History* 26, no. 3 (Fall 2014), 112.

¹⁴⁶ Susan Reynolds Williams, *Alice Morse Earle and the Domestic History of Early America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 12-13; Marling, *George Washington Slept Here*, 52.

donation process, but also as organizers, promoters, and custodians to the site.¹⁴⁷ In the months between Anne Pierce's death and the MHS vote to accept the gift, Jean L. Crie, who had lived with Pierce for several years as a housekeeper, led MHS members through the residence, sharing her "thorough acquaintance" with its history and condition.¹⁴⁸ The heads of several local women's organizations, including the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Daughters of 1812 society, the Women's Literary Union, and the Colonial Dames, signed on to help raise funds for the maintenance of the house and to staff the site with volunteers as it opened to the public. Crie's knowledge and status figured here, too, as she conveyed to her fellow DAR members, "all of the old stories regarding the house and its distinguished occupants."¹⁴⁹ After the initial season, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's daughter Alice, who was living in Cambridge, Massachusetts, contributed money for necessary repairs to be completed before the next summer.¹⁵⁰ The all-male membership of MHS may have made the agreement to assume the property, but it was Portland's clubwomen who enabled the house to operate in its early years.

This multi-pronged work by local clubwomen of raising money, promoting the house, and interacting with visitors as guides continued to define the early years of the house's opening to the public. Women made up over half of the individual contributors listed in an early notice about the Longfellow Memorial fund, and as of 1908, Mary Longfellow Greenleaf, the sister of Anne Longfellow Pierce, had provided the largest single donation.¹⁵¹ Additional contributions arrived from the local Home for Aged Women, from women's clubs in small towns up the coast,

¹⁴⁷ West, *Domesticating History*, 159-161; Bruggeman, *Here, George Washington was Born*, 59-70, 73-85.

¹⁴⁸ Minutes of Wadsworth-Longfellow House Committee, 4 Mar 1901, Fritz Jordan Papers, 1901, Container C45, Coll. 110; Untitled clipping, ca. 1901, Coll. 1952.

¹⁴⁹ Untitled clipping, ca. 1901, Coll. 1952.

¹⁵⁰ Untitled clipping, ca. 1901, Coll. 1952.

¹⁵¹ "Wadsworth Longfellow Home," n.p., Jan. 23, 1902, Coll. 1950; Goold, *Wadsworth-Longfellow House*, 11-12.

and from the proceeds of entertainments given by teachers and students in local schools.¹⁵² Paid admissions from visitors to the house, moreover, added substantially to the memorial fund the MHS set up to fulfill Anne L. Pierce's gift stipulations.¹⁵³ In addition, the lineal societies whose members staffed the house for tours gathered funds from among their membership. The Elizabeth Bartlett Wadsworth chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution allocated one hundred dollars towards the fund in 1902, and the Colonial Dames followed suited with a \$739 donation the following year.¹⁵⁴ Even in states outside Maine, DAR members sent letters to the editor of their local papers to drum up funds for the project in Portland.¹⁵⁵

Although women from these groups made substantial monetary contributions to the Wadsworth-Longfellow house, their volunteer work as guides provided the day-to-day labor necessary to open the site to visitors. By the fourth summer season, as many as three hundred fifty women representing the DAR, Daughters of 1812 society, Colonial Dames, or Women's Literary Union had offered their time as a guide during the sixteen weeks the house was open between June and October.¹⁵⁶ A number of these women already had some exposure to the role historic houses could play as sites of memory, having joined members of the MHS for a centennial celebration of the Wadsworth family's other ancestral home, in the village of Hiram, Maine, in 1900. There, Mrs. Lusannah Hubbard, like Anne L. Pierce a granddaughter of Peleg Wadsworth, had told stories about various artifacts in her residence and "made all feel that Wadsworth hall was their home for the day."¹⁵⁷ This model of combining encounters with the

¹⁵² "Longfellow Memorial Fund," *Portland Press*, Sept. 27, 1902, Coll. 1950; "The Longfellow House," *Eastern Argus* (Portland, ME), [June 12, 1903], Coll. 1950.

¹⁵³ "Wadsworth Longfellow House," Jan. 23, 1902, Coll. 1950.

¹⁵⁴ "Longfellow Memorial Fund," n.p., ca. 1902, Coll. 1950; "The Longfellow House," [June 12, 1903], Coll. 1950.

¹⁵⁵ Untitled clipping, *Portland Express*, Feb. 1, 1902, Coll. 1952.

¹⁵⁶ The two "Daughters" groups staffed the house for the first half of the summer, while the WLU took over in considerable force, with occasional help from the Colonial Dames, in early August. "Its Top Notch," *Portland Press*, Oct. 16, 1905, Coll. 1950; "The Longfellow House," *Portland Press*, June 10, 1904, Coll. 1950.

¹⁵⁷ "Wadsworth Hall," *Portland Press*, June 14, 1900, Coll. 1950.

brought with them fresh-cut flowers to place in vases around the house, a “pleasant feature” on which Goold remarked more than once.¹⁵⁸ These floral arrangements appear clearly in the professional interior shots taken of the house in 1902 and later used as souvenir cards and in formal publications about the site (fig. 3.12). The tradition of providing flowers was so strong that a former Portlander dispatched mountain laurel from her new home in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, to be used for the opening of the 1906 season.¹⁵⁹ On the occasion of the 1903 season opening, “bright fires [...] in the opening fireplaces” welcomed visitors to the house.¹⁶⁰



Figure 3.12. Fresh flowers in the sitting room, c. 1902, Maine Historical Society for the Maine Memory Network

¹⁵⁸ “Season Closed,” *Portland Sunday Times*, Oct. 11, 1903, Coll. 1950; Untitled clipping, *Portland Sunday Times*, Aug. 5, 1906, Coll. 1950.

¹⁵⁹ On another occasion, Goold noted that the day’s flowers came from a blue-bell plant a local resident had removed from the garden of the Wadsworth-Longfellow house years earlier. Untitled clipping, *Portland Sunday Times*, June 17, 1906, Coll. 1950; “Bunch of Blue Bells,” *Portland Press*, 11 July 11, 1905, Coll. 1950.

¹⁶⁰ Untitled clipping, *Portland Express*, June 23, 1903, Coll. 1950.

During the two morning and three afternoon hours when the site was opened, the women stationed themselves throughout the house to direct visitors, answer questions, and offer an overall blend, in Goold's words, of "entertainment and instruction."¹⁶¹ From the perspective of the historical society, the goal at the outset was to "tell the story of the house and the incidents connected with the pieces of furniture left there in a way to awaken an interest in the hearts of the listeners."¹⁶² Unlike paid guides, Goold argued, the faithful volunteers at the Wadsworth-Longfellow house did not slouch into the "singsong repetition of the same old story" hour after hour and day after day. Rather, each "puts a bit of her own individuality into the stories she tells."¹⁶³ To provide such attention and interest was intellectually taxing work, made all the more so during the worst of the summer's heat.¹⁶⁴ By 1909, the MHS hired a "permanent guide" for the stifling third floor, so that their volunteers not suffer unduly.¹⁶⁵

Portland women with the institutional affiliation to serve as volunteers claimed privileged access to the Wadsworth-Longfellow house and enhanced their social ties with other clubwomen. Membership in the city's lineal organization and literary societies proved these women were of the right background, socially and intellectually, to carry forward the site's domestic face. The local chapter of the DAR, after all, was named for Elizabeth Bartlett Wadsworth, the first mistress of the house; these "Daughters" asserted their place as worthy successors of Wadsworth's direct descendants by virtue of their shared Anglo-American ancestry. Volunteers enjoyed the distinction of being the first visitors to return and the last to

¹⁶¹ "Was a Banner Day," *Portland Sunday Times* Aug. 7, 1904; "The Longfellow House Will Open Monday," *Portland Sunday Times* June 18, 1905, coll. 1950.

¹⁶² "Longfellow House," n.p., Coll. 1952.

¹⁶³ "Not a Scratch Made," *Portland Sunday Times*, Aug. 28, 1905, Coll. 1950.

¹⁶⁴ "Was a Banner Day," *Portland Sunday Times*, Aug. 7, 1904, Coll. 1950; "The Stroller Fair," *Portland Evening Express*, May 9, 1906, Coll. 1950.

¹⁶⁵ MHS Representative to Women's Literary Union representative, May 1909, Wadsworth-Longfellow Correspondence 1882-1912, Container C17, Coll. 110.

leave the house each season, gathering by invitation for special preview days each June and an end-of-year reception each October. Similar to the way that certain parts of the house had been more or less available to callers in the Wadsworths' day, with close friends socializing in more intimate spaces like the back room, the guides garnered access to the house that casual visitors did not. The autumn events, in Goold's words, provided "something of a reunion of the guides," as well as the celebration of a successful season. Over light refreshments, the women regaled each other with their experiences and "the old rooms resounded with their laughter."¹⁶⁶ Goold even arranged to commission a gavel made from the sill of the front door of the house in tribute to the guides of the Women's Literary Union.¹⁶⁷

The guides engaged in gatekeeping and social positioning as they welcomed visitors to the house. Ella Matthews Bangs, a Women's Literary Union member and guide, captured this dynamic in a poem that appeared in the *Portland Sunday Times*. Like the tourists she guided through the house, Bangs was drawn to the site because of its tangible historical associations; unlike a casual visitor, she could attest that the site became most alive to her when she was by herself within its rooms. Her "dreaming fancy" awakened as the house grew silent and its guests departed; then, she called forth the "olden forms and faces" of the successive generations to live in the house: Peleg Wadsworth in a scarlet coat and silver buckles bidding welcome, a "bright-eyed maiden," Zilpah Wadsworth, presenting the standard to the Federal Volunteers at the front door, and, of course, Henry, "a dreamy youth" with "poet's visions." Only the arrival of a "shadow" across the threshold and "stranger voices" – a rather darker depiction of the guests

¹⁶⁶ "Its Top Notch," *Portland Press*, Oct. 16, 1905, Coll. 1950; see also "Last Day at Longfellow House," *Portland Press*, Oct. 25, 1902, "Season Closed," *Portland Sunday Times*, Oct. 11, 1903, and "To End the Season," *Portland Sunday Times*, Oct. 2, 1904, all Coll. 1950.

¹⁶⁷ "First Meeting Women's Literary Union at Kotschamer Hall," *Portland Sunday Times*, Nov. 15, 1903, Coll. 1950.

with which the poem had started – “break[s] the spell.”¹⁶⁸ As a guide, Bangs claimed not just more intimate access to the house’s space, but also to its memories; the site’s deepest associations, she asserted, remained out of reach to those who came as casual visitors.

At surface, the guides’ prerogatives embody all the shortcomings professionals in academic and historic preservation circles later leveled at lineal organizations, local historical groups, and the colonial revival movement. Their care for fresh-cut flowers indicated their superficial commitment to history; their freewheeling storytelling sowed inconsistent information at best and outright myths at worst; and their willingness to serve refreshments, use the fireplaces, and chip off pieces of the structure to make souvenirs showed their disregard for keeping the house’s artifacts intact and unblemished.¹⁶⁹ Framed in a different light, however, their priorities highlighted the degree to which the site’s existing rituals of sociability – and social distinction – extended into its new era as a public memorial. In other words, part of maintaining the site’s legacy as the home of the leading residents of Portland’s past involved maintaining the space as a site of working hospitality and social positioning for those members of Portland’s present deemed worthy of entry. At the outset, MHS’s commitment to preserving the site was inseparable from the desire to preserve “its homelike character.”¹⁷⁰

As in earlier eras, how one moved through this “homelike” space and engaged in its rituals marked one socially. Despite frequent assertions of the universal appeal of the Wadsworth-Longfellow house, Goold’s weekly newspaper updates also made clear that some appreciated its significance – and therefore merited access to its treasures – more than others. Each week, Goold thanked by name the guides who had served in the house and mentioned

¹⁶⁸ E.M.B. [Ella M. Bangs], “In the Longfellow House,” *Portland Sunday Times*, [Sept. 1902], Coll. 1950.

¹⁶⁹ West, *Domesticating History*, ix; Barnett, *Sacred Relics*, 25; Franklin D. Vagnone and Deborah E. Ryan, *Anarchist’s Guide to Historic House Museums* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, Inc., 2016), 34-35.

¹⁷⁰ Minutes of Committee on Wadsworth-Longfellow House Gift, 1901, Container C3, Coll. 110.

prominent visitors who had enhanced the importance of the site with their presence. Those with well-known ties to the publishing world, to universities, or to national politics affirmed the site's significance to American history and literature.¹⁷¹ Less worthy visitors haggled over the price of admission, complained about the heat, found the artifacts boring or, most damningly, had never heard of Longfellow.¹⁷² These accounts projected concern over cost as a failure to recognize significance and disinterest as a sign of general ignorance. For the guides or newspaper readers who appropriately valued the site, these entertaining foils demonstrated by contrast their own superior taste.

Lines of authority and access continued to shift within the Wadsworth-Longfellow house after it became a public historic site. If the public face of the venture for visitors touring the house were the female volunteers, the public voice of the project remained Nathan Goold. Characteristic of the slow professionalization of house museums, men like Goold increasingly occupied leadership roles, while women remained family as "auxiliary" stewards.¹⁷³ By 1905, he had published the first comprehensive guide of the house and its history, and in 1906, he took up an official position as the librarian of the newly-constructed MHS research library.¹⁷⁴ Goold's position as an elected officer and paid staff member of the historical society gave him decision-making powers that the clubwomen did not possess. In a reversal of the sentiments he had expressed a decade earlier, Goold declared in 1910 that managing the site on "a business

¹⁷¹ "Wadsworth-Longfellow Memorial," *Eastern Argus* (Portland, ME), June 25, 1903, Coll. 1950; "The Longfellow House," *Eastern Argus* (Portland, ME), Sept. 21, 1903, Coll. 1950; "Noted Visitors," *Portland Press*, June 27, 1904, Coll. 1950.

¹⁷² "The Stroller Fair," Coll. 1950; "The Longfellow House," n.p., Coll. 1952; "Some People Who Have Called," Coll. 1950.

¹⁷³ West, *Domesticating History*, 49-50.

¹⁷⁴ "To be Completed," *Portland Press*, 9 May 1905, Coll. 1950; *Proceedings of the Maine Historical Society, January 26, 1906, to November 22, 1906* (Portland, Smith & Sale, Printers, 1907), 9.

basis” improved the quality of the interpretation.¹⁷⁵ The next summer, Goold’s proof was in the profit: MHS fully replaced the rotating volunteer clubwomen with a cohort of paid guides, and returned to the society’s coffers one hundred dollars more than the previous year.¹⁷⁶ Even in this shift towards professional management, however, the site’s long tradition of invisible labor remained. In contrast to the public recognition the clubwomen had received, these paid guides, along with the janitors who had maintained the site since MHS took ownership, remained unnamed.

As the first decade of the public operation of the Wadsworth-Longfellow house came to a close, its promoters claimed resounding success. By the end of 1910, as many as 73,000 people had toured the house, traveling to Portland from dozens of states and from across the globe.¹⁷⁷ Admission fees and souvenirs sales brought money in the historical society treasury, helping to offset the cost of the new library building on the back portion of the house lot. The inviting front doors on Congress Street, moreover, had broadened the purpose of the historical society from the “sense of seclusion, of mere antiquity, and dignified isolation” of its books to a “prominent and vital part of civic and social life” in the state.¹⁷⁸ The domestic qualities of the Wadsworth-Longfellow house, members of MHS affirmed, furthered the public orientation of the institution.

The popular association of Longfellow’s poetry with domestic scenes and sentiments proved a liability to his reputation among literary critics as the twentieth century wore on. His “sentimental nationalism,” as Mary Louise Kete has characterized it, imagined a United States forged by affective bonds: “by memories of the past, by responsibilities of the future, by

¹⁷⁵ Nathan Goold, “Librarian’s Report,” *Proceedings of the Maine Historical Society, January 12, 1910 to December 14, 1910* (Portland: Smith & Sale, Printers, 1911), 29.

¹⁷⁶ Nathan Goold, “Librarian’s Report,” *Proceedings of the Maine Historical Society, January 12, 1911, to November 28, 1911*, (Portland: Smith & Sale, Printers, 1912), 21.

¹⁷⁷ *Proceedings of the Maine Historical Society, 1910*, 29.

¹⁷⁸ John Carroll Perkins, “Report of Committee of Wadsworth-Longfellow Memorial Fund, June 21, 1904,” *Proceedings of the Maine Historical Society, January 20, 1904, to June 25, 1904* (Portland: Smith & Sale, Printers, 1904), 21.

relationships with others.”¹⁷⁹ For emerging professional authors and critics, sentiment evoked gendered sneers. As early as 1882, Walt Whitman had described the recently-deceased Longfellow as the “universal poet of women and young people;” fifty years later, an Ivy League-trained critic felt entitled to assert that no one, “except wretched schoolchildren, now reads Longfellow.”¹⁸⁰

Conclusion:

For all of the material and rhetorical reorienting of the Wadsworth-Longfellow house around the authorial figure of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the site’s domestic connotations would prove more determinative in the formation of the larger Longfellow archive. Despite the poet’s diminishing status in literary critical circles beginnings in the 1920s, the Houghton Library at Harvard, an archival epicenter for canonical American literature, accepted from his descendants his personal papers and library in the mid-twentieth century.¹⁸¹ More of his personal papers and his household possessions continue to be housed nearby, at his longtime Cambridge residence, Craigie House, now a historic site operated by the National Parks Service. Here too descendants moved most of the papers of the poet’s immediate family, including those of the Wadsworth sisters, in the early twentieth century.¹⁸² In Portland remained the household objects Anne L. Pierce had left to the Maine Historical Society, as well as the material artifacts

¹⁷⁹ Mary Louise Kete, *Sentimental Collaborations: Mourning and Middle-Class Identity in America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 115.

¹⁸⁰ Walt Whitman, quoted in Virginia Jackson, “Longfellow in His Time,” in *The Cambridge History of American Poetry*, eds. Alfred Bendixen and Stephen Burt (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 238; Ludwig Lewisohn, quoted in Adam Sweeting, “Preserving the Renaissance: Literary and Public Memory in the Homes of Longfellow, Hawthorne, and Poe,” *American Studies* 46, no. 1 (Spring 2005), 28. I am grateful to Julia Hansen for referring me to Jackson’s work.

¹⁸¹ The collections held here include manuscript and printed copies of Longfellow’s published works, as well as boxes of his drafts, diaries, and correspondence. Harvard Houghton Library guides for MS 1340-MS 1340.12, <http://hcl.harvard.edu/libraries/houghton/index.cfm>.

¹⁸² For an overview of the LNHS collections, see <https://www.nps.gov/long/learn/historyculture/collections.htm>.

that had drifted there in the early years of that institution's stewardship. Some family papers remain at MHS, though these primarily deal with more distant relatives.¹⁸³

Today, scholars of Longfellow are most likely to start their research at Houghton, while members of the public typically encounter the poet at the two historic house sites. Artifacts most proximate to the poet's perceived genius now rest in those institutional spaces most aligned to his status as an author. Whatever the oscillations in Longfellow's critical status, the gendered hierarchy of the canon prevails in this archival array. It makes clear the elevated position of authors over other writers, of texts over objects, of academic spaces over domestic ones, and of scholars over others seeking to engage with the past.

The transfer of the Wadsworth family papers from Portland to Cambridge evacuated the writing of Eliza and Zilpah Wadsworth from the material space it so vividly recorded, while the parallel move of the next generation's documents separated Anne L. Pierce's historical work from the home she devoted decades to preserving. This physical fragmentation of the archives – of textual separated from material, of place of inhabitation separated from place of preservation, and of site of scholarly inquiry separated from tourist encounter – has contributed to the absence of actual domestic spaces in considerations of American literary culture.

¹⁸³ For comparison, the Wadsworth-Longfellow Family Papers at MHS make up one box, while the corresponding collection at LNHS takes up forty-five.

Chapter 4

“Grandmother’s Tales” to *Chronicles of a Pioneer School*

From its founding in 1792, the Litchfield Female Academy was an institution in which the study and pursuit of history received sustained attention. Student records abound with references to the subject, often in conjunction with the study of geography. Summarizing a week of school in the spring of 1803, Lucy Sheldon indicated the mix of painting, study, and recitation in which she had engaged and noted, “We have this week been comparing the towns of America with those of Europe, the rivers also.”¹ Another student, Mary A. Child, declared history “a very pleasing and interesting subject,” while her predecessor at school Julia Cowles found a particular day’s study less memorable and admitted, “I cannot recollect any of the History read this day.”² Still other students rendered the chronologies they studied with elaborate artwork. Marian Lewis recorded the history of more than a dozen civilizations on a six-foot-long chart, while Eliza Ogden surrounded a map of England with an intricate display of its monarchical succession (fig. 4.1).³ According to academy founder Sarah Pierce, history served the dual purpose of strengthening the mind and properly cultivating the imagination.⁴

¹ Lucy Sheldon (Beach) journal, 2 Apr. 1803, Series 2, Folder 5, Litchfield Female Academy Collection, Litchfield Historical Society (hereafter LFA Collection and LHS, respectively).

² Mary A. Child journal, 30 June 1820, Series 2, Folder 25, LFA Collection; Julia Cowles diary, 29 June 1797, in Laura Hadley Moseley, ed., *The Diary of Miss Julia Cowles: A Connecticut Record, 1797-1803* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931), 5.

³ Marian R. Lewis, “Chart of the History of the World,” c. 1814-1815, Object ca1900-09-11, LHS, <http://www.litchfieldhistoricalsociety.org/ledger/materials/98>; Eliza Ogden (Butler), “Chart of the History of the Kings of England,” ca. 1816-1818, Object ca1900-21-0, LHS, <http://www.litchfieldhistoricalsociety.org/ledger/materials/217>.

⁴ Sarah Pierce, “Address at the Close of School,” 1818, in Emily Noyes Vanderpoel, comp., *Chronicles of a Pioneer School, Being the History of Miss Sarah Pierce and her Litchfield School* (Cambridge: University Press, 1903), 177.

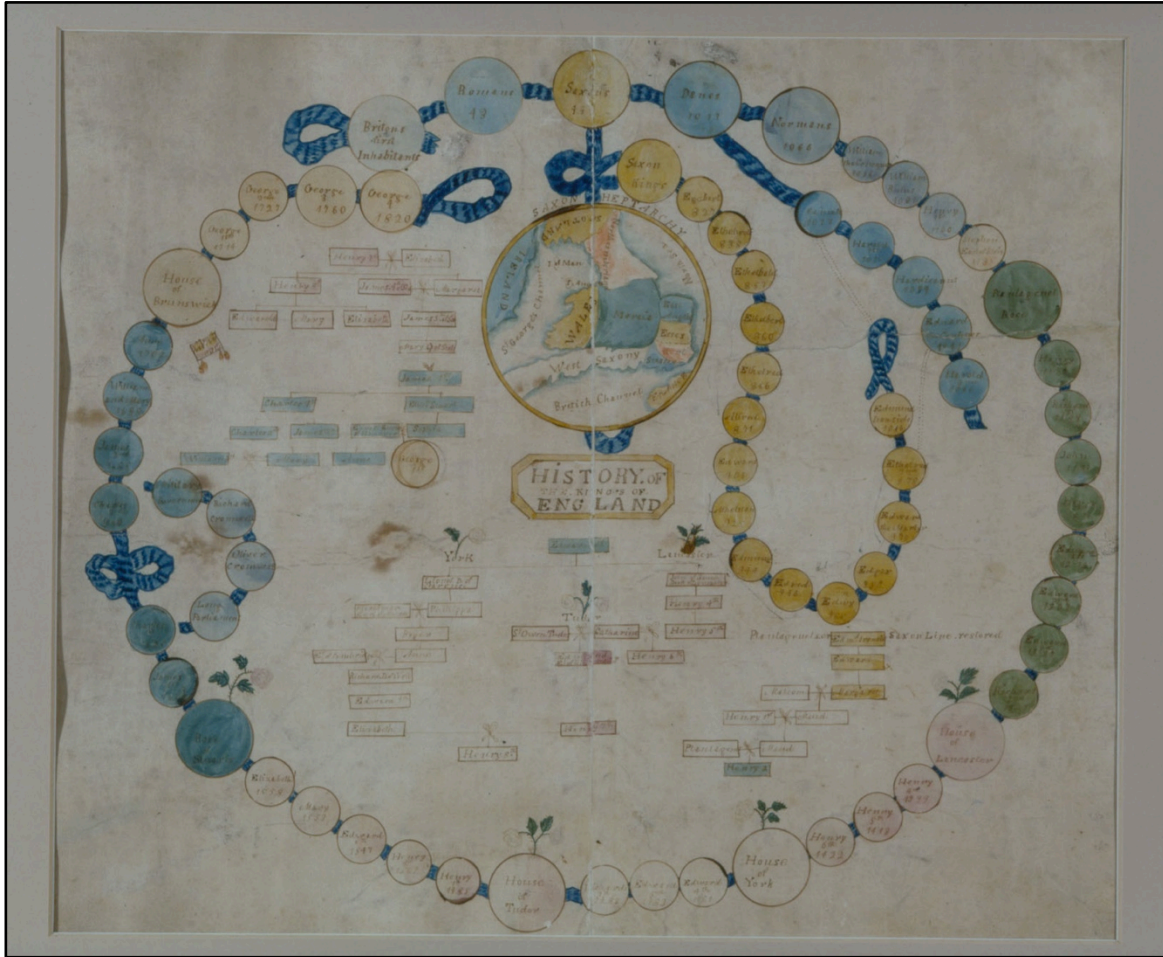


Figure 4.1. Eliza Ogden historical chart, c. 1816-1818, Litchfield Historical Society

Indeed, scholars have pointed to Sarah Pierce’s incorporation of the subject into the curriculum from the school’s founding as one of the primary innovations in women’s education that she enacted.⁵ As a complement to her teaching, Pierce also wrote history, publishing the four-volume *Sketches of Universal History, Compiled from Several Authors, for the Use of Schools* in the 1810s. Decades after her time as a student at Pierce’s academy, Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote to her former teacher, remarking her difficulty in finding a textbook “as satisfactory to me as are in my recollections of your History” and asking if Pierce might send her two copies

⁵ Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America’s Republic* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 39.

that she could use in instructing her own children.⁶ For her own part, Stowe had “carefully preserved,” despite living in several states over her adult life, a keepsake of her education: a composition she had composed and delivered for a Litchfield Female Academy exhibition.⁷

This chapter traces the ways Sarah Pierce and other residents of Litchfield – from the students of Pierce’s academy to their late-nineteenth century descendants – used experiences of education to actively situate themselves in relation to the past and to a particular place. Pierce, for instance, used claims about the past, ranging from her family’s history of polite learning to her sense of the divinely-ordained unfolding of time, to authorize her aims as a female educator. Alumnae of the school, by contrast, grounded their memories of Pierce and her teaching within a fondly-remembered Litchfield landscape. These diffuse commemorative activities, from the formal study of history to the personalized remembrances of friends, oriented their participants in the overlapping social contexts of school, town, nation, and Christendom.

Much of the scholarly literature on gender and education in the early U.S. republic has focused on expansions to curriculum and to the number of schools to consider larger questions about white, educated women’s position in the public life of the new nation.⁸ A second important strand of this literature has examined the personal, affective ties forged among young women at school and how such relationships reflected a broader nineteenth-century culture of sentiment.⁹ In both bodies of literature, time in school sets precedents for female students’

⁶ Harriet Beecher Stowe to Sarah Pierce, n.d., Pierce Family Correspondence, 1775-1825, LHS.

⁷ I am grateful to Mary Kelley for referring me to Stowe’s memories of Litchfield. Calvin Edward Stowe, quoted in Vanderpoel, *Chronicles*, 182.

⁸ Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (1980. Repr., New York: W.W. Norton, 1986), 185-231; Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (1980; Repr. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 256-294; Margaret Nash, *Women’s Education in the United States, 1780-1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*; Lucia McMahon, *Mere Equals: The Paradox of Educated Women in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).

⁹ Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: Woman’s “Sphere” in New England, 1735-1835* (1977; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between

opportunities and constraints later in life: academies trained the first broad cohort of female teachers, instilled female intellectualism with moral purpose, provided platforms on which young women could rehearse the rhetorical skills necessary to participate actively in civil society, and forged the correspondence habits and friendships that would sustain former students in the isolation that could accompany marriage and motherhood.¹⁰ This chapter adds to that picture the role that schools played as cultivators and containers of memory.

This important facet of American education is not least signified by the fact that former academy buildings and schoolhouses in New England often became physical repositories of memory when they were repurposed as historical societies or museums in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For example, the original Deerfield Academy building, first constructed in 1799, became the site of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association's exhibition rooms in 1880.¹¹ In Litchfield, the Revolution-era law school building was moved to a space adjacent to the town green in 1911 before being returned to the lot of the institution's founder, Tapping Reeve, in 1931 to be preserved alongside his home; both structures continue to be maintained and opened to visitors by the Litchfield Historical Society.¹² Although the original academy building for which Sarah Pierce secured subscribers in 1800 had been dismantled by the 1890s, her school, too, continues to figure in the memorial landscape of the town, largely due to the collecting and documenting efforts of a group of elite white women over several decades at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 1 (1975), 1-25; Martha Tomhave Blauvelt, *The Work of the Heart: Young Women and Emotion, 1780-1830* (Charlottesville: UVA Press, 2007); Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and the Antebellum City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 120-147.

