

The
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Lycoming County Historical Society

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Digging for Lost Stories from a Changing Past*

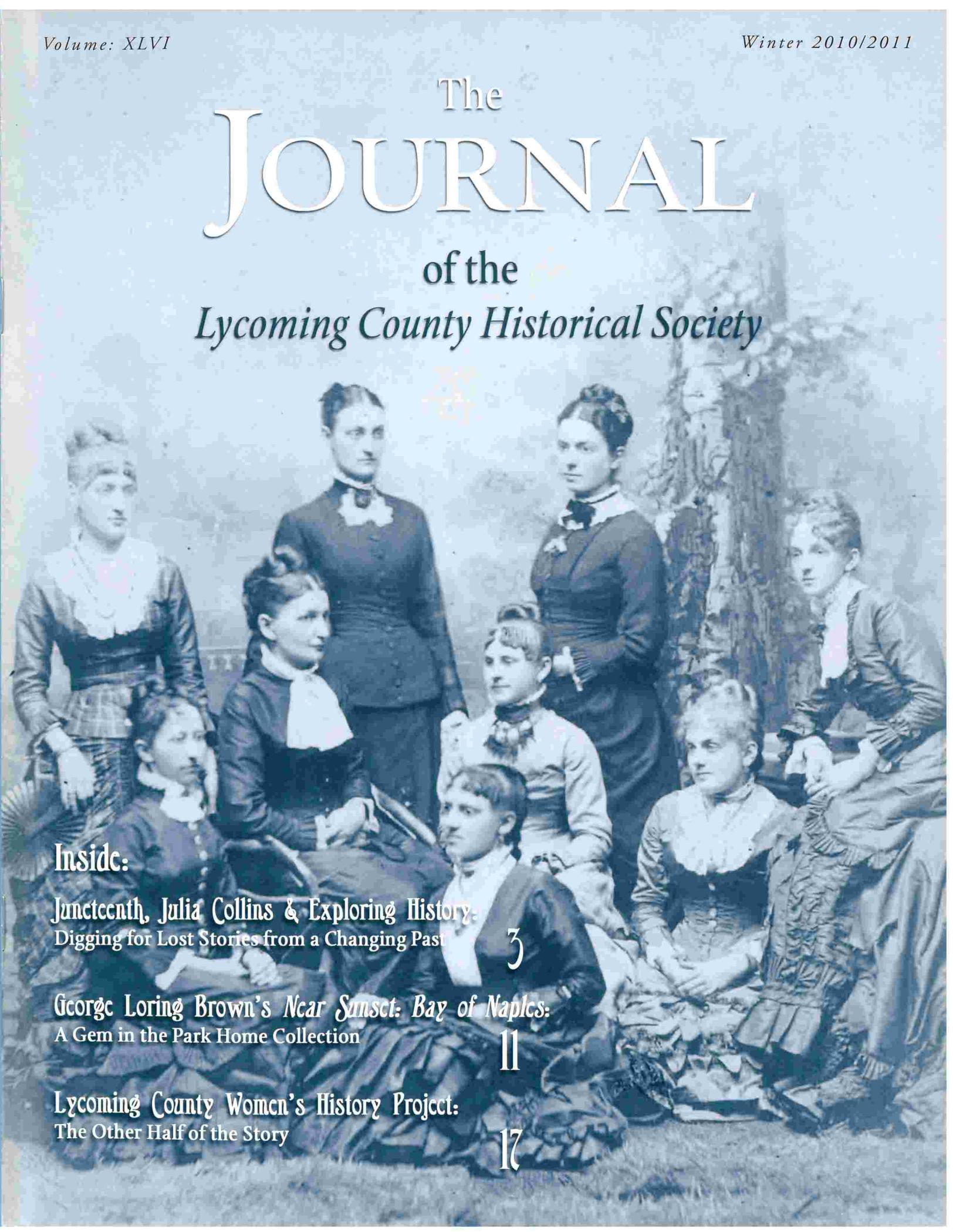
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In this article, Professor Kachun discusses the value of historical research and the story of his own discovery about the life of 19th century African American novelist Julia Collins, who lived and taught school in Williamsport in the 1860s. Under LCHS's sponsorship, Julia Collins recently received recognition with a Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission marker located on the Susquehanna Riverwalk near the Hepburn Street dam. Dr. Mitch Kachun is an Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in the History Department at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

George Loring Brown's *Near Sunset: Bay of Naples*:
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The Park Home, a personal care home formerly located at 800 West Fourth Street in Williamsport, housed a fine art collection acquired by local entrepreneur William "Bud" Stuart in the early 20th century. Many of this collection's paintings, recently restored, are now on loan to the Taber Museum and exhibited in its art gallery. In this article, Professor Golahny examines one of the works, George Loring Brown's *Near Sunset: Bay of Naples*. Professor Golahny teaches art history at Lycoming College in Williamsport.

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By: Janet McNeil Hurlbert & Mary L. Sieminski

In this article, Janet Hurlbert and Mary Sieminski outline a cooperative project focusing on women's history and involving Lycoming College's Snowden Library, Williamsport's James V. Brown Library, and the Lycoming County Historical Society. The project resulted in the creation of an on-line repository of archival material. The article not only explains how the project came about and who was involved, but also describes some of the holdings of each organization that are included in the repository. Janet McNeil Hurlbert is the director of Snowden Library and Mary L. Sieminski is manager of the Lycoming County Women's History Project.

Cover Photo:
Portrait of Ellie Campbell and co-workers from Lloyd's Shirt
Factory, c. 1880; from the Lycoming County Historical
Society collection.

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Juneteenth, Julia Collins, & Exploring History: Digging for Lost Stories from a Changing Past

By: *Dr. Mitch Kachun*

History is a wonderful subject because, if approached properly, history is *not* about memorizing dates and facts about presidents and wars and other events—all the stuff that makes students think that they *hate* history. History is about *people*; it is about trying to understand the lives and experiences of the people who came before us. Whether those people were family members, church founders, community leaders, or people who—on the surface—have no direct connection with us, the historian’s job is to reconstruct the world those people lived in and, even more important, to try to get inside their heads—to try to see *their* world as *they* saw it. In the end, this may be an impossible task, especially when dealing with a world that existed many decades, or even centuries, before our own. But in many ways, the more important thing is the effort. Not just because that effort helps us to understand the past, but also because the very act of trying to understand the world from another person’s point of view helps us to develop our own sense of empathy and open-mindedness. That lets us realize that all individuals are unique and have valid ideas and identities that deserve our respectful, thoughtful, and informed consideration.

History



For these reasons, history is really the most humanizing of the academic disciplines, because developing what we call “historical perspective” allows us an angle of vision into the past that can enrich our understanding of the present. This is not to say that we can, in some direct way, apply the “lessons of the past” to modern problems. That is one of the most widespread fallacies about history. Past actions—whether mistakes or triumphs—cannot be neatly reconfigured to address modern issues. Historical perspective helps us in far more subtle ways. It helps us appreciate the unintended consequences of past events and decisions. It allows us to view contemporary problems over a broad expanse of time, and to develop a sense of the complex factors that shaped today’s world. It allows us to see historical figures—whether they achieved renown or labored their whole lives in obscurity—as human beings with flaws, foibles, and feelings comparable to people in today’s society. Historical perspective forces us to always keep in mind how people’s actions in the past have shaped the world we live in today; and it compels us to consider the diversity of our world, our common humanity, and our ultimate identity with the people around us. We are all sharing this journey through history together.

I was extremely excited to have been invited to talk about history at Williamsport’s 2010 Juneteenth celebration because both the event we celebrated and the Williamsport community connect very closely with some of my own explorations into the past. My research into the history of African American emancipation celebrations has shown me how important those events were to nineteenth and early twentieth century black communities all over the country. My book on that subject, *Festivals of Freedom*, appeared in 2003, and since that time other historians have continued to expand our understanding of these very meaningful events.¹

It is also nice to see the revival of that tradition in communities across the nation, with the recent resurgence of Juneteenth celebrations like this one. People should keep in mind that while Juneteenth may be the best known celebration of the end of American slavery, that momentous event is celebrated on numerous other dates in different parts of the country. For example, April 16 is a federal holiday

commemorating the end of slavery in Washington, DC, on that date in 1862. Tennessee recently proclaimed August 8th as Emancipation Day in the state, acknowledging a long-standing celebratory tradition that is believed to be connected with the date that President Andrew Johnson freed his own slaves in 1865. Several communities in Gallia County, Ohio, celebrate on September 22, marking the date Abraham Lincoln issued his Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in 1862. African Americans in Thomaston, Georgia, celebrate on the last Saturday in May, possibly because, as with Juneteenth in other parts of the country, that was the date slaves in the region learned that they were free. And in 1948 President Harry S. Truman designated February 1 as National Freedom Day, in honor of the date in 1865 that Lincoln signed the joint congressional resolution that would become the Thirteenth Amendment—the action that unequivocally ended slavery in the United States. These and other commemorations of freedom are largely unknown to most Americans, but they represent African Americans’ recognition of the importance of emancipation for bringing the nation more in line with its founding principles of liberty and equality.

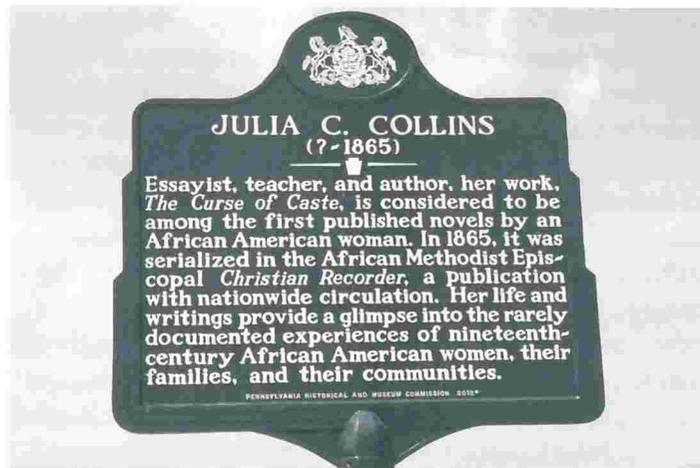
As much as this celebration of American freedom means to me, I was doubly pleased to return to Williamsport in 2010 to celebrate another historical milestone. I came to Williamsport for the first time back in 2003, when I was trying to piece together the biography of one former African American resident, Mrs. Julia C. Collins, and to develop a better understanding of her life and the community she lived in. I had discovered that Julia Collins was one of the earliest African American woman writers, and quite likely the first African American to have published a novel in the United States. After completing my research—in Williamsport, at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg, and at other locations—I collaborated with literary scholar William L. Andrews to craft an introduction for Collins’s work. In 2006, Oxford University Press published an edition of Collins’s 1865 novel, *The Curse of Caste; or The Slave Bride*, and her collected essays—the first time her work has been available to readers since it appeared in the 1860s. It is especially gratifying that, thanks to the efforts of several community members and

