

Rebecca Harding Davis Society Newsletter



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PRESIDENT'S REMARKS

Greetings!

This has been a very exciting year for those interested in the life and times of Rebecca Harding Davis. As you may remember from a previous e-mail, Jennifer Harding, of Washington & Jefferson College, applied for a Pennsylvania Historical Marker to recognize Davis's connection to Washington, PA, and Washington Female Seminary, the "sister" school of Washington and Jefferson; her application was approved and her request granted. The marker will be unveiled during a special ceremony hosted by Washington & Jefferson in April 2013. According to Jennifer, "Davis's marker will be the first for any individual woman in Washington County!" How exciting!! Thank you Jennifer for all your hard work in having Davis's connection to Washington recognized.

In addition to the special ceremony to mark the unveiling of the marker, Jennifer is planning a one-day symposium on Davis to showcase her work as a writer. Please keep an eye out for future e-mails announcing the date and time of the ceremony/symposium.

Finally, the April 2013 issue of *Topic: Washington & Jefferson College Review* will be dedicated to papers on Davis's work. Please consider submitting something for this special issue as we continue to promote the scholarship on Rebecca Harding Davis and her world. On another note, I am pleased to announce that we again had a wonderful representation of Davis scholars at the ALA this year. While I couldn't be there to thank you personally for participating in this great conference, and especially for presenting your research on Davis, I would like to recognize the great work that you have all done to keep Davis scholarship going.

I would also like to thank Mischa Renfroe, our conference coordinator, for all of her hard work in organizing so many conferences and panelists. She truly leaves no stone unturned to bring us some of the best papers on Davis's work. Please plan to attend our panel at the SSAWW, where Mischa has lined up another great slate of presenters for us.

We hope you like our newsletter and will think about submitting something for publication. If you have any items for the newsletter or would like us to recognize any publications or new research on Davis, please send that to our newsletter editor Sherry Harris at sharon.harris@uconn.edu any time; she will hold the information until the next newsletter. And, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Sherry for continuing to put together an interesting and informative newsletter, one that always gives us new information on Davis! Our membership continues to grow, and we will continue to offer the special membership deal of a free copy of *Bits of Gossip* with a two-year membership, which is just \$10. Please help us to recruit new members by spreading the word about this great offer.

Best wishes for a wonderful fall semester—

Robin L. Cadwallader, President

RHD: HER WORLD

The Legal Context of "The Case of Jane Boyer" - Alicia Mischa Renfroe

"The Case of Jane Boyer" reveals Davis's long-time interest in legal issues. Most notably, this story encourages readers to link the new crime of ransom kidnapping with the wrongful commitment of sane persons to insane asylums. The story opens with the narrator's recollection of the highly-publicized Ross kidnapping, a memory that reminds the narrator of other, less-publicized cases like that of Jane Boyer. By using the Ross case as a catalyst for Jane's story, Davis encourages her audience to view cases of wrongful civil commitment as a form of kidnapping that should garner the same public attention. Further, patriarchal inheritance practices provide a financial motive for Jane's kidnapping; an echo of the English law of primogeniture (the practice of passing an estate from eldest son to eldest son), her father's will provides for her inheritance on the condition that she produce a male heir. Since Jane has a daughter, her male cousin uses lax civil commitment laws to, in effect, hide Jane from her family and attempt to inherit the estate himself. Both instances suggest the legal concept of *parens patriae*—the paternalistic power of the state and the head of the household to protect the weak, a category in the nineteenth century that included women, minor children, and the insane.

Though published almost a decade after *Put Out of the Way* (1870), "The Case of Jane Boyer" begins with her kidnapping in 1868 and ends with her release from an asylum in 1868, on the eve of major reform initiatives in the 1870s. With its pre-reform setting, Jane's situation may have reminded readers of high-profile contemporary cases. For instance, in

1860, Elizabeth Packard was committed to an asylum solely on the signature of her husband, a minister who disagreed with her religious beliefs, and her case continued to garner attention well into the 1870s as she worked toward legal reform. In "A Letter de Cachet," Clark Davis described the state of Pennsylvania law, which allowed an individual to be committed on the signature of a single physician. Though the efforts of Packard, the Davises, and others produced significant changes, Davis continued to remind her readers of the implications, particularly for women, of patriarchal legal concepts on contemporary law.

