

# The Richards - Bryant Correspondence 1798 - 1851

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## Introduction

Lydia Richards was the eldest of nine children, born May 1, 1782 to James and Lydia Shaw Richards of Plainfield, Massachusetts. James Richards was one of the early settlers of Plainfield arriving sometime during the year of 1791.<sup>1</sup> He was a man of high intellectual capability and great social and religious dedication. Besides managing a family farm, James Richards served his town as Deacon to the Congregational Church, taught school for over thirty years, was a selectman for twenty-one years, Town Clerk for four years, district representative to the state legislature for five years, and Justice of the Peace for twenty-eight years.<sup>2</sup> The story of his life would document the ideal country gentleman at the turn of the century.

What follows is a sketch of the life of James Richards' daughter, Lydia Richards, as revealed through her correspondence with her lifelong friend, Charity Bryant. It is also a sketch of the life and times of the rural New England upper-class at the turn of the century: their religious, moral, and political sentiments, their attitudes about life and death and survival on the frontier and the activities of their day to day lives.

The Sheldon Museum in Middlebury, Vermont, houses a collection of over 400 letters written to and by Miss Charity Bryant between 1798 and 1851. Over 180 of these letters were written by Lydia Richards.

Charity Bryant was the last of nine children born to Dr. Philip Bryant of North Bridgewater, Massachusetts.<sup>3</sup> The Bryant and Richards families can be held to represent rural upper-class America at the turn of the century. Dr. Philip Bryant was a descendant of Stephan Bryant who

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Dyer, History of the Town of Plainfield, Hampshire County, Massachusetts., Northampton, Mass., 1891, p.168

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Vital Statistics, Bridgewater, Mass., Am. Ant. Soc., p. 184.

settled in the Plymouth Colony in 1632.<sup>4</sup> Thus the Bryants would seem, in some measure, to represent a defined sensibility. Dr. Bryant's grandson, William Cullen Bryant, achieved international recognition as one of America's first great poets and as editor of the Evening Post. Members of both the Richards and Bryant families achieved national recognition during Charity Bryant's lifetime. James Richards, Jr., Lydia Richards' brother, an early graduate of Williams College, achieved fame through his role in promoting the interest which led to the formation of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. He was also the first American Missionary to the Far East.<sup>5</sup>

By introducing the family as the medium through which to study the history of early nineteenth century America, I have run into some problems that compromise the coherent structure that it is History's duty to impose on past events. Rather than document any specific social or political movement, I have chosen to concentrate on the letters themselves. Countless questions must go unanswered. What the letters fail to discuss seems as important as what they do discuss. Relations between characters remain imprecise. It is not even clear how Charity Bryant and Lydia Richards came to know one another. Rather than focus on the particulars of their relationship I have chosen to look at a few outstanding subjects that were of interest to them. The bonds of family, the nature of travel and communication, the sources of livelihood, intellectual and religious attitudes, politics and the eventual rejection of home and family during the period of Western Migration; these make up the bulk of the following information. Though the details remain imprecise and the relations between subjects unclear, I feel that this study is warranted as it yields a personal perspective on the events of History as they affected a woman bright enough to pass judgment on what she saw.

The village of Plainfield, Massachusetts was settled during the 1770's by families emigrating from the coastal communities of Abington, Bridgewater and Weymouth, Massachusetts.<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>4</sup> Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. III, p. 200.

<sup>5</sup> Elsbree, Oliver W., *The Rise of the Missionary Spirit in America 1790-1815*, Williamsport, Penn., 1928, p. 103.

<sup>6</sup> Dyer, Plainfield, p. 19.

neighboring village of Cummington, where Charity Bryant spent time before moving to Vermont, was settled during the 1760's.<sup>7</sup> Both villages stand in the northwestern part of Massachusetts. The reasons for settling in this remote part of New England were much the same as the reasons that led to the settlement of Vermont. Lands located in the north, off the main waterways, were subject to the French and Indian invasions until the middle of the eighteenth century. But the conclusion of the French and Indian Wars in 1763 changed the situation that had prevented settlement. A tremendous demand for new lands had developed and Massachusetts was in heavy debt. Thus the decision to sell charter grants at auction along the western border of the state became highly expedient.

The Bryants were among the early settlers of Cummington; and the Richards of Plainfield. Both families emigrated from the Abington-Bridgewater area, southeast of Boston. It would seem that the two families were familiar friends even there. The town histories of Plainfield and Cummington show that the two families were closely tied through the bonds of marriage and their mutual involvement with community affairs. It is interesting that the position of Representative to the General Court of Massachusetts, from the Plainfield-Cummington District, was held almost continuously between 1784 and 1813 by members of the Richards-Bryant clan.<sup>8</sup> The first Representative was Ebenezer Snell. Snell was Lydia Richards' father-in-law and Charity Bryant's brother, Dr. Peter Bryant's father-in-law.<sup>9</sup> The second Representative from the Richards-Bryant clan was Lydia's father James Richards, and the third was Charity's brother Dr. Peter Bryant, (father to William Cullen Bryant).<sup>10</sup> Charity and Peter's father, Dr. Philip Bryant had been the Snell family physician when the Snell's lived in Bridgewater.<sup>11</sup> So the families had a long and close relationship.

The network of friends and families in rural New England at the turn of the nineteenth century was hindered by the difficult means of communication. Excluding the few domestic dwellings that

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<sup>7</sup> Foster, Helen H. & Streeter, William W., *Only One Cummington*, Cummington, Mass., 1974, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 393

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.36

lay about the village green, rural families lived at a distance of many miles from one another. Farm life was tedious and continually active. Those who might wonder how the early farmer occupied himself during the idle' months of winter needs to consider the nature of the early farm. Through the early; years of settlement the family farm stood as the major productive unit of the community. It was often a dozen years before the transportation and sale of surplus produce could provide sufficient revenue to induce an isolated farmer or two to allot his time more entirely to one of the variety of skills that were necessary to early farm life. The farm family functioned in the roles of a husbandman, merchant and manufacturer of their' own produce. Wheat was ground to flour. Flax was spun into linen. Linen was sewn into garments. Garments were traded for supplies and supplies used to finish other produce which saw a similar end. When a member of the family took ill a doctor was a luxury that, if available at all, could only supplement the nursing efforts of the family. Laws were enforced more through expedient compromise than judicial order. Thus everyone took it upon himself to become acquainted with a wide variety of productive and intellectual skills necessary to get by. Getting by was not to be taken for granted and even a mere subsistence was a perpetual source of insecurity.

Entertainment was found through the various social activities which would highlight the work week. The foremost among these was provided through the society of religious life. The Richards-Bryant letters do not convince me that it was only a fearful, pious devotion to Christ that brought men and women together on Sundays. More space was devoted to relating local gossip exchanged during the Sunday meetings than to the contents of the day's sermon. Mealtime and the kitchen also provided the means for social intercourse. The tavern, as a social institution, was a specialization of a function provided by the household, in much the same way as the merchant supplemented the commercial activities of the household. The kitchen was the center of farm life. There was something going on in the kitchen during every waking hour of the day.

The rural farm family frequently entertained out of town guests. The world of eighteenth century New England must have seemed a great deal smaller than it is today. The accounts of travel revealed in these letters suggest that it was a rare New England town in which one could not find

a familiar friend. During January of 1815, Lydia Richards was able to make the long hoped for trip to Weybridge, Vermont, to visit her friend Charity. Her accounts of the journey home to Plainfield give an indication of the closeness of New England society;

After we left Middlebury, we proceeded with tolerable speed to Salisbury, and called at Howards ...on to Pittsford, and called at Winslows... made it to Rutland and put up for the night at Fords.<sup>12</sup>

On and on this continued down across the mountains and through the Connecticut River Valley to Plainfield. But such a trip of 130 miles was prohibitively expensive and physically exhausting. It took four days to travel each way and when she got there she would stay for a few weeks. Such time was rarely available as the excuses for Lydia's many aborted attempts to visit Charity indicate.

The sharing of friendship, outside of the family, relied almost entirely on letter writing. The role of letters in the early nineteenth century was significantly more important than it is today. Children in the Richards and Bryant families were trained to write eloquent letters. The handwriting of itself was considerably more refined and it is evident that a majority of Lydia Richards' letters to Charity Bryant took upwards from two hours to complete. Finding this kind of time in a day was not easy and many of the letters bear two and three dates during which they were written. Lydia writes;

An inclination to write has not been wanting - I have many times thought. that I could have no greater pleasure as circumstances are than to write my, dearest, friend - but circumstances would not allow it.<sup>13</sup>

The usual time for writing would be after the day's activity was complete and Lydia adds;

I believe every person in the house is asleep, except myself and I suppose if my parents knew that I was writing they would think me imprudent for setting up so late — but if they knew my affection for- the person, to whom I am writing they might excuse me.<sup>14</sup>

The postal service in Plainfield was relatively poor through the early years of the Richards—Bryant correspondence. There was not even a post office in Plainfield until 1816.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Collection of the Sheldon Museum, Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #8151221, January, 1815

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. #8799528

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. #799528, fall 1799

<sup>15</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #816572, October 22, 1816

Before 1816 many letters were conveyed through a traveling friend. This saved the expense of postage and assured safe delivery. Until 1816 Lydia Richards received most of her letters from Charity Bryant via the post office in Williamstown. The newspapers in the major towns of Williamstown, Brattleboro and Northampton published a weekly list of the incoming mail that had not been picked up. The use of this postal service was balanced about equally with conveyance through friends. Whenever anyone from Plainfield intended to travel up through Vermont it was made semi-public knowledge. Trucking goods and correspondence was one way of defraying the cost of such trips. It was to the advantage of the traveler to make his friends and relatives aware of his plans. The complicated logistics of conveying a letter are expressed in Lydia's first letter to Charity after the letters migration to Weybridge, Vermont in 1807.

I hope that the letters have reached you which were written just after your departure from... Cumington - sent by Mr. Vinny who told me he should: pass thro' Middlebury. It was superscribed to Dr. Shaw or Mr. Hayward as I thought it would be more likely to be safely conveyed to one of them than to you, as you was an entire stranger.<sup>16</sup>

She continues by suggesting the arrangements for their future correspondence.

I have since made diligent enquiry for another opportunity to convey a letter to you (via a friend) but could find none...I had intended to write and send to the Post office in Williamstown...but I shall not pay the postage, as I have been informed that letters are more carefully conveyed when the postage is not paid till they are taken out.<sup>17</sup>

Usually, letters to be conveyed via the postal service were delivered to the post office in the nearest major town via a friend. But there was also a post-rider who would make these deliveries once a week. In one letter written in 1813, Lydia Richards excuses her neglect to respond quickly to one of Charity's letters because, "Two weeks, past our Post-rider has been absent."<sup>18</sup>

The cost of mailing letters, previous to the War of 1812 varied around 12.5 cents and after the war, around 25 cents. But this was between Plainfield and Weybridge. Distance was a factor of cost for letters. After the War of 1812 the postal service in rural New England showed a significant improvement, owing in part to the more sophisticated system of turnpikes and

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<sup>16</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant #807165. February 15, 1807.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #807165. Feb. 15, 1807.

waterways. During the earlier years letters from Plainfield took one to three weeks to arrive in Weybridge. By 1845 Lydia was able to report that, "I received your letter, mailed September 10 on Friday evening September 12."<sup>19</sup>

If problems with the mails were bad for Lydia Richards they could only have been worse for Charity Bryant. Middlebury was the main post-office of Addison County when she arrived in 1807.

