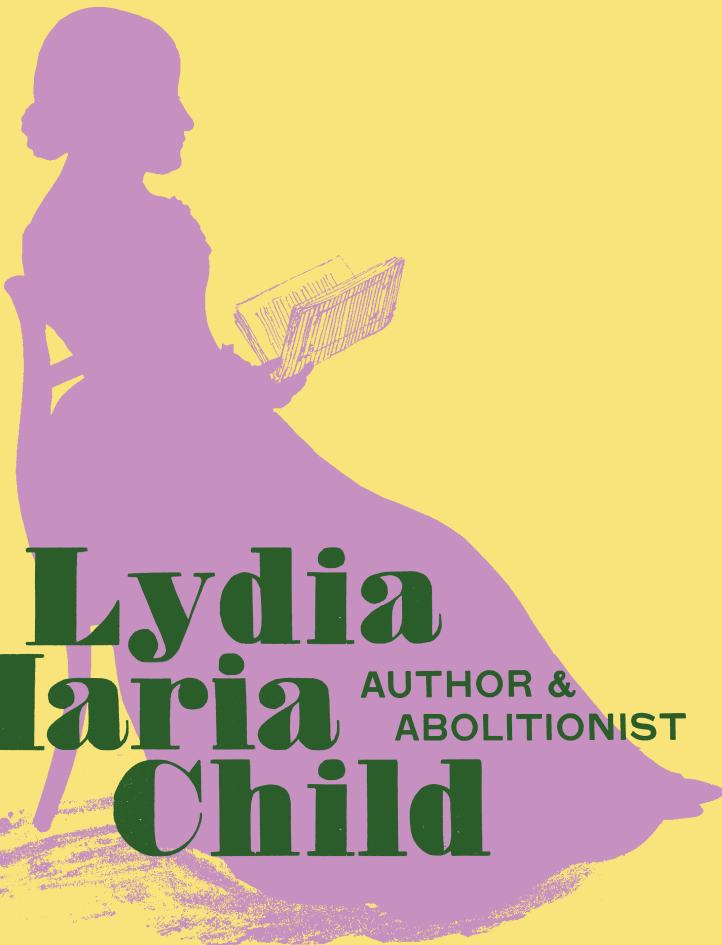




Lydia Maria Child

AUTHOR &
ABOLITIONIST

GATHERING UP THE FRAGMENTS

JUNE 21, 2018 — MARCH 31, 2019

MEDFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM



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EXHIBITION CURATED BY

KYNA HAMILL AND BETH HAYES

CATALOG TEXT BY

KYNA HAMILL, BOSTON UNIVERSITY



GATHERING UP THE FRAGMENTS

In the first lines of *The Frugal Housewife*, published in 1829, Mrs. Lydia Maria Child wrote: “The true economy of housekeeping is simply the art of gathering up all the fragments, so that nothing be lost. I mean fragments of *time* as well as *materials*.” This exhibit celebrates the time and materials connected to Lydia Maria Francis Child in Medford, her early work as an abolitionist, and the scope of her work as an author. You will find a patchwork of personal items, portraits, writings, and reforms that demonstrate her family’s long ties to the town and her truly original contributions to nineteenth-century American history.

Medford’s love of Lydia Maria Child (1802–1880) usually underscores her children’s poem, “The New-England Boy’s Song About Thanksgiving Day,” with its famous line “Over the river and through the wood.” First published in her edited volume *Flowers for Children* in 1844, the poem offers a sentimental narrative of the holidays in New England. However, by the time the poem was published, Child had already written or edited over 28 books, including biographies, literary novels, edited collections of letters, moral lessons for children, home economics, poetry, and appeals for the anti-slavery cause. There is so much more to learn about Lydia Maria Francis Child from her extraordinary output of writing. Throughout her life, she authored or edited over 50 books and pamphlets and left behind hundreds of letters that would later be edited into collections. She was singularly productive in the number of subjects that interested her, and no American author since has matched her variety of interests. We hope this exhibit will tell much more of her story both in Medford and throughout her remarkable life.

When the Medford Historical Society first opened in 1896, it was housed in Child’s birthplace at the corner of Ashland and Salem Streets in Medford. Because of her Medford roots, donations of her personal items were gifted to the society in the early years of its founding. Many objects came to us through Child’s nieces: Sarah (Preston) Parsons and Mary Elizabeth (Preston) Stearns, the wife of Abolitionist George Luther Stearns. Some of these items have never been seen publicly, and we are pleased to be able to show them for the first time.

* * *

A WORD MUST BE SAID about the difficulty of naming “Mrs. Child.” Born on February 11, 1802 in Medford, Lydia Francis’s namesake comes from a long line of Lydias including her great-great grandmother Lydia (Cooper) Francis (1661–1725), her grandmother Lydia Francis (1737–1768), and her aunt, Lydia Convers (Francis) Wyeth (1778–1850). For some reason, she found the name Lydia “unpleasant” and added the



30

middle name “Maria” in 1821 when she was baptized in the First Unitarian Church in Watertown, ministered by her brother. In a letter to Theodor Tilton, one of her editors, she wrote, “I added the name of Maria when I was twenty years of age. I was then ‘in search of religion’ ... I believe the name Maria was all the benefit I derived from baptism.”¹ From that moment, she preferred Maria (pronounced Mariah) and would sign her name in personal letters as “Maria,” or “L. Maria Francis.” When she married David Lee Child in 1828, she became Mrs. Lydia Maria Child. Publically, as an author, she used the name “Mrs. Child,” “L. Maria Child,” “Mrs. L. Maria Child,” or “LMC.” For purposes of consistency and respect, we will refer to her as L. M. Child throughout this exhibit unless we refer to the period before she was married.

