

Biography from Below

Ann McMath, an Orphan in a New York Parsonage of the 1850s

In her short life, Ann McMath did not write a novel, she did not publish poetry, she never led a reform movement, nor did she wed a notable man. She did nothing we customarily call important, and would be but a note in a genealogist's family history had she not begun a journal in 1851 when she was seventeen years old. Through her journal, we can glimpse life as it was led by ordinary women of her time, one marked not by the usual stuff of history, such as politics, culture, and social forces, but by grief, loneliness, the quest for self-perfection, the search for friends and a life companion, pride in one's work, and caring for family. McMath kept her journal regularly from 1851 to 1856, and that period constitutes three-fourths of its eighty thousand words. In the last fourth, she tells the story of her life to 1870, just three years before her death in 1873 at age thirty-nine.

McMath's journal is important for two reasons. First, it is an authentic voice of a young woman coming of age, full of self-doubt, lonely in her loss of family, anxious to establish female friendships in a new place, and questing for intellectual and moral perfection. Second, it is a firsthand account of the Second Great Awakening, told with an accurate ear for dialogue. It takes place in mid-nineteenth-century New York just after it had been so "burned over by the fires of religious enthusiasm" that historians have dubbed it "the Burned-over District." The journal, then, helps create a "biography from below" of an ordinary woman in extraordinary times.

Ann McMath's journal tells almost nothing about her life before she began writing in 1851. Yet, that earlier life can be reconstructed from a family genealogy, land records, annual school reports, local histories, and census data. Knowing about that earlier life as well as the world in which she wrote her journal allows the reader of her journal to understand it better. Even ordinary people like her left a "paper trail."

Ann McMath's trail begins, not in Horseheads, New York where she wrote her journal, but near Ypsilanti, Michigan where she was born in 1834 of pioneer parents from New York. Her Carr and McMath grandparents, all staunch Presbyterians, had come to Seneca County, New York in the 1790s. Unlike most other early settlers of New York who came from New England, they had come up the Susquehanna River valley from Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Ann's father, John B. McMath, was born in 1809 in Ovid. His future wife, Charlotte Carr, was born one year later in nearby Romulus. In 1832, John McMath's family and the families of several of his uncles moved to Superior Township of Washtenaw County, Michigan, just across the Huron River from Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor. The Carrs arrived there the same year. The two families were part of a pioneer settlement movement that increased the number of the county's people from 4,042 in 1830 to 14,920 in 1834.¹ Like almost all pioneers, they sought a better life for themselves and their children.

That better life was to come for John and Charlotte McMath through their marriage in 1833 and, with the help of John's uncles, getting started on their 280-acre farm in Superior Township, five miles north of Ypsilanti. They paid \$1,800 for their farm, and land records and old maps allow us to locate it.² Ann McMath, their first child, was born on that farm on May 24, 1834. The closest churches in Ypsilanti were so far away that she did not receive infant baptism.

Ann McMath spent her first fourteen years of life on the rough Michigan frontier. Two years after she was born, British traveler Harriet Martineau visited Ypsilanti and described it in her famous travel account of America. En route through the woods, Martineau wrote, "roads became as bad as, I suppose, roads ever are." "The log-houses—always comfortable when well made, being easily kept clean, cool in summer, and warm in winter—have here an air of beauty about them. . . . Those in Michigan have the bark left on, and the corners sawn off close; and are thus both picturesque and neat."³ Of course, Harriet Martineau did not have to grow up there, nor even spend a winter. Ann McMath did.

So did William Nowlin, thirteen years older than Ann. His memoir describes life just fifteen miles east of where Ann lived. Nowlin's detailed description and illustration of his family's cabin must have resembled the home of Ann's family. The cabin had two rooms downstairs and one upstairs. At one end of the house was a "Dutch chimney" of green wood and clay. Nowlin's description of the main room gives us a sense of the rest:

East of the door is a window, and under it stands a wooden bench. With a water pail on it; at the side of the window hangs the tin dipper. In the corner beyond this stands the ladder, the top

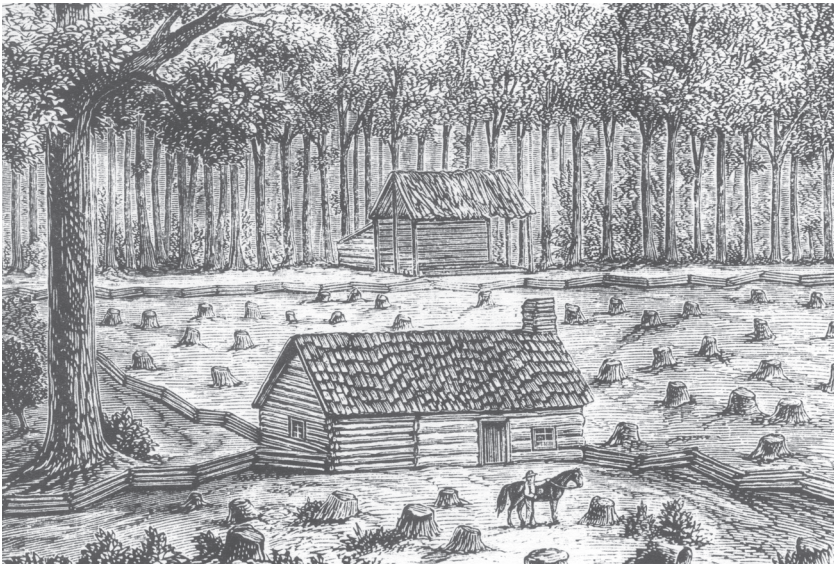
resting on one side of an opening through which we entered the [upstairs bed] chamber. In the centre of the east end burned the cheerful fire, at the left stood a kettle, pot and bread-kettle, a frying pan (with its handle four feet long) and griddle hung over them. Under the north window stood a table with its scantling legs, crossed, and its whitewood board top, as white as hands and ashes could scour it. Farther on, in the north-west corner stood mother's bed, with a white sheet stretched on a frame made for that purpose, over it, and another at the back and head. . . . In the next and last corner stood the family cupboard. The top shelves were filled with dishes, which mother brought from the state of New York.⁴