¹⁰ Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 262-274; Blauvelt, *Work of the Heart*, 146-183.

¹¹ Elizabeth Stillinger, *Historic Deerfield: A Portrait of Early America* (Dutton Studio Books, 1992), 2-3; Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (1991; New York: Vintage, 1993), 261.

¹² Rachel Carley, *Litchfield: The Making of a New England Town* (Litchfield, CT: Litchfield Historical Society, 2011), 287-288; 202-203.

Litchfield also appears prominently in scholarly work as a key site for the crafting of historical memory about the early United States. In particular, historians have highlighted how the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Colonial Revival movement, recast (and literally reshaped, rebuilt, or repainted) the town to evoke in popular historical imagination the quintessential New England village of old.¹³ The phenomenon of using Litchfield as raw material for imagining the American past, however, commenced earlier in time and extended beyond architecture and town planning. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, for instance, opens her study of early American material culture and memory on the Litchfield town common, arguing that reformer Horace Bushnell inaugurated the myth of American “homespun” there in an 1851 town centennial celebration speech.¹⁴ As the rest of her book demonstrates, that myth would be refined and sustained in small towns across New England in the century and a half that followed. Ulrich suggests that in Litchfield, this line forward extended to the early-twentieth century activities of the local Daughters of the American Revolution chapter, and specifically to the 1903 publication of *Tales of a Spinning Wheel* by members Elizabeth Barney Buel and Emily Noyes Vanderpoel.¹⁵

The pair’s commemorative activities, however, did not end there: that same year, a project that Vanderpoel had initiated several years prior to gather documents and information related to Sarah Pierce’s academy came to fruition in the publication of *Chronicles of a Pioneer*

¹³ “Colonial Revival” is an umbrella term for, in the words of Kenneth Ames, “any variety of artifactual interaction with visions of the colonial past.” Although often used in reference to a specific movement within American architecture that emerged around the turn of the twentieth century, “colonial revival” can signify a broad array of objects and activities, created and used across a broad stretch of time. In this chapter, I use “colonial revival” to refer to the ethos behind the historical work, including the remodeling of local architecture, the redesigning of public spaces, town-wide historical pageants, and the expansion of the Litchfield Historical Society’s collections, undertaken by Litchfield residents in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Kenneth Ames, “Introduction,” in *The Colonial Revival in America*, ed. Alan Axelrod (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985), 2-3; William Butler, “Another City upon a Hill: Litchfield, Connecticut, and the Colonial Revival,” in *The Colonial Revival in America*, ed. Alan Axelrod, 15-51 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985).

¹⁴ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (2001; New York: Vintage, 2002), 11-17.

¹⁵ Ulrich, *Age of Homespun*, 32-36.

School. The ornamental needlework and changing patterns of dress illustrated amid transcriptions of student diaries and compositions in the volume intimately linked the historical meaning of texts and of textiles.¹⁶ In 1851, the day before Bushnell rhapsodized on New England's Revolution-era daughters industriously spinning the very fabric of the new nation, Connecticut poet John Pierpont offered to the assembled crowd verses in praise of Sarah Pierce.¹⁷ New England's "homespun" myth, particularly in its concern for gender and material belonging, cannot be understood in isolation from a broader commemorative landscape. Litchfield's role in reshaping ideas about the nation's early history relied heavily on the town's historic institutions of elite education.

"Grandmother's Tales" and the Problem of Accomplishment

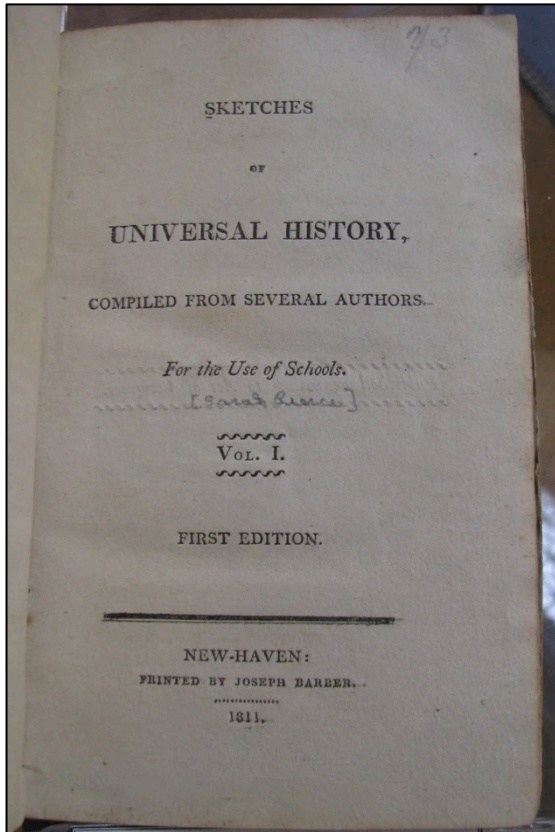
At first glance, *Sketches of Universal History* and "Grandmother's Tales," two extant historical texts authored by Sarah Pierce, seem only to contrast. The printed title page from the first volume of *Universal History*, a textbook published in four volumes between 1811 and 1818, is neat and spare: it announces the work is "compiled from several authors" and "for the use of schools." Following the convention of the time, Pierce remains unnamed (fig. 4.2).¹⁸ On the outside of "Grandmother's Tales," on the other hand, a simply-tied green satin ribbon on the spine complements the elaborate pattern stamped into the matching leather of the cover (fig. 4.3).¹⁹ Inside the pocket-sized album is a short, scribal text. The scope of *Universal History* spans the globe and human history, while the "Grandmother's Tales" focus on colonial New

¹⁶ Vanderpoel initiated the project and compiled most of the book's material, while Buel served as co-editor. Vanderpoel, *Chronicles of a Pioneer School*.

¹⁷ *Litchfield County Centennial Celebration, Held at Litchfield, Conn., 13th and 14th of August, 1851* (Hartford, 1851), 97-98.

¹⁸ [Sarah Pierce], *Sketches of Universal History, Compiled from Several Authors. For the Use of Schools*, Vol. 1 (New Haven: Printed by Joseph Barber, 1811), American Antiquarian Society.

¹⁹ Sarah Pierce, "Grandmother's Tales," Series 1, Folder 20, LFA Collection.



Figures 4.2 and 4.3. Title page of *Sketches of University History*, 1811, American Antiquarian Society. Cover of “Grandmother’s Tales,” Litchfield Historical Society

York. The tone of the former is didactic and moralistic, and that of the latter is anecdotal and vivacious. Finally, in scholarly treatment, the two works stand at odds: *Universal History* has long marked Pierce as an educational innovator, while “Grandmother’s Tales” has received no sustained attention.²⁰

In the early U.S. Republic, much of the public discourse on women’s education drew sharp distinctions between ‘ornamental’ and ‘serious’ subjects of instruction. Educational reformers of the time suggested that in a republic, women needed to be equipped to inform and

²⁰ Harriet Webster Marr, *The Old New England Academies Founded before 1826* (New York: Comet Press Books, 1959), 196; Barbara P. Atwood, “Miss Pierce of Litchfield,” *New England Galaxy* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1967): 32-40; Lynne Templeton Brickley, “Sarah Pierce’s Litchfield Female Academy,” in *To Ornament Their Minds: Sarah Pierce’s Litchfield Female Academy, 1792-1833*, 20-81 (Litchfield, CT: Litchfield Historical Society, 1993), 48.

infuse with virtue, rather than merely decorate, the civil society of the nation.²¹ As literary historian Catherine Kelly has noted, many women's historians of the 1970s and 1980s followed this rhetorical lead in their studies of women's education in the United States. They championed the Republican Mother; they chafed at the True Woman. One signified intellectual and political potential, the other personal and social confinement; one pronounced school orations and published essays in periodicals, the other stitched samplers and wrote, at best, sentimental verse. This fixation on the "problem of accomplishment," as Kelly has labeled it, has overshadowed the nuanced reality of educators seeking to balance 'ornamental' and scholastic instruction. One branch of learning provided a check for the other, shaping young women to be neither too coquettish nor too bookish.²² This was the gendered logic of intellectual life in the new republic: white women who would be useful in the realm of civil society while remaining deferential.²³

This aversion to the ornamental has hovered over the legacy of female academy instructors as much as it has over the learning of her students. Consider Sarah Pierce's contemporary Susanna Rowson, who established an academy in Boston in 1797. By that time, she had published several novels, including the transatlantic best-seller *Charlotte Temple*, and written and acted in plays on stages in London, Philadelphia, and Boston. Most scholarly work on Rowson as instructor, however, has little to say about her career as novelist and actress, while most treatments of her literary and theatrical careers leave her academy off-stage. While disciplinary divides figure here too, such a separation effectively severs Rowson's popular works of entertainment from her pedagogical works of instruction.²⁴ "Grandmother's Tales," in its

²¹ Catherine E. Kelly, "Reading and the Problem of Accomplishment," in *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, eds. Heidi Brayman Hackel and Catherine E. Kelly (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 124-125; 138-139.

²² Kelly, "Reading and the Problem of Accomplishment," 130.

²³ McMahan, *Mere Equals*, 5-7.

²⁴ Recent work that demonstrates the analytical potential of examining together Rowson's novels, plays, and educational publications include Marion Rust, *Prodigal Daughters: Susanna Rowson's Early American Women*

playful, pastoral anecdotes similarly disrupts the narrative of Pierce's 'serious' educational venture. Within the context in which Sarah Pierce composed *Sketches of Universal History* and "Grandmother's Tales," however, the two texts stood not as binaries, but on a continuum of historical practice.

Twenty years into her time overseeing the Litchfield Female Academy and serving as its lead instructor, Sarah Pierce prepared *Sketches of Universal History* for publication. Her preface framed the work as the result of "long experience" and as a tool accessible to students both in content and in cost.²⁵ The text deployed a calculated sequence of questions and answers to move readers through a chronicle of the world's great events, beginning with the biblical creation story. This format mirrored that of catechisms, works designed to initiate children into the central tenets of Christianity, as well as that of the early national schoolroom, in which students heard, read, and recited lessons. In *Universal History*, historical and moral instruction went hand-in-hand. Although the queries followed a biblical chronology and Christian cosmology – "What account can you give of the creation of the world?" and "Are all mankind doomed to endless misery, by Adam's transgression?" could be found in the opening pages – the narrative, at intervals, broadened to include settings from ancient Greece and Babylon to contemporary China and India.²⁶ Despite this expansive purview, *Universal History* still carried touchstones to a more localized community. At the back of the first two volumes, a list of subscribers, most of them students of Pierce, made the Litchfield Female Academy the culmination of this broad past.²⁷

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), esp. Ch. 5, and Jenny Heil, "Imperial Pedagogy: Susanna Rowson's Columbus for Young Ladies," *Early American Literature* 47, no. 3 (Jan. 2012): 623-648.

²⁵ Pierce, *Universal History*, 1: [3].

²⁶ Pierce, *Universal History*, 1: 5-7, 77-93, 170-173.

²⁷ Pierce, *University History*, 1: 173-176, 2: 214-216.

The educator also incorporated more personal histories into the classroom. In the fall of 1815, Caroline Boardman recounted in her school journal Sarah Pierce's regular Saturday afternoon morality lecture and mentioned that her teacher had remembered aloud her own mother's confusion over the concept of the Trinity. As she recorded Pierce's combination of recollection and instruction, Boardman went on to draw upon her own memory, of "the Indians [sic] definition of the Trinity of which I had heard my father speak" as a way to process the information she had received. On another occasion, Boardman joined two friends at their principal's house on a Sunday evening to "read a very interesting story of Miss Julia Cowles who was once one of Miss Pierce's pupils but now we trust is in heaven."²⁸ Cowles, of Farmington, Connecticut, had attended the academy in the late 1790s, during which time she kept a diary and a lively correspondence with her cousin Horace; she was engaged to the governor's son upon her death in 1803 at the age of eighteen.²⁹ Whether the story the young ladies read together was composed by Cowles herself or was merely about her life, Pierce invited her current students to apply the lessons gleaned from a former pupil's past to their own present, and so sustain her legacy.

"Grandmother's Tales," too, outlined an intellectual tradition and family heritage from which Sarah Pierce drew in staking her claim for white women's education in the early nineteenth century. The work is brief but layered: it offers a window both on eighteenth-century intellectual life and on nineteenth-century historical practice. The handwritten volume opened with a declaration: whatever the present generation's advances in science and philosophy, she wrote, "we cannot vie with our Grandmother[s] in familiarity with the streams of Helicon and Castali[a]," nor "their knowledge of literature & polite learning." Pierce's invocation of the

²⁸ Caroline M. Boardman journal, Series 2, Folder 79, LFA Collection.

²⁹ Moseley, ed., *The Diaries of Julia Cowles*, ix-xi.

waters of Helicon, the lofty home of the muses, and Castalia, a spring near its base that was said to inspire poetry in those who drank its waters, made clear that this “polite learning” in fact involved the heights of classicism.³⁰

By writing of “our Grandmothers” in this opening and deploying these unexplained classical references, Pierce made an implicit statement about whose history this was to tell, to remember, and to read. “Grandmother’s Tales,” more than the pedagogical *Universal History*, was meant for those who shared Pierce’s own elite heritage of polite learning. Those women steeped in classicism in the eighteenth-century were, in Caroline Winterer’s words, “not just literate but superliterate”: their facility with classical motifs marked learning, taste, and gentility.³¹ The next portion of the narrative situated that intellectual heritage within a sentiment-laden domestic scene. “The recollection of my Grandmother,” wrote Pierce, in a turn towards the personal, “flits across my mind like sweet music that has passed away with the distant breeze.” From there, she reimagined a childhood scene, of her grandmother in a “mahogany easy chair surrounded by a group of smiling children” ready to “catch the tale of old time” and so to pass the hours of a stormy evening. Such tales, Pierce asserted, conveyed “at the same time, instruction and pleasure.”³² This scene of domestic comfort and maternal affection, in other words, was not for Pierce at odds with the classicism and learning with which she started. Although scholars have since painted these traditions in opposition, Pierce affirmed that the foremothers she memorialized fluidly moved between them.³³

³⁰ On the waters of Helicon as a symbol of female learning, see Caroline Winterer, *The Mirror of Antiquity: American Women and the Classical Tradition, 1750-1900* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 15. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 6th ed., s.v. “Helicon” and “Castalia.”

³¹ Winterer, *The Mirror of Antiquity*, 5.

³² Pierce, “Grandmother’s Tales.”

³³ Winterer, *The Mirror of Antiquity*, 14-15.

After these preliminary remarks, Pierce turned to recounting the tales, which themselves conveyed much about gendered forms of literary exchange and social positioning in the eighteenth century. In each, an opening premise makes way for an exchange in verse. The first anecdote involved a well-respected New York City physician who “possessed the happy talent of uniting wit with good humor.” A young widow invites him and his wife to supper, and they decline out of apprehension of the weather. A servant of the widow returns with a note, from which the anecdote’s verses proceed. Her lines are witty and suggestive, as the final two stanzas demonstrate:

But widow it rains, no objection at all
The glorious great dangers to dare
A surtout of Flapped hat will defend your own skull
A cloak & golo shoes your dear.

My wife will catch cold I prethee make haste
A double advantage I vow
[To]night we’ll be merry & should she tip off
Your second is ready you know.

With that flourish of wry humor, the tale concludes. The second anecdote changes the scene and players but follows the same basic arc. A greeting goes out from the “small but intelligent circle of young ladies” of the grandmother’s natal village to a young man who has been “unfortunate both in business and in love.” He replies in verse, which, as in the first tale, a servant conveys back to the young women.

“Grandmother’s Tales” offers a window to eighteenth-century life and letters through a decidedly nineteenth century frame. Scholar David Shields has noted that the world of British American belles lettres dissipated rapidly following the American Revolution, arguing that the diffusion of gentility into the broader culture of the new Republic, aided by the expansion of

voluntary associations, libraries, lyceums, and print, supplanted it.³⁴ “Grandmother’s Tales” and other historical writing by white women from the 1820s instead show the culture of civility transmitted in memory across generations. As we will see in chapter 5, Hannah Mather Crocker’s *Reminiscences and Traditions of Boston* incorporated numerous examples of extemporaneous eighteenth-century verse into its historical narrative; novelist Sarah Barrell Keating Wood of Maine likewise interspersed echoes of the culture of civility into the manuscript reminiscences she composed between the 1820s and 1840s.³⁵ In the case of “Grandmother’s Tales,” the features of the frame – the small size and ornamentation of the volume, its scribal form, the sentimental scene at the start, and the gender of its author and protagonist – may have dissuaded scholars from peering intently at the window within.

These histories illuminate the ways that evolving practices of sociability – of exchanging poetic notes in the 1730s or of recording them in an album a century later – carried civility’s expressions of shared pleasure into the nineteenth century. The intimate, heterosocial circle at the center of the two tales expands to include, first, the intergenerational family circle gathered around the grandmother, and, via Pierce’s writing, a broader, though still select, set of readers invested in remembering the elite features of the colonial past. As Joanne Dobson and Mary Louise Kete have argued, creating and sustaining “affectional bonds,” even in the face of separation by time or space, was the ultimate purpose of nineteenth-century sentimental

³⁴ David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 320-327.

³⁵ Colby College professor of English Hilda Fife transcribed the manuscript copy of Wood’s recollections held at the Maine State Library (MSL) in 1965. As she notes, these recollections appeared serially in the *Portsmouth Journal* in 1859, and again in a Portsmouth newspaper in 1903. Additional manuscript versions of the recollections are now held by the Maine Women Writers Collection at the University of New England and the New England Historic Genealogical Society. Wood wrote additional recollections that descended in the families of her siblings and are now held at the American Antiquarian Society, Historic New England, and the Maine Historical Society. Hannah Mather Crocker, *Reminiscences and Traditions of Boston*, eds. Eileen Hunt Botting and Sarah Houser (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2011); Hilda Fife, “Madam Wood’s “Recollections”,” *Colby Library Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (Sept. 1965), 89-115.

writing.³⁶ For Shields, belletristic writings – “profoundly occasional” works extemporaneously circulated in the midst of conversation and other social pleasures – sat at odds with sentimentalism’s objective of preservation.³⁷ As a text that recaptures the shared feeling of a particular community in the eighteenth century in order for those in the nineteenth century to connect with a shared past, “Grandmother’s Tales” conveys at once civility and the sentimental. In addition to confounding the boundary between author and audience, then, it also straddles discursive modes and centuries.

“Grandmother’s Tales” reveals much about the priorities and practices shaping historical engagement in the early nineteenth century. The poems that appear in the volume have been conveyed by manuscript, mouth, memory, and, finally, manuscript again over the course of a hundred years. Both Pierce and her characters shift fluidly between reading, writing, and reminiscence, and Pierce’s position in particular – as childhood listener turned adult recorder of verses composed even earlier by someone else – confounds the distinctions typically drawn between author and audience. Pierce’s editorial comments assert the social value of combining “fascinating manners with solid learning,” and of intimate settings, like an evening circle, in which friends might engage in lively conversation. Finally, the tales also communicate fleeting details about food, dress, patterns of speech, and the tasks given to servants. “Supper in those days,” Pierce explained in the midst of the first tale, was “the favorite time for social intercourse among friends.” In the poem of the widow that follows, mention of lavish food accompanied ribald suggestion: “I have oysters & wine and a collar of beef / But alone I’ve no use for my

³⁶ Joanne Dobson, “Reclaiming Sentimental Literature,” *American Literature* 69.2 (Jun., 1997), 266-267 (quote); Mary Louise Kete, *Sentimental Collaborations: Mourning and Middle-Class Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 6.

³⁷ Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters*, xxv, 319.

tongue.” Like the writings of the Wadsworth sisters or the samplers of Providence, “Grandmother’s Tales” is a record profoundly embedded in daily life and domestic spaces.

Even after its initial composition, “Grandmother’s Tales” remained a site for engaging with and recording the past, as readers made annotations and additions to the work. Someone penciled in the name “Bard” in reference to the first tale’s Doctor, for instance. Sarah Pierce’s elder brother John had married Ann Bard, the daughter of a Dr. John Bard in 1786, and Pierce’s descendants knew that a Dr. Bard had served as George Washington’s personal physician.³⁸ This specification may have been an attempt to bolster the authenticity of the tales by linking them to a recognized historical persona, or merely to record on paper those details that previously had been taken as givens within the family circle.³⁹ Another annotation, on the back of the title page, lists the birth and death dates for Sarah Pierce and two of her siblings, James and Mary. The same annotator appears to be responsible for attributing the work to Sarah Pierce on the title page proper, and likely did so sometime after 1863, the year given for Mary Pierce’s death.⁴⁰

These accumulating layers show the nineteenth century’s shifting prerogatives of historical engagement at work. Pierce prioritized recapturing the vibrant intellectual culture that a former generation had enjoyed. She wrote to counteract the “pity, if not [...] contempt” that

³⁸ Sarah Pierce’s great-niece Jane Loring Gray communicated some of this genealogy to Emily Noyes Vanderpoel, who was collecting information on Pierce and her school, in the 1890s. Gray, however, confused Ann Bard’s brother Dr. Samuel Bard, who served as George Washington’s personal physician, with her father, Dr. John Bard. See Jane Loring Gray to Emily Noyes Vanderpoel, 16 Jan. 1897, 27 Feb. 1902, and 9 Mar. 1902, Series 4, Folder 19, LFA Collection.

³⁹ Ironically, genealogical digging suggests that either this attribution or the timing given for the tales is incorrect, even if it confirms a Pierce-Bard family connection. Ann Bard Pierce’s father, John Bard, was indeed a respected physician, but was born outside Philadelphia in 1716 and did not move to New York City until about 1746, fifteen years after the first tale is supposed to have taken place. However, his wife was Susanna, matching the name given in the narrative’s poem. Whether or not Sarah Pierce’s biological grandmothers had a social connection with the Bard family, as the tale suggests, is unclear. G.O. Seilhamer, Esq., *The Bard Family: A History and Genealogy...* (Chambersburg, PA: Kittochtinny Press, 1908), 96-97.

⁴⁰ The ink and handwriting of “by Miss Sarah Pierce” on the title page is darker than that of the other text, and appears to match that of the genealogical lines on the its reverse.

those in the present cast towards the past.⁴¹ For later readers, more precise details of chronology and identity enhanced the text. The partial genealogy, now some of the earliest text a reader encounters in the book, set the tales clearly within the orbit of the Pierce family history. It reiterates the identity of Sarah Pierce not only as author of the piece, but as a participant within the history “Grandmother’s Tales” narrates. The naming and placing in time of Pierce and her two siblings provides historical specificity, and therefore authority, that the tales do not.

Pierce’s Students and the Uses of History

The formal study of written histories – of hearing, reading, copying, and reciting from works like *Universal History* – represented only one of the ways Sarah Pierce encouraged her students to engage with the past. The four Lewis sisters – Marian (or Mary Ann), Amelia, Jane, and Louisa – attended Litchfield Female Academy in the 1810s. Among the surviving family papers is an essay one of the sisters prepared on “The Uses of History.” The composition reveals Litchfield Female Academy students making claims about the significance of historical knowledge and the role that it played in everyday life. The study of the past was not just a chronological roll-call to memorize, but an instrument to master for situating oneself in the world.⁴²

“History,” the Lewis sister wrote in the opening of her essay, “brings to our view the past as an example for the future.” The study of past civilizations, and their relative successes or failures, revealed merits to emulate and vices to reject. As an example of the “fatal effects of

⁴¹ Pierce, “Grandmother’s Tales.”

⁴² My interpretation of how Sarah Pierce and Litchfield Female Academy students applied to their lives is akin to what scholar David Glassberg has called a “sense of history.” This mode of engaging with the past differs from the register in which scholars usually operate, which prioritizes a detached pattern of interpretation superseding interpretation. A “sense of history,” argues Glassberg, tells us “*when* we are,” “*where* we are,” and “*with whom* we belong.” *Sense of History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 6-7, quotes on 7.

ambition and the prosperous effects of believing and worshipping the true God,” Lewis pointed to the conquest of North America. The superior numbers and strength of the Native Americans, she argued, could not surmount the trust of “our forefathers [...] in divine & not human aid.” This logic justified by implication the gap between prosperity and precarity in the world Lewis herself inhabited. She agreed with her teacher that “Literature & Virtue” defined the strength, accomplishment, and potential improvements of a society. “Even those things which we now should pass unnoticed may be of lasting benefit to others,” she asserted. As such, she concluded, the study of the past was “useful in every age of life,” especially when its narratives amused the imagination, provided moral instruction, formed one’s judgment, or exercised one’s passions.⁴³

For Pierce and her students, history was a subject and an active practice, something to deploy “in every age of life” to inform one’s thought, feeling, and imagination. In compositions and in more informal practices, Pierce’s students encountered the past on grand and small scales, and oriented themselves accordingly. Various forms of literary engagement – reading, writing, conversing, and commonplacing – as well as the fluid movement by practitioners among them proved central to this process. Scholars already have demonstrated the role that these habits of reading and writing played in the “self-fashioning” of students.⁴⁴ As they infused these practices with that of encountering the past, however, students also engaged in self-situating: they positioned themselves in terms of identity, space, and the unfolding of time. Although Pierce’s female students by and large would stop reading and reciting history lessons when they left Litchfield Female Academy, they continued to enact and refine these historical practices, often by drawing on material reminders of their time in school, over the course of their lives.

⁴³ “No. 8 – The Uses of History,” Series 2, Folder 21, Mary Ann Lewis Papers, LHS.

⁴⁴ Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 165-176.

For the Lewis sisters, those material reminders extended beyond the formal writing assignments they completed. Indeed, the bulk of the extant family papers are not school documents, but small, hand-delivered notes from fellow students and Litchfield neighbors. These record the exchanges of books, invitations accepted and declined, and requests to borrow bonnet patterns.⁴⁵ These informal documents might seem like an unlikely archive of one's education, but Litchfield's formal and extracurricular learning spaces often blurred.⁴⁶ Since some students boarded with Miss Pierce and her family, young ladies might find themselves taking tea or otherwise socializing in the company of their teacher, as Jane Lewis did, likely while attending the school in 1819.⁴⁷

Self-situating in domestic spaces around Litchfield worked in tandem with those conducted in the schoolhouse. Over three school terms between 1821 and 1823, for instance, the out-of-town students who boarded on the third floor of the Daniel Sheldon residence inscribed their names on the frame of a window there. As chapter 1 demonstrated, domestic inscriptions like this one marked spatial and social belonging. In this case, the boarders created a record that echoed the official register of students that appeared on the academy's printed catalog broadsides: their inscription extended the prestige of appearing on such a list to a space beyond the schoolroom.⁴⁸ As the Lewis notes record, friends, books, and conversation freely circulated through Litchfield's classrooms, parlors, and streets. The artifacts kept by the Lewis sisters also

⁴⁵ For a representative sampling from the body of notes, see Flora Catlin to Miss Lewis, n.d., Folder 20, Miss M. Cooke to Misses Lewis, n.d., Folder 30, Roger W. Cooke to Miss Lewis, n.d., Folder 31, Maria Tallmadge to Marian Lewis, n.d., Folder 112, all in Series 1, Mary Ann Lewis Papers.

⁴⁶ Kelly, *Republic of Taste: Art, Politics, and Every Life in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 24.

⁴⁷ Charlotte Sheldon journal, 11 June 1796, 18 July 1796, and 23 July 1796. Series 2, Folder 84, LFA Collection; Litchfield Female Academy students to Miss Jane Lewis, 26 July [1819], Series 1, Folder 68, Mary Ann Lewis Papers.

⁴⁸ For the women collecting information on the academy at the end of the nineteenth century, the students' record furnished a valuable cache of names, dates of attendance, and boarding patterns. Elizabeth R. Child to Emily Noyes Vanderpoel, with enclosure, 3 Nov. 1896, Series 4, Folder 7, LFA Collection; *Catalogue of the Litchfield Academy... 1830*, Series 1, Folder 12, LFA Collection.

indicate that students facing the prospect of leaving Litchfield sought out an inscribed record of that circulation: literary pieces selected by friends and deposited into the pages of an album.⁴⁹

Student journals, a prescribed component of learning at the academy, likewise transcended the boundaries of school and social life, of private and formal writing, and of self-fashioning and self-situating. Entries typically recorded progress through academic subjects and needlework or drawing projects as well as the broader social activities of students. For some writers, such as Charlotte Sheldon, novels, tea, and walks with friends filled those parts of the page not devoted to the day's geography lesson, while for others, including Mary A. Child, detailed sermon notes predominated.⁵⁰ Still other students, including Charlotte Sheldon's sister Lucy and Mary A. Child's close successor Laura Wolcott, blended school, sociability, and sober religious reflection.⁵¹ Recording and writing their experiences empowered Litchfield Female Academy students to situate themselves as authors and as ones authorized to shape the contours of their histories.

