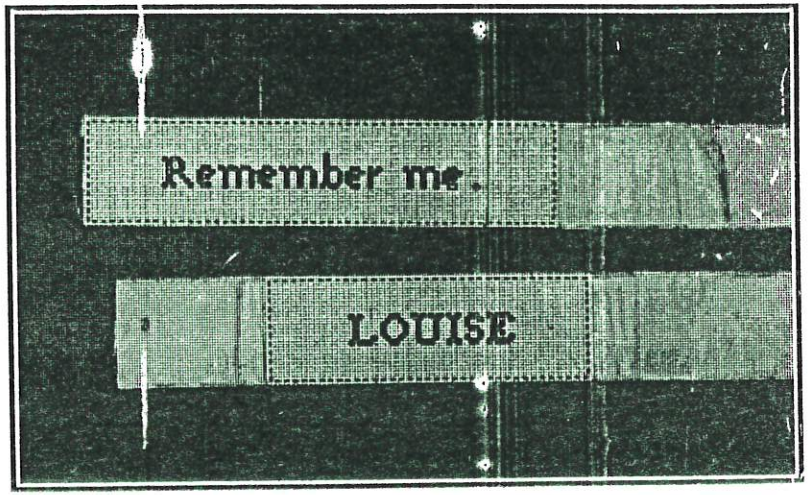

OLD YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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A Community Museum

"Remember Me":

Furnishings, Fashions, and Friendship in Nineteenth-Century York

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Catalogue photography, layout, and design: Sheryl A. Shanks

Cover Photographs:
Front: *Packing Scene in the Gallery Chamber of Emerson-Wilcox House*
Back: *Bookmarks discovered in book owned by Louise Wilcox Putnam*

Preface

For us as advisors to the Elizabeth Perkins Fellowship Program, one of the most exciting aspects of our work is fostering the blending of talents, skills, and scholarship of the individual Fellows in the development of their summer research project. This year we have had an unusually diverse group of summer interns who have examined the textile collection from many different perspectives. Their insights and skills considerably broadened the scope of the initial project which was to assess the textile collection and install a new layer of textiles in the period rooms of the Emerson Wilcox House.

With their experience in collections research Jennifer Perry, a 1991 graduate of the Winterthur Museum graduate program, and Kenneth Zogry, former assistant curator at Old Salem have developed a furnishings plan for the Emerson-Wilcox House and implemented the reinstallation of three rooms: the Small Parlor, Dining Room, and Long Parlor Chamber.

Lynn White, a Salem College graduate with curatorial experience at Biltmore Estate, The Corcoran Gallery, and the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site, applied her textile conservation, registration and exhibit skills to the design and installation of the Gallery chamber and to the textile component of the Long Parlor Chamber.

Julia Mickenberg, a recent graduate of Brown University, used her interest in social history in the examination of the female sphere in York. Her skills in oral history and primary document research brought a new community involvement to the program.

And Sheryl Shanks, with a Masters degree in American Studies from New York University, solved some of the architectural mysteries of the house and documented its changes, as well as used her photography and graphic design skills to photograph the textile collection and lay out the catalogue.

By coming to terms with the overall interpretation of the Emerson-Wilcox House and focusing on the mid-nineteenth century, the Fellows' work has moved the Old York Historical Society forward in fulfilling its mission and long-range plan. We salute them for their scholarship which took the 1991 project beyond our expectations and we thank them for a significant contribution to the interpretation of York's history.

Frances Lord and Sarah Giffen

Introduction

Sheryl A. Shanks

As we look back on history, our views and beliefs about the past continue to change. Old York Historical Society has committed itself to reexamining the interpretation of the history of the town of York and its relationship to the Piscataqua River region. Each summer the Elizabeth Perkins Fellowship Program brings young museum professionals to Old York to research, interpret and participate in the ongoing historical process. By being constantly challenged by the Fellows, the Society participates in a process which broadens and vitalizes history.

The summer of 1991 brought the fourth group of Perkins Fellows to Old York. The focus of the summer was the Society's textile collection and it was through these textiles that the Fellows explored the interdependence of historical study and material culture and their importance to the historical process.

The project began with a simple idea: layering textiles from the collection into the Emerson-Wilcox House. This would accomplish two very desirable tasks: appropriate textiles would be on display, and the introduction of period textiles in the house would enhance the period rooms. The first step toward this goal was for the Fellows to find out what was in the collection, and move the textiles into a more appropriate work space. This was beneficial to the physical care of the collection. The textiles were then labeled and sorted in preparation for a visit from Nancy Rexford, a textile consultant who evaluated the textiles and helped the Fellows assess the strengths and weaknesses of the collection. Familiarity and understanding of a collection is the first step toward a responsible installation.

Layering the textiles into the house became a complicated task that quickly illustrated the complexity of historical study. Adding textiles into the house required a meshing of the textile collection with the rest of the collection. The development of a long range plan for the interpretation of the house was the best way to accomplish this. The plan took into account the mission of the museum; Old York's interpretation philosophy which called for the inclusion of different periods within the house to allow the Society to interpret various periods of history; the architecture of the house; a knowledge of the various collections; and how they could be used to enhance one another.

The choice of objects for a solid historic installation must be made within a socio-economic context. In order to provide thorough documentation for the exhibit the Fellows focused on two rooms in the house for which they developed a thematic context. These rooms tell the story of Louise Wilcox Putnam and other wealthy widows in York during the mid to late nineteenth

century. Inventories, diaries, letters, and recipe books provide the background for the rooms' new furnishing scheme and contribute to the ongoing interpretation of the Emerson-Wilcox House.

The process by which a solid historic installation is created is a varied and complex one. The 1991 Elizabeth Perkins Fellowship project provided a first-hand opportunity for the Fellows to discover and experience this process, as well as to contribute to Old York's ongoing research. The following catalogue and the accompanying exhibit show the results of teamwork and commitment.

Acknowledgments

The Fellows would like to thank all of the people who made this catalogue, exhibit, and reinstallation in the Emerson-Wilcox House possible. Nancy Rexford and Jane Nylander were a great help to us in assessing our costume and textile collections and in deciding which objects were appropriate for the exhibit and period rooms. Special thanks go to Lisa Blinn for helping us with exhibit props, and to the Brick Store Museum for loaning us a wig and petticoats.

For the essay on widowhood, several descendants of Harriet Emerson and Louise Wilcox Putnam provided invaluable information and assistance. Special thanks go to Tom and Nancy Emerson Viele, who brought to our attention numerous documents; they were extremely helpful and enthusiastic about the project. Elizabeth and Mary Louise Cutts told wonderful stories about their great-aunt, Louise Putnam, and helped fill in some of the gaps in Old York's records of her family and the period she spent in the Emerson-Wilcox house. Roger Putnam told us where to find his great-uncle's gravestone, and Mason Newick was nice enough to put us in touch with Mr. Putnam.

We are also indebted to several people and organizations who provided much appreciated information and time: Kathy Francis, of the Museum of American Textile History, David Wood of the Concord Museum, Kerry O'Brien of the York Institute, Nan Cumming of the Maine Historical Society, as well as museum and academic lecturers Laurel Ulrich, Richard Candee, Richard Nylander, Mary Anne Caton and Gerald Ward. For their services, thanks to Cindi Young, Ken Ishii, Bob Lord, and the Portsmouth Fabric Co.

Finally, we would like to extend thanks to the trustees of the Old York Historical Society for their continued support of the program, and in particular to Dick Barnes for his unflagging interest and good humor. Most of all, we would like to thank the staff of the Old York Historical Society, especially John LaBranche, Virginia Spiller and Sarah Giffen. The entire project would never have come together without the guidance, patience, friendship, and hot meals provided by Frances Lord.

After Mourning: Nineteenth-Century York Widows and their Rituals of Death and Life

Julia Mickenberg

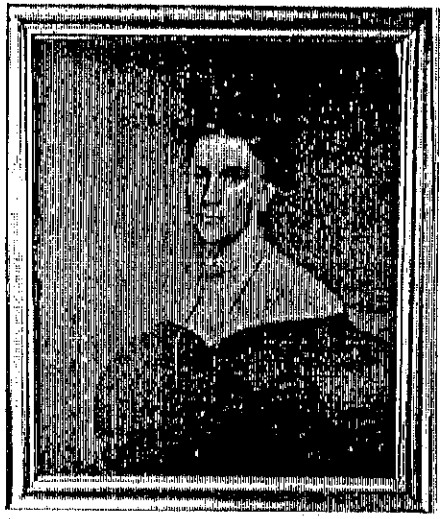
I do not feel that my dear husband is dead. The kind Father in his wisdom has seen fit to remove him from my sight, but his influences I still feel around me. My dear friend you know by sad experience how hard it is to say at all times "not my will but thine be done," when the husband, the partner of all our joys and sorrows, the one on whom we have leaned, with whom we have gone for years from week to week up to the house of the Lord, and taken sweet counsel together: when they are removed from our side, and we are left to walk the path of life alone. It seems dark and dreary, but I know it will be illuminated by the ways of the son of righteousness, and then when I reach the end, and look back, what now appears so long, will seem short to me. [1]

Harriet J. Emerson read these lines in the winter of 1874 in York, Maine, in a letter written in Kennebunk by her friend Sarah Hatch Bourne. They had been close friends for many years and it was only natural that Harriet, a widow herself, should share the grief that Mrs. Bourne felt at the loss of her husband, only natural that she would be able to empathize with this woman's "severe bereavement."[2] A woman experiencing the loss of her husband in the late nineteenth century would find herself not only without her closest companion, but also suddenly bereft of her role as wife—a role that largely defined the identity of the nineteenth-century woman.

