

In the Garden: Frances Seward, A Perspective

How often I wish you all here, it is so quiet and the garden is so attractive. Your lilly bed is in its glory and the peony bed is very gay, 'phlox' is just beginning to open its eyes, while the 'star of Bethlehem' and ragged Robin contend for the supremacy along the borders. The Senega perfumes the air with her pretty white blossoms & the roses yellow & pink are just beginning to show their colours. June is a beautiful month The scarlet runners Which I planted in the Labrynth are growing almost as rapidly as Jack's bean stalk, the sticks have a tendency to complicate the walks so much that the Labyrinth already affords much amusement.

-Excerpt from a letter written by Frances Miller Seward to her son, Frederick William Seward,
June 15, 1861¹

Frances Miller Seward wrote to her son, assistant secretary-of-state Frederick "Fred" William Seward, from her family home in Auburn, New York where the distant rumblings of war resonated deeply in whose path it crossed. Frances's letter conveys concerns for her "dear son" and newspaper accounts of a probable attack on Washington. Frances criticizes Union General Benjamin Butler's handling of the Battle of Big Bethel and admits to her general disinclination toward visitors. The letter's subject material is not unlike countless letters written by mothers to their sons at war, but for one exception; its attention to the garden illustrates a fundamental shift in the relationship among nineteenth-century middle-class women with the natural world.

This essay argues that the relationship of nineteenth-century middle class women with nature was increasingly defined by literary and epistolary constructions and through consumptive choices relative to it. This assertion is grounded in a wealth of evidence that demonstrates the trend was both local and national in its scope. From Emily Dickinson's "cunning moss" to the

¹ Frances Miller Seward (FMS), letter to Frederick William Seward (FWS), June 15, 1861, Seward Collection, University of Rochester Rare Books and Special Collections, Rochester, NY.

profusion of wrought-iron garden benches manufactured in American foundries, women turned to nature to express themselves in ways both deeply personal and overtly commercial.

The essay focuses on Frances Seward, wife of New York Governor and U.S. Secretary-of-State William H. Seward, mother to their four children, devoted daughter and sister, and staunch abolitionist. Frances was born in the early nineteenth century to a well-educated, moderately wealthy family on the western New York frontier. She, herself, received a sound education and possessed an inquisitive mind. She read voraciously and wrote regular letters to friends and family members throughout her life. Some would argue that Frances Seward neither represents the situation of nor the opportunities afforded most women in nineteenth-century America. This would be a fair assessment, were it not for the preponderance of evidence that suggests Frances's relationship with the garden was not an unusual one, nor was it exclusive to her class or educational status. On the contrary, Frances's relationship with the garden was part of a broader trend that saw women exploring the scientific, consumptive, and political implications of the natural world.

Frances's surviving letters provide an opportunity to narrow our focus to the local, individual experience, while appreciating their relevancy to larger issues. The letters document the seasonal arrival of flora, uncertainty over proper pruning of trees, heated interactions with gardeners, and the burial record of family pets. Writing to her husband, William H. Seward, Frances recounts her discovery of dahlia blossoms in the garden, a casual observation to be sure, but one that she endeavored to share with her oft-absent partner.² In an 1838 letter, Frances worries over the situation of "Nydia," a piece of statuary whose position in the garden exposes her to "mud and gravel - beside[s] she is under a black cherry tree which will stain her pretty face

² FMS, letter to William H. Seward (WHS), July 29, 1839, William Henry Seward Papers, UR.

when the fruit ripens and falls."³ In letters written to Frances by family and friends, the garden is a repeated subject, providing evidence of the strong link perceived between the letters' recipient and this outdoor space. That Frances had a physical connection to the garden is irrefutable; she weeded it, watched over it, argued with her father and gardeners over it, and wrote about it. There is also evidence that Frances had another, more imaginative, relationship with the garden influenced by the work of Romantic writers and epistolary conventions of the period. The garden, and the sylvan language it engendered, became a space for expressing agency, intimacy, and grief.

Aside from the letters, there are several primary sources by which we can more fully comprehend this subject. The Seward home and garden, now a historic-house museum, provides interesting clues to how the property changed during Frances's lifetime. Family photographs, though constructed artifacts themselves, allow us to peer more closely into their material and physical surroundings. The Seward and Miller families amassed a significant library, which provides us valuable information about the authors they read and the subject material they were drawn to.

