



Unnamed staff of Bread Loaf Inn, c. 1900

Dear Stewart-Swift Research Center friends and supporters,

With the first signs of Spring and encouraging reports about future social interactions, we hope that by mid-Summer we can collectively celebrate **Henry at 200**, the bicentennial of the birth of our founder, Henry L. Sheldon (August 15, 1821). The Research Center Advisory Committee is planning exciting exhibits and events to commemorate Henry's collecting efforts that endowed us with such rich and diverse archival holdings (see Lucinda's report below).

Since our Winter newsletter last December, we have been busy with a number of projects, including making numerous improvements to our Archives [website](#), adding a new resource ([Index to Persons in Visual Collections](#)), and creating our own SSRC [Instagram account](#). We also supported three virtually taught Middlebury College classes that required digital access to many archival documents, which you can read more about below.

In February, we honored *Black History Month* by publishing [three articles](#) based on research in our collections that focused on the historical presence of people of color in Middlebury and Addison County. In March, we are celebrating *Women's History Month* by highlighting the lives of Sophonisba Breckinridge and Madeleine Pollard, two progressive heroines with surprising links to our collections, explored in a two-part series below.

In this newsletter we cast our lens on underrepresented and forgotten communities of women and others. We honor the nameless staff of the Bread Loaf Inn portrayed in our banner photograph, the unnamed African American woman captured in R. Dean's portrait to the right, and the many anonymous "mill girls" – working class young women who supported themselves by laboring in local textile mills during the nineteenth century.

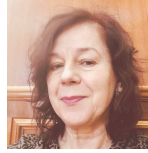


Some of them left behind correspondence that luckily ended up in our Archives (see bottom of this newsletter). But let's not forget the countless others, men and women, who maintained the beautiful homes and private and public properties around us, whose stories are not documented in our archival collections. Let the silences in our collections be a tribute to those who cannot speak for themselves.

Thank you for your support of our collections, their preservation, and our efforts to make them available to us all.

With best wishes,

—Eva



Eva Garcelon-Hart
Archivist

Henry at 200: Happy Birthday to our Founder!

“ ... I have spent all my leisure the past year trying to benefit future generations by preserving the handiwork of the articles representing all the different occupations of the early pioneers which I have called a Museum. May those who many years hence look at these articles take as much pleasure in doing so as I have in collecting them.”

— from Henry Sheldon's diary, 1881

Grab your party hats because we are having a birthday! Henry Luther Sheldon, the founder of the Sheldon Art Museum, Archaeological & Historical Society, Inc. (now known as the Henry Sheldon Museum of Vermont History) was born 200 years ago on August 15, 1821. From a single Roman coin purchased in 1875, Henry's astute collecting of artifacts, objects, art, and documents formed the basis for what has become the oldest community-based Museum in the country and ultimately the Stewart-Swift Research Center. Henry's focus on the local community, in conjunction with broad and diverse collecting patterns has enabled the Sheldon Museum to share the cultural heritage of Addison County and Vermont for generations.



Join us as we celebrate the 200th birth of Henry L. Sheldon and his cultural legacy, reflect on our history and embrace the future through exhibits, programs, publications, and events. This birthday is about celebrating the amazing history and moments of community connection, big and small, that the Sheldon Museum and Research Center have engaged in since 1882.

We are planning an exhibit that specifically highlights Research Center materials titled “Henry at 200: Vermonter, Collector, Founder” which will focus on Henry L. Sheldon and his life, the founding of the Sheldon Museum, his collecting pursuits, and emphasizing rarely-seen materials. You will learn why the establishment of Henry Sheldon's museum was history in itself, the importance of Henry's collecting and documentation, and see incredible archival materials and objects that illustrate the people, places, and stories of Middlebury and Addison County.

Henry at 200 is an opportunity to pay tribute to the past and our community's legacy, but also an important chance to look to the future. Watch on the website, email, and social media for exhibits, programs, lectures, music concerts, student projects, events, and of course, a party!



Lucinda Cockrell
Research Center Committee Chair

History Makers: The Statesman's Daughter

In the SSRC's History Makers series for Women's History Month, Archives Assistant Taylor Rossini explores the intersecting stories of two women who challenged the status quo of nineteenth-century life. Part I traces the story of Sophonisba Breckinridge, a pioneering social reformer born into a family of distinguished statesmen, whose portrait we discovered in the SSRC collection this summer.



