# A Sphere of Difference:
# The Construction of Female Identity at Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Connecticut

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**Abstract**

This paper draws attention to the influence of the Transcendentalist movement on women's education and identity in the Victorian period, focusing on the private school education that young women received at Miss Porter's School, in Farmington, Connecticut. The paper explores white middle-class femininity and education within the home during the Victorian period; the educational philosophies of Transcendentalists Amos Bronson, Sophia Ripley, and Margaret Fuller; and the development of female private school instruction within the United States, before turning to a case study of Miss Porter's School. Through the case study it will become apparent that Miss Porter's School was a place of transition, where women's education moved from the older values of the Victorian period to the emerging standards of the Progressive era. Women's education was affected by the changing ideas about women's place within Victorian American society. Using evidence drawn from photographica as well as textual materials, drawn mainly from the archives of Miss Porters' School, this paper applies the insights of interdisciplinary cultural history to re-energize the familiar subject matter on the ideals of Victorian womanhood.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

"As to the woman question, I suppose no one can deny God's appointment, she is designed to be, and must be, wife and mother- that she must administer the home. And just as plainly that man must provide for it… Why will not the reformers look at the nature of men and women, of the demands and possibilities of the home, and through the home to the world, and the developments therein."[1]

In the long and contested history of women's education in the United States, the Victorian era stands out as the period in which the relocation of women's education- from the home to the boarding school- transformed middle-class female identity. Daughters of white middle-class families turned to private boarding schools, instead of solely relying on the education that they were receiving from their mothers and other female relatives within their own homes. At the same time, better instructors emerged who were able to provide a greater range of courses and intellectual pursuits. The change in women's education was tied in part to ideals of femininity within the early Victorian era, but as we will see, the transformation of women's education in private schools such as Miss Porter's had its own consequences for ideals of "true womanhood." Women's education changed in response to the new ideas about womanhood; in turn, education helped to create new ideas about women and open up new possibilities for young women's sense of place in the world. This paper will examine Victorian era femininity through the education that young white middle-class women received within the home, and the influence of Miss Porter's School, a private school in Farmington, Connecticut. The school's founder, Sarah Porter, noted the possibilities of the home for her pupils but saw the girls' roles as being extended above and beyond the private sphere. Although she may have wanted her students to stay within the home, the outcomes that the students chose

[1] Sarah Porter, "To Annie B. Jennings," March 1, 1894, as quoted in *Miss Porter's School: A History in Documents, 1847-1948. Volume One: The School and Its Students, 1847- 1900*, Louise L. Stevenson ed., Garland Publishing Inc., New York, 1987, 84.

did not necessarily follow the domestic path; many students would later become leaders of the various social movements that peaked in the Progressive era.

Through an interdisciplinary perspective, this paper explores a new understanding of white middle-class young women's education and identity within Victorian American society. By combining the methodologies found in the fields of History and English with those of American studies and women studies, this paper offers a fresh reading of the secondary literature and uses primary sources that have not been explored elsewhere. In this way, it connects various subject matters, that have been previously thought to be separate from each other, and shows that there is an underlying commonality: the creation of Victorian female identity.

My paper traces the influence of Miss Porter's School on women's education by establishing the school's place in the context of important reform and spiritual movements of the nineteenth century- abolitionism, temperance, and women's rights- and most importantly, the context of the spiritual movement known as Transcendentalism and the movement's communal experiment at Brook Farm. I begin with a discussion of the influence of Transcendentalism on Victorian ideals of femininity and white female middle-class education, and illustrate the point through the examples of Margaret Fuller and Sophia Ripley, two key female members of the Transcendentalist movement. Their work reveals that Transcendentalism challenged expectations for white middle-class women, and encouraged women's education and experience outside the home. This chapter illustrates the spirit and intellectual atmosphere of the period, and the place of women within it. Through this study, it will be easier to understand just how Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Connecticut reflected the character of the era even as it,

became a point of transition from the older feminine values of the period and the new ideas of the forthcoming era.

The discussion of the Transcendentalist context for Miss Porter's work leads into a brief overview of the female private school education with the United States, beginning with the emergence of such education during the eighteenth century and the push from evangelical Christianity in the 1830s and 1840s. By examining changing ideals of femininity- from Republican womanhood to that of the cult of true womanhood—we can see that the courses that female pupils were taught conformed to the ideology of womanhood within society at that given time. I argue that Miss Porter's School provided its students with a unique female education that was divergent from more traditional female educational institutions.

In the latter sections of the paper, I turn to an in-depth case study of Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Connecticut, in order to fully understand the importance that the school had to the development of its students' concept of femininity and their role as women in the world. I argue that Miss Porter's School was unique, both in terms of the courses that Miss Porter's offered its students and the types of activities that they engaged in, and I attribute this unique curricular and extracurricular model to the influence and life of the school's founder, Miss Sarah Porter. The personality of the founder herself, was reflected in the unique position of the school she established, and at the same time, the founding principles of the school were tied to the larger spirit of the era. Through their education at Miss Porter's School, students became part of the greater intellectual community within the United States, and abroad, and widened their beliefs about their

own capabilities and positions as white middle-class women within Victorian American society.

The scholarship written about the subject of female domesticity in nineteenth century American society has emphasized a feminist perspective from its inception. The first works on the cult of domesticity demonstrated that viewpoint, and subsequent scholars have continued in that tradition. Barbara Welter's 1966 essay, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," could be considered the pioneer work of the area under discussion, in which she illustrated the main virtues that American women were to abide by in the nineteenth century. Although later scholars questioned Welter's assessment and sought a redefinition of the cult of true womanhood, or domesticity, Welter's work is still an influential text, especially in disciplines such as the history of race, gender, and class, and in interdisciplinary programs, such as women studies and American studies.

In the "Cult of True Womanhood," Welter argued that nineteenth century American women were judged by male society due to their innate moral qualities. These attributes included the virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. By adhering to those four principles American women could be said to be a part of the cult of true womanhood.[2] Furthermore, Welter emphasized that women were to be placed within the domestic or private sphere, as they were to be separated from the male-dominated public sphere.[3] The conception of the cult of true womanhood and the resulting separate spheres was a novel idea during the time of the essay's publication. Welter understood the American female experience to be one of compliance to not only her husband, but also to patriarchal society and its norms. She stated that the actions that

[2] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," in *Dimity Convictions*, Ohio University Press, Athens, 1976, 21.
[3] Ibid., 22.

women engaged in did not take women out of the private sphere. As a consequence of this, Welter emphasized that American women were meant to be in the domestic space as it was considered their "proper sphere."[4] Those women who did not follow the four virtues, or stayed within the home, were to be considered amoral or deviant characters, as they did not perform their sacred duty of uplifting the moral tone of society through the education of their children. This would lead them to be ostracized by polite society.[5] Welter's essay was the pioneering work on the cult of true womanhood, and due to its popularity in academia after its initial publication she reprinted the work in her 1976 collection of essays, entitled *Dimity Convictions: the American Woman in the Nineteenth Century*.[6] Subsequent scholars have looked at her work to further examine women's roles within the domestic space in the nineteenth century and the influence that they might have had on public discourse.

In response to Welter's essay, Ann Douglas' *The Feminization of American Culture*, examined the various religious and social roles that women played in Victorian America. Douglas argued that middle-class women were actual key participants in the creation of a national identity based on the consumer culture that developed in the nineteenth century.[7] Women were able to get out of the home and into the public space through the process of purchasing consumer products, which included sentimental novels.[8] This allowed women to have an alternate form of identity that was not based solely in the domestic sphere. In the end, Douglas explained that although women

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[4] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," in *Dimity Convictions*, Ohio University Press, Athens, 1976, 22.
[5] Ibid., 31.
[6] Mary Kelley, "Beyond the Boundaries," *Journal of the Early Republic* 21 (2001): 74.
[7] Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*, Alfred A. Knopf Inc., New York, 1977, 10.
[8] Ibid., 188.

through their actions as consumers and mothers could either violate or preserve the characteristics of femininity, there would be "no genuine change" to their position within society.[9] As mass consumers, and key participants in society, women felt that their real stories were being left unwritten.[10] Change would not occur because there was no way to replace Calvinist patriarchal values with a more "sexually diversified culture," and as a consequence, the "feminizing" of mass culture allowed for the continuation of patriarchal society that saw women as static figures within nineteenth century America.[11] The perspective offered by Douglas was a marked departure from Welter's argument. This was not a reclaiming of feminine identity because there was nothing for middle-class women to reclaim. Women were still seen as secondary figures in patriarchal American society, as their influence only came through their capabilities as mothers and religious devotion. Although they participated in public settings, they were seen as inconsequential figures. The conclusions that Douglas made has opened the door to more recent studies of the cult of true womanhood and its role in the formation of various female identities.

In response to both Barbara Welter and Ann Douglas, women's historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg argued that the female body was a cultural construction created by patriarchal society, and that idealized constructions of womanhood did not always accurately represent female identity within the domestic space. In *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*, she investigated how middle-class women defied those stereotypes through the close relationships that formed within the domestic

[9] Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*, Alfred A. Knopf Inc., New York, 1977, 199.
[10] Ibid., 184.
[11] Ibid., 13.

space.[12] Her analysis of the domestic sphere emphasized the strength and freedoms that women found within it. She showed that the myth that the cult of true womanhood perpetuates actually obscured the female relationships and identities that were formed within the home.[13] Smith-Rosenberg's work was one of the first attempts made in the field of women's history to examine the same-sex relationships that formed in the domestic sphere. Furthermore, her analysis provided a groundbreaking perspective on the formation of female identity in nineteenth century American society. Unlike her academic predecessors, who believed that the domestic sphere was a place of subjection and anxiety for middle-class women, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg opposed that understanding, and instead demonstrated that the domestic sphere actually provided women with a place to create a strong defence against the pressures of patriarchal society. As a result, middle-class women were able to emphasize the freedoms they found within the home through the bonds of close friendship that they developed with other women.[14] Those bonds were socially accepted by patriarchal nineteenth century America. It was through the work of Carroll Smith-Rosenberg that academics began to comprehend the notion that the supposed puritanical Victorian America may have been more flexible in their understanding of individual relationships than modern twentieth century American society.[15] Her work has affected the way that current scholars have viewed the cult of true womanhood. She has allowed other scholars to delve further into the formation of feminine identities in nineteenth century America.

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[12] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985, 13.
[13] Ibid., 51.
[14] Ibid., 53.
[15] Ibid., 76.

The current trend in modern scholarship regarding the cult of true womanhood is to use Welter's influential work as a starting point for analysis, instead of a definitive conclusion. Academia is engaging in more of an interdisciplinary perspective that allows for the further deconstruction of Welter's four main virtues. Modern scholarship views Welter's text as a foundational reference for their academic work. This is especially apparent as many recent scholars have discarded the notion of separate spheres as the accurate representation of women's lives in nineteenth century American society. There is a desire to see the active roles that women have performed in the public domain, such as in antislavery or temperance societies. Scholars have also looked at working class women or black women in order to see how female identity was created.

This can be seen in scholar Hazel Carby's work, *Reconstructing Womanhood: the Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*. Carby argued that black women in nineteenth century American society were unable to fit into the conventional understanding of true womanhood during that period, and as a result of their dual identity, as both black and women, they struggled to affirm their positions as American citizens. Furthermore, due to the racism that they had to endure when trying to participate in volunteer women's organizations, they had to form their own black organizations to help tackle the issues of their communities.[16] Her book examined how the ideologies of true womanhood were adopted and then transformed in order to effectively represent the experiences of black women and their formation of an "alternate discourse of black womanhood."[17] It was with this work that intellectuals researching the cult of true womanhood were able to see how race and class were constructed in ways that enhanced

[16] Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: the Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1987, 4.
[17] Ibid., 6.

the power of white society, and which allowed for the further subjection of black women to patriarchal society then their white counterparts. Carby's work explored the dynamics of race and class within the cult of true womanhood.

In more recent work, scholars have taken up the questions of space when it comes to discussions about the cult of true womanhood. Amy Kaplan's 1998 essay, "Manifest Domesticity," can be considered one of the most influential works on that association. She argues that although the deconstruction of separate spheres occurred, the domestic sphere was still seen in the context of a space that contrasted the domestic politics of the home to the policies of the foreign or national domain.[18] In other words, Kaplan emphasizes that foreign policy depended on the understanding that the nation was part of the domestic space and was in complete contrast to hostile and unfamiliar world found in foreign politics.[19] To further her argument Kaplan examines the domestic novels that were published throughout the nineteenth century. She argues that those novels had to project the idea of the national as private space, and to accomplish such a task those novels looked at the cult of true womanhood and turned inwards to look at the female private sphere. These domestic novels, such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, often spoke of the formation of the nation through the virtues of the female characters within the domestic space.[20] Kaplan's work allows scholars to engage in literary analysis of the formation of female identity within the domestic space. In addition, her essay provides a new perspective on how to examine the impact of the cult of true womanhood. It is through her novel approach of connecting space and female identity that current scholars are able to view the domestic space as a place where both public and national issues were

[18] Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," *American Literature* 70 (1998): 581.
[19] Ibid., 582.
[20] Ibid., 601.

represented. This in turn, allows for modern scholars to examine the influence that women had on such concerns.

Through the "Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," Barbara Welter influenced generations of intellectuals and their writings. Yet within the last forty-five years since its publication, Welter's work has undergone a critical transformation; from the leading perception of the cult of domesticity, to the work being used as a starting point for more varied observations. Current scholarship shows that the Welter's cult of true womanhood is no more, as it has been thoroughly deconstructed and reevaluated over the years. The understanding of female identity in the nineteenth century as a universal sisterhood has become an obsolete argument, as post-modern scholarship attests to the various female identities found throughout that period. Now, intellectuals look to how race, class, and the use of space created different understandings of the female self in Victorian America, and how their experiences were contrasted with those of women. As a consequence, the cult of true womanhood is being readapted by the emerging students of more interdisciplinary programs such as American studies, cultural studies, gender studies, and women's studies.

My analysis of Miss Porter's school is informed by an interdisciplinary perspective that will combine the insight found in American studies, English, History, women's studies, and other like-minded fields in order to formulate a nuanced approach to the study of Victorian femininity and white middle-class education within that period. In addition, this paper will continue to rely on the theoretical work of previous scholars. I will be using Barbara Welter's cult of true womanhood as an introduction into Victorian femininity, while expanding her viewpoint in a few ways. First, I will expand her

definition of the cult of true womanhood to include moral influence and affection. Secondly, as with Welter, I will examine the way in which domestic advice literature further provided information and lessons to young women on to how to become respectable ladies, and I will consider middle-class mothers' use of such advice in the domestic sphere to enhance the education of their daughters. With these two steps, I will be providing an updated perspective on the basis of feminine ideology and female education within the white women's sphere during the period.