An investigation of this kind, much like a garden, requires a general layout. If we were to wander into such a garden, where would we begin? One logical place would be with the setting itself, of the garden and of Frances's within it. Understanding that Frances lived most of her life, beyond occasional absences, in this setting unites the two in a long-standing relationship. Our journey through the garden would reveal subtle changes in its appearance over time. A trellis here, a statue there, hinting at stylistic influences and social attitudes that transcended the

³ FMS, letter to WHS, July 05, 1838, William Henry Seward Papers, UR.

garden's walls or fences. Settling our gaze on the variety of plants within it we would be reminded that the garden is an intentional place, where choice is exercised and the private is made public. A walk through such a garden leaves us with glimpses of its creators, beginning with Peter Crosby, the onerous gardener with whom Frances was in constant argument, moving on to William H. Seward, the absent husband who stayed abreast of its development from afar, and ending with Frances whose almost daily interactions with it are documented in her letters. While each actor contributed significantly to its change over time, it is Frances's experience that gives us the best opportunity to observe how the garden was conceptualized and internalized and to frame it within a larger conversation about women and nature.

Stirrings in the Ground

Frances was not born in the Auburn house she would call home for nearly fifty years. Her birthplace was described as no more than a "wooden dwelling place a few rods south of the old Seneca Turnpike" in Cayuga Village, New York.⁴ The village is situated on the scenic shores of Cayuga Lake approximately ten miles west of Auburn. It was to this remote corner of western New York that Frances's father, Elijah, brought his fifteen-year old wife, Hannah Foote, by stage sleigh in January 1800. Hannah, the daughter of Daniel Foote, a harness maker originally from Colchester, Connecticut, was a recent graduate of the Ladies' Department of Williamstown Academy where the two had met. Life in Cayuga proved a challenge to Hannah's "delicate constitution," yet despite its challenges, Hannah safely gave birth to two daughters, Lazette in

⁴ Benjamin F. Hall, *Genealogical and Biographical Sketch of the late Honorable Elijah Miller* (photocopy of original manuscript, date unknown, University of Rochester Department of Rare Books, Special Collections, and Preservation), 37. Benjamin Hall was born in 1814 in Whitehall, New York and came to Auburn in 1835. He entered the law office of Judge Elijah Miller at about that time. Biographical source: Joel H. Monroe, *Historical Records of a Hundred and Twenty Years* (Geneva: W.F. Humphrey, Printer, 1913), 196.

1803 and Frances in 1805. Added to their company in the wooden house was a remitted black slave formerly belonging to a man named Peter Hughes. Harry Hughes "took a fancy to his [Elijah's] children Lazette and Frances, and found apparent delight in rocking himself and them by the hour for days together in their capacious cradle."⁵

By 1809, this happy scene was overshadowed by sickness. In the summer of that year, Elijah took Hannah, accompanied by Lazette and Frances, back to her father's home in Williamstown to recover from what appears to have been tuberculosis. Hannah's health, predictably, did not improve. She died of pulmonary consumption in the winter of 1810 and her body was cremated, due to the frozen ground or the infectious cause of her death.⁶ Her ashes were interred in the Old Williamstown Cemetery. Upon hearing the news of her death, Elijah, who had since set up temporary household in Auburn's Center House, returned to Williamstown to retrieve his daughters. Elijah returned to this hotel at the corner of East Genesee and Market Streets, along with his sister Martha who took over housekeeping and child-rearing duties.

The family moved again in 1812 to a house on the east side of South Street between the Second Presbyterian Church and the Universalist Church.⁷ In 1816, Elijah purchased four acres of land on the west side of South Street from William Bostwick for four-thousand dollars.⁸ The land formed a triangle within Exchange, Genesee, and South Streets.⁹ Elijah commenced building a two-story brick house on the site. He hired Peter Crosby, the gardener and groom who would later prove a thorn in Frances' side, and Nathan Osborn "to plant forest trees on the margin

⁵ Hall, handwritten note between pages 66 and 67

⁶ Ibid, 37

⁷ Monroe, 50

⁸ Hall, 80

⁹ See Appendix B, I.

and Lombardy Popplars [sic] on the South Street front and to lay out and cultivate the garden."¹⁰

In the Autumn of 1817, Elijah's father, Captain Josiah Miller, died resulting in significant changes to the household. Martha, who had by this time watched over the girls for nearly six years, returned to the Miller homestead in Romulus. In her stead, Elijah brought his widowed mother Paulina and sister Clarinda to Auburn. Elijah, his mother and sister, and the two girls moved into the brick house on South Street in December 1817. Frances was twelve-years old.

