

**Imagined Landscapes:  
Geography, Identity, and Gender in the Early American Republic  
1785-1835**



Emily Wells

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Department of History

Advisors: Christine DeLucia and Robert Schwartz

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## **Introduction**

On November 8, 1814, a young woman named Hannah Alvard Bliss attended the first day of class at a school in Longmeadow, Massachusetts. That night, as she wrote in her journal, Bliss expressed her hopes for the new school term: “the several branches of learning which I expect to pursue are Reading Writing Spelling Grammar...Geography and Composition. I wish that I may make such proficiency in my studies as to give my Parents and Friends satisfaction.”<sup>1</sup> Although the six subjects that Bliss hoped to pursue were all important components of a young woman’s education, geography held a special significance.

In the decades that followed the American Revolution, members of the new nation began to embrace the American landscape as a point of connection between themselves and their fellow citizens. At the same time, geography became an increasingly significant component of a student’s education. By studying the nation’s boundaries and learning its terrain, students were able to envision the nation beyond the borders of their own town or county. In doing so, they could begin to think of the nation not just as an idea, but also as a tangible reality. By engaging with the American landscape through geography, they could also begin to explore their own identities as American citizens.

In this project, I examine the critical role that geography played in the education of young women in America between 1785 and 1835. To accomplish this,

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<sup>1</sup> Diary of Hannah Alvard Bliss Clarke, November 8, 1814, Warren-Clarke Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society (Boston, Massachusetts).

I have divided my analysis into four main components. First, I explore the educational opportunities available to young women in the decades immediately following the American Revolution. Next, I examine the pedagogical debates that changed the way instructors taught geography during the early nineteenth century. After establishing the historical and pedagogical contexts that surrounded geography instruction during this time, I reconstruct a variety of methods that students employed to aid their understanding of this subject. These included specialized forms of writing, recitation, drawing, and embroidery. Finally, I examine how young women expressed their personal experiences and perceptions of American landscapes through the creation of embroidered samplers and pictorial needlework.

### *Historiography*

At the heart of this study is the concept that national and personal identity can be expressed and defined through the physical landscape. Scholars of American environmental history have explored this idea extensively, tracing the nation's past through the complex and evolving relationship between society and nature. Among the first texts to explore this facet of the nation's history was *The Machine in the Garden*, written by Leo Marx in 1964. In this work, Marx explored the interplay between technology and the pastoral ideal in America, arguing for the existence of a "middle landscape" that lay somewhere between "wilderness" and "civilization." Three years later, in 1967, the historian Roderick Frazier Nash continued Marx's exploration of the landscape in his book, *Wilderness and the American Mind*. In this work, Nash assessed the relationship between "wilderness" and American identity.

More recently, historians have once again begun to look critically at the American landscape. In 1995, William Cronon reexamined the idea of wilderness in his essay “The Trouble with Wilderness,” arguing that it was not separate from, but rather a product of civilization. In 2003, the ecofeminist historian Carolyn Merchant explored the relationship between nature and the feminine ideal in her book, *Reinventing Eden*.

Connected to the field of American environmental history is the study of cartography, or how people have visualized terrain and space over time. Cartography has become a rich resource for historians interested in spatial history, an approach that examines both the spatial and chronological dimensions of history. For this study, I have focused on connections between cartography and education, a synthesis that was explored in 2006 by Martin Brückner in his study, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America*. In his work, Brückner considered the intersection between geography, literacy, and national identity, identifying how educators attempted to instill a sense of national identity in America’s youngest citizens.

Like Brückner, I have also drawn upon material culture in order to gain a more complete understanding of the world that students inhabited. The term “material culture” refers to the practice of using objects and other non-written sources as evidence in historical analysis. These sources are especially useful when studying individuals and communities that left little written record. In particular, I have examined a range of needlework pictures created by students during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Until recently, samplers and other



examples of “schoolgirl embroidery” were not valued as historical documents, but instead regarded as evocative reminders of America’s colonial past. The Colonial Revival movement, which began in the 1920s and lasted through much of the twentieth century, prompted collectors and historians alike to consider needlework as a form of “folk art,” thus placing it outside of the mainstream art historical canon.<sup>2</sup> In the 1970s, with the advent of the women’s history movement, scholars began to consider needlework with a more critical eye. Among the first historians to appreciate needlework for its historical rather than aesthetic value was Rozsika Parker in her work entitled *The Subversive Stitch*. In 1993, the historian Betty Ring laid the foundation for subsequent examinations of American needlework when she published *Girlhood Embroidery*. In her work, Ring considered the development of needlework over time while also considering stylistic trends in the context of individual schools. Today, historians including Susan P. Schoelwer, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich and Marla Miller have continued to investigate the historical significance of needlework, incorporating this craft into a broader narrative of women’s history and gender studies.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For a more complete overview of how the study of needlework has developed over time, see the introduction to Susan P. Schoelwer’s work, *Connecticut Needlework: Women, Art, and Family, 1740-1840* (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Susan P. Schoelwer has written several books on the history of needlework in America, including *With Needle and Brush: Schoolgirl Embroidery from the Connecticut River Valley, 1740-1840* and *Connecticut Needlework: Women Art and Family, 1740-1840*. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich examined the importance of textiles and textile production in early America in her book, *The Age of Homespun*. Likewise, Marla Miller examined the various roles that women played in the early American clothing trade in her book, *The Needle’s Eye: Women and Work in the Age of Revolution*.

## *Methodology*

To gain a more complete understanding of the role that education played in encouraging the development of a national identity, I have examined the pedagogy employed by educators and textbook authors as well as the lived experiences of individual students. To understand the theoretical aspect of education, I examined ideas regarding the “ideal” female education using popular literature as well as methods employed by instructors and textbook authors. To access these sources, I used digital resources on early American print culture, as well as published material held at the Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections. In order to understand how these theories were applied on a daily basis, I turned to diaries, notebooks, and artistic projects completed by young women while attending school. Because these students left few written records, it was necessary to draw upon examples of material culture, most notably maps and pictorial needlework, in order to paint a more comprehensive picture of students’ experiences. Many of the objects that I examine in this paper were made available through museums’ online collections. I also traveled to Boston, where I conducted archival research using original materials in the collections of the Bostonian Society and the Massachusetts Historical Society, two institutions with strengths in early Americana and the history of New England. Having the opportunity to engage with the stories of individual students was the most rewarding part of my research. By studying the objects and documents that they left behind, I was able to understand the construction of national identity as an individual as well as collective process.

## **Chapter One: Female Education in the Early American Republic**

Soon after the American Revolution, it became evident that the success of the new nation depended on the education of its citizenry.<sup>4</sup> Although this attitude primarily resulted in the improvement of male education, young women benefited as well. According to the historian Linda Kerber, the period between 1790 and 1830 witnessed significant improvements in the educational opportunities available to female students.<sup>5</sup> Although access to public education remained scarce, a large number of private, female boarding schools and academies emerged during this time.<sup>6</sup> While these schools generally followed European methods of instruction, they sought to prepare students to fulfill their roles as American citizens. In addition to emphasizing the importance of patriotic duty, these institutions helped young women attain the skills that they would need to fulfill their future duties as wives and mothers.

The schools discussed in this chapter catered primarily to the education of middle and upper-class white women. While free black women were barred from entering these schools on account of their race, lower-class white women were unable to attend due to the expense of tuition. By refusing to educate these women,

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<sup>4</sup> Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1980), 189.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 200-202.

schools perpetuated the existence of a rigidly stratified society divided along lines of class and race.

### *Cultivating “Polite and Useful Accomplishments”*

During the late eighteenth century, educators continued to follow European models of instruction. As a result, the education that young women received after the American Revolution differed very little from that which previous generations had encountered under British rule.<sup>7</sup> When advertising their schools, instructors emphasized their own qualifications in terms of their European educations. In 1795, one school advertised that English grammar, geography, arithmetic, and drawing would be “demonstrated by Mrs. Beck from London,” while daily lessons in French grammar would be given by “a gentleman from Paris.”<sup>8</sup> In 1794, another boarding school advertised the services of Mrs. Daly, “a native of France” who had lately come from London.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to employing European-trained instructors, these schools continued to educate young women according to European ideas regarding what subjects were necessary for a young woman’s education. At these schools, students would learn “useful” accomplishments such as plain sewing or cooking, in addition to the “polite” accomplishments such as decorative embroidery, writing, music, and

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<sup>7</sup> Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America’s Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2006), 76.

<sup>8</sup> “Young Misses’ Academy,” *Gazette of the United States*, September 21, 1795, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>9</sup> “Ladies’ Boarding School,” *Dunlap’s American Daily Advertiser*, December 13, 1794, America’s Historical Newspapers.

dance.<sup>10</sup> By cultivating these polite accomplishments, young women were able to display their genteel sensibilities. According to Mary Kelley, “readily identifiable signifiers of privilege,” such as the ability to dance or create decorative embroideries, were necessary for maintaining distinctions of social rank in an increasingly fluid and democratic society.<sup>11</sup> Following Kelley’s vein of inquiry, the historian Kariann Akemi Yokota argues that, as members of a postcolonial society, Americans were anxious to communicate their cultural refinement to the outside world and hoped to accomplish this by employing European instructors and adopting European standards of intellect and cultural achievement.<sup>12</sup> Although these markers of gentility drew upon aristocratic traditions, Americans adapted them to fit a new, national context.<sup>13</sup> As later chapters of this project demonstrate, students would often use these polite accomplishments as a framework to demonstrate their patriotism as well as their social standing.

The process of distinguishing individuals according to social rank played out on a daily basis within these private boarding schools and academies. Although every student received a basic education, instructors would often charge additional fees for lessons in more refined arts such as decorative embroidery or drawing. For example, in 1803, the Pleasant Valley Boarding School in New York offered instruction in “Reading and Plain Sewing” for twenty dollars per quarter, while an education in “Grammar, Writing, Arithmetic, and most kinds of Needle Work” was

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<sup>10</sup> Survey of advertisements published between 1790 and 1799, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

<sup>11</sup> Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 69.

<sup>12</sup> Kariann Akemi Yokota, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-98.

priced at twenty-five. If students wanted to receive lessons in “Geography, Working Maps, and the Use of the Globes,” their families would have paid thirty dollars per quarter.<sup>14</sup> By structuring their lessons in this way, instructors created a stratified social climate that mimicked the social divisions present in adult society.

Despite these practices of inclusion and exclusion, most middle and upper-class students would have encountered a similar curriculum while attending school. The most common subjects that young women studied were music, the various branches of needlework, foreign languages (usually French), English grammar, writing, geography, arithmetic, drawing, history, and dancing.<sup>15</sup> By comparison, young men pursued a more practical course of study. In one advertisement for a boarding school that offered instruction to both boys and girls, instructors offered to educate young women in reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography while also instructing them in artistic endeavors such as drawing, painting, instrumental music, ribbon work, “seed, shell, and paper work,” filigree, and six different varieties of decorative embroidery. Young men, on the other hand, would receive instruction in “English Grammar, Reading, Writing, Arithmetic and Book-Keeping.”<sup>16</sup> The range of subjects included in this advertisement demonstrates the important place that decorative arts occupied in female education. On the other hand, the opportunity to cultivate artistic skill is absent in the curriculums offered to their male counterparts who were being prepared for careers in the public sphere.

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in: Mary Zundo Peterson, “Stitching Empire,” *Common-Place: The Interactive Journal of Early American Life* 14 (Spring 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Survey of advertisements published between 1790 and 1799, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

<sup>16</sup> “Mr. And Mrs. Jones,” *The Washington Spy*, January 18, 1793, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

In addition to providing their students with an education in gentility, instructors also endeavored to prepare them for their future roles as American citizens. Although women were not expected to take an active role in public life and were denied the right to vote or hold public office, they could fulfill their patriotic duty through their roles as wives and mothers. In a newspaper article published in 1795, an anonymous author argued for the importance of educating young women by expounding upon their important role within an emerging domestic sphere.

“Women,” he wrote,

are not designed to govern the states, or command armies; to plead at the bar, or to preach in the church, and therefore need not study the sciences leading to those several professions. But there are employments suited to them...The importance of female education will rise in our opinion, if we consider women as persons who may become wives, and mistresses of families...the support or the ruin of families depends upon their conduct...they consequently determine the greatest concerns of mankind, and form the good or evil manners of almost all the world.<sup>17</sup>

By discussing the role that women played in determining the “greatest concerns of mankind,” the author frames women’s domestic contributions within a political context. Although women could not vote or hold public office, they could participate in political life by raising virtuous and productive citizens. This idea, which the historians Jan Lewis and Linda Kerber have termed “Republican Motherhood,” was often employed as a rationale behind providing improved educational opportunities for young women<sup>18</sup>. This idealized vision of American womanhood was, of course, limited to white women from the upper and middle class. By excluding certain

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<sup>17</sup> “On the Importance of Forming the Female Character by Education,” *Federal Intelligencer*, July 31, 1795, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>18</sup> Linda Kerber, “The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment, An American Perspective” in *The American Quarterly* 28 (1976) and Jan Lewis “The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic,” in *The William and Mary Quarterly* 44 (1987).



women from receiving an education, schools perpetuated pre-established notions regarding who should be allowed to shape the nation's future.