My analysis also supports Anne Douglas' argument that young white middle-class women were key influencers and movers within Victorian American society, but I move beyond her work by extending my study into women's moral and intellectual lives. It was not just through their roles as consumers of domestic advice literature and sentimental novels that women created a national identity outside of that of the domestic sphere, as Douglas argued, but in their participation in the intellectual, moral, and spiritual movements of the period. These would include being key members in abolitionism, temperance societies, transcendentalism, and women's rights. The creation of feminine identity will be examined in numerous ways throughout the paper, but the most important one will be through how identity was formed at Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Connecticut. It is in this section, that a localized place will be the best representation of how female identity was changing during the mid-nineteenth century. Using Miss Porter's School as a case study for the establishment of such a national identity will provide a post-modern perspective as to how a single location can speak volumes about issues that can encompass a nation. In this case it is national identity and women's education within the nineteenth century. This paper will also expand the arguments made

by Carol Smith-Rosenberg, by looking at how the close bonds young women were able to form within private schools, such as Miss Porter's, allowed them to be able to create feminine networks that would be able to provide advice and support to other women. With such communication networks in place, women were then able to comment on issues that were considered to be part of the public, male-oriented domain. Through such comments, those women were then able to adapt the way that middle-class American society viewed the ideals of Victorian femininity.

In terms of class and race, I will be deviating from Hazel Carby's assessment of black womanhood during the period under discussion because this paper is interested in the formation of white middle-class women's education and resulting identity within the nineteenth century. That does not mean that issues relating to race will not be addressed; there were important connections, for instance, between Miss Porter's School and both abolitionism and the Underground Railroad, but the black community is not the primary focus of this paper. With regard to class, this essay will be exploring the emergence of the middle-class identity and how that corresponds, however minutely, to the changing ideals of femininity and women's education through American society during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The issue of space in relation to national and foreign politics, as addressed by Amy Kaplan, will not be addressed in detail within this paper. However, I will be expanding upon her arguments that a deconstruction of the private sphere can occur. In this instance, it can occur in a localized space, that of the female boarding school and the interaction that the students at Miss Porter's School had with the public sphere. Through the adaption and reevaluation of previous scholarship, this paper will

provide a different approach to the study of the creation of femininity and women's education within the Victorian period.

## Chapter Two: A "True" Victorian American Education: Ideals of Femininity and Home Education

"One of the most interesting characters of the family circle is the good daughter… she feels the importance of her situation and cultivates in herself a character of great excellence… She is a comfort to her parents…selfishness is far from her nature, she is amiable and cherishes ill towards no one, forgiving and forgetting all injuries in true meekness and kindness. She never allows her time to pass unemployed…"[21]

Throughout the Victorian period, Americans divided aspects of private and public life into a belief known as separate spheres. This notion dictated that men's influence was found within the public domain and that women's influence was within the domestic space, or the home. As female advice writer Lizzie Torrey described, men "may sway the intellect and control the material power of the State," but women reign "over the heart, govern the home, and thus rule the world."[22] Furthermore, middle-class women were expected to abide by the conventions of female respectability that were found in the ideology of true womanhood. Discussions about female respectability were even found in the *The Budget***,** a student-run newspaper at Miss Porter's School, which greatly emphasized the necessary characteristics that the students were to display at all times, on campus or even when they were out of town. According to Barbara Welter, the cult of true womanhood centred on four cardinal virtues that white middle-class women, especially adolescent girls, must possess in order to be considered respectable women. These virtues included piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Adolescent women would be considered abnormal or immoral if they were deficient in even one of those

[21] "The Good Daughter," *The Budget*, vol.1, no.7, March 30, 1849, as quoted in transcribed newspaper articles from Miss Porter's School Archival Collection, 102.
[22] Lizzie R. Torrey, *The Ideal of Womanhood: or, Words to the Women of America*, Wentworth and Hewes, Boston, 1859, 13.

virtues.[23] As a consequence, it became the obligation of mothers to provide informal education to their daughters so that they would embody the principles of female respectability. This education was provided to their daughters so that the young women would become suitable wives and future mothers. The notion of female respectability, or the cult of true womanhood, was prevalent in the domestic advice literature of the nineteenth century. Mothers would educate their daughters about female propriety with guidance from the advice manuals and pamphlets of that era.

Domestic advice literature, which usually targeted white middle-class women residing in the home, became a new popular form of literature in the 1840s. Editors and writers of the time encouraged women to read their works, with the promise that their "loving care" and "control of their husbands and children" were essential to the maintenance of "the social order and public virtue."[24] As a result, it was the duty of young women to heed the lessons given to them by their mothers so that the moral tone of Victorian American society could be protected. This was connected to the development of prescribed domestic advice for young women to show affection and form close bonds between themselves and members of their nuclear family.[25] Affection became one of the main qualities that young women were to develop alongside the other virtues in the cult of true womanhood.

Through the use of affection, white young middle-class women were representing part of their moral control over their male relations. They were to be influencers, not manipulators, of the decisions of men. Affection was to be considered the most powerful

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[23] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," in *Dimity Convictions*, Ohio University Press, Athens, 1976, 21.
[24] Mary P. Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing about Domesticity*, *1830-1860*, The Institute for Research in History and The Haworth Press, New York, 1982, 20.
[25] Ibid., 45.

of all women's influences, as this created domestic attachment to the patriarchs of middle-class families. Advice manuals, such as Edwin Hubble Chapin's *Duties of Young Women*, noted that affection was vital in order for close relations to form between young men and women. Therefore, affection helped young women to take part in the forming of young men's decisions on the events or policies that were happening within society.[26] As the authors of the *Young Wife's Book* put it, the influence that young middle-class wives had on their husbands might produce "amendment[s]" to public decisions or policies, which "would be considered as a miracle if effected by any other hand."[27] Mothers taught their daughters to develop their feelings through a variety of ways, as young women were to perform their duties with the utmost care, love, and respect. Affection was to form the bedrock of household management for many young women once they married, and as a result mothers wanted their daughters well educated in the forms of love and respectability. Furthermore, mothers realized that affection would be indispensable when their daughters were to marry and produce children, as the families that the young women maintained had to be both intellectually and morally content.[28] The cultivation of love was seen as especially important when it came to the pious and pure lives that young women were to lead within nineteenth century American society.

Young women were taught by their mothers to lead pious and virtuous lives. Leading pious lives would allow those young women to create faithful and "more

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[26] Edwin Hubble Chapin, *Duties of Young Women*, Universalist Pub. House, Boston, 1869, 159.
[27] *The Young Wife's Book: a Manual of Moral, Religious and Domestic Duties*, Carey Lea and Blanchard, Philadelphia, 1838, 29.
[28] Orson Squire Fowler, *Love and Parentage, Applied to the Improvement of Offspring: Including Important Directions and Suggestions to Lovers and the Married Concerning the Strongest Ties and the Most Momentous Relations of Life*, Fowler and Wells, New York, 1844, 47.

perfect" households when they became married.[29] Religious devotion was considered to be connected to the emotion of affection, as spirituality imparted feelings of "purity, heavenly sweetness, and sacredness which always pertain[ed] to love."[30] As a consequence of the feelings that young women were to gain from their pious lives, they were to be impassive and unselfish in their manners, and they should only "prompt others rather than assert" themselves in order to be models for other women to follow.[31] With strong religious conviction came the need for young women, and Christians in general, to submit to the will of God. Submission to God, through understanding sacrifices that Jesus Christ had made in order for humanity to be saved, was considered one of the hardest lessons, if not the hardest, for young women to learn. Submission, as ladies' advice manuals described, was considered to be a duty of "such high and holy importance" that it only could be learned from the "Great Teacher," or God.[32] If women learned this than they would be able to create domestic areas that were retreats for the souls that resided within their homes. This form of compliance to God led to the understanding that young white women had to submit to the decisions and wills of their male relations.

Young women were taught to be passive and submissive to their male-relations, whether those were fathers, uncles, or future husbands. Mothers explained to their daughters that they were to be protected from the corrupting influences of the masculine public sphere by their male relations. Once married, women's protection was transferred

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[29] Timothy Shay Arthur, *Advice to Young Ladies on Their Duties and Conduct in Life*, Phillips and Sampson, Boston, 1848, 2.
[30] Orson Squire Fowler, *Love and Parentage, Applied to the Improvement of Offspring: Including Important Directions and Suggestions to Lovers and the Married Concerning the Strongest Ties and the Most Momentous Relations of Life*, Fowler and Wells, New York, 1844, 104.
[31] Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1977, 45.
[32] *The Young Lady's Book of Piety: a Practical Manual of Christian Duties for the Formation of the Female Character*, Crocker and Brewster, Boston, 1835, 7.

from their fathers to their husbands.[33] If they were to remain single, young women were to be both compliant and useful to their parents.[34] However, in return for their protection, young women were to perform their womanly duties with little complaint. This lesson was one that their mothers had taught them since childhood. For instance, when young women were to marry they were told by their mothers not to cause any provocations with their husbands over who had supreme authority within the household, as it was deemed uncouth. They were to give advice to their husbands instead of trying to extend their authority into areas where their husbands alone were "competent to act."[35] Furthermore, young women were taught to be patient and submit to their husbands' opinions instead of trying to govern them.[36] Through the submission of their desires to their male-relations, white young middle-class women were told that they were leading virtuous lives. In order for their moral purity to be felt within their homes, they were to create domestic settings that reflected their virtuous characters.

In terms of young women and their manners within the domestic space, information was given to adolescent women by their mothers. During the nineteenth century, there were numerous conduct books available in print for almost every social situation within the private sphere.[37] The domestic advice literature that their mothers consulted described the home as a place of order, peace, and stability. This outcome was to be perfected under the supervision of women, as the home was their empire where they

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[33] Mabel Collins Donnelly, *The Victorian American Woman: the Myth and the Reality*, Greenwood Press, New York, 1986, 9.
[34] Ibid., 32.
[35] *The Young Wife's Book: a Manual of Moral, Religious and Domestic Duties*, Carey Lea and Blanchard, Philadelphia, 1838, 38.
[36] Ibid., 38.
[37] Nicole Tonkovich, *Domesticity with a Difference: the Nonfiction of Catherine Beecher, Sarah J. Hale, Fanny Fern, and Margaret Fuller*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, 1997, 110.

reigned supreme through the "offices of benevolence and restoration."[38] The domestic literature of the period detailed how men spent their days working in the hostile public sphere and when they returned to their homes, for meals, relaxation, and sleep, they were not to be harassed by their wives to participate in the household chores.[39] As a consequence, young women were to spend their time cultivating attractive images of themselves for their husbands, by having fine dresses, cheerful dispositions, and good cooking skills. By doing this, white middle-class women were creating comfortable homes for their husbands, who had to endure the harsh realities of the public domain.[40] Moreover, their houses were to be places of peace, innocence, and virtue, where hearts were purified and the "moral luster" of their husbands' minds could be restored.[41] By keeping their homes clean and orderly, they would be contributing to the "happiness of society" and the "progress in the world," as various authors of domestic advice literature believed that the good which happened within the public sphere depended upon the amount of happiness that was found within the domestic space.[42] In order to create such environments, young women were trained so that they would not only be suitable companions to their husbands, but also to their husbands' friends and business partners. This was done in order to secure their families' financial and social success within society.[43] This could be evident through the cooking of proper meals, such as roast beef and vegetables, and through the setting of beautiful table centerpieces with polished

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[38] Edwin Hubble Chapin, *Duties of Young Women*, Universalist Pub. House, Boston, 1869, 13.
[39] Mary P. Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing about Domesticity*, *1830-1860*, The Institute for Research in History and The Haworth Press, New York, 1982, 35.
[40] Ibid., 37.
[41] *The Young Wife's Book: a Manual of Moral, Religious and Domestic Duties*, Carey Lea and Blanchard, Philadelphia, 1838, 34.
[42] Hubbard Wilson and Mrs. John Sanford, *The Lady's Manual of Moral and Intellectual Culture*, Leavitt and Allen, New York, 1854, 19.
[43] Frances B. Cognan, *All-American Girl: the Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America*, The University of Georgia Press, Athens, 1989, 75.

silver candles and the associated silverware for their dinner guests.[44] The home was to be the place in which young women were to showcase the "trophies of victories" that their male relations "won in the world."[45] It was only after they were married that young middle-class women were to undertake the creation of such a domestic space.

Throughout the nineteenth-century, marriages and the impact that they had on society became a focal point for writers of advice literature. The domestic advice literature often crafted the picture of middle-class families as being both patriarchal and part of a "busy social universe" that became "tightly integrated into the larger community."[46] As a consequence, marriages were often seen as "social alliances between two kinship systems," and not as the "private concern of two young lovers."[47] The friendships and kinship networks that developed through marriages needed to be maintained and preserved in order for their domestic and social environments to be considered respectable. As a result, young women were taught that in order to avert such dangers, as the failing to maintain such connections were considered to be, they needed to exercise "good sense and good temper."[48] Once married, middle-class young women were to engage in charitable acts and social events so that their communities would continue to grow and prosper. In order for that to happen, young married women had to

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[44] Mrs. L.G. Abell, *the Skillful Housewife's Book; or, Complete Guide to Domestic Cookery, Taste, Comfort and Economy. Embracing 659 Receipts Pertaining to Household Duties, Gardening, Flowers, Birds, Plants, Etc.*, D. Newell, New York, 1846, 79.
[45] Eliza Bisbeel Duffey, *What Women Should Know. A Woman's Book about Women. Containing Practical Information for Wives and Mothers*, J.M. Stoddart and Co., Philadelphia, 1873, 111.
[46] Mary P. Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing about Domesticity, 1830-1860*, The Institute for Research in History and The Haworth Press, New York, 1982, 23.
[47] Ibid., 23.
[48] *The Young Wife's Book: a Manual of Moral, Religious and Domestic Duties*, Carey Lea and Blanchard, Philadelphia, 1838, 18.

be charitable, friendly, and social when seeking out new acquaintances.[49] With the formation of new friendships, young women were able to help the good of their community by participating in social events. As domestic advice literature explained, by contributing to the good of the neighbourhood, young women were helping to create better domestic lives, where their womanly attributes would be used to influence the moral tone of society.[50] Through their connections to the public sphere, due to their preservation of kinship networks and participation in numerous charitable and social events, young middle-class women were able to engage, although only minimally, in the public sphere. Nevertheless, young women were still told by domestic advice experts to stay within the home in order for society to properly function.