—Kyna Hamill and Beth Hayes
June 2018

¹ *Lydia Maria Child: Selected Letters, 1817–1880*. Edited by Milton Melzter et al. University of Massachusetts Press, (1992), 460.

PORTRAITS

IN 1826, LYDIA MARIA FRANCIS sat for an oil portrait in Francis Alexander's studio in Boston [1]. She sent it to her sister Mary Preston in Maine and wrote "He wanted to make a Sappho out of me, and to pour over my very ugly face the full tide of inspiration."² Contemporary observations of the painting can be found in a letter by Mary Peabody (sister of Sophia Peabody Hawthorne, a painter herself and wife to Nathaniel).³ She wrote to her friend, Miss Rawlins Pickman: "I saw ... at Alexander's room a portrait of Miss Francis—I can compare the expression on her face to nothing but a tiger—(you perceive the effects of bad example) I think she must have 'called up a look' that minute, for I never heard that she looked fierce."⁴ The painting has been in our collection since 1899, although in the midcentury, an amateur "conservator" ruined the portrait in an attempt to fix it. Parts of the painting have been scraped off and repainted with caked on layers of badly smeared paint. Fortunately, a pre-restoration photograph exists [2] to show us her "tiger-like" expression. This is the first portrait we know of that was made of her likeness.

In 1841, L. M. Child moved to New York to become the editor of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, the weekly newspaper of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Her husband, David Lee Child, served as assistant editor, but stayed behind in Northampton to nurture his beet sugar project. L. M. Child boarded at the at the home of Isaac T. Hopper, a Quaker who was an active abolitionist. She loved to explore the city, although she found the job "an infernal treadmill." On July 20, 1841, she posed for this silhouette at the studio of Auguste Edouart [3]. By October, she wrote to her close friends Francis and Sarah Shaw to encourage them to have a similar likeness done:

I do want your profile and Sarah's; and I send this by Mons. Edouard, who cuts with remarkable genius. He is a real *artist*. He is to remain in Boston a few weeks. Will you go to his room and have your likenesses taken on the same paper, in some familiar, household attitude?⁵

L. M. Child's tastes leaned toward popular visual forms and her love of art celebrated what could be acquired by all classes. In *Letters from New York* (1843) she wrote:

2 *Selected Letters*, 7.

3 Mary T. Peabody married Horace Mann in 1843. Mary's sister, Sophia Peabody Hawthorne, married Nathaniel Hawthorne in 1842.

4 To Miss Rawlins Pickman on 16 April 1826. (Mass Historical Society, Horace Mann II papers. Op cit. Carolyn L. Karcher, *The First Woman in the Republic*. New York: Duke University Press (1998), 629.

5 *Selected Letters*, 149-150. To Francis Shaw, New York October 12th 1841 [Francis Shaw and Sarah Blake (Sturgis) Shaw were the parents of Robert Gould Shaw].

1



2



1 Lydia Maria Francis, portrait, age 24

Oil painting by Francis Alexander, 1826; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection; gift of Mr. W.H. Parsons in the name of Mrs. Sarah M. (Preston) Parsons, 1899 [over the mantle]

2 Lydia Maria Francis, portrait, age 24

Photomechanical from a portrait by Alexander, n.d.; Massachusetts Historical Society; photo. 81.142 [over the mantle]

3 Lydia Maria Child, portrait, age 39

Silhouette by Auguste Edouart; facsimile of ink, chalk and cut paper on paper, 1841; National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of Robert L. McNeil, Jr. [in lobby]

4 Lydia Maria Child, portrait, age 54

Posed with dress and necklace; daguerreotype, ca. 1856; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection; gift of Mrs. George Luther Stearns, 1899 [in center glass]

5 Lydia Maria Child, portrait, age 54

Posed with shoulders bare; copy of a photograph, 1856; Massachusetts Historical Society; photo. 81.141 [over the mantle]

6 Lydia Maria Child, portrait, age 63

Photograph, John Adams Whipple Studio, 1865; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection; gifted by unknown [case no.2]

Music, like everything else, is now passing from the few to the many. The art of printing has laid before the multitude the written wisdom of the ages, once locked up in the elaborate manuscripts of the cloister. Engravings and daguerreotypes spread the productions of the pencil before the whole people. Music is taught in the common schools, and the cheap accordion brings its delights to the humblest class of citizens.⁶

