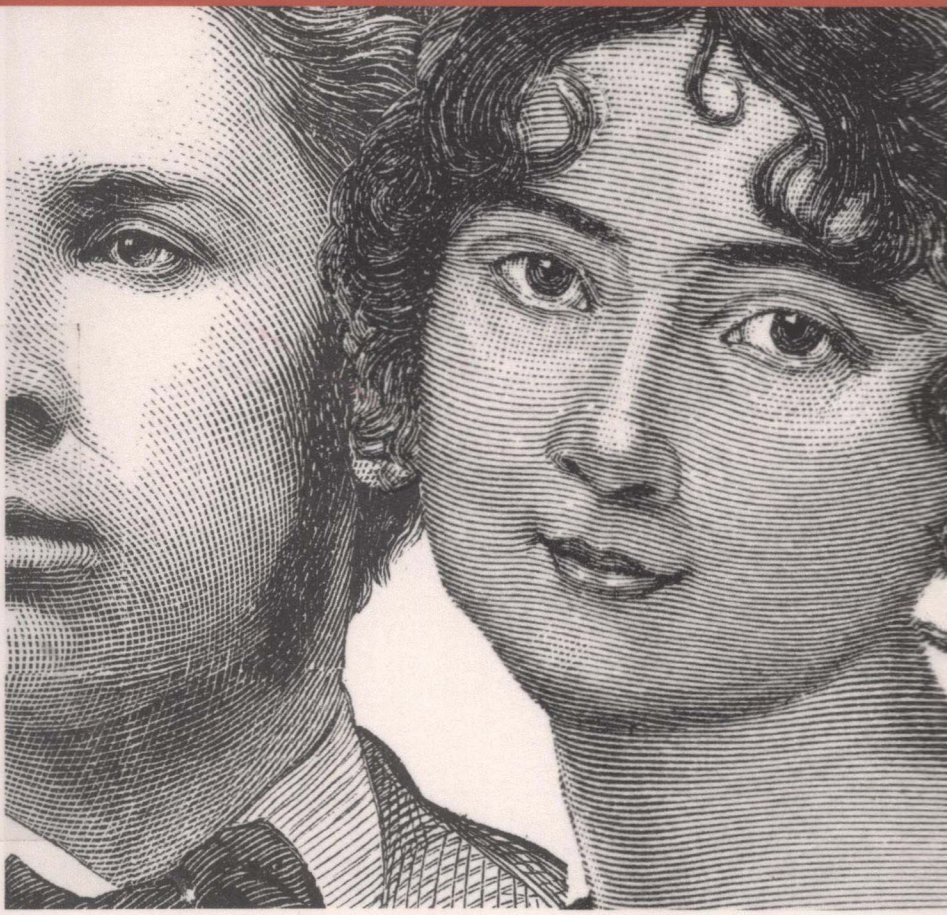
HANNAH MATHER CROCKER

Observations on the Real Rights of Women

AND OTHER WRITINGS

Edited and with an introduction by Constance J. Post



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Observations on the Real Rights of Women
and Other Writings

Legacies of Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers

To My Family

Preface

In doing research for *Signs of the Times in Cotton Mather's Paterna: A Study of Puritan Autobiography* (2000), I traveled to Boston to consult "Biblia Americana," Mather's vast commentary on the Bible, at the Massachusetts Historical Society. While there I also worked at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, where I came upon a reference to Cotton Mather's granddaughter, Hannah Mather Crocker, in the Mather Family Papers. That bit of serendipity led me to the collection of her many unpublished texts at AAS and her unpublished "Reminiscences and Traditions of Boston" at the New England Historic Genealogical Society, in addition to her published texts, *A Series of Letters on Free Masonry* (1815), *The School of Reform, or Seaman's Safe Pilot to the Cape of Good Hope* (1816), and *Observations on the Real Rights of Women* (1818).

Although I found a few scattered references to Hannah Mather Crocker in the secondary literature, the dearth of material about her made it clear that the project of reclaiming neglected women authors is not yet complete. To give Crocker the attention she deserves I first wrote entries about her for *The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing in the United States*, edited by Cathy N. Davidson and Linda Wagner-Martin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 222–23, and *The Dictionary of Literary Biography: American Women Writers to 1820*, edited by Carla Mulford et al. A more recent piece appears in *An Encyclopedia of American Women's History*, edited by Hasia Diner (New York: Facts on File, forthcoming). I have also given papers on Crocker at meetings of the Society of Early

Americanists, the American Literature Association, and the Transatlantic Studies Association and contributed to the scholarly conversation about her in print. See, for example, my essay about Crocker's participation in the transatlantic culture of creating catalogs of illustrious men and women in "Making the A-List: Reformation and Revolution in Crocker's *Observations on the Real Rights of Women*," *Resources for American Literary Study* 29 (2003–4): 67–88.

An important step in my project to recover the writings of Hannah Mather Crocker is to make her work widely available in a modern, annotated edition. Of the three texts published during her lifetime, only *Observations on the Real Rights of Women* has been reprinted in its entirety but without the benefit of an introduction or notes. Most of Crocker's texts, however, have never appeared in print. I am grateful that Sharon Harris and Cindy Weinstein, general editors of the Legacies of Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers series at the University of Nebraska Press, believed in the importance of the project, which gives readers unparalleled access to the broad range of Crocker's writings for the first time.

Editing the writings of Hannah Mather Crocker is a project that has taken me many years to complete, in large part because of the challenges presented by her unpublished manuscripts. My debts to others are many, especially to staff at the American Antiquarian Society, the Massachusetts Historical Society, and the New England Historic Genealogical Society, as well as the Hollis Library at Harvard and the Beinecke Library at Yale. The generosity of Iowa State University, including grants from the Center for Excellence in the Arts and Humanities, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the Department of English, made it possible for me to travel to collections and to have time to write. For their encouragement and helpful

suggestions about my work on Crocker I especially want to thank Kathleen Diffley, Mary Kelley, Carla Mulford, and Priscilla Wald, as well as Sacvan Bercovitch and the late Emory Elliot. I owe a special debt to my colleague Matthew Wynn Sivils for his knowledge of the intricacies of textual editing and to my copy editor, Judith Hoover, and project editor, Sara Springsteen, for their careful attention to detail. The insights of my husband, Danny, into the politics of the period as well as other matters have greatly enriched this volume, and I am grateful to him for this and so much more.

Introduction

On August 14, 1765, the office of Andrew Oliver, stamp master for Massachusetts, was destroyed and his home ransacked by the Loyalist Nine, later known as the Sons of Liberty; an effigy of Oliver was later found hanging in a tree. The Nine also surrounded the home of Thomas Hutchinson, lieutenant governor and chief justice of the Province of Massachusetts Bay, but they moved on when persuaded by a speaker who rose to Hutchinson's defense. On the night of August 26 a mob paid a visit to the homes of Charles Paxton and William Story. Paxton's was spared by the offer of free drink, but Story's was completely destroyed. A second mob trashed Capt. Benjamin Hallowell's home before the two parts joined to reach their third target that evening. The lieutenant governor was not so lucky this time. Enthusiasm was running high to seize the man suspected of supporting the Stamp Act and known to support the writs of assistance that gave the British government the right to conduct a search without needing to provide a reason to do so.[1] Finding no one at home, the crowd burst into the house and began smashing furniture and hauling out stacks of manuscripts and books that Hutchinson had amassed over many years for his projected history of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In "Reminiscences and Traditions of Boston" his niece, Hannah Mather Crocker, notes that the manuscripts, some of which belonged to her father, Samuel Mather, were dumped in North Square.[2] The mob, however, did not consider its work finished until it had also gutted the interior walls of the stately home, cut off the

cupola, and removed most of the slate roof. Dismantling the roof took several hours.[3]

On hearing that Hutchinson had fled to the home of his brother-in-law, Samuel Mather, some of the men rushed over there. Mather, however, refused to let them in and soon determined that it was unsafe for Hutchinson to remain with them a moment longer. According to Crocker, she "was sent to shew and escort him the pass, a back way through an alley to the house of Mr. Thomas Edes, father of the late Edward Edes, baker and grandfather of the present Senior Minister in Providence. Mr. Hutchinson continued there till 6 o'clock the next morn. The present writer," notes Crocker, "continued his companion through the night without sleep, then escorted him in safety to his sister's house the same way he retreated. He was calm through the whole scene and partook of Breakfast with the family. After breakfast he went to court in his common dress as his bagwig and robes were destroyed."[4] The sister's house was none other than the home of Hannah Crocker's parents, Hannah Hutchinson and Samuel Mather, from which the girl had escorted Thomas Hutchinson the previous evening. The incident, which occurred when Crocker was thirteen, appears in her miscellany, "Reminiscences of Boston," in which she recalls the details about her modest role in a major incident leading up to the Revolutionary War. Crocker's part in the episode encapsulates several themes in her writing: the conviction that women have a part to play in public affairs, the devotion to things antiquarian, and the determination to reconcile opposing viewpoints in an effort to achieve harmonious relations.

The daughter of Samuel and Hannah Hutchinson Mather, Hannah Crocker was born in Boston on June 27, 1752, and

died in nearby Roxbury on July 11, 1829, at the age of seventy-seven. She is buried in the Mather tomb at Copp's Hill in Boston. A direct descendant from what she called "the fourfold line of Mathers," ministers all, Crocker was the great-great-granddaughter of Richard Mather, who emigrated to the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1635; the great-granddaughter of Increase Mather, president of Harvard University (then Harvard College) from 1685 to 1692; the granddaughter of Cotton Mather, the most prolific writer in the colonies; and the daughter of Samuel, Cotton Mather's sole surviving son. On her mother's side she was the descendant of Anne Hutchinson, banished from Boston in 1638.[5] In 1779 Hannah married Joseph Crocker, the son of Josiah Crocker, a minister of Taunton, Massachusetts. A graduate of Harvard, Joseph Crocker served as a captain in the revolutionary army. The Crockers had ten children, but Hannah waited until her "olive branches," as she refers to them, were grown before she fulfilled her aspiration to become a writer.[6]

Crocker believed that the ideal time for a mother to take up writing is after her children "have spread forth to form new circles in society," leaving an empty nest that enables her to enter "a fully ripe season to read, write, meditate and compose, if the body and mind are not enfeebled by infirmities."[7] Although she believed the chief end of such activities is to be mindful of the needs of the next generation, the personal satisfaction to be gained from activities that cheer the "furrows of age" did not escape her notice. In an 1821 poem, "A Petition," she pleads with an old friend who told Crocker's granddaughter to hide Crocker's pen and ink in order to speed her recovery from lung fever. "Thinking," writes Crocker, "keeps your friend alive. / I live to think; I think to live" (182). In the juxtaposition

of living and thinking the chiasmus includes nothing about writing, an activity that Crocker regarded as inseparable from thinking and pursued as twin activities well into the last year of her life, when she finished her reminiscences in 1829 at the age of seventy-seven.

That text and others remain unpublished until now. Even before the 1815 publication of her first essay under the pseudonym "A Lady of Boston," Crocker tried her hand at writing a fast sermon, dated August 20, 1812, under the pseudonym "Increase Mather Jun. of the inner Temple" for that sermon and for a Thanksgiving sermon dated November 18, 1813. She also completed the manuscript of a short play, *The Midnight Beau*, in 1819. Several undated manuscripts make it difficult to fix the date of her first sustained attempt: "The United Trinity or consistant [*sic*] Catholic Christian" by "Candidus Maximus Originalis"; "Jephthah Vow, explained," for which no author is given; and "An Humble Address to the reason, and Wisdom of the American Nation," a third essay written under the pseudonym "Increase Mather Jun. of the inner Temple." There are also three versions of an essay on "Antiquarian researches, Pleasant and easy, By an original Antiquarian." A fragment of her writing is dated as early as 1772. Considered in their entirety Crocker's published and unpublished texts provide ample evidence of a sustained effort to develop her skill at writing in several genres, chiefly the essay but also poetry, drama, and the commonplace book.[8] The essay, however, remained a favorite vehicle for the expression of her ideas about a wide range of contemporary issues and thus a means by which to enter into public life.

Crocker did so as a "sublime amateur," the phrase applied by Susan Phinney Conrad to women writers of the period who wanted to avoid the negative associations of professionalism

with femininity.[9] As Conrad notes, women with intellectual aspirations in the period 1830–60 usually had a father who was a professional. Crocker fits this pattern. Although she wrote in the period before 1830, men on her father's side of the family had been professionals for many generations. Little is known, however, about her education. Unlike the women writers examined by Mary Kelley in *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*, there is no record that Crocker attended a female academy or seminary.[10] Though largely self-taught, Crocker at least had the advantage of her father's library with its hundreds of books that included many volumes written by her male forebears. Other women writers of the early republic, such as Phillis Wheatley, Judith Sargent Murray, Mercy Otis Warren, and Hannah Adams, also lacked a formal education. Given their scant resources the achievements of women writers in Crocker's generation seem all the more extraordinary when compared to women writers of the next generation, who had the benefit of the formal education available at female academies and seminaries.

The lack of formal education, however, did not produce a uniform career path among women writers in the early republic. Phillis Wheatley (1753?–84), a child prodigy, was writing poetry long before the 1773 publication of *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, when she was about twenty; the first major work of Hannah Adams (1755–1831), *An Alphabetical Compendium of the Various Sects*, appeared in print in 1784, before she was thirty; "On the Equality of the Sexes," the landmark essay in the March–April issue of *Massachusetts Magazine* by Judith Sargent Murray (1751–1820), was published in 1790, before her fortieth year; Mercy Otis Warren (1728–1814) saw nothing in print with her name on it until 1790, although her

play *The Adulateur* was published anonymously in 1772, when she was forty-four. Similarly the name Hannah Mather Crocker (1752–1829) did not appear on the title page of her first major publication, *A Series of Letters on Free Masonry*. Published in 1815, when she was sixty-three, the author is identified only as "A Lady of Boston."

Crocker did not let her delay in entering public life as a writer prevent her from taking on a wide variety of issues, whether a spirited defense of women's rights, Freemasonry, American exceptionalism, the need for reform, or the promotion of antiquarian research. These matters, treated singly or in combination in her writings, place her squarely within the political and cultural developments of the period of the early republic in the United States as well as the transatlantic context of Great Britain and the Continent. The advancement of Enlightenment values, those undergirding the American Revolution in particular, permeate her work, as do those of Scottish Enlightenment writers in the matter of common sense and rights.[11] Crocker is also representative of the period's renewed interest in literary genres such as the epistolary essay to articulate her support of Freemasonry; drama, in particular farce, to instruct foolish young men by entertaining rather than sermonizing; and satiric verse to excoriate physicians who cared more about their fees than the well-being of their patients. The sermon and the commonplace book also figure prominently in her writings; she relied heavily on the former in her jeremiads and on the latter in her two longest texts, *Observations on the Real Rights of Women* (1818) and "Reminiscences of Boston" (1829).

This book includes both published and unpublished writings by Hannah Mather Crocker. Of her published writings

it provides the complete texts of *A Series of Letters on Free Masonry* (1815), *The School of Reform, or Seaman's Safe Pilot to the Cape of Good Hope* (1816), and *Observations on the Real Rights of Women* (1818). Many of her unpublished writings are also included: the complete texts of "Fast Sermon" (1812), "Thanksgiving Sermon" (1813), and the farce *The Midnight Beau* (1819), as well as one of the three versions of the essay "Antiquarian researches, Pleasant and easy, By an original Antiquarian" (n.d.) and "An Humble Address to the reason, and Wisdom of the American Nation" (n.d.). Selections from Crocker's 1829 miscellany, "Reminiscences of Boston," convey the breadth of her interests, ranging from anecdotes about the early founders to a description of a spinning contest on Boston Common, a story about Benjamin Franklin learning to stoop and one about a ten-foot-long rattlesnake placed in her lap by Sir John Dalton, reflections on the origins of the Liberty Tree, and a no-fail recipe for clam chowder.

To understand Crocker's development as a writer, a useful place to start is with her earliest extant pieces, considered here under "Beginnings: 1772–1811." These are followed by selections arranged chronologically in three major groupings: "Finding a Voice, 1812–1814," "Becoming an Advocate, 1815–1819," and "Taking Stock, 1820–1829." These groups, it should be noted, are not mutually exclusive. For example, Crocker uses a pseudonym in both the first and second groups, but the pseudonyms vary. Likewise although she supported a variety of causes, the last essay in "Finding a Voice" is the first of her writings in which she describes herself as "a warm advocate," in this instance, "for the forming of associations for literary and scientific improvement" (34). The assumption of a public role for her advocacy, however, becomes much more appar-

ent in the second group, which includes three published texts and an unpublished play. "Taking Stock," a lifelong interest of Crocker's that surfaces in many of her writings, reaches its fullest expression in "Reminiscences and Traditions of Boston."

Beginnings, 1772–1811

Miscellaneous papers of Hannah Mather Crocker dated 1772, 1778, and 1786 shed light on her beginnings as a writer. The earliest of these highlights the importance she attached to respecting those with whom you differ, an idea found throughout her writings and usually combined with an emphasis on the need for mutual respect. The account notes with approval the high praise of Governor Thomas Hutchinson for the integrity and intelligence of clergymen in New England even though their views were far from his on the subject of politics. Hutchinson presumably extended this respect to his brother-in-law, Samuel Mather, the father of Hannah Mather Crocker, but whether the respect was reciprocated by the clergymen in their assessment of Hutchinson is absent from the unsigned document, dated September 21, 1772, and identified only as "recorded by a friend to all good men, tho' they differ, in their political, civil, or religious opinions."[12] The importance of the anecdote for Crocker is twofold: not only does it express the idea of mutuality that informs most of her writing, but it also serves as an example of her habit of collecting material from a wide variety of sources.

The conscious effort to produce a commonplace book surfaces in one of her miscellaneous papers, titled "A new collection of fragments taken from the public papers for rustick amusement in a winter evening by a friend of rural contentment." It is followed by a poem about the entertainment value these may