In a world where women were taught to orient their lives toward becoming the ideal wife and mother, what was left for widows in the late nineteenth century? The ritual of mourning that immediately followed the death of their husbands offered wives a way of dealing with the loss of their closest companion, and making the transition from wifehood to widowhood. Indeed, their diaries, letters and other records often reveal days, weeks and years composed of rituals, both public and private. Looking beyond a widow's period of mourning and examining her daily life magnifies the spheres and routines of women in general: to a great extent, widows were simply wives without husbands, faithfully looking after their homes and families, maintaining ties of kinship and friendship and attending church regularly, praying of someday joining their husbands in heaven.

Louise Wilcox Putnam, who spent most of her life in the Emerson-Wilcox house in York, experienced the loss of her husband in 1868 and continued to reside as a widow in the house until 1894. Her neighbor and friend, Harriet Emerson (a descendant by marriage of Emersons who were

former occupants of Louise's house) was widowed five years before Louise, and lived until about the same time. The objects and documents these two women collected, as well as family stories about them, offer glimpses into the lives of late nineteenth-century women in a small Maine town.



Portrait of Harriet J. Emerson courtesy of Tom and Nancy Viele. Photograph by Patrick Grace.

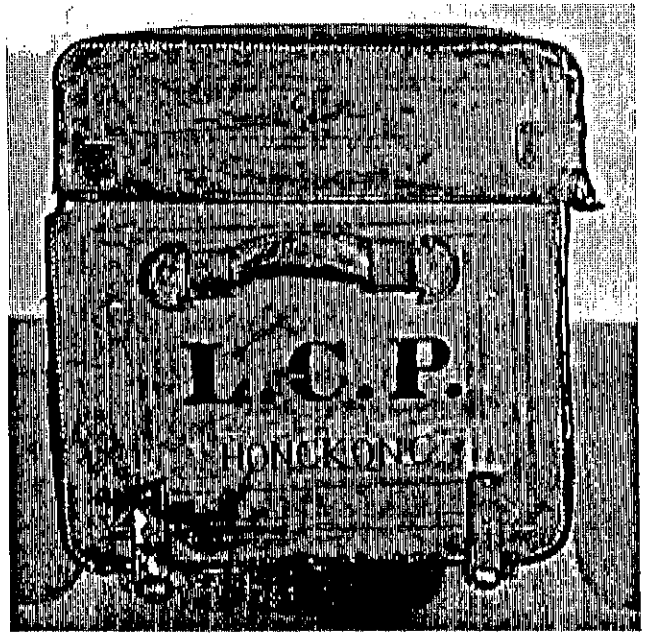
Portrait of Louise Wilcox Putnam

Harriet Emerson was born in Portland, but married into a family that had been established in York for over one hundred years. Her husband, Charles, was a well-respected lawyer in town. They raised four children and lived comfortable lives, attending church regularly and maintaining ties with neighbors and friends. They could afford to send their children to private schools and to piano lessons; they were members of local organizations and were well-known and well-liked individuals in town. The grief that Harriet felt in 1863 upon the death of her husband was no doubt felt throughout the community. After his death, Harriet continued to keep close ties with her family, neighbors and friends; she went to church regularly, belonged to several social organizations, and she continued to run her household. She never remarried.

As the wife of a China-trade sea captain, Louise Putnam's married life appears more exotic, but she was nonetheless of a socio-economic background similar to Harriet Emerson's and shared many of the same circles. Louise's father had acquired the Wilcox home from ancestors of Charles Emerson, and as an adult Louise continued to live there with her parents and an unmarried sister and later with her husband, William Putnam, although she

frequently accompanied him on his voyages to the Orient. Louise and William's only child died in Hong Kong as an infant, but the couple raised Louise's niece as their own. After William Putnam died, Louise stayed in the Wilcox house, maintaining contacts with her neighbors, receiving long summer visits from her relatives and often spending some of the winter months in Connecticut or in the Catskills with her brothers' families.[3] Like Harriet, Louise chose not to remarry after her husband's death.

Just what records of their existence did these two women leave? Some of Louise Putnam's possessions have remained in her house, including many of the objects she brought back from the Far East such as picture frames, furniture and her traveling trunk, as well as linens, her sewing kit and several of her books. But in terms of written records, the only surviving



Louise Wilcox Putnam's traveling trunk

documents are her obituary, a short will leaving everything to her niece, and most valuable of all, her cookbook or "receipt book." Handwritten recipes, home remedies, and tips along with clippings from newspapers are pasted over the yellowed pages of what was once her husband's ledger book.

This little scrapbook reveals a great deal, however: The names of the neighbors, friends and relatives with whom she shared recipes and remedies ("Mrs. Emerson's Hard Gingerbread" follows several pages after "Annie Sewall's Cough Mixture...Enough to kill a horse!"), newspapers she read,

plants that she cooked and preserved each season (a clipping suggests "THE BEST MODE FOR DRYING PUMPKINS"). We can glean clues about her dress (scribbled in pencil: "735 Tremont Street/ Boston Corsets"), the appearance of her hair ("Hair Oil" "1 part Bay Rum; 3 parts Olive Oil and 1 part Brandy—Shake well before using"), her ailments and how she treated them (cures are suggested for rheumatism, corns, indigestion, flatulency, cholera and neuralgia, to name a few). These clues yield insights into her domestic life in general. Moreover, the simple fact that the only written record she left behind was her cookbook tells a great deal about not just Louise Putnam, but about women of her time in general.

Of Harriet's possessions there survive two year-long diaries from 1857 and 1871, stacks of letters from relatives and friends (especially her daughter Abbie), records of her financial transactions, and many records and recollections of other family members. Harriet left more records of her life than Louise did, but we know they were neighbors and friends, and we can assume their experiences were similar. Both women not only experienced long widowhood, but both also lost children in their infancy, had relatives in places other than York, and maintained close connections to their families. Both women had the money to hire people to help with domestic work and both frequently had relatives staying with them in their large York homes. And Harriet and Louise were each part of a larger American culture that expected certain things of women, advised them (in schools, advice books, and "Ladies' Magazines") how to keep house, how to dress, and even how to mourn. They lived through the Civil War and benefitted from new inventions like the sewing machine and the railroad, and they witnessed the beginnings of the summer tourist industry in their own town.

Historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg refers to the 1870s as the heyday of the early American bourgeoisie—a new breed of what we would today term the "upper-middle class," who lived primarily in the small towns of the agrarian hinterland. The people of these towns looked to a ruling elite of bankers and merchants whose spheres of control and organizations were small, personal, and rarely extended beyond the neighboring community. "An odd medley of personal intimacy and hierarchical structure characterized small-town America," writes Rosenberg. "Everyone knew everyone else, heard similar sermons every Sunday, sent children to the same school. Thinking of themselves as neighbors, they all assumed their allotted places within a commonly agreed upon and precise hierarchy of power and influence based on wealth and Christian gentility. A harmony of outlook and shared expectations marked this world."[4]

Rosenberg's description of this small-town bourgeoisie echoes the experiences of Louise Putnam and Harriet Emerson. These experiences therefore are evidence that the political, social, and economic changes taking

place in the nation in 1870 were felt in York, Maine as well. What evidence do we have of how these changes affected the two women? Louise left an ironic relic from the newspaper she had been reading—on a piece of newspaper about one inch square, she saved instructions to help "Ladies clean their black dresses—silk, cashmere or alpaca..." On the other side of the paper can be found some hints as to the news she *wasn't* interested in enough to save—something about a "General Grant," but the context has been cut away. Perhaps she wasn't completely immune to the political concerns of her day, however. On a recipe for nougat are initials and groups of letters which at first glance appear to be doodles, but underneath them are written out the words "Who-Will-Be-Our-Next-President?" Was it only a word game she was playing with a friend while they cooked nougat? Or was she genuinely concerned, despite the fact that there was very little she could do herself to influence politics?

Harriet's papers tell more about how politics, technological advances and social changes were felt in York. On May 15, 1857, her daughter Abbie wrote from New York about her desire to go to an Anti-Slavery meeting— "I do want to go to one of the Anti-Slavery meetings dreadfully and hear Phillips and Fred Douglass, but Mr. B (Mr. Brooks, head of the household at which she was staying) spoke last night so strongly that I can't. He says 'tis not respectable, but I think this is a mistake..."[5] Abbie makes frequent references in her letters to politics, speculating about elections and the character of presidential candidates. "I don't think Mr. Cleveland is quite so bad as you think, tho' he is bad enough I've no doubt,"[6] she wrote in November of 1884 to her mother. Harriet was a Republican without question, but she was most interested in politics when they affected her day-to-day life: "The P.O. has been removed by the Democrats downtown and it is a great bother,"[7] she wrote to her son Edward in 1885.