The Nowlin and McMath cabins were in a deep forest of hardwood trees. These trees, several feet in diameter, towered more than one hundred feet. Equipped only with axes, families struggled to fell enough trees, as Nowlin put it, "until we could see the sun from ten o'clock in the morning till between one and two in the afternoon."⁵ Eventually, families like the Nowlins and McMaths cleared enough land for small corn crops and vegetable gardens. It probably was a good year when five or ten acres could be deforested and placed under cultivation. Between 1834 and 1838, William Nowlin and his father cleared sixty acres by cutting down five thousand cords of wood.⁶ Working alone or with help from uncles and cousins, John McMath could not have done that well, but he would surely have agreed with Nowlin's assessment of the job. "No man," Nowlin wrote, "unless he has experienced it himself, can have an adequate idea of the danger and labor of clearing a farm in heavy, timbered land. Then he knows something of the anxieties and hardships of a life in the woods: the walking, the chopping and sweating, the running and the dodging like Indians behind trees" for "their protection to save him from falling trees and flying limbs."⁷ The McMaths cleared their land, clayey and boggy at that, while plagued by swarms of biting mosquitoes. "Myriads of them could be found anywhere in the woods," recalled Nowlin. "The woods were literally alive with them. No one can tell the wearisome sleepless hours they caused us at night."⁸

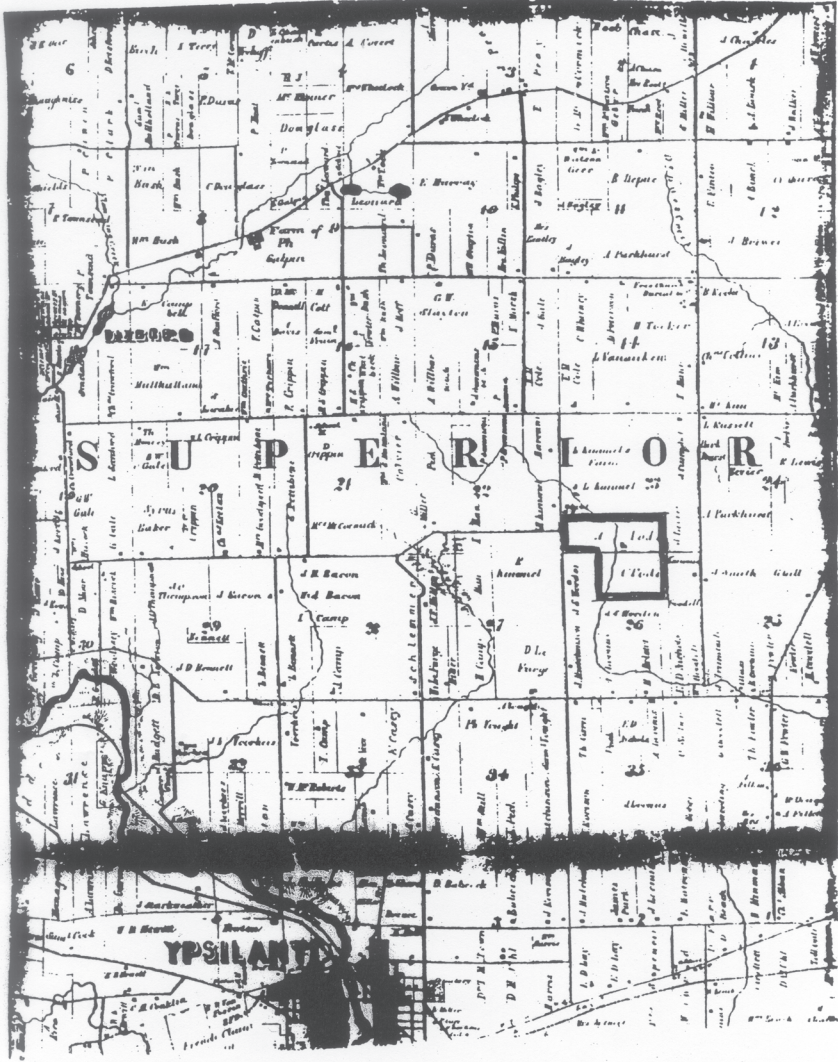
It was hard to make ends meet, even in normal times, and the McMath homesteading coincided with the Panic of 1837. The Nowlins nearly went bankrupt, and one of John McMath's uncles did. Only in the 1840s did things improve. Population stabilized. Wheat and corn production rose to half of what would be considered normal figures for late in the century. The forty-four churches of 1850 had seating capacity for half the county's population. Schools enrolled one-third of the population and adult illiteracy virtually ended.⁹



The McMaths home may have been like the Nowlin's first house, built in 1834.



