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The Life and Writings of Harriett Mulford (Stone) Lothrop

A sketch of Harriett Mulford Lothrop, a.k.a. Margaret Sidney in *The Publishers' Weekly* informs us that "Margaret Sidney's friends remember her as a little lady rocking beside an open fire. Long after the lamp should have been lit, she would sit in her old brown chair, thinking about the Peppers. From time to time a smile crossed her face just as if she were really listening to one of their amusing escapades" ("Margaret Sidney" 1763). A true friend of this remarkable woman, however, would remember far more than that passive scene. During her long and fruitful life, Lothrop not only wrote a children's bestseller under the penname of "Margaret Sidney," but she penned numerous other novels, started a national organization that still exists today, and became involved in a variety of civic and historical activities.

Harriett Mulford Stone was born in New Haven, Connecticut, on June 22, 1844 (Derry 1). Her father, Sidney Mason Stone, had two sons and two daughters from a previous marriage (Biography), but Harriett was the first child born to Sidney and his second wife, who was also named Harriett Mulford Stone. The couple later added another daughter to the family (Biography). Proud of her family's distinguished ancestry, Harriett wrote of herself: "On her father's side were many eminent in the Revolution, and in the literary and ecclesiastical history of New England. By her mother, she was lineally descended from John Howland of the Mayflower" (Autobiographical sketch).

Sidney Stone was a respected architect in New Haven who was known for designing local churches and public buildings, as well as for inventing a system of ventilation (Carson 407). The Stone family was well-known and respected in New Haven, and young Harriett had a happy childhood. She describes herself as having grown up in a “cultivated home in an University town,” with many “intellectual opportunities” available to her (Autobiographical sketch). Harriett was educated at Grove Hall Seminary, and after completing her formal education, she continued to live with her parents until her marriage (Swayne 207).

Harriett became interested in reading and writing as a young child (Autobiographical sketch). In a memo included among her family papers, Lothrop explains the early stages of her life as a writer:

I had “lots” . . . of girl and boy friends, and I was an out-of-doors little creature as far as restricted city life would allow. But I dearly loved to get away and curled up in a big chair in the Library, or under a large table where the ample cloth fell down and successfully hid me from the children ‘tagging’ me, then it was that I peopled my world. (Memo)

Harriett began writing by creating characters and plots in her imagination. She also continued to read and educate herself, as one of her notebooks from her early adulthood indicates. Labeled “Hattie M. Stone, New Haven, Wednesday, March 15th ’64,” the notebook contains quotes attributed to Mendelssohn, Bishop Fuller, Tennyson, Allan Cunningham, Goethe, and other authors (Letters). In later letters, Lothrop also mentioned her admiration for the writings of Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Louisa May Alcott, William Thackeray, and John Greenleaf Whittier. As an adult, she

wrote articles and gave speeches about a wide variety of authors, including Henry Longfellow, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Emily Bronte, and Sir Walter Scott.

At age 30, Harriett Stone published her first short story, “Polly Pepper’s Chicken Pie,” in *Wide Awake* magazine (Carson 408). The main character, Polly Pepper, was part of a fictional family of Peppers who inhabited a “little Brown House” in a New England country village. Years earlier Stone had created the Pepper family as a reaction to her childish desire to live in romantic poverty in the country. In a manuscript of an article explaining the origin of the “Five Little Peppers,” Lothrop tells that when she was six years old:

It was a great calamity to me that my father was a successful architect and not a poor man living in the country. I always stipulated while settling things in my own mind that we should live in a little brown house, quite old and run-down, while we, the family, had to scratch for a living . . . My soul longed for the companionship of chickens and pigs . . . (Letters, undated)

The young Harriett decided to create her own “little brown house” and “people” it with a family of three boys and two girls. As Stone grew older, she reports that she continued to imagine stories about her family, fleshing out the details of their situation: “As the children would have to work harder to ‘help Mother’ . . . I felt it was necessary to dispurse with the father . . .” She named them Pepper, being “morally certain that no other household could possibly claim it” (Letters, undated). Ironically, after the first Pepper book was published, Lothrop received letters from real families with the last name

of Pepper, and she even became the close friend of a Mrs. Pepper during her time in Concord (“Margaret Sidney” 1762). After naming her imaginary family, Stone claims:

I lived with my little brown house family day in and day out. No matter what the demands of my actual life were, there were “the Peppers” to have fun with! I never tried to make them say or do anything in particular . . . I was only the scribe to put down exactly what they told me . . . As for writing for people to *read*,--much less to *buy*, it never occurred to me, for years and years—until the public claimed the Peppers! (Letters, undated)

But it did eventually occur to Harriett Stone to publish her work, and she chose *Wide Awake*, a moral magazine for children published by D. Lothrop & Company, as the destination of her story about Polly Pepper.

