

Rebecca Harding Davis Society Newsletter



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Robin L. Cadwallader

Vice President, Publications:

Sharon M. Harris

Conference Activities Coordinator:

Alicia Mischa Renfroe

Web Master:

Michael Sell, Sell Communications

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PRESIDENT'S REMARKS

Greetings fellow Society Members,

It is my pleasure to say in this newsletter that the **Davis Society is now eight years old**. And, while we have grown over the past eight years, we need your help to continue to spread the word about Davis studies and opportunities for conference presentations. We also need your help to build society **membership**. Our membership is only \$5 per year, and a complimentary copy of *Rebecca Harding Davis: Writing Cultural Autobiography* comes with every two-year membership. Additionally, a lifetime membership is only \$75!

As president of the society, I would like to recognize **Mischa Renfroe** for her recent edition of Davis's *A Law Unto Herself*, a lesser known but wonderful novel originally published in *Lippincott's* magazine. Mischa, a founding member of the society and our conference coordinator, has provided valuable insight into Davis's *Peterson's* publications and with this new scholarly edition shows us that there is still much to be done in Davis studies.

I would also like to announce that Sherry Harris's expanded and updated **biography** of Davis is nearing completion. Sherry has uncovered some exciting information about Davis's life and will have some surprises for all of us who have worked hard to learn more about her world. We all owe Sherry a debt of gratitude for her continued commitment to Davis scholarship.

Additionally, I would like to recognize all of the other **scholars who have published on Davis** this past year. Indeed, there is always more to say about her life, her work, and her world. Thank you all for continuing to expand the discussion. (Please see Recently Published in this newsletter.)

Finally, I would like to let all of you know of the **historical marker** being erected in Wheeling, West Virginia, sometime next year, celebrating place in Davis’s fiction. The marker in Wheeling will be the second to recognize Davis as an author of merit. It complements the first marker, erected in Washington, Pennsylvania, the place of Davis’s birth and formal schooling. Look for more information on this event, as well as the fall **SSAWW Mid-Atlantic Women Writers Study Group**, which will be held in Washington and will feature Davis’s Washington stories.

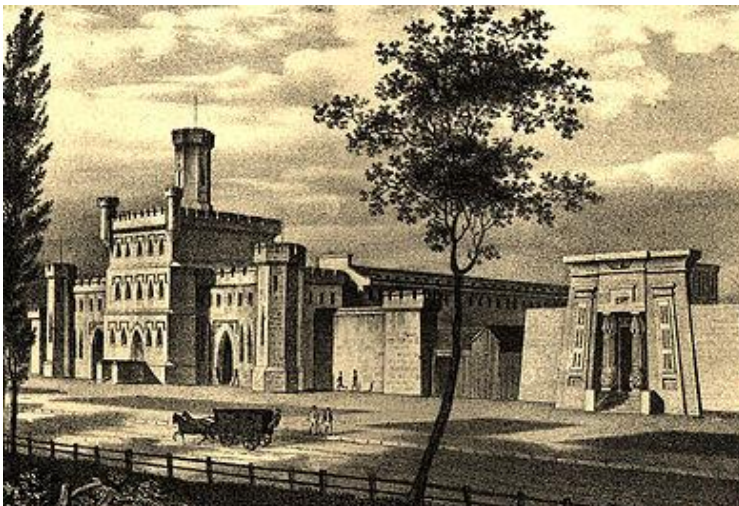
In closing, I must say that I am looking forward to our ninth year and the many opportunities for new and seasoned scholars to present and publish on Davis. Please watch for our Calls for Papers and other announcements throughout the year.

Warm Regards,

Robin

RHD: HER WORLD

Prison reform was one of many reform movements that RHD engaged in over her lifetime. In works as varied as “The Man in the Cage” (*Harper’s*, 1877) and “By-Paths in the Mountains” (*Harper’s*, 1880) or “Prisoners’ Sunday” (*Congregationalist*, 1888), Davis raised concerns about the innocent being imprisoned and conditions of the prisons. Much of Davis’s understanding of the need for reform came from her knowledge of Moyamensing Prison in Philadelphia. Its famous prisoners included Edgar Allan Poe, abolitionist Passmore Williams, and America’s first recorded serial killer, H. H. Holmes (made famous for a twentieth-first century audience in *The Devil in the White City*). Built in the early 1830s, the prison’s gothic architecture reinforced the horror of the prison in the minds of many Philadelphians. Below is an engraving of the prison a few years after it opened. – *Sharon M. Harris*



RECOVERING RHD - DIGITAL DAVIS

In March 2016, Sharon M. Harris launched the **Rebecca Harding Davis Archives**, a digital collection of Davis’s writings (<http://rebeccahardingdavisarchives.lib.uconn.edu/> - or just Google “Rebecca Harding Davis Archives”). Selections of her writings are currently available in the fields of fiction, nonfiction, journalism, and children’s literature. Also available on the website is an extensive bibliography of her work and a chronology of

her life. A publications chronology is also on the site, detailing the many periodicals in which she wrote over the years and demonstrating the various journals in which she published in any given year. Equally important are the Cultural Contexts essays that place Davis's work in broader contexts such as "Medicine," "Law," "Media," and "Children's Literature." Other essays are in the pipeline. Anyone interested in contributing a Cultural Context essay should contact the Site Administrator (sharon.harris@uconn.edu).

Crowdsourcing! We especially **need volunteers** to input texts for the website. No coding is required, just simple transcribing of a text. You will be credited by name and affiliation at the top of your entry. If you are interested, contact Sharon Harris for simple guidelines. Be sure to contact Prof. Harris before transcribing a text in order to avoid duplication, as several people are in the process of contributing texts.

RECOVERING RHD – Part II

Zachary Turpin, University of Houston

As a brand new member of the Rebecca Harding Davis Society, I'm excited to share "**Seventy-Three Uncollected Short Works by Rebecca Harding Davis: A Bibliography.**" Published just this past month in *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, this work adds to the monolithic bibliographic efforts of Jane Atteridge Rose and Ruth Ann Stoner Nieves. Davis scholars will probably recognize some of these "new" works—several appeared in the very first *Rebecca Harding Davis Society Newsletter!*—but many will likely come as a surprise. Besides publishing the bibliography and a brief introductory article, *TSWL* has reprinted three of these "new" Davis works. The first is "At Noon" (1887), a tale of the pleasurelessness of wealth. (To avoid spoilers, read the short story before you read the introductory article.) The second is "Women and Politics" (1859), Davis's earliest definite publication, reprinted here in full for the first time. (Excerpts previously appeared in Sharon M. Harris's landmark study, *Rebecca Harding Davis and American Realism.*) The final work reproduced is "Women as Imitators of Men" (1906), a fine example of Davis's complex late-life stance on both the New Woman and the cult of domesticity. These, of course, are just the tip of the iceberg. The bibliography is chock-full of tales, essays, articles, reminiscences, letters to editors and friends, and even a recipe. They span Davis's entire writing career. One of my personal favorites is "Old Delaware" (1888), an unsigned reminiscence that appeared in *Lippincott's* "no-name" issue. Readers were encouraged to guess who the authors were, and write in with their suggestions. Davis's authorship was revealed in a subsequent issue. (Indeed, one reader correctly guessed it!) This piece and more than seventy others together offer broad new expanses in Davis's fiction, politics, life, and thought. There is a great deal more to read, to know, and to discover of Rebecca Harding Davis.

See: tswl.utulsa.edu

FROM THE PEN OF REBECCA HARDING DAVIS

Davis wrote many critiques of America's aristocracy. Well-to-do if not wealthy, she and her husband participated in Philadelphia's society circles and had first-hand knowledge of their practices. This essay is also a critique of parenting—don't miss the allusion to roasting children on "the fire of prosperity"! It was one of her many unsigned editorials for the *Saturday Evening Post* and was published February 7, 1903. [This and many other of RHD's unsigned editorials for the *Post* are available in the RHD Archives; see article about the Archives above.]

“Cheating the Children”

One of our millionaires who began life as a poor lad and did not succeed until middle age is said to enjoy the fun and luxury which his money brings him like a hot-headed boy. He goes to balls and the play incessantly; he buys pictures, yachts, automobiles, and exults and rejoices loudly in each, until he becomes a bore to his blasé companions.

“How can you find so much pleasure in such things?” one of them asked him the other day.

“Because they are new to me. Remember that I had nothing when I was a boy,” he answered.

Isn't there a significant hint here to well-to-do American parents of to-day? They are cheating their children's lives of certain enjoyments which rightfully belong to their mature age by forcing them upon them almost in their cradles.

Two generations ago the respectable, God-fearing father and mother in this country believed that the first virtue to teach their children was self-sacrifice. “Spare the rod and spoil the child” was their maxim. The rod was not spared to the child, and the boy, as a rule, was forced to work hard for his education or living. Money was scarce in those days, and the root idea of religion was asceticism. Emerson's mother laughed at him when he winced at their clothes in winter and an always empty stomach. What was cold or hunger, she cried, when Greek or philosophy could be conquered. Down to old age his body showed the scars of that cruel neglect in childhood; but he and his cult always glorified the Roman virtue of his mother.

Where will you find such Roman mothers now? We have gone to the other extreme in our treatment of children. Money is plenty. The “old man” has heaped up enough for his boys and girls. He stuffs them with luxuries, he roasts them in the fire of his prosperity, as live geese in Strasburg are stuffed and roasted—and with very much the same result to their brains and heart.

Other nations are wiser. The heir to an English dukedom is kept in the nursery until he is old enough to go to Eton and be thumped and mauled by other boys. A royal princess of ten eats her boiled mutton and pudding with her governess at noon, and wears clothes as simple as those of any farmer's child. They never hear of “Society,” although they are being trained to rule over it.

The child of the wealthy American at two years old is probably a competitor in a Baby Show at Asbury Park, arrayed in satin and lace and stared at by thousands. Or if her parents are a little too well-bred for that they take her to hotels in summer or scamper over Europe with her until she is grown. She is, as a rule, overdressed and self-conscious. She has at twelve the jewels, the manners, and the effrontery of a middle-aged woman.

In all our large towns the children of wealthy parents have their theatre and card parties, their cotillions and balls, for which little boys engage their partners days in advance, and provide them with bouquets of costly roses. Their talk is of flirtation and engagements—a feeble parody of the feeble doings of their elders.

Now, is this state of things fair to the boys and girls?

At ten they are cheated out of the fun of childish games, out of the relish for plain food, out of the joyous ignorance, the dreams, the innocence which belong to childhood; and at thirty they are cheated out of all enjoyment or the pleasures of middle age because they were satiated with them when they wore kilts.

NEW AND FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS

Caddell, Jillian. “‘An Exchange of Territory’: Geography, Literature, and the American Civil War.” Diss. Cornell U, 2015.

Cadwallader, Robin L. "Rebecca Harding Davis and American Social Realism." Gale Researcher. 2016.

Renfroe, Alicia Mischa, ed. *A Law Unto Herself*, by Rebecca Harding Davis. 1877. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2014.

Scriptunas, Melanie Kay. "The Evolution of Appalachian Literature, 1870-1900." Diss. U of Delaware, 2015. DAI 75.11.

Turpin, Zachary. "Seventy-Three Uncollected Short Works by Rebecca Harding Davis: A Bibliography." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 35 (2016): 229-52. (See above essay.)

West, Michael D. "Romantic Irony in the Short Fiction of Rebecca Harding Davis." *American Literary Realism* 47.3 (2015): 235-49.

RECENT EVENTS SPONSORED BY THE DAVIS SOCIETY – Mischa Renfroe

The Society for the Study of Rebecca Harding Davis and Her World organized sessions at two national conferences this year—the triennial meeting of the **Society for the Study of American Women Writers** held November 4-8, 2015, in Philadelphia and the annual meeting of the **American Literature Association** held May 24-29, 2016, in San Francisco.

The society sponsored one session, "Rebecca Harding Davis, Marriage Reform, and U.S. Policies on 'Indian' Reform," at **SSAWW**. Two papers examined Davis's neglected work for *Peterson's Ladies Magazine*. Jane E. Rose of Purdue University North Central presented "Transgressing the Sanctity of a Marriage in Rebecca Harding Davis's 'Between Man and Wife'" and Sarah Gray of Middle Tennessee State University presented "'I am a hard man': Rebecca Harding Davis's Male Narrator in *The Second Life*." In "Davis and U.S 'Indian Reform Policies,'" Sharon M. Harris, emerita of the University of Connecticut, explored the evolution of Davis's representations of Native Americans across her career. Robin L. Cadwallader of St. Francis University chaired the session.

The society sponsored one session, "Rebecca Harding Davis: Revisiting 'Life in the Iron-Mills' and Reclaiming Neglected Texts," at **ALA**. In a fascinating multi-media presentation titled "The Laboring Self: Critical Implications of a 21st-Century Korl Woman," xtine burroughs and Sabrina Starnaman of University of Texas at Dallas explored the continued relevance of "Life in the Iron-Mills" and discussed the implications of their ongoing digital project; this project brings the text to piecework laborers from Amazon's Mechanical Turk crowd work platform, students, and other viewers in the joint creation of a present-day korl woman. Gretchen Martin of the University of Virginia's College at Wise presented "Obscuring the Narrative Point of View in 'Life in the Iron-Mills.'" Analyzing Davis's complicated narrative strategies, Martin made the case that Mitchell is the narrator. Drawn from her work on a scholarly edition of Davis's *Kitty's Choice, A Story of Berrytown*," Margaret Jay Jessee of the University of Alabama at Birmingham presented "Kitty's Choice and the Characterization of the 19th-Century Female Physician," which explored Davis's depiction its historical context in light of debates about birth control. In "A Law Unto Herself in Context," Robin L. Cadwallader of St. Francis University, Pennsylvania, examined Davis's novel through the lens of 21st-century choice feminism.

CALLS FOR PAPERS

The Society will organize sessions at the next meeting of the American Literature Association to be held in Boston, Massachusetts, on **May 25-28, 2017**. We have exciting plans to team up with the **Louisa May Alcott Society** for **joint sessions** and an excursion, possibly to the Lowell Mills National Park. We are especially interested in proposals that explore connections between Alcott and Davis. Please save the date and look for the CFP soon!

About the Newsletter

The Society thanks Michael Sell for maintaining the website. Past issues of the *Newsletter* are posted on the website at <http://scotus.francis.edu/rebeccaardingdavis/>.

If you wish to contribute items to the newsletter, please contact its editor:

Sharon.Harris@uconn.edu

For membership, please complete the membership form below and mail it along with your membership dues to:

Robin L. Cadwallader
Dept. of English
Saint Francis University
Loretto, PA 15940

Membership Form

Name:

Address:

Email:

Telephone:

This information may ____ / may not ____ be included in the Society's secure online Members' Directory.

Membership dues are \$5.00 annually. With a two-year membership or a gift of \$10 or more to the Society, you will receive a free copy of *Writing Cultural Autobiography*, a reprint of Davis's *Bits of Gossip* with additional material, edited by Janice Milner Lasseter and Sharon M. Harris.