From this self-evaluative writing, as well as the instructors' observations, students received feedback to guide their future behavior, patterns of thought, and compositions. Students knew that their journal writing, as their records of daily employments and study, would be read. Those keeping the academy-mandated journals periodically turned them in for review by Miss Pierce, her nephew and successor as principal, John Brace, or one of her assistants.⁵² For Julia Cowles and her cousin Horace, with whom she initiated a regular correspondence while a student at the academy, this blend of reflection, writing, reading, and reflection again, offered "the

⁴⁹ Abigail to Betsey and Jane Lewis, Series 1, Folder 2, and Mary Peck to Lewis Sisters, Series 1, Folder 84, Mary Ann Lewis Papers.

⁵⁰ Charlotte Sheldon journal, 1796, Series 2, Folder 84, and Mary A. Child journal, 1820, Series 2, Folder 25, LFA Collection.

⁵¹ Lucy Sheldon (Beach) journal, 1802, Series 2, Folder 3, LFA Collection; Laura Maria Wolcott (Rankin) journal, 1825, Series 2, Folder 31, Wolcott Family Collection, LHS.

⁵² For examples of this practice at work, see Charlotte H. Newcomb journal, Series 2, Folder 10, LFA Collection; Laura Wolcott journal, 9 Jan. 1827, Wolcott Collection.

history of our own lives, together with the various causes and effects of happiness and misery, of pleasure and pain [...], whatever shall tend to amuse, instruct, and reform.”⁵³ In an essay on improvement composed in 1802, Mary Ann Bacon elaborated on the complementary purposes of different forms of literary engagement: “by reading it is justly said we enjoy the dead, and by conversation The living and by contemplation our selv[e]s.” Self-reflection, or self-fashioning, grew out of a larger process of locating oneself among others, living and dead. “Reading furnishes The memory,” Bacon continued, while “conversation strengthens our discernment and contemplation improves the judgment.”⁵⁴ This sort of practice, as much as the content of students’ learning, would provide, as Sarah Beekman wrote in a composition, “resources within their own minds” as they faced adversity in the future.⁵⁵

Students might devote their journals to evolving uses over time. More than one volume opened with content of one sort – the mandated daily journal-keeping, usually – and concluded with another – often commonplace entries or other markers of reading. Mary Ann Bacon filled a legal-sized book of blank pages with journal entries, copies of compositions, excerpts of prose and verse, and a list of the students with whom she attended school in 1802.⁵⁶ Likewise, Lucy Sheldon’s journal from the winter of 1803, which interspersed daily activities with long accounts of her history lessons, transformed in its later pages into a commonplace book of passages from familiar transatlantic writers, including James Thompson, Johann George von Zimmerman,

⁵³ It was from one of these letters that Laura Hadley Moseley, a historian compiling and publishing Cowles’s diaries in the 1930s, constructed the volume’s prefatory biography. Horace Cowles, quoted in Moseley, ed., *The Diaries of Julia Cowles*, ix-x.

⁵⁴ The conclusion of her essay reiterated the social aspects of education with a ringing charge to her readers: “let us then aided by each other press forward in the road of improvement.” In a reversal of the many published advice letters directed to young women, Bacon framed the essay as an advice letter to her younger brother. “A Composition Written at Litchfield,” in Mary Ann Bacon (Mrs. Chauncey Whittlesey) journal and notebook, Series 2, Folder 103, LFA Collection.

⁵⁵ Sarah Beekman (Westbrook) journal, 1807, Series 2, Folder 99, LFA Collection.

⁵⁶ Mary Ann Bacon journal, Series 2, Folder 103, LFA Collection.

William Shakespeare, and Robert Southey.⁵⁷ When Pierce's students, like those of Mary Balch described in chapter 2, set into a single volume reflections of their personal activities, a record of their Litchfield social circle, and the words of polite authors, they transposed the transatlantic culture of letters into a socially-grounded, local context in which they themselves were central actors.

In other cases, the layers of material in an object demonstrate practices of memory accumulating, being recontextualized, or shifting over the longer lifetime of Litchfield Female Academy students. Charlotte Newcomb of Pleasant Valley, New York, filled the first forty pages of her journal with daily entries during her time as a fifteen-year-old student at Litchfield Female Academy in 1809 and 1810.⁵⁸ The second half of the volume is filled with newspaper clippings, dating from the 1830s to the decade following Charlotte's death in 1853. Many of these pieces reflected in printed form the sort of entries typically hand-written in friendship albums of the era: religious sentiment, memories of departed friends or well-loved places, and views of nature. Finally, a few loose sheets sit among the closing pages of the book: notes on the rivers of Russia, an ink sketch of a floral arrangement, and notes on the biblical story of Naomi and Ruth, which Newcomb perhaps would have encountered in conjunction with Sarah Pierce's student play on the same subject.⁵⁹ Newcomb assembled in this volume an explicit record of school, the actual materials of schooling, and clippings that reflected intellectual engagement after her formal education had ended. The clippings dating from after Newcomb's death,

⁵⁷ The content of friendship albums also might shift over the course of a volume. Both Jennette Hart and Jane Seymour's albums commenced with poetic inscriptions from friends and evolved into a collection of recipes. Lucy Sheldon journal, 1803, Series 2, Folder 5, LFA Collectio; Jennette Margaret Hart album, 1819, Series 2, Folder 55, and Jane Seymour (Beckwith) album, 1822-1827, Series 2, Folder 9, LFA Collection.

⁵⁸ Charlotte Newcomb (Benedict) journal, Series 2, Folder 10, LFA Collection.

⁵⁹ Sarah Pierce, "Ruth" [manuscript play], Series 1, Folder 21, LFA Collection.

moreover, suggest that her family members valued the volume as a keepsake of her education and as a repository for their own literary practices.

Student friendship albums, begun at Litchfield Female Academy and added to over time, similarly served as sites of self-situating during and after school. Mary Peck's album particularly demonstrates how the process of composing such a volume triangulated its participants, the particular moment of their learning, and the setting in which they did so.⁶⁰ Peck was a Litchfield native, who had attended Pierce's school for six years in the 1810s before returning to the academy in 1825 to teach drawing.⁶¹ She began assembling her album that same year and invited a combination of neighbors, peers, and students to add entries. The volume quite literally bound together people, place, and intellectual exchange (figs. 4.4 and 4.5). Gilt-

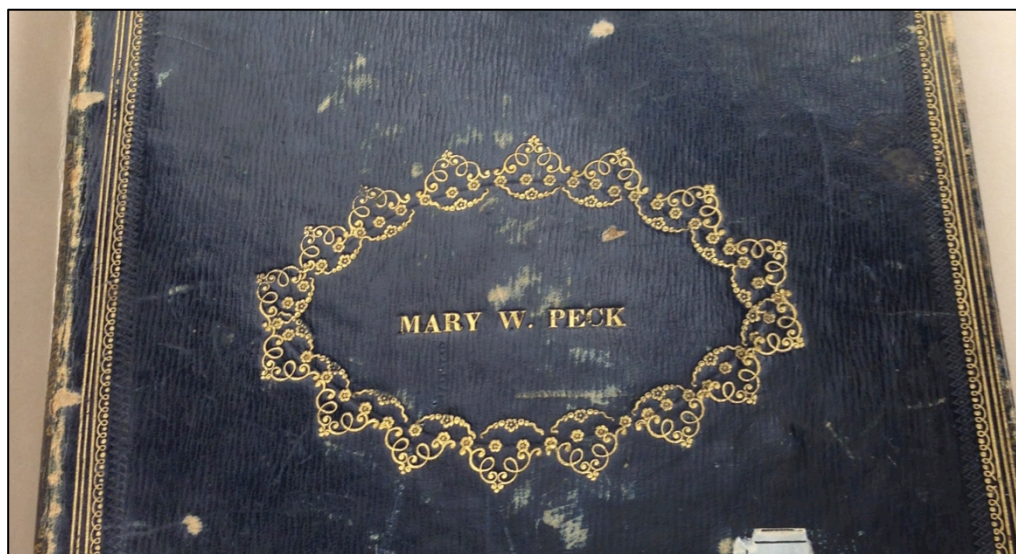


Figure 4.4. Detail of the front cover of Mary Peck's album, 1825, Litchfield Historical Society

⁶⁰ Mary Peck (Mansfield) album, Series 2, Folder 70, LFA Collection.

⁶¹ The Litchfield Historical Society maintains an expansive database of students who attended the Litchfield Female Academy and Litchfield Law School, much of which is based on data that Vanderpoel collected and published in her two-volume history of Miss Pierce's school. "Mary Peck Mansfield," *The Ledger: A Database of Students of the Litchfield Law School and the Litchfield Female Academy*, LHS, <http://www.litchfieldhistoricalsociety.org/ledger/students/1664>.

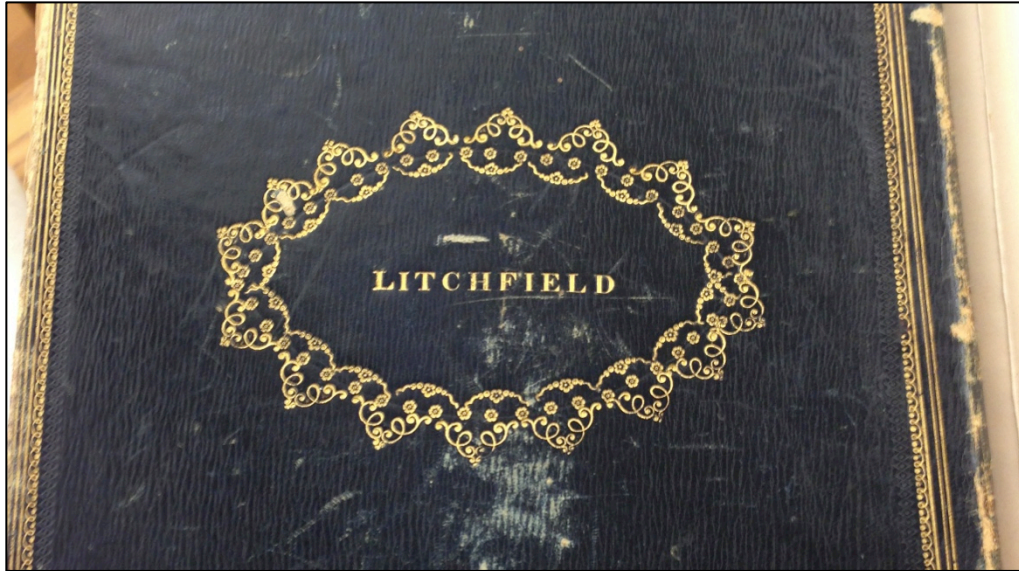


Figure 4.5. Detail of the back cover of Mary Peck's album, 1825, Litchfield Historical Society

stamped leather covers enclose the album's entries; one features Peck's name, and the other reads "Litchfield." These paired covers signaled the roles person and place together played in shaping and claiming the written tributes contained within.

Inside Peck's album, a rich combination of text, illustrations, and material artifacts furthered this meeting of people and place. Small hair memorials, set into medallions and inked with calligraphy accompany several entries dedicated to deceased loved ones. In the case of Mary Peck's sister Helen, a poem by family friend Benjamin Tallmadge, in addition to a hair medallion and ink-washed drawing of an obelisk, commemorated the scene of her deathbed, tethering such a life passage to a specific circle of neighbors (fig. 4.6). Other entries, many of them clustered towards the end of the volume, paired depictions of Litchfield's landscape with corresponding poems. Verses attributed to John Brace about Bantam Lake, for instance, sat underneath an illustration of that vista (fig. 4.7). Such pairings invited the album viewer to picture the physical landscape – or to recall it in memory – and hold it in view while proceeding



Figure 4.6. Hair memorial for Helen Peck, Mary Peck album, Litchfield Historical Society

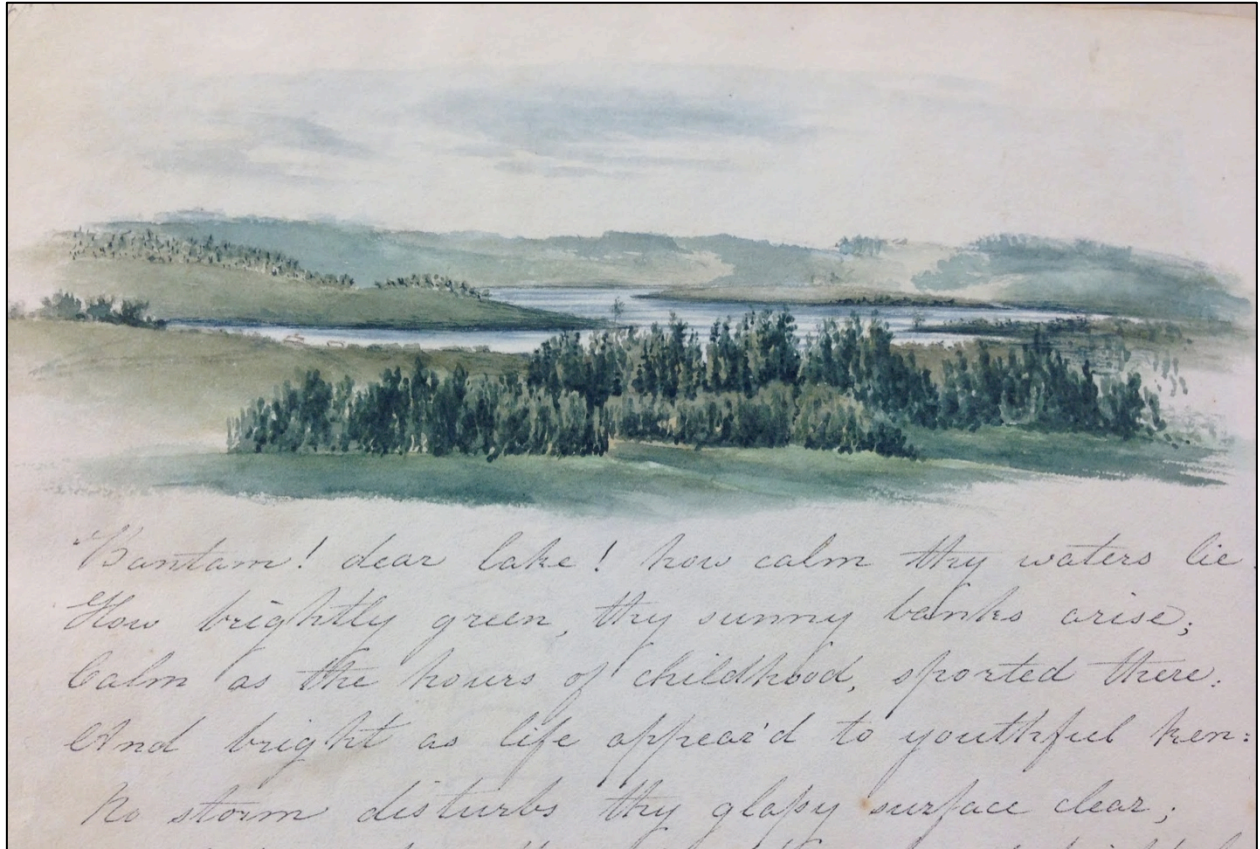


Figure 4.7. Bantam Lake recorded in watercolor and poetry, Mary Peck album, Litchfield Historical Society

to read the lines below. In this portion of the album, Peck also made two full-page colored illustrations, one of a stretch along the Bantam River, and one of the view from Prospect Hill (fig. 4.8).⁶² Testimony from other students indicate that Litchfield Female Academy pupils frequented both spots to read, to walk and converse with friends, or to take in the delights of a sunset.⁶³ The album commemorated not just a social circle, but the embodied experience of the social circle within a physical place.

⁶² Peck (Mansfield) album.

⁶³ Laura Maria Wolcott (Rankin) journal, 22 Aug. 1825, 23 Aug. 1825, 27 Aug. 1825, Series 2, Folder 31, and Tues. 7 Nov. 1826 and 15 Nov. 1826, Series 2, Folder 33, Wolcott Family Collection; Eliza Ogden journal, 15-16 Aug. 1816, in Vanderpoel, *Chronicles*, 162; Caroline Chester journal, 2 Aug. 1816, in Emily Noyes Vanderpoel, *More Chronicles of a Pioneer School of a Pioneer School from 1792 to 1833* (New York: Cadmus Book Shop, 1927), 184.



Figure 4.8. Prospect Hill, depicted in Mary Peck album, Litchfield Historical Society

As with many of the journals, albums, too evolved: they functioned at once repositories for memory and as a prompt to extend past relationships further into the present. As Catharine Beecher had suggested in her inscription in the early pages of Mary Peck's album:

Within this book to Friendship dear
Thy early friend will write her name,
And when afar thy steps shall roam
This token shall remembrance claim.⁶⁴

Neither time nor distance could sever the bonds of friendship, especially with material testaments to provoke one's memory. The final page of Jennette Hart's album similarly set out the long-

⁶⁴ Catharine Beecher entry, n.d., Peck (Mansfield) album.

term purpose an album might serve, with words borrowed from Washington Irving. “Who is there who does not fondly turn at times to linger round the scenes that were once the haunt of his childhood,” the transcribed passage inquired. To be able to return in memory to those friends who had shaped one’s youth was to have preserved, in the midst of the soiling “intercourse with the world,” one of “the purest pleasures that survive the happy period of youth.”⁶⁵

Volumes compiled in youth remained active sites of both literary engagement and memory, which later annotations to entries particularly demonstrate. In the mid-1820s, Margaret Bolles invited male and female friends in Litchfield and New Haven to inscribe her album, and they responded in kind, with written pieces on friendship, virtue, memory, and parting.⁶⁶ Bolles married Joshua Garrett of Litchfield in 1828 and eventually ended up living in Delphi, Indiana, alongside several other branches of her family. Over time, Margaret Bolles Garrett amplified her album’s inscriptions to make their creators more widely identifiable (fig. 4.9). She spelled

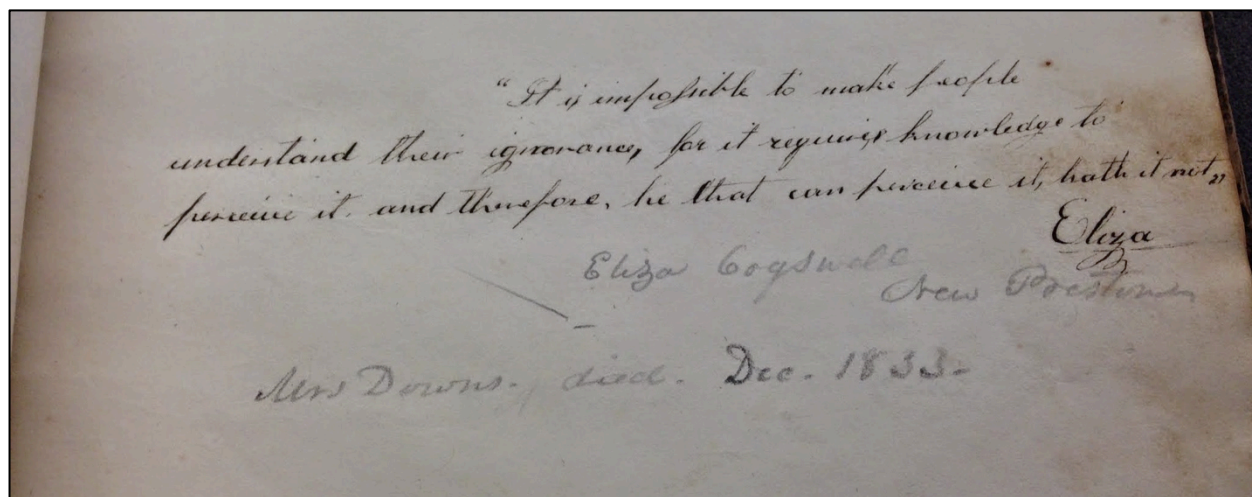


Figure 4.9. Annotations in Margaret Bolles (Garrett) album, Litchfield Historical Society

⁶⁵ The passage originally appeared in Irving’s satirical periodical *Salmagundi*. Hart album; *Salmagundi: Or, the Whim-Whams and Opinions of Launcelot Langstaff, Esq.* (3rd ed., New York, 1820), 374.

⁶⁶ Margaret Bolles (Garrett) album, Series 2, Folder 49, LFA Collection.

out names where there had been only initials or no signature at all, as she did in clarifying that “C.M.W” was William M. Clarke’s flipped monogram or that “Harry” was a playful Harriet Peck. She also recorded the dates and locations of her writers’ marriages and deaths, and in giving the married names of her female friends, preserved the link to their birth names and families. For instance, “Eliza,” Bolles Garrett indicated, was Eliza Cogswell of New Preston, turned “Mrs. Downs – died. Dec. 1833.” Sarah W. Griswold, who had signed her full name to an entry dated East Hartford, August 1827, had become “(Mrs Ripley),” of Hartford and New York. Here, Bolles Garrett also replicated the tone of the original entry, transcribing the opening lines of Lord Byron’s poem “Fare Thee Well” as part of her annotation.⁶⁷

New inscriptions, on the other hand, reflected the album owner’s shifting social circle. In the mid-1840s, Bolles Garrett’s niece Sarah and son William, each about ten years old, wrote in a few lines of poetry in the shaky hands of children. Another niece, Julia, inserted a poem, “How old art thou?” shortly before her marriage, and later a grown son, Charles, would conclude the album with lines in tribute to his mother. Just following this selection, on the final page of the album, Bolles Garrett had put her reckoning: “In this book there are 22 Married & 9 Dead.”⁶⁸ Rather than just a record of her time in school, the volume remained a site through which Margaret Bolles Garrett, married and later transplanted from Connecticut to Indiana, continued to articulate the details of her social network and the sentiments she felt for those in it. Another niece, Lydia Bolles Newcomb, later remembered that Sarah Pierce and her school persisted as

⁶⁷ Bolles (Garrett) album.

⁶⁸ Bolles (Garrett) album

“household words” among the transplanted family. Some of the old textbooks older family members had used at Litchfield Female Academy, moreover, remained household objects.⁶⁹

The commitment to historical engagement that Pierce had fostered in her students became clear upon her retirement from full-time academy work in 1832. Two alumnae of the school composed a lengthy tribute that appeared in one of the nation’s leading periodicals for women, Sarah Josepha Hale’s *American Ladies’ Magazine*, shortly thereafter in 1834. Former students, in other words, were among the first people to commemorate Sarah Pierce and argue for the historical significance of her life’s work. Indeed, it was students who crafted and disseminated the notion of Pierce as “*the pioneer of Female Education in our country,*” first in a valedictory address during her tenure as principal, and then in the repeated memory of that address in the published tribute in 1834. As the alumna then put it in the letter to her friend that appeared in Hale’s magazine, “though many of her successors may be more extolled, none *can* merit more [...] grateful praise.”⁷⁰ In the span of Pierce’s forty years as principal, Mary Kelley estimates, 182 academies and fourteen seminaries exclusively for women opened around the country.⁷¹ In such a rapidly flourishing educational landscape, the Litchfield Female Academy graduates who wrote in 1834 wanted Pierce’s school to remain a landmark.

As if in recognition of the way passing time might dilute the public legacy of their revered teacher, not to mention their own educations, the writer went on to specify the attributes that had distinguished Pierce and her academy. Their instructor’s constant aim was to inculcate usefulness, to demonstrate that the work of education extended beyond the schoolroom, and to

⁶⁹ Newcomb’s mother also had attended the school; her daughter added to her reminiscence: “To the very end of her life – 1878 – my dear Mother often spoke of the school.” Lydia B. Newcomb to Elizabeth Barney Buel, 6 Jan. 1902, Series 4, Folder 36, LFA Collection.

⁷⁰ Pierce’s nephew submitted the piece, at the request of one of the writers, to Hale’s publication; his name appeared in the printed version, while theirs did not. J.P. Brace, “Tribute to Miss Sarah Pierce: Extract of a Letter,” *American Ladies’ Magazine* (June 1834), 242 (emphasis in original).

⁷¹ Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 84.

guide students in laying a foundation on which they might improve for the rest of their lives. “The result we see in some of the most highly informed, elegant women of our country,” she declared.⁷² Married to legislators, professionals, and intellectual elites, or serving as educators and authors themselves, Litchfield Female Academy graduates stepped into the usefulness Sarah Pierce intended. Their teacher’s legacy was national in scope, sending out to every part of the “vast country” young women whose “acquired knowledge” and “seeds of virtue” together sowed an even greater harvest of social good.⁷³

Litchfield and its physical surroundings, the writer argued, shaped students’ learning and deeply resonated in their memories. In Pierce’s hands, the town’s “well cultivated farms extending to the north, their white houses embowered in trees,” and “walks shaded by the graceful and venerable elms” became resources through which to convey moral lessons about the goodness of the Creator and the virtue of hard work. The surroundings impressed upon students how a well-tended environment, like a well-tended mind, might convey “taste and refinement in their owners.” In this telling, Litchfield’s working landscape primarily functioned to edify academy students. Although the town’s shaded walks and neat residences might remain, the tribute writer wondered if the landscape would continue to be animated with such instructive purpose.⁷⁴ In other words, Litchfield and its environs would be diminished were it not for the imprint of education Pierce had provided.

This antebellum tribute laid the foundation for later commemorations of Pierce and her school. Litchfield Female Academy alumnae delineated the themes – Pierce’s ‘pioneering’ enterprise, the national reach of the school, the usefulness of their education, and the complementary role of Litchfield’s setting – that others would take up as the decades unfolded.

⁷² Brace, “Tribute to Miss Sarah Pierce,” 243.

⁷³ Brace, “Tribute to Miss Sarah Pierce,” 242.

⁷⁴ Brace, “Tribute to Miss Sarah Pierce,” 243-244.

In the final years of the nineteenth century, another group of women bounded by education, race, and social position amplified the academy's legacy in these same terms.

The Making of a Chronicle:

Sarah Pierce died at the age of eighty-four in 1852, a year after Litchfield celebrated its centennial on the town green. The famous academy she had founded six decades prior had ceased to operate but continued to register as part of Litchfield's heritage.⁷⁵ In addition to John Pierpont's poetic tribute, the Reverend Samuel Church used a portion of his centennial address to reflect on the "untried experiment" in female education Sarah Pierce had undertaken in the heady days of the new Republic.⁷⁶ Printed local histories that appeared around this time, including George Woodruff's *History of the Town of Litchfield* (1845) and G.H. Hollister's *History of Connecticut* (1855), also remarked upon the school's well-established reputation.⁷⁷ Hollister linked the legacy of Pierce's academy with that of the Litchfield Law School and asserted "while these two schools were in full and active life, Litchfield was famed for an intellectual and social position, [...] unrivalled in any other village or town of equal size in the United States."⁷⁸

Other mid-century writers cast the legacy of the school in quainter terms. Perhaps most notably, both Henry Ward Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, each of whom had briefly attended Litchfield Female Academy during their father's tenure at the town's Congregational

⁷⁵ Pierce scaled back her teaching responsibilities in the mid-1820s, naming her nephew, John P. Brace, her successor as principal; when she retired fully in 1833, he moved to Hartford to become the head of the well-known female seminary there established by Litchfield alumna Catharine Beecher. A Litchfield Seminary for young women continued to operate for several years, but the Academy building had become by the early 1850s the site of an institution for commercial education. Brickley, 68-69; Carley, 135.

⁷⁶ *Litchfield County Centennial*, 49-50.

⁷⁷ Pierce and the school also received passing notice in Payne Kenyon Kilbourne's *Sketches and Chronicles of the Town of Litchfield, Connecticut, Historical, Biographical, and Statistical* (Hartford: Press of Case, Lockwood and Company, 1859), 262. George C. Woodruff, *History of the Town of Litchfield, Connecticut* (Litchfield: Printed and Published by Charles Adams, 1845), 52; G.H. Hollister, *The History of Connecticut, from the First Settlement of the Colony to the Adoption of the Present Constitution*. 2 vols. (New Haven: Durrie and Peck, 1855), 603-604.

⁷⁸ Hollister, *History of Connecticut*, 604.

church, published work spun from the memories of their childhoods.⁷⁹ In 1870, Henry's boyhood recollections of his experiences in various Litchfield primary schools appeared in the *Christian Union*, the periodical he edited, and then as a reprint in other magazines. Though cast in playful terms that stressed his own youthful mischief, the piece also made condescendingly clear that the eventual clergyman had found little value in the early education he had received at the hands of women. "It was a ladies' school," he dismissively explained of Litchfield Female Academy. "The school was not expected to teach us, and it fulfilled every expectation." The "elder sisters" and other older students whom he portrayed seemed more maternal than studious. He recalled, for instance, one "kind-faced girl" approaching him to bestow a healing kiss to his tear-stained face.⁸⁰ Stowe's 1878 novel *Poganuc People: Their Loves and Lives*, which drew heavy inspiration from her early childhood in Litchfield, effaced the notion of a local female academy entirely. The main character, Dolly Cushing, blossoms into genteel womanhood only after she trades the implicit confines of her childhood village and the household of her Congregationalist minister father for the broader society of Boston and her wealthy, Episcopalian relatives.⁸¹

By the 1890s, Litchfield had several organizations devoted to preserving various elements of the town's historical image. In 1875, local resident F. Ratchford Starr initiated the work of a Village Improvement Society (VIS) that was intended to restore the appearance and infrastructure of the town's center to match the pastoral idyll members imagined Litchfield

⁷⁹ Young boys did occasionally attend Litchfield Female Academy, even though the primary constituents of the school were adolescent white women pursuing higher education. Henry Ward Beecher attended the school as a nine-year-old in 1824. Brickley, 29-31; "Henry Ward Beecher," *The Ledger*.