The McMaths second home may have been like William Nowlin's, built in 1834.



Location of the McMath farm in Superior Township, Washtenaw County, Michigan, adapted from 1856 wall map.

One of those schools was available by the time Ann McMath reached school age. An old map shows it to be one mile away, and its annual reports still exist. In 1841, perhaps her first year of school, she studied for six months with thirty-six scholars. Most schools were twenty-foot square log cabins with only one room. By 1843, Ann's school of sixty-one children lasted nine months.¹⁰ By the time she began her journal in 1851, Ann McMath had learned enough in that school that she could write clear narrative with few misspellings.

Just as conditions improved in Washtenaw County, Ann McMath's family sold its Ypsilanti farm in 1845 and moved north to the Saginaw River Valley. There, in Shiawassee County, the family returned to conditions as harsh and primitive as they had endured in the 1830s.¹¹ In that inhospitable land Ann's mother died in 1848. A sister and a brother had already died in infancy in Washtenaw County. Of Ann's three brothers and sisters only one, Charles Carr McMath, lived to adulthood.

The death of his wife must have devastated Ann's father. After eleven years of land-clearing and struggle on the wet and clay soil of Superior Township, a misnomer if there ever was one, they had sold their farm for less than they had paid for it. The new start in the Saginaw Valley was even more disastrous. Within two weeks after his wife's death, Ann's father gave up and sold out—again at a loss.¹² Surely in desperation, he sent the fourteen-year-old Ann to Horseheads, New York, to live with her mother's brother. He sent Ann's brother, Charles, to live with his own brother in Chili, a New York town near Rochester. These two families were the only relatives who seemed to have prospered. John B. McMath continued to decline. He died in 1851, just as Ann began her journal. His grave, like that of Ann's mother, has disappeared.

With her move to New York, fourteen-year-old Ann McMath began a totally new life. She would describe it in her journal. It was a life shaped by her new family, the religious atmosphere of her time and place, and the world of Horseheads and its region.

First, there was Ann McMath's new family, the Rev. Charles C. Carr (1812–1898) and his wife Eleanor (1813–1863). They had three daughters—Catherine or Kate, five years younger than Ann, Jane or Jenny, seven years younger, and Anna, twelve years younger. The Carrs, too, left a "paper trail" in census data, church records and directories, local histories, and newspapers. Carr, a graduate of regionally prestigious Auburn (New York) Theological Seminary in 1841, had come directly to the Horseheads Presbyterian Church. He would serve there until 1856 and again from 1863 to 1886, longer than any other pastor in the congregation's history. He also speculated in house building lots. An enthusiast for education, he built the town's school on one of his lots, and Ann continued her education there.



The Horseheads Parsonage in Ann McMath's time.



Horseheads Presbyterian Church in Ann McMath's time.

On another lot across Pine Street from the school, Carr built the house where Ann McMath came to live. The property included a barn, housing two prize-winning milk cows, a horse, and poultry. Old maps and a historic preservation survey allow us to find the house. One can still walk through Ann McMath's neighborhood, nearly unchanged since her day.¹³ Second, the

religious atmosphere of that time and place shaped Ann's life and journal. By the 1840s, New York was overwhelmingly Presbyterian and the "Second Great Awakening" had transformed it. Western New York, so "burned-over" by the fires of Charles Grandison Finney's religious revivals in the 1830s, had won the sobriquet of the "Burned-over District." Presbyterian Church membership had become almost exclusively dependent on conversion or on some regenerative experience that would make one "born again." Surely that faith bore little relation to that Calvinism we associate with stern election and predestination. Ann's journal is silent on those matters, but it is full of talk about sermons, scripture, sin, regeneration, right behavior, seeking and obtaining "hope," and hostility to spiritualism.

As Whitney R. Cross's classic *The Burned-over District* put it in 1950, the district was "the place where enthusiasts flourished."¹⁴ In turn, the people practicing those "enthusiastic" religious beliefs, especially women believers, became activists in the temperance, anti-slavery, and women's movements. Anti-Masons, Mormons, Adventists, the Oneida communitarians, anti-slavery leaders like Frederick Douglass, and the women's movement all had their birthplaces or homes in the "Burned-over District." Nor was the district's spirit isolated in time. Frances Fitzgerald has observed that "the history of the religious revivals of the 1830s and 1840s throws a good deal of light on the events of the 1960s and 1970s" in that the Burned-over District "was an analogue to Southern California in the 1960s" in its revolutionary change of values.¹⁵

The Rev. Carr's church reflected those values. A still-existing Greek Revival building of the 1830s, remodeled into a Carpenter's Gothic structure in 1857, housed the congregation. A 535-person list of church attenders from the 1850s and 1860s allows us to identify most of the church's members in federal and state censuses. They were members of farm families. They lived on modest farms of seventy-five to one hundred acres. A few were shopkeepers or physicians. The names of the town's manufacturers and landowning magnates do not appear on the membership list. Two-thirds of the Horseheads Presbyterians were women. The Ruling Elders, who ran the congregation, were all men.¹⁶

Carr, Ann, and other Presbyterians were so "fundamentalist" that they cooperated far more closely with local Baptists than they did with local Methodists, whose more substantial five hundred-seat brick church building may have appealed to a different class of people. According to the New York Census for 1855 each of the three churches had about 200 to 275 members, but Carr's salary of \$700 per year put him slightly ahead of his fellows. That figure might not have included the annual "donation," a fundraising dinner that netted \$100 to \$200.

