

Ada Shepard and her Pocket Sketchbooks, Florence 1858

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My Aunt Adeline, granddaughter of Ann Adeline Shepard, died in 1999 at the age of ninety-four. As we had planned, she left me the family archive—letters, journals, diaries, a few photographs, four pocket sketchbooks, and a two-volume, first edition of *The Marble Faun*, all packed in a tin toy chest from the 1940s. Aunt Addie had told me stories about Ada, as her grandmother was known, and over time I read the letters that she wrote during the two years she spent in Europe with the Hawthorne family. I knew little about *The Marble Faun*, other than the long-held family belief that Ada was a model for the character of Hilda; I knew nothing about Sophia Hawthorne's "wee sketchbooks" until Megan Marshall suggested that I read the manuscript copy of Sophia's "Journey of Eight days from Rome to Florence, 1858." (S. Hawthorne, "Journey" 338).¹ The story of how twenty-two-year-old Ada Shepard from Dorchester, Massachusetts came to live with the Hawthorne family in Italy has been told many times; Ada's "wee sketchbooks" that recorded her experiences in diminutive, carefully detailed pencil drawings have never been seen outside of the family.

On July 30, 1857, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote to his editor, William Ticknor:

I have engaged Miss Ada Shepard (a graduate of Mr. Mann's College at Antioch²) to take charge of my children while we remain on the Continent. She is recommended to me in the highest way, as respects acquirements and character . . . I have tried English governesses, and find them ignorant and inefficient. Miss Shepard is to receive no salary, but only her expenses . . .
(18:83-4)

Ada Shepard set sail from New York aboard the steamship *Ariel* on August 8, 1857, for a yearlong engagement with the Hawthornes. Landing in Le Havre, she went on to Paris and settled in the French language school of M. Fezandié to await the arrival of the Hawthornes. They were detained in England so in October, Ada took the initiative to join the family in

Leamington. Anticipating Ada's journey, Sophia Hawthorne remarked in a letter to her sister Mary, "I am glad she feels brave about being alone. I know ladies can travel abroad alone and be treated with perfect respect and care" (S. Hawthorne, Letter to Mary Mann, 16 July 1857, MS. Berg). Ada had a plan, and more than brave, she was eager and determined to take advantage of the opportunities that she would have, while employed in the Hawthorne family, to study French, Italian, and German in preparation for her return to Antioch College, where she had been offered a position as Professor of Modern Languages.

Ada's letters to her fiancé Henry Clay Badger, also a graduate of Antioch, and to her family, during her time with the Hawthornes, have been available to scholars for many years. Norman Holmes Pearson, who oversaw the transcription of the letters for the Collection of American Literature at Yale's Beinecke Library,³ never saw Ada's sketchbooks. Selected images from the sketchbooks, shown at the Hawthorne Society Symposium in Florence, June 2012, are published here for the first time.

Since the 1940s, scholars have pigeonholed Ada as "the governess," using her correspondence to illuminate her famous employer's European experiences. But Ada was more than a governess. Her education was unusual for the time and her later work as an educator gained the respect of her peers. In the years after publication of *The Marble Faun*, the assertion that she had been the model for the character of Hilda received considerable attention, so much so that Elizabeth Peabody felt compelled to deny it in a letter to the press⁴ (Peabody 372). Hilda and Ada share a similar New England heritage, but to read *The Marble Faun* in search of Ada Shepard would be unproductive. Study of her correspondence and journals reveals a young woman seeking to reap the benefits of new educational opportunities and embracing the spirit of women's rights ideals while remaining "womanly" as society required. As she suggested in her college graduation essay, her goal was "to promote the grand object of life—the growth of soul" (AAS, "All Success in Partial Failure," June 1857. MS.).

In 1850, Swedish feminist and writer Fredrika Bremer visited Boston, "the American Athens" (Bremer 10), and sought out those who were shaping the world in which Ada came of age. Bremer heard the "richly gifted speaker" Theodore Parker, "who with a strong and fearless spirit applies the morality of Christianity to the political and social questions

ADA SHEPARD'S SKETCHBOOKS

of the day and country" (Bremer 42), and just a few months before Ada entered the Normal School at West Newton, Bremer went there to observe a teaching demonstration and to meet "Horace Mann, the hopeful meritorious man of education for the rising generation." Ada Shepard knew and was inspired by both Parker and Mann, and Bremer's comments on what she saw at West Newton correspond to Ada's circumstance.