Because women were not allowed to vote in the nineteenth century, other inventions, ideas, and trends were more likely to be mentioned in their letters and diaries. In letters Abbie wrote from New York to her mother, she mentions learning to use a sewing machine, having a miniature daguerreotype photograph taken of herself, riding the train, using patent medicines for a cold, and wanting money from her parents to buy or make the latest fashion. She refers to *Peterson's* magazine and to *Godey's* and mentions her subscription to the newspaper, the *Independent*.[8]

Although Harriet herself was not in the city of New York but in the town of York, Maine, and still doing things as "old-fashioned" as making her own soap in 1871, she too witnessed many changes that same year right at home. On May 19th of 1871 she visited the new hotel, the Marshall House. "It is a splendid affair for this place," she wrote after returning home. "I hope it will be filled." Her own son Frank sought to capitalize on what he wisely

predicted might be an influx of tourists into the area by buying a new steamer, "'the Hoffman,' which he designs to run from Portsmouth to York the ensuing season for the accommodation of passengers, tourists, etc. I hope it will be profitable," recorded Harriet on June 9. And yet the growth in town was not always something she could see as positive, as her August 15 entry attests—her own little road was getting dusty from all the traffic: "such a constant drive of carriages is not pleasant."[9]

While women such as Harriet and Louise were forced to respond to changes taking place in the world around them, the biggest change in their own lives occurred at home, with the deaths of their husbands, forcing a transition from wifehood to widowhood. Despite "progress" and scientific advances, mortality rates were still remarkably high, and the home in most cases continued to be the place for convalescence and death itself. Harriet lost two children as infants, Louise lost one. In a diary she kept for ten months, Harriet refers to illnesses (often her own) or deaths forty-two times. Medicine was still backward from today's standpoint, and death was closer to most people's lives than it is today.

Responding to changes in society and religious outlook, death became sentimentalized and "domesticated" in the nineteenth century. As one writer points out, "the poetical effusions, the hair jewelry, the endless crape of nineteenth century American death—all may seem morbid or maudlin to modern eyes." In reality, what developed into highly ritualized expressions of grief and an elaborate system of mourning etiquette were a way of publicly expressing private grief in a socially acceptable way, and these practices also served to uphold moral and spiritual values.[10]

As Ellen Marie Snyder points out in an essay on Victorian death furniture, "How a culture treats its dead reveals much about the role of its living. In Victorian America, an emphasis on religion, home and appearances was reflected in a desire to project the trappings of home and life ever farther into the next world, slowly domesticating not only the cemetery, but heaven as well." A "domesticated" heaven meant the promise of a spiritual haven after bodily death, a heaven where the dead "did not die, but slept eternally, assured an afterlife with Jesus." Religious beliefs were adjusted to the needs of a society facing accelerated changes and uncertainty, and to a population craving order and less willing to conclude their relationship with the dead.[11] In heaven, the bereaved would be united with their loved ones, provided they held fast to their faith in God. The "domesticating" of death and heaven in the nineteenth century meant that women were expected to be guardians of the etiquette of death and of the values this etiquette reinforced. Hence the rituals of mourning were a woman's introduction into her role as a widow and the spheres she would be inhabiting in that role.

As one historian notes, "The mythical widow was virtuous, brave and self-sacrificing. Mortal widows were encouraged to be grave and not to give society cause for censure."[12] As widows, women faced the most severe restrictions upon their behavior and dress. For at least six months following the death of their husbands, widows were in "deep mourning" and were expected to withdraw entirely from recreational and social activity. Etiquette required a full year of dressing entirely in dull black attire, followed by a second year of gradual phasing in of other colors. Head coverings, complete with crape veil, were mandatory, and widows had available to them a full range of mourning accessories including gloves, black-embroidered or black-bordered handkerchiefs, and memorial or mourning jewelry, often made from a loved ones' hair.[13]

Etiquette books urged mourners to avoid excess when it came to dress, but sources such as the story "Widows," which appeared in an 1866 issue of *Godey's Lady's Book*, indicated that mourning could be quite fashionable. "Mrs. Witless," in full mourning regalia, flutters her mourning fan edged with black feathers while calling on her neighbors:

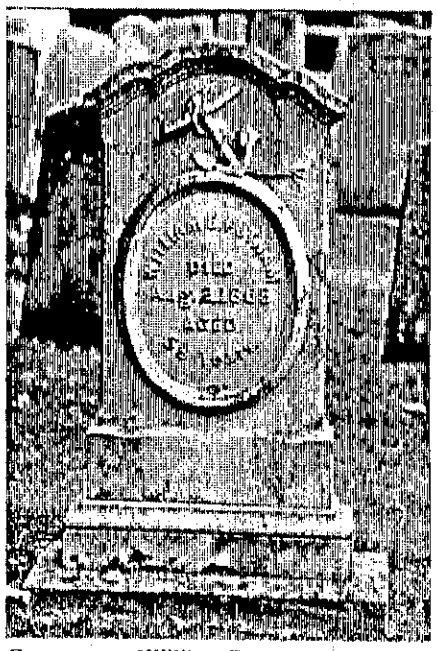
> Attached to it was her pocket-handkerchief bordered with black, and in her left hand she held a mourning card-case, filled with mourning visiting-cards. The fan and handkerchief diffused the delicate odor with which they were perfumed through the room, mingled with a sickly, crapy smell, for Mrs. Witless had her dress elaborately trimmed with that deepest of all mourning, being only in the sixth month of her widowhood.[14]

Certainly, such elaborate mourning practices were expensive and not accessible to everyone. But women like Harriet and Louise were members of the class which followed and perpetuated these rituals. Unfortunately, Harriet and Louise left little evidence of their periods of mourning, perhaps indicative of the fact that this truly was a time of withdrawal from society. But certain documents leave hints as to how death and mourning were integrated into their lives. A letter written in Portsmouth, the day following Charles Emerson's death reveals his eminence in local society, the ties that bound that community together and the deep seated faith in God which sustained many in their bereavement:

> *My dear Mrs Emerson,*
>
> *It was with extreme sorrow that I heard of the death of your dear husband, so highly esteemed and truly beloved. May the consolations of that religion which he held so precious sustain and comfort you and yours. From a state of weakness and infirmity he has passed on to be clothed with immortality and to enter upon a life that knows no decay.*

> *Personally, I feel much afflicted by the ties of kindred and social intercourse thus broken, which have bound me with so much interest and affection to your place. Please remember me with tender sympathy to your family.*
>
> *Very truly yours,*
> *John P. Lyman*[15]

Harriet and Louise clearly spared no expense when it came to putting their husbands' remains into their final resting places. Louise had an impressive gravestone made for her husband, with an anchor carved into it, and had him buried behind the First Parish church, with the rest of her family. Harriet actually saved the receipt for Charles' coffin, bought from Alfred T. Joy in Portsmouth: "Dealer in Feathers, Glasses, House and Ship Furniture, Coffins, etc. Also Finisher and Polisher of Ship's Cabins." From Mr. Joy she purchased a "walnut coffin, plate, handles, satin lining and box" for $22.00. She also had the remains of her two infants who had died at birth taken up and re-interred in the Emerson family plot where she erected a large, obelisk-shaped monument to her husband, onto which her own name was later added.



Gravestone of William Putnam

But after the gravestones were in place and the mourning period was over, life had to go on. In fact, the death of a husband really served to magnify the roles these women took on when they became wives, and forced them to develop those spheres that were truly their own, and not their husbands'. For women not burdened by the potential financial stresses of losing their husbands, becoming a widow served primarily to reinforce a woman's ties to her home and church, and even more to her networks of family and friends.

The church and the promise of spiritual reunion with the departed served as a great source of hope to widows. Harriet's diaries and correspondence reveal the central role which the church played in her life. She attended

church meeting almost every Sunday and often during the week, and in her diaries she thanked God for good weather (July 17, 1871: "This morning the air is pure: all nature looks refreshed and charming. How good the Lord is to us! May we praise and love Him more."), for good health and for a loving family. In addition, she looked to God for strength when facing difficult times or remembering them: On June 22, 1871 she recorded in her diary, "Eight years ago today my precious husband went to heaven—Oh, the desolation of that hour! Our father in heaven remembered me and comforted me. His Grace alone has sustained me to the present hour. May I love Him more and serve Him better every day of my life." Harriet recorded the anniversary of her husband's first stroke, the anniversary of her marriage, the anniversary of each of her children's births, and the deaths of the ones she lost in their infancy. Her husband's birthday, the death of his friends, and Harriet's own birthday served to remind her of the part of her life she spent with him. This recording was a way of memorializing and also a way of ordering inexplicable works of nature, in the same way that a belief in God provided hope and reason in an uncertain and often difficult existence.

Probably the greatest fear a woman would have upon losing her husband, her closest companion, was that of loneliness, a sentiment that clearly is expressed in the initial quotation from Sarah Hatch Bourne's letter. Harriet rarely expresses feelings of loneliness in her diary—perhaps because she had two sisters living with her; also she called on her neighbors or received them as visitors almost daily, corresponded by mail with children, cousins and siblings, and perhaps more important to her than any of these, saw her daughter Abbie almost daily. Her daughter's visits to help with baking or preserving or cleaning or to take her out for rides or go calling with her seemed to be the high points of Harriet's days, and she missed her daughter when she couldn't come.

In her book, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg discusses in detail the intimate bonds of kinship and friendship and the "emotional proximity" between women in the nineteenth century. Rosenberg contends that an intimate relationship between mothers and daughters was the essential link in the web of networks between women:

> Most eighteenth and nineteenth-century women lived within a world bounded by home, church and the institution of visiting, that endless trooping of women to one another's homes for social purposes. It was a world inhabited by children and by other women. Women helped one another with domestic chores in times of sickness, sorrow or trouble. Entire days, even weeks, might be spent almost exclusively with other women. Urban or town women could devote virtually every day to visits, teas, or shopping trips with other women.[16]

Rosenberg's observations ring true in Harriet's diary entries and letters and even in the context of recipes and remedies from female neighbors and relatives in Louise's cookbook. Aside from their husbands, women's lives tended to be framed by interaction with other women. Widowhood served to reinforce the ties that held women to one another. In Harriet's case, her daughter clearly became the most important person in her life, but their closeness was something that had developed long before Charles had died.