"The Rights of Inmates of Insane Asylums: A Petition to Congress that Post-Office Boxes Be Placed in Every Asylum—Powerlessness of Sane Persons Maliciously Imprisoned to Appeal to Friends for Aid." By A Regular Correspondent

...A memorial has been presented to the Committee on Post-Offices in support of such a bill and has just been published. This memorial has been written and presented by Mrs. E. P. W. Packard of Chicago, a native of Massachusetts, the daughter of a Congregational clergyman and the wife of another. She was imprisoned, she alleges, for three years, by her husband, who was preaching in Illinois. She had been educated a strict Calvinist, but led, as she says, by her own reason and common sense, she came to disbelieve the doctrine of total depravity. The utterance of those views, tolerated at first by her husband, caused them to become very popular, so much so that her husband and his church, she asserts, fearing lest their church creed might suffer serious detriment, resolved to put a stop to her moral influence. She recounts in the most vivid manner the story of her kidnapping and incarceration in the Jacksonville Insane Asylum by her husband, the efforts of her friends to prevent her imprisonment and secure her release, the treatment she received while in the asylum, and the manner of her escape. Taken from her family of six children, declared a legal non-entity, she remained in the asylum for three years, subject to the greatest ill-treatment, and having no communication with the outside world. The Superintendent, for selfish reasons, finally allowed her to explain her religious views to the trustees, who, although Calvinists, readily discovered that it was the use of her reason, and not the loss of it, which occasioned her imprisonment, and they accordingly ordered her discharge. Her husband then endeavored with the aid of the Superintendent, to secure her imprisonment in the Northampton Asylum in Massachusetts. She succeeded, however, in sending a letter to a judge in the town in which she lived, and her husband was ordered to bring her before him to show justifiable cause for imprisoning her. This he failed to do for want of evidence. She continues that after her trial of five days, the jury pronounced her sane, notwithstanding that her husband's witnesses swore it was evidence of insanity for a person to wish to leave the Presbyterian Church and join the Methodist; and notwithstanding the sworn testimony of his certifying physicians that she had the same kind of insanity as Henry Ward Beecher and Spurgeon, and three-fourths of the religious community. Her husband ran away in the night, leaving her homeless and penniless and without her children. She now wishes such laws enacted as will render an outrage of this nature upon any other American woman a legal impossibility. She believes that there are now

hundreds of women needing the help that she needed, and for them she now appeals to the government. (*New York Tribune*, Feb. 16, 1875)

“A Modern Lettre de Cachet,” L. Clarke Davis

...Yet there is not a man among us, however, pure, wise, or influential, who may not be, upon the certificate of a single physician, committed to the cell of a lunatic asylum, the walls of which are as high and strong, the keepers as vigilant and morose, the code of laws as absolute, the windows and doors as difficult to escape from, as those of any prison in the land.

...But let your enemies, or your heirs, and their physicians go quietly about their work; let them arrest you in the night, carry you to the asylum, and suggest to the governor of the institution that only they are to communicate with you in person or by letter, and no writ of habeas corpus can draw you from your living grave into the freedom of a citizen, for none knows where they have hidden you. Thenceforth you are dead to the world until your estate is put beyond your control or divided...dead, astute law-makers! (*Atlantic Monthly* 21. [May 1868] pgs. 588, 589)

FROM THE PEN OF REBECCA HARDING DAVIS

Rebecca Harding Davis’s interest in the law was longstanding and included political and social aspects of the law, as Mischa Renfro’s forthcoming edition of Davis’s *A Law Unto Herself* reveals. Davis wrote many stories about legal issues for *Peterson’s Magazine*, including “The Case of Jane Boyer” (*Peterson’s*, July 1877), published “By the Author of ‘The Second Life,’ etc., etc.” The 1874 case of four-year-old Charlie Ross, the first kidnap-for-ransom case in the United States, reverberated throughout the country. Even though a suspect was tried in 1875, suspicions about whether or not the right man or all involved parties had been arrested and tried lasted for decades, especially since Charlie was never found. The case was a newspaper sensation, and numerous articles, stories, and even sheet music (“Bring Back Our Darling”) were published. Thus Davis’s story is part of the cultural publishing phenomenon surrounding this national legal case, but it is also part of Davis’s ongoing cultural work against the lax laws surrounding incarceration in mental asylums. She and her husband, L. Clarke Davis, wrote many articles and stories attempting to enact reform in these laws during the 1870s. Her best-known work in this field is *Put Out of the Way* (1870). For more on the Davis family’s reform work in this area see *Rebecca Harding Davis and American Realism* (1991) and David Dowling, “Davis, Inc.: The Business of Asylum Reform in the Periodical Press,” *American Periodicals* 20.1 (2010): 23-45. – Sharon M. Harris