¹ Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003); Kathleen Ann Clark, *Defining Moments: African American Commemoration and Political Culture in the South, 1863-1913* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); J. R. Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August First: Emancipation Day in the Black Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007).

organizations, the state of Pennsylvania has honored Julia Collins with a historical marker, which was unveiled on June 19, 2010, on Williamsport's Riverwalk and Timber Trail. This marker is near the probable spot where Julia Collins taught school to Williamsport's African American children during the 1860s. Scholars of African American history and literature are also beginning to take note of Julia Collins, and she is finally being recognized for her accomplishments after having been ignored for over 140 years.²

We can learn many things through thinking about Julia Collins and her writing, and here is one of the most important. Julia Collins was probably the very first African American woman ever to publish a novel, but even the top scholars of African American literature and history had never heard of her before 2006. This should be a lesson to all of us about how incomplete and uncertain our knowledge of the past really is. Some people believe that history has already been written, that we pretty much know everything that happened in the past, and that the stories told in history textbooks cover what we know. That is part of the reason we sometimes hear people complain about new interpretations of the past—what some people refer to as “historical revisionism.” Many get upset when they hear that the history they learned in school is being challenged by new interpretations. In fact, “revisionism” is what historians have always done. It's our job. We find new sources, we examine old sources in new ways, we ask different kinds of questions, and we end up in each successive generation with new and more complex understandings of our past. So when you hear people complain that “revisionist” historians are “changing” history, keep in mind that this way of thinking perpetuates another historical fallacy—the false idea that we know what happened in the past, and that there is only one unchanging way to understand that past.

For example, until the middle of the twentieth century, the mainstream historical profession—the folks who write the textbooks—paid little attention to African Americans. Few were mentioned in textbooks outside a discussion of slavery; the idea that they had goals, motivations, ideas, or the ability to act on their own was often ignored. Much the same can be said of other groups who were largely omitted from



The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission historical marker for Julia C. Collins, located on the Susquehanna Riverwalk.



Mary Sieminski with the PHMC marker for Julia C. Collins, prior to its June 2010 unveiling.



Dr. Mitch Kachun speaks at the Julia C. Collins marker unveiling ceremony, as Tonya Anderson, Chief of Staff for State Representative Rick Mirabito; Williamsport mayor Gabriel Campana; Rep. Mirabito; and Collins descendant Jane Luther listen.

² For example, the *African American Review*, the foremost scholarly journal on African American literature, published a special edition devoted to Collins's novel: *African American Review* 40:4 (Winter 2006).



serious consideration by historians—women, the working classes, gays and lesbians, immigrants, and Native Americans, for example. Perhaps a few “token” members of the group were discussed, but for the most part they were either omitted from the American story entirely or merely treated as people who had no role in shaping the nation. So, again, when you hear people complain about history being rewritten, consider how narrow, incomplete, and often biased history was before new generations of historians began to investigate these different groups and their enormous impact on shaping American culture and history.

Julia Collins’s story provides a great example of a historical source that has been available to scholars for a long time, but that simply went unexamined. Her story suggests the kinds of stories that are still out there waiting to be told. Clearly, we do know a lot about what happened in America’s history. And the nation’s story, as it is sketched out in textbooks and other sources, provides a pretty good representation of what was going on. But it is far from a complete picture of the past. Think of American history as if it were a 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle. What we really know about that history would be comparable to our having maybe about 500 pieces of that puzzle. We have enough to have a pretty good idea of what the picture looks like, but there are a lot of details missing, and a lot of sections where we simply have to guess what would be there. In some cases, those missing pieces of history are completely lost, and we can never hope to really know what is in that part of the picture. For example, the vast majority of the 1890 federal census was destroyed in a fire, and those data are simply gone. Because of fires or floods or simply people throwing documents away, we have lost any hope of recovering immense volumes of information about the past.

In fact, a flood in Williamsport destroyed records that would have been very helpful in learning more about Julia Collins. The man I believe to be Julia’s husband was a Civil War veteran, and while I was examining his veteran’s pension application file (which he filed in the 1890s), I found that he did not include documents related to his marriages or many other activities because, he wrote, they had been “lost in high water” or “burned up or destroyed.” I am pretty sure the “high water” must have been either the 1865 or 1889 flood in Williamsport. I know, for example, that

Williamsport’s black residents were especially hard hit by the 1865 flood, since they were largely concentrated at that time on Mill St. and River Alley, down near the river. The Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church’s minister at that time (which was before the current church building was constructed away from the river) reported that, “There was four feet of water in my house and nine feet in the church.” Clearly a lot of personal possessions, letters, marriage and birth certificates, family bibles, church records, and other documents would have been lost.³

But while a lot of important information like this has been lost over the years, in other cases, there are pieces of the puzzle that are still out there waiting to be discovered, or waiting to be examined by someone who thinks they are worth the effort. Before I discuss the things I learned about Julia Collins and the Williamsport community from the 1860s, I’d like to provide some ideas about the kinds of sources I looked at to try to piece together Julia’s story—and also to suggest that any one of you can carry out similar detective work into the past.

That statement about the 1865 flood by the Bethel minister, Nelson H. Turpin, was reported in a newspaper called the *Christian Recorder*, which was then, and remains today, the official national newspaper of the AME Church. The *Recorder* and other black newspapers of the nineteenth century are essential historical documents, in part because they were one place in which everyday black people could have their names appear in print or where they could communicate their ideas to others, and in that way record their ideas—and their very existence—for posterity. In the 1860s, most white newspapers generally ignored black people unless they had been arrested. So you could read those papers and it might seem that black people simply did not lead lives that were worth remembering. But of course they *were* leading interesting lives, and they *are* worth remembering. Old newspapers—local and national mainstream papers, and any African American newspapers from the period—can teach us an enormous amount about life in those communities. Sources like census records, pension application files, city directories, and county histories, among others, help us to find African Americans, piece together the kinds of lives they led, the organizations they formed, the businesses

³ Simon C. Collins, Civil War Veterans Pension Application File, National Archives and Records Administration; letter from Nelson H. Turpin, *Christian Recorder*, April 22, 1865.



they owned, the ways they made a living, the sort of families they lived in, the way they got an education—and overall, the kind of communities they built for themselves.

The great thing is that you do not have to spend eight years in graduate school to be able to use these resources. Many are available to you free of charge right here in Williamsport, at the J. V. Brown Library and through the Lycoming County Historical Society and the Lycoming County Genealogical Society at the Taber Museum. I used those sources a lot in trying to learn about Julia Collins and her community. Resources like libraries and local historical societies have all kinds of cool objects and documents to look at: pictures of local soldiers and local sports teams; the discharge papers of Civil War veterans; the minutes of local women's clubs; old maps, property deeds, and city directories—these are annual volumes that list all the local businesses, the organizations (like Masonic lodges and churches), the local residents, their addresses and occupations, and tons more. I *love* reading old city directories.⁴

But my *favorite* historical source is the newspaper. Newspapers are great sources because *anybody* can just sit down and start reading. Nineteenth century papers were set up a little differently from ours, but they're pretty easy to figure out. Not only are newspapers very accessible for any reader, but also by their very nature they represent a chronicle of what was considered important at that time and place. So you get a very good, if somewhat selective, overview of what was going on, both in the nation *and* in the town where the paper was published—political issues and elections; business news; meetings of local organizations; weather and natural disasters; social activities of prominent community members; crime reports (which can often give you a glimpse at the lives of *not-so-prominent* community members); local and national sports; obituaries; letters to the editor; and what sometimes can be the most fun, classified ads and business advertisements. The main difference in how you read these old newspapers is that mostly they have been copied onto microfilm to protect the original paper documents from damage. But it only takes a little practice to get used to reading microfilm (and you don't have to get newsprint all over your hands). Just ask

your helpful librarian to get you started.

Another resource available to everyone is the National Archives and Records Administration (www.nara.gov), which I recently contacted for a copy of my dad's World War II service records. I'm waiting for them to arrive, and hoping those records will give me at least a little bit more insight into what my father did during that war. My interest was sparked by the HBO series *The Pacific*, about the U.S. Marines who fought the island-hopping campaign in the Pacific during World War II. My dad was one of those Marines in the Fourth Marine Division who was stationed in Hawaii and who fought on the Marshall Islands and at Iwo Jima and other battles. He earned a Purple Heart.

But the best place to start researching your family's past is by asking questions of older family members. This is something I wish I had done many years ago. My dad passed away in 1986 and I never really asked him about his experiences during the war, though I did learn from him about the Navajo "code talkers" because he was a radio operator. Based on what we know about those Pacific campaigns, he may not have really wanted to share a lot of details. But I know it shaped his life in important ways. At least into the 1960s he met occasionally with some of the other Marines he served with. Now I wish I had the opportunity to learn more about his life and experiences.

I likewise encourage everyone to *think* about the past. Think about the lives of the generations that came before you and the sacrifices people made to give us all that we have today. And do more than just think. *Read*. Read about the history of your country and your community. *Ask*. Ask your family members—while you still can—about the events and the family stories they remember. Ask your local librarians and archivists about what sources might be available for you to look at. And *explore*. Explore census records and newspapers and vertical files in the libraries. Explore your attics and your grandma's attic to see what old letters or school report cards or pictures are there. And *learn*. Learn more about who you are by trying to understand more clearly where you came from.

Now I would like to share with you some of

⁴ I found good general historical information on nineteenth century Williamsport in Robin Van Auken and Lou Hunsinger, Jr., *Williamsport: Boomtown on the Susquehanna* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2003); John F. Meginness, ed., *History of Lycoming County Pennsylvania*, published in 1892, reproduced electronically and available at www.usgennet.org/usa/pa/county/lycoming/history/lyco-history-01.html. Some representative materials I used from the James V. Brown Library include Boyd's *Williamsport City Directory* (multiple years), the Meginness Clipping File, Box G (mfilm), and the "Blacks in Williamsport" vertical file. Among the Lycoming County Historical Society materials at the Taber Museum, a most useful source for my work was "Prominent Abolitionists," typescript from the Janet Trice Collection in the Mamie Diggs reference notebooks, LCHS Research Library.



what I learned while doing research about former Williamsport resident, Julia C. Collins, and her writing. Collins's novel, *The Curse of Caste; or the Slave Bride*, was not originally published in book form, but it appeared serially in over thirty weekly installments in the *Christian Recorder* newspaper between February and September of 1865.