Frances and Lazette alternated their time between the house on South Street and boarding schools in Aurora, New York and Windsor, Vermont. In 1821, Frances began attending the Troy Female Seminary in Troy, New York under the direction of Emma Hart Willard. She remained there until the end of the 1822 academic term.¹¹ In Troy, she met fellow student Louisa Cornelia Seward, sister of William Henry Seward a law student from Florida, New York. "Henry," as he preferred to be called, and Frances struck up an acquaintance in consequence of the mutual friendship. In 1822, Henry passed his bar exam and the following year entered the practice of Frances's father, Elijah Miller.¹² Presumably, Frances played some role in Henry's relocation to Auburn. On October 20th, 1824, Frances and Henry were married at St. Paul's Episcopal Church.

Judge Miller permitted the marriage on the condition that they remain in the Miller household. Henry assented to the arrangement dourly, "I thus became an inmate of his family."¹³ Around 1829, Frances, Henry, and their young son Augustus moved to a house opposite the Miller estate, where they hoped that Frances's health would be better served.¹⁴ The arrangement

¹⁰ Hall, 80.

¹¹ Mary J. Mason Fairbanks, *Emma Willard and her Pupils: Or Fifty Years of Troy Female Seminary, 1822-1872* (New York: Mrs. Russell Sage, 1898), 82.

¹² Monroe, 231.

¹³ Frederick W. Seward, *Autobiography of William H. Seward: From 1801-1834* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1877), 62.

¹⁴ Seward, 75.

proved temporary; the Seward family returned to the Miller household in 1831 where Frances could enjoy the company of family during Henry's long absences arguing cases in circuit court and serving as a state senator in Albany.¹⁵ From this point forward, until her death in 1865, the South Street mansion would be her home. Occasional absences to Albany and Washington, D.C., in consequence of her husband's political responsibilities, were tolerated, but by no means a substitute for her home and garden - "I like Washington very much but shall be quite ready to come home in time for the garden."¹⁶

Frances shrank from the lively social scene of Albany and Washington, much less so from Auburn's. In a letter to Henry in 1833, she admits as much, "I never or very seldom enjoy parties, much less now you are away," and, also, to a "consciousness of feeling everything too deeply makes me assume a reserve and indifference far from my heart."¹⁷ Frances revealed these intimate glimpses of herself to a few privileged friends and family members. These glimpses are reserved to the letters she wrote them throughout her life. In the letters, she describes her interactions with neighbors, the health of her children, her symptoms of ill-health, the books she was currently reading, her loneliness, and the garden.

Frances in the Garden

Frances's earliest surviving references to the garden occur in the 1830's in letters written to Henry. In a March 1831 letter she writes to him of her recent decision to delay pruning trees,

¹⁵ Seward, 91.

¹⁶ FMS, letter to Clarinda Miller McClallen, December 22, 1849, William Henry Seward Papers, UR.

¹⁷ FMS, letter to WHS, July 08, 1833, William Henry Seward Papers, UR.

"I have concluded not to have any thing done with the trees until you come home. I have come to this wise resolution because I chanced to read an article in the paper to day respecting pruning."¹⁸

It is uncertain whether she is writing about the Miller garden or one kept at the house she and Henry resided in from 1829-1831. Later in the letter, she recalls a conversation with Nathan Osborn, in which they "talked about the garden a long time," presumably over the suspicious removal of several plants from it, a displeasure which she has no reluctance in sharing with her husband.

Hudson has made sad work. He has only left me one row of currant bushes standing and these the very poorest we had in the garden. He has dug up every thing of the shrub kind currants, barberries, lilac's on the south side and set out (for what I cannot imagine) grape vines in the place of them. In the middle and on the east side he has dug up currants and gooseberries some places he has filled the places with gooseberry slips, the black and white currants are all gone. I do not know what to do. Nathan says many of those which are thrown aside will not answer to put back again as they are dead by exposure some that be buried remain alive. ...Did you give him any directions to make these alterations? . . . I am afraid you will be tired of all these complaints.

The letter tells us interesting things about Frances's relationship with the garden. First, that she took a lead role in its care and maintenance. Second, that she had some ownership over it, "He has only left me one row of currant bushes." And third that she saw its importance as worthy enough to include in her correspondence with her husband.

