

Rebecca Harding Davis Society Newsletter



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PRESIDENT'S REMARKS

Greetings Fellow Society Members,

With this newsletter, the Davis Society is nine years old. It doesn't seem like that long ago that Sherry Harris and I spent a break between panels at the ALA and talked about the benefits of having a group interested in advancing the scholarship on Davis. I am so happy to see that the society has been growing during the past nine years and that scholars continue to find new ways to study Davis.

While we have grown over the past nine years, we still need your help to spread the word about Davis studies and opportunities for conference presentations. We also need your help to build society membership. Our membership is only \$5 per year, and a complimentary copy of *Rebecca Harding Davis: Writing Cultural Autobiography* comes with every two-year membership. A lifetime membership is only \$75, and choosing that option now means you won't have to remember to pay your yearly dues, which come with the benefit of our current newsletter!

As president of the society, I would like to recognize Sherry Harris's new, comprehensive **biography** on Davis, coming from WVU press in 2018. In this biography, Sherry has provided new information on Davis, gleaned through years of archival research, and expanded upon our prior knowledge of Davis's personal and professional life. There are some real surprises in this biography, and Davis scholars now and in the future will benefit from Sherry's current and continued work on Davis. Thank you, Sherry, for all you do to advance Davis studies and support the society.

My own small volume of Davis's **children's stories** will also be published in spring 2018, with illustrations from a very talented artist, Beth Wheeler. Beth has been working with me for some time to put together three of these small volumes, and I am as grateful for her contributions to these publications as I am in awe of her talent. The first volume reprints five children's stories, the second several of Davis's stories for boys, and the third her stories for girls. These small volumes are affordable and would make nice gifts for young readers, bringing a neglected area of Davis's oeuvre to twenty-first-century readers.

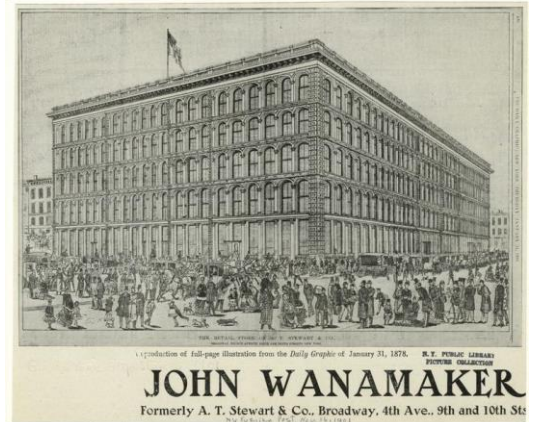
Finally, we are happy to recognize our new co-Conference Activities Coordinators Sarah Gray and Aaron Rován. The Society is grateful for the work Mischa Renfroe has done in this position, which she has held since the Society's inception, and we look forward to more wonderful conference panels and presentations

under the direction of Sarah and Aaron. As one of these upcoming events, we hope to arrange something special for our tenth anniversary, and we'd like all of you to be involved in the preparations. If you have any ideas for our celebration, please send them to me at RCadwallader@francis.edu; any ideas are welcome. We have already been talking with other author societies (Child and Woolson, specifically) and may have a joint symposium to celebrate our society's milestone. And, a milestone it is: Since we began, we have continually sponsored conference panels at both the ALA and SSAWW; contributed to the erection of a state historical marker in Washington, PA, at the site of the former Washington Female Seminary, from which Davis graduated valedictorian in 1848; and fostered scholarship at all levels of the educational spectrum (elementary through graduate school). This truly has been an exciting ten years for Davis studies in general and the society in particular. Please watch for our Calls for Papers throughout the year for opportunities to advance Davis scholarship still further and for an announcement of our anniversary celebration.

Warm Regards,
Robin

RHD: HER WORLD – Sharon M. Harris

Davis's editorial comments in "A Lesson from France" (below) on the need for women's education in basic business practices and a "dot" to insure her financial independence appeared at the time when many women were finding careers in department stores – as Davis notes, out of a desire to work outside the home or from financial necessity. Davis lived where the department store magnate John Wanamaker innovated many new sales techniques, including extensive advertising specific to his customer base. Drawing on his own art collection, merchandise was enhanced by displays that included original Titians and Manets. The building's Grand Court, a central atrium that ran the entire height of the building, became one of Philadelphia's most popular spots for locals and tourists.



