

IV

1835–1844

Early Papers from Cambridge, New York

THESE were simple times on a farm in Cambridge, New York, where they raised Merino sheep. The seven McKie children were growing up, being educated, and beginning to leave the family farm. The records of this period are sparse, but the papers that do exist, give some insight into their lives.

These were busy times for a growing America. A fire destroyed over 500 buildings in New York City in 1835 causing an estimated \$20 million in damages. Arkansas became the twenty-fifth state in 1836 and Michigan the twenty-sixth state in the following year. In 1836 Texas won its independence from Mexico, and in 1840, the sixth census showed that the United States had a population of 17 million of which an estimated 600,000 were immigrants who had come to America since the 1830 census. In 1843, 1,000 pioneering settlers left Independence, Missouri, and began what would become the great westward migration along the Oregon Trail. The institution of slavery was becoming increasingly controversial during these years and northern states passed laws that sought to obstruct the Fugitive Slave Act that required run-away slaves be returned to their owners in the South. At the same time, the “underground railroad” emerged for slaves fleeing from the South to Canada. In 1837 Victoria became Queen of Great Britain and Ireland. News still traveled slowly during these times but that too was beginning to change. Samuel Morse introduced Morse code in 1838 and in 1843 Congress made a grant of \$30,000 to establish a forty-mile telegraph line between Baltimore and Washington. The means of remembering things was about to change with Louis Daguerre’s invention of the daguerreotype process, the first form of photography, in 1839.

Letters, a schoolbook, and essays by:

Catherine McKie

George McKie

Sophia Whiteside McKie

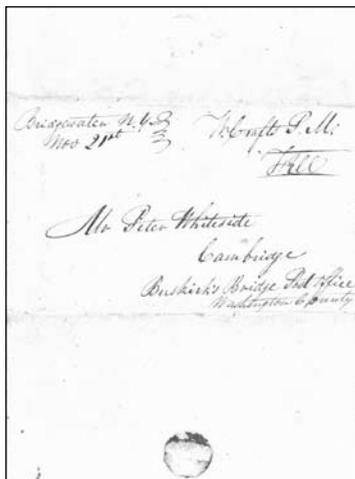
Noah Webster Jun.

Letters written from: Albany and Schaghticoke, New York; Poultney, Vermont; and school essays.



Sophia Whiteside

Born in 1796, Sophia was the second daughter of Peter Whiteside and Ann Robertson Whiteside. The only record of her education, undoubtedly in the one



Undated envelope addressed:
Mr. Peter Whiteside, Cambridge,
Buskirk's Bridge Post Office, Wash-
ington County.

room schoolhouse near the farm in Cambridge, New York, is her schoolbook from 1808 and a comment that she was a student of French which she read daily. Her small schoolbook, inscribed by her and dated "1808" is excerpted below. The original spelling has been retained, including the use of "f" where modern spelling would use an "s."

☞ Sophia's schoolbook:

An AMERICAN SELECTION of *Lefcons in Reading and Speaking*. Calculated to Improve the MINDS and Refine the TASTE of YOUTH and also to Instruct them in the GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY, and POLITICS OF THE UNITED STATES. To Which Are Prefixed, RULES in ELOCUTION and DIRECTIONS for Expressing the Principal Passions of the Mind. Being the THIRD PART of a GRAMMATICAL INSTITUTE of the ENGLISH LANGUAGE, To Which is Added, An APPENDIX, Containing Several New Dialogues. By Noah Webster, Jun. Esquire. (Printed at Boston, 1800.)

PREFACE

The design of this Third Part of the Grammatical Institute of the English Language is to furnish schools with a variety of Exercises for Reading and Speaking... In America, it will be useful to furnish schools with additional essays, containing the history, geography and transactions of the United States. Information on these subjects, is necessary for youth, both in forming their habits and improving their minds. A love of our country and an acquaintance with its true fate, are indispensable: They should be acquired in early life.

RULES for READING and SPEAKING

Rule I. *Let your articulation be clear and distinct.* A good articulation consists in giving every letter and syllable its proper pronunciation of sound.

Rule II. *Observe the Stops, and mark the proper Pauses, but make no pause where the sense requires none.* The characters we use as stops are extremely arbitrary, and do not always mark a suspension of the voice. On the contrary, they are often employed to separate the several members of a period, and show the grammatical construction...

Rule III. *Pay the strictest attention to Accent, Emphasis, and Cadence.* Let the accented syllables be pronounced with a proper stress of voice, the unaccented with little stress of voice, but distinctly...

Rule IV. *Let the sentiments you express be accompanied with proper Tones, Looks and Gestures.* By tones are meant the various modulations of voice by which we naturally express the emotions and passions. By looks we mean the expression of the emotions and passions in the countenance. Gestures are the various motions of the hands or body which correspond to the several sentiments and passions, which the speaker designs to express. All these should be perfectly natural. They should be the same which we use in common conversation. A speaker should endeavor to feel what he speaks; for the perfection of reading and speaking is, to pronounce the words as if the sentiments were our own.....

GENERAL DIRECTIONS for expressing certain Passions or Sentiments.

[From the Art of Speaking]

MIRTH or Laughter opens the mouth, crimps the nose, lessens the aperture of the eyes, and shakes the whole frame.

Perplexity draws down the eyebrows, hangs the head, crafts down the eyes, clofes the eyelids, fhuts the mouth, and pinches the lips; then fuddenly the whole body is agitated, the perfon walks about bufily, ftops abruptly, talks to himfelf, &c.

Vexation adds to the foregoing, complaint, fretting, and lamenting.