Harriett Stone’s choice of *Wide Awake* magazine reflects moral and religious values that are evident throughout her fiction, non-fiction, speeches, and letters. In a letter to Mrs. G. R. Alden, dated August 3, 1892, Lothrop articulates her religious beliefs: “this bringing Jesus into close, practiced, every day touch with humanity, is just what we want, to stop these dreadful socialistic and other evils” (Letters). In another letter, Lothrop asks a friend for advice about a recent job offer she has received from the American Monthly Magazine. Before accepting the position, Lothrop desires to know of “any reason in the present or past conditions of the Magazine why it would be unpleasant for me to have my name associated with it” (Letters 6/26/1894). Her ethical considerations clearly played an important role in her career decisions, whether she was considering a job offer or attempting to influence her audience. In the manuscript of a series of lectures Lothrop wrote titled “Talks to my Girls,” she dispenses chatty advice to

her teenage listeners, admonishing them to treat their teacher well; be charming, helpful, and pleasant at home; become acquainted with their pastor and his family; and above all consider the question, “do you love the Lord Jesus?” (Letters 1891). Near the end of her life, Lothrop’s letters continue to reveal her values, as she took the time to write a lengthy letter to her pastor from Old South Church in Boston. Addressed to “Dr. Gordon Pastor and Friend,” the letter relates Lothrop’s memories of his arrival at the church and expresses her appreciation for his work over the years (Letters 4/19/1924). These and numerous other examples from Lothrop’s life and writings reveal her high moral standards and the importance she placed on Christian-based moral activism. As admirer Jean Keller Anderson enthused, Harriett Lothrop was “a woman of brilliant mind; influence, force of character; high ideals and successful attainment. Yet, withal, a gentle, lovable, well-bred, beautiful womanly woman.”

Lothrop’s standards are, therefore, evident in her choice of publishers. In her autobiographical sketch, Lothrop states that she published her short stories and poems in magazines which were “the highest class of the religious press of America,” the chief of these publications being *Wide Awake*. Its publisher, Daniel Lothrop, had developed two “guiding principles” for his work: “1. Never to publish a book purely sensational, no matter what the chances of money it has in it. 2. To publish books which will make for true and steadfast growth in right living” (Chlebek 455). These principles mirrored Harriett Stone’s, and she not only continued to publish stories in *Wide Awake*, but she published her books as well through D. Lothrop & Company.

Stone published her first story under her initials, H. M. S., but she decided to come up with a pseudonym with which to sign the other Pepper stories and all subsequent

publications (Johnson 139). Lothrop relates, “I chose to write under a penname just as thousands of others do I suppose. I was not going to be good game for derision if I failed” (Memo). She adds that she did not want to draw attention to herself or her family. Harriett Stone decided on the pseudonym “Margaret Sidney,” explaining: “I chose the penname ‘Sidney’ because it was my father’s first name. He was a splendid man, strong and true . . . ‘Margaret’ was my favorite name for a girl *not* because it means ‘Pearl’ and ‘Daisy’ but because it means *truth*” (Memo).

“Margaret Sidney” soon became a prolific writer. The publication of “Polly Pepper’s Chicken Pie” led to a request from *Wide Awake* for more stories from Harriett Stone. She wrote 12 stories about the Peppers which were published serially in 1880, then collected in her first book, *The Five Little Peppers and How They Grew*, published in 1881 (Carson 408). The Pepper series eventually grew to total twelve books, consisting of four chronological books about the family, as well as eight volumes “of individual side lights on their life and doings” (Memo). While Lothrop sometimes wondered if she could continue to produce fresh stories about the Peppers, she continued the series largely to satisfy the questions of her audience (“Margaret Sidney” 1762).

