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By Choice or By Chance: Single Women's Lives In Nineteenth Century Suffolk County, N.Y.

"Whistling girls and crowing hens
Always come to some bad ends!"

Nineteenth-century saying.

By choice or by chance, six women of nineteenth-century East Hampton lived single lives either because they never married or because they became widowed or separated in mid-life. How did they fare in the changing social and economic times of nineteenth-century Suffolk County? They were well-educated; most of them attended Clinton Academy. They kept diaries, ran a farm or a business, educated their children. They were daughters of well-to-do families whose uncles and brothers "went west" in search of better land, perhaps more land. The sandy soil of East Hampton had become depleted after 200 years of intensive use. Even the demand for the products of the livestock herded onto Montauk was lessening as modern machinery, banking systems and communications became ever more prevalent.

I will be discussing these six women: Phebe van Scoy, Polly Hicks, Cornelia Huntington, Abbie Parsons, Delia Sherrill, and Eliza Glover. The first three were single women. Phebe van Scoy lived in Northwest and ran a farm "by herself", so tradition says. Polly Hicks of Amagansett also ran a farm by herself, and Cornelia Huntington, the doctor's daughter, was a poet and author, neither financially rewarding.¹ The next two were in their mid-thirties when they became widows and did not remarry: Delia Sherrill of East Hampton and Abbie Parsons of The Springs. Eliza Glover, at age 55, was legally separated in New York City in 1890 from her husband after eleven children.

These six women lived long lives: Polly Hicks lived to age 91; Cornelia, 87; Phebe Scoy, 81; Delia, 77; and Eliza, 75. Only Abbie died at age 54, her life cut short by cancer.² Each of these women had a well-developed sense of her own worth.

As well as their own diaries and references in others, each of these women can be found in the New York State Census of 1855 and 1865 which lists the crops raised, livestock, worth of farm what each family sold. This was chiefly cordwood, shipped to New York City for fuel, and, in turn, New York City shipped out horse manure to be sold for fertilizer. The northeastern U.S. generally enjoyed a good economy during the mid-eighteenth century, the two decades before the War of 1812, and the latter part of the nineteenth century. During the nineteenth century, middle-class families valued intimacy and family privacy. Home was not simply a place of residence—it was a focus for social life, a central element in class consciousness.⁽³⁾ Houses had separate spaces—sewing, music, breakfast, dining, and most important, sleeping where each had his own room. Servants came down the back stairs next to the kitchen. This same century saw canned food, ready-made clothes, laundries, bakeries, indoor plumbing, cooking stoves, ice boxes. There were brimstone matches, rubber overshoes, the steam press for newspapers and the daguerreotype.⁽⁴⁾ As clothing and furniture styles changed as well as eating habits, these women were alert to these changes and

embraced them all in the name of respectability.⁽⁵⁾ When Polly Hicks and her younger sister, Rebecca, were creating their cross-stitch sampler in the early 1800's, they were being prepared for living a "refined life". These women's lives were overlaid with this change from pre-Revolutionary "gentility" to nineteenth-century "respectability".

Legends in their own time, Phebe van Scoy and Polly Hicks were noted as farm managers—"running a farm by themselves" as contemporaries said. Diary keepers Eliza Glover and Delia Sherrill lived in families of other diary keepers. Housing is indicative of wealth and social standing, then as today. Two of the women lived in large, stylish houses built for their marriages: Abbie (Kimble) Parsons in The Springs and Delia (Parsons) Sherrill in East Hampton.

In 1848, the New York State Legislature passed a law granting legal ownership of property to women, married or not. This law would prove a boon to these women. Divorce laws became more liberal. Fewer than half of free white males in the U.S. owned real estate at mid-century.⁶ Yet all of these women did. These legal, economic and social changes impinged on the lives of these six nineteenth-century women.

Phebe van Scoy

Phebe van Scoy (1787-1868) is the only one of the six who lived her entire life in the same house. She assumed complete control of her father's farm in 1846 when she was 59. The farm raised grains for the market, butter was made. Polly Hicks (1790-1881), too, became the owner of a familiar farm when her father died in 1833. She was 43. Her capable brothers and sisters had left home.

Cornelia Huntington also inherited her father's house on Main Street.⁷ Although Cornelia is known as a diary keeper, only one ("book 5") has survived.⁸ One of her sisters and her only brother married. She and her younger sister, Abbey, lived in their father's house where they remained after his death. She was then 55; she was 61 when Abbey died.

Adelia Anna (Parsons) Sherrill (1838-1915) became a widow in 1874 at age 36. She had married when she was 21, in 1859, moving into the newly constructed Greek Revival-style house, the Sherrill family home which was a short distance from her parents' and grandparents' homes. She continued to live with her father-in-law, bringing up her children in the house and the farm her only son would inherit.

Abigail Jane (Kimble) Parsons (1848-1901) was 37 when her husband died in 1885. She, too, lived in a newly constructed Italianate-style house with a cupola, built near her husband's retail store and post office in The Springs. Abbie continued his business.

Eliza Jane (Fisk) Glover (1835-1913), at age 55, was legally separated in 1890 from her husband of 35 years. Of their eleven children, only nine grew to maturity.

Northwest is the area located northwest of the center with the woodlots. Its first buildings were the warehouses of the East Hampton merchants. By mid-eighteenth century, the Town Trustees, probably pressured by descendants of the first settlers, decided on a special division or sale of the acreage. Phebe Scoy's grandfather, an early purchaser, was the first to move there shortly after his marriage in 1757.

From 1760, for about a hundred years, Northwest was a thriving community. At first, "lop" fences were created to enclose the livestock, cattle and sheep. Barley, oats and Indian corn were harvested. These grains were taken to the many wind-powered grist mills in the area.⁹ The livestock was transformed into hides, tallow, meat, and wool—all very marketable products in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Isaac van Scoy, Phebe's

grandfather, had moved to Northwest in 1757, purchasing 300 acres of land on which he built his dwelling house, barns and other outbuildings. In 1771, he built a larger house for his eight children—a "new two-story, 34-foot-by-30-foot frame house.¹⁰ When his wife, Mercy Edwards, died in 1782, a Connecticut sandstone marker was erected in the family's burial plot on the farm.¹¹

Although Phebe van Scoy (1786-1868) is known to posterity as a woman who "ran a farm by herself", she was not living in isolation. The nine families who "farmed" in Northwest became a close-knit group; the original settlers' children married and even some of their grandchildren married each other.

In 1792, a school house was built in Northwest on the van Scoy property. In that year, there were thirty scholars; children of the other families were Bennett, Edwards, Miller, Parsons, Payne, Ranger, Terry.¹²

After the Civil War, the families moved away, the land reverted to woodland, the houses disappeared through fires or dismemberment. Today, much of the land is publicly owned parkland.¹³

Isaac, Jr., Phebe's father, began oyster harvesting along the creeks and in the harbor at Northwest.¹⁴ When he married about 1783, after the British occupation of Long Island, he continued to live in the family house. When his son was born in 1790, after two daughters, Isaac, Jr. planted a yellow bark oak tree near the front door. This male chauvinistic emblem lasted 140 years until the tree was blown down in the disastrous 1938 hurricane.

Phebe's family included her parents, Isaac and Temperance, her older sister, Mercy, then Phebe Phebe, then the two brothers and baby sister, Betsey, all born within ten years. Older sister, Mercy, married at age 20 in 1805 and moved to Southold. This mother may have died about this time, and Phebe, as oldest daughter at home, may have been in charge of the house. Little sister, Betsey also may have died at this time as there are no further records of her. Phebe was 24 years old in 1810.

In 1815, brother Arnold married and moved to Sag Harbor where he became a daguerreotypist.¹⁵ Brother Isaac Sylvester remained to work on the farm. In 1820, he married Charlotte Parsons, daughter of the nearby Parsons Family. Their only child, Charlotte, born in 1831, was seven years old when her mother died. Perhaps Isaac Sylvester and little Charlotte lived in the house with Phebe and her father.¹⁶

Isaac Sylvester caught the gold fever in 1849 and invested \$500 as a stockholder in the Sabina, a former whaling ship (with a total of 60 shares), going as a passenger to the west coast with many friends and a cousin. Perhaps Phebe put some money into this venture.¹⁷ At the time of the 1850 Federal Census, Phebe had been managing the farm for four years. This census indicates that Phebe's only resident help on the farm was a black woman, Phebe Horne, age 26, who lived in the house with Phebe. As noted, canned goods, brimstone matches, rubber overshoes, and ready-made clothing eased the housewife's lot. For the heavy work, plowing and such, Phebe was dependent upon her neighbors but, more likely, hired day laborers.

In 1865, according to the New York State Agricultural Census, the population of Northwest was 66 people. Wainscott had 89 persons and East Hampton, 775.¹⁸ Phebe van Scoy's 90-acre farm had a cash value of \$1,200 and livestock, \$120. Cash came in by selling 5 cords of wood in 1864 for which she got \$25. In 1864, she also made 70 pounds of butter and cured 200 pounds of pork, indicating that she had some livestock as well as fields of grain.

When Phebe died in 1868, at age 76, her unusual life style had made her a legend in her own time. The road to her house was known as the "Road to Phebe Scoy's".

After her death, the farm became the property of her cousin's son, George E. Van Scoy (1844-1911) who married in 1872. About ten years later, George's wife's father purchased the property and took the two ells off, removing them to his own farm. "The rest of the house was soon dismantled by anyone needing a little lumber."²⁰

Polly Hicks

The Hicks Family Farm of 40-50 acres was near the heart of Amagansett. The family lived near present-day Indian Wells Highway in a three-bay, side-entrance, two-story, gable-roof house with a two-story "el" to the rear, vernacular Federal in style.

A label on a lovely slat bonnet in the collections of the East Hampton Historical Society reads "Worn by Miss Polly Hicks". What kind of a woman was Miss Polly Hicks?

Miss Polly Hicks began life in the middle—a middle child who gets to look at both ends. Polly was the fifth child of nine, with three older brothers, an older sister, and three younger sisters. In 1800, as noted above, she and her sister, Rebecca, each worked on a cross-stitch sampler.²¹ Polly was ten and Rebecca, six.

In 1833, when her father, Zachariah Hicks, died, only two of the eight surviving Hicks children—Polly and Joseph—were living at home. Their mother died the next year. Polly, now age 44, and Joseph, her older brother (by a year-and-a-half) ran the farm for the next twenty years. The 1850 census gives us a clue: unmarried, Joseph is listed as insane! Polly not only had to manage the daily work on the farm, but had to see that Joseph, probably mentally retarded, was doing useful work within his mental capacity. Joseph died in July of 1853, and Polly was able to sell the Amagansett farm in March of 1855 for \$1,500.

With the money from the sale of the farm, Polly moved in with her sister, Rebecca, and her family.

Rebecca had married in 1815 and had seven children before she became a widow in 1839. The family lived on the east side of Three Mile Harbor in East Hampton on a farm called "Duck Creek". They also owned and farmed adjacent farmland called "Franklin Farm". Each farm had a large old house. Franklin Farm was run by Rebecca's oldest son, Daniel, with help from his siblings and later, his wife, Mary Edwards.

In the 1860 census, Polly is listed as an occupant of Daniel and Mary's household along with their two daughters, ages 7 and 1 (there was also a 13-year-old live-in "boy" helper). By 1870, Polly, age 80, is listed as a "boarder" in the same household of Mary (Edwards) Edwards, now a widow, and her daughters, Hannah, 17 and Mary, 11.

The various mid-nineteenth-century epidemics had decimated the Hicks/Edwards Family. Three of her nieces and her brother-in-law, Joseph Edwards, had died. In 1865, the dysentery epidemic took four more members of the family including nephew, Daniel Edwards, the major breadwinner.

As noted, in 1870, Polly, age 80, is listed as boarding with the widow Mary E. Edwards and her two daughters. In 1880, Polly, age 90, listed as "aunt", is living with her surviving niece and nephew, Samuel Edwards, age 45, and his sister, Rebecca, a household of single persons. They have a 23-year-old farm laborer living with them, Henry Talmage. The following year, Miss Polly died.

Polly had the advantage of commercially canned food and ready-made clothing. Her life span incorporates the timeframe of this change of attitude. Although her management ability enabled her to keep solvent, a farm as a viable source of income and lifestyle was fast

disappearing in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, males from this farm family had turned to fishing.

Cornelia Huntington

An entirely different lifestyle, centered in the village, was that of Cornelia Huntington. Highly intelligent, she exercised her faculties in writing poems, many celebrating life events of her friends.

Daughter of a medical doctor and sister of another M.D., she was the second child of four of Dr. Abel Huntington, a sixth-generation New Englander.

She was never called "Miss Cornelia"; apparently, her intimate family name was "Corneal" as quoted in some of her poems. Born in 1803, she lived the whole of her life in the nineteenth century. Her one novel, a melodramatic tragedy, was situated in the East Hampton of the 1840's. The novel, *Sea Spray*, was published under a pseudonym, Martha Wickham, in 1857.²² Catherine Beecher, a childhood acquaintance of Cornelia, was establishing female educational institutions. Cornelia was three years younger than Catherine, who lived her first ten years in East Hampton. In 1846, Catherine published her first book, *Miss Beecher's Domestic Receipt-Book*; copies have survived in East Hampton households.

An old, hand-written note on the library copy of Cornelia's novel says "written in 1852".

About 60% of all fiction volumes published in America between 1830 and 1860 were highly wrought, adventurous or satirical, while just over 20% were domestic or religious. In the 1840's, many were sensational "blood-and-thunder" novels; 705 of these were written by men, 23% by women, and 7% published anonymously.²³ *Sea Spray* seems to fit all categories.

Cornelia Huntington (1803-1897), in her novel written by 1852, describes East Hampton as it was during the lives of these six women.

The opening paragraphs of her book, written in the typically florid style of the period, carry the feel of the place which, even today, many believe still to be true.

"The last rosy flush of a surpassingly bland and beautiful day in December fell over the little village of Sea-spray. The sun had set, but the western sky was yet glowing with floods of golden light, and the whole clear expanse, above and around, was bright in the softly fading gleam.

"It was a pleasant hour—that quiet interval between daylight and darkness; and it was a pleasant village, too, that now lay dozing in its soothing glimmer. There was nothing remarkable in the simple, unpretending village of Sea-spray, which stretched itself about a mile from the Atlantic shore, on the eastern extremity of Long Island: the main street lying in a little miniature valley, the rise on either side being so slight as to be scarcely perceptible. There was nothing picturesque in the surrounding scenery; the fields lay on one flat, unbroken level, and there was neither a brook nor a rock within an hour's travel of the street; but the dash of the eternal wave was always sounding amid its solitudes, and the solemn and monotonous road...

"Stretched far away into the ocean...the villagers pursued quietly and contently their own usual avocations,...dwelling soberly where their fathers had dwelt, treading patiently the paths their fathers' steps had beaten, tilling the same fields, sheltered by the same roofs, believing in the same stern creed...

"There was fear now, however, that the spirit of innovation had begun to creep stealthily among them; the 'brushing up' mania had broken out here and there, and in several places along the street, snug little edifices might be seen in all the gloom and glory of fresh paint

and side-lights...turning up their puggish little portico noses in defiant scorn of the long, low, rickety roofs that confronted them; barns had marched sullenly back from the front line, and wood-piles had retired indignantly to the rear, to give place to painted pickets and ornamental shrubbery."²⁴ Such was the romantic description of the village that was the center of these women's lives, the "refined" village of these six women.

Cornelia's noval, *Sea Spray*, was published before any of Harriet Beecher Stowe's books on life in late colonial America.²⁵ In her own posthumous book, *Odes & Poems*, the editor, her nephew, Dr. Abel Huntington, noted that she did not want her poems published during her lifetime.²⁶ However, she wrote for the Spooner publications, *Long Island Star*, in 1864 under her name, adding "Author of *Sea Spray*".

There were several houses on Main Street, East Hampton that remained vacant after the British occupation of Long Island during the Revolutionary War.

The young Rev. Lyman Beecher had purchased one. He spent time and money repairing the house. Captain Thomas Wickham, in 1776, was appointed Auditor of Refugees' Claims with an office in Middletown, Ct. He did not return to East Hampton. In 1797, Dr. Abel Huntington (1777-1858) purchased the large house, now at 136 Main Street, across the street from Clinton Academy.

The Huntington children attended Clinton Academy, the esteemed school. At Clinton Academy, the alert Cornelia absorbed much in the open-style classrooms of the school. She closely observed her fellow students. In this, she followed the male Huntingtons in their medical notes. It would be her nephew, Dr. George Huntington, who would present a paper in 1872, based on these earlier doctor's records, that would identify and define a hereditary disease known as Huntington's Chorea.²⁷

Clinton Academy was much loved by its students as many of them who have written about their education can attest. Judge Henry P. Hedges, chronicler of East Hampton, enjoyed his school days. Cornelia, he notes, was a brilliant student.

It is unfortunate that so few records of this important school have survived. As noted above, the Huntington children probably attended Roxana Foote Beecher's "preschool" classes before going on to Clinton Academy. Cornelia was seven years old when the Beechers left East Hampton for Litchfield, Ct. She was already enrolled in Clinton Academy.

In 1813, her mother died; Cornelia was then ten. In later life, she writes about her parents at this time in an undated poem/letter in rhyme to Mrs. M.D.R.: "The twilight in my early home in vivid tints I view,/where in the spring-time of my life its first great grief I knew./ I see my Father pace the room with measured tread and slow,/With folded hands across his back and whistling soft and low.../I see my Mother's fragile form and clear mild eyes of blue,/with that fixed, far off, dreamy gaze so well my childhood new./...And Mariette, sedate and grave, though but a child in age,/...And that "black headed witch"—Corneal.../And Abby—fair as moonlight mist—flitting like fairy slight,/With flossy locks of flaxen hair and forehead marble white."²⁸

When Cornelia was about fourteen, the widowed Mrs. John Lyon Gardiner moved her five children into the East Hampton house, leasing the island to David and Juliana Gardiner, second cousins, of New York City. Their four children were born on the island including the to-be-famous Julia, "The Rose of Long Island". In 1825, the lease ended. Mrs. John Lyon Gardiner returned to the Island with her son, David, now 21, and Eighth Proprietor, the two girls, Sarah, 18, and Mary, 16, and the two younger sons, John and Samuel Buell Gardiner, 13 and 10, respectively.

Cornelia and younger sister Abby were invited to spend several weeks on the Island with their former classmates.