Look out in the April 1 *Addison Independent Arts & Leisure* for Part II, which examines the parallel life of Madeline Pollard, whose longstanding affair with Sophonisba's father offered her some semblance of the advantages into which Sophonisba was born, while relegating her to the annals of notoriety. These stories offer just a glimpse of what is hidden in the SSRC archives.

Read History Makers: The Statesman's Daughter



Taylor Rossini
Archives Assistant

Middlebury College Classes in the Archives

The SSRC has partnered with three Middlebury College courses this winter and spring, providing archival materials for students to conduct original research. All three courses engaged critically with the SSRC collection, focusing on anonymous individuals and often overlooked historical narratives.

***Histories of Struggle: Middlebury Town and Gown* (Bill Hart, Black Studies/History)**

Middlebury Professor Emeritus Bill Hart and his students investigated the historical experiences of Black, PoC, female, LBGTQ, gender non-conforming, and “othered” persons at Middlebury College and in the town using the archival collections at both Middlebury College Special Collections and the SSRC. SSRC-based student research projects included an examination of Vermont Governor William Slade's anti-slavery views in the context of the abolition movement and an exploration of how racial stereotypes in advertisements past and present participate in the construction of systemic oppression.



Bill Hart
Middlebury College
Professor Emeritus

***Material Culture in Focus: Hairwork* (Ellery Foutch, American Studies)**

Middlebury professor and Sheldon Trustee Ellery Foutch and her students explored the multivalent meanings on hair in American culture, past and present. Nineteenth-century Americans often saved or exchanged locks of hair as mementos, constructing elaborate items of jewelry or keepsake wreaths that emblemized familial relationships and kinship networks. Ellery's students examined hairwork objects from the museum collection and conducted original research with supporting documentation from the SSRC, uncovering the names and stories of the anonymous nineteenth-century women who created these beautiful, intimate objects.

***Vermont Collaborations Public Humanities Lab* (Ellery Foutch, American Studies)**

This year, Ellery Foutch's recurring collaborative public humanities course is mining the SSRC archives. Her students will explore the early history of the museum within

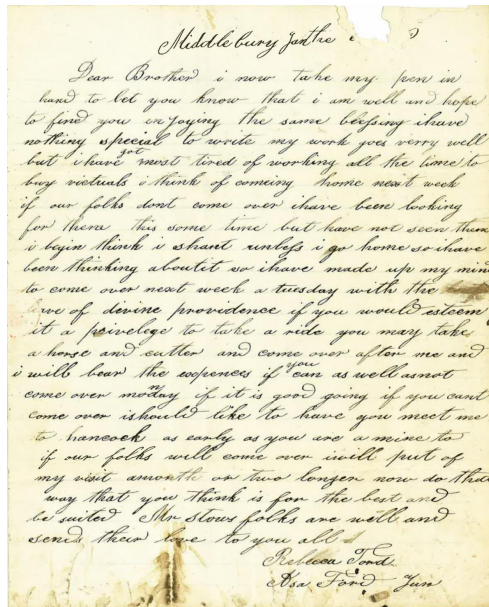
larger trends of collecting and local history, as well as think critically about how archives and collections are formed, developed, and made legible (or illegible) to broader publics. At the end of the semester, students will have the opportunity to publicly present their original research on objects in the museum and SSRC collections.



Ellery Fouch
Middlebury College Professor
and Sheldon Trustee

Working Women: The Lowell Mill Girls

Rebecca Ford (1810-86) and her sister Caroline, daughters of Asa Ford of Granville, Vermont, represent thousands of young women from Northern New England who worked in textile mills in Middlebury, Lowell (Mass.), and many other small towns. The Sheldon archives holds a collection of letters by the sisters written between 1838 and 1848 that provide a rare glimpse into the daily life of such women. Although their wages were low and workday long, they experienced much more independence in comparison to their sisters who labored on farms or supported themselves as domestics.



Thank you to the Stewart-Swift Research Center's donors and supporters!

Your continued support will help preserve our collections, and to implement public programming and a special exhibit celebrating the 200th anniversary of Henry Sheldon's birth and highlighting Research Center collections.

[Learn more about giving opportunities here](#)

[View in browser](#)



Henry Sheldon Museum
of Vermont History