Other letters hint at her emotional attachment to the garden. In another letter to Henry in 1831, she projects a longing for his return, "I wish you were home to see and give directions about the garden and shrubbery. I feel I am quite deficient in taste and judgement both about these things."¹⁹ Years later, the longing persists, "Your letter to Fanny which came last evening

¹⁸ FMS, letter to WHS, March 28, 1831, William Henry Seward Papers, UR.

¹⁹ FMS, letter to WHS, March 27, 1831, William Henry Seward Papers, UR.

dissipated our anticipation of a visit from you about this time. We wish very much to have you see the garden before this July sun pales the verdure and withers the flowers."²⁰

Frances's letters suggest that the garden provided a connection to her husband, as well as to others she cared for. The letters are also a constructed medium operating within a distinct set of social and philosophical conventions. When Frances recounts the garden's changing features - its glorious blossoms, its suffering in drought, its careful construction and tending - she is projecting nineteenth-century feminine virtues of cultivation, utility, and beauty onto nature as seamlessly as she would a discussion of faith, housekeeping, or motherhood. In fact, nature was considered a perfectly suitable medium for projecting feminine virtues in nineteenth-century America.

Frances's communion with nature, however, goes beyond simple projections. The garden provided a figurative surface onto which she could inscribe concerns that were unique to her. When she tends her son's garden, ensuring it has been "watered and weeded as much as he could wish," she is projecting a mother's love onto its green shoots.²¹ The "cheering influence" of spring in the garden is severely dampened by Frances's fears over the "shadow of war" and her family's role in it.²² And relief is mixed with resignation to the effects of drought on the landscape, "the grass is withering, and the beauty of the garden is departing but Will is not a wounded prisoner - and we are thankful."²³ It is likely that Frances was partly inspired to project her concerns onto the garden, and consequently to translate them on the page, by nineteenth-century literary conventions and popular discourse on women and nature.

²⁰ FMS, letter to WHS, June 18, 1864, William Henry Seward Papers, UR.

²¹ FMS, letter to WHS, July 23, 1836, William Henry Seward Papers, UR.

²² FMS, letter to FAS, May 1864, William Henry Seward Papers, UR.

²³ FMS, letter to FWS, July 17, 1864, William Henry Seward Papers, UR.

"Civilized" Women in Nature

American women's relationship with nature shifted dramatically in response to increasing industrialization during the nineteenth century. Many women moved into exclusive roles in the home, their production shifting in consequence to minds and hearts, rather than marketable goods and services.²⁴ Instead of a productive relationship with nature, women increasingly assumed a consumptive one - as educators, hobbyists, and enthusiasts. Some women, such as Almira Phelps, sister of famed women's educator Emma Willard, inspired by the work of botanists Carl Linnaeus and John Bartram, pursued the study of natural history for its scientific value to American minds. Others pursued literary ties to nature - reading works such as Sarah Hale's *Flora's Interpreter: or, The American Book of Flowers and Sentiments* (1832) or Sarah Fenimore Cooper's *Rural Hours* (1850). In *Made From This Earth: American Women and Nature*, Vera Norwood argues that literature of this kind "brought science into the drawing room."²⁵

Frances Seward appears to have appreciated both the practical and leisurely pursuits of nature. The Seward library contained a variety of pertinent sources, including Samuel Goodrich's *The Child's Botany* (1828), Robert Tyas's *Hand-Book of the Language and Sentiment of Flowers* (1844), and not surprisingly, Almira Phelps's *Familiar Lectures on Botany, Practical, Elementary, and Physiological* (1849).

Goodrich's book on botany is as much intended for parents' use, as it is for children, urging them to "direct their [children's] attention, by asking questions, and by requiring them to

²⁴ Vera Norwood, *Made From This Earth: American Women and Nature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 2.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 17.

apply what they read to what they see."²⁶ Frances invited her children into the garden and it became a familiar topic in letters to them throughout her life. Whether she involved them to "direct their attention" or simply for the pleasure of working outdoors is uncertain. But her decision to do so was entirely within the realm of virtues ascribed to mothers - to educate their children and to expose them to beauty.

