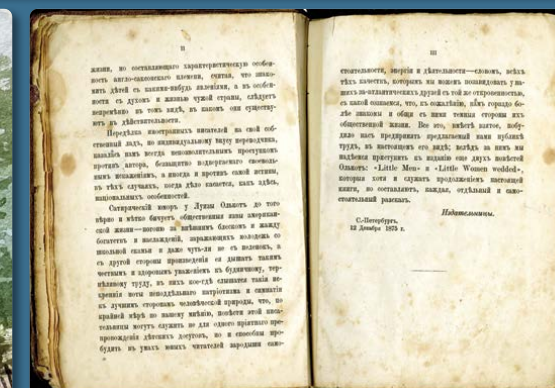
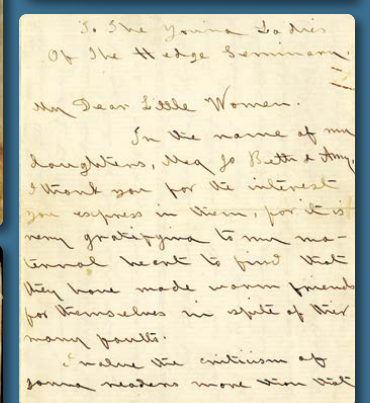
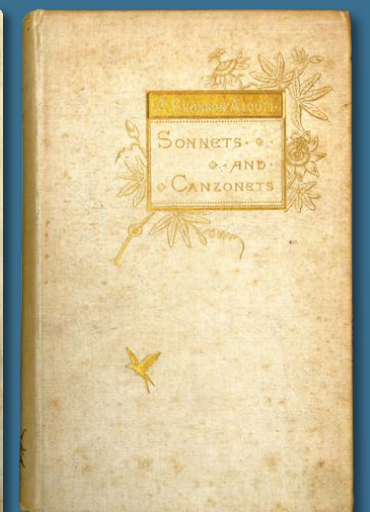
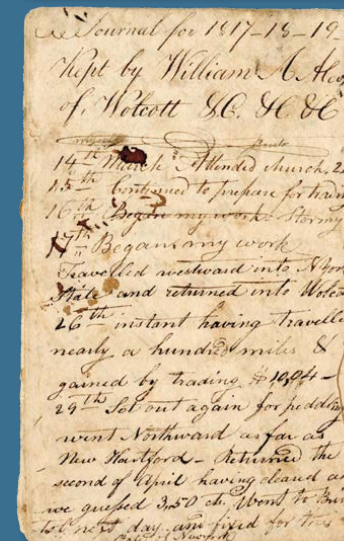
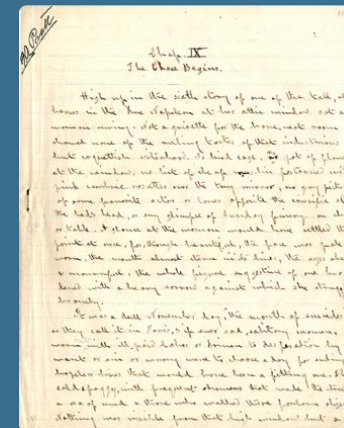
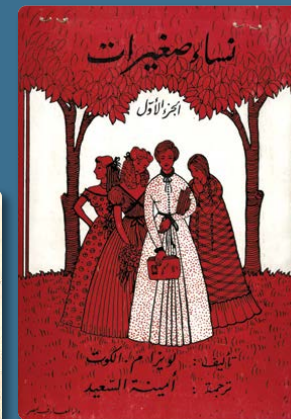


From a New Eden in Concord to Little Women

New Alcott Collections



When William Munroe founded the Library in 1873, his vision included art as a way of bringing culture to the people of Concord who did not have the opportunity to travel the world. He, along with Library Committee Chair Ralph Waldo Emerson, encouraged Concord citizens to donate art and books to the Library. Since the beginning, when Munroe established the Library as a public/private partnership between the nonprofit Library Corporation and the Town of Concord—with the Library Corporation owning the buildings, grounds, and art—the Trustees have taken their stewardship role seriously.

During the two decades I have served as a Trustee of the Concord Free Public Library Corporation, I have seen the William Munroe Special Collections significantly evolve. While we have had art and archives since the Library's founding in 1873, the Special Collections department was not created until 1975. Under the auspices of its first curator, Marcia Moss, and succeeded by Leslie Wilson in 1996, Special Collections developed important relationships with scholars and early Concord families resulting in publications, catalogs, programs, and exhibitions that brought greater renown to the Collections. Our current curator, Anke Voss, has built on their work by establishing her own vision and relationships with scholars, historic Concord families, and literary societies.

While the Trustees have been stewards of the Library's special collections since the beginning, their role expanded significantly when the Special Collections Committee was formed in 2010. With a deeper understanding of one its most important assets, the Board could provide more financial support for preservation, acquisitions, programs, and exhibitions and play a role in strategic planning, policies, accessibility, and advocacy.

Recognizing the widespread interest in the Library's Special Collections, the Library Corporation recently created The Munroe Society. This affinity group has opportunities to learn more about the Collections; attend special previews, receptions, and tours; and support acquisitions and conservation. We are deeply grateful to this group and other donors for making it possible to build our Alcott Family Collections.

We are so appreciative of the constant support of Library Director, Emily Smith, who always helps us find solutions and make things possible.

And we are especially grateful to Kent Bicknell and Timothy Mather for entrusting their magnificent Alcott Family Collections to us, knowing that we would take good care of them and share them with the world.

We hope that William Munroe would be pleased to see how his original vision has blossomed, perhaps beyond his dreams.

Sherry F. Litwack,
President, Board of Trustees
Concord Free Public Library Corporation



INTRODUCTION

Anke Voss, *Curator*
William Munroe Special Collections

The William Munroe Special Collections expresses its profound gratitude to the Concord Free Public Library Corporation and its donors, The Munroe Society—whose mission is the preservation and advancement of Special Collections—and to Timothy Mather for their extraordinary generosity in strengthening the Library's Alcott Family holdings. We celebrate today the transformative impact of their contributions.

Through this remarkable support, the William Munroe Special Collections proudly announces the unveiling of two major archives: the Bicknell Alcott Family Collection and the Mather Alcott Family Collection. Together with the Library's already distinguished holdings, these acquisitions establish one of the most significant collections for Alcott family research, deepening and broadening opportunities for scholarly inquiry.

This catalog is not intended to be a comprehensive inventory of the Alcott material in the William Munroe Special Collections, but simply a selection of highlights from the newly acquired Bicknell and Mather collections. By spotlighting these items, we hope to inspire further interest in the material as a whole.

In the fall of 2024, the William Munroe Special Collections acquired the Bicknell Alcott Family Collection, assembled over decades by Kent Bicknell, an Alcott editor and collector who helped found Sant Bani School in New Hampshire. Particularly notable for its representation of the broader Alcott family, the collection includes paintings and unpublished letters by Abigail May Alcott Nieriker, as well as a rare 1876 Russian edition of *Little Women* and the manuscript of Louisa May Alcott's dramatic piece "Mrs. Jarley's Waxworks." These materials illuminate the family's artistic range and the international reach of Louisa's literary reputation.

This landmark acquisition directly inspired an even more consequential gift in 2025: the Mather Alcott Collection. Although distinct in provenance, both collections were shaped by Dr. Bicknell, who served as curator and advisor to Colorado entrepreneur Timothy Mather. At Dr. Bicknell's recommendation, Mr. Mather generously donated his collection to the Concord Free Public Library's Special Collections in honor of Sant Bani School, ensuring that it would "be treasured, enhance current holdings, stay together, and be available for all to access."

The Mather Alcott Collection contains letters from Louisa May Alcott to Thomas Niles discussing the illustrations for the first edition of *Little Women*; an unpublished 1841 letter by Amos Bronson Alcott reflecting on the utopian aspirations of Fruitlands—“Eden is being planted in New England as fabled Paradise of yore”; and the original manuscript of *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, Louisa’s gothic thriller, unpublished until 1995, when it became a *New York Times* bestseller. These materials not only illuminate the Alcotts’ literary ambitions and philosophical commitments but also underscore the enduring vitality of their work.

Even before these latest additions, the Library stewarded an exceptional body of original material related to the Alcotts’ literary and intellectual legacy. Among its holdings are partial manuscripts by Louisa May Alcott of *Little Women* and *Little Men, Eight Cousins*, and *Under the Lilacs* and alongside, *Concord Book, Emerson*, and part of *New Connecticut*, manuscripts by Amos Bronson Alcott. The Library’s art holdings include several watercolors by Abigail May Alcott Nieriker. Its extensive printed collection features first and later editions of works by and about the Alcotts, as well as approximately forty volumes—many inscribed—that once belonged to members of the family, offering further evidence of their intellectual lives and personal connections.