A short, anonymous biography of Harriett Lothrop describes a significant event that occurred in her life about the same time as the publication of her first book:

The Peppers endeared their author not only to countless children, but to Daniel Lothrop . . . Curious to see what she was really like, he stopped off in New Haven on his way to New York in order to meet her. “Margaret Sidney,” warm-hearted and lively, small and trim, with brown hair and twinkling brown eyes, fulfilled his expectations. (Biography)

Daniel Lothrop and Harriett Mulford Stone were married on October 4, 1881, when Harriett was 37 years old and Daniel, a widower, was 50. In her autobiographical sketch, Lothrop proudly explains that Daniel was a direct descendent of John and Priscilla Alden of the *Mayflower*. She also provides an idyllic description of their marriage:

It is one of those rare instances of perfect companionship, possible only where Love reigns, and sympathy of tastes and pursuits is complete. In such an intellectual atmosphere home life is kept sweet and fresh, a blessing to all who come within its influence; an ideal picture to those who look upon it from afar. And here, in the glory of her life, [Harriett] works and sings. (Autobiographical sketch)

The couple lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, for about one and a half years after their wedding, since Mr. Lothrop's company was located in Boston.

In 1883 the Lothrop's moved to Concord, Massachusetts. For \$5000, they purchased the Wayside, a house which had previously been occupied first by Bronson Alcott and his family, then by Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne (Derry 1). Mr. and Mrs. Lothrop were both interested in the preservation of history, so they treasured their home and relished life in a well-known literary and historical community (Levin 165).

A daughter, Margaret Mulford Lothrop, was born on July 27, 1884. She was the Lothrop's only child and was believed to have been the first baby born at the Wayside in over a century (Bartlett 99). Although the family papers contain little information about Margaret's childhood, letters written from Harriett to Margaret in 1898 hint at the mother/daughter relationship during Margaret's teen years. Harriett was traveling to Washington, D. C., when she wrote the letters, which detail her activities and include

marginal comments such as “Stand up *straight!*” and “Have a good time at your Dance. Make others happy. They can’t be when you are dull” (Letters, 10/1898).

Harriett Lothrop maintained an active social life during her years of married life at the Wayside. Local newspapers mention her membership in the Beneficent Society, Monday Afternoon Musical Club, and the Women’s Board of Missions (Carroll). Her obituary in the Boston *Evening Globe* also names her as a member of the Atlantic Union of London, the National Peace Association, the National Geographic Society, the Society of the Descendants of the Mayflower, the Lyceum Club of London, the Twentieth Century Club, the Boston Authors’ Club, the Wednesday Morning Club, and the New England Women’s Club (membership dates are unspecified) (“Author” 2). Lothrop also continued to write after her marriage, producing moral novels and stories for children at the rate of about two books per year. While she did not publish the second “Pepper” book until 1890, she wrote other children’s books such as *How They Went to Europe*, *A New Departure for Girls*, *On Easter Day*, and *Old Concord: Her Highways and Byways*. During these prolific years, Lothrop predicted of herself:

There is a great future before this writer if the promise of these first books is fulfilled. She holds within her strong grasp great capacity for work, and the power of steady perseverance under discouragement. Moreover she possesses a deep Christian principle that tempers her buoyant enthusiasm and protects her from the danger of “Moods,” that bane to many writers.

Success most certainly awaits her. (Autobiographical sketch)

Despite the sorrow that would soon enter her life, Lothrop strove to fulfill this prophecy.

An 1892 letter from Harriett Lothrop written from St. Augustine, Florida, refers vaguely to health troubles her husband had been experiencing. At the time of writing, however, she reports, “now I have to say that all things are looking up, Mr. Lothrop is really gaining finely” (Letters 2/17/1892). Unfortunately, on March 18, 1892, Daniel Lothrop died after a short illness, leaving a widow and young daughter.

In her letters, Lothrop did not attempt to disguise her grief after the death of her husband. On July 24, 1892, she wrote to Doctor Clark, expressing her wish to commemorate her husband’s life as a Christian servant. Because Daniel’s “purpose in publishing” had been “to look out for the children and young people,” Harriett wishes to use the financial contributions of children to commission a bust of Mr. Lothrop (Letters). In an incomplete letter addressed simply “Dear friend,” Harriett mentions the memorial bust of Daniel which has apparently been finished by that time. She also states that she has set aside a room at the Wayside as a memorial to her husband and his life work (Letters 12/16/1894). A more personal expression of her grief occurs in a letter to “Pansy” Alden. Lothrop states that when her grief “all presses upon me and I am spent with suffering, I just spring forward to more of his work, and God has given me so much I can do” (Letters 3/3/1893).