Pity draws down the eyebrows, opens the mouth, and draws together the features.

Grief is expreffed by weeping, ftamping with the feet, lifting up the eyes to heaven.

Melancholy is gloomy and motionlefs, the lower jaw falls, the eyes are caft down and half fhut, words few, and interrupted with fighs...

Commanding acquires a peremptory tone of voice, and a fevere look...

Wonder opens the eyes, and makes them appear prominent. The body is fixed in a contracted ftooping pofture, the mouth is open, the hands often raifed. Wonder at firft ftrikes a perfon dumb; then breaks forth into exclamations.

Curiofity opens the eyes and mouth, lengthens the neck, bends the body forward, and fixes it in one pofture, &c.

Anger is expreffed by rapidity, interruption, noife and trepidation, the neck is ftretched out, the head nodding in a threatening manner. The eyes red, ftaring, rolling, fparkling; the eyebrows drawn down over them, the forehead wrinkled, the noftrils ftretched, every vein fwelled, every mufcle ftrained. When anger is violent, the mouth is opened, and drawn towards the ears, fhewing the teeth in a gnafhing pofture, the feet ftamping, the right hand thrown out, threatening with a clenched fift, and the whole frame agitated.

Peevifhnefs is expreffed in nearly the fame manner, but with more moderation; the eyes a-fquint upon the object of difpleafure, the upper lip drawn up difdainfully.....

GEOGRAPHY

Chap. XXIII.

Explanation of the Terms in Geography.

1. The *terraqueous globe* is the world or earth, confifting of land and water
2. About three fifths of the furface of the earth is covered with water.
3. The land is divided into two great continents, the eaftern and weftern.
4. The eaftern continent is divided into Europe, Afia, and Africa and the weftern into North and South America.
5. A Continent is a vaft tract of land, not feparated into parts by feas.
6. An Ifland is a body of land, lefs than a continent, and furrounded with water...

Chap. XXIV.

GEOGRAPHY OF THE UNITED STATES

The United States of America are fifteen; New Hampfhire, Maffachufetts, Rhode Ifland, Connecticut, (which four are ufually called New England) New York, New Jerfey, Pennfyvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Caroline, Georgia, Vermont, Kentucky, and Tenneffee.

The territory granted to thefe States, extends from Canada and the lakes to Florida; and from the Atlantic Ocean, to the river Miffifippi: It is about fourteen hundred miles in length, from northeaft to fouthweft; and from eaft to weft, its breadth, at the northern extremity, is about twelve hundred miles; but at the fouthern, not more than feven hundred.

The northern part of this land upon the fea, is called the *District of Maine*; but it belongs to the State of Maffachufetts...

NEW YORK STATE

Extends from the ocean to Lake Champlain and Canada, and comprehends about twenty miles on the east, and forty on the west of the river Hudson. It has Connecticut, Massachusetts and Vermont on the east, and New Jersey and Pennsylvania on the west.

The city of New York is situated upon a peninsula, or rather upon an island; for the water flows around it, and it is connected to the continent by a small bridge only, called King's Bridge, fifteen miles from the city. The city contains nearly three thousand five hundred houses. It is an excellent situation for trade, having a spacious harbor, which is seldom or never obstructed with ice...

...The college in New York, called Columbia College, is well endowed and furnished with professors; but its students are not numerous.

VIRGINIA

This state is bounded by the Atlantic on the east; by Maryland, Pennsylvania, and the Ohio on the north; by the Mississippi and Ohio on the west, and by North Carolina on the south...

...James River admits vessels of two hundred and fifty tons burthen to Warwick, and of one hundred twenty-five tons to Richmond, about ninety miles from its mouth...

...The towns in Virginia are not large; the people mostly residing on their plantations...

...Richmond, at the head of navigation on James' river, and the seat of government, contains about three hundred houses...

...Williamsburg was formerly a flourishing and beautiful town. It contained about two hundred and fifty houses, and was the seat of government.

The principal street is one mile in length on a plain, with the college at one end, and the capital or state-house, at the other, exhibiting a pleasant prospect. But since the seat of government has been fixed at Richmond, the city has decayed. Williamsburg is the seat of a university, but the institution is not in a flourishing state.

The large and numerous rivers which water Virginia are very favorable for commerce. The principal article of exportation is tobacco, of which about 60,000 hogheads are exported annually. Wheat is also raised in abundance, especially in the mountainous parts of the State. Corn is the principal article of food for the negroes, yet a surplus is raised for exportation.

 Slavery in Cambridge, New York:

Slavery in America is most often associated with the southern states, but it is a mistake to think that slavery did not exist in the northern states. New York had a slave population of 19,000 adults in 1756, and slavery was not abolished there until 1827. It was not until 1860 that New Jersey became the last northern state to abolish slavery. There is very strong evidence that there were slaves on the Whiteside farm in Cambridge, New York. In the archives at Cornell University is a copy of a bill-of-sale signed by Phineas Whiteside dated August 18, 1800 that refers to: "one female negro slave named Deon of the age of twenty—one or thereabouts, to have and to hold bargained slave so mentioned and sold to the said John Whiteside, his Heirs and assigns forever..." A second document has more recently been found that describes another "negro boy" on the Whiteside farms. This handwritten copy of another document reads:

“‘Sale of negro boy by my ancestors’ — Know all men by these present that we Susannah Whiteside widow [widow of Oliver Whiteside, 1766–1804, the youngest son of Phineas Whiteside], Peter Whiteside, Edward Whiteside of the Town of Cambridge, County of Washington and State of New York and James Prendergast [possibly the brother of the widow whose maiden name was Susannah Prendergast] of the Town of Pittstown, County of Rensselaer and State aforesaid, Executors of Oliver Whiteside, late of the Town of Cambridge, deceased, for and in consideration of the sum of one dollar paid at or before the sealing and delivery of these presents by Abraham Van Trugh of the Town of Cambridge, County of Washington and State of New York, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, have granted bargained and sold by these presents do grant bargain and sell unto the above named Abraham Van Trugh his heirs executors, administrators and assigns the term of service of a negro boy named Ben, born the tenth day of February one thousand eight hundred and two as will appear on record in the clerks office of the Town of Cambridge and until the said boy shall come to the age of twenty-eight years the term of service proscribed by law, to have and to hold the above named Ben so sold to the said Abraham Van Trugh his heirs executors administrators and assign and [illegible] against every person or persons lawfully claiming the above named Ben unto the said Abraham Van Trugh... In witness we have herewith set out hands and seals this ninth day of May in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and five. [Signed & sealed] Susanna Whiteside, Peter Whiteside, Edward Whiteside. [Witnessed by] Peter Whiteside & James Whiteside.”

This three-year old boy would appear to be the second slave that was sold from the Whiteside farm. It is not known if the two slaves were related.

—*Editor's note*

☞ Miscellaneous receipts:

Rec. Cambridge Jan 28th, 1832 of George McKie fifty two dollars in full for one hundred bushels of corn.
—*H. Darrow & Co by John H. Willard.*

Cambridge, April 3, 1832. \$7.04. Received of George McKie one of the Commissioners of common schools for the town of Cambridge seven dollars and four cents being the amount of public money owe [sic] unto school district No. 17 in Cambridge.

—*E. Hatch.*

Cambridge, April 3, 1832. \$16.28. Received of George McKie one of the Commissioners of common schools for the town Cambridge sixteen dollars and twenty-eight cents being the amount of public money owe until school district No. 15 in Cambridge.

—*Edward Johnson.*

Received of G. McKie on this sixth day of September 1841 the sum of thirty-five dollars, pay in full, for hay bought of me to this date.

—*E. F. Whiteside.*

☞ George McKie to his wife Sophia:

Albany, Feb 9th, 1835.

My Dear Wife— Having a little leisure and a good many thoughts of home and you particularly, I have been compelled to scratch a few lines and forward them on to you. I am in good health and feel grateful for the bless-



George McKie, 1791–1861. F. Forsheo, Photographer, Hudson, New York.



Sophia Whiteside McKie, 1796–1878. Sophia must have been a very unusual woman for she reportedly had twenty-two proposals of marriage before her twenty-first birthday. When she did marry, she married her brother-in-law. C. R. Clark, Photographer, 338 River Street, Troy, New York.

Wilson Wilson was most likely the schoolmaster. The letter is very difficult to read and much has been omitted.



ing. I am anxious to know how your Father and Niel is doing and conclude the best will be to return home on Friday so you may send Edwin to Troy Friday morning. Judge Skinner concludes to go home with me. William Wilcox and Margaret have been to Albany and I expect them at our House Friday [sic] evening. Margaret has purchased a new Hat— quite nice too. I cannot describe it. You will probably see it soon. Tell Edwin if he comes with the wagon to put both seats in it and the buffaloes. I have not anything more, quite barren you will perceive, but never forgetting the one who above all others have the strongest claims on my affections and esteem. —Yours with additional fondness if possible. —G. McKie.

☞ Catherine McKie is away at school:

Schaghticoke, May 27th, 1836.

My Dear Mother— Mrs. Wilson told me that Mr. Lee was in town. She said also that I might return with him if I chose. I should like to go but I think that I had better not for I am afraid that you can not bring me back before school on Monday. I think of you every day more and more and love you more and more although I am quite happy here. I like Mr. F— very much & the little girls are all very pleasant. I do not think that I could find any fault with them if I should try. Mr. Slocum came home last night... you sent me more than enough cloth for two towels. I will send the towels but keep the piece. Perhaps you may want something else made out of it. My teacher says that I recite my lesson very well... I went down street and got four oranges that night you left me. —Your Affectionate Daughter, *Catherine McKie*.

My Dear friend— I am extremely happy to have it in my favor to inform you that your little daughter appears to be happy and contented with us beyond my expectations... —your friend *Wilson*.

Catherine McKie was nine years old when she was sent to school in Schaghticoke, New York, about ten miles from the family farm in Cambridge. In addition to this letter from that time period, a penmanship lesson from 1831 and her “algebra” lessons from 1838 have been preserved. All of the below are solved in longhand in the workbook (her answers are in brackets). From the book of algebra lessons:

- Reduce 31472 farthings to pounds. [32]
- Bought a hogshead of rum containing 114 gallons at 96.00 cents per gallon and sold it again at 100.32 [cents] per gallon; what was the whole gain and what was the gain percent? [4.5 percent]
- Extraction of the Square root — What is the square root of 18,420? [135.72]
- Suppose a man had put out one cent at compound interest in 1620, what would have been the amount in 1824, allowing it to double once in 12 years? [131,072]
- What is the present worth of \$100 annuity to be continued 4 years, but not to commence till 2 years hence, allowing 6 percent compound interest? [308.39]
- Suppose I lend a friend \$500 for 4 months, he promising to do me a like favor some time afterward. I have need of \$300. How long may I keep it to balance the favor? [$6\frac{2}{3}$]

Sixteen years later, on October 30, 1854, Catherine recalled this period in Schaghticoke when she wrote to her mother: “George said you had been taking one

of those powders which ‘make you well when you are sick and when you are well will make you sick.’ This reminder of Mr. Wilson, and my home in Schaghticoke, brings also to mind the homesickness I had so much when I was there, and it was on one of these memorable occasions of illness that Mr. Wilson told me “Tobacco lie’ by way of diversion.”

Between 1843 and 1844 Catherine McKie studied at the Troy Conference Academy, now Green Mountain College, in Poultney, Vermont, about forty miles north of Cambridge. Her brother George was also a student there as was a young man from Hoosick Falls, New York, named Francis Thayer. Preserved are some of Catherine’s letters home to her parents, some of her essays, and one of her Mother’s letters to her children away at school.

☞ Poultney letters:

Saturday aft. Oct. 29 — 1843.

Dear Mother— I suppose you are wondering by this time, what I am doing— how I am situated, whether I am contented or not; I will give you a description, and then you can judge. George and myself left the Bridge, as I suppose father told you, about 1 o’clock, and came on, full of going to school at Poultney. The stage dined at Cam—, and I sat in the parlor half an hour and never thought of any India-rubbers, until we were halfway to Salem. I regret it very much as I shall need them, but I will do the best I can. We stayed but a few moments in Salem and neither George or myself saw any of Uncle Matthew’s family. The next place at which we stopped was Bishops Corners, where we stayed about 15 minutes, and the next and last place was the Troy Conference Academy— which we reached at 9 o’clock in the evening. Judge of our surprise on being told that the quarter does not end until next Wednesday. But I will endeavor to improve my time as much as possible.

George and myself had tea and then I was put in a room with a Miss Cochran, from Rupert with whom I am to remain [share] until next Wednesday, when I shall change. I intend to room alone as there are none here that

the Bridge Probably Buskirk,
site of Burkirk’s Bridge.



Buskirks Bridge, rebuilt 2004. First bridge here built in 1804, serving the Great Northern Turnpike, by Martin Buskirk, a tavern-keeper on the Cambridge, New York, side of the Hoosick River, re-built about 1850.

I fancy for a chum. My room will be on the third floor, a back room on the southwest corner of the building, in it is one window looking south and another west. Miss Cochran is a real Yankee in every sense of the word but a very good and pious girl. I did not eat anything after I left home until I got here, and I had a bad sick headache and was anxious to get to bed as soon as possible. I went into the room with Miss Cochran and as there was but one lamp in the room I did not see— but all looked as well as could be expected. I prepared to retire, and turned down the bedclothes; and what do you think the bed was; well just take one of the comforters; and spread one thickness over the straw bed, and you have it. It seemed rather hard I can assure you, after a ride of 45 miles and a sick headache for my comfort, to seek repose on such a bed; but I have become accustomed to it now, and sleep as well as if it were made of down. The next morning, at 5 o'clock, was wakened by the bell and at six went to the chapel for prayers. At 7, breakfast. The young ladies called, and all said, "Now I hope you will not be homesick," and it reminded me of home, so much, and the difference between home and this place that if ever there was a homesick girl, I was one. I cried myself almost sick, went to bed, took a nap, and woke up in much better spirits. In the evening went to church with all the other girls to attend a musical concert given by several of the quires [choirs] of the County.

Thursday morning came and with it hot biscuit (or dingbats as they are called here) for breakfast. At noon, mush and milk for dinner, Sumptuous, is it not: No danger of having the gout here. There was a music convention here which commenced with the concert I have spoken of. Thursday afternoon we went to the church where we were highly entertained with music and an address from Prof. Wentworth which was excellent. We went in the evening also, at which time the convention closed. The music through the whole was grand. Yesterday we had a good breakfast— broiled beef for dinner and good slap-jacks (pancakes) for tea, and today all is good.

I like the Teachers very much, and as far as I am capable of judging, they fill their places well. I went to see Miss Wright (Preceptress) in reference to my studies today, and think I shall study Latin, Rhetoric, Geometry, and Writing. It is just as George said in regard to the ladies. With the exception of twelve or fourteen, they look as if they never were out of the woods until they came here, the same with the gents. The bell rings for prayers so goodbye. —Prayers over. I hope my selection of studies will meet with your approbation. I may take something in the place of Latin. I am now reviewing Arithmetic in my room before next quarter. There are 80 boarders here. Tell Wina Sally to have a bed like mine and see how nice it is. The tea bell rings.

—Friday evening 10 o'clock. It is two weeks tomorrow since I commenced scribbling on this sheet, and then I supposed that it would have reached you long ere this. But if I have not written, it is not because I have not thought of home. No, not an hour has passed in which home has been forgotten: and at the lone hour of midnight when every room in the building is dark save mine, then, and not heartlessly, do I wish myself in that loved home once more. Tis then when fatigued by constant application from 6 o'clock in the morning until 12 o'clock at night, (meals included), I wish for a friendly chitchat by my own Father's fireside and truly appreciate the truth of the phrase, "There is no place like home." But I will turn to my studies... [page torn].

Wednesday evening 12 o'clock. I expected to have sent this scrawl last Monday, but will give my reasons for not doing so. I have said before that we have class meetings on Sat. evenings and Prayer meetings Sabbath evening. The first Sat. eve I requested Prayer for George. I did the same the next Sat. eve and the next also— which was last Sat. eve. He was present every time. Last Sabbath morning immediately after breakfast the Preceptress came to... [page torn] —*Kate*.

West Poultney. Feb. 17, 1844.