While Abbie was a young girl staying with cousins in New York, many of her letters home were marked "For mother only." Her letters discuss everything from clothing styles to politics to God. She mentions the latest gentleman who caught her fancy "...he has a very pleasant way of looking at me, " her health, her skin problems—"If I could only have something to prevent my face breaking out, I should be happy..."[17] In addition, she asks about relatives and neighbors back at home, names which appear almost twenty years later in Harriet's diary, attesting to the tenacity of these connections. She even refers several times to her old friend and neighbor, Louise Putnam. On October 22, 1859, Abbie wrote "I had a letter from Miss P today. [Mrs. P, we assume] Mr. and Mrs W were both at the depot to meet her. They had a letter from Mr. P. at the Isthmus. He has been dreadfully seasick and was much reduced but going on. Poor man. I am sorry for him."

After Louise lost her husband, with whom she had "travelled the seven seas,"[18] she too found herself in charge of her large York home. She too maintained a connection to society no longer through her husband but through ties of kin and friendship, primarily among women. Harriet recorded several visits to and from Mrs. Putnam (amongst the fairly large group of women on whom she "called" and received for visits) in her 1871 diary, and it was likely that Louise was a member in the "Ladies Circle," a social group that met weekly at a different woman's home and had over sixty members, including Harriet and Abbie.[19]

Louise's cookbook leaves clues as to what women did on these visits—most likely they traded not only news and gossip, but also recipes, remedies and sewing patterns that could aid one another in the tasks of keeping house and home in order. Harriet's diary confirms this: On February 3, 1871, Harriet recorded in her diary, "Annie Eastman took tea here and taught me to knit a square for a counterpane." Louise's cookbook contains recipes and remedies and household tips attributed to twenty-eight different women, most of whose names recognizable as her relatives or neighbors. (A few of these names come up most often, Emersons amongst them). In addition to giving some indication of Louise's own social circles, her cookbook offers insight into rituals of keeping house.

Cooking, of course, was central to the routines of the housewife, but as Louise's book suggests, it was only one of many rituals of "domestic life."

According to the contemporary advice book *The American Frugal Housewife*, the home was "...the gathering place of the deepest and purest affections;...the sphere of a woman's enjoyments as well as of her duties;...indeed, the whole world to her."[20]

Louise's repertoire of formulas and instructions went far beyond simple recipes, and includes a wide range of formulas and suggestions relating to personal female concerns and almost every aspect of household management. Home remedies for ailments from neuralgia to dyspepsia are some evidence that women in York were not immune, so to speak, to the widely popular and almost fashionable phenomena of wanness and fragility in nineteenth century women, particularly in cities.[21] Louise also wrote down or clipped anything that might aid in household management — such items as "Green tomato pickles; A BRILLIANT STUCCO WHITEWASH; How to Preserve Cider; Washing fluid; Elder Berry Wine; Preserving Herbs; Fly-Poison without Arsenic; Soft Soap; Growing Tomatos; flax seed tea; lemon jelly; cement; SMITH'S PARAFFINE LEATHER PRESERVER: Directions for Boots or Shoes; Oiling Harnesses [and] PLANTS IN ROOMS."

The wide ranging nature of these notations and clippings suggests the scope of domestic activities, even for women (such as Louise and Harriet), who could afford to and did employ domestic servants.[22] Notes at the end of Harriet's 1857 diary, complementing the routines she describes on the preceding pages include "Furniture polish, A Cure for Rheumatism, For Garget in Cows," and "To make an Indian-Pudding without eggs." Even with the servants for whom Harriet found plenty of work to do, she recorded in her diary such activities as doing dishes, sweeping, making soap, making jelly, baking, taking up the carpet, cleaning the attic, sewing, cleaning closets, trunks, drawers and rooms, shopping, managing finances, and nursing her own and others' illnesses. More often than not, the potential monotony of these chores was lessened by help from Abbie, who often spent the whole day baking or preserving or cleaning with her mother.

Inscriptions on the back of a bookcase in the Emerson home serve as a fitting memorial to the rhythms and cycles of domestic duties performed by women and shared amongst them: For almost half a century, from 1852 to 1896, nearly every year Harriet or Abbie recorded in pencil the ritual of spring cleaning. "*Cleaned Room*: April 24, 1854. *A.C.E.*...May 9, 1859: *Peggy scolding Fanny with a dirty face and Frank crying for his breakfast. How many times shall I have to wash this old concern. Pshaw!*" Fourteen years later, on June 13, 1873, she wrote in, out of order with the others, "*I have found there are worse things to do than cleaning this bookcase that used to be my horror.*" It is usually possible to guess which notations were Harriet's or Abbie's: "May 21 1874: *A pouring rain. My dear A is not here—Has enough to do at home these days. We put down the new carpet today....*"

Spring cleaning in one woman's home becomes a record of the rhythms of domestic life and the ties that bound families and, in particular, women together. The bookcase is a domestic diary, specific to one seasonal ritual, in one room, shared by a mother and a daughter. "June 20, '60 *Cloudy & showery a blue day miserable business this house cleaning*....June 21, '69 *Warm cloudy day I expect this is the last time I shall have this old bookcase to clean.* [But some things in life are constants]: June 16, 1871 *Fine clear day and cool this morn'g. Now I am not sure the last time will ever come.*" Through the notes on this bookcase we can glimpse changes in the home, sense the drudgery of housework and the regularity of its routines, and watch a daughter grow up and a mother grow old. "July 16, 1894: *24 years since my last date here. probably this will be my last. Room painted for E.O.E.*"[23]

History is the study of fragments, of the bits and pieces people thought to write down or save, the things they simply neglected to throw away. Louise's trunk and her bookmark, her cookbook and pillowshams, the gravestone she had made for her husband, her obituary, serve the same purpose as Harriet's diary, letters and scratchings on an old bookcase. These are the things that bring Harriet and Louise to life, things that reveal something about a time that has gone by but is, in a subtle, even unconscious way still with us. Women in the late nineteenth century lived on a threshold between traditional and modern, caught between "old-fashioned" and modern technology, values, roles, and spheres: from stage coaches to trains, from needle and thimble to sewing machines, from church groups to reform societies. Widows give us great insight into the spaces in society inhabited by women bereft of their husbands and how the women themselves viewed those spheres.

[1] letter from Sarah Hatch Bourne in Kennebunk to Harriet J. Emerson in York, March 8, 1874.
[2] quoted from S.H. Bourne letter.
[3] Harriet Emerson's 1871 diary mentions frequent calls to and from Louise Putnam. The great-granddaughters of her niece Elizabeth, Mary-Louise and Elizabeth Cutts, mentioned her fall trips to a family house in the Catskills and winter visits to Stamford, Connecticut. (author's interview, July 27, 1991). Louise's cookbook also contains a recipe for a "knickerbocker pickle."
[4] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).
[5] letter, Abbie Emerson to Harriet Emerson, New York, May 15, 1857.
[6] letter, Abbie Emerson-McIntire to Harriet Emerson, Titusville, PA, Nov. 14, 1884.
[7] letter, Harriet Emerson to Edward Emerson & family, York, Dec. 28, 1885.
[8] letters from Abbie to Harriet while in New York city in the 1850s.
[9] 1871 Diary of Harriet Emerson.

[10] Lawrence Taylor, "Symbolic Death: An Anthropological View of Mourning Ritual in the Nineteenth Century, " in *A Time to Mourn: Expressions of Grief in Nineteenth Century America.* , eds. Martha V. Pike and Janice Gray Armstrong. (Stony Brook, New York: The Museums at Stony Brook, 1980), p. 39.
[11] Ellen Marie Snyder, "At Rest: Victorian Death Furniture," in *Perspectives on American Furniture*, ed Gerald W. R. Ward. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1988), p. 270; p. 242. *A Time to Mourn*, p. 16.
[12] Barbara Dodd Hillerman, "Chrysallis of Gloom: NIneteenth Century American Mourning Costume" *A Time to Mourn*, p. 104.
[13] Ibid, p.26 (David E. Stannard, "Where all our Steps are Tending: Death in the American Context) and pp. 92-96. Mourning fashions tended to reflect regular fashions of the day, with certain trimmings and fabrics making the clothing identifiable as mourning clothing. The January 1868 issue of *Godey's Lady's Book* and Magazine lists in its "chit chat" section "some hints in regard to mourning goods," at the request of its readers.
[14] *Godey's Lady's Book*, 1866, p. 440.
[15] letter from John P. Lyman (family connection to Emersons: Charles' mother Abigail was a Lyman), Portsmouth, NH, June 23, 1863.
[16] Rosenberg, p.61.
[17] letters from Abbie to Harriet, 1854-1857, written in New York.
[18] The Cutts used this expression in author's interview, July 27, 1991.
[19] I have been unable to find other information about this society other than in the brief mentions of the get-togethers in Harriet's 1871 diary. She mentions where the meetings were held and how many came.
[20] Lydia Maria Child, *The American Frugal Housewife,: Dedicated to Those who are not Ashamed of Economy*. (Boston: Carter, Hendee and Co., 1833), p. 95.
[21] Harvey Green, *The Light of the Home: An Intimate View of the Lives of Women in Victorian America*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), pp. 112-114.
[22] In her book, *Never Done: A History of American Housework*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), Susan Strasser points out that period literature suggests that nearly every housewife employed servants, although in fact the practice was limited to middle and upper classes. The 1860 York census lists 13-year-old Mary Junkins as a member of the Wilcox/Putnam household, presumedly as a servant, and Harriet's diary records having a live-in helper, Miranda, as well as numerous people who came to fix things, work in the yard, drive her carriage and help out in general. As Harvey Green points out, however, "domestic service by no means allowed women in the middle class to become 'managers' of the home. The more common situation was division of labor," (p. 86).
[23] transcribed from inscriptions on the back of a bookcase in the Emerson Homestead, York, Maine. Transcriptions found in the Emerson papers, Old York Historical Society.