Ann's journal and the records of the Horseheads Presbyterian Church also show that their religion imposed a rigorous code of behavior. That code did not allow drinking or dancing. From time to time, the Session of Elders tried church members for committing such behavior. Bad language and "swearing" brought one member to such a "trial" and, in 1858, the Session reprimanded two sisters for dancing. Fortunately, say the Session minutes, "the sisters, who acknowledged their faults, seemed humble and asked to be forgiven; promising greater watchfulness in the future."¹⁷

Third, in order to understand Ann McMath's new life, one needs to understand the setting of her new home. Horseheads and neighboring Elmira of the Chemung Valley had just begun to enjoy considerable economic growth when Ann McMath arrived.¹⁸ That growth made the Chemung valley different from other parts of the "Burned-over District." Its growth was far less tumultuous and disruptive than that of the Erie Canal cities. Their experience has provided most of our understanding of the "Burned-over District."¹⁹ In those cities, their historians tell us, enthusiastic religion was a device for upper-class social control of working people. Scarcely any evidence exists for those developments in the Chemung Valley, nor can Ann McMath's journal be read in such a fashion. Rather, Horseheads and Elmira more closely resembled the rural "Southern Tier" New York of that time, which other historians only recently have discovered.²⁰ Settled in the 1790s, Horseheads and Elmira began to grow only with the building of the Chemung Canal in the 1830s and the railroad in the late 1840s. The twenty-three-mile canal rose and fell 516 feet through fifty-three locks to connect Elmira and Horseheads to the southern end of Seneca Lake. At its northern end, Seneca Lake was connected to the Erie Canal and its prospering cities. A sixteen-mile branch canal from Corning joined the Chemung Canal at Horseheads. By the 1850s, railroads connected Horseheads, Elmira, and Corning to Buffalo, New York City, and the Erie Canal cities.

Even so, Horseheads was still a somewhat sleepy backwater when Ann McMath arrived there in 1848. The hopes for industrial might, engendered by the building of the Chemung Canal, had not materialized. As late as 1855, it still had no more than one thousand people, and even Elmira had only eight thousand.²¹ Although it engaged in brick making and milling, Horseheads remained primarily a market town for a grain growing farm region. Those farms lay in broad valleys surrounded by hills. Most of Ann McMath's associates, like her fellow Presbyterians, were members of middle-income farm families. She had little to do with Horseheads' small population of Irish-American working people, engaged with the canal traffic or the building trades, or the tiny merchant class that served the farm and worker families. Horseheads might have been a backwater, compared with



Plan of Horseheads, from Rea's map of 1853.

Rochester, Syracuse, and Utica of the "Burned-over District," but to a girl recently arrived from the rough Michigan frontier it must have appeared as the center of civilization.

Just a few months before Ann McMath began her journal in late 1851, she was orphaned for the second time by the death of her father. In the face

of her double personal tragedy and in the religiously charged atmosphere of a Presbyterian manse, she quickly drank in the religious enthusiasm of western New York that she and her Michigan family had missed. That enthusiasm is a defining force of her diary.

Indeed, the first event in Ann's life after her arrival in Horseheads in 1848 was a conversion experience. That October, just months after her arrival:

I passed from death unto life . . . for the first time, strange to say, I realized that I was sinning in not becoming a Christian . . . and thought of my wickedness. . . . I told Aunt [Eleanor] my feelings. She asked if I was willing to submit to the Savior. What a struggle there was before I would say, "I hope I am willing." My mind was sad for three or four days. One afternoon I said to Aunt [Eleanor] How I wish I was a Christian. Aunt said are you sure you are not? . . . After retiring for the night, I lay meditating when suddenly something seemed to say, thy sins are pardoned. I was in ecstasies.²²

Historians' current explanation for such religious conversions—a widespread response to maintain social control over restive workers during a time of disruptive economic change—does not seem to explain Ann McMath's actions. Rather, her conversion seems almost exclusively a response to grief and loneliness. "This year closes," seventeen-year-old Ann wrote in late 1851, "and I am without father or mother. My nearest relative [is] a brother, but Uncle [Charles Carr] and Aunt [Eleanor] have almost taken the place of parents in my affections. However often when [I] feel towards Aunt like falling on her neck and caressing her am I grieved by her coldness. Oh Aunt you know not the depths of my love for you. You have no idea of the strength of my affection. You know not how many tears I have shed because of your seeming insensibility to my attachment."²³ And a year later she could write, "In the Orphan's prayer are the words 'Through that low bending willow, 'O'er my mother's grave.' It caused me to think that no 'bending willow' was 'o'er my mother's grave,' nor even a headstone, nor could even her children tell the spot where she is buried. . . . Yes, my mother, the privilege of going to thy grave to weep is not mine. Yet, thou wilt live in the memories of thy children while life shall last."²⁴