⁸⁰ Henry Ward Beecher, "Going to School," *Arthur's Home Magazine* (August 1870), 104-105, ProQuest American Periodicals Series (hereafter APS).

⁸¹ According to the introductory note in the Riverside Edition of Stowe's writings, the author's personal copy of *Poganuc People* included marginalia linking characters and scenes in the novel to her childhood memories of Litchfield. Characteristic notes included "Description of Father's Litchfield study," "Exact," and "My own experience." Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Poganuc People: Their Loves and Lives* (1878) in *The Writings of Harriet Beecher Stowe*, Vol. 11 (reprint; New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1967); *Writings of Harriet Beecher Stowe*, 11: viii-ix.

having had in the pre-industrial era.⁸² Never mind that Litchfield's common had been, according to a traveler observing it in 1803, full of "fragments of old fences, boards, woodpiles, heaps of chips, old sheds bottom upward, carts, casks, weeds and loose stones, lying along in wild confusion."⁸³ By 1882, the VIS also had begun a program through which local eighteenth-century buildings were honored with placards to convey their "history, security, patriotism, and stability."⁸⁴ The Litchfield Historical Society emerged in 1893 as the successor to the Litchfield County Historical and Antiquarian Society, which had existed since 1856. In the succeeding decades, the organization would move from a rented room in a village shop to its own dedicated space, in the Noyes Memorial Building, on a prominent corner of the town green. Local women inaugurated a chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1899 and named it for Mary Floyd Tallmadge, whose two daughters had attended the Litchfield Female Academy.⁸⁵

It was in this atmosphere of historical engagement that artist and author Emily Noyes Vanderpoel, in conjunction with a predominantly-female network of current and former Litchfield residents, returned the legacy of Sarah Pierce's school to the foreground of the local historical landscape. Beginning in 1895, Vanderpoel deployed this network to collect information, documents, and artifacts related to the pupils and teachers of the Litchfield Female Academy. The products of their collective labor – two printed books chronicling the history of the school, a critical mass of materials collected for the local historical society, and a commemorative stone marker in honor of the school – visibly and materially linked the history of the town with the history of the academy. Vanderpoel's extensive correspondence throughout

⁸² Carley, 177.

⁸³ Unnamed traveler, quoted in Joseph A. Conforti, *Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity from the Pilgrims to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 127.

⁸⁴ "Beautiful Litchfield," *Litchfield Enquirer*, May 3, 1882, quoted in Carley, 177.

⁸⁵ Carley, 185-186; "Mary Floyd Tallmadge," *The Ledger*.

the project offers critical insights into the making and circulating of a locally-grounded women's history at the turn of the twentieth century.

While Vanderpoel's project sprouted from individuals and memories grounded in Litchfield, it also branched out in ways that captured some of the largest national developments of the century between the 1790s, when Sarah Pierce founded her Academy, and the 1890s, when Emily Vanderpoel sought to memorialize it. The life experiences of the network of propertied white women who coalesced around the project reflected western migration out of New England, urbanization, the transformation of certain New England towns into summering colonies, and, to a less pronounced degree, the perceived decline of white, Anglo-American political and cultural power. Like the lineal organizations of the same era that Francesca Morgan has examined, the Litchfield Female Academy project brought together white women hoping to consolidate their social and economic standing in the present by upholding a racially-exclusive, genteel version of the nation's past.⁸⁶

Over the course of her adult life, Emily Noyes Vanderpoel displayed a profound commitment to enhancing and sustaining a version of Litchfield's past that emphasized the town's socially and intellectually elite features. Born in 1842 in New York City, she was the daughter of Julia Tallmadge, a woman with deep Litchfield connections who may have attended the Litchfield Female Academy, and William Curtis Noyes, a well-respected lawyer.⁸⁷ In 1857, her father purchased the Tallmadge family's ancestral home in Litchfield as a summer residence, and the site became a veritable home-base for his daughter's later historical work. By the time

⁸⁶ Francesca Morgan, *Women and Patriotism in Jim Crow America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 42-43.

⁸⁷ Julia Tallmadge Noyes is not listed as a student in either *The Ledger* database or, more tellingly, her daughter's compendiums. The database, however, does indicate that both the mother and sister of Julia Tallmadge Noyes, Julia Canfield (Tallmadge) and Elizabeth Tallmadge (White), attended the school; whether or not Julia Tallmadge Noyes herself attended, then, the academy likely held marked significance within the family.

she embarked on the project to compile a history of Sarah Pierce's school, the middle-aged Vanderpoel had become a noted watercolorist and a published author of artistic technique.⁸⁸ In the 1890s, she joined in efforts to reinvigorate the Litchfield Historical Society. She designed a distinctive shield logo for the organization and would serve as the association's curator and vice president at various points over the next four decades.⁸⁹ Concurrent with her early efforts to memorialize Miss Pierce's school, Vanderpoel gained admission to the Litchfield chapter of the DAR, which bore name of her great-grandmother.

These institutional affiliations proved critical as the project unfolded, because there were few formal historical resources on which Vanderpoel could draw as she commenced her work. There was no established archive of papers or artifacts related to the school. Concrete dates and names for those affiliated with it were scant. Existing history texts consistently, but only sparingly, referred to it. The physical footprint of the school, moreover, largely had been erased from the town's landscape. The Academy building, constructed in 1827, had been moved by 1860 and was dismantled further in the 1880s, while the Pierce family home – the initial setting of the school – was torn down in 1895 after standing on North Street for almost one hundred years.⁹⁰ Living graduates of the school who could provide first-hand testimony were diminishing in number with each passing year, as was the clarity of their memories. What she and the collaborators she recruited did bear was the sense that Sarah Pierce, her students, and the descendants who privately had been preserving their memories merited broader, public historical recognition.

⁸⁸ "Emily Vanderpoel, Artist and Author" (obituary), *New York Times*, 21 Feb. 1939.

⁸⁹ "Emily Noyes Vanderpoel," *The Ledger*; Litchfield Historical Society sign, Object No. 1893-01-0, Litchfield Historical Society Collections, <http://collection.litchfieldhistoricalsociety.org/collection/record/0dc6471e-543e-4b46-8514/>.

⁹⁰ J. Deming Perkins to Emily N. Vanderpoel, 3 Mar. 1897, Series 4, Folder 37, LFA Collection; Carley, 172.

Vanderpoel began to gather information by making inquiries within her existing social network in Connecticut and New York City, mainly of older women from long-standing, well-connected Litchfield families. Many of the local women who ended up working on the project also participated actively in the town's DAR chapter.⁹¹ Vanderpoel initially asked broadly about connections to the school, personal memories of students and teachers, and requested information about any material, visual, or textual records that might shed light on the life of the academy and academy-era Litchfield. These friends and neighbors, by turn, reached out to relatives and acquaintances elsewhere or provided Vanderpoel herself with the contact information to do so. For example, one of her earliest correspondents, Elizabeth Prince Child, had attended the Litchfield Female Academy in the 1830s and returned to reside in the town in widowhood; she wrote to the great nieces of Sarah Pierce on Vanderpoel's behalf.⁹² Later on, Elizabeth Barney Buel advertised the project in *American Monthly Magazine*, the DAR's flagship periodical, and invited contributors from the national membership.⁹³ Men and women three or four degrees removed from Vanderpoel, some of whom lived as far away as Chicago and Wisconsin, ended up participating in the project by providing reminiscences, genealogical information, or physical materials. Over the course of about seven years, she exchanged letters about the project with at least forty-four separate people.⁹⁴ These correspondents ranged in age from the twenty-three year-old Mary Brace Alton, who wrote on behalf of her grandmother, to the century-old Mary A. Hunt, who had attended the school herself.⁹⁵

⁹¹ A general sense of the chapter's activities and members may be found in the "Work of the Chapters" column, which appeared regularly in *American Monthly Magazine*.

⁹² One of these nieces was Jane Loring Gray, with whom Vanderpoel already had been corresponding for a year. Elizabeth P. Child to Emily N. Vanderpoel, 7 Oct. 1896, Series 4, Folder 7, LFA Collection.

⁹³ "Editor's Note Book," *American Monthly Magazine* 20 (Jan.-June 1902), 58.

⁹⁴ Although most of the project's contributors replied in a single letter to Vanderpoel or her friends, about one-quarter of her interlocutors wrote multiple times. Series 4, LFA Collection.

⁹⁵ Mary Brace Alton to Emily N. Vanderpoel, 12 June 1902, Series 4, Folder 1, and Mary A. Hunt to Emily N. Vanderpoel, 14 Feb. 1902, Series 4, Folder 24, LFA Collection.

As the project progressed, Vanderpoel made follow-up inquiries, often in person. “Ask Miss Lord about bowling alley,” she scribbled on the back of a page containing genealogical notes on the Lewis sisters, referring to an anecdote already circulating in the printed local histories.⁹⁶ “Ask Miss Wolcott about the episode as to Livingstone,” she wrote on the same page. On another sheet, she recorded the married names of several former pupils provided to her by Mrs. Joseph Jackson.⁹⁷ In these instances, she likely took advantage of the attraction Litchfield retained as a summering destination for many wealthy families, using the ritualized visits and teas of the season as occasions for spreading the news about the project and engaging new information and collaborators.

Collaborators showed investment in the quality and success of the project. Some wrote to offer corrections or additions to information that Vanderpoel had already received: Lucy Perkins remarked that a Mrs. Stimpson “was mistaken about my father and mother [...] but I think she may have meant my grandmother,” while Catherine Copp of Groton, Connecticut, commented that her sister, while speaking with some other ladies in Litchfield the previous summer, had given the wrong dates of their mother’s attendance at the school.⁹⁸ Another contributor volunteered to write to her cousins in Edinburgh and London to procure “more accurate information” about her aunt’s time at the Academy.⁹⁹ Vanderpoel, for her part, was willingly consulted with her correspondents and sought out the slightest of leads.

Many of the contributors brought to the Litchfield project experience writing and publishing historical studies, memoirs, or fiction. Henry Barnard, who had corresponded with Jane Loring Gray about Sarah Pierce in the late 1870s and later exchanged letters with Emily

⁹⁶ Emily N. Vanderpoel, “Notes for “Chronicles of a Pioneer School”,” Series 4, Folder 57, LFA Collection.

⁹⁷ Mrs. Joseph Jackson memo, Series 4, Folder 25, LFA Collection.

⁹⁸ Lucy A. Perkins to Emily N. Vanderpoel, [1897], Series 4, Folder 39, and Catherine B. Copp to Emily N. Vanderpoel, 6 Sept. 1897, Series 4, Folder 9, LFA Collection.

⁹⁹ Kate E. H---- to Emily N. Vanderpoel, 4 Nov. 1896, Series 4, Folder 21, LFA Collection.

Noyes Vanderpoel, was considered the authority on education in the early United States in the late nineteenth century.¹⁰⁰ Project collaborators Jane Loring Gray and Emily Curtis had each prepared memoirs in honor of their deceased husbands, natural scientist Asa Gray and Hartford minister Lucian Curtis, respectively. Jeanie Gould Lincoln of Washington, D.C. used her grandmother's childhood in Litchfield as the inspiration for several fictional romances set in colonial or Revolution-era New England. Others, such as Elizabeth Barney Buel and Lydia B. Newcomb, appeared regularly in the pages of the DAR's monthly periodical.¹⁰¹ Vanderpoel's collaborators, like Anne Longfellow Pierce, reflected the range of historical work in which both men and women might actively engage at the end of the nineteenth century.

Vanderpoel and her correspondents together cultivated and shared historical authority about Sarah Pierce and her school; by the same token, they brought to their work existing assumptions about the relative merits of certain objects, people, and events. Jane Loring Gray's first letter to Vanderpoel captured many of the sentiments that other correspondents would express about the effort to memorialize Miss Pierce's school. She began with humility: she was interested in the work but feared she had little to offer. (The rest of her letter, not to mention the nearly decade-long collaboration that it sparked, would prove otherwise.) Secondly, she listed those items in her possession with the significance most likely to register publicly, even as their relevance to the project at hand remained slight: the family letters written by Sarah Pierce's brother while he served under George Washington during the Revolutionary War. Subsequently, she offered what she characterized as the "little" and "quaint" likenesses, objects, and writings

¹⁰⁰ *American National Biography Online* (Feb. 2000), s.v. "Barnard, Henry"; Jane Loring Gray to Emily N. Vanderpoel, 11 Sept. 1896, Series 4, Folder 19, and Henry Barnard to Emily N. Vanderpoel, 22 July 1897, Series 4, Folder 4, LFA Collection.

¹⁰¹ Jane Loring Gray, ed. *Letters of Asa Gray*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1894); Emily C. Curtis to Emily N. Vanderpoel, 14 Mar. 1902, Series 4, Folder 12, LFA Collection; Jeanie Gould Lincoln, *An Unwilling Maid: Being the History of Certain Episodes during the American Revolution...* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1897); Elizabeth Barney Buel, "The Open Letter," *American Monthly Magazine* 19 (Jul.-Dec. 1901): 203, 303-304; Lydia B. Newcomb, "Genealogical Notes and Queries," *American Monthly Magazine* 23 (Jul.-Dec. 1903): 62, 166, 242, 396, 468.

left by her aunt. Next, she recommended a few acquaintances who might serve as sources of further information. Finally, she expressed feelings of both pleasure and loss at the news of Vanderpoel's work: "I certainly remember you and your mother very well, and most pleasantly associated with those dear Litchfield days, the very precious memories of one's girlhood."¹⁰²

Vanderpoel's solicitation for recollections of Sarah Pierce evoked for Gray personal memories of kinship, home, and place. In spite of the work of the VIS and other colonial revival enthusiasts to recreate Litchfield's past, Gray expressed a sense of irrevocable change and of loss over which she bore no control. "The places one knew," for Gray, ineluctably linked time and space: while the town green may have more closely resembled 1828 than 1878 by the 1890s, the seventy-six-year-old's "dear Litchfield days" remained as remote as her girlhood. Still, to have been invited to remember Litchfield Female Academy furnished a sense of social belonging not unlike that which students developed during their time at school. Vanderpoel's project carved out space for those with an academy connection to collectively preserve those places and associations kept alive "only in memory."

Spreading the *Chronicles* Narrative:

In 1903, almost a decade after Vanderpoel's correspondence about the endeavor commenced, the University Press of Cambridge, Massachusetts, published *Chronicles of a Pioneer School from 1792 to 1833, Being the History of Miss Sarah Pierce and Her Litchfield School*. The book ran to almost five hundred pages and included sixty-five illustrations.¹⁰³ In its

¹⁰² Jane Loring Gray to Emily N. Vanderpoel, 25 Sept. 1897, Series 4, Folder 19, LFA Collection.

¹⁰³ Although this commercial press had historic ties to Harvard University, it was not an academic press in the modern sense. By the time *Chronicles* appeared, the university had set up an independent printing office, and in 1913, it launched Harvard University Press. Emily N. Vanderpoel, comp. *Chronicles of a Pioneer School from 1792*

strictest sense, a chronicle presents history as a thorough and sequential compilation of events or documents, often conveyed without explicit authorial commentary.¹⁰⁴ In keeping with this definition, Vanderpoel reasoned in the opening pages of her book, “Writing of Miss Pierce’s work and influence is needless. The work can speak for itself and for her, who in her quiet, dignified way became such a power among her scholars and the community where she lived and taught.”¹⁰⁵ Many of the priorities at play as Vanderpoel and her circle compiled materials continued to be present in the published outcome of their work.

The chronicle-like format of the book, largely primary sources reproduced for readers, naturalized the presence and purpose of the school within Litchfield’s history. At the same time, narrative tension lies at the heart of *Chronicles of a Pioneer School*. As a tribute and memorial to Sarah Pierce, the book showcased the voices of the educator and her adolescent students. Yet Vanderpoel also leaned heavily on the perspectives of nationally-legible sources that would lend legitimacy to the school and those seeking to celebrate it. As such, *Chronicles of a Pioneer School* at once broadened and narrowed the legacy of Sarah Pierce and Litchfield Female Academy. The work reclaimed the reach and renown the institution had possessed in the early Republic by linking it to notable public figures. In doing so subtly it also neutralized the historical authority of the memories and material remnants of Pierce and her female students.

The selection, sequencing, and framing of the volume’s content particularly captured these competing sources of historical authority. Before Pierce’s work could speak for itself, Vanderpoel included several pages that outlined the educator’s elite lineage. Men of “position

to 1833, being the history of Miss Sarah Pierce and her Litchfield school (Cambridge: University Press, 1903); Max Hall, *Harvard University Press: A History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 8-10.

¹⁰⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 6th ed., s.v. “chronicle.”

¹⁰⁵ Vanderpoel, *Chronicles*, 5.

and influence,” of “daring and adventure,” and of “substance and education” connected Pierce to larger Anglo-American histories stretching from subduing Indians at Plymouth to assisting General Washington at Ticonderoga.¹⁰⁶ Vanderpoel referred to Pierce as “our heroine,” and declared that she had inherited her inspiration for the school and positive character from these venerable ancestors. In the absence, the compiler asserted, of much information on the origins of the school, she next provided a series of “contemporary notices” of Pierce and the academy. Apart from a 1793 letter exchanged between two of Litchfield’s prominent matrons, these excerpts drew from the printed histories and commemorative pieces produced by men far into the antebellum period.¹⁰⁷ At that point, the text moved to two student diaries.

Whether intentionally or not, Vanderpoel replicated and subverted the long-standing phenomenon in Anglo-American texts noted by literary scholar Janice Knight: she contained women’s narratives within the authoritative compass of male ones, even though the resulting text bore her own name, as compiler, on the title page.¹⁰⁸ Such an orientation – of “forefathers at the helm” – was also in keeping with other commemorative efforts spearheaded by women in the late nineteenth century.¹⁰⁹ A lengthy section further into the volume blended tales of local Revolutionary heroics with the reminiscences of three members of the prolific Beecher family – Henry, Charles, and Harriet – and another Ohio transplant, the prominent writer and newspaper editor Edward D. Mansfield. These figures remembered in glowing terms both the beauty of Litchfield’s setting and the vitality of its intellectual life.¹¹⁰ (Vanderpoel omitted Henry

¹⁰⁶ Vanderpoel, *Chronicles*, 1-4.

¹⁰⁷ Vanderpoel, *Chronicles*, 7-9.

¹⁰⁸ Janice Knight, “The Word Made Flesh: Reading Women and the Bible,” in Hackel and Kelly, 182-183.

¹⁰⁹ Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America’s House Museums* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), 161.

¹¹⁰ Vanderpoel, *Chronicles*, 20-43. For a late-nineteenth century take on Edward Mansfield’s historical significance, see William Henry Venable, *Beginnings of Literary Culture in the Ohio Valley, Historical and Biographical Sketches* (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1891), 409-435.

Beecher's sneering remarks about the school). Finally, more extensive genealogy, as well as the writings of Pierce's brothers during their tenure as public servants, concluded the book.¹¹¹

Elsewhere in the volume, Vanderpoel's tone and editorial vision proved more expansive. Because she included most of the materials that she collected through her extensive collaboration, *Chronicles* moved across genres, material forms, and time. In addition to the texts of diaries, school bills, poems, newspaper articles, and reminiscences, the book featured interspersed photographs of embroidery, watercolors, antebellum clothing, portraits, and Litchfield landscapes (figs. 4.10-4.12). Additionally, Vanderpoel reproduced several of the

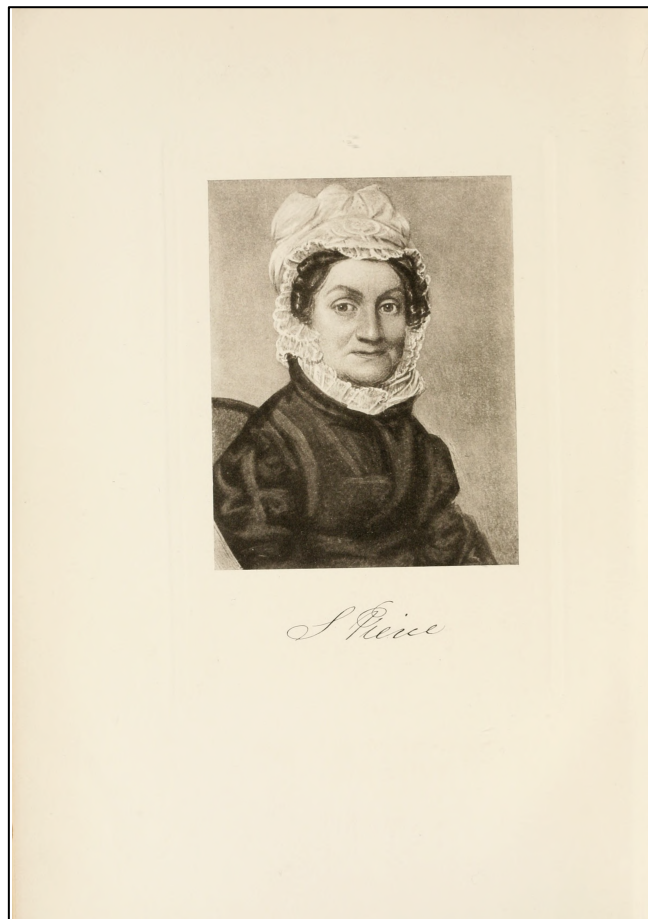


Figure 4.10. Portrait of Sarah Pierce, depicted in frontispiece of *Chronicles of a Pioneer School* (1903), HathiTrust

¹¹¹ Vanderpoel, *Chronicles*, 339-393, 448-450.

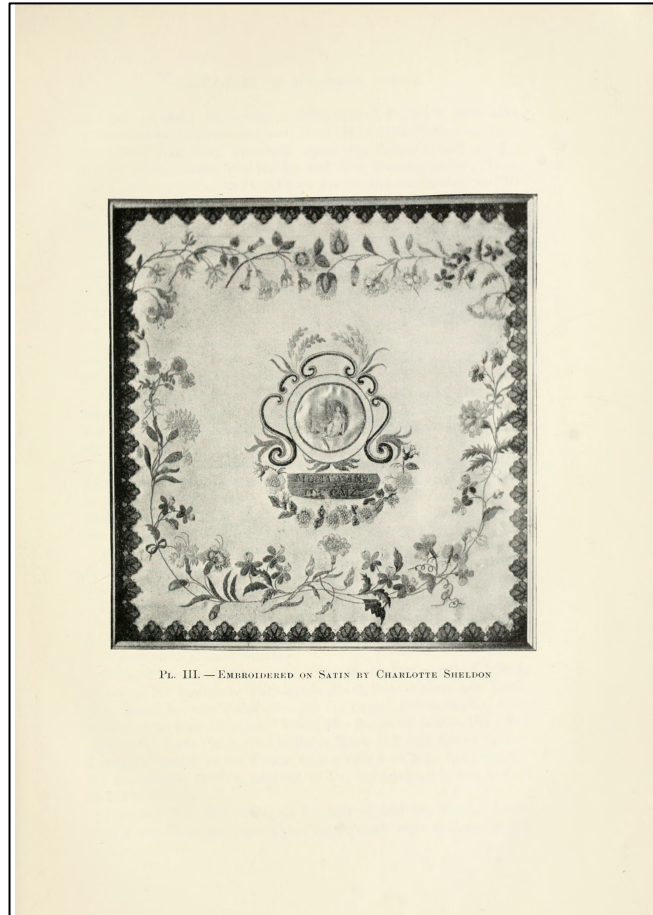


Figure 4.11. Charlotte Sheldon’s embroidery, depicted in *Chronicles of a Pioneer School* (1903), *HathiTrust*, 10

letters she had received from her correspondents, making accessible to readers the participatory process by which the book was created.¹¹² This multi-vocal, chronologically-flexible narrative bound town with school, those remembered with those remembering, and objects produced with objects preserved. “The society in Litchfield was such as to be a constant education,” Vanderpoel argued. Its influence on “the receptive mind of Miss Pierce,” as much as her own talents, paved the way for the school’s curriculum and methods to evolve as they did.¹¹³ By the same token, she suggested that the “air of old established dignity” possessed by Litchfield in her

¹¹² Vanderpoel, *Chronicles*, 286-299.

¹¹³ Vanderpoel, *Chronicles*, 6.

own day derived from the tone struck by Pierce and the town's other educators nearly a century before.¹¹⁴

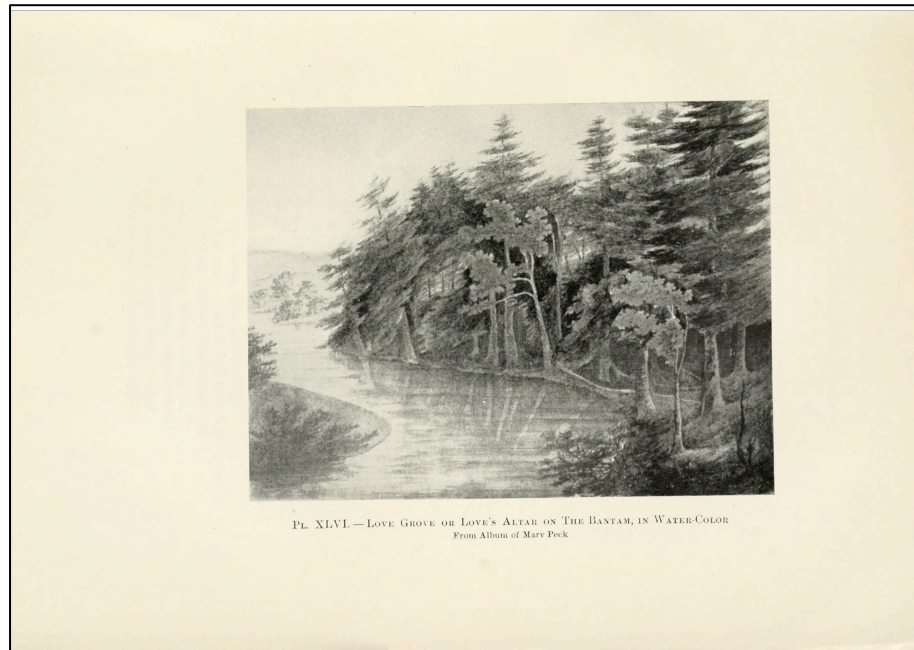


Figure 4.12. Watercolor from Mary Peck's album, depicted in *Chronicles of a Pioneer School* (1903), *HathiTrust*, 248

Reviews of *Chronicles of a Pioneer School* appeared in national newspapers and well-established historical periodicals. These pieces accentuated the volume's dual rhetoric of the school's national reputation and feminine character. Reviewers' treatment of the work and those who produced it, moreover, highlighted the tenuous position of female practitioners of history at the turn of the century. In some venues, Vanderpoel and her collaborators earned esteem as the creators of serious, intellectual work, while in others, they received praise, but were characterized as casual hunters of attic treasures.

The article that appeared in the *New York Times* in early 1904 recapitulated the thesis that Vanderpoel's volume set out: that Litchfield "has in the past two celebrated schools," one "by no

¹¹⁴ Vanderpoel, *Chronicles*, 20.

means the lesser in importance” than the other. The writer balanced a recognition of the thorough work involved in the production of the volume with a sense of wonder about the curious “topics of interest” contained in it. For this critic, the care taken to so meticulously preserve the memory of the school signified the “particular merit” Sarah Pierce’s endeavor had possessed. Here, the writer signaled, perhaps unintentionally, a cardinal truth about history and memory: that the very act of preservation enhances the significance of a particular moment or place in the past. The writer also plucked out and framed details from the book, such as the involvement in the project of Jane Loring Gray, “the wife of our greatest scientist,” and an anecdote that Sarah Pierce’s sister recounted about meeting Martha Washington, in a way that presented the subject of the volume in nationally-legible terms.¹¹⁵

The anonymous review that appeared in the *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* praised the volume, but in with feminized terms and a condescending tone. “The atmosphere of lavender, soft rustlings of muslin and little sober footfalls sound through these pages,” the piece began. The students remembered in the text became “gentle ghosts,” who narrate “mostly in capitals” the former times of the school: its rules, “elevated little dramatic efforts,” journal-keeping, and “demure festivities earned by good conduct.” Any comparable standing with the Litchfield Law School, or general intellectual engagement was lost. Ultimately, the article claimed, the “delightful volume” served best as a prompt for wistful memory: the reviewer concluded by “wishing one’s great-grandmother had [...] gone to Miss Pierce’s school, so that one might imagine her doing all the interesting things recorded here.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ “A Pioneer School,” review of *Chronicles of a Pioneer School*, by Emily Noyes Vanderpoel, *New York Times*, Jan. 9, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹¹⁶ Unsigned review of *Chronicles of a Pioneer School*, by Emily Noyes Vanderpoel, *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record (NYGBR)* 35, no. 2 (Apr. 1904), 151, APS.