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Philosophy of Change in the Emerson-Wilcox House

Jennifer A. Perry
Kenneth Joel Zogry

There is more to recreating a room...than gathering up original objects...(It) requires intense historical investigation into details of the way the room was used, contemporary practices in furniture arrangement, means of heating and lighting, types of floor covering, and window hangings. To misstate any one of these can throw your principal documented objects out of focus and often rob them of the authority of their presence...Nothing can ruin the process more quickly than the intrusion of personal preferences.

—William Seale, Recreating the Historic House Interior

The philosophy of exhibiting interiors in historic buildings has evolved over the past century. With the inception of Mount Vernon as the first historic house museum in 1858, historic houses functioned primarily as showcases of colonial "relics" which echoed contemporary anthropological exhibits. These institutions were formed and administered largely by volunteers, many of whom had direct ancestral connections with either the historic structure or the region.

By the turn of the century, a few institutions experimented with the creation of room settings in historic buildings. Antiquarianism, or the collecting and displaying of old objects, became the most popular approach used for interpreting historic houses throughout the country. In the 1930s, professionals at art museums promoted a new method of exhibition based on connoisseurship. Led by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Colonial Williamsburg, an emphasis on high-style objects characterized this phase. Administrators of historic houses rarely took into consideration the past occupants of the structure, relying instead, for the most part, solely on decorative arts standards set by larger institutions such as Colonial Williamsburg.

This ideology predominated until the late 1960s when contemporary political and social change challenged curators to incorporate social history into museum exhibitions and period rooms. This change manifested itself as "process realism," a term we use to describe the phase in which objects were arranged to create the illusion that the room's historical occupants had just stepped away from the scene. At some institutions this phase was manifested in the use of costumed interpreters who interacted with the public through first-person interpretation. This stage achieved its fullest realization with the opening of Plimoth Plantation which went so far as to replace period buildings and objects with reproductions that could actually be used.

In the last fifteen years, museum professionals have refined their approach to historic house interpretation by placing the emphasis on historical documentation of details which had often been regarded as irrelevant. This includes examination of how rooms and artifacts placed in rooms define past occupants' lifestyles. Such documentation, founded primarily on period inventories and pictorial sources, as well as the architectural and social history of the house, forms the basis of the reinterpretation of the Emerson-Wilcox House.

Since its opening in 1954, the Emerson-Wilcox House has showcased artifacts in a series of connoisseurship-oriented period room settings spanning one hundred years. Recent acquisitions as well as new social history research, however, have created an opportunity for rethinking the context and content of the rooms. Because of the over 250 years of architectural change, it is impossible to interpret the house accurately to one time period; this mixture of architectural elements within the rooms also makes it difficult to create a period room setting in every space. Therefore, the new interpretation plan suggests an integration of period room settings and gallery spaces. Period room settings provide the opportunity for visitors to view and understand material culture in a social context, while gallery spaces provide the opportunity to view and understand specific characteristics of individual objects.

Although our project resulted in a complete furnishings plan for the Emerson-Wilcox House, we focused on the reinstallation of the small parlor, the dining room, and a bed chamber. The bed chamber reinstallation serves as an example of the methodology employed in determining a furnishings plan for each of the three rooms.

The Society's collections as well as the social history research conducted this summer dictated the installation of a mid nineteenth-century bed chamber. Because Louise Caroline Wilcox Putnam resided in the house throughout most of the nineteenth century, the room reflects upper middle-class York interiors of the 1865-1875 period. Old York owns several objects that have a history of belonging to Louise Putnam and her husband, Captain William Putnam — most notably, a set of bedroom furniture thought to have been acquired by the Putnams around the time of their marriage in 1846. Supplementing the bedroom set and other Putnam objects with furnishings appropriate to the chosen time period and wealth level became our main focus.

To establish correct historical context for the bed furniture and other documented objects, we examined all York County probate inventories from 1864-1868. From that group we chose twelve for in-depth study because of their similarity to Louise Putnam's socio-economic level and because they were arranged room-by-room. Careful analysis of this group, along with a survey of period pictorial sources, revealed what additional furnishings would likely have been placed in an 1860s York County bed chamber.

The research made clear that the only furnishings necessary in addition to the Putnams' bed, case of drawers, washstand, and sewing table were several chairs and a small table. Paintings and photographs from the mid-nineteenth century helped us determine placement of artifacts and the treatment of wall hangings, floor coverings, window treatments, and mantel garniture, which often were not included on the inventories. The information gleaned from both types of documentary research enabled us to create a room based on period taste—a room in which every detail can be traced to period sources.

The social context for the general furnishings plan focused on two themes which received much attention from the Fellows during the summer. The first theme, sewing, indicated by the inclusion of a sewing table, sewing machine, and various sewing accessories, derived from the focus on textiles as well as from documentary evidence that Louise Putnam spent much of her time with needle in hand. Objects such as the black shawl, mourning picture, and box of mourning pins evoke the theme of mourning; in particular, how the mourning ritual was practiced by widows (see Julia Mickenberg's essay).

The current emphasis on primary research in historic house interpretation grew out of a tradition concerned more with aesthetics and modern taste than with historical truth. The current changes in the Emerson-Wilcox House reflect these latest changes in the philosophy of how to recreate historic house interiors. As William Seale suggests, changes to room spaces were based on documentation of a multitude of details; to guarantee the replication of 1860s taste, modern-day personal likes and dislikes played no part in the installations. The philosophy of change regarding historic house room settings may undergo further alterations in the future. At this point in time, however, the changes put in place this summer ensure Old York's participation in the mainstream of current thought and philosophy regarding historic house interpretation.

Sewing table in the bedchamber of the Emerson-Wilcox House

"A True and Perfect Inventory": Recreating Domestic Interiors in the Emerson-Wilcox House

Jennifer A. Perry

(Kenneth Joel Zogry contributed to the inventory research described below.)

In November of 1767 Benjamin Parker, John Dennet, and Nathanael Remick entered the Kittery home of Mary Fernald, a recently deceased widow. For probably several hours, if not days, the three men labored to assess the contents and value of Mary's fairly large personal estate, recording on paper every object in her house as well as every building and animal on her land. Their job must have been well done for by the following July, York County probate judge David Sewall officially accepted the trio's lists and descriptions and entered them collectively into court ledger books as the "true and perfect inventory of all the goods, chattels, rights and credits of Mary Fernald."[1]

Mary left no known diary or stack of letters to document her life, and so we do not know, for instance, what the weather was like in the weeks before she died or what the minister had preached about the last time she attended church, or what her feelings were concerning the recently repealed Stamp Act. Thanks to the meticulous work of inventory takers Parker, Dennet, and Remick, however, some aspects of Mary's life do not remain a mystery. The inventory reveals, for example, that she raised sheep and pigs; that the most expensive objects she owned (worth 51 pounds) were "four feather beds"; that she may have worn "1 pair of Silver bound Spectacles," worth a mere two shillings; that she decorated her house with "Pictures without Frames"; and that, indicated by the listing of a brass kettle, silver teaspoons, and an earthenware teapot, she most definitely indulged in a cup of tea now and again.[2] Mary's probate inventory does not disclose information about her religious and political leanings, but it does enable us to know something about the domestic environment in which she lived — what she cooked with, if not what she cooked; what she sewed with, if not what she sewed.

The interpretation of historic house museums relies extensively on inventories such as Mary Fernald's. The current approach to interpretation consists largely of the documented re-creation of the spaces and the objects in those spaces which in many ways shaped Mary's and many other past Americans' every day lives (see "Philosophy of Change in the Emerson-Wilcox House"). In understanding and interpreting material culture — tangible "whats" — a museum can also begin to communicate to the public certain intangible "whys" and "hows." Surviving inventories, then, prove invaluable for the re-creation of accurate period room settings. Thus they

were the basis, along with information gleaned from period pictorial sources, for the new installations in the Small Parlor, the Dining Room, and a Bed Chamber of the Emerson-Wilcox House.

It was decided that the room known as the Small Parlor would be furnished as a merchant class York parlor dating from 1765-1775. Research began with the examination of York County inventories compiled during those years. Since most inventories from that era do not list items room-by-room, it was assumed that the parlor (the best room in the house) would have included the most expensive items listed.