Starting a new diary, Cornelia wrote, "I have been on the Island more than a week during which time the weather has been rainy and unpleasant. Yet has my time passed delightfully away and I shall never forget the happiness I have enjoyed in this little week of my existence...I have looked across the bay a great many times today, for it is the first day...that I could discern the low level shore and scarcely perceptible hills of my own native abode, but as the sun set tonight (mist-mantled as it was) behind that dear isle which looked so lovely and sublime...Tuesday afternoon we have taken a ride about the Island this afternoon and I have been very well pleased with the excursion—the day is cloudy and the wind very boisterous and chilly...If at this early season the scenery does not appear to the best advantage especially to those who admire to see the earth smiling in her summer attire—but to me who love to contemplate nature in her most desolate state..."²⁹

In the 1826 diary (the only one known to be extant), Cornelia writes under 23 December, "I have had a party this week and heaven deliver me from ever being doomed to linger through another such a miserable evening. I had rather reap an acre of barley than to be condemned to be 'Lady Hostess' to people, who will neither afford nor receive entertainment, and I am now fully resolved never to give another party until I am married." Marriage was an alternative that Cornelia kept in the back of her mind. In the 1859 poem-letter to Jerry Mulford, she implies she thought his letter a long-distance proposal.

Cornelia decries the custom of "calling" "We spent the morning in receiving calls which in my opinion a foolish custom—bit it is the fashion and we must all bow to the all prevailing name of fashion..." (diary).³⁰

One fashion Cornelia did not disparage was that of creating poetry. Her friends enjoyed her poetry, much of it with the lilting rhythm. From 1815, in Hartford, Ct., Lydia Sigourney was published this saccharine verse.³¹ Whether Mrs. Sigourney was an influence on Cornelia cannot now be determined; Cornelia was interested in the work of Mary Wollstonecraft who advocated education for women.

Cornelia Huntington's novel, *Sea Spray*, is replete with Englishness. The main character's names are so British—Mr. & Mrs. Evelyn, Mr. Atherton. Cornelia may have envied her brother Dr. George Lee Huntington's star boarder, John Wallace, the mystery man of East Hampton. John Wallace was a Scotsman who had come to East Hampton in 1846 at the age of 57, funded by checks from a New York bank. He was soon boarding with Dr. George Lee Huntington.

Wallace was Church of England. By 1855, Wallace began to conduct, as a lay reader, Episcopal services in Clinton Academy. Within four years, there were enough communicants to consider a special meeting place. A chapel was constructed for summer services near Sophie Jones house, now the Home Sweet Home Museum.³² Cornelia, fascinated by this aura of British life, became an early communicant. Fifty years later, John Wallace's real identity was found. His name was John Wood and he was an Edinburgh lawyer who had had a dispute with his family and left.

In her writings, Cornelia mentions knowledge of the work of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) who is best known for her book of 1792, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, which John Wallace would have known and perhaps brought a copy with him from Scotland. How much her novel was influenced by conversation with John Wallace about his homeland and its social customs will never be known.

In her poems, Cornelia divulges herself. In a poetic answer to a letter of 1859 from Jerry Mulford, an East Hampton "boy" now living in Ross Grove, Illinois, Cornelia says, "My path has lain in sunshine, few sorrows I recall/and I've only known such changes as time must bring to all:/My brown abundant tresses, with their wavy wealth of curls,/I wear stuck up behind my ears, in awkward, knotted curls/...My face is brown and wrinkled, my eyes are growing dim,/My figure, never graceful, is anything but slim...". In this same poem, she describes her younger sister (by three years), "Abby who was lithe and light as a seagull on the wing,/sits reading by the ingleside, an invalid, poor thing."³³

In 1858, at age 82, her father died. Still living in that house with her sister, Abby, Cornelia was able to have long discussions with John Wallace at her brother's house. Her missing diaries may have included her thoughts during these years. Cornelia sold the house on Main Street after Abby's death and is recorded in the 1865 New York State Census with her brother in his much newer house on Newtown Lane. George Lee, his wife and two children, who in 1865 were fifteen-year-old George (who, as a graduate student, would present the paper on Huntington's Chorea to a scholarly medical audience), Mary C., 12, and the star boarder, John Wallace, age 79.

In the 1880's, life was closing in on these long-lived Huntingtons. Her sister, Mariette, recently widowed, lived in the castle-like house in the hills of Bridgehampton. Dr. George Lee Huntington would die in 1881 and Mariette, herself, at age 82, in 1882. George's widow would die just two months before Cornelia.

Against the background of the two managerial women discussed above, Cornelia Huntington appears as a little princess. When she died in 1890, at age 87, she was perhaps an object of awe in the town. An era had passed. The next three women typify the post-Civil War American woman. Each had a say in the setting up of the household, two of whom moved into new houses built for them; the third, Eliza Jane Glover lived in New York City on East Fourth Street perhaps in a rowhouse, before she and her husband and children moved in 1863 to Southold to a purchased home on several acres of land, where the Glovers had a vegetable garden as well as livestock.

Adelia Anna Sherrill

Adelia Anna (Parsons) Sherrill became a widow in June of 1874 at the age of 36. Delia grew up in East Hampton with her parents in their family home opposite the Dominy-built "Hook" Mill. Further north, into the "Hook", were other "old family" homes—Talmage, the Dominys themselves, and just beyond, one branch of the Sherrill Family. This family had four boys, just Delia's age. She settled on Nat—tall, slim Nat—who was just 6 years older.

Her husband, Nathaniel Sherrill, died from pneumonia at age 42. He was out haying in early June with his crew when a sudden rainstorm came. This thorough soaking soon turned into pneumonia.

Delia continued to live comfortably in the Sherrill Family's new house, occupied by eight people. Six of these were Delia's own children, 12-year-old Abie, the infant Willie (who would soon die, probably from childhood diabetes), and the four daughters ranging in age from 3 years to 14. Her father-in-law, Stephen Sherrill, ran the farm aided by an able crew. Some of the men ate noontime dinner in the ample kitchen of the Sherrill House, supervised by a cook-housekeeper who may have also lived in the house. As her father-in-law continued to manage the farm—the livestock and the growing of grains—Delia could devote her whole attention to her children and her unique "domestic role" as a nineteenth-century woman of the house.