In recent years, the Library has further enriched its collections by acquiring significant letters by Louisa May Alcott. These include a letter to publisher Thomas Niles of Roberts Brothers, circa 1868, containing editorial commentary on the publication of *Little Women*; letters to her British friend reflecting on the death of her sister, May, shortly after the birth of her daughter, Louisa May “Lulu” Nieriker; and a letter in which Alcott reflects on the autobiographical assumptions surrounding her most famous heroine, writing, “‘Jo’ is not myself any more than the others are my sisters, only suggestions of the four real girls.” In another striking example of her professional self-possession, she declares, “I do not write anything for less than \$100 & the length makes no difference.” Taken together, these letters offer rare and intimate insight into Alcott’s creative process, her negotiations with publishers, her understanding of authorship, and her reflections on the enduring characters who have shaped generations of readers.

Collectively, these extraordinary acquisitions reaffirm the Concord Free Public Library Corporation’s longstanding commitment to the William Munroe Special Collections and to the preservation of Concord’s literary and cultural heritage. By expanding access to manuscripts, correspondence, art, and rare editions, the Library ensures that the intellectual and creative legacy of the Alcott family will continue to inspire new generations of readers and scholars.

Conversing with the Alcotts: Lessons for Life

Kent Bicknell

Since my early years, I have been passionate about collecting, especially historical artifacts with a glowing presence. I love “literary sleuthing,” and when research reveals fresh facts, or helps connect old ones in new ways, the results are rewarding. Seeing information you uncovered woven into a new biography or a professional article inspires you to keep digging. On occasion, immersion in the past helps reinforce life choices as encouragement flows from the understanding one is not alone in choosing alternate ways of thinking and living. Finding connections with the past underscores how interwoven all life is—and has been over time.

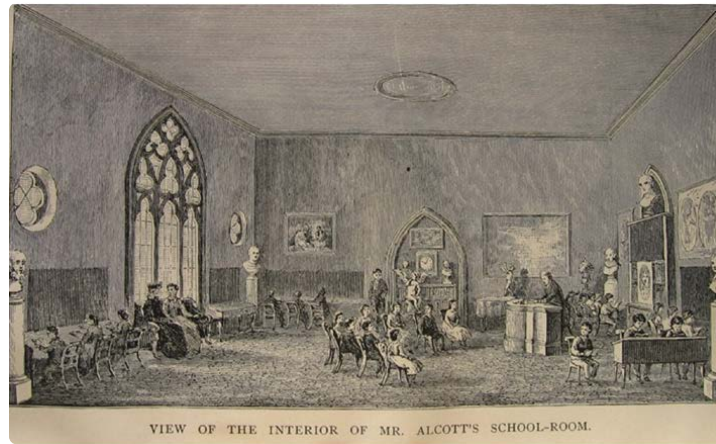
My father was a history instructor and my mother an elementary school teacher with a passion for antiques, which no doubt inspired my interest in vintage items with stories. I enrolled at Yale (where holding a first edition of *Don Quixote* [1605] in the Beinecke Rare Book Library provided an unforgettable experience), dropped out (it was the 60s!), hitchhiked around the country and met Karen, who became my lifelong companion. Together we found a spiritual path and I returned to college, graduating in 1970 as a Scholar of the House. I spent senior year immersed in fifteenth-century spiritual texts that illustrated how centuries-old ideas can endure and inspire when embedded in books and manuscripts.

In 1973, I helped found Sant Bani School in central New Hampshire and served as its head for the next forty-four years. The school, an outgrowth of a spiritual retreat center, Sant Bani Ashram, expanded from 6 students to over 150 in just a few years. While schoolwork and raising a family kept my collecting on a back-burner, in the early 1990s the passion blazed as I rediscovered the Transcendentalists. Indeed, I found that most of what my friends and I considered “trailblazing lifestyles of the 1960s” had been mapped before by the Alcotts and their friends: Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Peabody, Ralph Waldo Emerson and others. Their shared experiences, particularly around navigating the often-turbulent inner and outer waters of life, provided valuable lessons. Amongst that remarkable group, I was most drawn to the Alcotts: Bronson and Abigail, and their noteworthy daughters—Anna, Louisa, Elizabeth, and May. Their multi-dimensional lives, taken together, illustrate how to live with integrity while caring for others, and I began to collect Alcott family material in earnest.

Sant Bani School was founded on three guiding convictions articulated by the spiritual teacher H.H. Kirpal Singh (1894–1974) of India: 1) that everyone is unique so we have

KENT BICKNELL is an educator who, in 1973, became the founding head of Sant Bani School in Sanbornton, NH, a position he held for 44 years. A graduate of Yale, Kent is an independent scholar and passionate bibliophile with interests in the New England Transcendentalists. In 1995, he acquired, edited, and published Louisa May Alcott’s gothic thriller *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, which became a *New York Times* best-seller. His memoir, *Rainbow On My Heart* (2002), about a spiritual path, is based on many trips to India over five decades.

something to learn from everyone; 2) that learning finds its highest purpose in service to others; and 3) that kindness and respect should extend to all living beings. Twenty years after the school began, I came to see how closely this guidance echoed the educational vision advanced by Bronson Alcott in his Temple School in Boston (1834–1839). Alcott believed that each child carried a divine individuality best nurtured through active conversation; he understood learning as character building; and he stressed a reverence for life extending even to animals. In both traditions, education is not merely preparation for life; it is a way of living. Understanding Alcott’s perspective provided much support during periods when people questioned the value of a different approach—so I added more to the collection. Over time it expanded to include material representing other members of the multitalented family, including several paintings and unpublished letters from the accomplished artist May Alcott.



Elizabeth Palmer Peabody.
Record of Mr. Alcott's School, Exemplifying the Principles and Methods of Moral Culture.
Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1874.

At the same time I was building an Alcott family collection, a strong supporter of Sant Bani School, Colorado entrepreneur Tim Mather, was so intrigued he asked me to create a similar collection for him. For the next thirty years I served as curator and advisor to Tim, helping to assemble a second Alcott collection with a parallel vision: to reflect on lives well-lived as lessons for today.

In the summer of 2025 Tim asked me to recommend a permanent home for his collection where it would “be treasured, enhance current holdings, stay together, and be

available for all to access.” Having sold my Alcott Family Collection to the William Munroe Special Collections in the fall of 2024, I told Tim I knew the perfect place: the Concord Free Public Library. All the books, manuscripts, letters, photographs and ephemera would be coming home again. Tim agreed and donated his collection to the library’s Special Collections in honor of Sant Bani as a living embodiment of the values of the Alcotts.

Collecting the Alcotts has always been about companionship—about “old friends” manifesting through books (including volumes from their library), letters, journals, manuscripts, artwork, photographs and ephemera. Their thoughts and actions have provided encouragement while I followed a path less trodden. It has been exciting to reveal new threads in the warp and weave of their lives—and to see that fabric continue to grow. Placing both collections in the William Munroe Special Collections will allow so many others to participate in this conversation for decades to come.

“The Alcotts were large”: Manuscripts, Books, and Letters— Two New Collections

Daniel Shealy

“The Alcotts were large!” declared Louisa May Nieriker, the daughter of May Alcott, shortly before her death in 1975. Speaking with the biographer Madelon Bedell, Nieriker, called Lulu by her family, meant that the Alcotts encompassed so much of 19th-century American intellectual life. Reformers, activists, writers, artists, philosophers, poets, the Alcotts were not only idealists but people of action. In many ways these two collections, the Mather Collection and the Bicknell Collection, demonstrate how broad a swath the Alcott family cut in the 19th century and how their work and ideas lasted throughout the 20th century and now into the 21st. Both collections possess a tremendous research value for scholars. Viewed together they consist of a sweeping array of material—almost breathtaking in its scope and importance. What follows has to be two of the finest private collections of Alcott material ever assembled: numerous unpublished letters, hundreds of books, complete manuscripts, important presentation copies of books (most first editions), ephemera, photographs, first-appearances of tales in periodicals, obscure and rare printings of books, and even unpublished journals.