FROM THE PEN OF REBECCA HARDING DAVIS – Sharon M. Harris

In the early twentieth century, Davis wrote many (unsigned) editorials for the Saturday Evening Post. "A Lesson from France" appeared in the August 15, 1903, issue.

A Lesson from France

The American is ready enough to make any change in his habits of conduct, provided he originates it himself. But he willingly borrows no custom from foreigners. Now, there are many customs which he might borrow with profit.

Take the matter of a *dot* for his daughter, for example. The Frenchman, be he peer or laborer, as soon as a girl child is born to him begins to stint and save and scrape to lay aside a certain sum of her dower. When she is of a marriageable age it is there, ready to buy her a home or to enable some honest young fellow to marry her who otherwise could not do it. She goes into the marriage partnership with a certain happy sense of independence. She can help her husband to carry the load of the family. She can have something to lay by for

the *dot* of her daughter, if she have one. If she does not marry, she is not a dead weight for life on her family. She has capital, she has the little income which commands comfort and respect from France to Patagonia.

That is the debt which the French father thinks he owes to his daughter. He pays it.

The American father, as a rule, whatever his position, works hard to give his woman child the best of everything which his money will buy. If he lives in a house and in a style which double his income will not pay for, it is usually for her sake. She has dresses, jewelry, accomplishments, pleasures which keep him on the verge of bankruptcy. He lays nothing aside. If she marry before the crash comes, nobody knows of the deception but her husband. But if the father dies, the girl's life is ruined.

Look in the Mint, in the Government offices, in the department stores, and you will find tens of thousands of delicate, refined women brought up in luxury, ignorant of any art or trade, and penniless except for the pittance which they can earn by hard labor.

The English and French woman, too, whatever her rank, is usually taught the ordinary forms of business. There are no shrewder traders than the bourgeoisie women of Paris and Marseilles. They are helpmeets to their husbands behind the counter as in the home. One of them originated the methods and organized the forces of the greatest retail shop in the world, and all the successful shops in this country and the continent have borrowed her methods and her organization.

American girls are taught sciences and accomplishments galore. But how many of them know where to sign a check or how to settle an estate? This almost universal oversight in the education of girls is the more amusing as our worries boast that they now have taken all kinds of professions and trades out of the hands of men.

Very few American men in their secret souls believe that the market-place is the proper field for women. But if they choose to go into it, or if necessity drives them into it, why not qualify them for it?

THE LOST PAPERS OF REBECCA HARDING DAVIS – Janice M. Lasseter

A small trunk containing a treasure-trove of letters, diaries, clippings, photos, and other items belonging to Rebecca Harding Davis and other family members went up in flames roughly twenty years ago.¹ It happened in a house fire at the Maine home of Davis's great-great-granddaughter. Her home burned to the ground and with it Davis's trunk. The back story of this incident illustrates the risk when archival documents languish for many years in the homes of descendants. What we know now of those documents derives from Arthur Lubow's biography of Richard Harding Davis, Davis's son. Lubow calls the content of the trunk the Kehrig Papers, as he had secured them from Kristen Davis Kehrig, Davis's great-grandson. The journey of the chest from Davis to her descendants to its eventual destruction illustrates how critical documents can inadvertently disappear, and, in this instance, deprive us of a fuller understanding of an author's life and work



Kristen Davis Kehrig
May 5, 1934 - July 19, 2004

The poet Rachel Loden, Davis's great-grand-niece, alerted me in 2002 to the existence of a trunk that contained a plethora of letters and a wide variety of family memorabilia that she understood to be at Kehrig's home in Somes Bar, California. With the contact information she provided, I wrote to Kehrig, requesting an interview and enclosing a copy of his great-grandmother's memoirs that I had co-edited with Sharon Harris, *Rebecca Harding Davis: Writing Cultural Biography* (2001). Kehrig replied in a June 23, 2002, email. One paragraph delivers the sad news about the loss of the trunk: "The book by Rebecca is wonderful—she had quite a sense of humor. . . . If I come across anything interesting I'll be in touch. All the family letters burned in a house fire. Very sad—it was my daughter's house." The letters Loden knew I had hoped to find were no more. Still, I hoped a personal interview with Davis's great-grandson might elicit some new information about her.