In her diaries, Delia notes the novels she is reading. In March, 1870, "It is a severe snowstorm tonight—been sleet all day—have been reading *The Changed Bride's* by Mrs. Southworth. Wrote to Uncle Nat and Mary Cartwright tonight."³⁴ She finished the book at the end of the week. Another book of hers, *The Lamplighter* (published anonymously in Boston in 1857), is inscribed in beautiful Spencerian hand "Miss Adelia A. Parsons, Sea Spray, L.I.", the immediate influence of Cornelia! On a further text page in not such an elegant hand is written "Miss Anna M. Sherrill, East Hampton, L.I.", Delia's eldest daughter.

The 1880 Federal Census lists the occupants of the house as being Stephen Sherrill, age 79, farmer; his daughter-in-law; and the five children. Also listed as occupants of the house are Lois Talmage, age 23, unmarried servant, and Allen Smith, age 17, unmarried farm laborer, all born in New York State. Delia undoubtedly let Lois have a pretty free hand in the management of the kitchen. This would give Delia the free time to visit relatives, have tea with friends, go shopping in Sag Harbor and all the other things she did. There is no indication in her diaries of any conflicts with the cook-housekeeper.

Living as one of two adults in a household was unusual for Delia. Her own family, who lived about a quarter-mile up the street, had contained five people when she married—her grandmother, mother, brother and sister. Delia had moved into a very full household. In addition to her husband's parents, there were Nat's three brothers. During her fifteen years of married life, the composition of this household was recast.

The Civil War soldier brother was killed, her mother-in-law and the oldest brother died in the 1865 dysentery epidemic, and the youngest brother moved to Derby, Ct. to operate a store. Nat and Delia became the "head" couple in the house, although Nat's father, 64-year-old Stephen, remained in control of the farm.

Delia wrote in her diary for January 1, 1875, "This morning was awakened by the childrens' calling 'A Happy New Year, Mama'. I trust it will be a happier year than the last has been—in that I have lost both my husband and baby—dear little Willie, a sick child from the time he was ten weeks old, until he died, age eight months..."³⁵

Delia's life continues. Her father-in-law manages the farm with all the same help as before. Delia has tea with her friends and relatives; the children grow up.

In May, 1875, Delia notes "Phebe Baker came to work for me today and I expect her to stay all summer." In the back of his diary is recorded "Phebe Baker commenced work May 10th 1875. Wages \$2. Pr week."

Delia continues to do the washing on Monday, the ironing on Tuesday with Wednesday to finish if need be. Phebe would be helping in all these chores. Note that Phebe "came to work for me". Friday and Saturday, Delia baked. Other days, she sewed clothes for herself and the children. She cuts rags and then has a "rag party" with her friends who sew the ends of the rags together to be rolled up into a ball. This is then taken to a weaver who will weave a rag rug.³⁶

When Delia does her baking, she moves into the kitchen which is ruled by the cook/housekeeper, who has prepared all the meals for both family and the farmhands who eat at the house. Delia can spend a day shopping in Sag Harbor and come home to find the meal ready to eat. She has some income from stock and notes which she occasionally sells to buy luxuries such as a set of chairs for the dining room. In her diary, she notes the day the cattle are driven to Montauk and the day they return. Her son, Abie, was with the group driving on May 11, 1875. "Abie has been to drive the cattle to Montauk, the first time he has ever been—he went away at four o'clock this morning and arrived home at seven tonight." Abie

was 13 years old.³⁷

Her own mother died in April, 1875. Her brother, William Lewis Parsons, had come from Yates Center, Kansas to be with their mother, arriving about a week before she died. Her younger sister, Juliet, could not make it from the upper mid-west. "April 29 [1875] I went up home this morning—home no longer now Mother is not there..."³⁸

Living in her mother's house was her brother, Abraham S. Parsons, his wife, and their five daughters, making eight people.

Early in 1878, Abraham Parsons decided to buy the mill in Amagansett, moving his family there. Delia was able to give her brother a note for \$200 on the purchase of the mill.³⁹

Aware of the strong influence of culture, Delia records in her diary (21 March 1878) "Abie and May commenced to take singing lessons of Miss Libbie Dayton today." Abie was 16; May, 13.

In 1890, Abie married moving his bride into the house. Stephen, Delia's father-in-law, died two years later.

Delia continued her extensive correspondence with her siblings, keeping them aware of events in East Hampton. The local paper of December, 1901 noted that the Ladies Village Improvement Society's new cookbook (with some recipes by Delia) "had a wide circulation, going to Minnesota and Kansas".⁴⁰ Delia had sent copies to her sister and brother.

Abigail Jane Kimble

Abigail Jane Kimble was born and grew up in Dyberry, Pa., a small hamlet in the Delaware River Valley just north of Honesdale. In the late eighteenth century, the Kimbles, with many of their neighbors, had moved from eastern Connecticut to this part of Pennsylvania, known as the "Connecticut Town of Westmoreland".⁴¹ This Kimbles owned and lived at a stage stop which grew into a general store, post office and small hotel.⁴² This public service background would be a strong help to Abbie.

How did Abbie of Dyberry meet Joseph Parsons of The Springs? Well, their great-grandmothers were sisters.⁴³ Married in 1869, Abbie and Joseph moved into the new house in The Springs, set well back from the road; it encompassed the natural environment with a good view of Accabonac Creek and Gardinery's Bay beyond.⁴⁴ Just down the street, at the corner and past The Springs Chapel, was the grocery store that Joseph owned. He would soon be appointed Postmaster.

Abbie was a help-mate in the store as well as living a well-ordered life at home. For Abbie and Joseph, children came at four-year intervals. They were given the fashionable double names, the boys getting more romantic first names: Walton Grant, Phebe Jane, Lena Kimble and Raymond Schoonover. Abbie herself was Abigail Jane, and her husband, Joseph Dudley. After 16 years of married life, tragedy struck. Joseph contracted the measles at age 43 and died from its complications in 1885. But 37-year-old Abbie had previously looked for added sources of income. The 1880 census reveals that in that year, Abbie and Joseph had two boarders—one a 38-year-old fisherman, the other a 17-year-old clerk in the grocery store. When Joseph died, his children were 15, 11, 7 and 3. Fifteen-year-old Walton was helping in the store and in the yard. Eleven-year-old Phebe could help in the house. Abbie took over the management of the retail grocery store. However, she was not appointed postmistress until some years later in 1895, a position she held until she died in 1901.