When considered in this context, advertisements for boarding schools that offered instruction in the skills needed to manage a household acquire a new importance. In 1795, one school offered to teach students "regularity and method in the management of domestic concerns."<sup>19</sup> A year later, another offered to provide students with a "domestic, literary and polite education"<sup>20</sup> By teaching young women how to manage a household, instructors provided students with skills that would allow them to become models of Republican Motherhood.

### *Shaping a Student's Moral Character*

In addition to teaching the polite and useful accomplishments, instructors were also responsible for shaping the moral conduct of their students. This concern is demonstrated in *The Boarding School*, an epistolary novel written by Hannah Webster Foster in 1798. This novel, which follows the education of a group of young women, beginning with their time at a boarding school and progressing through their adult lives, demonstrates what many believed to be the ideal female education. At one point, the fictional preceptress, Mrs. Williams, tells her students that she will immediately correct "any indecorum of behavior."<sup>21</sup> This concern regarding students' moral conduct was not limited to fiction; almost every advertisement for

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<sup>19</sup> "Mrs. Lilly," *Daily Advertiser*, May 9, 1795, America's Historical Newspapers.

<sup>20</sup> "Mrs. Capron," *Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser*, September 3, 1796, America's Historical Newspapers.

<sup>21</sup> Hannah Webster Foster, "The Boarding School," in *The Coquette and the Boarding School: Authoritative Texts Sources and Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Jennifer Harris and Bryan Waterman (New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company), 139.

private boarding schools and academies assured potential customers that the morals and conduct of their students would be strictly supervised. As one preceptress wrote in an advertisement for her school, “parents and guardians may be assured that the utmost attention will be paid to their moral conduct, as well as improvement in politeness and good manners.”<sup>22</sup>

Fears that the morals and conduct of students would go astray once they left home was not completely unfounded. Newspapers often would publish accounts of young women whose lives and reputations had been ruined while attending school. These cautionary tales characterized young women as impressionable and in need of constant supervision. One student who had been swept up in an ill-fated elopement cited her school as the “origin of her ruin,” since it was there that “her mind had been contaminated by the conversation...of her school-fellows” and the attentions of her suitor had “made too deep an impression upon her heart.”<sup>23</sup> Fears of moral corruption or elopement were especially prevalent for young women who left home to attend school in neighboring towns or cities rather than remain under their parent’s guidance.

The idea that students’ minds were dependent upon the guidance of their preceptor or preceptress is articulated in *The Boarding School* when Mrs. Williams asks her assembled students, “your minds are a good soil; and may I not flatter myself, that the seeds of instruction which I have sown, ‘will spring up, and yield

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<sup>22</sup> “Ladies’ Boarding School,” *Dunlap’s American Daily Advertiser*, December 13, 1794, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>23</sup> “From a London Paper,” *Federal Gazette*, November 10, 1791. America’s Historical Newspapers.

fruit abundantly?"<sup>24</sup> Because private boarding schools and academies were meant to complete a young woman's education, the end of her time there indicated that she was ready to enter the adult world. As such, instructors were not only responsible for the education of their pupils, but were also expected to prepare them to take on a new set of responsibilities. As Mrs. Williams explains to her students,

to you the period is important. It is a period, which, while it relieves you from the confinement of scholastic rules, introduces you to new scenes of cares, of pleasures, of trials, and of temptations, which will call for the exercise of every virtue, and afford opportunity for improving the endowments, both natural and acquired, which you possess.<sup>25</sup>

Upon leaving school, students could no longer look to their instructors for guidance. Although they could continue to depend upon their parents or friends for advice, they would need to rely primarily upon their own judgment.

#### *Forming and Maintaining Networks of Female Friendships*

While at school, young women formed networks of female friendships that would, ideally, persist throughout their lives. This ideal is exhibited in *The Boarding School* through the letters that the characters exchange after they leave school and return to their respective homes. In one letter, the character Maria observes that "those friendships which are formed in youth, provided they be well founded, are the most sincere, lively, and durable."<sup>26</sup> Over the course of the novel, Maria's prediction proves true: through their letters, the characters help to guide each other through life's trials. In this way, they maintain the moral and intellectual lessons

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<sup>24</sup> Foster, *Boarding School*, 142.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

that their preceptress, Mrs. Williams, had taught them in school.<sup>27</sup> In addition to correspondence, the historian Mary Kelley suggests that books served as bridges between students who separated at the end of their school term. In their letters, young women would discuss the merits of what they were currently reading and ask their friends for recommendations on what to read next.<sup>28</sup> In doing so, they were able to sustain the intellectual community they had formed at school.

Diaries written by young women during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries testify to the existence of closely-knit social networks among students. One student named Sally Ripley frequently wrote in her diary about the excursions that she took with her friends. Together, they would take walks, pick strawberries, drink tea, dance, and play cards.<sup>29</sup> Another student named Harriot Coffin Sumner recalled how students at her school had “put a piece of black ribband [*sic*] on their left arm” in mock mourning for a student who had left school.<sup>30</sup> Later, Sumner remembered that another student had given her classmates parting gifts to signify their friendship.<sup>31</sup>

Although students may have followed the example of the characters from *The Boarding School*, it is also possible that many of their friendships faded over time. In the popular novel *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen presents a satirical take on a meeting between two old schoolfellows whom had met “only once since their

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<sup>27</sup> Foster also included a lesson on friendship in *The Boarding School*, testifying to the importance of these relationships to a young woman’s education.

<sup>28</sup> Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 179-180.

<sup>29</sup> Diary of Sally Ripley, American Antiquarian Society (Worcester, Massachusetts) in *American Women’s Diaries: New England* (New York: Readex Film Products, 1984).

<sup>30</sup> Diary of Harriot Coffin Sumner Appleton, Curtis-Stevenson Family Papers, The Massachusetts Historical Society, (Boston, Massachusetts).

<sup>31</sup> Appleton received a Latin dictionary and a writing book (1813).

respective marriages.” According to Austen, “their joy on this meeting was very great, as well it might, since they had been contented to know nothing of each other for the last fifteen years.”<sup>32</sup> Unlike the young women featured in *The Boarding School*, Austen’s characters had made no real effort to stay in touch after leaving school and the joy they felt upon their reunion was largely superficial.

Although women maintained varying levels of correspondence with their classmates, the connections they forged over the course of their education allowed them to establish intellectual communities that stretched beyond local boundaries. In this way, the friendships they formed around the shared bond of education helped to integrate women into a broader social landscape. Furthermore, the correspondence women exchanged with their former schoolmates provided them with a means to continue their intellectual pursuits outside of a domestic context. In this way, these communities provided some consolation for women’s inability to participate in male intellectual and political circles.

#### *The Beginning of the Female Seminary Movement*

Although private boarding schools and academies were meant to prepare young women for marriage and motherhood, they also awakened deeper intellectual curiosity in their students. In 1823, a young woman named Jane Noyes lamented her forthcoming departure from school: “this evening...my school days, my happiest days are ended!” For Noyes, reaching the end of her formal education was made all the more painful when she considered the future that awaited her:

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<sup>32</sup> Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Project Gutenberg, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/121/121-h/121-h.htm>.

“must I...relinquish the dear delightful employments of study,” she asked, “for the noise [*sic*] and confusion of domestic life [?]” Although she could not continue her education, Noyes vowed that “time nor change may...easily remove the love of school from my heart”<sup>33</sup> For Noyes, education was not a means to an end but rather an end in and of itself.

Until 1837, when Mary Lyon established the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in South Hadley, Massachusetts, women like Noyes had no opportunity to pursue a higher education.<sup>34</sup> Although Mount Holyoke did not call itself a college until 1888, it offered courses that were comparable to those taught at male institutions. In the first academic year of 1837-1838, students in the Junior Class studied English grammar, ancient geography, history, botany, rhetoric, and human physiology. At the same time, members of the Middle and Senior classes were engaged in even more advanced subjects, including algebra, natural philosophy, intellectual philosophy, chemistry, astronomy, and geology. Before arriving at the Seminary, students were expected to have acquired an education similar to that which was offered by the private boarding schools and academies, including knowledge of English grammar, modern geography, the history of the United States, and arithmetic.<sup>35</sup> Although many Mount Holyoke students went on to become wives

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<sup>33</sup> Diary of Jane Noyes, October 7, 1823, Noyes Family Papers, The Massachusetts Historical Society, (Boston, Massachusetts).

<sup>34</sup> When Oberlin College was established in 1833, administrators admitted women as well as men, however women were not admitted to their baccalaureate program until 1837. For more, see “Early History,” Oberlin College and Conservatory, <https://new.oberlin.edu/about/history.dot>.

<sup>35</sup> “The Annual Catalog of the Officers and Members of the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, 1837-38,” Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections.

and mothers after graduation, others devoted themselves to independent pursuits such as teaching and missionary work.<sup>36</sup>

Mount Holyoke's dedication to cultivating the intellectual capabilities of its students marked a new era in female education. Whereas previously, education had served as a gateway to gentility or as training for republican wives and mothers, female seminaries allowed students to engage in serious intellectual pursuits. By encouraging the social, moral, and intellectual development of their students, educators sought to ensure the continued success of the new nation through the knowledge and virtue of its citizens. Far from being an individual or family matter, education became a topic of national importance.

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<sup>36</sup> For more on the history of Mount Holyoke see Anne Carey Edmonds, *A Memory Book: Mount Holyoke College 1837-1987* (Mount Holyoke College, 1988)



## **Chapter Two: Geography Instruction in Theory**

In the years following the American Revolution, geography became an increasingly important component of a child's education. It was, in the words of the American geographer, Jedidiah Morse, "a SCIENCE, no longer esteemed as a polite and agreeable Accomplishment only, but as a very necessary and important Part of Education."<sup>37</sup> At the same time, parents and educators were less willing to rely upon Europe to supply their students' textbooks. Why, after all, should a student's first introduction to the geography of their own country come from outside their nation's borders? In 1784, Morse provided a solution to this problem. In the fall of that year, he published *Geography Made Easy*, the first geography textbook to be written by an American citizen. In the years that followed, American geography textbooks began to flood the market, each claiming to offer some improvement upon the ones that had preceded it. As the years passed, Morse's methodology, which had relied upon the repetition and memorization of text, gave way to a new preference for teaching through visual media such as maps and illustrations. Although this shift is evident in the textbooks published in the decades following the Revolution, it can also be observed in contemporary depictions of classrooms from this time.

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<sup>37</sup> Jedidiah Morse, *Geography Made Easy* (New Haven, 1784), 4.



"Two Young Ladies Studying Geography," from *Miniature Panorama: Scenes from a Seminary for Young Ladies*, c. 1810–20. Image courtesy of the Saint Louis Art Museum.

One such depiction can be found in an image drawn by a young woman sometime between 1810 and 1820. Here, we see two students engaged in the study of geography. While one reads aloud from a book, the other uses a compass to measure distances on a globe situated between them. It is a simple interaction, one that requires a minimal number of tools. Although the globe is positioned at the center of the image, it is, in fact, secondary to the text. Without the context provided by the book, the globe would be illegible.



Frontispiece to *A System of Modern Geography* by Nathaniel Gilbert Huntington, 1835.  
Image courtesy of the Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections.

In a second image, which was published in 1835 as the frontispiece to Nathaniel Gilbert Huntington's *System of Modern Geography*, we see an ideal classroom, filled to the brim with an array of intriguing objects. The textbook and globe from the first image are joined by a new assortment of educational tools. The walls are covered with maps depicting almost every corner of the globe. These are joined by illustrations that depict people from various nations. A portfolio propped open in the corner appears to contain illustrations of animals from around the globe. Although a large bookcase in the corner provides storage for the schoolroom's impressive collection of books, several volumes are scattered carelessly across the floor. Lying next to these abandoned texts are additional maps and several navigational tools. A telescope positioned near an open window waits patiently to reveal the wonders of the night sky. The instructor, who sits at the center of this

busy scene, reads aloud to one of his students while pointing to an atlas that lies open on the table. The rest of his students are scattered about the room, each engaged in various stages of observation and discovery.