The thorough research Vanderpoel's network undertook to build the volume likewise was sidelined. The reviewer speculated, "There must have been a great searching of old attics of rainy days."¹¹⁷ By contrast, another review in the same edition of the periodical referred to a publication related to the Missouri branch of the Sons of the Revolution, a book half as long as *Chronicles*, as an "imposing volume" with visual elements of "permanent interest." Another review, of the newest edition of the pamphlet series compiled by the Historical Society of Newburgh, New York, applauded the important "public service" of preserving and circulating local vital records.¹¹⁸ Whatever public service Vanderpoel and her compatriots' efforts might have offered in preserving the materials and memories of Miss Pierce's school, they were not marked here. Instead, their work came off as a casual, if time-consuming affair that provided imaginative, individual pleasure.

The editors of the *New England Genealogical and Historical Register* also chose to profile the history, in a matter-of-fact review that remarked on the "matters of [...] import" in the book that were "thoroughly described" and accompanied by a "good index." This reviewer, too, argued that the hallmark of the book was the way the words and images created "What may be called a photographic likeness of the times with which it deals."¹¹⁹ In other words, *Chronicles* created the impression among readers of a vaguely-old Litchfield reanimated 'as it really was,' even though reminiscences and historical narratives made up almost as much of the text as did the primary source documents that Vanderpoel had gathered. This imagined image, moreover, seamlessly layered the school and the town. Parts of Litchfield's history that preceded or

¹¹⁷ Unsigned review of *Chronicles*, *NYGBR*, 151.

¹¹⁸ Unsigned reviews, *NYGBR* 35, no. 2 (Apr. 1904), 148-149, APS.

¹¹⁹ Unsigned review of *Chronicles of a Pioneer School*, by Emily Noyes Vanderpoel, *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 58 (Apr. 1904), 210-211, APS.

followed the academy's four-decade golden age were effaced, as were the social circles of that period that did not revolve around the academy and law school.

Locally, the publication of *Chronicles of a Pioneer School* spurred more historical work. Those in Vanderpoel's social circle, many of whom had expressed interest in purchasing the book while it was still in production, greeted its publication with excitement and praise. Some of this enthusiasm also seems to have spurred an initial gathering of additional information, documents, and stories that Vanderpoel would publish as a sequel volume two decades later. Shortly after viewing the "interesting relics" in the Litchfield Historical Society's exhibits with Vanderpoel in 1907, Annie M. Clephane wrote from New Hampshire and sent pictures of her mother, a Litchfield Female Academy alumna, and the piece of embroidery she had made during her schooling there.¹²⁰ Fellow Litchfield historians Alice Bulkeley and Alain C. White, who published a narrative of the town's past in 1907 and 1920, respectively, remarked on the influence of Vanderpoel's work on their own and drew extensively from the documents and information she had gathered.¹²¹ A second volume on Litchfield Female Academy by Vanderpoel, *More Chronicles of a Pioneer School*, came out in 1927.¹²²

The two-volume history influenced scholars working in the academy as well. Thomas Woody, author of the study that would define the history of female education in the United States until the rise of women's history in the 1980s, drew on the *Chronicles* for his 1929 publication, while Conrad Logan, a doctoral student in Virginia, wrote directly to Vanderpoel to solicit her expertise on John P. Brace for an academic article he was preparing on American

¹²⁰ Annie M. Clephane to Emily N. Vanderpoel, 12 Sept. 1907, Series 4, Folder 8, LFA Collection.

¹²¹ Alice Bulkeley, *Historic Litchfield, 1721-1907: Being a Short Account of the Old Houses of Litchfield*, 2nd ed. (Hartford: Hartford Press, 1907); Alain C. White, *The History of the Town of Litchfield, Connecticut, 1720-1920* (Litchfield, CT: Enquirer Print, 1920).

¹²² The second volume was published in a run of 750 copies, each of which was hand-numbered: The University of Michigan holds copy 131, while Vanderpoel presented her friend James P. Catlin with copy 541 in 1934. I have not discovered circulation figures for the original publication. Vanderpoel, *More Chronicles of a Pioneer School*; James P. Catlin to Emily N. Vanderpoel, 12 Sept. 1934, Series 4, Folder 64, LFA Collection.

composition writing.¹²³ Despite what some reviewers had disparagingly suggested about the tone of *Chronicles*, these scholars were more than happy to capitalize on the access the work provided to Litchfield Female Academy's otherwise-uncirculated archive.

The *Chronicles* project had called that archive into being (fig. 4.13). As she recomposed and fostered relationships among the far-flung Litchfield Female Academy network, Emily Noyes Vanderpoel, who, after all, was already embedded in the operations of the Litchfield Historical Society, likewise prepared the channels by which many of the objects and documents



Figure 4.13. Emily Noyes Vanderpoel, sketch of Litchfield Female Academy building, Litchfield Historical Society

showcased in her book came into the society's possession. Mary Brace Skinner, a daughter of John Brace and academy graduate, sent her well-worn copies of the *Universal History* and a

¹²³ Thomas Woody, *A History of Women's Education in the United States* (New York: The Science Press, 1929), 1: 340; Conrad Logan to Emily N. Vanderpoel, 1932, Series 4, Folder 30, LFA Collection; Conrad Logan, "American Composition Teaching before 1850," *English Journal* 23, no. 6 (June 1934): 486-496.

photograph of her father. Emily Butler sent first a photograph and extensive description of her mother's chart of the history of England, and eventually donated the work itself. And Jane Loring Gray, among the closest of Vanderpoel's collaborators, sent manuscript plays, diplomas, family papers, and artifacts.¹²⁴

When feminist scholars sought to bring renewed attention to the history of women's education and intellectual life in the 1970s and 80s, Vanderpoel's published book provided ready, if filtered, access to Sarah Pierce and her students; as the field of women's history has evolved in the intervening decades, the archive of Litchfield Female Academy has given scholars the means to approach many of those documents and objects in new ways: to contextualize materials outside of the organizational structure of the book, to consider their physical components, and to trace their trajectories from family heirlooms to institutionally-held artifacts.

Conclusion:

One such artifact was "Grandmother's Tales." In 1895, in the very first letter Jane Loring Gray sent to Emily Noyes Vanderpoel, she concluded by mentioning "some quaint old writings for a fancy fair in 1833."¹²⁵ She offered them as among the papers and artifacts in her possession that might be of service to the project, though they came at the very end of the list. Over six years later, and well into their close collaboration on the *Chronicles* project, Gray wrote to follow up on various matters and to send Vanderpoel some materials, a few to "present [...] to

¹²⁴ According to Elizabeth R. Child, Gray kept a "Litchfield room" of family papers and furniture at her home in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Mary B. Skinner to Emily Noyes Vanderpoel, 4 May 1897, Series 4, Folder 50, Emily Butler to Emily Noyes Vanderpoel, n.d., Series 4, Folder 6, and Jane L. Gray to Emily Noyes Vanderpoel, 16 Jan. 1897, 8 Mar. 1898, 15 Dec. 1901, Series 4, Folder 19, LFA Collection; Elizabeth R. Child to Emily Noyes Vanderpoel, 7 Oct. 1896, Series 4, Folder 7, LFA Collection.

¹²⁵ Jane Loring Gray to Emily N. Vanderpoel, 25 Sept. 1897. Series 4, Folder 19, LFA Collection.

the Historical Society,” and others that she would “like returned.” In the postscript came an afterthought:

In 1833 I remember a Fair Sale for some object – And Aunt Pierce wrote some reminiscences which were put in little stamped leather covers – I have one if you care for it – I remember her repeating the verses, but I have forgotten who the people were that composed them – ¹²⁶

The “quaint old writings for a fancy fair in 1833” that Gray had mentioned six years before were “Grandmother’s Tales.”

Gray’s memory, though vague, gave “Grandmother’s Tales” a context that the volume itself did not bear. Sarah Pierce had gathered the reminiscences to be shared – and even sold – publicly, and she also had repeated the stories’ verses orally at various points in Gray’s childhood. From the postscript, it also seems likely that Pierce had prepared more than one copy of “Grandmother’s Tales,” suggesting that she intended an audience broader than her immediate circle to imagine the domestic and literary scenes she recorded. Later readers, perhaps Gray or another bearer of the album, recoded the book as a family history with the annotations that attributed the work to Pierce and gave some of her genealogy. Finally, that the volume came to Gray’s mind in both letters as an afterthought, and with no mention in between, suggests she registered “Grandmother’s Tales” as separate from the larger body of her aunt’s work.

Vanderpoel, who had been alerted to the existence of “Grandmother’s Tales” by Gray twice, did not include any mention of the piece in *Chronicles of a Pioneer School*, nor in the volume’s follow-up. Her reasons for overlooking the piece may have been as simple as its date of publication, after Pierce had retired, or its content, which did not directly deal with the school. Still, the two volumes of *Chronicles* featured Pierce family letters, some of which were neither written by nor addressed to Sarah, and which dated from before the school’s founding to after

¹²⁶ Jane Loring Gray to Emily N. Vanderpoel, 27 Feb. 1902, Series 4, Folder 20, LFA Collection.

her work concluded there.¹²⁷ Vanderpoel's editorial omission, like the interim between Gray's mentions of the volume, indicates the degree to which "Grandmother's Tales" already read as superficial to Sarah Pierce's legacy at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The "problem of accomplishment" influenced women's intellectual life in the early Republic but also the ways in which that intellectual life would be remembered and commemorated. If educators in the new nation sought to cultivate in their female students a delicate balance of serious and decorative learning, those in Emily Noyes Vanderpoel's cohort seeking to enshrine their legacy in the late nineteenth century likewise sought to counter the weight of memories – the localized, deeply-personal recollections of Litchfield Female Academy students – with that of history – those predominantly-male figures who set Sarah Pierce and her school into a larger, national story. Even with this balance, some of the reviews of *Chronicles* still dismissed Vanderpoel's historical work as a mere flight into fanciful memory.

By disowning, or at least diminishing, the ornamental and the local, historians from Vanderpoel to more recent scholars have muted those practices and artifacts that educated women historically used to stake authority on past and place. By excising memories like those kept within "Grandmother's Tales" from these histories, they have constrained where, when, and how women's intellectual life is thought to have occurred. Only in drawing these objects of memory back into the fold of historical study can scholars today come to terms with the variety of ways Pierce and her students used engagement with the past to situate themselves as educated women in their present moment.

¹²⁷ A section of Sarah Pierce's letters dating from 1802 to 1842 appeared in the main body of the text, while the first two appendices of the volume featured, respectively, the letters of her brother John, a colonel in the Revolutionary war, and her half-brother Timothy, a doctor who died outside Charleston, South Carolina, in 1800. Vanderpoel, *Chronicles*, 311-320, 339-393.

Chapter 5

Original Antiquarians: Women and Early National Historical Institutions

On July 17, 1818, nineteen-year-old Eliza Bridgham visited the American Antiquarian Society (AAS) in Worcester, Massachusetts, with her father Samuel. The father-daughter pair had departed their home in Providence, Rhode Island the day before to commence a three-week trip through western New England and the Hudson River Valley's resort towns. Forty-two miles from Providence, Worcester proved a convenient stopover after the first day's travel. The next morning, after walking about to view the town, Eliza joined her father and his "particular friend" Isaiah Thomas in "visiting the collection of Antiquities," before dining with the Thomas family for the midday meal and setting off in the late afternoon for their next destination.¹

"We were delighted," recounted Eliza in the travel journal she was keeping in the form of a letter to her sister Abigail. "The greatest curiosities in the Literary department, I thought, was a Bible printed 14 years, after the art of printing was invented, at Venice; the Bible the Archbishop Cranmer formerly owned, and the first newspaper, and first book, ever printed in America." She included details about the dates and place of publication for these latter two pieces before commenting, not unlike a reader of today, on their curious spelling and punctuation. Next, they had viewed "a great variety of other ancient things," including parts of the ruins of Herculaneum

¹ Eliza Bridgham (Patten) diary, 16-17 July 1818, Misc. Manuscripts, 9001-B, Rhode Island Historical Society (hereafter RIHS).

and Pompeii, a piece of a wine jug that had belonged to Cicero, “the chair Rev. Richard Mathews first sat in,” and an assortment of Native American artifacts (fig. 5.1).²

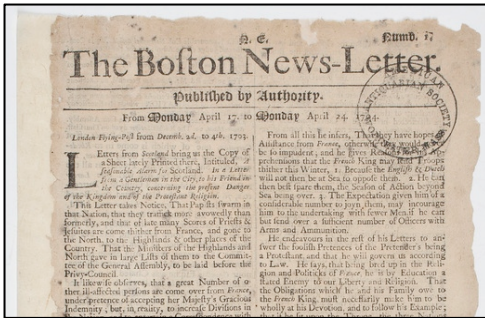
Much of what Eliza Bridgham experienced and recorded that day in 1818 is in keeping with the scant literature that exists on early historical societies in the United States. The society’s founder, Isaiah Thomas, loomed large as gatekeeper and guide; the collection included both textual and material objects; a number of the pieces mattered because of their status as either “firsts” or their proximity to “notable” figures and events – Cicero, the Mather family, and the invention of the printing press, while other elements of the collection – the objects from European excavation sites and the Native American artifacts – represented relics of seemingly-lost civilizations. “Antiquarian” encompassed text in various forms, fragmentary and intact objects, broad geographies, and lengthy chronologies.³

Other aspects of her testimony, first and foremost her gender as a viewer and observer within the Antiquarian Society, highlight how the unexamined politics of who interacted with these institutions, on what terms, and with what consequence. To the extent that scholars and institutions themselves have attended to the pre-1865 development of historical societies and historical practitioners, they have emphasized male founders, benefactors, and proto-scholars.⁴ With the exception of the house museum movement, which Patricia West persuasively has

² Some of the details Bridgham recorded were slightly inaccurate: the chair to which she referred was from the Mather family, and the date of publication for the *Bay Psalmbook* was 1640, not the 1740 she gave. These mistakes do not detract from the fact of Bridgham’s visit to the society nor her engagement with the materials she encountered there. Eliza Bridgham diary, 17 July 1818, Misc. Manuscripts.

³ H.G. Jones, ed., *Historical Consciousness in the Early Republic: The Origins of State Historical Societies, Museums, and Collections, 1791-1861* (Chapel Hill: North Caroliniana Society, Inc., 1995); Seth C. Bruggeman, *Here, George Washington Was Born: Memory, Material Culture, and the Public History of a National Monument* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 26-31; Steven Conn, *History’s Shadow: Native Americans and Historical Consciousness in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 116-153; Jean O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 85-87.

⁴ Louis Leonard Tucker, *Clio’s Consort: Jeremy Belknap and the Founding of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (Boston: Published for the Society, 1990); Joel J. Orosz, *Curators and Culture: The Museum Movement in America,*



Clockwise from top right: *Biblia Sacra*, AAS; Piece of wine jar from Cicero's cellar, Peabody; Woven burden strap with moosehair embroidery, Peabody; *Boston News-Letter*, AAS; Mather high chair, AAS.

Figure 5.1. Array of printed and material objects viewed by Eliza Bridgham, 1818, American Antiquarian Society and Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University

1740-1870 (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1990); Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in America Culture* (New York: Verso, 1991), 63, 71-78.

argued sparked from the organizational efforts of women in the 1850s and remained a predominantly-female endeavor until the 1940s, women are notable for their absence.⁵ Barriers to women's membership, rather than possibilities for their participation, are what scholars note.

And yet, Eliza Bridgham's diary entry is one of the earliest eyewitness accounts of the American Antiquarian Society, an institution that had been founded just a few years earlier in 1812 and which continues to flourish as a flagship research institution for scholars of colonial British America, the early United States, and the history of the book. Moreover, two of the specific pieces she mentioned – the 1476 *Biblia Sacra* printed at Venice and the highchair various members of the illustrious Mather family had “first sat in” – had found their way to the society's collections thanks to the investment of another woman, Hannah Mather Crocker, in the nascent group's efforts.⁶ To account in full for Eliza Bridgham's diary entry – of her as a young female visitor encountering texts and objects donated by one woman and then writing about them to another – is to resituate how scholars talk about the early history of collecting and historical societies in the United States in general, and of the American Antiquarian Society specifically.

Because, indeed, Bridgham's account is not singular in what it suggests about the active participation of white women in the work of gathering, preserving, observing, and interpreting historical artifacts in the first decades of AAS's existence. The opening pages of both the first book used to record donations, begun in 1813, and the first volume to record visitors' names, commenced in April 1832, directly indicate women's involvement with the institution.⁷ In other words, one does not have to go digging far to find these previously-overlooked participants:

⁵ Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's Historic House Museums* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 1995).

⁶ Isaiah Thomas provenance note for *Biblia Sacra* (1476), quoted in caption text of Philip F. Gura, *The American Antiquarian Society, 1812-2012: A Bicentennial History* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 2012), 5; Hannah Mather Crocker donation, Oct. 14, 1815, in “Donations to the American Antiquarian Society with the Names of its Benefactors,” 1813-1829, Folio vol. 17.1, American Antiquarian Society Records, American Antiquarian Society (hereafter Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records, and AAS).

⁷ Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records; Register of visitors, 1832-1852, Folio vol. 23.1, AAS Records.

they are front and center, though small in number, in the heart of the institutional record. How, then, could their presence have been missed? And what dynamics of how historical societies emerged in the early United States have scholars and institutions lost sight of as a result?

The bulk of the work presented here revisits two early chapters in AAS's history, which, quite literally, have been characterized as the era of founder Isaiah Thomas (1812-1831) and the era of his successor in vision Christopher Columbus Baldwin (1831-1835).⁸ Reading across printed and manuscript institutional records, as well as both official and private papers Thomas and Baldwin produced, I resituate the early development and institutional ripening of the AAS in light of the broad swath of female participants caught up in its work. Relatedly, I examine the physical spaces in which the early institution operated, emphasizing in particular the central role of domestic structures and household laborers. Such a narrative focus recenters the activities, motivations, and contributions of non-members within AAS's evolution.⁹ Those without institutional status, I argue, still managed to shape institutional culture. In addition to providing descriptive data about donors and donations for each of these epochs, I highlight how women framed their contributions within the larger work of what Hannah Mather Crocker called "antiquarian researches." Crocker in particular, whose life trajectory ran nearly parallel to Isaiah Thomas's and whose historical interests materialized in diverse forms, offers a compelling counterpoint to the existing founders' narrative.

⁸ The abbreviated titles of the first two chapters of Philip Gura's recent bicentennial history of the AAS are "Isaiah Thomas and the Founding of the Society" and "Baldwin Creates a State of Prosperity."

⁹ This framing builds from that of scholars who have traced women's active participation, despite their formal exclusion from the franchise, in the political culture of the early United States. Feminist scholars have made this literature plentiful, but several key touchstones to my thinking are: Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville: UVA Press, 2000); Susan Branson, *These Fiery Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Alisse Portnoy, *Their Right to Speak: Women's Activism in the Indian and Slave Debates* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: Omohundro/UNC Press, 2006); Martha Jones, *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Life, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2007); Amrita Chakrabarty Myers, *Forging Freedom: Black Women and the Pursuit of Liberty in Antebellum Charleston* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2011).

The chapter also demonstrates how this vibrant participation by women and other non-members could be effaced over time. One critical transformation was the erosion of material objects from AAS's collections in the late-nineteenth century. As the institution moved to position itself more squarely as a research library aligned to the emerging academic centers of historical knowledge, its leaders decided to transfer long-standing elements of the collection, particularly the "Cabinet" of material artifacts, to other institutions. Material objects were not the only type of artifact women had donated to the AAS in the early nineteenth century, but these items comprised a higher proportion of women's contributions than they did among men. Eliminating the Cabinet, moreover, diminished that part of the society most oriented towards non-scholarly, non-member visitors. The extraction of material objects from the collections, in other words, marked a concomitant extraction of women out of the institution's history.

Coffeehouse and Mansion-house: AAS's Early Years

The social connotations carried by each of the spaces in which AAS initially operated reveal the limitations of depicting AAS either as a primarily-individual venture – Isaiah Thomas's alone – or as a predominantly masculine one. The society's first meeting took place at the Exchange Coffeehouse in Boston, as would subsequent meetings in the city until 1818.¹⁰ To be sure, in the context of eighteenth-century British America and the early United States,

¹⁰ Fire destroyed the Exchange Coffee House in 1818, but when it was rebuilt in the early 1820s, AAS resumed holding their meetings there, and did so until 1836. Benjamin Thomas Hill, ed., *The Diary of Isaiah Thomas, 1805-1828, in Two Volumes*, in *Transactions and Collections of the American Antiquarian Society*, 9-10 (Worcester: AAS, 1909), 1: 169, 1: 406n.

I have examined three volumes of the original diary, which span the first ten years of the antiquarian society's operations. I cite Hill's printed edition here for ease of reference, as well as for coverage of those years I have not yet been able to consult in person. Isaiah Thomas diary, 1812-1822, Mss. Octavo vols. 7-9, Isaiah Thomas Papers, 1748-1874, AAS.

coffeehouses functioned as distinctly masculine sites of socializing.¹¹ Much of the formal work of the society, from electing officers and inducting members to appointing committees and amending rules, took place there, with the gendered exclusions of the space mirroring the gendered exclusions of the polity (fig. 5.2).¹²



Figure 5.2. Engraving of Boston Exchange Coffee House, 1832, American Antiquarian Society

Competing with the coffeehouse, however, was Isaiah Thomas's own home. Until the fall of 1821, the society's collections, literary and material, remained housed under Thomas's roof, an imposing two-and-a-half-story residence on Worcester's main street (fig. 5.3). When Worcester's AAS members, particularly those in elected positions, gathered during these years, they tended to do so at the Thomas residence.¹³ The chamber which housed Thomas's library,

¹¹ David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America*, (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by UNC Press, 1997), 20, 59-62.

¹² See, for example, *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, 1:250, 1:259.

¹³ *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, 1:277, 1: 395, 2:1, 2:81, 2:216.



Figure 5.3. Isaiah Thomas residence, late nineteenth century, American Antiquarian Society

and later the collections of the AAS, was a narrow room that ran alongside the depth of the right side of the house, directly adjacent to the best parlor and the dining room.¹⁴ As chapter three of this project demonstrated, domestic space in the early national period rarely functioned as a uniformly private or decidedly feminine realm; the collection's presence in Thomas's home, in and of itself, was not a simple feminine counterweight to the masculine coffeehouse. But its location does demand that we consider how AAS's operations within that space drew from, interacted with, or strained those of his wider household.

The centrality of Thomas's residence to the venture calls to mind a different set of social practices, including the heterosocial rituals enacted at the tea table and in the salon. If the topic of choice in the coffeehouse tended to be politics or trade – the Exchange Coffee House supplied a ready supply of both American and foreign newspapers¹⁵ – that of the tea table revolved around

¹⁴ Benjamin Thomas Hill, introduction to *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, 1: xii-xiii.

¹⁵ *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, 1:460n.

polite literature and general good taste, while the salon blended the two. In each discursive space, participants displayed the affective qualities of sensibility, wit, and overall civility.¹⁶ In both spatial and ideological terms, such an arrangement put the women of Thomas's family and social circle in close proximity to the society's labors from the start.

No wonder, then, that there is a close correlation between those women who appear as donors in the society's records – which were kept by Thomas himself for most of this period – and those who appear as social acquaintances and visitors in his diary. Of the twenty-five women who made donations before Thomas's death in 1830, sixteen also had personal connections to him and appeared in his diary. Thomas's daughter, two of his wives, a sister-in-law, and granddaughter all contributed during his lifetime, as did other women to whom they were connected.¹⁷ Others, including the Weld and Waldo sisters, were part of Thomas's social circle but also had male relatives who were themselves early members of the institution.¹⁸

Reading Thomas's diary and the AAS donation book in concert reveals that the entry of objects into the society's collections often corresponded to social visits. For example, in the year and a half preceding Thomas's acquisition of the Mather family library from Hannah Mather Crocker in late 1814, he noted having called upon her several times in Boston.¹⁹ Another donation from her, in September 1820, coincided with her son having visited Thomas in

¹⁶ Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters*, 99-140; xxvii.

¹⁷ Mary Anne Simmons, Isaiah Thomas's daughter, made a donation Oct. 14, 1829; his second wife Mary Fowle Thomas did so in May 1814; his third wife Rebecca Armstrong Thomas contributed before and after their marriage in June and November 1819; his sister-in-law Mary Turing Thomas gave three times between 1815 and 1826; and granddaughter Frances Church Thomas (Crocker) donated in 1822. I have identified these women primarily using genealogical information included by the editor of *The Diary of Isaiah Thomas*. Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records.

¹⁸ Mary Weld (Thomas), Eliza Weld (Andrews), and Hannah Weld were connected to Thomas by marriage and business partnerships. Ebenezer Turrell Andrews, Eliza's husband, was a founding member of AAS. AAS member Daniel Waldo Jr. (1763-1845) lived with his three unmarried sisters, Elizabeth, Sarah, and Rebecca in Worcester. *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, 1:14-15, 1:121n.

¹⁹ Hannah Mather Crocker donations, Dec. 1814, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records; *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, 1:188, 1:211, 1:253.

Worcester.²⁰ Crocker's final contribution to the society's collections, in 1828, came after a long hiatus and just a year before her death at the age of seventy-seven. As July rolled into August that year, Thomas's "good and aged friend" spent a few days with his family in Worcester before returning by stage to Boston. Ten days later, Thomas recorded her gift of *The Life of John Buncke, Esq.*, a four-volume Unitarian work printed in London in 1770, in the AAS donation book.²¹

These early women donors by and large were female counterparts to the gentleman collector of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century: exemplars of the new American Republic by means of their education, polite demeanor, and social standing.²² A memo that accompanied one of the first gifts to the society reveals how these features of personal character predicated women's access to the institution. According to the donation book, Mrs. Elizabeth Bliss of Rhode Island contributed in March, 1813, two volumes of almanacs dating from the 1670s to the 1750s. By contrast, the memo, which Isaiah Thomas seems initially to have tucked into one of the volumes, focused on Bliss's line of descent. She was "amiable and pious," and connected to important male figures in Rhode Island's colonial and Revolution-era history who were "distinguished for their Virtue, Patriotism, & Talents."²³ Thomas's memo made clear that what authorized a woman's access to the AAS, ineligible as she was for membership herself, was her connection to "illustrious men" as well as her own unimpeachable character.

²⁰ Hannah Mather Crocker donation, Sept. 8, 1820, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records; *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, 2:65.

²¹ Crocker likewise had spent time with Thomas in August 1825, after a family visit brought her to nearby Uxbridge. Though not reflected in the official donor record, Crocker composed a hand-written biography of Sarah Knight around that time, which Isaiah Thomas pasted into the end papers of the volume that entered the AAS collection in late October that year. *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, 2:211 "good and aged friend," 2:303-304; Hannah Mather Crocker donation, Aug. 12, 1828, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records.

²² *Historical Consciousness in the Early Republic*, 29; Marjorie Garber, *Academic Instincts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 12-13.

²³ [Memorandum on Elizabeth Bliss donation, March, 1813], Box 1, Folder 1, AAS Documents and Correspondence, AAS Records.

Together, the donation book entry and memoranda regarding Bliss and her gift give us a profile of a typical woman donor, but the distinctiveness of the information each record contains also indicates the methodological necessity of reading across AAS's institutional records, as well as what we might call the "extra-institutional" records of Isaiah Thomas and Christopher Columbus Baldwin, to develop a full picture of how women and other non-members participated.²⁴ Unlike a membership roll, there is no centralized place to locate women within the institutional record. The donation book is a good place to start, but as Bliss's example makes clear, its brief entries leave much about the identities and social connections of women to AAS unclear. It is the additional memo that accompanied her gift, specifically its extended family tree, that provides the critical information, specifically a birth name, for identifying Bliss herself.²⁵ This broader reading of sources, however, illuminates not only details about women at AAS that we would not have otherwise, but also new information about how the institution functioned. If the donation book provides a record of who donated what, this more extensive cross-reading of sources reveals *how* donations came into the collection and were put to use there.

For one thing, women facilitated the participation of men in the institution's ventures. John Cranch, a British painter residing in Bath, England, wrote to the society in 1818 to accept their offer of membership. While it was members of the society who had extended the official invitation for Cranch to join, it was the Englishman's niece, Thomasine Bond Minot (Mrs. Minott in the records) of Boston, who had "most obligingly sent me a pamphlet, contain^g the

²⁴ Though technically held in their own named collections, the papers of both Thomas and Baldwin are held at AAS and have been reprinted as part of the society's publications series. In other words, these "private" papers have been woven into the institutional archive and its history. I see this archival co-mingling of "private" and "institutional" records as a further indication of the fluidity that existed between the social lives of the institution's early operatives – male and female – and the life of the institution itself.

²⁵ On the difficulties of tracing female birth names and lines of descent, see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Creating Lineages," in D. Brenton Simons and Peter Benes, eds. *The Art of Family: Genealogical Artifacts in New England* (Boston: New England Historical Genealogical Society, 2002), 5-11.