Groups of six chairs, the most frequently noted parlor furniture, appear on over three-quarters of the inventories studied. Whether these chairs were always or usually a matching set is uncertain, although it seems probable in families of means. Recent research shows that from the seventeenth century until well into the nineteenth century, parlor chairs were commissioned in multiples of six. In 1783 a woman in Philadelphia told her soon-to-be-married daughter that a set of twelve mahogany chairs with woolen moreen, i.e. damask, bottoms was a necessity in any well-furnished parlor. Similarly, in 1764 Andrew Johnston of Charleston advertised "Twelve Mahogany Chairs with hair bottoms."[3] The six rococo style chairs placed in the Small Parlor, all with a history of ownership or association with York resident Nathaniel Barrell, consist of two English prototypes and four matching Piscataqua-region attributed chairs. The latter group may have been commissioned as a set, perhaps made to match the two English chairs that are quite possibly two of the "6 Mohogany Chairs ye Seats covd with Crimson Damask" which, according to a surviving bill, Nathaniel Barrell purchased from London cabinetmaker Samuel Walker in 1763.[4] Recent examination of the slip seat on one of the American chairs uncovered fragments, under original nails, of what appears to be a wool damask fabric, color definitely crimson.

The chairs have been placed under the windows against the walls, as visual evidence from the period most often shows. For example, the 1804 wood engraving by Alexander Anderson, "Checking the Barometer," clearly shows a set of matching side chairs lined up against the walls, their crestrails even with the chair rail but not in contact with the wall. According to contemporary household advice manuals, this position protects the wall as well as the chair backs from damage. As late as 1864 when Bostonian Edward Everett Hale wrote of his "twelve decorous...chairs...with their backs against the walls," chairs and other pieces of furniture were kept against the wall except when in use.This arrangement provided floor space for a variety of activities and prevented household members from tripping over furniture left standing in the center of dimly lit interiors. One Boston woman noted in her diary that she could look forward to bed only when "The children [were] asleep [and] [t]he chairs [were] set back."[5]

Also appearing with great frequency in parlor inventories are a "Great Chair," a looking glass, and various types of tables. Other than indicating when it is an armed chair, no inventory describes what a Great Chair looked like. Because of its consistently low monetary value, however, it is assumed to have been an old chair. Thus, a chair characteristic of the early eighteenth century — one with what inventories refer to as a "slit back" (probably vertical slats) with rush seat — represents the Great Chair in the Small Parlor.

Although Mary Hill Lamar of London counseled her brother in Philadelphia in the 1770's that in London households "neither tea or card tables stand in the best room," the preponderance of tables in the inventories referred to variably as "round," "square," or "oval" indicates that few York County residents followed this particular London dictate.[6] Visual documentary sources support this conclusion. "The First, Second, and Last Scene of Mortality," a circa 1774 American needlework by Prudence Punderson, not only shows chairs against the wall but also depicts a round tilt-top table. Thus the tilt-top table in the Small Parlor has been placed to the left of the fireplace. The Punderson needlework picture also depicts a looking glass between two windows.[7] A similarly-carved looking glass has been placed between the front windows in the Small Parlor. Other tables in the room are a square card table and a drop leaf table, both attributed to local joiner Samuel Sewall. Related examples of each of these tables are found in the Sayward-Wheeler House, a York property that remains furnished largely as it was in the eighteenth century and which therefore provides tangible documentation of what a York parlor contained two hundred years ago.

"Pictures" are commonly referred to in inventories and also seen in the Sayward-Wheeler House. Thus, both mezzotints and two oil paintings (including an 1868 copy of a 1760 painting by Joseph Blackburn of Sally Sayward Barrell, the wife of Nathaniel Barrell who purchased of the crimson damask covered chairs) have been placed in the room.

The corner cupboard, called a "bowfat" in the period, is filled with ceramics popular during the late eighteenth century: English creamware, Chinese export porcelain, and delft ware — all what one eighteenth-century bowfat owner called "China Plates...[and] other Earthenware." In addition, it also holds a silver tankard with a history of ownership in the Sayward family, as well as several silver spoons that bear the marks of Portsmouth makers dating from 1760-1780. Even fiction seems to support the silver objects' placement: in one of Harriet Beecher Stowe's stories, a not-so-noble character visits the local deacon to count "how many silver tablespoons and teaspoons graced the beaufet in the corner." Bowfats served as an important means of showcasing one's prized possessions and identified the parlor not only as a functional room but one also consciously used for display.[8]

The Dining Room has been furnished to 1820-1830 primarily because architectural evidence shows the room was added onto the house about this time. Forty-three York County inventories from 1824-39, three of them room-by-room, formed the basis for this reinstallation, along with visual evidence. Once again, information from the Sayward-Wheeler House was used, since the sitting room of that house was transformed into a dining space in 1810.

As in the case of parlor spaces, one of the most commonly noted features in dining spaces was a set of six chairs. Rarely specified as dining chairs, they are variously described as "bamboo chairs," " common chairs," " fancy flag bottomed chairs," " yellow chairs," etcetera.[9] The "sabre-leg" chairs selected for the Dining Room are a circa 1825-50 set of caned seat chairs with horizontal bowed crestrails similar to those depicted in the 1853 Joseph Russell watercolor, "Dining Room at Mrs. A.W. Smith's." The Russell watercolor illustrates two other elements incorporated into the Emerson-Wilcox Dining Room: an almost completely bare fireplace mantel and a fireboard. In *The Art of Dining* (1837) Thomas Walker expressed the belief that a dining room should be "without any individual ornaments or objects to distract the attention." The candlesticks placed at each end of the mantel conform to the placement of small oil lamps in "Dining Room at Mrs. A.W. Smith's" as well as to Walker's advice that lighting devices should be placed on the mantel, since "lights upon the dining table" only served to "interrupt the freest communication with the guests." Fireboards, decorative devices used in the nineteenth-century hearths during the summer when fireplaces were rarely in use, were recommended throughout the nineteenth century. The carved fireboard presently in place in the Dining Room will eventually be replaced with the simpler kind seen in the Russell watercolor and other pictorial sources.[10]

An 1838 painting by Mary Ellen Best entitled "Our dining room at York, England" inspired the Emerson-Wilcox House Dining Room table setting. Advice books dictated that tablecloths should always be white and that they should "hang down all around." Inventories do not specify the type of ceramics used, although English wares such as those seen in the Best painting were frequently imported to America at the time. For this reason green-edged English "pearlware" was chosen for the dining table. The main dishes, including tureens, plates, and platters, are placed in a rectangle in the middle of the table with oddments like serving spoons, salt dishes, and wine decanters in the corners. The design emphasis of the table setting was on proportion and symmetry. In the 1820's, household manuals advised that "side dishes [should be] in a straight line, and at a regular distance from each other, and also match in size and colour." They also advised that the table should look as if the placement of every napkin glass, spoon, knife, and dish had been

determined by plummet and line. Here the dishes all sit at one place, perhaps the influence of the French way of serving that became popular in the 1830's. After suffering through a dinner "a la francaise," one American complained, "The dishes were all handed round; in my opinion a most unsatisfactory mode of proceeding in relation to this important part of the businessman's life...Your conversation is interrupted every minute by greasy dishes thrust between your head and that of your next neighbor...It will not do. This French influence must be resisted."[11]

Some of the other objects which appear in specific inventories of dining spaces include highly valued clocks, dining and other tables, desks, and sideboards. A tall case clock has been placed caddy-corner in the Dining Room to match the position of clocks in a multitude of pictorial sources.[12] Conforming to the inventories as well as to an 1810 oil painting by an unknown artist, "Rhode Island Interior," a small table as well as a dining table was placed in the Dining Room. A Portsmouth-attributed portable writing desk with a green baize writing surface was placed atop the small table. The size of the desks listed in the inventories is unknown, but the Dining Room of the Emerson-Wilcox House certainly would not have accommodated a full-sized desk or desk-and-bookcase; their purpose is served by the portable writing desk. A period map, very similar to the one in Joseph Russell's watercolor of an 1815 New England dining room, hangs over this table and desk. The appearance of desks and their accessories in dining rooms of this period contradicts the common belief that nineteenth-century dining rooms were built or furnished as specialized spaces used specifically for dining. In fact, in 1831 one woman wrote that her dining room was used as much for writing and reading as it was for eating.[13]

The central object in any nineteenth-century dining room was, however, the sideboard, an object used almost solely to aid in the process of serving food. The arrangement above the neoclassical sideboard in the Emerson-Wilcox Dining Room reflects the grouping seen in the circa 1810-1815 painting of a New England family, "Family Group." It includes a painted tin tray (tin items appear frequently on inventories from the period) and a mourning picture wrought by York Resident Elizabeth Sewall in 1801. These objects, each a status symbol in its own way, point out that even this specialized object also had another function — that of display. A period household manual admonished servants: "study neatness, convenience, and taste" in preparing a master's sideboard "as you must think that ladies and gentlemen that have splendid and costly articles, wish to have them seen and set out to the best advantage."[14]

The last room which underwent a transformation this summer was the Long Parlor Bed Chamber. Building on social history research on widowhood (see "After Mourning: Nineteenth-Century York Widows and their Rituals of

Death and Life") and the many objects in the Society's collection that have a history of ownership by Louise Caroline Putnam, a resident of the house throughout much of the nineteenth century, this room (formerly a Federal era bedchamber) was reinterpreted to a period during Louise's widowhood — 1860-1870.