In the decade that elapsed between the creation of these two images, a dramatic pedagogical shift took place. The simple interaction between map and text had expanded to include a vast array of media. While the interplay between text and image remained, the image acquired a new importance. But how did this shift occur? The answer to this question can be found in the pages of the many textbooks published in the years following the Revolution. As geography became an increasingly important component of a child's education, educators began to reconsider the methods they employed to teach it. Although it is difficult to pin point exactly when this shift took place, we can roughly divide geographical instruction into two periods. The first period spanned from 1784, when Jedidiah Morse published his *Geography Made Easy*, to 1808 when Jacob Abbott Cummings published his *School Geography*, one of the first textbooks to adopt the new image-based methodology. During this period, textbooks contained few illustrations and students were expected to glean the majority of their information from the author's text. The second period, which began in 1808 and reached its full expression during the 1820s and 1830s, was dominated by a more image-centric approach. Rather than simply memorize the author's words, students were encouraged to form their own interpretations of the landscape based on the maps and illustrations included in their texts.

Although their prose may appear dry and uninspiring, textbooks had the power to shape a student's perception of the world and her place in it. As she studied the nation's physical composition, a student could begin to understand the nation as a tangible entity and place herself within its boundaries. Even as the nation struggled to assert its legitimacy to the outside world, it became real within the pages of these books. In this context, the arguments that took place regarding pedagogy were not mere disagreements over semantics. By seeking the most effective way to instill an idea of the nation in the minds of their students, educators went some way towards ensuring its survival. After all, in order for a nation to exist at all, it must first exist within the minds of its citizens.

*The Nation as Text: Jedidiah Morse and the Development of an American Geography*

The first American who undertook the task of producing a geography textbook specially calculated for the use of American students was the geographer Jedidiah Morse. In 1784, Morse published *Geography Made Easy*, the first textbook of its kind to be published in the United States. Morse's *Geography* quickly gained popularity and, in 1789, he published a second text entitled *The American Universal Geography*.

Until 1784, Americans had relied on Britain for the majority of their textbooks.<sup>38</sup> As a result, many looked forward to the prospect of possessing a textbook written by a fellow American. In Hannah Webster Foster's novel *The*

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<sup>38</sup> Robert Lawson-Peebles, *Landscape and Written Expression in Revolutionary America* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 64.



*Boarding School*, a character named Julia writes to her friend Cleora to tell her how happy she is to have received one of Morse's textbooks,

"it affords me, as it must every true American, the sincerest pleasure to be furnished with the means of acquiring this favorite science, by my own countryman; and the spirit of Columbian independence exults in my bosom, at the idea of being able to gain an accurate acquaintance with my own and other countries, without recourse to the labors of foreigners."<sup>39</sup>

It is clear from this passage that Foster considered Morse's *Geography* to be the most instructive choice for her fictional students. By incorporating Morse's book into her portrayal of the ideal American education, Foster testified to its success as both a geographical and national text. In reality, Morse's *Geography* did not supply much new information regarding the American terrain. He relied heavily on British methodologies and derived much of his information from existing works. The organization of his textbooks followed the system that had been established by the natural philosopher Robert Boyle in 1665. Like Boyle and other British geographers, Morse described the political boundaries and physical characteristics of the terrain before discussing its inhabitants. He also imitated Boyle's method for gathering information. Like Boyle, Morse would send questionnaires to prominent citizens who would then supply him with information regarding the terrain and character of the area in which they lived. Perhaps a result of his unwillingness to travel and see the country himself, his prose was highly derivative, relying upon facts and figures rather than his own evaluation of the terrain.<sup>40</sup> Some criticized Morse for employing this method since it allowed him to publish geographical information without

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<sup>39</sup> Foster, *The Boarding School*, 246.

<sup>40</sup> Lawson-Peebles, *Landscape and Written Expression*, 67.

gaining first-hand knowledge of the landscape. In 1784, the historian Jeremy Belknap wrote the following to Morse:

To be a true Geographer it is necessary to be a Traveller. To depend on distant and incidental information is not safe; and there is a material difference between describing a place that we have seen and one that we have not seen.<sup>41</sup>

In Belknap's opinion, a geographer needed to gain first-hand experience of the land before publishing a geographical text. However, in his criticism, Belknap failed to grasp the central purpose of Morse's texts. Although Morse was dependent on others for his information, the main purpose of his textbooks was not to provide new information but rather to provide a medium through which the nation could be conceived as a politically unified whole.<sup>42</sup> Morse himself admitted that his work was largely unoriginal. In the preface to his *American Universal Geography*, he explained that he had "aimed at utility rather than originality." He further elaborated that he had made "free use" of various publications and "frequently used the words as well as the ideas of the writers, although the reader [had] not been particularly apprized of it."<sup>43</sup> The practice of borrowing material from existing texts was an accepted practice at the time and Morse's derivative approach would not have appeared unusual to his contemporaries. Although the words of his *Universal Geography* may not have been entirely original, its true value came from Morse's effort to gather disparate pieces of information and combine them into a text that was both easy to understand and affordable.

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted in William B. Sprague, *The Life of Jedidiah Morse, D.D.* (New York: Anson D.F. Randolph & Company, 1874), Google Books, 193.

<sup>42</sup> Lawson-Peebles, *Landscape and Written Expression*, 68.

<sup>43</sup> Morse, "Preface to the American Geography, published in 1789," in *Universal Geography* (1793).

Morse was particularly concerned with making his textbooks available to a wide range of scholars. In the preface to his *Geography Made Easy*, he lamented, “geographical books have hitherto been too voluminous and expensive for the purchase, of by far the greater part of the inhabitants of the United States, which has, to them, been an effectual bar to an acquaintance with this science.”<sup>44</sup> He hoped that his publication could go some way towards remedying this situation.

It is very possible that Morse’s commitment to providing an affordable alternative to more expensive texts had a political, as well as economic, motivation. In the preface to his *Universal Geography*, Morse declared, “every citizen of the United States ought to be thoroughly acquainted with the Geography of his own country.”<sup>45</sup> In order to accomplish this noble goal, students would need a text that was both accurate and sympathetic to the American point of view. Morse, it seemed, had provided a perfect solution.

Although Morse conceded that it was important to become acquainted with the geography of the entire globe, he was mainly concerned with the United States. His *Universal Geography* was “calculated...to impress the minds of American Youth with an idea of the superior importance of their own country, as well as to attach them to its interests”<sup>46</sup> Here we gain a glimpse into Morse’s true motivation for writing his *Geography*. Through their lessons, students would begin to form an attachment to the nation. This could only be accomplished however if they were provided an

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<sup>44</sup> Morse, preface to *Geography Made Easy*, 5.

<sup>45</sup> Morse, “Preface to the American Geography,” in *Universal Geography*.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.



accurate and sympathetic portrayal of the United States. This type of portrayal could not be found in British textbooks of the day. As Morse wrote,

Europeans have been the sole writers of American Geography, and have too often suffered fancy to supply the place of facts, and thus have led their readers into errors, while they professed to aim at removing their ignorance. But since the United States have become an independent nation, and have risen into Empire, it would be reproachful for them to suffer this ignorance to continue; and the rest of the world have a right now to expect authentic information.<sup>47</sup>

Although he bemoaned the erroneous information that these textbooks provided to the rest of the world, Morse's main concern was for the American students who were obliged to read them,

To attempt to give American youth a knowledge of their own country from these imperfect and erroneous sketches, would be as fruitless as absurd—it would be to instill into the minds of Americans, British ideas of America, which are far from being favourable or just.<sup>48</sup>

At a time when the United States was attempting to write its own national narrative, it seemed inconceivable that Britain could continue to serve as a primary resource for information regarding the history and character of the new nation. Morse took particular issue with William Guthrie's *Geographical Grammar*, a widely published geographical text that often found its way into the hands of American schoolchildren. Not only did Morse find fault with Guthrie's treatment of the United States, which he found both deficient and inaccurate, but he also complained of the disproportionate attention that he gave to Great Britain.<sup>49</sup> In contrast to Morse, who dedicated the entire first volume of his *Universal Geography* to the American continent, Guthrie treated this topic last. Instead, Guthrie began his *Grammar* with

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Morse, preface to *American Universal Geography*.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

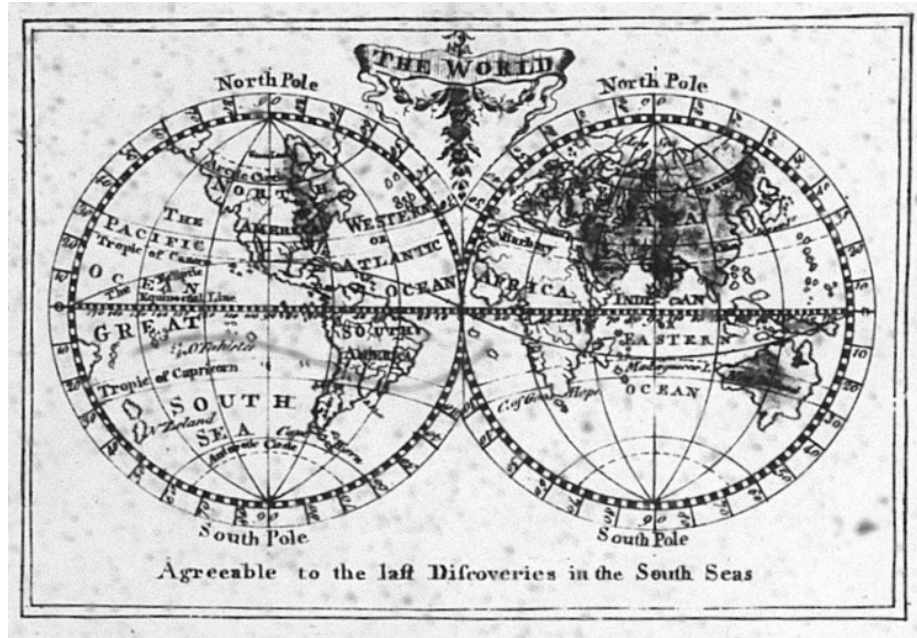
an extensive description of Great Britain and her colonies.<sup>50</sup> In Morse's opinion, if American students were to form an attachment to their own nation, it would be counterproductive to provide them with a textbook that focused primarily on the superior situation of their former rulers.<sup>51</sup>

While Guthrie included maps for almost every location that he discussed, Morse was less generous with his illustrations. In *Geography Made Easy*, Morse included only two maps, one of the world and another of the United States. Although Morse's decision to exclude maps of other nations could have been an effort to keep the cost of his *Geography* low, the prominence given to the national image would have situated his text within a patriotic context. Unlike Guthrie's map of the world, which occupied a large, two-page fold out, Morse's map was relegated to a single page. Due to the map's small size, it does not contain much detail. The continents, which are bounded by a thin, black line, appear empty and cartoonish. Other than a few major rivers, there is very little in the way of topographical detail. Furthermore, there is no indication of the world's political divisions. For Morse, this map was not meant to serve as a primary teaching tool. To gain a complete understanding of the world, students would need to turn to the text.

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<sup>50</sup> William Guthrie, *A New Geographical, Historical and Commercial Grammar* (London, 1787), Internet Archive.

<sup>51</sup> For more on Guthrie's *Geographical Grammar* see John Short, *Representing the Republic* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 94-97.



"The World" from *Geography Made Easy* by Jedidiah Morse, 1784.  
Image courtesy of University Microfilms: American Culture Series.

Although Morse's map of the United States is considerably more detailed than his map of the world, it too was not meant to serve as a primary source for information. Due to the success of Morse's textbooks, this map would have been one of the most highly circulated images of the new nation. In this context, it is important to view the map, not only as a purveyor of information, but also as a carefully crafted political statement. Engraved by the celebrated artisan Amos Doolittle, the map clearly delineates the nation's political boundaries. Dark lines and bright washes of color demarcate the nation's territory while slightly thinner lines mark the boundaries of individual states. Because color was usually added after a book was sold, no two copies would have looked exactly alike. Despite this, each map would have portrayed the nation in a visually coherent style. By privileging the national outline over those of individual states, Morse and Doolittle sought to portray the nation as a politically unified whole. According to Martin Brückner, "it

was precisely the cartographic design of the nation's official borderline by which Morse imagined he could inscribe the students' visual memory and verbal literacy with the idea of the nation."<sup>52</sup> Morse hoped that students would soon become as familiar with the nation's outline as they were with borders of their own state. To further emphasize the map's national context, Doolittle chose to orient it along the Meridian of Philadelphia rather than the more widely used Meridian of Greenwich. By orienting the map according to a system of longitude based at the nation's capital, Doolittle freed the nation from British cartographic convention.



