

The Harriet Beecher Stowe House & Library

The Stowe-Day Foundation

77 Forest Street, Hartford, Connecticut 06105-3296



February 1990

Library Use for 1989

In 1989 more library patrons let their fingers do the walking.

Telephone requests to the Stowe-Day Library, a research facility for 19th-century Americana, increased 178% over the previous year. Diana Royce, head librarian, and Suzanne Zack, reference librarian, responded to more than 200 telephone inquiries (up from 72 requests in 1988). The requests ranged from anquished adolescents, usually junior high school students or their equally frantic parents, asking that the librarians send "everything you have on Harriet Beecher Stowe" because "my report is due next week" to the producers of *Jeopardy*, a nationally syndicated television quiz show, verifying that there is indeed a printing press in the cellar of the Mark Twain House. Newspapers, local, regional, and national, called to substantiate information (biographical data, quotations, etc.) as well as to solicit anecdotal material to flesh out a story; while the research department of the *Reader's Digest* (a stickler for accuracy) phoned to ascertain the exact wording of a statement by Henry Ward Beecher, the precise date he uttered it, and just where was he when he said it.

Other requests included one from the White House Library to ensure the accuracy of a Mark Twain quotation that President Bush wanted to use in a speech; another from the National Observatory in Washington, D.C., likewise seeking to confirm a quotation to be used in a presentation; and one from a novelist gathering background on the woman suffrage movement for a work in progress. Increasingly, the librarians are fielding requests for information about black history, Victorian architecture, the horticultural practices of the last century, and the decorative arts, especially as exemplified in the Harriet Beecher Stowe House or as written about by Stowe and her sister, Catharine Beecher.

Written requests for information showed a modest gain in 1989 – 11%. Here, too, the scope of the inquiries reflected the interests of the library: architecture, decorative arts, history, literature, and the woman suffrage movement of the 19th century as well as the personalities of Nook Farm. A letter may solicit a general chronology of the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, while another sought the specificities and particularities of Harriet Beecher Stowe's activities during Holy Week in 1857. One writer wanted to know the type of revolver Fred Beecher, a nephew of Mrs. Stowe, had sheathed in his holster during the Civil War. Another researcher requested information about the visits that the women of Nook Farm made to water cures and any accompanying documentation of these stays. The regimen of calisthenics and exercises propounded by Catharine Beecher – and the appropriate dress for her program – was of concern to yet another researcher.

The number of patrons making in-person visits to the library increased by 27%, 405 patrons from 295 in 1988. Library tours were conducted for several groups, among them students from Guilford High School and Renbrook School, Connecticut; American Studies students from Trinity College; participants of the Mark Twain/Harriet Beecher Stowe Teacher Institute, the Amistad Institute of the Connecticut Historical Society,

Scholarly interest
in Isabella Beecher
Hooker as
suffragist and
spiritualist remains
high.



Photo from the Stowe-Day Library

and the Nook Farm Teacher Seminar; and members of the Friends of the West Hartford Public Library.

Research on Mark Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe remained the most frequent topics of interest. The issues involved in women's studies and the history of Hartford were the next two most researched subjects. Research on Victorian architecture and architects retained strong attraction, closely followed by interests in the decorative arts. Isabella Beecher Hooker and other members of the Beecher family still command scholarly attention.

A popular subject for research this past year was the Victorian Christmas – its customs, decorations, rites of festivities, foods, and family activities. A group of junior high school youngsters from Durham, Connecticut, after conducting research in the library, created a Christmas program for its school; while a curator of a historic house in Greenwich, Connecticut, used the findings of her research as a guide to decorating her restored home. In addition, National History Day attracted student groups from Connecticut and New Jersey to research and then present projects on Harriet Beecher Stowe in their state competitions.

For a master's thesis in social science one Harvard graduate student spent the summer studying the character of Topsy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to determine the evolution of a stereotype. Another student, from Erlangen, Germany, researched the contributions of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, perhaps America's most radical feminist and a grandniece of Stowe. Several researchers studied the role of Isabella Beecher Hooker in the suffrage movement as well as her involvement in 19th-century spiritualism. One scholar from California researched Mark Twain's relationships with the women in his life, while another, from New York, looked into the role of education in Olivia Clemens's life.

The interests of other patrons were wide-ranging: Charles Dudley Warner's editorial presence at the *Hartford (Connecticut) Courant*; Victorian cookery and cookbooks; the architecture of the Harriet Beecher Stowe and Mark Twain houses; the love letters of Samuel L. Clemens and Olivia Langdon; Japanese influence in Victorian America; and the Underground Railroad.