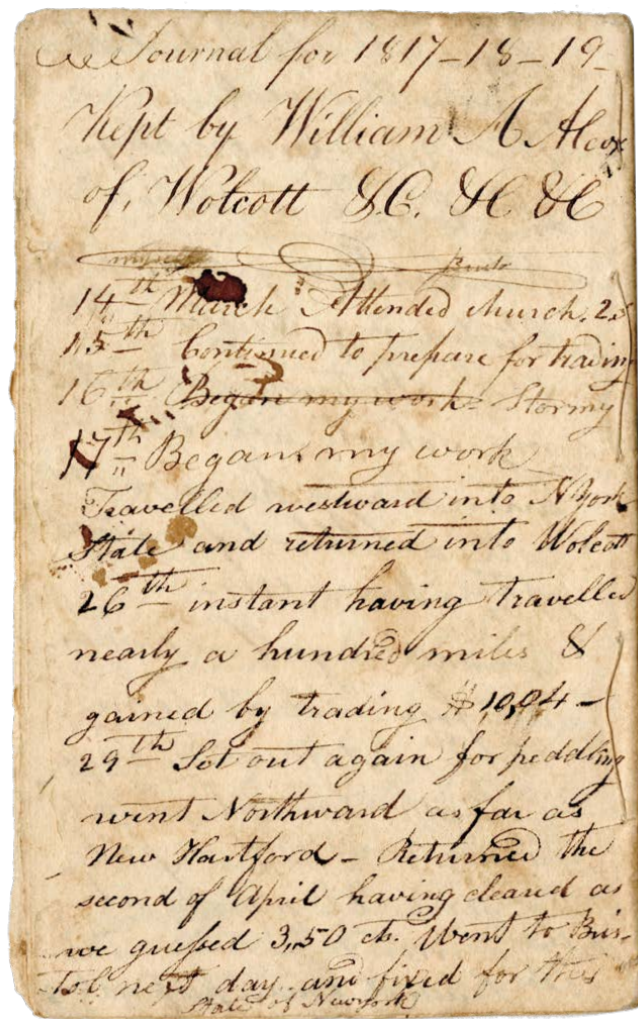
DANIEL SHEALY is Professor of English at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte, where he teaches American literature. He has published thirteen books on Louisa May Alcott, including co-editing *The Selected Letters of Louisa May Alcott* and *The Journal of Louisa May Alcott*. He also edited *Little Women: An Annotated Edition*, published by Harvard University Press. His most recent book, *Little Women at 150*, was published in 2022.



Concord Sketches : Consisting of Twelve Photographs from Original Drawings.
Boston : Fields, Osgood & Co., 1869.

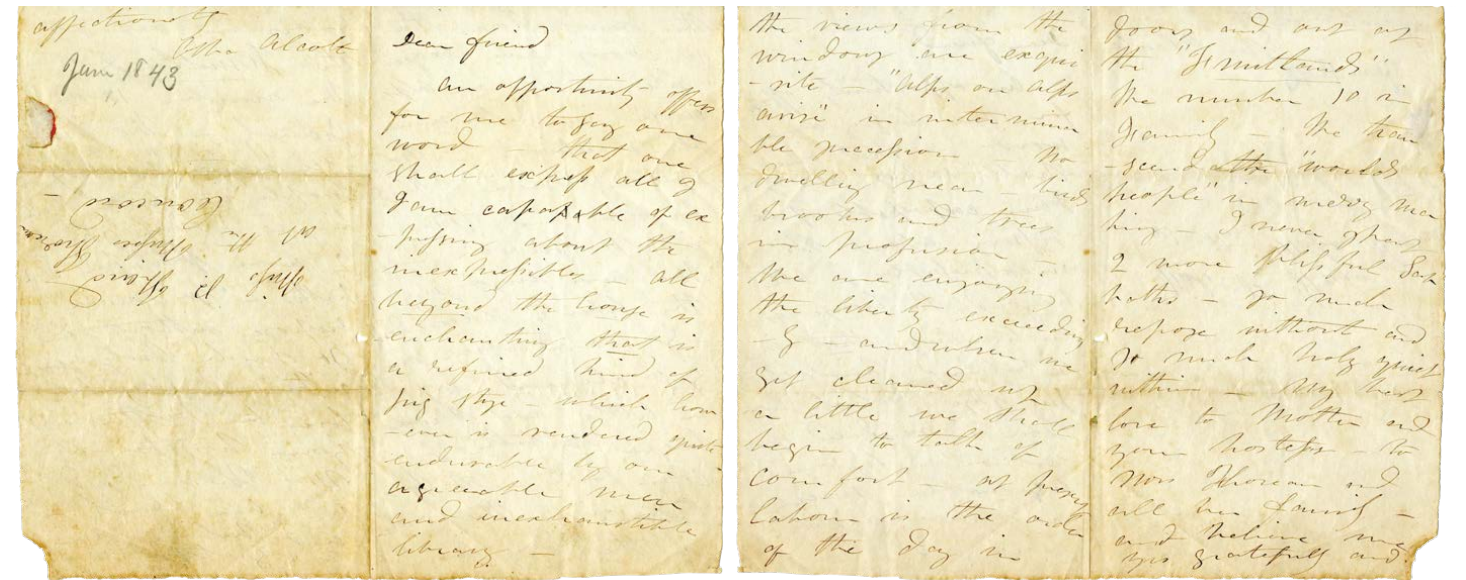
Bronson and Abigail Alcott: "Eden is being planted in New England"

Bronson Alcott, the Transcendentalist teacher, philosopher and educator, is well represented in these collections. First, there is an 1836 first edition of the two-volume *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*, a rare book in any instance. However, the book here is a presentation copy given by Bronson to his second cousin, William Alcott, a well-known educator and reformer (especially health reform). Dovetailing with this important book is



William A. Alcott
Journal, 1817.
(Mather Collection)

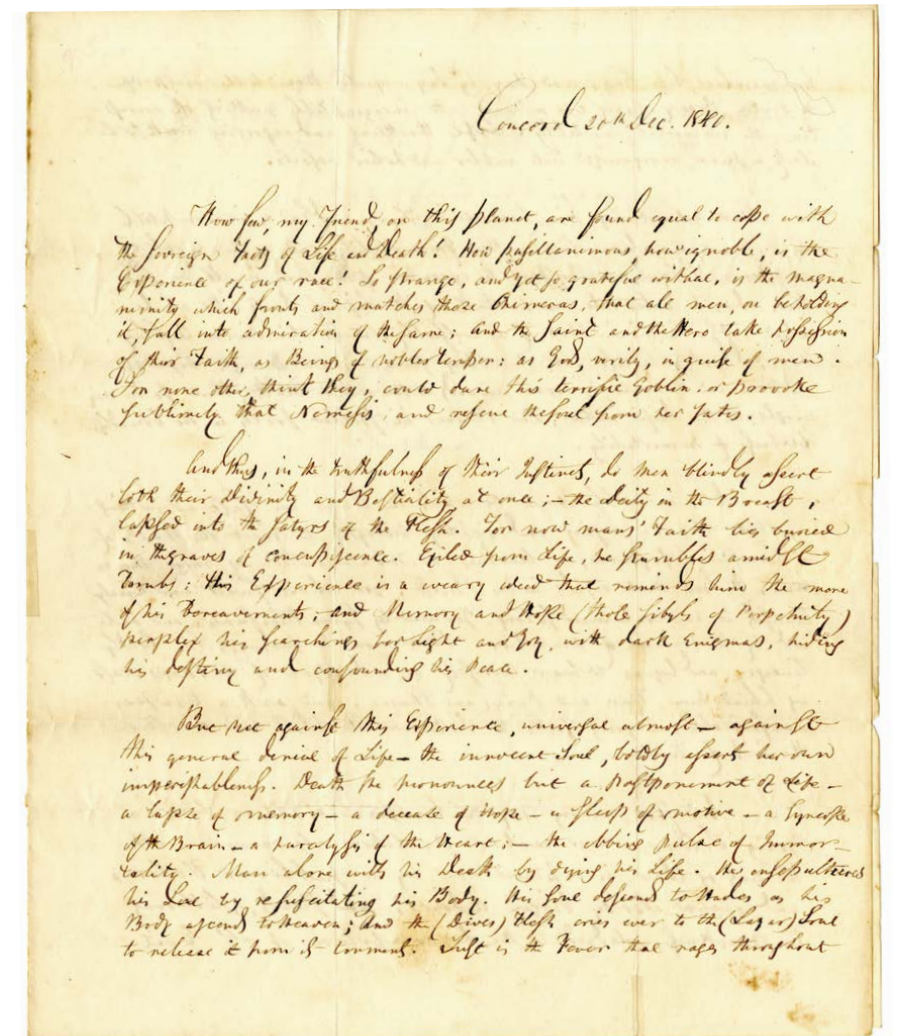
another fascinating part of the collection: the books and manuscripts of William Alcott (1798–1859). Although William was two years older than Bronson, the two were close, sharing a love of books and intellectual life. Like Bronson, William Alcott was a relentless journal writer, and he too led an examined life. In fact, the two Alcotts often exchanged views on the material they read. As Frederick Dalhstrand notes in his *Amos Bronson Alcott: An Intellectual Biography* (1982), both “were conscious of being different from the average Connecticut farm boy” (21). While the collection contains seven of William’s books (the most noteworthy *Vegetable Diet*, a beautiful copy of a very hard-to-find 1838 book), the most important parts of the William Alcott material are the unpublished manuscript journals from 1813 to the 1820s. These journals include Alcott’s peddling trips to the South in 1820, where he was accompanied by his cousin Bronson. Sailing into Charleston, SC, the two travel together through the Carolinas to Virginia, a trip that would become significant for Bronson. Forming the raw material from which William Alcott would compose his *Rambles at the South* (1854), the journals, as yet unexamined by scholars, offer a rare look into everyday farm life in the slave-holding South before industrialization.