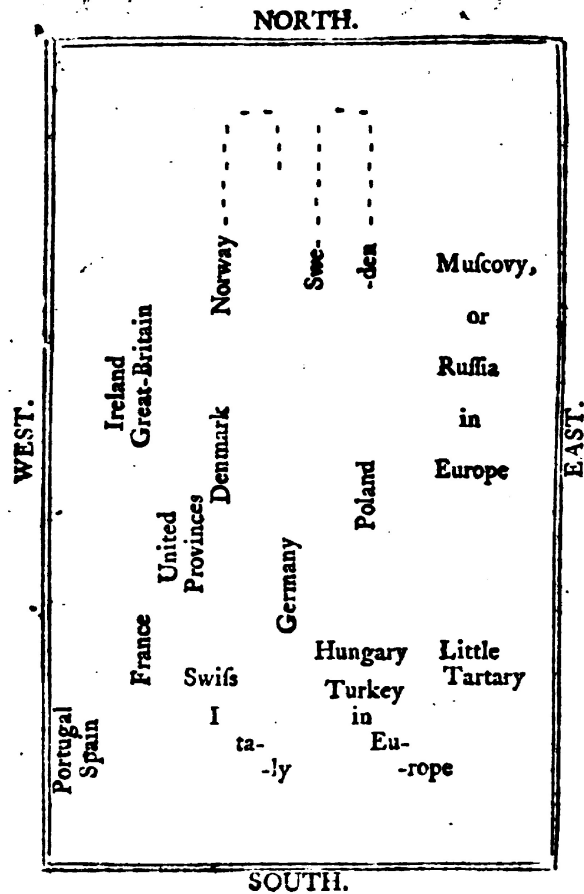
"Map of the United States of America," from *Geography Made Easy* by Jedidiah Morse, 1784.  
Image courtesy of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>52</sup> Martin Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture by University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 119.

To illustrate the remaining divisions of the world, Morse included four word maps. These maps, which covered the areas of South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa, did away with illustration entirely. Instead, the name of each country was placed on the page according to its physical location on the globe. This compromise between text and image would have seemed unusual at the time, especially in the context of a geography textbook. Morse's motivation behind creating these maps was both practical and pedagogical in nature. First, these maps would have been less expensive to produce than more elaborate, engraved maps. As a result, Morse would have been able to ensure that his textbooks remained affordable. Second, by portraying the globe as a textual construct, these maps reinforced the connection between literacy and geographical knowledge that lay at the heart of Morse's text.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 119-120.



"Map of Europe" from *Geography Made Easy* by Jedidiah Morse, 1784.  
Image courtesy of Readex: America's Historical Imprints.

The majority of Morse's information was conveyed through text rather than image. For each chapter, Morse would begin by outlining the borders of the place he was discussing and would then proceed to provide the student with pertinent details regarding its physical appearance and social composition. In *Geography Made Easy*, Morse began his chapter on Massachusetts by outlining its borders and orienting it in relation to its adjacent states. This state, he wrote, was "bounded N. by New-Hampshire and Vermont, E. by the Atlantic, S. by Rhode-Island and Connecticut, W. by New York. 140 miles in length, and 90 in breadth."<sup>54</sup> After he had outlined the region's size and orientation, he then began to add layers of detail

<sup>54</sup> Morse, *Geography Made Easy*, 29.

concerning its natural and social composition. For Massachusetts, he discussed eight different topics, including, rivers and capes, divisions, chief towns, soil and produce, government, inhabitants, religion, and history.<sup>55</sup> In this way, Morse followed a method similar to that of a cartographer. After outlining his map, he returned to fill the blank spaces with detail regarding the region's natural features, political divisions, and social character.

In his *Universal Geography*, Morse continued to rely upon text rather than image. Although he included more maps, the uneven distribution between the United States and the rest of the world remained. While he included four maps depicting various regions of the United States, the continents of Europe, South America, Asia, and Africa were each relegated to a single page.

#### *The Nation as Image: Educational Reforms and their Effect on Geography Instruction*

By the late 1820s, new educational reforms had begun to replace Morse's text-based pedagogy. Rote memorization gave way to a new emphasis on learning through observation and individual experience. At the forefront of this pedagogical shift was the Swiss educational reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. In his seminal work, *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children* (1801), Pestalozzi outlined a new educational system structured around sensory experience and group-centered instruction.<sup>56</sup> A disciple of the emerging Romantic Movement, Pestalozzi believed strongly in the instructive power of Nature. In a passage that seems to echo the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 29-32.

<sup>56</sup> "Johann Pestalozzi (1746-1827) – Career and Development of Educational Theory, Diffusion of Educational Ideas," StateUniversity.com, <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2319/Pestalozzi-Johann-1746-1827.html>.

words of the French philosophe Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Pestalozzi states, “from the moment in which [the student’s] mind can receive impressions from Nature, Nature teaches him.”<sup>57</sup> One of Pestalozzi’s most enduring legacies was his system of instructing students through a series of graded object lessons. During these lessons, students were asked to identify how many and what kinds of objects there were, describe their appearance or form, and recall their names.<sup>58</sup> In this way, young scholars were encouraged to observe the natural and artificial objects that could be found in their environment. Although their instructor provided guidance, Nature, in the form of the student’s innate curiosity and perception, was the true teacher.

Pestalozzi’s belief in the power of observation (a principle that he termed *Anschauung*) naturally resulted in a preference for displaying information through images rather than text. For Pestalozzi, instructing students to recite catechisms or memorize texts adversely affected their natural ability and willingness to learn. In the first chapter of *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*, Pestalozzi provides a vivid description of the horrors that awaited young scholars once they left the bliss of early childhood for the strict, text-based instruction of the classroom:

after they have enjoyed this happiness of sensuous life for five whole years, we make all nature round them vanish from before their eyes; tyrannically stop the delightful course of their unrestrained freedom, pen them up like sheep, whole flocks huddled together, in stinking rooms; pitilessly chain them for hours, days, weeks, months, years, to the contemplation of unattractive and monotonous letters.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Johann Pestalozzi, *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1894), 25, Internet Archive, [https://openlibrary.org/books/OL7244777M/How\\_Gertrude\\_teaches\\_her\\_children](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL7244777M/How_Gertrude_teaches_her_children). Pestalozzi was likely influenced by Jean Jacques Rousseau’s seminal work, *Émile, ou De l’éducation* (1762).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.



Unlike other educators of his day, Pestalozzi found more value in the “unrestrained freedom” enjoyed by young children than the “monotonous letters” taught in the classroom. In 1799, two years before he published *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*, Pestalozzi was given a chance to put his theories into practice. In July of that year, Pestalozzi arrived in the small Swiss town of Burgdorf. Here, he was employed as an instructor at a school created for the education of the lower classes. According to his biographer, Roger de Guimps, Pestalozzi did not hesitate to employ his own system of instruction after assuming his new post:

His lessons had nothing in common with the ordinary lessons of the day; he used neither books or copy-books, the Catechism and Psalms were abandoned, the children had nothing to learn by heart, nothing to prepare or to write, and no questions to answer. Their principal exercise consisted in repeating Pestalozzi’s words all together, whilst they drew on their slates, not letters as at Stanz, but anything they liked.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to encouraging his students to draw freely on their slates, Pestalozzi asked them to observe and identify objects in their environment. In this way, Pestalozzi freed his students from the chains of “monotonous letters” and encouraged them to use their senses to observe the world around them. Although he met with resistance at first, the town soon came to accept Pestalozzi’s new method of teaching. The local School Commission even commented on the effectiveness of his instruction and encouraged him to continue his work.<sup>61</sup>

While Pestalozzi was implementing his reforms in Switzerland around the turn of the nineteenth century, American educators were still held in thrall by

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<sup>60</sup> Roger de Guimps, *Pestalozzi: His Life and Work* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1902), 175, Google Books.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

Morse's text-based methodology. It would take another twenty years before the reforms advocated by Pestalozzi would take root in America. As the historians Maria Laubach and Joan Smith have shown, Pestalozzi's methods travelled across the Atlantic in a variety of ways. First, many educational reformers travelled to Prussia to observe these methods in practice. Those who were not able to observe Pestalozzi's methods first-hand soon learned of his work through the many publications and journals that championed his ideas.<sup>62</sup> By the 1820s, American educators had begun to employ Pestalozzi's ideas in the classroom.

Not long after Pestalozzianism arrived in America, textbook authors began to reconsider their methodology. Around this time, a greater number of maps and illustrations began to punctuate the dense lines of text that crowded geography textbooks. Among the first to incorporate Pestalozzi's ideas in this way was Jacob Abbott Cummings.<sup>63</sup> In the preface to the eighth edition of his *Introduction to Ancient and Modern Geography*, Cummings argued, "nothing valuable in geography can be learnt till it be conveyed to the mind by the sense of *seeing*, and there fixed by frequent repetition."<sup>64</sup> Cummings' preference for image over text follows in the vein of Pestalozzi's teachings. For him, spatial awareness was the key to understanding geography. For this reason, he emphasized the importance of using maps while

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<sup>62</sup> Maria A. Laubach and Joan K. Smith, "Transatlantic Dialogue: Pestalozzian Influences on Women's Education in the Early Nineteenth Century America," *American Educational History Journal* 39, 2 (2012): 271.

<sup>63</sup> In the preface to *A New System of Geography, Ancient and Modern* (1828), Sidney Edwards Morse attributes Jacob Abbot Cummings with making "the first important advance upon the old method of instruction" when he published his *School Geography* in 1808. Sidney Edwards Morse, preface to *A New System of Geography, Ancient and Modern* (New York: Collins & Hannay, 1828), iv-v.

<sup>64</sup> Jacob Abbott Cummings, preface to *An Introduction to Ancient and Modern Geography*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: Cummings and Hilliard, 1821)

teaching students geography. By using these visual aids, students would be able to “easily recollect whether any one state is larger or smaller than another, and form some good conjecture what proportion they bear to one another.”<sup>65</sup> To further advance a student’s awareness of proportion and spatial relationships, Cummings suggested that instructors “let the pupils always sit with their faces toward the north.” He then suggested that they “place the map of the world before [the student], and let them put their right hand on the letter E, the east side, and their left hand on the letter W, the west side.”<sup>66</sup> By orienting themselves to the map, students would have an easier time understanding the spatial relationships between countries, states, and other geographical areas. To assist students in this endeavor, Cummings provided an atlas that contained maps of the World, the United States, Great Britain, South America, Europe, and Asia. This atlas was especially necessary since Cummings’ *Geography* contained few maps or illustrations within the main text.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., iv.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., vi.



"Map of the World" from *School Atlas to Cummings' Ancient and Modern Geography Improved*, 1829. Image courtesy of the David Rumsey Map Collection.

After Cummings published his first *Geography* in 1808, other authors began to adopt and improve upon his methodology. Among them was Samuel Griswold Goodrich, an author who was perhaps better known by his penname, Peter Parley. In addition to maps, Goodrich included a variety of illustrations to help students navigate and understand the text. In the preface to his *Method of Telling About Geography to Children*, Goodrich explained the reasoning behind his choice to include illustrations:

Geography, more than almost any other youthful study, deals in visible images...The engravings in the present edition have been prepared with particular care; and as their utility in communicating clear and vivid ideas is now generally admitted, in Europe as well as America, I hope they may be found a particular recommendation to the work.<sup>67</sup>

By including illustrations, Goodrich hoped to convey a more complete understanding of the landscape. In addition to the political boundaries and

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<sup>67</sup> Samuel Griswold Goodrich, preface to *Peter Parley's Method of Telling About Geography to Children* (Hartford: F.J. Huntington, 1836), v-vi.

topographical features that could be gleaned from a map, students could now view the world from an on-the-ground perspective. In this way, Goodrich supplied information that had previously existed only in the realm of the student's imagination.

In his *System of Universal Geography*, Goodrich continued to provide detailed information about the locations that he discussed. In this work, he included extensive descriptions of the animals that inhabited various parts of the globe, arguing that, "no perfect idea of a landscape ever can be formed, without imagining the birds that are accustomed to hover in the air, or the quadrupeds that may be seen ranging the fields."<sup>68</sup> By including these details, Goodrich assisted students in forming mental pictures of the world's various landscapes down to the smallest detail. For him, a student's understanding of geography was not complete until they could envision the various corners of the globe in their mind's-eye. Goodrich also included images of the people who populated these landscapes. Often he did so in order to compare the fashions and customs of different cultures. On one page, students were encouraged to compare two images representing the people of Europe and Asia and note how "very differently people dress and appear in different countries."<sup>69</sup> By examining these illustrations, students could observe the world, and its inhabitants, without leaving the schoolroom. By portraying foreign cultures as inherently different, and in many cases, less civilized, Goodrich also encouraged students appreciate the "exceptional" nature of America.

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<sup>68</sup> Samuel Griswold Goodrich, preface to *A System of Universal Geography* (Boston: Carter, Hendee & Co., 1832).

<sup>69</sup> Goodrich, *Peter Parley's Method*, 17.



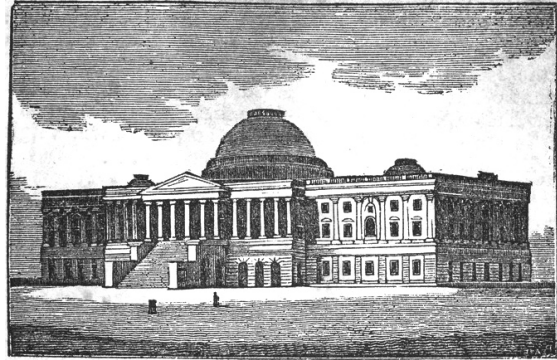
Illustrations from *Peter Parley's Method of Telling About Geography to Children* by Samuel Griswold Goodrich, 1830. Image courtesy of Google Books.

Another author who used illustrations to help students better understand his text was Nathaniel Gilbert Huntington. In his *System of Modern Geography*, Huntington provides students with images of the landscape while also showing some of the activities that took place within it. In Huntington's book, students might come across familiar scenes, such as an image of sleighs dashing through a snow-covered New England. They may have also encountered images entirely foreign to them, for example a wagon train traveling to the Western Territories. Upon turning the page to find an image of the pristine, newly constructed Capitol Building, they may have felt a budding sense of national pride. On the other hand, while viewing an image of enslaved people picking cotton on a plantation, they may have reflected upon the nation's struggle to live up to the very values that had come to define its identity. By including these illustrations, Huntington sought to teach students about both the physical and social components of the landscape. Several of Huntington's lessons had political or moral undertones as well. In his lesson on Sierra Leone for

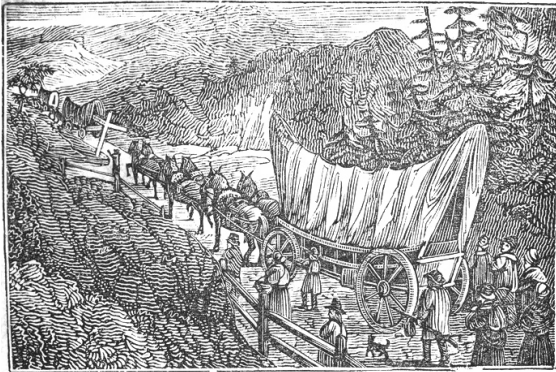
example, he discusses the “intellectual and moral degradation” imposed on the men and women who were captured and enslaved along the Western Coast of Africa.<sup>70</sup> By discussing controversial issues such as slavery, Huntington not only sought to awaken students’ moral feeling, but also attempted to impose his own political perspective upon the subjects he discussed.



*Winter Scene in New England.*



*United States Capitol, at Washington.*



*Travelling in the Middle States.*



*Gathering cotton in the Southern States.*

Illustrations from *A System of Modern Geography* by Nathaniel G. Huntington, 1835.

Images courtesy of the Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections.

While Huntington and Goodrich were promoting Pestalozzi’s pedagogy by encouraging students to learn from the visual materials that they included in their textbooks, the authors James Gordon Carter and William H. Brooks took this effort a

<sup>70</sup> Nathaniel G. Huntington, *A System of Modern Geography* (Hartford: R. White and Hutchison & Dwier, 1835), 279.

step further. In their *Geography of Massachusetts*, Carter and Brooks encouraged instructors to use drawing as a way to engage students with their material. As they wrote in the preface to their *Geography*,

“The drawing of the position of places, rivers, mountains, &c. will be found to fix the wayward *attention* of children and thereby greatly strengthen that important habit of the mind. The changing of the scale in drawing will be found to exercise the power of *judgment* to a degree of which few studies are capable. The facts to be learned of the *memory* without its monopolizing the whole intellectual power of the pupil.”<sup>71</sup>

By engaging the student’s judgment as well as their memory, Carter and Brooks hoped to cultivate the student’s intellectual capacity while also making it easier for them to retain facts pertaining to the subject they were studying. Using a small black board or slate, students would be asked to draw a map of the town where they lived and then repeat this task until they could do so from memory. In addition to drawing, students would read about their town in the provided textbook and recite their lesson in front of the class, using a large blackboard to re-create the map that they had now memorized. Once students had learned the geography of their own town, they would then proceed to the adjoining towns, the county, and finally the state.<sup>72</sup> By moving from the local to the national, Carter and Brooks broke with the favored method of the time. While most authors began with a description of the universe and then progressed to more local topics, Carter and Brooks believed that students should begin their studies by observing their immediate surroundings. Like Pestalozzi, Carter and Brooks believed that a child could learn more from these observations than they could from simply reading a textbook. By relying upon their

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<sup>71</sup> James G. Carter and William H. Brooks, preface to *A Geography of Massachusetts* (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, Little, and Wilkins, 1830), v.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, vi-vii.



own observations of the landscape, students would learn how to employ their judgment, a skill that they could then apply to the rest of their studies.

One of the most influential proponents for this new, observation-based methodology was Emma Hart Willard. Born in 1787, Willard had come of age at a time when rote memorization still served as the preferred method for educating children. When she was fifteen years old, Willard entered a local academy where she was first introduced to Morse's *Geography*. Although she excelled at her lessons, she encountered some difficulty while studying Morse's text, especially when she attempted to learn his chapter on Astronomy. To overcome her difficulties, she decided to employ her own method of study. One night, after reading through her lesson, she stole outside to observe the evening sky. As she later recalled, "the moon was at the full, and snow was on the ground. I wrapt [*sic*] my cloak around me and out of doors on a cold winter evening, seated on a horse-block, I learned that lesson."<sup>73</sup> In this quiet moment, sitting outside and gazing at the multitude of stars that hung in the night sky, Willard stumbled across an idea that would greatly influence her career as an educator. Rather than struggle through Morse's text, she had recognized the power of learning through experience and observation.

For Willard, it was essential to present information visually, whether through maps, illustrations, or direct observation. In the preface to her textbook, *Guide to the Temple of Time*, Willard recalled how the old method of instruction had failed to engage the power of the eye,

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<sup>73</sup> Henry Fowler, "Educational Services of Mrs. Emma Willard," *American Journal of Education* 6 (1859): 129.

In Geography, the eye was not made the sole, or the chief medium of teaching the signs of external things, as the forms, proportion, and situation of countries, rivers, &c., for though maps existed, yet they were not required to be used; but the boundary was learned by the words of the book, and the latitude by numbers there set down.<sup>74</sup>

In her books, Willard sought to correct this pedagogical flaw. According to the historian Susan Schulten, “Willard believed that information presented spatially and visually would facilitate memory by attaching images to the mind through the eyes.”<sup>75</sup>

One of Willard’s earliest contributions to the field of geography can be found in William C. Woodbridge’s *Rudiments of Geography*. Although she is not listed as a co-author, Woodbridge acknowledges Willard’s influence in his preface. Like Willard, Woodbridge believed that information would be easier to remember if it was presented through a visual medium. As he wrote in his preface to the *Rudiments*,

In every part of the work, the author has also kept the principle in view, that no language can impress ideas so deeply on the mind as *information addressed to the eye*. It is peculiarly important to adopt this method in a science that treats chiefly of *visible objects*, of which it is impossible to gain a complete idea without inspection or delineations. A description cannot give so distinct views of the geography of a country as a *map*; and no words can so fully convey the idea of a remarkable custom or curiosity as a *drawing* or *engraving*.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Emma Willard, introduction to *Guide to Temple of Time; and Universal History* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Company, 1849), 11.

<sup>75</sup> Susan Schulten, “Emma Willard and the Graphic Foundations of American History,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 33 (2007): 545.

<sup>76</sup> William C. Woodbridge, *Rudiments of Geography*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Hartford: Oliver D. Cooke & Co., 1826), ix.

Willard and Woodbridge designed their work so that the student would “derive most of his information from a careful examination of the maps and chart.”<sup>77</sup> The text itself is comprised mostly of questions that the student could answer while examining the map. Although geographers had employed this method in the past, Willard and Woodbridge differed from earlier texts by asking more questions than was customary and continually emphasizing that they could only be answered with the help of the map. Like Carter and Brooks, they also emphasized the importance of drawing. As Woodbridge wrote in the preface,

The author knows no method of study so well fitted to accomplish this object, as that of drawing maps *by the eye*... He should do this at first perhaps, by some easy mode of measuring, but ultimately, *by the eye alone*. Let him repeat this until he is able to draw the same outline from *memory*.<sup>78</sup>

By drawing the map over and over again, its boundaries, rivers, mountains, and other topographical features would be permanently inscribed upon the student’s memory. While repetition had also been an essential component of Morse’s approach, Willard and Woodbridge were among the first to apply this principle to visual learning. After the first edition of *Rudiments* was published in 1821, Willard and Woodbridge collaborated on a *Universal Geography* that examined both the Modern and Ancient World.<sup>79</sup> In her Ancient Atlas, Willard promoted the utility of

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>79</sup> While Woodbridge focused his efforts on the Modern portion of this textbook, Willard focused hers on the Ancient. Her interest in Ancient Geography foreshadowed her pioneering work in the field of Historical Geography.

drawing even further by outlining how students should progress through their drawings, beginning with the easiest map and ending with the most difficult.<sup>80</sup>

Although their approach differed greatly from Morse, the men and women who advocated for an image-based approach to geography shared his underlying motivations. First, many of these authors wished to correct the erroneous portrayals of the United States that could be found in European textbooks. In the preface to his *Universal Geography*, Goodrich lamented how “the geography of our country has been overlooked by European writers.” He hoped that his book would go some way towards rectifying this situation. As he wrote, “if the sketches he has drawn differ materially from those exhibited by most English travelers, it is believed that the distinction will be only that which must always exist between a faithful portrait and a gross caricature.”<sup>81</sup>

Most importantly, these authors sought the most effective way to impress the idea of the nation onto the minds of American students. By studying its physical features as well as its social composition, students could begin to conceive of the nation as a tangible reality. Both approaches sought to make the nation familiar to students. Whether through words or images, students could begin to envision the nation beyond the borders of their own town or county. Once these local barriers had been overcome, students could begin to understand their place within a larger political body.

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<sup>80</sup> Emma Willard, instructions to *Ancient Atlas, to Accompany the Universal Geography by Wm. C. Woodbridge and E. Willard* (Hartford: Cooke & Co., 1834).

<sup>81</sup> Goodrich, preface to *Universal Geography*.

### **Chapter Three: Geography Instruction in Practice**

Although the authors of geography textbooks set out with noble intentions, we cannot understand their true impact without first examining how these books were used in practice. While geography was an important subject in its own right, it was often used as a framework to teach “polite accomplishments” such as penmanship, drawing, and embroidery. Students were often encouraged to practice these skills by copying text and images from their geography textbooks. While some students copied toponyms over and over again to practice their penmanship, others drew and embroidered maps to improve their artistic skill. The repetition involved in each of these tasks was a crucial component of geography instruction. Each time a student wrote a place name in their journal or stitched a map onto a silken ground, the nation’s geography would become firmly impressed upon their mental and muscle memory.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, these artistic endeavors grounded the nation in a tangible reality. Whereas before, the nation may have existed as a vague concept, unconnected to a student’s daily reality, these exercises allowed students to form personal connections with the nation. Finally, these tasks allowed students an opportunity to exercise their geographic imaginations. As they traced unknown territories or inscribed the names of places to which they had never been, students could fill these unfamiliar spaces with their own imagined details.

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<sup>82</sup> Zundo Peterson, “Stitching Empire.”

As we have seen, instructors teaching geography during the late eighteenth century relied primarily upon text rather than image. In a diary written by a student named Sally Ripley, we can catch a rare glimpse into the daily experience of a student learning geography according to this method. On May 15, 1799, Ripley commenced her studies at the district school in Greenfield, Massachusetts. Here she was placed under the instruction of Proctor Pierce, a recent graduate of Dartmouth College who had previously been employed as an instructor at the New Salem Academy.<sup>83</sup> During her first few months at Pierce's school, Ripley devoted her attention to studying the English language. On July 15<sup>th</sup> of that same year, Ripley began to record her lessons in a journal. On July 16<sup>th</sup>, she began her study of geography. Although Ripley does not specify why she chose to begin recording her lessons at the same time she commenced her study of geography, it is likely that she did so at the urging of her instructor. As we shall see, the very act of keeping a journal became an important component of Ripley's education.

