

loved. . . . Louisa Alcott wrote books which were true and fine, but she never imagined a life as noble as her own."

To explore the connections between these two significant 19<sup>th</sup>-century women's voices in greater depth, the Rebecca Harding Davis Society and the Louisa May Alcott Society will offer a joint panel at the American Literature Association in May 2017. We invite papers that examine how Alcott and Davis treat or respond to any of the issues mentioned in the opening paragraph. Send brief abstracts by January 20, 2017 to Mischa Renfroe at [Mischa.Renfroe@mtsu.edu](mailto:Mischa.Renfroe@mtsu.edu) and Melissa Pennell at [Melissa.Pennell@uml.edu](mailto:Melissa.Pennell@uml.edu).



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#### Field Trip to Lowell Mills Park During ALA '17

**Watch the Listserv for details on a field trip during ALA 2017.** Following upon our successful visit to Orchard House in Concord to celebrate the Louisa May Alcott Society's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary during ALA in 2015, we are planning, in partnership with the Rebecca Harding Davis Society, a field trip to Lowell, Massachusetts, to visit the Lowell National Historical Park and its museums, especially the Boott Mill and the Boardinghouse, where exhibits explore the experiences of the New England "mill girls" and later the immigrants whose lives were shaped by the continuing Industrial Revolution. This field trip may be of interest to LMA Society members whose research areas include women and work, the immigrant experience, the rise of urban culture, and/or the impact of technology on 19<sup>th</sup> century American culture.

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#### The True Origin of the P.C. and the P.O. from *Little Women* by Susan Bailey

Much of *Little Women* is based upon real life events in the Alcott family. Chapter Ten, "The P.C. and the P.O.", in which the March sisters meet together for their regular meeting of The Pickwick Club, is no exception.

The inspiration for the Pickwick Club was Charles Dickens, a favorite of the Alcott girls; Dickens was often mentioned in Louisa's journals. From *David Copperfield* to *The Haunted Man* and *A Christmas Carol*, his gritty comedic

characters perfectly suited Louisa's sense of drama and humor. Among her favorites was playing Sophia opposite fifteen-year-old Alf Whitman's Dolphus from *The Haunted Man*, and Sairy Gamp from *Martin Chuzzlewit*, used to comfort both her sister Elizabeth during her illness, and the soldiers at the Union Hotel Hospital in Georgetown with much needed laughter.

Like the Alcott daughters, the March sisters were poor in material goods but rich in imagination. Alcott writes, "for as secret societies were the fashion, it was thought proper to have one, and as all of the girls admired Dickens, they called themselves the Pickwick Club."

Each sister took on a character from *The Pickwick Papers*, Dickens' first, and favorite novel: "Meg, as the eldest, was Samuel Pickwick, Jo, being of a literary turn, Augustus Snodgrass, Beth, because she was round and rosy, Tracy Tupman, and Amy, who was always trying to do what she couldn't, was Nathaniel Winkle."

Keeping to the spirit of humor in the novel, the members of the Pickwick Club gathered to share stories of happenings around them through a hand-written newspaper, and to "good-naturedly reminded each other of their faults and short comings." Items included "The Masked Marriage (A Tale Of Venice)" by Pickwick, "The History of a Squash" by Tubman, a letter from Winkle confessing her faults, plus poems, gossip and news within the family, and amusing advertisements and announcement such as this:

"THE DUSTPAN SOCIETY will meet on Wednesday next, and parade in the upper story of the Club House. All members to appear in uniform, and shoulder their brooms at nine precisely."

This newspaper (and the club) was based upon the real life *Olive Leaf* (in honor of a favorite periodical, *The Olive Branch*), which Louisa produced to entertain her family during the poverty-stricken Boston years. An issue dated October 19, 1848 is available for viewing on the Houghton Library website:

[https://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:30615426\\$1i](https://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:30615426$1i).

*The Olive Leaf* was produced when Louisa was seventeen. Thanks, however, to a little known book called *Lilliputian Newspapers* by James D. Henderson, we discover that, in fact, *The Olive Leaf* had a predecessor.

## Lilliputian Newspapers

By JAMES D. HENDERSON  
*Survivor of the LXIVmas*

### Foreword

By R. W. G. VAIL  
*Librarian, American Antiquarian Society*

ACHILLE J. ST. ONGE  
Worcester, Massachusetts  
MCMXXXVI

While doing research at the North Bridge Visitor Center archives in Concord, I came across a newspaper clipping that shed light upon this book:

Concord Journal, Thursday, August 27, 1936

### "Lilliputian Newspapers" Recalls Louisa Alcott's "Pickwick"

Miss Louisa May Alcott was, it appears, a genuine micro-journalist. In a recently published book entitled "Lilliputian Newspapers", James D. Henderson, a collector of tiny books, tells of Miss Alcott's paper, which had the distinction of being written entirely by hand and consisting of but one copy of each issue. The title, as all who have read *Little Women* will recall, was the *Pickwick*.

As *Lilliputian Newspapers* by James D. Henderson is available from archive.org, we can read firsthand about the origins of "The P.C. and the P.O."

Henderson reveals that Louisa created the newspaper when she was twelve in 1844 and that it was originally known by a different name: "The *Pickwick* was a manuscript newspaper, in size 10 and 8 inches, and comprised four pages, two columns to a page, entirely written by hand" (p. 60, *Lilliputian Newspapers*). Two issues were published between 1844 and 1845 when the family lived at Still River and Concord. Louisa wrote the early issues herself, but when it re-emerged as *The Olive Leaf*, all four sisters contributed.

Henderson revealed a poem dedicated to Marmee, published for the first time in his book and republished in the *Concord Journal's* August 27, 1936 issue:

The issue has a "Poet's Corner" on the front page with a verse by Louisa that has grace and rhythm. According to Mr. Henderson, "the reproduction presents for the first time a poem written to the mother of the four girls, over Louisa's signature."

Here it is:

### TO MOTHER

Accept our little offerings,  
Few and simple though they be,  
For we are poor, dear mother,  
In all save love to thee.

Yet the poverty is all unfelt.  
For the wealth our hearts can hold  
Of fadeless love is better far  
Than costly gifts of gold.

Like wayside flowers that humbly  
bloom  
And ask no fairer home  
May we be to thee, dear mother,  
Through the years that yet may  
come.

Thus may be cheer and brighten  
The path that thou must tread,  
And gently bend in sorrow's storm  
To shelter thy dear head.

*The Pickwick* was to mark the beginning of Louisa's many years of supplying stories for a variety of newspapers and magazines, including her infamous potboilers under the name of A. M. Barnard. Even after the immense success of *Little Women*, Alcott continued to write for periodicals.

If you are fortunate enough to obtain a printed copy of *Lilliputian Newspapers*, you will see a reproduction of the original copy of *The Pickwick*, found in the pocket of the inside of the back cover. The reproduction was made possible by Miss Beatrice Gunn, formerly of the *Youth's Companion*, a magazine to which Louisa often contributed.

James Henderson's book, published in 1936 is available at archive.org at <https://archive.org/details/lilliputiannewsp008307mbp>.

Newspaper clippings are from The Harriet M. Lothrop Family Papers (1831-1870) Courtesy National Park Service, Minute Man National Historical Park.

*Susan Bailey is an independent scholar authoring the “Louisa May Alcott is My Passion” blog at [www.louisamayalcottismypassion.com](http://www.louisamayalcottismypassion.com). She is currently working on a book on the life of Elizabeth Sewall Alcott.*



### **Member Voices: Where LMAS Members Share Their Meanderings in Alcott Studies**

By Azelina Flint

Seven years ago, in the summer of 2009, I spent a summer in Concord, Massachusetts. I was working on my undergraduate dissertation on Louisa May Alcott's *Moods* and travelled to Concord in search of inspiration. As a final year undergraduate, I didn't have much idea of what I was looking for, but I was captivated by the continuing imprint of Concord's literary legacy in the atmosphere and landmarks of the town. As a British student who had never taken a course in nineteenth-century American literature, I was truly enchanted by the experience of seeing Walden Pond for the first time, while the Thoreau Institute's library nestled in the heart of the woods was something straight out of a romantic scholar's imaginary ideal. I was particularly impressed by the words that Sophia Hawthorne carved in the window of the Old Manse with her engagement ring, describing the Concord trees in winter as “crystal chandeliers,” and, of course, the experience of touring the Alcott's Orchard House and inhabiting the setting that inspired many of the scenes in *Little Women* allowed me to visualise the novel in a completely new way. Since that first experience as an undergraduate, it has been my desire to return to the US and research the Alcott family and their connection with the wider Concord community in depth.

Six years later, I was elated to finally achieve this dream as the 2016 UK Fulbright US Embassy American Studies' Award Holder. As a Visiting Fellow at Harvard University, I was able to spend a full semester exploring the Alcott archives at the Houghton Library, in order to conduct vital research for my PhD. I was unsure of what I would find there, as the vast majority of work by Alcott is in print, thanks to ground-breaking work of such scholars as Daniel Shealy, Joel Myerson and Madeleine Stern, to name but a few. However, I was fascinated by the window into the wider world of the Alcott women that my time at the Houghton library facilitated.

While studying the diary of Louisa's elder sister, Anna, I was struck by the marked differences between herself and her fictional counterpart, Meg March, in *Little Women*. Indeed, in a letter to one of her sister's many

fans, Anna commented that, of all the Alcott sisters, she was the one who was most unlike her fictional doppelganger. Unlike the thoroughly domestic Meg, Anna's journal is peppered with complaints about her longstanding hatred of housework, and she complacently admits that she loves to be lazy—a surprising revelation from a member of a family who prized industry and hard work above all else. In the juvenile newspapers of the Alcott sisters, one of which is aptly titled “The Portfolio,” the reader also discovers that Anna was a precocious and gifted young writer—something that was further underlined by my discovery of the “Comic Tragedies” that she co-authored with Louisa, which were introduced to me by a fellow member of the Louisa May Alcott Society. However, Anna's journal makes it clear that she had no desire to pursue a career because she viewed her marriage as something of an escape from the emotional and financial strains of being a member of the Alcott family. The love for her husband that comes through in these pages is truly touching.

The correspondence of Louisa's youngest sister, May, is even more candid in its derision of Concord society as puritanical, stuffy, and repressed. Following her premature death in Paris at the age of thirty-nine, May's mother-in-law, Sophie Nieriker, wrote that May had avowed that she would never return to Concord unless her sisters were ill. The timeline of May's life as experienced through her letters is deeply moving, as the reader is able to trace her development from a passionate career-driven young painter and trendsetter in Paris, who believed she was too old to ever find a suitor, through to her whirlwind romance with the Swiss banker, Ernest Nieriker, who was sixteen years her junior. As a young married woman, May was determined to continue her art, and was strongly attached to the extended Nieriker family who supported her in her ambition. Her rapturous letters about her married life with Ernest only make the heartbroken letters of the Nieriker family following her death all the more poignant. In particular, the Houghton Library houses a two-stanza poem written by Ernest Nieriker, expressing his grief and hope that he will be reunited with his wife in the afterlife. Perhaps the most interesting revelation of the Alcott Nieriker papers is that the Nieriker family believed May died from a pre-existing medical condition, unrelated to the recent birth of her child—something that has been overlooked by the vast majority of Alcott family biographers.

During my time at Harvard, I was also given the opportunity to present my research on Louisa May Alcott at the Harvard American Studies' Graduate Colloquium, the abstract of which is included following this piece. The opportunity to undertake a full semester's research also enabled me to further explore the Alcott family's New England, and I was particularly drawn to an exhibit on the Alcotts in the town museum of Walpole, New Hampshire, which reopens this January. The Alcotts lived in Walpole from 1855-1857 and organised many private theatricals while there, some of which make it