The furniture in the room centers on the set of furniture thought to have been acquired by Louise and her husband Captain William Putnam around the time of their marriage in 1846. This set consists of a bed, washstand, sewing table, and chest of drawers. Pictorial sources, such as Joseph Russell's "Mr. J.S. Russell's Room at Mrs. A.W. Smith's" (1853), revealed that the bed should stand in the corner (rather than centered on the wall) and that the chest of drawers, with looking glass above it, should sit between two windows. According to probate inventories from 1864-1868, the only additional furniture forms necessary were several chairs and a small table. Contemporary paintings, such as "T.C.H. Martin as an Infant" (anonymous, 1857), determined that the mantel should be cluttered with a variety of small objects such as vases, fabric flowers and small boxes, and revealed time and again the presence of pictures hanging above.[15]

This time period also afforded us the opportunity of consulting photographs as sources for documentation. They show quite clearly the number and type of pictures, as well as the method by which they were hung (angled and supported by a black cord). At least in one case they corroborated the presence of a straw mat floor covering listed in inventories. Other objects in the room such as the pillow shams, a sewing case, and lithographs of Louise and William Putnam were added because of their Putnam family provenance. They also show how documented objects and inventory-based research complement each other and create an authentic and personalized historic interior.

In 1768 David Sewall indeed proclaimed Mary Fernald's inventory to be "true and perfect." It may have been true to the best of the inventory takers' knowledge, but it certainly was not perfect. What was the color of the blankets on Mary's four feather beds? Where and how did she display her "Pictures without frames"? What did her teapot look like? The same limitations confront those of us today who attempt to re-create period room settings. The new installations in the Emerson-Wilcox House Small Parlor, Dining Room, and Long Parlor Bed Chamber are true to the best of our knowledge, but they are not perfect. The Dining Room has no window treatment, in part because inventories and pictorial sources have revealed no uniform treatment. The fireplace in the Small Parlor awaits the addition of fireplace equipment because of similar problems. Questions remain concerning the choice and arrangement of pictures in the Bed Chamber. Before David Sewall put his name to the "true and perfect" inventory compiled by Benjamin Parker, John Dennet, and Nathanael Remick, he qualified the phrase "true and perfect." The document was "true and perfect" based on what "has yet come to his hands possession or knowledge, and that if any thing hereafter appear he will exhibit [it]."[16] Although at this time the new installations in the Emerson-Wilcox House are deemed "true and perfect," they too are subject to David Sewall's qualification.

[1] York County Probate Inventories, *Volume 12, 1768-1775*, pp. 33. York County Courthouse, Alfred, Maine.
[2] Ibid., pp. 33-35.
[3] Elisabeth Donaghy Garrett, *At Home: The American Family 1750-1870*. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990), p. 40.
[4] Bill dated March 26, 1763. Barrell family papers, private ownership.
[5] Garrett, pp. 40-42.
[6] Ibid., pp. 47-48.
[7] For a short discussion of the Prudence Punderson needlework see Harold L. Peterson, *American Interiors From Colonial Times to the Late Victorians*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), plate 6.
[8] Garrett, pp. 49-50.
[9] York County Probate Inventories, *Volumes 34-38*.
[10] For discussion of the Russell watercolor, see Garrett, p. 86.; on dining room mantels, see Garrett, p. 94.
[11] For discussion of "Our Dining Room at York," see Caroline Davidson, *Women's Worlds: The Art and Life of Mary Ellen Best, 1809-1891*. (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1985), p. 107 and for material on dining table settings see Garrett, p. 82.
[12] See, for example, an 1836 woodcut by Charles A Goodrich, "Thanksgiving Dinner," in Elisabeth Donaghy Garrett, " The American Home Part IV: The Dining Room," *The Magazine Antiques*, October 1984, p. 916, and "The Peckham-Sawyer Family" (1817), an oil painting by Robert Peckham, in Garrett, p. 211.
[13] See "Dining Room of Dr. Whitridge's, Tiverton, Rhode Island, as It was in the Winter 1814-15: Breakfast Time" in Garrett, p. 79. Uses of dining spaces also in Garrett, p. 78.
[14] For "Family Portrait," see Peterson, plate 21; for a discussion of sideboards, see Garrett, pp. 87-91.
[15] For Russell painting see Garrett, p. 121; for "T.C.H. Martin as an Infant," see Edgar deN. Mayhew and Minor Myers, Jr., *A Documentary History of American Interiors From the Colonial Era to 1915*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980), p. 143; and for photographs detailing late nineteenth-century bedroom interiors see Peterson, Plates 170 and 180.
[16] York County Inventories, *Volume 12*, p. 34.

Object Checklist

Catalogue entries include selected objects in the Bed Chamber and the Exhibit Gallery. Artifacts emphasized are textiles and those with a Louise Caroline Wilcox Putnam provenance.

Bed Chamber

Furniture

BED, CHEST OF DRAWERS, WASHSTAND, SEWING TABLE
(1962.1-.4)
New England, circa 1830
Tiger maple, secondary woods unidentified

Set of furniture with acanthus leaf and pineapple carvings, turned and reeded legs, original and reproduction brasses. Family tradition holds that this set was bought by or given to William and Louise Wilcox Putnam on their wedding in 1846.

CABINET (1973.113)
China, 1800-1900
Ebony, mother of pearl

Small black laquered case of drawers with two hinged doors; depictions of Chinese scenes and figures; mother of pearl inlay; gold striping on top, sides, and drawers. Probably used to hold jewelry.

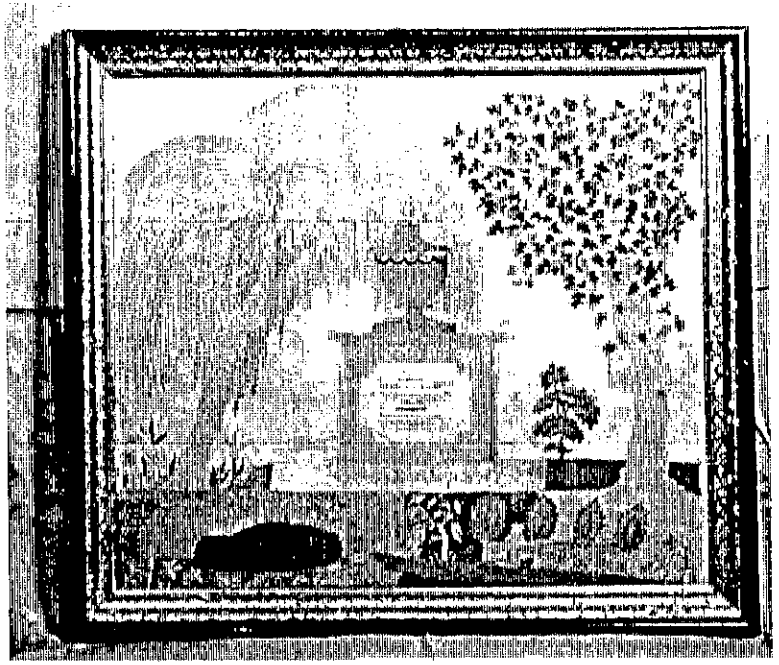
Wall Hangings

PHOTOGRAPHS (1973.093 a,b)
Place of origin unknown, circa 1865
Frames unidentified wood

Pair of photographs of a) Louise Caroline Putnam and b)William Putnam. Small stylized oval frames with applied decoration and black enamel paint.

PORTRAIT (1981.183)
Probably China, 1850-1860
Paper, frame walnut

Grisaille picture of Captain William Putnam taken from photograph. He is depicted with dark hair and beard and wears a buttoned jacket with a velvet collar and handkerchief in his right pocket. Oval frame.



Mourning Picture (1981.234)

MOURNING PICTURE (1981.234)
Maine, circa 1816
Silk thread on silk ground
History of ownership in Putnam family
Gift of G.W.S. Putnam

Needlework memorial in shades of gold, beige, taupe, yellow, and pale blue. Embroidered urn in center, oak tree to right, small trees along bottom. Wrought for James F. Putnam.

Textiles and Costume Accessories

COVERLET (1978.30b)
England or America, 1850s
Cotton chintz

Machine-stitched body with attached flounces on three sides. Printed design of rose sprays in reds and greens and scattered floral sprays of blues, yellows, and lavender on a stippled gold ground.

PILLOW SHAMS (1978.182-183)
York, Maine; 1840s-1880s
Linen
History of ownership by Louise Caroline Wilcox Putnam

Machine-stitched bleached fabric with a border of four rows of tucking at each side. Handwrought central monogram in satin stitch reading "LCP."

SHAWL (1978.186)
America or Europe, 1860s
Cashmere

Large, black, rectangular body with two fringed ends.

BRACELET (1982.214)
Probably New England, 1840s-1860s
Hair, gold

Interwoven hair bracelet with central octagonal gold medallion and gold clasp; Inset of woven hair encased in glass at center of medallion.

WATCH AND CHAIN (1983.322)
France, 1839
Gold

Watch face encased by glass; back opens to reveal maker's inscription and date, "1/1839 Perrusson/a Paris/ECHAP A CYLINDRE QUATRE TROUS EN RUBIS." Cover interior stamped "2986." Chain threads through slide which is mounted with a yellow stone and ends in gold hand-shaped ornament secured to watchcase by ovoid hanger.

FAN (1973.119a)
Possibly America, 1800-1900
Paper, unidentified wood

Black moire paper field and black wooden blades.

MITTS (1970.23)
America or Europe, 1850s-1860s
Silk

Black netting; cuff-length; with elastic cord.

Sewing Accessories

SEWING MACHINE (1961.003)
Biddeford, Maine, circa 1864
Cast iron
Gift of Kenneth Towne

Hand operated with wheel at right and fluted column with urn and acorn finial. Originally painted black with gold decoration. Disk on base reads "Manufactured by Shaw & Clark, Biddeford, Maine. Patented Sept. 10, 1846, May 8, 1849, Nov. 12, 1850, Aug. 12, 1851, May 30, 1854, Dec. 19, 1854, Nov. 4, 1856, Mar. 9, 1858, Aug. 13, 1861, Feb. 16, 1864. Licensed by Hoew, Wheeler & Wilson, Grover & Baker, Singer & Bachelder."