Both Abbie and Delia were able to continue their lifestyles in their "new" houses as well as provide an inheritance for their sons.

In the very open proto-big-business environment such as East Hampton, like so many small

towns across America, new and exciting ways to make money developed. In East Hampton in 1884, a future business leader wrote to his brother, homesteading in Kansas, who apparently had asked about returning home to the East Hampton farm. The letter details the costs of each item of farm life; the value of crops—wheat, oats, potatoes, straw hay—and the value of the animal products: prok, butter, eggs, milk. He then adds that renting their house in the summer makes up the farm deficit.⁴⁵

Ten years earlier, in 1873, this 32-year-old man had become the Town Clerk, a position he held for 29 years. With this meagre salary, he progressed to being a private banker. He was on the organizing boards of such modern businesses as the Home Water Co., East Hampton Electric Light Co., East Hampton Lumber Co. and East Hampton Telephone Company.⁴⁶ Such opportunities would have been available to Nathaniel Sherrill and Joseph Parsons if they had not died prematurely. Their aware siblings had moved to other towns to avail themselves of these typical nineteenth-century opportunities.⁴⁷

Eliza Jane Fisk Glover

In Southold, another midlife man was trying to accomplish similar objectives. William Henry Hobart Glover was 32 years old in 1863 when he and his family moved to Southold from East Fourth Street in Manhattan.⁴⁸

Already the father of five children, he and his wife, Eliza Jane Fisk, would have six more in Southold. The old Glover Family were early settlers of Southold. William's father, Thaddeus Glover, had moved to New York City about 1800 to take part in the building boom as a carpenter, possibly supervising such work. These Glovers loved the East Fourth Street neighborhood, his widow remaining there the rest of her life.

Eliza Jane Fisk was a New Yorker whose husband, William, had been a builder in lower Manhattan during the building boom of the early years of the nineteenth century. Eliza's brother, John A.P. Fisk was noted in a New York Times story as being a "third generation chop house keeper" in the Wall Street area. The Glover diaries are all from after their move to Southold in 1863. Eliza's father had died that year, but her mother remained in the house on Fourth Street living with her youngest daughter, the New York City school teacher, Henrietta Fisk ("Aunt Tetts").

Most of Eliza's relatives stayed in the city although not on Fourth Street. Some sisters lived in Harlem, others in Brooklyn. Henrietta's connection with the public schools was used by the Southold Glovers extensively. All nine of their surviving children lived with Aunt Tetts while they attended high school in the city.

Aunt Tetts visited in Southold over school vacations and in the summer. WHHG's 1870 diary mentions Aunt Tetts more than he mentions Eliza. He painted and wallpapered Aunt Tetts' room in his Southold house and he stayed in her house on East Fourth Street whenever he had business in the city, which was often. He was trying to set up a fish oil factory in Southold.⁴⁹ W.H.H. Glover's 1877 diary gives many details of the social life, especially with his cousin, Israel Peck, and his family on their large estate, "Oak Lawn" in Southold. County trotting races were held on this extensive acreage on the south side of the main road. The Glovers' house in Southold seemed to be part of a farm with barns and animals. The soil must have been good as the older boys would be planting vegetables and picking and selling them. They built brick walkways in the yard. WHHG repapered many rooms. He also used modern conveniences. "Sunday 25 March...took a wash in little Bath tub in forenoon...". On November 1, "Joe built new drain for Bath tub" ("Bath" was always capitalized). Taking the train to the city, WHHG almost always wrote to Eliza upon arrival even though he often went

home the next day. (Mails were much faster then than today.)⁵⁰

Of their nine surviving children, five were married in the 1880's before their parents' legal separation. As Eliza looked around the partially empty house, she realized that her marriage had not brought complete faithfulness from her husband nor the happiness she had expected. She found that WHHG was paying a great deal of attention to her sister, Henrietta. Therein lies the problem. By 1890, Eliza Jane (Fisk) Glover had gotten a legal separation from W.H.H. Glover.⁵¹ He had been paying too much attention to Aunt Tetts.⁵² Details of the separation are not known; possibly Eliza received a meagre amount of money. She lived by extensive visits to her married children.⁵³

The repercussions of this legal separation were difficult for some of her children. Charles, the fifth child, sided with his father; thus, Eliza never visited him. Ida, her oldest daughter, seems to have been very calm about it. Eliza stayed long periods at Ida's house in East Hampton. Lill, the seventh child, had severe emotional problems whenever her mother came to visit the couple of weeks.

In June 1906, Eliza left daughter Ida and her family in East Hampton and "took the cars" to Southold where she was met by her son-in-law, Lill's husband, and the two young grandsons. Waiting in the house was Lill's oldest child, 18-year-old Florence, and Lill. Lill became sick. The diary: "Lill was sick all afternoon, vomiting and headache. She was not able to eat supper with us." Lill's daughter, Florence, was recently married to Orville Beebe. The family would attend Orville's Southold High School graduation later in the week. It had been sixteen years since Eliza's legal separation. Forty-year-old Lill was still emotionally upset and retreated into sickness.

The eldest son, 51-year-old Harry, takes over much of the "entertaining" of his mother, as does 45-year-old Willie, both of whom lived in Southold. They take her visiting and on rides. Possibly the reason Eliza does not stay with either of these sons is because her former husband is residing there. (Aunt Tetts died in 1899.)

The younger sons—Mort, Lou and Fred—had married in the late 1890's and lived in Queens. They are more hospitable and Eliza spent time at their homes.

Eliza takes part in the life of each community. While visiting Ida, Eliza notes all who come to call; she follows the activities of her grandchildren. When her teen-aged granddaughter comes from distant Kansas to visit her Aunt Ida, she has the ideal East Hampton vacation—boating, picnics, rides in the "new" automobile, parties with lots of boyfriends.⁵⁴ "July 22, 1907...Hester Glover came on noon train. Herbert took her to the dance in Eve...[Herbert was 17-year-old Hester's cousin]. July 23...Hester out for a drive...July 24...A lovely day, Hester went to the beach with a party of Young Girls to take dinner & tea. Alice Dayton called to see Hester...Hester at the Beach all day. Got back just before dark." Each day, a note on Hester. "July 29. A cloudy morn, rain in Aft. Hester went sailing with Edith & Mary & Frank Eldredge, got home about 7 P.M. Had a fun time although it rained in Aft. They all came home in bus...July 31...A beautiful morn, quite warm. Hester off to Montauk with a party of young folks, got home on the 8 pm train, sayd she had a lovely time..."

Eliza gets older; her diary entries became sparse, then stop. Somehow, she has a flat in Brooklyn, where she dies in 1912, a year before her husband. He had tried to be a leading businessman; Eliza had helped him, but he missed his goal.

This is a glimpse into how these very different women lived, how they continued to thrive even though the more easily mobile males in their families sought their fortunes elsewhere.

Such are the various records of these six middle-class women. Some recorded their lives by writing diaries or poems. A calmness pervades their singular, well-ordered lives.

REFERENCE LIST

1 Jeannette Edwards Rattray, *East Hampton History and Genealogies* (Garden City Press, 1952), passim; hereinafter JER, EHH&G. Information on all the women discussed, except Eliza Jane Glover, can be found in JER, EHH&G, and in *ibid*, *Up and Down*.... It is only when tracing the female lines do these cousinships emerge. For the genealogist, it is interesting to note that some of these women, with their extensive New England ancestry were distant cousins. Abigail Kimble and the Huntingtons were descendants of a first settler of Windsor, Ct., Christopher Huntington. Adelia Anna Parsons and the husband of Abbey Kimble were eighth cousins, descendants of Robert Parsons of Lynn, Ma. and East Hampton. Phebe Van Scoy and the Glovers have a common Van Scoy/Van Schaick ancestor. The Hicks and the Van Scoys have a Sherrill ancestor. Pre-Revolutionary ancestors for Eliza Jane Fisk have not been found. Her husband's family, the Glovers, are New Englanders who moved to Southold, L.I. where they intermarried with the Southold early families. Documented family group sheets are on file with the Connecticut Society of Genealogists, P.O. Box 435, Glastonbury, Ct., 06033.

2 *East Hampton Star*, December 1901 (p. 403 microfilm).

3 Christine Stansell, "Women, Children and the Uses of the Streets: Class and Gender Conflict in New York City, 1850-1860" in *Unequal Sisters*, p. 121.

4 David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America, A Cultural Biography* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), p. 31.

5 Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), passim.

6 David S. Reynolds, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

7 Will of Cornelia Huntington, written 31 August 1858 gives all her real and personal property to her sister and her brother, now knowing she would outlive them both. East Hampton Library [X DG -101].

8 Cornelia Huntington, diary 1826-27. [Not transcribed.] East Hampton Library [OG 25].

9 Robert Hefner, *Windmills of Long Island* (New York, W.W. Norton, 1983), passim.

10 William D. Halsey, *Sketches from Local History* (Southampton, N.Y., 1934), pp. 96, 98.

11 Photograph of marker in William T. Griffith, *Nature Preserves in East Hampton* (Nature Conservancy, Sag Harbor, N.Y., 1190), p. 5, with map.

12 James Truslow Adams, *Memorials of Old Bridgehampton* (New York, 1916), p. 97.

13 Cedar Point County Park, several hundred acres; The Grace Estate of 516 acres.

14 Halsey, Sketches..., pp. 145-146.

15 Arnold van Scoy house in Sag Harbor, AIA Architectural Guide to Nassau and Suffolk Counties, Long Island (AIA and SPLIA, Dover, 1992), #210. Daguerre (1787-1851) had invented his photographic process by 1837.

16 Many of Isaac, Sr.'s siblings were dead by this time. His sister, Mercy Edwards, died in Sag Harbor in the 1830's; Elizabeth Bennett died a widow at Northwest in 1858; Hetty Osborne died there in 1840; David died in Amagansett in 1854; Patience Payne lived in North Haven; and Polly Ranger died in 1833 at Northwest. Isaac's cousin, Abraham Van Scoy ran a store in Sag Harbor. Zaykowski, Sag Harbor, pp. 84 and 132. It is probable that Charlotte Van Scoy was brought up by her mother's family in East Hampton.

17 This voyage is discussed in Prentice Mulford, His Story (The White Cross Library, ca. 1885), passim.

18 The population of The Springs is not listed separately and, therefore, it is probably included in the East Hampton count.

19 The census reads 80 acres unimproved land, 8 acres "improved", 3 acres plowed. Eight acres of meadow in 1864 had been reduced to 5 acres in 1865. Four tons of hay had been produced, 3 acres planted in Indian corn for grain. Her two cows of 1864 had become one in 1865. In 1864, Phebe Scoy had made 70 lbs. Of butter and 200 lbs. of pork. She sold 5 cords of wood in 1864 for \$25.

20 JER EHH&G, p. 603.

21 The samplers are owned by the East Hampton Historical Society.

22 "Wickham, Martha" Pseud. [Cornelia Huntington], Sea-Spray: A Long Island Village (Derby & Jackson, 119 Nassau Street, New York, 1857), pp. 9-10.

23 Reynolds, Walt Shitman's America, p. 85.

24 "Wickham, Martha" Pseud. [Cornelia Huntington], Sea-Spray: A Long Island Village (Derby & Jackson, 119 Nassau Street, New York, 1857), pp. 9-10.

25 Stowe's tetralogy of New England stories begins with The Minister's Wooing (1850), Pearl of Orr's Island (1862), Oldtown Folks (1869), and Poganuck People (1878).

26 Dr. Abel Huntington, ed., C. Huntington, Odes and Poems (New York, 1891), p. 59.

27 Huntington's Disease was pinpointed by the pioneering work of the Drs. Huntington. It is a

genetic disease, the gene of which has now been isolated.

28 Odes & Poems, p. 10, Introduction by Henry P. Hedges (1891) in which he describes Cornelia's enrollment at Clinton Academy. Some records of Clinton Academy, which operated as an education institution for almost 100 years, are in the East Hampton Library. Lists of students seem to be missing. They were possibly burned in the New York State Library fire of 1911.

29 Cornelia Huntington's diary 1826-1827, unpaginated.

30 Ibid.

31 Lydia Sigourney (1791-1865) is discussed in Elsworth Grant, ed. *The Miracle of Connecticut* (c. 1992), pp. 248-251, and in David M. Roth, ed. *Connecticut History and Culture* (1985, Hartford, Ct.), p. 133.

32 John Wallace presented the Sag Harbor Episcopal Church, Christ Church, with paired marble plaques with the Lord's Prayer and the Apostle's Creed sculpted on them. Dorothy Ingersoll Zaykowsky, *Sag Harbor: The Story of an American Beauty* (Sag Harbor, N.Y., 1991). Throughout the summer of 1858, Wallace spearheaded a construction fund for an Episcopal Church building in East Hampton for which he raised \$1,600 with most donations coming from the summer visitors.

33 Dr. Abel Huntington, ed., *C. Huntington, Odes and Poems* (New York, 1891), p. 59.

34 1870 Diary, Delia Sherrill, entry for Sunday, March 13. Original and transcript in East Hampton Library [HI 23 Envelope 1].

35 Diary, 1875-1903, Delia Sherrill. Entry for January 1, 1875. Original and transcript East Hampton Library [HI 23 Envelope 2].

36 Ibid. Rag party, June 10, 1875; purchase of chairs, June 18, 1875.

37 Diary entry for May 11, 1875.

38 Ibid. Entry for April 29, 1875.

39 Ibid. Entry for January 17 and 23, 1878.

40 *East Hampton Star*, December, 1901 (Microfilm, p. 403).

41 George J. Fluhr, *A Generation of Suffering on the Upper Delaware Frontier: 1742-1782* (Shohola, Pa., 1976). Map on p. 9.

42 Interview with Mrs. Rickert of Dyberry, Pa., October, 1988. Abbey's relatives ran this until the 1920's, when the area was denuded for a "dry dam" for the State of Pennsylvania

Flood Control project.

43 Jane and Dency Ross were sisters. Dency married a Jacks and Jane married a Mulford, related to the East Hampton Mulfords. They were daughters of William and Hannah Ross of Poquannock, Morris Co., N.J. The recently research genealogy is entitled George Ross and Constance Little (1990).

44 p. 26, Gwendolyn Wright, *Moralism and the Model Home*. Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980. The house, much altered, is at 824 Springs-Fireplace Road.

45 Woodward, *East Hampton...*, p. 175.

46 JER, EHH&G, p. 493.

47 Abram Parsons Sherrill first moved to L.I. towns as a school teacher, but then moved to Pike, N.Y. as a storekeeper. F.W. Beers & Co. *History of Wyoming Co., N.Y.* (N.Y. 1880), Town of Pike, p. 262. Nathaniel Huntting Sherrill moved to LeRoy becoming a carpenter. 1850 Federal Census (New York, microfilm reel 507, Genesee Co., Town of LeRoy) lists N.H. Sherrill, 43, carpenter; Harriet A. Sherrill, 36, b. Vt.; Harriet A. Sherrill, 13, f. NY, attended school; and S.A. Higgins, 40, f. VT, apparently a sister of Mrs. Sherrill. They had a 33-year-old male laborer, born in New York, living with them. 1850 Federal Census (New York, microfilm reel 617, Wyoming Co., Town of Pike) lists Abram P. Sherrill, 46, merchant with real estate valued at \$800; wife Elizabeth, 39; Children Mary E., 9, John S. 6, Eleanor W., 3, and Abram P., Jr., 6/12. They had a 20-year-old female liv-in helper, a native-born New Yorker.

48 Diary, William Henry Hobart Glover, 1877. Diary and transcription, East Hampton Library. [Diary XMD 27; Transcription vf 9292 Glover].

49 Ibid. Entry for June 20 and 22, 1877.

50 Diary, WHH Glover, 1877 entries, 25, 1 November.

51 New York Times, August 1, 1890, p. 8, col. 5.

52 I am indebted to Patricia (White) Wroten whose mother was a Glover and knew the family gossip.

53 Diary of Eliza Jane (Fisk) Glover, 1905-1909. Original and transcription at East Hampton Library [LIC HI 112, Env. 1-2].

54 Ibid. Entries for July 22, 1907 to August 13, 1907.

APPENDIX: THE WOMEN'S FAMILIES

PHEBE VAN SCOY (1787-1868), Northwest, East Hampton. Daughter of Isaac van Scoy (1758-1846) and Temperance Payne.

Siblings: Mercy (1783-1830?), Isaac Sylvester (1790-post-1860), Arnold (1793-1857), Betsey (1796?-?).

POLLY HICKS (1790-1881), Amagansett and Duck Creek. Daughter of Zachariah Hicks (1749-1833) and Rebecca Sherrill (1758-1834).

Siblings: Jacob (1782-?), Samuel (1783-?), Elizabeth (1786-1874), Joseph (1789-1853), Rebecca (1793-1865), twin son (d.y.), Hannah (twin) (1795-1826), Lydia (1798-1873).

CORNELIA HUNTINGTON (1803-1890), East Hampton. Daughter of Dr. Abel Huntington and Frances Lee.

Siblings: Mariette (1800-1882), Abby (1806-1864), George Lee (1811-1881).

ADELIA ANNA (PARSONS) SHERRILL (1838-1915), East Hampton. Married 1859 to Nathaniel Hunting Sherrill (1832-1874). Children: Anna M. (1860-1918), Abram Elisha (1862-1924), Mary Jerusha (1865-1940), Julia Parsons (1868-1939), Amy Blanche (1871-1949), William N. (b.&d. 1874).

ABIGAIL JANE (KIMBLE) PARSONS (1848-1901), The Springs. Married 1870 to Joseph Dudley Parsons (1842-1885). Children: Walton Grant (1870-1929), Phebe Jane (Jennie) (1874-1945), Lena (1878-1950?), Raymond Schoonover (1882-1940).

ELIZA JANE (FISK) GLOVER (1835-1913), East Fourth St., NYC, and Southold. Married 1855 to William Henry Hobart Glover (1831-1912). Children: Harry Warren (1856-1929), Ida Frances (1857-1909), William Hobart (1859-1940's?), Edwin Fisk (1862-1864), Charles Mortimer (1863-1943?), Nettie Irene (1864-1919), Gertrude Lillian (1867-1940's?), Elmore Livingston (1869-post-1880), Morton LeRoy (1871-1940's?), Lorraine Linwood (1873-1940's?), Arlington Frederick Clayton (1875-1940's)