Her religious conviction, which came out of this grief, stayed with her. Her journal is steeped in it. In February 1855, her church held a religious revival, the defining factor of the "Burned-over District." As one reads her journal entries for that month, one can sense how the revival

excited her and affected her personally. "I have many fears that I have not given myself unreservedly to Christ that mine is more a religion of the intellect than heart . . . In what . . . do I deny myself for Christ? It is no self-denial for me to refuse to go to a party for the sake of attending a prayer meeting for I should feel so guilty that I would expect no pleasure. Oh this heart! Who can know it?" Nor was she alone in that. More people joined the Horseheads church in the aftermath of that revival than at any other period.²⁵

If loneliness contributed to her religious conversion, Ann could never overcome it by becoming an integrated member of the Carr household. No matter how much Ann might have felt "like falling on her neck and caressing" Aunt Eleanor, she never really warmed up the "coldness" of her aunt. Although they became affectionate and respected each other, Aunt Eleanor was more mentor than mother. Ann's journal talks about her "love" for other young women, but it never speaks of "love" toward cousins Kate, Jenny, and Anna. They remained only cousins, not the sisters Ann may have hoped for. Although there was frequent give-and-take joking with Uncle Charles, he remained more the stern authority figure than a loving father figure. Ann left the Carr home only after her marriage in 1856. The reader of her journal is not surprised that, after her marriage, months would go by without Ann visiting the Carrs, even though they lived but fifteen miles apart.

In her coming of age in the Carr household, Ann McMath continually regretted her inadequacy and yearned for both spiritual and intellectual self-improvement. Luckily for her, she got the education in Horseheads that might have eluded her in Michigan. She attended school until age nineteen, studying geography, mental arithmetic, the mathematics of Legendre's textbook, and grammar. For some time, she took a French class. On her own, she struggled unsuccessfully to master history from the two standard textbooks of the day. Ann especially loved teachers and greatly appreciated their influence in improving her. Upon graduation, she sought female teachers as friends.

She also loved books, described in her journal with enough detail that we know what she read, when she read it, and the ways her reading shaped her intellectual development. Of course, much of her reading consisted of popular inspirational works one would expect to find in a Presbyterian parsonage of that time. Important in her conversion had been John Gregory Pike's widely circulated *Religion and Eternal Life or Irreligion and Perpetual Ruin* (1834). She put store in Jacob Abbott's popular *The Young Christian* (1832) and John Angell James' *Female Piety or the Young Woman's Friend and Guide through Life to Immortality* (1853). Also present at the parsonage and read or consulted by Ann McMath were compendiums of knowledge by such forgotten authors as Martin Farquhar Tupper's *Proverbial Philosophy* (1838), one of

the most widely read books of the century, John Warner Barber's *History and Antiquities of New England* (1841), and John Abercrombie's *Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers of Man and the Investigation of Truth* (1830).

The reading most influential on her development was the work of new women writers of fiction, notably Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' *The Sunny Side* (1851) and *A Peep at "Number Five"* (1852), and, especially, Susan Warner's *Wide, Wide World* (1852). Few people today learn anything of their work in American literature classes, except that Nathaniel Hawthorne dismissed them as "women scribblers." Ann McMath did not read Hawthorne, but she read Phelps' and Warner's books within months of their publication. She loved them. "I would that every member of our church should read [*A Peep at "Number Five"*], Ann wrote, "especially if they can see themselves as others see them." Millions of readers with similar views turned these books into runaway best sellers.²⁶

"The *Wide, Wide World* is the Ur-text of the nineteenth-century United States," writes Jane Tompkins in the Feminist Press edition of the novel. "More than any other book of its time, it embodies, uncompromisingly, the values of the Victorian era."²⁷ It certainly was the Ur-text for Ann McMath. She was an orphan like Warner's heroine, Ellen. "I think Ellen was situated a good deal as I am," Ann wrote in her journal. "Imag[in]ing what she would do if she only could act in some great work. Yielding too much to the pleasures of the imagination and not daily acting out her professions. She was sad and . . . she had her book, her work, her music and her pen at her pleasure. . . . She, like me, had the society of a few valued friends."²⁸

In all likelihood, such comments as these only were the starting point for what Warner's and Phelps' writing meant to Ann McMath. Her life situation so closely resembled the lives led by their heroines that the journal often seems to echo the plots of those books. The heroines ordinarily were orphans, powerless, and with few resources. They were as unloved in their households as Ann felt she was by Aunt Eleanor. They were as dominated by authoritarian men as she felt she was by Uncle Charles. These heroines, like Ann, sought love and empowerment for themselves. Ann's almost constant longing for spiritual and intellectual improvement, like the yearnings of the heroines she read about, would lead to such empowerment. Ann McMath's reading provides us with a new insight to readers and reading in the nineteenth century. Eventually, Ann became proud of herself, and reading Phelps and Warner helped her get there.

Ann, like Warner's Ellen, had her "society of a few valued friends." Thanks to the journal, census data, and a handwritten Presbyterian Church membership list, we can identify almost every one of them. We also can understand them as individuals and as a group. They were young women

similar in age. Almost all were from middle-income farm families of the Horseheads church. None were daughters of the handful of farming magnates or well-to-do business families. Two friends, Emma Savoy and Cornelia Dunham, were live-in domestics. Perhaps their lower status fostered an intimacy not as risky as friendship with better-situated young women.