For those of you who are not familiar with *The Curse of Caste*, let me provide a brief plot summary. Collins's novel focuses on the lives of a beautiful mixed-race mother and daughter whose opportunities for fulfillment through love and marriage are threatened by slavery and race (or "caste") prejudice. The novel is set mainly in Louisiana sometime before the Civil War. We learn that Lina, a very light-skinned slave, who does not at first even know she is a slave, meets and falls in love with Richard Tracy, the son of a prominent Louisiana slaveholding family. When her identity is revealed, Richard's love for Lina is so strong that he ignores their racial difference (and indeed he rejects southern slavery and all of America's racial conventions); he purchases Lina in order to free and then marry her. He is disowned by his father, and the lovers move north. When Lina dies after giving birth to a daughter, a despondent Richard, thinking the child is also dead, moves to Europe, while the child, Claire, is brought up in the care of a faithful servant. Claire grows up ignorant of her own racial heritage, and throughout most of the novel everyone—including Claire—assumes that she is white.

We first meet Claire at her graduation from a northern finishing school, and learn that she has accepted a job as a governess for a prominent Louisiana family—you guessed it, it's actually her own family, the Tracys. Here, as they say, the plot thickens, drawing Claire and her family ever closer to the discovery of her true identity as both a family member, and more problematic, a person of African descent. Although the threat of slavery is not an issue for Claire in the latter chapters of Collins's novel, the "curse of caste" is, in terms of her status in the household and the prospects for her future. What Collins held in suspense for the ending of *The Curse of Caste* was whether Claire's moment of self-discovery would be overshadowed by "the curse of caste."

One of the most fascinating things about *The Curse of Caste* is that few American novels were published during those few months in 1865, a time of

such enormous transition in American history. When Collins began *The Curse of Caste* in February 1865, the Confederacy was still fighting for its life. Chapter 7 of the novel appeared the day before Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox, thereby bringing the Civil War to its effective end. A week later, President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated. As Collins's novel churned along, Lincoln's vice president, Andrew Johnson, took the reins of the federal government and launched Reconstruction in the South. Around the time Chapter 18 appeared in June, Union General Gordon Granger landed in Galveston, Texas, and informed Texas slaves that they were free—initiating black Texans' celebration of Juneteenth. By the time Collins had finished thirty chapters of *The Curse of Caste*, 23 state legislatures had ratified the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution outlawing slavery. On September 23, 1865, the *Recorder* ran Chapter 31 of *The Curse of Caste*, which placed the protagonist, Claire Neville, on the verge of the novel's climax, when she seemed finally about to learn the truth about her identity. When readers of the *Recorder* opened the paper a week later, however, instead of a chapter from the novel, they found the headline "Correspondent Sick": "We are sorry to inform our numerous readers that we received a letter, informing us of the illness of our correspondent of 'Curse of Caste; or Slave Bride' notoriety. We hope that her sickness is not unto death. We look forward to a speedy return of health and the continuation of her beautiful story."

Readers of *The Curse of Caste* waited more than two months for the ending of Collins's "beautiful story." Then on December 16, 1865, the *Recorder* announced: "We are sorry to inform our readers that we have received a letter from Mr. S. C. Collins, informing us of the death of his estimable wife, Mrs. Julia C. Collins, authoress of 'The Curse of Cast [sic]; or, the Slave Bride.' She departed this life on the 25th of November last, and, as the letter says, in the full triumph of everlasting bliss. We know that many of our readers will be greatly disappointed on hearing that they are to be deprived of the pleasure of reading the balance of the beautiful story which she was writing for our paper." Julia had died of tuberculosis, a disease that claimed many Americans, especially the young and the poor, during the nineteenth century.

I first became aware of Julia Collins and her writings in 1995, while I was reading through old issues of the AME Church newspaper, the *Christian*



Recorder, while researching my book on emancipation celebrations. I can't say for sure why I was drawn to Collins's writings when I first encountered them. But I did notice Collins's weekly installments, as well as a few essays she wrote between April 1864 and January 1865. Because I was aware of some recent work another scholar had done on another black woman's serialized novels in the *Recorder* from a later period, I was curious as to whether scholars were doing similar work on Julia Collins.⁵ In any event, I photocopied Collins's writings, ending up with an inch-thick file folder that remained in a drawer for most of the next several years. I made occasional and half-hearted attempts to learn more about Collins during that time. However, it was only after my book on emancipation celebrations was completed in 2002 that I began to devote more concentrated attention to the search for Julia Collins.

Everything we know about Collins dates from April 1864, when she was first mentioned in the *Christian Recorder*, to November 1865, when she died of tuberculosis. We know she identified herself as an African American and that she lived for most of this brief period in Williamsport, but beyond that the most basic questions about her life remain unanswered. When and where was she born? Was she born free or enslaved, in the North or the South? Was she light-skinned or dark? Where and how did she receive her education? We do not even know under what *name* she was born, since Collins was her married name. We know that she was married and had children, but we know little about this family. We know she was, at least briefly, a schoolteacher for the African American children in Williamsport. Most of the material that concerns Julia Collins is represented by her own writings. *The Curse of Caste* and her six essays in the *Recorder* give some sense of her life, experiences, values, and community, and suggest her interest in race uplift, self-improvement, education, morality, and women's role in society. A close reading of these essays offers clues about the life of an educated and articulate African American woman living in a mid-sized, predominantly white northern town during the Civil War era. These essays also make it clear that Collins shared with other black women activists of the period an advocacy of what one scholar has called "a life in which the personal and the public were merged in an effort to realize the moral, social, and economic development of society."⁶

But for all my research in libraries; city, county, and state archives; city directories, census forms, and newspapers, Collins's personal life remains enshrouded in mystery. Although she published in an AME newspaper, Collins only became a church member on her deathbed. Her husband, variously identified as Stephen C. Collins or Simon C. Collins, was an African American barber who served in the Sixth Infantry Regiment of the United States Colored Troops during the Civil War. Barbering and school teaching were among the higher status occupations available to African Americans in the nineteenth century, and Julia's writing and her husband's later involvement with local and regional black civic organizations suggest that the Collinses were well connected and well respected within Williamsport's small, but growing, African American community. During the 1860s, Williamsport's black population increased from 170 to 602, while blacks in Lycoming County grew from about 400 to over 800. They appear to have had at least one child together, Emma or Annie Collins, who was born around 1862 and was buried in her father's plot in Williamsport's Wildwood Cemetery after her death in 1889. Since Stephen had been married previously, it remains unclear whether another daughter, Sadie Collins, born around 1858, was Julia's.

We know more about Julia's husband than we do about Julia herself. Stephen or Simon Collins lived in Williamsport as early as 1850, and remained in the area into the 1890s. Under the name Simon, he shows up in the 1900 federal census in Washington State, then in 1910 in Pueblo, Colorado. We can surmise that Stephen/Simon was very light-skinned, because in the 1900 census he is listed as being white. That census and other records indicate that his father was born in Spain, also suggesting a mixed race background. Stephen Collins died in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in 1921.

Julia Collins's virtual invisibility in the historical record raises big questions: WHO WAS THIS WOMAN??? And, more generally, how much—or how little—can we truly know about the past? What was life like for a few hundred black Americans living in Williamsport in the 1860s among some 15,000 whites? What was life like for those scattered around the rural parts of the county? And what went through the minds of those black women all over the country who, like Julia Collins, wrote stories and essays and

⁵ Frances Smith Foster, ed., *Minnie's Sacrifice, Sowing and Reaping, Trial and Triumph: Three Rediscovered Novels* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

⁶ Frances Smith Foster, ed., *A Brighter Day Coming: A Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Reader*, (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1993) 23.



poems but did not have the good fortune to have their words preserved? What motivated these women to speak and write? And what gave them the audacity to do so at a time when social standards discouraged even *white* women from writing or speaking in public? How did intellectual background, home and family life, work experience, community, religion, politics, skin color, and other factors affect these women and their writings? What is the relationship between their literary production, their family lives, and their social activism?

Answering these questions is not only difficult, it may be impossible. I certainly can't claim to answer these questions with any confidence with regard to Julia Collins. The thing that many people don't realize is that even some of the best known black writers and activists from the nineteenth century are sparsely documented in the historical record—Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, for example. *We think* we know a lot about their lives, but when you get right down to looking at actual documented sources, there are enormous gaps. To return to an analogy I used earlier, it's like trying to figure out what a 1,000 piece jigsaw puzzle looks like when you only have about half the pieces. Someone like Julia Collins is, at this point, almost unknowable because so little of even the basic outlines of her life has been recorded—it's as if we only have about 100 pieces of that thousand piece puzzle.

But Julia Collins's story still matters. In a field where "firsts" are still being discovered, *The Curse of Caste* represents what may be the earliest novel written by a black American woman. A thorough exploration of her life and writings is important for offering a glimpse into the complex and only dimly visible world of nineteenth century African American women. Given the gender and racial restrictions of the era, very few black women left any writings, and the lives of even the best known have been difficult to reconstruct. By following and building upon existing clues about Collins's personal life, we might more fully reconstruct her role within her family, her church, and her community, and thereby make some small progress in ending one silence, and reincorporating one lost voice into our understandings of African American—and American—history and culture. It is crucial that we focus attention on the life of this articulate and opinionated black woman, not only as an individual, but also in the context of the broader world in which she lived and wrote. Investigating Collins's life, along with closely reading what she wrote, will add to our understanding of early African American

literature, will help illuminate the lives of unsung black community leaders, and will expand our appreciation for the accomplishments of African American people throughout American history.

I have not done any significant research on Julia or her family since *The Curse of Caste* was reissued in 2006. I am currently working on a book about Crispus Attucks, the African American man who was killed in the Boston Massacre on March 5, 1770, leading many to see him as the first American casualty of the Revolution. Attucks is a figure that most American school children hear about briefly when they are introduced to the events that led to the American Revolution. But he is another figure about whom almost nothing is known. I have found some fascinating material about Attucks's life, and about the ways in which our culture's memory of him has changed from the time he was killed in 1770 up to the present.

But while I have moved on, I am very pleased to say that a number of local scholars here in Lycoming County, as well as others on the national level, continue to dig through the sources, trying to piece together more information about Julia Collins and her family. Lycoming County resident Jane Luther, a descendant of Julia Collins, has some incredible family stories and documents that help shed light on one branch of Julia and Stephen's family. I know that Mary Sieminski of the Lycoming County Women's History Project and African American genealogist Reginald Pitts are continuing to explore possibilities, as well. These local efforts have made possible the approval of a Pennsylvania state historical marker honoring Julia Collins. I am hopeful that, as these folks continue their research through both public and family resources, we will learn more about her life. Similarly, I am hopeful that the rediscovery of Julia Collins's story will inspire others here in Lycoming County to delve into their own families' pasts for more new stories that can help bring to light the extraordinary things that ordinary people have done. ♦



George Loring Brown's *Near Sunset: Bay of Naples*: A Gem in the Park Home Collection

By: Dr. Amy Golahny

The American artist George Loring Brown (1814-1889), although surprisingly little known today, had an immensely successful career as a landscape painter of both Italian and New England scenes and is often mentioned in the literature of American art. The excellent studies of Brown by art historian T. W. Leavitt are fundamental sources and interpretations for Brown's oeuvre, listing some twenty-two views of Naples Bay alone.¹ This article adds a twenty-third, a canvas of 1869, *Near Sunset: Bay of Naples* [Fig. 1]. First purchased as a traveler's recollection of a sublime Italian view with classical associations, its second owner, William "Bud" Stuart of Williamsport, probably acquired it as a representative example of a grand tour souvenir.

