

Connecting with the Past in Today's Present

Sheldon Celebrates Remarkable Local Women through History

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WEYBRIDGE RESIDENTS CHARITY Bryant and Sylvia Drake lived together as a couple for 44 years.

MIDDLEBURY — In honor of the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th amendment granting women the right to vote, the Henry Sheldon Museum's Stewart-Swift Research Center has been planning an exhibit of a selection of women who demonstrated the determination, persistence, and open minds needed to change Addison County in the past. The Revolutionary War, women's education, and preserving the state's history all called forth those qualities, well documented in the Research Center of the Museum, which was shaped by more than one of these women. Since the museum is closed for now, the Sheldon Museum will bring the stories of these women to you through a new series published in the *Addison Independent* over the next seven weeks.



EMMA WILLARD WAS the first to offer a college level education to women at the teacher training school she started in Middlebury.



SALLY KELLOGG MARKHAM was a child when her family was twice forced from their Addison home during the Revolution.

Whether personal, political or cultural, change requires sustained effort on the part of people who see themselves or the world in a different way. Sometimes they're simply swept up in it and have to react, as was the case for **Sally Kellogg Markham**, a child when her family was twice forced

from their Addison home during the Revolution. Her mother's strength and resourcefulness served her well then and as a model in later hard times. Neither had any of the advantages that **Emma Willard** soon brought to the education of girls, being the first to offer a college level education to women at the teacher training school she started in Middlebury. Some of Weybridge resident **Charity Bryant's** education came from life in a literary family whose prominence played a part in not only establishing her respectability but also in documenting her relationship with **Sylvia Drake**, with whom she lived as a couple for 44 years.

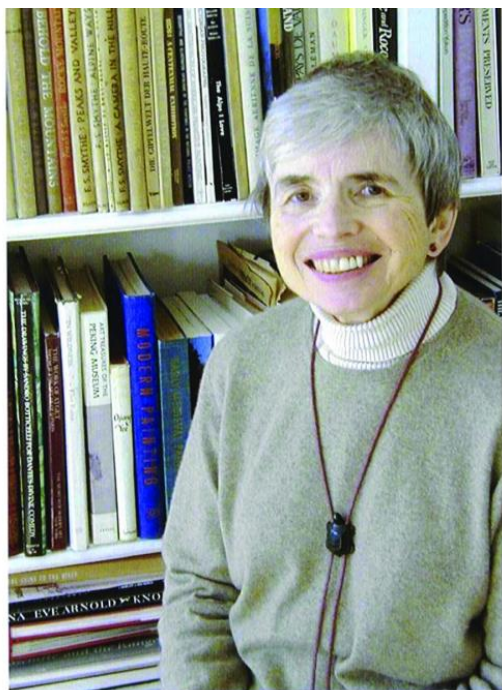


DOCUMENTING HISTORY WAS Abby Maria Hemenway's passion.

Documenting history was **Abby Maria Hemenway's** passion. She spent much of her life collecting, editing and publishing histories of every town in Vermont. Initially thwarted by the Middlebury Historical Society, who thought her plan inappropriate for a woman, she visited every town in Addison County lining up authors using her considerable knowledge of human nature and political skills. In the first town she visited, the minister she talked with was

impressed with her good sense on a variety of issues such as abolition of slavery, but was suspicious of her motives. “In one word, the staunch Orthodox Divine inclined to regard it as covering perhaps, a ‘woman’s rights’ move; they had had few years before one or two such women in the county and did not want any more.” By the time she left he was entirely supportive of the project. In Ferrisburgh Quaker Rowland T. Robinson’s response was different, saying “I will be pleased to see thee succeed. The Friends [Quakers] believe in women’s rights...thee knows too much to admit it; but thee does what is better than to say it, thee acts it.”

Two 20th century women also played important roles in preserving and uncovering the history of the state. In the 1970s when **Deborah Clifford** got her Masters degree in history from the University of Vermont, sources for the study of women’s history were not generally easy to



locate, but she did extensive research and writing, including a biography of Abby Hemenway, and became the first woman president of both the Sheldon Museum and the Vermont Historical Society. Thanks in part to another woman, Middlebury’s **Jessica Swift**, Clifford had excellent resources for research.



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A.J. Schillare. Jessica Stewart (Swift), ca. 1895

Swift had financed the building of the Stewart-Swift Research Center at the Sheldon Museum, enabling the organizing and cataloging of the many manuscript, printed, and ephemeral sources that make Middlebury and Addison County the best documented local area in the northeast. It includes correspondence between Abby Hemenway and Henry Sheldon. How ironic that it was Jessica Swift’s grandfather Philip Battell, who informed Abby Hemenway that her work was unsuitable for a woman.

Excellent as the Research Center documentation is, it doesn’t include everyone. Which courageous women of the past come to your mind? Who deserves recognition for their part in surviving or driving change? Why? Would you tell us about them? What about the Abenaki and people of color who’ve been ever-present but little recognized? Share your knowledge and stories with info@HenrySheldonMuseum.org.