Harriett Lothrop did not allow her grief to overwhelm her other activities; she did indeed “spring forward” to do her work. Her letters and other family records show that she kept busy after Daniel’s death, initially through running his publishing company. Lothrop ran the company for two years after her husband’s death (Levin 167), and many of her letters during that period were written on D. Lothrop & Co. letterhead. In one such letter written to Mrs. Alden, Lothrop states that she is writing in her office about a

temperance campaign that her husband had been involved with; in that situation she has decided to “follow his plan as I do in all things” (Letters 8/3/1892). On January 22, 1894, Lothrop wrote a letter to Mr. H. Butterworth that expresses her desire for the corporation to be debt-free when she sells it, after which she will support herself and her daughter through her writing (Letters). In 1894 Lothrop sold the publishing company, and it became the Lothrop, Lee, and Shepard Company (Carson 410). Throughout her lifetime, Lothrop continued to publish all of her books through this company.

After being relieved of her publishing duties, Lothrop devoted her time to other activities, primarily to the founding of historical societies. Lothrop had always been interested in history and proud of her colonial heritage, and in 1894 she organized the Old Concord Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (Derry 2). Then in 1895 Lothrop founded the National Society, Children of the American Revolution and became its first president (Derry 2). Lothrop explains that she founded the Children of the American Revolution “principally because my husband had so often spoken of the necessity for a patriotic society for young people to be started in every city in the United States” (Memo). C. A. R. records indicate that Lothrop wrote the constitution and by-laws for the organization, developed the requirements and procedures for membership and for chartering local societies, and organized the first local society of the C. A. R., with her daughter Margaret as member #1 on its national membership role (Salisbury 5). Much of her extant correspondence over the next decade involves her D. A. R. and C. A. R. duties. In one such letter to a C. A. R. society, Lothrop sums up the organization’s philosophy: “I beg of you my dear young friends, to remember that it is *in service*, that we best express our devotion to our country” (Letter 11/16/1896).

Lothrop's historical interests were also reflected in her dedication to the preservation of Concord's important houses. In 1894 she purchased Grapevine Cottage, the former home of Ephraim Wales Bull, who developed the Concord variety of grapes (Derry 2). She restored the house and placed a commemorative tablet at the site of the original Concord grapevine (Swayne 165, 307).

Lothrop became involved in preserving the memory of Louisa May Alcott through the preservation of her own home, the Wayside, as well as Orchard House, the Concord house where the Alcotts were living when Louisa wrote *Little Women* and her other books. When Orchard House was scheduled to be torn down in 1900, Lothrop bought it to prevent such a tragedy (Biography). Then in 1911, she sold Orchard House to the Louisa May Alcott Memorial Association for \$1.00 (Derry 4).

Lothrop's most enthusiastic involvement with historic homes was through her own home, the Wayside. After her husband's death she continued to live in Concord for many years, first wintering in Boston and summering in Concord, then living at the Wayside year-round with Margaret, then dividing her time between Concord and California after Margaret moved to California as an adult. Lothrop's letters to Margaret indicate her love for her home. In a letter to Margaret written on August 15, 1916, Lothrop states that summer at the Wayside is "perfectly beautiful," and "the days are full of sweet opportunities to write" (Letters). Lothrop also offered her home as the site of the Hawthorne Centenary celebration which took place on the 100th anniversary of Nathaniel Hawthorne's birthday, July 4, 1904 (Swayne 150). Much of her correspondence from that year refers to her efforts in planning the Centenary. Lothrop explains to Mrs. Howe, "When I planned the Centenary (I must now confess) it was with