Mirror-like daguerreotype photography was introduced in 1839 and was the first publicly available photographic process. It was popular for nearly twenty years until other types of photography such as ambrotypes and tintypes became available. By 1855, 400,000 daguerreotypes were made in Massachusetts with many of the studios lined up along Washington Street in Boston. Around 1856, Child agreed to have her first daguerreotype portrait made and commented, “I was 54 years old: and that is quite old *enough* to have one’s likeness taken.” This daguerreotype [4] was gifted to MHS in 1899 by Mary (Preston) Stearns along with a daguerreotype of Child’s brother Rev. Convers Francis (22) and an ambrotype of her father Convers Francis Sr. (24). Child sat for another, more intimate, portrait that day in 1856, although the whereabouts of the original daguerreotype is unknown. In a letter to her friend Anne Whitney in 1878, after David Lee Child passed away, L. M. Child gives the intimate details:

My dear old husband was as lover-like to the last year of his life, as he was during the days of our courtship. He was often saying: ‘I fell in love with your honest shoulders; and I want you to have a photography taken, on purpose for me, with the shoulders uncovered.’ So, at last, I humored the lover-like whim; and having no low dress, I folded a shawl about the bust.”⁷ [5]

In 1865, L. M. Child posed for three more portraits in the studio of John Whipple at 96 Washington Street in Boston—these make up the most familiar images of her reading on a “porch” with a cap on her head [6]. Although it looks posed at her home, this was a standard studio set used for portraits. Note the adjacent *carte de visite* portrait of Rev. Charles Brooks and Mrs. Brooks of Medford taken in 1863 who are posed in the same studio backdrop [19]. Child posed at Whipple’s studio at the request of her friend Harriet Sewall. This one reading was Child’s own personal favorite, as noted in a letter to her friend Lucy Osgood. Child liked that Whipple was able to make her “plain old phiz present such a good appearance to posterity. The one reading is positively handsome &

6 *Letters from New York First Series*. New York: Charles S. Francis and Co., (1843), dated September 8, 1842. 192.

7 *Selected Letters*, 550.

lady-like.”⁸ The front-facing portrait by Whipple was engraved by F.T. Stuart and used as the front image of her posthumous *Letters of Lydia Maria Child* edited by her friend Harriet Sewall in 1882.

CHILDHOOD AND NEIGHBORHOOD

BORN ON February 11, 1802 in Medford, Lydia Francis was likely christened at the First Parish in Medford by Rev. David Osgood (1746-1822), whose house still stands at 141 High Street. Her parents were Convers Francis Sr. (1766-1856) and Susanna (Rand) Francis (1766-1814). We know little about her childhood except that her mother died when Lydia Francis was only 12 years old. Her first letters dating to 1817 tell us that by age 15, she was living in Norridgewock, Maine with her sister Mary (Francis) Preston (1793-1847). Some of these objects such as the hooded cradle [7] and the ladder back chair [8], have old labels with claims that they came from the Francis family, but we do not have accurate enough records to be sure. In the early days of the Medford Historical Society, provenance and historical accuracy were not always important. The cradle and the chair, however, do date to the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century and are representative examples of provincial family objects that would have been passed down.

The Medford Historical Society was incorporated on May 22, 1896. In October of that year, they organized a historic festival and pageant called “On the Banks of the Mystic,” celebrating the town’s founding. With funds raised at this event, the Society was able to rent and furnish the quarters in the childhood home of L. M. Child built in 1800. This house is represented in the frontispiece woodcut for the first issues of the *Medford Historic Register*, published beginning in 1898 [9]. At the end of the first issue, the editors wrote: “The Society would gratefully receive as gifts or loans books or articles of historic interest and value.” It was in this manner that the Society first acquired many of its early historic objects. As early members of the Society, the Stearns and Hallowell families, who were close with L. M. Child, donated many personal objects (which must have been gifted to them), thus documenting their provenance.

By 1909, the Medford Historical Society building was represented in a postcard [10], demonstrating the importance of connecting the site of the headquarters to L. M. Child’s birthplace. Fred Woolley of Medford began to paint watercolors of old buildings in the area such as the Withington Bakery situated to the left of the house [11]. Relics, such as the window knobs [12], became like sacred objects and were removed from the house

8 *Selected Letters*, 453.

CASE NO. 1

7 **Francis Family Hooded Cradle**

"Slept in or used by Francis Family in Medford"; walnut, ca. 1760; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection, donation unknown
[to the left of case]

8 **Child's Ladder Back Chair**

Painted wood with gold trim and woven seat, ca. 1776; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection; donated by Mr. Wade Hervey, 1947
[to left of case]

9 **L. M. Child's childhood home and headquarters of the Medford Historical Society**

Woodcut, *Medford Historical Register*, January 1899; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection

10 **L. M. Child's childhood home**

Original headquarters of the Medford Historical Society founded in 1896; Postcard, 1909; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection

11 **The Old Withington Bakery around 1887, painted by Fred H. Woolley**

Water color, 1915; "Where the McPherson's lived when they came to Medford from Cambridge in 1887." L. M. Child's house was to the right of this; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection; presented by Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. McPherson, n.d.

12 **Window knobs from the shutters of the Lydia Maria Child house**

Porcelain and glass, date unknown; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection; "Given by Mrs. George Blakely, Custodian in 1915-1916, in 1934."