The painting both demonstrates the artist's pragmatic approach to his field and indicates the conservative taste of Stuart and his hometown.



Fig. 1. George Loring Brown, *Near Sunset: Bay of Naples*. 1869. Oil on canvas, 30" x 49 1/2". The Park Home Collection, Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Reproduction by permission of The Park Home Board.

¹ See T. W. Leavitt, *The Life, Work and Significance of George Loring Brown: American Landscape Painter*, Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1957; T. W. Leavitt, *George Loring Brown: Landscapes of Europe and America 1834-1880*, Exhibition catalogue, The Robert Hull Fleming Museum, Burlington VT, 1973; T. W. Leavitt, "Let the Dogs Bark, George Loring Brown and the Critics," *American Art Review* 2 (1974): 87-99. See also Maxim Karolik, *M. and M. Karolik Collection of American Paintings 1815 to 1865* (Boston: Harvard University Press for the Museum of Fine Arts, 1949); Phoebe Jacobs, "Diary of an Artist's Wife: Mrs. George Loring Brown in Italy, 1840-1841," *Archives of American Art Journal* 14.1 (1974): 11-16.

Born in Boston, George Loring Brown was trained there as a wood engraver. During an extended period abroad, from 1831 to 1834, he spent time primarily in London, Antwerp, and Paris. After returning to the States, he soon gained a reputation as an illustrator and landscape painter through the good offices of several Boston artists and collectors, including the illustrious Washington Allston. But soon Brown realized that the opportunities in Italy were greater than those at home. So he moved to Rome in 1840 with his first wife, Harriet Pease. According to her diary, Harriet was quite forlorn, since her husband spent his days and often his evenings at his work or in the company of other artists. In 1846, the Browns came back to the United States, possibly because of Harriet's unhappiness.

Nevertheless, the artist soon resettled in Europe and in fact spent the years 1840-1859 primarily in Italy, where he found his niche producing Italianate views for the lucrative tourist market. With his second wife, Louise Brossard (married 1848, divorced 1857), Brown established his household at 7 Vicolo dei Aliberti, near the Spanish Steps in Rome. He kept a diary in his account book, a fascinating record of his activities from 1851 to 1859.² Brown's notations provide detailed information about his acquaintances, patrons, and family. From the account book we know: that he dined frequently with fellow artists, played poker, and took riding lessons; that he wrote in French, knew Italian, and studied German; and that he helped care for his three young children, Michelangelo, Claude, and Angelica (he carefully noted his expenses for their doctor bills, playthings, and clothing).

Enmeshed in the artistic community of Rome, Brown produced highly valued paintings as commodities for the American tourist market. A stop at his studio was a must for many American visitors. These visitors often purchased a painting from him or ordered one to be sent back to the States. These typically well-to-do clients came from New England, New York, Cincinnati, New Orleans, and Baltimore. According to the account book, on several occasions Brown painted scenes specified by subject and size on commission for a client; at least two patrons ordered a series of four views (Florence, Rome, Naples, and Venice) for 1,000 *scudi*, a considerable sum.

Among these studio visitors was Nathaniel Hawthorne in April 1858, who gave a verbal portrait of Brown:

He is a plain homely Yankee, quite unpolished by his many years' residence in Italy; he talks ungrammatically, and in Yankee idioms; walks with a strange, awkward gait and stooping shoulders; is altogether unpicturesque, but wins one's confidence by his very lack of grace. It is not often that we see an artist so entirely free from affectation in his aspect and deportment.

Hawthorne went on to describe Brown's landscapes as having a magical light; he had this to say about one: "a moonlight picture – the moon shining so brightly that it seemed to throw a light even beyond the limits of the picture – yet his sunrises and sunsets, and noontides too, were nowise inferior to this. . . ."³

As the American Civil War approached, Brown returned to the United States, first to New York, where he lived from 1860 to 1863, and then to Malden, Massachusetts, near Boston. In Europe, Brown had sought to portray the romance and grandeur of nature and antiquity; back in the United States, he would depict similar qualities in his paintings of the mountains and marshes of New England. His reputation for capturing the luminous enchantment of Italy was secure, and a similar reputation for his New England scenes would soon follow. After his return to New England, Brown also continued to receive a steady stream of commissions for popular, recognizable Italian scenes. His style evolved, from thick pigment to thinner strokes; from more blended brush strokes to discrete dabs of paint; and from opaque to translucent color. A major interest of his was glazing; through layering different coats of pigment of varying opacity, he gained a rich tonal effect.⁴

* * *

Brown's *Near Sunset: Bay of Naples* is one of the Italian scenes painted after his return to America. It must have been based on earlier on-site sketches in watercolor, pencil, or oil, but the particular sketches related to this composition have not been traced.⁵ The technique is characteristic of the artist's experimentation

² George Loring Brown, account book, 1851-1859, unpaginated, Archives of American Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

³ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Passages from the French and Italian Notebooks*, 7th ed. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1885) 169-170. Hawthorne's description of Brown contributed to a character in *The Marble Faun*.

⁴ For a discussion of Brown's technique, see Leavitt's *George Loring Brown: Landscapes of Europe and America*. 13 ff.

⁵ For Brown's drawings, see Leavitt's *George Loring Brown*. 14.

with thin glazes over impasto (thick paint) layers. In the water, grayish tones over light blue render delicate reflections upon the sea. On the back of the canvas, which measures 30 by 49½ inches, is the penciled inscription: “Near Sunset/ Bay of Naples/ from Virgil’s Tomb/ by George L. Brown 1869.” It was Brown’s custom to inscribe his paintings on the verso (on the reverse or back side), with title and date.

Brown visited Naples several times, in the summer of 1844 and in July 1856. The “Virgil’s Tomb” in the inscription indicates the hill overlooking Naples, where the cinerarium was kept that was believed to have held the ancient poet’s ashes. However, Brown used considerable artistic license and adjusted the view in several ways with the result that the painting presents the bay as it could never have been seen in reality. His work shows Mount Vesuvius in the distance dominating the horizon. Directly below its crater is the Castel dell’Ovo, whose promontory should be smaller and more to the left. Brown made the shore on the left (part of the neighborhood of Chiaia) and the bastion at the right to be nearly parallel to give a more dramatic frame to the bay in the painting. In actuality, the square tower and bastion were from Roman ruins located farther to the west in the quarter of Posillipo and not visible at all from the place of Virgil’s Tomb. To compose the bastion, Brown most likely relied on a print in a popular guidebook by Vasi [Fig. 2], omitting the print’s taller tower and enhancing the shorter one so that it rises above the walls. It seems that Brown’s view of Naples Bay from Virgil’s Tomb is a composite, based upon sketches made on site and probably the Vasi etching.

Furthermore, while Brown’s painting depicts the sunset, the actual view from Virgil’s Tomb over the bay is to the east; the sky reflects the light of the setting sun to the west. The bay intensifies the light of sunset, but it cannot include the setting sun. (The sun and moon rise over the bay; they do not set over it.)

Of Brown’s documented 22 paintings of Naples, at least six are described as of the bay; these might be similar in composition to the Williamsport painting.⁶ At present, only one other is known, now at Bowdoin College [Fig. 3]. Dated 1864, it includes a Corpus Domini procession, and thus refers to early spring and the pervasive Catholicism of daily life.⁷ Although the sweep of the shore is nearly identical, the figures, trees and rocks, and especially the light are different in the two works. The Bowdoin painting depicts a golden sunset,

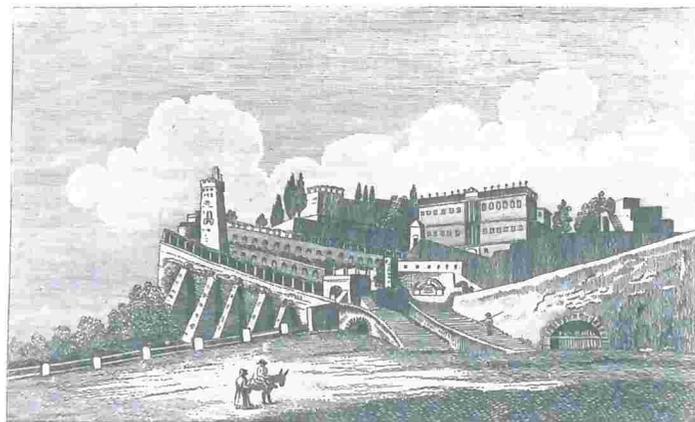


Fig. 2. Mariano Vasi, Coita di Posilipo sopra la Grotta, etching on page 83, from *Itinéraire instructif de Rome à Naples...*, Naples, 1821 (first published 1792). Reproduced with the permission of Rare Books and Manuscripts, Special Collections Library, The Pennsylvania State University Libraries.



Fig. 3. George Loring Brown, Sunset, View of Vesuvius and the Bay of Naples. 1864. Oil on canvas, 34 1/16" x 60 3/16" Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine. Bequest of Joseph E. Merrill, Class of 1854.

while the Williamsport canvas shows a later moment of fading rose and pale blue. Taken together, both canvases render the sequential moments of sundown, glowing warm yellow then dimming to pale rose. Pragmatically, in his various Naples views Brown repeated the overall compositions but varied the details.

Brown’s views of Naples belong to the tradition of depicting nature as a glorious setting for human endeavor. Such views would have carried a range of associations. During the Renaissance and afterward, the cinerarium considered to be Virgil’s Tomb was venerated by writers and artists, who hoped to absorb some of Virgil’s creative spirit; Brown’s vista of the bay “from Virgil’s Tomb” would recall to the viewer the Latin poet. Further, after the discovery of Pompeii in the eighteenth

⁶ Leavitt provided documentation for at least 22 views of Naples, and of these at least one is specified as “Sunset: Naples Bay.” Several are explicitly noted as of moonrise. It is unclear how many may have been composed from the hill of Virgil’s Tomb. See Leavitt’s *George Loring Brown*, 14 and Appendix II.