Robert Tyas's *Handbook of the Language and Sentiment of Flowers* eschews practical matters of botany and harkens to poetry, "which being readily appreciated, are treasured up in the storehouse of memory, to be thence drawn when we look on flowers, and so add a charm to objects which Nature has so bountifully clad with grace and beauty."²⁷ Tyas's view of nature transcribes upon it a language of sentiments, be they love or affection, scorn or sadness, which can be shared with others in letters, paintings, or in the choice of plants cultivated within the garden. Handbooks of this sort abounded in nineteenth-century America in what Ann Leighton in *American Gardens of the Nineteenth Century* describes as "the confusion of science with sentiment."²⁸ Frances's awareness that the "Dahlia" symbolized "instability" in her letters to Henry cannot be confirmed, nor can the countless other flowers she mentions in her letters to others. Tyas's book in her library, however, does confirm her general awareness of flowers' symbolic meanings for the period. Other notable titles in the Seward library include John Torrey and Asa Gray's *Flora of North America* (1838-1840) and Torrey's *Flora of the State of New York* (1843).

²⁶ Samuel G. Goodrich, *The Child's Botany* (Boston: Carter Hendee and Babcock, 1831, 4th ed.), preface.

²⁷ Robert Tyas, *The Hand-Book of the Language & Sentiment of Flowers* (London: Houlston & Stoneham, 1850), 7.

²⁸ Ann Leighton, *American Gardens of the Nineteenth Century* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 87.

For gardening matters and the cultivation of taste relative to them, Frances could turn to one of the most esteemed horticulturalists of the century, Andrew Jackson Downing. The Seward family subscribed to *The Horticulturalist* magazine, which Downing edited from 1846 until his death in 1852. Downing's contribution to nineteenth-century architectural and landscape design cannot be overstated. Born in Newburgh, New York in 1815, he was a prolific essayist, author, and magazine editor. In 1841, he published *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, quickly followed by the book *Cottage Residences*, which he co-authored with Alexander Jackson Davis, and then *Fruits and Fruit Trees* in 1845. That same year, Downing edited Jane Loudon's *Gardening for Ladies* and took over as editor of *The Horticulturalist*.²⁹

Downing was a strong voice for women in the garden, as is evidenced in a response he writes to a "New-England Country Girl" in an 1850 edition of *The Horticulturalist*, declaring

Alas! if Mrs. Ellis, or some other "woman of the nineteenth century," —instead of writing books to teach "mothers and daughters" what to do to be happy —would only persuade Victoria and half a dozen real live Duchesses —anybody, in short, who could and would *set the fashion* —to come to this happy paradise and demonstrate that *ladies* can and do walk, and ride, and work in the garden, and become real flesh and blood creatures, it would be a blessing to the nation.³⁰

Downing is referring to Sarah Stickney Ellis, who wrote a series of books on the role of women as mothers and daughters. In addition to Downing's egalitarian attitudes, he wrote extensively on the subject of taste, particularly as it related to the garden. From the proper ordering of trees to the balance of color among plantings, Downing left no decision to chance and his readers took notice. The influence of Downing's writings is subtly felt in the Seward garden and will be discussed further in subsequent pages.

²⁹ Leighton, 184-5.

³⁰ Andrew Jackson Downing, "A Letter to Ladies in Town," *The Horticulturalist and Journal of Rural Art & Rural Taste* IV, No. 12 (June 1850): 547.

Frances's attachment to the Romantics was also a significant influence on her relationship to nature and her garden, for despite their striking differences from the authors previously discussed, they represent an important literary influence for Frances, and indeed, for the nineteenth century. The Seward library contained several volumes of Lord Byron's works, Frances' favorite poet, as well as the poems of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, William Wordsworth, and Percy Bysshe Shelley. The authors arguably represent some of the strongest voices of the Romantic literary movement, which, in America, spanned the first half of the century.

Characterized by a deep attachment to nature and spirituality, Romanticism attempted to unite the two, best evinced by Emerson, "In the woods, we return to reason and faith."³¹ Romanticism responded to increasing industrialization throughout the modern world, as well as to the growing professionalization of science, through a fusion of "subjective" and "scientific" nature, achieving what Richard W. Judd calls a fusion of subjective and scientific nature that "gave American landscapes transcendent meaning and positioned nature at the center of American identity."³² The tradition for spiritual renderings of nature was well-established before the Romantics, a tradition in which Frances was likely well-versed, but the degree to which it was expressed and celebrated in literature and the arts was wholly a product of her time. The cultivation of a garden, consequently, was many things, not least of which a spiritual act.

"Embellishments" & Particulars

³¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature; Addresses and Lectures* (Boston: James Munroe & Co., 1849), 8.