great trepidation. I was solely responsible for it financially and every other way” (Letters 9/25/1904). According to the information contained in her letters, Lothrop invited the speakers, arranged for a commemorative tablet, and published a post-Centenary pamphlet. Norma Bright Carson describes this pamphlet as a “book that contains a full account of the proceedings of the centenary celebration, with the addresses then made given in full, and many letters that were received from eminent persons who could not, for one reason or another, come to Concord for the exercises” (412). Lothrop would be gratified to know that her daughter Margaret inherited her love of history, for she continued to preserve the Wayside after her parents’ death. She recognized the important literary contributions not only of Alcott and Hawthorne, but of her own mother, so she devoted much of her time to the preservation of the Wayside and the collecting of papers and artifacts related to her well-known parents. Due to Margaret Lothrop’s diligence the Minute Man National Historical Park has a wealth of information about the Alcotts, the Hawthornes, and the Lothrop, as well as over 100 boxes of the Lothrop family papers.

Lothrop was almost always involved with a project, so she moved from founding the C. A. R. to planning the Hawthorne Centenary, then branched out into numerous activities in the early 1900’s. In addition to traveling extensively around the United States throughout her life, she made six trips to Europe between 1900 and 1910 (Biography; Carson 410). Johnson mentions Lothrop’s interest in various social causes, such as the campaign to make the corn plant the national flower of the United States, and the plight of the Native Americans (144-45). She attended the inauguration of President McKinley in 1901 (Carroll) and entertained Mrs. Calvin Coolidge at her home in April 1921 (Derry 5). Lothrop was also involved in the war efforts during the Spanish

American War and World War I. As secretary of a committee of the Massachusetts Volunteer Aid Association, she wrote a letter in 1898 requesting money and supplies from the people of Massachusetts to help with the war effort (Letters 1898). In 1916, a letter written to Margaret mentions a local Red Cross effort she is participating in during the war (Letters 7/18/1916). Lothrop raised her daughter to be socially active as well. During World War I, Margaret took a leave of absence from her position as an instructor of economics and social service at Stanford University so that she could go to Europe to help with the Red Cross war relief efforts (Carroll). Letters from Lothrop to her daughter during 1918 were sent to her overseas.

Lothrop continued her literary efforts throughout her years as a widow, mentioning repeatedly that she wrote in order to support herself and her daughter. An incomplete draft of a letter found among her family papers indicates one such effort to look for work in 1894, the year that she sold her husband's publishing company. Lothrop informs the (unnamed) addressee that she must now write to earn a living and requests:

May I trouble you for any suggestion as to literary work I might do, or places where I might offer it. My plan has been to generally wait until requested to write. I have put aside all these lately because I have been so busy here. Now of course I have much time unoccupied. (Letters, undated)

Lothrop seems to have found plenty of "literary work" to keep her busy, since during her widowhood she wrote ten more books about the Pepper family as well as at least eight other children's books, publishing a total of nearly 40 books in her lifetime.

In addition to her novels, short stories, and occasional poems, Lothrop also authored numerous speeches and non-fiction articles on topics ranging from Concord authors to the prophet Daniel, from patriotism to prison reform. Manuscripts of over 40 of these articles and speeches can be found among her family papers. Also among her papers are hundreds of letters, including many from magazines, publishers, and newspapers, as well as from individuals such as Oliver W. Holmes, Sarah O. Jewett, John Greenleaf Whittier, Julia W. Howe, and relatives of the Emerson and Hawthorne families (Letters). Lothrop continued to write into her 80th year; in a short letter written several months before her death she mentions, "I have been busy a *little* every day on my literary work" (Letters 4/26/1924).

In her letters, Lothrop occasionally referred to her family finances, indicating that her attempt to earn a living through writing was successful. An emotional letter to a family member eloquently explains that she has put Margaret through Smith College and sacrificed in order to take her abroad several times (Letters, undated). In a 1916 letter to Margaret, Lothrop writes, "the monthly royalties for three months have exceeded last year at same time, and this July it is about \$200 in excess of last July" (Letters 7/18/1916). About a year later, another letter to Margaret mentions the enclosure of a check for \$200 to cover her March and April allowance; Lothrop assures her 33-year-old daughter, "I have plenty of money, more comfortably fixed than used to be my position" (Letters 3/17/1917). The most humorous example of Lothrop's financial awareness and honesty occurs in a letter to Mr. Richard Wood. Lothrop states that she will buy his horse "Teddy," giving a knowledgeable description of his monetary value, which she places at \$100. She goes on to admit that she had previously agreed to pay \$125,

however, so she is willing to keep her word or, preferably, split the difference and pay \$113 or \$115. She also remembers to ask for his “certificate as to age, pedigree, etc.” (Letters 4/6/1897). Lothrop’s independence and financial savvy seem unusual in a woman of her time. Her morals and writing style may seem old-fashioned to modern readers, but clearly Lothrop was ahead of her time in both the business and financial realms.

Lothrop’s letters from the 1920’s were usually written from California hotels, and they frequently mentioned her health. Twice she sent photographs to friends so they could see how healthy she looked. In March 1924, Lothrop informs her Cousin Mabel that “I feel much better than I have for many years.” She has been riding the trolley around San Francisco and having a “splendid time” enjoying the “glorious view” (Letters 3/10/1924). In a letter written to her cousins in April 1924, Lothrop encloses snapshots of herself “in order that you may see how much stronger I am getting” (Letters 4/26/1924). Several months later, however, Harriett Mulford Lothrop died in San Francisco on August 2, 1924. Memorial services were held for the well-loved woman at Old South Church in Boston (“Author” 2). Her ashes were interred in the family lot in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, Concord (Biography).

Harriett Lothrop is probably best known as Margaret Sidney, author of the *Five Little Peppers* series. One wonders how this woman managed to write 40 popular books in addition to her many other activities. Lothrop herself provided a wealth of information about this question. In her brief autobiographical sketch she describes her writing method: “Writing with a rapidity that is something marvellous, everything from her prolific imagination undergoes the strictest revision, sometimes lying by quietly for

months that it may receive this conscientious care.” An example of “the strictest revision” can be found with her story “Letty: A Story of ‘Sconset.” The story is accompanied by a letter addressed to Mr. Sanborn (presumably an editor) dated June 15, 1892. In the letter Lothrop explains that she had originally written the story “as it insisted on being written in my mind, intending it for some periodical or magazine that usually publishes artistic fiction, and where people’s religious instincts are not shocked.” Apparently Mr. Sanborn had been critical of the story’s ending because Letty had drowned. Lothrop cheerfully acquiesces to his criticism and explains in the letter that the revised story gives “little Letty another chance at life” (Letter to Mr. Sanborn).

Lothrop kept newspaper clippings labeled “ideas for stories,” a method that provides additional information on how she wrote. One such folder of clippings contains accounts of portable schoolhouses, the life of city scavengers, a child blown from a train, an accidental execution, and heroism in the war with Spain (Letters, undated).

Lothrop’s manuscripts not only suggest her methods of writing and revising, but also information about her writing style and values. The manuscript of an undated, twelve page article by Lothrop titled “Writing for Publication” is included among her family papers. The article’s stated purpose was to expose fallacies about fiction writing and to give warning and encouragement to potential writers. Lothrop warns young writers against believing that “fortunes are made by the pen,” that successful authors had an easy path to success, that writers should use dialect and focus on “out-of-the-way elements,” and that a young writer should receive the same attention as an experienced one (Letters, undated). She assures writers that hard, conscientious work will result in good writing and ideas, warns them not to “follow any style” (i.e. imitate), and suggests

that they use “clear, correct English” and “let foreign languages alone” (Letters, undated). Presumably the path that Harriett Lothrop followed to success is outlined among the warnings and advice.

How well did Lothrop succeed at following her own advice? She was certainly a popular success. Elizabeth Johnson informs us that *The Five Little Peppers and How They Grew* made an early best seller list (313). A 1937 issue of *The Publishers' Weekly* reports that sales of that title “are believed to exceed a million and a quarter copies” (“Margaret Sidney” 1762), while combined sales of the Pepper books total over two million. Lothrop’s obituary in the *Evening Globe* confirms the figure of two million, a phenomenal figure for a turn of the century children’s writer (“Author” 2).

Various critics have attempted to explain the popularity of these moral books for children, giving Lothrop mixed critical reviews. Lothrop herself assures us that *The Five Little Peppers and How They Grew* has become a classic of child-life (Autobiographical sketch). An early critic describes the Pepper children as:

. . . typical of the brightness, the vivacity, the wholesomeness, the resourcefulness, of the average American boy and girl . . . They are just the unspoiled, unspotted children that belong to a world in which the imagination must supply what fortune withholds, and in which honest aspiration uplifts in the midst of the ordinary course of good and ill.