The advice literature that mothers taught their daughters was supported by the medical profession of the era. A connection can be seen between the formation of womanhood and the medical advice that were given to those women during that era. The life experiences that white middle-class women were expected to have had both biological and social meanings. As historian Nancy Theriot suggests, the biological experiences of birth control, pregnancy, child birth, lactation were not just physical experiences, but experiences of social rituals and expectations in the female world of the domestic space.[51] This could be evident in the concerns that newly married young women had regarding pregnancy. They were worried about the number of children they could have and the amount of time between each birth.[52] Many middle-class young

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[49] *The Young Wife's Book: a Manual of Moral, Religious and Domestic Duties*, Carey Lea and Blanchard, Philadelphia, 1838, 19.
[50] Ibid., 19.
[51] Nancy M. Theriot, *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America: the Biosocial Construction of Femininity*, The University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky, 1996, 40.
[52] Mabel Collins Donnelly, *The Victorian American Woman: the Myth and the Reality*, Greenwood Press, New York, 1986, 59.

women feared being unable to effectively perform their duties as both mothers and wives, in addition to the health issues that could occur with consecutive and multiple births. Others linked the ideology of true womanhood to suffering, due to the alienation and pain that they experienced with practices of abortion and fertility control.[53] Medical experts believed that women's sexual organs were placed inside their bodies, and thus their sexual organs were not subject to their will but to "a biological clock" that they were unable to control.[54] They thought that this lack of self-control, which resulted once a month for upwards of thirty years, created "cyclical periods of pain, weakness, embarrassment, and…even insanity" in young women.[55] This only emphasized the lack of control that young women were considered to have over their own lives. As within domestic advice literature, the same themes of female respectability could be seen within the medical advice literature of the period.

Within the medical profession, young women were seen as frail, passionless, submissive, and unable to control their sexual desires without the assistance of their husbands. Yet, young women were able to exert their influence within the domestic sphere through their acknowledged moral superiority, due to their abilities to bear, educate, and nurture children.[56] Medical professionals believed that young women would be able to contribute to the good of society through their capabilities to become mothers. This helps to explain the amount of literature written about female issues, such

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[53] Mabel Collins Donnelly, *The Victorian American Woman: the Myth and the Reality*, Greenwood Press, New York, 1986, 50.
[54] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985, 183.
[55] Ibid., 183.
[56] P.C. Dunne, *Young Married Lady's Private Medical Guide/ Translated from the French of P. C. Dunne and A. F. Derbois, with Notes, Compiled from the Public Writings and Private Teachings of Those Eminent Medical Men by F. Harrison Doane*, Stacy and Richardson, Boston, 1853, ix.

as the inability for some young wives to become pregnant.[57] Through the domestic and medical instruction that young middle-class women received by their mothers, strong bonds of support formed between mothers and daughters, as the former educated the latter in female decorum.

Close relationships were produced between white middle-class mothers and their daughters during the Victorian period. Daughters often wrote in their diaries and journals of their need for their mothers' care and fear of severing that maternal connection through separation or death.[58] The connections that were formed between mothers and daughters allowed for the former to impart lessons to the latter. Those inherited lessons focused on young women and their selflessness, as well as the understanding of "physical suffering as transcendence," which would than surpass the limits of their physical bodies and result in them being able to gain spiritual power.[59] They were also encouraged to develop a "maternal instinct," which was to become "one of the ruling motives" in their lives once they married and had children.[60] With that in mind, mothers gave their daughters enough leisure time to pursue their own forms of entertainment and relaxation. They understood that their daughters would sooner or later inherit the womanly responsibilities that they themselves had to endure. This mother-daughter relationship, which provided young middle-class girls with leisure time, also contained a lesson about their daughters' "feminine future" and the "self-sacrificial demands of womanhood," which their

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[57] P.C. Dunne, *Young Married Lady's Private Medical Guide/ Translated from the French of P. C. Dunne and A. F. Derbois, with Notes, Compiled from the Public Writings and Private Teachings of Those Eminent Medical Men by F. Harrison Doane*, Stacy and Richardson, Boston, 1853, viii.
[58] Nancy M. Theriot, *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America: the Biosocial Construction of Femininity*, The University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky, 1996, 64.
[59] Ibid., 65.
[60] Eliza Bisbeel Duffey, *What Women Should Know. A Woman's Book about Women. Containing Practical Information for Wives and Mothers*, J.M. Stoddart and Co., Philadelphia, 1873, 139.

daughters would soon assume.[61] Mothers and daughters wanted to maintain that strong bond of affection and understanding towards one another once they became separated by marriage. Mothers wanted to relieve their daughters of the burden of marriage and motherhood by providing their daughters opportunities to relax and enjoy their adolescent lives. They realized that once their daughters married and became mothers themselves, that their daughters would be faced with numerous challenges; the lessons that they were taught would be tested to the fullest extents possible. As a consequence, middle-class mothers readied their daughters for the prospect of motherhood and the educational duties that were part to be part of those expectations.

Domestic advice literature believed that the most virtuous position that young women could attain was that of motherhood.[62] Since children were seen as America's future, the proper moral education of their children by their young mothers was seen as crucial to the development of a virtuous society. By educating their own children, young women would be passing down the lessons that they had learned from their own mothers. Lessons in obedience to their elders, how to be calm and gentle in their mannerisms, and to be selfless through their actions, were given so that their children could become both moral and useful citizens latter in life.[63] As a result, good formal and informal education was deemed necessary for white middle-class children. This was one of the reasons why so many middle-class families sent their female children off to boarding schools to be molded into proper ladies of mid-nineteenth century American society. The lessons that

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[61] Nancy M. Theriot, *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America: the Biosocial Construction of Femininity*, The University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky, 1996, 75.
[62] Nathan Strong, *The Character of a Virtuous and Good Woman: a Discourse, Delivered by the Desire and in the Presence of The Female Beneficent Society, in Hartford, October 4th, A.D. 1809*, Hudson and Goodwin, Hartford, Connecticut, 1809, 7.
[63] Mrs. L.G. Abell, *the Skillful Housewife's Book; or, Complete Guide to Domestic Cookery, Taste, Comfort and Economy. Embracing 659 Receipts Pertaining to Household Duties, Gardening, Flowers, Birds, Plants, Etc.*, D. Newell, New York, 1846, 29.

they received from their mothers would be formalized at private educational institutions. As historian Mary Ryan emphasizes, schools and other agencies of socialization were able to develop female domesticity beyond "the middle-class reading audience."[64] It was in female private schools that adolescent women would be able to expand the notion of true womanhood, through the inclusion of a formal education that went beyond courses in home economics and the like. Private schools would give young women the opportunity to find greater agency over their own lives and reconstruct the definition of femininity within mid-nineteenth century American society.

During the Victorian period, young women were expected to follow the ideology of true womanhood, which emphasized the pious, pure, submissive, and domestic nature that young women were said to posses. This belief was articulated in the domestic and medical advice literature of the period. Middle-class mothers would use that literature in order to provide an informal education to their daughters about female respectability. The literature told young women that their primary area of influence was within the home. There, young women would be able to exert their moral influence over the members of their own families with the hopes of helping to establish a better society. The lessons that young women received from their mothers allowed for them to form close bonds of love and support. The instruction that mothers gave to their daughters on female respectability was later transferred from their homes into private school female education. As a result, an examination of the education that young women received within private schools helps us understand the construction of white middle-class femininity, and the sense of agency that women found within such institutions.

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[64] Mary P. Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing about Domesticity*, *1830-1860*, The Institute for Research in History and The Haworth Press, New York, 1982, 101.

## Chapter Three: Female "Seekers" and the Quest for Education: Transcendentalism's Influence on Victorian Era Femininity

"A nation's character may be defined to be the particular form which the mind of the nation assumes from the various causes by which it is afflicted… The body is a temporary instrument by measure of which the mind performs the duties and fulfills, the objects of a certain mode of existence…"[65]

As part of the intellectual community of the period, Noah Porter, brother to Sarah Porter, and Yale university professor and president, accurately represents the mentality of the period. He was an active participant in the various intellectual debates and social reform movements that characterized the period. Reform groups were formed to address issues such as abolition, temperance, and women's rights. These groups allowed white middle-class women to step outside their homes and engage in social critiques through their participation in such movements. Through such critiques, women were able to voice their complaints against the male-practices of the public sphere. Women complained that the vices they associated with the male sphere, such as abuse, alcoholism, and various other forms of immorality, were brought back into their homes by their own husbands. Women such as Catherine Beecher, a women's rights activist and progressive female educator, believed that it was the duty of women to safeguard their homes against such attacks.[66] Part of this safeguarding included the improvement of young women's education. As a result, many mothers began to send their daughters to female private schools across the country, while others looked to join various reform or spiritual communities as a way to gain better insight into the issues that were affecting their lives.

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[65] Noah A. Porter, Jr., "Essay on National Character," Noah Porter Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, July 18, 1830, 1-2, Box.2, Folder 60.
[66] Margaret A. Nash, *Women's Education in the United States: 1780-1840*, Palgrave Macmillan Ltd., New York, 2005, 111.

One such community, called Brook Farm, was founded by the Transcendentalists, and it would prove to be a location for intellectual debate and education for women, especially when it came to trying to understand their social position. The founding philosophy of Brook Farm requires some explanation before we consider the relationship between such educational experiments and the founding of Miss Porter's School.

During the 1830s and 1840s, a spiritual movement known as Transcendentalism flourished in New England. With its emphasis on the individual's ability to gain spiritual awareness through their own "seeking" or intuition, the movement allowed for women to escape the confines of domesticity, or the private sphere. What were the roles given to women in the American Transcendentalist movement and did those roles provide women with a greater sense of agency over their identities as women? Through an examination of the lives and teaching styles of the some of the key leaders, namely Amos Bronson Alcott, Sophia Ripley, and Margaret Fuller, we can begin to understand the ways in which Transcendentalism allowed women to find authority outside the domestic sphere, while still navigating within that space.

The origins of Transcendentalism could be found in eighteenth century Enlightenment philosophy. With its emphasis on the rational mind, suspicion of false "religion[s]" as products of fear and ignorance of natural causes, Enlightenment thought allowed for liberal-minded religious individuals to adapt their more spiritual beliefs with scientific notions of the age.[67] Both the eighteenth century philosophies of John Locke and David Hume were used by Transcendentalists as methods to understanding the intellectual capabilities of the human mind. Locke believed that the infant human mind

[67] Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: the Making of American Spirituality*, HarperSanFransisco Publishers, New York, 2005, 37.

was a blank slate, or *tabula rasa*, which was able to be imprinted on through the life experiences that one had from the moment of one's birth, while Hume argued that the human mind was constantly shifting with experiences and as a result it lacked a singular identity.[68] Due to this assumption, Hume questioned the capacity of humans to use reason or other higher faculties of the mind, such as intuition. Transcendentalists, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, used this skepticism that was embedded within the Enlightenment philosophies but sought to find more effective ways to experience life events through the use of through reason and creativity.[69] Other European contributions could be seen in the works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, William Wordsworth, and Thomas Carlyle.[70] Another influence to Transcendentalism could be found in the pre-Christian esoteric tradition that was connected to Perennial Philosophy, or a set of values that had its roots in the ancient Far East. Through the work of Gottfried Leibniz, 1646 to 1716, the philosophy which recognized a celestial presence or truth within every living thing on the planet and as a result found similarities to the divine source, influenced Christian Reformers in England beginning in the seventeenth century with men such as Ralph Cudworth and Jacob Boehme.[71]

Religious historian, Leigh Eric Schmidt provides an accurate description of the Transcendentalist movement. The movement could be seen as a group of "seekers" who believed that at the fundamental level, spiritual fulfillment was to be found through the individual's quest for solidarity of the mind, body, and spirit, as well as their ability to "appreciate and appropriate" other religious mores and customs as resources for spiritual

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[68] Richard G. Gelgard, *The Essential Transcendentalists*, Jeremy P. Tarcher, New York, 2005, 10.
[69] Ibid., 11.
[70] Ibid., 12.
[71] Ibid., 7.

growth.[72] Transcendentalists sought to create an understanding of the world, of a more personal and intimate understanding between the happenings of the world and its source, by putting aside Unitarian beliefs for those based solely on intuition and self-knowledge.[73] Moreover, within American Transcendentalism there was a conviction that united the various visions of the movement. As scholar Richard Geldard explains, the common element within the movement was the belief that the individual mind was but a fragment of a universal mind or an overarching consciousness.[74] There was a refusal on the part of the Transcendentalists to believe in the "final answers to the fundamental questions of human life."[75] This refusal was demonstrated by both Sophia Ripley and Margaret Fuller, who denied the belief that women's roles were meant to be solely confined to the home and the feminine attributes associated with it.

The emphasis that Transcendentalism had on creativity and reason, provided Amos Bronson Alcott, Sophia Ripley and Margaret Fuller with the opportunity to educate young women in innovative ways as opposed to traditional female education and the womanly mannerisms that were associated with it. This can be seen with a passage from Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, in which she opposed the notion that "the improvement in the education of young girls is to be made by giving them young men as teachers, who only teach what has been taught themselves at school."[76] Fuller and other Transcendentalists were opposed to this method of instruction because it did not place emphasis on the individual, and as a result did not place women on equal footing with

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[72] Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: the Making of American Spirituality*, HarperSanFransisco Publishers, New York, 2005, 14.
[73] Richard Francis, *Transcendental Utopias: Individual and Community at Brook Farm, Fruitlands, and Walden*, Cornell University Press, London, 1997, 2.
[74] Richard G. Gelgard, *The Essential Transcendentalists*, Jeremy P. Tarcher, New York, 2005, 5.
[75] Ibid., 232.
[76] Margaret Fuller, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century, and Kindred Papers Relating to the Sphere, Condition, and Duties of Woman, Arthur B. Fuller ed., The Tribute Association, New York, 1869, 94.*

men. This led Fuller to comment that "We only ask of men to remove arbitrary barriers… But I believe it needs that Woman show herself in her native dignity, to teach them how to aide her; their minds are so encumbered by tradition."[77]

With such influences in mind, as well as the desire to change the intellectual and spiritual lives of their communities, the Transcendentalist Club was formed. Known as "The Symposium" or "The Club" by members, it was first formed on September 19, 1836 at member George Ripley's house in Concord, Massachusetts.[78] As Schmidt notes, the Club was a symposium that consisted of liberal Christian ministers and New England intellectuals, such as Amos Bronson Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Theodore Parker, Jones Very, George and Sophia Ripley.[79] As Transcendentalists, they sought to repair the growing tensions between the fields of literature, religious, and science through their inquiries into the fundamental elements of human life, and as a consequence they sought to bring about " a revision of human nature" that was consistent with a "spiritually coherent philosophy."[80] This could be evident in the reliance that American Transcendentalists had on the individual's intellectual capabilities to use reason and nature to become closer to God, or the divine truth, as was demonstrated in Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance" and Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (see figure one).[81] These values would be pursued in the Transcendentalist community of Brook

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[77] Margaret Fuller, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century, and Kindred Papers Relating to the Sphere, Condition, and Duties of Woman, Arthur B. Fuller ed., The Tribune Association, New York, 1869,172.*
[78] Edith Roelker Curtis, *A Season in Utopia: the Story of Brook Farm*, Russell and Russell, New York, 1971, 29.
[79] Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: the Making of American Spirituality*, HarperSanFransisco Publishers, New York, 2005, 29.
[80] Richard G. Gelgard, *The Essential Transcendentalists*, Jeremy P. Tarcher, New York, 2005, 7.
[81] See Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," 1841 and Henry David Thoreau, Walden, 1854, as quoted in *The Spirituality of the American Transcendentalists: Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Amos Bronson Alcott, Theodore Parker, and Henry David Thoreau*, Catherine L. Albanese ed., Mercer University Press, Macon, Georgia, 1988, 107, 291.