Though Middlebury was becoming a sophisticated country town, the availability of supplies remained a problem and even inks and paper were scarce at times

Trying to piece together the particulars of Charity Bryant and Lydia Richards' relationship is not easily done through their own words. They shared an intense devotion to religious inquiry which at times bordered on the philosophical. The predominate theme of this inquiry was the utter futility of the "vanities" of the "sublunar world". Some of the religious themes in their letters will be discussed later in reference to the religious life in Plainfield and of James Richards. It is clear that the moral values which Bryant and Richards held dear expressed a sublime admiration for the "glory and beauty of the human mind."<sup>20</sup> Undoubtedly such values were largely inculcated through the church. But it would be unfair to divorce the influence of the philosophical movements of their time, which suggested that every man, had the right to subject his private reality to the test of reason. In commenting on the nature of happiness, Lydia Richards proposed that;

Happiness, my dear, consists in the state of mind and not in the state of things...perhaps outward circumstances, such as health and friends, riches and honors, cares and business, and labor, society, solitude, poverty, disgrace, preferment, degradation, plenty, and want, do not so much effect one's minds and happiness as is generally and naturally supposed...The immortal mind is continually seeking happiness in some way or other - it will not rest but in vain does it seek to satisfy itself with earthly toys - riches are vain. - worldly honor is vain - and the enjoyments of time are fleeting.<sup>21</sup>

Inevitably such themes would move on to a discussion of religious matters and the eternal nature of the soul.

In discussing their relationship the Richards- Bryant letters are extremely sentimental. Separation

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. #845515, Sept. 15, 1845

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. #799568, October 1799.

<sup>21</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #810114. January 2, 1810.

from the community of friends was one of the burdens of life. Lydia frequently eluded to the afterlife when she and Charity might be in each others company forever. That was, of course, if she made it to Heaven. She always flattered Charity with confidence of her Heavenly destiny.

But on a more secular note, Lydia describes the value of friendship:

To acquaint each other with our feelings and circumstances, with our joys and sorrows, and with the various scenes which we are called to experience, with a Confidence that those to whom they are communicated will participate in whatever concerns us.<sup>22</sup>

Lydia Richards' friendship with Charity Bryant. remained strong throughout their lives. In 1810 Lydia felt confident to state that "our friendship I trust will last thro' life."<sup>23</sup> In 1827 she remarked that their correspondence had been "frequent, uninterrupted, and unbroken, for 25 years."<sup>24</sup> But there were lean years in the correspondence. Following Lydia's marriage in 1825, it dwindled to an average of one letter per year. Previously Lydia had written as frequently as ten letters per year.

The content of the correspondence changed little following Charity's permanent departure to Vermont in 1807. It is uncertain if they ever spent any prolonged periods of time together. Charity lived with her parents in Bridgewater until 1807. But she traveled around Massachusetts frequently, staying over at her brother's house in Cummington.

Charity's visits were always awaited with great excitement at the Richards household. Lydia made preparations for these visits by doing extra work around the house so she might have some extra free time during her friend's stay. Often it would be the case, however, that a trip planned would necessarily be cancelled at the last minute. Work, weather and a shortage of money variously combined prevented many of the trips that were planned.

Lydia Richards visited Weybridge only twice while Charity Bryant lived there. Charity visited Massachusetts more frequently. It is uncertain how Charity was able to clear the cost of the trips

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., #813212.1, March 12, 1813

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. #810625, Nov. 25, 1810.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. #827255, April 5, 1827

and escape her work. There is some indication that she brought her work with her. Charity seems to have been a woman of some means.

Parting from their short visits was always an occasion of great sorrow for Charity and Lydia. With each departure one could never be certain if it was the last they would see of each other. Lydia writes after one such visit, "O my dear, how long has been your departure — seven days seem almost as long as seven years which are gone."<sup>25</sup>

Charity Bryant was a few months short of her thirtieth birthday when she left the family homestead in North Bridgewater for Weybridge, Vermont. The reasons for the move are never mentioned. It is clear that she knew of home friends who had made the move. She had acquaintances in a number of Vermont towns. How she chose Weybridge over another town is uncertain. Presumably she was aware of the opportunity provided through a close proximity to neighboring Middlebury. Middlebury was fast on its way to becoming one of the wealthiest towns in Vermont and this provided Charity a clear route to economic independence. Another consideration is that, at age thirty, Charity must have sensed that her chances of finding a husband were narrowing. Her status as an "old maid" was a source of anxiety in that she always felt that she might be a burden on the family. She may have felt that if she was not going to marry she should achieve some degree of self-sufficiency. But the incidence of single women migrating to Vermont was quite low.

Most women in the early nineteenth century had secured a husband by the time of their twenty-first birthday. There had been attempts made by the family to set Charity up with a suitable mate. Her brother Dr. Peter Bryant wrote in 1804 that he had selected a perfect man for Charity to meet if she had not already done so herself.<sup>26</sup> But the right man never came.

Charity Bryant left her family home in Bridgewater during the first days of February, 1807.

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<sup>25</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #806504, Sept. 4, 1806

<sup>26</sup> Dr. Peter Bryant to Charity Bryant, #804613, Nov. 13, 1804

Winter was the best time of year for moving. She traveled the many miles up through Boston and the northwestern part of Massachusetts towards Cummington and Plainfield to pay old friends her respects before continuing north to Weybridge. She spent a few days at the Richards' house and then around February 12, departed for Vermont.

Travel through Vermont in 1807 was a tedious ordeal. By 1800 five major turnpikes had been established in the southern and eastern parts of the state. But there were always problems in crossing the mountains and inclement weather could make these roads as impassible as cow paths. Charity left for Vermont amidst such storms. Lydia writes;

How pleasing it was, to find that notwithstanding the tedious storms, the boisterous winds and extreme cold, you had at the expected time, arrived at the habitation of your valued friends...I know you must have suffered exceedingly on account of the very disagreeable and tedious weather, the badness of the passing and the fatigue which must attend such a journey.<sup>27</sup>

Through other letters many of the particulars regarding early travel are revealed. It was most convenient to travel in winter, when the roads were as poor as the early Vermont roads seem to have been. Usually there would be a horse or two and a large sleigh. But sleighing depended on good snow and this caused problems throughout the winter. Some years there might be no good sleighing all winter. Finding good snow often dictated the course of travel.

The sleighing we found to be very poor - the roads in many places entirely bare - but the most of the way we found snow and ice by the side of the roads and in the ditches... we rose as soon as it was light and pursued our journey among the mountains, turning in almost every direction and winding about to shun some of the heights and depths.<sup>28</sup>

Travel was as educational as it was exhausting. At the taverns one was liable to meet the most interesting people who could foretell dangers ahead or recount stories of their journeys. Another of Charity's visitors writes that, "at Whites Tavern at Mount Holly we were agreeably entertained with a wedding...we had to wait some time for our teas."<sup>29</sup>

Following Lydia's last visit to Weybridge in 1825 she wrote of the interesting people she had met

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<sup>27</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #807165.2, Feb. 15, 1807

<sup>28</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #815122.1, January 22, 1815

<sup>29</sup> Vesta Howard Guild to Charity Bryant, #815551.2 October.15, '815

along the way. She remarked with great enthusiasm about her visit to Deerfield, Massachusetts, where she stopped to visit a local landmark, a house "which was standing 121 years ago last winter when Deerfield was destroyed by Indians."<sup>30</sup> The house she describes is known today as the Indian House. The original Indian House which Lydia visited was demolished in 1845. A reproduction of this landmark has been built.

If the weather was good one could travel forty or fifty miles in one day. The day's travel would begin at sunrise and would last until an hour or so after sunset. Lydia mentions that such journeys provided time for reading and writing and there is one letter that was clearly written during a bumpy ride.

During the later years of Charity's residence in Weybridge the transportation revolution brought a tremendous change in travel and society in New England. Charity's nephew William Cullen Bryant stopped to visit her on his way from New York City to Montreal in 1833 but she was not home. He dropped off a volume of poetry and a note describing his journey;

We left New York...in the steamboat. At Hudson we took a stage coach for Great Barrington... from Great Barrington we went by stage to Pittsfield; from Rutland to Middlebury a very slow and tedious and consequently somewhat expensive journey on account of the very bad arrangement of the stages. The scenery however is uncommonly beautiful and picturesque.<sup>31</sup>

Weybridge, Vermont was first settled during the years before the Revolutionary War. Like most Vermont towns, Weybridge was abandoned during the Revolutionary War. Resettlement began during the middle of the 1780's. By 1807 Weybridge was a prospering village with milling and manufacturing industries.

Charity's early living arrangements are unclear. It was mentioned that she moved in with a Mr. & Mrs. Hayward. Mrs. Hayward was the sister of Sylvia Drake who became Charity's living companion through life. Whether the connection between Drake and Bryant was made before

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<sup>30</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #825523, September 1825

<sup>31</sup> William Cullen Bryant to Charity Bryant, from *The Letters of William Cullen Bryant* by W. C. Bryant III, 1973, p. 376

Charity's migration or during her initial weeks in Weybridge is uncertain.

Sylvia Drake was the sixth of nine children born to Asaph and Louisa Drake of Bristol, Vermont in 1784.<sup>32</sup> In 1808, at age twenty-four, Sylvia Drake moved in with Charity Bryant and the two spent the rest of their lives together running a prosperous seamstress shop. Charity had taught school in Pelham (near Bridgewater) before her move to Weybridge. Like most women of her time she had been trained in the art of sewing since she was a child. Charity seems to have developed her art to a fine skill because there are frequent references to the clothes she made for family members as being of excellent quality. She was successful enough with her work so that she was able to put away some savings from her profits. People who knew Charity described her as a tireless worker. One account runs, “ Mr. Shaw and Mr. Packard saw you — they say, however, that you work constantly, and have an apprentice.”<sup>33</sup> The apprentice, no doubt, was Sylvia Drake.

Over the years Charity and Sylvia took on other apprentices and their business prospered so that by 1829 she was able to supply Sylvia’s brother Cyrus with “necessary books and pay his tuition...and make all his clothes...and furnish him with twenty—four dollars yearly after he shall enter college.”<sup>34</sup> Charity had named Sylvia’s brother and she always regarded the child as "one in whom I had a particular interest." She had great hopes that Cyrus Bryant Drake might take up the ministry.

Whenever Charity traveled to Massachusetts there was always work for her to do. It even seems that the availability of work had some influence on her decisions to travel. In 1806, while still living in Bridgewater, she made a trip to Cummington and Plainfield. The Richards had some sewing work that needed doing and contracted with Charity to do it. Lydia writes, "it is indeed my dear the visit which I am most anxious about and not the sewing — tho indeed we wish to

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<sup>32</sup> H. P. Smith, *History of Addison County, Vermont*, D. Mason & Co., Syracuse, New York, 1882, p. 715.

<sup>33</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #807562.2, October 12, 1807.

<sup>34</sup> Charity Bryant to Asaph Drake, #829363, July 1829/

have the sewing done."<sup>35</sup>

In Weybridge Charity did work for the upper-class citizens of the town and of Middlebury. Business in the nineteenth century was a very personal affair and Charity made some important social contacts that helped her business. Charity worked for such influential families as the Storrs and the Hagers.