³² Richard W. Judd, *The Untilled Garden: Natural History and the Spirit of Conservation in America, 1740-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 248.

From the time Nathan Osborne and Peter Crosby commenced planting "forest" and "Lombardy Poplars" on the Miller estate, the reader must thereafter rely on family letters and a scant number of photographs to recreate the garden. It is likely that its contours and appearance changed over time, due in part to evolving fashions, personal taste, or amount of time available for its maintenance. To gain a better sense of the garden, a view of it relative to the property in which it was situated is useful.

The Miller-Seward House was positioned on an approximately four-acre lot facing east toward South Street, one of Auburn's most fashionable avenues. The original brick house that Frances's father, Elijah, built in 1817 was of a stately Federal style with its central-hall plan and fanlight transoms. The house underwent significant modifications during the 1840s in the Italian villa style, at whose urging it is yet unclear. In 1840, a two-story addition to the home was pursued, followed in 1847 by two more additions, a tower on the northwest corner and a wing off the back of the house.³³ To the rear of the house were located a barn, carriage house, and outbuildings, all of which were consumed by fire in 1860. The garden was positioned on the south side of the property. In an 1853 etching of the property, a wooden fence encloses the entire property punctuated by stone pedestals at both the main entrance and a secondary entrance.³⁴ The main entrance is flanked by two taller stone pedestals capped by stone lions, while the secondary entrance opens onto a service road that curves around the north side of the building. Mature trees line South Street. Others on the property hug the house presumably providing shade. In an 1843 letter to her son Augustus, Frances describes other aesthetic decisions pertaining to the property, "the fences have been removed between the court yard and the garden,

³³ Robert Hodder and Martha Demas, "William H. Seward House" (building-structure inventory form, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, August 1989), 1.

³⁴ See Appendix B, II.

the walks covered with slate stone - a trellis put up to shade the well and its appurtenances from observation - the carriage drive is now on the North side of the house - many of the new trees are alive and flourishing."³⁵

Other features of the garden included a pet cemetery where Jenny the Canary was buried after being left exposed in a rainstorm along with other beloved family pets. A fountain can be seen in an 1877 picture taken of the property after Frances' death, but no mention is made of it in her letters.³⁶ Henry made one reference to it in an 1868 letter, so there is some possibility that it was a feature during Frances's lifetime. The labyrinth she wrote of in 1861 is in quintessential Downing-style. In his *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, he cites them as a "source of much amusement to the family and guests."³⁷ Another garden feature worthy of Downing's approval was the summerhouse, what Leighton calls the "grace note in American living." Frances's daughter Fanny was particularly delighted by its winged visitors, "In the summer house the birds are busy hatching five little eggs."³⁸ Two garden sculptures are mentioned in Frances's letters, including Nydia the flower-girl and an ill-fated life-sized gardener. Apparently, the latter was repaired and then broke again in the care of a household servant named Nicolas Bogart.³⁹ A profusion of urns and baskets also appear in a photograph taken of the family on the grounds facing the house in either 1864 or 1865.⁴⁰

³⁵ FMS, letter to AHS, July 02, 1843, William Henry Seward Papers, UR.

³⁶ See Appendix B, III.

³⁷ Andrew Jackson Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1991), 91.

³⁸ Frances Adeline Seward, letter to WHS, May 19, 1862, William Henry Seward Papers, UR.

³⁹ FMS, letter to Lazette Miller Warden, June 3, 1838, William Henry Seward Papers, UR.

⁴⁰ See Appendix B, IV.

The variety of plants the Miller-Seward garden exhibited is striking.⁴¹ In addition to several varieties of trees, including Locust, Horse-Chestnut, and Poplar, a cornucopia of fruits and vegetables grew on the property, including strawberries, currants, plums, apples, cherries, grapes, cucumbers, corn, peas, beets, and potatoes. Perennial flowering plants included Frances's and Henry's favorite - the rose - along with the dahlia, peony, crocus, hyacinth, phlox, gladiolas, verbena, and Star-of-Bethlehem. The exact location of the plantings is unknown. The Swards left no record or layout of the garden other than references in their letters. This suggests the garden evolved over time according to their changing tastes and needs. Early accounts of the garden highlight plantings that could serve culinary purposes - strawberries, currants, cherries. Later accounts focus on plantings that have purely aesthetic value - dahlias, portulaca, and gladiolas. Such evidence points to the changing role of the garden. Where previously it had been enjoyed for its productive value, the food it could yield, the garden evolved into a consumptive space, which could be enjoyed for its intrinsic beauty and for the leisure opportunities it provided - walking through it, writing about it, communing with it.