Abigail May Alcott to "dear friend,"
June 1843. (Mather Collection)

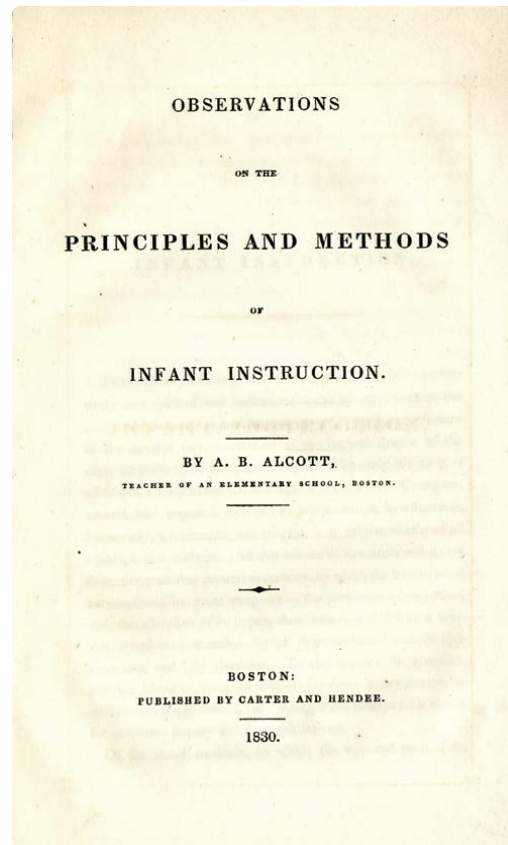
The Bronson Alcott manuscript letters in these collections are also extremely noteworthy, along with those of his wife, Abigail May Alcott. Two letters by Bronson to Christopher Greene, editor of *The Plain Speaker*, written in the early 1840s, show us Alcott in full bloom as a Transcendentalist as he promotes a vegetarian diet in his highly philosophical language, even promising Greene that “Eden is being planted in N[ew] England as fabled paradise of yore.” Another important letter is the one Bronson writes to his nephew Edward Gaylord in 1880, in which he speaks of May Alcott’s recent death in late 1879 in Paris: “We are all stricken low by this stroke... Tributes to the dear one... cannot heal the wounds of grief.”

Two letters written by Abigail Alcott in 1843 should also be noted. Here she discusses life at Fruitlands, the failed utopian community set up by Bronson Alcott and Charles Lane. While Abigail loves the

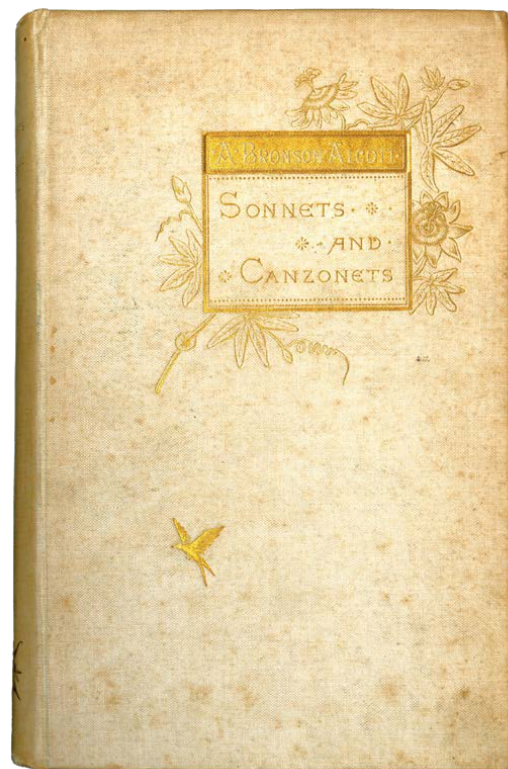


A. Bronson Alcott to Christopher Greene,
December 20, 1840. (Mather Collection)

A. Bronson Alcott. *Observations on the Principles and Methods of Infant Instruction*. Boston: Carter and Hende, Boston, 1830. (Bicknell Collection)



A. Bronson Alcott. *Sonnets and Canzonets*. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1882. (Bicknell Collection)



beautiful rolling hills and picturesque countryside—"Alps upon Alps"—she refers to the farmhouse as a "refined kind of pig sty which however is rendered quite endurable by our agreeable men and inexhaustible library."

A number of books owned by Bronson Alcott would certainly be used by scholars to explore Alcott's own readings, including a beautiful copy of Mary Wollstonecraft's feminist essay *Vindication of the Rights of Women* and a copy of the *Looking Glass Bible* (a book I've never seen before), which includes a version of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. These texts go far in helping to create an intellectual biography of this unique teacher, philosopher and poet. Also valuable to scholars are copies of Bronson's own works, including "Observations on the Principles and Methods of Infant Instruction," a very early essay from 1830, and a signed subscriber copy of *Sonnets and Canzonets* with photos of the subjects of his poems—a simply amazing edition.

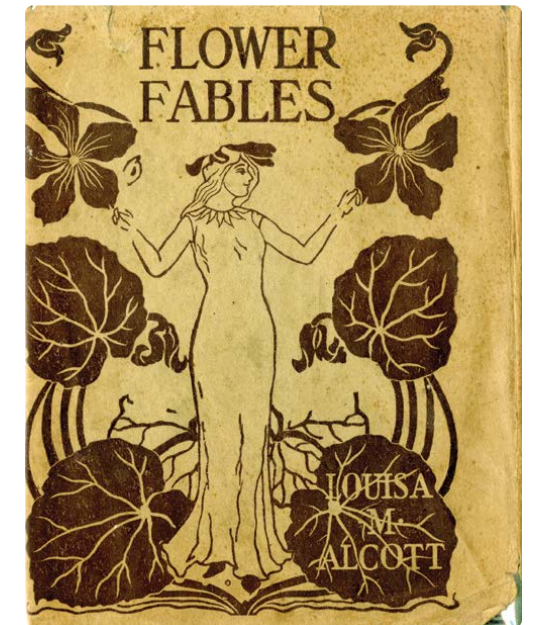
Louisa May Alcott: "Best wishes for the success of our *Little Women*"

When Louisa May Alcott was born in November 1832, Bronson Alcott wrote a friend that he hoped his daughter would eventually "deserve a place in the estimation of society." Louisa Alcott worked hard to achieve that recognition, and her place in the canon of American literature is secure. The manuscripts, books and periodicals in this collection demonstrate the wide range of her talents, from her early fairy tales to her gothic sensational stories, from her domestic novels to her children's stories, from her autobiographical sketches to her poems. All of it is represented here, from the struggling author attempting to make a living from her writing to the literary lioness whose classic *Little Women* (1868–69) catapulted her to fame around the world in the last half of the 19th century. And it is all simply exceptional!

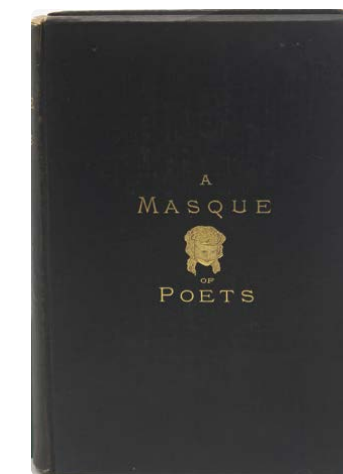
Among the highlights of Louisa May Alcott books in the collection is her first book *Flower Fables*, published in 1855—a rarity to find. Not only is the first edition here but also an 1898 reprint in excellent condition with a dust jacket (I've never seen a copy in dust jacket before). Also present are two first editions of *Hospital Sketches* (1863), Alcott's recounting of her time as a Civil War nurse in Washington, DC and her first real success as a writer. *Moods*, Alcott's first novel—and a controversial one—published in 1865, appears

in several editions here in these collections. There is an excellent copy of the first edition (with a pasted-on copyright notice by the publisher A. K. Loring), along with another first edition missing the final page but with a signed letter from Loring tipped in, which explains the rarity of the volume. In addition, there are copies of Loring's edition of *Moods*, issued in 1870, in which he hoped to capitalize on Alcott's popularity as the author of the best-selling *Little Women*. Finally, there is a first edition of the re-issue of *Moods* by Roberts Brothers in 1882, once Alcott bought back the copyright.

The thrillers, or blood-and-thunder tales as Alcott called them, form an important part of these two collections. Both feature



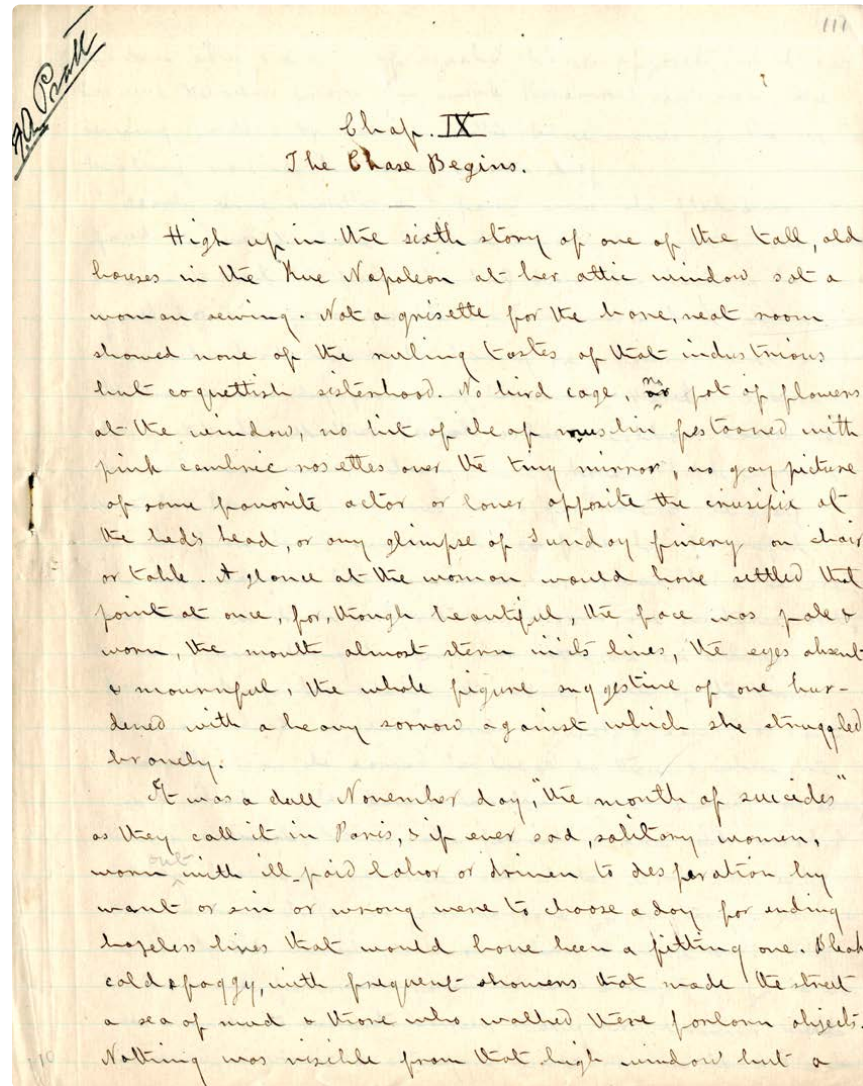
Louisa May Alcott. *Flower Fables*. Philadelphia: Henry Altemus Company, 1898. (Mather Collection)



Masque of Poets: copy of John Sewall Pratt Alcott (son of Anna Pratt). Includes Emily Dickinson's "Success," Henry David Thoreau's "Pilgrims," and Louisa May Alcott's "Transfiguration." Edited by George Parsons Lathrop. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1878. (Bicknell Collection)

complete runs of the serialization of several Alcott thrillers written anonymously for *Frank Leslie's Weekly Illustrated*: "A Pair of Eyes," "Enigmas," "Fate of the Forests," and "Taming a Tartar." These works are almost impossible to find in their original format today, especially complete runs of a serialized story; thus, these copies will allow scholars to see how these tales were laid out on the page and what type of stories appeared alongside of them. One of the highlights of the thrillers found in this collection is "The Mysterious Key" (1864), a stand-alone publication that is extremely scarce in its original format. Not only does

Louisa May Alcott. Manuscript of *A Long Fatal Love Chase*. Chapter IX, "The Chase Begins." (Mather Collection)



the collection have the first appearance of the tale but also a later reprint from 1880—also extremely rare and fragile.

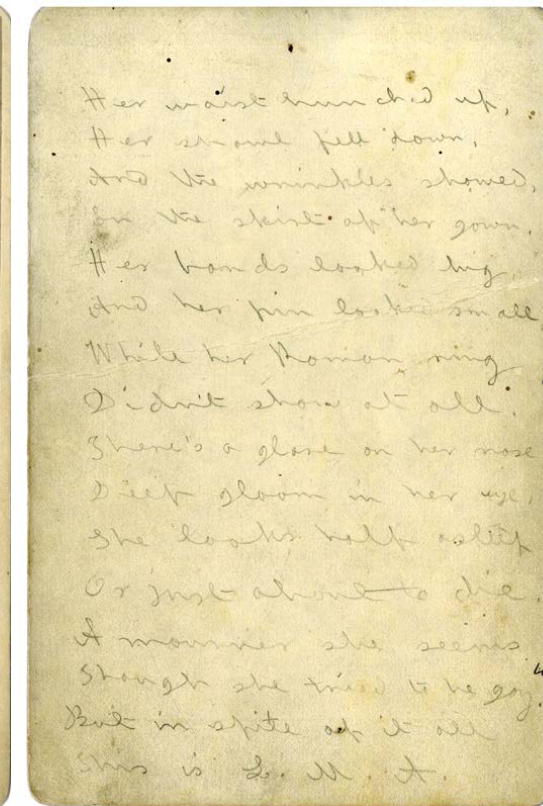
The most significant thriller, and perhaps the jewel of the collections, may well be the manuscript of *A Long Fatal Love Chase*. Deemed "too long and too sensational" by the publisher of *Flag of Our Union*, James R. Elliott, when Alcott submitted the manuscript in 1866, this work was revised, retitled (*Fair Rosamond*), and shortened by Alcott; however, she never re-submitted the work. It was not published until 1995, when Alcott editor and collector Kent Bicknell acquired the manuscript and restored it to its original form. Here is, perhaps, the most outstanding extant Alcott manuscript. First, only a couple complete manuscripts of a long Alcott narrative are known to exist (*Jo's Boys* is the other). But with this manuscript, scholars can see how Alcott composed her tale and then attempted to revise it. This manuscript of over 290 manuscript pages (recto and verso) is clearly a working manuscript showing one the choices of the author.

Although Louisa May Alcott is now known primarily as a fiction writer, Alcott's poetry is not neglected in this collection. Included here is a fair copy of her poem "My Kingdom," composed when Alcott was just thirteen, but not published until 1875. This manuscript version, copied out for a charity fair in 1887, is made even more significant by the full signature of the poet—"Louisa May Alcott" (Alcott seldom wrote out her full name). Related



to this item is the hymnal *The Sunnyside* (1875), which published her poem "My Kingdom"—a rare item to find (This is the only copy I have seen).

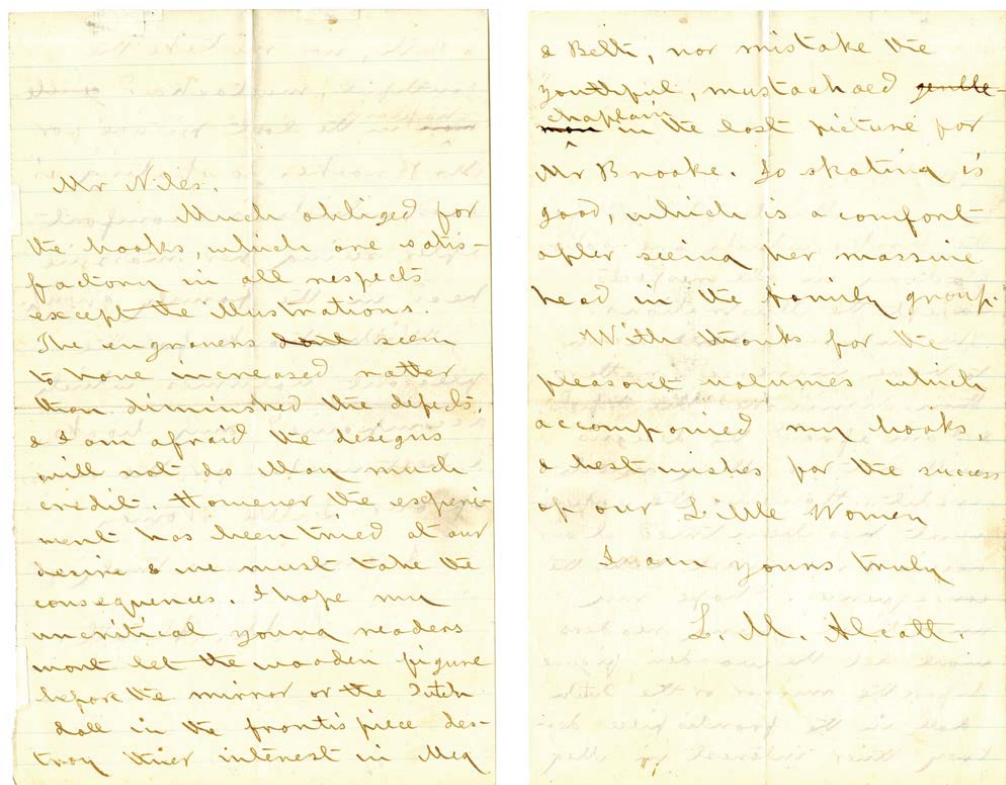
Alcott often wrote poems as a letter, and this example of expression is also found in the collection. Among the items I also find extremely valuable for research potential is the unpublished poem "To Constance," and the accompanying 14-page reminiscence of Constance Emery Ellis's visit to Orchard House in Concord, where her father was to operate the School of Philosophy from 1879–1888. In the poem, Alcott extols Constance as an example of the old-fashioned girl that the author so admires: "She dresses like a modest maid / Simplicity the truest beauty, / She makes her life a pleasant round / Of happiness and duty."



Louisa May Alcott Cabinet Photograph with original poem by Alcott on the back. (Mather Collection)

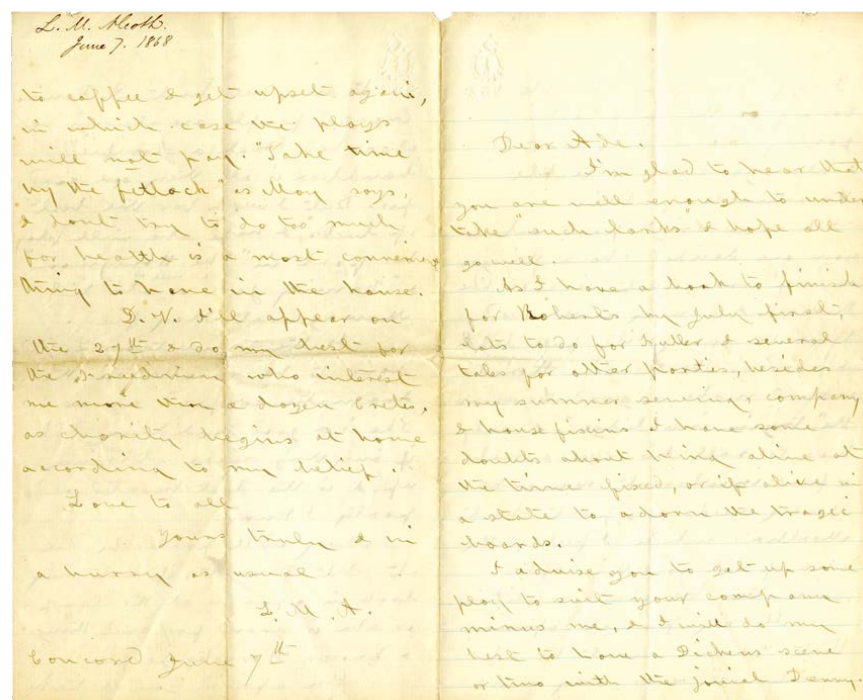
Another humorous, unpublished poem also possesses an interesting provenance. The short poem, written on the back of a cabinet photograph of Louisa May Alcott, was, as the story goes, sent to Ellen Sewall, the young woman to whom both Henry and his brother, John Thoreau, had proposed marriage. The photograph, probably taken in 1870s, was later discovered folded up in a copy of *Little Men* (1871), which Louisa had presented to the mother of Henry D. Thoreau. After Mrs. Thoreau's death, the book found its way into the home of Ellen Sewall. In the poem, Alcott expresses her dislike of the image: "There's a glare on her nose. / Deep gloom in her eye. / She looks half asleep / Or just about to die. / A mourner she seems, / Though she tried to be gay. / But in spite of it all / This is L. M. A."

Louisa May Alcott to her editor, Thomas Niles, on *Little Women*, 1868. (Mather Collection)



The Louisa May Alcott manuscript letters alone are outstanding, especially the three 1868 letters to her cousin Ade May, which are found in the Bicknell Collection. Louisa writes to her cousin in Leicester, MA, and discusses staging

Louisa May Alcott to Ade May, June 7, 1868. (Bicknell Collection)

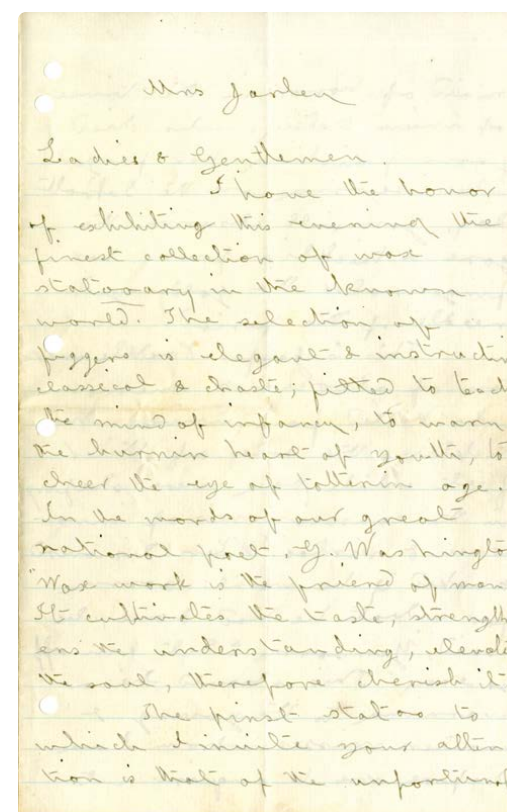


dramatic performances for the Freedmen's Aid Society there. One of the fascinating things about these letters is that they provide an important insight into Alcott at the time of the composition of *Little Women*. She tells Ade May, in the letter of June 7, 1868: "As I have a book to finish for Roberts by July first, lots to do for Fuller & several tales for other parties, besides my summer sewing, company & house fixins I have some doubts about being alive at the time fixed, or if alive in a state to adorn the tragic boards." By July 15, Alcott was excited about the performances and told Ade she was willing to portray "Mrs. Jarley's Waxworks" at the Leicester Town Hall at the end of July: "Jarley always goes well & makes a jolly wind up. It don't take long to arrange the "stattoos" if every one has his costume ready, & skips into it quickly. If I can get it into my trunk I'll

bring my Nice hat, which is grand for the giant, & will see if I have any relics of my former stage wardrobe which may be useful to the figures." Since these letters are to a close relative, they are intimate, showing us the "real" Alcott, humor intact. These few letters, along with accompanying handbills and a list of suggested costumes, props and cast list for "Jarley," also give us perhaps the most detailed observations about the amateur dramatics that Louisa May Alcott and her sisters so enjoyed. These letters would have certainly been included in *The Selected Letters of Louisa May Alcott* had they been known when Joel Myerson and I edited the volume.

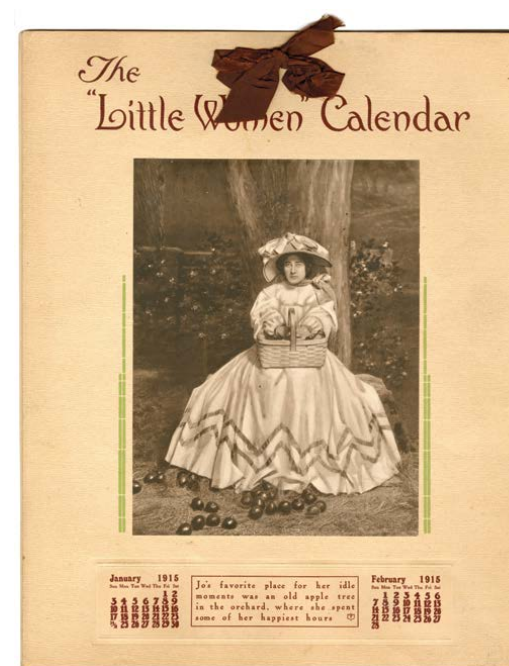
Louisa May Alcott's most famous work is present in these two collections in a variety of ways. However, two letters regarding the publication of *Little Women* stand out here. First is an 1868 letter Louisa May Alcott wrote to her editor, Thomas

Niles of Roberts Brothers, regarding the illustrations drawn by her sister, May Alcott, for *Little Women*, Vol. 1. May's illustrations did not turn out well, and, at times, there were negative comments from critics. Louisa Alcott tells Niles that "the experiment has been tried at our desire & we must take the consequences," and she closes the letter with "best wishes for the success of our Little Women." The other is a November 1868 letter written by Alcott to "Dear Little

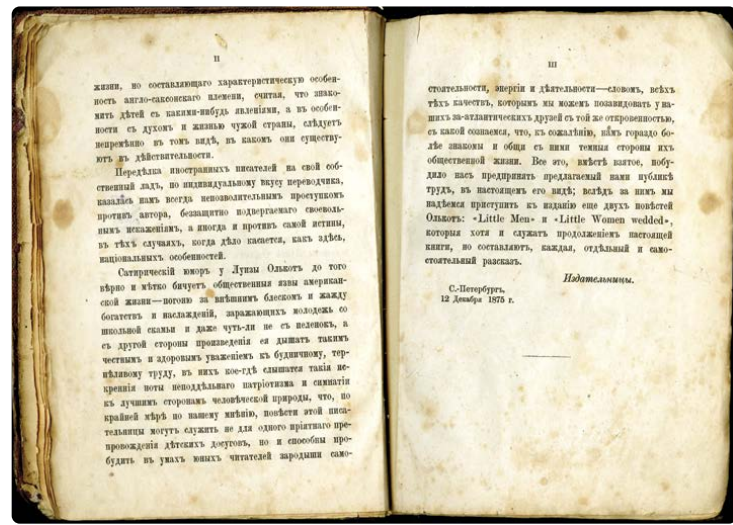
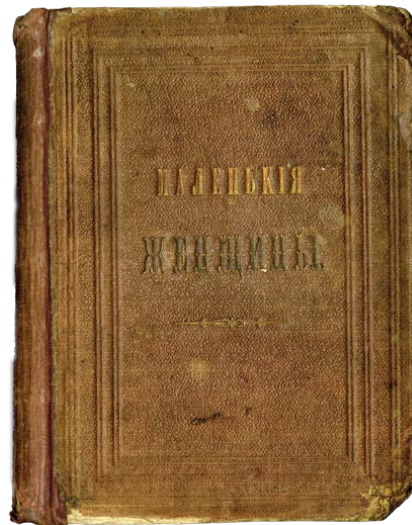


Louisa May Alcott. Manuscript of "Mrs. Jarley's Waxworks." (Bicknell Collection)

Women" at the academy attended by Caroline Hedge, the daughter of the Transcendentalist minister, Frederick Hedge. At the time of writing, Alcott was composing the second part of *Little Women*, and she confides to the girls that "I grieve to disappoint you but hasten to relieve your suspense by saying that Jo did not marry Laurie." Revealing the answer to one of the most important lingering questions (Will Jo March marry Laurie?) from part one of the novel before the sequel had even been published shows the faith Alcott had in her young readers. As she tells them, "Now this is in the strictest confidences you know." Neither of these letters have ever been published, but both offer revealing information about the composition of Alcott's classic novel.



The Little Women Calendar, 1915. (Mather Collection)

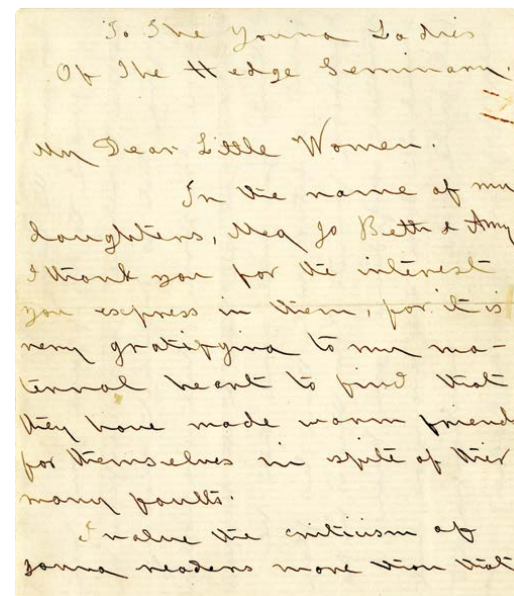


Russian Edition of *Little Women* translated, printed, published and distributed by a powerful feminist troika in 1876. (Bicknell Collection)

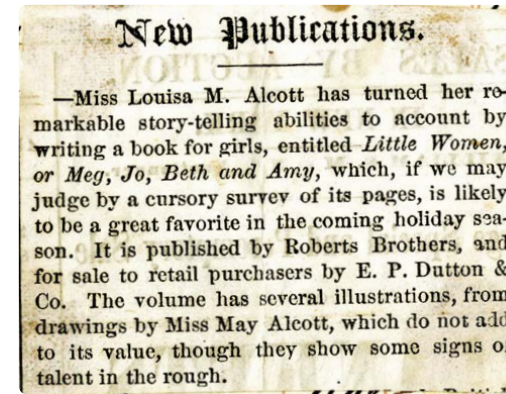
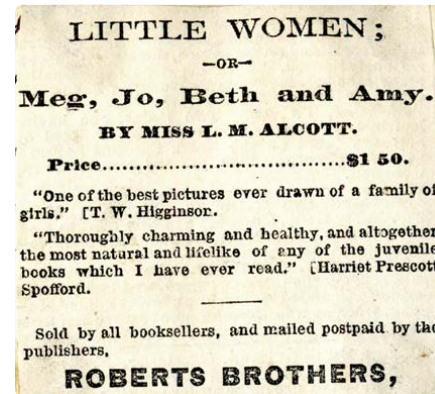
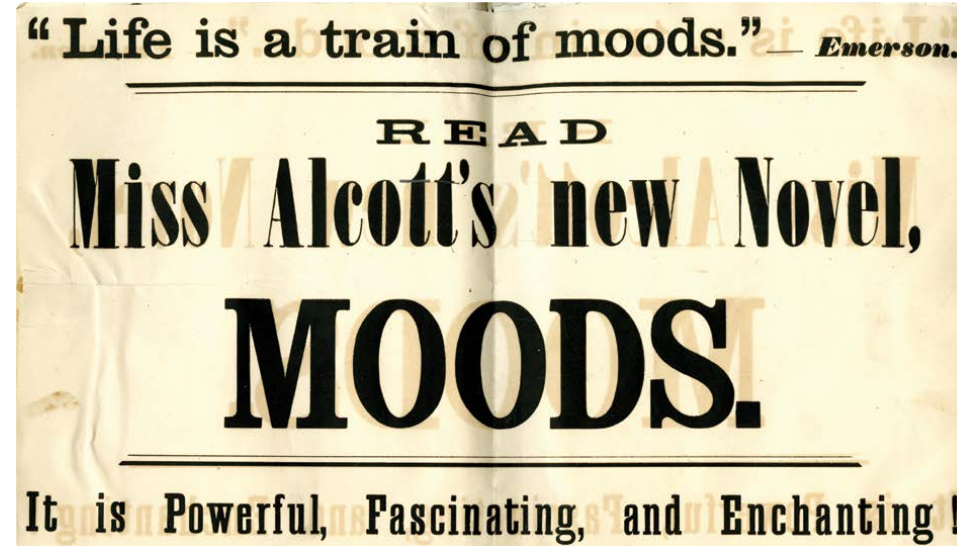
Little Women appears in the Mather Collection in a number of editions. But the ones that stand out the most are the first editions of *Little Women, Vol. 1* and *Little Women, Vol 2*, owned by Constance Winsor (Her father, Justin Winsor, was a Trustee of the Boston Public Library in 1867–68 and then Superintendent from 1868–1877). Given the inscription by Winsor (“Oct. 1, 1868”), *Volume 1* is clearly one of the first 2000 copies of the novel printed by Roberts Brothers in September 1868—a true first printing of the first edition of *Little Women*.

The foreign editions and translations of Alcott’s novels are also important to note here. The 1876 Russian edition of *Little Women*, found in the Bicknell Collection, is a book I have never seen, exceptionally hard to find, and of value to scholars working on translations of Alcott’s work. It was issued by a women’s publishing *artel* (a shareholding society), a group that eventually met with government resistance. Interestingly, the volume contains a short introduction by Russian women.

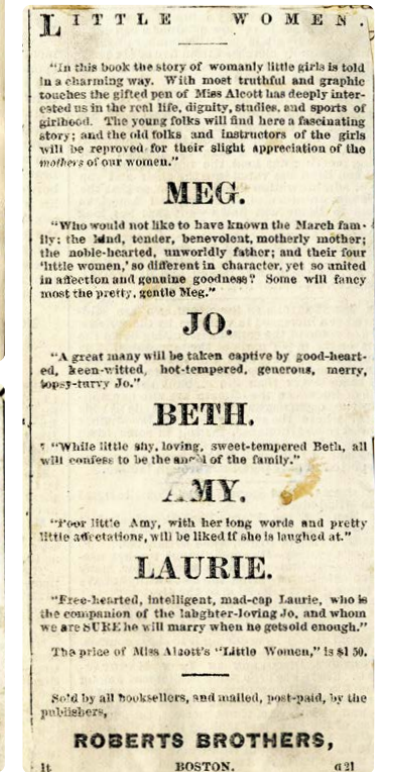
Translated only eight years after *Little Women*’s original publication, one wonders what Russian women had to say about Alcott’s novel. The introduction makes the connection between Alcott’s writings and the Russian feminist movement, at one point stating: “Louisa Alcott’s satirical humor so truthfully and accurately castigates the social ulcers of American life—the chase after superficial shine



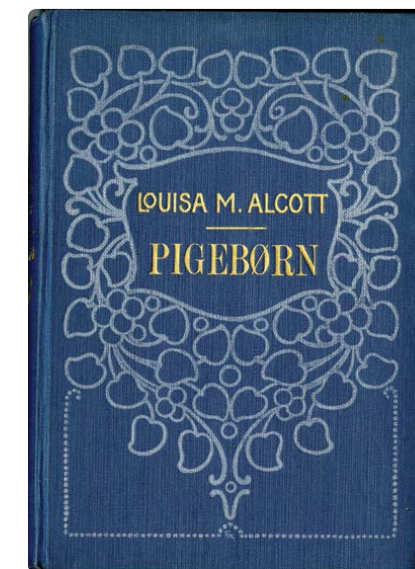
Louisa May Alcott, “To The Young Ladies Of The Hedge Seminary, My Dear Little Women,” November 1868. (Mather Collection)



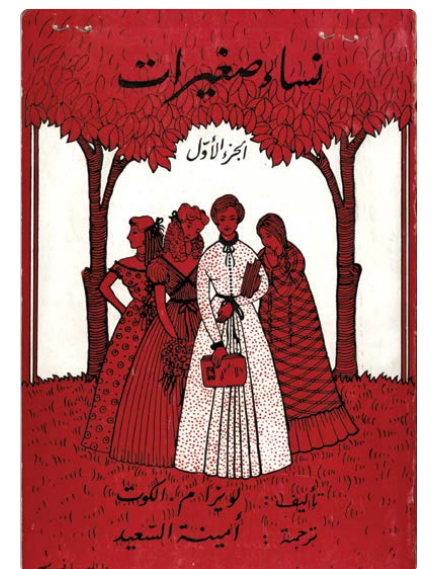
Scrapbook assembled by Louisa May Alcott, containing reviews of her work. (Mather Collection)



and the thirst for riches and pleasures, infecting the youth right off the school bench and almost right out of diapers.” Alcott would have probably agreed. The Mather Collection also contains foreign translations. Especially interesting are a number of Danish editions—all in excellent condition. Also fascinating is the rare copy of *Little Women* in Egyptian that was created and published by the U. S. State Department in 1954 (I’ve never seen one before). All of these translations go a long way in demonstrating the importance and influence of Louisa May Alcott and her literary canon around the world.



Louisa May Alcott: Danish Edition of *Little Women*. (Mather Collection)



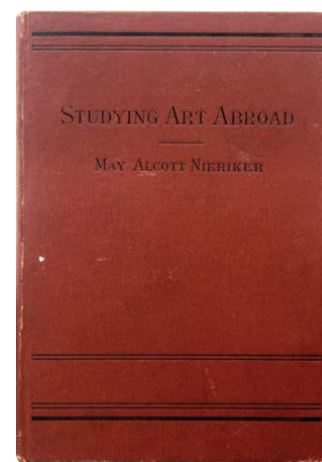
Louisa May Alcott: Egyptian Edition of *Little Women*. (Mather Collection)

May Alcott Nieriker: "Slang is all the rage"



Abigail May Alcott Nieriker.
Watercolor of an English Cottage.
Signed and dated July 19, 1873.
(Bicknell Collection)

The youngest member of the Alcott family forms an important part of these collections. The May Alcott Nieriker material alone is extremely noteworthy and valuable for future scholars. This is crucial to note since interest in May Alcott, as both an artist and a writer, has only grown, with several books about her published in the last few years. First, there are the four paintings by May Alcott. What can I say? These add to the limited—but hopefully growing—pieces of May’s art we now know about. Outside of Orchard House, the Concord Free Public Library, now holds the second largest collection of May’s art. “Sunset: A Fish Market on the Beach,” an unsigned and undated watercolor is a wonderful example of May Alcott’s skill as a copyist

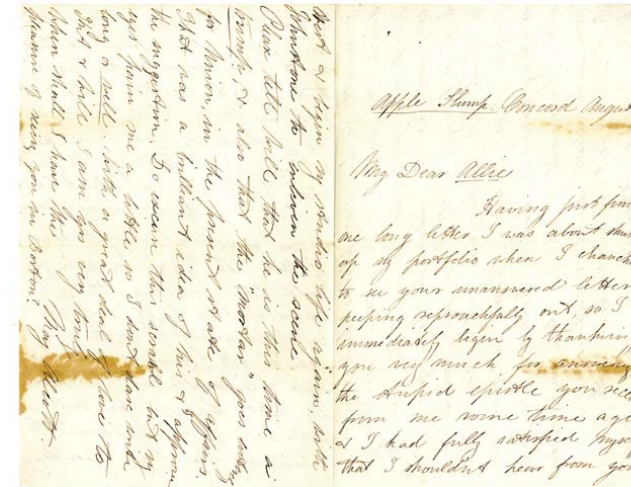


Abigail May Alcott Nieriker.
Studying Art Abroad: And How to Do It Cheaply. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1879.
(Bicknell Collection)

of J. M. W. Turner. The watercolor of Kenilworth Cottage, signed and dated July 1873, is reflective of the work she was producing in England, once she returned to Europe to study art.

The four May Alcott letters to Alice Putnam also have potential for scholars. Few letters from May have survived overall and these add to our knowledge about her daily life and work. Foreshadowing the Amy March of *Little Women*, they also show us May Alcott’s humor as she tells Putnam in July 1861: “Don’t be shocked by slang as when ‘you are at Rome you must do as the Romans do,’ & slang is all the rage here!” She also demonstrates her flirtatiousness when she confesses to her friend that “We have a fine artist here[,]

Carl Welsh[,] whose paintings are next to Church in fineness of coloring & I spend a good deal of my time in his studio watching him at his easel & if his wife wasn’t always there I should have glorious times.”



Abigail May Alcott Nieriker to Alice Putnam, August 18, 1861. (Bicknell Collection)

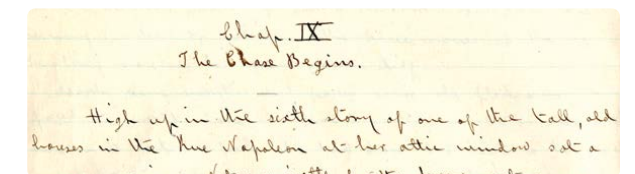


Abigail May Alcott Nieriker. Watercolor. Copy of J. M. W. Turner’s “Sunset: A Fish Market on the Beach.” Unsigned and undated. (Bicknell Collection)

Scholars and Sleuths: “The Chase Begins”

Overall, both of these collections are extremely valuable for scholars as they will be useful to those researching 19th-century American literature, American transcendentalism, women’s literature, children’s literature, and the history of American philosophy and education, just to name a few areas. Both the Bicknell and the Mather Collections complement the already-existing and always-growing archive of Alcott material at the Concord Free Public Library, and they expand the archive’s research potential for the second century of Alcott scholarship.

The Alcotts were indeed large, as Lulu Nieriker declared. Their ideas, whether about reform, education, or a life examined, speak to us still. What clues or discoveries will scholars or literary sleuths make of all of this material? To quote Louisa May Alcott: “The Chase Begins.” These two collections, sweeping in their scope, are filled with extremely rare items, all of which help tell the complex story of the Alcotts—a truly unique American family.



Louisa May Alcott. Manuscript of *A Long Fatal Love Chase*. Chapter IX, “The Chase Begins.” (Mather Collection)