Farm and the methods of teaching that Amos Bronson Alcott, Sophia Ripley, and Margaret Fuller would use in the 1830s and 1840s.

Transcendentalism gave young women the opportunity to work within the framework of domesticity, while still allowing them to influence the public sphere through their corporate and intellectual contributions to the movement. Women were still able to work within the framework of domesticity by being able to express themselves through activities such as reading, painting, and music. Although these pursuits were considered to be part of women's traditional roles, they were used and even appropriated as ways of expressing social criticism and ideas about social and political reform. Those women who participated in the Transcendentalist movement were able to gain a degree of agency over their lives through their roles as educators in the movement. This allowed them to step away from the home and into the public domain. This can be especially apparent at Brook Farm's school in West Roxbury through the female leadership of Sophia Ripley and Margaret Fuller.

In terms of the education of white middle-class youth, the unconventional method that Transcendentalists practiced was already in use before the school at Brook Farm opened. Amos Bronson Alcott (1799-1888), a key member of the movement, with the assistance of Elizabeth Peabody, had already stirred up controversy amongst the middle-class New England community with his educational practices at his school in Boston, known as Temple School.[82] Located on the fourth floor of the Masonic Temple on Tremont Street in Boston, the school opened on September 22, 1834 with eighteen

[82] Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: the Making of American Spirituality*, HarperSanFransisco Publishers, New York, 2005, 31.

students, of both sexes, between the ages of five and ten, in attendance.[83] He believed that children's spontaneity was due to them being "conduit[s] of divine revelation," and as a consequence, Alcott led them in free-form conversations on the spiritual wisdom found in the Bible, on the presumption that their spontaneity would create for natural and unhindered spiritual growth.[84] In his class, Alcott would also lead his pupils in Socratic dialogue, this was an educational method whereby discussion was initiated by the instructor's questions or school readings, in order for students to develop the students' "self-expression," both orally and written.[85] Students were to keep journals and record their daily observations and opinions.[86] Alcott credited his teaching method to Transcendentalism, known as the "divine intuition," or the knowledge that the children were to learn through the leadership of a "sympathetic guide or teacher."[87] It was in young adults that humanity would find renewal as they were vessels for "Physical Purity; Inspired Genius; and Spotless Holiness."[88] Students were to contemplate the spirit as it unveiled "itself within themselves," and that self-contemplation was to be connected with "constantly checking any narrowing effect of egotism" and the constant search for infinite virtue.[89] Alcott allowed his pupils to have the opportunity to express themselves through open-ended discussions and journal entries. This method of self-expression, which was later reproduced at Brook Farm, would give young women the opportunity to

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[83] Madelon Bedell, *The Alcotts: Biography of a Family*, Clarkson N. Potter Inc., New York, 1980, 93.
[84] Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: the Making of American Spirituality*, HarperSanFransisco Publishers, New York, 2005, 31.
[85] Philip F. Gura, *American Transcendentalism: a History*, Hill and Wang, New York, 2007, 87.
[86] Ibid., 87.
[87] Madelon Bedell, *The Alcotts: Biography of a Family*, Clarkson N. Potter Inc., New York, 1980, 94.
[88] Amos Bronson Alcott, *The Doctrine of and Discipline of Human Culture*, James Munroe, Boston, 1836, as quoted in *The Spirituality of the American Transcendentalists: Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Amos Bronson Alcott, Theodore Parker, and Henry David Thoreau*, Catherine L. Albanese ed., Mercer University Press, Macon, Georgia, 1988, 163.
[89] Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, "Record of a School," 1836, as quoted in *Selected Writings of the American Transcendentalists: Second Edition*, George Hochfield ed., Yale University Press, New Haven, 2004, 189.

comment on the patriarchal values of nineteenth century America, and thus help to provide them with a sense of control over their own opinions.

In addition to his alternative manner of teaching, Alcott rarely used normal forms of physical punishment for his students' misbehaviors in the classroom. Instead he used forms of persuasion and threats of abandonment or rejection. This could be seen when he punished two boys, who had been acting noisily in the classroom, by placing them into the anteroom of the school so that they would not be able to take in the rest of the conversation. As one of the boys noted, physical punishment would have been easier because, it "would have been over in a minute," but they would never be able to regain the lost conversation.[90] At other times, after he clearly explained the reasons for the infraction, Alcott would have the students administer the punishment on him, in front of the class, in order for them to feel guilty for their choices to misbehave. Such punishment was given out to the pupils so as to mould their consciences and their sense of social obligation.[91] After the closure of Temple School in 1841, Alcott would go on to teach at the school in Brook Farm. Alcott's form of instruction would allow for white middle-class female students at Brook Farm to become aware of their status within Victorian American society. Since his teaching practices were used as a template for the ones practiced at Brook Farm.

Brook Farm was established by George and Sophia Ripley in 1841. The community was situated on a two hundred-and-eight acre farm in the town of West Roxbury (later a suburb of Boston). Used as a milk farm by the previous owners, the site was comprised of a two-and-a-half story farmhouse, which was used as the main house,

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[90] Madelon Bedell, *The Alcotts: Biography of a Family*, Clarkson N. Potter Inc., New York, 1980, 97.
[91] Philip F. Gura, *American Transcendentalism: a History*, Hill and Wang, New York, 2007, 87.

with a variety of other buildings that were used as housing, libraries, or schools.[92] Established as "The Brook Farm Institute of Agriculture and Education," Ripley's community was considered to be more of a corporation than any other communal group of that period. As Historian Henrietta Dana Raymond describes, each member at Brook Farm was entitled to a single vote, required to hold at least one share of stock in the corporation, and was allowed to have five percent interest on their share in stock per annum, or they could "receive tuition for one pupil in the school."[93] In addition, the administration of the Brook Farm Association consisted of four trustees, which managed the property and covered any damages or losses that occurred on the premises.[94] Men and women, of all ages, helped to establish the corporate atmosphere of the community through the work that they performed. Men and women did the same sorts of work for equal pay at Brook Farm. Their work week consisted of six days and eight-hours per day during the winter months, and ten-hours per day in the summer months.[95] Brook Farm produced oil lamps, window sashes and blinds, footwear, Britannia ware, teapots, and nature books. They sold produce such as milk and vegetables, and they also produced their own newspaper, *The Harbinger*, with the property's printing press.[96] The goal of Brook Farm was to see whether the individual could be both a worker and intellectual at the same time, and as a result lead a freer, more enjoyable, and simpler life.[97] Those at Brook Farm sought to model for society the "outward expression to the great truth that all

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[92] Joel Myerson, "Rebecca Codman Butterfield's Reminiscences of Brook Farm," *New England Quarterly* 65, no.4 (1992): 612.
[93] Henrietta Dana Raymond, *Sophia Willard Dana Ripley: Co-founder of Brook Farm*, Peter E. Randall Publisher, Portsmouth, 1994, 33.
[94] Ibid., 33.
[95] Ibid., 36.
[96] Laurie James, *Men, Women, and Margaret Fuller: the Truth that Existed between Margaret Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson and Their Circle of Transcendental Friends*, Golden Heritage Press, Inc., 1990, 266.
[97] Michael McLoughlin, *Dead Letters to the New World: Melville, Emerson, and American Transcendentalism*, Routledge, New York, 2003, 22.

labour is sacred when done for a common interest." [98] The principle of gender equality was an important value that Brook Farmers wanted their young members to learn. This could be found through the education that they received while living at Brook Farm.

The school at Brook Farm became a destination for intellectual authorities to send their students before pursuing a high educational degree. For instance, Cambridge authorities would send their male students to Brook Farm, due to the high level of scholarship that George Ripley maintained there, before sending the students to Harvard for their entrance exams.[99] As a result, the female students at Brook Farm were receiving the same education as their university-bound male counterparts. The educational policy that was implemented was one of innovation and free intellectual development. This policy was similar to the one that Alcott had implemented at Temple School in Boston. It was based on the "perfect freedom of thought" between the pupils and teachers of Brook Farm. [100] Not only were the female students to be educated through the school's curriculum but through the examples of the older members of the Transcendentalist community. As Elizabeth Palmer Peabody noted, "every associate, whether he be a digger of a ditch as his highest accomplishment, will be an instructor in that to the young members," so that each young member, whether female or male, would "learn to except one kind of service from love and good will, and another from the obligations of others to render it."[101] Students could pursue any of the studies that Brook Farm had to offer, with

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[98] Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, "Plan of the West Roxbury Community," *The Dial,* Jan. 1841, as quoted in *Selected Writings of the American Transcendentalists: Second Edition*, George Hochfield ed., Yale University Press, New Haven, 2004, 393.
[99] Edith Roelker Curtis, *A Season in Utopia: the Story of Brook Farm*, Russell and Russell, New York, 1971, 70.
[100] Ibid., 71.
[101] Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, "Plan of the West Roxbury Community," *The Dial,* Jan. 1841, as quoted in *Selected Writings of the American Transcendentalists: Second Edition*, George Hochfield ed., Yale University Press, New Haven, 2004, 393.

individual instruction from any one of the faculty members. The members of the Brook Farm community offered their students that unique opportunity as a way to provide the best example of traditional school education, and to critique the manners in which ill-informed teachers were instructing white middle-class children in most schools during that period.[102] By educating young women to be part of a freer intellectual movement and business enterprise, adolescent women were able to participate in the world of commerce, or the public sphere, while at the same time the community of Brook Farm sought to remove itself from American society.

Sophia Willard Dana Ripley was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts on July 6, 1803 to Francis Dana Jr. and Sophia Willard Dana. Ripley's mother opened a school in her Willard family home, "the Fay House," where Sophia and her only sister, Mary Elizabeth Dana, gained an early education and subsequently taught at.[103] After gaining a formal education at Dr. Parks School in Boston, where she became proficient in Latin and Greek, she opened her own primary school with the assistance of her sister, located first on Mason Street and then at Fay House.[104] She married Harvard Divinity School intellectual and Unitarian minister George Ripley on August 22, 1827, and afterwards their house became the center of "domestic refuge" for rather passionate discussions on religion's place within society, utopianism, and Transcendentalism.[105] Throughout her time at Brook Farm, from its opening in 1841 until its closure in 1847, Sophia Ripley taught the students of the primary school history and modern languages. These were only

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[102] Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, "Plan of the West Roxbury Community," *The Dial,* Jan. 1841, as quoted in *Selected Writings of the American Transcendentalists: Second Edition*, George Hochfield ed., Yale University Press, New Haven, 2004, 396.
[103] Judith Strong Albert, "Ripley, Sophia Willard Dana," American National Biography Online, Feb. 2000 (accessed on Dec.2, 2010): http://www.anb.org/articles/09/09-00846.html;.
[104] Ibid., ANB.
[105] Ibid., ANB.

two of the elective courses, which ranged from natural history, agricultural, gardening, and industrial skills, that students could take.[106] Through her educational and intellectual contributions to the American Transcendentalist movement, Ripley became a model for the movement's liberal principles regarding the autonomy for women.

In regards to women's place within society, Ripley believed that the attributes associated with "true womanhood" were too general and did not allow for the adequate intellectual training of women. She disagreed with the patriarchal view that religion or piety was the special domain of women.[107] Sophia Ripley recognized that women did not live easy and thoughtful lives within the domestic sphere, but she did not call for women to disregard their duties at home.[108] Ripley sought to expand the sphere of women through a "social and spiritual revolution," which would contain greater "personal promise for women."[109] This corresponded to her critique of young female education during the Victorian period, as Ripley believed that they had to become independent thinkers who would be able to question the views of others and form their own unique ideals. If they did not do this then they would lose their own sense of self-hood and "never gain their husband's respect."[110] She believed that true womanhood could be represented in the "serene philosopher," an individual who would be able to bring their energized and peaceful mindset to the outside world in order to alleviate tension and

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[106] Henrietta Dana Raymond, *Sophia Willard Dana Ripley: Co-founder of Brook Farm*, Peter E. Randall Publisher, Portsmouth, 1994, 38.
[107] Ibid., 40.
[108] Ibid., 41.
[109] Judith Strong Albert, "Ripley, Sophia Willard Dana," American National Biography Online, Feb. 2000 (accessed on Dec.2, 2010): http://www.anb.org/articles/09/09-00846.html;.
[110] Henrietta Dana Raymond, *Sophia Willard Dana Ripley: Co-founder of Brook Farm*, Peter E. Randall Publisher, Portsmouth, 1994, 41.

suffering.[111] Such women would thus bring about a reformation of patriarchal society through enlightened moral principles. Sophia Ripley found support through Margaret Fuller's Boston Conversations on the autonomy of women. As a consequence, Ripley wrote a passionate essay entitled "Woman" in the Transcendentalist newspaper, *The Dial*, in 1841. This piece would serve as one the first assessments of the secondary status of women in Victorian America.[112]

Ripley's essay argued that women's secondary status was due to the inadequate education that young women received. That was the reason, she argued, that American society lacked "greatness" within both academic and cultural life, and as a consequence women did not understand the capabilities that they possessed.[113] She emphasized the "feeble" image that the clergy produced through their sermons, through their proclamations that women would become "lovely things" only if they would attend their domestic duties and follow the principles of true womanhood.[114] Throughout this period, women were considered to be dependents who could not find a degree of self-agency, except in times of peril where they would be left alone at the mercies of "unfriendly elements."[115] This was associated with the education that young middle-class women received during that era. There was an understanding, or so Ripley believed, that women were educated with the "tactic understanding" that they were only half-beings, or

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[111] Henrietta Dana Raymond, *Sophia Willard Dana Ripley: Co-founder of Brook Farm*, Peter E. Randall Publisher, Portsmouth, 1994, 41.
[112] Judith Strong Albert, "Ripley, Sophia Willard Dana," American National Biography Online, Feb. 2000 (accessed on Dec.2, 2010): http://www.anb.org/articles/09/09-00846.html.
[113] Tiffany K. Wayne, *Woman Thinking: Feminism and Transcendentalism in the Nineteenth-Century America*, Lexington Books, New York, 2005, 27.
[114] Sophia Ripley, "Woman" *The Dial*, January 1841, as quoted in *Transcendentalism: a Reader*, Joel Myerson ed., Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, 314-317, 315.
[115] Ibid., 315.

"appendage[s]."[116] In order for women to acquire more independence over their own lives, they needed to embrace a life of individual pursuit for domestic happiness and order. For this to be achieved, female adolescents had to pursue an intellectual inquiry into the "mysteries of life," with books as their sustenance, and with that they would be able to lead fuller, "brighter than sunshine" lives that were part of a "higher region" of divine order.[117] Sophia Ripley's beliefs, as expressed in the essay, were almost identical to the arguments that Margaret Fuller presented in her lectures on issues of women's place within society.[118] The contributions of Sophia Ripley and Margaret Fuller, to the intellectual development of young women and their activities outside the home, would help to establish a strong platform for woman's rights movement in the later part of the nineteenth century.