How I Became a Doctor of Divinity

John Hooker, cofounder of Nook Farm and husband of Isabella Beecher Hooker, in 1899 published a collection of personal essays. In this one he details how he became, briefly, a slaveholder.

The "Fugitive Slave Law," which was passed by Congress in 1850, created great alarm among the colored people of the North. Many of them were runaway slaves, and of course they had great fear of being discovered and captured, but the free negroes, as well, were alarmed lest they might be seized and carried off as slaves, the law giving the claimant a great advantage over the black man, by compelling the latter to prove his right to his freedom, which he might not be able to do if away from home, while the question was to be decided by a single magistrate of about the grade of a justice of the peace, and that finally and without appeal, the law providing that if the magistrate found for the claimant he was at once to issue an order, under which the claimant could immediately transport him out of the state. The law even appealed to the cupidity of this low grade of officials by allowing them a fee of but \$5 in case of a decision for the negro, and of \$10 in case of a decision for the claimant, the larger fee being put under the thin cover of compensation for his added trouble in having to make the order for the delivery of the negro to the claimant.

This act was but the culmination of a growing aggressiveness on the part of the slaveholders in the assertion of what they claimed as their constitutional rights, and of an obsequious concession to their demands on the part of Northern politicians. This state of things kept the blacks who were in fact fugitive slaves in a constant fear, though until this act was passed the free negroes were in no great

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

danger of being seized and carried off as slaves. For several years before the passage of the act Rev. James W.C. Pennington, a full-blooded negro, was the pastor of a congregational church of colored people at Hartford. He was a faithful pastor, and very much respected by the clergy of the city, as well as by the people generally. No one knew or suspected that he was a fugitive slave. But a short time before the passage of the act he came to me for a most confidential consultation and advice. He told me that he was a fugitive slave, and that he had never divulged the fact to any of his people in Hartford, nor even to his wife, and that it was known to nobody but the Quaker friends in Pennsylvania who had sheltered him at the time of his escape, and had afterwards aided him in getting an education. The fact was withheld from his wife, however, mainly to save her from disquieting fears. He told me that in his studies, in his domestic life, and in the discharge of his parochial duties, he was burdened with harassing apprehensions of being seized and carried back to slavery. He disclosed the fact to me that I might attempt to negotiate with his master for the purchase of his freedom.

He was born the slave of Frisbie Tilghman of Hagerstown, Maryland, and remained his slave until he ran away, when he was eighteen years old. He was now about forty. The name which he now bore was an assumed one; his name as a slave was "Jim Pembroke." After his

escape he found protection and assistance in a Quaker family in Pennsylvania, whose kindness he had ever since remembered with the greatest gratitude. He had already, in a stealthy way, learned to read a little, but here he began those studies which, ever since pursued with unremitting ardor and industry, had made him a man of intelligence and something of a scholar. After a while he entered the Christian ministry, and was licensed and ordained as a minister, and, as I have before stated, was now settled over a congregational church of colored people at Hartford.

That he could preach quite acceptably I knew, as I had often heard him, and at one time Rev. Dr. Porter of Farmington had exchanged with him, and the people of the quiet old town had been astonished, some of them shocked, by seeing one of the blackest of men in their pulpit.

After two or three consultations it was decided that it was best for him to go to Canada and remain while the negotiation was pending. After he had left the city I wrote to Mr. Tilghman, stating that I did so in behalf of his former slave, "Jim Pembroke," who was then out of the country and beyond his reach, but was willing to pay a small sum for his legal freedom. I took care, of course, to give him no intimation of his adopted name, nor of his place of residence. Mr. Tilghman wrote me in reply that "Jim was a first-rate blacksmith, and well worth \$1,000," and that as servants were then very high he could not take less than \$500. He also stated that he had learned that Jim was making himself useful in the world, from which I inferred that he had some knowledge of his being a preacher, and probably of the name he was bearing, and perhaps of his place of residence. The sum demanded was much beyond Mr. Pennington's ability to pay, and on my informing him of Mr. Tilghman's demand, we decided that it was not safe for him to return to Hartford, but that it was best for him to go to England, where he would find many friends among the abolitionists there. He did so, and was abroad about two years. He found warm friends wherever he went, and on visiting Heidelberg, in Germany, was made a doctor of divinity by the university there. This honor he accepted in a graceful speech (or possibly written communication), in which he declared his personal unworthiness of it, but accepted it as the representative of his race. When the Fugitive Slave Law was passed, in 1850, which, of course, made it out of the question for him to return to America as a fugitive slave, he was in Scotland. At this time it was generally known that he was a fugitive from slavery, this fact creating a wide interest in his case and drawing to him great sympathy. He frequently wrote to me, and I kept him advised as to the state of things here. Soon after this some friends in Scotland determined to take the matter in hand and raise the necessary money to secure his freedom, whatever might be the amount required, and appointed a committee to attend to the matter and correspond with me on the subject. Upon hearing from the committee that they wished me to renew the correspondence with Mr. Tilghman, and to pay him whatever he should finally insist upon, I wrote him, stating that Jim was now in England, and would not return unless his freedom was secured, and asking what was the lowest price he would take for his freedom. A stranger replied, stated that Mr. Tilghman was dead and that he was his administrator, and