⁷ John W. Coffey, *Twilight of Arcadia. American Landscape Painters in Rome, 1830-1880*, Exhibition catalogue, Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, ME, 1987. 81.

century, images of Vesuvius would call up the destruction of Pompeii; they might also allude to the thrilling – and real – threat of further eruptions. Brown's paintings of the Bay of Naples, then, conveyed the affinity of literate western society for antiquity. In this regard, it is noteworthy that among his close friends in Rome was Randolph Rogers, the American sculptor famous for his statue *Nydia*, the blind girl of Pompeii (begun 1853), popularized in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's best seller, *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834).⁸ For a period before his divorce from Louise Brossard, Brown lived in Rogers's house in Rome and he also painted two Italian views for him.⁹ While Brown approached his Neapolitan subjects with some fidelity to the appearance of the topography, Rogers chose to focus on a fictive literary character whose tragic death encapsulated the human dimension of the Vesuvian eruption in 79 C.E.

Critics generally praise Brown's views of Naples over his other subjects. The only commercially produced print after one of his works was a lithograph of Naples, showing Vesuvius in mirror image [Fig. 4]. This was praised as being "essentially an original drawing. Mr. Brown's contribution . . . , a very fine sunny view of the Bay of Naples."¹⁰ S. R. Koehler, curator at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, wrote in 1871 that Brown's latest pictures of Italian views were his best, singling out a "View from Vesuvius from the sea, by moonlight." Koehler noted: "The concert of colors is . . . subdued, the masses are not broken, but the inimitable aerial perspective remains."¹¹

* * *

Americans would have recognized the almost mystical quality of the sun setting over the area in Brown's Naples views, as the testimony of several noted American writers demonstrates. For instance, James Fenimore Cooper wrote in late summer 1829 that his "first night at Naples was absolutely delicious."¹² Cooper continued, "I can scarce imagine one who could ever tire of the witchery of Italy. Climate has a great influence in bringing about these results. . . . A volcanic

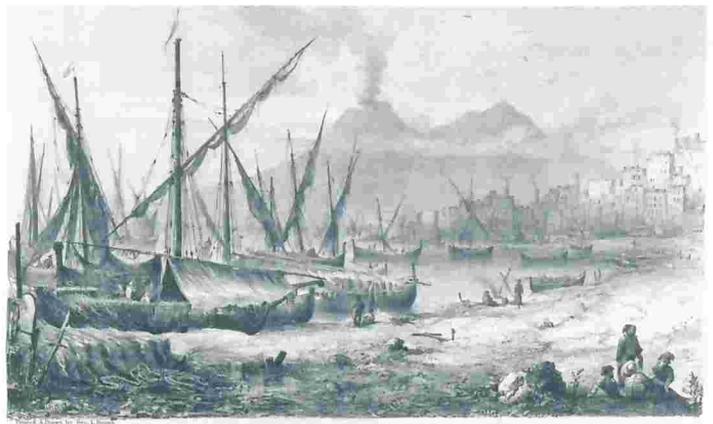


Fig. 4. George Loring Brown, American, 1814-1889
Bay of Naples, about 1860-70
Lithograph
Image: 17.4 x 26.8 cm (6 7/8 x 10 9/16 in.)
Gift of Sylvester Rosa Koehler K3170
Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

formation puts all competition at defiance in the way of the picturesque. . . . We want the water, the promontories, the bays, the peninsulas, the grand islands, and lastly, we want all the quaint and time-honoured forms that art assumed, in this region, three thousand years ago. . . ."¹³

Herman Melville considered the site as a place familiar to Americans through art and literature long before they went there. In his journals of February 1857, he noted as he arrived by boat from Sicily: "Dim mass of Vesuvius soon in sight. Recognized it from pictures of outline."¹⁴ Two days later Melville visited Virgil's Tomb and Posillipo, where he noted the "glorious view of bay" at sunset.¹⁵ For Henry James, struck by "the June beauty of Naples Bay at the sunset hour," the area represented an "incomparable wrought *fusion*, fusion of human history and mortal passion with the elements of earth and air, of colour, composition and form. . . ."¹⁶ He described the "descent from Posillipo . . . [near Virgil's Tomb as] an hour of enchantment beyond any notation I can here recover; all lustre and azure, yet all composition and classicism, the prospect developed and spread, . . . [to] radiance and horizons of pearl. . . ."¹⁷

⁸ For Randolph Rogers and his *Nydia*, see T. Tolles, ed., *American Sculpture in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, 1999) 1: 114 ff., esp. 117.

⁹ Brown, Account Book, unpaginated

¹⁰ "Domestic Art Gossip," *The Crayon* 7.7 (1860): 205. The lithograph is in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Department of Prints and Drawings, K3170.

¹¹ "George L. Brown," *The Art Review* 1 May 1871: 5.

¹² James Fenimore Cooper, *Gleanings in Europe: Italy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981) 96.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁴ H. C. Horsford with L. Horth, eds., *The Writings of Herman Melville: Journals* (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and Newberry Library, 1989) 15: 101. For the monument considered to be Virgil's Tomb, see J. B. Trapp, "The Grave of Vergil," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 47 (1984): 1-31.

¹⁵ Horsford with Horth 102.

¹⁶ Henry James, *Collected Travel Writing, The Continent: A Little Tour in France; Italian Hours; Other Travels* (New York: The Library of America, 1993) 616.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 617.

William Dean Howells walked along the shore from Chiaia to the Mergellina Grotto, ascended to Virgil's Tomb, and climbed the hill behind it. There, he wrote, "you have the loveliest view in the world of the sea and of the crescent beach, mightily jeweled at its further horn with the black Castel dell'Ovo."¹⁸ Not only was it compulsory to visit Virgil's Tomb, but it was also necessary to be on the hill at sunset – one of the most striking sites of these authors' travels [Fig. 5].

In contrast to the magnificent evocations of beauty by the authors quoted, other accounts describe Naples as an unpleasant assault on the senses and even the sanity of visitors. An anonymous American visitor admitted that Virgil's Tomb "commands so magnificent a view of the Bay of Naples," but that the environs "put to flight every poetic and romantic association."¹⁹ An Englishman, William Nassau Senior, described his walk near Virgil's Tomb, "It was almost unpleasantly hot. The disgusting population of Naples was all abroad – basking, quarrelling, gambling, and begging over the whole road. . . . you are never free from the sight, or indeed, from the contact, of loathsome degradation. . . ."²⁰ The real human chaos of the street was in marked contrast to the poetic view over the bay.

Brown's paintings would have encapsulated the idealized Italian experience for his patrons. Apparently the harsher and cruder reality of the streets of Naples that American travelers might have seen was outshone by the luminous atmosphere surrounding the city. But those who acquired their paintings independent of their travels would interpret Brown's vistas as presenting the experience of Italy with veracity and romance.

* * *

For the city of Williamsport, art collecting began late, and it did not occur in quantity. Strategically situated in forested north-central Pennsylvania on the West Branch of the Susquehanna River, Williamsport became a lumbering and commercial center. Through lumber, the city became wealthy; it was said to have had more millionaires per capita than any city in the nation during the 1870s. Some works of art still in Williamsport may be traced to their original local owners who traveled abroad and bought paintings, prints,



Fig. 5. Photo of Bay of Naples from Virgil's Tomb, ca. 1870. Alinari.

and sculpture to remember their experiences and to decorate their homes. But Brown's *Bay of Naples* is not among those works collected in Williamsport during the nineteenth century. Instead, the painting was acquired around 1940 by William "Bud" Stuart (1866-1951), who made his fortune in construction, oil, and real estate, and who amassed the largest art collection in the city beginning in the 1920s. Stuart's art holdings may be reconstructed from his 1939 will and 1955 estate inventory, which listed over 100 paintings that hung in his Grampian Boulevard house and in the Park Home (described on page 16 of this essay). George Loring Brown's *Near Sunset: Bay of Naples* did not appear in the will of 1939, but it did hang in his house, according to the 1955 inventory; it is thus reasonable to assume that he acquired the painting between 1939 and his death in 1951.²¹

Stuart's interest in art was nurtured by his family. His mother, Laura VanNess Stuart (1833-1926), was an artist who taught drawing at Williamsport Dickinson Seminary (now Lycoming College), from the 1850s through the 1870s. His father, Eugene Stuart (d. 1891), had a photography studio in downtown Williamsport. In 1896, Laura VanNess Stuart compiled a list of thirty art works then in Williamsport collections, and published it in the local newspaper. She wrote: "There is a notable appreciation of the beautiful in art, and growing desire for a few fine [pieces], rather than for an accumulation of a large number."²² Her list

¹⁸ William Deans Howells, *Italian Journeys* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company; The Riverside Press, 1901) 74.

¹⁹ "What a sight-seer did and saw in one day," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 8.43 (Dec. 1853): 98.

²⁰ Qtd. in N. Moe, *The View from Vesuvius* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) 137.

²¹ Documents in the Archives, Lycoming County Historical Society, Williamsport; *Williamsport Sun-Gazette* 16 March 2001: D-1. See further, Thomas W. Lloyd, *History of Lycoming County Pennsylvania*, 2 vols. (Topeka and Indianapolis: Historical Publishing Company, 1929); Robin Van Auken and Louis Hunsinger, Jr., *Williamsport: Boomtown on the Susquehanna* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2003).

²² Laura VanNess Stuart, "Valuable Gems: Paintings, Old Prints and Sculpture in Williamsport Homes," *Williamsport Sun Women's Edition* Spring 1896: unpaginated.

reveals that the city's prominent and wealthy residents regarded art as a sign of wealth, an indication of cultural sophistication, and adornment for their houses. Many works on her list are American landscapes by artists active in Pennsylvania: Jasper Cropsey, John Kensett, James Hamilton, and Thomas and Edward Moran. More pertinently, she mentioned that Italian landscapes and sculpture were well regarded, and that some were purchased abroad as mementos.

William Stuart's taste was not progressive but continued the Williamsport tradition of representational and conventional imagery. He acquired works by artists who fit in well with the patterns of collecting already established in Williamsport and documented by his mother. While he favored landscape and genre, he also collected Italianate vistas, portraits, and still life. The artists represented in his collection were primarily nineteenth century, with a few earlier painters and several from the early twentieth century. Stuart was not well educated, although he had travelled abroad; we do not know if he actually visited Naples. He nonetheless may have seen in Brown's *Near Sunset: Bay of Naples* the associations with Latin literature, history, and natural beauty articulated by the American writers quoted above.