From an early age, Margaret Fuller recognized that she was able to perform tasks that were considered to be outside the private sphere, or woman's realm. Due to the highly scholarly childhood education that her father gave her, Fuller was able to associate herself within the cult of true womanhood, as well as the male sphere, or public domain.[119] Fuller was taught by her mother the traditional womanly duties of sewing, cooking, and housekeeping, but also read books that were considered masculine in scope as assigned by her father.[120] She believed that one's female identity was not based on one's body, as medical professionals believed, but through the Transcendentalist's notion

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[116] Sophia Ripley, "Woman" *The Dial*, January 1841, as quoted in *Transcendentalism: a Reader*, Joel Myerson ed., Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, 314-317, 316.
[117] Ibid., 317.
[118] Tiffany K. Wayne, *Woman Thinking: Feminism and Transcendentalism in the Nineteenth-Century America*, Lexington Books, New York, 2005, 27.
[119] Laurie James, *Men, Women, and Margaret Fuller: the Truth that Existed between Margaret Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson and Their Circle of Transcendental Friends*, Golden Heritage Press, Inc., New York, 1990, 13.
[120] Ibid., 15.

of the soul.[121] In addition, Margaret Fuller saw that the right of choice, the free development of one's potential and spiritual aspiration belonged to every member of American society, both male and female.[122] For Fuller, and other female Transcendentalists, the "project of self-culture" incorporated the development of the individual and a social reform that was based on the "interpersonal relationships and complementarity between the sexes."[123] Fuller believed that religious feeling was an "essential vehicle" for the progress of women, as the mysticism embedded in it became part of an "intuitive spiritual quest for originality, transcendence, and emancipation" for the women of the Victorian period.[124] This corresponded to her understanding of a need within mid-nineteenth century America society for the improvement of women, especially young women, and their social status.

Along with the individuals at Brook Farm, Margaret Fuller believed that American society had become a materialistic and vulgar place. Although Fuller did not believe that Brook Farm would escape the evils of American society, through their vision of a perfect model community, she often visited the property and held her lectures on education and self-improvement.[125] Through her conversations, Fuller explained her belief that society repressed the potential of human development through the restrictions that Victorian American society placed on the female members of society. As a consequence, Fuller reconstructed white middle-class female identity and asked her

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[121] Cynthia J. Davis, "Margaret Fuller: Body and Soul," *American Literature* 71, no.1 (1999): 31-56, 45.
[122] Margaret Vanderhaar Allen, *The Achievement of Margaret Fuller*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, London, 1979, 127.
[123] Tiffany K. Wayne, *Woman Thinking: Feminism and Transcendentalism in the Nineteenth-Century America*, Lexington Books, New York, 2005, 100.
[124] Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: the Making of American Spirituality*, HarperSanFransisco Publishers, New York, 2005, 48.
[125] Margaret Vanderhaar Allen, *The Achievement of Margaret Fuller*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, London, 1979, 115.

female audiences to pursue individual development through the areas of history, religion, and mythology, in order for them to resist the "cultural norms of womanhood" that nineteenth century America placed on them.[126] Fuller's lectures provided the female students at Brook Farm's school with an opportunity to gain new perspectives on the traditional educational values that were normally associated with young women.[127] As a Transcendentalist and women's rights activist, Fuller gave young women a chance to express their individual perspectives on the social issues of the times and by allowing them to critically examine their own lives without fear of punishment. Scholar Tiffany K. Wayne, has noted that Fuller's feminist Transcendentalist approach influenced young women, who a generation later would become leading members in the women's rights movement of the 1850s, among them were Ednah Cheney, Paulina Wright Davis, and Elizabeth Oakes Smith.[128] Through Margaret Fuller, younger generations of women were encouraged to lead more active and innovative lives in the mid-nineteenth century, and as a consequence, change the roles that women were to perform in the decades that followed.

Fuller believed that education would have an important impact on the formation of society. She believed that teaching was "culturally important" to the creation of an upright society, in which young women would play an important part as moral educators of children, who were considered the future of American society.[129] Her original

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[126] Bell Gale Chevigny, "'Cheat Me [On] by No Illusion': Margaret Fuller's Cultural Critique and Its Legacies," in Fritz Fleischmann, ed., *Margaret Fuller's Cultural Critique: Her Age and Her Legacy*, Peter Lang Publishing Inc., New York, 2000, 29.
[127] Laurie James, *Men, Women, and Margaret Fuller: the Truth that Existed between Margaret Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson and Their Circle of Transcendental Friends*, Golden Heritage Press, Inc., 1990, 270.
[128] Tiffany K. Wayne, *Woman Thinking: Feminism and Transcendentalism in the Nineteenth-Century America*, Lexington Books, New York, 2005, 17.
[129] Charles Capper, "Margaret Fuller as Cultural Reformer: the Conversations in Boston," *American Quarterly* 39, no.4 (1987): 509.

approach allowed for young women to discover what their desires or pursuits were in life. This was evident in her 1843 work, "The Great Lawsuit: Man vs. Men, Woman vs. Women," where she argued that what women needed were souls that lived "freely" and "unimpeded to unfold such powers as were given" to them when they left their "common home."[130] In other words, as individuals, women had the right to live their lives in any manner that they chose, and if they did then they would contribute to the good of society. Fuller recognized the obstacles that she faced with her lectures, from the education that women received in American society during the mid-nineteenth century, and the restrictions that women had on the activities that they pursued in the domestic sphere.[131] For instance, commenting on the value of reproductive labour by women, Fuller explained that they had no say in the matter and so women, especially adolescent women, felt the need to place a criteria or standard on themselves.[132] Through the conversations she had and the lessons she taught, Margaret Fuller became a model for younger women. As a strong open-minded individual, she showed white middle-class girls that through their intellect and hard work, they would be able to participate in the public domain through commenting on and critiquing the patriarchal norms of American society.

With the formation of the American Transcendentalist movement in the 1830s and 1840s, white middle-class young women were able to navigate through the restraints that were placed on them through the cult of true womanhood. The American

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[130] Margaret Fuller, "The Great Lawsuit: Man vs. Men, Woman vs. Women," *The Dial*, July 1843, as quoted in *Selected Writings of the American Transcendentalists: Second Edition*, George Hochfield ed., Yale University Press, New Haven, 2004, 365.
[131] Charles Capper, "Margaret Fuller as Cultural Reformer: the Conversations in Boston," *American Quarterly* 39, no.4 (1987): 514.
[132] Margaret Fuller, "A Short Essay on Critics," *The Dial*, July 1840, as quoted in *Selected Writings of the American Transcendentalists: Second Edition*, George Hochfield ed., Yale University Press, New Haven, 2004, 306.

Transcendentalists adopted the principles of the Enlightenment, those of individual reason and creativity through the human mind, to use as a guideline for the moral education of mid-nineteenth century youth. This was apparent in Amos Bronson Alcott's Temple School in Boston, as well as through the communal corporation Brook Farm and its school. The liberal-minded approach of Transcendentalism provided their female members with unique positions as educators to middle-class adolescent women. These female members included Sophia Ripley and Margaret Fuller. By testing the boundaries of female respectability in Victorian American society, these two educators encouraged their female students to critique the patriarchal society that they lived in. The female students were to become strong and independent women who would be able to influence society through their moral beliefs and exemplary attitudes. The beliefs that were taught to young female students by Transcendentalists such Amos Bronson Alcott, Sophia Ripley, Margaret Fuller and others, allowed women to become more vocal about their status within nineteenth century American society. Thus the movement provided young middle-class women with the opportunity to challenge notions of female respectability during that period. Some of those students would later become key members to the woman's rights movement and other reform societies that formed in the later half of the nineteenth-century. As a result, Transcendentalism could be seen as a catalyst for a reformation of society that would see women as equals within American society. It was Transcendentalism that opened up questions about women's intellectual and moral lives, and sought to help women leaders within society.

Yale College philosophy professor, and later president from 1871to 1886, Noah Porter's educational philosophy was modeled, in part, from the New England

Transcendentalists and their school of thought. As anyone who went through his family letters, correspondences, and lecture materials at Yale can see, Noah Porter was very engaged with the thought processes of Transcendentalism. An example of Noah's engagement with Transcendentalist thought can been found in a lecture giving to his students about William M. Gooding's *Intuitions*, in which Noah states that "art is Body's work, Philosophy is souls work, Science is spirits work, neither of the three can do the work of the other, Confusing the two in attempts to get clear ideas of human powers; is like attempting to make a clear … lens by mixing mud with water."[133] Sarah Porter would watch and learn from her older brother lectures as his introduced his students to art, philosophy, and European culture.[134] She would then adopt his method of teaching and apply it to her own school. An example of this can be found in a letter written by Mary Keep, niece to Sarah and Noah, to her brother Samuel about the education that her sister, also named Sarah, was receiving at Miss Porter's School. She stated that "Sarah went down to school yesterday. She wished to study Latin and Botany- and to review Arithmetic and Geography. She is to commence Cicero…"[135] Through the adoption of her brother's educational methodology, Miss Porter's School was thus influenced by Transcendentalist teachings, which allowed for the students at the school to become more actively engaged in the intellectual and moral debates of the period.

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[133] William M. Gooding, "Intuitions," re. *Noah Porter's Human Intellect*. Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, Noah Porter Papers box 3, folder 80, 1869.
[134] Nancy Davis and Barbara Donahue, *Miss Porter's School: A History*, Miss Porter's School, Farmington Connecticut, 1992, 8.
[135] Mary Keep, "My Dear Brother," Robert Keep Papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, May 17, 1864, Box 2, Folder 21.

## Chapter Four: Progression of White Middle-class Female Private School Education within the United States

"Education is a cultivation of the intellect, and it should be trained to put forth its best efforts by means of its strongest powers. What are the advantages of education?... for the more knowledge we gain the more interested we are in the things which are transpiring around us and, of course, the more will our attention be engaged…If in society, we are able to join in conversation freely and without fear, to judge of the characters and dispositions of those with whom we are conversing and if we are intelligent, we may promote the happiness of others as well as our own."[136]

Throughout the nineteenth century, white middle-class parents sent their daughters to private schools, or finishing schools, so that they could be turned into respectable ladies and prospective wives. Nonetheless, the relationship between female boarding schools and the "cult of true womanhood" is more complex. While most private institutions conformed to the established middle-class values on femininity, not all did. A careful investigation into the traditional education that some schools offered reveals that Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Connecticut, did not abide by the same rigidity in their educational practices as did others schools of the period. As a consequence, Miss Porter's young women were not as restricted to the ideology of domesticity as others were at other educational institutions.

In the United States, the origins of female education within private educational institutions could be found in the late eighteenth century. Schools, both public and private, were created in order to foster the idea of republicanism and patriotism within young men and women. Republican womanhood sought to give young women autonomy by educating them about the values of patriotism, public welfare, and virtue.[137] Young women received "useful education[s]," with courses in basic arithmetic, reading, and

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[136] Laura W. Cone, "Advantages of Education," as quoted in transcribed compositions, 1850-1851 from Miss Porter School Archival Collection, 116.
[137] Margaret A. Nash, "Rethinking Republican Motherhood: Benjamin Rush and the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia," *Journal of the Early Republic* 17, no.2 (1997): 172.

writing, so that they could influence their future husband's decisions and manage a proper household.[138] The belief was that through education the newly created United States would succeed as a republican society. The success would not only be due to the accomplishments of its "male citizenry," but also its women, who were able to maintain the "virtue necessary for the republic to flourish."[139] As a result, many white women in the early republic pursued learning with great enthusiasm by attending formal educational institutions and organizing literary societies, where they read and discussed countless subjects, whether in astronomy, theology, or geography.[140] Advocates for female education believed that learning would bring young women closer to God. This was especially associated with courses in natural science, which provided female pupils with opportunities to "admire the works of God."[141] In addition, the proponents of female education believed that it would help prevent vice and loneliness from manifesting in the hearts of women.[142] By the Victorian period, the notion of republican womanhood had transformed into the cult of true womanhood with the assistance of evangelical Christians and their educational reforms. This transition was due in part to the changing ideals of femininity and women's education. By the early nineteenth century, the education of young women had been fully established as a necessity for the proper maintenance of the

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[138] A. Kristen Foster, "'A Few Thoughts in Vindication of Female Eloquence': the Case for the Education of Republican Women" in *Children and Youth in a New Nation*, James Marten, ed., New York University Press, New York, 2009, 133.
[139] Ibid., 139.
[140] Margaret A. Nash, *Women's Education in the United States: 1780-1840*, Palgrave Macmillan Ltd., New York, 2005, 29.
[141] Benjamin Say, "The Rise and Progress of the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia, 1789," 30-37, in *Women's Education in the United States: 1780-1840*, Margaret A. Nash, Palgrave Macmillan Ltd., New York, 2005, 29.
[142] Margaret A. Nash, *Women's Education in the United States: 1780-1840*, Palgrave Macmillan Ltd., New York, 2005, 29.

middle-class household economy, as well as the proper functioning of American society, instead of just having a closer relationship to God.

In the early 1830s, there was a push by evangelical Christians to educate young women in order to create a better society. Evangelicalism believed that through the cultivation of their higher moral standards, through female education, women would be able to elevate the moral tone of society, or the unenlightened world. This became evident throughout the nineteenth century, as advocated by numerous evangelical Christians and others, with an increasing shift to women as teachers of female education. The best teachers were not expected to possess the "manly virtues of intellectual superiority, emotional restraint, and physical dominance," but instead, the "most effective teacher would draw upon the female qualities of … maternal love, gentleness, and moral superiority."[143] This was evident in the teaching style of Catherine Beecher Stowe, who used feelings of love and gratitude, instead of fear of punishment, to create her learning environment. She also believed that young women would be able to contribute to the greater good of society if they adopted those feelings when engaging in the domestic sphere.[144] Such an emphasis on developing propriety and securing their social standings in young women became central to the courses that were offered at numerous American female private schools during the mid-nineteenth century.

