

VISIT TO THE MACDOWELL COLONY DURING WORLD WAR I  
By Katherine Haynes Gatch

Letter from Katherine H. Gatch to her family (Josephine and Albert Gatch) in Milford Ohio.  
Postmarked Peterboro [now Peterborough], NH, [Monday] June 17, 1918.

The writer, a member of the class of 1921 at Wellesley College, writes from the MacDowell Colony, where she had gone at the end of her freshman year, with a classmate (also a fellow-graduate of Miss Kendrick's School in Cincinnati), Mary Elizabeth ("M.E.") Ritchey.

Peterboro  
Sunday Morning [June 16, 1918]

Dear Family,

I have been a 'nawty' beast about writing these last three weeks but honestly, I haven't had time to breathe or sleep, much less write letters, these last days especially.

I might as well give you events in chronological order (a History Course under one Judith Williams instills that into one's system)

You should have seen us leaving Wellesley! We were the last out of Crofton and they were manifestly glad to see us go as the house had to be ready for alumnae. My trunks were ready to go at nine o'clock in the morning but not Mary Elizabeth's. She is an erratic backer to say the least. I did all the tearing up of the room and packing of room things. I even took down all the screwed articles—by Jove, Mother, you put those curtain rod holders up to stay! I at last even wrapped up many sundry articles of M.E.'s because it looked as tho she would never be ready for the 12:58. We had about three bites of lunch and rushed madly off for the train each laden down. I had a coat, a bag, a glof bag and a laundry case. (I forgot my knitting bag with my wool for my summer knitting in it) After jewing a boy down from 50¢ to 30¢ for taking two laundry cases & M-E's heavier suit case we started. I stayed to lug [?] some packages while M-E. went to Post office with said laundry. Mine she mailed but her own came undone and we had to carry it to Boston. South station never saw two freakier freaks. We were both so dead tired, having gone to bed ad 2:30 that morning that we headed straight for North Station and sat and waited for our train.

There are two trains a day to P. so you know how fast they are, and it took us three hours and a half. The train was one of the kind that stopped at every cow path and verily New England must be swarming with cows!

The part of New England that I have seen here-to-fore has been so near Boston as to be rather tainted by the outside world, but not so New Hampshire! The train went nosing leisurly [sic] among the hills and pretty soon the mountains (foot hills of the White Mountains you know) began to appear, all blue in the distance. It was strange but I felt as tho I had surely seen all this before. I knew there would be fields of sickly timothy-hay with scrubby, knarly little apple trees around them. The hilly pastures with rocks cropping out were all familiar too—and I positively felt that the sun would slant over the mountains onto the hay fields exactly as it did. I have a sneaking suspicion that my preconceived ideas are an odd mixture of Hawthorne, Whittier and my fourth grade geography illustrations. Only one thing I found that I hadn't looked for—neat little white houses with huge barns attached at the kitchen door. The barns are to big that the houses look as tho they must be a fancy dog kennel in front of a giant's house. They say it is because it is so cold on winter mornings that the canny Yankees hit on this plan to feed the stock in comfort. But the houses are all that way, even in the villages like Peterboro.

Well, we arrived at six thirty and were met by the Colony Ford, driven by the Colony painter (of barns and floors not portraits) and taken to the Turly Farm,<sup>1</sup> which is the only colony house open now. Its real name is the Eaves and it is the ladies house when all are open. We entered thru the kitchen and first met Emil & Mary who gave us the most cordial greeting we received, Mary being a love of an Irish girl and Emil her Italian husband. Then we proceeded to the dining room. First I met Mr. Robinson,<sup>2</sup> the man whom Alfred Noyes<sup>3</sup> considers America's greatest living poet, then Mr. Arthur Nevin, composer and

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<sup>1</sup> Also known as Old Tenney Farm (per email September 24, 2014 from Collette Lucas, Librarian, The MacDowell Colony).

<sup>2</sup> Edward Arlington Robinson (1869-1935). a prominent Americann poet, who spent the summers at the MacDowell Colony for many years. (*American National Biography Online* [hereafter, *ANB Online*, all references accessed August 17, 2014].