When she began her studies at Pierce's school, Ripley was fourteen years old. Although we do not know exactly how much time Ripley had spent in school prior to 1799, we do know that she studied for a quarter at a boarding school in Hingham, Massachusetts under the tutelage of a Mrs. Butler. It is possible that she gained her first exposure to geography while studying at this school. Although she had already been introduced to geography, her studies in Greenfield would provide her with her first opportunity to fully engage with the subject. As she wrote, "I have attended to

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<sup>83</sup> *The New Salem Sesqui-Centennial Report of the Addresses and Proceedings of the Celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Incorporation of the Town of New Salem at New Salem on Thursday, Aug. 20<sup>th</sup>, 1903* (Athol, Massachusetts: Transcript Book and Job Print, 1904), 55, Google Books.

Geography a little before but not so thoroughly as I now propose to.”<sup>84</sup> To accomplish this task, Ripley relied upon Morse’s *Universal Geography*.<sup>85</sup> Each day the class studied geography, Ripley would recite a lesson from Morse’s text. Later, she would record pertinent details in her journal. Although she copied each line verbatim, she was selective when choosing which passages to record. As a result, her journal reads like a condensed version of Morse’s text. A good example of Ripley’s method can be found in her lesson on New England. In the 1796 edition of his *Universal Geography* (which is very similar to, if not exactly, the edition that Ripley used), Morse devoted fourteen pages to the discussion of New England. Ripley condensed this sizeable chapter down into a manageable paragraph, which she then recorded in her journal:

New England is bounded north by Lower Canada; east by New Brunswick and the Atlantic, south by the Atlantic and Long island sound, has a very healthful climate it is a high hilly and in some parts a mountainous country it is better adapted for grazing than grain and is the most populous part of the United States. Vermont is 156 miles in length and 70 in breadth it lies between 42 and 45 deg. N latitude and between 1 and 3 S. Longitude from Massachusetts, W. by New York, it is divided in the middle by the Green Mountain which runs from north to south, this state is hilly but not rocky. Much cannot be said in favor of the present state of literature in this state, but their prospects are good.<sup>86</sup>

Although most of the information that Ripley copied from Morse’s text dealt with the region’s size and spatial orientation, she also included Morse’s evaluation of its terrain and his comments upon the present state of literature in the region. By copying these details, Ripley engaged with Morse’s interpretation of the physical

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<sup>84</sup> Ripley, July 16, 1799.

<sup>85</sup> Although she did not note which Geography book she used, a careful comparison of her lessons to the text of Morse’s *Universal Geography* (particularly the edition he published in 1796) reveals that this is the book she used.

<sup>86</sup> Ripley, July 31, 1799.

landscape as well as his discussion of the region's cultural achievements. For example, when considering the intellectual landscape of New England, Ripley may have agreed with Morse's optimistic assessment, challenging the notion that Americans were not as culturally sophisticated as their European counterparts. As we can see, students often accepted Morse's assessment of the world, including his biases against certain regions and populations, as truth. Morse's bias can be most clearly seen in his patriotic portrayal of the United States. On July 30<sup>th</sup>, Ripley recorded the following description of the new nation:

The American Republic is composed of almost all nations, languages, characters and religion which Europe can furnish. The English language is universally spoken in the United States it is spoken with great purity, until the 4<sup>th</sup> July 1776 the present sixteen United States were British colonies, on that ever memorable day the [illegible] [illegible] of the United States in Congress assembled made a solemn declaration of Independence. Several important branches of manufactures have grown up and flourished in the United States with a rapidity which surprises.<sup>87</sup>

This paragraph, which practically glows with national pride, shows how Morse was able to shape students' perceptions of the United States. It is clear from Ripley's journal that she accepted Morse's text, not as one man's opinion, but as an objective truth. By recording Morse's words in her journal, Ripley inscribed these lessons upon her memory. Morse's desire to shape students' opinions of the United States makes more sense when we consider the cultural anxiety that plagued Americans in the decades following the Revolution. As the historian Kariann Akemi Yokota has shown, Americans were eager to assert the legitimacy of their society by emulating the cultural standards of Britain while also establishing a unique national identity.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ripley, July 30, 1799.

<sup>88</sup> Yokota, *Unbecoming British*.



Morse's passage on the American Republic reflects both of these desires; while he celebrates the nation's accomplishments, he is also careful to establish the European heritage of its citizens.

In addition to copying Morse's words in her journal, Ripley would often recite his lessons in front of her class. In doing so, she would repeat his information twice, once verbally and once in written form. We might also imagine that, in order to perfect her recitations, Ripley practiced them the night before. Through these repetitious exercises, Morse's words would become a permanent fixture in her memory.

Ripley continued her study of geography until September 12<sup>th</sup>. By that point, she had progressed through almost every corner of the known universe, beginning with the stars and planets, and proceeding through North America, South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. Like Morse's text, Ripley's studies were heavily weighted in favor of the United States. In total, Ripley's journal included thirty-eight entries that mention her geography lessons. Of those, eighteen were devoted solely to the United States while the remaining twenty were split amongst the rest of the world.

Just as Morse had the power to shape Ripley's mental image of the world, he also influenced the way that she viewed her immediate surroundings. Morse's influence is especially evident in the journal entries that Ripley wrote while traveling to Boston with her father in the fall of 1800. Upon arriving in the city, Ripley does not describe her impressions of the landscape, the conditions of the roads, or the character of its inhabitants; instead, she situates the city within a larger, geographical context. As she wrote in her journal,

Boston stands on a peninsula and joins to Roxbury by a neck of land at the south part of the Town it is connected with Cambridge by a bridge over Charles river leading from West Boston to Cambridge, and another bridge across Charles river connects the north part of the town with Charleston, Boston contains a large number of handsome buildings.<sup>89</sup>

In this passage, Ripley adopts an aerial perspective, describing the city's general layout before moving on to more specific details. Like Morse, Ripley provides a general overview of the city without incorporating her personal experience of the landscape.

The process of reading Morse's textbooks was also recorded in popular literature from the same period. In 1798, just one year before Ripley began her study of geography, Hannah Webster Foster published her novel, *The Boarding School*, which recounted, among other things, a process by which students could learn geography. In a letter written to her friend, the character Julia recounts her recent efforts to improve her knowledge of geography. This course of study, which she considers to be more of an amusement than a chore, is aided by one of Jedidiah Morse's textbooks. As she writes,

My papa has kindly procured me Doctor Morse's last and much improved edition of Universal Geography, which with the assistance of a pair of globes he possessed, have afforded me the most delightful entertainment.<sup>90</sup>

Although Morse did not include many maps or illustrations in his geographies, this deficiency was remedied through the use of supplemental materials such as additional maps or globes. Most importantly, however, the lack of visual material provided students with the perfect opportunity to exercise their active imaginations. This geographical imagination can be found in Julia's letter. To

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<sup>89</sup> Ripley, October 1800.

<sup>90</sup> Foster, *The Boarding School*, 246.

encourage her friend Cleora to read Morse's *Geography* alongside her, Julia frames the task as an imaginary journey:

Come then, my dear Cleora, and without fatigue or expense, we will make the tour of the globe together. After investigating the local situation of different and distant climes, we will turn to the historic page, and examine the manners, government, character and improvements of their inhabitants. We will traverse the frozen wastes of the frigid zones, and the burning sands of the equatorial region; then return and bless the temperate and happy medium in which we are placed; and casting an eye around, exult in our peculiar advantages of soil and situation, peace and good government, virtue and religion.<sup>91</sup>

In her letter, Julia describes the “frozen wastes” and “burning sands” of exotic climes as if she had experienced and seen them first-hand. The written descriptions included in Morse's *Geography* provided a foundation upon which the reader could add their own richly imagined detail. Julia uses Morse's descriptions to craft mental pictures of places that she would likely never visit.

In her letter, Julia describes the intellectual endeavor of reading Morse's *Geography* in physical terms. She hopes that she and her friend Cleora will “make the tour of the globe together” and “traverse” faraway lands. She also mentions that “a pair of globes” will assist their effort. Using these globes, they will be able to trace the path of their imaginary journey and visualize the spatial reality of the places that Morse describes. In this way their intellectual journey becomes grounded in a physical reality.

Julia also praises the “peculiar advantages” of the American terrain. For her, the soil, government, religion, and virtue of America are not independent factors but rather cohered to form a unified whole. Her journey, which begins in “distant

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 246-247.

climes” and ends in “the temperate and happy medium” of America, mirrors the broader march of progress from the despotism of the Old World to the liberty and happiness of the New. Although the other locations that she visits are interesting and instructive, America represents the culmination of human endeavor. The American Republic was not simply another experiment in governance, but instead represented the most perfect form of government.

In her novel, Foster presents the study of geography as a communal activity, one that is shared among a group of classmates or close friends. As we have seen, journals from this time indicate that students often formed close bonds with their classmates, creating networks of female friendships that endured throughout their adult lives. Although schools largely drew students from the local area, those located in large cities such as Boston may have drawn students from surrounding towns as well. The students in Foster’s novel for example come from a number of different towns in Massachusetts including Salem, Newbury-Port, Harmony-Grove, Worcester, Concord, and Beverly. At the end of each term, as the students returned to their respective homes, these networks would be cast like a net across the landscape. In this way, students created a living map, one whose features were defined by the intellectual and personal connections that they had formed during their time at school. It could be argued that the creation of this map, a process that was facilitated by Morse and other authors of geography texts, was perhaps the most enduring result of a young woman’s education.

Another experience that Foster describes which is reflected in journals from this time is the excitement that many young women experienced upon receiving

textbooks or other school materials. Upon receiving her new book, Julia makes sure to relay the news to her friend, indicating that this was a special event. In 1813, a young girl named Harriot Coffin Sumner made a similar note in her journal after receiving a textbook from her grandmother. As she wrote, “[I] began Cummings’s Geography in June. Grand Mamma made me a present of the book and a set of maps.”<sup>92</sup> A year later, during a shopping excursion with her friends, Sumner decided to purchase two items: a skein of silk for her mother, and a geography textbook for herself. Her friend, Mary Lyman, also purchased a geography book.<sup>93</sup> For both Julia and Sumner, geography books were sources of enjoyment and provided them with a pastime that they could return to even after they had left school. When given by a family member, these books also served as a rite of passage, marking a student’s maturity and intellectual accomplishment.

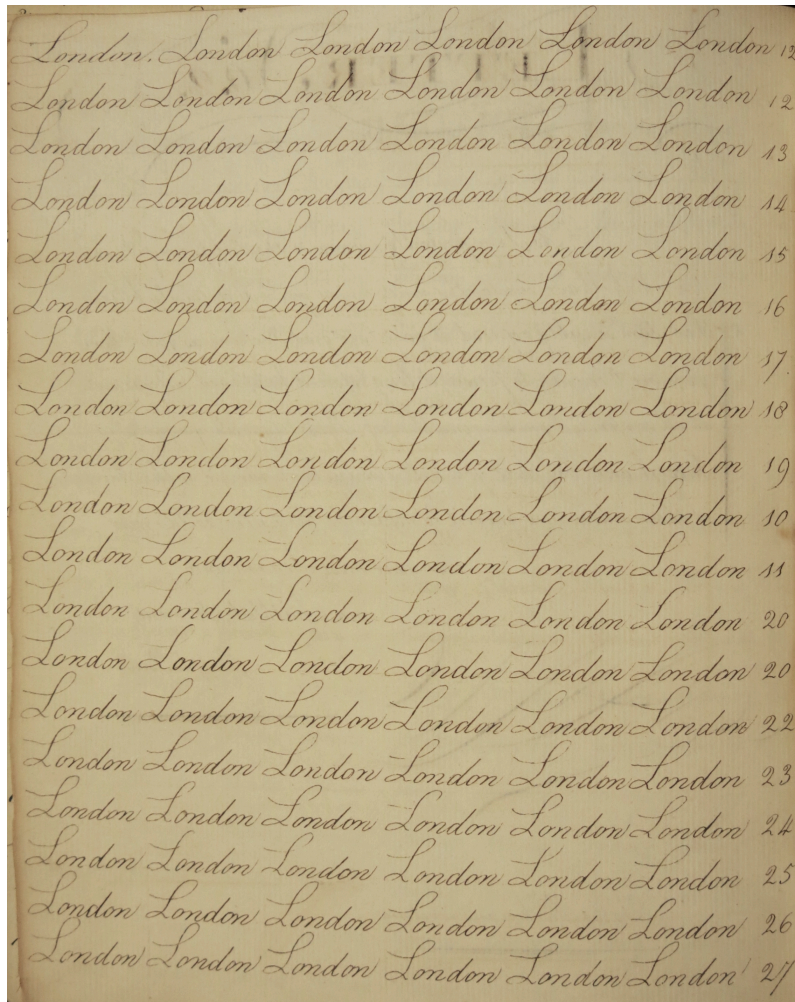
In addition to keeping a journal, or using maps to visualize geographic features, many students also incorporated geography into their penmanship lessons. One example of this can be found in a penmanship journal completed by a student named Sally Parkman in 1788.<sup>94</sup> To practice her penmanship, Parkman copied individual letters and numbers, wrote mock correspondence, and reproduced several poems. Most interesting are the pages that she filled with rows upon rows of toponyms. On one page, she wrote “London” one hundred and fourteen times. Several pages later, she did the same for a small village called Collingham.