Woman's increasing value as a teacher, and the employment of her as such in the public schools . . . is a public fact It even seems as though the daughters of New England had a peculiar faculty and love for this employment . . . (they) are universally commended for their character and ability. (Bremer 317)

"Daughter of New England"

Ann Adeline Shepard was born in Dorchester, Massachusetts, on May 4, 1835, the fifth of ten surviving children of Ann Pope Shepard and her husband Otis (Cutter 1236-8). By birth and by education Ada was most certainly a "daughter of New England." Dorchester's 1850 town map (Whiting) shows Ada's home on High Street near the Meeting House, Lyceum Hall, and the Mather School, its forerunner said to be the first publicly funded school in the country, which she most likely attended. The Shepard bakery stood at the foot of Meeting House Hill; a few miles away on the Dorchester waterfront, the A. & W. Pope Wharfs extended into Dorchester Bay. Their prominence reflected the importance of the coastal lumber trade in which Ada's maternal uncles and later two of her brothers were engaged.

Ada and her family attended Dorchester's First Church and Ada spoke fondly of the minister, "dear Mr. Hall." Nonetheless she was drawn to the impassioned sermons of Theodore Parker and would walk to Boston to hear him preach. She and her sister also went to hear women's rights advocate Lucy Stone when she came to Boston, and abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, whose newspaper *The Liberator* the family subscribed to (AAS, Letter to Kate Shepard, 14 Dec. 1851. MS.). At sixteen, several years younger than most of the students, Ada enrolled in the Normal School in West Newton.⁵ There she came in contact with Horace Mann, who as Secretary of Education had been instrumental in the Normal School movement. The curriculum was rigorous and expectations were high. Ada worked hard, but despite rules about

study habits and proper bed-times, she often sat up late reading *David Copperfield*, reciting language lessons in German and Italian with her friends, and discussing issues of the day, such as abolition and spiritual rappings (AAS, Letter to Kate Shepard, 14 Dec. 1851. MS.). With her landlady, Mrs. Houghton, she also discussed her future plans, contending that she was "cut out to be an old maid." Mrs. Houghton disagreed, Ada reported in a letter to her sister Kate, and said if so, "I must have 'failed in the making'" (AAS, Letter to Kate Shepard, 8 Nov. 1851. MS.).

Ada graduated from the Normal School at the top of her class just as Horace Mann assumed the Presidency of Antioch, a new co-educational college in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Mann encouraged Ada to continue her education at Antioch. She spent the following year reading Latin and tutoring a cousin in order to raise money for tuition. Arriving in Yellow Springs in the fall of 1853, Ada took the examination along with a young man named Henry Clay Badger. Both entered, not as freshmen, but as members of the sophomore class (AAS, Letter to Otis Shepard, 11 Sept. 1854. MS.).

Oberlin College, founded in 1839, was the first co-educational college in the United States, but in the early years course offerings were not the same for both sexes; women were educated in a "ladies department." At Antioch course offerings were fundamentally equal, but daily interactions between the sexes remained strictly regulated. Rury and Harper suggest in "The Trouble with Coeducation: Mann and Women at Antioch, 1853-1860," that Mann's approach "abrogated much of the spirit of coeducation" (Rury 486, Buchanan 67); Mann clashed with certain female students over "women's rights" issues and was opposed to "bloomer" dresses. Although she was not radical, in correspondence with her sister Kate, Ada styled herself as a "furious woman's rights" advocate. Despite her admiration for Mr. Mann, she decided that she must have a bloomer dress for walking (Mann, Letter to Sophia Hawthorne, 18 May 1858. TS., and AAS, Letter to Eliza Shepard, 13 May 1854. MS.).

Antioch's nascent literary societies caused Mann great concern as he was against women becoming public speakers, and, over time, the literary societies "became the lightning rod for ideological inconsistencies" at Antioch. Ada joined the Alethezetean Society, said to be the first co-ed literary society in the country (Rury 494-7, Buchanan 67-76). Writing to her sister Lucy, she expressed her fears and goals: