

# Chebacco

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# Welcome Tidings



BY

Rev. Robert Lowry, W. Howard Duane and Ira D. Sankey.

INCLUDING THE LAST HYMNS AND MUSIC OF THE LATE  
**D. D. Bliss**

BOSTON, MASS.:

**JAMES P. MAGEE, Publisher and Bookseller,**  
38 Bromfield Street.

FOR SALE BY BOOKSELLERS AND MUSIC DEALERS GENERALLY.

A late nineteenth century edition of "Welcome Tidings: A New Collection of Sacred Songs for the Sunday School." Emma A. Whitmore of Northeast Harbor inscribed her name in the book. The book is representative of the kinds of hymnals that would have been used by congregants. *Mount Desert Island Historical Society*

## *Committees, Churches, and Classrooms: Influential Women in the Early Nineteenth Century on Mount Desert Island*

By Brittany Goetting

### *Introduction*

Historians, genealogists and others have been able to gather an admirable amount of information about the English founders of Mount Desert Island. Town records and other public documents provide a glimpse into the thoughts and actions of individuals like Abraham Somes. However, information about the first English women on Mount Desert Island is more elusive. Virginia Somes-Sanderson once speculated about "what went through the mind of Hannah Herrick Somes as she stood on the deck of the vessel which was carrying her further and further from the familiar scenes of her Gloucester home."<sup>1</sup> The same documents that help build an image of Abraham Somes offer little insight into the experiences of his spouse, Hannah Herrick Somes.

It is difficult to piece together a picture of the lives of Mount Desert Island's women through traditional political and economic sources. Women did not hold political offices or participate in town meetings on the island during this period. In the Town of Mount Desert's municipal records, women are primarily listed as town dependents or as having been issued a warrant for coming "into this town for the Purpose of abiding therein not having obtained the Towns Consent."<sup>2</sup>

Women also infrequently appear in local and national newspapers. Many of the newspapers that were available on Mount Desert Island focused on shipping, the local and national economy, politics, and sensational stories. For example, Samuel Hadlock of Mount Desert murdered Elias Littlefield Gott in 1790. Hadlock fled to the house of a "Mrs. Manchester" where he "seized Mrs. Manchester by the hair of her head, pulled her out of doors, and threw her on the ground several times in a great rage."<sup>3</sup> The newspaper article provides little insight into Manchester's emotions or reactions. The town records and newspapers only offer information about women in exceptional or unfortunate situations. We can learn more about the lives of women during this period through church records, religious and lifestyle periodicals, correspondences, memoirs, and other sources.

A private memoir gives us a glimpse of a girl's childhood. Adelma Somes Joy (1837–1930) grew up on Mount Desert Island in the early nineteenth century. Later in life, she wrote several poems and short stories about her childhood. Her idyllic descriptions feature old country roads, blueberry-picking, and other romps through the countryside. Descriptions of her mother, grandmother, teachers, religious leaders, and neighbors are woven throughout her writings and reveal information about the women who lived in the early republic.<sup>4</sup>

Though absent from many public records, women do appear in church documents and reports. These allow us to see how women responded to and altered

their everyday circumstances and environments. Maine transformed from a Massachusetts frontier to a growing state during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Locally, the community was enmeshed in these political, economic, and social transformations. Women were unable to participate in politics, but they were deeply involved in the religious, economic, educational, and social life of the island. Their impact extended outside of their homes and their voices were heard through their participation in churches, societies, schools. The history of women helps us to better understand the development of the island and the larger trends that swept through the state and nation.

### *Churches*

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed the Second Great Awakening in the United States, a period of Protestant religious revival. Many churches, societies, and reform movements were founded to spread Christianity throughout the United States. Religious leaders particularly encouraged converts to evangelize their neighbors. Congregational, Baptist, and Methodist missionaries and ministers traveled to Mount Desert Island to preach their various doctrines, set up churches, and baptize converts. Women could greatly influence the religious culture of their community through their personal beliefs, church memberships, and participation in the fervor of the Second Great Awakening.

Several women were active founders and members of their local churches. Eight women helped found the Southwest Harbor Congregational Church in 1792 and they continued to join the congregation in larger numbers than their male counterparts.<sup>5</sup> This same trend was evident at the local Baptist churches. Baptist missionaries arrived in the late 1790s and the Eden Baptist Church was formed

shortly thereafter. Most of the church's founding members were women.

Many women held different religious beliefs than their fathers and husbands. They frequently tried to convince their husbands to embrace their religious beliefs and churches. These differences could sometimes produce tension, but many wives persisted. Elder Lemuel Norton noted that one woman he baptized was concerned that her husband may be upset by her conversion. Norton remarked that "it proved directly to the contrary, for on his being informed, where he was, of what had taken place at home, he wrote back to his wife that he was very glad to learn that she had become a Christian, and wanted her to pray for him."<sup>6</sup>

There is no record of any female preacher during this period on Mount Desert Island. However, women could guide religious doctrine and church policies through their memberships. Historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich found that "devout women who, working around the edges of formal organization, managed to evangelize their sisters and sometimes influence their ministers as well."<sup>7</sup>

The first churches on Mount Desert Island were Congregational and Baptist. These denominations tended to limit who could become a full member of their churches. Free Will Baptists and Methodists preached that individuals could choose to accept or reject salvation. These denominations therefore boasted a more open membership policy and their doctrine was popular with those that felt that the Congregationalists and Baptists were too restrictive. Many

women were attracted by the doctrines and preaching styles of Free Will Baptist and Methodist missionaries. In the 1820s, several women left their home churches to form new Free Will Baptists and Methodist congregations. According to the Eden Baptist Church records,

Sister Olive Avery made a communication to the church informing them that as she had long had trials on her mind respecting some doctrinal points, especially Election, as in the Methodist Society she has found a prospect of a pleasant and comfortable connection she therefore wishes to go and unite with them.<sup>8</sup>

Several other women from the Eden Baptist Church transferred to other denominations. At least four women transferred during this period to a Free Will Baptist church. This large number even inspired a policy change at the Eden Baptist Church. In 1835, the congregation "[v]oted that they consider it improper to Dismiss a member to join a church of another order. Voted to withdraw church fellowship from all who have or may withdraw their fellowship from this church to join one of another order."<sup>9</sup>

The Eden Baptist Church would frequently write letters of "transfer" for members who were moving to a new town and wanted to become members of their new home churches. The exodus of their female members prompted a new rule. The Eden Baptist Church would only write letters of transfer for

members who wanted to attend another Baptist church. Individuals who attended the religious services of other denomination would not be considered members of the Eden Baptist Church.

Women were active participants in religious revivals outside of regular church meetings. Traveling missionaries and ministers would frequently preach to large crowds in outdoor spaces or in someone's home. Revivals and meetings helped to spread new beliefs and ignite the religious fervor of their attendants. These events particularly attracted women to Mount Desert Island. Rebekah Pinkham, the wife of Elder Ebenezer Pinkham of Sedgwick, Maine, wrote about one particularly strong revival in the religious magazine the *Christian Watchman*. Pinkham frequently visited Mount Desert Island and was familiar with the religious environment of the island. Pinkham was not only impressed by the revival, but she wanted to contribute to it. She noted, "Oh what a blessed employment has the missionary who is sent forth of God to hold up to his fellow mortals, Christ, as the way, the truth, and the life. I really felt, if called of God, that I should be willing to spend and be spent in this precious cause."<sup>10</sup> Pinkham stated that she had gone door-to-door to speak to the residents of the island about Christianity and was delighted by her reception.

### *Committees*

Mount Desert Island women were active participants in voluntary societies or community organizations. Many religious leaders in the Second Great Awakening argued that Christians had a duty to morally reform society. Christians were encouraged to raise money and create societies that focused on specific issues and societal ills. According to historian Jonathan Neem, "The number of voluntary associations of all kinds grew ... by more than 5,000 percent in the rest of

American Missionary Association.

OFFICE, 4TH AVE. AND 22ND ST., N. Y.

\$ 2.00/100.

New York, Dec 27. 1898

The American Missionary Association acknowledges  
the receipt of Two <sup>00/100</sup> Dollars  
from the King's Daughters' Circle of Mount Desert,  
Name of Miss Mary A. Somers President

Which will be acknowledged in the AMERICAN MISSIONARY for March and faithfully applied agreeably to your directions if expressed or, if you leave the application of it to the Executive Committee, according to their best judgment.

H. W. Hubbard Treasurer.

PUBLICATIONS. Our Magazine, the AMERICAN MISSIONARY. Subscription price 50 cents per annum. Our friends will render a material service by extending the circulation of this magazine.

LIFE-MEMBERSHIP. Members of Evangelical Churches may be constituted members of this Association for life by the payment of thirty dollars into its treasury, with the written declaration at the time or times of payment that the sum is to be applied to constitute a designated person a life member; and such membership shall begin sixty days after the payment shall have been completed. Other persons by the

payment of the same sum may be made life members without the privilege of voting.

LEGACIES. We have lost some legacies evidently meant for us, because in making them the corporate name of the society was not used. In making bequests, the full corporate name should be given, viz. "The American Missionary Association." In some States, it is required that the Will should be made at least two months before the death of the testator.

NOTICE TO CONTRIBUTORS. Sums of Five dollars and upwards will be acknowledged by letter.

Money letters, and letters relating to packages, should be addressed to H. W. Hubbard, Treasurer, P. O. Box 40, Madison Square Branch, New York.

Received \$ from subscription for The American Missionary year to

Very thankfully received for our work on the Masters Service.

An 1898 receipt from American Missionary Society for a \$2.00 contribution from the King's Daughters. This receipt is representative of the contributions of nineteenth century voluntary committees. Mount Desert Island Historical Society

Massachusetts and Maine between the 1760s and the 1820s, far outstripping the state's population growth."<sup>11</sup>

Several reform voluntary societies formed on the island. Records from these early societies have not yet been found, but we can find information about them from religious association meeting notes and magazines. Voluntary societies allowed women to support and raise money for issues that were important to them. They were particularly passionate about missionary, benevolence, and tract societies.

Mite societies, or groups that collected funds for charity by small contributions, were quite popular. It was often easier for these groups to convince contributors to part with small change than to raise large sums of money. Joanna Hunting, the wife of the minister of the Eden Baptist Church, was the president of Eden Female Mite Society and Eden Female Primary Society. Both groups collected donations for foreign missionaries throughout the early nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> The town of Mount Desert boasted its own separate mite society and reportedly donated over five dollars to the American Baptist Missionary Society in 1821.<sup>13</sup>

Mite societies also allowed women to host special events to support their various causes. The Eden Religious Benevolence Society reportedly raised four dollars for the American Baptist Missionary Society in 1819 through a monthly concert series.<sup>14</sup>

Women participated in a variety of politically motivated societies. They could not vote on the island or in national elections, but they could voice

their opinions through their participation in these groups. Clarissa Hamor was a reportedly a strong leader in the abolitionist society. Local historian and descendent Eben M. Hamor noted that she was "a very active earnest Christian. [Hamor and her husband] were both strong abolitionists. She said politics were part of her religion."<sup>15</sup> Elder Enoch Hunting organized a Temperance Society at the Eden Baptist Church in 1825. The society comprised fourteen members and faced serious opposition from other church members who did not believe that temperance was a necessity. The organization survived at least until the mid-1830s and Hamor was a vocal proponent of the society.

Multiple benevolence societies competed for members and funding on the island. Even societies that included members of all genders were frequently dominated and led by women. The success of these groups allowed women to contribute to the political and economic culture, despite the legal restrictions that were typically placed on women during this period.

### *Classrooms and Education*

Education was an essential component of New England society. Protestants believed that one should be able to read the Bible for themselves and encouraged parents to teach their children to read. New England Protestants founded the first public schools in the United States to increase accessibility.<sup>16</sup> Education was a means of transmitting cultural beliefs. According to historian James Axtell, New England education was a "deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit and evoke knowledge, attitudes, values, skills and sensibilities."<sup>17</sup> Educators could therefore have an immense impact on student's academic knowledge and understanding of societal norms. Mount Desert Island schools taught basic reading, writing, and, arithmetic, and



other subjects to both male and female students. Teachers were able influence the community through their teachings and other contributions.

Women rarely taught secondary education during this period, but they were frequently responsible for primary education. According to Nellie C. Thornton, the first school in Southwest Harbor was taught by Polly Milliken.<sup>18</sup> Milliken taught her students how to read, write, and basic arithmetic. Her female scholars also learned how to sew and knit. Older boys were taught higher level mathematics, languages, and navigation in the winter by male teachers. Adelma Somes Joy fondly recalled her primary education. She "learned her A, B, C's in Mrs. Calvin Kittredge's private school and was taught to sew in Miss Kimball's primary class."<sup>19</sup>

Teachers frequently provided books to their scholars. Somes-Sanderson noted that "school agents and teachers supplied [books] and although a class might have almost as many different references as there were children, there was no dearth of reading material."<sup>20</sup> Female teachers could guide the education and interests of their students through their classes, book donations, and advice.

Private education could be just as significant as public education. Private education also allowed women more control over the content that was shared with their children. Historian George Street noted that Hannah Gilley would read to her children during winter evenings, and that she was displeased with the available religious curriculum at the Southwest Harbor Congregational Church. Gilley reportedly "bought books and read for herself; and by the time she had borne half a dozen children, she could no longer accept the old beliefs."<sup>21</sup> Gilley was still able to provide a significant religious education for her children, even without access to a church

or school that aligned with her beliefs.

The women had immense influence over the private and public education of their own children and their community. Their interests, donations, and efforts could steer the course of education. Women could not teach higher education, but they could reach children as they began to explore the world around them.

### *Conclusion*

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were a period of political, economic, religious, and social transformation in Maine. Women could not participate in politics, but they engaged with these state's evolution through their religious beliefs, voluntary societies, and education. These methods and institutions allowed the voices of women to be heard throughout the Mount Desert Island community and Maine in the early republic.

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*Brittany Goetting is a PhD candidate at the University of Maine and adjunct instructor at Husson University. Her research examines the evolution of Baptist identity and community in Northern New England and the Canadian Maritimes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. She most recently published "He Has Abundantly Poured out His Holy Spirit in Eden and Mount Desert": The Baptist Connection on MDI, 1790–1840" in the 2019 edition of Chebacco.*

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1827.

An 1830 edition of "The English Reader." Sarah Mayo of Eden inscribed her name inside the book in 1830. The book would have likely been used in a schoolhouse. *Mount Desert Island Historical Society*

Public Library, University of Maine Special Collections, Eden Baptist Church, Southwest Harbor Congregational Church, and especially my husband, Christopher Goetting.

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