Troy and Montreal were the two most important centers through which Middlebury and Weybridge artisans and merchants could obtain supplies. Charity and Sylvia obtained some of their supplies through Luther Hagar, who until the War of 1812 worked as a retail merchant in Montreal. There was frequent correspondence between them, mostly pertaining to matters of friendship. But in one correspondence Hagar mentions his business with Charity stating;

You must excuse me for not sending that vest pattern sooner but...I had not the time to write...if you have any use for it you can use it and the price is at your pleasure and you can pay me in your work.<sup>36</sup>

The economy of trade during Bryant's time in Weybridge was influenced to a large extent by the lack of currency available. Most goods that one bought were paid for in work. Labor itself constituted the main element, of value. Charity would make a coat for one of the Hagar children and receive goods from the Hagers' store. Everyone who traded their services kept detailed account books where they record debts owed to and by them. This is the only way an artisan or merchant could keep track of the sizable number of transactions he made, which often went months and even years before they were paid.

Charity, during her years in Weybridge, continued to do work for her family in Bridgewater. Sometimes her work was presented as gifts. But in one instance her father wrote, "we received the box you sent...the great coat suits me very well and so does the breeches...I shall want a coat in the summer of fall if you can get me cloth for one, you shall be paid for it when you come

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<sup>35</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #806580, October 30, 1806.

<sup>36</sup> Luther Hagar to Charity Bryant, #811364.1, June 1811.

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Lydia Richards was not an artisan, but by her own accounts she was perpetually working. Most of her work was done within the context of the family farm. As mentioned, wherever labor remained relatively unspecialized there was sure to be a large variety of goods that could be produced at least cost right in the home. An educated woman like Lydia Richards was a Jill of all Trades. Her most inclusive comment regarding the nature of her day to day work was written to Charity saying;

My employments are chiefly domestic sometimes assisting mamma in the cares and business of the family, sometimes spinning, sometimes weaving, sometimes sewing, sometimes knitting, sometimes visiting and sometimes receiving visits, with now and then an interval for reading and writing tho both are much neglected for the want of opportunity.<sup>38</sup>

This tableau of daily work comprises only a part of the activities that Lydia mentioned in further correspondence. Other duties included those relating to the farm animals and "washing clothes, floors and boiling out yarn."<sup>39</sup>

Late in the summer of 1824 Lydia Richards began mentioning a "new friend" in her letters.<sup>40</sup> The nature of this new friend was kept deliberately ambiguous and his name was not mentioned until 1825 when she writes;

With respect to the important subject which we conversed upon, I had heard nothing more respecting it, and thought of it only with indifference, till today, when Esq. Snell call'd and spent some time and proposed the subjects; What the decision or result will be, I cannot now say.<sup>41</sup>

The subject proposed was marriage. The man was Ebenezer- Snell, Jr., son of one of Cummington's most influential citizens, Ebenezer Snell, Esq. Snell had lost his first wife and had four children to raise. Snell was a neighbor of the Bryant' in Cummington. Charity's brother Dr. Peter Bryant had married Ebenezer Snell, Jr.'s sister Sarah.<sup>42</sup> Thus Lydia would have known'

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<sup>37</sup> Dr. Philip Bryant to Charity Bryant, #812117.4, Jan.17. 1812.

<sup>38</sup> Lydia Richardas to Charity Bryant, #804571, Oct. 21, 1804

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., #810321.3, May 21, 1810

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., #825160.1, Feb. 11, 1825.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

the young Snell through most of her days in Plainfield. She was forty-three years old at the time of her marriage.

The marriage ceremony was performed on October 27, 1825 on a wet fall afternoon amidst a grove of colorful maples and elms in the Richards' yard.<sup>43</sup> Lydia entered the state of marriage with some reluctance. But Lydia's letters indicate that she viewed marriage as an eternal and blessed consummation, "which will probably very essentially effect my happiness, not only in this life, but during the whole period of my existence."<sup>44</sup> By three o'clock in the afternoon of the twenty-seventh Ebenezer Snell and his new bride were racing towards Cummington where they were to live in his house.

Lydia's life in Cummington was little changed from the domestic scene she had left behind in Plainfield. Only now, Lydia had two young children, Mary, 11 and Ebenezer, 7 to take care of. The children were just part of her duties. In early nineteenth century rural society there were always artisans and part time laborers who had to board somewhere while they worked in town. This service was divided between the more prosperous land owners and the taverns. Throughout her early Cummington years Lydia makes frequent reference to a "girl living with us; a "boy helping with the chores." The business of the large household would have been overwhelming for a wife to do unassisted. The need for extra help was especially great during times of sickness or when the children were young. It was the daughter's duty to help with domestic duties. It must have caused some degree of anxiety for Lydia as each of her brothers left for college and careers while she remained home and inherited a larger share of the chores. Just a few years before her marriage Lydia mentions;

...we have a girl now here, spinning and weaving, whom we have held in suspense respecting the time which we should need her.<sup>45</sup>

At one point during her mother's illness in 1819 she wrote Charity in despair wishing she could just escape to the comforts of Weybridge and not be bothered by the toils of family life.

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<sup>43</sup> Foster-Streeter, Cummington, p. 355.

<sup>44</sup> Lydis R. Snell to Charity Bryant, #825359, October, 1825.

<sup>45</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #823553, Oct. 3, 1823.

....confined with the tumult and bustle and noise...and particularly the noise and confusion of crying, laughing, playing, falling,prating, screaming children, then have my thoughts transported me to your peaceful mansion.<sup>46</sup>

The times Lydia was able to escape to Weybridge were not idle vacations. She always begged Charity to be sure there was some work to be done when she arrived. But it was a relaxation compared with home life. Most of the trips Lydia planned to Weybridge were postponed because of an unexpected increase in her work load. Her first trip to Weybridge was in 1815 but she seems to have planned a trip for every year following. In 1808 she commented on the chores that kept her away;

I am fatigued with the care of business - Sally is full of business, and needs assistance - Joseph needs help in preparing for his journey to New Hampshire. James returns from Williamstown and must be attended to and needs much to be done. Mamma is sick and requires much care and attention.<sup>47</sup>

The most frustrating period came during the late years of her life. In 1842 at the age of sixty she wrote Charity that "after the death of Mr. Snell's oldest son, Samuel, our prospects were dark and uncertain, respecting the manner in which we should be provided for, and taken care of, in case we should be unable to take care of ourselves."<sup>48</sup> Shortly thereafter Lydia and Ebenezer Snell moved to Plainfield to take up residence with a wealthy local family, the Hallocks.

Leavitt Hallock was the son of Rev. Moses Hallock who had a significant influence on the intellectual life of Plainfield during his time. He was one of a number of Yale graduates that came to Western Massachusetts to preach in the late eighteenth century.<sup>49</sup> In rural, eighteenth century Massachusetts the Congregational parson, was usually the best educated, wealthiest and most prominent man in his town. Young men with aspirations towards the ministry would often study under such men before entering college. So was the case with Rev. Moses Hallock who, over a period of thirty years, prepared over three hundred students for collegiate studies,

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<sup>46</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #812520, September 20, 1812.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., #808525, September 25, 1808.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., #842220, March 20, 1842.

<sup>49</sup> Dyer, Plainfield, p. 34.

fifty of whom became clergymen.<sup>50</sup> They studied the classical languages, religion, natural sciences, philosophy and mathematics. Lydia Richards and her brothers were among his students. She seems to have been one of the few women admitted to his school. Hallock's most illustrious student was William Cullen Bryant. His school was known as a feeding ground for Williams College during its early years. In the records of Williams it is said that the number of students that would enter in a given year depended largely upon the number that Rev. Hallock could supply.<sup>51</sup>

Leavitt Hallock's own career in Plainfield merits distinction. He served variously as the Town Clerk, Justice of the Peace, Legislative Representative and Postmaster.<sup>52</sup> His primary sources of livelihood his mercantile mercantile and manufacturing interests. He owned a store and a boarding-house and a tannery. One of the most traumatic experiences to occur during Lydia and Ebenezer Snell's stay in Plainfield was in the last year of Lydia's life when Hallock's tannery burned to the ground.(Lydia's firsthand account of the fire is reproduced in the appendix)

The connection between the Snells and the Hallocks began in 1829 when Leavitt Hallock took Elizabeth Snell as his bride.<sup>53</sup> This explains how Ebenezer And Lydia came to be living with the Hallocks. But life with the Hallocks was less pleasant for Lydia. She complained bitterly that she felt trapped. As she and Ebenezer were living and eating with the Hallocks she felt obliged to "afford some assistance about the work."<sup>54</sup> During the four years she spent there until her death in 1846, Lydia complained that she felt like a servant in the Hallock household. It was particularly annoying because there were girls in the house who offered little assistance to relieve their aged step-aunt. She complained;

Mr. Snell and myself, in some degree at least have become like ciphers, and in a much greater degree than when we lived in Oumington...I must remember that I am but a boarder here- and have no right to dictate, control or claim.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Brown, W.C. Bryant, p. 38.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>52</sup> Dyer, Plainfield, p. 152

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>54</sup> Lydia R. Snell to Charity Bryant, #842311, May 11, 1842.

<sup>55</sup> Lydia R. Snell to Charity Bryant, #845230, March 30, 1845.

The most detailed description of day to day chores found in any of Lydia's letters dates to this period in the Hallock household:

I have the care and responsibility of keeping the beds and rooms in order both for the hired men and for company - also of washing windows, doors, floors &c...the clothes are principally sent away to be washed - the remainder consisting of aprons...pantaletts...night caps, shirt bosoms, collars, stockings, baby's clothes, pillow beens, towels and many more articles, I wash...I also iron all I wash. I also do all the baking... In one day I bake 12 large loaves of bread, some rye and indian, but mostly wheat and from 6 to 12 pies. Our baking days occur a little oftener than once a week...My time is so much occupied in work for the family that my own work is neglected...I never feel easy to sit down to my own work...-without going down to ascertain whether my services are needed below.<sup>56</sup>

Such complaints were not unfamiliar to Charity. As the middle of the nineteenth century drew near a good substantial living was not to be found for many people in rural New England. This was the main reason for the Bryant family's migration to Illinois about this time. The family letters which Charity received detail long and sometimes painful accounts of the suffering through the lack of work. Bankruptcy was commonplace amongst merchants and entrepreneurs.

The saddest victim of poverty in the Bryant family was Charity's sister Silence. Her husband, Ichabod Bryant was a journeyman joiner. Silence wrote complaining that the separation of families was one of the greatest evils of poverty. But she acknowledged that their poverty was due in part to their remaining in Pelham, Massachusetts. Work was scarce in Pelham as in all the New England towns that had ceased to grow during the era of Western Migration. Silence Bryant's husband travelled as far south as North Carolina and as far north as Middlebury, looking for work. Silence writes that, "while my husband sacrifices the comfort of living with his family and toils in that burning climate; while my children are obliged to leave their home as fast as they are able to labor to procure a subsistence, I shall refuse to make any sacrifice but gratify myself at their expense."<sup>57</sup>

During the winter of 1813 Silence Bryant received encouragement from Charity regarding the possibility of her husband obtaining employment on the construction of the college in

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>57</sup> Silence Bryant to Charity Bryant, #820367, June 21, 1820.