The push by evangelical Christians for female education was just one part of an ideological shift toward the belief that women had moral superiority over men and that education could thus be used as a tool, and a religious duty, to "better prepare women for

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[143] Jo Anne Preston, "Domestic Ideology, School Reformers, and Female Teachers: Schoolteaching Becomes Women's Work in Nineteenth-Century New England," *The New England Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (1993): 532.
[144] Catherine Villanueva Gardner, "Heaven-Appointed Educators of Mind: Catherine Beecher and the Moral Power of Women," *Hypatia* 19, no.2 (2004): 10.

their work" as promoters of a moral society.[145] Educators urged young female students to seek self-improvement in all their daily activities, whether that was attending to school work or cleaning duties at home.[146] There was an emphasis on shaping careless and idle girls into respectable and pious women through the education that female pupils were to receive from their instructors. This could be demonstrated in the promotion of music classes, where constant practice and improvement of either the voice or playing of an instrument by the female student was required so that they might be able to "enliven domestic scenes," or employ the accomplishment in religious services.[147] For most teachers, female education was to "prepare the young for the active duties of life, and to enable them to fill with propriety those stations, to which, in the providence of God, they may be called; This includes also a preparation for eternity." [148] Young women carried a new responsibility to become models of a benevolent and just society. As a consequence, there was a desire in this period for young women to be more intellectually accomplished through the studies of basic math, chemistry, political economy, and the like. This was to get women away from more "showy," although still socially accepted, studies of art, literature, and music.[149] Despite the acceptance among the white middle-class for their young women to take an array of courses, they were still confined to middle-class ideology of domesticity because of the roles that they were expected to perform at the completion of their schooling.

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[145] Margaret A. Nash, *Women's Education in the United States: 1780-1840*, Palgrave Macmillan Ltd., New York, 2005, 55.
[146] Ibid., 63.
[147] Mrs. Lincoln Phelps, *The Female Student; or Lectures to Young Ladies on Female Education. For the Use of Mothers, Teachers, and Pupils*, Crocker and Brewster, Boston, 1836, 376.
[148] Ibid., 28.
[149] Margaret A. Nash, *Women's Education in the United States: 1780-1840*, Palgrave Macmillan Ltd., New York, 2005, 72.

Adolescent women were restricted within the requirements of the cult of true womanhood as they only took courses in private schools that would increase their potential as future mothers and wives. Unlike young male education, young women were educated so that their bodies could be "shielded from public scrutiny," and as a result, their intellect was to be cultivated solely for the domestic sphere.[150] They were to have a superior moral presence within the household that was soothing, indirect, and overall, symbolic.[151] As noted in a convocation address that was given in 1860 at Laurensville Female College in South Carolina, "the influence of wom[e]n… permeates every fiber of human society… the rudeness of young m[e]n subdued, [their] character elevated" by the intellect of cultivated women.[152] These women were educated so that they would become "happy" women, meaning that they were to be married with children, managing a household, and financially supported by their husbands.[153] This belief was expressed in advice literature and instruction manuals for female education of the period. For instance, Hubbard Wilson, who published *The Lady's Manual of Moral and Intellectual Culture* in 1853, wrote that acquiring knowledge was to teach one to know their place and one's functions within society, and to render one "more useful, more humble, and more happy."[154] This conviction becomes especially apparent when one examines the courses that many of the female private schools offered young women during that period.

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[150] Mary Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1984, 111.
[151] Ibid., 111.
[152] Joseph LeConte, *An Address Delivered on Commencement Day of the Laurensville Female College, June 28, 1860*, James Hollingsworth, Printer, Laurensville, 1860, 4.
[153] Mary Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1984, 139.
[154] Hubbard Wilson and Mrs. John Sanford, *The Lady's Manual of Moral and Intellectual Culture*, Leavitt and Allen, New York, 1854, 33.

In private schools, young women were taught business courses, so that they would be able to efficiently manage their households once they graduated from school and got married. Courses in book-keeping, hand-writing, and basic arithmetic were given to young women so that they would be able to perform their "appropriate duty," or manage the household economy.[155] Female private schools trained their pupils to be companions to their husbands, and the "Christian-Mother-Educator" of their children.[156] The education that young women received was often made of "a few definitions or ideas, learned by the rote, and floating in the mind without any form, arrangement, or symmetry of parts," and as a result, it became necessary for middle-class girls to develop mental discipline in order to convert their acquired knowledge into "the most productive effect," that being the roles of mothers and wives.[157] This emphasis on proper education for motherhood related back to the cult of true womanhood, as good domesticity was supposed to be constructed, and subsequently demonstrated, by the young women in order for them to display their ability to create nurturing environments for the education of their children and a "warm shelter of compassion" for their husbands.[158] As a result of the emphasis on female pupils to be good mothers and wives, traditional female education confined young women to the ideology of domesticity.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the cult of true womanhood forced young women to stay within the domestic sphere of American society. Through the evangelical Christian movement, young women were able to take courses that were once taken by

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[155] Rufus William Bailey, *Daughters at School: Instructed in a Series of Letters*, Presbyterian Board of Publication, Philadelphia, 1857, 3.
[156] Barbara Welter, "Anti-Intellectualism and the American Woman," in *Dimity Convictions*, Ohio University Press, Athens, 1976, 75.
[157] Rufus William Bailey, *Daughters at School: Instructed in a Series of Letters*, Presbyterian Board of Publication, Philadelphia, 1857, 3.
[158] Eyal Rabinovitch, "Gender and the Public Sphere: Alternative Forms of Integration in Nineteenth Century America," *Sociological Theory* 19, no.3 (2000): 353.

male students only. During that period, few schools gave young women the opportunities to test the limits of female respectability. Nevertheless, at Miss Porter's School, young women were able to incorporate the ideology of true womanhood with their greater ambitions of becoming intellectuals and critics of patriarchal Victorian American society. Miss Porter's students were able to express their opinions without fear of being humiliated or penalized, and as a result of this, they were able to gain more self-confidence about their abilities as female intellectuals and social reformers.

## Chapter Five: Capturing of Identity at Miss Porter's School: A Place of Transition

"Wellesley's joke has lost its point,
Vassar's nose is out of joint.
The Farmington Girls are all the go;
The Farmington Girls are far from slow.
To college, to college,
We'll never go there, anymore."[159]

During the Victorian period, not all private schools were so traditional in their undertaken of female education. This was especially apparent at Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Connecticut. Established in 1843 by Miss Sarah Porter, the private school became the destination that many middle-class families sought when it came to their daughters' education (see figure two). The school was known for its maintenance of female respectability while offering courses that were considered unconventional for young women. Courses in natural history and the sciences were taken alongside classes in music, classic literature, and art. However, Miss Porter's School can be seen as a place in transition, from the old codes of Victorian true womanhood to the newer characteristics that would later define the New Woman of the Progressive era. Within this was at time contradictory notions, partly due to the influences of the various reform movements in the surrounding area, which would occasionally overlap each other. This was especially apparent in the life of Sarah Porter herself. Nevertheless, Miss Porter's School sought to create independent women out of the young girls that first came to the school. This was accomplished through the courses that Miss Porter's offered its students, as well as the reputable faculty and staff that maintained the family-like atmosphere of the school. The extra-curricular activities that the young women participated in would allow them to

[159] Grace Stoddard, "Song of Bertha Wrightman," 1891, as quoted in *Miss Porter's School: A History in Documents, 1847-1948. Volume One: The School and Its Students, 1847- 1900*, Louise L. Stevenson ed., Garland Publishing Inc., New York, 1987, 151.

broaden their understanding of their roles within American society and comment on the social issues that were affecting their lives on a daily basis.

My case study of Miss Porter's School spans from its founding in 1843 to 1875, a time frame that includes the Civil War. Although this case study is not about the Civil War's consequences for women's education, the war was the backdrop for many of the changes described here. Students at Miss Porter's did mention the impact of the war on their lives, through the most immediate effects including the death of relatives and the like, but the School still functioned much as it had in the antebellum period. The School's students were thus still able to test the boundaries of femininity. The evidence I have found reveals that while the education that young women received at Miss Porter's School became a part of the more general opening up of education for women after the conclusion of the war, there was nonetheless a continuity that the war did not break. Changes in women's sense of identity, and the education that accelerated these changes, were already in motion before the war began. Consequently, this continuity provides another example of the way in which traditional "periodization" of history needs to be re-thought when describing women's experience.

Through the classes that it held, Miss Porter's School demonstrated that it had redefined the traditional meaning of the cult of true womanhood. The attributes associated with the cult of true womanhood, those of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity were reformatted to include in its definition independent, intelligent, and rational womanhood.[160] The school followed the academic traditions of Catherine Beecher Stowe, Emma Willard, and Mary Leon, who claimed that women needed to be

[160] Margaret A. Nash, *Women's Education in the United States: 1780-1840*, Palgrave Macmillan Ltd., New York, 2005, 110.

properly educated so that they could "assert themselves and take action" with the social problems of the period, such as temperance and woman's rights.[161] Young women were to become "corrective" forces and "moderators" of what was wrong with society.[162] Such female educators wanted women to be as intellectually developed as their male counterparts, so that an efficient society could be created and maintained.[163] They argued that the knowledge that young women acquired from attending courses in history, languages, literature and the like furthered the students' aims of becoming "moral, tasteful, and intelligent women."[164] Pupils at Miss Porter's School also manifested their taste of intellectual pursuits through dramatic performances, music recitals, and by attending debates and lectures in town.[165]

Those students who were part of the Literary Club held dramatic performances for their classmates and the community at large.[166] On one such occasion, after reading *Minister's Wooing* they put on a performance of it for a number of Miss Porter's friends from Hartford at Farmington's Town Hall (see figure three).[167] Musical soirees were given by the girls for various audiences throughout the school year.[168] In terms of musical performances, these soirees were nice openers for the concerts that Sarah Porter

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[161] Margaret A. Nash, *Women's Education in the United States: 1780-1840*, Palgrave Macmillan Ltd., New York, 2005, 111.
[162] Hubbard Wilson and Mrs. John Sanford, *The Lady's Manual of Moral and Intellectual Culture*, Leavitt and Allen, New York, 1854, 8.
[163] Margaret A. Nash, *Women's Education in the United States: 1780-1840*, Palgrave Macmillan Ltd., New York, 2005, 111.
[164] Louise L. Stevenson, "Little Women? The Female Mind at Work in Antebellum America," *History Today* 45, no. 3 (1995): 4.
[165] Louise L. Stevenson, "Sarah Porter Educates Useful Ladies, 1847-1900," *Winterthur Portfolio* 18, no.1 (1983): 43.
[166] Charlotte Merriman, "Dear Father," February 29, 1869, as quoted in transcribed letters in Miss Porter's School Archival Collection, 201.
[167] Julia Anna Clark, "My Dearest Sister," November 26 1859, as quoted in transcribed letters in Miss Porter's School Archival Collection, 157.
[168] Julia Anna Clark, "My Own Dear Sister," November 5, 1859, as quoted in transcribed letters in Miss Porter's School Archival Collection, 156.

would provide her students each summer. Porter invited five musicians from New York City to give two concerts. These musicians would be part of the Academy orchestra and were considered by many to be "very fine artists."[169] The young women were also invited to attend the numerous intellectual debates and discussions that were held at various locations throughout Farmington each year. Talks were given by a variety of professionals such as Dr. Noah Porter, Dr. Dagget of Canandaigua, and J.P Thompson of N.Y.C lecture circuit would discuss issues relating to religion, health, exotic locations, and reform activities.[170] By participating in the entertainment and intellectual pursuits of Farmington, students at Miss Porter's School were able to get outside of the domestic realm and actively be a part of Farmington's unique community, and subsequently Miss Porter's School, during this period. This allowed the girls to explore their own identities and open their minds to the possibilities that were available to them outside their homes.

Part of the uniqueness of the school came from the life of Miss Sarah Porter herself. Sarah was born in 1813 to Reverend Noah Porter, pastor of Farmington's Congressional Church for sixty years, and wife Mehitabel. She passed away on Feb.17, 1900 at the age of eighty-seven. She was the third, out of seven children, and the eldest daughter. As a young girl, Sarah attended Farmington Academy from 1828 to1830 where she studied languages and advanced math.[171] She then proceeded to New Haven, Connecticut, where she attended The New Haven Female Institute, conducted by a former pupil of her father's, Ethan A. Andrews (see figure four). Courses at the Institute

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[169] Julia Anna Clark, "My Dear Mother," June 30, 1860, as quoted in transcribed letters in Miss Porter's School Archival Collection, 166.
[170] Julia Anna Clark, "My Very Dear Sister," March 17, 1860, as quoted in transcribed letters in Miss Porter's School Archival Collection, 162.
[171] Nancy Davis and Barbara Donahue, *Miss Porter's School: A History*, Miss Porter's School, Farmington Connecticut, 1992, 1.

included English, Greek, Natural History, Chemistry, Botany and Zoology; these were the same courses that were available to male students during that period.[172] In 1832 Sarah graduated went to Springfield, Massachusetts where she assisted Julia Hawkes, a protégé of Catherine Beecher. Under Beecher, Hawkes had learned the mentality that women should be trained to lead "God-fearing, useful, and intelligent lives."[173] This maxim would be upheld by Sarah Porter throughout her career as an educator. After her mentor's sudden death in Philadelphia, Sarah moved back to Farmington where she opened her school to day students from the area and those living as boarders in her parent's home. She returned briefly to Farmington in 1841 and took on fifteen pupils, but due to her family's financial difficulties she took a job in Buffalo.[174]

In Buffalo, New York, Sarah taught forty students with the assistance of her sister Miss Elizabeth Porter and Miss Mary Norton (later Mrs. Mary Norton Thompson), who was the former Regent of the Buffalo Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution and parlor lecturer on education. She was also assisted by Mrs. Thompson's sister Elizabeth Norton.[175] At the school in Buffalo, her female students were at first disobedient and would loudly interrupt Sarah when she was giving her lessons. As a consequence of such rude behaviour, Sarah created a sign language so that her students could ask her questions in a quiet and well-mannered way. With this is place, her students began to admire her, as Sarah established a rule of mutual love and respect in her

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[172] Nancy Davis and Barbara Donahue, *Miss Porter's School: A History*, Miss Porter's School, Farmington Connecticut, 1992, 2.
[173] Ibid., 2.
[174] "Sarah Porter," *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary*, James Edward T., Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer, eds., Belknap Press of Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971, this section found in Miss Porter's School Archival Collection.
[175] "This Day in Buffalo's History: Miss Porter's School Began Here," *The Times*, August 22, 1926, Scrapbook/ Buffalo and Erie Co. Public Library, Lafayette Square, as found in Miss Porter's School Archival Collection.

classroom that would continue on throughout her career.[176] It was in 1847 that Sarah was invited back to Farmington, Connecticut to reopen her Farmington School. She received such an invitation because the Farmington Academy, where she was educated, was now an all boys school and the more prominent families in town wanted Sarah to establish a school of her own, where she would be able to give their daughters an education that was on par to what was being taught to their sons. She accepted, and departed Buffalo with letters of regret from her students in her hands. Due to the great admiration that the wealthy parents who sent their daughters to Sarah school in Buffalo had for her, many ended up transferring their daughters to Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Connecticut.[177]

During this period, upper state New York was a hot bed of reform activity. In fact, Sarah's Buffalo school was near Seneca Falls, New York. Sarah Porter was only a single year removed from the Seneca Falls Convention on women's rights and the Declaration of Sentiments given by activist Elizabeth Cady Staunton. It is interesting to note how Miss Porter was connected to various reform-centered communities, as Farmington itself was a strong centre for abolitionists, temperance and missionary activities.[178] Men such as Austin Williams, Samuel Denning, John Treadwell Norton, and John Hooker led the vast majority of the reforms with the establishment of their own houses as shelters for runaway slaves from the South, who were escaping to the North through the Underground Railroad. One is able to see the connections that prominent Farmington families had to other reformer families. For instance, John Hooker was the husband of