Society's original prospectus, with the initiatory papers, and a valuable introductory discourse."²⁶ Thus when Cranch replied with his own thoughts on the importance of "antiquarial research" and the value of such a society, he was responding to materials that his niece had knowledge of, had procured, and had deemed useful to provide to him as a prospective member. Meetings in the coffeehouse and membership may have remained the province of men, but AAS's early efforts to extend their public presence through the medium of print – a tactic that the Massachusetts Historical Society had used as early as the 1790s – opened their activities to a broad reading public in which educated women were actively engaged.²⁷ Moreover, Cranch acknowledged both his admiration of the society's pursuits as "a science [...] independent of those party interests and prejudices which perplex and embroil the world," and his personal pleasure in being reminded, via the act of his membership, "of many excellent persons" – he enumerated them, men and women in equal number – "whose wisdom and urbanity taught me, even from my earliest memory, to revere America."²⁸ For Cranch, antiquarianism was a pursuit of both intellect and sentiment, of broad and personal histories.

Even more intriguingly, several women who were employed as housekeepers by Isaiah Thomas made donations. Much has been made of Thomas's long career as a prolific printer, and

²⁶ John Cranch to Rejoice Newton, Esq. Oct. 23, 1818, Box 1, Folder, AAS Documents and Correspondence, AAS Records. Thomasine Bond (1778?-1864) was the daughter of John Cranch's sister Hannah, and William Bond. The Bond family emigrated from Devon, England, to what is now Portland, Maine, in the 1780s, before settling in greater Boston, where William Bond engaged in a clock-making business. He became a member of the AAS in 1816, and made one donation that year and another in 1821. Thomasine married Captain John Minot in 1803. Her brother William Cranch Bond (1789-1859) became a well-known astronomer and the first director of the Harvard College Observatory; in a further indication of the commitment to historical work she had displayed in forwarding the AAS publications to her uncle, she seems to have contributed to the biographical sketches published shortly after her brother's death. See *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 25.4 (Oct. 1871), 392, and "Sketch of William Cranch Bond," *Popular Science Monthly* 47 (July 1895), 400, 402.

²⁷ *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. 1, 1791-1835* (Boston: Published by the Society, 1879), 250n; Gura, *Bicentennial History*, xi, 40-42.

²⁸ John Cranch to Rejoice Newton, Esq., Oct. 23, 1818, Box 1, Folder 29, AAS Records. According to a memo on the letter, Cranch's epistle, along with the gift of a publication on antiquarian activities in his hometown of Bath, England, did not reach AAS until June 1821. Cranch had died in England in January of that year. See mss. note on letter, John Cranch donation, July 3, 1821, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records.

the ways his professional work shaped his historical interests as well as the early collecting goals of the AAS.²⁹ His business partners and broader printing connections indeed figure clearly in the institution's records, with gifts such as the full run of Worcester and Boston papers arriving from the publishers annually.³⁰ The lines of kin, employment, and tumult in Thomas's domestic circle also rippled through the AAS records.

Eliza T. Knox began her employment in the Thomas household in July 1819, during the interim between the death of Thomas's second wife and his marriage to Rebecca Armstrong. Originally from Thomaston, Maine, Knox had arrived in central Massachusetts to live with family after divorcing from Henry Jackson Knox, the son of the famous Revolutionary War general. She worked in the family for about a year, at which time Isaiah Thomas gave her a set of books from his own collection with which to open a circulating library and support herself in nearby Uxbridge.³¹ When Thomas's marriage to Rebecca Armstrong ended in separation two years later in the summer of 1822, he wrote to Knox asking her to resume her housekeeping responsibilities. She assented, and spent the final three years of her life as a companion, caretaker, and hostess in the Thomas household. Upon her death, Thomas deposited her remains in the family tomb, next to those of his wife.³²

The timing of Knox's three donations to AAS tracks onto her flow in and out of the Thomas household, while the collective content of the three gifts conveys much about the overall make-up of the society's early collections. During her original tenure as housekeeper, she presented to AAS several pieces of currency – “called old Continental money” – from the

²⁹ Louis Leonard Tucker, “Massachusetts,” in *Historical Consciousness in the Early Republic*, 16-17; Gura, *Bicentennial History*, 13-14.

³⁰ See, for example, the contributions of several newspaper firms on March 19, 1822, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records.

³¹ *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, 2:67.

³² *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, 2: 220-223.

Revolutionary War. Though not among “the articles of deposit” Isaiah Thomas had outlined for the society in 1813, antique coins, foreign currency old and new, and paper bills constituted a substantial portion of the AAS’s early Cabinet, as they also did for other historical societies.³³ The Massachusetts Historical Society, for instance, stipulated that American “coins and curiosities” were to be kept “in the best part of the cabinet.”³⁴ That Knox believed such articles would find a home within the AAS collections indicates that she had access to a general knowledge about what other institutions in the United States were collecting.

Knox’s other contributions came within the final year of her life, in February and August 1825. First came another donation to the society’s Cabinet: “a handsome specimen of dark coloured marble, polished,” from a quarry near her former residence in Maine.³⁵ Just months earlier, in October 1824, Knox had returned east for a three-week visit to Thomaston, a coastal town situated between Augusta and Bangor. As literary scholar Joanne Dobson has illuminated, antebellum keepsakes embodied “the memory of love, the anguish of separation, and the hope of eventual reunion.”³⁶ Whether the piece of marble was a long-time keepsake that already had been with Knox in Worcester, or whether she procured it during her trip, when the piece joined a number of other geological specimens in the society’s collections, it indexed not only the natural history of North America but an element of Knox’s own past.

Her final gift, her only donation to the library portion of the collection, likewise marked the braiding of national and personal histories. The octavo pamphlet traced the May 1824 visit

³³ Eliza Knox donation, March 30, 1820, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records; Isaiah Thomas, “An Account of the American Antiquarian Society” (Boston: Published by Isaiah Thomas, Jr., 1813), 9-10; *Historical Consciousness in the Early Republic*, 66.

³⁴ *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. 1*, 209.

³⁵ Eliza Knox donation, Feb. 25, 1825, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records.

³⁶ Joanne Dobson, “Reclaiming Sentimental Literature,” *American Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (June 1997), 279.

of General Lafayette to a female academy bearing his name in Lexington, Kentucky.³⁷ The text was one of many hundreds published during the French general and Revolutionary War hero's 18-month long commemorative tour through the United States. As scholars long have recognized, Lafayette's triumphant return, and the enthusiasm with which he was received in large Eastern cities, sizable inland towns, and small hinterland outposts, spurred a wave of general historical interest in the young nation.³⁸

But the Lafayette Female Academy in Lexington also bore personal significance for Eliza Knox, whose sister Mary B. Reed served as preceptress for the school. In addition to the speeches given in honor of the Revolutionary icon, the work contained a catalogue of the academy's instructors, board of visitors, and students. As a whole, the piece recorded the work of Mary B. Reed as well as the intellectual standing of her female pupils. Annotations on the title page of the pamphlet, moreover, show that before the pamphlet was given to the antiquarian society by Eliza Knox, it was given *to* her by her sister and the academy's principal, John Dunham (fig. 5.4). Reed also capitalized on the opportunity to dispatch a brief line of news at the bottom of the page: "Yours of May 19th received and will be soon answered."³⁹ Like other letter writers of the era who were separated by great distances or dissuaded by the cost of postage, Reed deployed whatever was at hand to send – in this case, the cover of a pamphlet – to convey news.⁴⁰ When the pamphlet commemorating Lafayette's tour entered AAS's collection, then, it came bearing these records of Knox, her "affectionate sister," and their literary exchange,

³⁷ Eliza Knox donation, Aug. 20, 1825, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records. On the significance of female academies to public life in the early nineteenth century, see Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, especially 66-111.

³⁸ Anne C. Loveland, *Emblem of Liberty: The Image of Lafayette in the American Mind* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996); Sarah J. Purcell, *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 171-209.

³⁹ *Visit of General Lafayette to the Lafayette Female Academy, in Lexington, Kentucky, May 16, 1825* (Lexington, KY, 1825), AAS.

⁴⁰ Mary Kelley, "Pen and Ink Communion": Evangelical Reading and Writing in Antebellum America," *New England Quarterly* 84, no. 4 (Dec. 2011), 560.

as well. A day after Thomas recorded the donation, he noted in his diary that she had fallen in a fit, the opening salvo of what would be her final illness.⁴¹

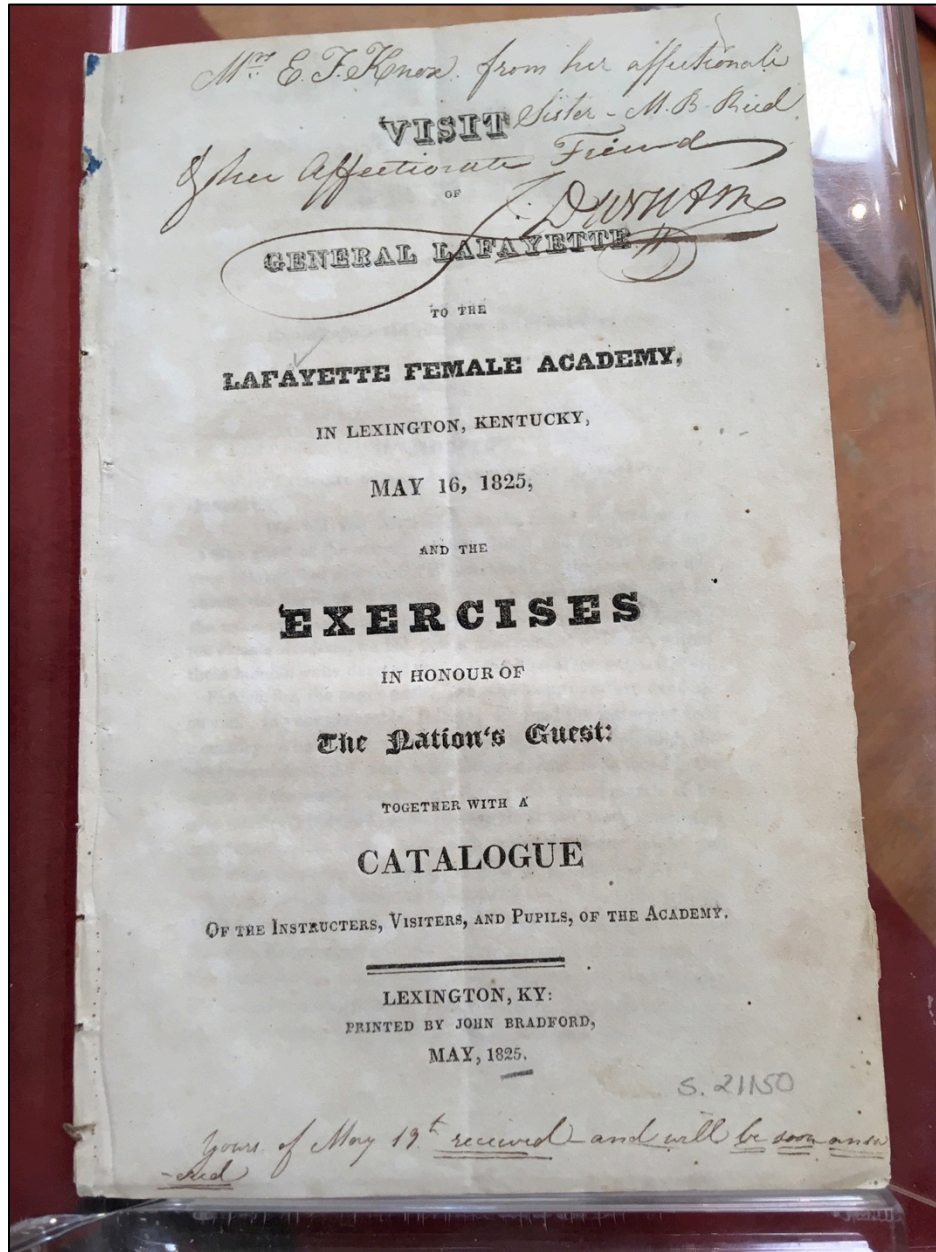


Figure 5.4. Title page of *The Visit of General Lafayette to the Lafayette Female Academy, 1825*, with annotations, American Antiquarian Society

⁴¹ *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, 2: 210.

Knox's death and the subsequent settling of her estate put Isaiah Thomas in communication with her extended family, including the brother with whom she lived in Uxbridge and the same sister, Mary Reed, whose academy work Knox's earlier gift had encapsulated. Reed traveled east the following summer, and spent five weeks with the Thomas family in Worcester and Boston. Afterwards, Thomas dispatched several trunks of articles from her late sister's estate to Lexington by way of Baltimore. Perhaps by way of thanks, perhaps motivated by her conversations with Thomas, or perhaps inspired by a visit to the Boston Athenaeum during her stay, Reed sent in return "petrified shells" and other natural history artifacts from Ohio, which entered the AAS cabinet in November, 1826.⁴²

With a few notable exceptions, much of what women gave to AAS before 1830 was comparable to the materials given by men. Both men and women contributed an assortment of materials, ranging from books and manuscripts to newspaper files, paintings, and material objects. Men on occasion gave fiction, women sometimes contributed land deeds and military works, and both groups donated sermons in abundance.⁴³ Women did, however, donate objects for the cabinet portion of the collection at a significantly higher rate than did their male counterparts. For the period 1813-1829, forty-five percent of women's donations were cabinet articles, a proportion 2.5 times as large as those by men (18%) and overall (19%). Although this rate for women fell in the 1830s to nineteen percent, the overall rate of cabinet donations also

⁴² *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, 2: 227-229, 249-255, 260, 263, 269; Mary B. Reed donation, Nov. 1826, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records.

⁴³ See, for examples, Isaiah Thomas's gift of 50-plus printed works, which included Ann Radcliffe's *Romance of the Forest* and *Mysteries of Udolpho* (July 1814); Rebecca Armstrong of Boston's contribution of 17th-century deeds on parchment (June 16, 1819) and Frances Thomas's donation of *Ordonnances de Louis XIV. Pour les Armées & Areseneaux de Marine* (March 5, 1822); and the sets of sermons Hannah Crocker and Rev. Charles Lowell gave within days of each other (October 12, 1815, and Oct. 14, 1815). All in Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records.

dipped in this period, making the proportional gap between women's gifts and the average rate even higher.⁴⁴

The notable exceptions in giving patterns manifested not just in the rates of cabinet donations but also in their contents, two strands of which deserve particular attention for the purposes of this chapter. First, women donors made almost no contributions of Native American artifacts, one of the most common categories of donations to the Cabinet in these early decades of AAS's history. In the early nineteenth century, AAS and other learned societies pursued and received articles related to Native Americans with much enthusiasm. This historical work, which entailed the excavation, collection, and display of Native American implements, as well as human remains, advanced the American imperial project of consigning the presence of native peoples to the distant past and so undermining their territorial and political claims in the present.⁴⁵

The lack of women donors sending Native American artifacts to AAS, however, does not mean that their gifts were not contributing to this nation-building project. As Jean O'Brien persuasively has theorized, white Americans used the twinned discourses of "lasting" – of asserting that Native people, their practices, and traces of their culture were fading from the American landscape – and of "firsting" – of replacing those vanishing traces with the accomplishments, lineages, and practices of Anglo-American settlers – to make claims of citizenship and belonging in New England's past and present.⁴⁶ While women donors contributed very little along the lines of the former, they most certainly gave objects that

⁴⁴ Data compiled from Donation book, 1813-1829, and Donations, 1830-1839, Folio vol. 17.2, AAS Records.

⁴⁵ Steven Conn, *History's Shadow: Native Americans and Historical Consciousness in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Jean M. O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Judy Kertész, "History, Memory, and the Appropriation of the American Indian Past: A Family Affair," in *New England Collectors and Collecting*, ed. Peter Benes, Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife (Boston: Boston University, 2006), 199-207.

⁴⁶ O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting*, xv.

conveyed the latter. Two of the three images of Christopher Columbus that entered the collection before 1830, for instance, came from women donors. As early as November 1814, Mrs. Elizabeth Andrews of Boston donated a “whole length, well-engraved likeness,” and in 1829, Miss Eliza Pride added a French lithography of the explorer’s first landing.⁴⁷ The timing of both donations corresponded with AAS’s annual meeting in late October, an event scheduled to correspond with the anniversary of Columbus’s arrival in the West Indies.⁴⁸

Second, and relatedly, women were more likely than men to donate items evocative of everyday, colonial American life. Nearly all of Hannah Mather Crocker’s cabinet donations, for instance, formerly had furnished her home: the framed family coat of arms, the whetstone with which several generations of Mathers had sharpened their writing quills, a tobacco box of illustrious provenance, several ancestral portraits, and, of course, the child’s high-chair that Eliza Bridgham saw on her visit.⁴⁹ Men did occasionally donate objects of this sort, as William Winthrop did by bequeathing to AAS a silver pot that had been in his family for seven generations, but these gifts made up a smaller proportion of men’s overall cabinet contributions than they did among women.⁵⁰ These family articles were not as explicit in their “firsting” as were the portraits of Columbus, the “piece of the Rock at Plymouth, on which our forefathers landed” given by Nathaniel Spooner in 1815, or the piece of glass “Said to be the first made in the United States” that arrived the following year from Robert Hewes.⁵¹ Instead, these household objects, passed down across generations (sometimes after having crossed the Atlantic

⁴⁷ Both pieces remain in the collection, and scanned images of each are available on AAS’s online image portal. Elizabeth Andrews donation, Nov. 1814, and Eliza Pride donation, Oct. 15, 1829, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records.

⁴⁸ “Meeting of October 23, 1813,” in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, 1812-1849* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1912), 20.

⁴⁹ Hannah Mather Crocker donations, Feb. 1, 1814, and Oct. 14, 1815, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records.

⁵⁰ William Winthrop donation, 1825, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records.

⁵¹ Nathaniel Spooner donation, June 1, 1815, and Robert Hewes donation, Oct. 22, 1816, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records.

alongside their early owners, as Hannah Mather Crocker alleged about the high chair and Elizabeth Oliver of Boston described about a large trunk⁵²), conveyed the domesticated rootedness of these Anglo-American families on New England soil.

These gendered distinctions likewise carried to a degree for donated objects with associations to the era surrounding the American Revolution. The Waldo sisters, family acquaintances of Isaiah Thomas, made a gift in October, 1826, of a pair of gloves “as were given to Pall bearers, at Funerals, previous to the Revolution.” In doing so, they contributed at once a material artifact and the memory of a historic cultural practice. Because the three sisters were born between 1765 and 1771, the pre-Revolution cultural memories they drew upon in giving the funeral gloves either were those of childhood or ones that previously had circulated in their social circle (fig. 5.5).⁵³ Their brother Daniel, an AAS member, made a Cabinet donation with Revolution-era resonance on the same occasion: his was paper currency from various American colonies. Unlike the gloves, a contribution of currency needed no explanatory remark to register its significance.⁵⁴

Also in 1826, Mrs. Mary Thomas of Lancaster, Isaiah Thomas’s sister-in-law, joined with several other women to give AAS “Ladies’ brocaded and sattin shoes of the fashion of 1750, or

⁵² Crocker asserted on more than one occasion that a Mather infant had actually sat in the high-chair during the family’s crossing in the early 1630s. However, recent analysis of the chair’s composition indicates that the wood is American poplar and that the piece likely was made in the Dorchester, Massachusetts, area sometime between 1640 and 1670. Hannah Mather Crocker “Mather Family,” and Abiel Holmes to Hannah Mather Crocker, Sept. 5, 1822, in *Reminiscences and Traditions of Boston*, eds. Eileen Hunt Botting and Sarah L. Houser (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2011); Elizabeth Oliver donation, Nov. 22, 1823, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records; Nan Wolverton, “On High: A Child’s Chair and Mather Family Legacy,” *Common-Place: The Interactive Journal of Early American Life*, 14, no. 3 (Summer 2013), www.common-place-archives.org/vol-13/no-04/lessons.

⁵³ As with the two sets of footwear that appear in figures 5.6 and 5.7, the funeral gloves depicted here are close approximations of the articles donated to AAS in the 1820s. Because these were among the objects deaccessioned at the end of the nineteenth century, the pieces originally donated are not available. Misses Waldo donation, Oct. 1826, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records. For genealogical data on the Waldos, see *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, 1:121n. On the material practices of grief in the colonial era, see Steven Bullock and Sheila McIntyre, “The Handsome Token of a Funeral: Glove-Giving and the Large Funeral in Eighteenth-Century New England,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 69 (Apr. 2012): 305-346.

⁵⁴ Daniel Waldo donation, Oct. 1826, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records.



Figure 5.5. Funeral gloves, 1765, Connecticut Historical Society, depicted in Bullock and McIntyre, "Handsome Tokens of a Funeral," 308



Figure 5.6. Brocaded shoes, 1760s, 2009.300.1640a, b, Metropolitan Museum of Art

1760, to 1777” (fig. 5.6).⁵⁵ Women’s clothing – where it came from, what it was made of, how it was worn – was a lightning rod of political discourse, as well as source of political expression, in the decades surrounding the founding of the United States.⁵⁶ The wording of the donation record was telling in this regard: Isaiah Thomas wrote of the shoes not as “given by” Mary Thomas and others, but as “worn by” them, underlining how the wearing of particular apparel shaped its meaning. As shoes of satin and brocade, the pairs the women donated were, in a real sense, *fashionable* – footwear for special occasions or leisured activity, rather than more durable ones for work. Four years earlier, William Lincoln of Worcester had donated a pair of eighteenth-century ladies’ pattens – utilitarian overshoes that were forerunners to modern galoshes and worn to preserve the more delicate shoes underneath (fig. 5.7).⁵⁷ Observed from a distance – from the



Figure 5.7. Pattens, late eighteenth century, C.1.41.161.4a, b, Metropolitan Museum of Art

⁵⁵ Mary Thomas donation, Nov. 1, 1826, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records.

⁵⁶ Kate Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2011); Linda Baumgartner, *What Clothes Reveal: The Language of Clothing in Colonial and Federal America* (Williamsburg and New Haven: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, in association with Yale University Press, 2002); Susan Branson, *These Fiery Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 68-72.

⁵⁷ William Lincoln donation, Oct. 15, 1822, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records; Object records for pattens (2009.300.1485a, b), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York online collection: <<http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/156377>>. For Lincoln to donate such a practical piece of apparel is striking; as Linda Baumgartner points out, “Then, as now, few people went to the trouble to save plain, intimate, and utilitarian apparel.” *What Clothes Reveal*, 27.

end of the nineteenth century, say – both the women’s donations and William Lincoln’s might register simply as women’s shoes. Such explicitly feminine articles were rare within the Cabinet collection, and in that respect the gifts bore much in common. To see only what these two gifts carried in common, however, flattens the nuances in meaning the pattens and brocaded shoes conveyed both at the time of their wearing and of their donating.

Finally, that most of the pieces with Revolution-era connotations entered the collection in 1826 should come as no surprise. The semi-centennial of the founding of the United States, scholars have argued, witnessed one of the earliest surges in interest for preserving and commemorating the early history of the nation.⁵⁸ AAS already had experienced nearly a decade and a half of strong collecting history by the arrival of the semi-centennial, as had other historical societies founded in the years and decades preceding it. Intriguingly, while 1826 was an average year in terms of the overall number of donations – there were fifty-four donation records that year, compared to an average per year before 1830 of fifty-seven – the proportion of donations from women that year, at eleven percent, was twice as high as the pre-1830 average.⁵⁹ Not all of the gifts that year, from women or from men, bore explicit ties to the political founding of the United States, but one can imagine that the historical sentiments circulating in periodicals, orations, and local festivities diffused the notion of preserving the nation’s past to a broader population.

Hannah Mather Crocker: Exception and Emblem

The relative plethora of extant materials bestowed by and about Hannah Mather Crocker to AAS and several other historical institutions in New England provide a much richer source

⁵⁸ Charlene Mires, *Independence Hall in American Memory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 57-79; Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*, 173, 176-177.

⁵⁹ Data compiled from Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records.

base than we have for figures like Elizabeth Bliss, Eliza Knox, or the Waldo sisters for discerning the scope and meaning of women's commemorative activity. If the fragmentary presence of most women in the AAS records, once read in concert, can give us a clear sense that women were, indeed, involved in the institution's early-nineteenth-century ventures, Crocker's more extensive written and material traces offer a window into how and why some women chose to do so. This firmer starting point also provides a stable benchmark by which to measure the treatment over time of women's involvement with the society.

The unevenness of the archival record, on the one hand, has rendered Crocker exceptional: the sheer volume of her donations, combined with her close familial ties to illustrious colonial men, means that her contributions to AAS readily have been recognized at various intervals in the society's history, especially in recent publications.⁶⁰ Crocker herself had admitted, "perhaps I stand alone on female ground as an advocate for masonry and a warm enthusiast in the cause of antiquarian researches."⁶¹ On the other hand, the contours of her experience—the way she framed herself in relation to her ancestors, the variety of materials she deployed to convey a sense of the past, the reasons she believed antiquarian activity was critical—were more emblematic than singular among women donors, at least among those who shared her social position. In another words, we can also read her statement of standing alone as strategic deference to justify her vocal presence in ventures where leading responsibilities traditionally had rested with men. The two-century trajectory of her legacy within institutional and scholarly

⁶⁰ For discussions of Crocker in recent institutional publications, see Gura, *Bicentennial History*, 2-5, and *In Pursuit of a Vision: Two Centuries of Collecting at the American Antiquarian Society* (Worcester: AAS, 2012), 25-30; For more focused explorations of her contributions, see Alea Henle, "The Widow's Mite: Hannah Mather Crocker and the Mather Libraries," *Information & Culture* 48.3 (2013): 323-343, and Wolverton, "On High." Crocker's printed and manuscript writings likewise have received renewed attention, in the form of newly-produced scholarly editions, in recent years: *Observations of the Real Rights of Women and Other Writings*, ed. Constance J. Post (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), and *Reminiscences and Traditions of Boston*, eds. Eileen Hunt Botting and Sarah L. Houser (Boston: New England Historical Genealogical Society, 2011).

⁶¹ Hannah Mather Crocker, "Antiquarian Researches," n.d., Box 10, Folder 4, Mather Family Papers, 1613-1819, AAS.

memory, moreover, most certainly *is* indicative of the long-term gendering of particular forms of historical knowledge and work.

Born in Boston in 1752, Hannah Mather Crocker came from what she called “the four-fold line of Mathers,” the prolific Puritan ministers Richard, Increase, Cotton, and Samuel, while her mother Hannah Hutchinson was the sister of Massachusetts’s Revolution-era governor.⁶² In the midst of the Revolutionary War, she married Joseph Crocker, a Harvard college graduate and captain in the Continental Army. She bore ten children between 1783 and 1795, five of whom reached adulthood, before becoming a widow in late 1797. Although left with almost no property from her husband, Crocker supported herself and her surviving children without remarrying, relying largely on what she had inherited from her father.⁶³

Hannah Mather Crocker’s literary and historical proclivities manifested in printed publications, her collection and preservation of colonial artifacts, and her proactive engagement with diverse civic organizations. In the final two decades of the eighteenth century, in the midst of managing a multigenerational household and mothering young children, she had begun to publish short literary pieces in Boston’s newspapers.⁶⁴ She also made two donations from her family’s collection of books and portraits, in 1794 and 1798, respectively, to the Massachusetts Historical Society in its first decade of operation.⁶⁵ These gifts, specifically the “valuable portion of the Mather Library” she had deposited, eventually earned Crocker an honor normally reserved for society members (who were exclusively men until 1849): a lifetime subscription of the group’s primary research publication, *The Collections of Massachusetts Historical Society*.⁶⁶

⁶² Crocker, *Observations*, xv; Crocker, *Reminiscences*, xiv.

⁶³ Crocker, *Reminiscences*, xix.

⁶⁴ Crocker, *Reminiscences*, xviii-xix.

⁶⁵ *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. 1*, 78, 116.

⁶⁶ *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. 1*, 342. The first female member of MHS was Frances Manwaring Caulkins of Norwich, Connecticut, whose historical work had been published in print; AAS’s was

Keeping up the family tradition of prolific civic involvement, she also actively participated in Boston's masonic culture and charitable societies.⁶⁷

Crocker's public presence as an author and antiquarian accelerated in the two and a half decades preceding her death in 1829. She continued publishing short pieces, usually poems, in the Boston newspapers, but also succeeded during these years in having several longer works, including *A Series of Letters on Free Masonry* (1815), *School of Reform, or Seaman's Safe Pilot to the Cape of Good Hope* (1816), and *Observations on the Real Rights of Women* (1818), published in print. It is this last piece, considered by scholars to be the first book-length assertion of women's rights to be produced in the United States, for which Crocker has received the most attention.⁶⁸

Crocker greeted the founding of AAS with approbation that she expressed in word and deed. "I early imbibed an interest for such a Society," she declared to the men of the institution in an 1814 letter.⁶⁹ "Having in my possession a number of valuable documents respecting the rise, and progress, of literature in America," she continued, "I formed an ardent wish they might be preserved and transmited [sic]." An ardent wish indeed. Just two days after her writing, Crocker's fourth donation in just over a year – a packet of Mather manuscripts – arrived in Worcester.⁷⁰ Over the course of fifteen years, the Boston antiquarian made fifteen separate gifts to AAS, the bulk of which came between 1813 and 1815.