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Noyes (1860-1958), an English poet who taught at Princeton from 1914 to 1923 (<http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poet/alfred-noyes>, as of August 17, 2014).

brother of Ethelbert,<sup>4</sup> then Mrs. Josephine Preston Peabody Marks<sup>5</sup> wearing the same smile that we were privileged to gaze upon a year ago. Next came Mr. & Mrs. Cole.<sup>6</sup> He is a composer and professor of music in University of Chicago, and Mrs. Cole is a wedded old maid and would-be pianist, Mr. Cole's wife. He is a dear with a nice twinkle. Then came Mrs. Perry a portrait painter and writer.<sup>7</sup>

I liked Mr. Nevin at once. He is so homely and has such a whole souled laugh and such beautiful musical hands. That day he had got a cable saying that his eldest son was wounded in France. His other son, aged 18, is on the Italian front and his wife is head Bacteriologist for the Red Cross in Paris. He himself is not strong enough to go over but has been doing community singing work in the camps here. I feel so sorry for him because he doesn't know how seriously Hardwicke is wounded and can't have a letter for three weeks.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Arthur Nevin (1871-1943), a composer who spent considerable time at the MacDowell Colony. During World War I he was involved with military choruses and bands. His better-known older brother Ethelbert (1862-1901), composer and pianist, had studied and performed in Europe as well as America. (Only Ethelbert is included in *ANB Online*.)

<sup>5</sup> Josephine Preston Peabody Marks (1874-1922), poet and playwright, had taught at Wellesley and was married to a professor of engineering at Harvard, L. S. Marks (*ANB Online*). She had been the speaker at Katherine Gatch's graduation from Miss Kendrick's Oakhurst Preparatory School in Cincinnati in June 1917.

<sup>6</sup> Rossiter Cole: not in *ANB*, but listed in the index of MacDowell Fellows: <http://www.macdowellcolony.org/artists-indexfellows.php> (accessed August 14, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Lilla Cabot Perry was a noted and wealthy American impressionist painter (<http://nmwa.org/explore/artist-profiles/lilla-cabot-perry>; accessed August 17, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Nevin's wife Mary Lynham, whom he married in 1907, was certified in bacteriology at the Institut Curie in Paris in 1911 (*Boston Herald*, February 21, 1911, p. 3). The older son, Hardwicke Nevin, was involved with the American Field Service during the war and published poetry about his experiences in the early 1920s (e.g. "Trenches" in *History of the American Field Service in France: "Friends of France" 1914-1917* [Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920], 253). Both Hardwicke and the younger son, who was eighteen years old in 1918, must have been children from an earlier marriage. I find no account of Nevin that gives details about his marriages and offspring. (Wikipedia seems hopelessly muddled.)

The Rankes, Mr. & Mrs., reporters for the Brooklyn Eagle,<sup>9</sup> arrived last night, straight from Paris. They came up here to write books about what they saw. I never saw people have to answer questions so thick and fast. Mr. Nevin was allowed the floor first but they had not seen his family. Then they all talked war for hours. Mrs. Perry's son-in-law was Gerard's attaché d'affaires in Berlin and she knows more than what is in Gerard's book.<sup>10</sup> Her son-in-law was appointed by [Theodore] Roosevelt and approved by Taft and has not had an easy time under Mr. Gerard, the Tammany Judge. This gentleman was a German scholar and as Mr. G started to learn German after he was appointed, this Mr. Grew did much of his work and most of Mr. Gerard's experiences were those of his attaché.<sup>11</sup> Oh I heard such volumes of things! The Rankes were in Paris when the long guns were going,<sup>12</sup> and Mrs. Nevin was knocked off her feet in her laboratory. Mrs. Ranke says that the French are a bit jealous of us, and resent our magnificent equipment [sic] of warehouses and provisions and can't see why all the men used behind the lines can't be put at the front. He thinks there are many slackers and much corruption in the Red Cross and a lot of sightseers in the Y.M.C.A. who are having a ripping time in Paris.

He has been right out at the front and seems positive that after this fall there will be no big fighting [,] that America's aid is beginning to

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<sup>9</sup> *Recte*: Edwin Carty Ranck and Reita Lambert Ranck (identified by Colette Lucas, email September 24, 2014). Carty Ranck published several books: e.g., *Poems for Pale People* (1906), and a novel, *The Doughboy's Book* (1925), but he and his wife do not seem to have published a wartime report. He had ongoing connections with E. A. Robinson and Mrs. Perry (see Scott Donaldson, *Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Poet's Life* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2007]).