(Carson 414)

Ten years later, Jean Keller Anderson gave a talk entitled “Memories of Childhood Days; Five Little Peppers and Their Author” to a Memphis, Tennessee chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Anderson compares the Pepper books to the books of

Frances Hodgson Burnett and Louisa May Alcott, explaining, "they deal with a lovable family of boys and girls, depicting in a most delightful way their simple home life." She praises Margaret Sidney because "her stories are written in a bright, breezy style, wholesome in tone, and so true to life . . ." Several later critics treated the Pepper books more harshly. In her 1971 article, Johnson states bluntly, "She did not write great literature, but she did write a lot!"(313). Betty Levin, writing in 1981, provides a more balanced treatment of Sidney's books: "That her Pepper books contained predictable plots, unbelievable coincidences, and indigestible sweetness cannot alter the fact that they were a joy to masses of children growing up at the turn of the century and after" (168). The books were appealing as "a dream spun from fancy, nostalgia for a life never lived, and belief in the goodness and strength of children" (173). Levin also provides a critical analysis of the Pepper books in the context of other children's books, a method to be continued in 1987 by Kornfield and Jackson. They interpret Lothrop's novels, together with the novels of Louisa May Alcott, Lucy Maud Montgomery, and Kate Douglas Wiggin, as part of the genre of female bildungsroman. This genre synthesizes the coming-of-age story and domestic fiction in order to illuminate "the social expectations of female life as well as the secret hopes and dreams which might not be revealed in another format" (69). Kornfield and Jackson use examples from the Pepper books to illustrate the conventions of the female bildungsroman, such as the positive portrayal of a matriarchal society, the heroine's wish to be a boy, the important role played by spinsters, and a grim picture of married life (70-73). These elements are "subversive to the nineteenth century cult of domesticity," a goal which Lothrop and the other writers mentioned must have been trying to achieve through their writing (74). While Lothrop

does seem to have succumbed to domesticity in some areas of her life, she was an unusual woman who married late, continued to write for a living after her marriage, and took a high-profile role in her community.

Anderson's speech provides high praise of Harriett Lothrop: "Her quiet dignity and refined charm of manner endears her to all with whom she comes in contact." Over 100 years have passed since Lothrop published her first Pepper book, and the name "Margaret Sidney" has long ago faded from popularity. As children's bestsellers have entered the era of R. L. Stine, Sweet Valley High, and the Babysitter's Club, however, one may look back on Lothrop's works with nostalgia for their simplicity and moral uprightness, finding them as endearing as their author.

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Biography of Harriett Mulford Lothrop. ts. Harriett M. Lothrop Family Papers. Minute Man National Historical Park, Concord, Massachusetts.

[This undated, four page biography was written after Lothrop's death. In the collection of Lothrop family papers, it is located near a one page biographical sketch written by Margaret Lothrop, who may have authored this anonymous typescript as well.]

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[The letter, dated December 28 (year unspecified), states that Lothrop has written the sketch, at Bolton's request, for inclusion in a reference book that Miss Frances

Hayes was planning to write entitled *Women of the [illegible] Time*. Hayes had apparently requested, through Bolton, “a page or two about the life and work of ‘Margaret Sidney.’” All quotes are taken from the most legible, and apparently most final, draft of the sketch, which is about three pages long in Lothrop’s handwriting.]

Lothrop, Harriett Mulford. Letters, mss, notebooks. 1864 to 1924. Harriett M. Lothrop Family Papers. Minute Man National Historical Park, Concord, Massachusetts.

Lothrop, Harriett Mulford. Letter to Mr. Sanborn, 15 June 1892, and “Letty: A Story of ‘Sconset” ms. Ms Am (159). Boston Public Library Archives.

Lothrop, Harriett Mulford. Memo. Undated. Harriett M. Lothrop Family Papers.

Minute Man National Historical Park, Concord, Massachusetts.

[This memo, written by Lothrop, appears to have been written for publication but is undated and unaccompanied by any explanation. It contains a version of the origin of the “Five Little Peppers,” the explanation behind Lothrop’s penname, and an anonymous poem called “Promise Yourself.”]

Part II: Secondary Sources

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