Esther Forbes, a Pulitzer-winning author of historical fiction, elected in more than a hundred years later in 1960. *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. 1*, xlix; Gura, *Bicentennial History*, 234-235.

⁶⁷ Crocker, as indicated in her quote from "Antiquarian Researches," passionately supported freemasonry. In addition to publishing work in defense of masonic activities, she founded and promoted St. Ann's Lodge, a female wing of the freemasons that likely was the first group of its kind in the United States. Crocker, *Reminiscences*, xviii-xix; Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 114-116.

⁶⁸ Crocker, *Reminiscences*, xiii-xiv, xxi, xxiv-xxvii.

⁶⁹ Hannah Mather Crocker to Thaddeus M. Harris, June 13, 1814. Box 1, Folder 29, AAS Documents and Correspondence, AAS Records.

⁷⁰ Hannah Mather Crocker donation record, June 15, 1814, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records.

These contributions played a foundational role in the development of the collection and remained notable in their scope for decades. The content of Crocker's gifts included fifteenth-through nineteenth-century texts printed in England, America, and elsewhere; manuscript letters, sermons, and treatises; several portraits; and a number of material artifacts related to domestic social life. Besides Isaiah Thomas, only one other donor – Elizabeth Bliss of Rhode Island, whom we encountered above – had made a contribution to the infant society before Crocker bestowed her first gift, a seventeenth-century English text and an early American psalter attributed to her grandfather, in April 1813.⁷¹ As of 1820, the number of her donations to the society was surpassed only by that of Isaiah Thomas and his son, and even twenty years later, after she had been dead for more than a decade, she remained one of the institution's top five donors.⁷² In this light, Eliza Bridgham's notice of Crocker's gifts in 1818 was no mere coincidence; it instead would have been a surprise had the young Rhode Islander, or any other visitor of the era, *not* encountered the materials she had contributed.

One of these donations – a large portion of the Mather family library – has dominated Crocker's legacy as a benefactress. Her brother Samuel valued the collection, made up of approximately 8,000 volumes as well as “a prodigious Number of valuable Manuscripts,” at 8,000 pounds sterling, and in their grandfather Cotton Mather's era, it was likely the largest private library in New England.⁷³ Indeed, according to one learned English visitor, the collection was “the Glory of New-England, if not of all America.”⁷⁴ When Samuel Mather died in 1785, Crocker and her sister Elizabeth inherited the collection. For Crocker, this family treasure, which contained original works by all four generations of her ministerial forefathers as well as a

⁷¹ Hannah Mather Crocker donation, April 1813, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records.

⁷² Data compiled from Donation book, 1813-1829, and Donations, 1830-1839, AAS Records.

⁷³ Julius Herbert Tuttle, “The Libraries of the Mathers,” (Worcester: Davis Press, 1910), 33, 28.

⁷⁴ *John Dunton's Letters from New-England: Publications of the Prince Society, Vol. 4*, (New York: Burt Franklin, n.d.), 75.

dense dose of religious, philosophical, and scientific treatises from England, functioned, by turns, as a source of income and a channel for philanthropy. As mentioned above, she had deposited a considerable portion of the library with the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1798, and Bowdoin College purchased a number of volumes from her in the 1810s.⁷⁵

AAS received upwards of 900 volumes of the library in November 1814, through a combination of an outright donation by Crocker and the purchase of a substantial portion by Isaiah Thomas. The degree to which Crocker's portion of this gift has been acknowledged has varied significantly in the two hundred years since the Mather library arrived at AAS. In official reports in both 1869 and 1874, society librarian Samuel F. Haven noted the important manuscripts that had come from Crocker, though in the latter instance he suggested that she had presented these materials to Isaiah Thomas rather than the society.⁷⁶ A few decades later in 1910, Julius Herbert Tuttle's minutely-detailed study of "The Libraries of the Mathers" remarked on the whole range of Crocker's gifts, including a portion of the library.⁷⁷

By 1945, however, Clifford Shipton's profile piece on AAS in the scholarly journal *The William and Mary Quarterly* elided Hannah Mather Crocker's involvement entirely, even while expounding over several sentences – worthy of quoting at length to highlight the mix of admiration and condescension in his tone – on the "great interest" of the Mather library:

In 1816 [sic] what remained of it came to the American Antiquarian Society where it is preserved today [...]. It represents perhaps the most dully theological and least interesting third of the original Mather library, for time and the family evidently made away with hundreds of other volumes which it must have originally contained. This, together with the Mather family manuscripts and the largest collection of the works of the Mathers, has

⁷⁵ Crocker, *Reminiscences*, xx-xxi.

⁷⁶ Haven's purpose in 1869 was to outline pieces of the collection suitable for printed publication. The "stout volumes" that the Massachusetts and Maine Historical Societies had already produced from the Mather papers in their repositories provided a particular impetus to showcase AAS's own holdings. In 1874, his remarks about Crocker preceded a lengthy discussion of a Cotton Mather treatise in the collection. S.F. Haven, "Report of the Librarian," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 52 (Apr. 28, 1869), 31-38; "Report of the Council," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 62 (Apr. 29, 1874), 11-12.

⁷⁷ Tuttle, "Libraries," 34-35, 45-46.

caused the American Antiquarian Society to be called “the Mather shrine.” Few come to worship in it, but many come to do research because one can explore hardly any field of American colonial history without tripping over the ubiquitous interests of the Mathers.⁷⁸

Drawing on Shipton, historian Len Tucker repeated the effacement in the mid-1990s, in what remains one of the few scholarly publications dealing with historical societies in the early United States. He undid Shipton’s passive voice, but in doing so displaced Crocker and made Thomas the sole actor in the venture, the one who “purchased the collection [...] and packed it for shipment to Worcester.”⁷⁹ In this trajectory, we can trace the accumulating effect, only recently dismantled by dedicated scholars and AAS staff members, of the gendered presumptions that have haunted the profession of history since at least the early twentieth century.⁸⁰

Here’s what we can say from the institution’s own donation book, a record Thomas himself was keeping at the time: he noted the accession of the Mather library in two entries, one after the other, in December, 1814, about a month after his diary recorded the packing up and transporting of the collection to Worcester. He listed Crocker as the donor for the first entry, for “Part of the Remains of the ancient Library formerly belong to the Rev. Drs. Increase, Cotton, and Samuel Mather,” and valued the gift at 300 dollars. (This entry also included a short memo on Crocker herself, outlining her line of descent from the library’s former owners).⁸¹ Thomas recorded himself as the donor for “The other Part of the Remains of the ancient Library,” a

⁷⁸ Shipton continued, “With this library came a remarkable collection of early American portraits which still form the key to the art holdings of the American Antiquarian Society.” Crocker presented these portraits – five of them – a year later in 1815, separately from the library. In other words, even if Shipton unintentionally mistook the library as solely Thomas’s gift, he unambiguously ignored Crocker’s unequivocal status as donor of the portraits and most of the other Mather materials in the collection. Clifford K. Shipton, “The American Antiquarian Society,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (Apr. 1945), 170-171.

⁷⁹ Here, Crocker was not the only key actor to be effaced: Isaiah Thomas’s coachman Joel Lawrence “and other assistance” had done much of the physical labor to pack and transport the collection to Worcester. *Historical Consciousness in the Early Republic*, 23; *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, 1: 253.

⁸⁰ In this regard, the work of Constance Post, Eileen Hunt Botting and Sarah Houser, Alea Henle, and Nan Wolverton, in examining Crocker on her own terms, has been especially significant.

⁸¹ Hannah Mather Crocker donation, Dec. 14, 1814, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records.

portion he valued at 500 dollars.⁸² In an addendum to this entry he reiterated the joint source of the donation, “The whole of the Remains now presented to the Society by Mrs. Crocker and by Mr. T. consist of about 900 volumes.” In the very next entry, however, Crocker appeared as donor once again: “Above Nine Hundred Sermons, in manuscript, and separated, written and preached by the Mathers. Together with A number of manuscript Books and papers which were in the Mather Library.”⁸³ In keeping with other manuscript donations in the early accession records, Thomas did not list a value for these pieces. In strict monetary terms, then, Crocker’s portion of the printed volumes donated may only figure as two-thirds of what Thomas contributed via purchase, but such a reckoning does not account for the substantial manuscript branch of the collection that Crocker presented herself.

The Mather family library – in its printed and manuscript components – was Crocker’s most significant gift in terms of size, but we know that she ascribed particular meaning to the bestowing of several material objects to the society. More than once her gifts came with an accompanying note explaining an item’s history and exhorting the society as to its significance. In February, 1814, for instance, she bestowed to the society three objects that had descended down the Mather line to her: the family coat of arms, a whetstone for sharpening penknives, and a tobacco box with the “tradition” of having once belonged to Sir Walter Raleigh.⁸⁴ “The male line of my family are extinct,” she explained, before asserting her intention that these heirlooms – and the legacy of those who had owned them – “may be preserved from oblivion under the protecting care of the antiquarian society.” Crocker framed herself as beholden to the society’s

⁸² As Alea Henle has noted, Thomas’s accounts, which he kept in his diary, record that he gave Crocker only \$200 for the library; if that indeed was the case, the dollar value of her contributions to the two Mather library gifts would be double what previously has been suggested. Henle, “Widow’s Mite,” 337.

⁸³ Isaiah Thomas donation, Dec. 14, 1814, and Hannah Mather Crocker donation, Dec. 1814, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records.

⁸⁴ Hannah Mather Crocker donation, Feb. 1, 1814, Donation book, 1813-1829, AAS Records.

“protecting care.” However, she also stipulated clearly her wish that the coat of arms would “head the Antiquarian Cabinet,” while she hoped the accompanying motto might be adopted as the society’s own.⁸⁵

Her essay “Antiquarian Researches,” likely composed around the same time and now held in the Mather Family Papers at AAS, expanded on both her position as a female historian and the significance of material objects to such endeavors.⁸⁶ “I now take pen in hand,” she declared in the opening lines, because friends and acquaintances had “repeatedly asked the question what utility an Antiquarian Society can be” and “what can possibly induce any Lady in promoting such an institution.” Her response asserted the importance of such ventures to the vitality of nations and the critical role that women could play in their advancement. “Even a matron may be the means of saving a nation by prudently recording and preserving certain documents,” she asserted. In this particular instance, she was referring to land titles and the physical boundaries of space, but elsewhere in the piece she argued for safekeeping “every species of information [...] as guides and directions for future generations.”⁸⁷ Like John Cranch, Crocker outlined a vision of antiquarian work that encompassed material objects, memories, and moral directives and upon which nations might be built.

Concurrently to making material contributions to AAS, Crocker also was preparing a lengthy history of her native city, a collection of what she called “Interesting Memoirs and Original Anecdotes” that eventually would be best known (after her death) as *Reminiscences and Traditions of Boston*.⁸⁸ The narrative of the latter work proceeded spatially through her

⁸⁵ Hannah Mather Crocker to Isaiah Thomas Jr., Feb. 21, 1814, Box 1, Folder 29, AAS Documents and Correspondence, AAS Records.

⁸⁶ The multiple copies of the essay that exist within AAS’s holdings suggest that Crocker intended for the piece, which was never printed during her lifetime, to circulate as a manuscript publication. Crocker, “Antiquarian Researches,” Mather Family Papers.

⁸⁷ Crocker, “Antiquarian Researches,” Mather Family Papers.

⁸⁸ Crocker, *Reminiscences*, 1n2.

neighborhood – Boston’s North End – recounting the layered histories of buildings, streets, and occupants one-by-one, with other associated anecdotes and poetry interspersed. Indeed, *Reminiscences and Traditions* also functions as an anthology of locally-written poetry by men and women, including a number of pieces Crocker authored herself. One version of the work (two drafts, plus a lengthy appendix survive) included verse by Mather Byles, Joseph Green, Cotton Mather, Sarah Parsons Moorhead, and Jane Colman Turrell, among others.⁸⁹ She also referenced and further described in *Reminiscences and Traditions* the practices associated with the artifacts that she and others had donated to the region’s historical societies; her lengthy explanation of the customs and expenses connected to funerals, for instance, suggests in vivid terms why the Waldo sisters may have considered funeral gloves from the colonial era an important material record to provide to AAS.⁹⁰ Crocker’s written work in “Antiquarian Researches” and in *Reminiscences and Traditions* was not separate from her material work of bestowing objects to historical repositories; both were necessary, to her mind, to preserve the past and to sustain future generations.

Antiquarian Hall: AAS in the 1830s

Three years after Crocker’s death, Christopher Columbus Baldwin, AAS’s first full-time, paid librarian and staff member, stood before the door of her father’s childhood home in Boston. It was the day after the society’s annual meeting in 1831, and he was on the hunt for additional “old papers” for them to acquire. Baldwin, following the pattern set by Crocker and Thomas, held the Mather family in high regard and bore a keen interest in seeing their legacy preserved. “The family should have a monument as high and splendid as that which it is proposed [...] upon Bunker Hill,” he had declared in his diary after visiting the family tomb in the Copp’s Hill burial

⁸⁹ Crocker, *Reminiscences*, 35, 37, 40, 107, 113, 228, 238.

⁹⁰ Crocker, *Reminiscences*, 236-237.

ground in few days earlier.⁹¹ These entries demonstrate Baldwin's keen interest not just in preserving historical documents, but in making pilgrimage to historical spaces.

For all his regard for the Mathers, however, Baldwin seemed little interested in Hannah Mather Crocker's role as the keystone fusing many of the family's possessions to the society's collections. His decision to pursue his hunt at the former home of Increase and Cotton Mather, rather than that of Samuel Mather and later Crocker herself, quite literally displaced her patronage. Much of the Mather library, which by then had been in AAS's hands for nearly two decades, certainly had originated in Increase and Cotton's home, but it had been passed down and preserved in Samuel and Hannah's. In prioritizing the former space over the latter, Baldwin passed over the proven family stewardship of Hannah Mather Crocker and set his aim instead on an untested source.

A woman answered Baldwin's knock. Like Crocker before her, she stood as gatekeeper to the materials the men of AAS sought to possess. In this instance, however, her place at the literal threshold of the potential repository was perceived more as an obstacle to be overcome than an opportunity to be cultivated. In Baldwin's telling, the "fat lady" at the door was obstinate in barring his access to the garret and ignorant as to the worth of what she perceived as "old papers which nobody could read."⁹² In addition to gender, differences in education and social position seem to have colored Baldwin's take on their front-stoop standoff. "How much, how very much it is to be regretted that our Boston Antiquaries will not rescue such invaluable gems from destruction!" he lamented in his diary. As old houses passed into the hands of anonymous occupants, the underappreciated "treasures" they contained rapidly perished.⁹³ Two

⁹¹ Jack Larkin and Caroline Sloat, eds., *A Place in My Chronicle: A New Edition of the Diary of Christopher Columbus Baldwin, 1829-1835* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 2010), 104, 103.

⁹² *Place in my Chronicle*, 104.

⁹³ *Place in my Chronicle*, 104.

months later, Baldwin returned to Boston to retrieve the papers the woman eventually had agreed to set aside for him (though she never had relented to his request to explore the house himself). He found his dire expectations realized: “My Mather papers,” he recorded possessively, “have been taken away. [...] What a pity! I could have made good use of them.”⁹⁴ However strong his sense of possession on the basis of his superior appreciation and care, actual acquisition of the papers remained elusive.

Christopher Columbus Baldwin has been celebrated within AAS’s history for significantly expanding the institution’s holdings and for initiating the work of systematically organizing and cataloguing the collections. His tenure as paid librarian functions as a benchmark in the institution’s development, evidence that by the early 1830s those aspects of the society that make it recognizable today as a professionally-managed organization – a paid staff, well-organized and catalogued collections, a keen eye for valuable acquisitions – already were beginning to bud. While the acquisitive librarian was out seeking hidden treasures for the collection, however, more and more visitors were making their way to Antiquarian Hall.

The decade following Isaiah Thomas’s death in 1831 certainly marked a new era in AAS’s history, but one whose emerging characteristics were reflected as much in changing profiles of donors and shifting patterns of use among visitors as they were in the official projects undertaken by Baldwin. Whereas in the earlier era, Isaiah Thomas had dictated much of the access to the collection, now the larger governing body of the society, through the intermediary of their hired librarian, would regulate how and by whom the collections were encountered. The make-up of the pool of women donors in the 1830s reflected these changes. Instead of relationships to Isaiah Thomas being a common thread, many women donors in this later period

⁹⁴ *Place in my Chronicle*, 108.

– eight of the twenty-three women who made contributions – had familial ties to the broader society membership.⁹⁵

Likewise, spatial changes that had been underway since before Thomas’s death expanded opportunities to interact with the collection. In the autumn of 1821, AAS had moved from the Thomas household into its own building (fig. 5.8). The new two-story structure, with six



Figure 5.8. Antiquarian Hall, 1829, American Antiquarian Society

⁹⁵ Data compiled from Donations, 1830-1839, AAS Records, and Frederick L. Weis, “A List of Officers and Members of the American Antiquarian Society, 1812-1947,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 56, no. 2 (Oct. 1946), 289-333.

ornamental columns across the façade and a cupola on top, sat on a large lot donated by Thomas near the edge of town. On the first floor, the space off the entry hall was divided between a librarian's office, a space for the cabinet collection, and a meeting room, while upstairs two large chambers were designated for the library of books, manuscripts, newspapers, and pamphlets.⁹⁶ Although complaints about the accessibility of the collections and suitability of the space for the ever-growing collections arose almost immediately, the new building came with a broadened capacity for receiving non-members and other visitors.⁹⁷

In October, 1831, the society approved new regulations for the library and cabinet as part of a larger revision of the organization's by-laws and constitution, and in those policies we can discern broad institutional workings that extended beyond Baldwin. Many of the stipulations did outline Baldwin's own responsibilities as librarian, including to register all donations and purchases; to mark, arrange, and catalogue all volumes and articles in the collections; and to keep the collections safe from fire, theft, and other loss. A number of the other rules, however, governed how visitors would use the space: during the week, the librarian was to keep the library room open from nine in the morning to noon and in the afternoon from two to five o'clock; all visitors were to record their names in a book; and no visitors were to remain unaccompanied in

⁹⁶ Gura, *Bicentennial History*, 32-35.

⁹⁷ In the same report in which Council members Rejoice Newton and Samuel Jennison celebrated the completion of the new building, they also noted that additional rooms needed to be prepared for "the proper distribution and preservations of the books" and to house the "but imperfectly arranged" Cabinet, while an unnamed visitor to the society in 1824, whose account of his experience appeared in the *New York Daily Advertiser* and the *Rhode Island American*, expressed "feelings of regret" that no person was appointed to keep the collections in order and accessible. "Meeting of October 23, 1821," in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, 1812-1849*, 170; "From the New-York Daily Advertiser. The American Antiquarian Society," *The Rhode-Island American*, Aug. 20, 1824, Readex: America's Historical Newspapers (hereafter AHN).

the library or cabinet rooms, nor to remove any book or article from its place in them, without the permission of the librarian or Council.⁹⁸

These new institutional structures also are visible in the very sources through which one can find visitors before and after Thomas's death. Most of what can be gleaned about early visitors to the library comes from scattered references in Thomas's diary of viewing the collections with men and women in his social circle, with the addition of serendipitous finds in other archives like Eliza Bridgham's account. As of 1832, when Baldwin, in keeping with the regulations approved by the society the previous autumn, instituted a visitors' log, references to visitors become inestimably more routinized. If one were tracing institutional development merely as a top-down, administrative phenomenon, one could stop there: Baldwin, from his official position, followed the regulations and established a visitor's log, thereby formalizing institutional practice. Opening to the pages of the register of visitors, which noted the name and place of residence of most visitors by date, also opens the possibility of tracing patterns of use by those without institutional standing.

As with the donation book, the presence of women as visitors is pronounced from the start of the volume Baldwin commenced. The first page records the visit of over twenty young women enrolled in Worcester's Female Academy, accompanied by Rebecca Newton, the parent of one of the students and the spouse of a prominent AAS Council member (fig. 5.9).⁹⁹ As Mary Kelley has emphasized, the thorough incorporation of historical study into the curriculum was one of the distinguishing features of the turn towards rigorous higher education that many female academies made in the early nineteenth century. As we saw in the previous chapter, their study

⁹⁸ "Of the Library," Box 4, Folder 23, AAS Documents and Correspondence, AAS Records. See also "Laws of the American Antiquarian Society, 24 Oct. 1831," in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, 1812-1849*, 244-248.

⁹⁹ April 14, 1832 entries, Register of Visitors, 1832-1852, AAS Records; *Place in My Chronicle*, 117.

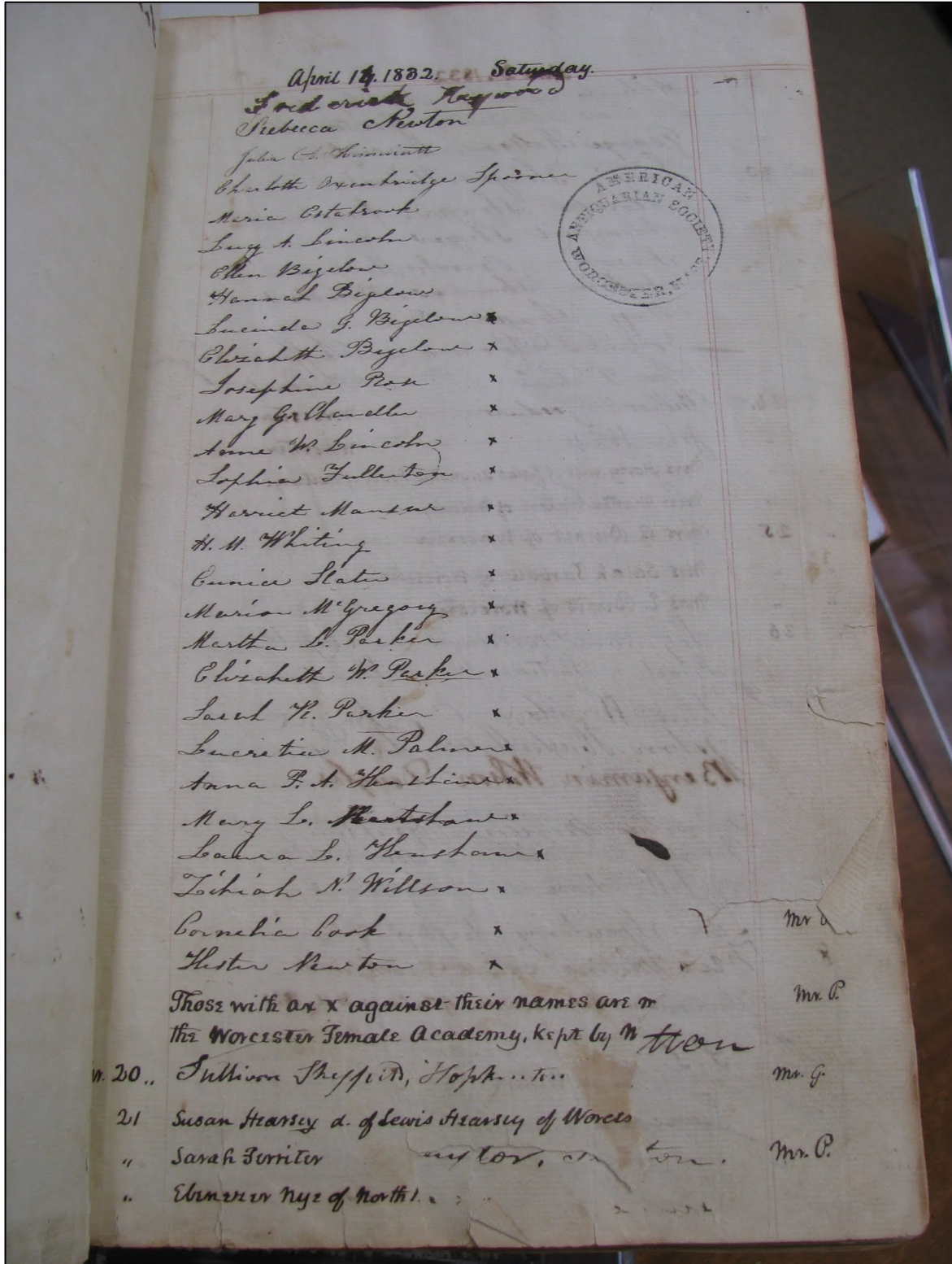


Figure 5.9. List of Worcester Female Academy students in AAS visitor's register, Apr. 1832, American Antiquarian Society

of the past materialized not only in memorization and recitation from textbooks, but also in dramatic productions, visual arts, and journal-keeping.¹⁰⁰ On the occasion of the Worcester Female Academy visit to the AAS, the material artifacts, old volumes, and extensive runs of periodicals provided a different set of historical objects, in the distinct setting of a building dedicated to their display and preservation, for the young women to measure against their other historical learning.

The school trip also is evidence that AAS's institutional ripening was matched by the growing prevalence of other institutions for higher education and knowledge production. One of the notable changes in donation patterns in this same time period is the pronounced uptick in gifts, usually in the form of annual reports or publications, from other institutions and voluntary associations. AAS had interacted with other learned societies such as the American Philosophical Society and New York Historical Society practically since its founding, but whereas gifts might come from two-three institutions annually in the 1810s and early 1820s, by the mid-1830s, it reliably was around ten such groups.¹⁰¹

At the same time, personal social visits continued to figure in the life of the institution, and particularly in Baldwin's librarianship, in unexpected ways. Among his extant personal papers, correspondence between Baldwin and women outside his immediate family is incredibly scarce. One significant exception is a set of invitations from several women connected to key figures within AAS's membership: Ann Sturgis Paine, the wife of Frederick W. Paine; the daughters of founding member Rev. Dr. Aaron Bancroft; Rebecca Newton, wife of the society's

¹⁰⁰ Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 94-99, 198-202.

¹⁰¹ In 1819, AAS received publications from the NYHS and APS; in 1829, the set included the APS, the Society of Natural History of New York, the American Bible Society, the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, and the Essex Historical Society; and in 1839, nine groups, including the American Colonization Society, Yale Medical College, the Kentucky Historical Society, and the Royal Academy of Sciences in Lisbon. Data compiled from Donation books, 1813-1829, and Donations, 1830-1839, AAS Records.

corresponding secretary Rejoice Newton; the sisters of Daniel Waldo; and so on.¹⁰² Individually, each invitation offers frustratingly little information: a couple lines of highly formulaic text, with a date or perhaps day of week but no year, in neat script on a quarter-sheet of paper. Pairing the dates with the days of the week mentioned, however, indicates that all of these invitations were extended to Baldwin either in 1828 or 1834. The occasions, moreover, clustered: four of the eight extant invitations fell within three weeks of each other in late April, the season during which AAS's semi-annual meeting was held, while another two coincided with the week of the society's annual meeting in late October. Baldwin's diary, extant between 1829 and 1835, offers few corroborating clues, besides that he attended many more evening parties and teas than the mere eight for which invitations remain.¹⁰³ So why were these invitations – hardly substantive in their text, as I've already mentioned – nearly the only written correspondence with women that Baldwin saved?

The overlapping layers of fragmentary details suggest that women within the AAS circle made a point of hosting heterosocial gatherings to correspond with the society's peak moments of institutional decision-making. Such a pattern would be in keeping with the work of the women in Washington, DC, to host social gatherings that doubled as opportunities for political networking and negotiating.¹⁰⁴ As Catherine Allgor has commented with regard to sources like invitations and calling cards, "If we can listen to what they have to say, the narrative in these documents [...] will demonstrate that a smoke-filled backroom and a lady's parlor are both political spaces."¹⁰⁵ On these occasions, Baldwin's performance as librarian was as much

¹⁰² Mrs. F.W. Paine to Mr. Baldwin, March 3, Mrs. Davis to Mr. Baldwin, Sept. 29, Misses Bancroft to Mr. Baldwin, April 13, Mrs. Swan to Christopher Columbus Baldwin (CCB), April 30, Misses Waldo to CCB, April 26, Mrs. Newton to CCB, April 21, Misses Denny to CCB, Oct. 27, Mrs. Miller to CCB, Oct. 16, Box 1, Folder 1, Christopher Columbus Baldwin Papers, AAS (hereafter CCB Papers).

¹⁰³ See, for a sampling of Baldwin's social invitations and outings, *A Place in My Chronicle*, 47-52.

¹⁰⁴ Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, especially 75-85.

¹⁰⁵ Allgor, 2.

subject to the scrutiny of Rebecca Newton or the Bancroft sisters as it was their male relatives. If the 1831 library regulations had delineated Baldwin's official tasks at Antiquarian hall, the invitations from AAS wives and sisters signified the social obligations of his position in Worcester's private residences; he had to uphold expectations in both arenas to succeed.