Conclusion

There is a photograph of Frances taken in her garden in 1863.⁴² She is seated in a chair with a small table at her right side, a book resting on it, her gaze directed downward to its open pages. Frances is dressed in a silk gown and white lace-trimmed bonnet. A dark flimsy shawl is draped casually over her shoulders. She is the picture of refinement and elegance. The backdrop is an interesting contrast to her stately figure. Behind her is a wall of tangled vines and shoots. At her

⁴¹ See Appendix A.

⁴² See Appendix B, V.

feet is a profusion of tall grass, which threatens to swallow the small table and the edges of her dress into its unruly mass.

Most photographic portraits bear the heavy mark of studio conventions. But, how much was that a factor in Frances's photograph? Did she choose to have her photograph taken in the garden? Did she choose this particular spot or did the photographer find the light there to his liking? Frustratingly, we will never know. If the decision was intentional on her part, it would provide further proof of Frances's close affiliation with the garden and her consumptive choices relative to it.

After Frances's death, Henry commissioned a small plaster sculpture of her using the photograph for its inspiration.⁴³ He chose John Rogers, an extremely popular sculptor of the time who had gained attention for his stirring series of sculptures depicting the Civil War. The sculpture of Frances sits on a black pedestal completely devoid of the natural features that characterized the photograph. It is all elegance and refinement, without any of the unruliness or tangled disarray. The sculpture presently resides in the Seward House Museum. According to staff, it was present at every Seward funeral from 1865 to 1951. The photograph of Frances in the garden, and its companion sculpture, clearly had significance to the Seward family. Their persistent presence in family ceremony points to their symbolic importance and Frances's place in the family's collective memory. The photograph and sculpture also testify to the potential of nineteenth-century consumers to capture such imaginative renderings for their own sake or for the sake of others. They are both constructed mediums, one on paper the other in plaster, and, like Frances's letters, signify a relationship where nature is used as a tool for communicating the self.

⁴³ See Appendix B, VI.

Frances's relationship with the garden was a complex one. It was one of her most long-standing, as regular and dependable as the seasons. It was a cause of great pleasure and frequent worry, through drought and the glories of summer. It was a space real and imagined with which she communed bodily and figuratively. When she weeded her young son's plot of earth, she projected her love for him onto a physical space. When she wrote to Henry about it, she was transferring this projection onto an imagined space, which is then captured on the written page. When Frances wrote yet another letter to Henry informing him of the "verdure" he was missing, she was both actively observing the cycles of the garden and using it as a surface upon which to inscribe her resentment at his frequent absence.

Projections and inscriptions of the self onto Nature, either through the written word, tending the garden, or in exercising consumer choice, was a radical departure from earlier understandings of nature that relied chiefly upon its productive and spiritual value. For Frances Seward and other nineteenth-century women, the garden became a space where they could exercise both increasing consumer power and greater public discourse. The former was achieved in the physical planning and cultivation of the garden, the latter in literary and epistolary constructions. These constructions are as much indebted to the Romantic movement, as they are to earlier conceptions of "woman" and "nature", or "woman" and "matter," as opposed to "man" and "mind."⁴⁴ These antecedents perhaps explain the readiness with which women responded to cultural trends uniting them to the natural world - in literature, the arts, as consumers, and in their own discourse with others.

Frances Seward's letters offer a glimpse of both the garden and Frances within it. The letters, like the garden, reveal change over time, changes that are interesting not just for what

⁴⁴ Barbara T. Gates, *Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 3.

they tell us of Frances's experience, but also that of her feminine peers. Increasingly, such women, accustomed to prescribed conventions of nature and gender, exercised new forms of agency, in their writings and in their spending habits, through the lens of feminized nature - the garden.

Appendix - A
Miller - Seward Garden Plant List

The following is a partial list of plants grown in the Miller - Seward garden as described in letters written by Frances Miller Seward, William Henry Seward, their children, and Frances' father, Elijah Miller.