Middlebury. The building then under construction is known today as the Old Chapel. It is a limestone construction built in the manner of a mill. Such a project would have required a dozen—odd, full-time workmen for half a year. Ichabod had hopes of obtaining employment on the job. Silence writes expressing her desire to get out of Pelham altogether and move to Middlebury;

I cannot but flatter myself with the hope that if we are favored of providence that we shall remove from here before another winter commences, I hope somewhere near you if I am disappointed I desire to submit with patience but the people here are all so poor.<sup>58</sup>

The sad tale of Silence Bryant never seems to have ended until her death. Her problems were compounded in 1820 when she wrote Charity that her husband, “was sick about a fortnight before he left North Carolina (for Pelham)... and died the 2nd of August.”<sup>59</sup>

Sickness and death played a role so important in the lives of Charity Bryant and Lydia Richards that it can be fairly said to have been the dominant theme of their correspondence, mixed with religion. All correspondence began with the hopes that the letter would find the recipient in good health. This was no mere formality because death loomed everywhere. Silence Bryant writes to Charity, regarding the death of a mutual friend. Her comments sum up in simple terms the general attitude on death.

Besty Conkey's death...Alas: how little did I think when I took my leave of her last June that I should so soon hear of her death. But I am sure I can never take leave of a friend again without remembering that in the midst of life we are in death.<sup>60</sup>

Death was particularly close to Charity Bryant because both her father and brother made careers out of the prevention of it; also, because through most of Charity's life she seems to have been in bad health, or at least complained of it. Death could be slow and painful or it could be fast and sweet. Lydia remarks on the death of her father-in-law;

A very remarkable death took place last week in Cummington. It was the death of Esq. Snell. He was so well as to walk to meeting on Sabbath and on Monday morning was found dead in his bed.

Lydia's own accounts of her direct experiences with death would make the modern reader

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., #813103, January 13, 1813.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 820470, Aug. 20, 1820.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 825205.1, March 1825

shiver. Death was brought surprisingly close to her daily life. One instance occurred during a visit to her Uncle's house in Savoy, Massachusetts. When she arrived there she found that Mr. & Mrs. Robbins' eleven month old infant was dying. She remarked, "it suddenly ceased to breath without a struggle...I assisted in dressing it for the grave and retired to rest about 12."<sup>61</sup>

The death of children was a constant in rural life. If Lydia seems to have dispensed with the baby's death in a rather perfunctory manner it was because she had seen so many children die. Families in the early nineteenth century were large, averaging over eight per couple. Few families could escape the experience of infant mortality. Neither the Richards nor Bryants did.

The greatest threat to life were the epidemics. Children were most susceptible to death at these times. The haunting specter of the epidemic had a tremendous impact on rural life. Descriptions in the Richards-Bryant letters give a chilling sense of the helplessness of people to preserve life once the epidemic struck. The images are truly horrific. An epidemic would move like the weather, slowly across the map. Whole towns lived in fear as the epidemic approached them. The worst of these epidemics was in 1813. The following are a series of pertinent quotes;

The shafts of Death are flying thick around us, Many have died many more are sick, But tis of the Lords mercies we are not 211 consumed.<sup>62</sup>

It is very sickly in Petucket and Mansfield with Spotted Fever, some term it, and others the cold plague...how far it will spread and how many of us will fall victim to this pestilence, is known only to him who ruleth all things according to his will.<sup>63</sup>

The Influenza has been very prevalent here - scary one escaped it - and it has occasioned Several deaths.<sup>64</sup>

There has been much weeping and wailing through out this part of the country for a month past...we have all had our share of...this wretched disorder.<sup>65</sup>

It is said that a very mortal fever has prevailed in Albany and of late Pownal and has made its appearance in Worthington - Death, great proprietor of all.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #813459, July 1813.

<sup>62</sup> Sylvia Drake to Louisa Drake, #813254, April 1813.

<sup>63</sup> Vesta H. Guild, #816876.4, February 1816.

<sup>64</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #807562.2, October 12, 1807.

<sup>65</sup> Oliver Bryant to Charity Bryant, #826209.2, March 9, 1826.

<sup>66</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #813154, February 4, 1813.

You have perhaps heard of the alarming disorder which is and has been prevailing in the many towns between here and Boston and which has conveyed great numbers to their long and eternal home. The spotted- fever is considered the most mortal and alarming disorder which has ever prevailed in our country and which seems to baffel all human skill. A Convention of Physicians have met at Brookfield this week to consult on the method of treating the disorder. Five hundred dollars were subscribed in Brookfield to defray the expense.<sup>67</sup>

Charity's brother Dr. Peter Bryant attended this conference. Bryant had a fascinating career, not unmixed with disaster. In 1795 Bryant apparently borrowed some money to speculate in a shipping venture. The company failed and he was forced to flee his farm and go into hiding to stay out of debtors prison. He had to make back the money before being caught so he contract a ship's surgeon. This was during a period of intense French-English conflict and the waters were not safe for neutral vessels. The French captured Bryant's ship and was stranded on the Isle of France in the Indian Ocean, where he worked in the island hospital. He finally arrived back in Cummington in 1797 where he again took up medicine.<sup>68</sup> Supposedly he was a doctor of remarkable ability in advance of his time. An advertisement in a local newspaper suggests that he was one of the first doctors to release a successful vaccination for smallpox.<sup>69</sup>

Dr. Peter Bryant was the Richards family physician. Lydia's letters gave many particulars regarding his work for their family and in Plainfield. House calls were the norm and he seems to have spent a great deal of time away from home.

Your brother is now absent on a journey to the Genessee to visit a man who is sick with a singular disorder called the sweetwater...he took the stage and has been gone, I believe, two or three weeks.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #810229, March 29, 1810.

<sup>68</sup> Brown, W.C. Bryant, pp 11-13.

<sup>69</sup> Foster-Streeter, Cumminton, p. 35.

<sup>70</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #813674, Nov. 24, 1813.

During her mother's illness in 1808 Lydia writes of the many visits paid by the doctor and the great help he had. been. It was during this time that Lydia's oldest brother Joseph Richards was in training for the medical profession under Dr. Bryant and he returned to attend to his mother's illness on one visit.

Some of the methods for treating the sick included the administering of medicines. Sometimes the doctor had to induce vomit in his patients. There were numerous references to the pills taken for this purpose called "pukes". But the most common medical treatment was to remove the bad blood in the patient by "bleeding" him. This was done by digging a multi—pronged device into the patient. Dr. Bryant wrote his sister during the last year of his life explaining his sickness and mentioning the treatment he was giving himself;

I caught a violent cold, which....occasioned a profuse bleeding of the lungs and another ulcer and soon reduced me lower that I had been at any time last summer...I believe the only art of curing consumption consists in removing the local inflammation which is constantly preying upon the lungs. This is best done by general and copious bleeding while there is sufficient strength to bear it — This I have adopted and live let blood I believe. near 30 times in the course of the past year.<sup>71</sup>

Lydia Richards always spoke affectionately of Dr. Bryant. He was intelligent, active and concerned, a man of paramount stature in Cummington society. The accounts of William Cullen Bryant's childhood suggest the important influence of his father. He cared for the intellectual development of his family. During their years as Representatives to the State Legislature both Peter Bryant and James Richards travelled to Boston. Wherever Bryant returned from these trips he brought a book or two for the family. William Cullen Bryant's son-in-law and biographer, Parke Godwin, compiled a list suggesting the library that the young Bryant was exposed to through his father. Authors included Hume, Shakespeare, Plutarch, Milton, Dryden, Pope and a collection of children's books.<sup>72</sup>

Within a few months of his last letter to Charity, Dr. Peter Bryant was dead.<sup>73</sup> Lydia's very sullen and passionate description of his funeral is included in the appendix.

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<sup>71</sup> Peter Bryant to Charity Bryant, #820105, January 5, 1820.

<sup>72</sup> Brown, W.C. Bryant, p. 16.

<sup>73</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #820252.2, April 2, 1820.

Lydia Richards' greatest toil came at times of family illness. Her mother had a severe illness during the late summer of 1808 and it was feared that she would not recover. Lydia wrote Charity the details of her nursing;

We take turns sleeping with her, taking care of her at night — I attended her last night — slept most of the time, except getting up four times to give her medicine. I have scarcely left the house...I have scarcely, had a whole night's rest in the whole time of her sickness, but have always slept some.<sup>74</sup>

Lydia mentions that at times she had attended the sickness of others outside her family. An account of her tending a Mrs. Peter at the moment of her death is included in the appendix.

The hazards of country life were, for the most part, attended to within the family. Over the years Lydia recounts a number of accidents that happened to members of her family.

Death and sickness were painful realities in early nineteenth century life. Religion played a central role in people's lives by cushioning the harsh truth of death. Life was not to be taken for granted. But then life was but the short interlude of eternity.

Men and women with whom Lydia Richards and Charity Bryant associated took a fond interest in poetry. It seems that all literate people composed their own poems to express emotions and attitudes about their perceptions of life. Charity Bryant wrote a large volume of poetry that has been preserved in the same collection with her correspondence. Dr. Peter Bryant composed poems and it was his influence in part that got his son William Cullen interested in such literary pursuits. A final note on death is expressed in a poem written to Sylvia Drake by her sister in 1801.

This world's a scene of trouble and strife  
And ills we wish for, when we wish for life  
And life's a fleeting, transitory thing  
Forever flying on the swiftest wing.  
...And Death that cruel unrelenting foe  
Oft unapprizing gives the fatal blow:  
Not age nor youth, nor all the bloom of health  
Not vigorous powers nor all the pomp of wealth

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<sup>74</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant., #808520, September 20, 1808.

Can from the power of Death, one mortal save  
Or keep the Body from the silent grave.<sup>75</sup>

Intellectual life in Plainfield and Weybridge was scarcely referred to in the Richards-Bryant letters. Sylvia Drake kept a diary during her years in Weybridge with Charity. Both she and Charity enjoyed reading but there was little time for it. The books listed in her diary can be held as representative of her intellectual interests. She notes having read a life of Susan Anthony, Meditation of James Meikle, a life of Miss Abigail Adams and Pilgrims Progress.<sup>76</sup> She was relatively interested in science, politics or the arts. The Richards-Bryant letters uphold this.

Sylvia Drake, Lydia Richards and Charity Bryant were interested in religion. Richards comments on and quotes from Spencer, Henry Kirke White and Young's Night Thoughts.<sup>77</sup> But the writer who was most influential on the ladies was Isaac Watts, an early eighteenth century English minister who wrote a considerable number of psalms that became popular with the Congregational parishes of New England.

Lydia mentions visits to museums in Boston on two occasions. But museums and libraries were not generally available in rural areas. Outside of an occasional concert at Rev. Hallock's or a lecture at Williams or Middlebury Colleges, there was little intellectual stimulation outside of the family and religious context

Lydia Richards did manage to get an education. It is clear from the quality of her letters that she had an excellent command of the English Language.

Until the year of her marriage, Lydia Richards spent most of her summers teaching school. In the cities a school teacher was usually college trained. Lydia was not but it was not a necessary qualification. Teaching was nothing Lydia did to entertain herself. She often referred to the

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<sup>75</sup> Polly Hayward to Sylvia Drake, #801379, June 1801.

<sup>76</sup> Murray-Donald M. & Rodney, Robert ., Sylvia Drake 1784-1868, The Self Portrait of a Seamstress of Weybridge", p.131

<sup>77</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #811503,813154,815205.1

burden of trying to teach children. "who are so dull and lazy."<sup>78</sup> She wrote Charity in 1806;

I live a very unagreeable life — but you know we must be doing something — a school,  
however, is no very agreeable place.<sup>79</sup>

Lydia Richards was fortunate to find work right in Plainfield during her early years as a teacher. During her later years she had to board away from home to teach in other towns around Hampshire and Franklin Counties. The school year for Lydia would begin in the middle of May and lasted for about fourteen weeks into the middle of August. She usually taught about forty students between the ages of four and fourteen, in one room.

Lydia's father taught winter schools. The winter school was more rigorous and it was unusual for a woman to take such a position. James Richards taught in Plainfield most years except 1810 when he taught in Shelburne. To teach in Shelburne it was necessary for him to be away from the family for the winter. He was able to come home every week but there is no reason given for his decision to teach out of town. This would seem to be an unpleasant expedient.

The religious aspects of the Richards-Bryant letters are the most complete and most interesting for they light they shed on contemporary events. This is because the Bryants and Richards were not passive observers but actually shaped the religious events around them. When Charity and Lydia were together religion was a common topic of conversation. When they were apart or when return letters were not forthcoming, Lydia would pray for her distant friend. At times she could not help wondering;

Whether you are an inhabitant of this earthly prison or of eternal  
regions, whether you are blest with health or frowned on by sickness,  
whether you live in domestic happiness or infelicity,  
whether your noble soul rises above the tempestuous oceans of  
terrestrial things or sine in the bellows of dormant grief.<sup>80</sup>

The two significant happenings in the religious world of America during the early nineteenth century were the Second Great Awakening and the rise of missionary spirit. Religious events

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<sup>78</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #799474, July 1799.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., #800121, January 21, 1800.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., #801171, Feb. 21, 1801

were largely influenced by political events of the time and the outlook, going into the nineteenth century, was not good. The election of Thomas Jefferson, to the Presidency of the United States in 1800 was representative of the disintegration of the Federalist-Congregationalist hegemony in the sphere of domestic policy. Congregationalism and the New England aristocracy had run the country from the start. The Bryants and Richards were products of this old order. Thomas Jefferson was the antithesis of their beliefs.

A full discussion of the religious context which shaped the events of nineteenth century Plainfield is beyond the scope of this paper.. suffice it to say that the attitudes which were most starkly contrasted in the personages of Timothy Dwight and Thomas Jefferson were America manifestations of a broader international trend. A world beyond the monastery and the theocratic elite were coming to an awareness of themselves and the split in the old order was resounding throughout the western world. This divergence became manifest on every level of society.

In the religious sphere of New England the split was most clearly evidenced by the rise of Unitarianism in Boston, the old center of American Congregationalism. Yale and Harvard have never been so far apart as they were during those years. It was Timothy Dwight, Moses Stuart and Leonard Woods of Yale who raised the banner of the New Divinity.<sup>81</sup> A revived sense of religious enthusiasm developed following the war-time lull, which continued throughout most of the years of the Richards-Bryants correspondence. Turing these years the Revival re=ined a dominant feature of Congregational life.<sup>82</sup> It was the increased religious enthusiasm that brought men to demand what they could do to serve Christ.

It was, in part, this determination to express their revived sense of piety that brought men like James Richards, Jr. to settle in a career as a foreign Missionary. Seeking answers to the question of duty became a primary concern on the college campuses throughout the Yale sphere of influence. The chartering of Middlebury College in Vermont (1800) was a product of this

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<sup>81</sup> Ahlstrom, Sydney E., *A Religious History of the American People*, Vol. I, 1975, p. 504.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 506

renewed sense of duty. At about the time Middlebury College was being founded, James Richards and Samuel J. Mills were forming the nation's first secret society dedicated to the spread of Christianity amongst the "heathens" in the Asian World. At Williams College in 1806 they formed the Society of the Brethern.<sup>83</sup>

As this movement spread amongst the colleges of New England a reporter was able to comment on the religious movements at Middlebury College;

The number of students in Middlebury College is 80; 60 are hopefully pious...There is a Theological Society which meets weekly for religious improvement, and possesses a respectable library...The students have also, for several years, supported a heathen child in Ceylon... The pious students attend and often conduct religious meetings in different parts of Middlebury and neighboring towns. They ere also employed as superintendents and teachers in Sabbath-schools, and are active in promoting those institutions in the vicinity of the college.<sup>84</sup>

The first letter Charity Bryant received after her move to Weybridge was a letter from an old friend encouraging her about the religious environment she was now in;

I understand...that there is a very great attention to religion in Middlebury...which is truly good news...which is like cold mater to a thirsty soul! My brother likewise informed me that there were some favorable symptoms respecting Zion in Weybridge that Christians appeared to have awakened in some measure to a sense of their situation — and sinners enquiring what they must do to be saved.<sup>85</sup>

What to do to be saved? Surely neither Lydia Richards nor Charity Bryant knew for sure, but they were determined to find out. This determined sense of inquiry brought out the highest level of intellect that the women ever revealed through their. correspondence. One of Lydia's most intellectual letters was written in 1810 regarding the afterlife and the nature of eternity and is included in the Appendix.

The first great Revival in Plainfield was brought to Charity's attention by Lydia in 1808. The

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<sup>83</sup> Oliver W. Ellsbree, *The Rise of the Missionary Spirit in America*, 1928, p. 99.

<sup>84</sup> *Poultney Gazette or Missionary Register*, Foultney, Vermont, March 19, 1823.

<sup>85</sup> Mary Hovey to Charity Bryant, #807156, February 6, 1807.

metaphor used to describe such revivals was that of the spring shower. They came unexpectedly and with great intensity. Most of the ministers in Hampshire County were Yale trained. It was their duty to inspire such Revivals. But the many letters written to Charity Bryant by her friend Rev. Eli Moody indicate that the preacher was but another traveler on the Lord's design for time. When the Revivals came the whole town was swept up in a flurry of commotion.

The uncommon appearances with respect to religion and frequent meetings in our neighborhood, have of late demanded much of my time and attention. The week past I have attended four conferences and a lecture. Within three weeks past, a large number, mostly quite young persons, have apparently experienced a real change of heart...many others are deeply impressed with a sense of their wretched and helpless state...But what appears the most unaccountable is that many, particularly...among the Methodists, instantly fall and appear to lie... in a fainting or swooning. Among the Methodists there is much confusion, disorder and enthusiasm — Their meetings are sometimes held all night...In the eastern part of Cummington...a very unusual attention to religion has appeared within a few days — so that nothing but reading the bible and prayers have been attended to.<sup>86</sup>

The following month Lydia writes that the storm was primarily over and the towns of Cummington and Plainfield, exhausted;

...it is impossible to give a just account of the awakening in Plainfield and Cummington — it exceeds description. Conference are less of recent and meetings less crowded But I believe prudence and religion would dictate that meetings should be less frequent for people have been almost worn out attending meetings — which have been held every evening in the week Saturday excepted. Sometimes there have been six or seven meetings in different parts of the town at the same time.<sup>87</sup>

Lydia Richards expressed her own heartfelt anxiety that she was relatively unaffected in her own enthusiasm for Christ. Her failure at conversion must have been agitated by her brother James, who died a Christian martyr in 1823 on the island of Ceylon. A second wave of enthusiasm hit Plainfield in 1814. But Lydia could only respond;

...I am like a dry tree while others are covered with verdure...I saw my sister a few minutes this evening. She observed that if one person in the Town was left unmoved she believed it would be herself. Let her share with me in your prayers and Sylvia's.<sup>88</sup>

Lydia paid close attention to revivals in other towns around Massachusetts and reported frequently to Charity about which towns were enlightened and which were "stupid". One

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<sup>86</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #808103, January 3, 1808.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., #808172, February 22, 1808.

<sup>88</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #814268.1, April 18, 1814.

wonders what purpose these revivals served when four years after the Plainfield Revival of 1814 Lydie can write, "Within a few weeks a very powerful awakening has commended and increased and still continues in Belchertown. But it Plainfield it is a time of great stupidity."<sup>89</sup>

The following year of 1819 Plainfield was surrounded on all sides, by newly wakened towns and Lydia was able to make the most sweeping generalization on the times;

Surely it is a new Era in the world — great things are accomplished both in Christian and Heathen lands.<sup>90</sup>

Lydia. Richards remarks on two more Revivals in the Cummington—Plainfield area, one in 1827 and the in 1839.<sup>91</sup> Yet through all the revivals Lydia never experienced a full conversion. She was surely a Christian, but by her own confession not an especially good one. She was, at least, vicariously thrilled by the conversion of some of her old students in the towns in which she had spent summers teaching. Lydia spent a great deal of time hunting for reasons for her failure to be awakened. In 1812 she wrote a clear definition of what it was to be a Christian and thus where she fit into the scheme of things;

I know there is happiness in religion — and I know it is not to be found, completely in anything else — this is no new discovery — I have long known it and even felt it. But all this does not constitute a Christian. Something more than knowledge is necessary — The heart must be concerned — the feelings must be right. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."<sup>92</sup>

In 1811 Charity Bryant seems to have undergone a conversion. A letter written by her to the Christian Friends Church of Weybridge, giving full details of her religious experiences is included in the Appendix

Lydia Richards had six brothers and two sisters, all younger than herself. James Richards, Jr, was the next oldest of the nine children. He was born February 23, 1784.<sup>93</sup> All of her brothers were college educated and four of them went to Williams College. Joseph trained under Dr. Peter Bryant to learn the medical trade. William made an even greater name for himself than his

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., #818615, November 15, 1818.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., #819277.2, April 27, 1819.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., #827625.2 & 839228.1.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., #812520, September 20, 1812

<sup>93</sup> Dyer, Plainfield, p. 169.

brother as a missionary in the Sandwich Islands, becoming an advisor to the King of the island and serving in their government where he wrote the nation's first constitution and code of laws.<sup>94</sup> He translated the Bible into their language and in 1845 he sailed to Europe with the Prince and heir to the throne, Haalilio, to obtain nation status for the small island Kingdom.<sup>95</sup> He served there as a Minister of Public Instruction and at his death on November 7, 1847 was regarded by the people of the Sandwich Islands as a hero.<sup>96</sup> Brother Jason carried on the family farm in Plainfield and in like tradition served as Town Clerk, Justice of the Peace and as Legislative Representative.<sup>97</sup> The two youngest brothers were educated at Amherst College. James F. became a doctor and Austin became a minister in New Hampshire.<sup>98</sup> Lydia's oldest sister died at age four and her youngest, Sally, married a farmer in Plainfield.<sup>99</sup>

James Richards Jr. is the longest remembered of her brothers. Briefly, he entered Williams College in 1806 where he became acquainted with Samuel J. Mills. They were instrumental in the Missionary Movement in America, and were largely responsible for the founding of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. He studied at Andover Theological School following his graduation from Williams. In September of 1811 he offered his service to the Board to become one of the first American missionaries. Before sailing for Ceylon in 1815, Richards set out to make himself as useful as possible in the strange land by applying himself to the study of medicine.<sup>100</sup>

In the Richards-Bryant letters the earliest reference to Missionary, spirit was in 1810, one year after James Richards graduation from Williams College. Lydia writes Charity that;

A remarkable missionary spirit prevail', both here, and in other places, and the minds of many people are much exercised about the state of the poor heathens, and savages, who are perishing without the Gospel. A considerable sum has been subscribed in this place for the support of missionaries by the men, and the women have it in contemplation to form a

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>95</sup> Lydia R. Snell to Charity Bryant, #845230, March 30, 1845.

<sup>96</sup> Dyer, Plainfield, p. 171.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 172

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Dyer, Plainfield, p. 171

charitable society by themselves, for missionary purposes.<sup>101</sup>

The Missionary movement began in 1792 in Kettering, England where a particular group of Baptists organized a missionary society and sent William Carey to India.<sup>102</sup> The earliest signs of a parallel movement in America date to 1800 with the publication of the first American missionary magazines. They were the New York Missionary Magazine, the Repository of Religious Intelligence and The Connecticut Evangelical Magazine.<sup>103</sup> The work of Samuel J. Mills and James Richards was reinforced in 1808 with the founding of a Divinity School in Andover, Massachusetts, where many of the first missionaries were educated. Mills and Richards were among the incoming students during its second year.<sup>104</sup> Aside from the renewed enthusiasm to serve God, the missionary societies were largely influenced by developments in the political sphere of the late eighteenth century. The discovery of new lands and the stories of Captain Cook aroused a great curiosity about the Far-East.

The establishment of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions brought' to the active stage the disparate interest that had been shown in the missionary movement. Within a year of its founding the Board was actively soliciting funds and making arrangement for the first American mission. The first mission consisted of Adoniron Judson, Samuel Newell, Samuel Nott and their wives together with Luther Rice and Gordon Hall. Their destination was India.<sup>105</sup>

Besides the missionary publications to which people like Charity Bryant would have subscribed, she was kept abreast of the missionary news through Lydia who obtained first hand accounts through her brother. Within weeks of the first missions departure she wrote Charity that "five missionaries have lately sailed from America to Asia - Mr. Rice whom you once saw here is one of them."<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #810107, January 4, 1810.

<sup>102</sup> Elsbree, *Missionary Spirit*, p. 47

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>106</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #812230.1, March 20, 1812.

She followed their progress by reporting early in 1813;

They arrived in Calcutta the end of August - but were not allowed to land and were ordered back in the same vessel - but they petitioned the government for liberty to go to the Isle of France and obtained it.<sup>107</sup>

Eventually this mission wound up in Bombay. They were refused a landing in Calcutta because of the War of 1812. The British in Calcutta suspected they were American spies.<sup>108</sup>

The conclusion of the War of 1812 was hailed by Lydia Richards "with sensations unknown to but few." She continues her exultation with regards to the missions;

This return is an event for which I have hoped and prayed, not only that our land may enjoy her former privileges, but that the way to the East may be opened to those who have long been waiting an opportunity to carry the news of a Savior to those who are now sitting in the region and shadows of death.<sup>109</sup>

Among those who were waiting was James Richards who was to lead the next American mission. This time the destination was Ceylon. Lydia announced this news proudly but with some remorse as it would surely mean the last departure of her beloved brother.

...the ordination of the missionaries...is to be the twenty-first. of June - and it is expected they will sail the next day. . .we have considerable to do in...preparing things for James.<sup>110</sup>

James Richards was ill during most of his years in Ceylon. His family lived in constant anticipation of the final death notice. This did not come until 1823, a year after Lydia's second brother, William, had sailed to the Sandwich Islands to begin America's sixth mission.<sup>111</sup> In 1822 Lydia wrote Charity telling that William "has been accepted as a missionary to the Sandwich Islands and...expects to leave this country for those islands in November."<sup>112</sup>

By this time the Richards' household had become a veritable center of missionary intelligence for

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 813154, February 4, 1813.

<sup>108</sup> Elsbree, *Missionary*, p. 113.

<sup>109</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #815205.1, March 5, 1815.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., #815322.2, May 22, 1815.

<sup>111</sup> *Poultney Gazette or Missionary Registry*, November 12, 1822.

<sup>112</sup> Lydie Richards to Charity Bryant, # 822422, July 22, 1822.

the interested citizens of Hampshire County. Lydia was the purveyor of this intelligence. The year of William's departure she wrote;

...such on account of the people there, that I do not wonder at all that their widows consent to be burnt on the funeral pile of their husbands - for if they refuse to do it they must retire from society, be forsaken by their friends, live in disgrace...The state of the females is wretched indeed - if unmarried they are disgraced - if married they are not servants merely but slaves to their husbands.<sup>113</sup>

In another correspondence she mentions a visitor who came bearing gifts from William;

...among other things sent to us was one of the heathen Gods! A piece of wood, about 18 inches long and about as large as your arm - whittled out into a form resembling human-- but with no ears! ... it has been an object of worship!<sup>114</sup>

The peak of missionary excitement came in 1845 during the last year of Lydia's life when, the whole house was to be clean'd and prepared for receiving my brother William, his five children and Haalilio, the native chief.<sup>115</sup>

The death of James Richards was a tragic but expected loss. A letter written to the Richards family regarding the circumstance of his death is included in the Appendix.

The Richards- Bryant letters are surprisingly empty of political content. The intense conflict between Federalists and Republicans and the events of the War of 1812 go almost without mention, unless they directly affected the events of day to day life. Such was the case with Charity's sister Silence who lost a son in the war.

Charity's own business was effected by the interference of trade with Montreal and the Hagar's subsequent departure from that city.

In 1813 Lydia wrote Charity and expressed a commonly held conviction that the war was but a prelude to the Millennium and that it was God's way of calling them home. Such beliefs gained

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 822120, January 20, 1822.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., #8221120, January 20, 1822.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 845230, March 30, 1845.

substantial credibility following the Revolutionary War when the excesses of the French Revolution made a sham out of the Democratic principles. The belief that the world was finally coming to an end was largely responsible for the revival of religious enthusiasm that was the Second Great Awakening. The War of 1812 only excited this enthusiasm. Lydia wrote in 1813;

Happy are they who amidst the tumults of empires, the disorders of nations, and the distresses of individuals, can put their trust in him to whom disorder and confusion are perfect regularity, and who sways the scepter of universal empire as he sees best.<sup>116</sup>

But when the war was settled in April of 1815, Lydia Richards and the town of Plainfield rejoiced and a day of celebration and prayer was called. Hundreds collected on the green and marched to the meetinghouse for prayers and then back to the green for thirty gun salute.<sup>117</sup>

Following the Revolutionary War, America entered an era of unparalleled growth and prosperity. With this came a tremendous influx of immigrants, and as the population swelled demands for new lands grew accordingly. The completion of the Erie Canal in the early 1820's brought the lands west of New York into close range for thousands of suffering debt-ridden New Englanders.

The Bryants were among the wave of new settlers that pushed the frontier west of the Mississippi during the 1830's. They arrived in Princeton, Illinois, in 1832.

Among the first settlers of Princeton, arriving shortly after the lands came on the market, the Bryants were able to pick the best plots. They immediately assumed leadership of the town;

John is recorder of deed, Rush is one of the county commissioners. Cyrus, clerk of the county commissioner's court...Sarah Louisa teaches near here.<sup>118</sup>

It was Dr. Peter Bryant's widow and family that first moved to Illinois. Sarah, his wife, corresponded with Charity and recorded many of the details of the families' new life. John

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<sup>116</sup> Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, #813322.1, 1813.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., #815205.1, March 5, 1815.

<sup>118</sup> Sarah Bryant to Charity Bryant, #838404.4, July 6, 1838.

Bryant assumed leadership of the clan and by 1838 had built the grandest house in the county.

In 1839 cousin Daniel Bryant wrote Charity that, "Austin Bryant and Arthur are among our nearest neighbors and Cyrus and John H. Bryant live about two miles from us towards town...My cousins all have good farms and I believe are all doing well as to pecuniary gains<sup>119</sup>.

Daniel Bryant had left Massachusetts specifically to make money to pay back debts. He announced proudly to his aunt that, "I work at carpenter business and have as much work as I can do and good wages."<sup>120</sup>

The family took well to their new environment. They prospered and grew rich on land speculation. The price of land had more than doubled since they arrived and thus, small sales returned big profits. Sarah Snell wrote to Charity and commented on the society of people in Princeton;

they are a temperate industrious people. I delight to go to meeting there...people' enquire for a good moral place and Princeton is recommended and good sober people are apt to settle there...it is called the Yankee Settlement.<sup>121</sup>

The West was not as homogeneous a society as the Bryants had left behind in Cummington. It was an era of political and religious tolerance and the West became a melting pot of types. Daniel Bryant remarked on the number of religious societies stating that there were as many "as any place with the same number of inhabitants. We have in Princeton, the Hampshire Congregational Society, the Independent Congregational Society, the Episcopal Methodist Society, the Protestant Methodist Society, Freewill Baptists and Selfwill Baptists, some Unitarians, some Universalists, some Mormons... and some Perfectionists."<sup>122</sup>

Back East Charity and Lydia were winding out their earthly days. Lydia Richards died of a lung disease on June 26, 1846, in the home of Leavitt Hallock.

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<sup>119</sup> Daniel Bryant to Charity Bryant, #839264.2, April 14, 1839.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Silence Bryant to Charity Bryant, #838406.4, July 6, 1838.

<sup>122</sup> Daniel Bryant to Charity Bryant, #841252.1, April 1841.

A testament to the lifelong friendship between Lydia Richards and Charity Bryant are the number of letters Charity received following the death of her friend. Lydia died without " "that assurance that she desired."<sup>123</sup> But she was not in terror of the thought of death. It came quietly and expectedly.

Charity Bryant lived until 1851. On October 5th of that year she followed Lydia to the grave. The enjoyments of her mortal shell were through.

I feel that the sense of History which these letters provide can be found in no text book. This paper is but an imitation of the truths that lie within them. They are tremendous document of social life.

I am unable to bring the letters to any concrete conclusion. A more detailed study might show how the Bryant and Richards family experience differed from or matched the historical context of their times.

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<sup>123</sup> Eben. Snell, Jr. to Charity Bryant, #846377, June 27, 1846.

# APPENDIX

## Appendix #1 — Family Tree; Richards & Bryant

1. Joseph and Sarah Whitmarsh Richards
2. James Richards, May 31, 1757 & Lydia Shaw
3. Lydia, May 1, 1782; James, Jr., February 23, 1784; Joseph, November 6, 1785; Sarah, August 15, 1787; Nancy Shaw, January 5, 1790 — December 20, 1794; William, August 22, 1793; Jason, June 27, 1796 — May 1, 1798; Jason (2nd), August 31, 1798; Austin, February 9, 1800.

1. Dr. Philip Bryant and Silence Howard Bryant
2. Oliver\*, March 5, 1758; Ruth\*, March 18, 1760; Daniél\*, June 27, 1763; Bazaliel, July 27, 1765; Dr. Peter, August 12, 1767; Cyrus, December 20, 1769; Ann, March 10, 1771; Silence, April 28, 1774; Charity, key 27, 1777\* died young
3. Dr. Peter's Family — Austin, April 16, 1793; William Cullen, November 3, 1794; Cyrus, July 12, 1798; Sarah Snell, July 1802; Peter Rush, November 28, 1803; Charity Louisa, December 20, 1805; John Howard, July 27, 1807.

Note: Anyone interested in doing Bryant Family Research might check the following for primary documents:

1. Bryant Family Association Papers Bureau County Historical Society Princeton, Illinois
2. William Cullen Bryant Papers at the New York Public Library, New York, New York.
3. Homestead Collection Cummington, Massachusetts
4. Sheldon Museum Middlebury, Vermont

## Appendix #2 — Lydia's Account of Hallock's Fire- 1846

....a loss which Mr. Hallock has lately sustained by fire! A great loss!' The loss of his large Tannery...wholly consumed with twelve hundred cords of hemlock bark, and one thousand sides of leather, ready for market. The whole loss is estimated at \$20,000 dollars! We could see the glow from the house and a boy was quickly sent for help. Very soon the Meetinghouse Bell began to ring with all the force possible and continued to ring for 1 to 2 hours. The bark which was piled up extended from the Tannery to within about 16 feet of the boarding house, a two story building a part of which was occupied as a Tailors shop, Closely adjoining which was a store ins one end of which liv'd a family, very near was another dwelling house, a part of which was occupied as a shed, barns, blacksmiths shop and sawmill, all owned by Mr. Hallock and Mechanics and other inhabitants of then employed by him...in a short time 100 men were there, ready for action...those who formed the line from the pond to the house and pass'd the buckets, work'd where it was so hot, as to scorch their clothes"

She continues to say that his losses have put Mr. Hallock in debt 12 to 15,000 dollars. This was a tremendous amount of money in that day. If Hallock owned property and capital in excess of his losses he certainly would have been one of Plainfield's wealthiest residents.

— 846204.3 Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, March 4, 1846

### **Appendix 3 - Lydia's Account of the Death & Funeral of Peter Bryant**

....our beloved Physician and the brother of my Friend is no more!! - I saw him shrouded for the grave and his head laid low in death...It was a striking instance of the triumph of Death!...He expired two weeks ago this evening.(Sabbath evening) about eight o'clock, as I was told...He died, I understand, very suddenly in his chair, by the bursting of a blood vessel. He uttered this sentence three times, "Lord have mercy on my soul" ...I attended his funeral...on Tuesday at twelve. The coffin was placed in front of the house, beneath the towering poplars, in the tops of whose trembling branches the winds seemed to wave their sighs...which reminded of Watts elegy on the death of Gunston where he says, "ye stately Elms, on your long orders mourn - strip off your pride, to dress your masters urn."

#820206 - Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, March 6, 1820.

Charityt's brother Bazaliel writes on the same occasion;

"I cannot bring myself to realize that I have not a brother left. My friends are continually dropping away - and I consider it a solemn call to be prepared for the same change."

#820250 - Bazaliel to Charity Bryant, April 20, 1820.

#### **Appendix #4 - Lydia's Account of Tending the Death of Dr. Porter's Wife**

I mentioned the death of Dr. Porter's wife. I would now mention a few of the particulars...She gave up all hope of living several weeks before her death. She used to look at her emaciated limbs and see death approaching and say, "O that I was prepared to die!" with great emphasis and often with tears - and sometimes added that she knew she was not. She once said nearly like this, "It seems to me I can't die without an interest in Christ." She frequently wept and groaned out, "O dear" and perhaps would add, "what shall I do"...She cared nothing about living, if she might only be prepared to die...I watched with her the last night of her life. She took a little opium about bedtime, but took it reluctantly...she slept...pretty quietly and coughed little till after day, but we perceived that there was a great quantity of phlegm collected, which ought to be raised. A little after day she began to cough and we raised her up as usual, but the phlegm was so tough and hard that it was impossible for her to raise much - after coughing considerable time with great exertion, she eased and we laid her down, but she immediately coughed again and we raised her up...after coughing several minutes without being able to raise but little, her head at once fell back on my shoulder - she was stiff all over - her eyes were set - and she ceased breathing.

#813459 - Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, June 1813.

## **Appendix #5 - Lydia Richards on the Nature of the Afterlife**

...time is continually, flowing - its current is wafting us along - soon it will reach the place of its destination, where it will join the ocean, and we shall be irrecoverably plunged in the deep, the immeasurable Ocean of Eternity. Time will then be swallowed up in eternity. Eternity is time continued but the scenes and employments of time... will no longer continue - New scenes and prospects will open to our view, of which we have not now perhaps, the most distant idea. Death will remove the veil which hides eternal things. When our mortal bodies shall be laid aside there will be nothing to intercept our sight; but the tremendous scenes of Eternity will burst upon us in all their solemnity and magnificence. And how will our solitary souls endure such an awful scene? shall we not need the kind Redeemer? Surely we shall.

#810625 - Lydia Richards to Charity Bryant, November 25, 1810.

## Appendix #6 — Charity Bryant's Religious Awakening — 1811

With God all things are easy. Born in a Christian land, blest with parents who early dedicated me to the Lord in the ordinance of baptism and educated me in the principles of Religion enforced by good examples. After I came to years of understanding I thought a religious character both desirable and important, but when I looked round on the profession of Religion...I thought it could not be the meek and gentle spirit of Christ. Still I felt as if there was in mankind a spark of Divinity which if cultivated would lead them to salvation, but in a change of heart had no belief. I held these opinions till sometime in the year of 1799 when in conversation with a Christian Friend I felt a conviction that a new heart was necessary and that I could never have it, unless given me by free and sovereign Grace and that it would be just in God to let me perish forever — I was much distressed by, these impressions but have no recollection of feeling anything like faith of Repentance...But on perusing some Missionary Magazines in April 1806 it pleased God to awaken my feelings. I felt the weight of my transgression to be more that I could bear. My iniquities appear'd so great that I thought the justice of God could not pardon them; but in the midst of this deep distress...those cheering words of Our Blessed Savior seemed to give me consolation, "My grace is sufficient for thee". here I felt willing to rest my cause, wholly convinced that for myself I could do nothing;

I kept my feelings chiefly to myself till the Vortex of Worldly Cares they were mostly swallowed up. But within few weeks past I have had many serious reflection and very lately on hearing a sermon it seemed to be set home to my mind, by the power of God, and I felt it was good to be there...God is, and ever will be, as fully acquainted with my feelings in private possession as in publick profession.

#811276 — Charity Bryant to the Christian Friends Church of Weybridge, April 26, 1811.

## Appendix #7 — Charity Louisa Bryant's Religious Awakening - 1827

My life until the year 1822 was spent in the follies and vanities of this world without any lasting serious impression. I was unconscious of the awful danger of my situation and ignorant of the depravity of my heart. My attention was then called to the concerns of my soul. I felt that I was a sinner and for several weeks sought for mercy, but the tempter in all his alluring forms invited me to again partake of the pleasures of this world. I yielded and became his willing captive. For two years my attention was almost wholly absorbed in vanity. But God who is rich in mercy did not leave me here. he saw fit to remove from me an only and dearly beloved sister. This was a heavy stroke. I felt the Land of Providence in it, the voice was louder than thunder in my ears, "be ye also ready". I thought I should never need another warning to drive me to repentance. But if the goodness of God will not lead us to repentance neither will his judgements nor threatenings. These feelings gradually left me in some measure... The spirit was often striving with me 'but I as often rejected his calls and invitation until the commencement of the revival here last spring. I attended a meeting and heard an exhortation from the stewards, "thou fool this night shall thy soul be required of thee." Then my carnal security fled...I felt as though it was my last cell and if my soul was then required of me I should be forever miserable. I resolved should God spare my life to spend it in seeking religion. I soon felt that my case was a hopeless one, These words were constantly in my mind, "The soul that sinneth shall die." The awful truths of the gospel sunk into my inmost soul. My sins rose like mountains before me...I felt that I had accumulated such a weight of guilt that my destruction was sure, and that the justice of God required it as a warning to others... I found I had no godly sorrow for sin. I was not willing to comply with the terms of the gospel. I wished to do something to merit salvation. I pointed out the way I would go to Christ and I felt that unless I could receive salvation on my own terms I would never accept of it. Like a drowning man I caught at everything within my reach. I was brought to see that the more I did to render myself acceptable in the eyes of God — only served to carry me further from him, and that I must renounce all dependence on my own exertions...I attended a meeting and heard a sermon from this text...My anxiety left me. I felt the door of my heart was opened that Christ did indeed enter and sup with me...I was filled with a serenity, a heavenly

calm which I cannot describe. The character of Jesus appeared infinitely lovely...I feel that there is 2 reality in religion and think I have enjoyed what the world can neither give nor take away.

#827612.1 — Charity Louisa Bryant to Charity Bryant, 11/1/27.

## Appendix #8 - Letters Pertaining to William Cullen Bryant

Unfortunately, Henry Sheldon (founder of the Sheldon Museum) sold most of the letters William Cullen Bryant wrote to his aunt Charity.

...sometime in August, someone rap'd at the door, to whom I open'd.. A man presented himself whose countenance I did not immediately recognize but it was our friend and relative Cullen Bryant. He had business in Lenox and when there thought he would visit this region once more - took the stage...and came to Worthington. the latter part of the week, where he spent the sabbath and on Monday walked over here, a part of the way across and passed through the graveyard, where lies the remains of his Father... His countenance and his appearance, I thought were rather sad...He look'd many years older than when I saw him last.

Lydia R. Snell to Charity Bryant, #841230.2

He (W.C. Bryant) has a very interesting little girl, quite forward of her age and will probably possess her father's genius - He has established himself in New York as a literary character with another gentleman by the name of Anderson. Their work is entitled the New York Review or Atheneum Magazine...William is much pleased with his occupation. The contrast is so great between his present employment and his former object of pursuit. that he imagines himself almost im a new world - He is now freed from the profanity and petty quarrels of a set of illiterate and dissipated fellows who continually perplexed and harrassed him - He now enjoys the best of society when fatigued by study.

Silence Bryant to Charity Bryant, #825501

William Cullen wrote me he had become very strong and rigorous...He eats no meat,butter nor anything greasy, drinks no tea or coffee, lives on bread, fruit, milk...

Sarah S. Bryant to Charity Bryant, #840529,

## Appendix #9 — Oliver Bryant's Autobiography

At the age of nine years I left home as a hired boy for seven months this being completed I returned home and spent the winter at school. The next season I left again in the same manner and so continued to do for ten years...in the summer I labour'd for wages and in the winter for my board and attended school never failing to find employment and always enjoyed good health. At the age of about seventeen my father died this was a severe affliction to us. My Brother Charles and myself were eye witnesses of this afflicting scene, we were then destitute of any temporal guide...I soon after entered the Mercantile business with Mr. Kingman hoping it might be of some benefit to me...I resolved to buy the stonecutting business, the prospects being very inviting for new beginners. In the spring of 1824 I went to Rhode Island and commenced business as a stonecutter, met with some severe accidents which induced me...to quit...In the spring I returned home expecting to return again and follow my stone cutting business — but I received an offer from Mr. Kingman again of \$150 per year for two years...I thought ...it might defray the expense and give me an inside into the trade which I then determined to follow...Thus in 1825 and 26 I was with him as clerk... I did not gain anything nor get into debt any deeper.