that in the circumstances, as he desired to close up the settlement of the estate, he would take \$150. He added that, as administrator, he had no power to manumit, but could only sell the slave, and the purchaser could manumit, and he wished me to name the person to whom the bill of sale should be made. Mr. Joseph R. Hawley, since our senator at Washington, was then my junior law partner, and he at once went to Maryland, carrying the money (a larger sum than was necessary had been sent me by the Scotch friends), and, by my directions, took a bill of sale to me. I thus became a slaveholder, and the owner of a doctor of divinity. On receiving the bill of sale I held it for a day to see what the sensation would be, and then executed a deed of manumission, which I had recorded in the town records, where it may be found in Vol. 76, page 356, under date of June 5, 1851. It set free "my slave, Jim Pembroke, otherwise known as Rev. James W.C. Pennington, D.D." It stands on record there for the wonder of future generations.



Photo from The Stowe-Day Library
The Reverend James W.C. Pennington.

After Dr. Pennington's return to this country and settlement over a church in New York, he attended at Hartford a meeting of the colored people that had been regularly held for several years on the first day of August in commemoration of the emancipation of the slaves in the English West India Islands, which took effect August 1, 1834. I attended this meeting, as did a few other white persons, and about two hundred colored people of both sexes. It was held in a grove in the suburbs, a platform having been erected for the speakers. Dr. Pennington was welcomed as their old pastor, and was one of the earliest called out, the call passing around for "Rev. Dr. Pennington." After he had spoken they saw me in the crowd, and a clamorous call was made for "Mr. Hooker." I went upon the platform, and prefaced my short speech with a few words, as follows: "Before I make a speech, my friends, I want to set you right about an error you have just fallen into. You all know that Mr. Pennington was once my slave. Now it is one of the elemental principals of slavery that the slave can own nothing. Everything that he acquires, or thinks he acquires, passes through him to his master. Even the mule that he got with his own earnings belongs to his master. Now when I set Mr. Pennington free I merely took my hands off from him — merely let him go. I did not give him anything. Thus the doctorate of divinity, which, as his master, I owned, remained with me, and did not go by his manumission to him, and I hold it still. So, when you next call us out on an occasion like this, I want to have you call for 'Rev. Mr. Pennington' and 'Rev. Dr. Hooker.'"

From *Some Reminiscences of a Long Life* (Hartford: Belknap & Warfield, 1899).

Noted and Quoted

Stowe was one of the most brilliant women of her generation, producing a body of work which is beginning to be recognized as a major contribution to the literature of the American Renaissance. Six of her nine novels stand out as documents of nineteenth-century culture and as works of extraordinary coherence and artistry: the antislavery novels for which she is best known — *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and *Dred: A Tale of the Great [Dismal] Swamp* (1856) — and four novels of New England life set in the decades immediately following the Revolution — *The Minister's Wooing* (1859), *The Pearl of Orr's Island* (1862), *Oldtown Folks* (1869), and *Poganuc People* (1878). Her other fiction written mostly later in her life, does not come up to the standard set by these six. Stowe provided in her prolific career shrewd criticism of slavery, Calvinism, women's roles, rampant individualism and materialism, and the gap between American egalitarian individualism and social reality. Marked by this intense commitment to social justice, Stowe's fiction also contains detailed and often witty portraits of American life in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In her use of vernacular speech and humor and in her penetrating portrayals of American life and mores, Stowe is the mother of American realism, preceding by several decades such better-known realist writers as Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, and Hamlin Garland.