Among Stuart's philanthropies was the founding of the Park Home, a retirement home for women which opened in 1940. The home was first located in the Herdic House Hotel, a grand hotel built in 1865 at 800 West Fourth Street in Williamsport, presently containing offices. Stuart dedicated this home to his mother, and after his own death many of his paintings were hung in its rooms. As a whole, Stuart's collection would have been appropriate furnishings in any of the Victorian mansions in Williamsport around 1900. Stuart amassed his collection evidently for pleasure, without a systematic or sophisticated plan. His most notable paintings are undoubtedly a pair of still life canvases by Severin Roesen (1814-1872), who lived in Williamsport during part of his career. In 1998, the Stuart paintings were exhibited at the Lycoming College Art Gallery, with an accompanying booklet.²³

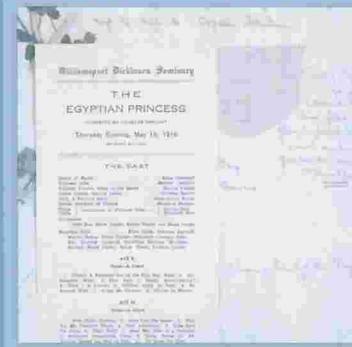
Brown's *Near Sunset: Bay of Naples* would have conveyed the natural beauty of Naples and the allusions to antiquity to its owners. To us, it is a demonstration of an artist crafting his imagery from earlier sketches and prints, and creating, after the fact, a wonderful souvenir of Italy.

George Loring Brown's *Near Sunset: Bay of Naples* and other paintings from the Park Home collection, including the two Roesens, are now on long term loan at the Thomas T. Taber Museum of the Lycoming County Historical Society in Williamsport, exhibited in its art gallery. ♦

Acknowledgments

In preparing this article, I was fortunate to have help with research questions from Kevin Avery of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Laura Latman of the Bowdoin College Art Museum; Scott Sagar, Curator, and Sandra Rife, Director, of the Lycoming County Historical Society and Taber Museum; and Richard Kopley, Jeanne Chenault Porter, and Sandra Stelts of the Pennsylvania State University. At the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Courtney Andersen and Patrick Murphy generously opened the museum's files and collections. I am grateful to Lycoming College for travel funding to Naples for essential research for this article. Mary Gibbs Smith, of the Park Home Board of Directors kindly assisted in my research. This article first appeared in *19th Century: The Journal of the Victorian Society of America*, 2005, vol. 25, no. 1, 12-17, and is here republished with slight changes, with the kind permission of William Ayres, editor of the journal.

²³Amy Golahny and Robert E. Kane, Jr., "The Park Home Collection," *The Journal of the Lycoming County Historical Society* 37.2 (Winter 1997-98).



Lycoming County Women's History Project: The Other Half of the Story

By: Janet McNeil Hurlbert and Mary L. Sieminski

Volume after volume has been written about the late war, and yet the half has not been told: and those of us that still have the threads of that war tightened about our hearts are daily reminded of those trying times when woman as well as man was called upon to aid in the struggle for our nation's life.

*-M. J. Levan "A Woman's Tribute,"
Now and Then, Vol. 3(5) 1891.
Journal of the Muncy Historical Society.*

Women's history is much like a quilt with fabrics of different shapes and colors representing women of different races and economic levels who have had varying advantages in life. There are blocks with some hidden meanings and a few mistakes. As with a quilt, it requires a thread to hold them all together and bring the whole to life. The Lycoming County Women's History Project, a significant initiative that tells the other half of the story, is one length of that thread. Through digital and computer technology, it binds together in an on-line database, materials on women's history that are in the collections of different organizations throughout the community. These materials make history come alive, not just about seminal events like war, but also about daily life, the arts, the world of work, and the life of the educated mind.

Inspired by the desire to chronicle the stories and contributions of women to the history of our county, this project involves an expanding array of organizations and individuals. Snowden Library at Lycoming College, the Lycoming County Historical Society, and the James V. Brown Public Library are major partners in forming the basic collection of resources. Many other clubs and organizations have contributed as well, including the Junior League of Williamsport, the Clio Club, and the Alumni Association of the Williamsport Hospital School of Nursing. Advised by a community-wide Users Council comprised of historical scholars, area teachers, and those interested in the field of women's studies, the project benefits greatly from a variety of perspectives.

At the core of the project was a vision of an online historical resource, making significant but little known monographic and primary source materials – photographs, newspaper articles, diaries, scrapbooks, correspondence, etc. – available for study. This vision became a reality with the creation of “Williamsport Women: Words, Images, Actions,” an online archive of resources available on the Web at <http://www.lycoming.edu/library/lcwhc.html>. These initial resources fall within the years of 1875 to 1925; as the project progresses, the time frame and geographic focus will expand.

A grant from the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services, through the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), administered by the Office of Commonwealth Libraries, made the online collection possible. Janet Hurlbert, Associate Dean and Director of Library Services at Lycoming College, who first explored the possibility of creating this model cooperative project, applied for and received the LSTA planning grant in 2007. The Lycoming County Historical Society and the James V. Brown Library were both eager to participate and provide their own materials for inclusion in the online archive. By working together, the three primary institutions have created a resource that would not have

To access the Lycoming County Women's History Project on-line database, visit the website <http://lycoming.edu/library/lcwhc.html>. On the left of the page under *SEARCH THE COLLECTIONS*, you will find two databases: Access PA Digital Repository and Internet Archive. Most of the material is in Access PA but books are in Internet Archive. The latter database permits the viewer to “turn” the pages.

Access PA Digital Repository

When you click on Access PA, you will arrive at the *Search Collection* page. For a simple search, enter a keyword in the first text box and click go. This will take you to a list of results in Access PA. You can click on any result to see the entire content of the document. If there is a *Search this Object* text box on the left of the screen, you can search within the text of the document.

While on the Access PA page, you can search all state resources by using the Search textbox in the upper right hand corner of the page.

Internet Archive

When you click on Internet Archive, you will arrive at the repository's search page. In the box titled *Welcome to Lycoming County Women's History Collection*, you have several options for exploring the collection, such as browse collection, browse by subject/keywords, etc. To explore the entire Internet Archive database beyond the Women's History collection, enter a keyword in the *Search* textbox at the top of the page and click *Go*.

been possible within the limits of each organization's budget and staffing availability.

Mary Sieminski, a librarian with an interest in local history and women's studies, was hired as the project manager. The first year of planning resulted in a comprehensive plan for digitizing source material. Consultants assisted in several areas: the identification of historically significant material, the assessment of conservation needs, and the technical aspects of digitization.

Dr. Janet Irons, professor of history at Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania, was recruited as historical consultant to the project. Dr. Irons had served as the Interim Coordinator of Lock Haven's Secondary Education Social Studies Program and had worked extensively with local schools. She teaches women's history courses and is active with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. Dr. Irons continues to advise the Women's History project, volunteering her time both as a consultant and as an active member of the project's Users

Council. Dr. Irons visited each of the three institutions several times giving advice about which were the most historically significant materials.

Tom Claeson, Program Director for New Initiatives at Lyasis (a membership organization for libraries and information professionals) and an internationally recognized consultant, provided expert technical assistance during the planning phase of the project. He continues to advise the project members. Claeson served on the LSTA-funded Pennsylvania Academic Library Consortium, Inc. (PALCI) statewide project that convened a group of historians, archivists, teachers and librarians to define the content of a statewide digital collection for the study of Pennsylvania history, culture and society. His experience on that project contributed greatly to the Women's History Project.

In 2009-2010, with a second LSTA grant awarded to Lycoming College, many resource materials were digitized. There are currently links to over 8,000 pages on the project's website highlighting the history of local women in five areas: voluntary and reform organizations, education, the arts, the workplace, and personal lives. Included are the founding documents for local women's groups and clubs, minute books, personal papers, diaries, cookbooks, scrapbooks, and photographs.

The project's central mission addresses a need to make the valuable, underutilized women's history resources in the county widely accessible. Historians believe this is an important goal. Dr. Irons puts it this way, "Given the understandable focus of much of Pennsylvania's traditional history on the male dominated industries of coal, steel and lumber, integrating the history of women into the larger story of industrializing Pennsylvania has been a challenge."

"The materials in this archive," according to Irons, "promise to expand our perspective of a largely male-dominated story of the lumber industry in Lycoming County. Historians are also embracing rural and small town women's lives to a greater extent than ever before." She further noted that this is particularly true in the 2007 Pennsylvania Historical Association publication by Marion Roydhouse, *Women in Industry and Reform: Shaping the History of Pennsylvania, 1865-1940*, which moves beyond the histories of women in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh to explore the lives of women of different classes and races in small industrial towns across Pennsylvania. These publications suggest that historians are beginning to recast women's history to integrate the stories of the frontier and the urban centers, the rural areas and the industrial towns. "The history of women in the lumber region," Dr. Irons said, "is an important unexplored component of this emerging larger story of

women in Pennsylvania."

Dr. Alison Hirsch, a member of the project's Users Council and the editor of the 2004-2005 issue of the *Journal of the Lycoming County Historical Society*, which focused on local women's history, put it this way: "What makes women's history so difficult to research is that women's stories from the past often must be pieced together from scraps in the historic record. Very few women left autobiographies, diaries, or piles of papers, and even if they did, very often they weren't saved because it was seen as mundane, unimportant, or not very interesting. But even the most mundane scrap can become interesting when combined with the right information from public records and when put in context using good secondary sources."

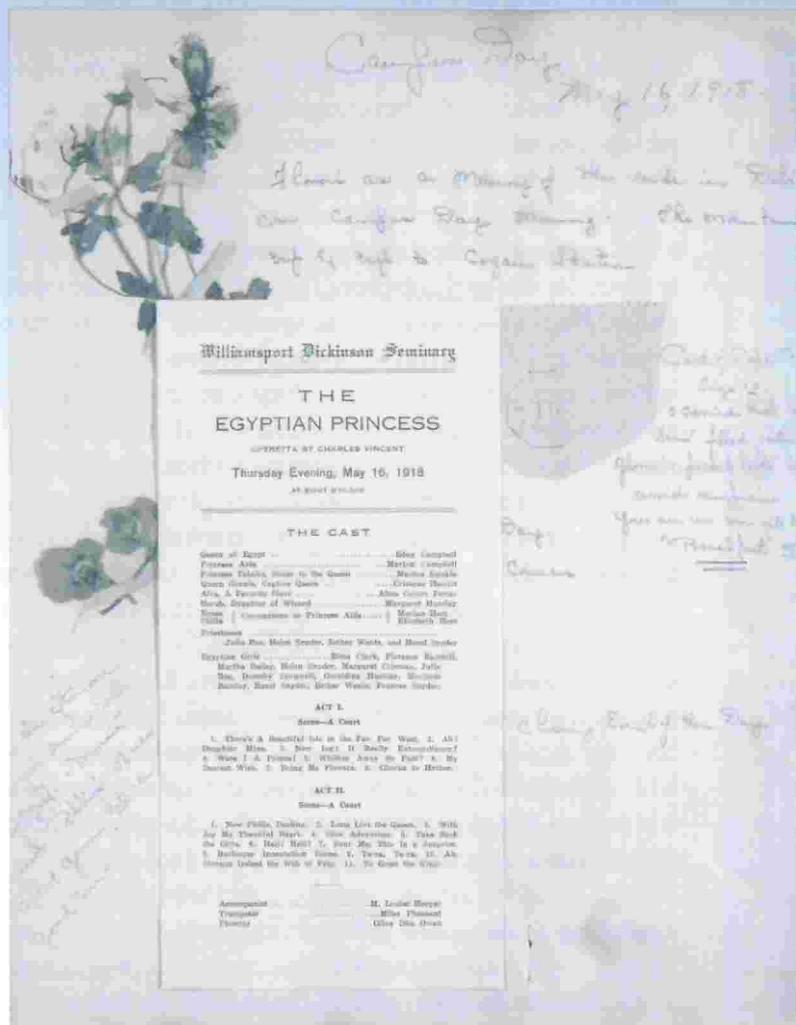
The Lycoming County Women's History Project has gathered "scraps" from the various collections and created a quilt of women's history. As with any quilt, the shapes and colors of the lives differ – from the affluent and educated such as Henrietta Baldys Lyon, the head of the local women's suffrage movement, to the working class typified by Carrie L. Shatto, a laborer at Stearns Silk Mill. These various lives – urban and rural, black and white, privileged and disadvantaged – are now threaded together into one whole cloth.