13 **View of the Salem Street Burying Ground, 1862**

Copy of an oil painting by George Loring Brown (1814-1889); on the art market in 2014

14 **Gravestone of Lydia (Cooper) Francis (1661-1725)**

"Here Lyes Buried ye Body of Mrs. Lydia Francis Wife to Mr. John Francis who departed this life August 24, 1725 aged 64 years."; great-great grandmother of L. M. Child; photograph by Patricia Saunders, Salem Street Burying Ground, 2018

15 **Gravestone of John Francis (1650-1723)**

"Here Lyes Buried the body of Mr. John Francis who departed this life January 3 Anno Domino 1728 Aged 78 years."; great-great grandfather of L. M. Child; photograph by Patricia Saunders, Salem Street Burying Ground, 2018

in 1915/16 when the Society moved to its current headquarters here at 10 Governors Avenue.

Just across the street from her childhood home, Lydia Francis would have looked daily at the Salem Street Burying Ground that held the remains of many members of the Francis and Rand families, who had settled in Medford in the early eighteenth century. In this reproduction of a painting by George Loring Brown from 1862 [13] we see how the burial ground might have looked in the middle of the nineteenth century, although the large obelisk at the burial site of Governor John Brooks (1752-1825) in the center would not have been there in 1802. We have been able to identify L. M. Child's great-great grandparents buried in the cemetery, Lydia (Cooper) Francis (1661-1725) [14] and John Francis (1650-1723) [15]. Records at MHSM state that Child's parents are also buried here, but the headstones have been removed or destroyed.

ABOLITIONIST FAIRS

L. M. CHILD BELONGED to the Female Society of Boston, an organization that planned fundraisers for the anti-slavery cause. On December 16, 1834, the society held the first Anti-Slavery Fair in Boston and raised \$300. The fairs became important sources of fundraising and were often held at Christmastime to offer articles that were "well-made, useful, ornamental and suitable for Christmas presents"; imported goods sent for the cause from England were also for sale. L. M. and David Lee Child both contributed items to them; after the third annual fair in December 1836, Child wrote to David's mother of a "crib-quilt" she made that sold for \$5 and "Mrs. Garrison [wife of William Lloyd Garrison] bought one of David's oak hearts."⁹ The quilt and the hearts were also listed as items sold at the fair in Garrison's widely-circulated abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator* on Jan. 2, 1837. This quilt is now housed at Historic New England. The quilts exhibited here are products made for and purchased at anti-slavery fairs, with one attributed to L. M. Child. They show the intricate 8-pointed star patterns with anti-slavery poems quilted into the panels. The pattern, called "North Star" or "Variable Star," reflected the Abolitionist symbolism of the North Star that served as an emblem of hope for enslaved people looking north. The quilt from the Royall House & Slave Quarters [16] is an Abolitionist Signature quilt which was made as a group effort to raise funds. Individual women and men would pay to have their names written on the quilt. Child's two-sided quilt [17] includes excerpts of two poems letter-pressed on cotton. In both quilts

9 *Selected Letters*, 60.

we see the metaphor of patching together selections of anti-slavery poetry and commentary into the competed textile.

*I would not have a slave to till my ground,
To carry me, to fan me while I sleep,
And tremble when I wake, for all the wealth
That sinews bought & sold have ever earn'd*

from William Cowper's "The Task" (1784)

*Oh! Let us weep with those who weep,
Beneath oppression's crushing hand:
And in our thoughts their anguish keep
Who till in tears our guilty land.*

from Elizabeth Margaret Chandler's "To A*****" (1833)

16 **Abolitionist Signature Quilt, 1838/1839**

"To condemn a man to perpetual Slavery is as unjust a sentence as to condemn him to death" —Alice Bartlett; Courtesy of the Royall House & Slave Quarters [case 1]

17 **Crib Quilt, sold at an Abolitionist Fair to raise funds for the movement**

Cotton and Silk, ca. 1837; "Made by Mrs. Lydia Maria child for Mrs. George L. Stearns"; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection; gift of the Hallowell Family, either 1905 or 1938 [bet. cases 1 and 2]

CHILD'S CIRCLE OF ABOLITIONISTS

DAVID LEE CHILD [18] was born in West Boylston on July 8, 1794 in the Jacob Hinds House. In 1817, he graduated from Harvard College and went on to teach at the Boston Latin School until 1822. He was then appointed by President Monroe as a Secretary of the United States Legation at Lisbon, Portugal and returned to the U.S. in 1824. Shortly after his return, he met L. Maria Francis in Watertown and she recorded in her diary on December 2, 1824: "Mr. Child dined with us at Watertown. He possesses the rich fund of an intelligent traveler, without the slightest twinge of a traveller's vanity."¹⁰ They were married at her brother's church in Watertown on Sunday evening, October 19, 1828 at 8 o'clock. Ann Hallowell records a letter from L. M. Child giving details of the wedding: the gown was "India muslin, a good deal trimmed with white satin. Clarissa Bigelow is to be bridesmaid." Gifts included: "A pretty butter knife and cream ladle," "a study lamp," "a jar of pickles," "a keg

¹⁰ *Letters of Lydia Maria Child* (1882), 8.



of tongues,” a pair of plated candlesticks,” “a pair of stellar lamps,” and “polished steel snuffers on a plated tray.”¹¹

David Lee Child was a good match intellectually for L. M. Child, as he was a lawyer in Boston, a member of the legislature, and a writer. After they married, he gave up his law profession to edit the short-lived *Massachusetts Whig Journal*. The couple struggled financially and family members called him “a genius for experiments, without counting the cost.” Much of their income had to come from L. M. Child’s profession as a writer. David Lee Child tried to connect their work in the anti-slavery movement to a scheme to grow sugar beet in order to divert the sugar industry away from using slave labor. For this, they moved out to Northampton in 1838 to begin what would be an ill-fated experiment.