Stowe wrote from a profound concern for certain divisions in American life. She especially lamented the passing of the close-knit communities of the Colonial period as industrial capitalism exacerbated the divisions between classes, separated the public, male sphere from the private, female sphere, and encouraged a materialistic, competitive ethic. She also addressed the central place religion traditionally had played in American life, advocating a compassionate, nurturing Christianity. Stowe's fiction is marked by a vision of a regenerated society that draws much from the past, but also looks toward the future.

Dorothy Berkson, "Introduction," *Oldtown Folks* (Rutgers University Press, 1987).



The Pearl of Orr's Island, a good book despite its ending and an interesting transitional one, bridges the literary gap between *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the postwar realists and exemplifies the changing literary trends. Her later local color books — *Oldtown Folks* (1869), *Oldtown Fireside Stories* (1872), *Poganuc People* (1878) — are maybe the best that were done in this early period of New England local color. If Harriet Beecher Stowe is best remembered by social historians for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, her place in literary history is guaranteed by her contributions to the local color movement through books like *The Pearl of Orr's Island*. Though little read today outside of New England, *The Pearl* is worthy of a small niche in the great hall of American classics. John Greenleaf Whittier called it "the most charming New England idyl ever written." Sarah Orne Jewett, another New England writer, said the book had "a divine touch here and there." Carl Van Doren, the modern critic, described the early chapters of *The Pearl* as "among the purest, truest idyls of New England." But Jewett went on to say the novel was "an incomplete piece of work." If the modern reader comes away with much the same reaction, he will also conclude that the moments of divinity make the book worth reading.

E. Bruce Kirkham, "Introduction," *The Pearl of Orr's Island* (The Stowe-Day Foundation, 1979).

The Finish on the Rainbow

In 1835, Calvin Ellis Stowe, aglow with wonder at the increasing affection of his future wife, wrote to Harriet Beecher of his "irrepressible anxiety." In mourning for his first wife, Eliza Tyler, who succumbed during the cholera epidemic in 1834, Calvin acknowledged his debt of gratitude to Harriet "for all her goodness." The couple was married on January 6, 1836.

Dear H.

I am so happy, with your note of this morning! Where the affections are intensely excited and fixed on one subject, you know how prone we are to an intense, irrepressible anxiety, which we can refer to no particular cause, but which goes through every nerve like galvanism. I am not sad, only melancholy: and the melancholy is not heavy, cheerless, and black, as it once was, but luminous, gently irradiated, like a thick

VALENTINE'S DAY

grove under the full moon. How shall I repay you for all your goodness? I know of no better way than by enjoying what I have already received, and asking for more. This is the way the Hebrew Psalmist expresses his gratitude to God. "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits? I will take the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord." How otherwise can a poor helpless creature express gratitude? I will feast upon all you have given me thus far, I will keep asking for more as long as I live, (the fountain of that which I want is in you inexhaustible), and you shall have every thing that is in my power to confer.

....

I am very glad to find that I am growing in your estimation. I have found it to be a universal fact among my friends, that the most unequivocal symptoms [sic] of the warmth of their attachment is an imagination that I am some wonderful great body. This puts the finish on to the "rainbow". . . Dear Hattie, I love you more than I can or dare tell you of; and so good morning. S.



Photo from Harry Birdoff Collection/The Stowe-Day Library

"How shall I repay you for all your goodness?" Calvin Stowe wrote to his fiancée, Harriet Beecher.

Open Invitation

The Stowe-Day Foundation invites you to join the Friends of the Harriet Beecher Stowe House and Research Library, a support organization. Four membership categories are available: Individual, Family, Supporting, and Sustaining. Friends enjoy a wide variety of activities throughout the year as well as the knowledge that they are supporting the aims and programs of the foundation.

Please make all checks payable to the Stowe-Day Foundation.

Cut along dotted line and return.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual . . \$ 20.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Please check here if your |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family 30.00 | employer is a matching-funds |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting . . 50.00 | participant and you will send |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining . . 150.00 | the necessary form. |

Name _____

Street Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip Code _____

The Harriet Beecher Stowe House and Library

The Stowe-Day Foundation

President Anne S. MacFarland

Director Joseph S. Van Why

Librarian Diana Royce

Curator Renee T. Williams

Editor Earl French

Photographer Laura Vassell

The Stowe-Day Foundation

77 Forest Street

Hartford, Connecticut 06105-3296

NONPROFIT ORG.

U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

HARTFORD, CT.

Permit No. 17

DO NOT FORWARD

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED