Jane Minot Sedgwick II and the World of American Catholic Converts, 1820-1890

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When Jane Minot Sedgwick II (1821-1889), the daughter of an elite New England Unitarian family, joined the Roman Catholic Church in 1853, she joined a new faith culture while remaining embedded in the social world of her birth. This dissertation argues that friendship with other female converts of a similar class was the most important factor in leading her to the Church and smoothing her transition to Catholicism. As a young woman, she was largely uninterested in her family’s religious activities and uncomfortable with their religious zeal, but after developing friendships with several elite women who had recently converted, she came to see Roman Catholicism as a viable religious option.

Throughout Sedgwick’s childhood, her family had emphasized usefulness, rooted in Unitarian theology, as life’s central goal. Yet she and her family members struggled to understand the relationship between usefulness and happiness as Sedgwick sought usefulness but craved happiness. Family members fretted over the impetuous, independent behavior Sedgwick exhibited during her search for usefulness, but hoped that eventually finding it would bring her emotional stability. In light of her emotional struggles and the suicide of her cousin, Sedgwick’s family began to concede that perhaps happiness had to precede usefulness. After studying Catholicism for ten years, Jane made the decision to convert, a decision she described as rational, and one that she believed would bring her happiness. Her family members came to accept her decision because they thought it would provide her with the happiness and emotional stability to become a settled, useful woman.
In Sedgwick’s new life as an unmarried Catholic laywoman in a transnational community of elite converts, friendship took on an increasingly important role. Confronted by family members who were uninterested in her efforts at Catholic philanthropy and priests whose ideas about gender and authority conflicted with her own, she sought support from others who understood her experiences as she endeavored to establish a Catholic school in her hometown. Inspired by scholarship on physical and cultural borderlands, this study illuminates the ways that converts inhabited borderlands between their several cultures, supported and consoled by others who shared their status.
APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

Jane Minot Sedgwick II and the World of American Catholic Converts, 1820-1890

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Acknowledgements

During the hot, difficult summer of my doctoral exam preparation, I was still casting about for a dissertation project. I had already decided I wanted to explore Catholic conversion in 19th century America, so I took breaks from reading by hunting around in the finding aids of major repositories. I had happened on this brief description of Jane Minot Sedgwick II in the finding aid of the Sedgwick Family Papers at the Massachusetts Historical Society: “[Jane] converted to Catholicism in 1853 and spent much of her adult life in Rome. Remaining unmarried, she founded a Catholic school in West Stockbridge and was active in the West Stockbridge Catholic parish administration.” A rather small life, from that description, especially in contrast to that of her famous grandfather and aunt, but it was enough to make me investigate further. As I began the project in earnest, my adviser urged me to go to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, to get a sense of her world. When I discovered that she was not to be found in the famous circular Sedgwick burial plot, I was intrigued. When I found her grave, nestled under the eaves of the Catholic church in town, I was hooked.

Fortunately for me, my committee members were hooked too, and I am so grateful to my adviser Richard Brown, and to Chris Clark and Micki McElya, for their support and encouragement. It has mattered so much that they have believed in the worth of the project, especially in those moments where I lost faith in my ability to say something meaningful about the past. My interest in Catholic converts began with a seminar paper in my adviser’s class in my second semester of graduate school. I thought it was a one-off project, but he told me it could be more. Throughout my time as his student, he has helped me become a more curious, rigorous, and empathetic historian both through his explicit guidance, and by modeling these best practices in his own research career.
Thank you to the UConn History Department more broadly, for its intellectual and financial support of this project over the years. In so many parts of my project, I see the influence of UConn faculty members who shaped my ways of thinking in seminars, workshops, and casual conversations. Nancy Shoemaker’s seminar on frontiers, colonies, borderlands, and empires was a truly transformative experience for me, and the intellectual challenges of that class led me to the interpretive approaches that shape this dissertation. Bob Gross’s counsel and probing questions, in the classroom and during chance meetings in the hallway between our offices, sharpened the questions I asked of my sources; two generous grants from the Draper Chair in American History then enabled me to complete the last remaining research on the project. Janet Watson was the first professor I interacted with as a graduate student at UConn, and since our first meeting, I have been fortunate to learn from her, teach with her, and sing with her. I, and everyone else in the department, would be utterly lost without our helpful and supportive staff, past and present: Jessica Muirhead, Kathy O’Dea, Heather Parker, Dee Gosline, and Nancy Comarella. Nancy’s support and friendship, in particular, meant the world to me: here, at the end of the dissertation process, I feel her loss keenly and wish she could be here so I could thank her in person.

Every historian owes a debt of gratitude to the archivists whose labor has made our own labors so much easier and more productive. The staff at the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College, Houghton Library at Harvard University, the Longfellow National Historic Site, and the Stockbridge Library made my visits smooth and enjoyable. Denise Eggers of the Paulist Archives in Washington D.C. not only helped me navigate those collections, but also gave me a hat and scarf when I lost mine and drove me back to the Metro stop in the bitter cold. Most importantly, I could not have completed this dissertation without the help of the staff at the
Massachusetts Historical Society, where the bulk of my research took place. Their knowledge and professionalism have made me hope that all of my future research will bring me back there to work at my favorite table under the watchful eyes of Charles Sumner. Richard S. Jackson of Lenox, Massachusetts generously allowed me to work with some Sedgwick family diaries he had found in the attic of his house and shared the local historical gossip about the family, both of which helped enormously. Thank you also to my colleagues at Archives and Special Collections in the Dodd Center at UConn, where I worked for the first four years of graduate school. Doing the labor of processing collections and working at the reference desk in a major archive prepared me to go into my own dissertation with a better understanding of how archivists do their work, and how I could best work with them as a researcher.

Abundant thanks must of course be given to the graduate students in the History Department at the University of Connecticut, past and present. Their encouragement, intellectual vigor, and good cheer have kept me going throughout my time in graduate school and have improved this dissertation immeasurably. Casey Green, Allison Horrocks, Mary Sanders, Oliver Scholes, Jessica Strom, and Tom Westerman are due particular gratitude. I have been fortunate enough to have a graduate student support system that extends beyond the boundaries of my department; to the members of the GEU-UAW Local 6950 Organizing Committee: thank you for allowing me to be a part of something great at this university beyond my academic work.

My closest friends have lived with Jane nearly as long as I have, tolerating and supporting my strange relationship with long-dead people, and always interested to hear the latest sassy line from a Sedgwick letter. Alex Lewis, Liz Bologna, Corinne and Dan Tagliarina, and Allison Holst-Grubbe know that the completion of the dissertation does not mean they get to stop hearing about Jane. My family’s quiet support has meant everything; even as they weren’t
quite sure *what* I was doing much of the time, they knew it was important, and accepted the ways that my work impacted our collective lives. My Aunt Suzanne, Uncle David, and cousin Amber deserve significant credit for the completion of this project, for it was their spare bedroom I occupied over summers and school breaks for four years as I completed the majority of my research in the Boston area. Though I helped name the new calves and give the chickens their eye drops, it is little by way of repayment for the gift they gave me.

And thank you to Jane, her family, and her friends, for allowing me to know them and write about them, and find my own meaning in their lives, thoughts, and actions.
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Introduction

This study examines the life of Jane Minot Sedgwick II (1821-1889), her conversion to Roman Catholicism, and her 36-year experience as an active laywoman. It not only treats how and why an elite Protestant woman like Jane converted, but also the struggles she experienced living a new faith. Despite the importance of priests and women religious in encouraging and sustaining her faith journey, the key to understanding Jane’s life as a convert is the unique space created by nineteenth-century women’s friendships. These friendships guided her to the Church and, upon her conversion, shepherded her into a network of transnational Catholic elites while helping her retain her privileged place in New England society. Moreover, they sustained her as she tangled with priests and bishops over the direction of her local Catholic community. By studying the various Protestant and Catholic cultures Jane came to know, and the ways she navigated them with the help of other converts, this dissertation provides a fresh assessment of how American converts came to Catholicism and lived out their new faith culture in a rapidly-growing, immigrant-based church.

When one visits Stockbridge, Massachusetts, the town where Jane was born, people will often ask if you’ve seen “the Pie.” By this they mean the Sedgwick burial plot in the town cemetery. This unique circular plot, with Jane’s grandparents’ obelisks in the center and concentric circles of Sedgwick relations buried around them, stands separated from the rest of the cemetery by thick hedges. Among the graves you will find Jane’s parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews. You will find markers for Mumbet, the former slave who

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1 Due to common names between generations, this dissertation will use the familiar “Jane” to refer to the woman at the core of the study. In all other cases, nicknames and familial references will be used whenever possible to avoid confusion – Uncle Charles, Bessie, Aunt Robert, etc. – but in the case of Jane Minot Sedgwick I and II, a more unique system will be employed. Jane Minot Sedgwick II often signed her letters “Jane Jr.,” but since she is the subject of the project, it seems incorrect to refer to her as though she is a secondary “Jane.” As a result, Jane Minot Sedgwick I will be referred to as “Jane Senior” in situations where confusion is likely.
Jane’s grandfather supported in her freedom suit against the state of Massachusetts. You will find a marker for Jane’s niece and namesake, whose body lies in Naples where she died, but whose place in the family is still marked in Stockbridge. You will even find the grave of Jane’s cousin Grace Sedgwick Bristed, who like Jane, was a convert to Catholicism, but still chose to be buried among her Protestant family. You will not, however, find any indication of Jane’s membership in the family. Neither will you find her in the Catholic cemetery just outside of the center of town. Instead, she is buried under the eaves of St. Joseph’s Catholic Church, which she helped build, on the opposite side of the wall from the pew she regularly occupied. Though she instructed her family to continue the upkeep of the burial plot, she herself chose a different resting place. If you were looking for her grave but did not know anything about her other than the family she belonged to, she would be very difficult to locate.

Even her contemporaries struggled to locate her. The *Pittsfield Sun* printed Jane’s obituary on February 21, 1889, which would have been her 68th birthday. In memorializing Jane, the obituary attempted to locate her, physically, culturally, socially, and spiritually. It did so by beginning with a detailed description of her burial under the eaves, “between the pines and the pew.” In tracing the trajectory of her life by beginning with the unique situation of her burial, the obituary presented an explanation for why she deviated from the path her distinguished birth had seemingly set for her by joining the Catholic Church, and suggested that in joining the Church, she had moved firmly from one world into another. The physical location of her body signified her social, cultural, and spiritual location.2

Jane was remarkably absent from her own obituary, which, while full of specifics about her relatives and the groups with which she associated, allowed her burial “Under the Droppings

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2 *Pittsfield Sun*, February 21, 1889.
of the Eaves” to communicate all that the reader needed to know about Jane herself. Few reading it would have found anything in there to contradict their assumptions about elite New England womanhood, Roman Catholicism, and religious conversion. Rather than memorializing her, Jane’s obituary attempted to explain her, and it did so satisfactorily without the reader really needing to know anything about her.³ This dissertation intends to know Jane, and understand her.

By studying Sedgwick as a participant in several cultural collisions, adaptations, and changes in 19th-century New England, this project illuminates several fields of inquiry in the history of religion, gender, and class. First, it reconfigures important themes in the literature of American Catholicism, as well as that of Unitarianism, religious choice, gender and social change in nineteenth-century America. As part of a larger literature on conversion, scholars have studied Catholic converts as individuals, in the context of religiously-mixed marriages, as members of religious communities, and as participants in transnational intellectual communities, all of which provide a basis for my work. Still, this literature has long depended on the abundant public and published private writings of notable male converts – those who were priests, publishers, and public intellectuals – without fully examining the ways that gender, status, and relationships influenced the conversion experience and shaped post-conversion life. By exploring the gendered dimensions of conversion and analyzing converts in the context of their friendships and faith-based relationships, my work revises and expands the literature on conversion to Catholicism.

One common response to this dissertation topic from scholars has been “Were there many converts to Catholicism then?” followed by “Why would she become Catholic?” These questions also frame much of the work on Catholic converts in the nineteenth century, and

³ Pittsfield Sun, February 21, 1889.
conversion in general; historians do, after all, look for causality. Moreover, they are reasonable questions, particularly in Jane’s case. She had been raised in such a solid liberal Protestant New England family and her conversion occurred at a time of heightened anti-Catholicism in America; either would be enough to make one wonder about her religious choice. These questions are important starting points for the project, and the frequency with which I’ve encountered them has told me something about the assumptions and expectations historians make about this subject.

Both questions indicate a belief that there is something incongruous and transgressive about elite converts to Catholicism in antebellum America, factors which must therefore have limited the number of converts. As Lincoln Mullen notes in his recent work on waves of Catholic conversion in this period, records from the nineteenth century indicate tens of thousands of converts to Catholicism in America, drawn from all ranks of society. Immigration alone did not swell the ranks of American Catholics. The fact that most of the scholarly work on Catholic conversion has looked at the same small set of converts may have helped inadvertently frame it as a fairly small part of the religious activity of the period. Jane and the thousands of Protestant Americans like her who became Catholic in the 19th century cannot be written off as curiosities, however. Instead, this dissertation seeks to make historical sense of Jane Sedgwick and others like her, as a first step towards understanding the larger world of Catholic converts in America.

In doing so, this project asks a series of questions that spring from the initial paradox Jane’s life seems to present. Given the pervasiveness of anti-Catholicism in America in the mid-19th century, especially among the elite Unitarian New Englanders who form the core of this

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study, how did Roman Catholicism become a viable religious option? What did it mean that the converts in this study all had friends who had also converted? How did these women understand their conversion and its personal, familial, and social ramifications? Perhaps most importantly, how did they adapt to a new faith culture? How did they live after their conversions? What happened to the lives and relationships they had before they converted? Given the controversies at the time about the compatibility of American and Catholic life, did these women see or feel any incompatibility? If so, how did they reconcile the issues to their own satisfaction? This dissertation addresses the most basic questions historians ask: what were the changes and continuities, in this case, for one woman who converted to Catholicism?

These questions provide a useful starting point for the study of Jane Sedgwick’s life, but the asking of them also forces an examination of certain assumptions that undergird the historical study of religion, especially Roman Catholicism, and women. After those initial expressions of confusion, many scholars have offered “solutions” to the apparent problem of Catholic converts, particularly female converts. The answers offered reveal much about the assumptions historians make about women, religion, and Catholicism specifically. In casual conversation and in published secondary literature, scholars repeat arguments that were being made in the 19th century when these conversions happened. By examining these existing arguments and the assumptions they make about gender, faith, and authority, this dissertation introduces a set counterarguments that complicate several longstanding arguments.

If scholars know anything about conversion to Catholicism in America in the 19th century, they know one or more of a small set of famous converts: Orestes Brownson, Isaac Hecker, and Mother Elizabeth Seton, now recognized as a saint by the Catholic Church. Some may know Sophia Ripley because of her role in Brook Farm and therefore her association with
Brownson and Hecker. Usually scholars who do not study religion know Orestes Brownson, who was an important public intellectual well before his conversion. Both Brownson and Hecker, his Brook Farm companion and founder of the Paulist Fathers, have been the subjects of extensive scholarly biographies in the past twenty-five years. Despite their clearly-exceptional status, Brownson and Hecker are often made to stand in for the totality of convert experience in America. Convert women appear peripherally in these works, particularly in David O’Brien’s excellent biography of Hecker, who was friends with Jane and many of the converts she knew, but the scholarly literature on Seton, despite her stature within the Church, is thin at best, and much of the older work on her life tends towards hagiography. Despite the thousands of recorded conversions to Roman Catholicism in the 19th century, there is scant literature on those converts outside a handful of prominent people.

Scholars who do not study religion have often responded to my topic by making the argument that women in that period must have been attracted to the aesthetic and ritual elements of Catholicism. This quick assumption suggests that our minds still make tacit connections between women, Catholicism, ritual, emotion, and irrationality. This connection is something that Catholic converts of the period grappled with explicitly. Orestes Brownson, when reviewing *Mora Carmody: or Woman's Influence*, a fictionalized conversion account, cautioned the authors

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of conversion narratives against making Roman Catholicism’s aesthetic beauty a thrust of their narrative. Such a narrative would be an easy target for Protestants, who saw forms rather than piety, sensuality where there should be sober spirituality.  

Ellen Gates Starr, an early twentieth century convert, faced a dubious Paulist priest who thought she might have only been attracted by Catholic aesthetics; she found that an amusing fear, given “the almost uniform ugliness of American Catholic churches.”

Many scholars have examined the pervasive Protestant attraction to Catholic art and forms in this period, but we must be careful not to assume such things caused conversion, even if, in some cases, they may have been the entry point into the world of Roman Catholicism.

These scholarly associations between gender, Roman Catholicism, visual culture, emotion, and even sensuality are not new ideas. A survey of the literature on religious choice across the twentieth century demonstrates that strong conceptual links between gender, race, class, civilization, emotion, and dependence were baked into the analytical frameworks of religious studies at the creation of the discipline. As Sean McCloud argues in Divine Hierarchies: Class in American Religion and Religious Studies, the emergence of the field of religious studies at the end of the 19th century coincided with the emergence of the field of eugenics, and scholars of religion of the period argued that religious choice alternately sprang from and created “degenerate” people. Catholicism was singled out as attracting emotional races and even “in the more advanced countries,” attracting converts “impelled by emotion.”

10 Sean McCloud, Divine Hierarchies: Class in American Religion and Religious Studies (Chapel Hill, NC:}
McCloud argues that these explicitly eugenic theories gave way to arguments about social environment at mid-century, followed by ideas of religion born out of “cultural crisis” and deprivation. In all cases, he argues, scholarly analysis of religion “unwittingly functioned to distinguish and classify religions in ways that supported existing racial, class, and regional hierarchies.”\textsuperscript{11} The language of emotion and reason that has governed the study of religion not only suggests the “divine” hierarchies that McCloud highlights, but also divisions based on gender.

I would argue that while taking gender into account is of utmost importance in studying conversion, and that the lack of attention to gender has been a serious oversight to this point, we must also be wary of making gendered assumptions. Existing gendered assumptions help explain how people made sense of conversions like Jane’s, from Unitarianism to Catholicism. If one understands Unitarianism and Catholicism to be at opposite ends of a spectrum of “rationality,” conversion can be hard to understand. If one understand men and women to be at opposite ends of that same spectrum, however, these conversions can be made to “make sense.” Instead, an analysis of conversion and gender must both attend to the different ways that men and women experienced religion and religious choice in the nineteenth century and carefully analyze the ways in which religions and religious practices were gendered.\textsuperscript{12}

Much of the historical and contemporary discussion of women’s conversion to Catholicism also concerns itself with relationships between women and priests. As Tracy Fessenden, Jenny Franchot, and Marie Anne Pagliarini have argued, the confessional was a site

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\item \textsuperscript{11} McCloud, 54.
\end{itemize}
of eroticized fear for Protestant Americans, where women faced the danger of hidden interactions with sexually-depraved priests. Setting aside Protestant sexual concerns, Catholic conversion necessitated interaction with a priest in a way that conversion to other religions in the period did not; as Lincoln Mullen notes, “One could not join by fiat or choice alone: converts were said to have been “received” into the church, rather than to have joined.” The sacramental nature of Catholicism, combined with the fact that only priests, and therefore only men, could administer them, linked converts with clergy in a unique way.

While scholars have taken men like Orestes Brownson and Isaac Hecker at their word that conversion was largely a solitary process for them, the existing literature suggests that the relationship with a priest is still presumed to be the most important one in understanding a female convert’s decision. For instance, Patrick Allitt’s analysis of female Catholic converts notes that the conversion of Eliza Allen Starr occurred “only under the guidance of Francis Kenrick, Archbishop of Baltimore,” without noting that her cousin Fanny Allen was a convert to Catholicism. The privileging of the convert-priest relationship in the study of women, but not in the study of men like Brownson and Hecker, reifies arguments made at the time and assumes that women had less control over their spiritual choices than men. While this last statement may be true in the broadest sense, beginning with that assumption closes off fruitful paths of scholarly inquiry and erases other women who were important in the conversion process. This project puts forward other relationships as more important for the spiritual lives of female converts, particularly relationships with other elite women who had converted.

14 Mullen, 10.
When historians of the 19th century talk about “conversion,” they mean two different things, depending on the population in question. The evangelical heart-religion of the 19th century was one of conversion, though that conversion that might be solely contained in one’s soul, testified to in front of a congregation, or written down as a formal narrative. The other use of conversion, by which we mean a conscious choice to join a particular denomination, possibly leaving another in the process, often overlaps with the first variety. Orestes Browson, in one of his many conversions, felt the grace of God and joined the Presbyterian Church as a result. His heart and soul were converted, but that internal change required an external change, a human performance of the work that had been wrought on his soul. Depending on the time, place, and religions concerned, scholars also look for particular markers that indicate formal reception into a denomination if required; baptism is perhaps the most common of these markers, especially for Catholic converts. These markers are useful, but they can distract from the processual nature of conversion by emphasizing the moment on the Road to Damascus, rather than the road itself, and suggesting that without an identifiable moment where the conversion was formalized, the conversion was somehow less real, or at least less know-able by historians.

Even the language of the road is problematic, however; along with the language of journeys and paths, it dominates the titles of 19th century conversion narratives and contemporary scholarly inquiry, particularly about conversion to Catholicism. In deploying these specific spatial and temporal metaphors, scholars reflect and reinforce assumptions about the

17 Orestes A. Brownson, The Convert; or, Leaves From My Experience (New York: Edward Dunigan & Brother, 1857), Ch. 2.
process of conversion and the duration of that process. Often scholars use the same language that converts used to acknowledge their subjects’ understandings of their own lives, an approach we should always take. But roads, paths, and journeys suggest direction and destination, a beginning and an end to the process of conversion. These conceptual frameworks serve to limit our understanding of what constitutes conversion itself, when and how it happens, and as a result, when and where we should look to understand it. When we ask “Why did she convert?,” we ask for reasons that explain a choice, an event, a journey with a beginning and an end. As a result, many examinations of converts privilege the “moment” of conversion as the object needing explanation and the end of the journey, leaving the rest of a convert’s life relatively unexplored. Moreover, there is no specific marker for the beginning of the road, so scholars often read back from the end of the road, looking for signposts that indicate where and when the road began.

Assumptions about “roads to Rome” and the primacy of male and priestly authority in the lives of American convert women have led scholars to ignore or give short shrift to the relationships that were often some of the most important for all American women: their relationships with other women. To understand Jane’s conversion, and indeed to understand her life more broadly, we must look at the “female world,” to use Carroll Smith-Rosenberg’s term.

Smith-Rosenberg’s forty-year-old argument – that historians know of the existence of “long-lived, intimate, loving friendship between two women” but do not think about it – has been deeply influential in my study of Jane’s life, because her argument still accurately describes the

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18 In the 19th century, such titles as Georgina Pell Curtis’ collection of essays by converts entitled Beyond the Road to Rome (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1914), more recently Franchot’s Road to Rome, Bochen’s The Journey to Rome. 19 Franchot, Roads to Rome. Prominent converts like Brownson and Hecker defy this model, because they were “important” after their conversions, as do those who either changed religion again or “reverted,” both indications that the initial conversion was not the end of the journey.
literature on American Catholic converts. By examining the relationships Jane had with the women in her life, many of which spanned the years before and after her conversion, this project helps explain how Jane came to be interested in Catholicism, how she came to accept it, how her family came to accept it, and how she learned and lived her faith for the thirty-five years following her conversion. It is in Jane’s friendships that the meaning of her conversion lies.

Moreover, the reliance on Brownson and Hecker as the primary examples of Catholic conversion also reflects a reliance on studying converts who published conversion narratives, who were public intellectuals, and whose papers are published; in the United States, most of the authors of Catholic conversion narratives were men, though women did write a few brief essays explaining their conversions later in the century.  

Published conversion narratives are valuable sources, of course, but they are intentional and crafted in a particular way. The publication of private writings necessarily indicates some “importance” placed on the subject, further enabling the historiography of a topic remains weighted towards its male participants. This is not to say that private writings contain some objective truth about a subject’s conversion, but they allow us a glimpse of different relationships that were also the sites of conversion. By attending to private writings and the intimate spaces of women’s friendship, this dissertation looks to new voices in new places to expand the conversation on where and how conversion to Catholicism happened, and what it meant for the people involved.

This study uses one convert – a woman from a prominent family, but not a prominent woman herself – to posit a different approach to understanding conversion than that which historians have relied on thus far. Jane Sedgwick did little that would qualify as “important,” so one might wonder why her life is worthy of a complete biographical study. It is precisely her relative unimportance that allows us to approach the tired narrative of the road to Rome with fresh eyes. We do not need to understand her conversion because she founded an order, like Mother Elizabeth Seton and Isaac Hecker, or because she was a significant public intellectual like Orestes Brownson. Her conversion does not need to explain something else she did, nor does some significant social contribution need to be understood in light of her conversion.

Relieved of this explanatory weight, Jane’s conversion becomes one element of a rich and complex life, and can no longer be an end unto itself. Rather than understanding conversion as a path that takes an individual from one cultural world into another, a journey that ends with reception into the new faith, this dissertation argues that conversion must be understood as a life-long process of cultural collision and adaptation. Instead of beginning with her conversion and reading back to find out “why,” this project begins by situating Jane in the world into which she was born and raised, over which she had little control, before exploring the choices she made that expanded her world and brought her to add “Catholic” to the groups with whom she self-identified.

Born to a prominent and well-to-do Massachusetts and New York Unitarian family, Sedgwick was wary of religious zeal throughout her childhood and teenage years, openly mocking a cousin who went to Burma as a Baptist missionary and an acquaintance who became a nun. Yet as a young woman, Sedgwick became friendly with women of her own social standing who had chosen Catholicism, including Ruth Charlotte Dana, Sophia Ripley, and Mary
O’Sullivan Langtree Madan. The intimacies of women’s friendships in the nineteenth century allowed for intense discussions of theology and personal observations of others living their faith. Sedgwick’s friendship with convert women who shared her birth culture allowed her to see Catholicism as a viable religious path for someone of her standing and heritage.

Sedgwick and her cohort of antebellum Catholic converts, inhabiting several distinct and overlapping cultures, endeavored to surround themselves with others who shared their experiences. Facing critical family and friends, they turned to those friends who understood and validated their choices and supported each other’s new Catholic-inflected benevolent activities. Sedgwick spent the last twenty years of her life attempting to establish a Catholic school in her hometown. The local church hierarchy disagreed sharply with her over issues of gender, class, and authority, but also desired the funds and respectability a convert like Sedgwick could bring. During two decades of conflict and miscommunication over the school, Sedgwick constantly sought reassurance from other elite converts that her views about Catholic institution-building held merit and deserved acknowledgement. Sedgwick’s existence as a convert was, at times, emotionally painful as a result of cultural conflict between her two worlds, but it was also painful when the patriarchal structures in each of her worlds robbed her of opportunity and control.

Jenny Franchot’s *Roads to Rome*, a rich book on the Protestant fascination with Catholicism, provides an excellent resource for understanding the imaginative world of Catholicism in which Sedgwick was raised. Moreover, her work examines the conversion of Sophia Ripley and Elizabeth Seton, focusing on what brought these women to Catholicism and the internal re-imagining that resulted from their conversion and led them to enter religious life. Anne Rose’s work on interfaith families provides another model for understanding how converts lived their faith, though her work primarily focuses on converts in the context of marriage, as
with Anna Ward, a Catholic convert, and her husband Thomas. Franchot and Rose study the self and the family, two central concepts in nineteenth-century American history, but the nuclear family and the cloister were not the only places where converts found religious community. Jane’s conversion, omitted from both books despite her close friendship with both women, comes into view when friendship is taken into account. Ripley’s friendship helped guide Jane to Catholicism, and Sedgwick guided Anna Ward, one of Rose’s subjects, to her reception into the Church.

Studying converts also means qualifying any discussion of an “American Catholic community.” Scholars argue that the mid-nineteenth century saw a “turning away from a Catholicism grounded in the American democratic tradition,” and as Peter D’Agostino’s work demonstrates, events like the Pope’s political difficulties tended to unify American Catholics. Yet Sedgwick believed her previously existing views on women’s rights and slavery could co-exist with her new faith, and she supported lay control and influence within the Church itself, placing herself in the barely-settled debate over the so-called “trustee system.” By examining the pre- and post-conversion views of Sedgwick and her friends, this study illuminates the way that converts blended seemingly-incompatible elements of their “native” and new cultures with the support of other converts; it challenges the assumption that converts to Catholicism fell into lock-step with Rome. Sedgwick’s own explanation of her conversion demonstrates how much

she understood herself to be a combination of cultures; she told her cousin Kate Minot that she had examined her religious options rationally, in true Unitarian fashion, until she found the one that seemed most reasonable to her.\textsuperscript{24}

With the exception of her aunt Catharine Maria Sedgwick, herself a convert to Unitarianism, who said her niece’s conversion made her want to put on sackcloth and ashes, Sedgwick’s family was remarkably receptive to her conversion.\textsuperscript{25} Yet converts expected disapproval from their families, and scholars have assumed such disapproval was present, given the seemingly-rampant anti-Catholicism of the period.\textsuperscript{26} This study argues that the Sedgwick family’s approval was based not in any particular acceptance of Catholicism, but in their desire to see Sedgwick fit their Unitarian-influenced model of female domestic virtue and behavior. Family members fretted over the impetuous, independent behavior Sedgwick exhibited and the periods of depression she endured during her search for a “useful” life. They hoped she would find emotional stability, unlike the other members of her family who had suffered mental illness. Catholicism seemed to provide Jane with the stability and occupation they expected in a woman of her status, so they accepted her choice. My work complements John McGreevey’s scholarship on the nineteenth-century conversation about the compatibility of Catholicism and American

\textsuperscript{24} Jane Minot Sedgwick II (JMSII) to Kate Sedgwick Minot (KSM), 2 June 1853, Box 92, Folder 18, Sedgwick Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. (The collection and repository will be referred to as SFP and MHS respectively.)
\textsuperscript{25} Catharine Maria Sedgwick (CMS) to KSM, April 11, 1852, New York, NY, Reel 4, Catharine Maria Sedgwick Papers, MHS.
\textsuperscript{26} Scholars look for “familial” separation when looking at converts, and find it, but it often goes unspoken that when examining \textit{female} converts, scholars are looking for rifts between wives and their husbands, brothers, and fathers. For instance, Rose notes that Anna Ward’s husband “underreacted” to her conversion, but that he must not have been pleased by it, demonstrating that there’s an assumed “correct” reaction on the part of male family members. In addition to Samuel’s rather benign reaction, Anna’s letters indicate a deepening relationship with her daughters and her sister after conversion, including their reception into the Church. Franchot notes that Ripley was “fueled by familial and marital isolation” to write to her cousin and close friend Charlotte Dana, also a friend of Jane’s, without noting that that was \textit{also} a familial relationship, albeit one with a woman. Rose, Franchot, 305.
culture by exploring the private, gendered spaces where that conversation took place, places that often consciously considered Catholicism separate from questions of class or immigration.  

Well before Sedgwick’s conversion, a family friend wrote to her mother, counseling her to accept the fact that her daughter was unlikely to meet a man with whom she could have an equal partnership. But, he argued, if they could encourage her to find some purpose in her life, “Jane will be useful, and because useful, happy.” As Lee Chambers-Schiller has argued, and as Catharine Maria Sedgwick herself demonstrated, there was a space, if limited, for unmarried women of means in New England to be active in a political and philanthropic word, though there is no indication that Jane’s unmarried state was a conscious political choice like those of the women Chambers-Schiller examines. Nor is it clear that her decision to remain unmarried reflected a belief that she idealized marriage and felt herself unworthy, something Zsuzsa Berend argues motivated some women at the same time. It is not clear that her choice to remain unmarried was actually a choice at all, but unmarried Jane remained, and rather than attempt to explain the reasons for that state, this dissertation considers the boundaries and freedoms of single womanhood, and argues that despite her status, Jane still found her movement and choices restricted not by the approval of male society, but by the legal and financial restrictions placed on women in the period.

For Catholic women like Sedgwick, there was also the additional possibility (and pressure) of a call to vocation. The scholars Maureen Fitzgerald, Carol Coburn, and Martha

28 Gaetano de Castillia (GdC) to Jane Minot Sedgwick 1 (JMSI), 19 June 1846, , Box 30, Folder 10, SFP.
Smith have pointed out that the Catholic Church provided women with a different set of opportunities than the broader secular culture, opportunities historians have often overlooked because of Protestant-inflected understandings of the channels of gendered power.\textsuperscript{31} For instance, Patrick Allitt’s \textit{Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals Turn to Rome}, covering the period between 1840 and 1960, relegates women to a single chapter under the assumption that a monolithic patriarchal culture unified America, Britain, and the Vatican across time, preventing convert women from making any significant contributions.\textsuperscript{32} Sedgwick never felt the call to religious life, but she often engaged in theological discussions with high-ranking clergymen, confidently asserting and defending her own interpretations. She disagreed with local clergy not over theology but over money, control, and sacramental availability, mirroring her secular experience.

Beyond any analysis of their intellectual engagement, this project illuminates the contentious role of convert women in serving a rapidly-expanding Catholic community. Sedgwick’s participation in American Catholic institution-building, rooted in a sense of her own power and duty as an elite woman, often brought her into conflict with members of the hierarchy, particularly those she viewed as “beneath” her. Her bishop and local parish priest repeatedly denied Sedgwick’s assertion that she deserved a role in her parish’s decision-making process, though they simultaneously solicited her financial support by appealing to her sense of elite benevolent obligation. This analysis of the role of converts in 19\textsuperscript{th} century Catholic institution-


building contributes to the literature on gender, authority, and opportunity within the American and transnational Church during a crucial period of growth.\footnote{The story of American Catholicism in the 19th century has largely been told as one of immigrant-based growth, so the literature on this topic is large. Dolan, \textit{In Search of an American Catholicism}; Mary J. Oates, \textit{The Catholic Philanthropic Tradition in America} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Dorothy M. Brown and Elizabeth McKeown, \textit{The Poor Belong to Us: Catholic Charities and American Welfare} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Dolan, ed., \textit{The American Catholic parish: a history from 1850 to the present, 2 vol.} (New York: Paulist Press, 1987); Fitzgerald, \textit{Habits of Compassion}; McGreevy, \textit{Catholicism and American Freedom}; Dolores Liptak, \textit{Immigrants and their Church} (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989); Steven K. Green, \textit{The Bible, the school, and the Constitution: the clash that shaped the modern church-state doctrine} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).}

The first chapter situates Jane as a member of the third generation of an important Massachusetts family. Though eclipsed in power and wealth by the 1830s and 1840s, when Jane came of age, the Sedgwicks remained among the cultural elite, connected to the most prominent writers, artists, thinkers, and activists of the age. Only ten when her father died in 1831, Jane felt pressure from her mother and close relatives to be worthy of her Sedgwick name, to be a useful, educated woman who could stand as a model of virtue in her community. As she grew into adulthood, Jane worked to find usefulness, but also simply wanted to be happy; in the context of three generations of mental illness, including the suicide of her cousin Charlie in 1841, striking the right balance between the two took on greater import. The second chapter therefore explores Jane’s attempts to find usefulness and happiness, balancing independence and social connectedness. These attempts culminated in a solo trip to Norfolk, Virginia, where she worked as a teacher to prove to herself, and to her detractors, that she could live independently. Having thus tested herself, Jane moved to adulthood with a greater sense of confidence in her own abilities to chart a successful course for her life, even if that was a life lived alone.

The project’s third chapter explores Jane’s conversion to Roman Catholicism, arguing that it was her friendship with her best friend, Mary “Cheery” O’Sullivan, another convert, that
helped make Catholicism a legitimate religious option. Cheery was a convert to Catholicism, and their friendship allowed Jane to see Catholicism lived and practiced by someone of a similar social and cultural background. Even before Jane showed any interest in conversion, members of the Sedgwick family commented on how “respectable” Cheery remained, though they joked about her Catholicism from time to time. When Jane began to seriously consider conversion, her family was concerned, but in time, they reconciled themselves to her choice because it seemed to make her happy, a state of mind that mattered in the context of familial mental illness and Jane’s struggles with depression more specifically. Though several priests played important roles in the final stages of Jane’s conversion, the most important factors in her conversion were the support and friendship of other convert women of similar status and the eventual acceptance of her closest family members. As a result, rather than drawing her from her family, Jane’s conversion provided her the contentment she needed to settle down and take up her role as the dutiful daughter and maiden aunt in Stockbridge.

As she moved into her thirties, the warm, tightly-knit family in which Jane had grown up began to spin off into separate nuclear families, and then began to disappear in a series of untimely deaths. This familial collapse, and the steps Jane took to build a new life following it, are the subjects of the fourth chapter. In the space of two years, Jane suffered the loss of her sister Fanny, her mother, her nephew (Fanny’s child), and her brother-in-law (Fanny’s husband). At the age of forty, she found herself evicted from the family home so that it could be occupied by her brother’s wife and children, and losing the temporary custody of her sister’s baby, who she had cared for throughout most of his brief life. While Jane’s family feared the Church would take her away from her family, instead it provided her refuge and purpose when her family collapsed. She did not enter religious life, however; the Catholics who sustained her were not
sisters, or priests, but a growing circle of convert women like herself with whom she spent her time. With these women, Jane engaged in many of the occupations of an unmarried woman of status – traveling, attending concerts and lectures, visiting baths – but also engaged in many occupations with a distinctly Catholic flair – reading theology, visiting with important members of the clergy, and working with other convert women to gain new converts to the Church.

With the support of these women in the late 1860s, Jane entered into a work of benevolence that occupied the remainder of her life: the establishment of a Catholic school near her hometown of Stockbridge. The fifth chapter explores the contentious relationship that developed between Jane, her bishop, her local parish priest, the Sisters of St. Joseph, and a series of important Vatican clergymen. Stymied by a bishop and priest who refused to allow a poorly-funded school to become a drain on a parish already staggering under the weight of debt, a debt she herself had contributed to, Jane used her own social connections to gain the influence and intervention of a number of cardinals. In doing something that seemed natural to her as an elite woman, she deeply angered her bishop, to whom her behavior was deeply subversive. Rather than blame this on her convert status, however, Bishop O’Reilly saw Jane’s failings as a product of her gender.

The clergy with whom she interacted were as prone to cultural misunderstandings as she was, and often saw her as a selfish wealthy woman, not recognizing the financial restrictions placed on her by her gender and unmarried status. Parallel to her struggle with the Church, she fought against the financial control of her cousin William Minot III, the administrator of her trust, whose poor accounting practices and apparent dishonesty often left her in a precarious financial position. Even as she struggled with learning to live in a different, Catholic world, she faced similar difficulties in both worlds. In both worlds, she was controlled by men, if not
explicitly, then through law and custom. She constantly sought to gain some measure of control over her life by marshalling information that she could use to persuade her few male allies, especially her brother and prominent members of the hierarchy, to intercede on her behalf.

Scholarship on American religion often remains separate from the broader history of the nation, and this project seeks to integrate more fully the histories of 19th century American religion, gender, family, and class by studying converts, whose lives cannot be understood without this integration. By exploring Jane Sedgwick’s life at the intersection of several conflicting cultures, my analysis suggests new ways of understanding how conversion occurred and how it affected converts’ spiritual, social, and family lives. This project explores how Jane Sedgwick adopted the beliefs and practices of Catholicism while retaining an attachment to cultural values of her New England Unitarian upbringing, resisting pressures to “choose” one side or the other with the help and support of her fellow converts. Most importantly, however, my work situates Sedgwick in a wider world of American converts and American Catholicism, demonstrating that the acceptance and fulfillment she found was not unique, and that presumptions about American anti-Catholicism must be tested against the lived experience of converts.
Chapter 1

*How we delight in every beauty we see developed & how we shrink from the blemishes that sometimes, in spite of every care, appear upon the fruit we have watched from the bud*

~Catharine Maria Sedgwick to Jane Minot Sedgwick II, February 5, 1832

After a dinner with Charles Sedgwick in 1848, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow reported that one of their companions remarked: “everything seemed to be Sedgwick in this region; the very grasshoppers in the fields chirp, ‘Sedgwick! Sedgwick!’”¹ While many members of the family lived in New York or Boston, the Stockbridge area was their familial gathering place, their emotional home. Unlike most of the cousins in her generation, Jane actually spent the majority of her life with Stockbridge as her permanent home, and its cultural world, so intertwined with her own family’s history, had a profound impact on her life. It was in Stockbridge that Jane’s Sedgwick forbears established themselves as people of status and political power, while grappling intimately with questions of mental illness, religious conversion, and the roles and rights of the less powerful in society, all issues Jane later faced in her own life. Growing up Sedgwick meant growing up with great privilege and great pressure from a sprawling family that had firmly established ideas on many of the decisions that faced Jane as she grew up. After her father’s death in 1831 following a serious battle with mental illness, Jane faced increasing pressure to develop into a “useful” young woman, whose character and behavior would live up to the Sedgwick name.

In their native Berkshires and beyond, the prominent and prolific Sedgwicks loom large in the history of the early republic because of their political and cultural influence, their connections with significant figures in the United States and abroad, and the vast correspondence

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they left behind. Historians who explore the papers left by the Sedgwicks usually focus on the early republican political leader and jurist Theodore, his wife Pamela Dwight Sedgwick, and the families of the youngest four of their seven children: the lawyers Harry and Robert, the novelist Catharine, and Charles, clerk of the Lenox court. In works on social change, gender roles, manners, sibling relationships, romantic love, and even the celebration of Christmas, scholars have used Sedgwick letters and journals to sketch a picture of the archetypal antebellum upper-middle class New England family.\(^2\) Catharine, in particular, as one of the most popular authors of the antebellum period, has been so often treated by scholars of gender that it is unusual \textit{not} to see her writing cited in work on the era.

The value placed on Jane’s parents’ generation by scholars was mirrored, in a sense, by those who knew them. So revered by their family and friends were the seven surviving children of Theodore and Pamela that on the occasion of the death of Frances, the second child, an in-law of the family stated:

They are all a beautiful and touching example of the devotion of brothers & sisters to each other. . . . They leave none behind them to compare with these elder branches, but still the blood of the Sedgwicks is apparent more or less in each one of the second generation.\(^3\)

That “second generation,” the Sedgwick cousins who came of age in the 1830s and 1840s, has received comparatively less scholarly attention, despite leaving behind its own voluminous records. Jane herself is scarcely mentioned. Part of the reason may be the sheer number of

\(^2\) Timothy Kenslea, \textit{Sedgwicks in Love: Courtship, Engagement, and Marriage in the Early Republic}, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2006); C. Dallett Hemphill, \textit{Siblings: Brothers & Sisters in American History} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Stephen Nissenbaum, \textit{The Battle for Christmas} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996). Placing the Sedgwick family in the shifting social landscape of the early republic is a difficult task; their financial status was never as high as their educational, cultural, and political statuses suggested. Kenslea describes the family as “wealthy.” Nissenbaum notes that while the Sedgwicks had a certain social pedigree, they were not terribly wealthy. Mary Kelley describes the family as “elites.”

\(^3\) Louisa Davis Minot to William Minot, June 5, 1842, Box 110, Folder 9, SFP. Hereafter “Aunt Louisa” and “Uncle William” in the text, LDM and WMI in citation.
cousins and the overlap of generations; Theodore and Pamela had nearly forty grandchildren, the first of whom was born when their youngest son Charles was only seven. More important, however, was the fact that Jane and the cousins with whom she shared her childhood were never as prominently involved in the notable social, political, or economic changes of their period as their parents and grandparents had been. Those changes reshaped American social structure profoundly, and while Jane’s parents and grandparents were clearly members of the economic elite, Jane’s status cannot be so simply and easily defined.

To understand Jane, part of an extended cousinage that had to live up to greatness, and to understand the Sedgwick family as a whole, it is important to locate them not only in the Early Republic but in a longer trajectory of social change. As Mary Kelley has argued, Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s autobiographical writings from the 1850s highlight the tension between the world of Theodore Sedgwick and the world of his children and grandchildren. Opining that her Federalist father longed for a United States that was “not without a strong aristocratic element,” Catharine herself had come to somewhat uneasy terms with the increasingly egalitarian world of the early republic.

For her nieces and nephews, who came of age in the 1830s and 1840s, the white male political egalitarianism of Jacksonian America was taken for granted, and they occupied themselves with other demands for social equality in America and political equality abroad, Jane as much as or more than any of her male relatives. While the family’s branches remained wealthier than most, far wealthier families began move to the Berkshires, building stately part-time residences that far outstripped the Sedgwick mansion, the most impressive residence

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Stockbridge when it was erected in the 1780s. Yet in mindset, in culture, and in opportunity, the Sedgwick family remained elite, even as American social structure changed around them. Jane’s childhood and young adulthood, while situated in a period of rapid social and cultural transformation, were primarily shaped by the Early Republican ideals of the privileged family in which she was raised.

In addition helping us understand the place of the Sedgwicks within their culture, an examination of Jane’s parents and grandparents demonstrates the particularities of the pressures she faced as a child. Secondary literature can help us situate her in her culture, but an examination of the generations that preceded her, and the specificities of their experiences, is vital for understanding Jane’s choices and the reactions her family members had to those choices. The nuances of her family’s history often complicate the broad strokes with which historians of the Early Republic speak of gender, status, marriage, family, and mental illness. The Sedgwicks’ own constant emphasis on their legacy and unspoken fears of declension – both social and personal – make attention the earlier generations important for our analysis of Jane’s life. For the Sedgwicks, character was the basis of everything, and the responsibility of ensuring the proper development of character in Sedgwick children fell to all members of the family; as Catharine Sedgwick wrote to her young niece Jane in 1832: “You know not my dear child how anxiously we watch the formation of your characters - How we delight in every beauty we see developed & how we shrink from the blemishes that sometimes, in spite of every care, appear upon the fruit we have watched from the bud.”

To understand the fruit, we must look further back than the bud, to the branch and the tree, not because family character is inherited, but because the Sedgwick family consciously looked to their own history and tried to shape the next generation.

6 CMS to JMSII, February 2, 1832, Catharine Maria Sedgwick Papers, Reel 16.
to be worthy of the tree that bore them.

The story of the Sedgwick family in the Berkshires began with the marriage of Pamela Dwight and Theodore Sedgwick on April 17, 1774. Pamela Dwight was one of two children, and the only daughter, of Brigadier General Joseph and Abigail Dwight. Her parents’ marriage had merged the families of two of the “river gods,” the social and political elites who dominated the Connecticut River valley in Massachusetts. Abigail Williams Sergeant came to Stockbridge as a child with her family; her father Ephraim was one of the wealthiest men of Hampshire County, and one of the four men granted land in the new English settlement of Stockbridge. He became the town’s largest landowner and first first selectman. When Abigail and Joseph married in 1752, Abigail was already a widow, having earlier married Rev. John Sergeant, the leader of the Stockbridge mission to the Algonquin tribes of the Berkshires. Upon his death, the town’s white elite and the remaining Indians chose to call the already-married Jonathan Edwards, preventing Abigail from replacing her husband in the same stroke.7 She instead married another river god, Joseph Dwight, who had made his fortune in land speculation, and moved south to Sheffield.8 In her autobiography, Catharine Maria Sedgwick recalls a contemporary’s description of Abigail as “tall and erect, dignified, precise in manner, yet benevolent and pleasing...[her manner of dress] marked the gentlewoman...”9 Pamela’s mother remained a strong presence in the Sedgwick family until her death in 1791.10

7 In calling Jonathan Edwards, the members of Stockbridge clearly meant to send a message to the Williams family, which had been instrumental in forcing Edwards out of an earlier position in Northampton. Benjamin W. Dwight, The History of the Descendants of John Dwight, of Dedham Mass, vol. 2 (New York: John F. Trow & Son, 1874), 625–627; Kenslea, Sedgwicks in Love, 2–3.
Theodore Sedgwick’s upbringing was nowhere near as privileged. Born in Hartford, Connecticut and raised in Cornwall, Connecticut, Theodore Sedgwick was the third son of a middling shopkeeping and farm family whose patriarch died when Theodore was eleven. At fifteen, he entered Yale, the only brother to go to college, but was expelled right before his graduation, possibly for participating in violent protest against the Stamp Act.\(^{11}\) Theodore managed to salvage his career, very quickly, by moving to Great Barringon, Massachusetts, to serve as clerk for his second cousin Mark Hopkins. After less than a year studying the law, Sedgwick was admitted to the Massachusetts bar, and set up shop in Sheffield in 1767. Establishing his place as a local elite, he engaged in politics, drafting the Sheffield Resolves in 1773 to protest British policies in the colonies.\(^{12}\) In 1771, his first wife, Eliza Mason Sedgwick, and her unborn child, died of smallpox she caught from her husband. Four years after her death, he married Pamela Dwight.\(^{13}\) The path to their union was not smooth, as Pamela and her mother were both concerned that Theodore had never made a public confession of faith, and Pamela in particular worried that differences in their religious beliefs would make them incompatible.\(^{14}\) Despite Theodore’s religious indifference, one that would persist until his deathbed conversion, Pamela’s children and grandchildren were devout Christians of various kinds, particularly the women. It was at Catharine’s own urging that her father became a Unitarian at the end of his life.

Catharine Sedgwick’s autobiographical writings in the 1850s ascribed a different reason to Abigail Dwight’s objections over her parents’ marriage: “My mother’s family... objected to my father on the score of family, they priding themselves on their gentle blood; but as he

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\(^{11}\) Kenslea, *Sedgwicks in Love*, 3–4
\(^{13}\) Kenslea, *Sedgwicks in Love*, 4–5.
\(^{14}\) Ibid., 14.
afterward rose far beyond their highest water-mark, the objection was cast into oblivion by those who made it.”  

While there is no surviving evidence of this objection, it reveals Catharine’s consciousness of the importance of status in the Sedgwick world. That Catharine would point to this as the problem is an indication of how much pride the family took in Theodore’s political and professional successes, and how much emphasis they placed on being useful, productive members of society.

The marriage may have begun as one of unequals, but Theodore’s star rose quickly; he was swiftly elected to the Massachusetts legislature, the Continental Congress, and the United States House of Representatives. He was also professionally successful, perhaps achieving his most famous success when he represented two enslaved people in Sheffield in their suit against their owner John Ashley, a freedom suit which, with others, led to the elimination of slavery in Massachusetts, and which committed the Sedgwick family to an anti-slavery position.  

Sedgwick employed one of those enslaved people, Elizabeth Freeman (Mumbet), who remained in the employ of the family for more than twenty years. In addition to his increasing prominence in the legal world, Sedgwick’s economic status also rose as the result of several real estate speculations in Massachusetts and western New York.  

While Theodore’s star rose, Pamela’s waned. As mother of seven surviving children, the first named after Theodore’s dead wife Eliza, she often begged her husband to return to Stockbridge. As Theodore’s political career continued in the House of Representatives, his time away from home grew longer and longer, and after her mother’s death in 1791, Pamela was left

16 Kenslea, *Sedgwicks in Love*, 16.
17 Welch, “Theodore Sedgwick (1746-1813): Federalist.”
alone with many children to raise. She began to experience periods of mental illness in the late 1790s, for which she was treated in a hospital several times. After serving as Speaker of the House, Theodore chose not to run for re-election in 1800. He returned home, but two years later he accepted a seat on the Massachusetts Supreme Court of Judicature at the other end of the state, despite his wife’s pleas for him to remain at home.

In Theodore’s estimation, his wife’s problems came from overburdening herself with “domestic chores,” and he urged her to take on more hired help. Pamela, conscious of her periods of illness as “desertions” of her obligations as a wife and mother, threw herself into her work anew during her psychological remissions. Whatever the cause of the illness, Pamela believed the absence of her husband contributed to it; her husband believed, or convinced himself, that it was tied to obligations that were not his responsibility. Even if he were to have stayed home, the solution would still have been to hire more help. While Pamela might not have been able to accomplish the duties that had fallen to her in life, that was no reason for Theodore to relinquish the duties he felt he had to his nation and his party. As a colleague told him, “A man of your standing in society ought not to be buried alive in Stockbridge.” In September of 1807, after a brief stay in Stockbridge, Theodore Sedgwick once more headed back to court in Boston, despite his wife’s distress. He was not at home when she died a few days later.

His relationship with his children cooled following their mother’s death and his swift remarriage to a woman of whom his children did not approve. At the same time, he required his

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daughter Frances to remain in an abusive marriage that he had arranged.\textsuperscript{23} During the last years of their mother’s life, the Sedgwick children began to refer to their father as “the judge” as often as they used the term “father,” and Catharine’s praise for her father must be weighed against her tacit acknowledgment that his choices certainly did not help her ill mother.\textsuperscript{24} To make matters worse, Theodore Sedgwick’s marriage to his third wife was followed quickly by the resignation of Mumbet, a decision that was devastating to the children, especially Catharine. Initially, the third Mrs. Sedgwick was a mild annoyance, but within a few years her step-children utterly despised her. They decried her profligate spending and the ill health that came from her “mode of living” – to Catharine’s mind, an excessive use of alcohol.\textsuperscript{25}

The eldest child, Theodore Sedgwick II, was clearly the favored son, and while he received a Yale education, Harry and Robert went to Williams College, and Charles, the youngest child, did not receive a college education at all. While noted for inheriting his father’s talent for debate, Harry Sedgwick was disappointed in his fortune, and nearly got himself expelled from Williams in his first term. He expressed frustration at having to clerk for his father in Stockbridge, rather than in Albany or Litchfield, Connecticut. He ran for local political office in 1810 and failed. After their father’s death in 1813, the Sedgwick children engaged in a protracted legal battle with their stepmother over the will. When the conflict became ugly, Harry, just starting in his legal career, damaged his professional reputation almost before it existed.\textsuperscript{26} Already slightly battered, but always headstrong, Harry Sedgwick began to look for a wife in Boston immediately after his father’s death in 1813, and the circle of women in which he and his

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 70–82.
\textsuperscript{24} Kelley, “Negotiating a Self,” 377; Kenslea, Sedgwicks in Love, 26.
\textsuperscript{25} Kenslea, Sedgwicks in Love, 55–7.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 53–69, 204.
brother Robert circulated was known as “the friendlies.”

One of the young women in this group was eighteen-year-old Jane Minot.

Jane Minot, whom Harry would marry, was the youngest of two children born to Judge George Richards and Mary Speakman Minot. George Richards Minot was a probate judge in Suffolk County and municipal court judge in Boston, and a prolific author. Like Theodore Sedgwick, he was a staunch Federalist. He died in 1802, when his daughter was seven, and when his wife died nine years later, young Jane went to live with her brother William and his new wife Louisa Davis Minot. She looked to William as her first real model of romantic partnership and family life. As an adolescent, she discussed this with the other “friendlies.” Like other women of the time, she used her family and social circle to work out what she wanted out of the life ahead of her, jotting down reflections in her commonplace book. She worried about whether she would find love, and whether she would prove capable of loving a spouse in the kind of companionate marriage that was becoming the ideal in her age. Afraid that losing her parents at such a young age had perhaps stunted her capacity to love and be loved, she mentally prepared herself for a life as a maiden aunt to William and Louisa’s family, believing she might die as early as the age of thirty. The role of maiden aunt would have put her in the company of many other women in Massachusetts, a state with twice the national average of spinsters between the 1830s and 1870s. But even when taking on her “chosen” role, caring for young William Minot II, she doubted her proficiency. She fainted on one occasion while carrying her young

27 Ibid., 86–126.
28 “Character of Judge Minot” in Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society (Published by the Society, 1802), 86-96.
nephew and was terrified that she’d killed him. \(^\text{32}\)

Even as a young woman, and even as she consoled herself over her potential early death as a spinster, Jane Minot formed ideas about the proper way to raise children. In a telling passage from her commonplace book, she laid out her views on changing ideas of parenthood:

It is becoming fashionable to make children happy in order to make them good. . . I would not cause children any superfluous pain but I believe that the earlier they are familiarized to their condition in the world the better they will act in it. Nothing is plainer than that this is a state of probation, and sorrow would not have been sent to us if it was not a means of improvement. . . If we are constantly receiving happiness in youth when we are older every attention to misfortune will be an effort of duty. Our first impulse will be to shun it when it comes to others or ourselves.

Her reflections on the new “fashions” in child-rearing were not baseless anxieties; Lee Chambers-Schiller’s examination of literature on parenting argues that the duties of fathers and mothers underwent a reconceptualization in the first few decades of the 19\(^{\text{th}}\) century, with greater emphasis placed on the role of the mother in child-rearing and the sentimental bonds between mother and child. As this emphasis grew in the antebellum period, commentators expressed the same fears Jane Minot had: that children raised in this fashion “lacked the important republican virtues of frugality, industry, self-control, and moderation.”\(^\text{33}\)

Jane Minot’s ruminations on proper child-rearing appear to reflect older Calvinist views on child-rearing. Her family’s religious beliefs were far more complicated, however. She was a confessing Unitarian throughout her life, but attended King’s Chapel, the first Unitarian church in New England. Unlike most American Unitarian churches of the period, which came to Unitarianism from Congregationalism, King’s Chapel had originally been an Anglican church,

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and long retained a unique Anglican/Unitarian style of worship.\textsuperscript{34} Her Calvinist strains of thought reflect a certain New England culture long steeped in those values, despite any person’s given denominational orientation. Her views on child-rearing were also indicative of her particular orientation as an elite woman who valued order, reliability, and self-discipline. She even recorded small successes, like when she forced herself to darn a small hole in her stocking before it had a chance to become a larger one, not because darning the stocking was a great achievement, but because “little exertions of this sort very much smooth the way for difficult virtues.”\textsuperscript{35}

These ruminations took on increased importance in June of 1816, when Jane and Harry began to court, and to fall in love. Their families had long been intertwined as actors in the state legal system; their fathers had both been judges, and even Louisa Davis Minot’s father had been solicitor-general at the time. The families had known each other socially, as well, as Harry and Robert fumbled their way through a series of disastrous flirtations and courtships among “the friendlies” through the spring of 1816. But by July 16 of that year, Harry and Jane engaged to marry, and their letters from the period of their engagement reveal an intensification of emotion. While William Minot did not block his sister from marriage with Harry, Harry and Robert’s letters make it clear that such intervention was a possibility.\textsuperscript{36} William wanted to make sure that his sister would be well cared for, and when Harry pondered moving to either New York or Stockbridge to start his career, William made it clear that his sister was used to “town life” and that removing her from that would do her harm. This seems to have helped Harry make up his

\textsuperscript{34} Carl Scovel and Charles Conrad Forman, \textit{Journey Toward Independence: King's Chapel's Transition to Unitarianism} (Boston: Skinner House, 1993), 75-98.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 108–120.
mind. He chose New York, and moved there in the fall of 1816, joining his brother Robert in practice. Jane Minot Sedgwick joined him in 1817 when they married.  

During the separation of their engagement, the couple’s letters demonstrate an ongoing discussion about the roles and responsibilities of married men and women. Both Jane and Harry viewed those roles and responsibilities as fluid, and open to negotiation, in ways that their parents’ generation might not have recognized. More specifically, though, they reveal the apprehensions of a young couple who remained strangers in many ways. As they were about to embark upon a life together, Jane was anxious about her future husband’s temper. She felt it was no threat to her, but she was deeply concerned that he would hurt his prospects by squabbling with important people as he was launching a career. Both were Unitarian, but while this put them in good company in Boston, it left them on the religious fringes in New York, where there was no Unitarian Church, and Harry’s willingness to defend his beliefs vociferously resulted in a falling out with important leaders in the Young Men’s Missionary Society, and an intense disagreement with a Presbyterian minister who chastised Harry for trimming his nails during a sermon. Harry’s reputation in Boston had been damaged by his behavior during the disposition of his father’s estate and by his clumsy courtships before engagement to Jane, so they both keenly understood the importance of his finding success in New York. A few days before their marriage, Harry and William Minot placed Jane’s property in trust to protect it from her husband’s future creditors, and “to support her in the event of his death or distress.” Her brother

37 Ibid., 124–5.
38 Ibid., 155–6.
39 Ibid., 159–64 Jane was aware of Frances Watson’s experience with her abusive husband, and made it clear to Harry that she had no fear of his temper being turned on her.
William, who had been her guardian since their father’s death, was the trustee.  

In 1818, only a year after they married, Harry and Jane welcomed a son into the world, naming him George after his Minot grandfather. Baby George passed away in early 1821, just as his mother was about to give birth to her second child. This baby, Jane Minot Sedgwick II, was born on February 20th, 1821. Her birth, so soon after her brother’s death, made her a bittersweet presence in the house, and her mother transferred her hopes for George onto this new baby. Writing to Louisa a few weeks after Jane’s birth, she described the good health of the “fat looking baby” with “beautiful form” she held at her breast. She explicitly recognized her daughter’s importance in the family:

> If my child is permitted to live we shall receive all the alleviation possible for the misery which has this winter fallen upon us but the life of a little child seems to me to be the most uncertain & delicate of all the slight foundations upon which we rear our hopes of happiness.

Even before she became aware of the difficulties in her parents’ marriage, young Jane would serve as a special comfort to her mother. Jane was her mother’s “sweet companion,” preventing her mother’s days from simply being “full of the keenest regrets & most gloomy forebodings” as Harry’s financial ventures failed. Despite, and perhaps because of, this heavy sadness, Jane Senior wrote often to her sister-in-law of her child’s growth and progress: “She is good & as far as we can judge intelligent - she is the delight of my whole time.”

Soon Jane would become the oldest sister in a family of four, joined by her sister Frances (Fanny) in September 1822, her brother Henry Dwight II (Hal) in August 1824, and her sister

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40 Ibid., 175.  
41 From this point on, “Jane” refers to Jane Minot Sedgwick II, with “Jane Senior” referring to her mother in sentences likely to cause confusion.  
42 JMSI to LDM, March 16, 1821, Folder 28, Box 6, SFP.  
43 JMSI to LDM, September 27, 1821, Box 28, Folder 18, SFP.  
44 JMSI to LDM, December 1821, Box 28, Folder 17, SFP.
Louisa in October 1826. By the time Fanny was born, however, the women of the family had relocated to Stockbridge, the last place Jane Senior had wanted to live. During their courtship, Harry had made her several important promises, first of which being that she would never have to make her permanent home in Stockbridge. Raised in Boston with her only relatives, Jane Senior dreaded the thought of being separated from her brother and sister-in-law, but also dreaded the isolation of rural living, particularly in Stockbridge.\footnote{Kenslea, \textit{Sedgwicks in Love}, 124.}

\footnote{Ibid., 204–5.}

\footnote{Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” \textit{Signs} 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 10.}

A second promise made during courtship was that Harry would not engage in business practices that might jeopardize the family’s financial security, but in the early years of their marriage, he nearly ruined their finances by engaging in risky investments. Breaking the second promise led Harry to break the first, and he sent his daughter and pregnant wife to live in Stockbridge to save money. Companionate and loving though their marriage might have been, it was not lacking in the hierarchies of the day. Harry remained in New York while his wife and children made a home in the Berkshires that became more permanent with every passing day.\footnote{Ibid., 204–5.}

Harry and his wife may have been a love match, a companionate marriage, but when it came down to it, Jane Senior still lacked control over her family’s economic well-being, and when her husband’s errors resulted in financial constraints, she had no choice but to go where she was told. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg emphasizes the female world connected by home, church, and visiting, emotionally separate from the male world.\footnote{Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” \textit{Signs} 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 10.} The removal of the Sedgwick women to Stockbridge emphasized the \textit{physical} distance between Henry and his family, just as Pamela and Theodore Sedgwick remained separate for much of their marriage. Even with the presence of
young Hal, and Uncle Charles nearby in Lenox, Jane’s early childhood was very much centered around her mother, her sisters, and her aunts.

Regardless of her mother’s misgivings about the family’s relocation to Berkshire County, Jane’s childhood in Stockbridge had much of the charm her father’s generation described, and she was a happy and mischievous child. Before she could even form letters herself, she was engaging in the letter-writing that characterized her family, dictating letters to her mother, who took them down faithfully. While this training in letter-writing was vital to a young woman, Jane’s earliest attempts produced such conversational gems as “I thank you very much for that warming pan you sent me but I am very sorry to tell you that I broke it. Tell yr mother that I love her very much & send her one million of kisses,” followed by a note from her mother to her sister-in-law Louisa explaining that she couldn’t wait for Jane to produce anything better before sending off the mail.\footnote{JMSII to Julia Minot, 1820s, Box 86, Folder 4, SFP.} Louisa had been her sister-in-law’s model for wifehood and motherhood as she pondered her future as a teenager, and she remained Jane Senior’s primary confidante in the early years of her marriage, a lifeline to the Boston society she so missed in her Stockbridge isolation. As a result, young Jane’s first correspondents and friends were her Minot cousins, especially Francis (Frank) and Julia, the youngest of Louisa and William Minot’s five children.

In the late 1820s, Harry began to exhibit serious signs of mental illness, as well as the near complete loss of his eyesight, a condition that both Fanny and Jane would suffer from periodically. His erratic behavior was characterized by a feeling of deep persecution; he sued the Boston asylum that was unable to cure him, and threatened to sue his brother Robert when he attempted to dissolve the partnership due to Harry’s inability to work. In his distress, the temper that his prospective bride had so feared seemed likely to destroy him. Unable to keep up his
practice, and in need of care, he joined his wife and children in Stockbridge.\textsuperscript{49} At least once, around 1829, Harry entered the newly-established Hartford Retreat for the Insane, and Charles wrote to his wife that while his sister-in-law was bearing up well and putting on a brave face, he saw “a silent and secret wearing of her spirit” underneath it all.\textsuperscript{50}

Jane Senior found herself overwhelmed with the obligations presented by her husband’s illness, and began to send the children away periodically to relatives in Boston and Quincy. Childhood illnesses, distressing under the best of circumstances, became too much to handle, as when young Jane sprained her foot and completely disrupted family plans.\textsuperscript{51} While Jane was traveling from Stockbridge to Boston to join her siblings at a relative’s house, Jane Senior confessed to her brother-in-law Charles, “I was as anxious about the child as it was possible for me to be considering my anxiety for her father.” In letters to her children during her husband’s illness, she tried to explain to them what was going on, telling them she missed their “sweet voices” but asking them for their patience while she cared for their “poor sick father.”\textsuperscript{52} For the wife and mother, sending Jane away was particularly painful; though her eldest daughter was “a great comfort,” she sadly acknowledged that her husband’s needs were so “boundless that I must retrench somewhere.”\textsuperscript{53}

While the care of an ill husband and the management of four young children fell within the prescribed sphere of a wife and mother in the early republic, Jane Senior faced the prospect of more daunting challenges. As her husband’s condition declined, she had to manage the family’s finances as well. It seems the family had not moved into their own home when they

\textsuperscript{49} Kenslea, \textit{Sedgwicks in Love}, 205.
\textsuperscript{50} Charles Sedgwick, \textit{Letters from Charles Sedgwick to His Family and Friends} (Boston: Privately Printed, 1870), 59.
\textsuperscript{51} JMSI to CS, n.d. [1831 or earlier], Box 85, Folder 27, SFP.
\textsuperscript{52} JMSI to CS, n.d. [1828-1831], Box 85, Folder 27, SFP.
\textsuperscript{53} JMSI to CS, n.d., Box 85, Folder 27, SFP.
relocated in Stockbridge; they may have rented a home or stayed with family. During her husband’s illness, the family evidently decided that a house should be built for the family, and Charles (in consultation with Robert) eventually stepped in to assist his sister-in-law. Charles explained to his brother that Jane had a good idea about money, and of what would make a “large and convenient” house, but was rather ignorant of how to actually go about building one.

She knows it is necessary to hire a mason and a carpenter, and to pay them; that one works in wood and the other in mortar; but she takes it for granted (from having lived in cities, I suppose) that when they are told to come, the mortar and the wood will come with them, of course.

Rather than blame this on her sex, however, Charles attributed his sister-in-law’s misunderstanding about house-building to her city-breeding, noting that she had a “general idea of the value of money” and a certain talent for judging “what is beautiful and becoming.”

It is quite clear that no one in the Sedgwick family questioned Jane Sedgwick’s ability or right to manage her family’s affairs during her husband’s illness. While she certainly could not take over his law practice, she took on the entire management of the household and his medical care. The comparison to the division of labor in the earlier generation of Theodore Sedgwick and Pamela Dwight Sedgwick during the latter’s illness is notable. While Jane Senior could and did take on her husband’s responsibilities when he was incapacitated, the idea of taking on his wife’s obligations was unthinkable for Theodore, even though he himself believed those obligations were causing his wife’s distress in the first place. While Theodore’s solution was simply to hire more help, there is no indication that Jane Senior took on additional servants to manage while her husband was ill, but rather chose to place her children with family members, as was common

54 Sedgwick, Letters from Charles Sedgwick, 55.
at the time.\footnote{Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World,” 11.}

When Jane and her siblings were home, however, and when Harry was in his more lucid periods, letters from Jane Senior indicate that the family enjoyed good times, and that Harry was never happier or more clear-headed than when he was playing with the children. He enjoyed seeing Jane and Fanny’s dance recital in town, and when Jane was away in Boston, staying with the Minots to give her mother some relief, he grew “impatient for her return.”\footnote{JMSI to LDM, n.d., Box 28, Folder 10, SFP.} Jane Senior, with the help of her sister-in-law Catharine, engaged an 18-year-old woman to teach French to Jane and Fanny (and others in the village, to help defray the cost), keeping the family intact while providing genteel educational opportunities.\footnote{JMSI to LDM, n.d., Box 28, Folder 17, SFP.} While Charles and his family planned their winter journey to visit the Sedgwick branches living in Albany, Jane Senior wrote to her sister-in-law Frances and said that if Harry continued to be tranquil at home, she would keep her family where it was, painting a picture of the healing effects of a quiet, loving domestic world.

He mingles in all their little games & never seems to me devoid of all sadness except when playing with them. They are of course very fond of him & never wishing him to go out if they can prevent it. That this source of unfeigned delight should [be] reserved to Harry amidst the wreck of all other happenings is a cause of deep and unceasing gratitude to me. \footnote{JMSI to Frances Sedgwick Watson, n.d. [late 1820s], Box 85, Folder 26, SFP.}

Part of the reason Jane Senior had never wanted to live in Stockbridge was the isolation; yet although circumstances were not ideal, this time of Harry’s illness was also the last time her nuclear family would be intact, and in once place, to enjoy each other. Pamela Sedgwick had believed that having her husband at home would have helped soothe her troubled mind, but she was never able to test her theory; her daughter-in-law, twenty-five years later, was certain that it
helped ease Harry’s burden. Despite the presence of illness, Jane and Harry spent Christmas 1829 listening to “peal[s] of merriment” as their children enjoyed the presents in their stockings.\textsuperscript{59}

Two days before Christmas 1831, Harry died in Stockbridge, leaving behind five siblings, a wife, and four children between the ages of five and ten. He took his place in the Sedgwick burial plot with his parents and his oldest sister Eliza, who had died in 1827. Charles, writing to Robert a few days after their brother’s death, consoled himself and his brother with the belief that they had done all they knew how to do, to alleviate Harry’s suffering. Charles gave primary credit, however, to Harry’s wife.

I suppose it is not possible to tell, or to calculate the extent of the blessing that Jane has been to him. Independent of everything that she did to keep his mind in the proper track, to divert it from that train which was filled with evil, to soothe and to comfort him, the amount of physical suffering which she saved him by her ceaseless watching and her judicious treatment, must have been immense. Jane has omitted nothing that she could do, she has done nothing wrong, and it is impossible that she should not, feel the happiness of having thus acted. If it is not secured to her as far as it can be by the fidelity of others, there will be some inexpiable sins to answer for.\textsuperscript{60}

But the happiness of Harry’s family – their family – was also a major concern for the woman left behind to run it. As she began to comprehend the magnitude of the task before her, she reached out to those who had become her family. In a letter to her sister-in-law Frances, Jane Senior’s words suggest anxiety that the family into which she had married would see Harry’s death as severing of their familial connection: “My dear sister, though the tie which has visibly united us is broken I trust the union of our hearts is too [unreadable] ever to be sundered.”\textsuperscript{61} Even as she leaned on her brother and sister-in-law, her closest friends, in the wake of her husband’s death,

\textsuperscript{59} Nissenbaum, \textit{The Battle for Christmas}, 163.
\textsuperscript{60} Sedgwick, \textit{Letters from Charles Sedgwick}, 66–7.
\textsuperscript{61} JMSI to Frances Sedgwick Watson, 1832, Box 85, Folder 26, SFP.
she recognized that her children were Sedgwicks, and that they lived hundreds of miles from
their Minot relatives Boston; her success as a single parent in Stockbridge would depend on the
Sedgwick family’s support.

Jane Minot Sedgwick’s concern and worry over the prospect of a life of single
parenthood consumed her in the months following her husband’s death, and she wrote to Frances
and Louisa of the shroud that had fallen over her, interrupted only by her children’s joys and
fights.

I go on in the same monotonous course of life which you might expect in my present
condition - reading & writing letters in the morn-g and schooling Jane in the afternoon,
till the other young ones come home & then devoting myself to them till bed-time -
During the fine moonlight nights I sometimes walk out with them in order to let them
enjoy a slide upon the ice. One evening they led me to the meeting house because there
was a fine glaze of ice - I seated myself on the horse-beach with my eyes fixed upon that
g rave yard where I shall sometime be united to their father - the little creatures played on
in high sport...

Immediately after her husband’s death, the care of those “little creatures” consumed their mother.
Writing to Frances, she acknowledged that in many ways, owing to Harry’s illness, she had been
the sole parent and household manager for several years, and that his passing had actually
diminished her responsibilities. Still, his needs had been great, and she admitted: “my mind was
has so long been accustomed to attend only to him that I have been invisible to other cares.”
Believing she had “neglect[ed]” her children, and cognizant of the “double responsibility” she
bore, she turned her focus to those children, and to Jane in particular. Her views on child-rearing,
documented in her commonplace book before she was married, had remained consistent, and
after her husband’s death, she felt more than ever the importance of raising her children to be
dutiful, responsible, and strong enough to bear up under life’s troubles.62

62 Ibid.
The children had been schooled locally during their father’s illness, and immediately after his death, Jane, now nearly eleven, was schooled at home by her mother. But in the ensuing months, Jane Senior became increasingly concerned about her eldest child’s development, and began to think of sending her to Boston for school. Jane’s position as the eldest child made her of paramount importance, of course, but her age also added to the urgency of the situation. It was not her lack of intellectual progress that worried her mother, but rather a lack of “moral” progress towards a steady character that would support her in her life as an adult woman. Eventually she sent her daughter to live with the brother and sister-in-law who had raised her when her own parents had died. She entrusted Louisa with the care and raising of young Jane in Boston, where the child attended Inglis’ School for Ladies in the winter and early spring of 1833.\(^{63}\) While Harry Sedgwick’s death certainly had an effect on the family’s life and situation, it was common for young women of Jane’s standing and age to be sent off to school at this point, either boarding school or day school. Aunt Louisa’s presence as a sort of surrogate mother eased Jane’s separation from home and her transition into society, while reassuring Jane Senior that her daughter’s developing character would be well supported at home as well as at school.\(^{64}\)

When she sent her daughter to Boston, Jane Senior wrote to Louisa, “I submit Jane entirely to your guidance for this winter & I trust you may find her rather less trouble than when she was last at yr house.” Expressions of frustration with Jane’s behavior, rather than her intellectual advancement, appear in every letter from her mother in this period.\(^{65}\) In February 1833, having received a letter from Mrs. Theodore Sedgwick II about how Jane was doing in

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65 JMSI to LDM, January 1833, Box 29, Folder 8, SFP.
Boston, Jane Senior wrote to Louisa that she was “far more anxious for [Jane’s] morals than her intellectual acquirements [sic],” and was more interested in the attention to duty that study could provide. After all, as Jane Senior had noted in her teenage years, it was important to learn the value of darning the small hole before it could become a large one.

Jane’s behavior was the source of great embarrassment to her mother, and she apologized profusely to Louisa for the trouble caused when Jane lost track of some personal item: “Her extreme carelessness I am aware must make her a very inconvenient member of any family. . . she must be made to feel in some way that such heedlessness is wickedness.” The distress over this particular aspect of her eldest daughter’s behavior is palpable in Jane Senior’s letters, as is her lack of faith in her daughter’s prospects for womanhood and even her general likeability as a person.

I am really surprised that you should have grown so fond of Jane - there is so much about her that is irritating & discouraging that she is likely to wear out her best friends - but as providence has sent her such a blessing far be it from me to interfere with its full operation.

This aspect of her childhood personality – the propensity to get distracted and lose things or leave tasks unfinished – seems to have been what worried her mother the most. Jane had only turned twelve two days before her mother composed this letter, but worries about her adult life were already beginning to consume her mother, and may have been the motivation for sending her to Boston in the first place.

The tone of her mother’s comments about young Jane’s behavior and worth must be placed alongside the reports coming from Louisa, her most trusted friend. A few days after Jane

66 Susan Anne Livingston Ridley Sedgwick, grand-daughter of the former New Jersey governor William Livingston. Hereafter “Aunt Susan.”
67 JMSI to LDM, February 23, 1833, Box 29, Folder 8, SFP.
68 Ibid.
Senior sent the letter complaining about her daughter’s “irritating & discouraging” behavior, she would have received one from her sister-in-law detailing the “grand success” of Jane’s birthday party. Louisa painted a picture of a happy, well-behaved child who “rec’d all her guests with ease & a very gracious manner,” and was the host of what the “grown up folks” called “the pleasantest party they had attended all winter.”\textsuperscript{69} As one of the goals of a young woman’s education in this period was the development of these sorts of social graces, Jane’s successful party was not a diversion, but an important part of her maturation.\textsuperscript{70} While Louisa understood her sister-in-law’s concerns, she seemed to take a less pessimistic view of Jane’s worth and prospects for improvement. She found her an agreeable and enjoyable child, and would retain her position as one of Jane’s staunchest defenders for the rest of her life.

As these letters indicate, Jane Senior was deeply concerned about her daughter’s perfectibility, and Jane’s impeccable behavior as hostess seems to have done little to change her mother’s mind, because Jane Senior proposed ending her daughter’s schooling in Boston shortly thereafter. In mid-March, Louisa sent another letter, asking her sister-in-law to come visit and see Jane’s improvement before pulling her out of school. She argued that Jane had improved about as much as could be expected in such a short time. This was, she said, a direct result of her schooling and the influence of her cousins, so Jane should be allowed to remain in school for the rest of the year except for a six week summer vacation in Stockbridge. Jane’s Scottish teachers, Mrs. Richmond Margaret Inglis MacLeod and her sister Miss Fanny Inglis, had admitted to Louisa that Jane was one of the most difficult pupils to teach, but also called her “generous & affectionate,” and noted that she had greatly improved in French, memorization, and dancing.

\textsuperscript{69} LDM to JMSI, February 27, 1833, Box 29, Folder 8, SFP.
\textsuperscript{70} Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World,” 18.
since her arrival.\textsuperscript{71} While none of Jane’s letters from this period survive, it is easy to imagine that the presence of a friendly aunt might have helped mitigate the tension that was emerging in her relationship with her mother as she moved into the next stage of her life.\textsuperscript{72}

Despite the developing view of childhood as a distinct stage of life, which was a luxury certainly available to a Sedgwick child, Jane Senior believed that a soft childhood would lead to nothing but misery in adulthood. As the eldest daughter of a family lacking a patriarch, making a good marriage was of paramount importance, and as a result, improving Jane’s intellectual abilities was not as important as improving her behavior and habits. Aunt Louisa took the more contemporary view, arguing that Jane’s successful party was “an example of one of [her] favorite maxims that happiness conduces to both beauty & goodness.”\textsuperscript{73} Jane’s mother was quick to dismiss her sister-in-law’s glowing reports of Jane’s behavior, writing to William Minot: “Mrs. Minot looks on every one with such a benevolent sanguine eye that I consider the evidence on this subject as doubtful.”\textsuperscript{74}

Antebellum female culture is often depicted as one in which mothers and aunts provided a deep well of emotional and practical support to young women. Smith-Rosenberg argues: “This was, as well, a female world in which hostility and criticism of other women were discouraged, and thus a milieu in which women could develop a sense of inner security and self-

\textsuperscript{71} LDM to JMSI, March 17, 1833, Box 29, Folder 8, SFP; Edward Everett Hale, \textit{Seven Spanish Cities and the Way to Them} (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1883), 185. Fanny Inglis later married Angel Calderón de la Barca, minister to the United States from Spain. In 1835, he was appointed minister to newly-independent Mexico, and while he and his wife lived there between 1836 and 1843, she produced the writings that would later become the book \textit{Life in Mexico}, published in 1843. Her writings about Mexican Catholicism resemble typical Anglo-American anti-Catholicism of the time, but it is notable that she became a Catholic three years after the publication of the book. Frances Calderón de la Barca, \textit{Life in Mexico} (London: Chapman and Hall, 1843).
\textsuperscript{72} Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World,” 15.
\textsuperscript{73} Lee Chambers-Schiller, “Woman Is Born to Love”: 34-35; LDM to JMSI, February 27, 1833, Box 29, Folder 8, SFP.
\textsuperscript{74} JMSI to WMI, November 13, 1832, Box 27, Folder 4, SFP.
esteem. . .[women] valued each other.” In fact, she argues that there are many possible explanations for the lack of hostility that contemporary scholars consider “almost inevitable to an adolescent's struggle for autonomy and self-identity,” including the diffusion of tensions throughout a young girl’s female network, as well as the general prohibition against female aggression and anger.75

Jane’s relationship with her mother was indeed intimate, especially after Harry Sedgwick’s death; in time it would develop into one of the more supportive ones in her life. At this point, however, we must question whether this relationship can be categorized as emotionally supportive. We know little of Jane and her mother’s day to day interactions, so we have no way of knowing if Jane herself was hostile to her mother throughout this period of adolescence, but Jane Senior’s words to her sister-in-law, and her views of childrearing, suggest that Jane was certainly aware of her mother’s disappointment. Louisa Minot, as aunt and surrogate mother, sought to diffuse that tension, just as Smith-Rosenberg argues, both by advocating for young Jane and serving as an honest, emotionally-supportive friend to her mother. Smith-Rosenberg argued that “emotional ties between nonresidential kin were deep and binding and provided one of the fundamental existential realities of women's lives”; Louisa Minot’s ties to both Janes helped balance and steady a difficult relationship.76

Louisa knew quite well that Jane Senior’s reasons for wanting to end her daughter’s time at school were more complex than she would admit, and she may have been the only person in a position to pull back the curtain on her sister-in-law’s motivations: “If Jane can be more

75 Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World,” 14, 17. Molly McGarry, “Female Worlds,” Journal of Women's History 12, no. 3 (2000): 9-12. McGarry repeats Smith-Rosenberg’s point about the lack of hostility to make a larger rhetorical point about contemporary feminist historians, but it is important to note that this point has been somewhat uncritically repeated.
advantageously situated than she now is, then you ought to change but for no other reason - do not let any desire to have her at home, any fear of giving me trouble influence you in the least, they have no place in a matter so important.” The fear of Jane being a burden was clear enough from her mother’s letters, but Louisa knew that her sister-in-law had always been lonely in Stockbridge, and now, more than ever, wanted her eldest daughter home. But as much as she was her sister-in-law’s closest friend, and because she was, Louisa was able to speak up for Jane’s interests when no one else could:

   It is no more than fair to Jane that this experiment should be made, no perceptible, certainly no permanent change could be effected in one so old as Jane in less time. She is already sensibly improved, quite as much as I expected for the time. I cannot but think that this improvement is owing as much to her school & her associations there, as to the influences exerted in our family, both operate gradually but surely, if it is a work of time & worth any time to cure defects...77

It seems, however, that Louisa’s pleas for patience had no effect. By May, Jane was home again in Stockbridge in May, sick with scarlet fever. It is unclear whether she went home and quickly fell ill, or went home because of illness, but Louisa felt sure that the child had caught it from her mother when she came to visit in Boston. Even at the last, Louisa expressed the desire to have Jane Senior leave her daughter in Boston so she could go to see Fanny Kemble in John Sheridan Knowles’ The Hunchback with her cousins and friends, one of many opportunities she would miss in Stockbridge. Whatever the reasons for Jane’s return to Stockbridge, her Minot relations missed her when she had gone and did not see her as a burden as her mother supposed.78

   This point is important, because Jane’s return to Stockbridge did not need to be permanent, and her aunt made it quite clear she would love Jane to return to school, even

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77 LDM to JMSI, March 17, 1833, Box 29, Folder 8, SFP.
78 Mary Minot to JMSI, May 3, 1833, Box 84, Folder 22, SFP.
suggesting that after another course at Mrs. MacLeod’s school, Jane might continue on to Mr. Emerson’s school, or if her improvement didn’t warrant the expense, to continue her studies with Miss Peabody. But as soon as Jane was home, her mother found every reason possible not to let her, or her sister Fanny, go to Boston for school. Fanny, she believed, would not attend school if her mother did not come along, and she was “convinced from due consideration of details” that it would not be right of her to go with the children to Boston, despite Louisa and William’s open invitation. But what about Jane? Despite reporting to Louisa that Jane had been diligent about reading, practicing her French, sewing her own clothes “patiently,” all without picking fights with those around her, Jane Senior felt that returning her daughter to Mrs. MacLeod would be “compelling [William and Louisa] to take her.” This language of “burden” pervades Jane Senior’s letters whenever the topic turns to sending her eldest daughter to spend time with relatives, a common enough practice in the period. Her persistent fears that her daughter would become a burden to her brother’s family were certainly rooted in her belief that her daughter was a difficult child, but perhaps also an awareness that this was not the first time William and Louisa had helped raise a child who was not theirs.

Despite all this concern, Jane’s educational needs were still important, and her mother did eventually allow her to return to Boston for school the following autumn. In October, Jane Senior was pleased to hear from Louisa of her daughter’s “exertions to do well.” She felt it was a crucial time for Jane: “much is expected of her & this is the time most important for fixing her habits.” In a letter to Jane a few months later, her mother reminded her to be kind to the relatives and friends she encountered in Boston and sent her a recipe for a particular way of cooking potatoes.

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79 LDM to JMSI, March 17, 1833, Box 29, Folder 8, SFP. Likely William Emerson and Elizabeth Palmer Peabody.
80 JMSI to LDM, “Wednesday Night,” 1833, Box 29, Folder 8, SFP.
81 JMSI to LDM, October 28, 1833, Box 29, Folder 8, SFP.
She was pleased to hear from Louisa that Jane was “docile, obedient & agreeable,” and took it as an opportunity to remind Jane of the importance of self-improvement.

I hope these qualities may be added industry & perseverance in doing those things which you do not want to do but which you are sensible ought to be done. As you are the oldest child I feel incredibly anxious that you should afford a good example to the other children...

If there had been a time for indulging Jane’s idiosyncrasies, it was over. As she became a young woman, it was time to correct her bad habits and cultivate in her a sense of self-improvement and obligation. As the eldest of three daughters of a fatherless family, Jane was the first one to make an impression on a society that expected her to marry well and perform her duties as a woman – as wife, mother, and sister – with the effortless grace to which her Sedgwick relatives aspired. Privileged parents in this period struggled to balance the development of their daughters’ intellectual gifts and instruction in the “domestic arts” needed to run their own households. While fathers were increasingly designing challenging programs of study for their daughters, Jane Senior found herself completely responsible for the education of her children.

Just as she and Louisa were contemplating what kind of education was best for Jane, the educational options for women in the United States were expanding, and with them the possibilities for the daughters of the emerging middle-class to receive more education. The subject of women and education in the antebellum period has been reevaluated in the past decade, particularly in Mary Kelley’s 2006 work *Learning to Stand And Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America’s Republic*. Kelley argues that education helped consolidate elite identity in the immediate postwar period, and then served the same function for

82 JMSI to JMSII, December 9, 1833, Box 85, Folder 28, SFP.
an emerging middle class identity beginning in the 1820s. In female academies and seminaries, and in the increasing proliferation of homosocial spaces like reading circle and benevolent associations, Northern women of the antebellum period articulated a vision of themselves as actors in “civil society.” Despite the proliferation of private and public educational opportunities for women that had already emerged by the time Jane entered Miss Inglis’ school, and the similarity of the curriculum in men’s and women’s secondary schools, Jane never attended any one institution of learning for longer than a few months.

Moreover, nothing in Jane Senior’s fretting or Louisa’s reassurances explicitly suggests that Jane’s brief schooling was necessary to cultivate the characteristics of a civically-engaged person, even one whose engagement was rooted in the feminine. Instead, it was all about correcting Jane’s bad habits, like carelessness and disobedience, and transforming her into the “docile, obedient & agreeable” young woman that society required her to be. And yet, in adulthood Jane would become a civically-engaged, even politically-engaged woman, as her mother and aunts had become, without the formative spaces that Kelley argues were vital to the cultivation of these tendencies. To understand this, we must acknowledge that while educational institutions became a site of identity formulation and consolidation for young women in the emerging middle class in this period, education itself had long been such a site for elite young women like Jane. For poorer and middling women, the home might have been the only site of education until the expansion of educational opportunities that Kelley details; for elite young women, a cultured home was a perfectly satisfactory educational environment. For Jane, “the Sedgwick home” covered several homes in Stockbridge, Lenox, New York, and Boston, but the

84 Kelley, Learning to Stand and Speak, Ch. 1.
85 Ibid., Ch. 2.
principle remained the same.

Jane’s Sedgwick aunts Eliza, Frances, and Catharine all attended private schools in Boston, New York, and Albany, similar to the one Jane briefly attended. Catharine Maria Sedgwick recalled being sent to school in Bennington, Vermont, because her mother felt that no schooling would be better than what her youngest daughter might receive in Stockbridge, which was narrowly provincial at that point. Later in life, Catharine lamented the lack of “systematic training” in her early years, but acknowledged that the gaps had been more than filled: “there were peculiar circumstances in my condition that in some degree supplied these deficiencies, and these were blessings ever to be remembered with gratitude. I was reared in an atmosphere of high intelligence.” This, combined with “humble, obscure village life,” the social intimacy of which Catharine felt was vital to her education, supplying the author with the instruction she needed. This analysis of Catharine’s educational path deserves attention, even as we study her niece, because despite the significant changes in educational opportunities for women between Catharine’s childhood in the 1790s and Jane’s in the 1820s and 1830s, the basic pattern of their education was nearly the same. Mary Kelley describes Catherine as a member of a “transitional generation whose formal educational opportunities were still very limited,” and yet in the next generation, very little seems to have changed in the education of Sedgwick girls.

Kelley describes Catharine’s education as “obtained from a family that valued learning and considered the transmission of culture a responsibility, its possession a birthright.” The next generation of Sedgwicks – Jane, her siblings, and her cousins – were also heirs to that

87 Sedgwick, Life and Letters, 46.  
88 Ibid., 51.  
89 Kelley, “Negotiating a Self,” 384.
birthright. More than that, however, they were heirs to a view of their place in the world that rendered a classroom education in civil participation unnecessary for the formation of their characters. As the wife of a difficult husband and then a widow, Jane Senior wanted her daughter close and wanted her daughter deeply and broadly educated. While a middling family might have had to choose between family unity and education, Jane Senior could keep her children at home, sending them out periodically for schooling, without being afraid that their intellectual or civic development would be stunted. Social mobility through education might have been the goal for the rising middle class, but for Jane, education was a birthright, an obligation, and a part of maintaining the status of the family into which she was born.

Despite her mother’s qualms about her development as a woman, and though she was no longer consistently attending school, Jane continued to impress with her wide-ranging intellectual interests and engaging personality. Coming back from a visit to Boston, she entertained her mother by reciting poetry and being “an agreeable companion.” Louisa noted: “I never saw Jane more bright & agreeable in my life, indeed I think she is just arrived at the perfection of all her powers.” Sarah Ashburner, the English fiancée of Theodore Sedgwick III, praised fourteen-year-old Jane’s interest in mathematics and natural philosophy, comparing her favorably to her younger self who only the previous summer had been “running over the beds & eating all the strawberries.” Moreover, Jane Senior was proud to see her daughter voluntarily attending to her clothes. Not only was she bright and interesting, she was developing those responsible habits that were so important to her mother. As she moved into young adulthood, Jane seemed to have found a balance between intellectual and practical pursuits: “Jane’s time has

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90 JMSI to LDM, April 21, 1835, Box 1, Folder 16, Minot Rackemann Papers (MRP).
91 LDM to CMS, April 30, 1835, Box 1, Folder 3, MRP.
92 JMSI to JMSII, May 8, 1835, Box 85, Folder 28, SFP.
been divided between studying Italian, darning stockings and reading Byron.”

Jane’s study of Italian was augmented by the arrival of a man who would become a lifelong friend of the family, Italian expatriate Gaetano de Castillia. A political prisoner of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, he and several other Italians had had their sentences commuted by Frederick I on the condition of deportation to the United States. Castillia arrived in New York in 1836, where he soon met Catharine Maria Sedgwick. By December, at Catharine’s encouragement, Jane had engaged him as a live-in tutor for her children and Bessie Sedgwick, the daughter of Charles and Elizabeth Buckminster Dwight Sedgwick. Though his time with the Sedgwicks was brief, Gaetano de Castillia would have a profound effect on the children and the mother, all while facilitating Jane Senior’s goal of keeping her children close.

Jane Senior was well aware that employing a virtual stranger, a foreigner, to teach her children and live in her house would seem odd to outsiders. The first fears she had to assuage were Louisa’s, who was heavily invested in the education of her nieces and nephew. It was well established, by this point, that Louisa would have preferred the children’s education to take place in Boston. Jane Senior spoke effusively about their new arrival to Louisa, noting that Hal and “Little Louisa” spoke with him in French, while Jane and Fanny spoke with him in Italian, Jane speaking “more fluently in that language than in her own.” Jane was singled out for particular praise from Castillia, who set her to reading Dante and a history of his home city of Milan in

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93 Louisa M. Sedgwick to LDM, 1836, Box 86, Folder 5, SFP.
96 Since both Robert and Charles Sedgwick married women named Elizabeth, the family often referred to them as Aunt Robert and Aunt Charles in their writing. This dissertation will hereafter follow that practice for the sake of clarity.
Italian. Jane Senior acknowledged that her sister-in-law would be worried about this situation, and that “to some of my friends it might seem a rash experiment to receive a foreigner into my family,” but she assured Louisa that she had had testimony in support of Castillia’s character that allowed her to believe this was a “wise & safe step.” Moreover, she described her choice to employ him as act of charity, stating that if his English were to improve through this engagement, he would be able to find work at a college. Moreover, she told Louisa “If I had not made him this offer he would have gone to Philadelphia to join the fraternity of Jesuits.”

By the 1830s, there were numerous private schools available for Hal, as well as an ever-growing number of academies and seminaries available for the education of young women. While Castillia had come highly recommended, he was not necessary; there were plenty of opportunities for Jane and Fanny to further their education at a female academy of high quality, and with their family connections, it would have been easy for them to find places in schools. Jane appears to have weathered her earlier transition to school quite well, facilitated by the support of friends and relatives, so any fear over that element should have been alleviated by this point. Yet after her return from Boston in the spring of 1834, Jane did not attend school outside of the little academy in her home where Castillia taught an assortment of Sedgwick cousins. A Sedgwick daughter deserved the highest quality education possible, and academies and seminaries were now filled with middling girls, which may be one of the reasons why Jane Senior chose to employ a tutor rather than sending Jane and her sisters to school. Kelley argues that education helped consolidate an emerging middle-class identity in the 1820s, and to an elite

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97 JMSI to LDM, December 11, 1836, Box 28, Folder 3, SFP.
98 Ibid. Castillia’s Catholicism, and Sedgwick feelings about it, will be discussed in later chapters, though it is useful to note that Castillia was likely the first Catholic Jane ever knew who she could consider her social equal.
99 Kelley, Learning to Stand and Speak.
family like the Sedgwicks, a private tutor now became the appropriate educational situation for a young woman like Jane, even as Aunt Charles ran a school for girls out of her home in Lenox. Moreover, Castillia’s presence as a live-in tutor allowed Jane Senior to provide her children with the intellectual development they needed as Sedgwicks, in the company of others of similar status, while keeping them close to her.\(^{100}\)

Castillia refined Jane’s earlier schooling, encouraging her to read more difficult works and providing her with someone on whom she could practice her language skills. Her mother was pleased with what developed, telling Louisa “Jane is full of the italians [sic] & their language I never have seen her so happy.”\(^{101}\) She and her sister Fanny, in particular, seem to have become very close to Castillia in his time there, and when he returned to New York at the end of the summer, he remained in contact with the family in Stockbridge, and his primary social circle in New York centered on the Sedgwick family – the Theodore Sedgwicks, the Robert Sedgwicks, and their family friends the Fields and the O’Sullivans – until his safe return to Milan in 1839.\(^{102}\)

To read Castillia’s introductory letter, sent in October of 1836, is to understand why Jane Senior had chosen him as an acceptable tutor, particularly for Jane. He sent the children a copy of John Lauris Blake’s *The parlor-book*, and used it a starting point for an extended commentary on his philosophy of education and the kind of learning he hoped they would pursue. Despite his gift’s subtitle “Family encyclopedia of useful knowledge and general literature,” he cautioned against encyclopedic knowledge, comparing its shallowness to the pursuits of “fashionable persons. . . always eager for novelty.” This approach to learning and moral development would

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100 Sedgwick, *Letters from Charles Sedgwick*, 84.
101 Louisa Sedgwick and JMSI to LDM, July 21, 1837, Box 86, Folder 5, SFP.
102 Gaetano de Castillia (hereafter GdC) to JSMI, October 21, 1838, Box 30, Folder 5, SFP; GdC to JMSI, April 26, 1838, Box 30, Folder 4, SFP.
never bear fruit; instead, “understanding wants exertion to unfold and improve its natural strength: the treasures of its fruits can not be at the surface, they are to be found only in the depth.” He hoped that their learning would improve their character, make them better able to recognize God’s gifts to them, and “enable you to bear worthy in society a name, which your friends, and countrymen are used to associate with the ideas of virtue and learning.”

Since her father’s death, Jane’s main “problem,” according to her mother, had been her carelessness and lack of focus, the very things that Jane Senior had thought vital to develop in a child well before she had any children of her own. Young Jane’s intellectual abilities had never been in question, and one can easily see why Jane Senior would be attracted to a tutor who could teach focus, which she believed Jane lacked, through academic study, which she knew Jane loved. But Castillia’s last point, that dedication to study would make the children worthy to bear the name Sedgwick, reveals a view of education that had gained traction in the early republic. While Castillia was writing to a boy and three girls, his primary work was to be with Jane and Fanny, shaping them into women of “virtue and learning.”

Enlightenment ideals of a non-gendered mind had changed by this period, leading to what Kelley calls “gendered republicanism.” In this sense, a young woman’s education was “contingent on her fulfillment of gendered social and political obligations.” In antebellum America, the onus would be on the women in the Sedgwick family to inculcate and encourage virtue in their male kin and friends, to bring “the home into the world.” While Jane Senior’s worries about her daughter’s behavior were undoubtedly rooted in worries about their future marriage prospects, it was also important that Jane be worthy of bearing the name Sedgwick, a fitting inheritor of a reputation earned by those who had come before her. The Sedgwicks

103 GdC to Henry Dwight Sedgwick II (hereafter HDSII), October 28, 1836, Box 38, Folder 25, SFP.
continued to understand themselves as members of a vital cultural elite with a responsibility to serve as models of “virtue and learning” to the lower orders.\(^{104}\)

Despite this status as cultural elites, and the privilege of a fascinating foreign tutor to help mold their minds and characters, Jane and her siblings were still in provincial Stockbridge. William and Louisa’s daughter Mary Minot, ten years Jane’s senior, often wrote her to keep her up to date on the goings-on in the Boston society in which Jane had spent time during her schooling. One letter detailed a Valentine’s Day party attended by “Your friend James coleman [sic]” and the wedding of “your former friend Miss Louisa Coolidge.” Pleased to hear “dear Jenny [Jane]” was getting better at her waltzing at home in Stockbridge, Mary lamented that Jane could not enjoy a dance with her German friend Dr. DeWitte. Jane was cut off from the latest and greatest in a social world she could have easily had access to.\(^{105}\)

Beyond keeping Jane disconnected from social and cultural worlds that her status could have introduced her to, her homebound education also constrained her female social network. Spending time away from one’s family at boarding school allowed young girls in this period to develop new friendships with other girls of social standing outside of their family network; these friendships often lasted years if not decades.\(^{106}\) Jane’s mother herself had been a part of such a network of young women – “the friendlies” – before her marriage.\(^{107}\)

One practical factor that undoubtedly contributed to Jane Senior’s desire to keep her daughter close to home was Jane’s periodic poor health, an issue that would plague her throughout her life. Retroactive diagnosis is difficult even with the most complete records, and

\(^{104}\) Kelley, “Negotiating a Self,” 393.
\(^{105}\) Mary Minot to JMSII, February 19, 1837, Box 84, Folder 22, SFP.
\(^{107}\) Kenslea, Sedgwicks in Love, 103.
Jane’s childhood records are anything but complete. According to her mother, she had scarlet fever at the age of twelve. Beginning in her teenage years, we see the emergence of a series of chronic illnesses, attacks of which would disrupt the family’s plans, and the treatment of which would occupy much of Jane’s adulthood. It was during Castilla’s time with the family that Jane’s “dyspepsia” first appeared, followed in the next few years by trouble with her eyes, an ailment shared by Fanny and their father. Most debilitating, however, were intense bouts of rheumatism that left her unable to move for days and weeks, and led to a lifetime dedication to the “water-cure.” Jane’s illnesses – chronic, but not constant or predictable – may have also limited her abilities to attend school away from home. Unlike other families with fewer resources and family connections, Jane’s family could continue to provide her with an excellent education at home, at least for a brief time.

Physical maladies like dyspepsia and rheumatism were not the only illnesses that Jane had to face as she grew into adulthood, however. Her grandmother and her father had both suffered from mental illness, and it had contributed to both of their deaths. The first mention of Jane’s dyspepsia is also the first mention of her suffering from what she and her family often called depression.108 The connection between the two is obvious and even commonplace to Louisa:

I am very sorry to hear that Jane is still afflicted with the blues but hope that as soon as she can drive off her dyspepsia the cloud will pass away for I have observed in William’s case how dreadfully disordered the mind becomes in this disease so nobody who has not seen him as we have done, can imagine the agony & horror of mind as he used to call it, under which he suffered.109

108 See CMS to Charles Sedgwick, January 20, 1825, in Sedgwick, *Life and Letters*: “I went to Mr. Sewall’s in one of those horrid fits of depression when one would cut one’s throat if (as Jane said about killing the chicken) it would not hurt.” Catharine also describes her brother Harry’s condition as “his depression,” CMS to Frances Sedgwick Watson, December 19, 1828, Box 80, Folder 2, SFP.
109 Mary Minot to Jane Minot I Sedgwick, March 11, 1837, Box 84, Folder 22, SFP.
To Louisa, and to the Sedgwicks of her generation who spoke of it, including Catharine Maria Sedgwick, mental illness of this sort – of the sort experienced by their family – was caused by environmental factors, like Jane’s dyspepsia, or Pamela Dwight Sedgwick’s isolation. Doctors at the time described a wide range of cultural and physical causes for mental illness, including what we would now call a genetic predisposition.\textsuperscript{110} Despite the presence of some sort of depressive condition in three, perhaps even four generations of the same family, many members of the Sedgwick-Minot clan denied that there was any familial tendency towards madness.\textsuperscript{111} This 1837 letter was the first mention of Jane’s experience with mental illness, but it would recur throughout Jane’s life, and other members of the family would also be struck with mental illness.

Jane Minot Sedgwick II’s acquaintance with Castillia, the beginnings of her serious physical illnesses, and her earliest mental health issues all occurred as Jane was emerging as an adult. In the years since her father’s death, she had matured, shedding many of the habits of adolescence that had so terrified her mother. But it would remain to be seen whether Jane had grown into a woman worthy of her last name. She was the child upon whom her mother’s hopes and dreams had rested since the bittersweet day of her birth, and much was expected of her. All things considered, she was still a remarkably sheltered young woman compared to those of a similar social status, and even compared to her Minot and Sedgwick cousins. As she entered her twenties, she began to venture further away from home, into a world far more complicated than the idyllic Stockbridge childhood she shared with two generations of Sedgwicks. Between her mother and Castillia, she had been educated to see prudence, consideration, rationality, and civic

\textsuperscript{111} Sedgwick, \textit{Life and Letters}, 29.
engagement as the virtues embodied in useful women, especially Sedgwick women. In her young adulthood, she began to doggedly employ those virtues, sometimes to the chagrin of her family and friends, as she took upon herself the obligation to find a usefulness that would satisfy her.
Chapter 2

*I am willing to wait for the light which comes from doing the will of God. But Jane's mind desires intensely demonstration in all things. She must therefore be doomed to distraction.*

~Jane Minot Sedgwick I to Louisa Davis Minot, undated [1830s]

As a child, Jane had been urged to develop her intellect and her character, first through private schooling and then with a private tutor. Her mother never worried about Jane’s intellectual abilities, but instead labored to instill obligation, industry, and self-discipline, hoping to moderate Jane’s intense passions and moods in the process. As Jane moved into adulthood, she practiced the roles expected of her – mother, wife, aunt, civically-engaged elite woman – which greatly pleased her family. But Jane wanted to know herself, her limits, and what she wanted and needed out of life. She wanted to know what would make her useful and what would make her happy. While she wanted to please her mother and live up to the Sedgwick name, her letters make it clear that she wanted to set her own terms for a useful and happy life, even if those terms brought her into conflict with her family and friends. Her family members, in turn, struggled at times to tolerate her moods, laughing at her “peculiarities” and commending her for managing a cheerful tone. By the mid-1840s, Jane still did not know exactly what occupation would make her happy and useful. She had, however, gained a greater confidence in her own ability to make good, informed, well-reasoned choices and put them into practice, without social or familial sanction if necessary.

Despite her adventurous and determined personality, Jane found her choices increasingly limited by physical and mental afflictions, some of which would plague her for the rest of her life. Jane and her sister Fanny had intermittent trouble with their eyes, as had their father, and
Fanny even went blind on several occasions.¹ Other illnesses, like typhoid fever and rheumatic fever, were infectious diseases fairly common in the United States in the 19th century. More complex, however, were the so-called “fashionable-diseases” that plagued elite women in this period, the generalized aches and pains soothed by visits to places like Saratoga for “the waters.” As Ann Douglas Wood and Diana Herndl have noted, it is impossible to say whether more women were ill in the 19th century than had been ill in the 18th. Wood argues that women in the 18th century may have downplayed illnesses, while their successors in the 19th century not only discussed illness obsessively, but were also defined by it, as individuals and as female bodies naturally predisposed to be “unwell.”² None of this discounts the fact that when Jane and her family felt that she was ill, they made decisions based on their understanding of that illness and its treatments, though those treatments may have caused more harm than good. In early 1842, Jane suffered from a debilitating rheumatic fever. It began in mid-January and persisted for more than two months, with a bed-bound Jane bled regularly.³ A month after the bleeding began, and two months into the attack, Jane was taking “colchicum & rheumatic pills” and eating “broth rusk & a little cream toast.”⁴ At that point, she was still unable to stand and could only sit up for half an hour each day. It is impossible to know how much her use of colchicum, which is now understood to be highly toxic, compounded her ailments.

Jane recovered from this bout of rheumatic fever, but her joint problems continued, and

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¹ LDM to WMI, July 3, 1842, Box 110, Folder 10, SFP; HDSII to JMSI, March 1841, Box 26, Folder 1, SFP; JMSI to LDM, n.d. [1840s or 1850s], Box 28, Folder 4, SFP.
³ JMSI to LDM, February 17, 1842, Box 29, Folder 12, SFP; CMS to JMSI, March 2, 1842, Reel 14, Catharine Maria Sedgwick Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.
⁴ JMSI to LDM, March 14, 1842, Box 28, Folder 1, SFP.
she and her family were constantly worried about what might bring on an attack. A lover of the outdoors, particularly of hiking and riding, Jane was now believed to be in danger of an attack whenever the weather turned damp or she was caught in the rain. Just a few months after her initial sickness, she fell ill again, this time as a result of her willingness to throw herself into activities with great vigor:

Jennie too has been quite sick, owing to a ride on horseback, she set out with the intention of riding two miles, & went ten, & was out till 8 o’clock in the evening & got chilled. She had an attack of rheumatism & could not walk for days, but no fever or inflammation set in, & she is now better & looking less distressed than she has been the past week.  

This anecdote illuminates Jane’s personality and the hindrance rheumatism was to her approach to life. She threw herself into whatever she was doing, never going two miles when she could go ten, but the presence of chronic rheumatism would shape much of what she believed she could do with her adult life.

In Jane’s eyes and in the eyes of her family, however, the most worrisome medical problem she faced was that of persistent dyspepsia. The term now refers to what is more precisely called “functional dyspepsia,” to differentiate it from gastric distress resulting from an ulcer, and its causes are unclear even today. At the time, doctors and laypeople alike argued over its causes and treatments, and it could refer to any combination of internal digestive complaints and mental health problems like depression. One key point of agreement was that there was a strong connection between gastric distress and mental distress, though which caused which was unclear. Moreover, the etiology of the disease differed depending on the sex and class of the

5 LDM to WMI, June 23, 1842, Box 110, Folder 9, SFP.
sufferer, as did the treatment. Jane began to suffer from the physical and mental symptoms of dyspepsia in the late 1830s, and she found herself in good company in the family.

Any sign that a person was unwell seemed to suggest dyspepsia to the Sedgwicks, who worried constantly about unbalanced minds and bodies. Aunt Catharine herself described a deep sadness and lethargy in the winter of 1828 as a “moral dyspepsia.” When it came to the more familiar dyspepsia that also involved the presentation of physical symptoms, Catharine felt sure it could be conquered with a mixture of physical exercise and mental fortitude, at least among the young. When Jane’s cousin Catharine Sears Watson was unwell that same winter of 1828, Aunt Catharine feared it might be dyspepsia, and suggested that “in most cases with persons so young it may be overcome by resolution.” She believed that diet was important, but also “cheerful influence. . . occupation suited to the taste. . . [and] agreeable exercise,” wondering “[h]as she ever tried walking before breakfast?” In the same letter, Catharine also suggested that the solution to her brother Harry’s mental illness would be to “engage in any business moderately productive & suited to his taste.” To Catharine, mental and physical activity, combined with strength of character, could cure one of the disease.

Aunt Louisa, on the other hand, believed the physical illness caused the mental illness, having seen it in her husband William.

I am very sorry to hear that Jane is still afflicted with the blues but hope that as soon as she can drive off her dyspepsia the cloud will pass away for I have observed in William’s case how dreadfully disordered the mind becomes in this disease so nobody who has not seen him as we have done, can imagine the agony & horror of mind as he used to call it, under which he suffered.

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8 CMS to Frances Sedgwick Watson, January 21, 1828, Box 80, Folder 2, SFP.
9 CMS to Frances Sedgwick Watson, February 8, 1828, Box 80, Folder 2, SFP.
10 Mary Minot to JMSI, March 11, 1837, Box 84, Folder 22, SFP.
While for Louisa, the mental ills would pass when the physical ills were cured, for Catharine the two went hand in hand. Jane Senior felt that social engagement and exercise were most important to her daughter’s health, but that Stockbridge was not the right place for her to be well: “[O]ur late lonely life does not suit Jane. She cannot exercise amidst blossoms & trees & she becomes dyspeptic & melancholy.”11 When Jane began to suffer from dyspepsia, as with everything else, her family had an abundance of conflicting opinions on the subject, and shared them freely.

Conflict over the precise proportions of the medicine aside, the Sedgwicks understood the cure for dyspepsia in women to be stimulation. For Jane, getting sufficient exercise and social engagement was a constant goal, but going for long walks was impossible whenever her joints were aching. As her excessive horseback riding indicates, the exercise required to soothe her dyspepsia could very easily inflame her rheumatism. As she grew into adulthood, Jane constantly sought a way to balance her desires with the physical and mental limitations that she and her family felt threatened to overwhelm her at any point. But above all, Jane and her family believed that if she could find the right “occupation,” a word they used frequently, she could be happy and healthy. Jane’s mother had been concerned with her daughter’s “usefulness” since her childhood, and the emergence of dyspepsia and rheumatism merely intensified the need to find that usefulness.12

Despite her health problems, and in fact because of them, Jane kept up the active visiting schedule expected of a woman of her class.13 She began to travel around Massachusetts, New York, and Connecticut, always in the company of her extended family or close family friends.

11 JMSI to HDSII, April 5, 1843, Box 26, Folder 3, SFP.
12 A Google N-gram of the words “occupation” and “usefulness” in combination shows a marked increase in the prevalence of that combination from 1800 to 1835, at which point it levels off.
Aunt Louisa, always her niece’s champion, reported that Jane was an “agreeable [and] amiable companion.” Traveling about the Northeast and spending time with relatives opened up new social worlds, but the family’s financial constraints plagued Jane’s mother. When her daughters constantly pestered her about doing things the way Aunt Susan did them, she privately expressed her frustration to Louisa: “Much as I value the standard I should destroy all the care & comfort of my home by attempting its imitation. Traveling and making small financial decisions on her own meant that Jane had to come to terms with her family’s financial limitations. Despite Catharine’s advice that she simply must spend at least nine dollars for a “sufficiently handsome hat” on a trip to New York, Jane recognized that her mother’s advice to “mind what Aunt [Catharine] says” was not to be followed in all situations: “I do not think it is worth while to get an expensive hat for a few weeks in the city when a more common one would do as well to wear all summer.” Throughout her adult life, Jane remained conscious of the financial restrictions placed upon her by her fatherless situation, and later her status as a single woman whose money was held in trust, though she never explicitly lamented her unmarried state for this or any other reason.

As Jane became an adult, new influences emerged in her life to compete with the views of her mother and aunts. The most important of these influences was the O’Sullivan family, with whom the Sedgwicks began socializing in the late 1830s. An Anglo-Irish Protestant family, its most prominent member was John Louis O’Sullivan, journalist, politician, and vocal advocate...

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14 LDM to JMSI, February 16, 1840, Box 29, Folder 11, SFP.
15 JMSI to LDM, n.d. [1840s], Box 28, Folder 4, SFP. Susan Sedgwick, the wife of Theodore Sedgwick II, was from a very wealthy political family in New Jersey.
16 JMSII to JMSI, 1834, Box 86, Folder 1, SFP.
for “Manifest Destiny.”\textsuperscript{17} This family exposed Jane to radical Democratic politics, the extensive use of slaves, and the lived practice of Roman Catholicism in the form of two converts from Anglicanism: the sisters Mary and Adelaide O’Sullivan. In particular, Mary “Cheery” O’Sullivan, a woman who is usually only mentioned by scholars for marrying two different men who became her brother John’s political and business associates, became Jane’s closest friend in young adulthood. Cheery’s friendship and attention would gradually guide Jane into the Catholic Church.

In describing the ancestors of John Louis O’Sullivan, Edward Widmer argues that “[a]lmost all of the family’s achievements had been spectacular disasters.”\textsuperscript{18} Jane herself observed in 1841 that “[t]he O’Sullivans certainly are particularly unlucky as a family.”\textsuperscript{19} Their family motto, \textit{Modestia Victrix}, or “Victory through moderation,” rarely described their lives. The patriarch, John Thomas O’Sullivan, was Irish-born, and married English-born Mary Rowley. His ship was seized by the U.S. government on suspicion of piracy in 1823 and a year later he drowned off the coast of South America, leaving behind six children: William, John, Thomas, Charles (Herbert), Mary (Cheery) and Adelaide.\textsuperscript{20} The O’Sullivan family had held a Jacobite baronetcy since 1753, but the family’s Catholic fervor seems to have dimmed by the next generation, when the subsequent baron joined the British Army to fight in the War of American Independence. Mary Rowley was herself the daughter of a vicar, and all correspondence from the period of Jane’s acquaintance with the family suggests she and the children were thoroughly

\textsuperscript{17} Amy S. Greenberg, \textit{Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
\textsuperscript{19} JMSII to HDSII and JMSI, February 4, 1841, Box 26, Folder 1, SFP.
\textsuperscript{20} Marquis of Ruvigny and Raineval, \textit{The Jacobite Peerage}, 144–5; Widmer, \textit{Young America}, 27–33.
Anglican.

Mary Rowley O’Sullivan moved her entire family to New York in 1827, and sued the government for compensation over the seized ship, eventually securing $20,000 in 1836, likely with the help of Vice President Martin Van Buren, who also took an interest in John’s career. In 1835, the family relocated to Washington D.C., and John used that money to establish a political-literary newspaper with his brother-in-law, Cheery’s Irish husband Dr. Samuel Langtree.21 The United States Magazine & Democratic Review, which began publication in October 1837, looked to a wide range of Democratic politicians and laypeople for submissions, but despite the newspaper’s repudiation of Boston Whig conservatism, the founders eagerly courted the Massachusetts literary elite for contributions.22 Catharine Maria Sedgwick was one of the first authors O’Sullivan approached, and she willingly provided him with an article on the recent financial panic.23 O’Sullivan quickly made use of the extended Sedgwick-Minot family connections. Aunt Louisa helped him secure the contributions of other elite New England women, and introduced him to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.24 This new connection between the O’Sullivan and Sedgwick families blossomed, bringing Jane into contact with Cheery O’Sullivan Langtree, several years her senior, who quickly became a close friend.25

In many ways, Jane’s relationship with Cheery mirrored her mother’s relationship with Louisa Minot a generation earlier: one woman on the cusp of adulthood, the other just beginning.

23 Widmer, Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City, 260.
24 LDM to JMSI, August 27, 1837, Box 29, Folder 9, SFP; LDM to JMSI, September 12, 1837, Box 29, Folder 9, SFP.
25 Valerson, Mother Adelaide of St. Theresa, 12. Cheery O’Sullivan’s birthdate is unknown. John Louis O’Sullivan, the second oldest, was born in 1813, and the fourth child Adelaide, was born in 1817, so I estimate that Cheery was between five and seven years older than Jane.
life as a wife and mother. By 1838, the O’Sullivans and Langtrees were visiting the Sedgwicks in Stockbridge and New York. In the winter of 1840-1841, the *Democratic Review* moved to Manhattan to take advantage of the intellectual and social capital in New York, and John took up his place in the New York assembly, to which he’d been elected in the fall of 1840. Cheery was a frequent visitor to New York and Stockbridge, and the O’Sullivans knit themselves completely into the Sedgwick social world, befriending the families of Robert and Charles Sedgwick as well. While Cheery’s friendship would be instrumental in guiding Jane to the Catholic Church, she was not the first or only convert to Catholicism in the O’Sullivan family. The choices of her younger sister Adelaide, who converted as a child, were the talk of Jane’s social world before Cheery even became Catholic.

Much of what we know of Adelaide O’Sullivan’s life comes from what is essentially a hagiography. Adelaide became a Catholic at some point in her childhood, to the great disappointment of her Anglican family, particularly her mother and her brother John. When the family moved to Washington, she was allowed to continue her piano training at the school for young women at the Georgetown Convent of the Visitation. While it was Catholic, elite families looking for the most refined educations for their daughters patronized it willingly. Her time at the convent school was brief, but transformative, and she soon revealed to her family that she was not content to remain a laywoman in the Church. Her hagiography tells of her opening the family Bible to the page where weddings were noted, and underneath the notation for her

26 Widmer, *Young America*, 45–6.
28 Rose Hawthorne Lathrop and George Parsons Lathrop, *A Story of Courage: Annals of the Georgetown Convent of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Riverside Press, 1894). In this sense, the Georgetown Convent school was not unconventional, even as it was the first of its sort. Other examples include the Charlestown Ursuline Convent, which was famously burned.
sister’s wedding to Samuel Langtree, inscribing that she had wedded herself to Christ. Jane and her family were witness to several years of the strife in the O’Sullivan family over Adelaide’s decision to pursue religious life, and Jane got her first real sense of the problems that divergent religious choices could cause in a family.

The first mention of Adelaide in the Sedgwick papers is from Jane herself, in a letter to her cousin Will, in the middle of the controversy. In the mid-1830s, Mary Rowley O’Sullivan and her son John had worked desperately to marry Adelaide off in order to “save” her from the convent, and she had reluctantly engaged herself to a Mr. Spring. Jane’s letter to Will conveyed “sad news of poor Adelaide O’Sullivan.” She had broken off the engagement and gone back to the convent.

[S]he has been so worked upon by the nuns that thy have induced her to adhere to her former resolution of taking the veil and she now bitterly repents having yeilded [sic] to what she considers the snares of the devil in engaging herself to Spring.

Now, Jane wrote, she spent “whole hours on her knees begging for mercy” for her family, her mind “greatly agitated almost to insanity.” Adelaide was still young, and her family members believed they could force her to bend to their will if necessary, but John and Mrs. O’Sullivan were doubtful that such a plan would really solve the situation. Jane, however, thought it was the best course of action; while she believed Adelaide was enthusiastic and devoted to her faith, she nevertheless believed that the young novice was making her choices more “by fits and starts than a steady principle.” Her enthusiasm would fade with her youth, and she would “repent when it [was] too late.” Sage words indeed from a serious seventeen-year-old woman, and indicative of her distrust of what she saw as “irrational” ways of making decisions.

29 Valerson, Mother Adelaide of St. Theresa, 31.
30 JMSII to William Minot II (hereafter WMII), March 30, 1838, Box 27, Folder 7, SFP.
In the second half of the letter, Jane shared her views on an instance of religious devotion even closer to home. She recounted the return of her cousin Catherine Sears Watson Webb. Webb had become a Baptist in the late 1820s, married Abner Webb, and traveled with him to Burma as a missionary. She had later fallen ill, which her doctors attributed to the climate, and was encouraged to return to the United States. Jane was not impressed with her cousin’s devotion.

So here she is, after spending five years among those barbarians when she might as well have been trying to convert the winds, with nothing to reward her for what she has endured that I can see except the consciousness that she has sacrificed her health and happiness in the performance of what she believed to be her duty.

The stories of Adelaide O’Sullivan and Catherine Webb take up the majority of Jane’s letter to her cousin, and reveal a certain skepticism about the extremes of faith and devotion. Jane seemed to find something irrational and foolish in the desire of both women to live their faith deeply and express it outwardly. Moreover, these choices had to be ill-considered, because in Jane’s opinion, well-reasoned decision making could never have produced these particular outcomes.

Jane’s distrust of and distaste for the religious enthusiasms of Adelaide and her cousin Catharine comported with the beliefs of New England Unitarians more generally. Nathan Rives notes that in the battle over disestablishment in Massachusetts in the first third of the nineteenth century, Unitarians argued strongly to preserve the standing order not simply because they benefitted financially from it, which they certainly did, but because of their views on order, education, and enthusiasm. Taking it as given that religion provided moral order and was still somewhat enforced through blasphemy and Sabbath laws, and rejecting the notion that voluntary religion could work without state support, Unitarians argued that disestablishment would be most

31 Catharine and her husband, along with “seven native assistants,” were listed as the staff of the Baptist mission in Rangoon in 1835. “American Baptist Mission in Burmah,” The Missionary Herald, February 1853, 75.
32 JMSII to WMII, March 30, 1838, Box 27, Folder 7, SFP.
dangerous for residents in poor, rural regions that would not be able to keep a settled ministry without public funding. The key word here was “settled,” because Unitarians argued that without such a thing, these populations would be served by itinerant ministers and, as Channing argued, “Ignorant ministers are driven almost by necessity to fanaticism,” providing instantaneous enthusiasm rather than conversion through a slow process of character development. This fight over disestablishment positioned Massachusetts Unitarians in direct opposition to a growing body of Protestant denominations, with Baptists standing as one of the groups with a long history of bearing the oppression of establishment.\textsuperscript{33} Jane’s rejection of her cousin Catharine’s religious devotion was rooted in her Unitarian understanding of the role of reason and education in religion and religious leadership, an understanding in which the Baptists were positioned as the polar opposite of rational, informed religion.

Adelaide O’Sullivan may have broken off her engagement and returned to the convent, but her final vows were not yet a certainty. Her family did not want to use force, but they and her friends were still hopeful that something might change her mind. In the summer of 1838, she came to Stockbridge with her family, as she had done before, and Jane Senior noted that she was “handsome as ever” if a bit more serious. “The lonely nun” shared an awkward meeting with Mr. Spring, “her former lover,” but Jane Senior was disappointed to hear that there was no chance they would renew the engagement. Still, she believed that romance was the solution to the predicament: “I fear her life will be a painful conflict unless some fascinating lover steps in to be the arbitrator of her destiny & thus happily settle the difficulty – if you know any such champion for a lady’s heart pray send him on.” In Jane Senior’s understanding, the battle was not so much

for Adelaide’s soul as for her heart, and not between this world and Heaven, but between the two
groups of men competing to be “arbitrator of her destiny.” Adelaide’s temporal father was long
dead, and spiritual fathers had stepped in to fill the void. If another suitable man could be found
to guide her, her destiny could be changed, and the life of a “lonely nun” avoided.

This narrative of the young impressionable woman falling under the manipulative sway
of Catholic priests and nuns was very much in the air at the time. Only four years earlier, a mob
in Charlestown, Massachusetts had burned down an Ursuline convent school much like the one
in Georgetown on the rumor that a nun was being held against her will. Soon after that, the
publication of two seminal pieces of anti-Catholic literature stoked the fires further. In 1835, a
former student of the Charlestown school named Rebecca Reed published *Six Months in a
Convent*, followed the next year by Maria Monk’s *Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk, or, The
Hidden Secrets of a Nun’s Life in a Convent Exposed* about a convent in Montreal. Yet elite
Bostonians desired convent educations, and most of the students in the Charlestown convent at
the time of its burning were the daughters of prominent Unitarians like the Sedgwicks and
Minots. While anti-Catholicism was a way of culturally separating a Catholic “Old World” from
the Protestant “New World,” a refined but rigorous European education that went beyond the
available finishing schools was very alluring. Protestant women, despite their distaste for and

34 JMSI to WMI, July 29, 1838, Box 26, Folder 19, SFP.
35 See Marie Anne Pagliarini, “The Pure American Woman and the Wicked Catholic Priest: An Analysis of Anti-
Catholic Literature in Antebellum America” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 9, no. 1
(Winter 1999): 97-128; Tracy Fessenden, “The Convent, the Brothel, and the Protestant Woman's Sphere,” *Signs* 25,
Press, 2000).
37 Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: Antebellum Protestant Encounters with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of
California Press, 1994); Daniel A. Cohen, “The Respectability of Rebecca Reed: Genteel Womanhood and Sectarian
even fear of the captivity of the convent, admired what historian Joseph Mannard calls the “self-denying benevolence” of women religious, and Catharine Beecher even used convents as one of the models for her educational associations.\(^{39}\)

In the fall of 1838, Adelaide returned to the convent in Georgetown, determined to become a Visitation sister, and her family resorted to desperate measures. John O’Sullivan went down from New York to Washington while Jane Senior cared for Mary Rowley O’Sullivan, who was too distraught to accompany him on the journey. It was up to John “to rescue Adelaide if possible from the hands of the Arch Bishop who has been so successful in his appeals to her conscience as to frighten her into a promise to return to the Georgetown convent.”\(^{40}\) They were unsuccessful, and Adelaide did enter the convent, though Jane Senior added the conditional: “at least till she changes her mind.”\(^{41}\) She did change her mind, but not in the way that JMSI hoped. At the prompting of her confessor, Cuban priest Father Felix Varela, Adelaide read the writings of St. Theresa of Avila, one of the founders of the Carmelite order. Deciding she wanted to be a member of the Discalced Carmelites, she journeyed with Varela to Cuba in the fall of 1840.\(^{42}\) In 1841, Jane Senior noted in a letter to Louisa: “Adelaide has succeeded to the place of a lonely saint in the convent & is called Santa Theresa - she is very happy.”\(^{43}\)

In the fall of 1840, Jane had developed a sufficiently close relationship with the O’Sullivans to receive an invitation to their Washington, D.C. estate. In January, she departed for her first significant trip without a member of her family. Most of the anxiety Jane Senior expressed on paper was over her daughter’s finances, not her ability to function away from

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\(^{40}\) JMSI to LDM, October 30, 1838, Box 28, Folder 10, SFP.

\(^{41}\) JMSI to LDM, November 12, 1838, Box 28, Folder 14, SFP.


\(^{43}\) JMSI to LDM, November 28, 1841, Box 29, Folder 11, SFP.
home, though she did believe this new experience would help Jane learn valuable skills. As usual, she confided her parenting concerns and hopes in her sister-in-law Louisa.

This is a new experience in Jane’s life – she has never before been. . . where she has not had you or me [to] aid & advise her – the pursuit of fashion under difficulties is as great an exercise of the faculties as the pursuit of knowledge, I should find or greater: & Jane has had an infinite variety of annuities how to look respectably with economy but she will slump along some how. . .

Her language indicates a continuing concern over Jane’s ability to manage herself, but Jane had shown earlier that she was able to moderate her “pursuit of fashion.” On the eve of her daughter’s twentieth birthday, Jane Senior “concluded at last that it was best to let her judge & act for herself.”

Only one of Jane’s letters from this first journey survives, but it reveals that she did far more than simply “slump along.” In fact, she was exercising her capacity to “judge & act for herself.” In the portion of the letter directed to her brother, Jane lamented that Cheery and Herbert continued to “put her out of patience” by teasing her about two of her passions, “slavery and the Plights of women.” Jane’s own interests in these issues had never been stated in writing prior to this, though both had cultural and familial precedence. Her grandfather Theodore Sedgwick stood as counsel in *Brom & Bett v. Ashley* before the Massachusetts Supreme Court in 1785, helping to establish that slavery was unconstitutional under the Massachusetts state constitution. Both Theodore Sedgwick, as judge, and Louisa Minot’s father, Daniel Davis, as state’s counsel, participated in *Massachusetts v. Martin*, which, in dealing with the legality of confiscating a woman’s property because of her husband’s loyalism, revealed the tension

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44 JMSI to LDM, January 2, 1841, Box 29, Folder 11, SFP.
between republican citizenship and coverture. The male members of her family, given their gender and the nature of their occupations, regularly came into contact with a racialized and gendered legal system, while the female members discussed them privately and, in the case of Catharine Maria Sedgwick, lived them publicly. All of this was set against a backdrop of an American women’s rights movement emerging out of anti-slavery activism in the years immediately prior to Jane’s trip. With this family and social background and her keen curiosity, Jane had been thinking of these two issues while in Washington, and she told her brother of two trips she had taken while there: one to a convent, that of the Visitation Sisters in Georgetown, and one to a plantation near the Langtrees’ residence. Her reaction to these two encounters reveals a young woman beginning to reckon with the views she had absorbed growing up, as

46 Linda Kerber, “The Paradox of Women's Citizenship in the Early Republic: The Case of Martin vs. Massachusetts, 1805,” The American Historical Review 97 (April 1992): 349-378. In particular, this case dealt with property that Anna Gordon Martin had brought with her to her marriage and owned outright, and therefore the relationship between loyalist confiscation and women’s property rights, the question of women’s ability to choose to be disloyal, and the question of women’s citizenship itself. In arguing for the state and its right to retain Martin’s property, Davis and James Sullivan argued for an expansive understanding of married women’s rights and obligations, particularly the obligation of loyalty of all persons, from which women were not excluded by virtue of being feme covert. The panel of four judges, including Theodore Sedgwick and Francis Dana, whose descendants would also become Jane’s friends, rejected Sullivan and Davis’ argument. Sedgwick offered a lengthy discourse on the subject, stating: “Can we believe that a wife for so respecting the understanding of her husband as to submit her own opinions to his, on a subject so all-important as this, should lose her own property, and forfeit the inheritance of her children?...Because she did not, in violation of her marriage vows, rebel against the will of her husband?” As Kerber distilled Sedgwick’s sentiments: “Did the state intend…to call upon married women to rebel against their husbands?” Kerber, 373. That these two families were involved in a thorny case involving women’s property rights in 1805 cannot be ignored in the context of William Minot’s precautions involving his sister Jane’s marriage to Harry Sedgwick in 1817. Jane Minot Sedgwick’s property was carefully set aside in trust for her protection; decades later, this William Minot’s grandson would control and abuse Jane Minot Sedgwick II’s inherited Minot property in trust.

47 For an effective summary of this process, see Kathryn Kish Sklar, Women's Rights Emerges Within the Antislavery Movement, 1830-1870 a Brief History with Documents (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2000). As Sklar notes, many within each movement were more than happy for anti-slavery activists and women’s rights activists to part ways, and despite Jane’s commitment to both principles, many scholars have emphasized the social benefits that accrued to white women in a slave society. Kathleen M. Brown, Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, & Angry Patriarchs: Race, Gender, and Power in Colonial Virginia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Louise Michele Newman, White Women’s Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Pauline Schloesser, The Fair Sex: White Women and Racial Patriarchy in the Early American Republic (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Thavolia Glymph, Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Economy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
well as the views of this family to which she had recently become close.\textsuperscript{48}

Reflecting on the trip to the plantation, and her other experiences with slavery in Washington, she expressed horror at the treatment of African-Americans in the area, even by those slave owners who she said considered themselves “kind, indulgent, [and] considerate.” She saw “miserable hovels,” where slaves slept on the floor and were given “a peck of meal” a week. Those she was with told her this treatment was on the better end of the spectrum. Reflecting upon what she’d seen, and comparing it with what apologists for slavery claimed about the system, she saw the gap between rhetoric and reality: “They talk about the negroes being such a happy set of people, but I had not seen one in the district who, if they did not look too utterly stupid to have any expression at all, did not appear from their countenances to be... miserable.”\textsuperscript{49} Given Jane’s family background, these thoughts were not revelations; certainly she had intellectually engaged with the injustices of slavery, though this was probably her first interaction with actual slaves. But she was the guest, and the close friend, of a family that not only supported slavery philosophically but also owned them as well. When condemning what “they” said about slavery, she was indicting Cheery and her family as well, showing that her close friendship with Cheery did not mean Jane was uncritical about her friend’s choices and beliefs.

Jane’s opposition to slavery appears periodically throughout her correspondence from this point on, and her family continued to engage with the movement, if not in a particularly participatory way. Three years later her cousin Bessie and Uncle Charles breakfasted with “brother Douglas, a colored man and a slave, escaped five years ago,” and that same year Jane

\textsuperscript{48} JMSII to JMSI and HDSII, February 4, 1841, Box 26, Folder 1, SFP.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
met Lydia Maria Child and wrote to her Uncle Charles of her experience. Her letter does not remain, but her uncle replied that he was pleased to read of her positive assessment of Child, for he felt she had been unfairly criticized. Wondering out loud why God had created a world with slavery and poverty, he said the only way he could keep his Christian faith was to accept that it must be this way for some reason, but sought his niece’s thoughts: “Will it be always so? Tell me, young Jeanie, you of the new social school.” Her interaction with plantation slavery as a young woman – actually seeing something she had only read about – seems to have catalyzed her opposition to the practice in a new way.

As Jane would later become a Catholic through Cheery’s influence, it is important to note other instances in which Jane was not persuaded, as well as Jane’s own ability to persuade others. As her mother said, she desired demonstration in all things, and trusted implicitly her own capacity for rational thought above that of others, even those closest to her. In the case of slavery, reading about a thing was not the same as seeing a thing, and when she confronted the lived reality of plantation slavery, she evaluated the conflicting narratives she had learned against what she saw, and was not persuaded by what Cheery and Herbert told her. Her interaction with slavery was not the only instance on this trip where she was forced to reevaluate a conventional narrative, though in the second scenario, the narrative she began to question was one that she had been raised by her family and culture to believe implicitly.

After her description of the slaves she met, Jane continued her letter, telling her brother of a visit to the Georgetown Visitation convent, facilitated by Adelaide O’Sullivan. As with her experience with Southern slavery, Jane’s tour of the convent exposed the flaws a popular

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narrative, though one that she was less primed to dismiss, in this case the anti-Catholicism that pervaded New England culture and that she herself had expressed only a few years earlier. “They all were apparently so happy and some laughing and talking so merrily together that it gave me anything but an idea of the gloom which I had supposed was to be found within the walls of a convent. Some of the sisters had such lovely faces and such charming manners that I never can forget them.” Her first exposure to Catholicism had been when Castillia lived with her family, though it was limited; there was no church for him to attend in Stockbridge, and he later noted that he had never spoken with Jane about his faith. More recently, Jane had experienced Catholicism more intimately with Cheery, but the convent was something beyond lived lay Catholicism. To American Protestants, “the convent,” real and imagined, represented everything that was wrong with the Church. Still, many elite Protestant parents decided that the refined European education available at convent schools outweighed the dangers, particularly when sisters explicitly promised not to proselytize. Jane’s reaction was part of a larger elite ambivalence towards Catholicism, a phenomenon which will be explored in more depth in the following chapter, but it further demonstrates her desire to reconsider received truths and compare them with her observations.

Though Jane herself drew no attention to the contrast between her experiences at the plantation and the convent, the juxtaposition of the stories is striking. In both cases, received cultural wisdom failed to hold up to experience. Her appraisal of slavery reinforced pre-existing
family views, shoring up her beliefs against the pro-slavery arguments of the period, even in the face of counter-narratives from friends like Herbert and Cheery. Her reconsideration of the life of women religious was more striking and transgressive. The strange and possibly abusive world of the convent was a touchstone of anti-Catholic rhetoric, and had she seen it proved accurate, whatever intellectual openness she had had towards Catholicism might have ceased. Instead, what Jane saw inside the convent may have served to put a crack in the argument that Catholicism was particularly bad for women.

This ability to recognize that perhaps the happy slave and the miserable nun were both myths demonstrates what Jane’s mother once noted about her daughter. Reflecting on Jane’s struggles with “religious dogmas” well before any particular interest in Catholicism, her mother had once noted: “I am willing to wait for the light which comes from doing the will of God. But Jane’s mind desires intensely demonstration in all things. She must therefore be doomed to distraction.” For Jane Senior, this tendency was problematic for the ways that it might exacerbate her dyspepsia without the proper balance of “physical & intellectual labor,” but it also reflected the Unitarian values with which she had been raised. Beyond her mother, friends and family noted her tendency towards skepticism, though they took a more positive view. Family friend Lucy Channing Russel compared Jane and her own daughter Anna, who she considered “born a skeptic,” lamenting that “all that she receives must be tried by her own mind.” Despite these tendencies, Russel considered Jane and Anna to have one character virtue that mitigated their skepticism: they were both “true.” Therefore, despite the potential for “distraction” that worried Jane Senior, Jane could be trusted to always come down in the right place.

56 JMSI to LDM, n.d., Box 28, Folder 3, SFP.
57 Lucy Channing Russel (hereafter LCR) to JMSI, n.d. [1840s], Box 29, Folder 17, SFP. In addition to her deep
struggles with abstract principles aside, family letters also indicate a keen interest in science, one her mother fostered, noting with pride “Jane has prepared quite a good article upon astrology for the scientific which meets tomorrow ev’g,” even as she had noted a month earlier that her daughter was “groaning over her scientific preparations.”

Old enough to travel without her family and debate social issues of the day, Jane was also old enough to keep house without her family, at least for a few months. After she returned from Washington, she spent the spring of 1841 in Stockbridge with her 14-year-old sister Louisa while her mother and sister Fanny were away. None of the other Berkshire Sedgwicks were around to keep them company, the weather was “inexpressibly forlorn,” and save for a visit from Grace and reading Barnaby Rudge in the newspaper, Jane lamented “there is hardly anything going on here to keep us alive.” Her mother wrote to Hal at Harvard that Jane had become “a most accomplished cook” while she was away, the benefits of which Hal would enjoy when he came home for vacation. Not only had Jane become a good cook, Jane believed she had “made out extremely well in the housekeeping department. . .” To women of Jane Senior’s upbringing, the development of these dual abilities was vital to success as an elite woman. Jane needed to be able to perform the tasks of maintaining a household, but also needed to know how to delegate tasks and manage the household help that did the majority of the work in elite households. The

[58 JMSI to LDM, November 12, 1838, Box 28, Folder 14, SFP; JMSI to LDM, October 30, 1838, Box 28, Folder 10, SFP. Jane’s interest in science was not unusual for women of her age in this period, and had she gone to a formal women’s school, she would have received instruction there was well. Kim Tolley, “Science for Ladies, Classics for Gentlemen: A Comparative Analysis of Scientific Subjects in the Curricula of Boys’ and Girls’ Secondary Schools in the United States, 1794-1850,” History of Education Quarterly 36 (Summer 1996): 129-153
59 JMSII to HDSII, April 11, 1841, Box 26, Folder 1, SFP.
60 JMSI to HDSII, April 18, 1841, Box 26, Folder 1, SFP.]
Sedgwick household itself had a cook and at least one domestic servant, a Mrs. Kitty O’Brien O’Doyle.  

Catherine Beecher’s *A Treatise on Domestic Economy, for the use of young ladies at home, and at school*, published the same year as Jane began her practice housekeeping, bemoaned the abandonment of housework by young girls in elite and middle class families. She argued that only the loss of inexpensive domestic help resulting from farm girls choosing factory work would push elite and middle class families to train their daughters properly, and that elite families would lead the way. While the influx of immigrants at mid-century would provide a new labor supply, as the Sedgwick’s domestic situation demonstrates, Jane’s education as a child and her activities as a young woman demonstrate that training in how to cook, sew, and run a household remained important to her mother. Despite her prodigious intellectual and conversational talents, Jane received the greatest praise from her mother for developing domestic skills.

Jane had been in a hurry to return from Washington in the spring, but not to keep house. She was rushing home to see her cousin Charlie before he departed for Europe. She got home in time, for which she was undoubtedly grateful in retrospect. Her Uncle Charles’ son, Charlie was one year Jane’s junior and had grown up with her in Berkshire County. He became a student at Harvard, a bright boy by all accounts, and his father’s pride and joy. He took first college honors, but suffered from a “nervous fever attended by delirium” in the fall of 1839. At the time, Jane Senior noted with relief that “Charley’s mind has not been the least affected by his

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61 Last will and testament of JMSII, December 1870, Box 32, Folder 28, SFP,  
The following fall, he suffered a sudden mental breakdown. His Aunt Catharine later described this as the result of overwork, not simply in college, but throughout his life. From what I have learned in later years of the danger of too severely working the brain in childhood, I think that Charles was overworked before that delicate organ was consolidated. . . Each day of his life he was overworked in every way, so that when he came to the critical period, the time when the mysterious powers of nature are most rapidly developing, he broke down. The following fall, he suffered a sudden mental breakdown. His Aunt Catharine later described this as the result of overwork, not simply in college, but throughout his life. From what I have learned in later years of the danger of too severely working the brain in childhood, I think that Charles was overworked before that delicate organ was consolidated. . . Each day of his life he was overworked in every way, so that when he came to the critical period, the time when the mysterious powers of nature are most rapidly developing, he broke down. 

After a period of rest at home, Charlie appeared to have regained his health, but his father chose to keep him out of school. Catharine later lamented that the family had no idea how sick Charlie really was. He appeared to be getting better, but “the appearance was fallacious.” In February 1841, while Jane was in Washington, it was finally decided that he should go to Europe to recuperate fully, hence Jane’s concern about getting home before he left. For a family that had already seen two generations touched by mental illness, Charlie’s struggles were terrifying, and the family was proactive in sending him to Europe. Unlike Jane’s father, he was not institutionalized. This particular disease was different, and the mind-body connection was central to treatment. As Catharine described it: “A mysterious, insidious disease was at work. Its manifestations were slight; the medical men called it a form of dyspepsia; it was attended with occasional fits of dejection.” While in Jane’s case, the cause of her dyspepsia was a bit muddled, in Charlie’s case, the family agreed with contemporary medical belief that the origin of these stomach problems lay in an overworked brain. The mental energy expended in intellectual pursuits was believed to draw necessary blood away from the other organs, leaving

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63 JMSI to HDSII, October 12, 1839, Box 25, Folder 20, SFP; Sedgwick, Letters from Charles Sedgwick, 141.
64 Sedgwick, Letters from Charles Sedgwick, 141.
65 Ibid., 142.
66 Ibid.
them prone to failure. Moreover, this also led to mental illness that the Sedgwick family called “the blues” or “depression,” which they often linked to dyspepsia. Mental rest was considered one of the primary treatments.

Charlie was reportedly cheerful and helpful to the captain of the steamer on which he was traveling up until the final days of the voyage to Liverpool. He wrote letters to his family, wishing them well, but they were shot through with a desire that his family should be relieved of the burdens he placed upon them. Upon his arrival in England, he took a turn for the worse.

The day before their arrival he took to his bed and said he had a bad fit of dyspepsia. It was with difficulty that Capt. D. persuaded him to leave the ship and go with him to his hotel — he was in the deepest dejection. The next day he was found dead in his bed with an empty phial of laudanum beside him.

The steamer that arrived in Boston in late April was supposed to bring them news of Charlie’s arrival in England; instead, it brought Charles “the news that his precious child had passed on.”

Charles’ letters to his sister Catharine immediately following Charlie’s death reveal how the Sedgwicks’ experience with mental illness influenced their reactions to Charlie’s struggles.

I do not think that Elizabeth and Kate were as well prepared for the blow as I was. For the last five months I have almost daily and nightly felt this cup could not pass from me unless I drink it. . . That fear, which in spite of me has so long embittered every reflecting hour, will rest – I trust forever – in Charlie’s grave. He is at rest, poor boy, and I am not unthankful. The loss of Charlie we shall feel till our dying day. . . but I assure you, after much reflection, that the loss is not aggravated by the manner of his death. I think there is as much reason to believe that that was a merciful dispensation of Providence. . . mercifully taken from sufferings which human skill could not remove, which the watchful affection of earthly friends could not alleviate.

His sad resignation to his son’s fate sounds much like his reflections on Harry’s death ten years earlier. When Harry died in 1831, Charles wrote to his brother Robert that they were all no doubt

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67 Amariah Brigham, “Influence of Mental Cultivation in Producing Dyspepsia – Irritation of the Brain Its most frequent Cause” Herald of Health, July 1873.
69 Ibid., 146–7.
feeling “gratitude that his day of rest has come,” having felt for months a “moral certainty” that he could not defeat his illness.\(^\text{70}\) Now, with the death of Charlie, a third Sedgwick had succumbed to mental illness, and a third generation had been touched by feelings of futility and hopelessness in the face of it. For a family that placed such importance on mental discipline, the only way to explain this persistent, insurmountable mental illness was to place it beyond science and human understanding, into the hands of God alone.

At this point, Charles saw his son’s suicide as a blessing from God: “I fear that some of my friends have fancied that there were some ingredients mixed in this bitter cup that have in creased its bitterness — but I have not tasted them. If he had no choice, God has in mercy taken him from the evil to come.”\(^\text{71}\) There was one thing, however, that filled Charles with regret in the wake of his son’s death. Charles had assumed, despite all evidence, that his son’s behavior was a result of personal weakness of character.

I was impatient of Charlie’s weakness, intolerant when his disease was upon him. The experience of seventeen and a half years of such disinterestedness and devotion as I never saw equalled, ought to have satisfied me that disease had wrought the change in him, and that he had no greater power of will than the dead.

Charles’ early appraisal of his son’s behavior is not surprising in a family where one’s strength of character was of paramount importance, and in an age when depictions of mental illness in popular discourse were linked with weak character. Charles consoled himself, however, with a firm belief that everything he did was out of love for his son and a desire for him to do well in life: “I am conscious that I always had an intense desire for his usefulness and happiness.”\(^\text{72}\) Jane Senior always knew her daughter would be agreeable, but was afraid she would not be useful,

\(^{71}\) Ibid., 148.
\(^{72}\) Ibid., 147.
and had attempted to educate her for usefulness. Against the background of this family tragedy, how was Jane to proceed in her search for usefulness when she was exhibiting symptoms similar to her cousin Charlie?

Charlie’s death was followed in September by the death of his uncle Robert Sedgwick, who had never fully recovered from a stroke several years earlier. Then in October, Jane and both her sisters were struck with typhoid fever. Louisa did not survive, dying two weeks before her fifteenth birthday.73 Only months after he had been on the receiving end of such comforts, Charles Sedgwick wrote his sister-in-law to console her on the death of her youngest child. In a sad twist of fate, the Sedgwick sibling Jane Senior had most relied upon in her Stockbridge isolation had been in New York when Louisa died. He wrote to her that they were now “fellow-sufferers...united in heart.”

I have lost a child wanting in nothing but happiness. You have lost one wanting in nothing that a young human creature can receive or impart. I have escaped from an abiding, oppressive fear; you have all the consolation of the sweetest memory, and both of us have the comfort of a strong hope... if our dear children are, as I hope, looking down upon us, it will refresh their spirits to see us endeavoring, by what cheerfulness we can, to lighten the load of life.74

While there is abundant documentation of this sort of consolation between the “adults” in the family, we have no words from Jane on the occasion of her cousin Charlie’s death or her sister Louisa’s death.

Jane, Hal, and Fanny may have skated in the cold moonlight ten years earlier, unable to fully comprehend their father’s death, but things were much different in 1841. By all accounts, Louisa’s death devastated her siblings. Jane and Fanny were still recovering from the illness, but

73 CMS to LDM, October 15, 1841, Box 80, Folder 10, SFP.
74 Sedgwick, Letters from Charles Sedgwick, 153-4.
her Aunt Catharine, serving as nurse and support to her sister-in-law, commended Jane’s “gentle & calm” behavior. Hal, she said, was the “greatest sufferer” who had “lost the joyous sprint that harmonized with his.” Catharine’s letter painted a grave picture of the devastation that such a death could wreak on an extended family with such ties. She noted that while Jane, Fanny, and Hal were bearing up as well as could be expected, Bessie, Uncle Charles’ daughter, “feels as if she had lost all.”

The sheer number of children in the extended Sedgwick family meant that every child could have a playmate their age. Just as fewer than six months separated Jane from her cousin Kate Sedgwick, Charles’ oldest daughter, and they practiced the skills of adulthood like letter-writing with each other, Louisa and Bessie had been separated by fewer than three months, and had a similarly close relationship. The children of Harry, Robert, and Charles Sedgwick, and the younger children of Louisa and William Minot formed a strong cohort of friends and cousins whose bonds increased in strength as they navigated the joys and perils of adulthood together.

Much has been made of the close-knit relationships among the children of Theodore and Pamela Sedgwick, particularly among the four youngest siblings. Dallett Hemphill’s work with the Sedgwick siblings of Jane’s father’s generation demonstrates the extent to which siblings acted as “shock absorbers” for those growing up in the early republic. As she put it, “[p]arents might pass away, but sibling ties were lasting.” And while many of Jane’s closest playmates were her cousins, in addition to her siblings, Catharine Sedgwick felt that the cousins being raised as siblings was an important way to pass down the sibling bonds of her generation.

It is delightful to me, who stand in an equal relation to the children, to see them growing

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75 CMS to WMI, October 19, 1841, Box 80, Folder 10, SFP.
up more like brothers and sisters than cousins. God grant that that affection, which was our most precious inheritance — which has been the sweetest blessing of our lives, may continue long after we have ceased to watch over it.\textsuperscript{77}

Yet as much as sibling ties were supposed to outlast parental ties, and continue long after parents, aunts and uncles were gone, sometimes they did not. The sibling bonds between the cousins, so lauded by the previous generation, meant that the loss of Louisa and Charlie in 1841 deeply affected siblings and cousins alike, and an observer might, as was noted on Louisa’s death, “find it difficult to say who was most grieved.”\textsuperscript{78}

In the years following her sister’s death, Jane spent increasing amounts of time traveling and visiting with her cousins in New York, where she could also enjoy the company of the O’Sullivans. For a woman of Jane’s status, adult life included more than wifehood and motherhood. The privilege of a life dedicated to these pursuits may have been an ideal for those women looking to claim middle-class respectability, but for Sedgwicks who already knew they were respectable, there were a wealth of philanthropic, religious, and reform movements in which to involve themselves. In addition to dabbling in the benevolent causes advocated by her mother and aunts, Jane also participated in the amusements of New York society, public and private. Throughout, we see glimpses that while Jane was certainly no radical, she remained open to reconsidering common knowledge and social convention, insulated by the respectability conferred upon her by her status.

Traveling to Boston with her Aunt Catharine soon after Louisa’s death, Jane had the opportunity to visit a pioneering doctor of the period. They stopped in Worcester to visit the Worcester Insane Asylum, run by Dr. Samuel B. Woodward. In 1821, Woodward had been on

\textsuperscript{78} CMS to WMI, Oct 19, 1841, Box 80, Folder 10, SFP.
the original committee appointed to survey Connecticut’s mentally ill, along with Eli Todd. Their recommendations led to the creation of the Hartford Retreat for the Insane, where Jane’s father received treatment.\textsuperscript{79} While the Hartford Retreat was a rather exclusive private institution, the “Worcester hospital,” as Jane called it, was a public institution and cared for a large number of patients. Worcester, founded in 1833, was considered a model institution, not least for its perceived success in curing patients.\textsuperscript{80} As the oldest child in her family, Jane had visited her father at Hartford, and certainly remembered him during his struggles with mental illness at home. The memory of Charlie’s death was also fresh in her mind. While this facility was for patients of a different class, her experiences allowed her to approach the patients at the Worcester hospital with a measure of openness.

The first night they were there, Dr. Woodward took them into a large hall where his children and the patients were having a dance, though “much more quietly and with less excitement” than the dances Jane recalled from home. She turned down the opportunity to dance with them, but said that if she had “felt in the spirits for dancing” she would have joined in. The next day saw the renewal of an old acquaintance:

One of the patients into whose room we went, inquired on seeing me, if I was Miss Jane Sedgwick and then informed me that she recollected me as a child at Hartford. I then thought I remembered her face. She was a Miss Pynchon whom I used to see at the asylum. I dare say you remember her as she used to be a great deal in my father’s room. She inquired particularly after you [Jane Senior] and Uncle Charles.

The presence of a former Hartford patient now at Worcester a decade later suggests flaws in the cure model of treatment, but that was probably no surprise to Jane and Catharine. Neither the doctors consulted in Boston nor Hartford had been able to cure Harry Sedgwick. After a brief

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Ibid.}, 98.
period, he had returned home, and died soon after. Miss Pynchon, however, represented a different trajectory. While we know nothing of her family life, we know that she was not cured, but was now in a state-run institution, perhaps no longer able to afford the costs of treatment at Hartford. For all of the praise Worcester received for curing patients, several of those that Jane mentioned in her letter to her mother appeared to be permanent residents of the hospital, most strikingly a woman who told Jane: “Oh I shall never be better. I’ve got all my children to kill! I’ve got to kill them in the wood.”  

What impressed Jane most that first night were Dr. Woodward’s daughters, who had been “sent on Angel’s missions among these unhappy people.” To Jane, it was the influence of people like the Woodwards – elite and benevolent, just as Jane was trained to be – that made a difference for the non-elite patients in the Worcester hospital. As much as she had experience and knowledge of mental illness within her family, Jane understood mental illness within a specific framework of status. Beyond its rate of cure, Jane saw distinct class-based successes at the Worcester hospital.

Each of the women had a nice little bedroom kept in perfect order, in which they were generally sitting sewing or occupied in some way. . . I should observe nothing peculiar about them for the most part except that they were more courteous in their manners than our people of that class generally are which is I think owing in a measure to the personal influence of Dr. Woodward.  

Many of the particularly ill patients Jane saw seemed to be incurable, but she still understood the hospital to be a success because of these sorts of changes. Women who were disordered were, through the influence of their social betters, brought into some kind of order, gaining manners they would not normally have had without the influence of the Woodwards. Jane would go on to

81 JMSII to JMSI, November 18, 1841, Box 26, Folder 2, SFP.  
82 Ibid.
reconsider many of the ordering structures of her life, but her writings consistently reflect the idea that the class hierarchy was natural and could not be successfully transgressed.

Despite her interest in these benevolent matters, Jane was most interested in returning to Stockbridge and her mother and sister. This visit had been planned, especially because it gave Jane the chance to visit a dentist in Boston, but coming on the heels of Louisa’s death, Jane lamented: “I never left home with so much reluctance.” Once back home in Stockbridge, Jane remained there for several months. Her rheumatic fever in the winter and spring of 1842 put a damper on her usual socializing, but by the end of April, she began to travel again. Her first trip was a return to Boston, in the company of her mother and sister, to stay with the Minots. As always, her Aunt Louisa was glad to see her, and her Minot cousins who were away were eager to hear of her progress. Louisa wrote to her daughter Julia that Jane “improves very fast she walked to the end of the Charles St. Mall & back this morning & looks remarkably well she is cheerful & very calm & sweet.”

With Cheery now in Albany with her only surviving child Ada, called Addie, Jane had all of her friends as close as she ever would. The next few years of her life were spent between Boston, New York, and Stockbridge. In New York and Boston, she socialized, but in Stockbridge, she kept house and cared for ill members of the family. Cheery and Addie spent much of the early summer of 1842 in Stockbridge with Jane, and Castillia visited regularly. While Jane suffered from eye maladies, they were nothing compared to the sufferings of her sister Fanny, who lost her sight periodically around the time of Jane’s recovery from rheumatic fever. Jane spent time reading Clarissa out loud to her sister, and was joined by a gentleman.

83 Ibid.
84 LDM to Julia Minot, April 21, 1842, Box 1, Folder 17, MRP.
85 JMSI to HDSII, May 28, 1842, Box 26, Folder 3, SFP; LDM to WMI, June 23, 1842, Box 110, Folder 9, SFP.
named Alexander Watts, one of Fanny’s admirers. While Jane Senior and Fanny went off to Springfield to see a doctor about Fanny’s eyes, Jane kept house again, this time with her Aunt Louisa. Louisa spent most of the summer in Stockbridge with Jane’s family, commenting to her husband: “it will be a convenience to her to have me in it during all these changes & journeys of herself & her daughters.”

As much as Jane had recovered from the worst of her fever, she was not well. Because of her sister’s illness, her own recovery had been pushed to the side, and she had turned from patient to caregiver overnight. But it appeared that she would find relief, and a little traveling as well, as soon as her mother and sister returned from Springfield. She was to journey to the springs at Saratoga with her Uncle Charles and her cousin Horatio Byington, though Aunt Louisa doubted she’d have any female companions, as her mother needed to stay home. The hope was that the waters would have a positive effect on her rheumatism. Till then, she practiced at housekeeping, gaining the approval of her aunt. After washing their breakfast dishes, gathering their peas and berries, and ordering their dinner, “our labours are at an end, the remainder is visiting walking & conversation. Jane is very cheerful & makes an excellent housekeeper.”

Jane busied herself keeping house and packing for Saratoga.

A month later, the situation had shifted dramatically. Louisa wrote to her husband in Boston to tell him she was leaving to go to Saratoga with a large party of friends and relations. She would travel with her son William, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, and Kate Sedgwick, to be met in Saratoga by Fanny, Hal, Jane Senior, Uncle Charles, and perhaps his daughter Bessie as

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86 LDM to Julia Minot, June 28, 1842, Box 1, Folder 18, MRP. His mother Matilda Ridley Watts was Aunt Susan’s sister, and the Watts and Sedgwick families shared a close relationship.
87 LDM to WMI, July 3, 1842, Box 110, Folder 10, SFP.
88 Ibid.
89 LDM to WMI, July 8, 1842, Box 110, Folder 10, SFP.
well. Jane was to remain in Stockbridge and keep house. Not only was she to keep house while
the rest of her family went on a trip that was originally planned for her, she was to do so while
the cook’s daughter was ill with scarlet fever. Her cousin Frank Minot came out from Boston to
stay with her, and the two of them kept house in what Frank claimed was “a very splendid and
hospitable style,” but for the most part, Frank seems to have spent his days shooting ducks,
smoking cigars, and drinking claret.

Why did a trip to the waters to ease Jane’s rheumatism turn into a trip to the waters for
everyone else while Jane kept house? “Jane [Senior] came very unwillingly & only because
Fanny could not be persuaded to come without her,” leaving despite the fact that the family cook
was exhibiting symptoms of scarlet fever. Louisa remarked: “in that state of her family it is not
surprising that Sister Jane was loth to quit home, & leave all this doubtful state of things to her
daughter Jane’s responsibility,” but she came anyway, because Fanny wanted to go and would
not go without her. Very little about Fanny Sedgwick remains in the archive, but if one
tendency emerges from descriptions of her, it is the tendency to cling to her mother. This had
been seen years earlier with her unwillingness to go to school in Boston with Jane if their mother
stayed in Stockbridge. In this case, Jane’s ability to function independently and run a household
meant she could also be left behind to fend for herself.

Jane stayed in Stockbridge for the rest of 1842, attending the biggest Sedgwick social
event of the year in November: the marriage of her cousins Kate Sedgwick and William Minot
II. Three years earlier, Kate had traveled to Europe with Aunt Catharine and Uncle Robert,
where she met Will. The two were in love before they returned to the United States in 1840.

90 LDM to WMI, August 8, 1842, Box 110, Folder 10, SFP.
91 Frank Minot to Harriet Minot, August 14, 1842, Box 1, Folder 18, MRP.
92 LDM to WMI, August 14, 1842, Box 110, Folder 10, SFP.
Now, on the eve of the wedding, Jane kept house for the bridegroom in Stockbridge as the day approached. In addition, Jane served as Kate’s bridesmaid. The road to wedded bliss had been smooth for Will and Kate, and Cheery was partially correct when she noted “how agreeable it must be to you all,” but Jane had mixed feelings about the situation. She was so unsettled by the news of her cousins’ engagement, she felt compelled to “[give] way to the impulse of my heart for once,” sending Kate a letter expressing her feelings on the news. While she had known this day would come, when it arrived, she felt dissatisfied.

I am very fond of William & allways have been but the truth is he does not quite satisfy me for you – indeed I think hardly any man living would. I can hardly conceive that you are really and truly in love with William but if I see that is the case I trust I shall be reconciled though I must confess I am not at present.

She believed William was probably upset with her reaction when he had revealed the news but was “too taken up with his own happiness” for it to make much difference. She felt compelled to reveal the innermost depths of her heart to her Kate, even though it might cause pain and heartache, and even though her friendship with Kate had been uneven.

Dearest Kate you were my earliest friend and though the great difference in our characters has prevented our having much sympathy – I have always had a stronger affection for you than I think you ever realized. . .

Kate was only six months older than Jane, and the two had been raised together. Other, older Sedgwick cousins had married before this, but this was the first child of the younger cohort, the children of Harry, Robert, and Charles, to take this symbolic step into adulthood. For Jane, the idea of Will and Kate stepping into this new life together was deeply troubling.

93 Mary O’Sullivan Langtree to JMSII, January 14, 1842, Box 32, Folder 24, SFP. Hereafter “Cheery.”
94 JMSII to Kate Sedgwick Minot (KSM), January 10, 1842, Box 9, Folder 18, Charles Sedgwick Papers, MHS.
95 Ibid.
Despite Jane’s clear reservations about the engagement, Kate asked her to be her bridesmaid. Jane was deeply touched, and poured out her heart to Kate once more. She apologized for having doubted Kate and Will’s love, and having slighted his character, but admitted that the entire affair made her uncomfortable in a way she could not deny.

I do think the marriages of one’s dear friends are almost always so painful even under the least painful circumstances that it requires an effort to be willing to be present at them - but your choice of me for your bridesmaid I cannot but value too much as a mark of your affection not to wish to comply with it.

Kate had been deeply hurt by Jane’s view of her engagement, and Jane lamented the fact that she had not expressed her love alongside her criticism: “I do not know why it is not easy for me to do this with you though I love you so much.”

Catharine Maria Sedgwick had endured great emotional anguish over the marriage of all of her siblings, particularly her “mother-sister” Eliza and her brothers Robert and Charles. Jane, Kate and Will were not siblings, but the pain of the marriage may have been compounded by the fact that the bride and groom were both Jane’s close relatives, “forming a closer bond of union between the families” but simultaneously walling both of them off from her in their new nuclear family. In both letters on the subject, Jane expressed to Kate that Will, who was also her cousin and friend, had been too absorbed to notice her distress: “I naturally felt when I have been with him this summer that he has been too much engrossed with you to care much for the present about the society of any body else.” Her comments suggest that her pain stemmed not only from her separation from Kate but also from Will. In the Sedgwick family, and among

96 JMSII to KSM, 1842, Box 9, Folder 18, Charles Sedgwick Papers, MHS.
98 JMSII to KSM, January 10, 1842, Box 9, Folder 18, Charles Sedgwick Papers, MHS.
99 JMSII to KSM, 1842, Box 9, Folder 18, Charles Sedgwick Papers, MHS.
families of their class more generally, strong links formed not only between siblings, but between first cousins as well. Jane was losing two friends at the same time, and losing them to each other.

It seems unlikely, though, that Kate and Will’s marriage caused Jane any greater anxiety about her own marital future. Kate married just after her twenty-second birthday, while Will was only twenty-four, both marrying quite young in comparison with their cohort, and even with their parents. While the ideal of companionate marriage may have prompted nineteenth-century women to hold out for their ideal relationship, in this case it seems to have facilitated the swift union of two young people in love. Kate and Will had a growing brood of children by the time the rest of the younger female Sedgwick cousins began to marry, starting with Fanny in 1849 at the age of 27 and ending with Lizzie in 1860 at the age of 36. As much as Kate and Will’s marriage may have been Jane’s first taste of the coming transformation of the cousinage into separate nuclear families, there was still time yet to enjoy life with her single cousins.

In the following years, Jane spent more and more time with those cousins in New York. She may have been practicing the skills of adulthood, and able to deploy them when necessary, but she was still a young, single, elite woman who had plenty of time for diversions. Jane and her mother went to New York for Christmas in 1843, and Jane spent the next few months there, socializing with family and friends, but particularly with her cousin Lizzie, two years her junior. In a series of letters between Lizzie, Robert Sedgwick’s daughter who lived in New York, and Bessie Sedgwick, Charles Sedgwick’s daughter who lived in Lenox, a portrait of Jane emerges that shows her as a serious and sensitive young woman, acutely aware of how she was viewed by

100 Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World,” 11.
those around her. But we also see the lighter, sillier side, as she engaged in the sort of parlor
diversions and minor romantic intrigues that were exclusive to her stage of life, even attracting
the attention of a young man herself.

As she had not spent any time at boarding school, had spent little time outside of
Stockbridge, and had spent almost no time out from under the watchful eye of her mother and
Aunt Louisa, Jane’s opportunities to form extra-familial friendships had been extremely
limited. With her entrance into New York society, she was not separated from her family, but
her social world grew. Lizzie, to whom she grew quite close, was a “new” friend; she was the
daughter of Robert Sedgwick, had lived in the city her entire life, and socialized quite separately
from the Berkshire County Sedgwicks. Jane’s letters with Lizzie when away from New York
demonstrate the kind of intimate female friendship with someone her age that she might have
formed earlier in her life in other circumstances. Lizzie was still family, however, and the built-in intimacies of that relationship seems to have permitted a certain frankness about Jane’s social
failings. Jane’s friendship with Cheery, on the other hand, exhibited much more of the pure
intimacy and adoration of the deep female relationships of this period. These new sources of
emotional support were very important as Jane navigated unfamiliar situations and relationships.

Her New York circle included some friends of the Sedgwicks and O’Sullivans, especially
the family of Lucy Channing Russell, the sister of William Ellery Channing. With a greater
variety of friends, Jane had the opportunity to participate in many social events particular to the
period. Her mother, who was with her in New York, praised her participation in a 100-person

101 Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World,” 17-8. Smith-Rosenberg places great emphasis on the role of female friendships formed outside of the familial female world in women’s social development, and notes that the primary site of these friendships is school. Jane’s lack of formal schooling and familial isolation did not mean she was lacking in socialization, but it does cast her friendships before the age of 20 in a rather unique light.
tableaux vivant organized by friends of theirs, the Carrolls. Jane acted in four scenes, including as Beppo in a dramatic interpretation of Byron’s poem of the same name and as the wolf in Little Red Riding Hood. One of the members of the audience had quite a different impression of the tableaux. George John Curley, a young British man visiting New York, had been invited to the viewing. He found the tableaux an “unnatural curiosity” lasting four hours, and prayed to be spared from enduring any more in the future.

The success of the tableaux vivant staged by the Misses Carroll prompted the extended Sedgwick family to stage their own production. Tableaux vivantes, popular among the upper-classes, were simply frozen scenes with no dialogue. Parlor plays, another popular form of home entertainment, were often written particularly for the middle-class parlor itself, with dialogue and simple or non-existent sets and costumes. The Sedgwicks set their sights on something greater: James Sheridan Knowles’ play “The Hunchback.” They seem to have had none of the anxieties that would emerge in the later nineteenth century about the propriety of such activities for women. Social commentators at the time worried about the women embodying these roles and performing them in quasi-public spaces, transgressing cultural norms of gender and class. For the Sedgwick family, concern over women of culture working in public was tempered first by Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s prolific publishing career, and second by the family’s close relationship with the English actress Fanny Kemble. It was Kemble’s performance in “The Hunchback” that Jane had had to miss a decade earlier, when her mother removed her from

102 JMSI to LDM, January 21, 1844, Box 29, Folder 13, SFP.
school in Boston. Now, as an adult, Jane would take part in a staging of that play in a most transgressive way.

The Sedgwicks began working on “The Hunchback” as soon as Jane’s tableaux vivant ended. Lizzie wrote to Bessie in Lenox when they had been working for three weeks, recounting the ups and downs of casting and rehearsal. Fanny took the part of Julia, the female lead made famous by Fanny Kemble, now “Mrs. Butler” to the Sedgwicks. Lizzie and her younger sisters Sue and Henrietta took the other female parts. Most of the male parts were taken by Lizzie’s brother Ellery, Alexander Watts, and several other Sedgwick cousins and friends. The role of Master Walter, the male lead, had been performed by the playwright when the play premiered at Covent Garden in 1832. In this parlor production, Jane played the role.105

Despite the availability of men to play the role of Master Walter, none seems to have suited the part. Lizzie admitted that retaining a man in the secondary lead role of Clifford had been difficult. Their cousin Theodore had originally been cast, but two weeks into rehearsal had quit the play “in his own unceremonious manner of taking leave, without so much as by your leave.” The O’Sullivans were put to the task of finding a replacement, but their suggestion, a young Henry Ward, was rejected. Then Fanny brought along Mr. West, who had starred with Jane in the tableaux vivant earlier in the month. Lizzie thought she had an ulterior motive: “Then Fanny. . . humbly brought Mr. West - an intimate friend of the McCoons and partner of Wm Russell, to be her lover.”106 Still, Jane’s casting as Master Walter cannot be put down entirely to a lack of available men. It seems that in addition to her strong commitment to the endeavor, Jane also had the talent and dedication necessary to carry off a leading role.

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105 Elizabeth Ellery (Lizzie) Sedgwick to Elizabeth Dwight (Bessie) Sedgwick, February 1844, Box 9, Sedgwick Papers, Stockbridge Library.
106 Ibid.
For a woman, playing a male role required careful negotiation, and a woman acting in that capacity needed to maintain and perform her femininity even as she attempted to embody the masculine. Those who were concerned about the increasing popularity of parlor plays were worried that women, whose characters were inherently more malleable than those of men, would permanently take on the aspects of the characters they played. In many cases, this concern focused on playing female characters of dubious moral quality. In Jane’s case, she also had to worry herself with how to dress as a man while not dressing too much like a man. She took it very seriously, and problems with the costume left her stalking around the various Sedgwick apartments, “her face densely clouded,” begging Lizzie for help.

I forgot my writing and was soon intensely interested in a discussion on trunk hose, tights, top boots, doublets, wigs, humps, caps &c; the dress must be mannish, but befitting a woman. We must ascertain the exact point where leg could be called ankle no longer, and though a tolerably long ankle might be visible, very little leg was allowable. I drew Jeanie the pattern of a dress that I thought would answer... which would cover the leg, and would not look inappropriate... The question of whether the dress could be made in a style “befitting a woman” without being too “mannish” was a subset of the larger question posed of women who acted. Yet despite Jane and Lizzie’s concern over the outfit, there does not seem to have been much concern that acting in this fashion was inappropriate or dangerous for Jane. If anything, the cousins were more concerned with getting the costume just right.

This was not the first time that the appropriateness of Jane’s dress had been at issue, nor the first time her behavior had been potentially transgressive of gender boundaries. She had certainly been an active child, and carried that into her young adulthood. In the summer of 1839, her mother noted: “yesterday Jane had to perform her usual office of pioneer through the ice hole

108 Lizzie Sedgwick to Bessie Sedgwick, March 1844, Box 9, Sedgwick Papers, Stockbridge Library.
to some of the dark strangers who wish to be picturesque in still of nature.” The location in question, now known as the Ice Glen, is a sheltered ravine that contains ice and snow even in the middle of summer. The current trail to the Ice Glen is still rated “difficult”; that Jane was a regular “pioneer” there in the 19th century tells us something of her athleticism.\textsuperscript{109} Despite this being a regular part of her life, there are no comments from the family correspondence that indicate they thought her behavior was “unladylike,” but one comment from around the same time suggests the wider world disagreed.

Aunt Louisa remarked upon a conversation she had had with a Mrs. Gorham, who she described as having a “reproachful style.” In attempting to avoid a quarrel, Louisa told her of Jane’s “droll” response to an invitation to New York: “that she had no clothes, & would not go in Eve’s style in N.Y.” The response from Mrs. Gorham was cutting: “It is the first time I ever knew Jane hindered from doing anything by consideration of dress. There are great revolutions going on among the women, but this is the greatest I have heard of yet!” The suggestion here – that Jane was known for defying this social convention – tells us something of Jane’s character. Her concern over her Master Walter costume, and over her clothes for her trip to New York, indicate that she acknowledged convention, even if she ultimately decided to defy it. Her Aunt Louisa’s rejection of Mrs. Gorham’s criticism tells us that Jane had at least a few supporters who tolerated her behavior even when it was unconventional.\textsuperscript{110}

When the play was finally performed, in front of a significant audience, the family correspondence indicates Louisa was not Jane’s only supporter. Her mother wrote to Louisa that John O’Sullivan was filled with praise for her performance, claiming to have never seen the “real

\textsuperscript{109} http://www.upperhousatonicheritage.org/searchresult-detail.php?hs_id=107
\textsuperscript{110} LDM to CMS, n.d. [1838], Box 1, Folder 5, MRP.
Master Walter” till now. Jane Senior felt her daughter had acquitted herself well, particularly given the nature of her role.

Indeed, Jane astonished everyone by her nice conception of the part her clear firm articulation, entire self-profession. . . considering that she took this part entirely to oblige others & because nobody else could well do it she deserves some praise – it was rather trying for a young lady to appear before an audience of 70 persons in a male character- but there was not the least impropriety in her costume & she seemed nothing but the real upright Master Walter, the true father of Julia.¹¹¹

Lizzie, in an effusive letter to Bessie after the play, said “Jane’s acting was admirable, it seemed impossible she should ever be anything but Master Walter.”¹¹² Aunt Catharine was also amazed at her performance: “her presentation of Master Walter was a reality - She was the wronged earnest right hearted warm headed Hunchback.”¹¹³

Jane’s relatives were not the only ones enraptured by her performance. Despite Mr. West’s inclusion at Fanny’s request, it was her older sister who caught his eye. He and Jane had acted together in the tableaux earlier in the year, and he took this repeat engagement as an opportunity to get to know Jane better. Within a few days of him joining rehearsals, Lizzy wrote to Bessie that he “[admired] Jane excessively.”

Without devoting himself to either of the girls he has become quite intimate with them, and without their suspecting it in the least, has been quietly observing and studying Jane’s peculiarities – he says little and never flatters, but Anna Russell told us that he thought Jane the purest creature he had ever seen, that she was the life and soul of the house, that he had often fancied such a character, but had never seen anything like her before.

¹¹¹ JMSI to LDM, February 24, 1844, Box 28, Folder 8, SFP.
¹¹² Lizzie Sedgwick to Bessie Sedgwick, March 1844, Box 9, Sedgwick Papers, Stockbridge Library.
¹¹³ CMS to JMSI, February 23, 1844, Reel 14, Catharine Maria Sedgwick Papers.
She said they were all delighted at this development, and felt it was doing Jane some good to be “more popular” than she ever had been. Bessie agreed, musing “popular she has never before been I suspect, and it was that which she needed to sun herself in to become bright & happy like other people.” They both hoped that her experiences in New York, and the attention of Mr. West would “produce a lasting impression. . . that will not wear away.”

Outside of these few letters, Mr. West is never mentioned again. Even his first name is unknown. What is mentioned again, over and over, is Jane’s personality, the one that made this romantic attention so surprising to her family, particularly her female cousins, all of whom were at an age to be particularly conscious of their attractiveness to the opposite sex. Jane’s cousins were pleased and a little amazed that Jane, who they felt was so odd and could be so disagreeable, was receiving such attention. Not only did Mr. West not mind her peculiarities, he was actually attracted to them. Just as her mother had hoped that a “champion” might appear to save Adelaide O’Sullivan, Bessie and Lizzie hoped that romance, even fleeting, could save Jane from her own serious temperament and unpopularity.

Aunt Catharine praised Jane’s performance as Master Walter, but also joked with Kate about Jane’s serious temperament: “She took it to heart as she does every thing else. . . Levity in the laugh-g actors was misery to her.” A few years earlier, Catharine had commented that Jane, “having just passed the boundary line of childhood, like other borderers is most annoyed by encroachments from the other side.” Lizzie felt Jane was both overly-eager and overly-sensitive, and lamented that after she told Jane she was too busy to speak with her, “I turned and

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114 Lizzie Sedgwick to Bessie Sedgwick, February 1844, Box 9, Sedgwick Papers, Stockbridge Library.
115 Bessie Sedgwick to Lizzie Sedgwick, February 11, 1844, Box 84, Folder 25, SFP.
116 CMS to KSM, February 23, 1844, Reel 14, Catharine Maria Sedgwick Papers.
117 CMS to JMSI, n.d. [1838], Reel 17, Catharine Maria Sedgwick Papers.
saw Jeannie’s face it was crimson, and I saw I had mortally offended.”118 When Lizzie and Bessie agreed that being popular was something new for Jane, something she had never experienced before, they fervently hoped that it would help her become “like other people.” Some of those who knew Jane intimately felt that she was never going to be truly happy as she was, and hoped that the presence of this or that activity, this or that person, would effect the necessary change. It is notable, however, that Jane had two champions within her own family; the first, her Aunt Louisa, had always been her supporter, but the second, her mother, was growing to appreciate and admire the daughter who had concerned her so much ten years prior.

In many areas, the family felt that Jane had shown great growth. Jane Senior had feared for her daughter’s character when she was a child, but now she had the confirmation from friends like Lucy Channing Russel that Jane possessed the “invaluable trait” of integrity, and Jane Senior herself noted how well received her daughter was in society.119 She had proved, through her traveling, that she could do much more than “slump along.” But the constant anxiety in the family was whether or not Jane was cheerful, occupied, and content. After all, she had already begun to demonstrate that when a situation was not to her liking, she was willing to take action to change it. Soon, Jane was actively looking to attempt “something in the way of regular business,” as her mother put it.120

Despite her success at keeping house and socializing agreeably, two important skills for adult womanhood for someone of her class, and her enjoyment of the multiple social events, benevolent activities and intellectual pursuits available to an elite woman of her age, Jane was not content and cheerful. She and her mother both believed this was because she was not

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118 Lizzie Sedgwick to Bessie Sedgwick, March 1844, Box 9, Sedgwick Papers, Stockbridge Library.
119 LCR to JMSI, n.d., Box 29, Folder 17, SFP; JMSI to LDM, n.d., Box 28, Folder 13, SFP.
120 JMSI to HDSII, n.d. [1834 or 1844], Box 25, Folder 1, SFP.
properly occupied. As her mother had put it, Jane’s desire for “demonstration in all things” meant she must therefore be “doomed to distraction.”¹²¹ Jane wrote to her brother at college about her life in “dreary and rainy” Stockbridge: visiting, attending dances, gardening, and reading. She found this life of leisure unfulfilling.

Fanny and I are consoling ourselves with several hours a day of German which we are studying at this rate - she for amusement and I partly with the object of fitting myself for any future schemes for you see I do not seem to be discouraged yet though for the present I hope I shall be contented to stay quietly at home with my friends.²²

New York did no better than Stockbridge, simply supplying her with more of the same. The turning point came while she was in New York, during the winter of the play. Someone, probably Herbert O’Sullivan, made a comment to her in passing that she couldn’t manage on her own if she needed to. To Jane, a serious young woman bored with her life and requiring “demonstration in all things,” that kind of statement was a challenge.

The bit was quickly between her teeth, and this fear of dependence, combined with the family’s focus on usefulness, catalyzed a plan for Jane to work independently as a teacher. Though it took several months to arrange everything, Jane’s determination to “make the experiment” was fierce, and brought her into conflict with friends and family. With the support of her mother, Kate, and Lizzie, however, she ventured into a new world, utterly alone by design, to test herself and know herself. By the end of the experiment in the spring of 1845, she knew herself well, and had developed clear ideas about what would and would not make a satisfactory life.

¹²¹ JMSI to LDM, n.d. [1840s], Box 28, Folder 3, SFP
¹²² JMSII to HDSII, n.d. [1840s] Box 86, Folder 2, SFP.
Jane’s desire to go abroad to teach met with a mixed response, and many who disapproved failed to understand why Jane could not accept the “good” life she already had. Herbert understood her desire for usefulness, but in his usual patronizing fashion, urged her to exert herself in “those kind domestic offices” which he was sure would bring her more happiness than the plan she was developing.

With good health, and not having the necessity to “work for your living,” and surrounded by such a family and circle of friends you ought to be very happy; and if you only once get into the right course, I am convinced you will be...¹²³

By this point, however, Jane had little patience for others telling her what “ought” to make her happy, and Herbert’s attempts to urge her back into her small social circle seem to have fallen upon deaf ears. Though Jane and Herbert had grown quite close in the brief time they had known each other, and Jane had come to see him as a brother, his disapproval struck a nerve. While Herbert casually joked that Jane had no need to work for her living, implying that she could live on her Sedgwick status, Jane remained a fatherless and husbandless Sedgwick. Her mother’s money was tied up in trust, and it is quite clear from Sedgwick family correspondence that the Harry Sedgwick branch were the poor country cousins. Perhaps to Herbert, whose family seemed reconciled to the boom-and-bust cycle they seemingly found themselves in, Jane’s situation seemed stable, but Jane and her nuclear family were well aware of their financial constraints, even as family members like Aunt Catharine urged Jane to spend more of her money if she wanted live fashionably while visiting her fashionable family in New York City.

Aunt Catharine herself provided a model of acceptable if unique female occupation, as did Aunt Charles, who ran a small school for young women out of her home in Lenox. For Jane, taking up a teaching position in a private school would have been both socially-acceptable and a

¹²³ Herbert O’Sullivan to JMSII, December 1, 1843, New York, NY, Box 32, Folder 6, SFP.
natural extension of her family’s emphasis on female education. Women in Massachusetts increasingly took up public school positions as well.\textsuperscript{124} In addition to the possibility of teaching for Aunt Charles or in public school in Stockbridge, another opportunity presented itself in New York. Cheery attempted to persuade Jane to assist her in the Catholic charity school she was running in Brooklyn under the auspices of Cuban priest Felix Varela, who had been Adelaide’s confessor. Understanding her friend’s constant quest, Cheery was sure Jane could do “an immensity of good” and be “very useful” if she would remain in New York as her assistant. But teaching amongst the people who cared for and supported her was not what Jane had in mind, and she set her sights on teaching in the South, away from everyone she knew.\textsuperscript{125}

While there was a longstanding tradition of private tutors in wealthy Southern homes, and Jane did have invitations to teach in such a setting, she chose a different option. The first half of the nineteenth century saw the rise of private academies throughout the South, and it was to one of these academies that Jane headed. No letters remain to indicate why she chose an academy position over a private tutoring position, but for someone who expressly disliked isolation from society, the prospect of facing that in a strange place may have been unappealing. Instead, Jane chose to take a position at the school of a Mrs. Hackley in Norfolk, Virginia. William Ellery Channing had tutored a young Harriet Randolph when she was a child; now as Harriet Randolph Hackley, she ran a fledgling girls’ school.\textsuperscript{126} Channing’s sister, Lucy Channing Russell, arranged for Jane to go teach there for a term, beginning in the fall of 1844.

\textsuperscript{125} Cheery to JMSII, September 12, 1844, New York, NY, Box 32, Folder 24, SFP.
Once the plan was set into motion, Jane had much to arrange, and was still fending off the worries and criticisms of those around her. In addition to some concerns about the distance of her sojourn, there were worries about how Jane, the consummate New Engander, would fare in the South. Cheery urged Jane to reconsider only a few weeks before her departure, believing “not even [her] love of adventure” would be enough for her to endure her time in Virginia. Herbert continued his attempts to persuade Jane, even appealing to her generosity by urging her to give the job up so a woman with greater need could take it. Foremost in his mind, however, was the loneliness he felt Jane was bound to feel, even in a city, noting “there is not man, woman or child in the borough…whose society could in any degree compensate you for the loss of your friends.” He expressed reservations about the only woman of similar age Jane was likely to encounter, Miss Martha Hackley, Harriet’s daughter. All he had heard of her led him to believe she was nothing but “a silly young woman…engaged to be married a year hence to an equally silly young man, which no doubt will make her all the sillier meanwhile,” and every description of Jane by her friends suggests she had little patience for silliness. Herbert continued to needle Jane about her plans, and particularly about her choice of Norfolk, his tone shifting from humor to concern until he finally admitted: “Oh, how I wish that I could join in your expedition of discovery!”

For other family friends, the concerns about Jane’s expedition south were quite different from those expressed by the O’Sullivans. After making the initial contact with Mrs. Hackley, Lucy Russell continued to serve as liaison between her and the Sedgwicks. In addition to

127 Cheery to JMSII, September 12, 1844, New York, NY, Box 32, Folder 24, SFP.
128 Herbert O’Sullivan to JMSII, October 2, 1844, New York, NY, Box 32, Folder 1, SFP.
129 Herbert O’Sullivan to JMSII, October 2, 1844, New York, NY, Box 32, Folder 1, SFP.
130 Herbert O’Sullivan to JMSII, August 1, 1844, New York, NY, Box 32, Folder 24, SFP.
communicating information to Jane Senior, she also took it upon herself to emphasize how she must prepare her daughter for her immersion in a new culture. This preparation, in Russell’s eyes, consisted of making sure Jane knew she was obligated to keep her opinions about slavery and religion to herself unless Mrs. Hackley directly asked for her opinion.

I think as she voluntarily places herself in this situation she shd never volunteer an opinion to any one…it would not merely be showing a want of delicacy but it might be an injury to Mrs. Hackley’s school – she must not even look as though she could speak daggers if she were allowed – with Jane’s strong feelings I know that this must be a great trial and you must prepare her for it.\(^{131}\)

To Russell, this was not only important because of Jane’s natural inclination towards the expression of strong opinions, but also because of Hackley’s position in the community, which Russell felt might be damaged by any association with Jane’s views. Where Cheery and Herbert danced around the issue of slavery, Russell confronted it directly, and Jane Senior took her warnings to heart, later mentioning to Louisa that she had impressed upon Jane the importance of holding her tongue. In the end, Russell’s fears about Jane, Mrs. Hackley, and the collision of their two cultures were not unfounded, though slavery would not be the spark of their confrontation.

In the end, Jane’s most fervent supporter in her desire to teach in Norfolk was her mother. In the early parts of 1844, as Jane’s determination grew, her mother cast about for alternatives, asking Hal to find a French boarding house wherein Jane could put her language skills to use, in the hopes that she might not go South. But as the summer progressed, she demonstrated a new understanding of her daughter’s temperament and needs, writing to Louisa of her commitment to Jane’s plan to seek out a teaching engagement, especially in a warmer climate that might improve her health as well as her spirits. While friends like Herbert saw no need for such a

\(^{131}\) LCR to JMSI, September 24, 1844, New York, NY, Box 29, Folder 17, SFP.
drastic change in her life, Jane’s mother came to understand the practical and emotional benefits that her daughter might gain.

I think [she] may very well earn her board in that way & I am very desirous that she should make the experiment. She is certainly better qualified than many young ladies who go South for this purpose - of one thing I am certain, that this measure is as important as a surgical operation would be if Jane had a tumour on her face. [B]ut it is difficult to make this understood by any of her friends except myself.¹³²

Whether pleased with or simply reconciled to her daughter’s decision, Jane Senior recognized that it was necessary. Her inclusion of herself as Jane’s friend, and as the singular friend who understood her motivations, demonstrates a growing understanding and acceptance of her daughter that would prove important during the years of Jane’s conversion.¹³³

Reconciled to her daughter’s decision, Jane Senior was also forced to defend it against the outrage of her son, who believed Jane’s hot-headed actions would reflect poorly on the family by suggesting she was seeking employment out of financial need. If Hal delivered his first round of criticism in a letter, no such letter remains in the archives, but Jane Senior’s response tells us something of his fears, which were unique to his gender and position in the family. Jane Senior firstly reassured him that Jane was not to be a governess, but rather a teacher in a “small private school, where she will be on the same footing in regard to her respectability that Castillia held in our family.” She was being brought on because of “what she knows in modern languages.” Hal, now twenty and able to take on the mantle of the man of the family more fully, clearly saw Jane’s venture as lacking respectability, something that might communicate a loss of financial and social status to those they knew, which could in turn affect Hal as he looked to make a name for himself in the legal profession. To that end, Jane Senior offered Hal a different

¹³² JMSI to LDM, 1844, Stockbridge, Box 28, Folder 15, SFP.
way of framing Jane’s trip that might allow him to explain it to nosy acquaintances: “it is understood that she goes for the benefit of a southern climate, that her teaching is merely an equivalent for her board, & that she is in the position of Mrs. Hackley's daughter.” While working specifically to earn money was not an acceptable occupation for a woman of Jane’s status, traveling for one’s health and utilizing one’s intellectual abilities in the service of education could be understood as respectable by the Sedgwicks’ social equals.\textsuperscript{134}

Still, Jane Senior acknowledged her daughter’s real reasons for taking the trip, and asked her son to recognize and accept the benefits this trip might bring to his sister.

\ldots as she has wanted to try a Southern winter & to test her power of occupying herself usefully & independently I prefer that she should now embrace this opportunity - it will be a good discipline for her & should she succeed the benefit to her character will be greater than she can obtain any other way. You would be surprized to see the business like manner in which she is preparing herself for her new vocation.\textsuperscript{135}

As Jane prepared for departure, those around her also noticed a new-found determination in the way she carried herself. Harriet Davidson Field, who had originally opposed the idea, now believed it might do her some good, but noted that were Jane a man, she would be able to exercise her “self-reliance” in all parts of life, without recourse to this kind of venture.\textsuperscript{136} Jane busied herself with obtaining all she would need for her trip, and for her time in Norfolk, including a plentiful supply of books, as Mrs. Hackley had made it clear the school, and Norfolk itself, was without the materials Jane would need to teach her language classes. As the date of her departure neared, Jane heard rumors about the quality of the Hackley school from Cheery, who told her the school was “extremely superficial & that the girls who have been educated there are so ordinary and common place.” As she boarded the ship on the day of departure, “the palor

\textsuperscript{134} JMSI to HDSII, September 30, 1844, Box 25, Folder 9, SFP.
\textsuperscript{135} JMSI to HDSII, September 30, 1844, Box 25, Folder 9, SFP.
\textsuperscript{136} Harriet Davidson Field to JMSI, October 2, 1844, New York, Box 29, Folder 18, SFP.
[sic] of Jane’s face told the feeling of her heart,” but Mrs. Field wrote to Jane Senior that “Jane had the composure of one who had ‘put her hand to the plough & would not look back.’”  

From the boat, Jane wrote and sent a letter to her brother at Harvard. Earlier, her mother had showed her one of the private letters he had written expressing disapproval of her choice to go and teach. In a cutting missive, she acknowledged that he still found her decision “degrading” by association, but argued that he could not possibly understand her feelings or her motives, as they had grown so far apart as they entered adulthood. She believed that all of her reasons for going were well founded, including one that had not previously been discussed: the “painful feeling of the necessity of separating for a time” from Hal himself. She felt their relationship had degraded so much over the previous year that “rather than that our intercourse should continue in this painful manner I had almost rather never see you again.” She hoped that when they were reunited, he would be more forgiving of her flaws, for which she claimed there were good reasons which would arouse his sympathies if he knew them. In her decision to go to Norfolk, Jane was making choices that she believed would lead to more happiness, or at least less pain, in multiple areas of her life.  

Smith-Rosenberg argues that in this period, “American society was characterized in large part by rigid gender-role differentiation within the family and within society as a whole, leading to the emotional segregation of women and men.” The situation and composition of Jane’s family meant that she and her brother had probably spent more time together growing up than had her father been alive, and that Hal himself had grown up in a very female world. Still, he had gone off to Harvard in 1839, leaving the women at home, pursuing a course of study (when he

137 Mary Rowley O’Sullivan to JMSI, October 18, 1844, New York, Box 30, Folder 8, SFP.  
138 JMSII to HDSII, October 18, 1844, Box 91, Folder 1, SFP.  
could be bothered to get to class) that was unavailable to Jane. Her letters to him teased him about putting on airs and graces and forgetting that his sisters were still at home: “But a gentleman of your important associations perhaps should not be required to recollect so trivial a circumstance.” Hal’s career at Harvard seems to have been rocky, with the entire family having to admit defeat at the last minute and not attend commencement in 1843 because Hal was not expected to “finish his part.” Little from the year prior to Jane’s departure for Norfolk exists in the archives to explain the deep animosity that arose between the two siblings by the fall of 1844, but their separation in this period of becoming adults, and the different ways in which they were expected to become adults, likely contributed to their poor relationship.

One extant letter from Hal to Jane Senior demonstrated the depth of his condescension towards his sister and her decision, even after receiving the earlier letter from his mother that attempted to explain the worthiness and respectability of Jane’s plans. Like his mother, he used medical terms to describe his sister’s choice: a “radical remedy” for a “burning fever.” He knew that his sister was determined to give her scheme a trial “with all her energetic soul.” In a few sentences, however, he summed up how he and others close to Jane perceived her struggles in life.

Jane is a genius, as far as the practical conduct of life goes. How Nature stumbled into such a mistake as not to make her one in reality, or what that mistake really is, I never could exactly determine, for she has every one of the canonical qualities of genius - energy, determination, concentration, boldness, enthusiasm &c &c everything but the genius itself. That she certainly has not got, but that makes no difference here.

140 HDSII to JMSI, n.d. [June 1842], Box 26, Folder 3, SFP. Hal blamed his frequent tardiness to recitation on having to room “out of college,” suggesting that he was already feeling self-conscious about status differences before Jane’s decision to go to Norfolk.
141 JMSII to HDSII, April 11, 1841, Box 26, Folder 1, SFP
142 LDM to WMI, August 18, 1843, Box 110, Folder 11, SFP.
143 HDSII to JMSI, October 20, 1844, Box 91, Folder 1, SFP.
Even Harry still struggled to understand Jane’s inability to get her life together and put her plans into action in a way that worked. He still hoped that her experiment in Norfolk would be a success, but most notable is his seeming recognition of the fact that the approval or advice of those around her mattered little to Jane when it came to something like this. She was going to do it no matter what anyone said, and it was not worth it to try to hold her back. While Harry still scoffed at her determination, Jane Senior’s reaction demonstrates that at least some family members were beginning to accept this aspect of Jane’s personality and make the best of it.

By the end of October, Jane was well situated in Norfolk, or as well situated as she could be in a city of strangers. While her early letters to her mother painted a favorable portrait of her situation, her letters to her cousins were far more candid. In a letter to Lizzie, she lamented the fact that Mrs. Hackley had unexpectedly given her an English grammar class of a dozen very young girls, as she had no experience teaching or managing young children and no real knowledge of English grammar. In addition, she was teaching two French classes, and despite her lack of experience, found her confidence in the classroom growing as she realized her students were poorly educated, by her standards, but more obedient than she expected. She was not enthused by the requirement that she teach Italian to Martha Hackley, who she found as insipid as the rumors had suggested. She had little positive to say of Norfolk, which she found dirty and disagreeable, or its society, which she found lacking, but found the climate itself agreeable.

The loneliness of her position, one she compared to that of Robinson Crusoe, had

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144 In this observation Jane was not alone. The relationship between a humid climate and a sluggish culture was a common trope of Northern visitors to Southern climes. Sedgwick family friend Fanny Kemble Butler observed much the same in her life as a plantation wife in South Carolina. Frederick Law Olmsted, who traveled through the South in the mid-1850s, had this to say about Norfolk: “Norfolk is a dirty, low, ill-arranged town, nearly divided by a morass. It has a single creditable public building, a number of fine private residences, and the polite society is reputed to be agreeable, refined, and cultivated, receiving a character from the families of the resident naval officers. It has all the immoral and disagreeable characteristics of a large seaport, with very few of the advantages that we...
quickly eased the irritations she felt with friends and family members back home, though she still reserved a little irritation for Herbert. As the fall progressed, however, the silver linings tarnished and Jane became more frustrated. She found fault with the school, with Mrs. Hackley, with Martha Hackley, with her students, and most profoundly with the culture of Norfolk and the South more generally. Over the course of the end of 1844 and 1845, Jane found herself tested in ways she had not imagined when she set out to make her experiment, but worked to conduct herself in a manner fitting her station and birth culture.

Jane quickly became aware of the profit being made from her labor, going so far as to calculate precisely how much Mrs. Hackley was making from the classes she taught, and providing that information to her mother as proof that it was in her “power to earn money if I choose it – so new an idea that it is highly gratifying.” Her hopes of educating young girls were quickly dashed on the rocks of cultural difference. Rather than developing young girls into intellectually-engaged women, she came to believe she was simply being asked to provide a patina of refinement for the girls of Norfolk society, or the “little witches,” as she called them in one letter she begged her mother not to share with anyone. In a coincidental turn of phrase, she told her brother “I wish you could see the materials I have to make ‘de Stael’s and Wolstonecrafts’ out of and I am sure you will think me a genius if I effect such brilliant results

should expect to find as relief to them. No lyceum or public libraries, no public gardens, no galleries of art... no public resorts of healthful and refining amusement, no place better than a filthy, tobacco-impregnated bar-room or a licentious dance-cellar, so far as I have been able to learn, for the stranger of high or low degree to pass the hours unoccupied by business.” John D. Cox, Traveling South: Travel Narratives and the Construction of American Identity (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005), 121, 150; Frederick Law Olmsted, A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States; With Remarks on Their Economy (New York: Dix & Edwards, 1856), 135-6. Electronic edition accessed 10/21/2015. http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/olmsted/olmsted.html

145 JMSII to Lizzie Sedgwick, October 27, 1844, Box 91, Folder 1, SFP.
146 JMSII to JMSI, November 17, 1844, Box 91, Folder 2, SFP.
before spring.”

It is doubtful that Mrs. Hackley had characterized Jane’s mission at the school in this way, so Jane’s comments here reveal something of the feminist views that she had earlier hinted were important to her. She understood her mission to be that of cultivating the minds of young women for their own intellectual and social benefit, rather than simply to polish them for the marriage market. Even her mother had attempted to alleviate her brother’s qualms by stressing that Jane was not to be a governess but a teacher, suggesting that all Sedgwicks involved saw the latter as a more valid occupation.

Her views on the true nature of Mrs. Hackley’s school were situated in larger realizations about the differences between elite New England and Virginia culture. Mrs. O’Sullivan had given her letters of introduction to “some of the first people of the place,” but they had been “backwards in their attentions” and given her no notice. Eventually, she stopped attempting to befriend “these people,” and jokingly compared her situation to that of Castillia, imprisoned in the Spielberg. She was pleased that she had brought so many books with her, particularly those in foreign languages, because she found it impossible to get the books she desired in Norfolk. Reading became her primary pleasure, from Schiller to Austen, the “imaginary creatures” of fiction filling “the purpose of friends and companions which I can find nowhere else here.”

Finding little chance of intellectual engagement with her social peers, and running out of books to read and reread, Jane sought to develop her mind by practicing her own language skills. Unable to practice with her local peers, whose level of expertise was closer to that of the girls she was teaching, she sought out the services of a French gentleman in the city in order to keep up her conversational French. Not wanting to upset Mrs. Hackley, she brought up the idea to one

147 JMSII to HDSII, December 1, 1844, Box 91, Folder 2, SFP.
148 JMSII to JMSI, November 17, 1844, Box 91, Folder 2, SFP.
149 JMSII to JMSI, November 24, 1844, Box 86, Folder 4, SFP.
of the other teachers before seeking out the gentleman, and decided not to approach her employer until she knew whether the arrangement was possible. This undertaking resulted in a traumatizing rift with Mrs. Hackley, one born out of the differing cultural expectations about the purpose of education for elite women that had driven Jane to this solution in the first place. As Jane later put it: “I little imagined the consequences of that unfortunate proposition!”

Having hinted at difficulties in earlier letters, Jane finally confessed the entire experience to her mother in a torrent of words. With her hand raised to knock on a door, she accidentally overheard Mrs. Hackley expressing “petty grievances” and “meannesses” about someone, only to realize that she was the subject of her employer’s words. She fled the scene, and in despair, pondered leaving Norfolk immediately. Realizing she could not do so without revealing what she had overheard, and unwilling to provide further fuel to a woman who might well spread her views of Jane around society, she resolved to remain till the end of her term. Moreover, she refused to present her friends in the North with such a reason for her failure. The worst part, to Jane, was that she had feared that no one had liked her and believed she had tried so hard not to bother anyone, knowing “that the least trifle would be made the most of.” While she had overheard disparaging remarks, she had no idea what “trifle” had prompted her employer’s outburst, but as Mrs. Hackley had been sick in bed for weeks, Jane suspected Martha had been her betrayer.

Still wondering what she had done to so anger Mrs. Hackley, Jane was called back to the dinner table one night right before Christmas. Mrs. Hackley told her that her attempt to engage

150 JMSII to JMSI, December 27, 1844, Box 91, Folder 2, SFP.
151 JMSII to JMSI, December 27, 1844, Box 91, Folder 2, SFP.
the French gentleman for lessons might prevent the school from acquiring any new students for
Jane’s French class in the spring term.

Perfectly amazed I enquired what she meant. Oh said she “of course it will be
immediately reported all over Norfolk that this new teacher that I had brought on from
the North as such a famous french scholar had turned out so ignorant of the business that
she was obliged to take lessons herself” I was too much overwhelmed to reply and then
she went on to say that...it might even have ruined the school, that is any other school
established on a less firm foundation than her own...

Yet the most severe damage was not to the school but, in Hackley’s opinion, to Jane’s own
reputation, which was most certainly ruined and would prevent her from finding future
employment as a teacher. “Mortified and confounded beyond expression,” Jane apologized to
Mrs. Hackley, who responded that she was willing to exercise “Christian forgiveness” towards
her, remarking that it was her fault, to an extent: she would not have taken Jane on as a teacher if
she had known she was not competent to teach."152

Still, Mrs. Hackley relented and admitted she was unlikely to lose students, as the parents
of Jane’s students (whose daughters had previously taken lessons with the same Frenchman Jane
had engaged) had noticed their daughters’ improvement under Jane’s tutelage. But nevertheless,
Mrs. Hackley said, this was not Jane’s first infraction. One of her biggest errors, in Mrs.
Hackley’s eyes, was not having concealed her inexperience from her students. When she first
opened the school, rather than reveal that she was “perfectly ignorant of the business of
teaching,” Mrs. Hackley had gone to great lengths to conceal the fact, and was surprised that
“Miss Sedgwick” had “so little tact” as to reveal her inexperience. Upon hearing this accusation,
Jane told her mother she “mentally substituted ‘so much honesty.’”153

152 JMSII to Jane Minot Sedgwick I, December 27, 1844, Box 91, Folder 2, SFP.
153 JMSII to Jane Minot Sedgwick I, December 27, 1844, Box 91, Folder 2, SFP.
For Jane, this unfortunate situation was the product of the one decision she had gradually come to regret – going to Mrs. Hackley’s in Norfolk instead of a school in some other city or a private tutoring position on a plantation – a decision Herbert and Cheery had cautioned her against. Still, it was quite clear that Jane perceived a vast cultural difference between Norfolk and her regular haunts. Almost immediately upon arrival, she described herself as “non simpatico” with her social equals in Norfolk, and that difference in temperament centered, for Jane, on different approaches to intellectual engagement. She found books of all sorts scarce, both in the house and for purchase, and was thankful she had brought so many with her, particularly those in Italian and German. While she found her students more well-mannered than their counterparts in the North, she did not find them to be engaged learners. Instead, she found the culture of the South seemed to govern everything including education: “Everything is inert and inactive neither the parents nor the children are much about their learning and it is rather hard work to beat into stupid or lazy brains.”

The misunderstanding over Jane’s proposed meetings perfectly exemplified this divergence. For Jane, keeping up her language skills by talking with a native speaker was more than appropriate, it was necessary as part of her continued intellectual growth. Following her early instruction, primarily from Castillia, Jane had practiced and improved her language skills by reading foreign language novels and speaking and writing in German, Italian, and French with her siblings and cousins. Education was not simply part of making Jane and her female siblings and cousins more marriageable, though that was certainly part of the goal of female education.

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154 Jane’s connection to Mrs. Hackley had been provided by Lucy Channing Russell, whose brother William Ellery Channing had known Hackley as a child when serving as a tutor for the Randolph family. Though some of Jane’s struggles might have been alleviated had she been serving as a tutor, her isolation might well have been worse. Pryor, “An Anomalous Person”: 370.
155 JMSII to Lizzie Sedgwick, November 24, 1844, Box 86, Folder 4, SFP.
156 JMSII to JMSI, November 17, 1844, Box 91, Folder 2, SFP.
As Kelley argues, women’s education in the early republic was about cultivating an engaged civic femininity. For Jane, education never ended because it was part of living that engaged femininity. She sought out conversation with a native French speaker to keep her skills up and improve them, because self-improvement was a goal in and of itself. In Jane’s estimation, Mrs. Hackley’s confusion stemmed from the fact that she saw her students’ education as a discrete product, not a lifelong process. While it is unclear whether Hackley herself could understand Jane’s point of view, or if she tried, it is clear that she believed the Norfolk elite would see Jane’s actions as those of a woman who didn’t know enough to impart that knowledge to their daughters. Jane had hoped to educate for personal improvement and transformation, and felt that she was being used to provide the final polish to elite women that was more important for its existence than its effects.

Themes of style versus substance, appearance versus reality, and surface versus depth pervade the correspondence between Jane and her friends and family during her Norfolk. In an early letter to Kate, Jane lamented the performance she was expected to give, but was confident she was managing to convince those around her: “I do not wonder that my metamorphosis should strike you in an equally marvellous light - for a long time I had the feeling that I was acting a part quite as much as I did in Master Walter’s dress.” At times, Jane felt she was losing her self-identity in Norfolk, constantly aware of how important it was to perform her gender and status to the specifications of a new audience. Recalling their play a year earlier, she told Lizzie: “I should be very glad to act another when I get out - to get into a natural state again… I am afraid before March I shall lose all the identity of my former self.” If anything, acting on the stage in the Sedgwick family parlor among those who shared her temperament felt

157 JMSII to KSM, December 15, 1844, Box 91, Folder 2, SFP.
more real than life in Norfolk. She hoped that when she returned as a shell of her former self, “if
the sparks are not quite extinct perhaps they will revive under the genial influences of friends and
society.”158

By Christmas, the emphasis on appearances seemed to have stymied Jane’s attempt at
intellectual engagement in Norfolk. In the new year, however, Mrs. Hackley reconsidered and
allowed Jane to begin taking French lessons. This was not due to a change of heart on the matter,
but rather a fear that preventing Jane from taking lessons would earn her a reputation as a
“tyrant.” While Hal urged her to confront Mrs. Hackley over her mistreatment, Jane remained
silent, not wanting to provoke her employer into spreading stories in public.159 Instead, she kept
her head down and worked away in isolation: “My life continues to be passed in the same
unbroken monotony and solitude.” To her recollection, her social life while she was in Norfolk
consisted of one afternoon tea with another teacher at the school, and the only “Happy New
Year” she received was from a “polite old black servant.” She lamented the immense distance
she felt from those “in the world,” to whom she wrote “by way of giving an occasional report of
my continued existence.”160 She finally returned home at the end of February, undoubtedly
pleased that the arrangements for her period of employment at Mrs. Hackley’s school were open-
ended, allowing her to leave as soon as the term was over.

During her sojourn in Virginia, Jane reflected extensively on the experience and its value.
Just as Herbert had predicted, she was lonely without her friends and family. When her mother
raised the possibility that Hal might be able to visit her in February and escort her home, Jane
leapt at the possibility, telling her brother she would be willing to sacrifice some of her “dear

158 JMSII to Lizzie Sedgwick, December 25, 1844, Box 91, Folder 2, SFP.
159 JMSII to JMSI and HDSII, January 12, 1845, Box 91, Folder 2, SFP.
160 JMSII to JMSI and Fanny Sedgwick, January 27, 1845, Box 91, Folder 2, SFP.
bought ‘self dependence’” for it – a humorous remark, perhaps, but one rooted in the recent painful disagreement over Jane’s decision to exercise her self-dependence by going to Norfolk. Jane had paid for that self-dependence in separation, loneliness, and emotional distress, but other than this moment of longing for her brother’s company, she gave no indication that the price was too high. She may have feared she was losing her very self without the support of family and friends, but ultimately, she had not. Instead, at nearly every turn, she reminded her correspondents (and herself) how important and valuable her trip was.

One thing I always bear in mind - that however much the circumstances in which this experiment is made are to be regretted - I should have been most unhappy and discontented this winter if I had not made it nor do I think I shall be at all more satisfied hereafter to lead a life of idleness if that should be my fate.161

In addition, Jane was determined to prove her naysayers wrong. Even in Virginia, she continued to hear of the men in her social circle making pronouncements about her “experiment.” After Stephen Field’s comments reached her in January, she vented her anger in a letter to Fanny: “He has been making up some more of his ridiculous speeches about me ‘my high minded and noble undertaking!’ Absurd creature! I should be glad to show him that I am not to be gulled or made a cat’s paw of by him!” 162

Back in New York by mid-March, Jane echoed her perpetual concerns about finding some occupation. Her mind desired demonstration in all things, and now that she had experienced the benefits of a useful, occupied life, she could not be idle again. She spent a few days resting and catching up with friends, but soon found herself back in the “idle and unsettled life” of the upper middle class, and her “old restlessness” returned. For the rest of the spring, she served as a teacher in Cheery’s “charity school,” but left employment there in early summer to

161 JMSII to JMSII and HDSII, January 12, 1845, Box 91, Folder 2, SFP.
162 JMSII to JMSI and Fanny Sedgwick, January 27, 1845, Box 91, Folder 2, SFP.
return to Stockbridge, where she found herself once more among her beloved family. She set aside time for reading and visiting, and took up a spot in a French boarding house in New York in the fall, enjoying all of the pleasures denied to her in Norfolk.

Those close to her noticed a distinct change in her demeanor. Aunt Louisa’s appraisal was customarily positive: “Jane Jr is very calm well & bright & very attentive. . . she is now a very noble interesting character.”163 Jane Senior noted her daughter’s “serenity” following her “rigorous exertions in the cause of benevolence.”164 Jane herself was aware of the benefits of her time in Norfolk, not least because she had used that time to examine herself and come to some conclusions about what she needed from life, and what she needed to be in life. During her time in Virginia, she had mused to her mother: “It is worth while to be deprived for a time of the privileges we have been in the habit of considering as matters of course to know the value of them.”165 Jane quickly learned from her deprivation that she did not want to live a solitary life, one disconnected from her friends and family. Independence was in no way dependent upon isolation.

In addition, Jane had found herself in a situation where she was deprived of the freedom to express her views, her personality, and her temperament. As she struggled with the feeling of losing her identity, she confronted that identity and considered whether she was eager for its complete restoration. In the end, she decided that there was room for self-improvement. She wrote to Lizzie of her plans upon her return.

I have resolved as far as I can help it not to be distressed by little marks of unkindness or carelessness from my friends, of whose affection I have received so many real proofs, which have so often pained me, and which perhaps I may have aggravated - and if you

163 LDM to WMI, August 20, 1845, Box 110, Folder 13, SFP.
164 JMSI, Journal, May 10, 1845, Box 30, Folder 26, SFP.
165 JMSII to JMSI and Fanny Sedgwick, January 27, 1845, Box 91, Folder 2, SFP.
will exercise a similar forbearance towards me I think we shall be happier together as friends than we ever have been.\textsuperscript{166}

In many ways, her goals sounded exactly like the hopes Lizzie, Bessie, Aunt Catharine and others had expressed on her behalf – that she would find a way to be less sensitive and more “like other people.” To an extent, Jane made that a personal goal, but she also returned from Norfolk with a new confidence in her own ability to make the choices that were right for her. She had proven to herself, and to her family, and to Lizzie and Herbert and that “absurd creature” Stephen Field that she could do what they feared she could not. She could make choices, follow through, and manage on her own.

\textsuperscript{166} JMSII to Lizzie Sedgwick, December 25, 1844, Box 91, Folder 2, SFP.
Chapter 3

I have taken this step with a care and deliberation which prevents my regarding it as possible that I should change my faith for any other opinions.
~Jane Minot Sedgwick II to Kate Sedgwick Minot, June 2, 1853

Jane returned from Norfolk a changed woman, in many ways. Confident in her ability to make appropriate choices that would lead her to a life with which she was satisfied, she continued to seek the usefulness she had been raised to value. Her family, pleased by the changes Norfolk seemed to have wrought in her temperament, encouraged her pursuits. For Jane, the lifestyle her family’s wealth allowed and encouraged was unsatisfactory, and she began considering some new occupation almost immediately. Jane Senior noted that her daughter had thus far “led rather an eccentric course from her love of independence & her desire to obtain useful occupation” but that she had seen “a decided improvement in self-government & in her consideration for others” as a result of her time in Norfolk.¹

. Even before her “experiment” in Virginia, Jane had been dabbling in Roman Catholicism, primarily through her friendship with the O’Sullivan family. Upon her first encounter with the family, during the controversy over Adelaide, Jane expressed anti-Catholic thought that mirrored that of her mother and other acquaintances. Over the course of her twenties, she moved from criticism to inquiry and from inquiry to commitment. After careful deliberation, and with the tacit approval of her family, she chose formal entrance into the Church, and received the sacrament of baptism in May 1853 with her brother at her side. This chapter argues that Jane’s evolution from anti-Catholic New England Unitarian to devout Roman Catholic was guided and normalized by the presence and emotional support of other female converts of a similar social status. The respectability of these associations, in addition to the

¹ Diary of Jane Minot Sedgwick I, July 24, 1846, Box 30, Folder 26, SFP.
emotional stability Catholicism seemed to bring, helped Jane’s family come to terms with her choice to join the Church.

In understanding conversion to Catholicism in this period, scholars have emphasized two guiding impulses, the self and the family, both of which are important concepts in the scholarship on antebellum American culture. Jane’s own internal motivations were important in her conversion, of course, and while she had no Catholic relatives, religious devotion was clearly a significant element of Sedgwick character. The key to understanding Jane’s conversion, however, is a third guiding impulse: friendship. Already friends with Mary “Cheery” O’Sullivan Langtree, who had become a Catholic in 1841, Jane cultivated friendships with an increasing number of elite convert women in the second half of the 1840s. Her Catholic friends, beyond standing as exemplars, provided counsel, answered her questions about theology and practice, and even guided her to the best priests. Through friendship with the converts in the O’Sullivan family, and with an ever-widening circle of elite convert women, Jane came to see Catholicism as a legitimate religious option for an elite young woman in New England.

Jane’s zeal did not guarantee her family’s approval, however, and converts to Catholicism were right to fear familial and social disapproval, as Adelaide O’Sullivan’s struggles demonstrated. The influence and continued respectability of Jane’s convert friends helped mitigate any concerns that Jane was being directly spiritually seduced by Catholic priests, a fear in the New England Protestant the Sedgwicks inhabited. Yet the most important factor in the family’s acceptance of Jane’s conversion was outside of the realm of religion altogether. Jane had been raised to develop upstanding moral character and find occupations that allowed her to exercise that character in way that benefitted others – a goal those of her status called “usefulness.” In the years leading up to Jane’s conversion, the Sedgwicks and Minots came to
believe that if Catholicism provided a path to acceptable feminine behavior and emotional health for Jane, it was good enough. That Catholicism could become an acceptable path speaks to the difficulty Jane faced in finding usefulness and happiness, and the anxiety her family felt over her struggles. While her family members still urged her to find purpose in life, and some held out hope that she would change her religious affiliation to something more palatable, they accepted her conversion because they believed her newfound faith provided her emotional stability, which took on greater importance against a background of successive generations of mental illness within the family. Jane was, for the first time, “placid” and “quiet,” and those close to her felt that she would finally settle into the useful womanhood they had long desired.²

To understand Jane’s conversion to Catholicism and her family’s reaction to it, we must examine the social and familial forces that shaped her religious upbringing and the religious options deemed “legitimate” for a woman of her background. Regardless of any other religious forces or the strength of any individual Sedgwick or Minot’s devotion, Jane grew up in a devoutly Unitarian family, and it was the moral philosophy of Unitarianism that shaped her views of reason, intellect, and faith. Her parents, aunts, and uncles came of age during a moment of crisis and controversy, and their letters and journals demonstrate a keen awareness of how their faith contrasted with other, more dominant religious forms. They raised their children with the tenets of “liberal religion,” but certain elements seem to have stuck more than others. Jane and her cousins and siblings were not particularly devout Unitarians as they grew to adulthood, but they had learned to value the reason and individual choice espoused by their birth religion, and they were very certain in what they did not believe in. Jane’s lack of explicit devotion did not mean she remained uninfluenced by the tenets and culture of her parents’ faith; on the

² EDS to KSM, June 9, 1852, Sedgwick Box 83, Folder 9, SFP.
contrary, the way she went about joining the Catholic Church demonstrated that Unitarianism had made a considerable impression on her worldview, and much of that worldview remained after her conversion.

As Daniel Walker Howe notes in his examination of Unitarian moral philosophy at Harvard, historians have long been content to view Unitarianism as a transitional stage on the spiritual journey from orthodoxy to Transcendentalism that lacked any internal theological coherency of its own. In doing so, they present Unitarianism as a faith lacking the stability and coherence necessary for any individual believer to endure in it, a charge often leveled at Unitarians in the early 19th century by Orthodox ministers, who saw Unitarianism as an inevitable path to infidelity. In more contemporary writing, scholars often suggest this presumed lack of doctrinal rigor as an explanation for prominent Unitarian converts to Roman Catholicism. Despite the work of Howe, Conrad Wright, and others to change this view over the past forty years, both the theological complexities and lived realities of antebellum Unitarianism remain largely invisible in the historiography of the period, despite the fact that so many political, economic, and cultural leaders were confessing Unitarians. Moreover, the modern union of the Unitarian and Universalist Churches can color perceptions of both churches in the 19th century, so it is important to make note of the fact that the two churches operated differently, drew from different social groups and locations, and stood in deep theological opposition, especially over the nature of salvation. In addition to the failure of a more complex reading of 19th century Unitarianism to take hold in the broader literature on American history, the historiography on lived Unitarian practice is scant at best. Most work on American Unitarianism focuses on

Unitarian theologians or social activists, rather than the way ordinary Unitarians experienced their faith. Given the gendered dynamics of religion and public space in the 19th century, this scholarship is therefore not only dominated by the voices of men, it reflects the importance of elements understood as “masculine” at the time – independence and reason – without understanding how those elements were embodied differently in men and women. To understand Unitarianism as the Sedgwicks lived and practiced it, we must look at their words and actions in the private spaces of their lives.

For the Sedgwicks and Minots, coming to and living their Unitarian faith was complicated by the vagaries of geography and the politics of status. Boston was the cradle of American Unitarianism, and the well-to-do and politically prominent Minots were regular attendants at King’s Chapel, which had uniquely come to Unitarianism via Anglicanism, rather than Congregationalism. Unitarianism’s influence throughout the Northeast diminished as one moved west and south into Western Massachusetts and Connecticut, however, ending in the Connecticut River Valley. The Sedgwick siblings came to Unitarianism as young adults, initially through the influence of William Ellery Channing himself. Kate Minot later wrote that her Aunt Catharine first interacted with Channing when in Boston caring for her dying father, who joined the faith on his deathbed. Both Catharine and Harry Sedgwick entertained an interest in the Unitarian Church, but neither made a formal commitment until years later, Harry in 1819, and Catharine in 1821, around the time Jane was born.4

Originally, members of both families could only avail themselves of Unitarian churches when in their Boston residences. When Harry and Jane Sedgwick moved to New York to begin

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their married life, there was no Unitarian church in the city, nor was there one in Stockbridge or Lenox. Since forgoing worship completely was an impossibility, especially for Jane Senior, they had to change affiliations or find a way to create a Unitarian community. They, with Uncle Robert, Aunt Catharine, and Lucy Channing Russell, were among the founders of the New York City Unitarian Society in 1819. Founded in the middle of a crisis of faith that was splitting Congregationalists throughout the region, the group faced a particularly hostile climate in New York, whose religious leaders were not tolerant of this particular strand of theology. After having him speak to a group of her friends in her home, including the Sedgwicks, Lucy Russell arranged for her brother William Ellery Channing to speak publicly in the city in May 1819, and Harry Sedgwick booked a hall for the occasion. A few weeks before his New York engagement, Channing delivered a sermon entitled “Unitarian Christianity” in Baltimore, explaining and defending Unitarianism’s theological and intellectual positions. Channing then spoke three times on May 16th in New York, to a packed house.  

This success led the group of supporters to formally establish a congregation a few days later. They secured the temporary services of Henry Ware Jr., who was disappointed with what he considered small audiences for his sermons (200-300 people) and considerably more hostility than he was used to in New England. Yet the group soldiered on, and All Souls was legally incorporated in November 1819, with Harry Sedgwick leading the way.  

Jane Senior’s earlier worry that her husband lacked religious fervor was put to rest in the early years of their marriage. Beyond simply putting his name on the church’s charter, he intervened in two early controversies

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6 Kring, *Liberals Among the Orthodox*, 30-43. All Souls would eventually call Ware’s brother William to be its minister.
facing New York’s Unitarians. In 1820, the *Commercial Advertiser* printed a “curious historical document” linking English Unitarians and North African Muslims, provided by Rev. Henry Feltus, an Episcopalian minister at St. Stephen’s. Harry Sedgwick helped fellow All Souls congregant Henry Sewell craft an initial response to this accusation. Later year, when New York Presbyterian minister Gardiner Spring delivered a sermon casting aspersions on those “advocates of liberal religion and morality,” Harry Sedgwick responded with the pamphlet *On the Charges Made Against the Religion and Morals of the People of Boston and Its Vicinity by the Rev. Gardiner Spring, D.D.*.⁷ Harry Sedgwick proved himself a devoted steward of the church he helped found, willing to stake his reputation on public defenses of his faith and its institutions.

The Sedgwick and Minot women were also keen analysts of their faith, its institutions, and its controversies. Catharine Maria Sedgwick, for instance, had no qualms about deeming a sermon with which she disagreed a clear sign of the minister’s “debility of the mind.”⁸ Later, after the installation of Henry Ware Jr.’s brother William at All Souls, Catharine spoke much more highly of the “serious” and “evangelical” quality of the sermons in her “little church,” though she observed the young minister still had room for improvement.⁹ Later, she and her family helped shepherd Charles Follen, a German minister and husband of their friend Eliza Cabot, into a position as interim pastor. She supported him even as the congregation’s opposition to him grew in response to his stubborn personality and outspoken abolitionism, which discomfited many of her fellow churchgoers.

While certainly pleased to have a Unitarian church in New York, Aunt Catharine complained to Eliza Cabot that there was only *one* in the city. She believed that as devoted as the

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⁷ Kring, *Liberals Among the Orthodox*, 105-111.
congregants were, they sometimes needed an “energy that will make our pulses beat quicker and give an impulse to our thoughts and affections.”

Jane Senior and Catharine aroused and channeled those thoughts and affections by helping create a “charity-school” in the basement of the church, an impulse shared by many other elite Unitarian women at the time. Designed for limited social uplift, the school sought to instill worldly, class-based values as much as any knowledge of the divine: “Our plan is to have it kept in one of the lower rooms of the church by a woman, and superintended by the ladies. We mean to teach the children the rudiments of learning, and how to mend and make their clothes, darn their stockings, etc.”

This impulse towards benevolence was not restricted to Unitarian Protestantism, but Howe notes a particularly Unitarian benevolence in the Early Republic. He argues that the growing rejection of predestination meant that there was no need to restrict sacramental fellowship to the “elect,” eliminating a major component of a church’s corporate identity. Instead, benevolence would bring unity and purpose, and allow well-to-do Unitarians to “cultivate their moral powers.” As such, most Unitarian benevolent ventures focused instilling virtue and fostering rational (by their measure) behavior rather than providing direct financial assistance to the poor, whose condition was believed to stem from their own vices, rather than larger social forces.

As there was no Unitarian church or minister in Stockbridge, Jane’s family’s religious practices shifted sharply upon their move from New York to the Berkshires. In the early days of their time in Stockbridge, they interacted pleasantly with the clergy of the area, but remained steadfast in their own religious convictions. Upon her husband’s death, Jane Senior received a customary visit from Stockbridge’s Congregational minister, David Dudley Field. Despite

10 Kring, Liberals Among the Orthodox, 142.
11 Sedgwick, Life and Letters of Catharine M. Sedgwick, 158.
disagreeing with his views, she appreciated his attempts to offer comfort and kept her thoughts to herself so as not to upset him. Over the following decades, however, Jane’s family appears to have attended St. Paul’s Episcopal Church when in Stockbridge and All Souls when they were in New York. The New York Sedgwicks – Robert Sedgwick, his wife Elizabeth Dana Ellery Sedgwick and their children – remained committed Unitarians. Lenox Sedgwicks, who were far more settled in the Berkshires than Jane’s family, seemed to favor the Episcopal church of the religious options open to them, though in his later years, Charles Sedgwick expressed a fondness for the Methodist church.\(^\text{13}\)

The Sedgwicks and Minots of this generation wrote extensively about the role religion played in their lives, particularly during times of trial, not only as a source of spiritual comfort but also of that all-important usefulness the family desired. When baby George died in 1821, just before Jane was born, William Minot wrote to his brother-in-law and urged him to keep himself occupied in his grief: “Do not relax your interests in the Church. You have done well & all your friends here are proud of your exertions in that cause.” When physical and mental illness struck Harry himself, the family relied on their faith as all human interventions seemed to fail. They did not expect God to cure Harry, however, either of His own will or because of their supplications. Even as Catharine acknowledged God might save her brother from his affliction, she admitted her hopelessness: “I see no relief but in death - but God’s ways are not our ways.”\(^\text{14}\) Aunt Louisa spoke of it as her “mainstay…not solemn or too lofty for everyday use.”\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{13}\) Charles Sedgwick, Letters from Charles Sedgwick to His Family and Friends (Boston: Privately Printed, 1870), 222. Elizabeth Dana Ellery Sedgwick, as her name indicates, was connected to several other families important to this study. As her given name is the same as another of Jane’s aunts, this study will refer to her as Aunt Robert, as the family did.

\(^{14}\) CMS to Frances Sedgwick Watson, December 29, 1828, Box, 80, Folder 2, SFP.

\(^{15}\) LDM to CMS, May 18, 1837, Box 1, Folder 4, MRP.
Beyond expressing the comfort they found in religion, Jane’s family members also expressed why Unitarianism *specifically* gave them comfort, and where they stood on the controversies that wracked the church. Catharine, newly converted, argued that many contemporary Unitarian clergymen placed too much stock in “intellectual attainment,” and lacked the “holy devotedness” necessary for their vocation. In the same letter, however, she defended Unitarianism against criticism that its rationality made it worse than “fellowship with the devil.” Catharine’s beliefs chart an important course between a common, and false, dichotomy surrounding 19th century religion: that it was either intellectual or emotional, Unitarian or evangelical. While Catharine may have worried about an excessive emphasis on “intellectual attainment” within her own church, she valued the emphasis on reason at the core of Unitarian teachings.\(^\text{16}\)

At the time of Catharine and Harry’s conversions, Unitarians were concerned with the proliferation of “ignorant ministers. . . driven almost by necessity to fanaticism,” and opposed disestablishment in Massachusetts lest rural areas lacking funds for a settled, educated ministry become victims of “uneducated enthusiasts,” in Channing’s words.\(^\text{17}\) Still, on the eve of joining the Unitarian Church, Catharine expressed concern that Unitarians lacked even a hint of evangelical spirit.

While those of the orthodox faith are traversing sea and land, forsaking brethren and sisters, and houses and lands, and penetrating the untrodden wilderness, those of a ‘purer and more rational faith’ seem neither to lift their hands or breathe their prayers for its propagation.

To her, this “lukewarmness” was a “stumbling-block” on her path to conversion, and she endeavored, with Jane Senior, to spread the moral teachings of the Unitarian Church. She was

\(^{17}\) Rives, 252.
not above criticizing Boston Unitarians for their “want of... zeal.”\textsuperscript{18} It was within this religious context that Jane was raised, in which she pursued religious alternatives. The question for Jane, as she explored Catholicism and other religions as a young woman, was whether or not rationality and “zeal” could be merged, particularly in a woman of her temperament.

Despite Catharine’s admiration of the tactics of “those of the orthodox faith,” the Sedgwicks and Minots all agreed that Calvinism was not an acceptable religious option. Jane’s early education in Stockbridge itself did involve religion, and she was proud at earning the catechism medal in school. While it is unclear precisely which catechism she was learning, Uncle Charles’ writings on Bessie’s schooling make it clear that the family had no fondness for old-time New England religion:

> Miss Sarah [the schoolmistress] began yesterday to inoculate her children with the vims of the Westminster Catechism. It is now, I presume, perfectly understood that Calvinism is not likely to be taken the natural way. Bessie came from school, and with a sort of innate heresy began to dance upon the Saybrook platform with great glee.\textsuperscript{19}

Aunt Catharine’s private and public writings reveal a deep distrust of the Calvinism she had rejected. In particular, she noted the way it had hurt her older sisters, who were “educated when the demonstration of religion and its offices made much more a part of life than now — when almost all of women’s intellectual life took that tinge.” In particular, Catharine lamented the way her eldest sister Eliza had “suffered under the horrors of Calvinism” before spending the final fifteen years of her life free from the “cruel doctrines of Geneva.”\textsuperscript{20}

The willingness of the Sedgwicks to attend Episcopalian and Unitarian churches alike reflects the fact that an individual or family’s choice of worship went beyond theology. Religious

\textsuperscript{18} Sedgwick, \textit{Life and Letters of Catharine M. Sedgwick}, 116.
\textsuperscript{19} Sedgwick, \textit{Letters from Charles Sedgwick}, 58.
\textsuperscript{20} Sedgwick, \textit{Life and Letters of Catharine M. Sedgwick}, 68.
choices were embedded in a broader social context, and status determined which choices were “acceptable.” As Jane and William Pease’s research demonstrates, Bostonians of high social and political standing in the Early Republic overwhelmingly affiliated themselves with Episcopal or Unitarian churches, which bore little theological similarity to each other. Moreover, changing affiliations and joining a Unitarian church in Boston was “more likely to be undertaken to enhance future prosperity than to legitimate past worldly accomplishments.”

As such, status, in addition to geography and temperament, shaped an individual’s movement between confessional affiliations. When Catharine Watson, Jane’s cousin, found herself caught up in the evangelical fervor of the Second Great Awakening and became a Baptist, the family was not pleased. She was only 24 or 25 when she converted, and there was fear that it would “[subject] her very susceptible mind to new emotions & conflicts.” It certainly did subject her to new emotions, in a sense, because she married a Baptist missionary the following year and departed for Burma. Moreover, Aunt Catharine’s comments on her niece’s choice convey a firm belief that Catharine Watson’s transgression was not only theological but social. In fact, as Aunt Catharine framed it, theology and status were inseparable, and the conversion was dangerous because it threw Catharine out of her class.

. . . it brings her into intercourse with unenlightened + illiterate people. Religion must take the color and bear some relation to the dimensions of the mind in which it dwells - with Catharine it must be an [sic] devoted & refined sentiment but with her new brothers & sisters it is, I should fear, far otherwise. 22

To the Sedgwicks, and to New England Unitarians more generally, evangelical Protestantism was rooted in emotion, not the rational thought they privileged, and therefore could be and was

22 CMS to Frances Sedgwick Watson, April 11, 1831, Box 80, Folder 4, SFP.
practiced by the most uneducated segments of society. In this case, the religious choice simply
did not match, and might prove dangerous as a result. When Catharine decided to go to Burma,
the family was concerned, but Aunt Catharine resisted “remonstrances that might seem unkind,”
and urged her sister to look on the bright side. She had raised her daughter to make good choices,
so they must trust that even if this did not appear to be a good choice, it was Catharine’s
choice. 23 Not everything was bad, after all – at least she was getting married before she left!

Despite the commitment of their parents, aunts, and uncles, Jane and the cousins with
whom she was close seem less than devout by comparison. They socialized with prominent
Unitarian ministers and families, including the Deweys, the Wares, the Follens, and the extended
family of William Ellery Channing. Yet for most, church attendance in their adolescent years
seemed lax unless enforced by the older generation. While at Harvard, Hal admitted to being
tardy to most prayers, as well as many recitations, but blamed this on being forced to room “out
of college,” presumably to save his family money, as opposed to any personal failing. 24 Jane
Senior and Aunt Louisa often bemoaned their children’s lack of attentiveness and wished for
ministers who could have some effect on the “young people.” 25 Even when her children showed
a hint of interest in a sermon on Christian union, they tempered it with disapproval of its length.
Jane Senior lamented in her journal that there was no “deeper anguish” than the inability to guide
one’s children to the appropriate “paths for their virtue & happiness.” 26

The Sedgwicks and Minots of Jane’s generation were not in the thrall of unbelief, but
their religious practices appear to have been dictated more by custom than any particular fervor

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23 CMS to Frances Watson, June 29, 1832, Box 80, Folder 5, SFP
24 HDSII to JMSI, June 20, n.d. [1842?], Box 26, Folder 3, SFP.
25 JMSI to LDM, December 25, 1848, Box 28, Folder 12, SFP.
26 JMSI Journal, January 23, 1844, Box 30, Folder 26, SFP.
or devotion. In the summer of 1845, the Sedgwick and Minot clan gathered in Stockbridge to witness the baptism of a baby, presumably Kate and Will’s daughter Jane Sedgwick Minot, nicknamed Posey, by Dr. Parker at the Episcopal church. In a peculiarly Sedgwick gesture, the family brought a portrait of the Judge along to oversee the ceremony. In writing to her son Frank, Aunt Louisa noted that while the parents of the baby were both Unitarian, they were not terribly concerned with “the tythes of merit & communion,” but held to the “weightier matters of the law which are the cornerstones of faith to all christian sects.” Despite the fact that Unitarians eschewed the idea of original sin and the need for baptism, Kate and Will chose to have their daughter baptized in Stockbridge by the local Episcopal priest.27 Nothing in the archives suggests a motivation for this choice, but social concerns may have played at least as large a role as spiritual ones.

Of the cousins with whom Jane spent significant time, only Bessie wrote about her faith or gave more than a passing mention to church attendance. She often wrote to Lizzie about her regular attendance at Dr. Parker’s church. While the Sedgwicks may have attended St. Paul’s, they seem to have made limited theological and formal concessions. In a long commentary on a service from 1842, sixteen-year-old Bessie gave her tacit approval to a sermon on “the importance of going to church in a devout and reverential frame of mind.” She was critical, however, of Parker’s impassioned delivery, and resisted his suggestion that things like kneeling would increase devotion in “the calm and quiet of our own little church.” Her subsequent comments suggest that her resistance to increased formalism was common among her fellow church-goers, who may also have been attending Episcopalian worship as the least bad option.

27 LDM to Frank Minot, August 10, 1845, Box 1, Folder 23, MRP.
Some form must be necessary - but either extreme is bad - and in a very strict observance of forms do you not think the heart is more oft to be old or indifferent and the mind to stray. I am sorry Mr. Parker distresses himself so much but I think he is unreasonable to expect a strict observance of the forms of his own church from persons who differ from him in so many points as most of his congregation do.

In particular, Bessie disapproved of Parker’s attempt to motivate his congregation by challenging them to contemplate the Catholic worshippers who had been using St. Paul’s earlier in the day. While the Sedgwicks opposed strict worship, Bessie’s belief that her prayers were at least as “earnest & sincere” as those of a Catholic who was “obliged by custom to go down on his knees” hints at the deep ambivalence she and her family members felt towards Roman Catholicism. In particular, her comparison of Catholic compulsion and Unitarian free choice hits at the heart of American Protestant disdain for Catholicism.\(^\text{28}\)

In that vein, Jane’s Unitarian upbringing was as much about knowing what beliefs and approaches she should reject as it was about knowing particular doctrines or prayers. Her family raised her to be devout, but not overly emotional in her religious expression, something she clearly learned well based on her reaction to her cousin Catharine Webb’s missionary activity. The family supported a certain level of religious zeal, as long as it was channeled into appropriate benevolent activities like education. This belief that any usefulness inspired by faith should be devoted to causes of social reform rather than direct evangelism was not simply a marker of their denominational affiliation, but of a particular intersection of confessional identity and class in New England. Identifying as rational Unitarians, the Sedgwicks could attend Episcopalian services without fear, knowing that they had the strength of character to make their own decisions about the forms and prayers and doctrines they would accept. This family culture shaped Jane as she matured into adulthood and began to consider her own religious affiliation. Its

\(^{28}\) Bessie Sedgwick to Lizzie Sedgwick, November 1842, Box 84, Folder 25, SFP.
emphasis on good character, usefulness, and moral philosophy over doctrine contributed to the reactions of her family members, and to her own justification of her conversion.

Jane’s growing social circle encouraged her tendencies to inquiry; in addition to Cheery, she made friends with Anna Hazard Barker Ward in the early 1840s. Anna and her husband Samuel Gray Ward were the first prominent and wealthy family to build in Lenox, in 1844, largely at the urging of Charles and Elizabeth Sedgwick. They became regular guests of the Stockbridge and Lenox Sedgwicks, and Jane often traveled to Lenox to visit Anna specifically. The Wards’ papers reveal an intellectually curious and engaged couple who fit perfectly in the Berkshire culture the Sedgwicks fostered. The Wards and Sedgwicks spent many nights together, reading Wollstonecraft’s “Rights of Woman,” Lessing’s “Nathan the Wise,” and Sterne’s Tristram Shandy, among other cosmopolitan works. Although Jane Senior seemed to worry that her daughter sought out the Wards too insistently, Anna and Jane developed a quick friendship. Anna was 8 years older than Jane, and much like Cheery had been when she first met Jane, a young wife and mother. Anna knew the O’Sullivan family as well, and her friendship with Jane grew just as Cheery married her second husband and found herself increasingly distant from Jane geographically.

A New Orleans native, Anna had been raised in an elite Quaker family, and much like elite Bostonians in the 1830s, attended a convent school as a young girl. Moreover, the Ward household was one of religious engagement and exploration on the part of both husband and

31 JMSI to HDSII, n.d., Box 25, Folder 2, SFP.
wife. The family held eclectic “services” together in their house, mixing religious and secular texts, as when “Sam read from the Psalms and from Marcus Antonius.” On another occasion, he read from the “famous Hindoo Scripture.” Just as the Sedgwicks had several years earlier, Anna went to observe the nearby Shaker community in New Lebanon, and was amazed by “one woman in a sort of extase [sic]. . .[who] went round like a top thirty times in a minute - for twenty minutes successively.” Anna read the Bible, theology, and modern religious writings, including Fenelon, Thomas á Kempis, Horace Bushnell, John Bunyan, and a biography of William Ellery Channing. She heard Andrew Jackson Davis speak on spiritualism. While in bed for two months following complications after a miscarriage, she read Swedenborg, a favorite of her husband. Not wedded to one denomination, she nevertheless valued general Christian religious practices: “My little half hour of prayer & meditation is meat & drink & comforts me through everything.”

Jane often spent time at the Wards’, and sometimes talked theology with them. One day, after delivering the “tremendous news from France” of another revolution, she was set upon by Mr. Ward, “his present purpose being to enlighten her upon Swedenborgianism.” Jane was not interested in a deep exploration of Samuel Ward’s “spiritual world.” As Jane Senior recounted to Hal: “She told him that the aperture of her mind being. . . small & incapable of admitting but a very little at a time, she doubted if life were long enough for her to give so much of it to such mystical themes.” While certainly a woman who enjoyed an intellectual challenge, and one

33 Diary of Anna Hazard Barker Ward, July 18, 1848, Samuel Gray Ward and Anna Hazard Barker Ward Papers, Houghton Library.
34 Diary of Anna Hazard Barker Ward, March 20, 1848, Samuel Gray Ward and Anna Hazard Barker Ward Papers, Houghton Library; JMSI to HDSII, March 21, 1848, Box 25, Folder 1, SFP.
well aware of her intellectual prowess, Jane seems to have been disinclined to spend her mental energy on religions like Swedenborgianism, seeing far greater value in reason than mysticism.

Another spiritual choice Jane rejected out of hand was also the one that scholars have seen as the natural end to Unitarianism. The Sedgwicks were not unacquainted with Transcendentalism, and moved in the same circles as many prominent supporters. In 1841, several members of her family went to hear a lecture by Emerson in New York, the popularity of which surprised Jane. While she expressed that she was not surprised to hear that “Alexander [Watts] would become a convert,” she was surprised that her Aunt Catharine found anything of merit in Emerson’s philosophies. She stated that she may have been biased, as she had a “strong dislike” of Transcendentalism, though she had had “derived great pleasure from the conversations of Miss Fuller with other intelligent women not a little colored with it.” Jane reserved her scorn for Emerson himself.

…to me, Emerson's lectures are a perfectly meaningless jargon which it is distressing to listen to. They gave me a feeling of being spiritualized or exalted, nothing but a sense of dizzy giddy confusion. If it be a new light pouring in upon us I fear my eyes will never be opened to see it.

Despite the Unitarian origins of Transcendentalism, it came in for sharp criticism from Unitarians for its rejection of “the final and supernatural authority of the Bible,” a belief which Unitarians had gone to great lengths to emphasize in response to their Orthodox critics. Jane’s rejection of Emerson’s “meaningless jargon” because she felt there was ultimately nothing of substance under all of that “dizzy giddy confusion” resonates with this broader Unitarian condemnation of Transcendentalism, and gives us further evidence that Jane valued reason above all other paths to spiritual enlightenment.

The Sedgwicks and Minots contrasted their Unitarianism against Calvinism, evangelicalism, mysticism, Transcendentalism, and High Church Episcopalianism. Like all Protestants, however, they found the starkest contrast between their faith and Roman Catholicism. Bessie’s distrust of Roman Catholic ritual reflects one of the many contours of antebellum anti-Catholicism. The private writings of the Sedgwick and Minot family members, and Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s public writings, bear out the arguments of Jenny Franchot, Tracy Fessenden, Daniel Cohen and Elizabeth Fenton that Anglo-Protestants used Catholicism – real and imagined – to explore the boundaries of the nation, democracy, Protestantism, sexuality, women’s behavior, and a changing class structure. In many ways, the difficulty in understanding any individual deployment of anti-Catholic tropes in antebellum America comes from the fact that they were used to explore such a wide variety of political, economic, and cultural tensions, and were so fluid as to be contradictory at times. As such, to understand Jane’s conversion and her family’s feelings on the matter, we must understand what Catholicism meant to the Sedgwicks and Minots specifically.

Certainly the most influential book on Protestant views of Catholicism in the 19th century in the past twenty years is Jenny Franchot’s 1994 book *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism*, a wide-ranging examination of literature, historical writing, tourism, architecture, and conversion. Focusing primarily on the three decades prior to the Civil War, Franchot argues that Catholicism, or “Romanism,” as she calls it, “operated as an imaginative category of discourse through which antebellum American writers…indirectly voiced the tensions and limitations of mainstream Protestant culture.” In particular, she argues that Catholicism as a “foreign faith” within America itself played a role in “articulating and organizing a Protestant middle class identity.” Her use of the terms “mainstream Protestant” and
“middle class” notwithstanding, Franchot’s subjects are primarily drawn from the old elite like the Sedgwicks rather than from any rising manufacturing bourgeoisie, and as a result, despite the prevalence of evangelical Protestantism in the period, from upper class religious groups like Episcopali ans and Unitarians. As such, her work explores how people just like the Sedgwicks and Minots encountered Catholicism (rather than Catholics themselves) in person, by exploring catacombs and cathedrals, and in literature and historical writing.36

While she acknowledges that the general outline of antebellum anti-Catholicism was imported from the Old World, she argues that it “encountered novel, intriguingly American factors,” most importantly an Anglo-Protestant culture of conquest and expansion that was nevertheless conflicted over the racial, ethnic, and religious boundaries of nationhood. Rome became one of the key sites for safely confronting these issues, as elite Americans increasingly took advantage of shortened travel times to explore the Old World, and Rome in particular. Despite bringing with them a deep skepticism about Rome and Catholicism, they found the Eternal City fascinating. Franchot argues that these tourists viewed the catacombs, a popular tourist destination, through a “revisionist lens of Protestant history,” in which Christian time was broken up into apostolic, papal, and reformed eras. The catacombs represented a “lingering Catholic past existing behind or beneath a vital Protestant present,” relics from an unsullied period before papal “contaminations” that might be brought forward and made useful. Anglo-Protestants contrasted dead, stagnant, “papal” Catholicism and that vital Protestant present, ever industrializing and expanding. In addition, the enclosed spaces of catacombs, cathedrals, and convents gave architectural support to the Protestant fear of a particularly Catholic “interiority,”

a spiritual and physical seclusion from the world where unknown corruptions might take place. Confrontations with Catholicism and Rome simultaneously attracted and repulsed various members of Jane’s family in this period, and Franchot’s work provides abundant context for understanding those reactions.\(^{37}\)

More recently, Elizabeth Fenton’s *Religious Liberties: Anti-Catholicism and Liberal Democracy in Nineteenth-Century U.S. Literature and Culture* has countered a long-standing narrative that claimed anti-Catholicism’s political importance waned in the Early Republic only to be restored by a surge of immigrants at mid-century, the period upon which Franchot’s argument rests.\(^{38}\) Instead, she focuses on the Early Republic, and traces the role of “the Catholic” in articulating a developing “logic of private and public that equates privacy with freedom and thereby treats ‘Protestantism’. . .as the means of safeguarding liberty for the greatest possible number of individuals,” rather than an explicit separation of church and state.\(^{39}\) In *The Linwoods: or, “Sixty Years Since” in America* (1835), Catharine Maria Sedgwick articulated a key element of that logic: “The political institutions of a people may be inferred from their religion. Absolutism, as a mirror, reflects the Roman Catholic faith.”\(^{40}\) As Fenton argues, this assumption that Catholicism equated to absolutism was based on the idea that Catholics were denied the interior privacy necessary to make independent decisions or even comprehend the world unmediated by Church hierarchy.\(^{41}\)

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37 Franchot, *Roads to Rome*, Ch. 2.
Fenton’s argument about the importance of contrasting priestly influence with the Protestant privacy necessary for liberal democracy exists in some tension with the private interiority of Franchot’s “Romanism.” Taken together, however, these arguments demonstrate the obsessive antebellum desire to know, monitor, and control the interior lives of those understood to be lacking the independence necessary for the exercise of true freedom. Anglo-American Protestants expressed fear over the dangers of the private spaces of Romanism, where priests and nuns interfered with the minds and morals of young women. In doing so, however, they reflected their own desires to know and control. The danger of Romanism was not privacy itself, which was clearly of value in the Early Republic, but that the physical and mental privacy of Catholicism would separate women from the people who should have control over their lives.42 Instead of being monitored and controlled by their blood fathers, mothers, and siblings in the private space of the home, they would fall prey to the influences of a corrupted version of the family – priests, abbesses, monks and nuns – in the corrupting spaces of churches and convents.

Perhaps the most studied instance of anti-Catholic violence, the 1834 burning of the Ursuline Convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts, demonstrates the complexity of understanding the motivations of the rioters and what the incident actually reveals about New England in the Early Republic. The convent, after its move from Boston to Charlestown, served the families of the local Protestant elite by providing a refined education worthy of the town’s best girls.43

42 As with many other rights in the Early Republic, the issue was not simply whether they were rights but who had them. In her examination of the shifting legal framework surrounding spousal abuse, specifically that of wives, Ruth Bloch argues that the increasing value on privacy after the Revolution accrued mainly to men, both as rights-bearing citizens and heads of private families, and closed off possibilities for women to pursue legal remedies to their situation. While not explicitly connected to this discussion, the historical and historiographical conversation around religious choice is certainly conceptually related to other discourses of privacy at the time. Ruth Bloch, “The American Revolution, Wife Beating, and the Emergent Value of Privacy,” Early American Studies 5 (Fall 2007): 223-251.
Despite its auspicious beginning in 1820, the convent was shrouded in controversy in 1832, when Rebecca Reed, who had entered religious life the previous year at the age of 19, left the convent and told others she had been seduced into joining by the nuns, eventually publishing *Six Months in the Convent* in 1835.

Daniel Cohen argues that historians often assume Reed’s story was completely fictional because they equate it with the following year’s *Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk, or, The Hidden Secrets of a Nun’s Life in a Convent Exposed*, which was absolutely fictional. Instead, Cohen argues, we must examine Reed as an agent of her own destiny and framer of her own story. Reed had not been lured as she claimed, “but rather had gained entry through her skillful manipulation of networks of patronage within the Catholic community.”

Her claims of seduction and the awful conditions within the convent, however, fell on a receptive audience. When one of the assistant superiors briefly left the convent at the end of July 1834 before being persuaded to return by the Bishop, working men in Boston began planning to “liberate” her, with Rebecca Reed’s male relatives urging them on. On the night of August 11th, a large crowd gathered and, lighting a torch from one of those on Boston Company 13’s engine, burned the convent to the ground while firemen and police watched.

The convent fire has captivated scholars of the 19th century, and of American Catholicism, and many have sought to understand the motivation of the rioters and the general indifference with which a major incident of arson was met by those of the Boston area. In 1937, Ray Billington argued that “class antipathies, religious jealousies, and economic conditions”

combined to drive the “No Popery” sentiment of the period that led to the burning as well as the acquittal of those involved. Historians have argued over which of these motivations mattered more, but more recently, scholars have accepted the overdetermined nature of the incident. Adopting the framework used by Alfred P. Young in his examination of Early Republican memories of and reverence for Revolutionary-era activities, Cohen situates the Charlestown burning in a longer British colonial tradition of constitutionally-accepted mob action.

Cohen notes that Anglo-American colonials had long directed riot actions towards disliked religious groups, like the Quakers, and disliked ethnic groups, like local tribes. In addition, Anglo-Americans had often rioted against symbols of moral corruption: earlier brothels, but in this situation, private spaces where priests and nuns were suspected of sexual offenses towards young women. Participants in the Charlestown burning later said their motivations were anti-Irish and anti-Catholic, and the involvement of Reed’s family suggests some concern over sexual impropriety. In addition to these three historical motivating factors, Cohen outlines one more broad impulse. As in revolutionary-era attacks against British officials and their property, citizens mobilized to assail an alien institution that they perceived to be both antidemocratic (or antirepublican) and anti-American. As one Charlestown agitator put it, convents were “bad” institutions that “ought not to be allow[e]d in a free country.”

The complex and flexible nature of anti-Catholic discourse in the Early Republic can make analysis difficult. As such, an examination of how Jane and those around her deployed that discourse provides a better understanding of the specific ways in which the family understood Roman Catholicism, and how those understandings changed during the process of her

47 Cohen, “Passing the Torch,” 533.
conversion. The Sedgwicks and Minots often used tropes about Catholicism and references to Catholics themselves as metaphors in casual speech and writing. Charles Sedgwick, in describing his intellectual influences as a young man, wrote: “with the blindness of a Catholic’s faith, I adopted all opinions and performed every action prescribed by my elder brothers.”49 Upon receiving a copy of Sir Walter Scott’s *Kenilworth*, Catharine Maria Sedgwick “saluted it with as much enthusiasm as a Catholic would a holy relic.”50 These two instances demonstrate the Protestant fascination with the interior life of Catholicism and its effects on Catholic religious practice. Catholic faith was blind because its practitioners were not allowed to see and experience the world or even Scripture itself, but through a Vatican-approved lens. As such, they were denied an unmediated experience of God, and their religious practice consisted of conditioned, almost instinctual responses, rather than conscious expressions of faith.

The determination of Catholics to cling to their “peculiar” traditions was a source of amusement in the Sedgwick family. Jane Senior told her son of the good chuckle they all had over the latest “religious merriment in Germany,” where she claimed some Catholics had declared themselves Protestants but reserved the right to maintain all “outward embellishments of their religion” and the belief that “the power of working miracles is. . . granted by the Deity to some of the saints.”51 This depiction of Catholics as lacking the intelligence or intellectual freedom to comprehend and see contradictions in their own theology further develops the sentiments expressed by her brother- and sister-in-law. The Sedgwicks and Minots were not dismissive of the aesthetic products of Catholicism, but despite some attraction towards the aesthetic grandeur of the Church, they were careful not to allow that attraction to overtake them.

51 JMSI to HDS II, n.d. [1845], Box 25, Folder 1, SFP.
Aunt Catharine wrote to Jane while she, Uncle Robert, and Kate were traveling in Europe that she was impressed by the grand Catholic churches of the continent, but she claimed to be much more pleased by the simple churches they had seen in England.\textsuperscript{52} For a Sedgwick, the rational mind needed to remain in control of the senses.

Gaetano de Castillia’s entrance in to Jane’s domestic circle forced the family to reckon with Catholicism in a new way. For Jane Senior, his religion was part of her justification for hiring him at all. In defending her willingness to invite a single man into her masterless home, she told Aunt Louisa that he came with excellent references, worked well with her children, and that by hiring him, she was preventing him from going to Philadelphia to work with the Jesuits.\textsuperscript{53} As Castillia became a treasured member of the family, they reconciled this with their view of Catholicism by considering Castillia as an individual, and setting him aside from the rest of his co-religionists. Catharine Maria Sedgwick, singing his praises, acknowledged he was a Catholic, but “such a Catholic as Fénelon was, as St. Paul was, ‘clothed in the whole armor of God.’”\textsuperscript{54} She went on to compare his gentleness to that of St. John. The Sedgwicks reconciled themselves to Castillia’s Catholicism by understanding him as a product of the apostolic age Franchot outlines, before papal corruption necessitated a Reformation.

Despite Fenton’s argument that this anti-Catholic spirit persisted since the colonial period, the arrival of Irish immigrants in the middle part of the century added new dimensions to American anti-Catholicism in the antebellum period. The Sedgwick and Minot families were not immune to the prejudices of the day, and were quite able to separate elite educated Catholics like

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[52] CMS to JMSI, May 13, 1839, Reel 17, Catharine Maria Sedgwick Papers.
\item[53] JMSI to LDM, December 11, 1836, Box 28, Folder 3, SFP. Even if meant simply as a joke, Jane Senior’s argument indicates the contours of Sedgwick thought about Catholic “entrapment.”
\item[54] Sedgwick, \textit{Letters from Charles Sedgwick}, 130.
\end{itemize}
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Castillia from the Irish who were “flooding our country,” in Catharine’s words. Fanny was horrified by Irish immigrant violence in New York, musing that “[o]ne would not expect it in America.” In July 1848 a scandalized Aunt Louisa reported a riot at a Catholic picnic in Reading, Pennsylvania to her daughter Julia: “A most outrageous proceeding which will I trust meet with exemplary punishment, our populace will be no better than that of Paris, if immigration continues at the rate it has done.” Jane’s family members claimed to recognize something uniquely un-American in the behavior of Irish immigrants, who were becoming interchangeable with “Catholics” in contemporary discourse. Moreover, the association of Catholicism with a primarily working-class population further lowered it in the sights of elite American Protestant. Harry wrote to his mother of a girl in his New York neighborhood orphaned by cholera, and asked her if she could find a way to place the girl in service in the Berkshires. He noted “she is Irish & I suppose of course ignorant,” but felt that with attention, something good could be made of her.

Perhaps the keenest view into the family’s view of the Catholic faith itself comes from Louisa Minot’s visit to the Georgetown convent in 1836, the same one her niece Jane would visit five years later. Louisa’s visit to the Georgetown convent was also her first time on “such holy ground.” Writing to Jane Senior in 1836, her comments mirrored some of her niece’s later thoughts. She noted the happiness of the pupils, the attractiveness of the grounds, and the angelic face of Sister Lucilla, the woman who guided her around the convent, rhapsodizing that her appearance was “what the sentiments of devotion, nourished in a heart naturally affectionate & refined only could have imparted.” She also approved of the bearing of the archbishop: “a man

55 Fanny Sedgwick to JMSI, April 11, n.d. [1840s], Box 86, Folder 27, SFP.  
56 LDM to Julia Minot, July 20, 1848, Box 2, Folder 6, MRP.  
57 HDSII to JMSI, July 1, 1849, Box 26, Folder 9, SFP.
of noble figure & very mild & intelligent face extremely courteous & graceful in his manners.”

He took Louisa into the chapel, which she noted was arranged “with that view to heighten the sentiment of devotion by calling in the aid of taste,” a distinct characteristic of Catholics, in her view.58

As much as Louisa was able to see the happiness and devotion in the Georgetown convent, her approval had its limits. She remarked to the archbishop that the Church’s use of attractive architecture revealed its “knowledge of human nature,” and he responded that when Protestantism was as old, it would have the same wisdom. Willing to commend the Church to an extent, Louisa found this assertion too much.

Unless their wisdom can be turned to better ends than... the chains of superstition & establishing a spiritual disposition, I wish we may still keep to our simplicity... We often hear it said, religion will decline without external aids, that the present zeal among protestants is but a remnant of the catholic spirit, & that we must choose between a religion which tends to & will inevitable arrive at abuse, or more but it is not so, we are not to choose between a bad religion or none, but between a good religion or a bad one, for religion of some sort we shall always have since religion is an essential element in human nature.

She could admire the architecture and the effects of devotion, but the argument that the Protestant church had any ground to make up or owed something to Catholicism was more than Louisa could tolerate. Despite all the trappings, Catholicism still bound its believers in “the chains of superstition.”59

When Jane visited the same convent in 1841, her juxtaposition of the happy nuns and miserable slaves suggests that in the few short years since her condescending words over Adelaide O’Sullivan’s decision, she had developed a greater willingness to acknowledge positive

58 LDM to JMSI, May 17, 1836, Box 29, Folder 9, SFP.
59 LDM to JMSI, May 17, 1836, Box 29, Folder 9, SFP.
effects of Roman Catholicism. While age and personality might have contributed to Jane and Louisa’s differing reactions, most important is the relationship each woman had to Catholicism when she visited the convent. Louisa admired the Catholic aesthetic, and was willing to concede that those in the convent appeared happy, but all of that could not change the fact that she found Catholic theology and practice – Catholicism itself – hollow and false. Jane certainly knew of her aunt’s visit and had probably read or heard Louisa’s letter, but by this point, she was closer to everyday Catholic practice than her aunt had ever been. Perhaps if she had visited the convent in 1838, when the O’Sullivan family was new to her, her reactions would have mirrored those of her aunt more closely.

In only a few years, however, her friendship with the O’Sullivans had begun to reshape her perspective on Catholicism. When she walked into the Georgetown convent in 1841, Catholicism had already ceased to be the curiosity and spectacle it had been for her aunt. It was no longer simply a strange religion practiced by anonymous women in dark cloisters, it was something Adelaide practiced in daily life. When Louisa saw the happiness of the sisters, she knew it was not true because she knew the religion was not true. When Jane saw the happiness of the sisters, she was more intellectually open to the possibility that their happiness was true because their religion was true.

The Sedgwick-Minot family view of religion and Catholicism was a complex one, and its competing impulses helped lead Jane to a place where Catholicism could become a legitimate option. Her parents, aunts, and uncles exhibited, as expected, a firm commitment to belief itself, and to the importance of human institutions of religion. They were not passive or uncritical Christians, and Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s writings in the era of her conversion demonstrate significant deliberation and reflection on the path to Unitarianism. While they often contrasted
rational Unitarianism against other faiths, their discussion of Catholicism demonstrates they recognized it as the polar opposite of their faith in many ways - an irrational, superstitious faith that deprived its believers of spiritual privacy and true freedom of conscience. Moreover, their uncritical use of many of the common jibes directed toward Catholicism and the Irish, and their metaphorical use of it made it clear it continued to represent something exotic and other, even as they increasingly encountered Catholics in their own backyard. Soon, however, the Sedgwicks would encounter a Catholic in their own family. Their distaste for Catholicism had not prevented them from keeping company with Catholics of their own class, however, and as a result, Jane had been exposed to lived Catholicism in an intimate fashion. By the mid-1840s, she was seriously considering conversion.

The question remained, however: were Catholicism and American values compatible? Her family, and indeed her Anglo-American Protestant culture, expressed deep suspicion about the compatibility of Catholicism and free society, especially that variety found in America. How could a religion that seemed to restrict freedom of conscience co-exist with the democratic principles of the United States? For as often as these questions, posted by Protestant Americans in the 19th century, sprang from misunderstandings, they were also echoed by Catholic commentators on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, especially by prominent converts like Isaac Hecker and Orestes Brownson. Hecker, in particular, was consumed by the question of the compatibility of the Catholic Church and the United States, arguing that “America presents to the mind…one of the most interesting questions”

To ask the question is, of course, to accept some possibility of the answer being “no,” whether you are a 19th century Sedgwick or a modern scholar. A survey of the historical

literature on the issue suggests that the answer is: “It depends on when you’re asking the question.” Jay Dolan’s *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* suggests the question in its title, but argues that in the period he calls the “age of democracy” – 1780 to 1820 – the Enlightenment values that shaped American culture also shaped American Catholic culture. In addition to the fuller citizenship that independence brought them, Catholics also took to Enlightenment ideals like religious toleration, education, and what Dolan calls the “reasonableness of religion.” Moreover, American Catholics embraced the values of democracy, leading lay Catholics to exercise control over parish finances and property in a system of trusteeship that mirrored the styles of incorporation favored by American Protestant laity.61 Dolan cites prominent Catholic laypeople – Mathew Carey and Charles Carroll – but also includes among his “Enlightenment Catholics” members of the clergy like John Carroll, the first bishop of Baltimore, and a supporter of the move for independence.62

Maura Jane Farrelly argues that the compatibility of American and Catholic values in the United States stretches back through the Revolution and British North America during the colonial period, transforming Dolan’s “age of democracy” from a brief moment into the end of a much longer period. She, like Dolan, argues that scholars have seen the tension between American and Catholic values because they focused on the immigrant American Catholic experience from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. The Catholics of the Revolutionary period and earlier, however, were generally descendants of the first Catholic colonists in 17th century Maryland. These Catholics were socially marginalized by English

Protestants, legally marginalized following the Glorious Revolution, and practiced their faith without any formal Catholic infrastructure, seeing a priest once a month or even once a year. The decision to remain a Catholic in this environment was not necessarily an easy one, and Farrelly argues that American Catholics were primed to accept the individually-oriented rhetoric of the Revolution by making countless individual decisions, over a hundred years, to remain committed to their faith. Eighteenth-century Maryland Catholics clung to a historical narrative of 17th century toleration that had been lost because of English Protestant intervention, and in 1776, they sought to reclaim rights as full citizens not as Englishmen but as Marylanders.63

If American Catholicism had for so long been developing along with American identity more generally, why then did Hecker and so many others, Catholic and Protestant, feel the need to answer the question of whether a person could be Catholic and American? As Franchot and Fenton have argued the tension was far more of a constant for Protestants than for American Catholics. Dolan points to several shifts that emerged in the Early Republic, both within the United States and in Europe, that help explain why the American Question reemerged for consideration by American Catholics. Firstly, not all American Catholics were supporters of this Enlightenmment approach to religion; some laypeople and members of the clergy alike hewed more closely to a more traditional Catholicism that promoted “the authority of the hierarchy and the subordinate role of the laity.” Relatedly, the early 19th century also saw the rise of a mentality now known as ultramontanism, the “belief that Catholicism must be Rome-centered with all authority resting in the papacy,” leading to what Dolan calls the “Romanization” of American

Catholicism. A series of confrontations over church governance between the laity and the American hierarchy in the first few decades of the 19th century led to an ecclesiastical crackdown on lay governance. Most importantly, perhaps, the Church in America became more Roman as it became more Irish; Irish immigrants brought with them an experience with Protestants as oppressors and the Pope as the symbol of liberty. By mid-century, the character of American Catholicism had changed, shifting from a variety in which Jane’s rhetoric of individual choice and reason might have fit quite easily.

In that new American Catholicism, however, the tension existed and had to be confronted. At mid-century, the question had two prongs; first, were the Church and America culturally compatible, and second, did the Church in America have legitimate unique needs because of its location? The first part of the question generally hinged on the issue of authority. Tocqueville argued that Roman Catholicism was a good fit for America, and called Irish Catholics the “most democratic and most republican class.” Protestantism made people more independent, he argued, but Catholicism made them more equal. Brownson, who had earlier questioned the compatibility of the Catholic Church and American culture, began in the late 1850s to argue that the Church was vital in America: independent of the state, and popular sovereignty, the Church could “uphold the principle of authority against anarchy and maintain the benefits of liberty against…absolutism or despotism.” On the question of whether or not Catholicism was compatible with democracy, Brownson shifted over time, bringing him into conflict with friends like Hecker. In the years after the Civil War, Brownson strongly resisted the

64 Dolan, In Search of American Catholicism, 38-46.
66 Patrick W. Carey, Orestes A. Brownson: American Religious Weathervane (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. Eerdmans, 2004), 235-6
move to Christian union, and argued that “our work is to Catholicize America, not Americanize Catholicism.” Democracy, he argued, could only work in thoroughly Catholic society, for the base nature of humankind meant that only with the spiritual elevation provided by the Church could men create “good government.” Despite this claim, he became increasingly dubious about the compatibility of America and the Church.67

Father Hecker, who had followed his friend Brownson into the Church, split with him over the question of Catholicism and Americanization. In many ways, Hecker’s entire Catholic life was consumed with either arguing for the compatibility of the Church and the United States or taking action to adapt each to the other. Hecker joined the Redemptorists, a German order of priests, but came to feel that the religious orders of Europe were ill-equipped to deal with the American political and social order, not least because of the significant language barriers they often brought with them. His 1857 journey to Rome to petition for an American branch of the Redemptorists led to his dismissal from the order, but he was subsequently able to persuade the Vatican to allow him to establish the Missionary Society of Saint Paul the Apostle, members of which would come to be known as Paulists. From the outset Hecker was candid about his desire to focus on evangelism, but the conditions of the American Catholic Church – a rapidly swelling organization lacking infrastructure and personnel – caused him to think creatively about how it might be accomplished. If Hecker and his fellow Paulists could not personally preach to all Americans, they would have to find another way of spreading the Word.68

Hecker looked to the world of publishing to evangelize, and in doing so, hit upon a nerve in the Church. While his belief in the worth and power of the written word for the purposes of

67 Carey, Orestes A. Brownson, 326-9.
Catholic education and evangelization remained firm throughout his life, the Catholic Church. During the nineteenth century the Vatican had moved towards a more nuanced stance on the press and publishing as part of larger negotiations with a changing European society, but there was tension and resistance even as change came incrementally. Gregory XVI's 1844 encyclical *Inter praecipuas* outlined the dangers of the Protestant bible societies in Europe, which the Church believed fostered dangerous levels of intellectual freedom. Moreover, he argued these Bible societies gave out shoddy translations to the “unlearned and unstable,” regardless of status – they even gave the Holy Book to infidels. The encyclical claimed that since the Council of Trent, the Church had worked to instruct parishioners “more thoroughly,” through increased preaching and even some written material. The central message of the encyclical was that it was the responsibility of the Church hierarchy to bring Scripture to the masses, guiding and instructing them rather than letting them (mis)interpret it for themselves.69

Gregory’s successor, Pius IX, expressed similar thoughts in his 1846 encyclical *Qui pluribus*, and even encouraged the production of tracts “to build up the faith to instruct the people” in *Nostis et nobiscum* (1849).70 Still, the Vatican fear of intellectual freedom – and the implied danger of freedom of conscience – was not simply a Protestant bugaboo. Hecker, who took a much kinder view of original sin than his friend Brownson, felt that reading was worth the risk – after all, it was what had brought him to the church – but he was rather radical in that view. Even as Brownson wrote in support of the initial number of Hecker’s newspaper *The Catholic World*, he argued that only the very highest classes of men had the “masculine intellectual

69 “Inter praecipuas,” http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Greg16/g16inter.htm.  
The discipline” that enabled careful and close reading.\textsuperscript{71}

The hesitant support of minimal freedom of the press is indicative of larger ideological problems within the Church, as it struggled to confront the “isms” that it felt were immoral but to which its people seemed drawn. Pius IX’s encyclical \textit{Quanta cura} (1864) and the accompanying “Syllabus of Errors,” condemned naturalism, liberalism, rationalism, socialism, and in a dismissive sentence, the “pest” of bible societies.\textsuperscript{72} At the moment when Jane Sedgwick came to Catholicism, Catholicism itself was internally divided over whether resistance or adaptation to “modernity” was the correct path forward. America, as a “modern” democratic state, seemed to present the greatest challenge. Coming to Catholicism in this period, Jane faced the question of whether or not the things she valued in her birth culture were compatible with the new religious culture she was considering joining, and whether or not joining the Church would require a level of submission with which she was comfortable.

Throughout the period of time following her Norfolk sojourn in which she searched for usefulness and happiness, Jane maintained a moderate interest in Catholicism. Her interest was not piqued by the philanthropic “useful” elements of this new religion, but by friendships with other female converts of similar background and status. These friendships were vital, because for Catholicism to become a legitimate religious option for Jane as a young woman, she needed to move away from her adolescent views as demonstrated in her reaction to Adelaide’s entrance to the convent in 1838. When studying the lives of \textit{female} American converts, scholars often place emphasis on one particular relationship in understanding the conversion, that of the potential convert and her spiritual director, the priest who brought her into the Church. For Elizabeth

\textsuperscript{71} “Use and Abuse of Reading,” \textit{The Catholic World}, July 1866, 16.
\textsuperscript{72} “Quanta cura,” http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9quanta.htm.
Seton, for instance, it was the Archbishop of Boston, Jean Cheverus. For Sophia Ripley, it was Bishop John Hughes. For Eliza Allen Starr, it was Archbishop of Baltimore, Francis Kenrick. In assuming the primacy of the priest in conversion, scholars have tacitly affirmed Protestant tropes of gendered power within the Catholic Church that colored the language of American Protestants in the 19th century.

While it is important to understand the relationships Jane developed with her two primary spiritual directors, Father Francis Knackstedt and later Father Isaac Hecker, it is important also to recognize that neither of those men led her to the Church. Instead, I argue that for Jane, and indeed, for many of the female converts in this period, the intimacy provided by women’s friendships allowed her to witness Catholicism as practiced by other educated, Anglo-American women of high status and respectability. This increased familiarity with the practice, combined with Jane’s desire to seek “demonstration in all things,” facilitated her continued interrogation of received wisdom about faith and culture, and made her open to joining the Catholic Church. When, after years of consideration, Jane chose to do so in 1853, she did so only after determining that she had found, as she described it, “Truth.”

These new Catholic friends were particularly important to Jane’s development and self-image. Growing up in a family as large and close as the Sedgwick-Minot clan, there was always a sibling or cousin with whom to play, and until her twenties, virtually all of Jane’s close friends were also her relatives. As she moved into her twenties, Jane began to develop a circle of friends who were not required to be friendly to her and spend time with her out of familial obligation.

73 Franchot, Roads to Rome, Ch.
75 JMSII to KSM, June 2, 1853, Box 92, Folder 19, SFP.
For a woman quite aware of her difficult personality, this was significant growth. Simply coming to know Adelaide better during the period of her novitiate, which was also a period of great personal and intellectual growth for Jane, allowed her to reconsider her view of women religious as miserable women trapped by scheming priests. As she met and befriended more converts, her openness to Catholicism grew.

Between 1838 and 1841, Sedgwick and Minot letters show a marked shift in Jane’s attitude, from uncritical deployment of anti-Catholic tropes against Adelaide O’Sullivan to considering received wisdom about Catholic women religious. This new openness was further tested when Cheery herself joined the Church around 1842. Despite her sister’s childhood conversion, Cheery herself was not a Catholic when she and Jane first became friends, but her conversion was not a complete surprise to the Sedgwicks. As usual, Lizzie transmitted the New York news of Cheery’s conversion to the Berkshires to keep Bessie apprised of the situation, but Bessie not shocked at the turn of events: “O were you in earnest about Mrs. Langtree having turned Catholic - I had not a doubt of it - It did not seem to me at all surprising.”76 By this point, Jane and Cheery were intimate friends, and while no record of Jane’s reaction remains, it seems likely that it did not mirror her scornful reaction to Adelaide’s entrance into the convent a few years earlier.

Despite the growing intimacy between the Sedgwick, Minot, and O’Sullivan families in the late 1830s, Jane initially met them in the middle of the crisis with Adelaide. She had no chance to know Adelaide outside of that situation, and it seemed to fit perfectly into pre-existing narratives of Catholic female entrapment. Jane had come to know Cheery, however, well before Cheery’s conversion. It is unclear for how long Cheery had been considering Catholicism, but

76 Bessie Sedgwick to Lizzie Sedgwick, n.d. [1842?], Box 84, Folder 25, SFP.
even if it had been for the duration of their young friendship, Jane still became friends with a woman whose religion was not yet her most distinct feature. In fact, descriptions of Cheery suggest that her conversion might have been more easily accepted by those around her because, in all other senses, she was a refined and sensible woman: “Mrs. L is indeed. . . comely. . . in every sense of the word, full of delicacy taste & sentiment, & symmetrically beautiful.” The maintenance of respectability by converts to Catholicism may have helped facilitate elite indifference to converts in their midst; Cheery may have joined a faith associated with the lower classes, but she was still a woman of “taste.” As Marie Anne Pagliarini’s study of the “pure American woman” in American literature of the period argues, Catholicism was understood as “a threat to the sexual norms, gender definitions, and family values that comprised the antebellum ‘cult of domesticity.’” In particular, there was a fear that priests, simultaneously figured as sexually repressed and depraved, would tarnish sexual purity of American women. Jane Senior’s compliment about Cheery’s continued respectability held added importance because of the perceived dangers of her adopted faith.

The Sedgwicks remained in close contact with the O’Sullivans, and Cheery’s devotion to her faith grew alongside her devotion to Jane. When the O’Sullivan fortunes fell again in the spring of 1844, they were forced to move from their “romantic quarters” in Union Square to the Sedgwicks’ neighborhood in Greenwich Village, and the families saw even more of each other. Jane Senior noted that “Mrs. Langtree has become a very devout Catholic attends all the prayers

77 JMSI to HDSII, May 28, 1842, Box 26, Folder 3, SFP.
& fasts & reads all the high catholic books.” 79 To Jane Senior, and the rest of the Sedgwicks, these things were Catholicism, the outer trappings of an inner spiritual life that was utterly unfamiliar. Lizzie’s description of a Sedgwick and O’Sullivan night out at the opera demonstrates the way the families viewed Cheery’s newfound religious devotion as a curiosity, and even an object of humor. Lizzie took up most of a sheet of paper to tell Bessie of the amusing incident that transpired after they had all found their seats.

Mrs. Langtree was blushing scarlet, John started to his feet - altogether something was amiss - I asked Jeanie if Mrs. L had lost anything, what it was? “Yes, something of no value” “Yes I mean of great value to her” “None to any one else” All this in her mysterious manner. A lady and gentlemen behind us were assisting and occasionally asking what the lady had dropped, Mrs. Langtree was still blushing deeply, Jane was nervous and confused - Heavens thought I it must be a billet doux, a rope ladder, or a phial of poison - Just then, the gentleman behind us, picked up something, Cheery seized it, as hurriedly a her gentle nature would permit her, and thrust it into her muff - It was a rosary! however I tried to look as if I had not seen it, and was quite surprised when John turned round, and said with a smile that was faintly sarcastic, “Her rosary, you see”...

This small anecdote reveals John’s view of Catholicism had not changed since he was involved in the attempt to “save” Adelaide, and that Lizzie certainly saw this fuss over a rosary as a comical situation. Furthermore, Cheery’s conversion had seemingly made Catholicism the primary framework in which the families situated her; Lizzie noted she sat at Jane’s side “with the sweetness that a Saint might show to a favorite votary.” 80

Jane’s role in the scenario, however, demonstrates the ambiguity of her role as friend to a convert. The rosary was not valuable, but it was - priceless to Cheery, worthless to everyone else. If Catholicism was priceless to Cheery and worthless to John and Lizzie, what was it to Jane? In this scenario, her views on Catholicism were not what governed her actions. Her affection for Cheery guided her action; the rosary was important to Cheery, and Cheery was important to

79 JMSI to LDM, April 31, 1844, Box 29, Folder 13, SFP.
80 Lizzie Sedgwick to Bessie Sedgwick, January 1844, Sedgwick Papers Box 9, Stockbridge Library.
Jane, so finding the rosary was important to Jane. Cheery was not a Catholic friend to Jane - she was a friend who had become a Catholic. Jane supported her friend’s beliefs and interests, and joined her for the important moments in her life, as when Cheery had her young daughter Addie baptized later that year.81

Jane was also comfortable enough with the idea of Catholicism by this point to consider going to work in Cheery’s charity school instead of going to Norfolk to teach. Cheery even went so far as to check with one of the priests that she would be allowed to have “heretic assistants.”82 One of Cheery’s earlier appeals, in the summer of 1844, provides insight into how her conversion helped normalize the choice for Jane. “Indeed if you should be in New York next winter, I intend to enlist you in my service as assistant, when you get tired of the little dirty unwashed children you can talk italian [sic] with Mr Menpiatti.”83 Other O’Sullivan letters confirm that Father Varela’s charity school was, unsurprisingly, populated by the children of New York’s lower classes. In many ways, it was broadly equivalent to the charity school Aunt Catharine and Jane Senior had devoted so many hours to decades earlier.84

Setting aside the particular religion at the root of her benevolence, Cheery’s charity activity was completely in line with what was expected of a woman of her status. It was a slightly different form, but it was usefulness nonetheless. Moreover, this letter indicates that transgressing religious boundaries had not also caused Cheery to transgress class boundaries. She may have joined a religion associated with the lower classes, but her behavior demonstrated that

81 Lizzie Sedgwick to Bessie Sedgwick, May 3, 1844, Sedgwick Papers Box 9, Stockbridge Library.
82 Cheery to JMSII, September 12, 1844, Box 32, Folder 24, SFP.
83 Cheery to JMSII, July 1844, Box 32, Folder 24, SFP.
84 Cheery’s apparent leadership of this school, with Varela, matches the patterns detailed by Anne Boylan in her study of life-cycle and benevolence in antebellum Boston and New York. She argues that there was an “implied consensus that being married (or widowed) was a desirable characteristic for a benevolent society’s leader to possess.” Anne M. Boylan, “Timid Girls, Venerable Widows and Dignified Matrons: Life Cycle Patterns Among Organized Women in New York and Boston, 1797-1840,” American Quarterly 38 (Winter 1986): 781-3.
she was still respectable, which suggested that her decision to convert had not been rooted in the “passions” that had so irked Jane when she considered Adelaide and her cousin Catharine. The importance of this difference cannot be overstated, as Jane’s decision to convert would later be closely scrutinized by her family members, who worried about the process by which she arrived at the decision to join the Catholic Church, and were keen to determine what effects, positive or negative, it might have on her behavior.

The timeline of Jane’s own conversion is difficult to determine. If she kept a diary, it is not extant in any Sedgwick archives, and unlike prominent male converts of the time like Brownson, Hecker, and Joshua Huntington, she did not publish a book or pamphlet detailing her reasons for converting. In fact, her extant letters dwindle to nothing for long periods in the years following her trip to Norfolk, and so reconstructing her decision to convert involves reading out of the silences. The earliest evidence that Jane was interested in Catholicism to the point of considering it a viable option for church attendance came soon after the incident at the opera, where Jane seemed to sympathize with her friend’s embarrassment over a dropped rosary. Jane expressed a clear desire to attend the local Catholic church while in Norfolk in the winter of 1844-1845, despite the fact that it would have been easier for her to go to church with her employer. Instead, she expressed a clear distaste for one religion tolerated by the rest of her family.

I had intended before I came to go regularly to the Catholic church as I had understood that all the other preaching was of a most inferior order and all this family are devoted Episcopalians. This form of worship was always particularly repugnant to me and as here it is more formal and insipid than usual.

One of the social connections provided by Cheery offered the potential of a space in her pew in the local Catholic church, but Jane felt uncomfortable asking that favor of her, and instead
accepted the offer of one of her Catholic students’ parents. Still, she felt uncomfortable accepting that generosity, and took matters into her own hands: “I think I shall be obliged to hire a seat of my own for I am resolved I will not go to the Episcopal if I can avoid it.”

Eventually she secured a seat, and her description of it as “the greatest event which has happened in my life since I have been here” speaks to her misery in Norfolk and the role that the Church may have played in boosting her spirits and helping her endure her trials.

This dismissal of the Episcopal Church’s “form of worship,” particularly when performed in a more “formal” sense, suggests that Jane took issue with the structure and rituals of the Episcopal service. Much like Bessie, Jane this approach in Episcopalian worship, but unlike Bessie, she seems not to have found Catholic formalism problematic. Many historians have argued that the rituals and aesthetics of Roman Catholicism influenced the decisions of converts, particularly women. Jenny Franchot argues that many Protestants were entranced not by Catholicism itself, but by “Romanism,” a metaphorical construct built on an imagined historical Church in which aesthetics loomed large. Ryan Smith argues that antebellum Protestants readily adopted Catholic design and architecture even as they burned Catholic churches, motivated by the fear of losing ground to a worldwide church with resources and power, represented not only by immigration but also by notable conversions to Catholicism. Protestants, he argues, attempted to “provide a more vibrant worship experience, project a more ‘churchly’ appearance, and defuse some of the peculiar attractions of the Roman Catholic Church.”

Yet Jane expressed resistance
to that formalism, much as her cousin Bessie had done when Rev. Parker attempted to push his congregation in that direction.

Jane’s distaste for Episcopalian formalism alongside a growing interest in Roman Catholicism suggests that the role of ritual and form in her decision to convert was negligible, or that she felt Episcopalian formalism was untrue because its theology was untrue. While Jane was not one to flout convention for the sake of making a splash, she had shown herself to be less concerned with following rules she could not see the point of; in her dismissal of Episcopalian worship alongside an acceptance of Catholic worship, we see evidence that rather than being lured by the aesthetic pleasures of a faith, Jane thought carefully about the substance and meaning of the gestures she would be asked to make. Ritual and form were not, in and of themselves, something to be eschewed; if imbued with meaning and truth, they could be acceptable to Jane’s rational mind.

Following her return from Norfolk, Jane assisted Cheery for several weeks in Cuban priest Felix Varela’s charity school. Whereas she felt no desire to instruct Miss Martha Hackley in Italian that the woman would never use, Jane extended her obligations at the Catholic school by going in during Holy Week to instruct a young woman, “a good little thing though not very bright,” who hoped to become a teacher. Aunt Catharine updated Jane Senior on this activity, describing the student as “dull,” but noting that it was good to see Jane so invested in a project, and able to ignore “all her Aunt E’s jests about not dressing ‘Schoolmadam’” with “smiling serenity.” Beyond her investment in the school, it seems that Jane had made a deeper investment in Catholicism following her Norfolk trip. Now back in New York, where she could choose from a wide variety of churches, she continued to attend a Catholic church.
...at this point enters Jane dressed for Church (Good Friday) & looking in her pretty new white bonnet & her silk dress (Sara’s gift) so pretty & so satisfied that I wish you could have a vision of her - She has some oak-leaves & acorns for inside flowers and when I recomd to her to get a corresponding wreath for the outside she sd no - such decoration did not befit the walk she had marked out for herself.\textsuperscript{88}

Norfolk had transformed Jane in powerful ways. While there, she set a goal for her return: “not to be distressed by little marks of unkindness or carelessness” from her family. This letter from Aunt Catharine shows the manifestations of that newfound determination and confidence. Not only were her newfound religious interests providing her relief from “a life of restless repining,” in her aunt’s words, Jane was making choices about her own religious life without worrying about her family’s reaction.

In the fall of 1846, Jane Senior chose Jane to accompany her brother on a trip to Europe, the stated purpose of which was to improve his French before he entered fully into the practice of law. Jane’s behavior and fortitude in Norfolk had convinced her family that she was responsible enough to be put in charge of her brother, with Aunt Catharine noting that Jane could take care of herself. This trip also provided Jane with the opportunity to witness Old World Catholicism in all its splendor. Arriving in France in December, she and Hal spent several weeks exploring the museums and churches of Rouen and Paris. From there, they journeyed to Marseille, arriving in Rome in February. The siblings got on quite well, according to their letters and those of their cousin Frank Minot, who had been in Europe for some time. They watched their money carefully, and seem to have come to a new realization about their social standing when forced to examine it in a global context. They may have been members of the social elite in New York, but in Europe, they confronted their comparative lack of wealth and their Americanness. Fanny, the most social of the siblings, wanted to know all about the fancy parties and people her brother and

\textsuperscript{88} CMS to JMSI, March 21, 1845, Reel 17, Catharine Maria Sedgwick Papers.
sister were meeting. Jane had to confess, however, that when their connections through Fanny Kemble led to an invitation to a “grand soirée” thrown by Lady Duff-Gordon, she found herself without appropriately fashionable clothing. In the end, she had few options: “I decided to follow Mr. Collins advice to Elizabeth Bennet to wear those of my garments which were superior to the rest so I made my muslin gown do.” 89

In Rome, Frank escorted them as they followed the well-worn paths of so many elite American travelers before them, including their cousins Will and Kate. Frank, who had been in Europe for two years and learned something of the culture and cultural expectations, helped his cousins avoid social miscues, and guided them through the standard American tourist routes. For instance, on the morning of Lady Duff-Gordon’s party, the three travelers walked to the Capitol to witness the annual ceremony in which Rome’s Jews petitioned for permission to remain in the city.

…but when we got there we were informed that the ‘new’ Pope had established that this was heretofore to be done in private we were very sorry to have had to walk for nothing though we could not find fault with the good Pope for sparing the poor Jews this…humiliation. 90

Despite their approval of the Pope’s choice to spare Roman Jews their “humiliation,” Jane and her family members had been perfectly willing to take part in the public spectacle of humiliation had it proceeded as usual. Pius IX’s relative tolerance and liberalism in the early years of his pontificate had been noted by American Protestants and Catholics alike, in particular his “kindness to the poor outcasts of the Ghetto.” This incident demonstrates both that early liberal Protestant approval of Pius as well as the limits of Catholic and Protestant toleration of Jews. 91

89 JMSII to Fanny Sedgwick, February 1847, Box 26, Folder 6, SFP.
90 JMSII to Fanny Sedgwick, February 1847, Box 26, Folder 6, SFP.
91 Peter R. D’Agostino <i>Rome in America: Transnational Catholic Ideology from the Risorgimento to Fascism</i>
The Catholic Church provided the Segwicks with infinite activities to pursue, and Frank noted he went to bed exhausted each night after a full day of sightseeing and shopping. Not long after their attempt to see Rome’s Jews was foiled by the new pope, they went to see Pope Pius IX himself. No written reaction from Jane survives, but Frank’s discussion of the audience with the pope suggests he was relatively tolerant of Catholicism.

His holiness received us very courteously, and made some enquiries about America. Mr. Franklin Dexter made him a speech in French, to which the Pope replied in the same language, saying that it always gave him pleasure to see Americans, and thanking us for the visit we had made him…I was much pleased with his sensible and benevolent countenance, and his courteous manners. Many of the party sent in their watches and rings and rosaries to be blessed, which operation they all underwent in a lump. I was sorry not to have some rosaries to have blessed for my Catholic friends…

Frank’s benign reaction to the Pope, and his regret that he did not have any rosaries to have blessed for Catholic friends, suggests that the strength of New England anti-Catholicism might have been generational, as well as class-based. Yet there is great similarity between Frank’s assessment of Pius IX and his mother’s assessment of the bishop she met at the Georgetown Visitation convent a decade earlier. The markers of status impressed both mother and son, and Louisa had expressed discomfort only when the bishop made theological claims. Frank was not pushed to contend with theology, and much like the Sedgwicks with Cheery, seemed to find a pleasant face and good manners satisfying enough.

The letters from Europe make it quite clear that Jane was smitten with Rome, and Italy in general, but that she strongly disliked Paris. As the time drew near for them to return to that city so that Hal could begin to work on his French, Jane looked for a way to return to Rome for a few weeks, particularly Holy Week itself. Hal himself was disinclined to return to Paris as well, so

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92 Frank Minot to LDM, January 6, 1847, Folder 2, Box 1, MRP.
after a journey to Naples, both siblings returned to Rome. Hal took up French lessons in Rome, while Jane spent her days touring the city, particularly the Vatican itself. Her only frustration was the lack of time to fully explore and understand.

The Vatican I am in despair about - The four visits which are all we have been able to accomplish seem a mere nothing - and my impressions generally of the pictures and different beautiful things I have seen are in general vague - I must carry away more distinct impressions with me when I leave here.93

There is no indication, however, that Jane’s interest in Vatican art was, at this point, solely due to a particular interest in Catholicism. Jane had long maintained an interest in art and European culture, partially nurtured by Castillia, and so her exploration of the Vatican’s art collections is not surprising. Moreover, none of the letters from this trip, as detailed as they are, refer to a trip to the catacombs, one of the cultural touchstones of Franchot’s “Romanism.” Instead, with her unique family connections, she was able to explore the Sistine Chapel and other galleries in the company of one of her family’s friends, Anna Jameson, a prominent British art historian.94 At this point in her life, Jane seems to have been in a space between. She was no longer compelled to make anti-Catholic remarks or backpedal any time she found herself attracted to Catholic art and culture, but neither was she a committed and zealous defender of the Church. Franchot argues that American Protestants experienced a deep ambivalence towards Catholicism – a simultaneous attraction and revulsion – but Jane’s experiences in the 1840s reveal a different kind of ambivalence, one that would require resolution in a way Franchot’s “Romanism” never did.

Indeed, Jane’s letters from Europe indicate that she continued to think critically about the social institutions and ideologies of her time, particularly the meanings of liberty, as she toured

93 JMSII to JMSI, March 10, 1847, Box 26, Folder 6, SFP.
94 JMSII to JMSI, May 1847, Box 26, Folder 6, SFP.
southern Europe. She and Hal kept up with news from home as best they could, including Polk’s
declaration of war against Mexico. While Jane felt “nothing but mortification about the whole
affair,” she was afraid her brother’s “American love of . . . triumph exceeds his sense of
justice.”95 Her reaction is unsurprising, given that she had earlier lamented Polk’s election itself
in a letter to Herbert, and her writings in this period make it quite clear that even as her brother
and other male members of her family became more firmly entrenched in their Democratic
views, and despite her friendship with the O’Sullivans, Jane bound herself to the Whig cause.96

In addition to news from home, sight-seeing in Venice also provided her ample
opportunity to ponder liberty. After discussing Byron’s favorite painting with a docent, the topic
turned to the Venetian government’s polite request that the poet take his political ideas
elsewhere. The docent opined: “they always allow those who don’t like their government to find
another to suit them,” but Jane remarked that the docent himself seemed disinclined to test his
theory. Later in the day, Jane was further “struck though by the different notions of liberty in
different countries.”

At the hotel where we are staying there is a black porter a most unusual circumstance for
I have hardly seen a black since I have been in Europe - and though he speaks very good
Italian and French - I thought I detected the familiar accent of our negroes - I asked
where he came from and he said - North Carolina. His mistress had brought him over on
a tour through Europe and he had taken advantage of his privileges here to make off and
set up for himself. He thought he should hardly return to America for Europe was the
country for equal rights - he could speak the truth here he said.97

Franchot argues that the imaginative space of “Romanism” and Old World Catholicism allowed
New England Protestants to explore and critique the boundaries of their own society. In many
ways, Jane had been doing just that from a young age, and these examples show how her

95 JMSII to JMSI, May 1847, Box 26, Folder 6, SFP.
96 Herbert O’Sullivan to JMSII, January 2, 1845, Box 32, Folder 25, SFP.
97 JMSII to JMSI, May 1847, Box 26, Folder 6, SFP.
European travels provided her with more to consider. That little about the Church itself appears in her European musings indicates that, unlike others who confronted the Old World and found themselves simultaneously repulsed and attracted, Jane had already begun her process of coming to terms with Catholicism via a different route, and had no need for metaphorical analyses of liberty involving the Church. Given her earlier discussion of her “vulnerable points” on slavery and women’s rights, she clearly believed Anglo-Protestant society itself was rife with potential and actual oppression without the assistance of the Roman Catholic Church.

Still, her letters indicate that she maintained a suspicion for the institutions of the Church, if not its theology. When her gondolier accidentally took her in the wrong direction, “near an insane asylum on one of the islands,” other people might have asked to be rowed away as fast as possible. Jane’s reaction, however, was to encourage him to go closer so she could visit. She explicitly compared the management and residents of this institution to the hospital in Worcester she had visited with Aunt Catharine six years earlier, noting that one “poor wretch” seemed the most “pitiable object I ever beheld,” except for one woman she remembered from Worcester – undoubtedly the woman determined to break out to kill her children. Unlike Worcester, she found few residents who trusted her enough to speak with her, save “several crazy priests seemed particularly disposed to be conversible.” The reason for the wretched state of the asylum was quite obvious to Jane: “The institution as far as I could find out seemed to be under the management of a body of monks so I suppose it is not very well conducted especially as they had a large number in chains.” Jane’s own experience with mental illness gave her a particular insight into treatment options and a disinclination to see the mentally ill as inherently dangerous. This one statement on the management of the Venetian institution demonstrates that Jane still
brought an assumption of Catholic backwardness, at least among its European institutions. In this situation, her assumptions seem to have been borne out, at least by her measure of “progress.”

Upon her return from Europe, Jane entered again into the routine of a woman of leisure, but her interest in Catholicism intensified. Following the death of her husband Samuel Langtree in 1844, Cheery married again in 1845, this time to another business associate of her brother John, a Cuban plantation owner named Cristobal Madan y Madan. This relationship would eventually remove Cheery from Jane’s domestic circle, and from the country altogether. It would also nearly land John O’Sullivan in prison, as he and Madan participated in a failed Cuban revolution several years later. Before her removal to Havana in the mid-1850s, Cheery spent increasing amounts of time in Washington, D.C., had two more children, and worked to manage the affairs of the children from her husband’s first marriage. Through it all, the friends kept up a lively correspondence, and Cheery continued to counsel her friend about religious affairs. Jane’s friendship with Cheery had been instrumental in opening up the possibility of Catholicism, and as she considered conversion, her friendships with Cheery and other convert women provided vital support and encouragement.

Jane’s circle of Catholic friends expanded considerably in this period. She made the acquaintance of Ruth Charlotte Dana and her cousin Sophia Dana Ripley sometime around the mid-1840s, when both women joined the Church of Rome. Both members of a prominent Boston family, Sophia is well known to historians for her involvement, with her husband George, in the establishment and management of Brook Farm. Located in West Roxbury, where the Minots lived, many famous names of the age spent some time at this social experiment, including Ralph

98 JMSII to JMSI, May 1847, Box 26, Folder 6, SFP.
99 Edward Widmer, Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), Ch. 6.
Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Peabody, and most pertinent to the history of Catholicism in America, Orestes Brownson and Isaac Hecker, both of whom converted shortly after their time there.\textsuperscript{100} Ruth Charlotte Dana, known as Charlotte, came from an equally famous branch of the family. Her brother, Richard Henry Dana Jr., was well known at the time for his tales of his time at sea, \textit{Two Years Before the Mast}. Charlotte would go on to become one of Jane’s closest friends and traveling companions in the years following her conversion.

Charlotte Dana joined the Church on February 18, 1846. Previously, she had attended the high Episcopalian Church of the Advent in Boston with her father and brother. Both men had been founders of the church – “pioneers of ritualism,” in the words of Angela Henrietta Dana Skinner, Charlotte’s niece who later converted to Catholicism as her aunt had. Angela recalled the wide-ranging religious genealogy of her family.

\begin{quote}
My father and grandfather were converts to the Protestant Episcopal Church from orthodox Congregationalism. . . My mother was a Presbyterian. Nearly all our relatives were Unitarians or Congregationalists, while among our nearest neighbors and best friends were Irvingites and Swedenborgians.\textsuperscript{101}
\end{quote}

Charlotte, however, became a Catholic. There remains even less documentation of her motivations than of Jane’s, but her father’s letters indicate a passion for introducing Gregorian Chant at Church of the Advent. Despite his willingness to use his friends’ Catholic connections to secure music and information on the musical and liturgical forms of the Catholic Church,

\textsuperscript{101} Georgiana Pell Curtis, ed., \textit{Some Roads to Rome in America} (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1909), 382.
Richard Henry Dana Sr. strenuously objected to any connection people might make between his church and the “Romish” one.\textsuperscript{102}

Despite his high church tendencies and love of ritual, he was not a Catholic sympathizer, and his reaction to his only daughter’s conversion was of the variety historians often look for and expect. Charlotte selected her brother to attend her as she joined the church, asking him to communicate her decision to their father. The son had hesitated to do so, not wanting to upset his father, and so Richard Henry Dana Sr. discovered after the fact that Charlotte “was received into the Romish Church.”

It has depressed me most sadly. Fond of me as she is, I feel as if she had gone from me. I cannot if I could, convey to you the sense of solitariness . . .that is upon me. My interest in what is around me has left me. . . Where one is dearer than my life to me, to have the cord cut that bound us together to what is dearer than life also almost breaks the heart. . .Yet, with all thy sorrow of heart (perhaps because of it) I believe her love for me & mine for her was never so strong, so deep, as now.\textsuperscript{103}

Charlotte’s conversion, to her father, might just as well have been her entrance into the seclusion of the convent. His lament that his daughter had been separated from him in this life and the next was tempered by love, and despite his worries, there was no separation between them in this life. The following year, when his wife died, he sent some of her remaining possessions to Charlotte, including her Bible. He noted that these possessions were sacred to him, and “notwithstanding your frequent experiences of my infirmities of temper, my dear, dear daughter, you are sacred to me, most sacred to me.”\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{102} Richard Henry Dana Sr. (hereafter RHD Sr.) to C.S. Henry, April 9, 1845, Box 10, Folder 3, Dana Family Papers, MHS.
\textsuperscript{103} RHD Sr. to C.S. Henry, February 20, 1846, Box 10, Folder 8, Dana Family Papers, MHS.
\textsuperscript{104} RHD Sr. to Ruth Charlotte Dana (hereafter RCD), May 16, 1847, Box 10, Folder 17, Dana Family Papers, MHS.
Dana family letters indicate that Charlotte was acquainted with the Sedgwick's by 1845, probably through her relatives the Channings. Lizzie, still in New York, learned of the latest religious gossip from Bessie, who was spending time with her sister and brother-in-law in Boston:

Did you know that Charlotte Dana has avowed herself a Catholic - and been received into the arms of the Church. To be sure that is no great leap from Puseyism - which they all adhere to I have been told - but it seems to me the strangest thing for a Boston person - born and bred among these regular proper people - who find the most enlightened path - and tread it peacefully all their lives.105

“Puseyism,” a reference to Edward Bouvriere Pusey and his part in the Oxford Movement in the Anglican Church, was a charge often leveled at High Episcopalians in America, especially after another Oxford leader, John Henry Newman, converted to Catholicism.106 Charlotte and her father were indeed “Puseyites” of a sort, despite his strenuous objections towards being associated with any “Romish” practices. Bessie’s reaction – surprise that this could happen to a “Boston person” raised among “regular proper people” – was common for the period. To someone like Bessie, Charlotte’s move from High Church Episcopalianism to Roman Catholicism confirmed Protestant worries about places like Church of the Advent, and would have justified her own concern with Rev. Parker’s tendency towards formalism.107

105 Bessie Sedgwick to Lizzie Sedgwick, 1846, Box 84, Folder 26, SFP.
106 The Oxford Movement, also known as “Tractarianism” after the Oxford Tracts published between 1833 and 1841, was a movement among Anglican priests and theologians. Central to their inquiry was the issue of the authority of the Anglican Church, something they argued was valid based on centuries of unbroken apostolic succession that rightly broke from the Catholic Church when it became too corrupt. Some members also advocated for the restoration of older liturgical forms to the Anglican service. Newman’s conversion to Catholicism, and those in England that followed, also inspired many Episcopalian converts in the United States. See Patrick Allitt, Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals Turn to Rome (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 51-85; Lincoln A. Mullen, “The Contours of Conversion to Catholicism in the Nineteenth Century,” US Catholic Historian 32, no. 2 (2014):14-15.
Charlotte’s cousin Sophia Ripley followed her into the Church, but took a very different religious route. In 1827, she had married George Ripley, a young Unitarian minister, but within a few years both had begun dabbling in Transcendentalism, and the depression of 1837 led both to consider how best to engineer “the application of philosophical principles to human society.”

They read about and visited experimental communities, and in 1841, they moved to Brook Farm to help start a society founded on those principles. Within a few years, Sophia began questioning Transcendentalism and searching again for religious truth. She turned to the preaching of William Henry Channing for a time, but developed an interest in Catholicism in the fall of 1845, following in her cousin’s footsteps. After several years of consideration, she joined the Church at the end of 1847 or the beginning of 1848. Sophia and Charlotte’s paths represent two basic routes to conversion for Protestant Americans in scholarship on the 19th century. Charlotte is the archetypal emotional convert wooed by aesthetics for whom high church Episcopalianism was merely a stepping stone. Sophia, on the other hand, represents the more cerebral Hecker-Brownson model, “Ernest the Seeker” looking for liberation and Truth after having gone to Transcendentalist extremes.

When Jane met Sophia around the time of the latter’s conversion, Jane Senior tolerated her daughter’s friendship with the “sensible & interesting” convert. Her view of Ripley’s conversion was more positive than Bessie’s had been of Charlotte’s: “As to her particular form of faith it is simply strange to me that she can embrace it, but since it is the source of happiness

108 Henrietta Dana Raymond, Sophia Willard Dana Ripley: Co-Founder of Brook Farm (Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall, 1994), 19
109 No scholar seems willing to date Ripley’s conversion more precisely than that. Raymond, Sophia Willard Dana Ripley, 66; Franchot, Roads to Rome, 307.
110 Charlotte’s interest in incorporating chant into the services of the Church of the Advent seemed to telegraph her interest in Catholicism, but later letters make it clear she was a proficient musician, so her interest in exploring new musical styles before her conversion should not be seen as a gateway, certainly not in any stereotypical female sense.
to her its elements must be true & elevated - we can always find equally good people under every denomination.”  

Another woman of the family’s acquaintance, a Miss Julia Metcalf, joined the Church in these same years, and earned the admiration of Sophia for managing to pass “for a born Catholic.” Julia was the daughter of a prominent Massachusetts judge, Theron Metcalf, who had attended law school with Jane’s father in Litchfield. Her brother Theodore Metcalf was one of the founders of Church of the Advent, along with the Danas. With Charlotte, her friend since school, Julia too found her way to Catholicism. Jane’s circle of convert friends grew beyond Cheery, but in all cases, these women were of similar social standing, and may have gone far to assuage any family worries that Jane’s interest in Catholicism would lead to transgressing class lines. Of particular importance is the fact that two of these women, Sophia and Cheery, were married, and none of them showed any inclination towards taking the veil as Adelaide had.

Between 1848 and Jane’s baptism in 1853, few letters remain written by Jane herself to allow us to understand her motivations and fears in converting. The extant letters, as well as those in the Sedgwick Papers from Cheery and other friends, reveal a period of careful consideration and deep study during which Jane attacked thorny theological issues and fretted over the effect her conversion might have on her family. Even though letters from Cheery make it clear Jane was wrestling with these issues, and the family’s letters amongst themselves paint a picture of a woman for whom the Church played an increasingly large role, Jane’s letters with her mother and siblings make almost no mention of her religious explorations. Yet unlike the conversion narratives of men like Brownson, Hecker, Huntington, which portray solitary efforts

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111 JMSI to JMSII, n.d., [1846], Box 85, Folder 28, SFP.
112 Franchot, Roads to Rome, 317.
to free themselves from the clutches of Protestantism, Sedgwick and Minot letters from this period make it clear that as Jane came closer to conversion, she depended increasingly on a network of female Catholic converts.

One thing Cheery could not do for Jane, of course, was bring her into the Church herself. Jane needed a spiritual director, but not just any director would do. Cheery had opinions on the quality of priests just as Aunt Catharine had opinions on the quality of Unitarian ministers, so when her best friend needed counsel, Cheery directed her to a pre-approved priest. Father Francis Knackstedt was a Swiss Jesuit who had, with several others, been forced to leave the country in 1848, taking up positions teaching theology at Georgetown and later at the newly-founded Loyola College in Baltimore. Joseph Curran argues that many of the divisions among the Maryland Jesuit community in this period fell along domestic-international lines. While American Jesuits felt Georgetown’s struggles were due to the failure of foreign priests to adapt to American university administration, Knackstedt and his fellow immigrant Jesuits found the discipline at Georgetown sorely lacking.\^{113} This division between American and European was repeated a few years later within the Redemptorist order in America, eventually leading Hecker to found the Paulist Fathers, an American missionary order. While his American peers seem to have found Knackstedt hard and unpleasant, Cheery believed him to be the perfect director for Jane, and arranged for the two to meet. By her own account, Jane was quite taken with Father Francis, and remained close to him until his death in 1857, comparing him at times to Castillia.

Perhaps encouraged by Jane’s enthusiasm in contrast to the lackadaisical approach he saw in his own students, Knackstedt seems to have set a rigorous course of study for Jane. Her

reading materials for her education with Father Francis, both before and after her conversion, were those of a woman thinking critically about her faith, its history, and its theological controversies. While most of her religious commonplace books are undated, letters between her and her family make it clear that she was reading two Catholic writers in the year before her conversion – the English bishop James Milner and the English Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman. In a letter to Hal, she argues that Wiseman’s lectures from the 1830s were superior to Milner’s earlier work *The End of Religious Controversy* because the former’s “argument is more logically and powerfully [sic] put together.”¹¹⁴ This approach – to read widely and weigh the evidence – mirrored her approach to her Norfolk “experiment.” Jane’s path to Catholicism proceeded just as she chose, and while it was facilitated and supported by others, no one else’s convictions could supersede Jane’s own need to experience and know things for herself.

As can be expected from this approach, there is no evidence that any particular moment or revelation allowed Jane to make the decision to commit herself to the Church. She had been an interested and active Catholic, in many senses, for several years already, reading extensively, praying, and attending mass. But she had not been baptized, and was not truly a member of the Church. During the years prior to her baptism, she also maintained an interest in education, even running a Sunday school for the Catholic children of Stockbridge out of her family’s kitchen.¹¹⁵ A letter from Father Varela from May 1852 reveals some of the anxieties with which Jane was struggling as she sought happiness and usefulness. Jane’s original letter is not extant, but Varela’s response indicates she had inquired about the growth of Catholic educational

¹¹⁴ JMSII to HDSII, September 1, 1852, Box 86, Folder 3, SFP. Lincoln Mullen notes that the members of the famed Barber family, all of whom converted in the first few decades of the 19th century, also read Milner, having received the book from New England Archbishop Jean Cheverus. Mullen, “Contours,” 12.
¹¹⁵ JMSI to LDSM, July 7, n.d. [1850], Box 28, Folder 11, SFP.
institutions in the United States. It appears his own school in Brooklyn had closed, but he was looking forward to reopening it when he returned from the Council of Baltimore, and looked forward to Jane’s “cooperation” in that matter.\textsuperscript{116}

Then, Varela quoted a few lines from Jane’s original letter, in which she had expressed a desire that she might be within the bosom of the Church so that she could join the Sisters of Charity. Jane had written: “I am sensible that one who is not so, has a little right to make any demand upon your time.” Varela responded:

> Any person that calls upon me in the name of Charity, and for the purpose of doing charity is a brother or sister of Charity and has a right to my time, which can never be better employed. What you say you could wish, I do wish, but the want of such qualification will never be an obstacle to the good work of instructing the ignorant - Much more so when the experience I have of your prudence gives me every confidence that the children of my congregation will not learn from you any thing that may disturb them in their religious principles.\textsuperscript{117}

Varela’s sentiments reveal much about Jane’s anxieties in choosing to convert. This letter is the only indication that Jane ever expressed any interest in becoming a sister or nun, and Varela’s response suggests that Jane’s interest stemmed more from a desire to be useful in the way that interested her, rather than any serious call. Varela’s response, that Jane could be useful just as she was, is striking. Since childhood, Jane had explicitly and implicitly heard the message that she needed to change and be better in order to live up to the expectations of her family and culture. This seemed to suggest another way.

In addition to this single reference to taking the veil, it is important to note that none of Jane’s letters or the letters of those close to her indicate any desire to marry or any potential suitors, save the mysterious Mr. West who had joined her in the Sedgwick parlor play in 1844.

\textsuperscript{116} Felix Varela to JMSII, May 4, 1852, Box 32, Folder 7, SFP.
\textsuperscript{117} Felix Varela to JMSII, May 4, 1852, Box 32, Folder 7, SFP.
Despite having the social and economic freedom, and perhaps even the desire, to remain unmarried, there is no doubt Jane understood that wifehood and motherhood were the valorized social roles in her culture. As a single elite woman, her role was to assist her female relatives in child-rearing; even Aunt Catharine, best-selling author, took on this role and embraced it, at least when it pleased her to do so. Yet Catholicism did not inherently offer an escape from these expectations, and in fact may have added to them by presenting two privileged roles, motherhood and religious life. If Jane was at all worried that Catholic life would subject her to additional pressures, Varela’s letter may have helped pave the way to a final decision to join the Church. In telling Jane she could be useful in his educational efforts even without becoming a Catholic, he may have also helped her believe she could have a useful place in the Church as an unmarried woman without taking religious vows.

In addition to her guidance from Knackstedt in Georgetown, Jane also studied with Dr. John Murray Forbes, an Episcopalian priest who had converted to Catholicism in 1849. He may have been suggested to her by Sophia Ripley, as it is through Sophia’s letters to Charlotte that we learn of the result of Jane’s time with Forbes. Forbes told Sophia that Jane had been under his instruction for “some weeks,” and that she had written him afterwards that “all her difficulties were cleared up”; Sophia’s commentary to Charlotte indicates these were personal theological difficulties, not familial barriers to conversion, which gives us an idea of the point at which Jane may have formally decided to enter the Church. But her experience with Forbes had not been as pleasant as her time with Father Knackstedt.

Jane broached the question of the 2d commandment & the Dr. good man answered her much more meekly & patiently than you did, gentle as he is, he did not get through (don't breathe it) without one spat, when he ventured to suggest that so many questions might indicate some little want of humility on her part. She was ill after this, poor thing, took to
her bed & sent for him! Aren't the converts strange beings. Dr. F seemed to understand her completely.\textsuperscript{118}

Jane’s concern over the second commandment’s prohibition against graven images echoes a common Protestant objection to Catholic theology and design.\textsuperscript{119} For someone raised Unitarian, reconciling the second commandment with Catholic theology would have indeed proved a struggle. Jane’s reaction here suggests that she was not simply upset at “the spat,” but also the implications of Forbes’ statement: that she should stop questioning and instead be more submissive. Forbes remained a Catholic priest until 1859, when he committed what his Catholic opponents called his “apostacy” and returned to the Episcopal Church.\textsuperscript{120} Other than the few weeks of instruction Sophia mentions, however, it is not apparent that Jane ever met with Forbes again, nor does she ever mention him in her writing, unlike Knacstedt and Hecker, who she mentions often and with great fondness.

Varela, Forbes, and Knackstedt’s guidance notwithstanding, Jane required and desired more support on her journey. Even Sophia’s account of Jane’s disagreement with Forbes indicates that Charlotte herself had already counseled Jane on the issue of the second commandment. Cheery was particularly concerned that Jane have the appropriate spiritual director because she herself could not provide the guidance she had hoped to as Jane’s closest Catholic lay friend. Forced to journey to Cuba to attend to her husband’s affairs in 1852, she was disappointed to find him better than expected, and lamented not having stayed with Jane to “assist” her in her “admission to the Church.” She suggested Jane select Sophia Ripley instead, if

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{118} Sophia Ripley to RCD, November 5, 1852, Box 14, Folder 10, Dana Family Papers, MHS.
\textsuperscript{119} Smith, \textit{Gothic Arches, Latin Crosses}, 15-6, 80-1.
\end{flushleft}
she decided to go to Baltimore for her baptism instead of Boston. Cheery’s letter conveys a deep sense of responsibility for her friend’s well-being during her spiritual journey, and suggests that whatever good Father Francis or any other priest might do for her, the social and personal dynamics of the conversion process needed the intimate knowledge that only friendship could provide. Even for a woman as determined and headstrong as Jane, there were fears about social and personal repercussions as a result of joining the Catholic Church, and from a distance, Cheery guided Jane as only a best friend could.

Firstly, while Cheery believed Catholicism could bring Jane peace, she was afraid the process of finding that peace might be a bumpy one because of Jane’s temperament.

I am very anxious about you Oh dear Jane, I do so hope you may find peace to your soul - you will I am sure especially if you keep calm & collected in the exercise of your religion - I say this because you are so enthusiastic & excitable that i fear as it so often does it may make you ill - a good director will so much resist this. . .

Jane’s “enthusiastic & excitable” nature had long distressed her and her family, and her relatives had tolerated many of her early endeavors in the hopes that they would provide her with settled occupation. Cheery believed that Catholicism could provide that “peace” Jane and her family sought, but only if Jane could practice it in a “calm & collected” manner. This internally-contradictory suggestion echoes many Sedgwick and Minot letters, as well as central questions about the making of the self in America. Did Jane’s stomach troubles cause her mental illness, or did her depression cause physical ailments? How could she control her dyspeptic symptoms with regular occupation if those symptoms prevented her from getting out of bed? Did Jane need to be useful to be happy, or did she need to be happy to be useful? How could Catholicism bring her

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121 Cheery to JMSII, n.d. [1852], Box 32, Folder 5, SFP.
122 Cheery to JMSII, n.d. [1852], Box 32, Folder 5, SFP.
peace if she was temperamentally disinclined to a peaceful nature? What governed an individual’s course of life – inherent disposition or environment in which he or she was raised?

Yet Cheery’s fears were not simply that Jane’s nature was incompatible with peace, or that she was simply too excitable to proceed without the firm guidance of a good director. She was afraid that Jane’s family would interfere with her religious explorations in a way that would provoke the worst elements of Jane’s nature: “I am so fearful that any ridicule will excite your temper, and when you are indignant, like myself, you are so earnest in expressing it that it looks like downright anger.” Cheery’s fears were not without foundation, of course, as the family often teased Jane about her seriousness and sensitivity. Her serene disposition in the face of her aunt’s “schoolmadam” teasing notwithstanding, Jane remained a sensitive and even intense personality, her reactions tempered as much by avoiding the causes of distress as by developing a stiff upper lip.123

Cheery’s advice for defusing this situation was that Jane should concern herself with the family member whose reaction mattered most, and who could smooth over the situation with the rest of the family. Though Jane Senior had originally opposed her daughter’s decision to go to Norfolk, she was eventually convinced of the good sense of the plan, and became Jane’s staunchest defender in the face of criticism from family and friends. In this case, even more than with Norfolk, Jane needed and wanted her mother’s blessing, regardless of how sure she was of her decision to convert. As such, Cheery suggested the course that Jane’s persuasion might take: “you must convince your mother that practical effort of the Catholic religion when properly observed in the true spirit of the church will make you happy, peaceful & self sacrificing.” In essence, Jane was to make the argument that this would make her happy, which she wanted, self-

123 Cheery to JMSII, n.d. [1852], Box 32, Folder 5, SFP.
sacrificing, which her mother wanted, and peaceful, which everyone wanted. While Jane might achieve salvation for herself through conversion, the benefits to Jane’s family would be accrued in this world. Cheery believed Catholicism had the potential to solve Jane’s personal struggles as well as the strife within her family: “I am only thinking of you, at the same time I cannot bear you to give any pain to your mother, which you surely never will if you become a thorough Catholic.”

The following winter, Jane spent several months in Northampton and Brattleboro taking the water cure before journeying to New York, and then on to Baltimore with her brother. There, in the company of Hal and prominent Baltimore Catholic Emily Louisa Hinton Harper, she was baptized at the beginning of May. There are no extant letters from Jane herself describing the experience or her motivations. What does remain, however, is a single letter to Kate Minot in June 1853, following Jane’s return from Baltimore. In it, Jane refers to a letter she had received from Kate which stated her acceptance of Jane’s religious choice. In response, Jane made it quite clear that Kate should not hold out hope that she would change her affiliation: “I have taken this step with a care and deliberation which prevents my regarding it as possible that I should change my faith for any other opinions.”

Jane’s decision to join the Church had been a long time coming, and no one could accuse her of making it lightly; she had been attending Catholic mass periodically since at least 1844, and had been teaching the catechism to local Catholic children even before her baptism. It is difficult to compare the so-called length of the conversion process among Jane and her friends, partly because despite the scholar’s desire to know the first step on the road to Rome, that simply

124 Cheery to JMSII, n.d. [1852], Box 32, Folder 5, SFP.
125 HDSII to JMSI, May 9, 1853, Box 26, Folder 11, SFP.
126 JMSII to KSM, June 6, 1853, Box 92, Folder 19, SFP.
is not how Catholic converts approached the situation. Her friend Charlotte became a Catholic in 1846, after faithfully attending Church of the Advent through 1845, but we have no evidence of how long she was considering conversion. Sophia Ripley’s conversion is harder to date, falling sometime in the winter of 1847-1848; we know she had been dissatisfied with Brook Farm as far back as 1843, and had seen two friends, Brownson and Hecker, join the Church, but we know little of her process. Jane’s friend Anna Ward, who she would help guide to the Church in 1858, explored various religions, including Swedenborgianism, throughout the 1850s, before becoming a Catholic. While for each of these women, there was certainly a shift from exploration to the concerted study necessary for reception into the Church, it is not simple to establish when that shift happened, if the subjects themselves were even aware of it. What is notable, though, is that while Jane explored Catholicism, there is no evidence she was actively exploring any other faith, though she seems to have attended Unitarian services with her family. Moreover, her exploration of Catholicism lasted significantly longer than that of her convert friends.

In expressing her acceptance of Jane’s choice, Kate had quoted Aunt Catharine’s first book, *A New-England Tale* (1822), in which the heroine, a vigorous and independent-minded Protestant, becomes a Quaker through the influence of the man she loves. To allay the readers’ qualms over this decision, Catharine quoted the poet George Crabbe, lines that Kate in turn quoted to Jane: “Minds are for sects of various kinds decreed, As different soils are formed for different seed.” Aunt Catharine had used this same argument to express anxiety over Catharine Webb’s choice to become a Baptist. In that case, Aunt Catharine feared that her niece had chosen a religion that did not match the temperament of mind raised with “rational” faith. Despite the fact that Kate used this argument to indicate her acceptance of Jane’s choice, Jane’s need to

reassure her of the permanence of her affiliation suggests that Kate too may have felt Catholicism was not a good “match.”

While Jane was glad for her cousin’s acceptance, she took issue with these lines, and used them to present an argument against sectarian division that reads like a proof. Jane argued that this idea of different sects for different minds was rational enough when applied to “heathen religions, the forms of superstition that have appeared independent of Christianity,” which Christians knew to be “erroneous.” It could not, however, be applied to true Christianity itself.

. . . it appears to me very evident that if there is another life to which our lives here are expected to conform, that is to say if God and another life are facts not vague theories, and the Deity has made a revelation concerning these things to his creatures, the mind of each must be as capable of receiving it as the results of mathematical science or the law of gravitation.

For Jane, if all Christians accepted the premise that their faith rested on facts that God had revealed to humans and that He had given them the capacity to know those facts, there could be no acceptance of sectarian differences. If God’s laws were as true as natural laws, disagreement on those laws would prevent individual humans from achieving salvation. Instead, like scientists pursuing the truth of natural laws, humans must pursue religious truth. Despite the ecumenical spirit that animated her cousin’s acceptance, Jane argued that “Truth can never properly be likened to a kaleidoscope which changes its pattern with the touch of every new hand that holds it.”

Jane’s emphasis on reason and truth does not necessarily set her apart from other converts of the period, and in fact her language mirrors that of other converts who published narratives of their experiences. For Jane, reason was part of her birth culture and part of the faith in which she was raised. For Orestes Browson, who wrote one of the few true Catholic conversion narratives

128 JMSII to KSM, June 6, 1853, Box 92, Folder 19, SFP.
of the 19th century, reason was a part of his manhood. To understand this important difference, and therefore to understand why a historiography of Catholic conversion that only uses men is problematic, we must examine the dynamics of conversion more broadly in the Early Republic. Susan Juster’s examination of gender in evangelical conversion narratives in this period situates gender and authority at the center of a profound male anxiety over submitting to God’s authority. She attributes the frequent discussion of suicide in the evangelical narratives of men and women to “the real distress caused by the evangelical demand for complete self-renunciation.” While women experienced authority through personal relationships, she argues, for men, “authority [was] embodied in an abstract system of rules and principles rather than in a personal figure.” It is to this understanding that Juster ties the self-centered nature of male narratives; the removal of others from the process of conversion focuses the narrative on the relationship of self to God’s authority.129

The experience of radical evangelical conversion resolved the anxiety over authority and brought men to an acceptance of their inability to effect their own salvation. This type of submission did not sit well with some men, particularly in its denial of human agency in effecting salvation. For some men, the question of authority and agency was resolved through evangelical revival, but for others, that resolution could only come through a major denominational change, such as that experienced by Brownson and Hecker.130 Brownson’s The

130 There were some Roman Catholics who utilized revivals to gain converts and bring lapsed Catholics back into the Church, but by and large revivalism was looked down upon by Catholics. In an account of a revival in 1834, one Catholic editor used phraseology akin to that used against Roman Catholics by Protestants. The preachers used theatrics and spectacles to enthrall their victims, particularly a group of women who “lost the equilibrium of their reason.” Revivals were considered “a mockery on common sense, mere trickery to cheat the understanding and keep up the delusion.” “Extract,” United States Catholic Miscellany, 10 May 1834, p. 356. See also Jay P. Dolan, Catholic Revivalism: The American Experience, 1830-1900 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978).
*Convert; or, Leaves From My Experience* is shot through with language about manhood and submission. Upon leaving Presbyterianism, he promised he would “maintain the rights and dignity of [his] own manhood.”\(^{131}\) Later, when he renounced Universalism, he claimed “I felt restored to my manhood.”\(^{132}\) Reflecting on his period of Saint-Simonism, he mused that despite the new ideas of Fuller and Martineau on marriage, “Women do not usually admire men who cast off their manhood.”\(^{133}\) In introducing his ultimate decision to convert to Catholicism, he boldly stated: “I reclaim my reason, I reclaim my manhood.”\(^{134}\) During the period of his conversion to Catholicism, Browson figured himself in his narrative exactly as Juster suggests – as a monk in a cell, reading, thinking, and praying, finally away from the influences of men who would pervert his reason.

That Browson understood reason to be the province and indeed the very marker of manhood is not surprising, yet it does cast Jane’s own emphasis on reason, rooted in her Unitarian background, in a different light. There is nothing in her writing or her family’s papers to indicate that Jane was seen as irrational or prone to make decisions based on emotion, even if she was described as sensitive. Moreover, unlike Brownson, who portrayed himself as a lone wolf, fighting against those who would trick or force him into submission to a false authority, and then brought his entire family into the Church after him, Jane’s conversion process balanced the input and counsel of friends and priests with her own desire to know and understand.\(^{135}\) In many ways, these conversion experiences show the inverse of Juster’s argument about gendered

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understandings of authority could simultaneously be true: Brownson may not have liked it, but he certainly felt he experienced authority in his relationships with other men, while Jane, despite her social position, let her religious choices be guided not by those in authority over her but by her own deliberate comparison of the systems she considered reasonable choices.

Some might argue that Jane’s defense of “Truth” simply reflects the zeal of a new convert. When placed in the context of Jane’s behavior in young adulthood, however, it reflects a consistent approach to life. In Jane’s younger years, her mother quoted a passage from Ecclesiastes, “Seek not out things that are too hard for thee, neither search the things that are above thy strength,” and claimed to follow its guidance. She lamented that her daughter’s mind “desires intensely demonstration in all things” and that Jane would therefore be “doomed to distraction.” In a certain sense, she was. Her writings and choices indicate that she relentlessly pursued fulfilling occupation and questioned social values and practices, contradicting her family’s desires if necessary. Unfulfilled by the Unitarianism with which she was raised, she examined her religious options. Unmoved by antebellum heart religion, she preferred an intellectual approach to finding faith. Uninterested in Transcendentalist lectures that left her with “nothing but a sense of dizzy giddy confusion,” she sought some external truth.136 Friendship with elite female converts exposed her to a particular lived practice of Catholicism, one that valued intellectual engagement and validated her intellectual approach to faith. That her conversion was nearly a decade in coming reflects this approach, and her desire for demonstration in all things. Her mother feared she would be doomed to distraction, but in Roman Catholicism, Jane found intellectual occupation, friendship, and a truth that held up to her rigorous examination.

136 JMSII to CMS, March 1841, Box 80, Folder 10, SFP.
While Jane’s interest in Catholicism grew over many years, and she spent quite a while considering whether to join the Church, her family struggled to accept, or perhaps chose to ignore, the seriousness of her interest. I argue that the Sedgwick and Minot families eventually accepted Jane’s conversion not only out of religious toleration but also because of their deep desire for her to “settle,” emotionally and physically. For years, there had been great hand-wringing over Jane’s emotional state: her unreasonably high standards, restlessness, abundant enthusiasm, and periods of depression. Over time, her family softened its singular focus on usefulness, making room for happiness and emotional stability, and most of them came to believe that Jane was finding those things as a result of her interest in Catholicism. In the end, the Sedgwicks and Minots accepted having a Catholic convert in the family because they believed Jane’s newfound happiness would eventually translate into the usefulness and duty that they expected and desperately wanted from an elite woman.

The family member most concerned with Jane’s religious development was undoubtedly her mother, who expressed consistent and constant worry about her children’s religious devotion, or lack thereof. Even as Jane continued to dabble in Catholicism, it was not serious enough for her mother to consider it regular, committed churchgoing, nor did she stop going to other churches with her family. Jane Senior continued to fret over the lack of religious commitment she saw in her children, and the deleterious effect it would have on their characters. At Christmas 1848, Jane Senior wrote to Louisa of her goals for wintering in New York: to be close to Hal and understand his “course of life,” to be with Fanny while she underwent treatment for her eyes, and to soothe Jane’s “dyspepsia & continual depression.” “[L]astly & privately,” however, she intended to stay in New York “to have my children under some religious influences which I
thought might be in better accordance with their taste than those to which they have been
subjected at home.”

Jane Senior’s words echo those of her sister-in-law Catharine, who had been so
cconcerned that Catharine Webb’s Baptist missionary life would cause her grief because she had
been raised with tastes that would not be satisfied by evangelical Protestantism. In the minds of
the Sedgwick elders, Sedgwick devotion needed to match Sedgwick tastes. The Sedgwicks of
Jane’s generation seemed largely uninterested in religion, but when they did express interest, it
was often tempered by distaste for the available religious options. Bessie’s letters indicated she
was not impressed with Episcopalian worship, and if Jane’s Norfolk sentiments held true in the
North, she was equally unimpressed with the primary non-Calvinist option in Stockbridge. Jane
Senior believed her children needed the influences of a religion that conformed to their tastes, as
members of an educated elite, if they were to become committed Christians. She regretted her
inability to provide her children with consistent Unitarian worship in Stockbridge, and attempted
to make up for that deficiency in their adulthoods.

Jane Senior remained committed to the belief that religion was the primary shaper of
character, and that Fanny, Jane, and Hal all needed “a deeper religious sentiment.” Knowing this,
yet unable to effect a change in them, she lamented the structures of her Unitarian faith, or the
lack thereof.

…with this strong conviction in my own mind, joined with a feeling of utter inability on
my part to bring about this change - I sometimes wish that we had all been educated in
the orthodox faith; simply because the organization of their religious societies seems
more favorable for the introduction of serious impressions into characters not naturally
disposed to receive them.\footnote{138}{JMSI to LDM, December 25, 1848, Box 28, Folder 12, SFP.}

\footnote{137}{JMSI to LDM, December 25, 1848, Box 28, Folder 12, SFP.}
Undoubtedly Jane Senior saw different problems plaguing her children. Hal, by every indication, was singularly uninterested in religion in this period, except as an object of historical study. Fanny’s extant papers are so minimal as to provide little clue to her religious disposition. Jane, however, seems not to fit her mother’s description of “characters not naturally disposed to receive” religious wisdom. In fact, Jane Senior’s earlier description of her eldest daughter as someone whose “mind desires intensely demonstration in all things” and who must therefore be “doomed to distraction” suggests that Jane was, temperamentally speaking, the perfect Unitarian, and not a woman likely to be influenced by her mother’s attempts to bring about a change.

In the early 1850s, Jane Senior referred to Jane’s exploration of Catholicism as her “present hobby. . . which thus far works well & furnishes her employment. . .,” suggesting that whatever Jane’s level of commitment to the Church at that time, her mother believed (or hoped against all hope) that it was still a hobby.\(^{139}\) Jane’s mother framed her daughter’s interest in Catholicism as a temporary interest, and one that might bring about greater religious fervor that could be appropriately channeled, even as her language reveals that she was beginning to think of her daughter as a Catholic. When Jane began to run a Catholic Sunday school out of the kitchen in her mother’s house in the summer of 1850, Jane Senior saw it as an appropriately benevolent activity for a woman of her standing, and approved because it saved the local Irish children from a day of idleness. Jane Senior remarked that her daughter seemed well occupied, and was “a very rational Catholic & will give these children some good notions.”\(^ {140}\)

This comment reveals the ultimate paradox of Catholic converts in antebellum America, particularly those who were raised Unitarian. If anyone could be a “rational Catholic,” in Jane

\(^{139}\) JMSI to unknown recipient, n.d., Box 29, Folder 24, SFP.  
\(^{140}\) JMSI to LDM, July 7, n.d. [1850], Box 28, Folder 11, SFP.
Senior’s opinion, it was certainly one whose original faith culture and personality predisposed her to a rational approach. This sentiment reveals the complexity of Protestant views of Catholicism. Instead of a monolithic Whore of Babylon, the Church was understood as a historical entity that had, hundreds of years before, lost its way. Those best able to embody its apostolic qualities were, in the eyes of Jane Senior, elite cradle Catholics like Castillia, and those who had been raised as Protestants. While Sophia Ripley envied Julia Metcalf’s ability to pass as a “born Catholic,” Jane Senior seemed to take the view that if her daughter did choose to join the Church of Rome, she would provide cradle Catholics with an example of how to be better Catholics. Moreover, it is notable that Jane’s participation in this peculiar and irrational faith seemed to make her behave in a settled, rational manner, at least in the eyes of her family. As Jane’s interest in Catholicism increased, her family members gently stretched their cultural frameworks to accommodate her interest, and reframed her choice in ways that made it palatable to their sensibilities.

In particular, the family focused on the change it brought about in Jane’s behavior. In June 1852, Aunt Charles recounted a recent social gathering to her daughter Kate and gave an account of Jane that was fairly typical for the time, wherein she sharply rebuked some family acquaintance whose opinions she found lacked rigor. But Aunt Charles immediately noted that “Jenny however usually seems in a particularly quiet placid state of mind, from which I infer that she finds Catholicism [a] wholesome diet.”141 Jane’s family had described her personality with many adjectives, but “placid” and “quiet” had rarely been among them. Quite often, in fact, she had been the subject of pity even among the cousins she counted as her closest friends. Bessie, daughter of Charles Sedgwick, and Lizzie, daughter of Robert Sedgwick, often corresponded

141 EDS to KSM, June 9, 1852, Box 83, Folder 9, SFP.
over what was to be done about Jane’s tendency to talk more than was polite and take other people’s words too seriously. This anecdote demonstrates that while Catholicism had not changed Jane’s personality, her family believed it had tempered it a bit. Earlier, her mother had praised activities that brought Jane serenity, however temporary, so something that could bring her more permanent peace was very appealing to the family.

Jane’s benevolent duties to the Catholic community of Stockbridge became part of her daily domestic life, as when her mother wrote to Aunt Louisa that Jane’s “care of the household as well as the Catholic community will, I think, help her up. . .”142 Jane’s own personal history, in combination with what had happened to Charlie, and even to her father, meant that anything that might “help her up” was worth the family’s consideration, particularly something that simultaneously kept her close to home. In particular, contrary to Richard Henry Dana Sr.’s fears about his daughter’s separation from him upon her conversion, the Sedgwicks noted that Jane’s increased religious devotion, even though it was to Catholicism, simultaneously helped integrate her more fully into the secular, domestic world. Catholicism was helping her up, and settling her down, fostering happiness that led to usefulness.

Letters indicate that part of Jane’s attraction to the Church was the intellectual engagement it provided. For her and her brother, this intellectual interest in theology provided a dynamic that had been lacking in their relationship. For instance, in the summer of 1852, Harry wrote to tell his sister he was sending her one of the Catholic books she’d requested, but since he thought it would take her a while to read it, he had held the other one back so he could read it first.143 This period began a life-long correspondence on religious history and theology between

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142 JMSI to LDM, n.d., Box 28, Folder 17, SFP.
143 HDSII to JMSII, August 31, 1852, Box 92, Folder 14, SFP.
the two, one that they both enjoyed, despite the fact that neither was ever fully swayed by the other’s opinion. This gesture and the correspondence that followed, from the younger brother who had once held such contempt for his oldest sister’s choice to teach on her own, indicates that Jane’s good behavior was more important to Harry than the means by which it arrived.

Despite working hard to understand her daughter’s interest in positive terms, Jane Senior certainly did not encourage Jane’s interest in Catholicism. As it became clear that she would convert, Jane Senior struggled to make the best of it. Writing to Aunt Louisa in the summer of 1852, she said that if Jane were determined to join the Catholic Church, she would “allow” it, and accompany her to ensure it was done in a respectable fashion: “This is a pretty hard trial to me but I suppose I must make up my mind to it – if I see any good practical success in her increased devotion to duty & increased serenity I shall be resigned. . . “144 She expanded upon this sentiment in a letter to her brother William:

I shall not be surprized if she finally settles down in the Catholic faith – This, though a great disappointment to me, I ought not to deplore if it be an honest refuge from unbelief – I have done all I thought judicious to prevent such a result, regretting above all things the invisible entrapment such a faith must bring about from her priests, but I try to think of the virtuous models that church offers...if she must adopt that faith, she may try & follow those rather than the blind bigots who are all abounding in that sect.145

These worries, even after years of Jane’s interest in the faith, reveal that Jane Senior still exhibited the typical Protestant fascination with and suspicion of Roman Catholic religious life, particularly fear over Jane’s potential intellectual, physical, and spiritual “entrapment.”146 Yet those “virtuous models” Jane Senior praised, and the faith she was willing to accept, facilitated

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144 JMSI to WMI, n.d., Box 28, Folder 17, SFP.
145 JMSI to WMI, n.d., Box 26, Folder 19, SFP.
her daughter’s confinement in another sense. In addition to serenity, Catholicism brought about
Jane’s “increased devotion to duty,” a willingness to stay in one place and fulfill the social and
familial obligations expected of her, while providing her opportunities for benevolent usefulness.

Uncle Charles, too, seemed to accept that his niece’s newfound happiness was a result of
her religious choices, even before she officially joined the Church. Someone in town had
mentioned to him that Jane was “quite constant at matins and vespers,” but he brushed it aside in
a letter to his sister Catharine, noting that there was “nothing better to wake up one in the
morning, or keep one awake at night,” so he chose not to concern himself with it. Instead, he
mused on the way Jane’s choices seemed to affect those around her. He noted that “[e]verybody
seems to shrink from such conversions, as if they were a weakening of their own faith. To me it
only seems a part of the great Beneficence to make so many paths to heaven, that anybody who
walks that way at all, may find one to go in.”147 This ecumenical spirit appears frequently in the
family’s letters, though some struggled to apply their principles when confronted with a potential
Catholic cousin.

There were certainly hints of anti-Catholicism in the Sedgwick reactions to Jane’s
conversion. When she was baptized, Hal attended the ceremony to support his sister’s decision,
though he wrote to his mother that the priest who baptized her looked sallow and suspicious, just
as he had expected from a Jesuit.148 Aunt Catharine’s reaction, however, was most dramatic. Just
a few days after her own brother’s letter to her on the many pathways one might find to God,
Catharine Maria Sedgwick wrote to her favorite niece Kate with a much different view of Jane’s
activities.

148 HDSII to JMSI, May 9, 1853, Box 26, Folder 11, SFP.
For Heavens’ sake what is Jeanie doing in Boston? Is she going, or gone into, the Catholic Church? I shall feel like putting on sackcloth & ashes if this comes to pass – a Lover & Champion of Liberty voluntarily joining the key-stone of absolutism!149

Catharine’s framing of Jane’s potential conversion as an abdication of freedom reflects the early republican anti-Catholicism of Fenton’s work. Moreover, her concerns echo those she expressed over Catharine Webb’s conversion, and Bessie’s shock over Charlotte Dana’s conversion. Sedgwick women were not raised to abdicate their hearts and minds to religion, and yet, in Aunt Catharine’s estimation, two of her nieces had done just that!

Catharine’s reaction went beyond the almost-inborn anti-Catholic sentiment of the Anglo-Protestant world. Unlike the stories conjured by Rebecca Reed and Maria Monk, and the fears that helped drive the Ursuline convent burning, there was no discussion of entrapment, even from someone like Aunt Catharine, who described her niece’s choice as “apostacy [sic].” Like other members of the family, she saw the role of usefulness at the center of Jane’s interest in Catholicism, acknowledging that if Jane were “weak enough” to join the Church she might find “occupation & perhaps a safety valve.” But unlike those closer to Jane, Catharine did not accept Jane’s choice, arguing even at the end that if Jane simply put her mind and heart to it, she would see that Unitarianism could provide her with purpose, without “recourse to vespers & matins,” and without “voluntarily joining the key-stone of absolutism.”150

The difference between the reactions of those closest to Jane and the reaction of her more distant Aunt Catharine is striking, despite the fact that all involved saw Jane’s usefulness as a goal. Catharine saw usefulness as the ultimate goal, one best pursued through Unitarianism, while much of the rest of the family had come to see Jane’s usefulness and happiness as equally

149 CMS to KSM, April 11, 1852, Reel 4, Catharine Maria Sedgwick Papers.
150 CMS to KSM, April 11, 1852, Reel 4, Catharine Maria Sedgwick Papers.
important goals. Catherine’s own status as a convert makes her reaction even more notable, and while they did not agree on the religion, Catharine and Jane both exhibited the zeal of converts.¹⁵¹

Catharine’s reaction differed from those of her family members in another important way. For Jane Senior, Hal, Uncle Charles, and others, Jane’s conversion tested the limits of their intolerance. They had all expressed anti-Catholic sentiments in the past, but when confronted with a Catholic in their midst, they softened their rhetoric. Catharine’s reaction demonstrated quite the opposite. In a letter to Kate in May 1852, when Jane’s conversion was not assured but her interest in Catholicism was well known within the family, Catharine expressed hesitation over continuing on in life as a “Protestant champion.” Instead, she felt “content with the great principle achieved and fixed by the Protestant battle — the right of private judgment.”¹⁵² Yet when Jane exercised that private judgment, Catharine’s tolerance was tested. Neither she nor anyone else in the family called on the rhetoric of seduction they had used to describe the fate of poor Adelaide. To do that would have suggested that the Sedgwick family had not sufficiently monitored and guided Jane’s beliefs and behaviors. Catharine admitted that Jane was “voluntarily” joining the Church, yet she called it weakness, a personal failing by someone lacking the courage and intellectual strength for Unitarianism.

Though the family never explicitly raised the spectre of priestly seduction, that framework was inescapable at mid-century. The path Jane had taken to the Church may have helped mitigate their concerns, however. It was not only important that respectable women like Cheery, Sophia, and Charlotte had been Jane’s introduction to the Church, but also that they

¹⁵¹ Kring, Liberals Among the Orthodox, 147.
¹⁵² Sedgwick, Life and Letters of Catharine M. Sedgwick, 338.
continued to be with her during and after her conversion, tethering her to the secular world. That none of these women, or indeed any of Jane’s convert friends during her life, entered religious life would have added a level of reassurance. These women not only allowed Jane to see Catholicism as a reasonable option but reassured her family members by serving as a buffer between Jane and the priests and sisters of Romanism.

Jane was aware of the misgivings of her family, and Cheery cautioned her after her conversion: “conform so far as possible to your mother’s wishes in all you do” to prevent the “family estrangement” that often transpired in these situations. But just as with Charlotte Dana, and with the O’Sullivans, no estrangement occurred. Jane devoted herself to her family, particularly her mother, and to her Church. Her cousins Lizzie and Bessie, close friends since childhood, corresponded about Jane’s life change. A few months after Jane’s baptism, Lizzie wrote to Bessie.

Jane you know has come back from her Baltimore expedition an avowed Catholic – It is really pleasant to me to see her looking so happy & contented in the bosom of Mother Church – I felt quite like Dives when I beheld her...Who shall judge – It is our own happiness we all seek in such a connection, and it is only ourselves that must decide.

Jane’s family, even her mother, had to acknowledge that Jane seemed to have more happiness and purpose as a Catholic, and family harmony was greatly increased as a result. Moreover, conversion seemed to forestall a continued search for usefulness that might have led to the behavior and emotional instability they feared. Instead, Jane contented herself with raising money for the building of a church in Stockbridge, teaching Sunday school, and corresponding with Catholic acquaintances. Most importantly, she stayed in Stockbridge and took care of her

153 Cheery to JMSII, July 8, n.d. [1853], Box 32, Folder 26, SFP.
154 Lizzie Sedgwick to Bessie Sedgwick, n.d. [1853], Sedgwick Papers, Box 9, Stockbridge Library.
aging mother and assisted with her siblings’ children, as was expected for the maiden daughter of the family. When she traveled, it was to Rome in the company of other elite women, both for her health and her faith, acceptable behavior for a woman of her standing. Despite their heritage, and in fact because of it, Jane’s family members were willing to overlook their disapproval of her choice of religion if it helped her lead a settled, useful life that met their standards for female behavior.

Jane justified her choice to Kate by arguing that she made her decision using the reason and ultimately the personal judgment her Unitarian family had raised her to value. She was satisfied with her choice because it brought her intellectual challenge, contentment, and in her words, “Truth.”155 It made her happy and as with many of her other choices, she was disinclined to spend much of her time explaining her decision to others. Despite her mother’s longstanding argument that usefulness preceded happiness, Jane’s conversion demonstrates that the family had made room for alternate paths to fulfillment. They were satisfied with her choice because it made her happy, but also because they believed it would lead to the varieties of usefulness dictated by her sex and status. In the end, the Sedgwicks and Minots accepted having a Catholic convert in the family because they believed Jane’s new-found happiness would be externalized in the stability and attentiveness to duty that they expected and desperately wanted from a woman of her status.

155 JMSII to KSM, June 2 [1853], Box 92, Folder 19, SFP.
Chapter 4

*I must mark out some plan of life for myself and why not this?*
~Jane Minot Sedgwick II to Father Isaac T. Hecker, August 31, 1859

Newly Catholic, Jane exhibited stability and good behavior in ways that pleased her family, but this was not simply a result of spiritual contentment. Friendship from other Catholic converts had helped lead her to the Church, and it continued to play an important role in her life, providing a framework in which to realize her own character and be useful. In converting, Jane had not left one world to enter another. Instead, she voluntarily joined one culture while remaining deeply embedded in another culture. For the remainder of her life, nearly forty years, she lived in the borderlands of a dominant Protestant American culture and a transnational Catholic culture, joined there by hundreds of similar elite Americans. For Jane and the Catholic women with whom she built her post-conversion life, there was never a question of choosing one culture over another or picking one side of the border to stand on. They dwelled in the borderlands together, seeking and providing counsel, comfort, and understanding to others in their situation. Dutifully they sought out and mentored other women through conversion, working in concert with priests like Father Isaac Hecker. Jane’s move to fully immerse herself in the Church did not come immediately following her conversion, however. It was only after experiencing a series of deaths and marriages that left her alone in a new way that she looked to the Church as she tried to “mark out some plan of life” for herself. As such, her life following her conversion further disrupts the ideas of inevitability and arrival that often color discussions of conversion.

Most scholarly treatments of the lives of converts focus on the crucial years leading up to conversion itself, seeking to understand the process of conversion and answer the “why”
question. In some cases, scholars continue to examine the life of the convert, but primarily in cases of those who entered religious life or became prominent Catholic intellectuals and leaders like Orestes Brownson, Isaac Hecker, and Elizabeth Seton. The historian Jenny Franchot’s examination of these three converts and Sophia Ripley essentially terminates with conversion itself, and she is not the only historian to see conversion as the end of a process, a culmination of sorts. In examining converts like Hecker, Brownson, and Seton, the scholarly path of least resistance is to see them as people who left one world and entered another; their primary interest to scholars seems to be as curiosities whose decision to convert tells us something about what Americans “needed” at a particular moment in history. Yet Jane lived over half of her life as a Catholic convert and laywoman, and while she had gone to great lengths to come to a decision about joining the Church, there is much to learn about how she would live her faith as an active participant. ¹ To understand Catholic converts in the 19th century, we must push on and explore the worlds they entered and the worlds they created.

Jane’s family continued to be outwardly tolerant of her religious beliefs, providing some material and emotional support for her benevolent activities. While some, in the spirit of religious toleration, criticized American anti-Catholicism, others continued to disparage Catholicism publicly and privately. Family members approved of Jane’s network of respectable convert friends, but remained concerned about her becoming too deeply enmeshed in a world that would make her “too Catholic.” For Jane, the decades following her conversion were an exercise in balance and discernment, as she endeavored to inhabit both worlds simultaneously while remaining true to both. Her family wanted to preserve Jane’s respectability and keep her in

¹ After all, conversion was not permanent, even in the most fervent convert, as John Murray Forbes’ example demonstrates.
their social world as much as possible. Jane’s conversion, and the anti-Catholicism expressed by some family members, did not drive her further into her network of convert friends, however. Instead, as an unmarried woman, Jane watched as her extended family’s structure changed around her with members marrying and dying, moving further out of Jane’s sphere. Catholicism had helped make her happy, and settled her into the domestic life her family imagined for her. As that domestic life changed, she increasingly drew upon other converts for friendship, social connections, and support.

As Jane’s siblings and cousins married and as many of her family members died, the Sedgwicks remained connected by blood and pen, but they increasingly separated themselves into nuclear family units. Unlike her unmarried Aunt Catharine, who had her own apartment attached to her brother’s house in Lenox, Jane kept up a constant pilgrimage, spending time in Stockbridge, New York City, Washington and Europe. She traveled with, lived with, and corresponded with a growing and changing network of female converts of similar social standing. Associating with other elite converts allowed Jane to preserve a place in her old culture while growing in her new faith culture and maintaining the respectability expected of her.

Whether or not an American could be a Catholic was a question of the era. Father Isaac Hecker wrote extensively on the subject, arguing at times that Catholicism was the best religious option for Americans. Orestes Brownson, on the other hand, eventually became so ultramontane that he rejected the “American question” altogether, arguing that America was a lost cause. Jane and her friends spilled little ink on the topic, perhaps because in reconciling themselves to their conversion, they had answered the question to their own satisfaction. Jane had long been one of the more Whiggish members of her family, interested in the abolition of slavery, international politics, and the rights of women. Her conversion did not seem to change her orientation on these
topics, and she remained more “liberal” than many of her cousins as well as many Catholics, even in the Northeast. Her benevolent activities largely took the same form they had before her conversion, primarily the education of less fortunate members of society. Just as she remained politically and socially engaged, she also continued to read widely on topics of religious controversy, discussing them with her brother, her priests, and her convert friends.

By the time of Jane’s conversion, her female contemporaries in the family, all in their late twenties and early thirties, were beginning to marry. Most importantly for Jane, her only living sister Fanny married Alexander Watts on April 23, 1849. Alexander Watts’ mother was Aunt Susan’s sister, and this marriage further strengthened the bonds between these two elite families. Alexander first appears in Sedgwick letters in 1842, sitting at Fanny’s bedside and reading novels to her during an illness. Sedgwick correspondence indicates Alexander’s sustained romantic interest in her throughout the period leading to their marriage, but Fanny’s own feelings are much less clear. Bessie and Jane stood as her bridesmaids, but by Bessie’s own telling, the days preceding the ceremony were full of tears from Fanny, who was uncomfortable with the entire affair. Jane Senior, on the other hand, simply wanted “to hurry Fan in and out of church with just so much of ceremony as was considered indispensable to making them man & wife,” and she chose not to invite the Minot cousins to New York for the ceremony “for it will all be over in a minute or two.” Fanny and Alexander wed in 1849 at Church of the Holy Communion, an Episcopal church in New York City, in a ceremony performed by Rev. Samuel Parker, the Episcopal priest from Lenox.

2 JMS to LDM, June 28, 1842, Box 1, Folder 18.
Bessie’s letter, the only description of the days leading up to Fanny’s wedding, suggest conflicted motivations for the marriage, but the subsequent years appear to have been pleasant enough for the couple. Their first child, Alexander Jr., was born on New Year’s Day 1852, followed by an exceptionally premature Henry in 1858, who stunned the family by surviving his three-and-a-half pound birth weight.4 The Watts family spent lots of time with Jane and her mother in Stockbridge, and often left their children with them while they traveled. In fact, it is difficult to discern whether they even had their own home in New York, where Alexander and his family lived. Still, Fanny’s marriage removed her from Jane in a new way, and the hole it left was undoubtedly greater even than Kate and Will’s marriage, which had so upset Jane years earlier, as had Hal’s removal to Cambridge and then New York.

With the birth of Fanny’s children, and her brother’s marriage to his cousin Henrietta “Netta” Sedgwick, Lizzie’s younger sister, in 1857, Jane effectively became the maiden aunt like her Aunt Catharine. In fact, in just over a decade, all of the surviving children of Robert, Harry, and Charles Sedgwick married, ending with Lizzie’s marriage in 1860 at the age of 36. All of these marriages produced children, and in the case of the female Sedgwicks, pulled them away from Berkshire County. Jane and her older cousin Maria Banyer Sedgwick became the only unmarried Sedgwicks remaining in the area. Clearly marrying later in life was not unusual in this family, so it is difficult to determine when or even whether to refer to Jane as “single,” “unmarried,” or as a “spinster.” Her status as an unmarried woman of means, while certainly not the ideal of the age, did not set her apart as particularly unusual in this period, as both Lee Chambers-Schiller and Christine Jacobson Carter document in their work on unmarried women

4 JMSII to JMSI, January 4, 1852, Sedgwick 92:11; JMSII to JMSI, April 30, n.d. [1858], Box 86, Folder 1, SFP.
in New England and South Carolina. More important than the question of whether Jane had to marry seemed to be whether Jane wanted to marry, and even whether she felt capable of it, physically and emotionally.

The only extant reference to a suitor is to the mysterious Mr. West, so taken by Jane’s personality in 1844. Several months after her encounter with West, however, Herbert O’Sullivan alluded to Jane’s views on marriage, providing some insight into her motivations. He described his impressions of Elizabeth Baylies Hoffman, who had recently married Wickham Hoffman, a close friend of the Sedgwicks and former suitor of Kate Sedgwick Minot. Herbert described the new Mrs. Hoffman as intelligent and pleasant, not silly and vapid, remarking: “After all, Miss Jane, with due deference to your peculiar opinions, there is nothing gentlemen are so easily subdued by as gentleness & an apparent dependence in the other sex.” Herbert’s comment suggests that not only was Jane lacking in gentleness and a willingness to appear dependent on a man, but also that she was conscious of those views and unashamed of them.

When considered in combination with Castillia’s later comment about Jane’s ideal husband being someone who “should fully appreciate her, and take care of her developing her faculties both of affection and talent,” Herbert’s remark suggests that Jane’s independent personality contributed to her unmarried state. It is impossible, from the remaining correspondence, to determine whether Jane ever made a conscious decision to remain unmarried. In her 1984 book Liberty, a better husband: single women in America: the generations of 1780-1840, Lee Chambers-Schiller argues that there was a space, if somewhat circumscribed, for

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6 Herbert O’Sullivan to JMSII, June 12, 1844, Box 32, Folder 24, SFP.
7 GdC to JMSI, August 8, 1844, Box 30, Folder 8, SFP.
unmarried women in New England in the Early Republic. In Chambers-Schiller’s understanding of this cohort of women, including Jane’s aunt Catharine Maria Sedgwick, many “spinsters” made the conscious choice to avoid marriage in order to pursue “autonomy,” be it for professional reasons or to engage more fully in benevolence or social activism.  

More recently, Zsuzsa Berend has argued against this older historiography, which she sees as a “progressive” narrative for spinsterhood that ignores cultural context. Instead, she argues that middle-class women remained unmarried precisely because they took love and marriage so seriously they often found themselves unworthy of it, and that much of the emphasis on self-development was in order to prepare oneself successfully for marriage. Still, there is no indication that Jane ever made any explicit decision to remain unmarried on principle or to devote herself to the cause of benevolence. If her independence prevented any marriage, it may just as easily been because of male discomfort with her temperament, as Herbert implies, as because of any conscious decision on her part. Moreover, it is not difficult to imagine that Jane made the conscious choice to avoid marriage in order to avoid childbirth and its effects on her health; years later, she would make precisely that argument when discussing the possibilities of a benevolent life, lamenting: “There might be, however, very serious, perhaps insurmountable, obstacles to my joining any association of the kind - being of so exceedingly nervous a temperament, and having so little strength, so many invalid habits, etc.”

Despite this constant reshaping in her domestic life, Jane spent most of her time with her mother or her family in New York and Boston, traveling to Washington and Baltimore a few

10 JMSII to Isaac T. Hecker (hereafter ITH), August 31, 1859, Box 27, Folder 11, Isaac Hecker Papers, Paulist Archives. (Hereafter IHP).
times to see Cheery and Father Francis. With the confidence gained in her Virginian and European trips, and the spiritual comfort brought by her conversion, Jane became comfortable at home as she had long desired. She could be useful to her family, as they wished, but her new faith provided her with both spiritual peace and new opportunities for usefulness in the community. Even before her baptism, she had taught Sunday school in the village, and had assisted at Cheery’s school. Now, as a confirmed Catholic, she took on the role of leader of the small, largely immigrant Catholic community in Stockbridge and the vicinity, at least in her own mind. While the relationships of those around her changed, she appeared increasingly comfortable with the role prescribed to her while still asserting personal independence—physical, intellectual, and religious.

By all accounts, her family was pleased with the ways that Catholicism brought Jane occupation and usefulness, especially because it kept her at home and kept her emotionally stable. In the early years of her conversion, before there was a church in Stockbridge itself, she often journeyed to Pittsfield to the north or Great Barrington to the south to attend mass. Having mentioned a recent trip to Great Barrington, Jane Senior told her son: “the interest & activity afforded by [Jane’s] new religion is an unspeakable benefit & moreover she is really of great use to a large class whom we protestants [sic] cannot reach.” Usefulness, the externalization of a properly-formed character, was the metric by which Jane Senior judged the merit of her daughter’s religious choice. Jane, who her mother described as a “rational Catholic,” retained enough of her birth culture, in her mother’s estimation, to provide a useful bridge between cultures.

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11 JMSI to HDSII, November 1855, Box 25, Folder 17, SFP.
12 JMS to LDM, July 7, n.d., [1850], Box 28, Folder 11, SFP.
Jane continued to receive the greatest personal support from her mother, her Aunt Louisa, and her Uncle Charles. The latter two seemed particularly disgusted by outbreaks of anti-Catholic violence and the success of the Know-Nothing party. When a Boston newspaper printed attacks on Catholic schools, Aunt Louisa wrote to tell Jane that “the better classes of the community” had come to the defense of the nuns and “put down the Know-Nothings & their disgraceful persecution of the Catholics in a very skillful & gentleman-like manner.” She further stated, with no trace of irony: “Surely if there is a spot on Earth where each one has a right to the free exercise of his own form of religion it is & ought to be Boston.” Uncle Charles had similar pride in Lenox, which he noted was the only town in the state that had not elected a Know-Nothing politician or established a Know-Nothing lodge. Even in criticizing the Know-Nothings, however, he could not avoid criticizing Catholicism, accusing the new political party of “[adopting] the worst principle of the Catholic religion, its Jesuitry,” with its creeds and secrecy. Despite Jane’s status as a Catholic, and her family’s approval of it, what Franchot calls “Romanism” still provided a rhetorical well into which Protestant Sedgwicks could not avoid dipping.14

The members of the family who had expressed the most opposition to her conversion and the greatest anti-Catholic sentiment in general continued to do so after Jane’s conversion. Hal’s mentions of Jane’s religion, at least to others, still contained a tone of mockery, as when he said that if “resting on the Bosom of the Church” had not solved her health problems three years after her conversion, he would have a “small opinion” of the Church. He suggested that Jane should

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13 LDM to JMSI, April 22, 1855, Box 29, Folder 16, SFP.
instead “review her course and take some steady Puritane mixture.” More problematically, in September 1857, Hal made a public speech that expressed anti-Catholic sentiment, though nothing in the archive remains to indicate where or on whose behalf. Jane was, unsurprisingly, quite hurt at the start: “It is true that I felt it keenly at first as it seemed to me for a professor of such liberal principles a very unnecessary fling at Catholicity and an unkind disregard of your sisters’ feelings in a matter in which they were so nearly interested.” She assured him, however, that she did not believe he really meant what he had said, and that “what was not intended should not be thought of a second time.” Certainly Hal’s words were thought out and he meant what he said, but Jane’s letter smoothed over their disagreement in the name of domestic harmony, more specifically her harmony: “I should be extremely glad however that nothing painful or annoying should occur during your next visit to mar my pleasure connected with it.” Considering that bad blood with her brother had contributed to her decision to go to Norfolk alone, family interactions like this demonstrate that Jane was now confident enough in her choices not to let familial criticism derail her, and confident enough to speak sharply to her brother she felt it necessary.

Jane’s new faith had done little to dissuade her most anti-Catholic relative, Aunt Catharine. In a letter written to Kate’s daughter Alice Woodbourne Minot on May 3, 1853, later published with her collected letters under the title “Recollections of Childhood,” Catharine mused that there had been but one Irish man in Stockbridge when she was growing up, but that by 1853 there were “two thronged churches in Berkshire, and occasional mass in all the villages where they swarm.” She believed that, in the long run, the infusion of Irish into the American

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15 HDSII to JMSI, January 25, 1856, Box 26, Folder 12, SFP.
16 JMSII to HDSII, September 29, 1857, Box 93, Folder 25, SFP.
population would do more good than ill, because unlike “shiftless” black servants who were only looking to better themselves, the Irish were “willing servants.” Moreover, she reiterated a conventional 19th century narrative of assimilation, believing that “as ignorance cannot compete with knowledge, nor get the mastery of it till there is an immense odds of brute force, as a despotic religion has neither sanction nor security in the midst of free institutions,” the Irish would be absorbed into American culture and scrubbed of their “despotic religion.”¹⁷ This letter, written less than a week before her niece’s reception into the Catholic Church, shows that unlike other family members, Aunt Catharine was still unwilling to concede any ground on the subject of Catholicism, and saw it as inextricably linked to issues of class and immigration.¹⁸

As the rest of her family expressed a certain amount of toleration, and even praised the effect that Catholicism had had on Jane, Catharine’s public writings continued to use anti-Catholic tropes. In 1857, she published a short piece in Harper’s titled “The Ladies of the Sacred Heart.” She gave an account of a young woman taking her vows at the Manhattanville convent, to which she had gained access through a “kind Catholic friend,” quite possibly Addie Langtree, who made her own vows there several years later. Catharine’s depiction of the ceremony reads like classic antebellum anti-Catholic fiction. This woman was to be pitied, because it is likely

¹⁸ Aunt Catharine’s concern with the dual problems of Irish poverty and their potential social mobility was of course shared by many Anglo-Americans, and the issue of social mobility among Irish immigrants and their children continues to be one of scholarly inquiry. For many years, the narrative was one of slow, even stagnant, Irish upward mobility, epitomized in the work of Stephan Thernstrom, particularly Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964). In subsequent decades, scholars have reconsidered this argument and moved away from monolithic explanations of “an Irish experience” by considering regional variations in culture and economic experiences. See Tyler Anbinder, Nativism and Slavery, 32-4; Heather J. Griggs, “Go gCuire Dia Rath Agus Blath Ort (God Grant That You Prosper and Flourish): Social and Economic Mobility among the Irish in Nineteenth-Century New York City,” Historical Archaeology 33 (1999): 87-101; David Noel Doyle, “The Remaking of Irish America, 1845-1880,” in Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States, ed. J. J. Lee and Marion R. Casey (New York: New York University Press, 2006). Jane’s own views on Irish Catholic social mobility will be discussed in the following chapter.
that in her untrained and eager youth, she was led astray by those skilled in the arts of persuasion, and now found herself bound in “shackles...which no after-repentance can unrivet.” Catharine swore to her readers that in the “closing act,” she saw “a slight recoil in the hitherto passive subject.” But then it was finished.

Henceforth her individuality was to be merged in a community; her loves and friendships to be melted into relations to a conventual sisterhood. Henceforth no forgetive action of the mind, no self-originating purpose, no impulse of affection. She became part of a machine; its action to be governed by stern laws. The rising day had nothing new to unfold; to-day must be as yesterday, and to-morrow as to-day.

At this point, however, Aunt Catharine paused, and put to her readers the possibility that she was simply prejudiced. In the conclusion of the piece, she answered her own question with a resounding “no” by depicting a proper model of domestic unmarried womanhood: a woman who aided orphans, prisoners, helped arrange marriages, and cared for her nieces and nephews. While the nuns of the Sacred Heart lived in “gloom and sterility, in fancied subservience to a stern Deity,” Catharine’s favored models of unmarried womanhood, including herself, participated in a “cheerful, loving, filial service, rendered to a benign Father.”

Aunt Catharine’s fealty to this narrative, despite Jane’s actions and behaviors as a Catholic, demonstrates the power it held in antebellum American society. In addition to her benevolent actions, which comported in many ways with what her aunt espoused, Jane remained committed to forming her own conclusions on politics and society. Much as she had before her conversion, Jane continued to desire demonstration in all things. Though she sought to reconcile her previously-held views to those of the Church, she was not willing to accept dogma that she found unethical, contrasting distinctly with the views expressed by Orestes Brownson in his

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spiritual autobiography *The Convert:* “I…consider submission to the teaching of the Church the noblest exercise I can make of my reason and free will.” Jane’s behavior was similar to that she exhibited before her conversion, except she had been rejecting Segdwick family dogma instead of that of the Church. Despite her family’s transition from staunch Federalists to ardent Democrats, and her deep friendship with the O’Sullivan family, Jane charted her own political path, and had long been willing to suffer ridicule for it. She had disagreed with her brother over the Mexican War, and with the O’Sullivans over slavery and women’s rights more generally.

Jane’s political and social views following her conversion are of particular importance, and her experience contradicts scholarly assumptions that the zeal of a convert would necessarily make her follow the Church in all things. Historians have often studied converts for whom this was generally true, reinforcing the assumption, but Jane’s experience challenges that narrative. While Protestant Americans feared the influence of Catholic male citizens, whose votes were not safe since they belonged to a religion that barred freedom of conscience, fear of Catholic “entrapment” applied to women as well, as expressed by Aunt Catharine when she feared her niece was joining the “key-stone of absolutism.” Jane was well-educated and attentive to politics. She may not have been able to vote, but her status, particularly as a Sedgwick, allowed her to mingle with prominent politicians and thinkers. Her status also allowed her to speak her views, to an extent, and her personality virtually ensured it. By all accounts, her interest in and subsequent conversion to Catholicism did little to make her more willing to acquiesce in the views of others, either her family members or her priests.

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In the years immediately preceding her conversion, Jane, along with many in the Northeast, threw herself into the cause of the Hungarian Revolution upon Kossuth’s arrival in New York in December 1851. She then traveled to Boston and, with her mother, Kate, and Anna Ward, met the “Magnificent Magyar” and his party in January 1852. Not only did Jane demonstrate “her zeal in the cause of freedom & misfortune” by attending balls and fundraisers, she involved herself in fundraising itself, enlisting prominent friends like the scholar Joel T. Headley to give lectures in support of the revolutionaries. She took German lessons from one of the Hungarian émigrés who was in need of money, which Jane Senior called “a good vehicle for her benevolence.”

We cannot simply write off her zeal for the Hungarian cause as Jane having been swept up by those around her, as many of her cousins were doubtful of Kossuth and his cause, though her Aunt Catharine supported the Hungarian refugees just as she had supported Castillia and other Italian refugees ten years earlier. Moreover, letters between family members contain the kinds of jokes about Jane’s enthusiasm that they always had, particularly about her single-mindedness and willingness to sacrifice without thinking. Her cousin Julia remarked: “I hear Jane has a beautiful silk dress; but I hope she will not take it to New York with her, lest she should give it there to some shivering Hungarian, so that we cannot see it when she comes to

21 Scholars have noted the zeal with which Americans in the North supported Kossuth on his arrival, though their support dimmed. For some, it was his lack of commitment to anti-slavery principles, to which they had assumed he would adhere. To others, it was an unwillingness to involve the United States in a foreign situation, even simply by giving money. Merle Curti, “The Impact of the Revolutions of 1848 on American Thought” Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 93 (Jun. 1949):209-215; Michael A. Morrison, “American Reaction to European Revolutions, 1848-1852: Sectionalism, Memory, and the Revolutionary Heritage” Civil War History 49 (June 2003): 111-132; Timothy Mason Roberts, Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 146-167.

22 Diary of Anna Hazard Barker Ward, 1852, Samuel Gray and Anna Hazard Barker Ward Papers, Houghton Library.


24 Lizzie Sedgwick to Bessie Sedgwick, n.s. [1851 or 1852], Sedgwick 9, Stockbridge Library.
This interest in Hungarian independence coincided with her serious study and consideration of Catholicism, and there is no indication that studying Catholic theology did anything to dull her commitment to justice as she saw it.

Jane’s strong interest and activism on behalf of Hungarian independence during the moment of her conversion is made all the more notable by the fact that Kossuth faced significant Catholic opposition in America and Europe itself.\(^{26}\) Between 1846, with the election of Pius IX, and 1852, when Kossuth left America without the money and support he had hoped to find, American Protestants grappled with the potentials for liberal reform and state-craft in Europe, and reconsidered their own Revolution and its legacy in light of the 1848 revolutions abroad, the growing sectional crisis at home, and the added dangers of “women’s rights conventions, peace congresses, and republicans, fourierites, grahamites, anti renters, strikers, female doctors, prize fighters, communists, screamers and heaven knows what,” in the words of one Georgia Whig. For most in America, Kossuth was a symbol of radicalism, degradation, and the disruption of the social order.\(^{27}\) Nothing in Jane’s correspondence indicates that she went off Kossuth like so many Americans did, certainly not for ideological reasons, despite the fact that by this time, she was seriously considering conversion.

Relatedly, historian Peter D’Agostino argues that this period radically reshaped American and European Catholic views of the European revolutions, the office of the papacy, and Pius IX himself. After a brief year wherein American Protestants saw the pope as a positive, liberal force in the struggle for an independent Italy, they turned against him, as did Italian revolutionaries, when he refused to support an Italian war with Austria. The pope fled Rome to Gaeta, near

\(^{25}\) Julia Minot to JMSI, n.d. [early 1850s], Box 84, Folder 19, SFP.


Naples, and remained there until 1850. This turn of events galvanized American Catholic opposition to the Roman Republic and its American backers, notably Margaret Fuller, whose dispatches from Italy were counterbalanced by an American Catholic press that fed its readers a steady diet of pro-Pius IX articles. After his return from exile in 1850, the openness of the early years of Pius’ pontificate had been replaced with the restoration of absolutism and a complete condemnation of liberalism. D’Agostino demonstrates, with public and private writings, that “the Catholic laity embraced the persecuted symbol of the pope.”

Though Jane was actively considering Catholicism during this period, her papers give no indication that she felt compelled to change her political views on issues of political justice as a result of her nascent Catholic faith. This intellectual independence certainly fits with what we know of Jane from the decades prior to her conversion, and may have gone a long way to reassure her mother that Jane was still rational, even as she became Catholic.

Jane Senior had finally consented to her daughter’s conversion because it made Jane happy and settled, and because she knew that the danger of Jane’s unhappiness and unsettledness could have significant consequences. While she would not have chosen Catholicism herself, and hoped until the last minute that something could lead Jane down a different path, she reconciled herself to Jane’s decision not because she accepted Catholicism itself, but because she believed Jane could be a reasonable Catholic because of her Unitarian Sedgwick upbringing. Jane could be a rational Catholic, like Castillia, imitating the lives of long-dead saints instead of contemporary Catholics. In doing so, she would embody the best of the apostolic age and the post-Reformation age, perhaps avoiding the dangers of the papal age that persisted in

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Catholicism despite its inherent tendency to decay. Jane Senior believed that if her daughter had to be a Catholic she could be the right kind of Catholic, though she worried about influences that might lead her daughter to become the wrong kind of Catholic.

In a letter to her son, she laid out her concerns, and sought his support in maintaining a careful balance for Jane. Her concerns and suggestions would not have been out of place in a letter from 1837. In a letter about her thirty-four year old daughter, however, they reveal that despite Jane’s conscious effort to make her way in the world on her own terms, her family members still saw the danger of a foreign entity shaping her destiny, and asserted their right to counter it by doing likewise. The letter began by highlighting the conventional danger: the priest. Jane’s last letter had contained an enclosure from Father Francis, a small picture of Jesus with a French motto emphasizing his importance. Jane Senior assumed this was a “delicate hint from him to draw me near the Catholic faith.”

This was not the first time Father Francis had expressed a desire to convert the rest of Jane’s family, as well as a more general interest in their well-being. Jane often communicated this to her brother, after whose business successes and failures Francis often inquired, and about whom Francis had remarked “Such a noble soul! . . Oh! If I could only be with him one week I could make him a Catholic!” Father Francis’ “delicate hints” to Jane Senior and his inquiries about Hal, not to mention a few medals blessed here and there, seemed to fit the family’s expectations of the “Jesuitical” wiles used to gain converts. Jane Senior drew a clear line,
however: “I am satisfied with what [Catholicism] has done for Jane but do not desire its intrusion in my family.”

As pleased as Jane Senior was with changes wrought in her daughter by her new faith, she warned her son that they still needed to monitor Jane.

. . . I think it very important that we should all manifest our interest in Jane to check as far as possible the exclusive power of her Catholic friends over her mind - if she can hold their faith in its barest form divested of extravagances, it will continue to be the greatest blessing of her life. . .

Much as she had argued prior to Jane’s conversion, she was willing to accept the apostolic form of Catholicism, stripped of all papal “extravagances.” She did not express any particular worry that Jane was susceptible to such extravagances. Jane was, however, shaped by the influence of others. This was not simply the trope of the seductive priest, and the danger was not that of being lured into Catholicism. Instead, the danger came from her “Catholic friends,” were they allowed “exclusive power. . . over her mind.” There was no need to separate Jane from these friends, for they did her powerful good, but the situation required surveillance to ensure Jane remained on an acceptable path. The unique space created by women’s friendships had led Jane to the Church in the first place, and from Jane Senior’s perspective it still posed some danger.

The family’s view of Jane as “peculiar” suggests an explanation for their worries about the influence of her friends. It was not simply their belief about Catholicism’s seductive nature, though that belief certainly may have contributed to their concerns. Instead, it was the acknowledgement that Jane’s life lacked some of the things that a woman of her age and status should have. Jane Senior believed that, if properly controlled, Catholicism could “continue to be the greatest blessing of her life,” a blessing that was necessary because it might prove “a

31 JMSI to HDSII, n.d. [1855-6], Box 25, Folder 17, SFP.
32 JMSI to HDSII, n.d. [1855-6], Box 25, Folder 17, SFP.
compensation for many social privations to which her personal peculiarities make her liable.”

Essentially, Catholicism and the happiness and usefulness it brought, might make up for the fact that Jane was too strange to become a wife and mother, perhaps even too odd to sustain many friendships. The implication, of course, was that if she was not a wife and a mother, Jane’s life would be empty, by all societal measures, even in a family containing a very successful unmarried woman.

While Jane Senior encouraged her daughter’s benevolence, and even suggested that the joy she herself had felt doing charity work had rarely been matched by her domestic experiences, there was no denying the social pressures she and Jane must have felt. In a fatherless family, devoid of significant income, the pressure for marriage was even greater. Fanny may not have wanted to marry Alexander Watts, but marry him and his considerable wealth she did. Even Aunt Catharine, successful and unmarried herself, privileged the married life over her own in her public and private writings. While the Sedgwicks may have tolerated the late marriage of their daughters, they did not necessarily like the delays. As Aunt Susan wrote to Kate Minot on the birth of her second child in 1851: “How matronly dear Kate you must look! & how much more to be admired than if you had, like some of your perverse friends & relations, adhered to cold, unlovely ‘singedom!” One can only wonder which friends and relations Susan meant in that moment: her sister-in-law Catherine, Jane and her fellow unmarried cousins in their late twenties, or perhaps her own unmarried 38-year-old daughter Maria.

33 JMSI to HDSII, n.d. [1855-6], Box 25, Folder 17, SFP.
34 Catharine Maria Sedgwick often wrote on this issue, and her last published self-contained work was Married or Single? 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1857).
35 Susan Ridley Sedgwick to KSM, October 1851, Box 92, Folder 9, SFP.
Without a husband and children to occupy her daughter’s time, Jane Senior gave guarded approval of the occupation Catholicism provided. Yet without a husband to monitor Jane’s religious activities and make sure she remained the right kind of Catholic, it remained the duty of her mother and brother, much as Mary Rowley O’Sullivan and John O’Sullivan monitored Adelaide’s religious activities in the absence of her father. To do this, Jane Senior proposed, they should “manifest [their] interest” in her and her activities, to simultaneously encourage, direct, and surveil. There are numerous accounts of the family hosting Jane’s Catholic friends, providing space for her Sunday School class or masses, and donating goods and time for fundraising fairs. Moreover, Hal continued to discuss religion with his sister in voluminous letters, citing the church fathers he had failed to read before her conversion, as well as contemporary controversial writings. The Sedgwicks made an uneasy peace with Jane’s faith, but would have been pleased had she chosen to return to the Unitarian fold. Until that happened, however, they would remain engaged and involved in her life to make sure her Catholic friends, and more importantly her priests, did not tempt her deeper into their Catholic world.

Jane Senior’s fear was not without foundation, because those Catholic friends took on new and important roles in Jane’s post-conversion life. Jane’s reception into Catholicism had been smoothed by women like Cheery, Charlotte and Sophia, but becoming a Catholic meant more than getting baptized and then going to mass each week. Becoming a Catholic was a lifetime process for a convert, something that officially began with baptism but really began much earlier. Only other female converts of similar backgrounds could truly understand Jane’s experiences. As a result, intimate friendships with Catholic converts took on renewed importance in the decades following Jane’s formal entrance into the Church. Her connection to a mobile, transnational network of elite Catholic converts came not only from her close convert friends,
but also from the elite Anglo-Protestant network itself, because these elite Catholics remained embedded in the social worlds of their births. Through this network, Jane made new friends, found new traveling partners, and met new and increasingly prominent members of the Catholic hierarchy. Her core group of friends – Cheery, Sophia, and Charlotte – expanded to include Anna Ward, Julia Metcalf, Julia Beers, Sarah Peter, Emma Cary, Cheery’s daughter Addie Langtree, Mary Dallas, and even her own cousin Grace Sedgwick Bristed. By interacting with other converts of similar, or even slightly superior, social status, Jane maintained connections to her birth culture while learning the culture of her new faith. In doing so, she joined, shaped, and strengthened a distinctive American convert culture.

That convert culture demonstrates why it is important to disentangle intertwined threads of anti-Catholic, anti-Irish, and classist sentiment in nineteenth-century America; while all three often went together, they were distinct impulses, and separating them helps us understand the apparent contradictions in Jane’s conversion. Sophia Ripley had praised Julia Metcalf for being able to pass as a “born Catholic.” Passing as a born Catholic did not, however, mean passing for a poor or working-class Irish-born Catholic. The existing world of respectable Catholic women, both cradle and convert, meant that Jane could perform her faith fully to her own satisfaction without transgressing ethnic or class boundaries. As such, Jane and her cohort maintained a certain distance and separation from Catholics of other classes and nationalities. One way of doing this was to attend churches operated by members of specific religious orders, or staffed by converts themselves, that embodied an Anglo-American religious sensibility. Despite the universality of the Church and its liturgy, these converts chose to attend churches rooted in their own culture. In New York, for instance, Jane’s circle frequented St. Ann’s, where Dr. John Murray Forbes preached, or churches of the Redemptorist order to which convert priests like
Isaac Hecker and Clarence Walworth belonged until the establishment of the Paulist Fathers. Converts living abroad faced additional challenges finding a church that felt “right.” In Paris, Cheery expressed a longing to attend a Redemptorist church again, but admitted, “the Jesuit Church here is like home.” While in Rome, Jane enjoyed hearing Dr. Manning preach: “such beautiful concentrated thought expressed in the purest most elegant English.”

Travel in foreign countries represented a larger problem, particularly in “Latin” countries, ironically enough. After Cheery’s marriage to Cristobal Madan, which involved the birth of two more children and the management of his existing children, her daughter Addie Langtree found herself on the outside of this new blended family, and traveled to Lisbon with her uncle John when he was named minister to Portugal by Franklin Pierce in 1854. A devout Catholic, she found it difficult to attend mass in Lisbon

. . . the men chatting, the women sitting bitterly on the floor, whispering and laughing together - dogs running hither and thither - Oh! a Portuguese church with an old priest galloping thro’ the mass, is a sad place. I am sometimes obliged to go to mass at one near us when I cannot get so far as the English College (conducted by English priests) and I assure you, were it not for the obligation, and the fear of committing a mortal sin, I would by far prefer to remain at home.

Addie noted that members of the French aristocracy with whom she had become acquainted were similarly “scandalised” by the behavior of the Portuguese in church. Addie framed her discomfort in terms of respectability, or the lack thereof, and by differentiating Portuguese behavior from French and English behavior, created a hierarchy of “good” and “bad” Catholics.

She, as an Anglo-American woman could be a good Catholic in a way her Portuguese co-

36 Cheery to JMSII, December 5, 1854, Box 32, Folder 26, SFP; Sophia Ripley to RCD, June 21, 1857, Box 15, Folder 13, Dana Family Papers, MHS.
37 Cheery to JMSII, n.d. [early 1850s], Box 32, Folder 4, SFP.
38 JMSII to HDSII, March 3, 1862, Box 95, Folder 8, SFP.
39 Addie Langtree to JMSII, May 28, 1857, Box 30, Folder 12, SFP.
religionists could never be. Her inherent ethnic and cultural respectability allowed her to be the best kind of Catholic.

Even as Mediterranean and Latin American Catholic culture repulsed them, Jane and her convert friends expressed a deep longing to be surrounded by Catholics. Almost immediately after conversion, they began referring to themselves as “we Catholics” and others as their “Protestant friends.” In both Portugal and Cuba, Cheery and Addie were surrounded by practicing Catholics, and any of the women could easily have surrounded themselves with Catholics in Boston, New York, Washington, and even in the Berkshires. These Catholics were not the ones they wanted, however. In a sense, their ideal social circle had narrowed with their conversions to include converts of similar social standing and some high-born cradle Catholics, like Emily Harper, the Baltimore Catholic who attended Jane at her conversion. When abroad, that social circle sometimes expanded to included members of the European aristocracy, both converts from England and nobility from Catholic countries like Poland. Part of the post-conversion process was learning to live as a Catholic, culturally as well as spiritually, but Jane and her friends did not seek out help from or model themselves after the cradle Catholics who surrounded them. Instead, they saw a convert of a similar upbringing as a far better model of lived Catholicism than a lower-class Catholic who had lived their faith their entire life. For all the talk of the universal Church, and the powerful language of crossing into a new world upon conversion, Jane and her fellow converts dipped selectively into the well of Catholic practice and

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40 JMSII to HDSII, April 4, n.d. [1862-4], Box 86, Folder 2, SFP; Sophia Ripley to RCD, 1852, Box 14, Folder 1, Dana Family Papers, MHS.
culture, choosing to associate only with those who could have been their friends prior to their conversions.41

Catholic friends of the right sort were understood to be vital to an elite convert’s spiritual practices. When Sophia Ripley died in 1861, Charlotte wrote to Hecker, broken hearted over the loss of her only “Catholic relative,” and implored Hecker to pray “for those left.” Charlotte needed his prayers for the eventual conversion of the remaining members of her family, all Protestants, if she wanted to see them again in the afterlife.42 In the years immediately following her conversion, Jane spent most of her time in Stockbridge, and was particularly happy when she had Catholic visitors. When Cheery, Addie, and the two new children Lola and Julian came to Stockbridge for a visit, Jane Senior wrote to Louisa that Jane was “in the third heaven, having so much Catholic sympathy about her.” Another convert friend, Emma Forbes Cary of Boston, came to visit in the fall of 1858, and Jane Senior was pleased that Jane had “such a friend to sympathize with her in her religious moments.”43

Before the construction of St. Joseph’s Catholic Church in Stockbridge, Jane had to travel to attend Mass in a church, she sometimes chose to journey all the way to Pittsfield.44 There, she could attend church with Julia Beers, originally of Litchfield, Connecticut, yet another convert she had met through the Danas.45 On one occasion, she went up “to perform her matins” in

41 These complex interactions of race, class, and Catholicism are perhaps best explored in Linda Gordon’s The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).
42 RCD to ITH, March 3, 1861, Box 28, Folder 3, IHP.
43 JMSI to HDSII, n.d. [1854], Box 25, Folder 18, SFP, Box 26, Folder 17, SFP.
45 JMSI to HDSII, November 1855, Box 25, Folder 17, SFP.
Pittsfield. While “matins” referred to offices held at several different times, mostly dawn or early morning, and the non-Catholic Sedgwicks may have used the term to refer to any of the divine offices Jane attended, it does indicate that Jane’s life of leisure allowed her to attend services at times when working-class Catholics would not. Of the devotions practiced by American Catholic women in the 19th century, the divine offices were not broadly popular. If Jane wanted to attend with anyone, it would most likely be another Catholic of similar standing, and in the Berkshires, that invariably meant a convert.

In addition to attendance at divine offices and daily mass, elite converts also made a devotion of reading Catholic books, particularly theology and controversial literature. While Hal often assisted Jane in getting Catholic books, sending them up to Stockbridge on the train, her convert friends did far more to keep Jane supplied with reading materials. Dunigan’s Catholic bookstore in New York supplied many of these books, but friends also lent and borrowed books amongst themselves with great regularity. Sophia Ripley was perhaps the most constant New York resident among Jane’s circle of friends, and she begged Jane to allow her to “execute [her] little commissions” instead of giving them to Hal, “who probably, if he were not a very affectionate brother, would regard them as a great bore.” By using Sophia, Jane could be assured of getting the right materials, since Sophia had a greater familiarity with the literature, and could also avoid bothering a family member. While unspoken, Sophia’s letter carries an undercurrent of the persistent worry about anti-Catholic sentiment from within one’s own family. Cheery had urged Jane to tread carefully so her Catholicism would not upset her mother, and

46 JMSI to HDSII, January 4, 1856, Box 26, Folder 12, SFP.
48 Sophia Ripley to JMSII, June 15, 1854, Box 32, Folder 26, SFP.
while Hal had always willingly helped Jane get general books from the city, Sophia suggested that using her network of convert friends for Catholic books might be preferable.

Despite the ten years of careful study and consideration preceding her baptism, Jane never stopped reading and engaging with theological controversies, both abstract and practical, after she joined the Church. While it has been noted that men like Hecker and Brownson engaged in controversial discussions over the compatibility of Catholicism and American life and the issue of infallibility brought up by the First Vatican Council, a convert did not need to be a public intellectual to engage in these discussions. Beyond conversations with her brother and friends like Charlotte, Jane corresponded and met in person with Fathers Francis and Hecker and other clergy. It was clear from the period before Jane’s baptism that not all priests were suited to work with any and every convert. Father Francis and Father Varela had encouraged Jane, and Francis had been willing to engage Jane intellectually. Father Forbes, on the other hand, had not, and his attempt to stifle Jane’s intellectual engagement seems to have immediately removed him from her roster of acceptable priests. With the support and knowledge of her friends, Jane could find the priests who suited her best.

Even so, the relationship of a convert and her spiritual director was often fraught with misunderstandings, compounded by the unique and gendered power dynamics present between an elite convert and a priest. Jane’s own temperament exacerbated these issues at times, but dissecting a difficult interview with a friend who knew her personality as well as the priest in question helped her approach the next interview with a plan to make it better. For instance, after a meeting with Father Francis during which he and Jane discussed very few of the points she had intended to raise, he made a comment that Jane interpreted as critical of her talkative nature. Cheery interpreted it differently, arguing that “he meant that he had such delight in seeing you
that he forgot how the time passed & perhaps his chat with you was a recreation he seldom indulges in with so devoted a listener.” Citing her own experience, where Father Francis had been willing to send her away after half an hour, and comments the priest had made about Jane, she reassured Jane that their director appreciated her inquisitive nature. As previous chapters have argued, Jane was acutely aware of her sensitivity to criticism, but also that her personality was not universally admired, especially when embodied in a woman. Cheery suggested a path forward.

Why didn’t you interrupt him & say “Fr. Francis, I have so much on my mind to confide to you” & then remind him how he told you to arrange your points of discussion with him previous to your going to see him, precisely that the time might not be wasted in merely the pleasant enjoyment of meeting again.

Having known Jane throughout her difficult young adulthood and her long conversion, Cheery knew how to console her and give her direction. Spiritual direction could not be separated from personal direction, and that was where friends mattered more.49

Even when the two were separated by great distances for years at a time, the depth and intimacy of Jane and Cheery’s friendship allowed these conversations to continue. Cheery’s second marriage seems to have left her daughter Addie, a teenager at the time, without a home, or at least without a home where she felt welcome. Before and after her stay in Lisbon during her uncle’s tenure as minister to Portugal, Addie spent increasing amounts of time with the Sedgwicks and Fields in Stockbridge, bringing her close to Jane in the process. In a sense, this period in Jane’s relationship with Addie mirrored her own nascent friendship with Cheery in young adulthood. Addie herself was a convert to Catholicism, though not in the way Jane and her mother were. Cheery had had her daughter baptized when she was young, but whether or not she

49 Cheery to JMSII, March 30, n.d. [1855], Box 32, Folder 2, SFP.
would actually be a Catholic was left up to her. Through Jane and Cheery’s support, she became “entirely Catholic,” in her mother’s words.⁵⁰

In a letter from Lisbon, Addie expressed a perspective on their friendship that demonstrates the conceptual relationship between faith and friendship for these women.

I do not believe you have any idea of how glad I always am to receive your letters. You may smile, but they give me something of the sort of feeling I have when I leave Church after hearing a Mass very devoutly. I suppose it from the sense of perfect trust and reliance in both cases. My darling Miss Jane - I certainly do love you dearly.⁵¹

This “perfect sense of trust and reliance,” found in intimate friendships and in their Catholic faith, sustained elite convert women, making any disagreement or betrayal particularly devastating. When Cheery felt that Jane had betrayed her confidence by sharing an intimate detail from one of her letters, she felt deeply hurt. To Cheery, their conversations, whether in person or in the form of correspondence, were imbued with the sanctity of the confessional. Jane’s betrayal wounded her as a priest’s would have.⁵² When Cheery begged her distant friend Jane to “receive some of yr Communion for me especially,” her request drew its power from the intimate nature of their friendship and the memorial nature of the Eucharist.⁵³ For converts, faith and friendship resonated at the same spiritual frequency.

Just as friendships were bolstered by faith, friends were not immune from disagreements over matters of faith. In a note of apology after a fight in which she and Jane had both dug in their heels, Addie noted that “notwithstanding we are both Catholics our views are different on some subjects.” In this situation, and undoubtedly many others, the two friends worked their disagreement out on their own. In other situations, they drew upon priests for mediation just as

⁵⁰ Cheery to JMSII, February 15, n.d. [early 1850s], Box 32, Folder 4, SFP.
⁵¹ Addie Langtree to JMSII, July 17, 1861, Box 32, Folder 27, SFP.
⁵² Cheery to JMSII, December 9, n.d. [early 1850s], Box 32, Folder 8, SFP
⁵³ Cheery to JMSII, February 15, n.d. [early 1850s], Box 32, Folder 4, SFP.
they drew on their friends to negotiate uncomfortable encounters with priests. Just like the convert women themselves, priests were sometimes very adept at mediating situations and at other times made a royal mess of things. In the experience of Jane and her friends, foreign-born Catholic-from-birth clergymen often pushed for solutions to problems that converts found unpalatable, and converts pushed back.

Cheery’s second marriage, for instance, was not always happy. Both parents brought children to the marriage, but Addie was shunted to the side while Cheery attended to the care of two children with her new husband as well as several older children from his first marriage. Cheery was never effusive about her marriage, but the problems came to a head in 1856 when she and Madan disagreed over the management of the children. For a time, Madan kept her away from the family altogether. She sought counsel from Jane, of course, but also from an unnamed archbishop, as her usual confessor had recently died. Most likely it was Archbishop John Hughes, who had helped bring Sophia Ripley into the church. Hughes’ counsel on this occasion, however, was not well-received. Cheery decided to reject the archbishop’s advice and instead devote herself to receiving the Eucharist more regularly: “I hope it will restore me somewhat to the condition of mind ‘His grace’ the Archbishop had well nigh deprived me of forever.”

While she did not accept whatever Hughes had said, she still recognized his importance as a mediator between her and her husband, and sent Jane again to inquire with him “if he thinks there is any hope of peace being arranged betwixt Crist’l & myself.” Moreover, she wanted Jane to tell her exactly how Hughes spoke about her, because she wanted to know “what tone he takes about one he has so deeply wronged.”

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54 Cheery to JMSII, n.d. [1856 or 7], Box 32, Folder 4, SFP.
55 Cheery to JMSII, n.d. [1856 or 7], Box 32, Folder 4, SFP.
how Hughes’ advice may have wounded her. “Addie will have told you that I am to return to my home & return the charge of my children entirely & to be treated with the most perfect respect - This will be enough for the rest all is in the hands of God and I am resigned to suffer what He chooses.” If Hughes had told her that it was her duty to submit to her husband in all ways, this was certainly not to Cheery’s liking. While she eventually resigned herself to some reconciliation with her husband, the tone and content of her letters demonstrate that her faith did not make her willing to submit blindly to her husband or even an archbishop. We may mark this down to personality, but this rejection of a priests’ views from a Catholic raised as a Protestant indicates the ways that conversion did not mean a wholesale rejection of the previous culture and theology.

Other priests met with greater approval when they attempted to resolve difficult situations among converts. In addition to finding her a priest in Rome who had spent time in America and whose “heart [was] still there” to assist her with a legal issue, Isaac Hecker helped Jane with more personal relationships. When Jane received no letter from Cheery following Jane Senior’s death, she was deeply hurt by her best friend’s silence. A timely letter expressing Cheery’s condolences survives in the Sedgwick Papers, but as Cheery was living in Havana at the time, it may have been delayed or misdirected. Whatever the source of the misunderstanding, Jane and Cheery were estranged for a time and Cheery sought Hecker’s help in repairing the friendship.

Hecker also successfully mediated more ironic if still perilous personal situations. Like Jane, Emma Cary spent significant time in Rome where she made the acquaintance of an Italian gentleman who later gave her “a great number of rare relics” accompanied by “very peculiar”

56 Cheery to JMSII, n.d. [1857], Box 32, Folder 2, SFP.
57 ITH to JMSII, November 9, 1857, Sedgwick 30:12.
58 ITH to JMSII, December 14, 1859, Box 32, Folder 26, SFP.
letters. Cary took these letters to her parish priest who said the intent of the letters and gifts was “unmistakeable.” He advised her to let the correspondence drop, and give the relics to a local church, allowing the priest to acknowledge receipt of them. Cary agreed with this course, but Jane objected, and sent “quite severe letter on the subject of [Cary’s] utter disregard of this person’s feelings.” Cary claimed that romantic interest in her had derailed this gentleman’s spiritual progress, but Jane felt it was cruel to simply cut him off without an explanation. Afraid that Julia Beers and Sophia Ripley agreed with Jane, Cary requested Hecker speak to Jane instead of her.

If I write to Miss S[edgwick] she will tell him everything I say; -therefore, I put the case in your hands, well knowing how great a favor I ask. Will you please tell her as much or as little as you choose, or nothing, just as you think best? . . . If you think explanation to Miss S. will do any good, have the charity to make it. I fear nothing but mischief will come of it.

While Emma sought the advice of her local parish priest she hoped that Hecker, with his knowledge of all of the women involved, could sort out the personal ramifications.

In the end Hecker helped Emma dispose of the relics, sending his brother George to collect them at the customs house and placing them with the Redemptorists. Regardless of his and Cary’s explanations, Jane still felt her friend had done wrong by the Italian gentleman.

Again, Cary asked for Hecker’s intercession, not necessarily because his status gave him power over Jane, but because he knew Jane and might persuade her.

To you I say that his letters are such as I don’t wish to receive and do not choose to answer. He is a generous man, I think, but wondrously silly. Jane is so - like her own dear self that I cannot explain the case to her. I want her to feel kindly to him and use her influence for his good. He is one of those babies that are quite unfit to take care of themselves or anyone else.

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59 Emma Cary to ITH, January 26, 1870, Box 32, Folder 9, IHP.
Cary’s fond frustration with her friend reveals that Jane’s conversion had changed little about her personality. She still bound herself to the cause of justice, even in small cases of personal wrongs, and her friends still saw her as over-zealous and stubborn, “so like her own dear self.” While Dr. James Murray Forbes had proved himself unable or unwilling to accommodate Jane’s personality, Cary could trust Hecker to understand Jane and resolve the situation effectively.60

These women spoke with Hecker in a particular way, as he was not simply another priest to them. In petitioning for the creation of the Paulist order, Hecker had argued to Pius IX that America needed a uniquely American priesthood. Yet Hecker’s “sympathy” with Jane and her convert friends went beyond a shared American culture. After all, there were American-born and American-educated priests and bishops in America, and Jane and her friends were often at odds with them. Sharing the same elite cultural background and the same personal background of conversion gave these women, and Hecker, a unique understanding of each other’s struggles, and the ability to provide comfort and advice when cultures clashed.

In the years immediately following her conversion, Jane broadened her network of Catholic friends and deepened some of those relationships, especially as Cheery’s marital obligations took her out of the country. These new friends and acquaintances increased in importance in the mid-1850s as marriage and death separated Jane from those who were close to her. The deaths of her beloved Uncle Charles and Aunt Louisa in 1856 and 1858 left her bereft of two of her greatest supporters. Then, just a few days before Christmas 1858, a short illness took her sister Fanny, whose death left a husband, a six-year-old son, and an infant son. In an attempt to resume her engagement with the world six weeks later, Jane went to Boston to stay

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60 Emma Cary to ITH, June 20, 1870, Box 32, Folder 14, IHP.
with Will and Kate, but even surrounded by her family, she sought out her fellow converts Charlotte Dana and Emma Cary to help assuage her grief.\footnote{JMSII to JMSI, February 13, 1859, Box 94, Folder 10, SFP.}

Still, a letter from Woodbourne, the Minot estate in Roxbury, makes clear that Jane’s family remained foremost in her mind; despite her earlier resistance to the role of maiden aunt, she had become increasingly amenable to it. After counseling her mother to remain with Harry and Netta in New York instead of returning to Stockbridge in the dead of winter, Jane wrote: “For myself I shall be thankful to do anything for Fanny’s children and you know that I am so much attached to them that the duty would be to me a pleasure.”\footnote{JMSII to JMSI, February 13, 1859, Box 94, Folder 10, SFP.} On the occasion of Jane’s trip to Norfolk a decade earlier, Castillia had been certain of her success because her sense of duty was “as much refined and uncompromising as we can desire.”\footnote{GdC to JMSI, January 22, 1845, Box 30, Folder 10, SFP.} Despite that, she had been distinctly uninterested in performing the duties of the maiden aunt, even before her siblings had married and had children. But in 1859 this particular situation led familial love to merge with duty in Jane’s understanding of her role in life.

Jane wrote to her mother that the company of her friends in Boston had done her good on February 21\textsuperscript{st}, 1859, and departed for New York several days later after hearing her mother was not well.\footnote{JMSII to JMSI, February 21, 1859. Box 86, Folder 1, SFP.} On February 24, she arrived at her brother’s house in New York only to discover that her mother had died several hours earlier. With this death following so closely on her sister’s, Jane was alone in a new way, and she felt it acutely. Her Catholic friends rallied around her. Isaac Hecker sent a description of Jane to a mutual friend in Rome, letting the friend know how Jane was handling her mother’s death.
It has deeply afflicted Miss Jane. . . She goes out only to early morning Mass, but I have encouraged her as much as I was able to take more exercise, which she promised to do. What else could support our dear friend, in her present afflictions, but the Catholic faith? which it does, for it is the only resource she has at hand. Her mother seemed to be her all in this world, and it requires great strength of faith to stand with God alone. . . how thankful we should be to have that faith which is deeper than all other ties, & is the source of a support which makes us tranquil & peaceful when every thing else that is near & dear to us is taken away & we are left alone.65

As Hecker’s lines demonstrate, Jane’s solitude was not simply a matter of self-perception. With her mother gone, her two sisters dead, her brother married and living in New York, and nearly all of her contemporary cousins married, she was alone in a way unique to women of her status and time. Hecker suggested that Jane would be standing with God alone and that her faith would have to sustain her in that isolation, but the collection of Catholic friends and acquaintances she had assembled in the previous twenty years continued to support her. Her faith and friends sustained her.

Moreover, by the terms of her mother’s will Jane was not allowed to be alone, legally. Jane Senior had not changed her will following Fanny’s death, and when her own death followed so soon thereafter the execution of Jane Senior’s will created a complex legal situation. Prior to Jane Senior’s own marriage, her brother William had placed her inheritance from her father in a trust to shield it from Harry Sedgwick’s affairs, as he doubted his future brother-in-law’s financial acumen. As a result, that inheritance had been protected from Harry’s poor business deals. Jane Senior’s will, completed in 1848, divided her estate equally between her three children, and Fanny and Jane’s portions were “on their separate personal receipts without the control or influence of their husbands in case they marry” and protected from such husbands’

65 ITH to Anna Ward, March 15, 1859, Box 27, Folder 4, IHP.
debts. Hal could inherit directly, but Jane could not; her inheritance was held in trust. The third portion, which had been designated for Fanny, passed to her widower Alexander. Hal and their cousin William Minot II were designated as executors, and Will was designated trustee over Jane’s portion.

Quickly, Hal and Jane adjusted to this new legal reality. Jane granted her brother power of attorney, and Hal moved to gain complete ownership of the Stockbridge house, purportedly to keep it in the family. Jane’s letters show she remained there throughout the summer and early autumn of 1859. Assuming Jane had no intention of living in Stockbridge for more than a few weeks in the year, and seeking to earn money from the Stockbridge house, Hal endeavored to lease the house to his brother-in-law Alexander. The implication was that Jane should swiftly find herself somewhere else to live. Despite her education and status, a woman in Jane’s position could be displaced in a heartbeat. She wrote to her brother in October 1859, begging him to reconsider.

…the thought of leaving it gives me such a heart sickness as I cannot express. You and I cannot be classed in the same category in this matter - It is indeed the home of your childhood - and the place of your strongest attachments, but for a long period of years you have only passed a very short time each year here - while for me it is the only home I have ever known.

She understood her brother’s need to earn money from the property, and acknowledged that it would be difficult to maintain the household on her own, but she believed that once Alexander was settled in the house, he would never leave. Instead, she proposed that he and the children might move in, joined also by Aunt Robert, who was nearly twenty years widowed. Hal seems

66 Last will of Jane Minot Sedgwick, November 11, 1848, Pittsfield Probate Court Records.
67 Power of attorney document, September 5, 1859, Box 30, Folder 21, SFP.
68 JMSII to HDSII, September 29, 1859, Box 94, Folder 15, SFP.
69 JMSII to HDSII, October 18, 1859, Box 94, Folder 16, SFP.
to have acceded to his sister’s wishes, but her letter makes clear that she was at her brother’s mercy and knew it.

As it turned out, Jane did not have to worry about her brother-in-law and her nephews becoming permanent of the Stockbridge home. Alexander Jr., the older of the two boys, died suddenly in the summer of 1860, and Alexander Watts’ own health began to decline precipitously around the same time. As he prepared to go to New York for the winter, Alexander Watts charged Jane to care for “little Hal” at Stockbridge—an assignment she enjoyed since she found him “a most engaging little fellow gaining in attractions every day.”⁷⁰ She suspected, rightly, that Alexander would never return from his trip to the city. Much as she had earlier urged her brother to allow her to stay in the family home, she now urged him to help maintain her household, which she believed would soon be reduced to herself and the small boy who connected them to their departed sister.

What is to become of this darling child? I cannot endure to think of the probable separation which will take place after his father’s death - Gladly indeed would I devote my life to so precious a charge - though I am the last person to whom it would be given - but after his poor grandmother no one will ever feel half the love that I do for him - It seems as if the little creature knows this by instinct for his affection for me increases daily and he clings to me in a manner that is truly touching.⁷¹

She had known that she had no legal right to stay in her home, and had thrown herself on her brother’s mercy. She also knew she had no legal claim to her nephew if he became an orphan, but the thought of losing him completely pained her. She was left, once more, to call upon her brother. She asked if he had ever considered adopting their nephew after his father’s death, and

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⁷⁰ JMSII to HDSII, October 22, 1860, Box 94, Folder 24, SFP.
⁷¹ JMSII to HDSII, October 31, 1860, Box 94, Folder 24, SFP; JMSII to HDSII, November 3, 1860, Box 94, Folder 24, SFP.
urged him to broach the subject before Alexander died, or she was sure the child would be spirited away to the Watts family immediately.

When Alexander died, the enormity of the past few years fell heavily upon Jane as she wrote to her brother: “Oh! What an accumulation of sorrows have fallen upon our household within so brief a period! Could I have believed two years ago that I should so soon be left alone with the frail little blossom whose life then seemed almost a miracle?”

Henry had been born premature, weighing only three and a half pounds. That he survived while his mother, grandmother, brother, and father all died, seemed truly a miracle. But soon he was gone too, living with the Watts family in New York. So the home in Stockbridge became once more a dwelling for the wife and children while the husband, now Hal, worked in New York. Hal’s wife Netta and her children moved to Stockbridge permanently; and while Jane eventually purchased a smaller house in Stockbridge, she never again lived in the house that had been her home.

It was not the Church or her Catholic friends that drew Jane from her family, as they had feared. Instead, as her family departed she increasingly turned to the Church and her friends. Her family members, particularly her mother, had accepted Jane’s involvement with Catholicism and her later conversion because they believed it would settle her down and provide an occupation. Jane Senior believed that as long as they demonstrated interest in Jane’s activities and monitored the company she kept, ensuring she remained a “respectable” Catholic, her new faith could be a blessing that gave her peace and happiness despite her “personal peculiarities.” Jane’s own words, though, from the summer after her mother’s death, reveal that she saw things quite differently. For weeks after her mother’s death, Jane remained “languid & hard to rouse,” stirring

72 JMSII to Cheery, November 7, 1860, Box 32, Folder 26, SFP.
herself only to go to Mass each morning.\textsuperscript{73} While visits from family members supplied some comfort, she understood that her life had changed fundamentally with the death of her sister and mother. Writing to Father Hecker in August 1859, she bluntly stated: “The object to which the devotion of my life was due has been taken from me.” Catholicism did not yet measure up to family bonds.

Recognizing she had lost many of the familial connections that had finally brought her usefulness and happiness, Jane set her sights on the future, emphasizing usefulness, and looking to the Church for occupation.

I am determined as far as depends upon myself not to waste my time and faculties in an objectless life, but to turn them to some account for the service of the Church, provided I can find such a sphere for myself either here or elsewhere. . . I must mark out some plan of life for myself. . .

Jane felt a particular urgency at the end of August 1859, when she believed she was soon to be forced out of her house or, as she put it to Hecker, “family reasons oblige me now to make a change and decision in my plan of life.”\textsuperscript{74} Despite one more year of family obligations helping to care for her sister’s children, 1859 marked a significant shift in the way Jane organized her social and personal life. Jane’s Catholic friends had gained increasing importance in the years following her conversion and now, in the last three decades of her life, they became crucial for her well-being. Nevertheless Jane did not leave one world to enter another. If anything, she worked harder to remain rooted in Stockbridge, even as she spent long stretches of time in Rome and began to pursue benevolence with greater vigor.

Jane had engaged in benevolent activities on behalf of the Catholic community in Stockbridge for several years before her conversion, and those activities had increased

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\textsuperscript{73} Bessie Sedgwick to HDSII, March 10, 1859, Box 94, Folder 11, SFP.  
\textsuperscript{74} JMSII to ITH, August 31, 1859, Box 27, Folder 11, IHP.
throughout the 1850s. Benevolence provided her with occupation, which pleased her and her mother, and it also served to reinforce the boundaries between Jane and her working class co-religionists. Jane’s relative isolation as an elite convert in Stockbridge meant that quite often she was only working with an itinerant clergyman, allowing her great latitude and control over projects. Her later attempts at benevolence, which will be discussed in the next chapter, brought her into conflict with members of the Church hierarchy, but her earlier activities proceeded smoothly. By the time of her mother’s death, she had set her sights firmly upon a single goal: building a Catholic church in Stockbridge. She pursued this goal, and later benevolent endeavors, in a manner consistent with her upbringing, mirroring the benevolence of many of her elite friends who had become Catholic before her.

Benevolence, charity, and activism for members of the American elite did mean mixing with “unfortunates” or breaking social barriers. Often it meant reforming *within* barriers and strengthening them. Despite her own involvement in prison reform activism, and her support for many reforms in theory, Aunt Catharine strongly argued against the proposed establishment of a “Home for Discharged Convicts” in Stockbridge. In fact, Catharine begged her cousin Thaddeus Pomeroy, one of the local men working to establish the home, to think of the rights of the people of the area, who she argued were primarily women who should not be endangered in this fashion. She also suggested he consider the effect this would have on property values and the character of the community, which depended on safety. She understood that he was moved by Christian charity, but still could not comprehend why “you and other judicious, and thinking, and patriotic members of our village society should have banded together to introduce into our still pastures and by our sweet water-courses, amid our flocks of defenseless sheep and lambs, these state-
prison wolves. . .”⁷⁵ Jane’s own experience with mental illness and her witness to her father and cousin Charlie’s experiences provoked a lifelong interest in mental health treatment, but when she visited the Worcester State Hospital, she was pleased to see that the patients there were being treated in a manner appropriate to their class. She noted that the women kept their bedrooms in neat order and sat quietly sewing, and “were more courteous in their manners than our people of that class generally are,” a change Jane attributed to the presence of the head doctor’s refined daughters.⁷⁶

For Jane and many of her friends, the benevolent activities in which they engaged prior to their conversions continued after their conversions, particularly activities centered on the poor, and especially women and children. Sometimes converts recast those activities in light of their new faith commitment, as in the case of Jane’s school, but often their activism and benevolence persisted independent of their faith, at times even shaping their interpretation of Catholicism and bringing them into conflict with other Catholics, lay converts and members of the hierarchy. Jane’s opposition to slavery continued, bringing her into conflict with Isaac Hecker, who was himself one of the more progressive public Catholic voices on the topic in America.⁷⁷ She continued to advocate for the expansion of women’s rights, a subject over which much ink was spilled in the community of convert women alone.⁷⁸ Isaac Hecker printed pieces by Jane’s friend Emma Cary on both prison reform and women’s rights in an 1868 issue of his national newsmagazine The Catholic World, only to receive a swift rebuke from another female convert, his close friend Eliza Cullen. She argued that Cary’s piece on women’s rights was primarily

⁷⁵ Sedgwick, Life and Letters, 225.
⁷⁶ JMSII to JMSII, November 18, 1841, Box 26, Folder 2, SFP.
⁷⁸ “The Rights of Women,” n.d., Box 32, Folder 20, SFP
about “women’s duty” and doubted it would “make the faith of six women active.” She told Hecker quite frankly: “Father I am proud that you should be the founder of the Paulists, but I am not quite satisfied with your Pauline doctrines as to women.”

As Jane entered the world of Catholic benevolence, she grappled with significant structural differences unfamiliar to her from her experience with secular Protestant activities. As economist Mary J. Oates argues in her survey of the American Catholic philanthropic tradition, bishops controlled “dogma, sacrament, and discipline,” and generally sought control over philanthropy as well, but were forced to work closely with the laity who provided the financial support and the sisters and brothers (primarily sisters) who did the vast majority of the labor, often for little or no money. While Oates uses the term philanthropy to mean money and time “given under the aegis of the church, to benefit others,” explicitly excluding money given to the congregation itself, her work, and Jane’s experience, shows that these two areas of giving were intertwined, especially when the same significant givers often funded both kinds of projects. Jane’s later benevolent work in education was intimately tied to her earlier efforts to build a church in Stockbridge, both conceptually. For that reason, I will consider both the building of the church and the establishment of the school as “benevolent activities.”

Oates presents a narrative of American Catholic growth and development that differentiates between a rural west and urban east, each with different forms of charity and different relationships with mainstream Protestants. She also argues that Catholic philanthropy’s goals and methods varied over the course of the 19th century based on increasing numbers of poor Catholic immigrants to urban areas and a mid-century waxing of anti-Catholic sentiment,

79 Cullen to ITH, Sept 12, 1868, Box 31, Folder 8, IHP.
80 Cullen to ITH, September 17, 1868, Box 31, Folder 8, IHP.
followed by a significant waning around the time of the Civil War. Oates’ thoroughly researched study certainly represents the general experience of American Catholics, but the characteristics of rural New England Catholicism, as well as Jane’s financial and social status, complicate her narrative. Jane’s experience in Stockbridge mirrors rural western experiences more closely than those of the big urban eastern parishes in some ways, because Stockbridge was still a “frontier” mission. As a result, Stockbridge and southwestern Massachusetts in general do not quite conform to Oates’ narrative, which argues for a focus on church building in the first sixty years of the century overlapping with a growing institutional charity movement in the last sixty years of the century. For much of the 19th century, southwestern Massachusetts did not have the Catholic population to build the most basic institutions – churches with installed, permanent priests – let alone the larger charitable apparatuses of nearby urban centers. In examining Jane’s effort to bring sisters to run a school, it is important to remember that this attempt at institution-building paralleled, rather than followed, the establishment of basic Catholic institutions.

In trying to do good and be useful to her parish in Stockbridge, Jane undoubtedly looked to the efforts of other converts, including Sophia Ripley and another woman with whom she had been acquainted since youth.82 Sarah Peter (1800-1877) was born in Ohio, the daughter of Governor Thomas Worthington. Trained as an artist in Philadelphia, she then married Edward King, the son of Rufus King, and following his death, William Peter, the British consul at Philadelphia, who died in 1853. Raised an Episcopalian, Sarah Peter joined the Catholic Church in Rome in 1855. She had been an active philanthropist before her conversion, directing her energies in religious and artistic avenues, and those interests extended into her Catholic life. She

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82 Sarah Peter first appears in Jane’s papers as Sarah King, in 1837. Mary Minot to JMSII, February 19, 1837.
funded the establishment of a convent in Cincinnati in 1857, and then traveled to Europe to raise funds for mission work in the city to gain further converts.

The convent that Sarah Peter endowed in Cincinnati was the Order of the Good Shepherd, an order of women that operated many “Houses of the Good Shepherd” throughout the United States and Europe in the 19th century. In general, their mission was to minister to “fallen women,” including indigent women, prostitutes, single mothers, and prisoners. With the toleration, rather than active support, of Archbishop Hughes, Sophia Ripley and other women, many of whom were Jane’s friends, succeeded in opening a House of the Good Shepherd in New York City the same year as Peter’s establishment in Cincinnati. With so many of her close convert friends involved in this particular cause, it is not surprising that Jane herself left funds for the establishment of a House of the Good Shepherd in her diocese as an offshoot of the one in Boston.

Sarah Peter, twice widowed and daughter of a prominent politician, and Sophia Ripley, married with significant social and intellectual connections in Boston and New York, could afford to endow convents in a way that Jane could not. Much as bishops emphasized that the giving of time was key to true Catholic benevolence, and emphasized its difference from Protestant reform efforts, wealthy Catholics generally believed their obligation could be satisfied simply by providing financial support. Peter expressed this quite clearly when giving the money to found the convent in 1857, when she remarked “I shall work hard this summer...to get my charities in motion, and then I think I shall feel at liberty to retire, while they do my work, as a

capitalist retires on his revenues.”85 Oates outlines growing tensions among Catholics over whether relief or social reform was the best use of benevolent energies, as well as tension between upper/middle class and working class styles of giving.

Without a church building the Catholics of the community, Sedgwick and Irish alike, were forced to borrow spaces for worship, and they could have only an itinerant clergyman, not a permanent priest. For years this situation had persisted, as illustrated by Bessie’s comments about Catholics holding mass in her Episcopal church in 1842, and Aunt Catharine’s remarks about the Irish holding mass in a shop. Catharine’s comments that there had been no Irish in the Berkshires before the 1850s was not quite true, but an increase in immigration caused the Catholic population of the area to swell, and to Jane a church in Stockbridge seemed a downright necessity. Jane was unable to give large sums of money like Sarah Peter, though she had been able to give over the use of her kitchen or even her barn, when they had been hers, before her brother’s family took ownership of the house. The growing Catholic population of Berkshire County needed a church, and Jane felt she could use her time and energy, in addition to her money, to effect a much-needed change.

Jane began directing fundraising for the church as early as 1854 at least. She held the first of her church fairs that year with the support of Cheery, Addie, and Miss LeClerc. Despite her approval of Jane’s occupation, Jane Senior could not help but poke fun at her daughter’s endeavors in a letter to Hal.

... yr little room is now turned into a Catholic library containing Donnegan’s books which are designed to be sold at the fair with various pictures, catechisms, rosaries, & other appendages of that gorgeous hierarchy which have been whittled down to the taste & finances of the common Irish.86

86 JMSI to HDSII, April 22, n.d. [1850s], Box 25, Folder 4, SFP. Donnegan’s refers to Dunigan’s, a Catholic
The humor, of course, came from the perceived mismatch of Catholic opulence and local Catholics. Jane was certainly aware of her mother’s feelings, and her goal was indeed one of uplift. Cheery referred to Jane’s efforts to raise money for the church as her “labors among the low Irish.”

Even though Jane’s benevolence was directed towards a faith her family did not share, they contributed time and goods when asked. Hal never made the trip up for the 1859 fair, as Jane had hoped he would, but he helped her manage and deposit the funds she raised. Jane was hurt by her brother and sister-in-law’s inability (or lack of desire) to come up from the city for the fair, but suggested another way of helping, in lieu of their physical presence: “the best contribution will be to take a few chances in the raffles if you feel so benevolently disposed.” Kate’s twelve-year-old daughter Alice sent along some worsted work to be sold at the fair. In a letter of thanks, Jane told Alice that her willingness to contribute to the fair meant more than the monetary benefits it would bring, but assured her she would “have it reckoned up that we may know exactly how much we owe to your little fingers.” The willingness of Jane’s family to contribute money to her efforts to establish a church is not surprising. In one of the many uneasy truces between American Protestants and Catholics, elite Protestants throughout the country took pride in donating to the construction of Catholic churches, even as they took no great steps to stem anti-Catholic sentiment or even violence.

bookseller in New York that Jane and Sophia Ripley often patronized.
87 Cheery to JMSII, July 18, 1853, Folder 32, Box 5, SFP.
88 JMSII to HDSII, 1859, Box 86, Folder 3, SFP.
89 JMSII to HDSII, July 8, 1859, Box 95, Folder 15, SFP.
90 JMSII to Alice Woodbourne Minot, May 31, 1859, Box 94, Folder 12, SFP.
This second successful fair put Jane and her partner Father Peter Egan, the resident priest at North Lee, in a position to begin the construction of the church itself. Jane involved herself with overseeing and paying the contractor, including engaging in protracted disputes with him over cost and the slow pace of the construction. Her brother assisted her by helping to direct materials that came in through New York. The following year, in July 1860, Jane persuaded her friend Father Hecker to come to Stockbridge to preside over and bless the laying of the cornerstone of “her church.” She very much thought of it as her church, and did not see herself as an assistant or helper in the effort to build it, but rather as the person leading the campaign. Jane’s mother had worried about her adopting too many of the trappings of Catholicism, but her benevolent activities in founding St. Joseph’s demonstrate that whatever trappings she adopted, she remained an elite New England woman in the best traditions of her mother and Aunt Catharine, living out her good Sedgwick character in benevolent usefulness.

Aside from their separate benevolent projects, one activity Jane and her convert friends shared was bringing others, particularly women, into the Church. Certainly Jane worked for the conversion of her brother and his family, but her efforts went beyond family and beyond piecemeal attempts at conversion. Elite convert women in the nineteenth century engaged in a conscious and systematic effort to gain further converts from their social ranks. Jane and many in her circle worked with Father Isaac Hecker in this venture, and though they often spoke of taking direction from him and deferring to his judgment, their actions indicate they had a distinct and important role to play in the process of conversion. Jane’s upbringing, status, and gender allowed her access to a pool of potential elite converts and gave her the ability to connect with them in a

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92 The Metropolitan Catholic Almanac, and Laity’s Directory, for the United States (Baltimore: F. Lucas, 1860), 150.
93 JMSII to ITH, July 26, 1860, Box 27, Folder 19, IHP.
way that a man like Hecker could not. Jane brought other women into the Church the same way other women had brought her into the Church: talking with her friends about her faith, directing them to literature and priests, and modeling Catholic respectability.

One of Jane’s first efforts at conversion was with her neighbor and friend Anna Hazard Barker Ward. In the 1840s, Anna’s writings show no Catholic impulses, but she did not seem opposed to Catholicism in general, perhaps because of her childhood educational experiences in a convent school in New Orleans. Anna attended mass with her servants, one of whom was the sister of the “Irish girl” who attended Jane and her mother. She helped the servants with their catechism and gave them Catholic books as gifts for good service. Still, she continued to explore a variety of religions while maintaining a general religiosity she found sustaining.

The historian Anne Rose examined Anna Ward’s conversion in her book Beloved Strangers, giving particular attention to how Anna’s religious wanderings and eventual conversion affected her marriage. Rose’s explication of Anna’s path to the Church featured Isaac Hecker as the primary catalyst, and while he certainly played an important part in her conversion, the groundwork for her conversion was laid prior to her acquaintance with Hecker. Certainly we must acknowledge that the importance of her the friendship with Jane and other Catholic-minded women came first. When Anna first entered the Sedgwick sphere, she knew Catholics from opposite ends of the social spectrum: her servants and Cheery Langtree.

In the winter of 1857-8, when Jane went to Rome with Lizzie, Grace, and her Aunt Robert, Anna Ward and Isaac Hecker were also in the Eternal city. Jane and Anna had come for

95 Diary of Anna Hazard Barker Ward, 1845, Samuel Gray Ward and Anna Hazard Barker Ward Papers, Houghton Library.
96 Herbert O’Sullivan to JMSII, August 1, 1844, Box 32, Folder 24, SFP.
their health, while Hecker was there to petition the Vatican for permission to found an American missionary religious order. The extant papers surrounding Anna’s baptism by Pope Pius IX indicate she had frequent appointments with Hecker in Rome in the weeks preceding the ceremony, and he provided her with a catechism and other materials. Indeed, a few days following her baptism, Hecker wrote to priests in America of this “American Lady” he had led to the Church. Anna, upon seeing the Pope, had fallen to her knees and “acknowledged for the first time her faith; by declaring to him that she recognized him as the visible head of Christ’s true Church upon earth; & then woman like, burst into tears.” The Pope, suitably impressed with her devotion, mused on the power of Rome to compel conversion. In Hecker’s telling, Anna offered an additional reason for her conversion.

“Hecker noted that the news of this incident spread like wildfire among the cardinals and monsignors, something that would certainly benefit his efforts to persuade key members of the hierarchy to support his new religious order: he had demonstrated that he, and his American approach, as embodied in Questions of the Soul, could successfully bring American Protestants into the Church.”

There is no mention of Jane’s presence at the audience, but even if she were there, which is quite likely, it seems Hecker would have been unlikely to mention her to the audience of his letter. A letter from several years later, however, gives insight into how Anna first began to

97 Anna Ward to ITH, February 16, 1858, Box 25, Folder 4; February 18, 1858, Box 25, Folder 5; February 24, 1858, Box 25, Folder 5; March 9, 1858, Box 25, Folder 8, IHP.
98 ITH to “Brethren,” April 3, 1858, Box 25, Folder 11, IHP.
engage with the Church in a serious manner, and also how convert women like Jane may not have recognized the role they played in the conversion of their friends. In 1860, Anna sent her sister Elizabeth Van Zandt with a letter of introduction to Father Hecker in New York. The letter of introduction mentioned that Lizzie Van Zandt was distressed over her son’s poor health and needed counsel, but in a letter a month earlier, Anna told Hecker she wanted him to meet her sister, who might be brought into the church with a little coaxing. Anna’s daughter Annie soon declared: “Father Hecker is just the person, he understands her perfectly.” It seems that Anna had been correct, and her sister was soon brought into the Church.

Later in the fall, Anna remarked to Hecker: “It seems to me very wonderful that my sister was brought to you, as I was, in what seemed an accidental manner.” She went on to describe the accident of their own meeting and its connection to her sister’s situation.

When I asked Jane for “Questions of the Soul” in St. Peter’s, she smiled & said, “Why the Priest who wrote the book, you just saw leaving me,” and when my sister wrote me she heard the Convent Bells at sunset, it occurred to me it might be from your church, so I sent her the letter for you.

While both of these situations feature a measure of coincidence, there was little accidental about them. Notwithstanding a coincidental meeting in St. Peter’s (which may not have actually occurred), it is not difficult to believe that Jane already intended to introduce Anna to Hecker after she had read Questions of the Soul. While the church bells may have caused Anna to think of Hecker in her sister’s moment of despair, she had already expressed a desire for her sister’s conversion. Framing these situations as accidental downplays the agency of the converts.

99 Anna Ward to ITH, July 2, 1860, Box 27, Folder 19, IHP.
100 Anna Ward to ITH, June 11, 1860, Box 27, Folder 18, IHP.
101 Anna Ward to ITH, October 23, 1860, Box 27, Folder 22, IHP.
themselves, but it is quite clear that both Anna and Jane aimed to convert women close to them and took advantage of opportunities.

Jane, Anna, and other convert women were part of an active network of converts working to bring others into the Church, both individually and in concert with priests like Isaac Hecker. A range of beliefs and desires compelled them to devote themselves to this cause: not least was the pure desire to bring people to salvation in the True Church. But one important secondary motivation linked these women and Hecker: the desire to prove that Americans not only could be Catholics, but could be devout and valuable Catholics who joined the Church because of their American nationality, not in spite of it.

Soon after her conversion, Sophia Ripley began to express the loneliness of being a Catholic in a Protestant world, a feeling only alleviated when “Sunday comes.” Still, she felt herself united with her fellow converts in a particularly strong way.

Daily the world is looking more frightful to me, this natural world so mean; people are so mean, so wicked, so worthless; & the best are in such a bewilderment. I feel most deeply the call that all of us, particularly our little band of new converts in this country have to perfection. I find myself repeating the Litany of our Lady of Loretto [sic] in their & my own behalf, that we may be made worthy of our vocation.102

The responsibility of a newly-converted American was not just to find individual spiritual perfection. Instead, this “little band” had a vocation. Catholic women, particularly those who did not want to join a convent, could not have a recognized vocation in the Church. This had concerned Jane, who had hesitated to join the Church as she did not feel the call and wondered how that would affect her place and her usefulness. For that is precisely what Sophia’s “vocation” was – “usefulness” for Catholic converts in America, particularly women. While it was not an all-consuming vocation, Sophia’s words suggest a real sense of consecrating oneself

102 Sophia Ripley to RCD, 1855, Box 14, Folder 1, Dana Family Papers, MHS.
to a sacred duty. And while prayer from converts, sisters, brothers and priests could all aid in bringing more people into the Church, American converts were uniquely qualified to persuade others, just as Hecker argued that American priests were needed to revitalize American (and immigrant) Catholics\textsuperscript{103}.

In 1856, Sophia wrote to Charlotte, inviting her and Julia to join a group “quietly forming under [Hecker’s] auspices.” This group was a “newly formed Confraternity for the conversion of those who are favorably disposed towards the church.” After providing a long description of how to have names placed in the book, and the amount of alms and number of masses that needed to be offered, Sophia simply stated: “Each person of sense will cause masses to be offered, according to their ability.” This formalization of the effort to gain converts, complete with a secretary to record names confidentially in the book, was the formalization of a vocation. These convert women understood themselves to be standing shoulder-to-shoulder with secular and religious clergy, as well as brothers and sisters across the U.S., in the effort to bring Americans into the Church. In doing so, they fulfilled the expectations of both their Catholic and Anglo-Protestant cultures by participating in form of benevolence rooted in both.\textsuperscript{104}

Jane and Anna both targeted the same woman for conversion directly after Anna’s own entrance to the Church. Jane’s cousin Grace Ashburner Sedgwick, Uncle Charles’ youngest daughter, remained unmarried, despite a brief relationship with her cousin Hal that nearly led to marriage. She was also uncertain regarding her path in life just as Jane had been, but without any of Jane’s remarkable intelligence. Descriptions of her by her family suggest she and Fanny

\textsuperscript{103} Lincoln Mullen argues that the swell of conversion in this period was partly driven by converts themselves gaining converts. He cites Brownson’s work as a public intellectual and the missionary work of Hecker’s order, the Paulists, but their role in conversion would have been much different from what Jane and her friends saw as their vocation. Lincoln A. Mullen, “The Contours of Conversion to Catholicism in the Nineteenth Century,” \textit{U.S. Catholic Historian} 32, no. 2 (2014): 13.

\textsuperscript{104} Sophia Ripley to RCD, August 5, 1856, Box 14, Folder 17, Dana Family Papers, MHS.
shared a similar personality: whimsical and social, if a bit temperamental. Jane certainly knew Grace growing up, as they lived nearby and visited often, but there was a 12-year gap between the two cousins. Grace was only twenty when Jane converted, but over the next few years, she developed an interest in Catholicism herself.

The first direct mention of Grace’s interest in Catholicism comes from her cousin Lizzie, while they were in Rome with Jane in 1858. Writing to Bessie, Lizzie mentioned Grace whispering to a companion in St. Peter’s that she wished she could become a Catholic. What happened next encapsulates the process used by convert women to bring new converts into the Church.

An English woman, a recent convert, overheard her & immediately addressed her. She cd become one did she find the right guide - She herself wd show her the way. Nothing in the world so zealous as a Catholic in pursuit of a soul. She made appointments with her immediately to show her some converts. She came to see her, then sent Monseigneur Talbot an English dignitary likewise devoting himself to conversions.

Lizzie’s description of this mysterious woman’s approach mirrors the approach visible over and over in the letters of Jane and her convert friends. In particular, this episode reinforces the importance of the convert making her first serious steps towards the Church in the company of other converts, before being acquainted with a member of the clergy especially selected by those converts.

It seems unlikely that Grace’s exclamation in St. Peter’s was the result of a sudden interest in Catholicism, despite Pius IX’s belief in the power of the Roman environment to inspire conversion. She had witnessed Jane’s own process of conversion, witnessed Jane practice her faith in Stockbridge and engage in elite benevolence on behalf of her church. In Rome, she saw Jane “making herself happy” visiting the tombs of the saints and making pilgrimages. Lizzy

105 Lizzie to Henrietta Sedgwick, January 3, 1858, Sedgwick 93:26.
described Jane “smiling broadly to herself. . . with an expression so extatic that you are sure she is escorted by. . . a Capuchin or Franciscan invisible to you.” Still, Grace was not quite ready to join the Church, preferring to enjoy Carnival and “[entertain] herself & us by making game of all the world not sparing the Pope & Michael Angelo’s Last Judgment.”106 Instead, Jane, Anna Ward, Isaac Hecker and unknown others worked together over several years to ensure Grace’s conversion.

Two years later, Grace was still hesitant about conversion, and Jane began to feel frustrated. Hecker had visited Berkshire County in early summer 1860, and spoken with Grace, but had not secured her conversion. Jane wrote to him that she would give a copy of “Philothea,” the common name for de Sales’ *Introduction to the Devout Life*, to her cousin after discussing potential reading material with Hecker; but she expressed doubt it would work:

I do not mean to be hopeless or faithless about her conversion - but as the fancy has been so long entertained without leading to any practical result - I cannot feel confident that it will now - You should have prolonged your visit and some more talks with you would probably have been more efficacious than books.107

Jane’s description of her cousin’s interest in Catholicism – as a “fancy” that had yet to yield a “practical result” – echoes Jane Senior’s desire to believe that Jane’s interest in Catholicism was one of many fancies and would never bear fruit. For Jane and the other converts in her world, however, the journey to the Church was usually a long one. Jane, from the sure position of a convert, criticized her cousin’s unwillingness to commit, but she had herself weighed Catholicism for nearly a decade before deciding to convert.

Hecker himself remained patient, and urged the convert women in his social circle to give their potential recruits the time they needed to come to the Church. Responding to Anna about

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106 Lizzie Sedgwick to Constance Brevoort Sedgwick, January 23, 1858, Box 93, Folder 26, SFP.
107 JMSII to ITH, July 26, 1860, Box 27, Folder 19, IHP.
Grace’s process later in 1860, he expressed a willingness to meet with her again if she came into the city, for he did not see her as a hopeless case, just one that needed time: “There is a view of seriousness in her character which promises to assert itself some day - and she is too well informed to put up with a sham, and too earnest to attempt to satisfy her heart with a halfway Religion.” Nevertheless, he expressed a frustration common to the letters among converts in this period: the lack of available literature appropriate to an American audience in the 19th century. “I was puzzled what to advise her to read - a bit upon Philothea - tho not precisely meeting her wants. She had been reading some spiritual books. . . referring more to a religious state of life than one in the world.” In suggesting de Sales, Hecker did the best he could, but he argued that Philothea and “others with similar aims. . .belong to the life of a past age and were written for a people [more] depressed in character than ours.”108 This lack of literature suited to an optimistic American population merely emphasized the need for the kind of face-to-face engagement and modeling that brought Jane and Anna into the Church.

The following spring, Anna was still after Father Hecker to “bring G.S. into the Church,”109 but Hecker was not worried: “I have kept in mind Grace Sedgwick - and mentioned the matter to Miss Jane, at present she is in no need of more assistance.”110 Comments like these, and Hecker’s general interaction with women like Anna, Jane, Charlotte, and Sarah Peter, suggest that he understood them as his partners in this endeavor, and more importantly, recognized that they might have influence in these situations that he could never have. Still, Jane could not defeat all obstacles, despite being Grace’s friend and elder cousin. As Jane had approached her own ultimate decision to enter the Church in 1852, Grace’s mother had noted

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108 ITH to Anna Ward, November 2, 1860, Ward Papers, Houghton Library.
109 Anna Ward to ITH, April 26, 1861, Box 28, Folder 4, IHP.
110 ITH to Anna Ward, July 24, 1861, Ward Papers.
that she seemed “in a particularly quiet placid state of mind. . . from which I infer that she finds Catholicism [a] wholesome diet.”¹¹¹ Now, however, when it was her own unmarried daughter exploring Catholicism, she put her foot down. Jane reported to Hecker in July 1861 that “Grace still professes herself as much in earnest as ever in her search after the truth - though her mother’s opposition forced her to suspend it for a time.”¹¹²

No letters or diaries by Grace remain that document her own conversion, but letters from others indicate that sometime between Jane’s 1861 letter and 1864, Grace’s family came to consider her a Catholic. When Aunt Charles died in 1864, Aunt Catharine wrote a note of consolation to Anna, a close friend of the deceased. She was more concerned, though, with “dear little Grace who in her loneliness is the greatest sufferer in this bereavement.” Her sisters married and her brothers dead, Grace was indeed alone, much as Jane had been. Aunt Catharine was not too worried, however, because she believed Grace had the support and comfort she needed: “Truly I rejoice in the belief that her Catholic Faith is an immense help and consolation to her.”¹¹³ This is a remarkable statement from Catharine Sedgwick, who had so derided Jane’s choice to join the “cornerstone of absolutism” and busy herself with “vespers and matins.” A year before Jane’s conversion, Catharine had pronounced the end of her career as an active “Protestant champion” as the highest aim had been secured: the right of private judgment. This did not stop her disparaging Jane’s conversion, but it appears that by the time of Grace’s conversion, Catharine had come to believe her own pronouncement: “. . . that God should look

¹¹¹ EDS to KSM, June 9, 1852, Box 83, Folder 9, SFP.
¹¹² JMSII to ITH, July 31, 1861, Box 28, Folder 8, IHP.
¹¹³ CMS to Anna Ward, November 25, 1864, Samuel Gray Ward and Anna Hazard Barker Ward Papers.
with more favor on any individual because he is a Catholic or a Protestant seems to me incredible.”\textsuperscript{114}

Grace and Jane’s paths into Catholic life did not remain similar, however, as Grace only remained single a few more years. In 1867, she became the second wife of Charles Astor Bristed, widower of Laura Carson Brevoort.\textsuperscript{115} She became stepmother to John Bristed, her husband’s son from his first marriage, and Cecile, his illegitimate daughter from an affair with an unknown woman of good social standing. Grace had a son, Charles Astor Bristed Jr., in 1869, and though she seems to have faced some scorn from those in the Astor social circles, who viewed her as an inferior, her marriage was, by all accounts, a happy one. Bristed was significantly older than Grace, however, and he died in 1874, leaving her with a five-year-old child and two willful adult stepchildren.

During the marriage, Grace may have considered herself a Catholic, but to all outward appearances, she was Episcopalian like her husband. She often attended Grace Church or the Church of the Epiphany with him, but her diary indicates many mornings where she declined to attend services, complaining of a headache or other ailment.\textsuperscript{116} We cannot know whether these were simply excuses given by a woman who felt no desire to attend Episcopalian worship, but there is no indication that her marriage persuaded her to change her confessional affiliation. Following her husband’s death, Grace renewed a correspondence with Father Robert Fulton, and while on a trip to Europe, had her son Charley baptized into the Catholic Church. She, like Jane,

\textsuperscript{114} Sedgwick, \textit{Life and Letters}, 338.
\textsuperscript{115} Brevoort’s sister Constance was married to Ellery Sedgwick, son of Robert. When Constance abandoned her husband and ran off to Europe with another man, taking their daughters, it caused significant strain between Grace and her husband. Diaries of Grace Sedgwick Bristed, private collection of Richard S. Jackson.
\textsuperscript{116} Diary of Grace Sedgwick Bristed, 1868, private collection of Richard S. Jackson.
spent much of the rest of her life in Rome, and her son eventually became chamberlain to three successive popes.

Just as Jane’s benevolent activities increased as her family connections dwindled, her time overseas in Europe increased greatly in the last three decades of her life. As with her benevolent activities, Jane’s decision to stay in Rome for months or years at a time might easily be attributed to the zeal of a convert. When Castillia heard that she was to make a journey to Rome in 1861, for instance, he assumed it was for the “over-care for her spiritual health.” After all, he argued, “To a converted one of such warmth of feeling and power of imagination as our good Jane is, Rome must have irresistible attractions.”117 Certainly her choice of Rome was influenced by her faith, but the ultimate drivers were eminently more practical: her health and her family’s finances.

An examination of the family’s correspondence indicates that the beginning of the Civil War brought significant economic challenges. During the war, her family’s fortunes declined sharply, and as a single woman without any permanent domestic obligations, Jane was the one most obliged to save money. This situation, combined with Jane’s continued ill health and desire for a Mediterranean climate, made Rome an obvious choice, as Jane could live more cheaply there. Moreover, Jane expressed that her family’s misfortune, and the general distress gripping the country in the 1860s, affected her mental and physical state, and so her decision to remove herself to Rome, at least initially, was strongly influenced by her desire to remain happy and healthy.118

117 GdC to CMS, November 18, 1861, Box 80, Folder 25, SFP.
118 JMS II to KSM, November 2, 1862, Box 95, Folder 10, SFP.
Jane’s experience in this period, repeatedly traveling between the United States and Europe, between her native and adopted cultures, was not without tension. Her Catholic faith, and perhaps more importantly her Catholic friends, sustained her in her transatlantic existence, for many of those friends shared similar struggles. Jane first returned to Rome after her conversion in 1857, but in the company of Aunt Robert, Lizzie, and Grace, remaining enmeshed in her Sedgwick social world while taking periodic sojourns on her own to fulfill her Catholic desires. On her later trips, however, she traveled in the company of converts like Charlotte Dana, while spending time with members of the broader elite American expatriate community in Rome. While in Europe, Jane lived independently, finding plenty of sympathetic Catholic company. She struggled to pay off the debt of the little church she had helped build in Stockbridge, which still lacked a permanent priest, but in Rome she could attend a different church every day.119

Still, she did not leave Stockbridge behind mentally when she left it physically. In fact, she constantly expressed a desire to be home, and thought constantly of her family and her Catholic community there. When in the United States, she longed to be in Rome with her Catholic friends, immersed in Catholic culture. She could never fully satisfy these yearnings to unite her two existences, but the company of her closest Catholic friends from New England soothed the tension. When she was with them, she engaged in activities that reflected her elite upbringing and Catholic faith. They visited churches, attended retreats, took pilgrimages to holy sites, met with important Catholic figures, all while attending concerts, discussing books, and visiting other members of the American expatriate community.

Despite her immersion in Roman culture, she remained tied to the United States because her cousin Will’s control of her allowance constrained her movements and choices. Jane’s

119 JMSII to HDSII, November 2, 1862, Box 95, Folder 11, SFP.
inability to govern her own finances frustrated her greatly, and despite lacking any legal authority, she spoke her mind about her money and told Hal what to do with the family’s assets. In particular, she repeatedly emphasized to her brother that the instability of her life, largely due to distance and the inability to communicate consistently, prevented her doing their bidding to “live very cheaply.” She often argued that they understood little of how Italian society worked, particularly for a single woman traveling alone. During the war, in particular, she felt utterly adrift. In the summer of 1862, Jane begged her brother for some direction: “I cannot avoid feeling some anxiety. Of course I cannot expect at a crisis like this when all our financial affairs must depend upon our military success to know or to be advised as to what is best for me to do.” Waiting to hear from them about how much money she might have for the upcoming fall season, Jane reminded her brother that a delay in making arrangements would force her into undesirable neighborhoods far from her “American friends,” and might well end up costing more in the long run. Still, she often recognized that her own comforts or wants were not of great concern to her male family members in America: “it is of little use laying before you at this distance the difficulties of my position.” As in America, her life in Rome was precarious. She was elite, but as an elite woman abroad, she had little of the security provided by family and friends at home.120

No matter how long she was in Rome, and how much she enjoyed life there, Jane’s heart longed for Stockbridge, and her benevolent activities while abroad continued to center on the Catholic community of her home. To Europeans, and to the Vatican in particular, America was a challenge, and some believed it to be fertile missionary ground. First and foremost, however, it was nation with a rapidly expanding Catholic population. Joseph J. Casino's work on the

120 JMSII to HDSII, September 6, n.d. [1860s], Box 86, Folder 2, SFP.
development of the Catholic parish in the Northeast has generated numbers that illuminate the problems facing the clergy as they attempted to minister to a rapidly-growing Catholic population. The Church found it nearly impossible to keep up with the population growth, and in 1850 there were 448 priests in the Northeast ministering to a population of 737,000 Catholics, a ratio of 1 priest for every 1,623 Catholics. Many Catholics received the sacraments not at a home parish but from itinerant priests. In Manhattan specifically, where Hecker and his Paulist brothers were based, the ratio of priests to Catholics in 1840 was 1 to 4,454, and by 1865 was 1 to 4,861, even with the foundation of seminaries in Europe specifically designed to supply the United States with priests.\(^\text{121}\)

Jane’s presence in Rome, and her connections with members of the hierarchy like Cardinal Barnabo, head of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, allowed her to obtain material goods and financial support for St. Joseph’s. During a public audience with the Pope, for instance, Jane happened to be presented alongside a group of women “who had lately instituted a society for distributing articles of church furniture to poor missionary parishes,” writing parenthetically “by this I hope to profit.”\(^\text{122}\) Despite her willingness to hold mass in the Sedgwick barn prior to the building of St. Joseph’s, and her eagerness to secure castoff vestments and furniture, she still wanted her church outfitted fashionably. In 1864, she secured a painting for the altar, which she sent home with the help of an expatriate artist friend, making sure to instruct her brother that he was not to be tricked into paying any duty on it.\(^\text{123}\) In Europe, she sought to use the connections she developed to aid the Catholics of her little community in


\(^\text{122}\) JMSII to HDSII, March 9, 1862, Box 95, Folder 8, SFP.

\(^\text{123}\) JMSII to HDSII, May 16, 1864, Box 95, Folder 14, SFP.
Stockbridge, perhaps believing that a more complete and attractive church would help persuade the archbishop to provide St. Joseph’s with a resident priest, and one day allow her to come home for good.

As much as Jane wanted a permanent priest, however, no such thing would ever make Stockbridge home to her as it had been for the first forty years of her life. By the mid-1860s, Jane possessed no true home, having become a permanent pilgrim in Europe and the United States. Lacking a spouse as well as control over her own finances, she could not make Stockbridge her home or maintain it as the center of the Sedgwick world. Unlike her Aunt Catharine, she never held a cherished place in her brother’s home. A younger Jane, the one who struck off on her own for Norfolk, defying her friends and her brother, might not have minded this separation. But conversion to Catholicism had settled Jane into a domesticity that pleased her, even as her siblings and cousins married and formed nuclear families outside of Stockbridge. In the years following her conversion, she had her mother, her sister, her nephews, the Catholics of Stockbridge, and a network of other converts with whom she could navigate this new Catholic life. The sudden death of her sister, mother, nephew and brother-in-law upended this happiness, and with the world of her family in tatters, she turned to the other world for consolation, strength, and occupation.

Conversion to Catholicism did not drive a wedge between Jane and her family members, but rather drew her closer to them. Without them, she wondered at the purpose of her life, but in subsequent years, she made a place for herself at the point where her elite Protestant birth culture met a vigorous transnational Catholic culture. With other Catholic converts, she practiced her faith, pursued intellectual and political challenges, gained converts to the faith, and lived out her faith and her Sedgwick values in benevolent endeavors. As she wrote to Father Hecker after he
encouraged her to pursue Catholic benevolence after her mother’s and sister’s deaths: “I must mark out some plan of life for myself and why not this.” Jane was never one to do something half-way, however. She did not simply raise funds for a church, she pored over the blueprints with the contractor and the priest. Nor could she rest after the completion of St. Joseph’s. For the last twenty years of her life, Jane devoted herself to one particular benevolent goal: a Catholic school to serve the children of Stockbridge. Her work towards this goal brought her into conflict with the Massachusetts hierarchy in new ways, however, and the last decades of her life demonstrate the extent to which her values and behaviors remained anchored in Sedgwick elitism even as she deepened her connection to the Catholic Church.
Chapter 5

For when a person wishes to have the honor and credit of establishing a religious house, they should attend to it themselves, and not leave the work to be done by others.
~Bishop Patrick O’Reilly to Jane Minot Sedgwick II, March 1, 1882

In the fall of 1870, Jane returned to Stockbridge after one of her many sojourns in Rome. Boarding in a neighbor’s house while her brother’s family occupied her former home, she wrote to her brother in New York, where he still lived and worked. After asking him to update her on the condition of her bank account and that of the Stockbridge church, St. Joseph’s, which was still under construction, she reminded him that she herself had plans: “my own affairs which are coming to a crisis very soon - my future bishop is consecrated tomorrow.”¹ These “affairs” were her plans to establish a Catholic school in the Stockbridge parish. The Archdiocese of Boston had created a Diocese of Springfield to serve the fast-growing Catholic population of central and western Massachusetts, installing thirty-six-year-old Patrick T. O’Reilly as its first bishop.² Several months later, she received a letter from the bishop who pledged: “With regard to the ultimate arrangement of your affairs, I repeat that I shall carry out your desire, should God spare me, as faithfully as I can.”³ From these early letters, the arrangement and the willingness of both parties to execute it seem straightforward, but the events of the last twenty years of Jane’s life certainly demonstrate that what she and O’Reilly hoped would be a simple act of benevolence was a far more fraught proposition than either imagined.

Their decades-long miscommunication was rooted in specific cultural assumptions about gender, status, education, and the appropriate channels of power and authority. Jane and “her bishop,” despite being united in devotion to the Church, framed their arguments in a series of

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¹ JMS II to HDS II, n.d. [September 24, 1870], Box 86, Folder 2, SFP.
³ Patrick T. O’Reilly to JMS II, April 3, 1871, Box 28, Folder 1, SFP.
unspoken assumptions about each other. These assumptions reveal their specific understandings of their own privileges and obligations, and those of others with whom they interacted. For O’Reilly, a non-elite cradle Catholic recently installed to manage a sprawling diocese with insufficient funds and personnel, assumptions about Jane’s status and gender guided his interactions with her. His belief that he knew best what his diocese needed often conflicted with Jane’s claims to a more intimate knowledge of the area and its population. Jane’s limited and particular experience with the Church shaped her assumptions about how money and power flowed, and her privileged upbringing shaped her understanding of her own influence, sometimes leading to disastrous consequences for her relationship with O’Reilly.

In the marriage and death of so many friends and members of her family, Jane saw the shrinking of the social world in which and for which she had been raised. Rather than pulling her from her familial and social duties, her conversion to Catholicism had given her the happiness and peace of mind necessary to engage fully in those duties; in their absence, she believed her faith would give her some further purpose in life. In looking to busy herself more completely with Church-related benevolent activities, she hoped to enact the usefulness her mother and Aunt Catharine had hoped to see for her, albeit not in the church they imagined. Jane, however, lacked the support – social and financial – of a spouse or living parents, and it remained to be seen how exactly she would live the benevolent life.

Female converts to Catholicism engaged in a wide variety of benevolent activities that mirrored those of their Protestant friends, with activism shaped as much by their elite backgrounds as their newfound faith. But the opportunities for growth and female benevolent influence were far greater in the Catholic Church in America than in the benevolent realms Jane and her friends had been raised. While its membership in the United States grew by leaps and
bounds, the Church’s institutions lagged behind, lacking personnel and infrastructure. To a woman like Jane, whose social and intellectual background gave her access to power, money, and a deep well of status-based self-confidence, the Church presented an opportunity to be useful in the ways she felt were most important. With her interest in education and a previous background in teaching, Jane directed her Catholic benevolent energies into the foundation of a school in Stockbridge with an established group of sisters in charge.

For members of the hierarchy, in America and in Rome, prominent converts like Jane were a mixed blessing. Their money and status held the potential to do great good, and some like Father Isaac Hecker warmly embraced their contributions to a Church that needed money and assistance during a stage of rapid institution building. Moreover, the Church endeavored to hold up prominent converts like Jane as symbols of the compatibility of Catholicism and American life – evidence of Catholic respectability. In this situation, the irresistible force of the Catholic Church, in the form of Bishop Patrick O’Reilly, encountered the immovable object of elite white New England privilege, in the form of Jane Minot Sedgwick II. For years, O’Reilly and Sedgwick wrote back and forth over the establishment of the school, with the tenor of their letters always remaining deferential, but with caustic notes at times. Each insisted that the other was hindering the foundation of the school.

One particular aspect of Jane’s experience as a woman shaped her interactions with O’Reilly and Michael Carroll, her local parish priest. Parallel to her struggle to establish a school, Jane engaged in a protracted battle over her financial affairs with William Minot III, her cousin’s son who assumed control of her trust. Existing financial documents and Will’s own letters indicate that his bookkeeping of her accounts was sloppy at best and dishonest at worst. Jane was concerned at his dishonesty, of course, but lived with a more general anxiety about her
financial situation stemming from the legal and cultural forces that prevented her from controlling her own money. In both worlds, Jane faced individuals and structures that stripped her of control. Though the anti-Catholic rhetoric about priests controlling and corrupting women was strong, Jane’s experiences, and those of Adelaide O’Sullivan, show that the secular Protestant world was just as invested in controlling women, though far less invested in supporting them.

In order to gain and maintain what little control she could, Jane worked to collect information about her financial situation and secure allies who had the power to do what she could not: influence and control those who sought to control her. In the case of her personal finances, this meant depending on her brother Hal, whose legal expertise, family connections, and gender meant he could protect her money. In the case of her benevolence, however, Jane could not depend on Hal, whose influence did not extend to the Church. Instead, Jane leveraged the privilege she did have – her social status and connections – to find powerful men in the Catholic hierarchy who could bring influence to bear on her bishop, her priest, and the various women religious she attempted to engage.

Throughout these twenty years, Jane’s dependence on her circle of convert friends only grew. Separated from her family by death and social circumstance, she leaned on her friends as many unmarried women of her position did. The dependence on her friends went beyond similar social backgrounds. As Jane’s investment in her project deepened, she struggled at times to navigate the channels of power in the Church, and in her frustration, sought guidance and consolation from her convert friends. In her estimation, they were the only people in the world who could understand her experiences and give her guidance. Just as Cheery had helped her navigate her meetings with Father Francis, and Hecker had helped her and Emma Cary bridge
their disagreement over the gift of a relic, these friends offered their thoughts and support as Jane struggled to understand the motivations of the bishop and the sisters she hoped to attract to Stockbridge. This support was vital for Jane, who suddenly found herself in a situation where her Sedgwick name could not smooth away all of the obstacles.

The establishment of the school was not Jane’s first foray into Catholic benevolence, or indeed benevolence of any variety. Her family viewed her as someone passionately committed to ending whatever injustice had caught her attention at the moment, be it a personal or systemic injustice, and had long encouraged her to find “usefulness” in benevolence as an antidote to her physical and mental ailments. The women in her family saw benevolence as a worthwhile pursuit on its own terms, not simply as something to be done until or in lieu of marriage and motherhood. During Jane’s early adulthood, her favored Uncle Charles encouraged her in her admiration for Lydia Maria Child’s abolitionist activities, allowing his own opinion to be altered by his niece’s strenuous support of Child. Moreover, Jane Senior encouraged her daughter’s pursuit of benevolent activities during the period of time when many of those in her age cohort looked towards marriage. In response to a letter wherein Jane expressed approval of the actions of Abby Hopper Gibbons, another prominent abolitionist and prison reform advocate, her mother mused on the personal fulfillment she had found in benevolent activities.

You are quite right in believing a life like that of Mrs. Gibbons’ to be the most certain source of happiness – when I was a young girl I had a strong taste for such occupations as she follows & though marriage & its domestic cares have changed the direction of my mind, I can truly say that I have had no such perfect serenity in my subsequent experience as I then enjoyed.

4 Charles Sedgwick, *Letters from Charles Sedgwick to His Family and Friends* (Boston: Privately Printed, 1870), 217. The letter is misattributed to JMSI.
5 JMSI to JMSII, n.d. [1846?], Box 85, Folder 28, SFP.
There is no indication that Jane’s status as a single woman was a deliberate political statement like that made by women of similar backgrounds profiled by Lee Chambers-Schiller. These women, she argued, consciously decided not to marry after “a rigorous assessment of the marital institution that found it wanting and in conflict with female autonomy, self-development, and achievement.” Still, statements of approval like this one from Jane Senior, whose admiration and approval meant most to Jane, undoubtedly encouraged Jane as she moved to devote her life more fully to benevolence after her mother’s death.

Her decision to pursue benevolence in the form of education was undoubtedly influenced by the examples surrounding her in family life. Her mother and Aunt Catharine had helped run a school in the basement of All Souls in New York, and her Aunt Charles ran a well-respected school for girls of status in Lenox throughout much of Jane’s life. Even as she saw it as a test of her own mental fortitude and ability to independently earn money, Jane spoke of her time teaching in Norfolk as a benevolent action, bringing a good education to children whose financial status could not otherwise make up for the geographical isolation into which she believed they had been born. Upon her return from Norfolk, she extended that benevolence to Cheery’s “charity school” in Brooklyn under the auspices of Father Varela, one of her first intimate experiences with poor and working-class Catholics.

Much of what took place between Jane, her bishop, her priest, and the sisters indicates that they all struggled with the idea of benevolence enacted by a woman of status who was not wealthy. Jane was a propertied woman, but with her money held in trust, and lacking a husband or supportive parents, she was alone, and very restricted in her abilities to give. Unable to give

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generously in her lifetime, Jane attempted to make her benevolent mark after her death by leaving money to the causes she supported. Even here she faced judgment and resistance, and a letter from her brother suggests the social pressures she navigated as she decided how to engage in Catholic benevolence.

When writing her will, she wanted to leave $10,000 to the House of the Good Shepherd in Boston, with the possibility of it being used to open one closer to Berkshire County. Persons unknown criticized her for this choice of bequest, and she wrote to her brother and sister-in-law for support. Setting aside the object of her benevolence, which he felt was a “noble one,” Hal explicitly defended his sister’s right to give money as she pleased: “I think the right to dispose of one’s means, according to our conscientious convictions of right, is quite indisputable.” Netta, he noted, “most spontaneously and cordially justified your right to act entirely according to your own judgment without comment or criticism from others.” While Hal and Netta never felt any great sympathy for Jane’s religious choices, they nonetheless supported her right to do what she wished with her own property, a view not supported by law or custom, even in the 1880s. Ten years earlier, Jane had given her brother power of attorney, and this statement suggests that she was right to place her trust in him. This trust would prove important later in her life, when others sought to gain control over her finances, and dismissed the idea that Jane had the right to “dispose of [her] means” as she saw fit.

But it was not a lack of money or financial freedom alone that caused Jane to hesitate as she considered a life of benevolence. Perhaps knowing that her ability to donate was limited,
both legally and practically, she considered the gifts she could provide through her labor working in association with others. Still, she hesitated to commit herself to something where others would depend on her, suggesting a complex understanding of her own independence:

There might be, however, very serious, perhaps insurmountable, obstacles to my joining any association of the kind - being of so exceedingly nervous a temperament, and having so little strength, so many invalid habits, etc. . . it is very doubtful whether I should succeed. 10

Neither Jane nor her family ever gave an explicit reason for her decision to remain unmarried, apart from her mother’s oblique references to her peculiarities as a source of deprivation in her life. It is not unlikely, however, that she may have believed her mental and physical infirmities made her unsuitable for marriage. In marking out “some plan of life for [herself],” Jane found that the same things that prevented her from performing her domestic duties to their fullest might also prevent her from performing benevolent duties in the world.

Still, these problems were not new; Jane had long been “of so exceedingly nervous a temperament” with “so many invalid habits,” and had worked to find a life compatible with those conditions in the hope that regular activity might eventually alleviate them. When presented with the opportunity to chart a new path in life, she presented a clear picture of the unavoidable obstacles in her path but determined that, in the end, “there can be no harm in trying.” If she met with no success, she still had a plan: “I shall try to go back to Rome and endeavor to save my own soul at least, which is all that God has given in my charge.” 11 In the end, she would indeed return to Rome, many times, and work to save her soul. But she also labored at one goal of benevolence for nearly twenty years, buoyed by supportive convert friends, until it finally came to fruition a few years before her death.

10 JMSII to ITH, August 31, 1859, Box 27, Folder 11, IHP.
11 JMSII to ITH, August 31, 1859, Box 27, Folder 11, IHP.
Over the period of a few years, beginning in December 1858, Jane lost her sister, mother, nephew, brother-in-law, and her family home. Just as she began to find her feet again and look for a new source of occupation, the Civil War threw the country and her family into turmoil, and her trips to Rome took on a greater importance. She discussed McClellan’s tactics in letters with her family, recognizing that “all our financial affairs must depend upon our military success.”

Her trips to Rome were taken primarily to save her and the family money, as it was cheaper for her to live there than in America, and her finances were already burdened by a debt she had inherited from her mother. Though Jane spent most of the 1860s traveling between Stockbridge, New York, Boston and Rome, she remained connected to the project in which she had invested herself before the dissolution of her family - the construction of the church in Stockbridge. But by the latter part of the decade, after the turmoil of the war and the financial instability it brought to her family, she had moved on to a new, related project: the establishment of a school at Stockbridge or, failing that, at West Stockbridge.

In the late 1860s, when Jane began to seriously consider the establishment of a school, Stockbridge and West Stockbridge were mission churches, ministered to by Father George Brennan, the pastor at North Lee. Jane’s interaction with the Church hierarchy in this initial attempt to establish the school is instructive, because it demonstrates how much her approach to benevolence remained rooted in the elite Protestant culture of her birth. When Father Brennan proved unreceptive to Jane’s idea for a school, Jane petitioned the bishop at the time, John Joseph Williams, in Boston. When Williams failed to give Jane satisfaction, she continued up the chain. While in Rome during the Civil War, she had become acquainted with Alessandro Barnabò, the Cardinal Prefect of the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, and it was Barnabò

12 JMSII to HDSII, n.d. [early 1860s], Box 86, Folder 2, SFP.
she called upon when frustrated by Williams. The documents that remain do not explicitly speak to her concerns, but the general impression given is that Jane accused Father Brennan of some kind of financial impropriety. When Barnabò inquired with Williams, he responded that Brennan promised to be more careful with money in the future but blamed the issue on the pre-existing debts at the churches he had recently come to manage.

The problem of debt and income generation was certainly not one Brennan would have been able to escape in a different part of the country. In the late 18th and 19th century, American Catholic clergy struggled to generate income not only for their own salaries but also for the construction and upkeep of church buildings, as well as the institutions of charity that grew over the course of the 19th century. Several factors unique to America influenced the ability of clergy to raise the necessary funds. Firstly, there was a general lack of wealthy parishioners who could be called upon to fund major projects or even day-to-day expenses, unlike in Europe. The presence of wealthy Catholics in Europe also meant that many poor and working-class Catholic immigrants were unaccustomed to making financial contributions. Both of these factors would have affected Brennan’s ability to manage the debt of his parish.

Several approaches arose to fund American churches, none without difficulty or controversy. The establishment of both weekly and subscription offertories in the Early Republic helped pay for building debts, as did the practice of pew rents, which were common by mid-century but condemned by Rome and two Baltimore Councils. The other option for the priest of an indebted parish was to seek help abroad from something like the Leopoldine Society or the

13 In English, the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, hereafter the Propaganda. The name of this congregation was changed to the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples in 1982; JMSII to HDSII, March 9, 1862, Box 86, Folder 2, SFP.
14 Silas Chatard to JMSII, 1868, Box 32, Folder 27, SFP.
French Society for the Propagation of the Faith, though fascination with the exotic meant that Europeans were more interested in donating to “frontier” missions.\textsuperscript{16} Jane herself had taken advantage of European charity when she met some women at the Vatican who later agreed to donate some furnishings for St. Joseph’s, which had just been built.\textsuperscript{17} Jane’s involvement in the building of the church had included a significant amount of charity work, but it is not strange that Brennan would place some blame for the indebtedness of the parish on Jane herself, even if this was not stated in the communication from Williams. We have no way of knowing who was “telling the truth” here, but Jane’s accusation of priestly financial impropriety would not be her last, nor would her connection to the indebtedness of the parish be forgotten. American Catholicism may not have had the wealth that European Catholicism had to work with, but Jane’s presence as woman of status intimately involved in church operations made her a target in several ways.

In an interview with Cardinal Barnabò following Williams dismissal of her charges, Jane expressed that she felt “pain” at the appearance that she was “acting against [her] Bishop,” but Barnabò told her this must be borne for the “good of religion.” She told Barnabò that although she had made this accusation against Brennan at the urging of other priests who told her it would be wrong \textit{not} to come forward, it was clear that Williams considered the matter closed, and she wished to withdraw her complaints. She also asked Barnabò to refrain for the time being from helping her with her plans for the school since Bishop Williams was clearly “irritated” with her.\textsuperscript{18} While he could refrain from contributing to the discussion over the school, Barnabò told

\begin{flushend}
\textsuperscript{16} Oates, \textit{The Catholic Philanthropic Tradition in America}, 1-5.
\textsuperscript{17} JMSII to HDSII, March 9, 1862, Box 95, Folder 8, SFP.
\textsuperscript{18} JMSII, “My conversation with Card. Barnabo on the subject of my charge against Rev. G Brennan &c,” n.d., Box 32, Folder 21, SFP.
\end{flushend}
Jane that there was no way to stop the investigation of Brennan, regardless of what she or the bishop wanted, as a formal inquiry had already been initiated.

The eventual outcome of the inquiry was the worst possible one for Jane: Williams successfully kept Brennan in his position, perhaps because the dearth of priests at the time made his behavior less important than his ability to minister to a large geographical area.\(^9\) This situation, however murky, helps us understand Jane’s excitement and relief at Bishop O’Reilly’s appointment, removing her from direct contact with Bishop Williams, though Stockbridge continued under the ministry of Father Brennan. Though she expressed pain at the appearance of acting against her bishop, she did not express regret for her actions, for in this case, she felt it was her right and obligation to go over Brennan’s head, and later the bishop’s, as it was a case of potentially serious financial malfeasance.

Jane was not, however, overstating the matter when she wrote that the bishop’s consecration could throw her affairs into crisis. Unlike Sarah Peter, Jane could not afford to simply donate the money required for the establishment of a school. Her inability to produce a lump sum would remain a point of contention and misunderstanding between her and the bishop for years to come. Instead, to fund her project, Jane needed to make savings here and there, including living in Europe again if that would save money. As a result, O’Reilly’s consecration affected the future of her living situation.\(^{20}\) There is no record of their conversation, but sources suggest that they did in fact meet and come to some agreement on future benevolent activities. Jane changed her will in December 1870, adding O’Reilly as co-executor with her brother. In this will, Jane left $17,000 to her family members, primarily her brother and her namesake niece,

\(^{19}\) JMSII, “My conversation with Card. Barnabo on the subject of my charge against Rev. G Brennan &c,” n.d., Box 32, Folder 21, SFP
\(^{20}\) JMSII to HDSII, November 23, 1870, Box 96, Folder 7, SFP.
$500 to Addie O’Sullivan, $100 to her mother’s former domestic servant, and $10,000 to the House of the Good Shepherd in Boston. The remainder of her estate, she designated to O’Reilly and his successors.\(^{21}\)

Jane rewrote and added codicils to her will many times between 1870 and her death, and it is important to note that wills remained her primary avenue of benevolent giving throughout most of her life, given that her property remained in trust. Unlike Sarah Peter, who could simply donate funds for a convent, Jane could not donate any more than what she could sacrifice out of the income provided for her by her cousin. Instead, she aimed to fully enact her benevolence after her death. Her inability to simply give the money needed during her life led her to urge for changes in parish administration and increased sacrifice on the part of the bishop, local priests, and potential sisterhoods. Her conflict with Brennan, and her suggestion that he was wasting money, suggests she had looked to the Lee parish coffers to subsidize her school. When later priests refused her the use of parish money in a similar fashion, Jane continued to leverage the support of prominent members of the hierarchy to which her elite status granted her access, first with her bishop, and then with cardinals and other Vatican personages, just as she had done when thwarted by Father Brennan.

O’Reilly, for his part, seems to have assumed that Jane’s status as a highly-educated elite woman meant that she had significant monies at her disposal. His letters suggest he made two significant assumptions that shaped his interactions with her throughout their relationship. The first was that Jane was as wealthy as her name suggested. Certainly she was not ever in danger of the poorhouse, but her father had died when she was a child, after several years of bad business dealings, and her branch of the family simply did not have the wealth of the other branches.

\(^{21}\) JMSII will, December 27, 1870, Box 32, Folder 28, SFP.
Moreover, she had far less control over her money than O’Reilly presumed. His letters often suggest he believed she was simply unwilling to give him more money, but her correspondence with her brother and her cousin Will Minot III reveal that even though it was a good income, Jane was still living on a fixed income, and one that could be reduced at any time without her consent. In addition, it is important to remember that one of Jane’s motivations in going to teach in Norfolk was that she needed to know she could provide for herself if the situation arose. Now in middle age, often ill and using a wheelchair, Jane doubted she had the physical ability to earn money, and divesting herself of her income while still alive was risky.

The arguments made by Jane, Bishop O’Reilly, Father Carroll, and related friends and family members about money, gender, and power demonstrate the messy lifelong process of conversion. Jane elected to be baptized into a new faith community, but that water did not wash away her old understandings of the world and how it operated, even as she pointedly and repeatedly referred to herself as being part of that community. Over the course of the last twenty years of her life, Jane attempted to blend the goals and methods of the New England benevolent elite with those of the Catholic Church. At times, this resulted in miscommunication and conflict when long-standing assumptions came into conflict. More importantly, Jane’s experience revealed and exacerbated the tensions and fault lines that already existed within each of her two worlds. Often, this was in situations where the two systems were in accord with each other over issues of gender, and Jane’s feelings of powerlessness were magnified when she faced similar flavors of patriarchy in each world, even as the men in each world judged their counterparts in the other to be flawed patriarchs.22

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22 In pointing to structural similarities between cultures usually taken to be contradictory, I take inspiration from Nancy Shoemaker’s work on North American contact in *A Strange Likeness: Becoming Red and White in*
Despite the support of the bishop, establishment of a Catholic school was not simple, and over time, old obstacles became entrenched while new complications arose. The basic elements needed for the school’s establishment were money and personnel. The money question led to several long-standing disputes between Jane and her bishop: How much money was needed at the start? How much money was needed for long-term operations? Who should provide that money and how? The question of personnel was deeply related to money. Which religious order should run the school? Would they come? How much money would they require? Whose approval would they need?

The most basic problem for Jane was that she simply could not donate all the money necessary to found the school in one lump sum. Moreover, Jane initially believed that the school’s funding should be a shared responsibility. She sought to compensate for her own financial restrictions by using money from the parish coffers to fund the school. Much to her dismay, the churches in Stockbridge and West Stockbridge were perpetually in debt. One way she sought to remedy this was to alter the composition of the parish itself by redrawing the boundaries to include wealthier parishioners. There were still not enough priests to go around in the diocese, many serving multiple towns, so most parishes included several towns. At the time of O’Reilly’s installation, Father George Brennan, based in North Lee, also served mission churches in Stockbridge and West Stockbridge, the neighboring industrial town.\footnote{Eighteenth-Century North America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).}

Despite Jane’s belief that rearrangement would provide a solution to the funding of the school, O’Reilly repeatedly rejected the notion, stating the following spring: “no one can have the spiritual interest of the children of my diocese more at heart than I; yet, I cannot do all that I...”\footnote{In writing of the period, Stockbridge was often differentiated as “Old” Stockbridge.}
desire for them.” He was planning to divide the Lee parish, but he had no firm timeline or idea about how that division would occur, nor would any division produce the result she wanted. He said that was perfectly willing to support the establishment of a sisterhood in either Stockbridge or West Stockbridge, provided that there was money to support the sisters and their school. Throughout this correspondence, O’Reilly avowed his “support” for the project, but never seems to have meant financial support.24

A week later, the timeline for dividing the Lee parish became much firmer. West Stockbridge was about to dedicate its new church, and Father Brennan had asked the bishop to “take the missions outside of Lee off his hands.” O’Reilly’s decision cannot have pleased Jane.

I shall be obliged, therefore, notwithstanding the scarcity of priests, to appoint a resident pastor at one of the Stockbridges. I think West Stockbridge will be the more eligible place. This may affect your plans to a certain degree; and I felt it a duty to let you know my contemplated arrangement.25

While Jane strongly desired a resident priest in Stockbridge, she cannot have been surprised at O’Reilly’s decision to install one at West Stockbridge instead. West Stockbridge had a long history of industrial activity, including extensive marble quarrying and iron mining, and its Catholic population had swelled in the 19th century.26 It absolutely made sense to install a resident priest in West Stockbridge and have him serve Stockbridge as a mission. Such a decision did not affect her ability to fund a school either way, nor did it satisfy her desire for full-time access to a priest in her hometown.

24 O’Reilly to JMSII, April 3, 1871, Box 32, Folder 28, SFP.
25 O’Reilly to JMSII, April 11, 1871, Box 32, Folder 28, SFP.
Jane forged ahead with her plans for a Catholic school nonetheless. Even as the funding remained elusive, she worked to solve the other issue: who would run the school? O’Reilly’s papers suggest that the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth were an early choice, a rapidly-growing American order following the Rule of St. Vincent de Paul, founded in Bardstown, Kentucky in 1812. Soon, however, she moved on to the order that she would end up spending ten years trying to persuade: the Sisters of St. Joseph Carondelet. Originally invited by the bishop of St. Louis to open a school for deaf children in 1836, they had grown rapidly, and by 1860 had established their own “American” constitution and central government, separating themselves from the motherhouse in France. They focused on primary education, operating 175 schools by 1920, though they also ran hospitals, orphanages, women’s colleges, and special schools for the deaf.

At the close of 1871, she secured one thing that was vital in the process of founding the school: consent from O’Reilly: “I hereby give my consent to the reception of the sisters of Nazareth; or any other approved sisterhood that may suit the wants of the people of Stockbridge parish. I have no doubt that they will be suitably provided for by you and the good people of Stockbridge.” With two sentences, O’Reilly gently asserted his power over Jane, and reminded her of her obligations. Without O’Reilly’s consent, no group of sisters could or would settle in the Stockbridge parish. With his last sentence, he reminded her that the cost of funding any sisterhood remained her responsibility; she could fund it herself, or get the members of the parish to fund it, but it would not be the responsibility of the diocese of Springfield. O’Reilly’s consent

29 O’Reilly to JMSII, December 17, 1871, Box 32, Folder 28, SFP.
in 1871 is important to remember, however, because ten years later, he and Jane would still be arguing over whether he’d made his “decision” about the school, suggesting that each saw a different role for O’Reilly in the process.

The financial implications of parish boundaries continued to bedevil Jane and her bishop, and he often discussed the issue with her in letters. Changing boundaries was not simply a matter of moving figures around on a balance sheet. O’Reilly also had to negotiate conflicting egos. Were he to re-combine parishes in a particular way that would deprive one priest of a particularly wealthy set of parishioners, he faced a rebellion that he’d heard of through the rumor mill: “Fth. Laughran heard Fth. Brennan say he would give up his parish if [South] Lee were taken from him.”\(^\text{30}\) As the earlier situation with Father Brennon showed, keeping priests happy was important as they were scarce, and their petulance and even financial misdeeds could be overlooked if it would keep them in their churches. While waiting for a decision on parish boundaries, Jane established and funded a small school at the West Stockbridge church, though not a full-time school staffed by women religious.\(^\text{31}\)

Father Laughran’s death in March 1874 threw further doubts on the future of the parish. In Rome again, Jane received a letter from O’Reilly in which he stated that both parishes were in debt owing to Father Laughran’s poor money management and “[trusting] overmuch the honor and honesty of many who deceived him.” Jane’s own church in Stockbridge came in for particular criticism:

You know that I was obliged to advance money $825 last Fall, to meet some demand on Old Stockbridge church: since then I have lost more to the same church, and I have not received any of the original loan. I am grieved to state that many matters have not been

\(^{30}\) O’Reilly to JMSII, October 15, 1873, Box 32, Folder 29, SFP.
\(^{31}\) Father Michael Carroll to JMSII, August 25, 1875, Box 32, Folder 29, SFP.
carried on in your native parish, in a manner to suit my strict ideas of business. I hope by care and watchfulness things will be more closely seen to in the future.

That care and watchfulness was to be provided by Father Michael Carroll, “a young priest who will give satisfaction” in his new position as resident priest at West Stockbridge and attending the Stockbridge mission church. O’Reilly noted that the small school, about which Jane was “always so solicitous,” still carried on, but he could provide no promises for the future. Carroll’s presence, far more than O’Reilly’s, would prove vexing to Jane in her quest for permanent Catholic education in Stockbridge.

By September, O’Reilly felt Carroll had begun to get his parish on a path to financial security, and reiterated his support for the new priest: “Perhaps he is not quite so polished a man as the late Father Laughran; but I think his executive ability and financial ability much better.” He referred again to the money he had loaned Father Laughran for the Stockbridge church’s debts, including a suit brought by a workman who claimed he had not been paid, and then mentioned he had received the money for the school she had sent through her brother. O’Reilly often repeated and juxtaposed these two thoughts in his letters to Jane. While Jane worried about funding Catholic education, O’Reilly saw countless parishes in debt throughout his diocese and a wealthy convert fiddling while Rome burned. This tension – between elite donors with pet causes and diocesan and parish administrators with heavily-indebted parishes – flares up throughout O’Reilly and Carroll’s correspondence with Jane.

Jane continued to search out a group of women religious willing to move to Stockbridge and take up teaching duties among the children there. Despite O’Reilly’s earlier consent which

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32 O’Reilly to JMSII, June 6, 1874, Box 32, Folder 29, SFP.
33 O’Reilly to JMSII, June 6, 1874, Box 32, Folder 29, SFP.
34 O’Reilly to JMSII, September 21, 1874, Box 32, Folder 29, SFP.
named the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, they seem to have been discounted rather quickly as a viable option, and Jane turned to the Sisters of St. Joseph Carondelet. Surviving letters from Mother Agatha, at the order’s headquarters in St. Louis, suggest Jane was nothing if not persistent: “I see, even, if we were inclined to forget our engagement, your indefatigable zeal would not allow us to do so.” Despite Jane’s persistence, the sisters would not come. Instead, Mother Agatha suggested that any attempt at founding a school wait until Jane was back in America. She noted “several motives in making this request,” but only spoke of one: that several sisters had recently died and the order needed some time to fortify their numbers before undertaking a new project.35

As the proposed school remained a pipe dream, Jane continued to monitor the progress of the small school in West Stockbridge, the one about which she was “always so solicitous.” While O’Reilly humored her with updates, Father Carroll seemed disinclined to answer many of her questions, which he saw as meddling. In August 1875, he wrote her a very detailed letter which opened: “I have received during last week your letter & in reply wish to state that the School has not been closed a solitary day since I have come to the parish except during vacation.” He went on to say that he did not know whether or not he would be able to keep the school open much longer, for the debts of the parish weighed heavily on him. The situation had become so bad that he faced legal action “on account of our church debts which I had no part in contracting yet have to pay them.”36

Even if not directly blaming her for the general debt of the parish, he forcefully stated that the school Jane established at the West Stockbridge church made up a significant portion of

35 Mother Agatha to JMSII, July 14, 1875, Box 32, Folder 29, SFP.
36 Carroll to JMSII, August 25, 1875, Box 32, Folder 29, SFP.
the financial drag on the parish. This financial burden could not, at the moment, be resolved by the everyday working class members of the parish, whom Carroll mentioned were still suffering from the effects of the recent depression. All he had to work with was what Jane gave, and he was unable to pay for teachers’ salaries, room & board, coal, and “repairs which as you know must be done in a school room where children have been for ten or eleven months.” He had $300 to accomplish all this for “the children were unable to contribute anything owing to the hard times.” He mentioned how much he would need for the upcoming year, but was careful to state that he was not asking more of her than her usual $300, just that he would “be grateful to anyone who helps us with our school,” hinting that Jane might find other benefactors among her circle of friends.37

Still, Carroll was supportive of Catholic education in theory, for he believed it could “save them from a corrupting world, for if our children are lost the next generation is lost & Catholicity suffers.” In this, he echoed many Catholic clergymen who believed separation from public schools was the only way to avoid the contamination of a Protestant-inflected curriculum. Yet Carroll felt that he was at the limit of his influence over the situation: “I bring to the school question my influence, my labor & what money I possibly can. This is all I can do & more than it God cannot expect of me.” Echoing O’Reilly’s statements, Carroll made it clear that the clergy in this diocese were not going to divert funds or actively fundraise for such a venture, a position from which they did not move.38

37 Carroll to JMSII, August 25, 1875, Box 32, Folder 29, SFP.
Jane was not satisfied with Carroll’s accounting of the school, and apparently demanded a further reckoning of exactly how he had spent the money each month. He provided that account, mentioning that several hundred dollars which she donated during the current year for the running of the school were in fact used to pay the debt owed to the school teachers for the prior year’s operations. He asked her to “make an heroic effort this year” to keep the school open through the following July, but admitted that it would probably need to be closed after that point. Instead, he gently suggested she provide money to pay back the significant debt on the Stockbridge church, the one she had been so involved in the construction of. He closed by providing her with a little perspective:

The times here are very dire I do not see how I can support myself as the works in West Stockbridge are very dull, men working on half time & getting but $1-50 per day & support a large family with that. Hoping you are well & wishing you every blessing.39

In most letters, Carroll and O’Reilly mentioned the relative poverty of the parishioners as a hint that general donations might perhaps be more useful than specific (and insufficient) donations for a school.

Despite Carroll and O’Reilly’s hints, Jane found herself unable to make larger donations to the parish, either for the establishment of the school or to help pay down the parish’s debt. To understand her contentious relationship with Father Carroll over money, we must look to her increasingly contentious relationship with the man who controlled her trust. For her health and in order to save money, Jane continued to spend a portion of most years in Rome, generally the winters. She had a group of friends surrounding her, and her brother’s eldest daughter Blossom visited for some time, but the distance from her brother and her cousin Will Minot III, the administrator of her trust, caused her great anxiety. Dependent on them for the management of

39 Carroll to JMSII, October 20, 1875, Box 32, Folder 29, SFP.
her money and its disbursement, she continued to fret over plans for the future, whether for her own travel or her benevolent efforts. In February 1880, for instance, unable to get a clear report of her expected income, she was unable to make plans to return to Stockbridge because she had no idea what money she had “to live on.” If the income from the rents was not sufficient to cover her living expenses in Stockbridge, then she would remain in Rome where she could live less expensively, but not knowing prevented her from making any decisions about her future plans.\(^\text{40}\)

Moreover, this uncertainty about what her brother and cousin would allow her meant that however heroic an effort Father Carroll wanted from her, she could not make long-term promises about money. Carroll begged Jane to send money through Will or Harry, and Jane in turn begged Harry and Will to carry out her financial instructions, even as she apologized to Harry profusely for asking him to do these things even as he had “much to attend to.”\(^\text{41}\) Jane Senior’s wealth had been placed in trust to shield it from her husband’s potential (then actual) financial mistakes, but for Jane, the trust system limited her financial autonomy, and therefore her ability to pursue her faith in ways considered normal for women of her class. Ironically, had she been married or even widowed, she might have had greater control over her fortune and its disposition. Had Jane simply lived the life of a single elite woman in Europe without a desire for philanthropy, she might not have felt these restrictions and her own futility as acutely. As it stood, the trust system prevented her from disposing of her money as she saw fit, even if her choices turned out to be “mistakes.”

At a fundamental level, Jane’s gender dictated her level of personal freedom, even though she was wealthy, educated, and well-connected. Carroll and O’Reilly’s assumptions about her

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\(^{40}\) JMSII to HDSII, February 20, 1880, Box 86, Folder 3, SFP; JMSII to HDSII, March 4, 1880, Box 86, Folder 3, SFP.

\(^{41}\) JMSII to HDSII, November 12, 1880, Box 86, Folder 3, SFP.
behavior were rooted in assumptions about class and status. To them, she was elite, and a former Protestant, and those identities determined her behavior. When she did not give them money, it was because she was being stingy, or because, as a convert, she did not understand the financial pressures that weighed upon the Catholic Church in America. These factors certainly contributed to Jane’s thoughts and actions, but so did the limitations placed on her by her gender. Certainly Jane might have found a way to sacrifice more of her income, which she later chose to do, but she had few liquid assets.

There was also the complicated issue of donor relations. By stepping into Catholic philanthropy, Jane stepped into a long-standing debate about the conditions under which the Church or an individual priest should accept a donation, and about how much control the donor should have over the disposition of her donation. That discussion was itself situated in the long and contentious history of lay control over church property in America. The grounds for controversy with Carroll had already been laid by Jane’s friend Margaret Kilduff, who had donated funds for a stained-glass window in the parish. The controversy around Kilduff’s window donation prompted Father Carroll to articulate, more strongly than ever before, the problems he had with those who were inclined to donate to his parish.

Though Jane’s letters to Carroll do not survive, his letters to her give some sense of the “controversy about the window given by Margaret Kilduff,” as Jane labeled one letter on the topic. He disagreed with her assertion that “a donation received must be appropriated according to the wish of the donor.” Instead, he argued that it must only be appropriated thusly if an explicit agreement existed between the church and the donor. While it is unclear whether there was no explicit agreement made at all or whether there was simply miscommunication, Carroll stated his desire to avoid all such agreements. He felt this practice of accepting gifts that were
“half equal” to carry out the project had sunk the parish into debt, implicitly blaming Jane for the financial straits in which he found himself, as a result of the incomplete funding of the construction of St. Joseph’s.\(^42\)

As to the accusation that he had appropriated Kilduff’s funds, Carroll stated that he had done no such thing, and if she did not want her donation to go into the general fund for the church, she could have it back any time she wanted. His phrasing, that Kilduff feared he would “appropriate that balance to his own use,” is striking, suggesting the depth of the mistrust between donors and the priest. More importantly, it suggests that Kilduff and Jane saw Carroll using the funds to pay off the parish’s debt, one that he had not created but was liable for, as his “own use.” This suggests Jane felt she had just as much a right to choose how money should be used in her parish as the designated male spiritual leader and parish administrator, and that her judgment was equal to, if not superior to, that of the leader.\(^43\)

Though Jane may not have been aware of it, her actions and views in this situation echoed a movement in Early Republican Catholic history now known as “trusteeism” In a period when there were more immigrant Catholics than priests to minister to them or buildings in which to hear Mass, lay trustees took on an important role in church governance. These trustees, similar to a contemporary parish council, were elected members of the lay community, and not only held parish property in trust on behalf of the community, but also incorporated their churches under local and state laws of incorporation, following the model of the Protestant congregations that surrounded them, and expecting a level of control over the temporal operations of the parish that infuriated priests and bishops. Though this model brought lay trustees into conflict with priests

\(^{42}\) Carroll to JMSII, July 23, 1877, Box 33, Folder 1, SFP.
\(^{43}\) Carroll to JMSII, July 23, 1877, Box 33, Folder 1, SFP.
and bishops periodically between independence and the Civil War, the period between 1815 and 1830 was the period of greatest conflict. As Patrick Carey has argued in his extensive research on trusteeism, though lay trustees modeled their systems off of the culturally-available systems in America, when accused of imitating Protestants by Catholic hierarchy, they drew on Scripture and church history to argue that their interpretation of church governance was sound. As Carey argues, their interpretation of the early Church was valid, and “supported the trustees' contention that what they were calling for in the American church was a recovery of the lay voice in the church to meet the new needs of a republican age.”

Before 1830, Rome had largely played the role of referee between American laity and clergy, at times limiting the power of local bishops as well as lay trustees. In appealing to Rome’s authority, Carey argues, American laity inadvertently increased and strengthened Rome’s ties to the American church. After 1830, changes in American and Roman concerns effectively snuffed out lay trusteeism by 1860. Firstly, American bishops officially opposed trusteeism through the Baltimore Councils, and their decisions were rubber-stamped by the Vatican. In 1829, for instance, Rome decreed that “the property of new churches must be incorporated in the name of the bishop.” Moreover, the composition of American Catholic laity changed, and Irish immigrants tended to take the side of the bishops unlike their French, German, and Anglo-American predecessors. On the Roman side, the Vatican grew increasingly ultramontane over the course of the 19th century, and particularly opposed to national Catholicisms. As Carey puts it: “trusteeism, perceived as a manifestation of ecclesiastical

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autonomy, had no chance of a favorable hearing in Rome.\textsuperscript{45} The system was effectively dead, and American priests and bishops had the Vatican’s imprimatur that financial control over parishes rested with them alone.

Jane, however, had no understanding of this background; her fear that Carroll would use Kilduff’s donation for his “own use,” and her suggestion that that would somehow be improper, makes it clear she had a different view of lay and clerical rights and responsibilities. As a result, Jane went over Carroll’s head and brought Bishop O’Reilly into this matter, and in responding to her demands that Carroll cleave to Margaret Kilduff’s wishes, O’Reilly said that if he were in Carroll’s place, he would give “Mrs. K” her money and “tell her to keep it.” Moreover, he said no layperson had the right to tell Father Carroll how to use money donated without condition, stating that it was “quite enough for priests to give an account to their Bishops about such monies,” and he resented the implication that Carroll was behaving dishonestly. He had little sympathy for Jane, who felt affronted by Carroll’s correspondence: “No priest who values his character will tamely submit to such imputation, and I do not blame Father Carroll for the letter he wrote you.”\textsuperscript{46} O’Reilly was correct in his inference; Jane did not trust Carroll, and she stated so explicitly, at least to her brother. She believed that the bishop’s hesitance over bringing the Sisters of St. Joseph to run a school came “from Fr. Carroll’s secret opposition to what he pretends openly to promote.”\textsuperscript{47} Moreover, these early interactions with Carroll continued the distrust of certain priests that Jane had exhibited with Brennan.

\textsuperscript{46} O’Reilly to JMSII, July 21, 1877, Box 33, Folder 1, SFP.
\textsuperscript{47} JMSII to HDSII, n.d. [1880], Box 86, Folder 2, SFP.
Jane and Margaret Kilduff were not without reason to suspect financial malfeasance or misappropriation of donated funds, however. Nineteenth-century American Catholicism did not lack for priests and bishops who sought to appropriate funds donated by the laity or earned by women religious for their own purposes. Historian James Kenneally documents numerous instances of bishops appropriating money from philanthropic ventures in their dioceses, including an instance where the Bishop of Maine appropriated $50,000 that had been donated to a convent in his diocese.\textsuperscript{48} Jane and her fellow female converts were, they felt, at even greater risk of having their wishes ignored because of their gender just as they were in secular matters. To Jane, Carroll and O’Reilly’s financial choices represented misplaced priorities, and possibly blatant mismanagement, and she did not hide that view. To O’Reilly and Carroll, the priorities needed to be paying down the parish’s debt, not establishing institutions that, while worthwhile, had the potential to incur even greater debt.

Jane, for her part, struggled to manage her own debts and obligations. She continued to spend winters in Rome, though sometimes her stay stretched late into the spring when she could not get any news from home about her income or where she might live for the season. Her letters from Rome continued to express great anxiety about her financial affairs, primarily their unpredictability. Of course, it would be ridiculous to state that Jane, in absolute terms, was in a difficult financial situation. Despite her fears as a young woman, she had not been forced to work for a living, which she saw as a blessing in her invalid condition. She kept a ladies’ companion, Mary Kearney, which was certainly a luxury, but as an invalid spinster, less of a luxury than it

\textsuperscript{48} James J. Kenneally. \textit{The History of American Catholic Women} (New York: Crossroad, 1990), Ch. 4, especially 47-50.
might have been for someone who had a husband or child to push her wheelchair and help her out of bed.

Even accounting for these luxuries, Jane ultimately lacked control over her financial decisions, and certainly was not free from the judgment and pressures of others. When she told O’Reilly and Carroll that she could not promise them money, she was not lying, from her perspective. Everything depended on what her cousin Will decided. From her perspective, the Bishop had one thing she did not have: the ability to make his own financial decisions. As a result, she suspected he was simply making the wrong decisions. It is vital to read Jane’s correspondence with local church hierarchy alongside her correspondence with the men in charge of her trust. Read alone, either set of letters suggests that Jane might simply be bad at figures, or even paranoid. Read together, these two bodies of letters suggest that Jane was right to be concerned about what other people were doing with her money. Moreover, for a woman who had long desired to know her own capacity for self-sustenance, lack of control over her own finances was rightly a source of great anxiety. The trust system had protected her married mother’s money, but as a single woman, it stripped Jane of financial freedom.

After William Minot III fully assumed control of the trust, Jane grew increasingly concerned about his accounting. One cause of distrust was that Jane believed Will reneged on promises, leaving her in a precarious financial position: “In spite of his repeated guarantee that I should have $4000 income Will has already cut me down to $3500 which to me with the engagements I have now undertaken is a very serious loss.” She was alarmed enough that she confided in her brother that she intended to “take advice (I mean in a quiet way)” because she was “alarmed about his mental condition” on account of the increasing sloppiness of his
accounting. When Father Carroll or Bishop O’Reilly asked her to give a guarantee of money in the future, Will’s control over her trust and his capricious nature meant that Jane could not give those guarantees.

Her concerns were compounded by Will’s unwillingness to give her complete accounts. He frequently gave her offhanded summaries of the state of her accounts, speaking as though he was doing her a favor – “I will not confuse your mind by giving a full account” – even as she continued to request a full account. In a letter of May 1878, he gave a forthright explanation of how society and the legal system itself enshrined the precarity of her financial situation.

I wish you would please have a little more faith in me than you have in the Church or any other incomprehensible institution! My ways are dark and inscrutable I admit - even as those of the goose who laid the golden egg. Better you may just as well accept the facts as they are & not endlessly disturb yourself with anxieties - They facts I am sorry to say are these - If I resolve to practice iniquities, no vigilance or enquiries on your part can prevent my taking a large portion of your little all - so that the only way for you to keep your peace of mind is to shut your eyes resolutely and believe that you have a trustworthy nephew!

In demanding full financial accounts from Will, and from O’Reilly and Carroll, Jane was attempting to exercise what limited agency she had over her personal finances. To her, the only way to have any control over her finances was to know them inside and out. Throughout this period of her life, she trusted her brother implicitly, and while she could not do anything about financial mismanagement herself, her brother could, but only if she knew that it had happened. When Will or Bishop O’Reilly refused to give Jane a full reckoning of their financial interactions, they took what was, to her, the only measure of control she had over her financial

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49 JMSII to HDSII, December 8, 1880, Box 86, Folder 2, SFP.
50 William Minot III (hereafter WMIII) to JMSII, May 7, 1877, Box 95, Folder 16, SFP.
51 WMIII to JMSII, May 29, 1878, Box 95, Folder 18, SFP.
freedom. In both situations, Jane began to look for outside help in the form of men to whom Minot, Carroll, and O’Reilly would have to listen.

In the early years of her attempt at Catholic benevolence, Jane primarily worked at persuading Bishop O’Reilly and Father Carroll to support her venture in spiritual, practical, and financial ways. Save a few letters to various organizations of women religious, she engaged with these two men nearly exclusively. In the late 1870s, however, Jane’s frustrations grew, and she adopted a new strategy for securing her goals, one that reflected her elite self-identification. She believed her dream for a Catholic school in Stockbridge was being blocked by her bishop and local parish priest. O’Reilly, she believed, simply refused to understand the importance of the school and appropriate funds, but most of her blame fell on Father Carroll, who she believed was using “underhanded” tactics to undermine her efforts. She saw the Catholic hierarchy much as she saw her own native social hierarchy, one in which those with status were to be afforded certain privileges and respect, especially by those below them. In order to advance her plan, she believed she would have to advance her request up the hierarchy, just as she had when thwarted by Bishop Williams and Father Brennan.

Jane’s correspondence in this period demonstrates a perception of power and hierarchy drawn from her own experiences in her secular, pre-conversion world. Much as Bishop O’Reilly based his perception of Jane’s ability to give money on other cultural and social markers of status without understanding the more complex intersection of gender, class, and marital status, Jane’s perception of the functioning of power within Catholic hierarchy similarly lacked nuance. To her, women religious rested at the bottom of the Church’s power structure, followed by priests like Carroll, then bishops like O’Reilly. Above O’Reilly stood monsignors and cardinals, and ultimately the pope. Jane, through her pre- and post-conversion connections, had access to
members of the hierarchy up to and including the pope, and she sought to use that access to effect the changes she sought in her own parish.

In July 1879, Sister Mary Agatha of the Sisters of St. Joseph Carondelet wrote to Jane and appeared to validate the idea that the sisters were at the mercy of the local clergy.

In regard to your zealous desire, of soon seeing a religious Com-ty established in your native parish, permit me to say, that if the good Bishop of Springfield and the worthy M Rector of Stockbridge write with you in applying for our Sisters, we shall make no difficulty, in sending a small colony of them according to the wants of the place.

While acknowledging that the impetus for the foundation of the “religious Com-ty” came from Jane, Sister Mary Agatha’s letter implied that there were more important authorities to be followed. However much Jane might presume she had the authority to make things happen, the sisters would not come without a clear invitation from the bishop and the pastor of the parish. Even as Sister Mary Agatha was writing to Jane to clarify why they could not immediately come, Jane had already moved on to a higher authority, and this escalation greatly angered O’Reilly and Carroll.52

Around 1878, Jane became acquainted with Giovanni Simeoni, who had been appointed Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda.53 Without Jane’s side of the correspondence, we cannot be sure exactly what she requested of Simeoni, but we can certainly assess the repercussions. Just as Jane received the above letter from Sister Mary Agatha, she received one from O’Reilly, who had been contacted by Cardinal Simeoni.

I had a letter from His Eminence. . . asking me to write a letter to the Propaganda, leaving the sum of $25,000, which you were to give for school purposes to W. Stockbridge, to

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52 Mother Agatha to JMSII, July 8, 1879, Box 33, Folder 2, SFP.
53 In English, the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, hereafter the Propaganda. The name of this congregation was changed to the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples in 1982.
my successor for that special purpose, in case of my demise or removal to same after
disease.\footnote{O’Reilly to JMSII, July 9, 1879, Box 33, Folder 2, SFP.}

On first glance, this might merely suggest that Jane wanted assurances that a later bishop would
not divert her money for another purpose, or more specifically, that Carroll would not persuade
O’Reilly’s successor to allow him to divert the money. Her role in the “Kilduff affair” certainly
suggests that she was a firm supporter of lay control over donations, and that she had little trust
in Father Carroll.

O’Reilly continued, however: “It may not be generally known, but I’m sure his Eminence
knows it, that American Bishops make their wills, immediately after their consecration,
providing for all contingencies of this kind.”\footnote{O’Reilly to JMSII, July 9, 1879, Box 33, Folder 2, SFP.}
Certainly Simeo
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did know this, and his
willingness to write such a letter suggests that Jane persuaded him that his imprimatur was
necessary to protect her money. While this certainly conveys her distrust in Father Carroll, and
possibly O’Reilly as well, it also suggests a more generalized distrust of a male-based legal and
financial system. If O’Reilly had already made a will that would provide protections for Jane’s
bequest, Jane may still have believed that a letter from the Propaganda was necessary to properly
secure her money after her death. After all, her interactions with William Minot III had made it
abundantly clear to her that she had little to no power when it came to her finances, and she had
endeavored to gain as much knowledge as possible and involve as many (male) people as
possible in order to make it harder for her wishes to be disregarded.

The fact that that Jane had linked him to some financial impropriety in the eyes of the
head of the congregation that was ultimately in charge of American Catholicism seems to have
made O’Reilly more brazen. His writings from this point on were increasingly defensive and
accusatory, suggesting Jane failed to understand the Church, its ways, and its needs. Jane, in turn, increasingly saw herself as a defender of the Church, protecting the (poor) Catholics of the Berkshires from small-minded, profligate priests and a bishop who was well-meaning but overwhelmed and out of touch with the realities of his rapidly-expanding diocese.56

All parties in this debate endeavored to prove that they had the best interests of Stockbridge-area Catholics in mind by showing they understood the working and living conditions of the parishioners, who were generally Irish laboring families. O’Reilly began to use the poor state of the economy in Berkshire County to emphasize not only how impossible it was to fund a school out of parish funds, but also Jane’s responsibility for the straightened circumstances themselves.

I must tell you that until this year there was no work in Stockbridge. He declares that many of them were actually suffering for the necessaries of life; and that the revenue of the parish has been so poor, that he has been obliged to collect from door to door, the salary which he paid his assistant… I would remind you that you and Father Laughran are to blame for the debt incurred by the addition and repairs of the church.

He also sought to make clear his support of Carroll, the man he had installed to get the Stockbridge parish back into a position of financial health, should not have to suffer “others [going] among his people to collect… [interfering] with his efforts.” O’Reilly firmly rejected what he saw as Jane’s attempt to draw promises from him by threatening to give the money to someone else, and closed his letter with a remark that threw Jane’s own feelings of suffering into relief: “This Country, at least the Irish element of it, is in a state of excitement over the starvation in Ireland. I was sorry to learn that your health was so poor.”57

56 O’Reilly to JMSII, July 9, 1879, Box 33, Folder 2, SFP.
57 O’Reilly to JMSII, March 15, 1880, Box 33, Folder 3, SFP.
Jane, having managed to pay down her inherited debt by living abroad, was now able to offer more to the Sisters of St. Joseph, which she believed would quell O’Reilly’s concerns about the parish’s finances. Jane again asked the sisters to come, offering more money, this time with the explicit support of Cardinal Simeoni and Pope Leo XII. To her shock, the sisters again rejected the invitation, despite the important names attached to it, with little explanation of the reasons: “Various reasons oblige us, however, to respectfully beg leave, to decline accepting or undertaking the foundation contemplated by you.”58 The sisters had, in their previous communication, asked for a letter from Jane, O’Reilly, and Carroll, but Jane had supplied them with a letter from someone “more important.” Assuming that the Sisters’ most recent rejection was due to the lack of a direct invitation from O’Reilly, she wrote to request that invitation. When she did not hear from O’Reilly immediately, she interpreted his silence as a refusal to invite them – an indication that it had never really been about the money at all – and returned to Simeoni to plead her case. There is no indication that she thought the lack of an invitation from Carroll, the parish priest with whom the sisters would work, played any part in their rejection of her offer. Why should it, when she had the support of a Cardinal?

In the September of 1880, O’Reilly returned home from a vacation to find a series of letters from Jane, the last of which chided him for not responding promptly and stated that Cardinal Simeoni had taken over “the whole business about the sisters,” as O’Reilly put it. O’Reilly accused Jane fudging details about both the finances of the parish and her own magnanimity. He feared that her comments about him had been misleading and damaging, and considered them “matters of conscience” which she was obligated to explain. While he deferred to Rome, he was clearly upset Simeoni had written to the Sisters and invited them to come to

58 Mother Agatha to JMSII, June 23, 1880, Box 33, Folder 3, SFP.
Stockbridge without his knowledge. “I am not surprised that the Sisters did not avail themselves of the privilege,” O'Reilly noted, but said that he would happily invite the Sisters now that he had Sedgwick's promise of funds. When he invited them to Stockbridge, however, they declined again, and their letter to Jane on the subject was as enigmatic about the reasons for refusing the invitation as before: “We fully appreciate the preferences show by you for us - and regret that we cannot oblige you.”

A long draft of one of Jane’s letters to O’Reilly explains much about the refusal of the sisters to come to Stockbridge. Jane thanked him for his willingness to take charge of the money she was donating for the school, and disburse it as necessary. She was confused, however, at the explanation the bishop had given her for why the sisters would not come: that they had visited and found the facilities wanting, despite having visited them with her in 1877 and approving. She acknowledged, with some surprise, that the parish debt still stood at $17,000, but felt that was a separate issue now that she was able to offer a house and $600 a year to support the school, with a $25,000 bequest after her death. After all, she said, “No great things have ever begun on a great scale.” Instead, she believed the flaw in the plan lay with Father Carroll, who had sent her a letter.

It speaks for itself and I fear puts a stop to all further efforts on my part. If Fr. Carroll were really anxious for Sisters in the parish could he not have sent an answer to their respectful letters I write to him asking him to write them - His invitation as he is well aware being required according to the usual customs in the US he would naturally have either consented to write them or stated his objection…

Despite the invitation of bishops, cardinals, and the pope, Jane could not force the sisters to come, and she could not force Father Carroll to invite them. O’Reilly certainly had the power to

59 Mother Agatha to JMSII, October 26, 1880, Box 33, Folder 3, SFP.
60 Quoting the life of Mother Duchesne, which was in turn quoting Joseph-Marie, Comte de Maistre.
61 JMSII to O’Reilly, draft, n.d. [1880], Box 32, Folder 21, SFP.
force Carroll to acquiesce, and the fact that he would not exercise that power further frustrated her.

Nothing in Jane’s letters, or those of O’Reilly and Carroll, indicate the three were mindful of the changes happening with the Sisters of St. Joseph Carondelet in St. Louis, but some historical context can shed light on their hesitance to accept an invitation. Since the establishment of the house in Carondelet, just outside of St. Louis, in 1836, the Sisters of St. Joseph had gone from a small cluster of French sisters to “an eclectic band of German, French, Irish, and American-born sisters,” in the words of Carol Coburn and Martha Smith, who have written the most comprehensive examination of the Sisters of St. Joseph and their role in American history. Mother Celestine Pommerel, who came to the U.S. a year after the foundation, became mother superior in 1839, and over the course of nearly twenty years of her leadership, she actively recruited American sisters in order to stabilize and grow the small group and keep up with the teaching demands placed on them by the community. As they Americanized from within, they were also forced to adapt to American customs by the local community, as when their school for black children (slave and free) was forced to close following daily threats from crowds who claimed they were coming to “put [the sisters] out of the house.” Still, their successes were great, and Mother Celestine moved to expand beyond the diocese of St. Louis in 1847, sending sisters to Philadelphia, and by the late 1850s, they had a presence in virtually every region of the country. 62

As the community grew, Mother Celestine began preparations to centralize and separate the structure of governance, to allow the American community to function independently from the mother house in France. She died in 1857, but her successor Mother St. John Facemaz

continued her work through the divisive period of reorganization. Under the existing French constitution, the sisters in America were highly subject to the local bishop wherever they worked, who had the power to appoint the superior and control the daily activities of the sisters in his diocese. The new American constitution would change that organization to officially sanction what had been in practice to some extent during Mother Celestine’s period. The St. Louis house would function as the motherhouse for the congregation in America, with an elected female superior who would have authority over all the houses in the United States, though a series of provincial houses under the motherhouse’s authority would manage their own regional affairs. Many bishops with communities in their dioceses resisted this move to centralization, hesitant to lose authority to both a female superior and the Bishop of St. Louis, who would technically have ecclesiastical control as the bishop of the diocese where the mother house was located. Moreover, Mother St. John sought papal approbation as a subsequent step in reorganization, which would put the sisters under direct Vatican control and further limit the power of bishops.⁶³

In 1860, after voting to accept the new constitution, the sisters formally elected Mother St. John as the first superior general. The backlash from bishops was swift. They still did not have to allow the sisters into their dioceses, and many gave existing sisters an ultimatum: either separate yourselves permanently from the mother house and place yourselves under diocesan control, or pack up your things and go to St. Louis. The Carondelet sisters lost all of their houses and institutions in several major cities, including Philadelphia, and in many places some sisters acquiesced to the local bishop’s demands for separation while others, committed to general governance, left for St. Louis. These sisters were not alone in facing this “divide-and-conquer

tactic,” as Coburn and Smith term it, and it was why papal approbation was so very important as a shield from local meddling. After a long process, the Sisters of St. Joseph Carondelet received provisional papal approbation in 1863, a status which was made permanent in 1877. During that period, the sisters elected a new superior in 1872: Agatha Guthrie, an American-born convert to Catholicism.

Jane’s actions and their results reveal the differences in how she understood the power dynamics of the situation, and how the sisters understood them. The bishop was unwilling to invite the sisters, so Jane appealed to a Cardinal, assuming that the sisters would obey his requests over those of the bishop. When she finally gained the approval of the bishop as well, the sisters still refused to come because, Jane believed, they lacked an invitation from one last person: Father Carroll. That women religious and a lowly parish priest could scuttle her plans flew in the face of Jane’s understanding of authority, both her own and that of church hierarchy. Still, Jane believed that authority could be exercised here, and attempted to force O’Reilly to bring Carroll to heel by giving him an ultimatum, and threatening to “abandon the project” if she did not hear from him in 60 days. Given the sisters’ self-governing status and papal approbation, it might seem strange that they would refuse the cardinal’s request. They still needed local approval to establish a house, however, and given their history, and the experience of sisters in America more generally, the sisters chose to avoid situation in which they would be set up in direct conflict with the parish priest, if not the bishop himself. Just as Jane sought to assert what little control she had over her own situation, and gain more when possible, the Sisters

64 Ibid, 58-62.
65 Ibid, 64-5. Coburn and Smith also note that Mother Agatha often joked about her convert status, excusing her eccentricities with the remark, “It’s the Protestant in me.” When one sister unaware of her convert status remarked, “I think there is always something queer about converts, don’t you?,” Mother Agatha “deadpanned” the response, “Yes, I do.”
66 JMSII to O’Reilly, draft, n.d. [1880], Box 32, Folder 21, SFP.
of St. Joseph Carondelet were engaged in their own protracted battle for control, and refusing Jane was one way of asserting it.

Jane’s letter to O’Reilly remains only in draft form, and it is unclear if it was ever sent, but the fact that she would continue to approach the situation in this fashion shows us she still struggled to comprehend, or perhaps respect, the way that authority operated in the Catholic Church. Her actions indicate that despite her immersion in the faith, she not only clung to beliefs about her own importance and power as a woman of means, but more importantly to beliefs about the Catholic Church that she was raised with as an American Protestant in the Early Republic. Catholic men posed a danger to American society, it was argued, because they took orders from their priests, and ultimately from the pope. Catholics had no private judgement, no freedom of conscience, and were therefore incapable of participating in a democratic society. Yet here were sisters and a parish priest who were seemingly not bound to any higher authority within the Church that Jane could recognize, and in the case of the sisters, had a measure of democratic self-governance. Her approach to founding the school demonstrates that while she had joined the Catholic Church, she still did not understand it fully. If she had converted thinking that the power dynamics in her old world were the same as those in her new world, her stunning defeat by “lowly” priests and sisters certainly proved her wrong.

With nothing happening in Stockbridge to keep her in the United States, Jane returned to Rome, joined in the winter of 1880-81 by her convert friends Charlotte Dana and Anna Vernon. Then, in a fulfillment of a long-held desire, she was joined by her brother Hal, her sister-in-law Netta, and their children Ellery, Alick, and Jane’s namesake niece, Blossom, who was 23 at the time. She also met with Cardinal Simeoni informed him of what had happened with the sisters, at
least from her perspective. Simeoni wrote to O’Reilly, seemingly to chastise him, as did Jane, and O’Reilly’s response to Jane was swift and fierce. Claiming he had almost decided not to respond at all, given his anger, he changed his mind and wrote “to state that I pardon whatever may have been imprudently done or said by you, for I feel you did not intend any injury.” He thanked her for defending his character, but said he had no idea that he was well known enough abroad to need such protections, nor had he any idea why he should need defending: “for my conscience tells me I have done my duty.” He claimed to still have no firm idea why the sisters refused their invitation, having received no letters from them, but supposed it had something to do with the size of the house.

Having “forgiven” her at the outset of the letter, he proceeded to emphasize not only how badly she had damaged his reputation, but his view of why she had done such damage. He said that the tone of Simeoni’s letter made him think Jane had given the Cardinal an incorrect and undeserved impression of the him. “This is a very serious matter: women should be very cautious when speaking to such personages, especially about the Bishops of the Church. Again I repeat that I am sure you did not mean to do wrong; but we may unintentionally do others a great injury.” It is notable that to O’Reilly, her status as a convert did not matter, nor did her position of social privilege. Instead, O’Reilly’s explanation suggests he would have expected a similar situation to arise with any laywoman. Jane’s lack of understanding came not from her status as a convert, but her status as a woman, which placed her permanently outside the hierarchy and made it impossible for her to fully understand its operation.

67 HES to Teedy Sedgwick, February 27, 1881, Box 97, Folder 12, SFP; RCD Journal, Volume 52 & 53, 1881, Dana Family Papers, Schlesinger Library.
68 O’Reilly to JMSII, February 4, 1881, Box 33, Folder 4, SFP.
69 O’Reilly to JMSII, February 4, 1881, Box 33, Folder 4, SFP.
Sophia Ripley had once rhapsodized that Julia Metcalf was able to pass for a “born Catholic,” but no matter how much Jane learned to “pass,” O’Reilly’s comments suggested she would never be able to do what she wanted as an active member of the Church, nor should she. Whether a “born Catholic” or a convert, Jane was a woman, and to O’Reilly, to Will Minot III, and to the two worlds in which she operated, that was what mattered. Perhaps the purest published expression of the bishop’s view, Father Bernard O’Reilly’s *The Mirror of True Womanhood* (1876), was not a promulgation of a new ideology of Catholic womanhood but rather a reflection of American domestic ideals, reminding women that their proper “sphere” was the home, and warning against the dangers of idle hands and women’s rights. Much like the American trustees who argued for Scriptural support of their American-inflected systems of governance, O’Reilly grounded his arguments for American domestic ideals in Catholic readings of Scripture.

O’Reilly’s view certainly reflected the dominant ideal of Catholic womanhood in the 19th century, but that view was not uncontested. Isaac Hecker’s writings make it clear that he not only saw a fundamental equality of the sexes, particularly in the spiritual realm, but also believed women could and should give much to the public life of the church. His newspaper, *The Catholic World*, published female authors and translators with great regularity, and he dedicated significant effort to finding someone to establish a female community comparable to the Paulists, the missionary priest order he had founded. Sarah Peter was one of the women with whom he

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corresponded on this idea. Neither convert status nor national origin was a guarantor of Hecker’s position, as his close friend Orestes Brownson hewed more closely to Father O’Reilly’s views. Still, it helps us to understand Jane’s view of her own power and privilege within the Church to know that a close friend and spiritual adviser seemed to validate her actions. Regardless of Hecker’s thoughts, however, it was Bishop O’Reilly’s view of Catholic womanhood that ultimately determined Jane’s opportunities in the Diocese of Springfield, and his scolding of her seemed to settle the matter, or would have with a woman less stubborn than Jane.

While Jane had been licking her wounds in Rome, O’Reilly had been busy in the diocese – engaging the Sisters of St. Joseph to come teach in Chicopee, Massachusetts. This had enabled him to find out exactly how much it cost to have the Sisters of St. Joseph: a furnished house, with all energy costs paid, as well as $200 a year per sister. These figures certainly suggest that Jane’s “little house” and $600 a year were not sufficient to support the school she desired, but it also begs the question of why this information was not communicated any earlier. Had Jane known the amount of money necessary, perhaps she could have mustered it, but that may not have been what the sisters desired. Indeed, the lack of communication further suggests that the sisters’ hesitance and then refusal had been about money but also about the situation into which they’d be stepping, one in which there was a great amount of tension between their patron and the clergy under whose jurisdiction they would fall.

Satisfied that this information about the cost of the sisters had settled the question of Jane’s school for now, O’Reilly said he would do what he could to further her project, but

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73 ITH to Sarah Peter, December 15, 1857, Box 24, Folder 7, IHP.
74 O’Reilly to JMSII, April 11, 1881, Box 33, Folder 4, SFP.
reminded her “if we are not fishing we shall be mending our nets.” O’Reilly wrote to her of his “much praised & commented upon” address on the occasion of Garfield’s death, as well as the vast number of children he had confirmed in her parish. He seems to have been satisfied that the primary obstacle to the Sisters of St. Joseph was the money, because he was now confident they would come if Jane would “show them means of support.” Until then, and until she returned to the United States and could negotiate with the sisters herself, he felt there was nothing to be done.

Jane did not agree, and sent a further series of letters to O’Reilly. In response, he stopped prevaricating, and told Jane clearly and forcefully what he thought of her and the situation. She had accused him of still having come to no real decision on the schools. Perhaps she meant no decision as to whether he would force Carroll’s assent, but he said he had long since come to a decision:

Shall I repeat it? Well! it is that sisters shall come and schools be established in your native parish, whenever you give me or show me the means of doing so. If I understand the English language I cannot be more definite than this. Now! To be plain and definite, you have never shown me the means.

Moreover, he believed that she had an incorrect view of what could and should be expected of those who had consecrated their lives to the Church.

It is very pious and good to imagine that sisters should make good sacrifices for the love of God and religion; but, though I feel satisfied they would do a good deal for both of these motive, they must have something to eat and something to wear… Of course they object to the basement for [a] schoolroom.

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75 O’Reilly to JMSII, May 20, 1881, Box 33, Folder 4, SFP.
76 O’Reilly to JMSII, October 18, 1881, Box 33, Folder 4, SFP.
77 O’Reilly to JMSII, December 13, 1881, Box 33, Folder 4, SFP.
To Jane, carrying with her deep cultural understandings of Catholic religious life, believed that the sisters failed to follow what she understood to be their vow of poverty, just as Carroll had failed to follow her understanding of his vow of obedience. Certainly many bishops and priests in this period were willing to take the services of the sisters in their dioceses while withholding their wages, but perhaps O’Reilly’s situation in a poor, understaffed diocese gave him some sympathy for the sisters in the face of such demands.

In March 1882, O’Reilly received a letter from Jane in which she declared her intention to abandon the project altogether. He said that it was her choice to do what she wanted with her own money, but expressed that he was not surprised at her decision, and believed it to be the only one possible in this situation. “For when a person wishes to have the honor and credit of establishing a religious house, they should attend to it themselves, and not leave the work to be done by others.” He believed he should bear no blame for what had happened, and that Jane should think about her own actions.

I was under the impression that my permission to establish the school, and my moral support was all that was needed. I never withheld these. But I had too much to do to hire workmen and superintend repairs of houses and school rooms +c. This is not my business. I am sure the Pastor of Stockbridge would do this: but such work is not done for nothing in America, as you know full well.78

Certainly Jane knew that nothing was done for free in America, but she did seem to think that those who had consecrated their life to the Church should be willing to sacrifice. In her understanding of the Catholic world, the rules were different, and she charted a course based on those assumptions. O’Reilly’s blunt rebuke argued, in a sense, that whatever other rules existed, the church in America was of America, and he was more than happy to follow its rules.

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78 O’Reilly to JMSII, March 1, 1882, Box 33, Folder 6, SFP.
More so than in any previous letter, O’Reilly dispensed with other justifications and rested his argument firmly on the weight of his prerogative as bishop. Even if he had the funds to sacrifice for her pet project, why should her claim be any more worthy than those made by the dozens of other parishes in his diocese? He also pushed back against members of the Church hierarchy in Europe who failed to understand his local circumstances: “Some imagine that we do not push the matter of Catholic education in this Country, especially in New England. Those who talk so know nothing of our peculiar circumstances.” Those circumstances – the rapidly-growing Catholic population that was fast outpacing the available institutions and was not rich enough to support the institutions it needed – led O’Reilly and his fellow priests and bishops to make difficult but important choices: “we build churches first to keep our people from going to Protestant churches, and when we can we build school houses.”79 O’Reilly was the bishop, and he knew what his diocese needed. To him, the matter was closed.

No letters between Jane and O’Reilly between March 1882 and August 1885 remain in Sedgwick papers, save for notes on two conversations she had with him in October 1882, following her return from Rome, and then in September 1883. In neither conversation did O’Reilly change his position on the school. Jane did not give up on her dream of a school following these conversations, however, but she did choose to go about it without the bishop’s involvement or awareness. The contents of these conversations, at least what Jane recorded of them, indicate why she felt competent to pursue her project without O’Reilly’s knowledge or permission, and why she remained so attached to this project in this place for these people.

In her 1882 meeting with the bishop, her first in many years, Jane again blamed the failure of the school on Father Carroll, and vicariously, on O’Reilly for not having forced him to

79 O’Reilly to JMSII, December 13, 1881, Box 33, Folder 4, SFP.
give his consent. She argued that had Father Egan or Father Laughran been in charge, the school would already have been in operation. She then moved to the topic of a permanent resident priest in Stockbridge, as Carroll was permanently assigned to West Stockbridge and attended Stockbridge from there with the help of a curate, Father William Hart.\textsuperscript{80} In all previous discussions of this general issue of parish boundaries and assigned priests, the stated goal had always been to form a wealthier parish. This time, Jane revealed a far more personal motive: “I said that it was now a serious question whether I should be exiled from my country and home because it was impossible for me to have here the privileges of my religion.”\textsuperscript{81}

Prior to this instance, Jane had made no mention of this issue in her decisions about where to live. Having lived abroad for part of every year for more than a decade, she had successfully paid down an existing debt by 1880, and so found herself with slightly more money and more possibilities as a result. Funding a school was one possibility, but so was returning home to live in Stockbridge, which she had not called home since the dissolution of her family in the early 1860s. A permanent return was not possible, in Jane’s opinion, because the Stockbridge church was not well attended enough for her to have access to the sacraments.

Going further, Jane said she “must now appeal to him for the poor people of his flock who were practically deprived of [the sacraments],” and laid out a case against Father Carroll and his curate Father Hart. She decried “Fr Hart's mode of hearing confessions - going away before the people at a distance or in the mills could possibly get to him,” and spoke of a parishioner who “came 6 times in vain and at last went away in tears.” This complaint was a serious one, as lack of access to confession was as good as lack of access to the Eucharist for a

\textsuperscript{81} JMSII, “My interview with Bishop O’Reilly in Gt Barrington,” October 4, 1882, Box 33, Folder 5, SFP.
devout Catholic. Jane claimed that previous priests had scheduled their mass and confession times so that those who worked in the mills would have access to the sacraments, and that the current priests lacked the faith and devotion to do their jobs properly. Moreover, she argued that Carroll had given a very “disedifying” sermon in which he said he would rather have his parishioners hear fewer sermons from their own pastor than to “subscribe to Fr Drumgolds [Drumgoole’s] and associations of that sort since they would only get about a thousandth part of a mass each.”

To Jane, Carroll’s attempt to dissuade his flock from “edifying” themselves with supplementary materials while simultaneously failing to provide them with the moral edification he was supposed to was deeply offensive, and demonstrated a lack of faith. O’Reilly had claimed she did not understand the needs of the diocese as he did, and here Jane insisted that it was she who truly understood the residents of Stockbridge. O’Reilly might have been a cradle Catholic, a bishop, and a man, but Jane was a Sedgwick and a Stockbridge native.

Having been told by O’Reilly that her gender essentially disqualified her from comment, Jane used her native status to argue for what she believed was necessary in the Stockbridge parish. She also was not afraid to use her wealth and cosmopolitan life experience, telling O’Reilly that she “had been in many different countries since my conversion and observed the different state of things in all but that here was quite exceptional.” Moreover, she felt it was her obligation – as a Catholic, as an elite, as an educated woman, and as a Sedgwick – to stand up for her fellow parishioners, even though she had not been in the parish permanently for twenty years. She asked what was necessary to obtain a resident priest, and O’Reilly told her it would

83 JMSII, “My interview with Bishop O’Reilly in Gt Barrington,” October 4, 1882, Box 33, Folder 5, SFP.
need a “general petition” rather than a request from a few people. Jane did not feel that such a petition would be difficult to obtain if she asked them to make one.

These people were very timid and superstitious in relation to a priest (this the Bishop acknowledged) They were afraid to approach him - thinking that bad luck would come (Instance the opinion that I had fallen lame because I had opposed Fr. Brennan) He laughed said he had no doubt - Also they required always a leader - I could get them all up at once - but I knew this would be very imprudent. “Of course.”

Jane may not have been in the parish as a permanent resident, but this passage indicates that she was certainly not forgotten by the Catholics of the area. Setting aside, of course, that she had more or less built St. Joseph’s, she argued that her falling out with Father Brennan and Bishop Williams was still remembered in the area. Jane may have “fallen lame” as a result of that conflict, but she was willing to stand up to another priest and bishop if necessary. Her barely-veiled threat – “I could get them all up at once” – encouraged O’Reilly to appoint a resident priest immediately and avoid the commotion of a general petition.84

No resident priest appeared, however, and a year later, Jane was petitioning O’Reilly again. This time, Jane not only accused Carroll of shirking his duties, but of greed as well.

Bp. O’R spoke of the great expenses (as reported to him of course). I said “but how do we know that this is reliable against all appearances that we can judge of?” The Bishop said sternly “Do you think a priest is going to lose his soul for filthy lucre?” I replied quietly – “I don’t know - but Judas did.” “Yes” he said “Judas did but we hope there are few Judas now.” I said Bishop Fitzpatrick said to me once “There are Judases now in the Church.” The Bishop gritted down and said “Yes but we hope not many.”

To assure O’Reilly that she was not without reason for distrusting Carroll’s accounting, she begged him to look into “the transaction of the purchase of the marshy pond in W.S.” She asked the bishop why it was that a Protestant minister and his family could support themselves “on what an Irish Catholic Priest would not look at?” This, she said, seemed to “[touch] the weak

84 JMSII, “My interview with Bishop O’Reilly in Gt Barrington,” October 4, 1882, Box 33, Folder 5, SFP.
point,” and O’Reilly admitted that he “could not get the priests here to live as moderately as they
should,” but then blamed this on their housekeepers for being too extravagant.85

This answer did not satisfy Jane, and she pushed into the main thrust of her argument, which went beyond a convert’s understanding of the vow of poverty. She asked O’Reilly if he had similar troubles with his French priests, and he agreed that he did not, and acknowledged that many people had to live and support a family on less than what his priests had. Jane felt she had finally gotten O’Reilly to admit to what she believed she had known all along: “…the fact is these men who must otherwise drive the plough or dig by taking to the priesthood want to live as fine gentlemen… I don't care what a man comes from the church was founded on a fisherman, but this career evidently offers a great temptation.”86

Upon Carroll’s assignment to West Stockbridge, O’Reilly had reassured Jane that though he was not “polished,” he would be an effective priest, suggesting Jane had anxieties about his class background. Ten years later, Jane herself revealed just how deep those anxieties ran; most of her experience with Catholics before her friendship with Cheery had been with immigrants who worked for her or her family, and her issues with Carroll reflect a degree of animosity towards Irish working class social mobility.87 Her Aunt Catharine believed Irish immigration would provide a class of contented servants, unlike black Americans desperate to move up the

85 JMSII, “Conversation with Bishop O'Reilly in Pittsfield,” September 17, 1883, Box 33, Folder 7, SFP.
86 JMSII, “Conversation with Bishop O'Reilly in Pittsfield,” September 17, 1883, Box 33, Folder 7, SFP.
87 For instance, Jane once regaled her brother with tales of Old Eve, their perpetually-angry German housekeeper, and her daughter Young Eve, who was man-crazy. “Young Eve it seems in disgust at her Mother’s treatment of her was resolved to get married in spite of her bad luck with the other two she has picked up a third young german whom she married a week since. She says the other two were bad but this one is very good, and she knows I shall like him for ‘he dont drink, and he dont smoke, and he dont do nothing bad, and has got good clothes besides.’" JMSII to HDSII, April 11, 1841, Box 26, Folder 1, SFP. Moreover, Jane’s anxiety over Carroll’s social climbing by way of the Church reflects the tension over the increase in women’s vocations among Irish and Irish-American women at mid-century. As Maureen Fitzgerald argues, single Irish women could essentially escape the poverty (and patriarchy) of their secular, public lives by joining a convent, which to Protestant outsiders was the epitome of poverty and patriarchy. Maureen Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion: Irish Catholic Nuns and the Origins of New York’s Welfare System, 1830-1920* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 32-3.
ladder. Scholars have sometimes struggled to discern whether anti-Catholic rhetoric was about religion, national origin, or class. Jane’s anger at Father Carroll disentangles that rhetorical knot for a brief moment, and also helps us understand her conversion; in her mind, Catholicism was separable from class and national background.

Having cast Carroll in this light, Jane reiterated her call for a resident priest to properly attend to the working Catholics of the town, for access to the sacraments should be the primary consideration of a pastor: “Does not Fr C. know that a working man cannot throw up his days work or the people miles off in mills to break away early to get to him at 4 or 5 PM!” 88 Her suggestion that Carroll had joined the priesthood simply to “live as a fine gentleman” suggested that she believed he was a person who would otherwise have been “[driving] the plough” or something similar. His refusal to adjust the mass schedule to accommodate the local laboring population might have been more understandable had he been a “fine gentleman” by birth, but coming from the same class as his parishioners, the only thing that could explain Carroll’s behavior was a desire to earn a good salary and live well while shirking his duties. He may have been drawn from the same “stock” as his parishioners, and indeed the same stock as Bishop O’Reilly, but Jane was of Stockbridge stock, and she believed she understood the needs of the populace more clearly than those who, by all rights, ought to have.

Despite entreating the bishop for a resident priest for the Catholics who lived and worked in Stockbridge for a second time, Jane returned to her initial personal argument at the end of her second conversation with the bishop. Her final argument reveals another layer to her desire to have a resident priest and return “home.”

88 JMSII, “Conversation with Bishop O'Reilly in Pittsfield,” September 17, 1883, Box 33, Folder 7, SFP.
I argued all my arguments - for my family’s sake - for a resident priest for us without which I could not live with my present infirmities here and the importance & propriety of my not separating from them and losing all hope of my influence as an aid to their conversion.

In her conversation the previous autumn, Jane had asked O’Reilly if she was to be “exiled from [her] country and home” since she could not practice her faith as she desired in Stockbridge. Here, she expanded on that reasoning, revealing that she needed priest in Stockbridge because she was too ill for constant travel to a neighboring town for the sacraments. Most importantly, though, she needed to be near her family in Stockbridge so that she could continue her work on one of the tasks most important to convert women in this period: gaining further converts to the Church.89

Taken together, Jane’s arguments demonstrate the complexity of her situation as a convert woman trying to live in two worlds. These conversations reveal that each of the actions she seemed to take on her own behalf were also taken on behalf of those she cared for, and vice versa. For twenty years, she had lived half her time in Europe. On the surface, one might assume this was the choice of a Catholic convert who had the means to live as part of an expatriate community in the capital city of her faith, with the side benefit of a Mediterranean climate for her health. Her letters revealed that the initial motivation for her living in Rome was that she, as an unmarried woman, could most easily make the sacrifice of living abroad so as to help her family save money during a rough period. She herself had no real control over her finances, and an inherited debt to pay off, and she strove to live frugally so that she could eventually fulfill her dreams of Catholic philanthropy by founding give money to a group of sisters for a school in Stockbridge.

89 JMSII, “Conversation with Bishop O'Reilly in Pittsfield,” September 17, 1883, Box 33, Folder 7, SFP.
Now, as that project seemed to be in danger of collapse, she revealed a deeper motivation for her frugal behavior. Only when she had paid off her debt could she dream of returning to live full time in the place that had been her home for the first forty years of her life. In doing so, she would find personal fulfillment by being in the place she belonged, among her family and among the people she claimed to understand. Additionally, she did not need Rome to find spiritual fulfillment, something she could do and needed to in Stockbridge by working to save the souls of those who meant the most to her. It may have taken quite a while for her to get to this position, but if O’Reilly could provide Stockbridge with a resident priest, Jane believed she could have everything she needed and wanted in one place. 90

Reading O’Reilly’s letters, one might assume that Jane had been well and truly shamed, willing to drop any attempt to found a Catholic school. But as her 1882 and 1883 conversations with O’Reilly suggested, she would not concede that he, rather than she, truly understood the community and its needs. Intellectual and emotional support from other female converts who understood her unique situation had helped her pursue this course and stand her ground, and that same support would help Jane continue her search for a group of sisters to run a school in her parish, without the support or knowledge of her bishop. These women not only understood Jane’s temperament, they shared the same cultural language and assumptions, and so understood her arguments about the situation in a way the bishop, the sisters, and the priests could not. These friendships supported and sustained her, but also contributed to the rigidity of her worldview.

Few letters between Charlotte Dana and Jane remain from this period, possibly due to the amount of time they spent living and socializing together. In the correspondence that remains, Charlotte counseled her friend in letters filled with citations to theologians and saints, as opposed

90 JMSII, “Conversation with Bishop O'Reilly in Pittsfield,” September 17, 1883, Box 33, Folder 7, SFP.
to those from Carroll and O’Reilly, who cite economic figures and Vatican-mandated procedures. Charlotte’s letters stand in stark contrast to those of Carroll and O’Reilly; where theirs are contradictory and critical, hers demonstrate understanding and provide counsel. Moreover, Charlotte agreed with and reiterated many of the intellectual and spiritual positions Jane had advocated before and after her conversion, and was able to conceptually link them to Jane’s current efforts on behalf of benevolence.

Charlotte had long concurred with Jane on views of dependence, reason, and the role of both in spiritual and temporal life, begging her “never to let dependence take possession” of her, for “it darkens the understanding & hurts the judgment & makes a slave of the noble soul - & certainly does not honour or please our good Lord.” She admitted that some people believed it was “quite pious to be under the dominion of a sad troubled spirit,” but argued that “a Catholic never will admit this passion to rule over them any more than any other violent impulse.” To her, Catholicism believed that “reason must be uppermost & it is a struggle to keep it so, over the sensitive nature,” and gave people “self possession to offer to our God & we ought to have that.”

In these views – that reason and self-confidence were central virtues in Catholic life – Charlotte agreed with much of what Jane had argued throughout her life. Before and after her conversion, she had been plagued by a fear of dependency, and her own justification of her conversion rooted it firmly in the rational Unitarian tradition in which she had been raised. Jane had stood up to priests like John Murray Forbes who had told her she needed more humility, with the support of Charlotte and Sophia, and that kind of support validated her later resistance to

91 RCD to JMSII, n.d. [1850s], Box 32, Folder 7, SFP.
clerical demands. Charlotte’s insistence that reason and independence were virtues for all Catholics and all people, even women, was vital to Jane’s self-understanding.

As Jane struggled with her attempted benevolence, Charlotte counseled her in the context of their long friendship. She urged her to remember what had caused her trouble before – “you have not taken a wide eno’ view” – and urged her to take a wider, higher view of the world, which might bring the humility of understanding herself as she appeared before God. Her call for humility was not a call for submission, however: “I repeat to you what I have been told ‘If you would be self possessed have possession of your power.’”\(^\text{92}\) She counseled Jane to remember St. Theresa of Avila’s work *The Interior Castle*, particularly her separation of “imagination” and “understanding.” St Teresa stated that while troubled by the imagination, which could lead to temptation, “we need not let ourselves be disturbed” and give up. The mental and emotional disturbance caused by the imagination was “inevitable,” St. Teresa claimed, “therefore do not let it disturb or grieve you, but let the mill clack on while we grind our wheat; that is, let us continue to work with our will and intellect.”\(^\text{93}\) Charlotte advised Jane “We were created for God & must have faith hope & charity, not in imagination, but real virtues that we use when we are tried by lower sensitive nature.”\(^\text{94}\)

Jane, and the Sedgwick family in general, had long concerned themselves with being rational creatures, despite a familial history of mental illness. Moreover, the ability of a woman to exercise reason and not her “lower sensitive nature” was a familiar debate in 19\(^\text{th}\) century America, and by framing Jane’s struggles with her own nature and her interactions with others in

\(^{92}\) RCD to JMSII, n.d., [1860s or later], Box 32, Folder 7, SFP.
\(^{94}\) RCD to JMSII, n.d., Box 32, Folder 7, SFP.
familiar terms, Charlotte reassured her friend to trust in the principles that had guided her throughout her life, before and after her conversion. In another letter, she went further:

"Trust in God more & more, & offer yourself to Him. I mean your own real self, just as you are, as tho now art, (not under any fancied state or imagined possible frame of mind, for you cannot keep up to it & will disappoint yourself & perhaps turn your own illusion of looking at self into a cloud of despondence) Be true to yourself, that is kindness."

As men of the Church and men of the world alike tried to make Jane feel as though the things she was interested in were outside her purview and beyond her understanding as a woman, Charlotte reassured her that her “real self” was enough for God. Throughout the period of her conversion, this message had been an important one for Jane, coming from priests and lay converts alike. Coming from Charlotte in a period when others were castigating her “real self,” these words were again vital in helping Jane continue on the course she had set for herself, for better or worse.

Jane’s other primary correspondent throughout this period was Mary Dallas. Little is known about her, though her letters indicate that she knew Jane’s convert friends Charlotte Dana, Anna Ward, and Emma Cary. She died in 1911, unmarried, having lived for forty years in Cambridge with Annie McKay, or McCaughey, and her obituary referred to her as a “member of one of the old Cambridge families.” She made Jane’s acquaintance around 1879, and more than forty letters from her exist in the last ten years of Jane’s life. Her letters adopt a distinctly different tone from Charlotte’s, filled with emotion and devotion, accounts of visions and miracles, encouragement to prayer and lists of prayers and novenas offered. Like Charlotte, she supported Jane’s vision of the world, but often did so by reassuring Jane that she understood the

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95 RCD to JMSII, n.d., Box 32, Folder 7, SFP.
96 RCD to JMSII, n.d., Box 32, Folder 7, SFP.
needs of the Stockbridge parish and the workings of the Catholic Church better than O’Reilly, Carroll, and the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Where Charlotte emphasized intellect and will, Mary Dallas emphasized contemplative prayer and a near-mystical relationship with Christ and the Blessed Virgin. Her prayers often centered on Jane’s benevolent endeavors. For instance, in February 1882, she wrote to Jane, who believed she had finally secured the Sisters of St. Joseph through Cardinal Simeoni’s intervention: “On the morning of the 20th of this month I believe I received an assurance that your long laborious waiting was rewarded, that a favorable answer had been given… Such a work so earnestly persevered in must garner a rich harvest!” When the sisters declined, and Jane had to meet with the bishop in September 1882, Mary sent her support: “I believe I have reason to think that a decision may be concluded or will be very soon and I am prepared to rejoice with you in entire sympathy.” Following the painful interview with O’Reilly in October 1882, Mary believed it to all be part of a longer, universal struggle: “Certainly my friend the long continued struggle would appear unaccountable did we not clearly perceive the arts of the evil one constantly employed to thwart all your efforts for the effecting his final overthrow, where he has reigned undisturbed.”

Mary believed that “the arts of the evil one” were on display in the actions of Father Carroll and the Sisters, who had been led astray: “I am in one sense rather surprised that the ‘Sisters’ should demur at the ‘basement’ but as you infer it must be another and last shaft from the enemy.” She offered prayers to the patron saint of the order, hoping that “St. Joseph will open the good Sisters eyes” to the idea of holding school in the church basement: “it seems to me

98 Mary T. Dallas (hereafter MTD) to JMSII, February 22, 1882, Box 33, Folder 6, SFP.
99 MTD to JMSII, September 16, 1882, Box 33, Folder 6, SFP.
100 MTD to JMSII, October 26, 1882, Box 33, Folder 6, SFP.
it should be more a matter of faith accepting whatever the Lord provides no matter how small and inconvenient.” She believed that “if the first step on their part is made then St. Joseph will build plan and provide for his children,” echoing Jane’s comments to Bishop O’Reilly that “No great things have ever begun on a great scale.” As much as Mary believed this decision was the work of the Devil, she also saw greater structural problems in the conduct of women religious:

Far be it from me to question the conduct of God’s consecrated virgins for whom I entertain the highest respect but still my experience of devout people belonging to orders and those outside has led me to think that too much of prudence is manifested oftentimes when faith would lead them out and beyond such narrow limits.

In Mary’s understanding of the world and God’s operation in it, God would provide if only the sisters would have faith as Jane had faith. Dividing the world into “devout people belonging to orders” and “those outside,” Mary reinscribed the sort of Romanist understanding of women religious with which she and Jane were raised. In reality, women religious in America had gone to great lengths to remove the barrier of the cloister, as it prevented them from doing work in the relative rural areas to which they’d been assigned at the turn of the 19th century. They were as much of the world as Jane was. To Mary and Jane, however, the sisters had been made timid, and their faith dulled, by their withdrawal into the world of the cloister.

Mary reserved especial condemnation for the local provincial superior in Flushing, commenting: “I shall be forced to believe that she does not possess the true spirit of her high vocation.” She urged Jane to meet again with the sisters soon, either in Flushing or Chicopee, sure that her faith and devotion could convince them to come to Stockbridge. When Jane did so, and was told that the problem was not the “little house,” she was left confused as to what

101 MTD to JMSII, October 26, 1882, Box 33, Folder 6, SFP.
103 MTD to JMSII, January 30, 1883, Box 33, Folder 7, SFP.
obstacle remained. Mary agreed that whatever was happening to delay the establishment of the school, it was not Jane’s fault:

… I can see no reasonable grounds, but want of confidence faith and fervor, of course far be it from me to assert such as the true motives or reasons of the Sisters, there may still be something hidden through charity, perhaps in regard to the Bishop’s want of firmness. Since did not Sister Cecelia only a week or two ago tell you that the small house so had nothing to do with it. What can be the reason of this two sides each so very contradictory to the other? 104

At no point in her correspondence did Mary agree with or even mention O’Reilly’s contention that Jane had not offered enough money to secure the sisters. In supporting Jane’s views so wholeheartedly, Mary validated Jane’s worldview, and encouraged her to continue to pursue the possibility of the school by interacting directly with the sisters, even as O’Reilly thought the question was settled.

Moreover, she repeatedly expressed a sentiment missing from O’Reilly and Carroll’s letters: sympathy. “Did I not recognize the hand of God in all your trials, I should think the slow torture to which you have been so long subjected most inhuman. If by my sympathy I could lighten your burden I would be only too happy.” 105 From her young adulthood, Jane had sought out those who would be willing to understand her, and would validate her feelings. For many years, she had leaned on Cheery, who had died in Cuba in 1867. 106 Charlotte Dana and Mary Dallas assumed Cheery’s place, validating Jane’s religious views, social views, and personality flaws and strengths.

With support from women like Charlotte and Mary, Jane dismissed O’Reilly’s call to mend her nets, and continued to push for a school in Stockbridge. She seems never to have been

104 MTD to JMSII, February 23, 1883, Box 33, Folder 7, SFP.
105 MTD to JMSII, January 30, 1883, Box 33, Folder 7, SFP.
106 Susan Rogers O’Sullivan to JMSII, April 25, 1867, Box 32, Folder 27, SFP.
sure of exactly why her request was being denied. Had it been the lack of money? Was the basement not an acceptable classroom? Was the small house unacceptable? Was Carroll resisting? Was O’Reilly resisting? Charlotte reassured her that she should neither condemn herself for her worries and flights of fancy nor abandon the reason that had served her so well. Mary validated her beliefs that the clergy and women religious with whom she worked were lacking in the faith and courage necessary for such a venture – faith and courage that Jane possessed. These reassuring voices not only sustained her through the seeming defeat of 1882, but also through the next six years, in which much would change, but Jane would eventually get her school: St. Mary’s School, established in 1885 in Lee, Massachusetts.

So little progress on the creation of a school had happened over the previous years because the involved parties simply could not understand each other’s perspectives and therefore could not communicate. Jane and O’Reilly both felt themselves boxed in by financial situations they could not change, and both doubted each other’s understanding and dedication to the Church. Several things shifted in the 1880s that allowed Jane’s school to become a possibility, and Jane and O’Reilly each made concessions to each other that allowed them to proceed without feeling that they had given ground.

Jane first endeavored to find out exactly why the sisters would not come, since so many different and contradictory reasons had been given. O’Reilly sent a letter to the mother house in St. Louis, but Mother Agatha simply replied that they had to decline Jane’s “kind proposal.” Direct correspondence with the sisters in Chicopee confirmed that they found it impractical and unhealthy to teach in the church basement. Following her interview with O’Reilly in October

107 Mother Agatha to Patrick O’Reilly, March 21, 1883, Box 33, Folder 7, SFP.
108 Sister Mary Theresa to JMSII, February 19, 1883, Box 33, Folder 7, SFP.
1883, she returned to Rome, accompanied by her niece Blossom, with a heavy heart due not just to her personal struggles, but also the struggles faced by her extended family.

In March 1883, her cousin Susan Sedgwick Butler, who had been a frequent companion of hers in Rome, died at age 55.109 Sue’s sister Kate, the youngest of the family, had given up her writing career at Sue’s suggestion, and now found herself a destitute, alcoholic, and socially-ostracized divorcee and single mother in Italy. She confided in Jane – “if Susy has not left provision for me, I am literally on the street” – and Jane gave her at least £50 from her yearly income before Kate’s death in 1884, and visited her in Florence. Kate also broke a trust to reveal to Jane that her brother Hal was in dire financial straits, and had not even confided fully in his wife. Kate begged Jane: “Dearest Jane, oh I am oppressed! I am almost wild with trouble. I do not in writing to you think of myself but I trust in God's holy will that you will see fit if you are called before our dear brother to provide for him.”110 For Jane to provide for Hal alone, setting aside the rest of his family, was impossible, yet she had to concern herself with this possibility as well.

While Jane was in Rome in 1884, however, several things shifted, leading to a situation where her benevolent goals could finally be realized. First, in 1883, Father George Brennan, with whom Jane had had such strife, resigned from his position as pastor of the Lee parish, and was replaced by Father T.M. Smith. Mary Dallas remarked that though Jane was still burdened with Father Carroll in her own parish, it must be a “consolation” to have a “zealous fervent priest” in Lee.111 Moreover, Jane continued to speak with other bishops and Vatican officials, despite the trouble that had caused her with her own bishop in the past. She corresponded in earnest with

109 Susan was the daughter of Robert Sedgwick, the younger sister of Lizzie and the older sister of Netta.
110 Kate Sedgwick Valerio to JMSII, March 9, 1883, Box 97, Folder 23, SFP.
111 MTD to JMSII, March 13, 1884, Box 33, Folder 7, SFP.
Father Smith about the possibility of a school in Lee rather than Stockbridge, but there still remained the problem of finding a group of sisters to come.

To solve this, Jane followed an old pattern, despite its lack of success in the past. In March 1885, Cardinal Simeoni wrote to the Sisters of St. Joseph Chambery in France, inquiring about the possibility of setting up a school in West Stockbridge or Lee. Mary Dallas’ letter of June 18, 1885 reveals the results of Simeoni’s inquiry: “At last the great and the joyful tidings have fallen upon my ears. The goal is reached! The harbor gained! Oh! what repose what refreshment of spirit must now be yours!” Nothing in the letters indicates why this group would have chosen to follow Cardinal Simeoni’s request without the explicit invitation from the local bishop. Jane wrote to her brother in July, apologizing for the delay in her return, but confident that she made the right choice in staying through the spring, for “the object that I have been laboring for is accomplished,” and she would return after the sisters set sail in October. When she returned from Europe in 1885, it would be for the last time.

Bishop O’Reilly seems to have been the last to know about the establishment of the school. Writing to Jane in August 1885, he expressed his displeasure with how things happened:

> Now! With regard to your business: I shall be glad to receive and welcome the Sisters of St. Joseph from Chambery. But I must candidly confess that I was displeased at your engaging them without my knowledge or consent. I think an American Bp. knows better than any other person, even better than His Eminence, the Card. Prefect of the Propaganda, what is fitting for his Diocese.

O’Reilly had made these arguments before, but in this case, it seems to have been bluster to make a point. He did not choose to stand in the way of the foundation of the school for two reasons. Firstly, the school was to be founded in Lee, where the priest was supportive and the

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112 Cardinal Simeoni to “Reverend mother,” March 1885, Box 33, Folder 8, SFP.
113 MTD to JMSII, May 29, 1885, Box 33, Folder 8, SFP.
114 JMSII to HDSII, July 16, 1885, Box 98, Folder 13, SFP.
church’s financial situation stable. Despite all of O’Reilly’s “moral support” for the school, he had never been willing to force it on the debt-ridden Stockbridge parish against Father Carroll’s wishes. His willingness to accept Jane’s actions – which had previously outraged him – were connected to Father Carroll in another way.

I visited Stockbridge and West Stockbridge during the week. I am going to make a radical change there. . . I am going to remove Fr. Carroll, who has not given edification for the past year. I shall send a priest there who will be, I think, the right man in the right place.115

Father Carroll had initially been installed to be the “right man in the right place,” using his “executive ability and financial ability” to get the Stockbridge parish back on firm financial footing. While O’Reilly had approved of his business acumen, Jane had railed against the practices of his ministry, particularly his failure to provide the sacraments. It seems that Jane had been proven right, though O’Reilly did not acknowledge that she had warned him of this behavior at least three years earlier. Rather than invite Jane to lord that over him, perhaps he chose to ignore her “disobedient” behavior in turn and let bygones be bygones.

The sisters sailed on October 3, 1885, and by November 17, they were set up in Lee, according to the Bishop, who had traveled from Springfield to see them. Mary Dallas rejoiced, and Anna Ward came to help.116 O’Reilly’s initial reaction was positive: “I like their spirit very much. I think they are much more rigid than the Srs. of St. Joseph in the States; and they are thoroughly French in their measures and ideas.” But his approval only went so far, and he singled out their Frenchness as a distinct problem: “Three of the five…do not speak a word of English, and are absolutely useless at present. The other two, of Irish descent, speak English but with a horrible French accent. This is the material to commence and carry on a school in

115 O’Reilly to JMSII, August 8, 1885, Box 33, Folder 11, SFP.
116 MTD to JMSII, February 17, 1886, Box 33, Folder 13, SFP.
America!!” One of the non-English speakers was the Mother Superior, but as she had made a strong impression upon the community and O’Reilly believed she would soon learn enough English to “get along,” he was willing to accept her, but insisted that Father Smith send back the other two immediately.¹¹⁷

Wanting to avoid any appearance of being opposed to or unfamiliar with Catholic education in the United States, O’Reilly placed this new school in the broader context of American Catholic education.

In fact, in a City, even those of Irish descent would not be allowed for some time to teach English. It is a fatal mistake to get foreigners to come to this Country, to teach our children a language they - the Srs - know nothing about. I do not state these facts to reflect on the Srs; for they are not to blame for their deficiencies… The two English-speaking Srs I invited to Springfield, to learn the method of teaching, & they are here now at the convent, and will remain a week. It is useless to say that the Community know absolutely nothing of the manners and customs of this Country.¹¹⁸

As he had long done in situations where he was critical of Jane, he did not come out and say what he meant, but merely stated who did not deserve blame, hoping Jane would understand that she did. In this situation, however, Jane had one thing she had never had before: the support of the resident priest. Moreover, her nephew Harry Sedgwick (her brother’s son) had shown interest in church matters and had taken it upon himself to act as her financial agent in the Berkshires when she was not around, including going to see the bishop several times. Jane’s strategy of gaining the support and allegiance of those who the bishop had to listen to had finally born fruit, and St. Mary’s School was founded. It still operates today.

Jane spent the remainder of her life in the United States, though never again permanently living in Stockbridge. Her final years were consumed with the legal proceedings of removing

¹¹⁷ O’Reilly to JMSII, November 17, 1885, Box 33, Folder 12, SFP.
¹¹⁸ O’Reilly to JMSII, November 17, 1885, Box 33, Folder 12, SFP.
William Minot III as the administrator of her trust, with the full support of her brother, who had found serious errors in her accounts. It was Will’s refusal to honor, or even acknowledge, a legal agreement he had made about her income that finally caused Hal to do what his sister asked and go over the accounts. In doing so, he found grave errors and overdrafts to do with a renovation on the Devonshire property, withdrawals that Will had originally pressured Hal to approve without Jane’s consent. As difficult as it was to take legal action against a family member, this step was necessary from Jane’s perspective because she absolutely had to continue funding the school now that it had been established. Hal, who had so long ago been embarrassed by Jane’s trip to Norfolk since it might make people think the family had financial difficulties, proved himself willing to advocate for her forty years later, even at the risk of a scandal. With his son’s help, he successfully extricated her from the control of William Minot III and regained the money that she had thought lost, shortly before her death in 1889.

Her friend Charlotte had once written in her religious journal: “I shall die soon & be judged by my own works.” For Jane, who had no husband and no children, St. Mary’s School in Lee was what remained of her after her death. It represented, for her, a decades-long struggle to do the kind of good she wanted to do in the world. She had so long thought of herself as star-crossed: lacking the money, the health, and the energy to accomplish what her mind and heart wanted. Still, she remained unrepentantly confident in her intellect and faith, defying those in her life who contradicted her. She beat against the bars that her birth culture and her adopted faith put up, sometimes to no avail, and feared she would leave nothing behind.

Shortly before her death, Jane received letters from three young women in Lee. They were the first three postulants to emerge from St. Mary’s, preparing to sail to France. Jane’s interest had always been in education for education’s sake, but her school had reaped additional
benefits more quickly than she expected. One of the young postulants opined: “I had many sacrifices to make when entering . . . but when regretful thoughts come to my mind, they are easily banished when I consider that I left all for God.” Jane, however, had not left all for God, even as she had made devotion to her new faith the centerpiece of her adult life. Throughout her adulthood, she had endeavored to combine her old and new lives. She struggled when those two value systems proved incompatible, but she struggled even more when they reinforced each other. She had changed her faith, but she could not change her gender, so she acted strategically to gain the support of those men who could be sympathetic and supportive in navigating the American legal system and the Roman clerical system. Their support, and the support and friendship of the convert women with whom she spent the majority of her life, allowed her to navigate her blended worlds. She wanted to found a school not simply because that was a thing that Catholic converts did, but because that had been something important to her before Catholicism. In the establishment of St. Mary’s, Jane left a small, hard-won legacy that represents a life lived in two worlds, and her absolute refusal to sacrifice one for the other.
Conclusion

Charity that reaches not beyond the grave is false and human.
~Ruth Charlotte Dana, c. 1880s.

Because of her gender, Jane had always intended to do her best work after death, when she could dispose of her wealth unencumbered by the wishes of others. Her final will and its three codicils, all written in the last three years of her life, show how she had come to terms with her blended world. The things written about her – by family, friends, clergy, and the public – show how they all still struggled to understand her and tried fervently to locate her in one place or the other. For many of them, her life had been a journey from one place to the other, a journey that was simultaneously confounding and straightforward.

Her last days and the manner of her death demonstrate the extent to which she had become disconnected from the social networks and privileges her parents’ generation of elites enjoyed. Her Aunt Catharine, a model of independent unmarried womanhood in the 19th century, traveled where she wished and made her own decisions, but she still had places to call home. Her brother Charles’ house had a special apartment for his sister, and he left provisions for her in his will that she should have “such pieces of ground for the cultivation of plants & flowers,” and that his family allow her to make his house “her dearest home.”¹ In her later years, she made the Minot estate her primary home, occupied as it was by her favorite niece Kate, and died there in 1867. Most of the Sedgwicks and Minots died in the bosoms of their families, even if they died while traveling, because so many Sedgwicks and Minots traveled together or to each other. Jane’s mother had died at her son’s home in New York in 1859, for instance. Not all of Jane’s family died surrounded by the faces of those they loved. Her cousin Kate Valerio Washburn,

¹ Last will and testament of Charles Sedgwick, July 28, 1856, Pittsfield Probate Court Records.
who lived in Florence, had no such comforts. Divorced, shunned by society, and making copious use of alcohol and other medications, she died alone in Germany in 1884.

After Jane’s return from Europe in 1885 and the establishment of the school, it is unclear where she went and when. She received mail from her nephew Harry in the fall of 1886 catching her up on Stockbridge news, and while the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph Chambery lists a visit made by Jane to Lee, there is no evidence she stayed in the Berkshires for any extended period of time. She continued to rent out her properties in Stockbridge for income. She often received letters from Will Minot in Boston, suggesting she was not there either, since she would likely have been staying with his father, her cousin. In March 1887, she was diagnosed with a malignant growth in her bowel, and around that time, letters indicate she was staying with her brother in New York, as he assisted her in her lawsuit against Will.²

In November 1887, she traveled to Washington to take up lodgings there in an apartment near Anna Ward and her husband.³ No explanation for her decision to move remains in existing materials, though if frugality was her motivation, the efforts were wasted on this trip. She struggled to find affordable housing, especially as the impending inauguration led to a rise in prices, and also to find rooms with doorways and hallways wide enough to accommodate her wheelchair.⁴ Much as in Rome, she spent her time as a shut-in, and did not have an enjoyable time while there, by her own accounts. She wrote often to her brother, both about the ongoing suit against William Minot III and also how disconnected she felt from her family: “I am glad you all had a really happy Xmas. It could hardly be expected that I should have anything but a

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² Doctor’s report, March 29, 1887, Box 33, Folder 15, SFP; HDSII to WMIII, April 22, 1887, Box 98, Folder 16, SFP.
³ Lola Madan to JMSII, November 29, 1887, Box 33, Folder 16, SFP.
⁴ Emma D. Sedgwick to JMSII, October 7, 1888, Box 22, Folder 19, SFP.
dull one shut up here in solitude and so unwell.” Still, her papers are full of letters from her
brother and sister-in-law, as well as their sons Harry and Alick, the latter of whom had gone to
California.

She continued to send money to the school in Lee by way of Father Smith, and received
updates from the sisters. Letters from Mary Dallas indicate that despite the success of the Lee
school, Jane still held out hope for a school in her own parish. The school at Lee would have
been much too far for any Stockbridge Catholic child to travel, especially from West
Stockbridge, which had the higher concentration of Catholics. She received many letters of
support from Cheery’s children – Lola, now Marchioness of San Carlos, and Addie, now a sister
at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, the convent at which she had been baptized – as well as a
variety of Catholic laywomen in the Washington and Baltimore area with whom she had become
acquainted. Still, her life in Washington seemed small, with her young cousin Emma Sedgwick
her only local support beyond the Wards.

Jane had always been ill, and had been expecting her own death for twenty years, but her
death seems to have come as a surprise to those around her, perhaps for that reason. The most
complete account of Jane’s death comes from her friend Charlotte’s journal

[Feb 12] Telegram to Mrs Rackemann [Bessie]
Jane Sedgwick died at 2 ock PM today
[Feb 13] Call from Mrs. Rakemann, with telegram about Jane’s death…Called
Archbishop…He will not forget Jane’s soul.
[Feb 14] Letter from Mrs. G. Dana account of Jane’s last hours sent it to Mrs Rakeman
who called with invitation from Cousin Henrietta [Netta] for me to come to her home to
Jane’s funeral Sat 10 ock
[Feb 16] Requiem Mass for Jane

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5 MTD to JMSII, July 18, 1888, Box 33, Folder 17, SFP.
In the days and weeks that followed Jane’s death, she was eulogized by friends, family, and clergy. Their thoughts tell us something of how she was understood by those who knew her in her different worlds, and how little some of them understood her at all.

I.

*Jane remembered by Berkshire*

Jane’s obituary in the *Pittsfield Sun*, printed on February 21, 1889, lists no author. Its content suggests that the author made meaning out of the bare facts of Jane’s life within a social and cultural context that struggled to understand the choices she had made and the things that she felt gave her world meaning – her family, her friends, her faith, and her independence. Jane’s original world, the one dominated by her Sedgwick upbringing, features prominently in the obituary. In the mind of the author, and undoubtedly in the community at large, Jane was notable first for being the daughter of Henry Dwight Sedgwick, whose religious writings and legal efforts on behalf of the Greek government came in for particular praise. Her connection to the locally-beloved Charles Sedgwick was noted, as was her mother’s origin in a family of great “wealth and culture” from Boston. As the paper put it, “the deceased represented the best blood of both ends of the state.” Her brother received a one sentence mention as her only surviving family member, “a prominent and wealthy lawyer,” despite the fact that his wealth was certainly not stunning or stable.⁶

As it had been since her childhood, when her Aunt Louisa and Aunt Catharine both noted that Jane’s generation had much to live up to, Jane’s place was in reference to the greater Sedgwick generations that had come before her. This narrative of declension was not simply born out of false nostalgia; compared to her father’s generation, and certainly compared to her

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⁶ *Pittsfield Sun*, February 21, 1889.
grandfather’s, the Sedgwicks had fallen by nearly every measure as American society changed around them. In fact, the most consistent claim one can make about the Sedgwick fortunes over the three generations is that they were highly unstable. The few instances where this process of declension had been arrested were due not to the successes of the men in business, but to the successes of the women in marriage, as with Grace’s marriage to Charles Astor Bristed. Only the women who married well, and married up, achieved the level of wealth and stability the men of the family hoped for.

The Sedgwick-Minot family into which Jane had been born was perhaps the zenith of the group as a family, though it was not the height of their political prominence. Jane’s grandparents’ marriage had been a difficult one, with Theodore’s extended time away from the family serving to exacerbate his wife Pamela’s mental illness, and their second daughter Fanny’s marriage to an abusive man had further strained the family’s happiness. Stockbridge itself was a backwater town, its sparse population contributing to Pamela and the children’s isolation. Theodore was a well-connected and prominent Federalist, but his party’s power waned, and while his children were never as politically important as he was, they developed social, cultural, economic, and intellectual networks that far surpassed those of their father. The four younger children – Robert, Harry, Catharine, and Charles – remained particularly close, and they and their spouses helped transform Stockbridge and Lenox into places of retreat and relaxation for authors, politicians, publishers, and artists. It was, as described in Fanny Kemble’s fictionalization of the region in *Far Away and Long Ago*, the “Happy Valley,” at least for the Sedgwicks.7

Jane, her siblings, and her cousins had been raised in this idyllic atmosphere, even as her father’s illness and poor business practices had necessitated the move to Stockbridge in the first

place. Her family’s privilege and social connections allowed her to receive an education more akin to that of a planter’s daughter, albeit from a far less conventional tutor. Winters in New York and summers in Stockbridge, all of them under the aegis of privilege, allowed Jane to exercise her fancies and her control over them. She made herself sick riding her horse in the rain, attended her “scientific society,” studied Italian, French, and German, and played the male lead in a very intense parlor play. She had family and connections in Boston, New York, and Washington, D.C., allowing her to travel and meet interesting people during her formative years. Despite being raised by a single parent, Jane was truly raised by a huge family, with dozens of cousins as friends.

Jane’s own generation was not as singularly accomplished and revered as that of her father and his siblings. Hal pursued law, essentially the family trade, and followed his father, uncles, and grandfather into legal practice. He went to Harvard, compared to his father who had gone to Williams, and his grandfather who had been thrown out of Yale, and yet his financial fortunes never rose as high as those who had come before him. Treading the same path for three generations produced different results for all three men, and reveals the way the old elite ways of lawyers and New England land speculators were eclipsed by a rising manufacturing elite. Hal’s legal practice was steadier and more consistent than that of his father and grandfather, yet he was just as easily bankrupted by the Civil War as his father had been as a result of his own poor investments. For Jane and the other women of the family, they may have been long-single and even resistant to marriage, but nearly all of them eventually married, and married well. Changes in the American economy and social structure, as well as the sheer size of the Sedgwick cousinage, meant that Berkshire had become a site of nostalgia even as Jane and her siblings and cousins continued to call it “home.”
As for Jane herself, her obituary outlined her religious journey and philanthropic efforts with some accuracy, though without actual knowledge of her views or the timeline of her conversion. As such, it simply fit her into the conventional narrative.

It is not clearly known what turned Miss Sedgwick and her cousin, now Mrs. Charles Astor Bristed, toward the church of Rome, but it is thought the grandeur of the worship in the churches at Rome, where the deceased and her cousin were visitors 30 years ago, had much to do with it, they being impressed very deeply by the ceremonies and traditions, the clear antiquity of the church its established descent from the apostles.  

By yoking her conversion to Grace’s, the obituary reaffirmed that there was one narrative, one path to Catholicism for women of their status and origin, collapsing their different lives, ages, and life experiences into one journey. As so many contemporaries asserted, and successive generations of scholars have reaffirmed, these women were pulled to the Catholic churches by ritual, grandeur, and history. The obituary emphasized the aesthetic and historical draw the Church was believed to have on women, but the more prurient lure of seductive priests was not to be asserted in 1889 in the obituary of an elite woman. Jane might have agreed on the importance of the historical Church in her faith, but would also have asserted the role of reason, something wholly absent from her obituary.

Indeed, the obituary went on to note that her parents had been Unitarians, but emphasized the toleration and accommodation expressed by the family upon Jane’s conversion:

…her conversion to Rome was a deep grief to the mother though it never made a harshness or unpleasantness in the family, her brother accompanying her to Baltimore to be with her during her renunciation of the Protestant faith and her admission to the church.  

In many ways, this assessment of Jane’s conversion and the family’s role in it is quite true, though there was much sniping over her conversion in the back channels of Sedgwick

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8 Pittfield Sun, February 21, 1889.
9 Pittfield Sun, February 21, 1889.
correspondence. Despite the anti-Catholicism they had so long expressed, they tolerated Jane’s conversion in the hopes that it would save her life rather than her soul. In addition, the obituary’s plain accounting was far less contentious in 1889 than it might have been in 1853 when she converted. By the end of the century, while certainly not considered fully American, Catholicism was far less the hot-button issue it was at mid-century. Tempered by time and status, Jane’s Catholicism no longer posed the existential threat to Protestantism it had decades earlier. Even Aunt Catharine had stepped down from her position as the “Protestant champion” in favor of toleration.

Jane’s Catholicism was also tempered by the fact that she continued to fit an established pattern of elite Protestant respectability. Subsequent to her baptism, the obituary noted that Jane “began to manifest her faith by works,” including her donations to fund the construction of St. Joseph’s and the oil painting of the Holy Family she brought from Europe to be the altar piece. The obituary also mentioned an important piece of paper framed and hanging on the wall next to “her pew,” though the writer was unsure whether it was a plenary indulgence for the fifty people named, or simply a papal blessing (it was the former.) It then went on to detail the largest benefaction of her life, the $6,000 to establish the parochial school in Lee, adding “it is understood that her will gives a house and lot in Stockbridge for a sisters’ residence and convent work in connection with the Stockbridge church.” As for Jane’s other interests, the obituary states categorically: “Miss Sedgwick had little or no interest in the public affairs of Stockbridge, outside the local church.” Why should she? In this narrative, she was no longer a part of Stockbridge outside the local church. Despite owning property in town and visiting as often as
she could, she was seen to have “left” Stockbridge, even as she contended with people burning down her property from across the Atlantic.\textsuperscript{10}

Jane’s public obituary presented the best case scenario for an elite female convert’s life as imagined by the wider American culture, one in which the woman was raised in a respectable family and was lured away by the more sensual elements of Catholicism, but still managed to retain and perform her respectability in her new culture. Still, the funeral of a prominent Catholic was written about as somewhat of a spectacle, with a full description of the ritual involved, including the vestments of the priests, the trappings of the coffin, and the “services prescribed by the church” said at the graveside. It was Jane’s graveside that occupied the opening and close of the obituary, noting her special dispensation to rest under the eaves of the church: “she lies between the pines and the pew, in her brick lined grave.” The obituary itself, however, did not truly situate Jane between the pines and the pew, her Sedgwick life and her Catholic life. In its estimation, she was firmly ensconced in the bosom of the Church, her faith symbolically refreshed by her grave’s position: “for the rain that pours from the slates and snow that slips from the eaves in winter must fall upon the mound under which she sleeps.”\textsuperscript{11}

\textit{II.}

\textit{Jane remembered by the clergy}

In addition to her obituary, the \textit{Pittsfield Sun} also printed the eulogy delivered by Father John Madden, the priest who had replaced Jane’s loathed Father Carroll, but with whom she had had little personal interaction. He had only been in Stockbridge for a few years at the point of her death, and she had not lived there during that time. The funeral mass was concelebrated by

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Pittfield Sun}, February 21, 1889.
\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Pittfield Sun}, February 21, 1889.
Father McLaughlin of Pittsfield and Fathers Murphy and Fitzgerald of Great Barrington. It is unsurprising that Bishop O’Reilly was not in attendance, but it is somewhat surprising that Father Smith of Lee, the priest with whom she had worked most closely at the end of her life, was not a part of the ceremony. He might have been able to speak more personally about Jane in the eulogy, but as it stood, that task was left to Father Madden.

Acknowledging that others could give a better and more accurate account of Jane’s “noble qualities,” or recount “in their proper order the events of a useful and well spent life,” Madden instead explored what he believed the congregation might find if they were able to enter into “the privacy of the life of the soul.” Far more than the Sun’s obituary, Madden’s eulogy noted the processual nature of Jane’s conversion: “cruel, harrowing doubts, anxious hesitation, earnest longing for the truth, patient seeking for God’s will.” Still, one Jane had accepted God’s will, Madden surmised, her heart was thereafter perpetually at peace.

The time of trial passed, we would see the light of Divine Faith gently yet powerfully entering a candid and well posed soul, dispelling all doubt, banishing all uncertainty and satiating to the full every spiritual craving. Henceforth, no vain regrets, no count of sacrifices made. All is forgotten in the conscious possession of the priceless boon of Faith.¹²

This assessment resonates with the Sun’s view, with what her family said of Jane at the time, and with the barest reading of religious conversion discourse in the 19th century. But Orestes Brownson, Isaac Hecker, and thousands of evangelical converts spoke not only of the initial submission to God’s will but the subsequent spiritual struggle. Jane’s own writings, dozens of journals and scraps of papers, demonstrate that she continued to struggle with points of Church doctrine throughout her life, especially where they contradicted political and social beliefs that had long been important to her.

¹² Pittfield Sun, February 21, 1889.
Madden acknowledged that a “woman of such strength of character, refinement of manners and varied accomplishments cannot pass away in any community without her loss being sensibly and universally felt,” but also reminded those assembled to think beyond “material interests,” the “stone and marble” her financial bequests had left behind. He reminded them that Jane had also, many years before, been a dedicated teacher of the catechism to local children: “Those only who have had experience can know how much patience and humble sacrifice is required to perform aright this work of mercy.” Going further than the obituary, Madden recognized that Jane had not simply given of her money but also of her time. Though not mentioned here, unsurprisingly, it is important to remember that Jane’s time as a Sunday school teacher came before her formal reception into the Church, when her mother praised her as a “rational Catholic” who would have a beneficial impact on the local Irish children. This further complicates the neat timeline and trajectory asserted in the eulogy and obituary. Madden argued that Jane’s desire to teach was “evidence of the deep appreciation of the grace that God had given her in leading her to knowledge of the Truth.” Her interest in teaching pre-existed her reception into the Church by many years, of course, but this argument fit the narrative of a soul wholly transformed in the process of conversion.

Madden closed with Jane’s final days, in which a long illness “gave her an occasion to practice patience and resignation,” virtues beloved of Catholics and Protestants alike, at least when embodied by women. In actuality, the end of Jane’s life had seen her as outspoken as ever, and as contradictory as ever, firing off letters full of invective to Will and engaging the Sisters of St. Joseph of Chambery without the knowledge and permission of her bishop. Jane had never been a shrinking violet, before or after her conversion, though her Church and her culture had no framework to understand or accept her assertive personality that was not laden with judgement.
Madden’s only acknowledgement of Jane’s temperament, certainly known to everyone in that church, was to note that she was “almost impatient of obstacles that time and circumstances alone could remove” in her pursuit of Catholic education in Stockbridge, though even this could be understood, as was so often the case, as an animating Catholic “zeal.”

III.

*Jane remembered by those who knew her well*

The member of the clergy who had had to contend with Jane’s assertive personality the most was not in attendance at her funeral, though we can imagine his eulogy would have sounded much the same. Bishop O’Reilly had been in Bermuda at the time of Jane’s death, and only learned about it a week later. He privately eulogized her in a letter to Charlotte much as her family might have: “Good saint! She had her peculiarities, (who has not?), but she was a saint.” He prayed that she would receive her reward in the afterlife for “all she did for Church and education,” noting that Jane “considered the founding of this school the great work of her life” which brought her comfort before the end.¹³

We have no reflections by any of Jane’s family members on her death, but O’Reilly’s memorializing of her “peculiarities” resonates with their words on her when she was alive. The words “peculiar” and “peculiarities” had followed Jane around her whole life, often used in backchannel Sedgwick correspondence to describe whatever it was about Jane that made her too much for others to handle. Bessie and Lizzie had marveled that a potential suitor seemed to value Jane’s “peculiarities.” Herbert had mocked her “peculiar” opinions on the equality of the sexes. Her mother had reconciled herself to Jane’s conversion in the hope that her Catholic faith might prove “a compensation for many social privations to which her personal peculiarities make her

¹³ O’Reilly to RCD, March 31, 1889, Box 39, Folder 19, Dana Family Papers, Longfellow National Historic Site.
liable.” Some, like Kate Valerio, who endured her own oppressions, took a more charitable view: “I like her so much; she is really good and when one gets used to her peculiarities really nice.” In a fit of pique, enraged by her decision to travel to Norfolk for work, her brother had thoroughly described all of her peculiarities, calling her a genius in all ways but intelligence, and implying that she was an embarrassment to the family.

Still, some of her family members saw the good side to Jane’s personality, and felt she had settled over the course of her life. In comparison to her sister Grace’s distasteful attempt to break her dead husband’s will, Sue Butler said Jane’s “sentiments rang out so true beside Grace’s – she is genuine, simple, straightforward.” Sue explicitly rejected the argument that this change had been brought about by Jane’s conversion, however, and felt it was “something in original fibre, strengthened by circumstance.” That was a pattern of change that fit within the Sedgwick model, based on something inherently solid in her character.

IV.

Jane’s legacy

From 1870 to her death, Jane wrote, revised, and added codicils to a series of wills intended to do what she could not do while she was alive: dispose of her assets. Over time, she changed her will based on the births of nephews, the deaths of cousins, changes to her philanthropic goals, and her own financial situation. In examining her final will and its three codicils, we see that Jane balanced bequests to her family, her church, and the convert women who had supported her throughout the second half of her life. Nothing in her papers suggests she ever aimed to leave all of her money to the church; instead, she carefully managed her finances to give exactly what she wanted to the people and institutions who mattered to her. The money
and material goods she left, and the people to whom she left them, show how much she saw each of her worlds as valid and important.

Her earliest will, as discussed in Chapter 4, left about $20,000 to her family members, $10,000 to the House of the Good Shepherd in Boston, and the remainder of the estate Bishop O’Reilly. In 1882, when she had moved on to new philanthropic endeavors but when it seemed as though her dreams for Catholic education in the Berkshires was in serious jeopardy, she rewrote her will. She reduced her legacy to the House of the Good Shepherd, leaving them only $2000, and sharply reduced the amount left to Bishop O’Reilly. He and his successors would receive only $2000, while Father Michael Corrigan of New York, who became Archbishop in 1885 and was a strong supporter of Catholic education and opponent of “Americanization,” received $12000. O’Reilly saw this change as an attempt to force his hand by withholding money, and refused to rise to the “bait.” Her 1882 will captures the nadir of her relationship with O’Reilly.

Jane did not change her will again until she returned permanently from Europe, following the establishment of St. Mary’s in Lee. In July 1886, she wrote her last will and testament, adding codicils in November 1886, August 1888, and September 1888. The original will dealt with the major disposition of her remaining assets, primarily her share in the Devonshire Street estate, while the codicils divided up her minor pieces of property and made adjustments in her bequests where she had been able to pay part of the intended bequest during her life. Still, these three codicils made major changes to the final will. Rather than leaving groups and people certain percentages of her estate, or fixed amounts, Jane clearly had set amounts of money she

14 JMSII Will, December 27, 1870, Box 32, Folder 28, SFP.
15 JMSII Will, February 21, 1882, Box 33, Folder 6, SFP.
wanted each group or person to have, and once that money was delivered, even if was before her death, her desire to give was satisfied.\textsuperscript{16}

The first group mentioned in her final will was one that had long appeared in her wills: the House of the Good Shepherd. Originally given $10,000 in her first will in 1870, she had reduced that to $2,000 in 1882, and to $1000 in her final will in 1886. She noted in her final will that she had previously intended to give more to this organization, but “to my regret a change in my circumstances has put it out of my power to carry that intention into effect.” Jane’s Catholic friends supported the House of the Good Shepherd, Sophia Ripley in particular, and early in her philanthropic career, Jane had intended to do the same. Perhaps she did regret not being able to leave them more, but she seems to have been willing to sacrifice that cause for the one that was more meaningful to her. Saving “fallen” women was certainly a worthy cause, in Jane’s estimation, but it was not something she devoted her life to, as she had with the cause of Catholic education in the Berkshires. Making a large bequest to the House of the Good Shepherd would have been a very Catholic bit of philanthropy, but in diverting her charitable energies to her efforts in Berkshire, she kept her financial donations close to “home,” just as she had done with her time, teaching the catechism in her mother’s kitchen and holding mass in the family barn.\textsuperscript{17}

The second group discussed in her will, and in each codicil, was the Sisters of St. Joseph Chamberry, specifically Sisters Philomena Fosseret and Marianne Augusta O’Connor. The will suggests that the sisters controlled some of the school’s finances, while Father Smith, the Lee pastor, controlled others. Jane originally left to the sisters the sum of $2000 as well as the

\textsuperscript{16} JMSII Final Will, July 21, 1886, Box 33, Folder 13, SFP; First Codicil, November 4, 1886, Box 33, Folder 14, SFP; Second Codicil, August 26, 1888, Box 33, Folder 14, SFP; Third Codicil, September 27, 1888, Box 33, Folder 14, SFP.
\textsuperscript{17} JMSII Final Will, July 21, 1886, Box 33, Folder 13, SFP.
infamous “little house” in West Stockbridge, suggesting that despite accepting and supporting
the school in Lee, she still held out hope that a school would be established in her own parish.
Her interviews with Bishop O’Reilly in 1882 and 1883 gave strong evidence that she continued
to see herself not only as the benefactress of the Stockbridge parish but as an advocate for its
members, adults and children alike. It was not enough for her to have succeeded in establishing a
Catholic school, because that school was not serving her home. The legacy left in her will was an
attempt to finally accomplish the goal she had set for herself twenty years earlier.18

In the first codicil, she added to the bequest for the sisters by leaving them the mortgage
on the Quigley property, then after selling the property in the intervening years, left them an
additional $1000 in the second codicil, in August 1888, noting specifically that any money she
gave them before her death should be deducted from the bequest. A month later, however, the
final codicil to her will revoked all financial bequests to the sisters, as well as the gift of the little
house. Nothing remains in the Sedgwick papers to indicate why this happened, but it is not
unreasonable to think that the sisters in Lee communicated to Jane once and for all that the house
was insufficient for a school, and she was persuaded to give up her hope for a school in the
Stockbridge parish, canceling or reducing her financial legacy to what she could give them
during her life. Instead, she left the sisters candlesticks, vestments, pictures, a set of the Stations
of the Cross, relics, candles, an altar stone, and altar furniture, all of which she called “suitable
for a chapel.” Of particular note was “the oil painting of the Saint [presumably St. Joseph] which
I intended for a chapel.” Clearly Jane had been saving these items for the chapel she hoped

18 JMSII Final Will, July 21, 1886, Box 33, Folder 13, SFP; First Codicil, November 4, 1886, Box 33, Folder 14,
SFP; Second Codicil, August 26, 1888, Box 33, Folder 14, SFP; Third Codicil, September 27, 1888, Box 33, Folder
14, SFP.
would be part of the school in Stockbridge, and while the little house was of no use if such a school were to be abandoned, at least the material goods could be used.  

Along with her bequests to the sisters, Jane left money to Father Smith at Lee to pay for the operation of the school, though much like her bequests to the Sisters, the amount of money left was changed in subsequent codicils. In the first codicil to her will, in November 1886, she notes that she had promised Father Smith the sum of $6000 for the operation of the school. Up to that point, she had paid $5000 of that sum, and intended to pay the remaining money in her life, but indicated that whatever remained of the remaining $1000 should be paid at her death. A year and a half later, she indicated in the second codicil that she had paid her entire obligation to Smith, and simultaneously raised the amount of her bequest to the sisters by $1000, only to eliminate that entire financial gift two months later. In the end, other than the chapel furnishings, Jane left nothing more to the school she had founded than the money and resources she had given them during her life. O’Reilly, on the other hand, seems to have risen again in Jane’s estimation by the end of her life. In addition to an original bequest of only $500, she subsequently left him the little house, her house in Stockbridge with all its contents, and an additional $2750 financial legacy.  

Does Jane’s rather limited financial bequest to the school in Lee indicate she no longer saw Catholic education as an important object of philanthropy? It could indicate such a thing, but to draw that inference would again assume that Jane’s conversion and subsequent life as a Catholic represented a break with her old world and her complete subsumption into her new

19 First Codicil, November 4, 1886, Box 33, Folder 14, SFP; Second Codicil, August 26, 1888, Box 33, Folder 14, SFP; Third Codicil, September 27, 1888, Box 33, Folder 14, SFP.  
20 First Codicil, November 4, 1886, Box 33, Folder 14, SFP; Second Codicil, August 26, 1888, Box 33, Folder 14, SFP; Third Codicil, September 27, 1888, Box 33, Folder 14, SFP.
world. Instead, if we consider the rest of the bequests she left, we see that she carefully
apportioned her money and property to all of the people and groups that meant something to her.
Moreover, she timed those gifts carefully, giving to some groups, like the sisters, within her
lifetime, and leaving other bequests till years after her death. Her will demonstrates that she had
specific ideas about who needed funds when, and attempted to organize her finances in order to
maintain the schedule of giving she had devised for herself.

There is every indication that Jane gave the sisters and Father Smith everything she
promised them, and did so within her lifetime. Other than her own living expenses and
exceptional family emergencies like Kate Valerio’s penniless state, every spare penny she could
persuade Will Minot to part with went to the funding of St. Mary’s school in Lee. While Will
clearly preferred Jane to pay down her debts during her life, Jane argued that there was little
point of that, when she could be putting what little money she had to work now instead of
waiting until her death, whenever that might be. By the time she died, Jane had “completed” the
work she had intended to do with the foundation of the Lee school. Her decision to leave the
little house to Bishop O’Reilly instead of the sisters in the months before her death suggests that
she had given up on a Stockbridge school, and with her financial obligations to the sisters and
Father Smith complete, in her estimation, that portion of her giving was finished.21

Beyond her material bequests to the sisters, Bishop O’Reilly, and the House of the Good
Shepherd, the rest of her bequests were to her family and friends. Almost all of the financial
bequests were to be paid out within five years of her death, following the payment of any debts.
She left $6000 each to Blossom, her brother’s only daughter and eldest child, and Alick, the third

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21 Third Codicil, September 27, 1888, Box 33, Folder 14, SFP.
of his four sons. Jane’s bequest to her niece and namesake is not difficult to understand. When Jane died, Blossom was thirty and unmarried. Leaving Blossom a lump sum of money with no strings attached was a way to give her a measure of financial independence that Jane herself was never able to achieve. Blossom eventually married in 1917 and died a year later, and so she used that money to live much as Jane had – as an independent woman in Italy.

Alick’s bequest is also not terribly difficult to understand, though it does require some contextualization. His eldest brother Harry had certainly been a great help to Jane, and the correspondence between the two indicates a warm relationship. Harry’s later life even indicates an interest in Catholicism; he wrote a biography of his aunt’s dear friend Father Isaac Hecker. Harry was successfully practicing law, however, and Jane may have felt he did not need financial support from her. The second son, Teedy, was in divinity school at the time of Jane’s death, but also looked to have a stable future as an Episcopal priest. Ellery, the youngest, who would go on to serve as editor for The Atlantic, was only seventeen at the time, with no sure future. Why, then, leave such a significant sum to Alick and not to Ellery? Alick was in California at the time of his aunt’s death, though he corresponded with her regularly, and the reason he was there provides a possible explanation for Jane’s large bequest. Alick was there for his health, and seemed to be headed for a life as an invalid. Of any of his relatives, his Aunt Jane was the one who understood the financial and emotional toll such a life could take. In leaving significant money to this niece and this nephew, Jane used her money to recognize and honor the difficulties she knew they would face, having experienced both of them throughout her life as a single, invalid woman.

22 JMSII Final Will, July 21, 1886, Box 33, Folder 13, SFP.
Jane left one other explicit financial bequest, and it was the only one she designated to be paid out within a year of her death. She left $2000 to Mary Kersey, who had served as her lady’s companion for at least ten years, and designated it to be paid within a year of her death. The bequests to O’Reilly, Alick, Blossom, and the House of the Good Shepherd were to be paid within five years, but Jane’s will indicates that she understood Mary would need her bequest as soon as possible simply to keep supporting herself. That portion of the will also indicated that any of the legacy that Jane paid to Mary before her death was to be subtracted, and the final documents surrounding the will indicate that only half of the bequest needed to be paid out after Jane’s death. Jane chose to give thousands of dollars to Mary and Father Smith while she was still alive, as she became increasingly infirm, knowing that both of them would need money before the disbursement of money from the estate. She was undoubtedly correct, as Mary received her money almost two years to the date after Jane’s death.23

Jane did not only leave financial gifts for those people and organizations that meant something to her. She left her personal possessions to specific people, listing the provenance of each object if that was relevant to the gift. To her companion, she left a crucifix, a framed picture of the Madonna, her household furniture, and clothing. Leaving dresses, scarves, shawls, stockings, and underclothes to her companion, Jane’s will requested that Mary “would distribute among the poor such of these articles as should not be useful to herself, not forgetting Mary Larkin.”24

To several family members, cousins, nieces, and nephews, she left the objects that tied her to members of the family who had gone before her. She left her cousin Bessie a pair of

23 Probate document, February 10, 1891, Box 33, Folder 14, SFP.
24 JMSII Final Will, July 21, 1886, Box 33, Folder 13, SFP.
brooches containing locks of Jane Senior and Uncle Charles’ hair, and to Bessie’s daughter Julia a sugar cup originally given to Jane by Julia Minot, undoubtedly her namesake. She left several objects to Henry Watts, who she had helped raise in his infancy: his mother’s cup, a kettle his parents had received as a wedding present, and a “cameo likeness” of his grandmother, who had died when he was a few months old. Her nephew Harry Segdwick, who had been a help to her in the last decades of her life, received his grandfather Harry’s set of Shakespeare. An eight volume set is listed in the inventory of property created after Jane’s father’s death, and is the only item of his that his daughter passed on after her death, perhaps the only item of his she was able to hold on to over the nearly sixty years since his death.25

Jane also remembered the convert women who had sustained her in her Catholic life. Twenty years earlier, when Cheery died, her sister-in-law wrote to Jane to inform her, and to communicate her bequest to her best friend: “Mary left you, with her fond love, her rosary, and a brooch to wear in memory of her.” In Jane’s will, she left the brooch and rosary to Cheery’s daughter Lola Madan. To Cheery’s older daughter Addie, to whom Jane had become a close friend and mentor, Jane left several framed prints she had received as gifts from Cheery, as well as something precious to her as a convert: “also a small crucifix blessed by Fr. Francis Knacksted [sic] by whom I was baptized.” Jane gave Addie and Lola gifts that connected them to a specific time in her life, the years leading up to and immediately following her conversion, when her friendship with Cheery helped her see Catholics as something other than the “other.”26

In the thirty-five years of her Catholic life, Jane had assembled a wide group of convert friends. Some, like Cheery and Sophia Ripley, had preceded her in death, but those who outlived

25 JMSII Final Will, July 21, 1886, Box 33, Folder 13, SFP.
26 JMSII Final Will, July 21, 1886, Box 33, Folder 13, SFP.
her received gifts representative of the life Jane lived with them. Anna Ward, Charlotte Dana, 
Emma Cary, and Anna Vernon received Jane’s Catholic books and prints. Angela Dana, 
Charlotte’s niece who both Charlotte and Jane mentored through her conversion, received Jane’s 
statue of St. Joseph and her rosary, which had belonged to Padre Ragonesi, the man who had 
assisted her in finally bringing the Sisters of St. Joseph to Massachusetts. To Ragonesi, she left 
an Italian prayer book, and 100 francs for his diocese in Italy. 27

V.

Locating Jane

The obituary in the *Pittsfield Sun* opened with a description of Jane’s burial place, 
specifically with the fact that she had obtained special permission from the bishop to be interred 
“under the very eaves of St. Joseph’s Church, and only removed by the thickness of the wall 
from the pew she occupied in the church.” The obituary described Jane’s final resting place in 
typically-romantic style:

The glow of the colored window falls into the pew; several large pine trees stand a rod or 
two away and so she lies between the pines and the pew, in her brick lined grave, nestled, 
so to speak, close to the altar and literally under the droppings of the sanctuary, for the 
rain that pours from the slates and snow that slips from the eaves in winter must fall upon 
the mound under which she sleeps.

Even in 1889, when anti-Catholic fervor had cooled to a simmering suspicion, Jane’s conversion 
made her an oddity. She had, in the minds of the Berkshire public, transgressed several 
boundaries with her conversion, and so it is no surprise that the paper spent the entire first 
paragraph of a five-paragraph obituary on the location of her grave, which was such a 
representation of that transgression.

27 JMSII Final Will, July 21, 1886, Box 33, Folder 13, SFP.
Being buried under the eaves of the church was transgressive in itself, but being buried in St. Joseph’s cemetery would have been similarly transgressive. It would not have been religiously transgressive, but socially transgressive. Burial in the Stockbridge Protestant cemetery in general would have been transgressive, because Jane was a Sedgwick, and the Sedgwicks were all buried in the circular family plot. All the Sedgwicks were there, as well as many associates: the two spinster sisters of Theodore II’s wife Sarah Ashburner, several relatives of Grace’s husband, and quite a few people whose connection to the family is no longer immediately apparent. Jane did not die in Stockbridge, it is true, but neither did her brother or her niece Blossom. They both died in Italy, and yet her brother is buried in the family plot, and Blossom has a marker there though her body was laid to rest abroad. Certainly Jane’s faith would dictate that she be buried in a Catholic cemetery, which goes part of the way to explaining her decision, though her cousin Grace, a faithful Catholic whose son became a papal chamberlain, chose to be buried in the family plot despite her Catholicism. Had Jane chosen, she could have privileged her family connections over her religious beliefs, and taken her place in the concentric circles of Sedgwicks veiled from view by tall, thick hedges.

From all we know of Jane’s faith, that choice would have been a difficult one to make. Yet being buried in the St. Joseph’s cemetery would have been an equally difficult choice. Like most Catholic cemeteries in Protestant New England towns, the cemetery for Stockbridge’s Catholics is set outside of the main part of town. It is filled not with the names of Jane’s friends and relatives, but with the names of those who worked for her friends and relatives. Her conversations with Bishop O’Reilly made it clear that she certainly felt a kinship with her Stockbridge co-religionists, but she also saw herself as their advocate because of her privilege. She was not of them, in so many ways – her relative financial freedom, her education, her access
to the upper ranks of the Catholic Church – and so her placement with them in their cemetery would have been as jarring as her placement in the Sedgwick plot. She would have fit, to some extent, in either place, but she would not fully fit in *either* place.

One wonders where Jane might have been laid to rest if she had not taken steps to choose her final resting place. How would her brother, the executor of her will, have chosen to bury his sister? She might have ended up in St. Joseph’s cemetery, more likely in the Sedgwick plot, but almost certainly not under the eaves of the church. To be buried in that location was not unheard of, but it was not conventional, and we can puzzle out some of the meanings Jane might have had in mind when she asked the bishop for permission to be buried there. Certainly her wish exhibited a desire to be close to the place into which she had poured money, time, and love. But there were much longer traditions linked to burial under the eaves of churches specifically so that the water that ran off the church would drip on the graves and sanctify their occupants. There was a Roman tradition of burying babies in that location which continued into the Christian era when it expanded to include adults as well. The tradition seems to have been simultaneously reserved for those who died without the chance to receive the last rites, specifically penance, and those with religious or social distinction, especially the aristocracy. Whatever Jane’s personal reasons, the association of this burial location with supplemental sanctification is inescapable.

Though not part of her will, Jane did leave behind instructions that indicate her choice to be buried outside the Sedgwick Pie was in no way a rejection of that location or the relatives who lay there. On a slip of paper, Jane left the following message: “It is my desire that my heirs should continue to pay what is necessary to keep the graves of our family in the cemetery in

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order in the same proportion as I have done during my life. Jane Sedgwick Stockbridge Nov. 6th 1883.” With this note, as with her bequests to her nieces, nephews, cousins, and her brother Hal, who received whatever remained of her estate after her passing, Jane marked her connection to her Sedgwick family, even as her life had taken her further out of the Sedgwick orbit than her parents, aunts, and uncles might have imagined upon her birth.

Those who remembered Jane, publicly and privately, struggled to locate her, though there was a strong tendency to see her as a woman who had taken the “road to Rome,” a road that inherently took her away from the “Happy Valley” and everything it represented. It seems fitting, though, that it is impossible to discern when exactly Jane began to consider the possibility of joining the Catholic Church. There is no single moment when she took her first step on the road to Rome, for though she joined the Church, she never needed to leave home to do it. When family circumstances forced her to leave Stockbridge, she went to Rome, but spent the rest of her life trying to create the conditions under which she could return and have everything she needed in one place. Though she never married, she spent much of her adult life dedicated to learning, traveling, and benevolence, precisely the things she would have done had she been an unmarried Unitarian woman in the second half of the nineteenth century. Her financial legacy was that of a woman who saw her faith as something that enriched her existing life, rather than replacing it, regardless of the unique nature of her conversion.

Jane’s conversion was an important and valued moment her life, but Roman Catholicism did not overwhelm her existing beliefs, personality traits, or goals, nor did it remove her from her family or social group. Where her birth culture and her new faith culture conflicted, Jane relentlessly read, argued, and prayed, only finding peace when she had satisfied herself, a pattern

29 JMSII note, November 6, 1883, Box 33, Folder 8, SFP.
that would not seem out of place in a Unitarian mind and soul. In that and many other ways, the story of her conversion is one of continuity as much as it is one of change. When we ponder the curious existence of Catholic converts in nineteenth-century America, we say “How could that be?” We ask that question because we have failed to examine the rich and contradictory lives of people like Jane Minot Sedgwick II. In studying Jane’s life, this project has resolved no contradictions, and has shown many to be imaginary. Instead of trying to locate her in this world or the other, as so many did following her death, it has located her exactly where she wanted to be – at the meeting point of two worlds, with one foot in each, accompanied by the women who most understood her.
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