L. M. Child credited William Lloyd Garrison (1805-1879) for inspiring her to join the anti-slavery movement, a cause she championed for the rest of her life. In January 1831, Garrison published the first issue of his newspaper, *The Liberator*, which appealed to the moral conscience of its readers and urged them to demand immediate freeing of the slaves in the Southern states. The paper is credited with starting the abolitionist movement in the North.

Child was an early supporter of the cause and would go on to champion many anti-slavery “heroes” including Garrison, George Thompson, Lucretia Mott, Angela Grimké and George Luther Stearns [20] who was married to her niece, Mary. One of these activists was the controversial abolitionist John Brown (1800-1859) who advocated armed insurrection

¹¹ Anna D. Hallowell, *Medford Historical Register*, 3:3 (July 1900), 100.

CASE NO. 2

18 David Lee Child (1794–1874)

Portrait, colored pencil, n.d., artist unknown; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection; gift of Mr. W.H. Parsons in the name of Mrs. Sarah M. (Preston) Parsons, 1899

19 Mr. and Mrs. Charles Brooks, October 14, 1863

Carte de visite portrait, Whipple Studio, 96 Washington Street, Boston; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection; Charles Brooks Collection

20 Major George L. Stearns (1809–1867)

Signed cabinet card photo, ca. 1854; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection; Gift of Mrs. George Luther Stearns, 1899

21 Mansion House of George L. Stearns, College Avenue, Medford, MA,

Photo, ca. 1870; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection

22 Pike, possibly used at Harper's Ferry, ca. 1857

The label associated with the object reads "Col. Stearns Estate, John Brown's pike."; Medford Historical Society & Museum; provenance unknown. [large case on the west wall of the museum]

23 Lock of John Brown's Hair, 1859

"Hair of John Brown of Ossawatimie, given to me by Mrs. Stearns, 1869 —L. Alexander," "John Brown's hair, cut off of his funeral by his daughter, given by her to Mrs. G.L. Stearns, by Mrs. Stearns to me, L.G.A."; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection; gift of L. Alexander, date unknown

24 John Brown Bust, carved by E. A. Bracket, 1859

Cabinet Card Photo, Litchfield studios, Arlington, MA.; Medford Historical Society & Museum; gift of Mrs. George Luther Stearns, ca. 1860

25 Emancipation Proclamation, 1865

Copy of the lithograph by Max Rosenthal; Printed by L. Franklin Smith, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Library of Congress

26 Elizur Wright Jr. (1804–1885)

Cabinet Card Photo, ca. 1880; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection; gift of the Wright Family, ca. 1930

to gain liberation from slavery. In 1859, he led a raid on Harper's Ferry by arming 21 men (16 white and 5 black: three free blacks, one freed slave, and a fugitive slave) with weapons. Altogether Brown's men killed four people, and wounded nine; ten of Brown's men were killed (including his sons Watson and Oliver). Two years prior to the raid, Brown came to Boston to raise funds for his movement and he was invited to the mansion house of George L. Stearns in Medford [21]. Stearns supported Brown financially for the raid, an act that made him part of the "Secret Six," a group of abolitionists who also included Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Theodore Parker, Samuel Gridley Howe, Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, and Gerrit Smith. After the raid, Brown was captured and sentenced to death and Stearns escaped to Canada for a time. In jail, Brown appealed to L. M. Child directly to help raise funds for his wife, children and the families of the men taken with him. Child told him that "believing in peace principles," she did not sympathize with the "method" he used, but she told him, "Feel no anxiety about your family. They will be abundantly cared for ... I have beside me six letters, from strangers, all desirous to contribute."¹² MHSM owns what is claimed to be one of the 950 pikes purchased by John Brown (with funds provided by the "Secret Six") for the attack at Harper's Ferry [22]. The label reads "Col. Stearns Estate, John Brown's pike." However, our records do not clarify its provenance. After Brown's death, pieces of his hair became reliquaries [23] and Mary (Preston) Stearns memorialized him by commissioning a marble bust of John Brown [24] by the artist Edward Augustus Brackett (1818-1908). She provided the artist \$120 in gold coins to travel to Virginia to sketch Brown's features and take measurements. The marble bust of John Brown was officially unveiled at the "John Brown Party," on the estate of George L. Stearns on January 1, 1863, to celebrate the first day the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect. (The bust, recently re-discovered, is housed at Tufts University.) A lithograph [25] of the proclamation was printed by L. Franklin Smith who personally presented a copy to Abraham Lincoln on March 6, 1865. The proclamation was hand written in the center and surrounded with cameo portraits of the nation's founders along with principle leaders of the anti-slavery movement. L. M. Child can be seen in the top right corner.