The Carr household must not have approved some of Ann's friendships, especially the one with Mary and Sarah Estes. When she arrived in Horseheads, Ann recalled, "Mary was about fourteen and she was so winning and affectionate that we soon became very much attached to each other. How I loved her . . . she was my favorite in the school." The Estes gravestone in the Horseheads Cemetery reveals that Mary and Sarah were motherless teenagers like Ann, and that must have drawn the girls together. The trouble was that Estes family members were Hicksite Quakers, believers in the primacy of Spirit possession over theology or doctrine. Their beliefs illustrated the religious ferment of the day. Those beliefs also nearly destroyed Ann's friendship with them, perhaps because of Uncle Charles' religious principles. Worse yet, Mary asked Ann to read one of what Ann termed "the pernicious works" of Andrew Jackson Davis (1826–1910), a spiritualist, clairvoyant, and faith healer who dictated his books while in a hypnotic trance. "Of course I would not read it," wrote Ann. Mary and Sarah "believe there is no hell and yet they say they believe the Bible. I wonder that two such sensible girls can think so. . . . Since that time I have tried to tear them from my affections." But she could not. Despite their "Universalist sermons," they remained lifelong friends.²⁹

Other friendships added to Ann's grief. Ann may have loved year-younger Rebecca Barbour most. They were school mates, attended choir practice and other church functions together, and visited back and forth although Rebecca lived almost two miles away on a farm north of Horseheads. When Ann was twenty, Rebecca died a lingering death from tuberculosis. No one really took her place. The loss of Rebecca, added to the loss of her parents, surely increased Ann's sense of isolation.

Ann felt close to one relative, cousin Sarah McMath. Sarah, four years older than Ann, lived on a farm in the Rochester suburb of Chili with her parents and her brother, one year older than Ann. Ann and Sarah had become close when Sarah, like Ann, lost her mother in 1851. They visited each other frequently. Ann had a long visit at Sarah's home in 1854, and even wrote a travel account of the visit. Yet, the diary is more interesting for the sisterly exchanges and conversation between the two young women, each in search of who she was. Sarah, who never married, joined Ann and her husband, William, on a vacation trip to the Wyoming Valley of Pennsylvania in October 1860. Ann also described that trip in her

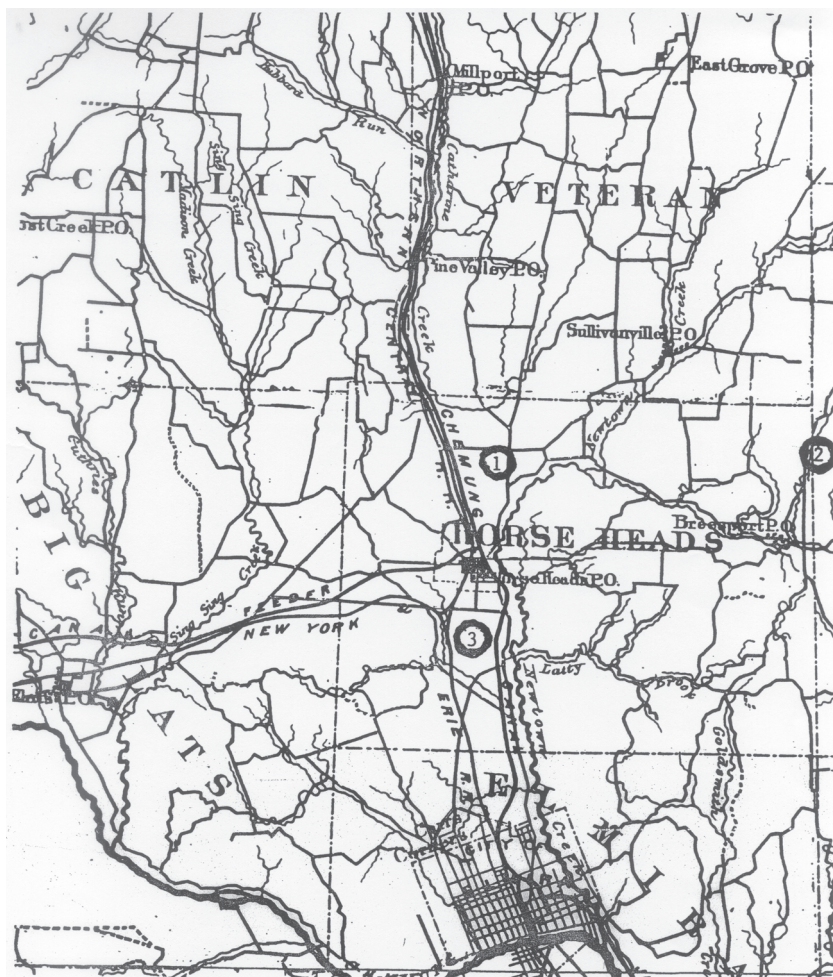


Davis Hotel from Rea's map of 1853.

journal. They visited each other again in 1863 and 1864. The two women saw each other last when Ann and her family moved to Kansas in 1869. By then Sarah, her father, her widowed brother, and his four children lived in St. Louis, Missouri.