Lycoming College collection

From Lycoming College, when it was known as Dickinson Seminary, we have the scrapbooks of two female students. One is the scrapbook kept by Emery Mack "Pete" Bell, a student from Watsontown, PA, who graduated in 1918. Miss Bell chronicled her daily student life by pasting into the scrapbook anything and everything that happened – bulletins, programs, musical events, announcements, tests, rules for students, letters from home, dried flowers, and other mementos of college life. Bell describes the grim events of World War I and talks of friends who became part of the conflict.

The scrapbook of Lucille Sturgis, Class of 1926, includes programs from seminary events, the student roster card listing her classes, letters from home, notes to friends, greeting cards, social cards, napkins, buttons, Halloween decorations, and even a fork that must have come from the dining hall. Sturgis, whose married name was Lucille Sturgis Gramley, was from Millheim, PA, and was the daughter of Bessie E. Sturgis, a member of the Class of 1902. The Sturgis scrapbook reflects the more upbeat mood of the 1920s, quite different from the overtones of war in the Bell scrapbook kept ten years earlier.

Also from Lycoming are two female students' autograph books, as well as a diary kept by Elizabeth



Page from the scrapbook of Williamsport Dickinson Seminary student Emery Mack "Pete" Bell, c. 1918; from the Lycoming College Archives collection.

Pages from Williamsport Dickinson Seminary student handbooks, 1920-1925, showing contrasting dormitory rules for boys (on the left) and girls (on the right); from the Lycoming College Archives collection.

DORMITORIES

1. Rooms will be thoroughly cleaned once each week by the lady in charge of that work. Students are expected to keep their rooms neat and orderly at all times to the satisfaction of the duty teacher. Rooms should be ventilated during the breakfast hour. Beds are to be made and the rooms put in order for the morning inspection.
2. For decorating purposes push pins and hangers can be purchased at the office. Nails and paste are not to be used. Disregarding this last condition will involve a fine.
3. Students must refrain from throwing anything out of windows. Each room is provided with a waste-paper basket and this should be emptied when necessary in the large containers located on the halls.
4. Students must turn off their lights whenever they leave their rooms. Burnt out bulbs can be exchanged for new ones by applying to the book-store. Each room is entitled to one 50-watt bulb. Additional lights may be had by applying at the office and paying the necessary fee.
5. Students are requested to report promptly any breakage or damage to their rooms so that the same may be promptly repaired. The management of the school tries to keep the building and equipment in good condition, and appreciates the cooperation of the students to this end.
6. A student is held responsible and charged for any damage or breakage in her room.

DORMITORIES

1. Girls are responsible for the care of their own rooms. Rooms are to be neat and orderly at all times. They should be ventilated during the breakfast hour and beds made and rooms in order for the morning inspection.
2. For decorating purposes push pins and hangers can be purchased at the office. Nails and paste are not to be used. Disregarding this last condition will involve a fine.
3. Students must refrain from throwing anything out of windows. Each room is provided with a waste-paper basket and this should be emptied when necessary in the large containers located on the halls.
4. Students must turn off their lights whenever they leave their rooms. Burnt out bulbs can be exchanged for new ones by applying to the book-store. Each room is entitled to one 50-watt bulb. Additional lights may be had by applying at the office and paying the necessary fee.
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6. A student is held responsible and charged for any damage or breakage in her room.

Rich in 1924. Rich's diary includes a description of the 1925 Greater Dickinson Banquet and a careful listing of her daily expenses – from trolley fare, to art supplies, to sanitary supplies. A quick look at the Dickinson Seminary *Handbook for Students* from the 1910s and published in two versions (one for boys and one for girls) reveals differences in the way the college treated its male and female students. The boys had maid service for their dorm rooms; the girls cleaned their own rooms. The girls had more restrictions, including earlier curfews; the boys had more freedom to come and go as they wanted.

Tripartite, the woman's literary society, was very active on campus from the mid-1800s into the twentieth century. In the online collection are selections from the minutes and programs from their "Annual Entertainment." The topics chosen for debates provide insight into the times. The debate topic for the "Annual Entertainment" held on March 2, 1889 was "Resolved, That the battle of Gettysburg exerted a greater influence on civilization than that of Waterloo."

The college archives also contributed selected research papers written by advanced history students over the past twenty years. These papers reflect original research on such local history topics as the Young Women's Christian Association, the Bethune-Douglass Center, and the Junior League of Williamsport.

Lycoming County Historical Society collection

The Lycoming County Historical Society houses some exceptionally rich collections. Among the works selected for the Women's History Project are photographs, diaries, rare printed materials, pamphlets, and correspondence.

The pamphlet *A true record of the Temperance Crusaders, why and what they did, with names of women signers to address to saloon-keepers, list of officers, etc.* is one highlight of the collection. The 29-page pamphlet, published in 1907 by the Central Women's Christian Temperance Union, chronicles in great detail the activities of these ardent crusaders in 1874 and lists the members of the organization, as well as a detailed list of the saloons they visited, which saloon keepers treated them with respect, who shut the door on them, and which ones doused them with buckets of water as they prayed. The collection also includes a stern photographic portrait of "Mother" Mussina (Jerusha B. Mussina), the leader of the local Woman's Crusade.

Another women's charitable organization, the Woman's Christian Association, was organized in 1873. This organization was made up of representatives from Williamsport's Protestant churches. The first annual report chronicles the establishment of the Home for the Friendless, a home for needy children and elderly women.

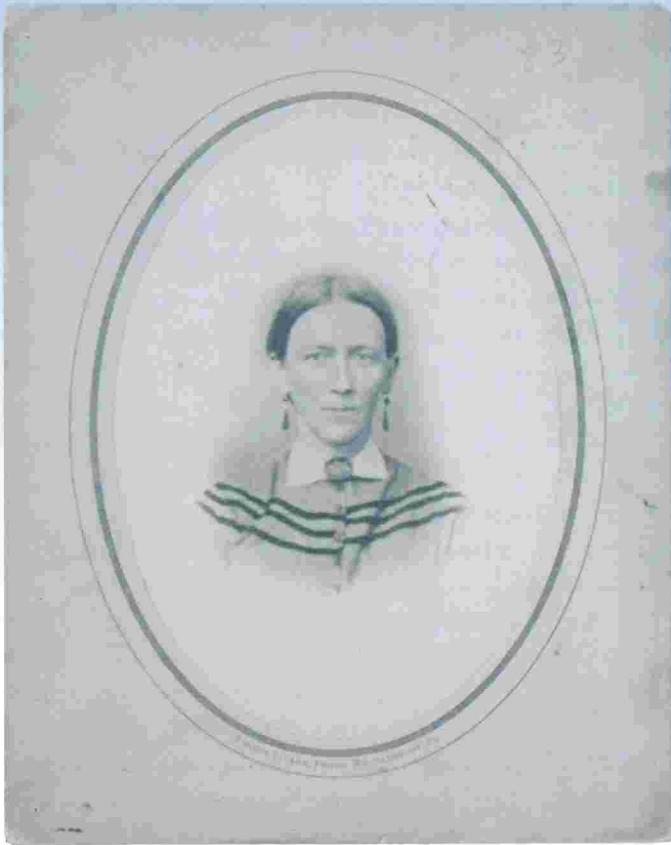
The reports list the officers, committee members, board of managers, the names of members, the charter, and treasurer's report. Recognizable names such as Herdic, Lyon, Mussina, and Otto are found throughout the pamphlet. The Home for the Friendless evolved into the Williamsport Home, whose board of managers continues this day to be all female.

The handwritten *Cookbook of Mollie Kraemer*, who lived in Montoursville, gives a glimpse of what everyday life was like for a woman in charge of a household. Along with the food recipes, there are home remedies and directions to concoct household poisons. For example, on page 30 of Kraemer's household book one can find a concoction to get rid of bedbugs, something that would be relevant even today. Just under the letter "A" in Mrs. Kraemer's loose-leaf book, we find an "Ague Cure for Malaria," a recipe for "Amy's Devil Food Cake," and "Alma Walker's Sodium Brine for Cockroaches."

The Lycoming County Historical Society holds 23 of Winifred Maynard's diaries dating from 1905 to 1929. Miss Maynard, a member of the prominent Maynard family of Williamsport and the church secretary for Trinity Episcopal Church, uses her daily diary entries to chronicle her life. Michelle Sullivan, a Brown Library volunteer who transcribed Maynard's 1918 diary, commented, "Each entry is a single page and describes her day-to-day activities. Within each entry, Maynard includes small personal remarks and opinions about the people, places, and events in her life. Miss Maynard was a caring, faithful, and honest person, which is evident through her writing." Her entries follow a similar pattern as her every day happenings rarely varied. 1918 chronicles the year she turned 29, which includes a trip to Atlantic City, the death of her grandfather, and a long visit from her sister. Suffrage was a topic of conversation among her women friends. The great influenza epidemic struck that year. Trinity Episcopal Church was closed between Oct. 4, 1918 and Nov. 6, 1918 and Maynard complains gently that the quarantine cut into her social life. Five representative annual diaries were selected to be digitized for this project.

Employee newsletters of the Bush and Bull department store give us a glimpse into the lives of the women working in the retail industry early in the 20th century. The 1892 catalog from Pott's Shorthand College lists faculty members, courses of study, tuition, testimonials, and lists of graduates, including those from Lycoming County. Both men and women took these courses to prepare themselves for careers in business.

From the extensive photograph collection at the Historical Society, we selected 200 for inclusion in the online collection. Helen Yoas, a librarian who is knowledgeable about local history, was the primary



Portrait of Jerusha B. "Mother" Mussina; from the Lycoming County Historical Society collection.