There were other citizens in Medford who also worked for the abolitionist cause, including Elizur Wright Jr. [26], for whom Wright's Pond is named. Although he did not yet live in Medford, Wright co-founded the American Anti-Slavery Society in December 1833 and served as the Secretary until 1839. Wright eventually moved to Medford where he championed natural parks and was instrumental in securing

12 *Selected Letters*, 327.

the Massachusetts Forestry Act of 1882 and in founding the Middlesex Fells Reservation. Rev. John Pierpont (1785-1866) was the minister at the Unitarian Church in Medford from 1849 to 1856. An active abolitionist, he gave speeches and wrote poetry for the cause including one entitled “The Fugitive Slave’s Apostrophe to the North Star” in 1839.

FAMILY AND PERSONAL ITEMS

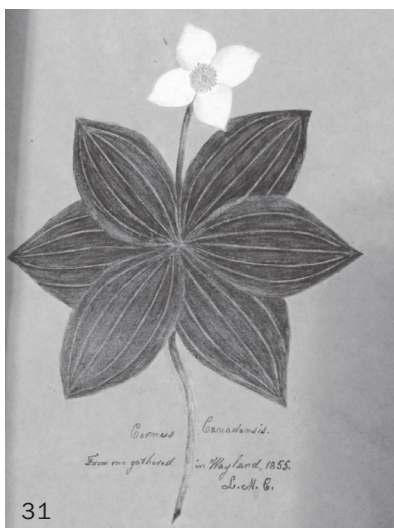
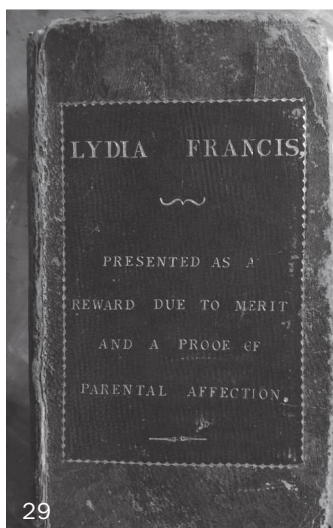
L.M. CHILD’S FATHER, Convers Francis Sr. [27] was the son of Benjamin Francis (1734-1798) and Lydia (Converse) Francis (d. 1768). The Francis family settled in Medford in the beginning of the eighteenth century and some members of the family are buried in Salem Street Burying ground. Convers Francis made his mark by inventing the “Medford Cracker,” and ran a bakery in Medford Square from 1797-1818. In his *History of the Town of Medford* (1855), Rev. Charles Brooks stated that: “Mr. Francis produced a cracker which was considered more tasteful and healthy than any heretofore invented.” All of the crackers were made without the aid of machinery and were “kneaded, rolled, pricked, marked (with “Medford”) and baked by hand.” The term “cracker” comes from the process of the biscuit cracking into two equal parts. Brooks stated that Medford crackers were distributed throughout American and as far as England.

Rev. Convers Francis [28] was the first member of the family to go to college. He graduated from Harvard College in 1815 and went on to study at Harvard Divinity School followed by ministering at the First Unitarian Church of Watertown from 1819 to 1842. He also taught in the Harvard Divinity School in 1842. L. M. Child and her brother were close intellectually and she often seemed frustrated that she could not have attended college herself. In letters to him dating as early as 1817, young Lydia Francis argued about the merits of Samuel Johnson, John Milton and Homer, all books her brother must have given to her to read:

I perceive that I shall never convert you to my opinions concerning Milton’s treatment of our sex. Whether the ideas I have formed of that author be erroneous or not, they are entirely my own.¹³

We may learn a bit more about the intellectual dynamic between L. Maria and Convers from a story entitled “The Brother and Sister” that she included in her collection, *Autumnal Leaves*, published in 1857. In it, siblings John and Esther gain their intellectual curiosity from a maternal grandmother, who was purported throughout the neighborhood to have been an “extraordinary woman.” Esther and John’s own parents are

13 *Letters of Lydia Maria Child*, 1.



described as “healthy sluggish animals” and “dull” so the siblings bought books with money they earned by selling eggs. L. M. Child writes that Esther “was as eager for information, as her more vivacious brother ... and as a woman, her pathway of life was more obstructed.” In 1821, Lydia Francis moved from her sister’s house in Maine to live with her brother in Watertown. Here she met Ralph Waldo Emerson and Theodore Parker and began her career as a writer.

The personal objects in the exhibition also include her childhood bible [29], and a gold pocket watch [30] The gift was organized by George Thompson, a British anti-slavery activist who came to America to give speeches and Maria (Weston) Chapman, the chief assistant to Garrison in the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society and co-editor of *The Liberator*. In a letter to Thompson on Sept. 18, 1835, L. M. Child wrote: “My watch keeps excellent time; but its publicity sometimes embarrasses me a little.”¹⁴

The Floral Souvenir book [31] is one of the historical society’s most prized personal objects. It was given to Mary E. Stearns from “Aunt Maria” in 1855 and would have been part of what was called a “gift book genre”—a kind of scrapbook that offered sentimental literary and artistic contributions as a decorative keepsake. This volume was hand made by Child and includes poetry both original and clipped from other writers, original drawings, sheet music, and embellishments all centered around the theme of flowers. Specimens of pressed flowers from places where she lived are also included. Child includes a hand-written index at the back describing over 200 pages. In *Letters from New York* (1843), L. M. Child

14 *Selected Letters*, 37.

CENTER GLASS CASE

27 Convers Francis Sr. (1766–1856)

Ambrotype, image on glass, ca. 1854, J. Stimpson Studio, Cambridge, MA; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection; gift of Mrs. George Luther Stearns, 1900

28 Rev. Convers Francis (1795–1863)

Daguerreotype, ca. 1860; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection; gift of Mrs. George Luther Stearns, 1900

29 Lydia Francis, Personal Bible

Leather embossed, published in 1812; “Presented as a reward due to merit and a proof of parental affection.”; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection; gift by unknown, probably Mrs. George Luther Stearns

30 Gold Pocket Watch

Presented to Lydia Maria Child, August 8, 1835; “Given from a few of the LADIES of Salem and Lynn, MA to their friend MRS. CHILD, the true, the noble, the irreproachable who made the first APPEAL on behalf of American Slaves, August 8, 1835.”; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection; gift of Mr. W. H. Parsons in the name of Mrs. Sarah M. (Preston) Parsons, 1899

31 Floral Souvenir book by L. Maria Child

Scrapbook with original poems and drawings; “For Mary E. Stearns from Aunt Maria,” 1855; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection; gift of Mrs. George Luther Stearns, n.d.

32 Baby’s Gown

Cotton and lace, 1821–1822; “Wrought by Lydia Maria Francis at the age of nineteen for her niece, Sarah Preston”; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection; gift of Mr. W.H. Parsons in the name of Mrs. Sarah M. (Preston) Parsons, 1899 [standing case beside center glass case]

33 Sarah (Preston) Parsons (1822–1897), age 41

Carte de Visite, 1863, A.M. Burnham Photographer, Bangor, Maine; niece of L. M. Child, sister of Mary E. (Preston) Stearns; Medford Historical Society & Museum Collection; gift of Mrs. George Luther Stearns, 1898-1899 [standing case beside center glass case]

wrote, “From childhood, I have had a most absorbing passion for flowers ... The flowers have spoken to me more than I can tell in written words.”¹⁵

Obviously close with her nieces, for Mary’s sister, Sarah (Preston) Parsons, Lydia Francis made a baby’s gown [32] around 1820/21. Sarah is pictured at age 41 [33]. The dress is hand made from fabric called *Broderie Anglaise* (what we now call eyelet lace) that was manufactured by having holes punched or cut in fabric in a pattern and then overcast or embroidered in the surrounding material—in this case, cotton. The fabric would have been imported from England and she would have carefully cut the dress pieces so they could be sewn together to make the pattern flow correctly. She was an excellent seamstress as the tiny and evenly spaced stitches demonstrate. The dress was probably meant to be “handed down” to successive generations.

BOOKS AND READING: FROM CHILDREN TO FREEDOM

L. M. FRANCIS’S FIRST BOOK was a novel entitled *Hobomok* (1824). Set early America in the 1630s, it tells the story of a colonial white woman who married a Pequod Indian, had his child and suffered the social consequences. Knowing it was a controversial subject, she published the book under the pseudonym, “An American” and as per the practice at that time, she would have paid to print and distribute it at her own expense. It took a year before favorable reviews began to come in and by then she published her second novel, *The Rebels, or Boston before the Revolution* (1825) this time under the name “By the Author of Hobomok.”

In August 1826, when she was 24 years old, L. M. Francis wrote that she was “engaged to edit a book for children, ninety pages once in two months, and all original matter. Two publishers made the request to me, and I refused, but some Boston ladies finally persuaded me into it.”¹⁶ This was the *Juvenile Miscellany* and proved to be one of the best periodicals of its kind with a focus on moral education and amusements for children. The *Juvenile Miscellany* began with a subscription base of eight hundred and fifty, and grew during her eight-year stint as editor. By the summer of 1833, L. M. Child was a sought after author and the *North American Review* called her the foremost woman writer in America. She had already published nine books including: *Hobomok*, *The Rebels*, *The First Settlers of New England* (1828), *The Frugal Housewife* (1829), *The Mother’s Book* (1831), *The Girl’s Own Book* (1831), and *The Ladies’ Family Library* in

15 *Letters from New York, first and second series* (1879) September 1, 1842, 132.