Flowers

Peony	Sweet Pea
Rose	Balsam
Lily	Crocus
Phlox	Hyacinth
Star of Bethlehem	Tulip
Polygala Senega	Verbena
Scarlet Runner Bean	Portulaca
Chrysanthemum	Gladiola
Tiger Lily	Dahlia
Day Lily	Pinks

Fruits and Vegetables

Corn
Cucumbers
Potatoes
Beans
Apples
Plums
Strawberries
Cherries
Red & White Currants
Grapes

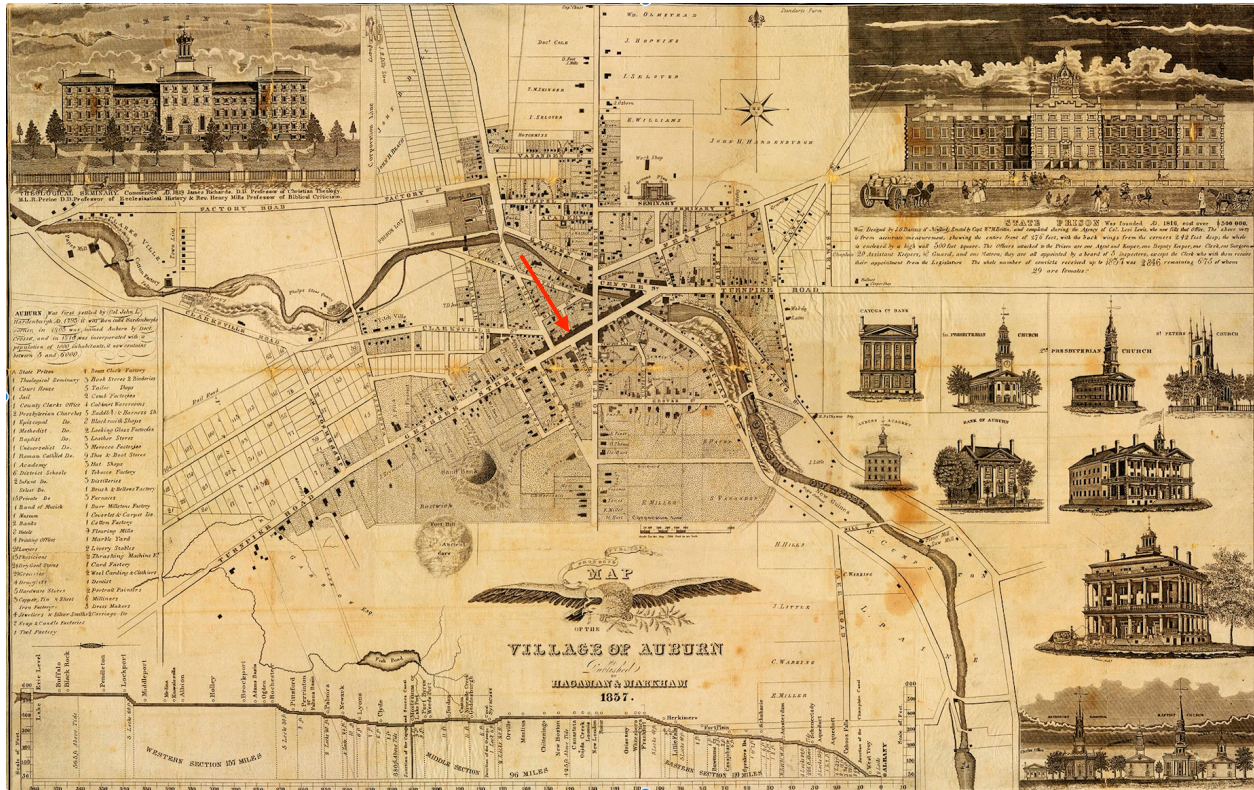
Trees

Lombardy Poplar
English Cherry
Horse-Chestnut
Locust

Appendix B Photographs & Illustrations

I. Map, Auburn, NY, 1837. Haganam & Markham. Image courtesy of City of Auburn, NY.

*Arrow indicates location of Miller-Seward Estate in triangular parcel of land bound by Genesee, Exchange and South streets.



II. Illustration, Seward House, 1853. Image courtesy of Seward House.



Seward House, 1853
Courtesy of the Seward House, Auburn, New York

Appendix B cont...

III. Stereoscope card, Seward House, 1877. Image courtesy of Seward House.



IV. Stereoscope card, Seward House, c.1864. Image courtesy of Seward House.



Appendix B cont...

V. Photographic print, Frances Seward, 1863. Image courtesy of Seward House.



VI. Plaster statue, Frances Seward, 1865. Executed by John Rogers. Photograph courtesy of Seward Family Project, University of Rochester.

