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Letter from the President

Five years! It’s now been an unbelievably long and impossibly short time since a visionary group of young scholars founded the Lydia Maria Child Society, holding its first meetings at the American Literature Association Conference in Boston in 2015. Since then, the Society has sponsored multiple well-attended panels at various conferences, including the Society for the Study of American Women Writers’ 2018 gathering in Denver and American Literature Association meetings in San Francisco and again in Boston. Last year’s Social Justice panel at ALA included some especially provocative papers and vigorous discussion—exactly what we have all hoped the Society would foster as it moves forward. Sustaining this energy will require more new hands, among them, I hope, those of many younger researchers and activists.

I’ve been heartened to see that, according to the MLA Bibliography, between 2008 and 2018 (the last year the database lists), Child has garnered 49 publications. Yet readers of this message will not dispute the fact that, notwithstanding virtuoso work by Child’s biographer Carolyn Karcher and the contributions of many others over the last thirty-odd years, Child and her legacy still merit much more attention. Child has received recognition in important venues. In 2001, she was honored by the National Women’s Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, New York. The current Poetry Foundation website provides an informative biography, which begins, “Lydia Maria Child ranks among the most influential of nineteenth-century American women writers. She was renowned in her day as a tireless crusader for truth and justice and a champion of excluded groups in American society—especially Indians, slaves, and women. A writer who heeded the call for an American literature with American themes, she was a pioneer in several literary genres.”

———

Child speaks to us as urgently today as she did to her contemporaries.

-K. L. KILCUP
Child speaks to us as urgently today as she did to her contemporaries, and we need her expansive and inclusive vision more than ever. The LMCS welcomes new members from every quarter, and I ask existing members to urge friends and colleagues, inside and outside the academy, to join us.

Child’s message from *First Settlers of New England* (1829), published as Indian removal loomed, still resonates powerfully: the book, she asserted, sought “to prove, from the most authentic records, that the treatment [the Indians] have met with from the usurpers of their soil has been, and continues to be, in direct violation of the religious and civil institutions which we have heretofore so nobly defended, and by which we profess to be governed; thus subjecting ourselves to have the finger of scorn pointed at us, for having so grossly violated the principles which form the basis of our government.” I remain in awe of Child’s courage and foresight; we continue to need such leaders and advocates. I hope you will all continue to share Child’s work, encourage new members to join us, and use her words as sustenance—and as inspiration for the social justice work we still so urgently need.

~Karen L. Kilcup, President

[I wrote this note before the coronavirus transformed all our lives, but my words about needing leaders with Child’s egalitarian, compassionate vision seem more appropriate than ever.]

## New Feature Coming to LMCS Website: Reviews & Resources

By Gia Coturri Sorenson

In the spirit of helping spread knowledge about Lydia Maria Child and her work, we are going to begin a new feature! Every other month or so, we will post a review of a recent scholarly article on our website so scholars can have a better sense of the current conversations in Child studies. These reviews will be short and will concentrate on specific features. For instance, in addition to summarizing the article's argument and which texts the piece examines, we will consider the article's intended audience. Since much of our work involves pedagogy, we want to ensure that Society members know which essays will suit their undergraduate or graduate students and which essays are better suited for their own research. We will also be posting a bibliography to help society members traverse the growing world of Child scholarship.

We hope that these reviews will inspire conversations about Child's work and will encourage scholars as they pursue their own research. We also hope that our reviews will demonstrate the breadth of Child’s work, helping those who are just beginning their study to navigate her oeuvre.

If you have works in mind we ought to feature, please let us know! Email us at lydiamariachildsociety@gmail.com.

Please visit us at [lydiamariachildsociety.wordpress.com](http://lydiamariachildsociety.wordpress.com)
Now in its third year, the Lydia Maria Child Social Justice Award recognizes students and professionals who continue Child’s tireless work toward a more just and equitable world. Chosen from a field of outstanding applicants, our 2019 awards were given to undergraduate student María Antonieta Rondón of Boston University, who has worked extensively to support refugee communities, served as editor-in-chief of her school’s multimedia intersectional feminist “thought project,” and raised consciousness about and offered aid to those affected by the turbulent political situation in Venezuela, her home country; doctoral candidate David Puthoff of New Mexico University, who writes about interracial solidarity in the nineteenth century, has taken a leading role in making his university’s writing program more accessible and justice-oriented, and volunteers extensively in his community, helping to provide resources from “know-your-rights” trainings to warm meals; and finally, Dr. Debra J. Rosenthal of John Carroll University, who has graciously agreed to share with readers of this newsletter insights into her impressive scholarly, pedagogical, and service work on such timely issues as poverty and climate change. We hope our readers will be as inspired as we are by the extraordinary work of our three award recipients and by Debra’s remarks below.

Could you describe the social justice work you’ve done that makes you most proud? I am most proud of the way I have been able to teach, semester after semester for many years, courses with a justice and ethics emphasis. For about 10 years, I have taught a course called Poverty and American Literature. The course makes students aware of socioeconomic inequality and includes a mandatory service-learning component. As opposed to doing service (often a one-time experience, or an experience painting, sorting, or stocking shelves where participants do not interact much with those being served), service learning is a semester-long, interactive experience where students work directly and consistently with adults facing conditions of impoverishment. Such direct partnerships are an important part of the pedagogy. The service and the literature work well together. I also teach a course on climate-change literature that is linked to a course on the biology of climate change; students must co-register for both and learn about climate catastrophe for 6 hours a week. For about 15 years, I have had a theater collaboration between my course on African American literature and Karamu House, the country’s oldest continuing African American theater. I am the organizer of my university’s Muslim-Jewish lunch group. I also serve on the board of directors of the Hebrew Free Loan Association (interestfree.org), which for one hundred and fifteen years has been giving zero-interest loans to people in Northeast Ohio who cannot access traditional forms of lending. I also serve on the Community Relations Committee of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland.

[continued on page 5]
Recognized as the oldest, producing African American theatre in the nation, Karamu House is continually cited as one of Cleveland’s top four treasures—and featured in the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture and listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places.

karamuhouse.org

What projects are you working on currently? Currently, I am working on three books about one of the most compelling justice issues of our time: climate change. I am writing my own monograph as well as editing two collections of essays on the topic for different academic publishers.

What keeps you inspired as an academic/activist, especially in these times of political turmoil? I remain inspired because there is so much work to be done to educate people about the dangers of the impending climate catastrophe. As educators, we have so many opportunities to reach the next generation through our teaching and scholarship.

What advice would you offer LMCS newsletter readers who would like to incorporate more activism into their academic work, be it in their writing, in their classrooms, or on their campuses more generally? How might they start, and what guiding principles would you suggest they keep in mind? I would see what resources and opportunities exist at their universities. Does the university make it easy to do service learning? How amenable is the department to creating new courses with an ethical or justice perspective? Are there other scholars with whom you can team-teach a course (and thus help you ramp up your own learning)? Does any summer funding exist to launch a new scholarly project?

Any words on how L. M. Child fits into your own work or your broader thinking about activism and its role in academia? I wrote a chapter of my dissertation (which became my first book) on Child, and I remain inspired by her persistence and sense of rightness as she forged ahead.
Note from Medford Historical Society

By Kyna Hamill

In the Medford Historical Society & Museum collection, which houses many personal items owned by L. M. Child, we draw attention to one of her most intimate projects, the unpublished Floral Souvenir scrapbook. Dedicated to her niece Mary (Preston) Stearns, the over four hundred pages spans from 1827-1855 and includes poems, clippings, cuttings, and hand-colored pencil drawings of flowers. Some of the poems are clippings by Hawthorne and Emerson copied in Child’s hand-writing, but a few are her own compositions. Child, of course,

Flowers have spoken to me more than I can tell in written words. They are the hieroglyphics of angels, loved by all men for the beauty of their character, though few can decipher even fragments of their meaning.

—L. M. CHILD

loved flowers. She and her husband David Lee Child moved many times from Boston to Northampton, to New York, New Rochelle, West Newton and finally to Wayland. We know that she carefully dug up her beloved White Star of Bethlehem bulbs, covered them in good soil, and took them with her with every move. The pencil drawings done in her own hand illustrate pansies, lilies, daffodils, tulips, a butterfly, a caterpillar and a chrysalis with captions that mark the date and location where she rendered them. To her niece she wrote: “From childhood, I have always had a most absorbing passion for flowers...”; she describes that the scrapbook was “a monument to Flowers.” Child’s handwriting is exquisite throughout, and she includes an index at the end. She tells Mary, “I am well aware that my drawings have no merit to entitle them a place in the Souvenir, but when these busy hands are at rest, perhaps you will like to tell your children and grand-children that they were painted by Aunt Maria, a simple old child who used to write ‘Flowers for Children.’”
News from Wayland Historical Society

By Jane Sciacca

Child has been getting recent attention for her support of women’s suffrage. In April, we are having an exhibit of Wayland women at the Wayland Library and, of course, Child is featured.

The minister of Wayland’s First Parish Church, Stephanie May, gave a lovely talk on Child, and the Historical Society set up an exhibit of Child artifacts from our collection, including her bonnet and a patchwork quilt on which she signed a square. The former minister of First Parish, who has studied Child for years, has given up his papers on her. In 1980, he held a memorial service at the Child gravesite in North Cemetery to commemorate the 100th anniversary of her death.

Woman stock is rising in the market. I shall not live to see women vote, but I’ll come and rap on the ballot box.

-L. M. CHILD

And yes, they know she was not a Unitarian, but she was a close friend of Edmund Hamilton Sears, who was minister during the time she was here.

2019 Conference Notes

By Sarah Olivier

The Louisa May Alcott Society and the Lydia Maria Child Society hosted a “Walking Tour of Reformist Boston” at the American Literature Association Conference in 2019. This historical tour featured 19th-century women’s and antislavery sites important to Alcott and Child. In addition, the LMCS partnered with the Alcott Society to organize the panel “Notorious Women, Sensational Texts: The Lives, Writings, and Reforms of Louisa May Alcott and Lydia Maria Child,” co-chaired by Sandra Burr and Sandra Harbert Petruilionis. Elizabeth Dean provided a genealogy of political care in Child’s and Alcott’s work; historicist Jane Sciacca described the local ties that bind Child and Alcott as neighbors, writers, and reformers; while Monika Elbert spoke about the spectacle of the city and the drama of charity in Child’s and Alcott’s writings.

The LMCS Social Justice Pedagogy Roundtable at the ALA, moderated by Karen L. Kilcup, featured Laura Mielke, Lydia G. Fash, and Emily Gowen. Topics included social justice in the literature classroom and teaching beyond the university. Gowen, who was considered for a 2019 LMCS Social Justice Award, talked about her work with Andrew Donnelly in running Freedom Summer Collegiate (freedomsummercollegiate.org), an organization that recruits, trains, and funds doctoral candidates to provide transformative summer seminars to college-bound high school students in underserved communities.
LMCS Membership

We invite you to join the Lydia Maria Child Society or renew your existing membership. Members of the LMCS have access to our listserv, receive our newsletter, and are invited to vote, hold office, and/or contribute to our events and programs.

Join or renew on our website at lydiamariachildsociety.wordpress.com/join-us/.

If you prefer to join or renew by mail, please use the form below.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

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INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION (if applicable):
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Submission of this form (with payment) guarantees membership, which is active for one year (unless lifetime) and renewable each July.

Please remit payment to Lydia Maria Child Society at 3304 Perry St., Denver, CO 80212

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