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<sup>92</sup> Appleton, 1813.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 1814.

<sup>94</sup> Sally Parkman, *Penmanship Journal*, 1788, Parkman-Blake Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, (Boston, Massachusetts).

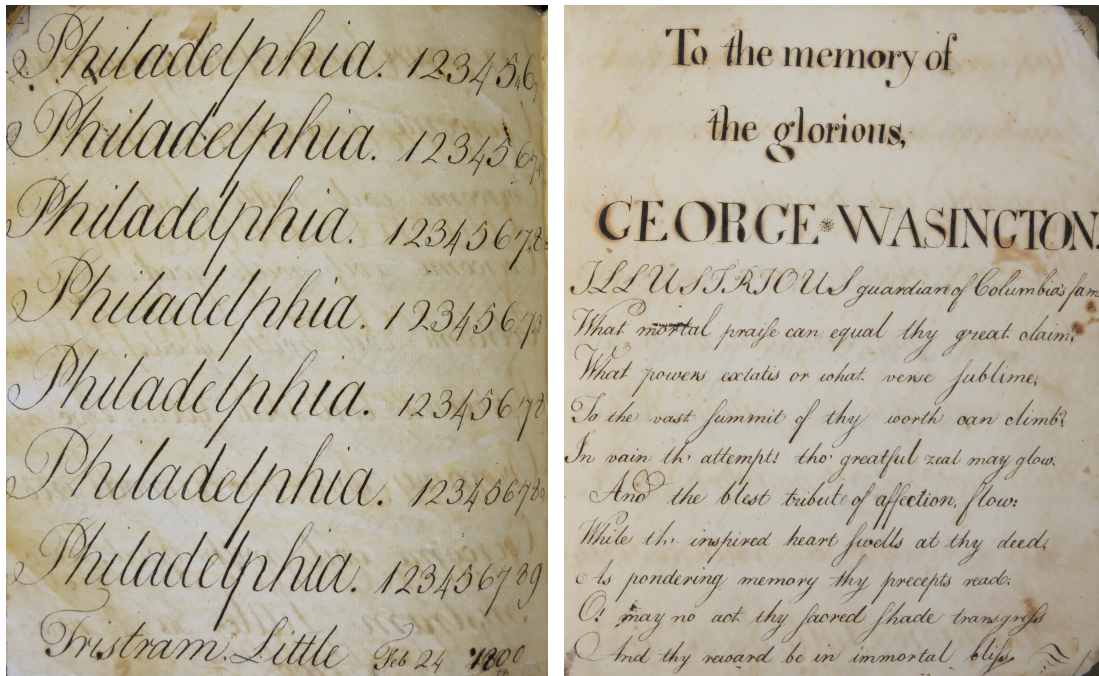


Page from Sally Parkman's Penmanship Journal, 1788.  
Images courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Young men also used geography as a framework for their penmanship lessons. In 1800, a student named Tristram Little created a journal very similar to Parkman's.<sup>95</sup> The place names that Little chose however were more focused on the United States. On one page, he inscribed the name of the nation's capitol, Philadelphia, and on another he wrote the name of his own town, Newburyport. Little also included two epithets dedicated to the memory of George Washington.

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<sup>95</sup> Tristram Little, *Penmanship Journal*, 1800, Massachusetts Historical Society (Boston, Massachusetts).

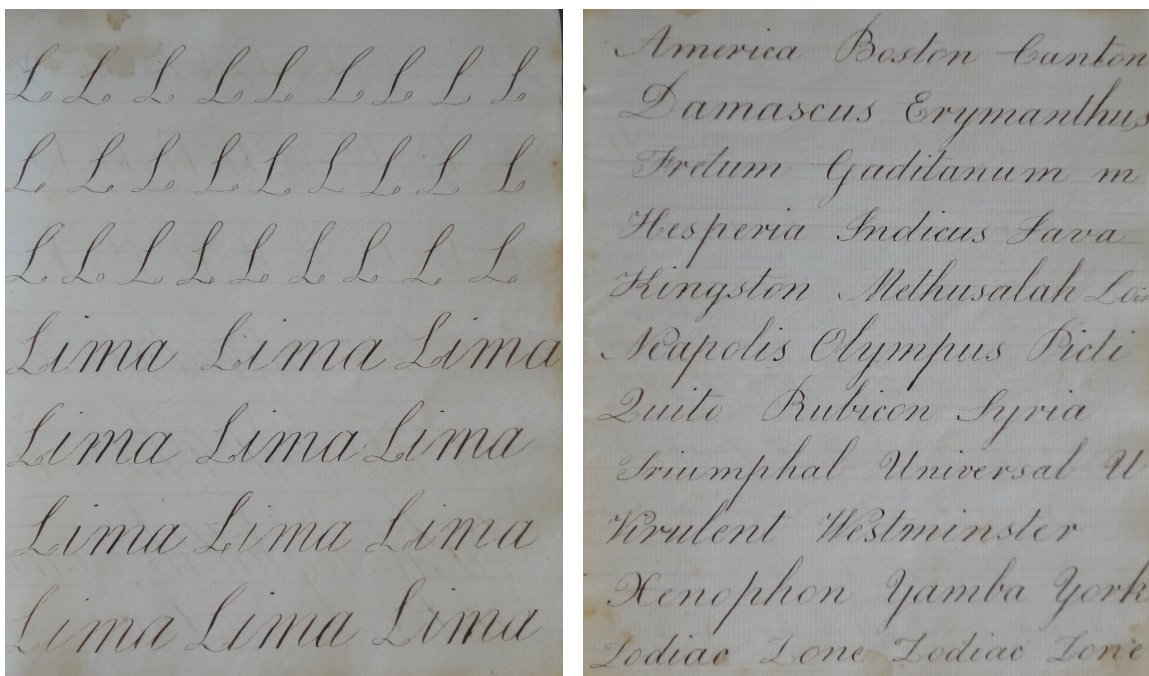


Pages from Tristram Little's Penmanship Journal, 1800.  
Images courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

In 1814, a student named Hannah Alvard Bliss created a journal that consisted almost entirely of place names.<sup>96</sup> In the first half of the journal, Bliss matched place names with letters in the alphabet, for example, L for Lima, N for Naples, and W for Washington. On other pages, she wrote alphabetically ordered lists of words, most of which were place names. In total, her journal mentioned fifty-six different locations. While some of these places were local, for example Framingham or Boston, others, like Gondar, Dehli, and Canton, were more global.

<sup>96</sup> Hannah Alvard Bliss Clarke, *Penmanship Journal*, 1814, Warren-Clarke Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society (Boston, Massachusetts).

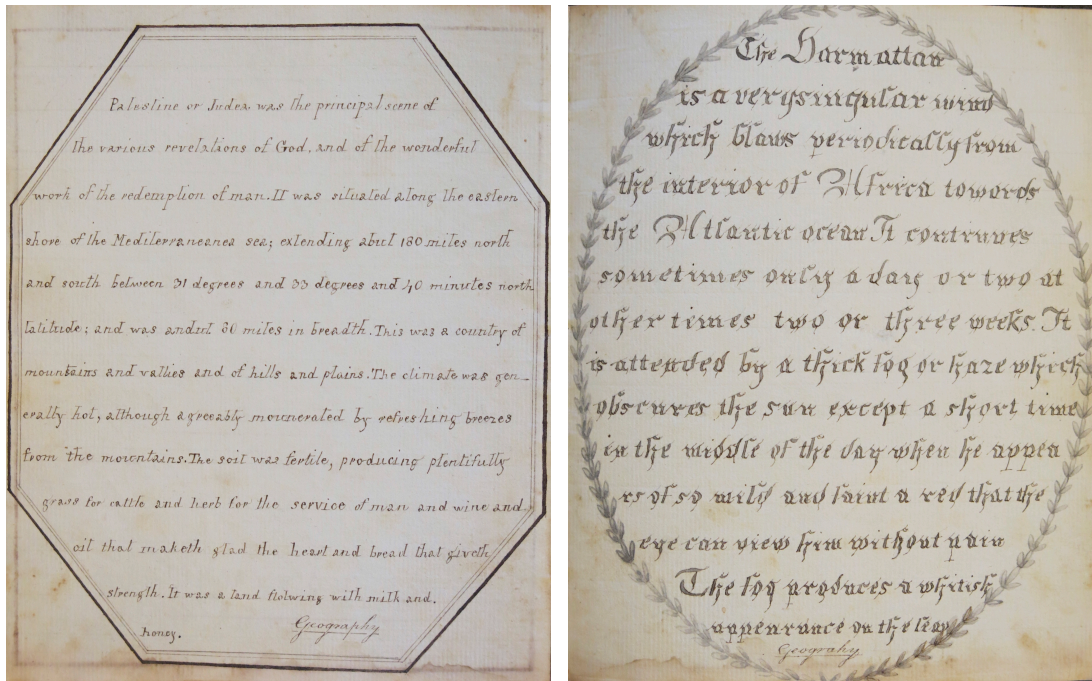




Pages from Hannah Alvard Bliss' Penmanship Journal, 1814.  
Journal from the Massachusetts Historical Society. Images taken by author.

Near the end of her journal, Bliss copied two full passages from Cumming's *Ancient and Modern Geography*. While the first passage discusses the boundaries and character of Palestine, the second treats upon the Harmattan, a strong wind that occasionally blew across the interior of Africa. Both passages are neatly written and inscribed within a decorative border.





Pages from Hannah Alvard Bliss' Penmanship Journal, 1814.  
Images courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Like Ripley, the young men and women who created these penmanship journals used writing as a tool to aid their geographic memory. By writing these place names over and over again, the locations that they represented would become permanently inscribed upon the student's memory. The inclusion of place names in these journals appears to be a post-Revolutionary phenomenon. For example, when a young woman named Sukey Bulfinch created a penmanship journal in 1778, she did not include a single place name.<sup>97</sup> Although these journals can be considered as visual objects, there is no graphic representation of the spatial relationships between the places they discuss. Instead, they rely solely on text and repetition.

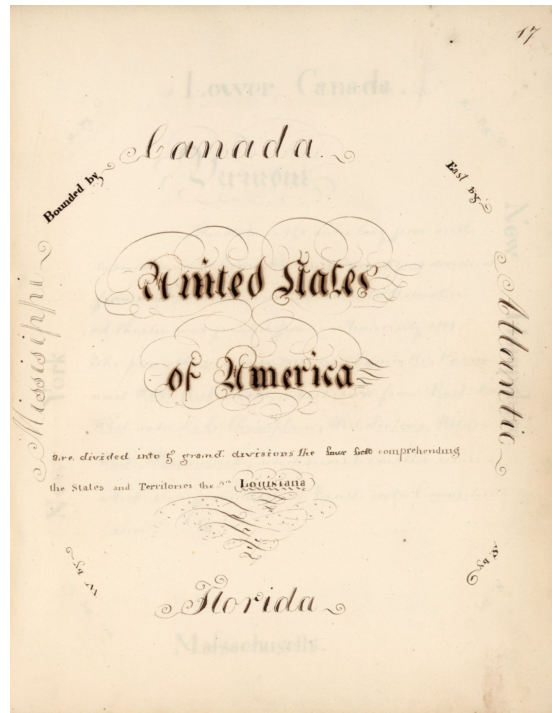
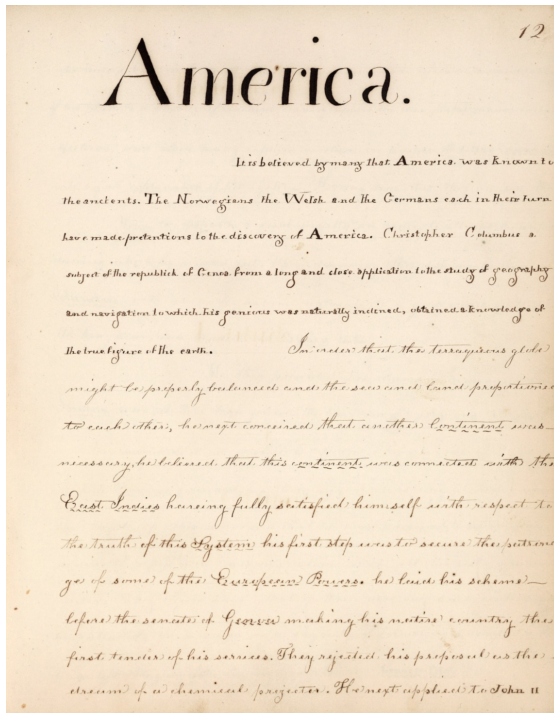
<sup>97</sup> Sukey Bulfinch, *Penmanship Journal*, 1778, Bulfinch Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society (Boston, Massachusetts).