Not until early 2004 was I ready to travel to Kehrig's home in northern California. When I phoned Kehrig's home, more dismal news greeted me. Kehrig had died of cancer two days earlier. His wife invited me to attend the celebration of Kehrig's life. Bereft of the alternative, I accepted the invitation. At the memorial event on the spacious, tree-lined grounds of the Kehrig home, copies of the photograph seen here were available to guests.

A limited genealogy helps us to track the journey of the chest from Davis to Kehrig, who descended from his great-grandparents Rebecca Harding Davis and Lemuel Clarke Davis, his grandparents Richard Harding Davis and Bessie McCoy Davis, and finally his parents Hope Harding Davis and Jean Louis Kehrig. Richard was a famous war-correspondent and novelist. His second wife Bessie McCoy Davis, a Broadway dancer and singer, became celebrated as the "Yama Yama Girl" in 1908. Heart disease took Richard's life while Hope was an infant. Five years later, Bessie moved with her little daughter to France. The two lived in the Basque town of St. Jean de Luz, outside the coastal city of Biarritz. Fifteen years later, Bessie died there in 1931. Two years later, eighteen-year-old Hope married Jean Louis Kehrig (1934-2004), a native of St. Jean de Luz. They moved to the States where their son, Kristen Davis Kehrig, was born. Davis's daughter Nora Davis Farrar inherited the trunk from her mother at Davis's death. Nora passed it on Hope, although the date is not known. Kehrig took possession of the trunk after Hope's death in 1976.

To return to the odyssey of the lost chest and its contents: I came across a biography of Richard that had relied on some of the chest's contents to fill out various details of his life. Arthur Lubow's *The Reporter Who Would Be King* (1992) cites the Kehrig Papers. In August 1984, Lubow flew from his New York home for an interview with Kehrig at his Somes Bar, California, home. Lubow departed, trunk in hand. Once the biography was published, Lubow contacted Kehrig to arrange for the return of the trunk. Kehrig reached a logical decision, which turned out to be a fateful one, and recommended Lubow send the trunk by truck to his daughter, who lived considerably closer to Lubow, rather than to California. Lubow sent the trunk off in 1993. I have been unable to date the year of the conflagration of Kehrig's daughter's home in which the trunk was immolated.

Lubow supplies all the substance of the various materials in the chest that we will ever know. He cites the Kehrig Papers 172 times. He includes letters quoted in Charles Belmont Davis's *Adventures and Letters of Richard Harding Davis* (1917), citing from the Kehrig papers and *Adventures and Letters*. Lubow corrects several errors in some dates assigned by Charles. Most of the citations refer to Richard's letters, diaries, war notebooks, and scrapbooks, though some letters to Richard were from Charles and Nora. Only six letters by Davis herself are cited, and all are to Richard. The references to Davis reveal nothing new about her. Nonetheless, phone conversations and email correspondence with Lubow indicated that some of Davis's writings, diaries, scrapbooks, and memorabilia were indeed among the trunk's contents. Details, however, except for her trip to Boston and Concord, escape him. Also, he pointedly remembers seeing a lock of Nathaniel Hawthorne's hair in this trunk, a lock Hawthorne must have given her when she was a guest in his Concord home in 1862. This detail implies that Davis held onto materials important to her. Yet specifics of any of her cherished items other than this lock of hair will never be available.

We can only speculate about whether the trunk's contents may have deepened our understanding of Davis. We know that they have been important for Richard's biographers. Gerald Langford considers them indispensable to his *The Richard Harding Davis Years* (1961). Lubow counts their value second only in importance to the University of Virginia's Clifford Waller Barrett Collection where the bulk of Davis's letters and her bowdlerized diary reside. Richard's letters are held there as well. Lubow's biography offers new information about Davis's family, particularly about Richard's marriage to Bessie and some late complications of Nora's life.