Dear Mother— It seems like an age since I left home and all Friends connected with it. I do not wish you to infer that I have been homesick again, yet I must confess that I have been a little bit lonely, but as studying has commenced, I'll bid farewell to everything belonging to the order of the "blues". We had a long tiresome ride coming up in the stage. The stage came to the Bridge at 12 o'clock. Mr. Pick and six students in one stage and Miss Marvin in another. We went up with her. At Cambridge we found Lib Beadle and some other old school girls, waiting for the stage. We arrived in Salem about 4 o'clock. Mary Mathews was at Mr. Gile's. There was but one stage going North so we were obliged to ride from Salem to Granville very much crowded, as there were 18 in the stage. At Granville there was an extra provided and we rode more comfortably. There was a gentleman of the name of Worthington who rode up in the stage, and was formerly connected with Lansing Taylor when in Albany. He brought a son to school who is about the size of J— and a very interesting little fellow. He (Mr. Worthington) gave me a history of Mr. T—'s family, and to sum it all up in one word, he had an exalted view of the whole family. The school is much larger than it was last quarter and everything goes on smoothly. We have 76 boarding at present and more are expected. Our Steward and Lady give unusual satisfaction, & our board is one of the first class. My studies are French, Logic, Mental Ph-y, and Writing. I have been in the spelling class but have been sent out. You may think this is rather strange but I will give you an explanation. When Mr. Peck was organizing the classes, he said he would call the class in spelling and he should like all who thought it necessary to take their seats for that class, to do so. But he said if any of the teachers found a word spelled incorrectly in any of the compositions, the author would be sent into the orthography class even if it were the best scholar in the school. He said too that if any went into class who were found by the Teacher to be good spellers, that they would be sent out of the class. So you see that it is rather a compliment not to be allowed to stay in the spelling class.

Esther Marvin, of who I have spoken, has a bad cough and I fear that unless she has it cured soon, she will be obliged to leave school. I have made her come and room with me & I shall keep her in the room until it is safe for her to go into the cold air. Olive Allen, who you heard me speak of, has been quite sick and under the doctor's care more than a week but is a little better today... In regard to a carpet, if you choose to sew two breadths of your rag carpet together, 13 feet in length and put in a box and leave it at V. & D. Marvin, Troy (Father knows where they are) and Mr. Marvin can send it to me. That is, put the direction on the box & Mr. M— will send it by some acquaintance. You can do just as you think best about it. The carpet that I have is almost worn out. Is Mr. Campbell with you now? If he is, you cannot be

Mr. T— probably refers to Francis Thayer whom Catherine McKie met while studying at the Troy Conference Academy in Poultney, Vermont.

lonely. In regard to light clothes I will write in the future. I would like to write more but have no time as I want to take this to the Office so that it can go in mail tonight for you recollect that you told me to write if it were but six lines. Mary M— told me that Mr. R— was not expected to live. I am anxious to hear from her. Give my love to all at home, Father and all enquiring friends. If you should send me a carpet, a fruitcake or anything with it would be acceptable. Write soon as convenient. George is well and wishes to be remembered to all. —Your Daughter *Kate*.

Tuesday, West Poultney, March 25, 1844.

Dear Mother— Perhaps you may have wondered why I have been silent so long. But could you see how I have been situated perhaps you would not find so great cause for surprise.

In the first place then, you recollect that when I was at home, you told me that I should write oftener, and I supposed that I would; but after I had written and waited for an answer, I hoped that by keeping silent you would remember that a letter from home would be as dear to me as one from me could be to anyone. But since I received Henry's letter, I have felt that if you was not worn out with sick ones I ought to be thankful to say nothing of writing letters. Well then to justify myself, sickness is my plea. Not that I have been sick, but Olive Allen of whom I have spoken to you. She rooms next to me and for a week we did not know but she might be taken away any moment. Esther Marvin has been sick too. I made her come and room with me until she recovers so as to be able to go in the halls. She was with me two weeks, when her Physician said she might go to her own room, and not expose herself to the cold air any more than was absolutely necessary. Her lungs are very much affected, and I never saw a person have a worse cough. Last Friday afternoon she was taking some tea in her room, when she was seized with a violent pain in her head— her face turned almost as red as was possible except a small spot on her cheek which was very white. Her face and neck very much swollen. A physician was sent for immediately. He came in a few moments and attempted to bleed her but her blood seemed so thick that it would not run but very little. Several things were done for her and she was relieved. Her Physician said that it was congestion of the lungs and brain and that if she had not been relieved in a very short time, the eruption of a blood vessel would have been the consequence. He said that there was much danger of another attack during the night, and if she had another, she could not live through it. I can assure you that it was solemn enough. Two young ladies and myself took the directions and sat up with her that night, and we may truly say that we watched— for I presume that she drew not a breath without being heard as we stood over her constantly. The night passed and her life was spared. She told me that if she had another spell, she could not live; and that if her face began to turn red when she was asleep to wake her, for she did not wish to go to sleep and wake at the judgment bar of God. You may imagine that it was a solemn time. Her Mother was written for that night, and she came today. Esther will go home next week probably if she is no worse. Mr. Newman, of whom you have heard me speak, has lost his child. I sat up with that one night. Mr. Pick is sick now.

He has taken a severe cold, and has a bad cough, and some fever, but we hope that he may soon be restored to health. By what I have written, you will readily conclude that there has been much illness among us as well as others. Henry wrote that Clara was sick at our house, poor thing. Would that she were happy in another world, I hope she is better now. And as for “Shany,” as Clara calls her, I know not what to say. To wish her happiness were vain, yet I have a wish for her— it is that she may always sit behind the stove, and laugh, as much as she pleases.