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[176] Nancy Davis and Barbara Donahue, *Miss Porter's School: A History*, Miss Porter's School, Farmington Connecticut, 1992, 4.
[177] Ibid., 4.
[178] Ibid., 4.

suffragist Isabella Beecher and brother-in-law to both the educator Catherine Beecher and the novelist Harriet Beecher (see figure five).[179] One can also see this radical streak in Sarah Porter as well. While in the Farmington Academy, she had published an article on Dec. 31, 1827, when she was only 14 years old, in which she stated that Americans were more heathen-like than the Turks, since being a Christian nation, Americans were still enslaving individuals. She considered America to be a free-land for all and that it was the duty of Americans to see blacks elevated to their rightful position of freedom, as she believed that they were both human beings and fellow men.[180] Her belief was reaffirmed during the Amistad case, 1839 to 1841, where in 1841 it was ruled by the US Supreme Court that the Africans had been illegally transported and held as slaves, and thus ordered them to be freed from captivity. Sarah Porter, herself, was said to have housed some of the slaves that were in Farmington, Connecticut, and educated them while they were in America (see figure six). However, Sarah Porter is still a contradictory figure, as she believed in the abolishment of slavery within the United States but did not believe that women should be allowed to vote. This is representative of the period of transition regarding the notions surrounding women and their place within American society. Due to the influences of the intellectuals and reformers within her life, the school that she established later would be considered by some to be an "intellectual hot-house."[181]

Miss Porter's School was founded in 1842 by Miss Sarah Porter after she borrowed $32.94 from her family to equip the school, bought room over a store on Main

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[179] Nancy Davis and Barbara Donahue, *Miss Porter's School: A History*, Miss Porter's School, Farmington Connecticut, 1992, 4.
[180] Sarah Porter, "Comparative Claims of the Greeks and the African Slaves," Dec.31, 1827, appeared in the "Academical Gazette" of the Farmington Academy. Miss Porter's School Archival Collection.
[181] Rev. James Gibson Johnson, "Acceptance of Building in Behalf of the Ecclesiastical Society," as quoted in *Addresses Delivered at the Opening Services of the Parish House*, McMill, Farmington, Connecticut, October 28, 1900, 26.

Street in Farmington.[182] Yet the school closed when she moved to Buffalo to teach, and as a result it did not reopen until 1847. Her school, the Farmington Female Seminary was completed (work was finished on the building) in 1849 (see figure seven). Before this she had used the floor over a store. She then expanded her school through the acquisition of Farmington's hotel, the Union Hotel on Main Street, which was formerly used by the Farmington Canal trade. In 1851 she expanded her school to the second floor, as the Seminary Association decided not to use the second floor as a school for younger children. In 1852, Sarah added a one –story addition to her school house (see figure eight).[183] It was here then that Miss Porter established her school's mission.

Sarah Porter's mission was to "educate young women to be good Christians, good wives and companions to their husbands and good mothers, whose influence would shine like a saving light in their domestic world."[184] In order to accomplish such a task, young women had to become familiarized with the higher culture and education of Victorian American society.[185] By 1851, she had 11 day scholars and 19 boarders. As a result of the increasing number of students enrolling in her school, Porter sought the assistance of her sisters Lizzie, and later, Maria. As the school expanded, and more students began to graduate from Miss Porter's School, Sarah hired former students as teachers in order to meet the high demands and expectations of her school (see figure nine). Sarah would not hire college educated women as teachers, as she felt that they were arrogant and narrow minded; not suited to the spirit or vision of her school.[186] An example of this could be

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[182] Nancy Davis and Barbara Donahue, *Miss Porter's School: A History*, Miss Porter's School, Farmington Connecticut, 1992, 1.
[183] Ibid., 5.
[184] Ibid., 8.
[185] Ibid., 8.
[186] Ibid., 21.

found in Eliza Langdon, who graduated as a student in 1847 where she immediately received a position within the school where she continued to teach English and piano lessons until she retired in 1884.[187] It was through the education that the young girls received at Miss Porter's that allowed them to become models of the changing ideals of womanhood.

Heavily influenced by her brother's method of teaching, which in turn was mannered on the educational philosophies of the New England Transcendentalists, Sarah Porter gave her students the opportunity to explore their own intellectual desires by arranging the academic year of her students in a manner that allowed her students to take only independent electives. At Miss Porter's, the school year was divided into three terms, comprising of fourteen weeks each. The young women were given four weeks of vacation in the spring, five during the summer, and one at Christmas. Parents were charged $110 per term for board and tuition, and an additional $20 per term if their daughter was to be instructed on the piano or in singing.[188] The excellent education that Miss Porter's students received was due to the independent and elective courses that the girls were allowed to take and the quality of instruction given to them by their teachers. Students could choose from a wide variety of classes, these included: Arithmetic, Botany, Chemistry, Composition, Classics, Geography, Geology, Geometry, German, History, Music, Moral Philosophy, Practice (both dramatic and musical), Natural Philosophy, Reading, Spelling, Themed Religion, Trigonometry, Writing, and Zoology. With the more traditional courses, such as music, women were allowed to create complicated

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[187] Nancy Davis and Barbara Donahue, *Miss Porter's School: A History*, Miss Porter's School, Farmington Connecticut, 1992, 9.
[188] "Miss Porter's School, Farmington, Conn.," as quoted in transcribed notes from Miss Porter's School Archival Collection, 1847, 15.

compositions, and learn more classical music as to become better educated in higher culture and broaden their tastes. Works such as Sir Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology; or, the Modern Changes of the Earth and Its Inhabitants* and Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* were used by teachers to instruct their pupils on the topics in the field.[189] In addition, the young women also read Hume's *English History*, Lieber's *Civil Liberty and Self-Government*, and Homer's *Iliad*.[190] Those textbooks were usually only studied at male-only educational institutions, and as a consequence the students at Miss Porter's School were given an education that was on par to what the seniors at Yale were being taught, by Sarah Porter's brother Noah.[191] The acceptance of these courses, at female private schools such as Miss Porter's, represented the willingness on the part of some female educators to advance the position of women during the period through the process of advanced education.

Further educational benefits came from the small sizes of the classes, which never had never more than seven students in each one. Due to this, friendships were formed, and encouraged by Miss Porter, between the young women and their teachers.[192] Students were not to be given grades or rankings at Miss Porter's but would receive either a fail or pass at the end of the school year. This was in stark contract to the other girls' schools and colleges of the period. Part of the reason for this unusual system was due to the fact that Sarah Porter believed that the girls should lead "simple and humble"

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[189] Sir Charles Lyell, "Principles of Geology; or, the Modern Changes of the Earth and Its Inhabitants," John Murray, London, 1850. Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Phillips, Samson and Company, Boston, 1854.
[190] Charlotte Merriman, "My Darling Mother," June 4, 1861, as quoted in transcribed letters in Miss Porter's School Archival Collection, 81.
[191] Ida Sawyer, "My Dear Sister Lizzie," October 21, 1871, as quoted in *Miss Porter's School: A History in Documents, 1847-1948. Volume One: The School and Its Students, 1847- 1900*, Louise L. Stevenson ed., Garland Publishing Inc., New York, 1987, 211.
[192] Nancy Davis and Barbara Donahue, *Miss Porter's School: A History*, Miss Porter's School, Farmington Connecticut, 1992, 10.

lives.[193] In addition to all this, Sarah would hire experts in their fields to teach her young ladies. Men such as German Philosopher Herr Brandt, German Composer Karl Klauser and American Impressionist Robert B. Brandegee were hired by Sarah herself to teach music and art respectively (see figures ten and eleven).[194] Sarah also entertained authors Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mark Twain, and Charles Dudley Warner at her school.[195] On a typical day, students attended classes in the morning and afternoon. Met during the evenings to have dinner with Sarah Porter and recited readings, from Dickens, Thackeray, George Elliot, or Wordsworth to name a few, sewed, and did other traditional activities.[196] Every evening, Sarah Porter would read stories to the girls, but for the sake of the girls' modesty, would skip the more blush-inducing passages.[197] On Sunday evenings, Sarah would choose one girl to report on the sermon that was presented that morning in Church, and one on the evening talk. Each student had to recite the text of the day, a summary and her own commentary.[198] These evening activities would allow a sense of routine and warmth within the daily lives of Miss Porter's School community.

Sarah Porter considered her school and those within it, whether faculty, staff, or students to be part of an extended family. When Sarah Porter had her own free time, one could often find her either tutoring students who needed further assistance, keeping the school account books, or staying up late into the night to help nurse an ill or homesick

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[193] Sarah Porter, "My Dear Ethel," March 30, 1896, as quoted in transcribed letters in Miss Porter's School Archival Collection, 81.
[194] Nancy Davis and Barbara Donahue, *Miss Porter's School: A History*, Miss Porter's School, Farmington Connecticut, 1992, 10.
[195] Ibid., 20.
[196] Anne G. Seel, "She Started a School Neither Practical Nor Necessary," *Yankee*, September 1980, 154.
[197] Nancy Davis and Barbara Donahue, *Miss Porter's School: A History*, Miss Porter's School, Farmington Connecticut, 1992, 11.
[198] Elaine Carlson, *A Brief Historical Sketch of Miss Porter's School: as Told to Elaine D. Carlson by Nancy Davis*, Miss Porter's School, Farmington, Connecticut, 1973, 6.

individual.[199] Due to this familial mindset, Sarah Porter tried to influence the moral development of the girls as much as possible. This was especially apparent with her rules regarding contact between her students and the young men of the surrounding area. As with other women's colleges at the time, Porter's separated women from men, which reinforced the Victorian codes of the times. When boys did visit Farmington they came under the guise of "cousins."[200] In fact, contact between the young women and the young men of the town was strongly discouraged; the waving of a handkerchief, or the returning of any signals to young men would, if caught, result in the immediate dismissal of the girl from the school.[201] In the Yale Manuscripts and Archives collection, there was a correspondence letter that I found between Robert Keep, nephew to Noah and Sarah Porter, to his good friend, James Edwards, in which it references the "blushing girls" of Miss Porter's School.[202] Blushing, due to the fact that as the girls were walking in their designated area, James caught a few of the girls' eyes and they hurried away while blushing profusely. This would appear to indicate that the girls were aware of consequences if they were found in contact with men such as James Edwards. In addition, when a student misbehaved, Sarah Porter was never heard to raise her voice but would find an unorthodox way of dealing with the rowdy student. For instance, one night a group of students had procured a forbidden meal in their rooms long after they were to be in their beds fast asleep. Porter heard the girls giggling and so went to investigate. When she opened the door and saw all the food on the table, she smiled at the girls, and walked

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[199] Nancy Davis and Barbara Donahue, *Miss Porter's School: A History*, Miss Porter's School, Farmington Connecticut, 1992, 9.
[200] Ibid., 22.
[201] Elaine Carlson, *A Brief Historical Sketch of Miss Porter's School: as Told to Elaine D. Carlson by Nancy Davis*, Miss Porter's School, Farmington, Connecticut, 1973, 4.
[202] James Edwards, "Bar Room, Bar Room Table, to Robert Keep," Farmington, Connecticut, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, box 2, folder, 31, May 19, 1864.

over to the table where she proceeded to create the most "unappetizing combinations," such as mayonnaise on chocolate, or mustard on cake, that every item of food was spoiled. She then turned, smiled, and said "Good-night, girls," then closed the door behind her.[203]

Part of the family atmosphere came from the traditions that the students participated in while at the institution. One of the traditions came in the form of dress regulations. At Miss Porter's School, girls were to wear simple dresses with no adornments, except for a thin watch chain, broach, and a set of plain earrings (see figure twelve).[204] Sarah Porter enforced this rule so that every girl, regardless of their wealth, would maintain their humbleness and befriend one another, regardless of the wealth of one's parents. Traditions were an important part of Miss Porter's School, as they allowed for the young women to form close ties with one another. The most important tradition involved an Old Girl, the term for graduating year student, befriending a New Girl, the name given to an incoming student, and would then proceed to teach them the various rules and customs at Miss Porter's School (see figure thirteen). This is especially apparent when one looks at the following brief excerpt from a poem regarding the supposed relationship between the incoming students and their mentors:

"There's a rule in Farmington ever so old
That a New Girl should be very meek,
Should speak when she's spoken to, do as she's told,
And offer an Old Girl her seat.
She should step off the boardwalk an Old Girl to pass.
When ordered to come, she should fly.
And then after doing the best she can,
The Old Girls are certain to cry,

[203] Anne G. Seel, "She Started a School Neither Practical Nor Necessary," *Yankee*, September 1980, 157.
[204] "Regulations for Dress Code in Miss Porter's School," as quoted in transcribed notes from Miss Porter's School Archival Collection, March 28, 1862, 17.

'You Get more and more fresh everyday; You get more and more fresh everyday!'"[205]

As the school year progressed, the friendships that were formed between the New Girls and Old Girls would grow stronger, so much so that by the winter if one was out walking around Miss Porter's School grounds then one would probably see the students skating, tobogganing, or sleighing (see figures fourteen and fifteen). In nicer weather, one could probably find them dancing together around the grounds, going for hay-wagon rides, or for a ride in the carriage (see figures sixteen and seventeen). Sleep-overs and picnics were other popular ways in which the girls would cement their friendships (see figures eighteen, nineteen, and twenty-one). So that by the end of the year, when the girls went back home to their families, the young women could be found writing letters to one another on a regular basis in order to maintain their closeness with each other.

It was precisely because Sarah Porter used affection, and thus created a familial atmosphere at her school, that Miss Porter's School can be said to be a place of transition. Through such an approach not only did she greatly develop the moral and intellectual lives of her students, but Sarah Porter reshaped the possibilities of women's education during this period. One of the best ways in which to evidence Miss Porter's School as a place of transition is through the photographic evidence provided, and although the evidence is but a small fraction of the photographic collections available at Miss Porter's School Archival Collection, one is still able to notice how engaged the students were in a world that clearly stretched beyond the imagined limitations of the "woman's sphere." By reading photographs as artifacts or texts, this paper gives voice to women who would

[205] Louise McClellan, "Song of the New Girls," as quoted in *Miss Porter's School: A History in Documents, 1847-1948. Volume One: The School and Its Students, 1847- 1900*, Louise L. Stevenson ed., Garland Publishing Inc., New York, 1987, 149.

otherwise be silent in the historical record. As artifacts, these photographs are a standing testament to the social obstacles, i.e. moral restrictions, which the young women overcame head-on. The students at Miss Porter's School, by the mid-nineteenth century were challenging the stereotypes that were given to them by the traditionalists of the period. Miss Porter's School girls would even challenge the assumptions of the Headmistress herself, who believed that her students should stay in the home in order to effect the most change. The challenges by the students towards Sarah Porter effectively demonstrate that the intended results that Sarah Porter desired did not always occur. In other words, there was a gap between the intent of Miss Porter and the consequences that the students chose for themselves. It was in part due to this gap that allowed for the students at Miss Porter's to negotiate their places as women within American society, especially after 1880 and the creation of the New Woman. As a result, when one looks at the visual evidence, one can see that those young women were more modern than quaint and that they were ready to face the challenges that society gave them with smiles on their faces.