SPOOL HOLDER and PINCUSHION (1983.68)
Probably America, 1850-1875
Cast iron, brass, velvet

Iron base with floral and scroll cast decoration and gold velvet pincushion in brass cup at top. Trunk pivots 360 degrees to rotate pierced wheel of nine spool holders.

SEWING BOX (1983.14)
Place of origin unknown, 1840s-1870s
Tortoise shell
History of ownership by Louise Caroline Wilcox Putnam

Small box with rounded corners and square metal plaque on top engraved "LCP." Top lifts on hinges revealing cloth covered interior made up of compartments for sewing needles, spools of thread, thimbles, etcetera.

PINCUSHION (1983.170)
America, circa 1850
Silk, paper

Heart shaped with two short pink ribbons hanging down front.

Miscellaneous

CARD CASE (1973.123)
China, 1850s
Ivory
History of ownership by Louise Caroline Wilcox Putnam

Small, rectangular, carved case with three-dimensional Chinese scenes. Center floral oval on obverse bearing letters "LCP."

BOOK (no accession number)
England, 1850
Paper
History of ownership by Louise Caroline Wilcox Putnam

Novel entitled *BELLAH; A Tale of La Vendee* . Green cover with brown foliate border illustration and scene. Inscribed on title page, "L.C.Putnam 1851./Ship Roman/W.E.P."

BOOKMARKS (no accession numbers)
York, Maine; circa 1851
Silk, cotton, paper
History of ownership by Louise Caroline Wilcox Putnam

Brown embroidery on white punched cardboard stitched onto light green silk ribbon. Inscriptions read, "Remember me." and "LOUISE".

Gallery Chamber

Furniture

CABINET (1973.097)
China, 1840s-1860s
Bamboo

Large upright base painted black with two cupboard doors, four solid shelves, four splayed legs, and brass latch and hook. Doors, sides, front, and side and top crestrails in geometric motifs. Family tradition holds that this piece was brought from China by Louise Caroline Wilcox Putnam.

DESK (1973.127)
Probably China, 1840s-1860s
Ebony

Large table-like form painted black; original marble writing surface replaced with wood top; carved borders, gallery, and legs.

STOOL (1973.135)
China, 1850s-1860s
Bamboo

Rounded body in shades of beige, brown, and black with six main supports top to bottom; between each support is an elongated oval piece attached by rattan ties. Top is basketwork over wood with outer edges attached by split bamboo circle and pegs.

CHAIRS (no accession numbers)
Possibly America, 1850-1860
Mahogany with mahogany veneer, ash, cotton chintz, silk tape

Pair of upholstered Grecian-Rococo Revival style side chairs with acanthus leaf carving and cabriole legs. Replaced seat and upholstery.

Mannequin with dress(T37/M), Collar(1978.91), Brooch(1962.201), and Shawl(1978.58/S)

Wall Hangings

PHOTOGRAPHS (1973.202 a,b)
Place of manufacture unknown, original paintings circa 1830s

Photographs of oil paintings in carved teakwood frames of a) David Wilcox and b) Elizabeth Cutts Wilcox.

PAINTING (1962.146)
Painting and frame China, 1850-1851
Painting oil on canvas; frame unidentified wood

Painting of large, black, three-masted sailing ship in center with several figures on deck and flying American flag; two English ships at left, sampan in foreground, Chinese junk at right; "ROMAN" at bottom center. Light wood frame painted black to resemble ebony; carved at corners and in center of bottom, top, and sides; two carved gold leaf inner borders. *The Roman* was built by George Raynes in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, circa 1850. The ship's captain on voyages to China in 1850 and 1851 was William Putnam, the husband of Louise Caroline Wilcox Putnam.

PAINTING (1962.147)
Painting and frame probably China, circa 1851
Oil on canvas, teakwood

Louise Caroline Wilcox Putnam in seated position with brown hair falling over shoulders. Dressed in green dress with horizontal orange and green stripes. Elaborately carved wide frame composed of birds, flowers, scrolls, and geometric motifs.

Textiles and Costume Accessories

Mannequin

DRESS (T37/M)
New England, 1850s-1860s
Silk, cotton twill bodice lining, linen skirt lining, silk braid trim

Day dress with fitted bodice, dropped shoulders, "coat" sleeves, netted button closure and full skirt. Sleeves trimmed with brown silk braid. Skirt fullness backswept with gathers and box pleats. Fabric with wide brown moire stripes alternating with black-banded chine stripes on cream ground typical of 1850s. Netted bodice buttons and alterations to sleeves and skirt indicate mid-1860s style.

COLLAR (1978.91)
New England, 1840s
Linen

Embroidered and drawn-work lace with scalloped edge.

BROOCH (1962.201)
America or Europe, 1840s-1860s
Gold

Oval set with cabochon (unfaceted) ruby surrounded by pearls; gold setting enhanced by chased and engraved motifs.

SHAWL (1978.58/S)
Probably Europe, 1850-1865
Silk

Handworked lace, black colored, triangular body with scalloped edges.

Trunk Contents

DRESS (T1/M)
New England, 1850s-1860s
Silk with cotton twill bodice lining, glazed linen skirt lining, and wool braid

Copper-green evening dress with fitted bodice and netted button closure and full skirt. Sleeves re-cut from bell shape to coat shape; waistline shortened; skirt refashioned with front box pleats, back gathers, and demi-train—all indicate 1860s alterations to 1850s dress.

PURSE (1962.22b)
New England, 1850s
Linen canvas, wool yarn, brass beads, wool cord, glazed cotton lining

Berlin work (colored wool embroidery on canvas) body with twisted wool cord handle.

PURSE (1972.128)
America, 1850s-1860s
Silk velvet body, steel frame, metal beads, silk ribbon

Garnet colored body on frame with steel-beaded tassels and embroidery.

PARASOL (1973.210)
America, 1840s-1860s
Silk, wood, bone, ivory

Green body with simulated bamboo hinged handle; wooden ribs tipped with ivory; carved bone ferrule and handle.

MITTS (1970.26)
Probably America, 1850s-1860s
Silk

Off-white netting; mid-arm length.

COMB (1973.30)
Probably China, 1840s
Tortoiseshell

Intricately pierced and carved hair ornament.

SHAWL (1981.237)
India, 1860s
Wool

Small, multicolored, individually handwoven squares pieced together.

FAN (83.322)
China, 1850s
Silk, bone, duck and peacock feathers

Flat base with white feathers coated with gesso and decorated with painted red and blue flowers; surmounted by peacock feathers; bone handle with silk rosettes and tassel.

Chinese Cabinet (top to bottom)

NIGHTGOWN (1972.133)
New England, 1860s
Cotton, mother of pearl
Gift of Mrs. Alfred A. Gillette

Machine-stitched white body with dropped shoulder line and hand embroidered yoke and cuffs; mother of pearl buttons.

PETTICOAT (1972.137)
New England, 1850-1865
Cotton

White body with tucked skirt and scalloped and embroidered hem; alterations to waistband and tucks.

CHEMISE (1972.134)
New England, 1850s
Linen
Gift of Mrs. Alfred A. Gillette

Handwoven body with triangular embroidered and scalloped applied yoke and embroidered sleeves.

SHAWL (1978.77)
China, 1850
Silk

Heavily embroidered white "corner" shawl or *shawl a pivot* with elaborate center-back floral motif and applied silk fringe.

SHAWL (1981.243)
Europe, 1860s
Wool

Large jacquard woven (machine-made) body with red field and intricate stylized floral and paisley motifs; applied and fringed border imitates applique construction of Indian prototype.

Chair

SHAWL (1973.206)
Europe, 1850s or 1860s
Wool, silk

Narrow rose-pink scarf with red-brown-white paisley borders at ends; fringed.

NIGHTGOWN BAG (1978.185)
York, Maine; circa 1846
Cotton, mother of pearl
History of ownership by Louise Caroline Wilcox Putnam

Ribbed cotton with eyelet lace ruffle and white cotton tambour embroidery; mother of pearl button closure. Monogram reads "LCP." According to *The Workwoman's Guide* (London, 1838; facsimilie edition, Sturbridge, MA), "Nightgown Bags" were intended for travel and could be made in any size (#1978.185 measures 23 1/2" x 16 1/2" (closed), including ruffle) to accommodate a nightgown, cap, dressing gown, change of linen, or a "tidy" (a small case with pockets for hairpins, thread, tape, curl papers, toothbrush, powder, etcetera.).

SHAWL (1973.81)
Europe, date of manufacture unknown
Silk
Gift of Mrs. E.F. Hooper

Machine-woven lace, ecru colored, triangular body with scalloped edges.

Travel Accessories

TRUNK (1976.190)
New York, New York; 1850-1875
Wood, leather
History of ownership by Louise Carolina Wilcox Putnam.

Saratoga trunk covered with sewn and tooled leather with iron reinforcements on corners. Bottom has two strips of wood over leather and four iron casters marked "Pat'D, Nov.—1858 No. 1." Side bears "L.C.P. Hong Kong." Cover lifts open on two hinges revealing white cloth interior and removeable drawer; contains compartment held into cover well with brass locks.

CARPET BAG (1978.169)
America, circa 1865
Wool, leather

Tall dark red, gold and black ovoid wool body with leather handles.