I suspect letters from James T. Fields and/or Annie Adams Fields to Davis might have been contained in the chest. Fields's letter accepting "Life in the Iron-Mills" for the *Atlantic Monthly* would surely have been a keeper for Davis. I asked Lubow specifically about that, but he could not recall. His focus, quite naturally, was on Richard. He quotes Davis's letters only as they pertain to Richard. Whether other letters in this chest written to or by Davis would have expanded our knowledge of Davis's life and work, we have no way of knowing. The inclusion of Hawthorne's lock of hair does suggest that some early publishing memorabilia may well have been preserved long after her death. Surely, then, other items

important to her career as a writer were contained in this trunk. Lost to us are papers that would have amplified our knowledge of Davis and her work, in addition possibly to providing unpublished manuscripts.

¹ In this piece, I refer to Rebecca Harding Davis by Davis and to Kristen Davis Kehrig as Kehrig. Other family members are distinguished by their first names. Out of respect for their personal privacy, Kehrig's children and wife are not named.

RHD COMPLETE WORKS DIGITALIZED

The digitalization of Davis's complete works (<http://rebeccahardingdaviscompleteworks.com>) is ongoing. On the home page, you can find a list of recently added materials, search the entire website, or review available works by genre ("Browse Collections"). Don't miss the enlightening "Cultural Contexts Essays" as well, which contextualize Davis's work in relation to the law, the media, the field of children's literature, and medicine. We will be adding new material frequently and soon will have a selection of pertinent exhibits and photographs.

We welcome contact from anyone wishes to input a text (in Word; the site administrator will code and upload the texts) or to write a Cultural Context Essay. For more information, just send an e-mail to Sharon M. Harris (sharon.harris@uconn.edu).

NEW AND FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS – Compiled by Harry Olafsen

About Davis:

Mazurek, Raymond A. "Rebecca Harding Davis, Tillie Olsen, and Working-Class Representation." *College Literature*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2017, pp. 436–58.

Moon, Setbyul. "Female Body, Voice, and Space in Rebecca Harding Davis's 'Life in the Iron Mills.'" *Hankuk University of Foreign Studies Literature Studies*, vol. 67, 2017, pp. 27–52.

Scriptunas, Melanie. "Rebecca Harding Davis and the Politics of Postbellum Tourism in Southern Appalachia." *Appalachian Journal*, vol. 43, no. 3/4, 2016, pp. 192–221.

Tharp, Allison. "'There Is a Secret Down Here': Physical Containment and Social Instruction in Rebecca Harding Davis's Life in the Iron Mills." *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 47, no. 1, 2017, pp. 1–25.

Tomc, Sandra. "'a Form of Life in Which Art Is Not Art': 'Life in the Iron Mills' and the Artist As Worker in the Nineteenth-Century United States." *American Literature*, vol. 89, no. 3, 2017, pp. 497–527.

Turpin, Zachary. "Seventy-Three Uncollected Short Works by Rebecca Harding Davis: A Bibliography." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2016, pp. 229–252.

Mentioning Davis:

Anderson, George Parker, editor. *Novelists on the American Civil War*. Gale, Cengage Learning, 2016.

- Babilon, Daniela. *The Power of Smell in American Literature: Odor, Affect, and Social Inequality*. Peter Lang GmbH, Internationaler Verlag Der Wissenschaften, 2017.
- Biddle, Gertrude Bosler, and Sarah Dickinson Lowrie. *Notable Women of Pennsylvania*. U of Pennsylvania P, 2016.
- Bordelon, David. "Blackpool on the Picket Line: Hard Times Goes Viral in Nineteenth-Century America." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2017, pp. 49–68.
- Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. Twentieth anniversary edition. ed., Columbia UP, 2017.
- Giffen, Allison, and Robin L Cadwallader. *Saving the World: Girlhood and Evangelicalism in Nineteenth-Century Literature*. Routledge, 2017.
- Pfister, Joel. "Surveyors of Customs : American Literature As Cultural Analysis." *How America Works : Getting Personal to Get Personnel*, Oxford UP, 2016.
- Smith, Whitney Womack. "'Blind Tom' Abroad: Race, Disability, and Transatlantic Representations of Thomas Wiggins." *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2016, pp. 164–75.
- Town, Caren. "'There Was That in Her Face and Form Which Made Him Loathe the Sight of Her': Disfiguration and Deformity of Female Characters in 19th Century American Women's Literature." Dissertation, 2017.
- Wearn, Mary McCartin. *Nineteenth-Century American Women Write Religion: Lived Theologies and Literature*. Routledge, 2016.