At Miss Porter's School, the students participated in numerous extra-curricular activities. Porter believed that with such additional activities, would only help to further the girls to become "free women … cultivate their minds and to have an active influence on their sphere of society."[206] Through their participation in various sports, the students were able to further their identities as women and extend their education into an area which most other female boarding schools prohibited. Students at Miss Porter's were involved in numerous sports such as equestrian, fencing, rowing, tennis, and the like (see

[206] "Dear Skip," May 27, 1982 as quoted in transcribed letters in Miss Porter's School Archival Collection, 3.

figure twenty-one).[207] There was even the establishment of a Base Ball Club at Miss Porter's School in the 1860s by pupil Kate Stevens (later Mrs. M.B. Hughes) and some of her fellow schoolmates. It was named Tunxis, after an old Indian Tribe in Connecticut, and the young women would play a few games a months, which eventually led them to receive a challenge from the Trinity College team at Hartford. Unfortunately, some of the parents complained about the "somewhat strenuous exercise" and thus the team was unable to play another season.[208] This provides an example of some of the restrictions, mostly on moral grounds, that were plaguing some athletically-inclined students at Miss Porter's and female educational institutes across the country. As many parents, with the advice of professionals of the period, believed that by engaging in strenuous activities, young girls would not develop properly and that such exercise would cause fertility issues for the young women later in life.

Another extra-curricular activity that the students at Miss Porter's School participated in, which departed from traditional female education, was the publication of their student newspaper, *The Revolver*. Although the newspaper only was in circulation for a short while, only for three months in 1847, through a series of satirical essays the students commented on the relationships between men and women, and the attributes pertaining to both sexes.[209] The students gave themselves power to "reform themselves and their peers" by adapting a "conventionally male metaphor to show how they fired shots- persuasive words- to the hearts of their readers."[210] The papers motto was "that

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[207] Julia Anna Clark, "My Dearest Mother," June 6, 1860 as quoted in transcribed letters in Miss Porter's School Archival Collection, 165.
[208] Kate Stevens (Mrs. M.B. Hughes), "Girls of the '60s: Her Story, 1867," as quoted in *When I Was at Farmington*, The Alumnae Bulletin of Miss Porter's School, 1946, 119.
[209] Louise L. Stevenson, "Little Women? The Female Mind at Work in Antebellum America," *History Today* 45, no. 3 (1995): 3.
[210] Ibid., 3.

those who are able to accomplish something have self-confidence."[211] It was this confidence that allowed the students at Miss Porter's School to attack the construction of nineteenth century femininity. For instance, the students would disdainfully write about the fashionable young women who sought to gain suitable husbands by their looks only. Ideal men would value the young women of Miss Porter's instead, as they were not vain but humble in their intellectual pursuits.[212] The newspaper allowed for women to test the limits of female influence in the public domain in that period. This newspaper would later continue into the 1850s to 1870s under the name of the "Budget."[213] It could be seen as part of the same process that would eventually see female activists and reformers combating the ideal of true womanhood in the following decades.[214] The women's rights movement would incorporate much of the rhetoric that was used, as well as the style of writing, in female-headed newspapers during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in American society. Although Miss Porter herself was against women acquiring the right to vote, some of her students did not necessarily agree with her and would later become influential figures in the fight for women's rights during the 1880s.

Miss Sarah Porter wanted her students, while under her care, to be awakened to "true intellectual effort, to self-direction, to a sense of responsibility for others, [and] to the great idea of service."[215] She accomplished this task through the elective and independent courses that she offered to her students, through the highly regarded teachers

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[211] "Possunt q uia posse videnture," *The Budget*, vol. 1, no.2, November 10, 1848, as quoted in transcribed newspaper articles from Miss Porter's School Archival Collection, 95.
[212] Louise L. Stevenson, "Little Women? The Female Mind at Work in Antebellum America," *History Today* 45, no. 3 (1995): 4.
[213] "Possunt q uia posse videnture," *The Budget*, vol. 1, no.2, November 10, 1848, as quoted in transcribed newspaper articles from Miss Porter's School Archival Collection, 95.
[214] Eyal Rabinovitch, "Gender and the Public Sphere: Alternative Forms of Integration in Nineteenth Century America," *Sociological Theory* 19, no.3 (2000): 353.
[215] *Addresses Delivered at the Opening Services of the Parish House*, McMill, Farmington, Connecticut, October 28, 1900, 11.

and staff, and by allowing her students to participate in extra-curricular activities that gave them the opportunity to enjoy activities that were usually prohibited to the female sex. Included in this were sports such as baseball, dramatic performances, and commenting on the social ills of society through the publication of their satirical newspaper. Integrated into Miss Porter's School was a familial atmosphere that allowed the students to form close bonds with one another, through the traditions that the school had, and the daily activities that the girls enjoyed with each other. During this period, 1840 to 1875, Miss Porter's School can be said to be a transitional location of feminine identity, from older Victorian notions of femininity, through to the emerging characteristics of womanhood that would be characterized in the New Woman of the Progressive era. At this school, girls were educated to become better wives and mothers, but they had their mind opened to possibilities of a future that lay outside the home and included more interaction within the public sphere. Although the students at Miss Porter's School did not fully engage with the public sphere, they set up the foundation in which the next generation would be able to do so. In doing this, they created a legacy of female independence and spirit that continues at the Miss Porter's School today.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

"Within these walls we've happy been,
And many joys have tasted,
We many busy hours have seen,
Too many moments wasted…
Then farewell friends and schoolmates all,
We'll ne'er forget each other.
And oft will some moments call
Sweet thoughts of one another."[216]

During the Victorian era, the cultivation of the ideals of femininity was an important component of the education that young girls were to receive, as it would ultimately allow them to protect their homes from any infringements made upon the domestic space from the corrupted male public sphere. Within the home, mothers were to instruct their daughters through the assistance of the domestic advice literature of the period. Both white middle-class mothers and daughters were to follow the virtue embedded within the cult of true womanhood, those being piety, purity, submissiveness, moral influence, and domesticity. Yet the identities of these women were also influenced through the various reform movements of the period, such as abolitionism and women's rights. One of the better instances of how these movements could help promote female education and independence was Transcendentalism. Through the Transcendentalist community of Brook Farm, women were able to be given an education that was outside the domestic sphere and which stressed participation within the community and independent thought. Key female figures of Transcendentalism, Margaret Fuller and Sophia Ripley, helped to promote the notions of independent womanhood. The call for advanced female education was a continuation of the efforts made by female private

[216] "Unnamed Poem," *The Budget*, vol. 1, no.7, March 30, 1849, as quoted in transcribed newspaper articles from Miss Porter's School Archival Collection, 103.

schools within the United States since the eighteen century. Nevertheless, it would not be until the Victorian period, with the help of evangelical Christians that female private school education would become popular amongst middle-class Americans. One the most sought-after private schools within the United States at this time was Miss Porter's School. However, Miss Porter's School was unlike the other private schools of the period, as it provided world renowned instructors, unique courses, and opportunities for its female students to engage in extra-curricular activities that were usually not available to young women, and would allow for critiques of American society. Furthermore, Miss Porter's School held a unique position on female education as it represented a place of transition, from the more engrained values of the Victorian period, for instance upon piety and purity, to the emerging standards that would later define the Progressive era, such as social commentaries.

This paper explored identity and women's education, by considering how such identities were formed and influenced by the domestic advice literature of the period, various movements, such as Transcendentalism, and the daily lives of students within private schools. In this post-modern age, the study of white middle-class female identity during this era is thought by many to be a well-covered subject, especially since academics are now looking at issues such as class, race, and transnationalism. Yet, this paper proves that there is still much to be discussed when it comes to supposedly picked over topics. It is through an interdisciplinary perspective that such overly studied fields can become re-energized and new understandings of those topics can be brought to the forefront.

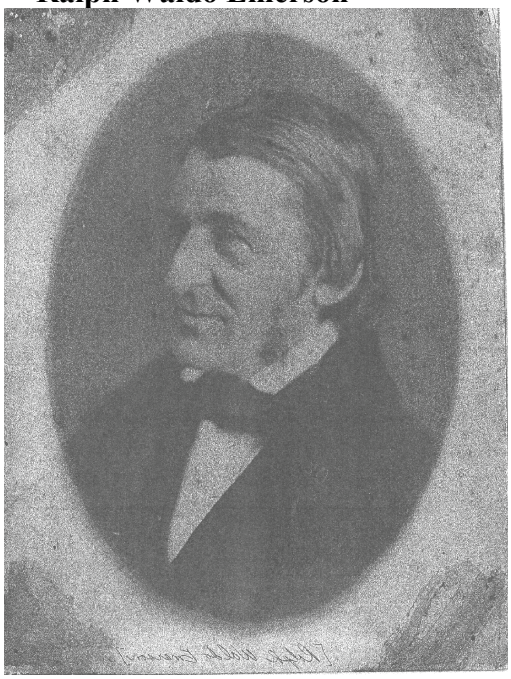
More importantly, however, the themes that are covered within this essay are still relevant today. These themes include the creation and maintenance of identity, where national identities are being re-formed with every new political agenda across the world. How to continue to hold on to one's identity in a rapidly changing environment, such as urban centers, is related to this. In addition, are the factors that influence young women and their personal struggle to find their true personalities, factors such as television commercials, magazine ads, and other mass media images that propagate "ideal" womanhood. Female education is a much commented issue today, especially in relation to developing countries and topics such as illiteracy. Private school education is also an area that is discussed, especially when compared to the education that children receive within the United States public school system. So needless to say, there is still much that needs to be said, and consequently studied, about issues surrounding themes such as female identity and education within past and modern-day societies.

Scholarship still needs to be done, regarding the progression of female identity and education within the United States, in order to fully understand just how the two topics influenced one another throughout the history of American society, up to and including the present-day. It would be of especial benefit to continue this subject matter by expanding the scope of this paper, to include the Progressive era, or to look for parallels, continuities and contrasts with discussions of women's education in the 1950s and 1960s, and in the present. The expansion of the scope would give us a clearer picture of the ways in which white middle-class women's education and identities are tied together, and the significance of such a connection to the creation of a national American character or mythology. Until that time, however, students of American cultural studies,

and American History, will have to be content with the fact that the interdisciplinary perspectives open up the possibility that familiar and well-worked subjects will be re-evaluated and new information or understandings will be brought forth.

# Illustrations

**Ralph Waldo Emerson**



(Yale University Manuscripts and Archives)

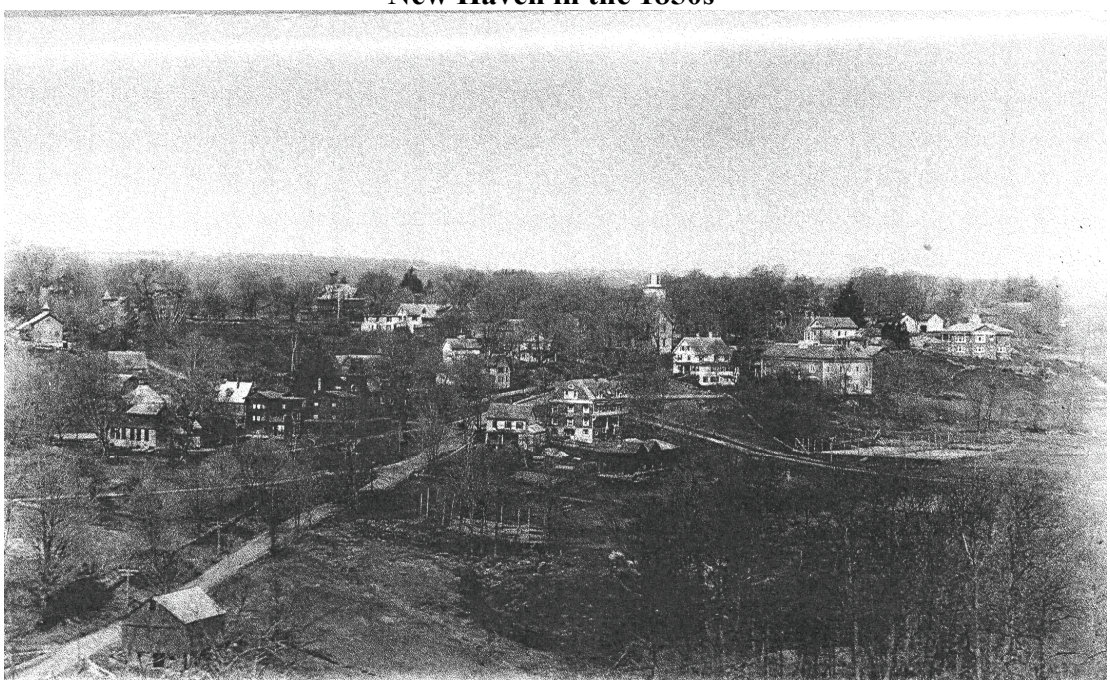
**Miss Sarah Porter**

(Miss Porter's School Archival Collection)

**Mary Eliza Dennis 1876**

(Miss Porter's School Archival Collection)

**New Haven in the 1850s**



(Yale University Manuscripts and Archives)

**Harriet Beecher Stowe**

(Yale University Manuscripts and Archives)

**”Little Richard”**

(Miss Porter’s School Archival Collection)

**Old School House**

(Miss Porter’s School Archival Collection)

**Miss Porter’s School**

(Miss Porter’s School Archival Collection)

**Teachers at Miss Porter's School**

(Miss Porter's School Archival Collection)

**Inside Robert Brandegee's Art Studio 1870s**

(Miss Porter's School Archival Collection)

**Art Teacher Robert Brandegee**

(Miss Porter's School Archival Collection)

**Miss Porter's School Girls**

(Miss Porter's School Archival Collection)

**Old Girls**

(Miss Porter's School Archival Collection)

**1870s Winter**

(Miss Porter's School Archival Collection)

**Students at Play (Tobogganing)**

(Miss Porter's School Archival Collection)

**Students at Play (Dancing)**

(Miss Porter's School Archival Collection)

**Students on Hay Wagon Ride**

(Miss Porter's School Archival Collection)

**Tea in the Garden Mid 1860s**

(Miss Porter's School Archival Collection)

**Dorm Room 1870s**

(Miss Porter's School Archival Collection)

**Students in Dorm Room**

(Miss Porter's School Archival Collection)

**Playing Tennis**

(Miss Porter's School Archival Collection)

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