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to Bridgewater.; 812506 - 9/6/12; 812520 - 9/20/12, Plainfield to Weybridge; 812522 -  
9/?/12; 812611.2 - 11/11/12; 812611 - 11/11/12; 812267 - 12/20/12; 813154 - 2/4/13;  
813212.1 - 3/12/13; 813507 - 9/7/13; 813607.1 - 11/7/13; 813674 - 11/24/13; 814170 -  
2/20/14; 814213 - 3/13/14; 814268.1 - 4/18/14; 814362 - 6/12/14; 814410 - 7/10/14;  
814457 - 8/4/14; 815122.1 - 1/22/15; 815129.1 - 1/29/15; 815156.3 - 2/6/15; 815162 -  
2/12/15; 815166.2 - 2/16/15; 815205.1 - 3/5/15; 815322.2 - 5/22/15; 815511 - 9/11/15;  
815551.1 - 10/1/15; 815630 - 11/30/15; 816201 - 3/1/16; 816407 - 7/7/16; 816572 -  
10/22/16; 816617 - 11/17/16; 817216 - 3/16/17; 817366.1 - 6/16/17; 817464 - 8/14/17;  
817625 - 11/25/17; 818120 - 1/20/18, Plainfield to Weybridge; 818211 - 3/11/18; 818311 -  
5/11/18; 818513 - 9/13/18; 818.615 - 11/15/18; 818.629 - 11/29/18; 819110 - 1/10/19;  
819277.2 - 4/27/19; 819378 - 6/28/19; 819502.1 - 9/2/19; 819662 - 12/12/19; 820206 -  
3/6/20; 820252.2 - 4/2/20; 820270 - 4/20/20; 820453 - 8/3/20, Ashfield to Weybridge;  
820524 - 9/24/20, Plainfield to Weybridge; 820614 - 11/14/20; 821129.2 - 1/29/21; 821228  
- 3/28/21; 821413 - 7/3/21, Conway to Weybridge; 822120 - 1/20/22, Plainfield to  
Weybridge; 822178 - 2/28/22; 822422 - 7/22/22; 822579.2 - 10/29/22; 822655 - 12/2/22;  
823230 - 3/30/23; 8.23553 - 10/3/23; 823616 - 11/16/23; 824211 - 3/11/24; 824266.1 -  
4/16/24; 824314.1 - 5/14/24; 824529.2 - 9/29/24; 824664.1 - 12/14/24; 825160.1 - 2/11/25;  
825418 - 7/18/25; 825322.2 - 5/22/25; 825523 - 9/23/25; 825523 - 9/?/25; 8255.59 -  
10/9/25.

3. -Lydia Richards Snell -to Charity Bryant - Post-Marriage 826155 - 2/5/26, Cummington to

Weybridge; 826252 - 4/2/26; 826372 - 6/22/26; 827255 - 4/5/27; 827625.2 - 11/25/27;  
828678.1 - 12/28/28; 832301 - 5/1/32; 832558.1 - 10/8/32; 833359 - 1833; 834253.1 -  
1834; 836119.1 - 1/17/36; 836318 - 5/18/36; 837108.2 - 1/8/37; 839228.1 - 2/28/39;  
841230.2 - 3/30/41; 842220 - 3/20/42; 842311 - 5/11/42, Plainfield to Weybridge; 842559 -  
10/29/42; 843453 - 8/3/43; 845230 - 3/30/45; 8455.15 - 9/15/45; 845673.1 -  
12/23; 846204.3 - 3/4/46; 846264.2 - 4/14/46; 846309 - 5/6/46; 846329.1 - 5/29/46.

#### 4. Lydia Richards to Sylvia Drake

811504 - 9/4/11; 816624.2 - 11/24/16, Plainfield to Weybridge.

#### 5. Letters Written by Charity Bryant

To Sylvia Drake in Bristol, Vermont: 807357 - 6/7/07; 807378.- 6/28/07; ,807402 - 7/2/07.

To the Christian Friends Church of Weybridge: 811276. - 4/26/11.

#### 6. Anna Bryant Kingman to Charity Bryant

799360 - 6/10/99, Pelham to Plainfield; 807569 - 10/19/07/;

809412 - 7/12/09; 809690.2 - 12/09; 810303 - 5/3/10; 81066a - 12/11/10.

#### 7. Bazalier Bryant to Charity Bryant

814300 - 5/14, Bedford, N.Y.; 818374.2 - 6/24/18; 819415 - 7/15/19, Kent, N.Y.; 820250 -  
4/20; 82245.2 - 8/2/22;

#### 8. Daniel Bryant to Charity Bryant

816176.3 - 2/26/16, Easton, Mass. to Weybridge; 817128.2 - 1/28/174'Bridgewater to

Weybridge; 822301 - 5/1/22; 823209.1 -3/9/23; 8.24214 - 1824; 827558.1 - 10/8/27;

835.214 - 3/14/35; 839264.2 - 4/14/39, Princeton, Ill.. to Weybridge; 846157.3 - 2/7/46.

#### 9. Sarah, Snell Bryant. to Charity Bryant

819165 - 2/15/19, Cummington to Weybridge; 825174.1 - 2/24/25;  
833321.2 - 5/21/33; 834380 - 6/30/34; 835121.2 - 1/21/35; 836520 - 9/20/36, Princeton, Ill.  
to. Weybridge; 837410.1 - 7/10/37; 838404.4 - 7/6/38; 839312 - 5/2/39, Greenfield, 111. to  
Weybridge; 840529 - 9/29/40, Iamouille, Ill. to Weybridge; 843652.3 - 12/2/43; 845616 -  
11/16/45, Princeton, Ill. to Weybridge.

#### 10. Silence Bryant to Charity Bryant

807800 - 1807, Pelham to Weybridge; 809402 - 7/2/09; 809900.1 &.2 1809; 810172  
2/22/10; 813103 - 1/13/13; 613565 - 10/15/13; 815354 - 6/4/15;. 817140 - 1/17; 820367 -  
6/21/20, Belahertown to Weybridge; 820470 - 8/20/20, Pelham to Weybridge; 822529 -  
9/29/22; 822651.4 - 12/11/22; 823156 - 2/6/23; 824179 - 2/29/24; 825220 - 3/22/25;  
825266 - 4/16/25;

#### 11. Vesta Howard Guild to. Charity Bryant

815551.2 - 10/15, Bellows Falls to. Weybridge; 815562 - 10/15, Easton, Mass. to Weybridge;  
816454 - 8/4/16; 824368.1 - 6/18/24; 825.125 - 1/25/25; 8255.01 - 9/1/25.

#### 12. Miscellaneous Correspondence with Charity Bryant Adeline Plummer Bryant to Charity Bryant, 830206.1 - 1/30/30. Caroline Bryant, 800356 - 6/6/00. Charity Louisa Bryant, 825125 - 1/25/25, Cummington to Weybridge; 8255.01 - 9/1/25; 827612.1 - 11/1/27.

Cyrus Bryant,. 8255253.1 - 1825, Columbia, S.C. to Weybridge. Edwin Bryant, 828512.2 -  
9/12/28, Boston to Weybridge. Oliver Byrant, 828604 - 11/4/28, Pelham to. Weybridge;  
826209.2 - 3/9/26; 827355.3 - 6/5/26. Dr. Peter Bryant, 804613 - 11/13, Cummington to  
Bridgewater; 812117.4 - 1/17/12, Cummington to Weybridge; 820105 - 1/5/20. Peter Rush  
Bryant, 822202 - 3/2/22, Cummington to Weybridge; 822368.1 - 6/18/22; 823166 - 2/16/23,  
Great Barrington to Weybridge. Dr. Philip Bryant, 810114.3 - 2/14/10, Bridgewater to  
Weybridge; 812117.4 - 1/17/12; 813369.1 - 6/9/13. Calvin Hagar, 812907.1 - 7/7/12, St.  
Andrews, Quebec., Can. to Wey. Eliza Hall, 799366 - 6/16; 799326 - 5/26/99; 799127 -  
1/27/99 Grace Hayward, 799732 - 6/22/99, Pelham to Plainfield; 800356 - 6/6/00/

Mary Hovey, 807160 - 2/6/07. Rev. Eli Moody, 825222.1 - 3/22/25, S. Hadley, Mass, to Weybridge; 825352 - 6/2/25, Shelter Island, N.Y. to Weybridge. Abigail "Nabby" Snell, 817117 - 1/17/17. Ebenezer Snell, Jr., 846377 - 6/27/46, Plainfield to Weybridge.

## **II. Miscellaneous Primary Sources**

1. Drake, Sylvia, Diary, 1823-1827, Collections of the Sheldon Museum,
2. Watts, Isaac, The Poetical Works of, Printed by George Cawthorn, London, England, 1802.

## **B. Secondary Sources**

### **I. Town and State Histories**

1. Dyer, Charles N., History of the Town of Plainfield, Hampshire. County, Mass., Northampton, Mass., 1891. - Good Richards family accounts, no index.
2. Foster, Helen & Streeter, William W., Only One Cummington, Cummington, Mass., 1974 - Excellent modern town history with good index.
3. Mitchell, Nahum, History of the Early Settlement of Bridgewater, Mass., Kidder' & Wright, publishers, Boston, 1840. - I did not use this extensively.
4. Smith, H.P., History of Addison County, Vermont, D. Mason & Co., Syracuse, New York, 1882. - Excellent County History.

## **II. Bryant Family Books &. Articles**

1. Brown, Charles H., William Cullen Bryant, Chas. Scribners, New York, N.Y., 1971. - Excellent biography, scholarly with footnotes.
2. Curtis, George William, The Life, Character & Writings of William Cullen Bryant, Chas.

Scribners, N.Y., 1878. - Not as good as Brown.

3. Godwin, Parke, A Biography of William Cullen Bryant, D. Appleton & Co., New York, N.Y., 1883. - Godwin was Bryant's son-in-law and official biographer.

4. McLean, Albert F., Jr., William Cullen Bryant, Twayne Publishers, Inc., New York, N.Y., 1964. - A critical evaluation of Bryant's poetry.

5. Murray, Donald M., "The Medical Letters of Dr. Peter Bryant (1767-1820)" from the Bulletin of the History of Medicine, July-August, 1963.

6. Murray, Donald M. & Rodney, Robert M., "Sylvia Drake 1784-1868, The Self Portrait of a Seamstress of Weybridge" from Vermont. History, April 1966. - Both of Murray's articles have been extremely valuable to me as prototypes for Bryant family biographical research.

### **III. General Background. Reading**

Ahlstrom, Sydney E., A Religious History of the American People, Doubleday & Co., Garden City, New York, 1975

- The best book on the subject - a great help

.

Elsbree, Oliver Wendell, The Rise of the Missionary Spirit in America 1790-1815, Williamsport Printing & Binding Co., Williamsport, Penn., 1928.

- Excellent, scholarly, revealed the significance of James Richards to the Missionary movement.

Elsbree, Willard S., The American Teacher, Westport, Conn., 1939.

- Good source on the role of teachers in early America.

Keller, Charles Roy, The Second Great Awakening in Connecticut, Archon Books, 1968.

- My research indicates how wrong he is in suggesting this to be a predominantly Conn. movement.

Ludlum, David, Social Ferment in Vermont, Montpelier 1948. - Good social history of

Vermont.

Stilwell, Lewis D., Migration From. Vermont, Montpelier, 1948. - Good history of migration.