As to the school this quarter, everything moves onwards in fine [letter torn]. George is doing well in his studies and appears anxious to go on. As for myself I have nothing to say except that I like my studies very much. As to staying until the close of the term, we wish to know as soon as possible— you and Father know what we wish to do, and of course it is for you to decide as you think best. If I am not to stay longer than this quarter, do not send my carpet, if you say that I can, then let me know as soon as convenient, and I will send for some other things that I shall need. Give my best love to Father and all br-s [brothers]... Remember me to E.P. Beadle if home, and tell her how I have been situated that I could not write her— also to her Mother, & Lee, Sarah & S. and Mr. and Mrs. Akin. Finally to all enquiring friends. Write me as soon as possible, all the particulars will highly interest me, although they may seem unimportant to others. George wishes to be affectionately to all. Tell the little ones I should like to kiss them all a dozen times. From *Kate*, as ever.

Mother it is at this hour, when the sun is disappearing behind the western hills, that I wish myself with thee, that I wish myself at home by my own Mother’s side but I must cease for the scalding teardrop tells me, that now I can not sit by the fireside of my own loved home.

Wednesday, West Poultney, 8th May.

Dear Mother. I received by George all that was sent, and I can assure you, that I was much pleased. I received more than I expected, and tender my sincere thanks to the different Donors. I was surprised to hear that I had a silk dress, but cannot say that I am sorry that it has come... I have received a hat and parasol from Esther Marvin. I sent her the money for the parasol, four dollars, and my hat was seven. Do not exclaim I beg of you. I wanted a handsome straw hat and it is so, truly. Perhaps the price will appear too great to ‘*some of the family*’. But let Ed call to Mr. W— and leave seven dollars for Esther from me— and say nothing more to her. She will know what it is for. And let it pass paying for parasol and hat that she purchased for me. What deception: but is it not for the best? I am doing well in my studies, and my health is good. I have the pieces to my worsted dress. It was the pink one that I cared most for. The school is increasing in number every day. There are ninety-six boarders here at present. If there is good letter paper in the store I wish you would get me a quire. The girls have come in and put a nightcap and a pair of spectacles on me and now I am showing them how Grandmother can write. And it seems as though you might hear them laugh, if it is 45 miles. I cannot write any more and send this out tonight so I must bid you good night. My love to all. —*Kate McKie*.

P.S. Put up a cake of Father’s shaving soap with my dresses.

Enclosed handwritten receipt:

Miss Catherine McKie
To: Mrs. Hannah Cobb Dr.
To 8 weeks Board 12 / \$12.00
Received Payment in full for the
above bill— Hannah Cobb.

☞ A letter from Sophia Whiteside McKie:

George Wilson McKie, West Poultney, Vermont.
Cambridge, May 20th, 1844.

Dear Children— I have delayed writing a few days expecting a letter from you before Edwin would go to N.Y., and I did not know but there was something here that you would like to have sent you. As I suppose you have learned by Edwin's letter that we intended you should stay until the end of the term and did not know that you understood it so before your Father left you. You have had reason to expect your piece of carpeting before this but it is only a few days since this much was woven and cut off and sent home. When you see it, you will say what a splendid roll but it will do so for a short time. I hope you will soon write and let me know what things you both will require for summer. George will you want a vest and pants? Can they be made there if you need them? You recollect you have the pattern for summer pants here.

I feel very much interested for those persons that you have spoken and written to me about that were sick, particularly Miss Marvin. I think her case must be a very critical one but I sincerely hope she is much better. If you know how she is when you write, say how she is... Sickness continues in our place. Jane is in a very reduced state, sits up but a few minutes in her bed at a time except when she is compelled to on account of severe fits of coughing. She appears to realize her situation and has a great desire to get better but seems composed, resigned— death has no terrors to her. I watched last night with her and came home this morning with as bad a cold as you almost ever saw me have and you can judge how I look and how well I can see which will be some apology for this scrawl... Your Father has a very bad cold with considerable toothache and has been very busy with almost all the men clearing the stumps and stones of the cranbury hill for Hiram Starbuck. He has taken it for three years. The meadows in the hollow are let out to mow which you know will be a great relief to us all. Your Father has received a letter from Gardner, the Schuyler debt Lawyer. He says the Slade case is decided and the probability is we may get 2000\$ and it will enable us to assist Niel and that would be very gratifying... It is now getting dark again as has been the case every time I have set down to write. You perceive I have been disappointed again about sending the box, but I hope you will get it safe and will be well to enjoy your fruit if you cannot get maple sugar. Your lemons will be almost past— there is none to be had here. Now I have told you all the little news I think of at present that is worth writing and some that is not. Time passes on about as usual. No preaching except one Sabbath from Mr. Bullians since Mr. C— left us, and we felt quite at a loss what to do with ourselves for a few sabbaths. The traveling has been unusually bad this spring— almost impassable on accounts of the drifts they were bad until nearly the last of March, and then came the mud which has prevented us from going to the Bridge until last Sabbath. Sally went with Mr. Beach. The family have all retired. The 3 boys have kissed me good night. Almost nine. May God be with [you / us] this night and through life is the sincere wish of your Mother [*and written around the edge of paper*—] I have been brought up very short I did not know but I had another page until I was on the last line. The boys left kisses for you both. You will have business enough for the ensuing week to read this. I feel a little

Letter is unsigned, but is in the handwriting of Sophia Whiteside McKie.

assist Niel Niel McKie was attempting to establish himself as a grocer in New York City at this time.

unpleasant that I am not sending much of anything to George but whatever you need you will have sent when we hear from you and E— gets back.

West Poultney, June 27, 1844.