RECENT EVENTS SPONSORED BY THE DAVIS SOCIETY – Mischa Renfro

The Society for the Study of Rebecca Harding Davis and Her World organized two sessions and an excursion at the annual meeting of the **American Literature Association** held May 25-28, 2017, in Boston. For the first time, the Davis Society joined the Louisa May Alcott Society for a joint session and an excursion to the Lowell Mills National Park. We toured the Boott Mills Museum and watched a demonstration of a worker operating a loom. The museum runs most of the machines on the floor to simulate nineteenth-century factory conditions, and visitors must wear ear plugs for protection from the noise. Several of us were reminded of Davis's apt description of a textile mill in *Margret Howth*: "The floors shook constantly with the incessant thud of the great looms that filled each story, like heavy monotonous thunder. It deafened her, made her dizzy as she went down slowly" (15). When our tour took us to the second floor, we could feel the machines running below. We finished the day at the Boarding House Museum and the Mill Girls and Immigrants exhibits. The Boarding House Museum replicates typical living conditions; mill girls were housed in small bedrooms that could accommodate four to eight people. We would like to thank **Melissa Pennell** for organizing the trip to Lowell.

Building on the excursion to Lowell, the society **co-sponsored a session with the Louisa May Alcott Society** that featured papers exploring connections between the two writers, particularly their ideas about

women and work. **Jane E. Rose** of Purdue University Northwest-Westville presented “Reclaiming the Spiritual Self through Maternal Benevolent Feminism in Rebecca Harding Davis’s *Margret Howth* and Louisa May Alcott’s *Work*,” **Ariel Zibrak** of the University of Wyoming presented “Life and Labor in the 1870s: Davis and Alcott on Work” and **Sarah Gray** of Langston University presented “Market Negotiations: Rebecca Harding Davis’s and Louisa May Alcott’s Representations of Women, Work, and Marriage.” In “Waiting: Temporality and the Race Question in Rebecca Harding Davis and Louisa May Alcott,” **Katie Waddell** of the University of Kentucky explored the representation of race in Alcott’s *Hospital Sketches*. The session was well-attended, and a spirited discussion followed. **Melissa Pennell and Mischa Renfroe** co-chaired the session.

The society sponsored another session titled “New Approaches to Rebecca Harding Davis: Journalism, Gender, and Genre.” In “Rebecca Harding Davis and Local Color Fiction,” **Aaron Rovin** of the University of West Virginia examined Davis’s complicated engagement with local color conventions in “The Yares of Black Mountains” and **Kristy Burkhardt** of the University of Alabama Birmingham explored the representation of shifting gender roles in “The New Woman and the True Woman in Rebecca Harding Davis’s *Kitty’s Choice*.” Robin Cadwallader planned to present her work on Davis’s journalism but was unable to attend the conference. **Mischa Renfroe** chaired the session.

UPCOMING EVENTS SPONSORED BY THE DAVIS SOCIETY – Mischa Renfroe

The society will organize sessions at the next meeting of the **American Literature Association** to be held in San Francisco, California, in May 2018. The society is also planning a tenth anniversary celebration.

Please save the date and look for the CFP soon!

About the Newsletter

The Society thanks Michael Sell for maintaining the website. Past issues of the *Newsletter* are posted on the website at <http://scotus.francis.edu/rebeccahardingdavis/>.

If you wish to contribute items to the newsletter, please contact its editor: Sharon.Harris@uconn.edu

Membership

For membership, please complete the membership form below and mail it along with your membership dues to:

Robin L. Cadwallader
Dept. of English
Saint Francis University
Loretto, PA 15940

Membership Form

Name:

Address:

Email:

Telephone:

This information may ____ / may not ____ be included in the Society's secure online Members' Directory.

Membership dues are \$5.00 annually. With a two-year membership or a gift of \$10 or more to the Society, you will receive a free copy of *Writing Cultural Autobiography*, a reprint of *Davis's Bits of Gossip* with additional material, edited by Janice Milner Lasseter and Sharon M. Harris.