Over the first five years during which the visitor's log was kept, over 3,500 people came to see the library and cabinet at Antiquarian hall. In contrast to the proportion of women donors, which remained under ten percent through the 1830s, women represented about a third of visitors in this time period.¹⁰⁶ Day-to-day and month-to-month, the ratio of men to women visiting AAS varied, and sometimes weeks would pass without any women setting their names into the log. On the other hand, there occasionally were days when women were the only ones to peruse the shelves and cases of the library and cabinet. It would be far too great a leap to argue that AAS became a female-centered space on these occasions – after all, as per the rules passed by the all-male Council, the librarian remained steward and sentinel over the space and its contents – but these records do force us to imagine repeated moments when the primary audience – or in fact the *only* audience – for AAS's exhibited treasures were women.¹⁰⁷ Beyond rethinking who might occupy the space of Antiquarian hall on a given day, these occasions also demonstrate that women's encounters were not always mediated through male relatives. These female visitors were not mere followers of their husbands and brothers – neither, obviously, were all those who did arrive in mixed-gender pairs or groups – but were pursuing AAS's offerings independently.

While a great number of those men and women who recorded their names came from small towns in central Massachusetts surrounding Worcester, the pool of visitors also extended

¹⁰⁶ As with donations, this percentage fluctuated; the annual percentage of women visitors ranged from a low of 23.7% in the period April 1833-April 1834 to a peak of 36.6% in April 1836-April 1837. Register of Visitors, 1832-1852, AAS Records.

¹⁰⁷ Data compiled from names recorded between April 1832-April 1837 in Register of Visitors, 1832-1852, AAS Records.

nationally, and even internationally. For one thing, this data suggests that AAS's institutional reach indeed straddled local and national concerns. The mix in geographic make-up also reflected Worcester's own geographic position, as at once the civic and commercial hub of central Massachusetts and a key crossroads of New England's by-ways and railroads. Beyond attracting those traveling between the Northeast's largest cities, Worcester also frequently served as a stopover (as it did for the Bridghams) for those traveling to the emerging tourist spaces of New England's hinterland.¹⁰⁸

Visitors who came to AAS, then, brought a veritable cacophony of antebellum cultural processes into the rooms of Antiquarian hall: the groups of young people who came from small outlying towns may have sought the culturally-refining experience of a city institution; the young men who noted their affiliations to Amherst, Williams, and a number of other New England colleges linked AAS to the growing role of higher education on the path to respectability; the parties from Savannah, Charleston, or New Orleans visiting in July or August joined in the lively seasonal exchange and familial networks spanning North and South, while those arriving from Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan Territory – likely recent New England transplants – renewed their ties to their region of origin.¹⁰⁹ Those visiting from furthest afield – the missionary to the Sandwich Islands, the ship owner's son from Bermuda, the Armenian-born professor in Constantinople – reflected AAS's interest, already evident in various texts and objects received

¹⁰⁸ Gura, *Bicentennial History*, 55. The centrality of Worcester to travelers is evident in Theodore Dwight, *The Northern Traveller and Northern Tour* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1831), 267-270, 313-315. For a broader discussion of early nineteenth-century tourist culture, see Dona Brown, *Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 1995), 15-40.

¹⁰⁹ Catherine Kelly, *In The New England Fashion: Reshaping Lives in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 242-248; Margaret Sumner, *Collegiate Republic: Cultivating an Ideal Society in America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014), 139; Brown, *Inventing New England*, 25; Joseph Conforti, *Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity from the Pilgrims to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 150.

into the collections, in the missionary, mercantile, knowledge-producing, and influence-building efforts that Americans were undertaking globally.¹¹⁰

What can we discern from these figures, other than the allure of the cabinet and library collections to a broad visiting public? For one thing, the importance of these visits, which may be tempting to read as casual encounters by tourists, comes into focus when read closely against the same period's donation records. Of the twenty-five women who made donations during the 1830s, eleven also made visits to the society, often in the weeks or months preceding their contributions. The three Gardner sisters – Delia, Mary, and Octavia, daughters of General Stephen Gardner of Bolton, Massachusetts – visited Antiquarian Hall in mid-January 1835, accompanied by Lydia Moore and George Withington of that same town. (Baldwin was in Boston that day, rifling through the “rarities” of the Massachusetts Historical Society, so another local member likely received them instead.)¹¹¹ Their party of five made up almost half of that winter month's visitors. Three months later, the sisters dispatched to the society a gift of three pamphlets, an 1801 printing of Hezekiah Packard's *The Christian's Manual*, and a weighty, seventeenth-century London folio.¹¹²

Educator Zilpah Grant's interactions with the society are particularly telling of the way that visits, donations, and correspondence might compound each other. Grant long has been well known within the field of early American women's history as the founder and principal of the Ipswich Female Academy; her early partner in this venture, Mary Lyon, went on to establish the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary.¹¹³ She first came to Christopher Columbus Baldwin's

¹¹⁰ Rosemarie Zagari, “The Significance of the “Global Turn” for the Early American Republic: Globalization in the Age of Nation-Building,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2011), 1-37.

¹¹¹ January 1835 entries, Register of Visitors, 1832-1852, AAS Records; *Place in my Chronicle*, 229.

¹¹² Misses Gardner donation, Apr. 1835, Donations, 1830-1839, AAS Records.

¹¹³ Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 87; Elizabeth Alden Green, *Mary Lyon and Mount Holyoke: Opening the Gates* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1979), 38-47, 63-101; Eliza Paul Capen and Leonard W. Labaree, “Zilpah Grant and the Art of Teaching: 1829,” *New England Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (Sept. 1947), 347-364.

awareness in August, 1832, when Salem annalist Rev. Joseph Felt visited the library and discussed the potential of establishing a new female college in Worcester, with Grant as the proposed head.¹¹⁴ Baldwin thought the plan “a good one,” and two years later, when Zilpah Grant herself entered the library, he wrote of her as “among the most distinguished of her sex for talents in New England.”¹¹⁵ Grant, for her part, availed herself of the opportunity to deposit a record of her work in the collections during or shortly after her visit in early May, 1834. She recently had overseen her students’ spring examinations and was passing through Worcester at the start of a four-month journey with a few former students to promote female education and missionary schools as far west as Michigan Territory.¹¹⁶ That same month, Baldwin recorded in the donation book her gifts of the 1834 *Catalogue of the Ipswich Female Seminary* and an address given at the school by Daniel Dana.¹¹⁷

Almost since AAS’s founding, many authors and orators had made a habit out of donating copies of their printed works to the society: in the midst of their dispute over the publication of their competing histories of New England, for instance, Hannah Adams and Jedidiah Morse each had donated pamphlets defending their position against the other’s. Though scholars have said much about how notions of gendered authorship shaped both writers’ statements during the controversy, they have left unremarked this facet of donating and making available for historical adjudication a record of the dispute.¹¹⁸ Placing the Ipswich Seminary’s

¹¹⁴ *Place in my Chronicle*, 132; Aug. 1, 1832 entry, Register of Visitors, 1832-1852, AAS Records.

¹¹⁵ *Place in my Chronicle*, 196; May 2, 1834 entry, Register of Visitors, 1832-1852, AAS Records.

¹¹⁶ Zilpah P. Grant to [Unknown], 22 April 1834, and Zilpah P. Grant to Mary Lyon, 20 Sept. 1834, Folder 2, Zilpah Grant Banister Papers, 1820-1874, Mt. Holyoke Digital Archives, <http://clio.fivecolleges.edu/mhc/banister/> (hereafter Grant Banister Papers).

¹¹⁷ Zilpah P. Grant donation, May 1834, Donations, 1830-1839, AAS Records.

¹¹⁸ Jedidiah Morse donation [June-July 1814] and Hannah Adams donation July 14, 18[14], Donations book, 1813-1829, AAS Records. For a recent exploration of the dispute, see Michael J. Everton, “The Courtesies of Authorship: Hannah Adams and Authorial Ethics in the Early Republic,” *Legacy* 20.1&2 (2003): 1-21. Everton frames the long-standing scholarly notions of how gendered authorship figured in the case within a larger backdrop of the emerging market of American publishing and competing senses of authorial ethics.

catalogue, a document that outlined the history, curriculum, and social make-up of the school, in the collections likewise preserved in a public repository Grant's labors and educational philosophy. In doing so, she joined the ranks of other early female educators and academy founders who took pains to justify their endeavors and shape their legacies through written histories.¹¹⁹

Five years later in the spring of 1839, Zilpah Grant wrote to AAS, inquiring whether “any or all of the following” – a variety of printed pamphlets and periodicals – “would be of use to your society.”¹²⁰ She seems to have sent the seminary catalogue for that year at the same time as her letter, perhaps intending to convey in material terms the sincerity of her proffered gifts, for a copy of it entered the collections under her name that same month. This small donation was particularly significant given its timing and content: Grant recently had announced her retirement from teaching and, as she commented to her friend and colleague Hannah White, the catalogue outlined “the whole truth in one period” of her decision.¹²¹ Grant's wider correspondence indicates that concurrent with her communications to AAS that spring, she was distributing the catalogue to share the news of her departure with friends and colleagues as well as making plans for dispersing the furniture, books, and other materials she had accrued over the years. Shortly before writing to AAS, for instance, Grant had offered to Mary Lyon several educational

¹¹⁹ In 1821, Portland educator Penelope Martin reflected at the opening of a manuscript history of the school she had long kept with her sister, “I am the more incited to preserve some memorial of this truly interesting period; lest with the lapse of [time] the most imposing object of my life, & that which has concentrated all the best feelings, and faculties of my mind; should be consigned to oblivion...” [Penelope Martin], “A manuscript history of the Misses Martin's School,” (1821), Folder 5, Penelope Martin Collection, Maine Women Writers Collection, University of New England.

¹²⁰ Z.P. Grant to Librarian of the Antiquarian Society, 20 Apr. 1839, Box 5, Folder 31, AAS Documents and Correspondence, AAS Records.

¹²¹ Zilpah P. Grant donation, April 1839, Donations, 1830-1839, AAS Records; Zilpah P. Grant to Hannah White, 8 May 1839, Folder 3, Grant Banister Papers.

volumes for purchase.¹²² While there certainly was a pragmatic edge to Grant's distribution of materials among colleagues and institutions –for spatial and pecuniary reasons, she simply could not keep all she had accumulated in her new life – she also seems to have been hopeful that the materials of her life's work be preserved and used.

Having received an affirmative reply to her offer from Samuel Haven, who had become AAS's librarian two years earlier in 1837, Grant sent the printed remnants of her dispersing household "to commit to the care, use & ownership of the A.A.S" in early May.¹²³ The gift included volumes of a number of newspapers, including the *Boston Telegraph*, *New York Observer*, and *Connecticut Observer*, as well as evangelical and educational publications. Many numbers among these volumes, Grant apologized in an accompanying letter, were "wanting," but she acted on the knowledge that those pieces that were included might help A.A.S. in its never-ending effort to have complete runs of the periodicals in its collections. (If not, she gave Haven leave to pass them off to a local temperance group or to burn them and so "emit more light"). The annual catalogues for the two institutions she had served as a teacher and administrator over the course of fifteen years, by contrast, were not intended to supplement existing materials and arrived "inclusive."¹²⁴ In their completeness, the catalogues she submitted to the society's "use and care" represented a thorough archive of her own work. Finally, Grant included two books in her gift, with the express wish they be preserved.¹²⁵

Institutional correspondence expanded with Baldwin's appointment as librarian, making for a greater number of letters accompanying donations in the 1830s and revealing the spectrum

¹²² Mary Lyon to Zilpah P. Grant, 12 Apr. 1839, Folder 7, Grant Banister Papers. Lyon replied that she would take an encyclopedia and that a student organization, a "Memorandum Society" charged "to preserve a history of its members, & a general history of [...] the Seminary," would likely purchase a volume of the *Annals of Education*.

¹²³ Zilpah P. Grant donation, May 1839, Donations, 1830-1839, AAS Records.

¹²⁴ Zilpah P. Grant to Samuel Haven, 8 May 1839, Box 5, Folder 31, AAS Documents and Correspondence, AAS Records; Grant donation, May 1839, Donations, 1830-1839, AAS Records.

¹²⁵ Grant to Haven, 8 May 1839, AAS Documents and Correspondence.

of motivations and positions from which women made their gifts. When Fanny Boot of Boston sent Baldwin a seventeenth-century New Testament in Greek and Latin, she hoped that in offering her “morsel of antiquity” to AAS that she could “add some years” to the volume’s existence.¹²⁶ Eliza Rotch Farrar, who had been educated in England and was married to Harvard professor of mathematics and natural philosophy (and AAS member) John Farrar, expressed pleasure in forwarding an old volume from the family library to Baldwin, believing he could “discover merits in it which we cannot.” Sending Baldwin books was not her only historical venture, however; she was preparing for the press a biography of William Penn and requested that Baldwin send with expedience anything he ran across in the AAS library that might be useful to her research.¹²⁷ And in September 1833, Lucy White Thaxter, the wife of lawyer and Massachusetts statesman Levi Thaxter, presented the society with a hefty Puritan work printed in Amsterdam in 1611. She had visited Antiquarian hall with her husband and Rebecca and Rejoice Newton that same month and would return again in 1838.¹²⁸ Either during her visit or in a follow-up letter, Thaxter admitted to Baldwin that she used the volume primarily as a doorstep. In his letter of acknowledgment for the gift, Baldwin shared what he knew about the work’s publishing history and teased that he would be happy to receive any other bibliographic treasures her neighbors were using to “block open doors.”¹²⁹

Conclusion: Extracting Objects and Exceptionalizing Women

¹²⁶ This volume exemplifies the imbrication of “private” and “institutional” records. Though catalogued among Baldwin’s personal papers, the letterbook volume also bears the title “Letters to the Librarian, Vol. 4.” Fanny Boot to Christopher Columbus Baldwin, 26 Oct. 1834, Octavo Vol. 8, CCB Papers.

¹²⁷ Eliza Farrar to Christopher Columbus Baldwin, 2 Nov. 1834, Octavo Vol. 8, CCB Papers.

¹²⁸ Lucy Thaxter donation, Apr. 1833, Donations, 1830-1839, AAS Records; Sept. 20, 1833 and Aug. 1-13, 1838 entries, Register of Visitors, 1832-1852, AAS Records.

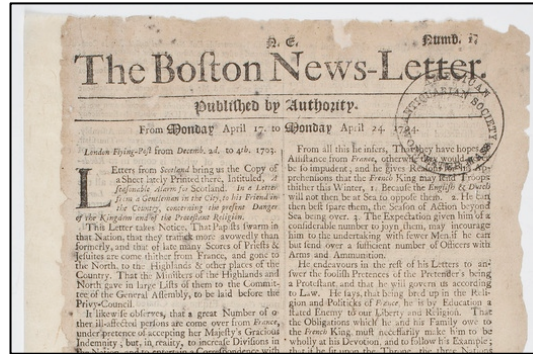
¹²⁹ Christopher Columbus Baldwin to Mrs. Lucy Thaxter, 5 Oct. 1833, CCB Papers, Octavo Vol. 5 (“Letters from the Librarian, Vol. 1”).

Let's return to Eliza Bridgham and the diary entry with which the chapter opened. Recall that she viewed objects from the "literary department" – the centuries-old Bibles, and some of the first texts printed in New England – *and* a variety of physical artifacts, including fragments from ancient Mediterranean sites, Native American implements, and colonial American furniture (fig. 5.1).¹³⁰ Besides indexing her place as an observant commenter on the society's early collections, her tabulation of what she saw encapsulates both continuities and changes between the AAS she visited on a July morning in 1818 and the one that operates as a major research institution today. When I shared her account (which is held not by AAS but by the Rhode Island Historical Society) with staff members there during a research trip, one curator commented that they still consider a number of the items Bridgham specified as hallmarks of the collection. Nearly all of the material objects she mentioned seeing, however, left the society in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century (fig. 5.10). The decisions by AAS's governing bodies to dismantle the Cabinet collection and to turn more exclusively towards scholarly research ventures came with far-reaching consequences, particularly for the legacy of the non-member women who had actively participated in the institution's life for nearly a century.

Two factors related to the emergence of history as a distinct discipline tied to the academy undergirded AAS's changing material contours and institutional priorities at the turn of the twentieth century. The first involved the growing specialization among methods for studying the past.¹³¹ Many of the geological pieces, natural specimens, and Native American artifacts at AAS moved in this era to natural history collections, including the Smithsonian Institution and

¹³⁰ Eliza Bridgham diary, 16-17 July 1818, Misc. Manuscripts.

¹³¹ While at the beginning of the nineteenth century "antiquarian" signified a broad chronological and material scope – any object or text, natural or human-made, that might illuminate a corner of the near or distant past of an immediate or faraway place – by the end of the century, the study of the past increasingly became segmented by material, time, and place of origin, not to mention method. Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 151-152; Ian Tyrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 25-40.



Clockwise from top right: *Boston News-Letter*, *Biblia Sacra*, Mather high chair, AAS

Figure 5.10. Items viewed by Eliza Bridgham that remain in the AAS collections, American Antiquarian Society

Harvard's Peabody Museum, where AAS staff believed they would receive more scientific preservation and examination.¹³² As many scholars also have pointed out, however, the consigning of Native American artifacts to natural history museums, rather than integrating them into collections dedicated to exhibiting the history of the United States, signaled the separation of

¹³² Mary Robinson Reynolds, "Recollections of Sixty Years of Service," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 55 (1945), 9-10; Gura, *Bicentennial History*, 156-158.

indigenous peoples, past and present, from the territorial and political space of the U.S. nation-state.¹³³ Some art objects from the collection – a Michelangelo statue replica, an elaborate eighteenth-century mirror, and portraits of Worcester notables – went to art museums.¹³⁴

A second, related factor was the emerging hierarchy between history and antiquarianism, that latter of which increasingly signaled amateurism. The professionalization of history and its attendant validation of “scientific” research methods meant that the manuscript and printed documents in AAS’s collections and the scholars who used them gained new pride of place. Newer institutions, such as the Worcester Society of Antiquity (later the Worcester Historical Society), founded in 1875, took on the work of collecting and exhibiting artifacts of local historical interest.¹³⁵ Between 1886 and 1895, AAS dispatched to this organization a number of the colonial-era objects women had donated decades before: the ladies’ shoes worn by Mary Thomas and others, the funeral gloves given by the Waldo sisters, and, the seventeenth-century trunk from Elizabeth Oliver.¹³⁶ The span of objects and objectives that originally could be held under the rubric of *antiquarian* in the era of Hannah Mather Crocker or John Cranch narrowed as AAS and many of its users moved to work under the rubric of *history*. Material and philosophical deaccession went hand-in-hand: the removal of these portions of the collection represented in material terms the changing expectations about how AAS would be used, by whom, and for what purposes.

The exceptions to this material deaccession are telling. The Mather family high-chair and a number of other physical objects that Hannah Mather Crocker donated remained; the small

¹³³ Conn, *History’s Shadow*, 154-197.

¹³⁴ Reynolds, “Recollections,” 10, 17.

¹³⁵ Gura, *Bicentennial History*, 140-142, 147.

¹³⁶ Reynolds, “Recollections,” 10; American Antiquarian Society references in WHM records, compiled for Nan Wolverton by H.V. Izard, December 2014 (Unpublished document). My thanks to AAS fellow Christen Mucher for altering me to this document and to Nan Wolverton for sharing it with me.

chair, in particular, continues to be treasured. Crocker became the exceptional woman donor within institutional memory in part because her donations became exceptional objects within the collection. Her material legacy remained visible, and although the credit she received for her donations and historical work would ebb and flow over the twentieth century, the continued presence of her gifts in the collection has made her larger presence as a contributor easier to recover. The ongoing preservation of these objects is fitting, too, since Crocker had written in the essay “Antiquarian Researches” that “the most minute article” might, when viewed in future, inspire the advance of art, courage, and virtuous leadership. Though few in number, other domestic, feminized objects remained as well: in 1840, the society purchased from the estate of deceased member Frederick Paine, in tribute of his longtime patronage, a large needlework picture stitched in the mid-eighteenth century by one of his female ancestors.¹³⁷ If in 1813 Elizabeth Bliss’s connection to great men had served as the ticket of entry for her donation, the association of these articles to prominent male figures served as their allowances to remain.

Lack of membership did not prevent women with means from donating, visiting, and otherwise participating actively in the early decades of AAS’s venture. cursory glances of documents from later in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – the society’s *Proceedings*, where accounts of donations most reliably appeared after 1850, the index of correspondents writing to the society, and later volumes of the visitor’s logs – further indicate that at no point before the election of the first woman member of AAS in 1960 were women completely absent from the institution’s life. Instead, lack of membership figured as a greater disadvantage to women after the fact, in barring their access to the means through which to influence whether their participation would be recognized, regarded, or remembered. Men with the authority to

¹³⁷ Donations of Manuscripts, Paintings, and Curiosities, Feb. 1841, Accessions, 1840-1851, Folio vol. 17.3, AAS Records.

influence what entered the collections or who visited the library – most notably in the early years of the society, Isaiah Thomas and Christopher Columbus Baldwin – had proven relatively receptive to women’s participation, but they were under no obligation to reciprocate that participation with permanent institutional recognition. Putting women donors and visitors back into the early history of the AAS refigures the early culture of the institution itself, shedding renewed light on the varied actors, material objects, and household spaces caught up in the formal historical work of the early nineteenth century.

Conclusion

The profession of history has a gender problem. Typically, scholars have painted that problem in terms of the representation of women as subjects and producers of scholarship. The first generation of feminist scholars working in the academy devoted much attention to breaking down the gendered prerogatives that had excluded women from literary and historiographical canons. These concerns persist. As recently as a decade ago Alice Kessler-Harris remarked that “women whose scholarship revolves around women are still [...] encouraged to branch out or broaden their scholarship.”¹ Public historians, too, have noted the relative absence of women’s stories in major museums, historic sites, and commemorative markers across the country.²

Committed to Memory demonstrates that gendered presumptions also haunt the very means by which scholars produce historical interpretation, from the materials and repositories we consult to the typical audiences and venues we address. As Natalie Zemon Davis asserted in 1984, “When we debate what the subjects and methods of history should be, we are usually debating at the same time what the shape of the historical community should be and where we stand in it.”³ Echoing in contemporary debates about the relationship between public and academic history are the repercussions of the early twentieth century feminization of material objects, historic houses, and amateur historians. To the extent that these distinctions remain

¹ Alice Kessler-Harris, “Do We Still Need Women’s History?” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Dec. 7, 2007, <http://www.chronicle.com/article/Do-We-Still-Need-Womens/4897>.

² The long-standing – and politically fraught – efforts to build a National Women’s History Museum is perhaps the best-known example of this absence. Many of the public historians advocating for greater representation of women at historic sites are calling for broader attention to gender and sexuality in the fields of public history and historic preservation. Gail DuBrow and Jennifer Goodman, eds., *Restoring Women’s History through Historic Preservation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Susan Ferentinos, *Interpreting LGBT History at Museums and Historic Sites* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

³ Natalie Zemon Davis, “History’s Two Bodies,” *American Historical Review* (1984): 2.

unmarked, the field of public history – the offspring of vernacular historical practice and the academy’s professionalism – will remain “Plan B.”⁴

For much of the twentieth century, academic historians continued to use allusions to feminized bodies to disparage those forms of historical work taking place beyond the ivory tower. Responding to the growth of popular histories in the 1940s, Wood Gray of George Washington University complained to a colleague, “Clio is going to be just a gal-about-town on whom anybody with two bits worth of inclination in his pocket can lay claims.”⁵ A generation later, J. Morgan Kousser titled a piece for *The Public Historian* with the rhetorical question, “Are Expert Witnesses Whores?”⁶ His answer, of course, was no, but the gendered provocation on which he premised the article demonstrated that Gray’s earlier sentiment remained credible. History at work and in demand outside of the academy carried the stain of a loose woman ready to treat with the highest bidder.⁷

The bodies of desexualized women, in turn, have served to convey the irrelevance, inaccuracy, and insularity of public historical engagement, especially in small-scale, local settings. At the turn of the twentieth century, John Franklin Jameson, the founding president of

⁴ For a sense of the competing claims of public history’s origins inside and outside of the academy, see the early *Public Historian* essays of Robert Kelley and Ronald Grele. Anthony T. Grafton and James Grossman, “No More Plan B: A Very Modest Proposal for Graduate Programs in History,” *Perspectives on History* 49, no. 7 (Oct. 2011), <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/october-2011/no-more-plan-b#>; Robert Kelley, “Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects,” *Public Historian* 1, no. 1 (Jan. 1978), 16-28; Ronald J. Grele, “Whose Public? Whose History? What is the Goal of a Public Historian?” *Public Historian* 3, no. 1 (Jan. 1981), 40-48.

⁵ Novick’s work, in gathering scholarly statements on the boundaries of ‘objective’ history across the twentieth century, has served as an inadvertent index for the gendered distinctions I present here. Novick himself declined to make a clear statement on the merits of public history, demurring that the field was too new to write about conclusively. Instead, he commented tepidly, “Professional courtesy has mandated a formally positive response to public history by the professorate, and by the two major national professional organizations” (520). Wood Gray, quoted in Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 193-194.

⁶ Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 514.

⁷ Bonnie Smith notes a similar pattern in conversations about academic histories: “The adjectives ““sexy,” “fashionable,” and “hot,” which are used to designate bad history (or the history of people or color and women), are [...] rich with gendered efficacy.” Smith, *Gender of History*, 3.

the American Historical Association, disparaged the collections of local historical societies as “the poke bonnets and spinning wheels of all garrets,” and on another occasion he characterized the motivation behind their work as “pettiness and sterility.”⁸ In this narrative, aged “blue-hairs” care for cluttered collections and peddle senile stories. On the eve of the twenty-first century, the trope appeared at length in a piece on the work of museum educators and interpreters. In contrast to the “little old ladies, scions of the local history society, who made their way down to ye olde house museum every Sunday afternoon to awe visitors with their ability to trace local families’ roots back to the Mayflower and marvel over how well-made things were back in the good ole’ days,” professional interpreters, this writer asserted, employ their visitors’ time efficiently, interpret artifacts discriminatingly, and dramatize the past without sacrificing objectivity.⁹

Even those attempting to highlight the similarities among different modes of historical practice have occasionally fallen into these gendered trappings. David Lowenthal remarked in the late 1990s that heritage and history are “not so much disparate species as opposite sexes,” where the primary difference is that practitioners of heritage embrace bias and those of history seek to reduce it.¹⁰ Resuscitating the gendered logic of (feminine) bias and (masculine) objectivity, Lowenthal made clear which form of history belonged to which sex. What are we, as producers and consumers of historical narratives, to make of the persistence of these

⁸ J. Samaine Lockwood’s *Archives of Desire* tackles this trope and recovers what she terms the “intimate historicism” of New England’s late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century female regionalists. John Franklin Jameson, quoted in Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 519. 72; Lockwood, *Archives of Desire: The Queer Historical Work of New England Regionalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), esp. 8-15.

⁹ Daniel Bluestone notes that the broader American public shares this perception of preservationists. Mark Howell, “Interpreters and Museum Educators: Beyond the Blue Hairs,” in *Public History: Essays from the Field*, eds. James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia, 141-156 (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 1999), 141 (quote); Bluestone, “Academics in Tennis Shoes: Historic Preservation and the Academy,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 58, no. 3 (Sept. 1999): 300-307.

¹⁰ Lowenthal goes on to suggest that public history results from the blending of heritage and history. David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 167 (quote), 122.

allusions? And more pressingly, for those of us who work as professional historians, how are we willing and equipped to respond? This dissertation argues that these utterances grew out of a historical process that divided history from memory along gendered lines. In contextualizing this process, *Committed to Memory* recovers both acts of preservation by everyday historians and acts of dismissal by emerging professionals.

The white women this dissertation profiles who engaged in historical work at the opening and closing of the nineteenth century were neither promiscuous nor senile, but they did undertake that work with a sense of historical authority: a recognition that their lineage, their learning, and their taste entitled them to record their presence in the unfolding of time. In the early nineteenth century, their acts of employing a closet's plaster to preserve a sentimental tie, of memorializing the people involved in the making of their samplers, or of donating a pair of brocaded shoes they had worn on the eve of the Revolution to a historical society asserted that domestic spaces and the artifacts within them figured critically in the broad work of preserving the past.

At the end of the century, their heirs – in social and cultural, if not lineal terms – continued to take up household objects as conveyers of history, but articulated their significance through narratives of national progress, notable men, and domesticity. For these amateur historians, the feminine associations of these objects did not diminish their historical significance. Indeed, the settings and rhetoric in which they situated window etchings, samplers, and friendship albums often amplified those associations: couched in the logic of domesticity, the perception of a realm insulated from politics, these artifacts could appear as neutral witnesses to Anglo-American gentility, past and present. Consigned to memory by professionals then and now, the historical power of these objects and the spaces of their preservation continues to

operate. When we seriously reckon with that power, as this dissertation has sought to do, we not only come to new insights about the particularities of historical practice in the past but also develop a stronger awareness of the deep-seated presumptions that shape whose history counts, in what settings, and with what consequences.

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