Dear Mother— After so long a silence I do not know as you will care to hear from me, thinking perhaps that I have almost forgotten home. But appearances are deceitful— and I can only say that I have thought of home as much as ever, but have not had time to express my thoughts through the medium of pen and ink. The only reason is that, my studies and preparation for the Exhibition have taken my attention from 4 o'clock in the morning until 11, or 12 o'clock at night. Last evening the Ladies Ex, took place. The compositions were all most excellent (excepting my own)... Perhaps you may not know that Troy Annual Conference is in session here at present, consisting of 175 Ministers. The Church is very large and was, to use a low expression, crammed full. As usual George has crept out of Exhibition, he does it to the injury of himself, but neither the persuasion or threats of the teachers produced any effect on him. The dresses you sent me were beautiful and I hope the time will come when I can repay those who are so kind to me at present. I endeavor to improve my time as much as possible. The bell has rung for 6 o'clock and I must send to the Post Office— I cannot write to Niel immediately and I wish you would write to him and say that I have received his gifts and am much gratified with them. My best love to all— —*Kate*.
Keep this letter on account of the scheme.

Letter written on the back of a school program, *Gentlemen's Exhibition*, Troy Conference Academy, June 26, 1844.

☞ Catherine McKie's Essays:

Some of the essays are dated while others are not:

What is your life? It is ever a vapour that appeareth for a very little time and then vanisheth away.

How true and yet how little realized.

Life has frequently been compared to a day. Youth has been considered analogous to the morning, ripening manhood to noonday, and old age to the shades of evening. How striking the analogy.

In the morning of life we are gay and thoughtless. We think only of the present and cast not a thought on the morrow.

In the meridian of life the joys of the past seem to be in some measure forgotten and our minds are occupied with anticipation of the future.

In the evening of life we realize our situations, the shortness of life and the necessity of preparing ourselves while young for another world. Conscious as we are of the shortness of life we should engage (employ) ourselves in such a manner so that if spared 'til old age we can look back upon the days of our youth without the sad reflection that we have misspent the time which has been so graciously allotted to us by our maker.

After being absent for some months from my native village, I with pleasure retraced my steps and finally reached it late Sat. eve. The next day being Sabbath, I resolved to go to church, and hear our own minister preach once more. I went to church, and after taking my seat I cast my eye around expecting to meet a glance of recognition from those

On January 13, 1840, the steamship *Lexington* left its pier on Manhattan's East River at 4:00 p.m. bound for Stonington, Connecticut, carrying 143 passengers and crew and a cargo of cotton. In the early hours of the evening a crew member noticed that some of the woodwork around the smokestack was on fire. Unable to extinguish the fire, the crew unsuccessfully attempted to launch the lifeboats. The cotton quickly ignited and the fire soon spread to the entire ship and passengers and crew were forced to jump from the ship, a few lucky ones using bales of cotton as rafts. The frigid waters in Long Island Sound caused many to die of hypothermia and many who clung to the bales of cotton fell off and drowned. A nearby sloop failed to respond with aid, and there were only four survivors of this, the worst steamboat disaster on Long Island Sound.

I loved, but here in many cases I was disappointed. During intermission I walked out of the church, and the first thing that attracted my attention was the old church-yard. I at once felt a desire to look upon the graves of those friends whom I had laid beneath the cold sod and I hastened to gratify my desire. While passing along to the grave of a relative, my attention was attracted to one newly made— at the head of which was placed a plain but neat stone. There was something about it that seemed to forbid me to go on, something that seemed to say to me “see whose name is inscribed here.” I unconsciously stepped back that I might read the name, and if I at that moment had heard a peal of thunder, I could not have been more startled. It was the name of one who I had supposed till this moment to be among the living. This was indeed a time for reflection. When I had left my home, this friend, now beneath the tomb, was enjoying everything that health and prosperity could bestow. I had heard nothing of her death and I knew not whether she was in a state of happiness or misery, and I feared for her, unless she had experienced a change. I hesitated not a moment, but hastened from the church-yard, determined to ascertain the state of her feelings before death. I soon met with a person who I knew would be able to give what information I wanted. I enquired about her sickness, death etc. I was told that she had been taken away very suddenly, and that her last words were, “I cannot die.” There could be no hope then that she was among the blest. It did seem to me awful, that she, whom I had known from childhood, whom I had ever loved, should suffer eternal death. Oh! thought I, had she prepared herself to meet her God, she might now be happy, she might be in the presence of her God, and his [*His*] smile would now rest upon her. She had Christian friends, but perhaps they had never warned her of the necessity of preparing for death: but was that an excuse! No a just God had required this duty of her, and she had neglected it, and it was but just, that she should suffer the consequences. —*Kate McKie*. (Catherine McKie. Oct. 25)

Death has ever been considered the great enemy of mankind, and in whatever form he presents himself, [he] seldom fails to produce an emotion of dread of which it seems almost impossible to divest ourselves. But there is much difference in the degree to which this sensation is awakened under different circumstances. Take for instance the burning of the *Lexington*, several of her passengers at that time were on their return to friends whom they had not seen for years; and as they drew near their native homes how many sad hearts became glad in view of meeting those who were near and near. The alarm of fire was given and in a few moments the boat was wrapped in flames. What must have been the feelings of the passengers as they were driven by the flames from the boat and obliged to commit themselves to the mercy of the waves; what the feelings of a mother too who, with her infant in her arms, spent her last moments in endeavoring to catch at some object by which she might save herself and child; but all in vain for they too had been chosen by the [illegible] destroyer. No one could have beheld this awful scene without the most painful feelings. But let us enter the chamber of death and view a scene entirely different. There lies a young female apparently in the arms of death, one who a few weeks since was enjoying good health and little thought she would so soon lie on a death-bed. But it came to see her now, the same smile plays upon her features that was wont to be there in the bloom of health, and it seems as if the very angels themselves are waiting with impatience for her to bid a last farewell to earth and its trivial enjoyments that they may fulfill their duty by conducting her redeemed spirit to a happier sphere. But see?— She bids farewell to earth, and now, her spirit is winging its way to mansions of eternal rest. When we behold such a scene as this there certainly can be no anxiety in regard to the departed; for who can but say