The Case of Jane Boyer

I have followed the history of the kidnapping of the child, Charlie Ross, and the efforts for his discovery, with peculiar interest, owing to the fact that, in the course of my own experiences, I have had knowledge of one or two cases similar in kind. In one instance, it was a man, who vanished absolutely from his place without any assignable cause for such disappearance; in the other, a woman. The first case, for private reasons, it would be improper now to relate in detail; but to the recital of the second there can be no reasonable objection, although several of the parties concerned are yet living I shall use the ordinary precaution of altering the names, to avoid their discovery, and also the localities, and give the facts as they happened.

I premise, however, that the number of these mysterious disappearances, as every lawyer well knows, are much more numerous than is ordinarily supposed. In the case of the Ross child, for example, over five hundred children have been examined in the vain search for the missing infant, each one of whom was a waif, or stray, of whose parentage or proper homes no information could be obtained. In the disappearance of adults, it is only when the missing man chances to be a prominent citizen, (as in the case of Chancellor Livingstone, in New York, or the Russian attaché, in London, both of whom suddenly vanished in the midst of crowded streets, and were never heard of again,) that the matter comes to the ear of the public. Men of less note disappear, and the story, after a brief whisper in the neighborhood, dies out, and is forgotten. Behind each history, however, lies a background of romance and crime far more tragic, if dramatically presented, than any invented by mere fiction-mongers.

I shall be able to give no such fictitious coloring to the facts of this case, which I shall briefly set down, as they were known to me in my medical capacity, and also in my personal relations with the actors in the sad drama.

Holman J. Boyer was a physician in a good practice, in one of the valley counties of Virginia, before the war; the county, indeed, adjacent to that in which I, a much younger man, settled at a later date. My practice and Boyer's in no wise interfered with each other, the distances being so great. We met occasionally, however, at consultations, and in the rare conventions of the medication association of that part of the State. Boyer was a middle-aged man before he married. His wife was a Miss Jane Whitcomb, of Norfolk. There was a little buzz of gossip at the time, about the discrepancy in their ages, the lady being reported as young and prominent in society, while Boyer was a grave man, fond of his own fireside. One child was born to them, a girl, and it was in my attendance on this child and its mother, that I first became intimately acquainted with Boyer. They were so precious in his eyes, that he would not trust himself to prescribe for either of them in the slightest ailment. Did Mrs. Boyer's head ache, or little Amy cough, a messenger was dispatched post-haste for me. Having heard of the gossip, and curiosity as to the suitability of the match, I naturally observed the family attentively.

Mrs. Boyer was young, but in no sense a beauty, or likely to be attractive in society. She was a gentle, low-spoken little woman, a notable housekeeper, compounder of jellies and

pickles, keeping her servants well in hand, and having no thought beyond her husband and child, and in a less degree, her parish church. If she went into society at all, it was to sit in the corner with some matron of kindred tastes, and discuss new recipes for soup, or patterns for children's dresses. Both Boyer and she partook unwillingly of the state dinners, and whist parties, in which the hospitality of the neighborhood found outlet. They were never so happy, or so thoroughly themselves, as when alone together at their own fireside.

To be candid, while I had a warm friendship for Mrs. Boyer, as a most estimable woman, I found her rather a dull companion. I naturally grew weary of Boyer and Amy as everlasting topics of discourse. I was at a loss, too, to understand how she had ever been a prominent member of society anywhere, unless through her wealth. Jonah Whitcomb had been one of the largest landed proprietors in south-eastern Virginia. His plantations were well-stocked, too; his imported cattle being especially famous. Mrs. Boyer was his only child, and inherited the property a year or two after her marriage.

In June 1858, I one day received a note from Mrs. Boyer, asking me to drive over and examine Amy's knee, in which her father fancied he detected some sign of weakness. She was, she stated, the more anxious to have it looked to, as they proposed to leave home the next day for a short visit to her old home in Norfolk. I rode over early the next morning, and found, as I anticipated, Boyer and his wife in a nervous state of alarm, and nothing whatever the matter with the knee. Amy was a slight, delicate child of five. Her mother held her in her lap while I made the examination.

When it was over, she said, in her peculiarly low, quiet voice, "If this child were to be crippled in her hip, made unhappy in anyway, it would kill me." And looking at her, I believed it.

I remained to breakfast, and as their trunks were down, and strapped, in the hall, consented to drive over with them to the station, and accompany them on one stage of their journey, as I had a patient in that neighborhood, sending my horse home by one of the servants.

We drove over therefore, to the station, Mrs. Boyer full of anxiety concerning the lunch, and a certain little trunk containing some of Amy's finery, which was missing for awhile. She fussed and worried until it was found, and then subsided into her usual placid quiet, holding Amy asleep in her lap, and listening with rapt attention to Boyer's discussion of politics, without understanding half he said.

We took the train for the next station, where we stopped to find my patient, and they to wait an hour for an express-train. The station, like so many in Virginia, was but a low, wooden house, with office and bar-room opening on the platform, and scattered along the tracks one or two huts, belonging to negroes, who supplied passengers with coffee, and "snacks" of fried chicken and hot biscuit.

My patient was soon disposed of, and I returned to the little office, intending to remain with them and see them off. A journey was no ordinary affair in those days, and commanded a certain respectful attention from friends and lookers-on. I found Boyer and his wife seated in

the open station, while Amy lay on the bench fast asleep, her head supported on her mother's lap. Mrs. Boyer called our attention to her, saying how pretty she was, with her fair hair tumbled and curled about her face; and as she spoke, she laid some fern-leaves, which the child had gathered, about her temple, like an airy crown. Now, Amy was not a pretty child, but I remember noticing that her features were delicate, and the effect of the feathery circlet peculiar and fine. Her mother looked at her, however, with a kind of mute adoration. The child awoke presently, and curled herself up on a heap of shawls on the bench.

It was then near noon. The express-train was due at a quarter before one.

"We shall have time to take lunch, Dr. Schwarz," said Mrs. Boyer. "Jane, open the basket."

The sandwiches, tarts, cakes and relishes, etc., were soon spread out on top of an empty box, over which a white cloth was spread. I remember that we jested with Mrs. Boyer on her unusual keenness of appetite, as she ate heartily, praising her own recipes incessantly. We were still joking and laughing in this idle way, when she rose, saying she would gather some field-herbs, which she had seen growing on the other side of the station.

Boyer and I remained smoking in the station, while the two servants, Jane and Tom, went in and out, arranging the lunch-basket, etc. it was, be it remembered, broad noon-day, in an open country, where the little shed of a station commanded a view of fields and forests for many miles.

Two trains passed, one a freight-train, which halted for a few moments, the other the down express, passing with a full head of steam on.

Boyer looked at his watch. "Our train is due in five minutes. Amy, waken up, my child. Stay with Jane until I find your mamma. On which side of the road is your mistress, Tom?" as he stepped out on the platform, and looked up and down.

"She's just heah, sah. I seed her a pullin' yarbs in dis meadow. Heah—" going down the bank into the meadow, and looking about with a startled face. "Foh God, massa, I dunno whah she is!"

She was not in the meadow, nor in the road. In a word, she was gone, as utterly vanished as if the wind blowing across the clover-covered fields had carried her with them. I have no time nor inclination to make a dramatic story out of this matter. The reader must paint for himself our alarm. The laughing, and then terrified search, in which the station-master, and three stolid old negro women of the neighborhood, proved the persistence with which Boyer went over and over the same ground, trying to joke, while he was pale with terror, assuring me that she would be found in a moment. But he was not uneasy. Why should he be uneasy? What could happen to Jane?

The train came and passed; the afternoon began to wax late. She was not found.

Boyer staggered to the bench and sat down. It is incredible that anything could have happened to her, "in daylight, within call," he said, wiping his lips.

There was one possibility which I suggested: that she had mistaken the train which stopped for the one she was to take, and had been carried on to the next station. A most

unlikely chance, as I knew, as she could not mistake a freight for a passenger train, and certainly would have rejoined us before entering the cars. However, he husband seized on this bare hope eagerly, as I hoped he would do, and drove to the next station, to be disappointed. But the suggestion had opened out vague chances, and kept him from despair.

To be brief, the search was vain. Mrs. Boyer had disappeared, and for two years no tidings of her reached her miserable husband. All that energetic friends, a country police, (by no means energetic,) and unlimited outlay of money, could do, was done, but in vain.

Two years later, Boyer came to my plantation late one night, as I was preparing for bed. I went down to the library to meet him, and found him standing in his riding boots, pale and haggard.

“Read that, Schwarz,” he said, holding out an open letter. It was postmarked New Orleans, and ran as follows:

“SIR:

“I would advise you to give over further search for your wife. She is unworthy of your loyalty to her. She left you voluntarily, to join an old lover, whom she had never ceased to regret or to love. They took the express train that day at the next station, while you were still searching for her; went direct to New York, and sailed for Europe. The writer of this saw her a month ago in Florence. She is well and happy. Forget her if you are wise.

“Your friend,

C-----.”

I looked at Boyer, afraid to question him.

“Why do you say nothing?” he cried, passionately. “Was there ever a more infamous slander? If I but knew the devil that wrote this! Oh, Jane, Jane!” He dropped into a seat and covered his face with his hands. “To think that she is exposed to such calumnies as this, and I cannot protect her!”

I allowed his excitement to subside.

“There was nobody, of course, to whom Mrs. Boyer had ever been attached?” I then asked.

“Oh, Jane had some childish love-affair with Tom Heming, her cousin. Such a flirtation as all girls have. She laughed it with me many a time.”

“And Heming?”

“He disappeared from Norfolk long ago. Went to the dogs, I believe. This cursed scoundrel has heard of that, I supposed, and based his lie upon it.”

So firm was Boyer’s faith in his wife, that he made no inquiry whatever concerning Heming, or any effort to follow the clue. My own inclination led me to trust her. If ever there was a faithful wife and mother, I said, that woman was Jane Boyer. And yet—where was she? She had no enemies. She had carried no watch or jewelry on the day of her disappearance, which could tempt robber or murder. And as regarded this matter of first love, God only knows what secrets are hidden in the breast of the most commonplace woman. Nothing but a mad, absorbing passion could have drawn Mrs. Boyer away from her child. Yet, when I

remembered her utter lack of emotion the day she left, her worry about baggage, even the unusual zest with which she ate her lunch, the matter became hopelessly steeped in mystery.

A year later, a solution came to the riddle. Boyer received another letter from New Orleans, in the same handwriting, briefly stating that Mrs. Boyer had been deserted by Heming, (the name was given now,) had returned to New Orleans, and had died a month before in abject poverty. Immediately before her death she had been received, under an assumed name, in one of the hospitals.

I went with Boyer to New Orleans. The register of the hospital was examined. The statement of a woman's death, under the assumed name, on the given date, was verified, and the description of her, elicited by close questioning of attendants and physicians, left no doubt on my mind that it was Mrs. Boyer who had met this miserable end.

Boyer, however, listened to the account unmoved.

"You are not yet convinced?" I said, as we left the hospital.

"Convinced? If my wife, Schwarz," he said, stopping short in his earnestness, "were to stand on this pavement before me and confess her guilt, I would not believe her. I would think her mad, under the influence of evil spirits, but I would not believe her. I know my wife. Whether she is dead or living to-day, she is as pure as God's angels."

But the faith of others was not so firm in Mrs. Boyer. A week or two later, application was made by the next heir of Jonah Whitcomb, for possession of his estate, his daughter, Jane Boyer, having died intestate in New Orleans, and without any male issue. It appeared that old Whitcomb had devised his property to his daughter and her male heirs. Should she fail to make a will, and die without a son, the estate reverted to the nearest of kin in the male line bearing the name of Whitcomb. This proved to be a certain Joseph Whitcomb, who was not slow in pressing his claims. He brought forward testimony to prove that Mrs. Boyer had been seen in Europe with Heming, and had died under an alias in the New Orleans hospital.

To be brief, Joseph Whitcomb obtained the property, and Boyer was left dependent on his practice, the annual proceeds of which he spent almost wholly in search of his wife, employing the most skilled detectives in every city in the country. He had a calm, quiet faith that one day she would return to him.

Amy, in the meantime, was growing into a healthy, happy girl, who had been taught by her father a feeling of devotion to her lost mother, akin to religious faith.

"I wish the child to be prepared for her. I do not know what day she may come back," he said to me one day. "There is not an hour in which I do not think, what if she should be on her way now? I never go into a strange street or house without looking from side to side in search of some clue to her."

The genial, light-hearted fellow had become a grave, silent man. His wife's name never passed his lips, except to his daughter or to me.

In the meantime the war wrecked the little property he had, and rendered search more hopeless.

In 1868, just ten years after the disappearance of Mrs. Boyer, I went with her husband to Baltimore, to a convention of the Medical Association of the South.

While there, we chanced to go into the Cathedral to look at the celebrated picture of the Descent from the Cross, just as a procession of young girls, a Sodality or other society, passed through the aisles. The children were dressed in white, and carried emblems, banners, etc.

Suddenly Boyer grasped me by the arm.

"Look there—there!" he whispered, his face blanched and eyes dilated. I could see nothing but the smiling, innocent faces of the girls, who had halted momentarily beside us.

"The banner! St. Agnes!" he cried.

In front of us was a small banner of white silk, on which was painted the Virgin Martyr as a child, with the flowing hair, lamb, and crown of leaves, by which she is known. But there was something in the picture which raised a long-forgotten, intangible memory. The features were delicate, the hair fair, and tangled in damp curls. The crown was a circlet of fern-leaves.

"It is Amy, as she was the day her mother disappeared. My wife painted that head."

"But Mrs. Boyer had no skill as an artist."

"That is Amy's face as her mother last looked on it. She painted the head. Stay. Stand here. Do not let that banner pass out of your sight. I will bring Cowden. I will not trust myself in this manner." Boyer spoke in a whisper, his excitement was intense, his breath came slowly, and clogged. Cowden was a detective officer, who years before had been employed in the case. In a few moments he rejoined me, with Boyer, whose eyes were fastened on the banner, as if he actually touched his wife through it. When the procession was dismissed, Cowden motioned us to wait outside.

"A word is all that is needed here," he said, going to the priest's house. He returned in a few moments. "It is as I thought," he said. "The banner was not made here. It was bought in New York, of some regular dealer in military and church decorations. We can have his name to-morrow, when Father Sullivan has time to look over the bills."

"To-morrow? Do you think I can wait until to-morrow?" cried Boyer.

"What will you do?"

"I shall take the next train for New York. You can telegraph me the name of the dealer, and follow me as soon as you have learned it. I cannot lose a moment."

"Very well," said Cowden, adding privately to me, that he should be glad of any way to be rid of Boyer for the next month. "Friends, and parties interested, always damage a case," he said, oracularly. "They're incessantly crossing the trail, and dulling the scent, if I may express myself in that way. I don't think much of this banner business. It's an accidental likeness. It's not likely Dr. Boyer could carry his child's face clearly in his mind for ten years."

I agreed with him. But I went on with Boyer to New York that night, and early the next morning received a telegram:

"Bought of Hupp & Glosner, Nassau Street, April 16th of last year."

We repaired to Hupp & Gloscher's, and were received by a stout, middle-aged man, a junior partner in the firm.

"Yes," referring to his books. "Two banners, bought April 16th, by Rev. J. Sullivan, Baltimore. Um—um—price--- Um—subject not mentioned. It would be impossible now to ascertain by whom the work on the banners was executed. We have many workmen and women employed in New York, but no record is kept of individual work. Most of our finer specimens of embroidery and painting are imported. They are done in convents, I believe. From your description, I have little doubt that the banner you refer to is one of these."

"You see, Boyer, it is hopeless," I said, as we turned away.

"Hopeless? I never was so certain of success! The painting was not imported, for it was done by my wife. And she is in this country; my instinct tells me that. We have a certainty before us. Cowden will be here with the banner by noon."

Cowden arrived at noon, and with the banner we returned to Hupp & Gloscher's. Cowden went directly to the clerk who received the work as it was brought in.

"Have you any means of discovering the artist who painted this head?"

"That?" putting on his eye-glasses. "Imported. Undoubtedly French."

"No," said Boyer, hotly. "It was done by an American lady, now, as I believe, in this city."

"Really, sir, your information is so much more accurate than mine on the matter, that you will excuse me if I go back to my work," taking up his pen.

Cowden glanced hastily around. A shrewd-looking woman was at work, near by, sorting fringes.

"You select the fringe for banners?"

"Yes."

"You must have an eye for color. You no doubt remember this design?" unrolling the banner.

"Very well. It is not one of our regular patterns. It was done by Mrs. Best."

"Absurd," growled the clerk. "Mrs. Best is a mere dauber."

"Occasionally she has brought very nice work. This is one of her best specimens."

"And her address?" Cowden took out his note-book and pencil.

"No. 40 Ann street, Newark."

We took the next train to Newark, found Ann street, and were ushered into the parlor of a swarming boarding-house. Boyer started, trembling, to his feet, as a woman's step was heard without. The door opened, and a squat, gross Irish woman entered. He sank into a chair, and did not look up nor speak; seemed to have fallen from the height of hope into a dull stupor.

"Mrs. Best," said Cowden, with unusual suavity, "we called to order a painting from you, a duplicate of a banner furnished Messrs. Hupp & Gloscher."

Mrs. Best's ruddy face glowed. Cowden opened the banner. Her countenance fell.

"I can't duplicate that. It was too wearying a job," with a rich, Irish brogue.

“We will pay double, treble, the rates you usually receive,” said Cowden.

“Couldn’t do it at no price.”

“You *did* paint it, eh?” I said, sharply.

There was a quick, furtive gleam of cunning in her eye. Then she said, calmly, “In coorse. Who else would do it, sur?”

Cowden rose instantly, and took a most polite leave of her.

“Bribe her,” I whispered.

“That mild obstinacy is not to be bribed,” he said. “But we must not make an enemy of her. We may want her presently. Take Boyer back to the hotel, and meet me here at three o’clock. I have my hand upon the clue.”

An hour before the appointed time, however, a quick tap was heard at the door of the room where I was with Boyer. He sat silent and motionless, staring on the ground. I had found it impossible to rouse him, and finally gave up in despair.

Cowden entered. A faint trace of excitement showed itself on his stolid face. He went directly up to Boyer, and handed him a paper. It was a writ of habeas corpus, summoning the directors of the Strangford private insane asylum to deliver up the body of Jane Boyer, illegally confined therein.

“How did I clinch the nail?” turning his back quickly on Boyer, and talking to me in a high, sharp key. “Nothing easier. When the woman Best refused to paint a duplicate, at any price, it was plain that she had not painted the first, and could not now procure help to do it. My course was equally plain: To find out where she could have commanded the services of the artist at a nominal price. A few inquiries discovered that she was, a year ago, a nurse in this private mad-house. A few dollars to the porter of the mad-house revealed that Mrs. Boyer is still confined there, and has been for ten years. Nothing easier.”

My readers can surmise the end of my story. Boyer compelled the release of his wife. The law at that date was lax in allowing the admission of patients to these institutions, but vigilant in forcing their release, especially when money and influence backed the demand. Mrs. Boyer’s story was simple enough. In the meadow, an old negro woman had induced her, by some tale of want, to cross the woodland to her hut. There she had been gagged and bound, and kept in an upper room, while Boyer and I were searching for her below. That night she was taken across the country, her clothes changed, and she was then brought on as a maniac to this institution. The instigator of the whole plot was, of course, the man who was benefited by her disappearance, Joseph Whitcomb, who was soon forced to disgorge his ill-gotten gains.

“I painted the banners for the nurse,” said Mrs. Boyer. “The work, I think, kept me from going mad, and that face I saw always—always before me, night and day.”

Her voice died down into silence. She forgot to finish speaking, frequently, and moved and spoke like one in a dream. She had come out of her living grave, a shadow, in mind and body, of her former self. When Amy was brought to her, she seemed actually terrified by the healthy, joyous girl.

"This is not my little child," she sobbed, clinging to Boyer's breast.

I ventured to hint to him my fears that she was hopelessly weakened. "She will require the most skillful treatment," I said. "You had better consult C----," naming an eminent medical authority.

"My dear Schwarz, she requires love and home. I am the best physician now," he said.

As I write, a fair, plump matron, with gray curls, drives her pony-carriage down the road, with her little grandson holding the reins. It is Mrs. Boyer; and as her laugh rings out as cheery as the boy's, I am satisfied that Boyer's prescription has proved effectual.

UPCOMING EVENTS & CALLS FOR PAPERS

Conference: Society for the Study of American Women Writers

The Society has organized one session for the upcoming triennial meeting of the Society for the Study of American Women Writers to be held October 10-13, 2012, in Denver, Colorado.

"Citizenship and Belonging in the Work of Rebecca Harding Davis"

Chair: Robin L. Cadwallader, St. Francis University

1. "Into What Kind of Wild?: Rebecca Harding Davis and 'The Yares of Black Mountain,'" Evelyn Navarre, University of Massachusetts, Boston
2. "Anomalies in the Borderlands: Rebecca Harding Davis Constructing Citizenship," Nancy Strow Sheley, University of California, Long Beach
3. "*Waiting for the Verdict*: Identity Trials in Women's Novels of the Civil War Era," Karen Tracey, University of Northern Iowa

Conference: "Witnessing and Remembering Civil War(s): Woolson, Davis, and Their Contemporaries," Columbus, GA, February 21-24, 2013

Keynote Speaker: John Neff, author of *Honoring the Civil War Dead: Commemoration and the Problem of Reconciliation*

In honor of the Civil War's Sesquicentennial, the Constance Fenimore Woolson and Rebecca Harding Davis Societies invite proposals on any aspect of "Civil Wars" in Woolson's and Davis's works or in the works of their contemporaries. The plural is meant to evoke the diverse issues and viewpoints involved in representing the war itself and the many other battles over identity and culture in the Civil War and Reconstruction eras.

Possible topics include:

Contending Nationalities

Cultural Frictions

Slavery and/or Emancipation
Reconstructions of Gender, Race, and Class
Memory and the War
Regional Re/Constructions
The Home Front
The Spaces and Displacements of War
Women's Roles Challenged/Transformed
Border Crossings
Postwar Travel
The Politics of Writing the War and its Aftermath

Proposals on the above or related topics are particularly desirable; however, papers on all aspects of Woolson's and/or Davis's lives and works are welcome. Graduate student proposals are encouraged. At least one travel grant will be awarded to a graduate student.

Please send all queries and proposals to Dr. Anne Boyd Rioux at aeboyd@uno.edu, using the subject line "Woolson/Davis Conference 2013." Deadline: August 15, 2012.

An optional trip to the National Historic Site at Andersonville, GA, is also planned. Connecting flights as well as a shuttle are available between Atlanta and Columbus.

Historical Marker and Call for Papers: Washington and Jefferson College

Washington & Jefferson College has received authorization for a historical marker recognizing Rebecca Harding Davis's birthplace to be placed in Washington, PA, where Rebecca also attended school at the Washington Female Seminary. Our thanks to Jennifer Harding (no relation) of the W&J English Department for her work in achieving this recognition for Davis.

To coincide with the unveiling of the historical marker, *Topic: Washington & Jefferson College Review* is soliciting essays for a special issue on Rebecca Harding Davis; the planning for a one-day symposium is also underway.

Please help to continue the scholarship on Davis and support the work being done by the W&J English Department by submitting a paper for consideration by the journal's editors. The deadline is September 15, 2012. For information on submitting a paper, go to:

<http://www2.washjeff.edu/topic/>

RECENT EVENTS SPONSORED BY THE DAVIS SOCIETY – Mischa Renfro

The Society for the Study of Rebecca Harding Davis and Her World sponsored one session at the annual meeting of the **American Literature Association** held on May 24-27, 2012, in San Francisco, California. The society organized an “Open Topic” session focusing on Davis’s lesser-known works, including “Blind Tom,” *Margret Howth*, and *Earthen Pitchers*. In “Rebecca Harding Davis’s Legacy to Nathaniel Hawthorne,” Christopher Hager examined Davis’s influence on Hawthorne during the last years of his life. Suggesting that Davis provided the catalyst for a “new streak of realism” in Hawthorne’s later work, Hager suggested that her bleak vision in “Life in the Iron Mills” shaped Hawthorne’s treatment of Harper’s Ferry in “Chiefly About War Matters” and that her depiction of Stephen Knowles in *Marget Howth* inspired parts of his Septimius Norton, the protagonist of his unfinished final manuscripts. Focusing on “Life in the Iron Mills” and “Blind Tom,” Robert Abrams argued that “a major dimension of Rebecca Harding Davis’s writing is her mistrust of the visible human body—either as scientifically specimenized or as open to self-vigilant bourgeois narcissism—in that it remains an untrustworthy index of what, in *Life in the Iron Mills*, she terms ‘unawakened power.’” Drawing on one of Davis’s most fascinating texts, *Earthen Pitchers*, Emily Dolon analyzed the vexed question of Davis’s unsatisfactory endings. According to Dolon, Davis uses endings that lack closure to foreground the limitations of sentimental plots and to suggest the open-ended questions of realism.

“New Perspectives on Rebecca Harding Davis”

Chair: Mischa Renfro, Middle Tennessee State University

1. “Rebecca Harding’s Legacy to Nathaniel Hawthorne,” Christopher Hager, Trinity College
2. “Wayward Music and Bodily Monstrosity: The Korl Woman, Blind Tom, and the Enigma of Human Potential,” Robert E. Abrams, University of Washington
3. “Rebecca Harding Davis and her Troubled Conclusions,” Emily Dolan, University of Connecticut

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/rebeccahardingdavis/>.

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

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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.