In her early twenties, Ann's friends were most likely to be schoolteachers her own age. They attended parties and picnics together, took drives in the country, and talked about books. Ann's journal speaks of how she "loves" them. Yet, the journal's description of the love sounds more like friendship than passion.

Some friends were particularly influential, such as two-year-older Sarah and seven-year-older Mary Payne and their mother Elizabeth. These were women who historians associate most closely with the "Burned-over District," women who connected their deep religious belief with such reform movements as feminism, abolition, and temperance. The Paynes were fellow Presbyterians.



Horseheads region as it appeared in the 1869 *Atlas of Chemung County*. 1 = the principal farm of William and Ann Hammond; 2 = their secondary farm; 3 = Ann's School District of 1852.

John Payne, a physician and Presbyterian Elder, was very close to Rev. Carr. He had been a founder of the Chemung County Medical Society and was active in the temperance movement and the anti-slavery Free Soil Party. Elizabeth Payne was an especially strong woman and a clear role model for Ann. She had been the principal influence in Ann's religious conversion, which took place in the Payne home, perhaps a refuge for Ann from the Carrs. "She is

more interesting and more able than any of the men have the ability to be," Ann wrote. "I love her, notwithstanding her eccentricities."³⁰

Elizabeth Payne's principal eccentricity was her advocacy of women's rights as part of the emerging temperance movement in New York. She was one of several Elmira area women active with Susan B. Anthony in the formation of the Women's New York State Temperance Society (WNYSTS) in 1852–1853. They created a temperance society run by women because existing temperance organizations forbade women from leadership positions. Male temperance leaders persecuted the Elmira and Horseheads women for their leadership efforts just as their sisters were persecuted elsewhere.

Unable to attend a meeting of the WNYSTS in October 1852 Elizabeth Payne sent a letter, dated October 8, 1852, congratulating this "new effort of women to bless and save her race." Nor was she bothered by the "stern and unyielding opposition" from men that their movement had attracted:

That *Woman* should have awakened from the deep sleep of centuries, to a consciousness of the duties and obligations, which the spirit of the times has imposed upon her, seems to have disturbed the quiescence of conservatism in an unprecedented degree. The plans of operation proposed by the Women's New York State Temperance Society, are especially distasteful to all those who have chosen to confine all their nobler aspirations within the charmed circle of popular precedence. Ridicule, misrepresentation, and perversion are the weapons with which we are assailed. The grossest absurdities are reported of us, and our whole course denounced as eminently unworthy of woman.

Were our opposers disposed to commend what is *commendable*, kindly *admonish* us when erring, and sustain us in our well doing. I think none would refuse to be benefited by their fraternal counsel and advice. This wholesale proscription, is strongly characteristic of those who make their conservatism an apology for culpable inefficiency, and savors much of that blinded spirit of usurpation, which is in painful contrast with the spirit of Christ, and which dwells not in the bosom of those who are *laborers together with him*.³¹

Male opposition to women's rights in the temperance movement increased during 1852 in Elmira and Horseheads as it did elsewhere. In August, Susan B. Anthony, Emily Clark, and H. Attilia Albro spoke in Elmira churches and established a local chapter of the WNYSTS. By fall, conservative Elmira clergy even attacked the right of women to speak at temperance meetings, and took over the local women's temperance move-

ment. A particularly anti-women's rights speech by Elmira's foremost Presbyterian, the Rev. David Murdoch, brought the issue to climax. "Woman's rights! What are they?" echoed the *Elmira Republican* after Murdoch's speech. "What is all this humbug about spouting in the pulpit, and declaiming at the forum! . . . Is the world upside down, that man should be put below and woman on top! . . . She . . . cannot step aside from the sphere which God and nature designed for her, without deprecating her own condition, and dragging down the whole human race."³²

One can tell from her journal entries that Ann quietly agreed with Elizabeth Payne on women's rights. Uncle Charles clearly did not. His agreement with the views of his mentor, Murdoch, triggered a terrible fight with Elizabeth Payne, a conflict that Dr. Payne could not patch up. Ann's journal says that the Elders discussed the issue for months, but none of that discussion appears in the minutes of their meetings. By 1854, the Paynes left Horseheads for Michigan, where they disappear from the censuses.

If Ann, the orphan in a not particularly loving home, had to mute her support for women's rights, she could be more vocal regarding temperance and abolitionism because Uncle Charles was an activist in those causes. Ann's journal tells us that she attended lectures by abolitionists. In 1852, she read the autobiography of Frederick Douglass, the great African American leader of abolition. She followed it immediately with Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, read within months of its publication. "No one can read it," she wrote on August 11, "and be willing to aid the slavecatcher." She described aggressive temperance campaigns in Horseheads, and she and Uncle Charles went to nearby Elmira to hear the famous temperance speaker, John Gough.