that an individual in such circumstances would be far happier than if permitted to live; but at the same time there is, in seeing an individual calmly resign himself to the sleep of death, something that is calculated to startle. But why is it so? Is it because we feel that the same hand that takes one individual from this world has the power to call us, and we know not how soon that hand may think proper to do so. Why should we tremble then and fear to die: since Death but unbinds the soul and frees it for the sky. And in connection with this we feel as we stand around the bed of death, that great preparation is necessary in order that we can pass the boundary to that bourn “whence no traveler returns.” And if we are prepared, should it not rather be considered a kind messenger that has come to sever the link that binds our spirits to this earth and give them opportunity to commence an eternity of happiness.

Then “Aft’ as the bell with solemn tole [*or*: toll]
Speaks the departing of a soul
Let each one ask himself, am I
Prepared should I be called to die”

—Catherine McKie, Sept 7.

The proper study of mankind is Man.

Some time since while traveling in a stage-coach, I had an opportunity of verifying the truth of this maxim. At the time to which I allude I stepped myself into a coach and after securing myself a comfortable seat, the first thing I did was to ascertain who were my companions. The first one, who attracted my attention, was a young lady, who I soon learned without much exertion on my part, and apparently none on hers, was a graduate from the Albany Female Academy. According to her account, she had left school about a year previous loaded with the highest honors. Her dress showed plainly that she was a *faithful votary of fashion*. The small delicate hand, on which many brilliant diamonds found a resting place, evidently had not been familiar with domestic utensils. A showy gold chain glistened upon her neck, attached to which a splendid watch plainly showed the wealth of the owner, and were I to judge from her constant reference to it for the time, I should suppose the hours passed slowly. As the result of my observations, I concluded she would be called a *fashionable lady*. The second of my companions, whom I proceeded to notice, was a man whose very existence almost seemed to depend upon the passing of some tariff law, or the erection of a United States bank. He firmly believed that unless such and such bills were passed in Congress, that the people of the United States would be in a worse condition than those under a despotic government; that there was so much extravagance existing, as to affect the morals of the country and that it was time for something to take place, to put a stop to such proceedings. Seated beside him was an individual who in one respect seemed to have avoided the curse pronounced upon man, for judging from appearances he had not eaten his bread by the sweat of his face. He seemed to find his principal amusement in twirling the key of his watch, or in minutely examining his gold-headed cane. Perhaps a more full description would be conveyed, by saying he was a flop. The next one of our number whom I observed was a lady and from her irritable disposition and from the state of her nerves, I concluded that she had taken a strong cup of coffee before starting. She was not at a loss for occasions to express dissatisfaction and was constantly making some exclamation about bad roads and careless drivers. The remaining passenger was a lady. She, I judged, was one whom sorrow had taught to look to the right source for happiness. Her countenance bore an expression so high and noble, and at the same time so calm. A humility that it seemed as if none but pure thoughts would dare to

approach and seek to find a home within a breast so holy. She sat alone, apparently insensible of surrounding occurrences. I had now formed some idea of the characters of my companions and wished for an opportunity for each to display some of the traits that dame nature had bestowed on them.

As I was musing upon these differences, we were suddenly started from our seats by the stage turning to one side and on asking the driver what had happened, he told us that the vehicle had received a slight injury and that he would be obliged to go back about a mile to a place where he could get it repaired in a short time; our company seemed disposed to wait there, until he returned, and accordingly all left the coach. We had not proceeded far, when suddenly the sun was darkened, and on looking up we saw that we might expect a thunder-storm; and as there were no building that we could reach before rain might fall, there was no alternative but to remain where we were. Our anticipations were soon realized. A flash of lightning and the sound of thunder, told us that the storm was near. In a few moments large drops of rain began to fall, flashes of lightning came in quick succession and peal after peal of thunder rolled over our heads. The rain now fell in torrents, and it seemed as if the next flash would wither some tall oak or pine, in the adjoining forest. Now was time for reflection, but most all of our company but me were not of that kind to enjoy such a time as this. All save one was struck with fear, she, who put her trust in him who rules the storm, was calm. You might see her viewing the lightning and listening to catch the sound of the thunder as it died away at a distance. To her it appeared sublime, for it was the voice of God. The storm passed, and again the sun made his appearance. How changed the scene: All nature seemed to rejoice, and as we were passing by an old hedge, our plain lady, as she was called by some, perceived an insect and in the next moment had it in her hand, viewing it with a magnifying glass. This was more than the young lady could bear, with such delicate feelings as she had been cultivated, and while the others crowded around to see the beautiful insect, she stood at a distance and said that she was *extremely surprised* to see anyone *so vulgar* as to be gratified by the sight of a *worm*; and seemed upon the point of fainting when we requested her to look at it. At this time our coachman returned and again we took our seats, the fashionable lady suffering *intensely* from the disarrangement of her nervous system occasioned by the sight of a *worm*. The businessman seemed wrapt in thought, apparently devising some way to make money and the irritable lady contented herself by saying, "that it was just as she expected with such a driver." Whilst the plain lady was still busily engaged examining the worm, I read in the expression of her countenance. —*Kate McKie.*

In an unidentified handwriting
worm not an insect.