16 Hallowell, 100.

CASE NO. 3

- 34 **Kneeling Slave, Frontispiece for *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of American Called Africans*, 1833**
Published by Allen and Ticknor in Boston; authored by “Mrs. Child”
- 35 **Facsimile of a Broadside / Woodcut of a kneeling slave: “Am I not a man and a brother?”**
John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–1892), 1837; Library of Congress
- 36 **Facsimile of the title page for *Flowers for Children*, 1845**
Authored by L. Maria Child; Library of Congress; “New-England Boy’s Song About Thanksgiving Day”
- 37 **Facsimile of the lines of the poem, page 1 of 3**
Library of Congress

Book titles in this case:

The Girl’s Own Book. Boston: Carter, Hendee and Babcock, 1831

An Appeal in favor of that class of Americans called Africans. New York: John S. Taylor, 1836

Letters from New York First Series. New York: Charles S. Francis and Co., 1843

The Mother’s Book. New York: C. S. Francis & Co., 1844

Letters from New York First Series. New York: Charles S. Francis and Co., 1845

Letters from New York First Series, 3rd edition. New York: Charles S. Francis & Co., 1845

Letters from New York, Second Series. New York: Charles S. Francis and Co., 1845

Views on Slavery, by An American. [L.M.C.] Boston: Wm. H. Rand, 1855

The Progress of Religious Ideas, Through Successive Ages. (Three Volumes). New York: C.S. Francis & Co., 1860

Looking Towards Sunset, Ed. Boston, Ticknor and Fields, 1867
(Courtesy of Ruth Roper)

Letters of L. Maria Child, with a Biographical Introduction by John G. Whittier and Appendix by Wendell Phillips. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1883



*When the storm has passed his soul shall
 When the storm has passed his soul shall
 What else remain for this Christian race?
 Ours more peaceful, more, more, than these
 Dangers!*

Drawn by E. Davis

34

4 volumes (1832). The Boston Athenaeum, a private library, gave her free privileges — a rare honor for a woman.

The year 1833, however, was a turning point for her writing career after L. M. Child began to participate in organizations dedicated to anti-slavery. Prior to this, most of her writing would have been placed in the domestic sphere, emphasizing household advice and the education of children. In 1833, she published her book *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans called Africans* knowing it would be a controversial endeavor. She wrote in the preface, “I am fully aware of the unpopularity of the task I have undertaken, but though I *expect* ridicule and censure, I cannot *fear* them.” The publication came at the beginning of a national movement that would be highly political and contentious and forever changed the focus of her work toward political activism. She was condemned for crossing over from women’s discourse to the male sphere of political discourse and was all but ostracized from the publishing community for a period of time. In his introduction to her *Letters* published in 1882, John Greenleaf Whittier gives us a sense of the impact of this shift in her writing:

It is quite impossible for any one of the present generation to imagine the popular surprise and indignation which this book called forth, or how entirely its author cut herself off from the

favor and sympathy of a large number of those who had delighted to do her honor. Social and literary circles closed their doors to her. The sale of her books, the subscriptions to her magazine fell off to a ruinous extent. Thenceforth her life was a battle, a constant rowing against the stream of popular prejudice and hatred. And through it all she bore herself with patience, fortitude, and unshaken reliance upon the justice and ultimate triumph of the cause she had espoused.¹⁷

The figure in the frontispiece [34] shows an enslaved man kneeling in an appeal for freedom. The image of a supplicant male slave in chains appeared as early as the 1780s in England as the seal of the Society for the Abolition of Slavery. It is an oft-repeated image and can be seen on the 1837 broadside publication of John Greenleaf Whittier's anti-slavery poem, "Our Countrymen in Chains" [35]. Although the northern abolitionists were well-meaning and used the image as an effective means to communicate the ethics, morality and the humanitarian mission of the movement, its legacy is uncomfortable and derogatory in the way it depicted enslaved peoples as begging for their freedom and pleading for the kindness and generosity of others in a humble posture. He is shown as a grateful, respectful African who suffered passively until their cause was taken up others. It is important to remember how such images played a large role in the narrative that abolitionists wanted to communicate and do not represent the enslaved people's side of the story.

Finally, we end with the poem, "New-England Boy's Song About Thanksgiving Day" [36, 37] published in 1844, twelve years after her appeal. It seems odd that L. M. Child would be remembered today only for this poem, which is not representative at all of her career as a writer, activist, friend, wife, aunt and daughter. One of L. M. Child's last books, *Looking Towards Sunset* (1867) was a collection of essays, poems and commentaries on aging. It was dedicated to her dear friends, Miss Lucy Osgood (of Medford) and Miss Henrietta Sargent and includes the following:

When I was myself near the fairy-land of childhood, I used my pen for the pleasure of children; and now that I am travelling down the hill I was then ascending, I would fain give some words of consolation and cheer to my companions on the way.

Lydia Maria Francis Child lived the last decades of her life in Wayland, MA, content and finally financially secure. She died on October 20, 1880 and is buried beside David Lee Child in the North Cemetery.

17 *Letters of Lydia Maria Child*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co. (1882), ix.

MEDFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

10 Governors Avenue, Medford, MA

medfordhistorical.org

ADDITIONAL EVENTS & PROGRAMS

TALK

JUNE 21, 2018 — 7:00 PM

Abolition through Tourism: Lydia Maria Child's Mammoth Cave Letters
by Emma Newcombe, PhD

TALK

JULY 12, 2018 — 7:00 PM

Nothing but a Tiger: The Portraits of Lydia Maria Child
by Kyna Hamill, PhD

WALKING TOURS

SEP. 8, OCT. 6, & NOV. 3, 2018 — 10:00 AM – NOON

Lydia Maria Child's Medford led by Nancy White
(meet at Riverside Ave. Plaza, bet. River St. and City Hall Plaza)

THANKS

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By L. M. C. 1855.