Even so, these entries on the Paynes, women's rights, temperance, and abolition contain only the briefest mention of the "public sphere." Ann led her life mainly in the "private sphere." If newspaper accounts are any judge, the public sphere was left to the men in her life. In Horseheads, as throughout in the 1850s, American political parties were in complete disarray. Whigs, who constituted the educational, temperance, and anti-slavery leadership, evolved into "Know-Nothings" before emerging as Republicans. Defections even occurred among the Democrats, few of whom were Presbyterians. Uncle Charles was active in those changes. He was a pillar of the Whig party and the Chemung County Education Association in its advocacy of public schools. As early as 1851, he was an officer in the Chemung County Temperance Society, which promoted political candidates supportive of the Maine Law. Those issues and anti-slavery caused him, Dr. John Payne, and other male members of the Presbyterian Church to abandon the Whigs for the Free Soil Party in 1852 and 1853. The Free Soil Party advocated both temperance and hostility to the Fugitive Slave laws. DeWitt Curtis, a rising

young man in Ann's set, also was active in all those efforts. Carr's Whigism and enthusiasm for education surely explains Ann's journal entries of April 1 and 12, 1852, describing how he was beaten up when he tried to preach in a nearby schoolhouse he had helped found. No newspaper or court records exist for this event, but the names of Carr's attackers appear in newspaper accounts as Democrats and opponents of public education.³³

Ann McMath's journal also describes her preparation for a life career. She had two options. One was teaching. At ages seventeen and eighteen, common ages for beginning teachers in that day, Ann taught in a district school. Her journal and newspaper accounts provide a participant view of America's public schools in their pioneer stage. Training was slight. In January, April, and September 1852, she received the customary teacher training at "teachers association" meetings. Each "training" session consisted of a moral lecture by prominent regional clergymen, a more philosophical lecture by a regional attorney, and short presentations by successful practicing teachers. This training may not have used the professionals from the new teacher training colleges, but it did use the community's best-educated members. In Horseheads, that training was sufficient when teaching was considered as temporary employment for recent school attendees.³⁴

After this training, Ann taught for twenty-four weeks from April to October 1852, in the District 5 School, just south of Horseheads. The 1855 New York census rated her school's physical condition as one of Horseheads' three "bad" schools. It rated six others "good," "middling," and "poor." On any given day, she taught as many as twenty-nine students or as few as six.

Ann hated teaching. She especially hated the dependency and lack of security of having "to board around" among the various farm families, sometimes sleeping in a different house each night. Most of all, she hated whipping students. "I dislike to whip. It makes me tremble so. I wish my nerves were stronger." One parent regularly scolded her daughter, one of Ann's students. "She says she never has been to school so long without getting whipped. I am glad I have not whipped her." When the school year finally ended, Ann rejoiced, "I cannot realize that I am free again."³⁵

Yet, teaching like that was so poorly paid that it was not a career. To make a career as a real teacher, teachers like Ann's beloved Susan Belcher, Eliza Boss, Mary Roberts, or E. N. Campbell, one needed a normal school or college education. Such colleges were only beginning to be established. The first normal school at Albany began in the 1840s and nearby Elmira Female Seminary, the predecessor to Elmira College, opened only in 1855. With an education from one of those institutions, one could teach in a Union School, a high school. Charles and Eleanor Carr could not make that investment for their own daughters, let alone their orphaned niece. Ann's journal suggests that the Carrs even debated paying Ann's tuition

to the last year of high school or her tuition for French class with Susan Belcher. As a result, the closest Ann got to the teaching profession was through her friendships.

From time to time, especially when she read of their work in such magazines as *Mother's Magazine* and *Christian Parlor Magazine*, Ann yearned to be a missionary in China or some other exotic clime. "If I am a Christian, if I am capable of learning the language, if I have ability to teach, if I have strength to endure the fatiguing duties, why should I not be [a missionary]? Why is it not my duty."³⁶ As a missionary she could also escape the Carrs and find personal value. Poor health and an insufficiently strong religious commitment always stood in the way of that choice.

The other career for women of Ann McMath's background, of course, was marriage. For the three years between leaving school and her marriage in 1856, she lived with the Carrs while she sought a companion. She was tall, slim, and popular despite her objections to the day's courting practices. Religious scruples caused her to stay away from parties where there was dancing or kissing games such as "wink'em," an amorous version of musical chairs. She objected when some members of the young women's sewing circle turned it into a courting opportunity by inviting young men. She did enjoy other community-based courting opportunities such as picnics. There, in the hills surrounding Horseheads, couples would picnic, sing, and then pair off in the woods.³⁷

Such scruples did not prevent her from having "gallants" or suitors, but like most female diarists she scarcely ever wrote about them in her journal. Read carefully, one can identify the suitors she rejected. There was Peter Whitaker, a prominent future storekeeper. There was Edwin Parker, future owner of a hardware store. There was DeWitt Curtis, a budding attorney, joiner of temperance and education societies, and activist in Whig and Republican politics. There was even a mystery suitor, "Ik," code-named perhaps from the character of Ik Marvel in George Mitchell's *Reveries of a Bachelor*.

Instead of them, she chose farmer William Oliver Hammond for her life companion. Hammond, whose grandfather had settled in the neighboring town of Big Flats in the 1790s and whose father had a well-established farm there, was a good-looking farmer and temperance-minded. More importantly, he met Ann's requirement of being a professing Christian. In a day when few men were church members, William's name appears on the Presbyterian Church's membership list. Indeed, he seemed to favor young women of the parsonage. Ann had some anxiety that he favored a rival, the daughter of the Big Flats Presbyterian pastor. Despite William's excellent qualities, Ann's journal gives only the briefest description of their courtship.³⁸