52

A fine cure for Malaise

20 grs. cayenne red bark
 20 grs. Carb. Sore
 20 grs. cayenne
 1 pt. whiskey
 1/2 pt. sweetened condensed milk
 1/2 pt. brandy

Washing fluid
 1/2 oz. Borax
 1/2 oz. Salts of ammonia
 1/2 oz. " " tartar
 1 gal. water
 1/2 pint in a basin of water

Bedbug Poison
 1/2 oz. Croton cathartica
 1/2 pt. turpentine

Sweet Pickle for meat
 1/2 gal. of vinegar add
 1/2 lb. of salt
 1/2 lb. brown sugar
 1/2 lb. salt peter
 All these to add until you
 cannot go covered with liquor
 weighed down with heavy
 spunk to keep inside pickle
 keep in a jar until it
 is used

A page from Mollie Kraemer's cookbook; note the entry for "Bedbug Poison" partway down the page; from the Lycoming County Historical Society collection.

selector. Yoas started with a list of the names of women who should have been well known during the scope of our time period, 1875-1925, either on their own merit or as part of a prominent local family. Finding few photos of them in the Historical Society collection, Yoas said that she “had the pleasure of selecting anything that caught my fancy. Having found photos of some of the young women whose activities had been documented in the Lycoming College Archives materials already in the Women’s History Collection, I began to think ahead to the newspaper items that would be added from the James V. Brown Library’s microfilm collection.” Yoas found that few of the prominently named women of the time appeared in the newspaper index, seeming to bear out the theory that women were usually mentioned in newspapers only on the occasion of a wedding or a death. For that reason, there are numerous wedding photos, marriage notices, and obituaries included in the Women’s History Project.

From the Historical Society’s collection, Yoas chose more than forty “anonymous” women because of their costumes, their activities, or their surroundings, despite – or because of – the fact that they never achieved the well-deserved fame of women like early physicians, Rita B. Church and Jean Saylor Brown, or former slave Mary Slaughter, who dedicated her life to providing homes for needy black women. The works and lives of such prominent women stand out in greater contrast against the backdrop of all those lesser known or unknown women.

Several rare books from the Historical Society collection were added to the archive including *Sioux Memory Gems*, a volume of poetry by Lycoming County native Myrtle Miller, who, along with her husband, photographer John Anderson, spent over 40 years living on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota. Autobiographical essays by Anderson from the Historical Society collection add context to the poetry. The Andersons went to Rosebud shortly after they were married. It was just after the Battle of Wounded Knee, and she writes about the battle. “After the drunken soldiers had somewhat sobered up, they went out to gather up the dead. Five Ghost shirts were found on as many dead. There are many Ghost shirts in the country and claimed as having been worn in this battle. This is false. These shirts were worn only while the Indians were dancing, but these had not been removed when the soldiers attacked.” John Anderson was given one of those shirts.

The books *100 Years of Tradition, 1883-1983* and *The Pride of Tradition, 1983-1988*, compiled and published by the Williamsport Hospital School of Nursing Alumni Association, contribute significantly to the collection. These two volumes have been used

close to 1,000 times since they were added to the on-line collection in February 2010. Each alumna is listed and each and every word in the text is searchable enabling researchers to trace the individual students.

James V. Brown Library collection

Contributions from the James V. Brown Library provided necessary context for the original documents from Lycoming College Archives and the Historical Society. The library’s local newspaper collection on microfilm provided us with important background information on individual women, women’s organizations, and events that held significance to women in the community.

Newspaper articles include an 1895 *Gazette and Bulletin* story about Mrs. Margaret A. Hagan, a mixed-race woman who owned the “Star Laundry” and was also an electrotherapist with a clinic on East Third Street called “The Electric Baths.” Her obituary and an essay written about her by her great-granddaughter, Sheila Gregory Thomas are a part of this collection. The new “Home for Fallen Women” was the topic of another 1895 article in the *Gazette and Bulletin*. The home was on Jefferson Street near Hepburn Street and was intended “as a home for friendless girls and women who have fallen, or who are in circumstances that may lead to their fall.” Other articles report both on the women’s suffrage movement and on the establishment of an anti-suffrage society in the city.

Rare monographic material from the Brown Library was added to the Internet Archive collection where it is very easy to read – one can electronically flip through the pages. The Junior League of Williamsport generously agreed to make three of their local history publications available – *One-room School: Lycoming County’s Legacy*; *Homes and Heritage of the West Branch Valley*; and *The West Fourth Street Story*. These works are important, not only for what they tell us about the women in the county, but also that each was researched and written by local women. Now, electronic versions of these rare out-of-print volumes are available to researchers everywhere and they, too, have been used hundreds of times.

* * *

Not only are the documents from these three institutions now accessible without needing to travel to them, but also because of today’s technology used in their digitization, these printed materials are now full-text searchable, meaning each word in every document is “indexed.” The handwritten manuscript material is slowly and laboriously being transcribed, so that these documents, too, can be searched by their content.

HERDIC—BARROWS.

Marriage this Morning of Mr. James P. Herdic and Mrs. S. M. Barrows.

Mr. James P. Herdic and Mrs. S. M. Barrows, widow of the late Colonel Barrows, were married this morning at the residence of Mrs. S. A. Jeffries, Lock Haven, by Rev. Dr. Bonnell. The wedding was a quiet one, entirely free from ostentation. Among those present were Mr. and Mrs. Peter Herdic, Mrs. F. L. Herdic, Mrs. George W. Strayer, Mrs. M. A. Tiffany, Miss Lizzie Cunin, Mrs. Ella McCormick, Hon. S. Woods Caldwell and wife, Mr. James Jeffries, Mr. Albert Grow, and Mr. Edward Dickinson. The bride and groom returned to Williamsport on the noon train, and left on the Niagara this afternoon for Colorado Springs and

Gazette & Bulletin newspaper article about the wedding of Mr. James P. Herdic and Mrs. S. M. Barrows, July 9, 1881; from the James V. Brown Library collection.

Death of Mrs. J. L. Mussina.

Mrs. Jerusha P. Mussina, wife of Jacob L. Mussina, died at ten minutes past eight o'clock last evening, after a long and painful illness. She was in her seventy-third year, having been born April 20, 1813, in Lycoming county, and always resided in Williamsport. She became a member of old Pine street M. E. church in 1830 at the age of 17, and was married March 18, 1834. She was a teacher in the Pine street Sunday school for over fifty years, thirty years of which time she had charge of the infant class. In 1873 and 1874 she was the leader of the temperance crusade in this city. She leaves five sons and three daughters, all living. Mrs. Mussina was a representative woman, and distinguished for her piety and devotion to Christian duties. She was a leader in the church and fore-

Obituary for Jerusha B. Mussina, Gazette & Bulletin, Feb. 12, 1886; from the James V. Brown Library collection.



Portrait of Ellie Campbell and co-workers from Lloyd's Shirt Factory, c. 1880; from the Lycoming County Historical Society collection.

Project manager Mary Sieminski, center, and friends review archival material.



Having the three collections “side-by-side” in the internet database, along with the ability to search them each simultaneously, greatly expands the depth and context of a researcher’s findings. For example, in a search for “Temperance,” the users find *The Story of the Temperance Crusaders* from the Historical Society collection, newspaper articles, including the obituary of Mother Mussina from the Brown Library collection, and the manuscript material of Mother Mussina’s daughter, Helena, a student at Dickinson Seminary, including the salutatory address she gave at her college graduation in 1866.

Similarly a search for the “Home for the Friendless,” established by the Woman’s Christian Association, retrieves a digital version of the Historical Society’s copy of the *First Annual report of the Woman’s Christian Association*, newspaper articles from the Brown Library collection, and a research paper written by a Lycoming College student.

After keying in a name search in the database for “Jean Saylor Brown,” the first female physician in Williamsport, a founder of the Williamsport Hospital, and a graduate of Dickinson Seminary, searchers can not only find information on her professional activities, but also the newspaper story announcing her marriage, the recipe for tonic broth she contributed to the *Williamsport Cook Book* published in 1895 by the Auxiliary of the YMCA, and the poem she contributed to *The Floral Album*, a book of autographs collected by Helena Mussina on the occasion of their graduation.

Additionally, because the Women’s History Project is part of the statewide Access Pennsylvania Digital Repository, users are not only able to search the database of local materials but also to simultaneously search regional and statewide resources. (See sidebar on page 18 for an explanation for navigating the website.)

These materials present an exceptional opportunity to tell an ample story of a part of Williamsport’s history including the activities of women. Without these materials one would never know how important women were in helping to establish social service organizations and hospitals, organizing temperance movements, pursuing the arts and letters, or working in local textile mills. What is perhaps most unique about the materials is their diversity and richness. Dr. Irons observed, “It is difficult to imagine that a similar set of resources exists for a similar county in Pennsylvania.”

Lycoming County women’s stories share much that is true of the women in the United States as a whole, making the archive an excellent teaching tool. The range of these sources presents outstanding pedagogical opportunities in women’s history classes as well as in research methods classes.

The momentum created by the project has also resulted in an awareness of the value of the many collections in the hands of local organizations and individuals and the need to preserve historical records for present and future generations. One organization, the Alumni Association of the Williamsport Hospital School of Nursing, has donated their extensive collection to the Lycoming County Historical Society where it will be preserved. The student register, which lists each student enrolled in the program, is already a part of the online collection. Alta J. King, who graduated in 1884, is the first student listed.

Now that the basic digital collection is in place, we turn our attention toward the future. With new avenues to discover and strong commitments from the three cultural organizations, a project like this offers continual excitement. Next on the content list will be the inclusion of materials from the Pennsylvania College of Technology archives, and possibly, materials from other local historical societies. Additionally, project personnel have inventoried the archival collections of the Home for the Friendless and the Young Women’s Christian Association and are seeking funding to add documents from those collections to the online archive. The Alumni Association of the Williamsport Hospital School of Nursing has provided grant monies to Lycoming College to continue to add significant materials from their collection.

It will also be exciting to discover organizational or private collections of women’s materials that could be digitized and added, even if the collections remain physically outside institutional settings. In this manner, the size of the collection will grow and become even more diverse as it deepens. These future endeavors will depend on outside funding from national and local sources through grants or by individual contributions.

The project has also inspired other related activities. Dr. Amy Rogers of Lycoming College is preparing a web-based curriculum guide to benefit middle and high school student researchers with ideas for teachers as to how best to utilize the collection. Highlights will include lessons on the history of local women in volunteer and reform organizations, education, the arts, the workplace, and in their private lives by utilizing primary and secondary sources to reconstruct the events of the time period.

These materials may be old, but the newest technological advances such as social networking will be used to get the word out. Right now a Facebook page promotes new digital materials every week, and those most heavily involved in the grant are happy to introduce groups to the collection. Just search Facebook for “Lycoming County Women’s History Project.” It is through these collective methods, which stitch together the old with the new, that women’s history will receive the attention it deserves. ♦

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