<sup>10</sup> James Watson Gerard (1867-1951) was appointed ambassador to Berlin in 1913 and had a controversial career there. He and Franklin D. Roosevelt had been rivals in the Democratic Party's primary election for the U.S. Senate in New York in 1914. Gerard was associated with the Tammany Hall faction of New York Democrats. The book by Gerard is probably *Face to Face with Kaiserism* (1918). (*ANB Online*)

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Grew (1880=1965) was at the beginning of a distinguished diplomatic career; he served in Berlin 1915-17. He married Alice Perry, the daughter of Lilla Cabot Perry. Grew himself was wealthy and well-connected; his wife was not only a Cabot but also a granddaughter of Admiral Oliver Hazard Perry. (*ANB Online*)

<sup>12</sup> I.e., the German artillery bombardment of Paris with "Big Berthas" in the spring of 1918.

hold the Germans now and that by fall they will be licked, but that the war will dribble on for a long time. Mrs. Ranke is not so optimistic. She can see nothing but ruin and desolation for every one. Once I overheard Mr. Nevin asking about pieces of shell and shell wounds, and Mr. Ranke not knowing about his son told him how big they were and how ghastly the wounds and I could hardly keep the tears back at the look that crossed Mr. Nevin's face. He follows Mr. Ranke about so as not to lose a word he says.

Well, I seem to have strayed from Peterboro to the war, but it's here in this lovely woods just as it is every where else.

Oh I wish you could see the woods. At present I am writing at the study where Mrs. Marks<sup>13</sup> has been working (she left yesterday). The wind is making a lovely soft noise in the tops of the pines and oh they smell so deliciously. The ground is covered with even lovelier [sic] ferns than those of Michigan and there are birch trees, too. All that I see out of the window. From the door I see Mount Monadnoc all blue across the valley. The studios are scattered far apart, all thru the woods. Yesterday we had lunch in Mrs. Ritchey's.<sup>14</sup> Mrs. MacDowell<sup>15</sup> is not at home but we are going thru the house today. I was there yesterday and saw her garden. It runs right to the brow of the hill and looks off to Monadnoc. I am going to see the "Log Cabin" where Mr. MacDowell composed, today too. I saw his grave yesterday. It is on a lovely knoll looking off to the mountains. There is no monument but he is buried beside a huge natural glacial boulder with a native clump of white birches. A stone wall is built around the plot and a lovely rustic gate opens into it under a rustic arch. It is lovely.

Turly Farm is just a regular old New England farm house, barn attached too, except that the woodwork is all white and there are dainty little swiss curtains at the windows. The food is good and I am getting so rested.

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<sup>13</sup> *Recte*: Elizabeth Marsh, who worked at Schelling Studio (identified by Colette Lucas, email September 24, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Mary Elizabeth Ritchey's mother, Belle MacDairmid Ritche, was a playwright and, at this time, a fellow at the MacDowell Colony. There seems to be no biography, but a number of her short plays are held in the Cincinnati Public Library and elsewhere.

<sup>15</sup> Miarian Griswold Nevins MacDowell (1857-1956), the widow of the composer Edward MacDowell (1861-1908), had established the Colony in her husband's lifetime and remained its guiding spirit until her death. (On both MacDowells, see *ANB Online*).

Yesterday we just wandered all day. I saw all Peterboro. We went with the man to deliver the lunches at the studios. We got out at Mrs. Perry's and she invited us in.

Mr. Nevin wasn't at his so we peeked in and I saw his piano and an unfinished score spread [sic] out on it where he had been working.

It is so cool that we have log fires and wear wraps. The studios are so attractive. I think I could write too if I could sit in one and smell the pines and watch Monadnoc. No wonder MacDiowell wrote Woodland Sketches. I am so sorry not to meet Mrs. MacDowell. They say she is wonderful. It is surely nice of Mrs. Ritchey to let me come up (guests aren't usually allowed) and I'm so glad that you wanted me to come instead of going straight home.

I got your letter yesterday Mother. Walked to the post office for it. This letter is for every body, but I must stop now and go back to dress for dinner. Perhaps can add more later. How I wish you all were here because you would be so interested in the people, and you would love the place

[in bottom margin] Tell Milton<sup>16</sup> to chew the [enclosed] leaves to see if he recognizes them.

Much love,

Katherine

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<sup>16</sup> The writer's younger brother, Milton McCormick Gatch.