In 1819, a student named Harriet Baker created a penmanship journal that embraced geography as both a visual and textual construct.<sup>98</sup> Like Bliss, she arranged passages from her geography textbook into visually pleasing compositions. Unlike Bliss however, Baker arranged her compositions to reflect the spatial relations of the locations that she discussed. Around each passage that she copied in her journal, Baker wrote the names of the states, countries, or oceans that surrounded each location. In this way, her pictures were similar to Morse's word maps. Although she began with passages on astronomy and the divisions of the globe, she devoted the majority of her journal to the geography of the United States. To provide context for this section of her journal, Baker devoted five pages to the history of America followed by a word map of the United States. After completing her general treatment of the United States, Baker proceeded to discuss each state and territory individually. Although each state is presented separately, they are all linked stylistically to each other and to the national map, ensuring that they are viewed, not as separate components, but as a unified whole. For each location, Baker drew a word map followed by a more traditional pictorial map.<sup>99</sup>

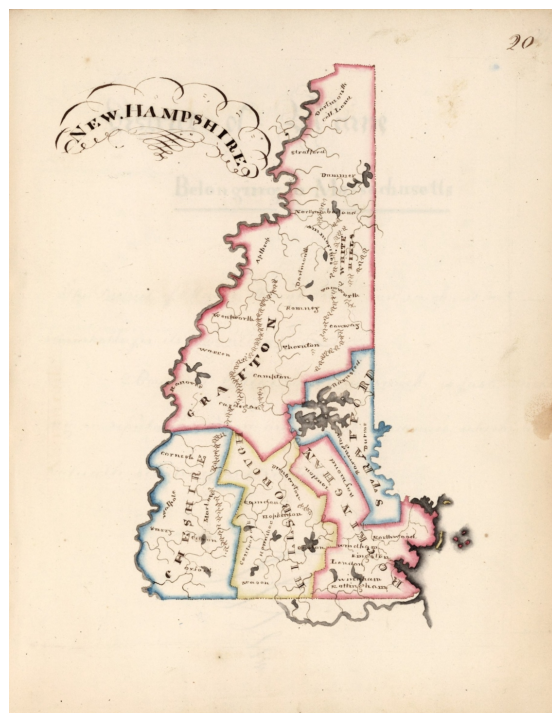
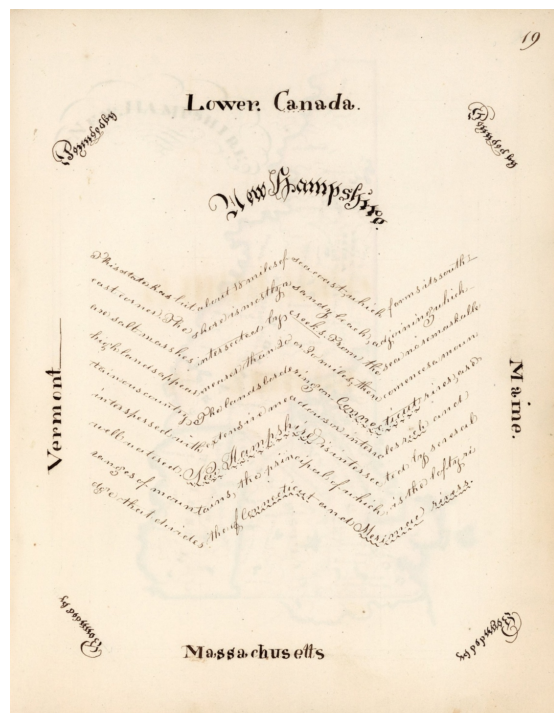
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<sup>98</sup> Harriet Baker, *Book of Penmanship*, 1818, David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, <http://www.davidrumsey.com>.

<sup>99</sup> Baker did not provide maps for New York, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois and Michigan, although she did include descriptions for most of them.



History and Word Map of the United States from Harriet E. Baker's *Book of Penmanship*, 1818.  
Images courtesy of the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.



Word Map and Pictorial Map of New Hampshire from Harriet E. Baker's *Book of Penmanship*, 1818.  
Images courtesy of the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.

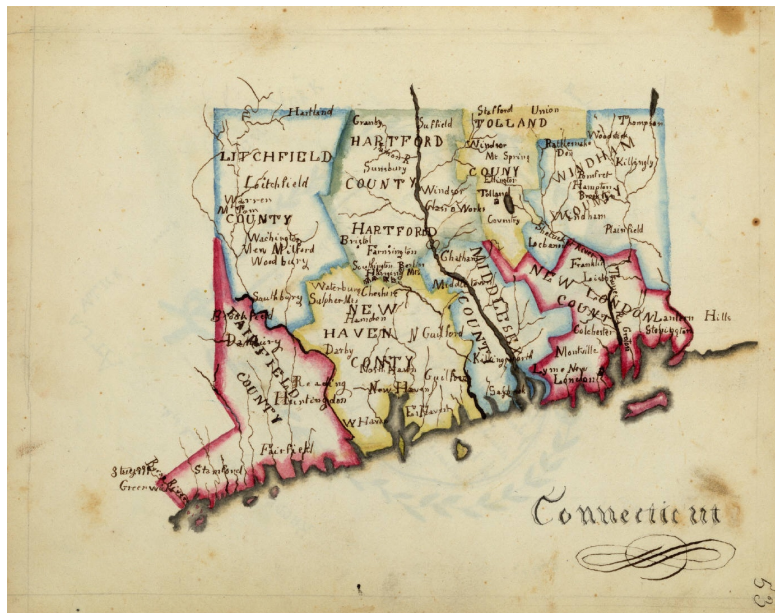
Although both maps attempt to impose a geographical order on an otherwise unordered assortment of text, Baker's pictorial maps go a step further by fully visualizing the nation's boundaries and divisions. In this way, Baker's journal represents a hybrid between the two pedagogical approaches that dominated geography instruction during the early nineteenth century. As she shuffled between these two approaches, she would begin to form an imagined map of the nation, one that consisted of interleaving layers of text and image. Not only would she be able to recall the passages that she had so carefully inscribed upon the page, but she would also be able to ascribe this text to a spatial reality. By inscribing text within the visual boundaries of the map, Baker would have formed a more complete picture of the nation, one that existed somewhere between the written and visual world.

Several years later, in 1823, another Vermont schoolgirl named Frances Henshaw created a penmanship journal that closely resembles the one written by Baker only four years before. Like Baker, Henshaw begins her journal with a brief overview of astronomy before discussing the globe's various zones and divisions. In her section on the United States, Henshaw begins with a six-page summary of the nation's history before moving on to maps of individual states.<sup>100</sup>

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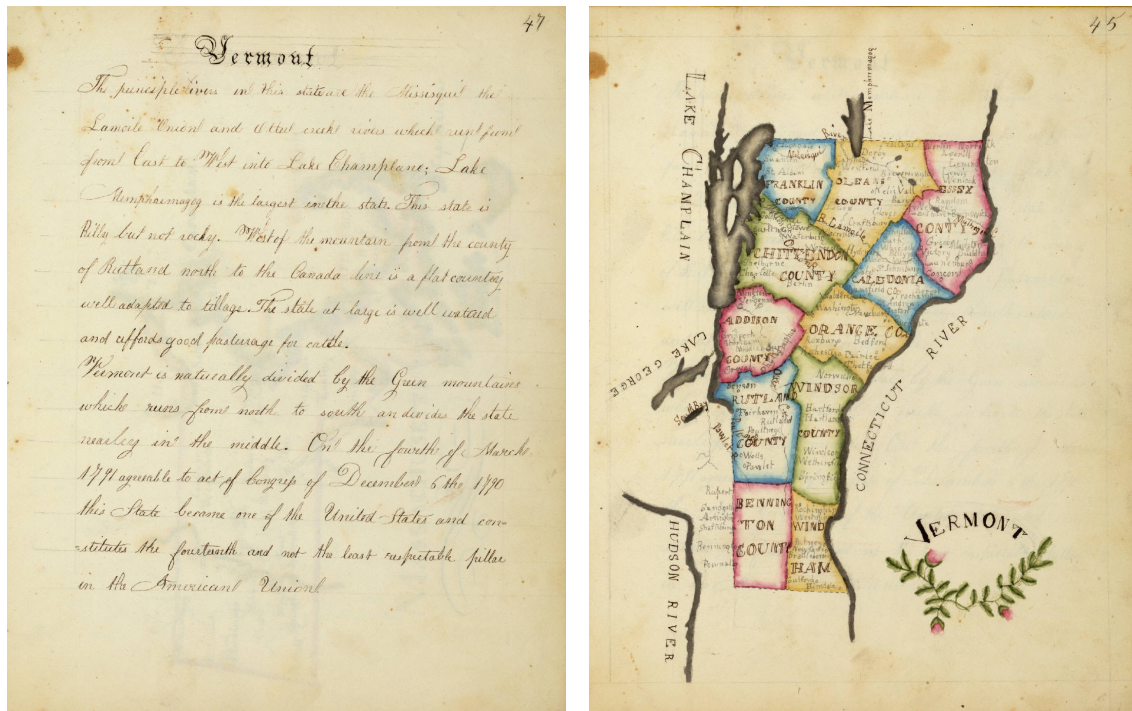
<sup>100</sup> Due to the stylistic similarities of Baker and Henshaw's journals, we can infer that they followed a common template. In 1818, another student named Catharine M. Cook created a journal along a similar template while attending Mr. Dunham's school in Vermont. For more information see, Notation on *Title Page: Harriet E. Baker's Book of Penmanship & Maps* in the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, <http://www.davidrumsey.com>.





Word Map and Pictorial Map of Connecticut from Frances Henshaw's *Book of Penmanship*, 1823.  
Images courtesy of the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.

Although Henshaw usually arranged the passages from her textbook to reflect actual spatial relationships, in some cases she did not. For example, when she copied her passage for Vermont, she simply wrote it in paragraph form.



Description and Pictorial Map of Vermont from Frances Henshaw's *Book of Penmanship*, 1823.  
Images courtesy of the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.

Not only did these maps help fix the nation's geography in Henshaw's memory, but they also served as a tangible reminder of the years that she had spent in school. It is easy to imagine Henshaw returning to her journal as an adult, perhaps to peruse its pages or show it to one of her six children. In doing so, she would add another, invisible layer to the maps that she had so carefully drawn as a child. As she reviewed the boundaries of the nation and its individual states, she would also be able to trace her own personal experience, reminiscing on her education and the connections she had forged with her fellow classmates. On February 4, 1872, a year

before she passed away, she gave the journal on to her son, Truman Augustus Post, an act that testifies to the journal's personal importance.<sup>101</sup>

While Baker and Henshaw's journals represent the pedagogical transition from text to image, another journal, created in 1836 by a Boston schoolgirl named Martha Anne Kuhn, represents a more complete acceptance of Pestalozzi's method. Kuhn created her journal at the age of nine while attending the Temple School under the instruction of Amos Bronson Alcott, father of the celebrated author Louisa May Alcott. Like many, Alcott had been introduced to Pestalozzi's methods in the late 1820s after reading an essay written by one of the Swiss educator's disciples, James P. Greaves.<sup>102</sup> As an educator who had earned a reputation for his progressive philosophy, it is not surprising that Alcott was quick to adopt Pestalozzi's methods.

A lithograph of the Temple School's classroom, which Kuhn tucked between the pages of her journal, provides further insight into Alcott's methodologies. Although busts of ancient philosophers serve as the main source of decoration, the walls are also adorned with several hanging maps. The chairs, positioned to face three communal desks, could easily be rearranged to form a circle around Alcott's desk. According to Kuhn, Alcott would often ask students to sit in this arrangement, making it easier to discuss the day's lesson as a group.<sup>103</sup> It would appear that this classroom was perfectly suited to Pestalozzi's methods. Not only did it display maps and other visual materials, but it also lent itself to communal learning.

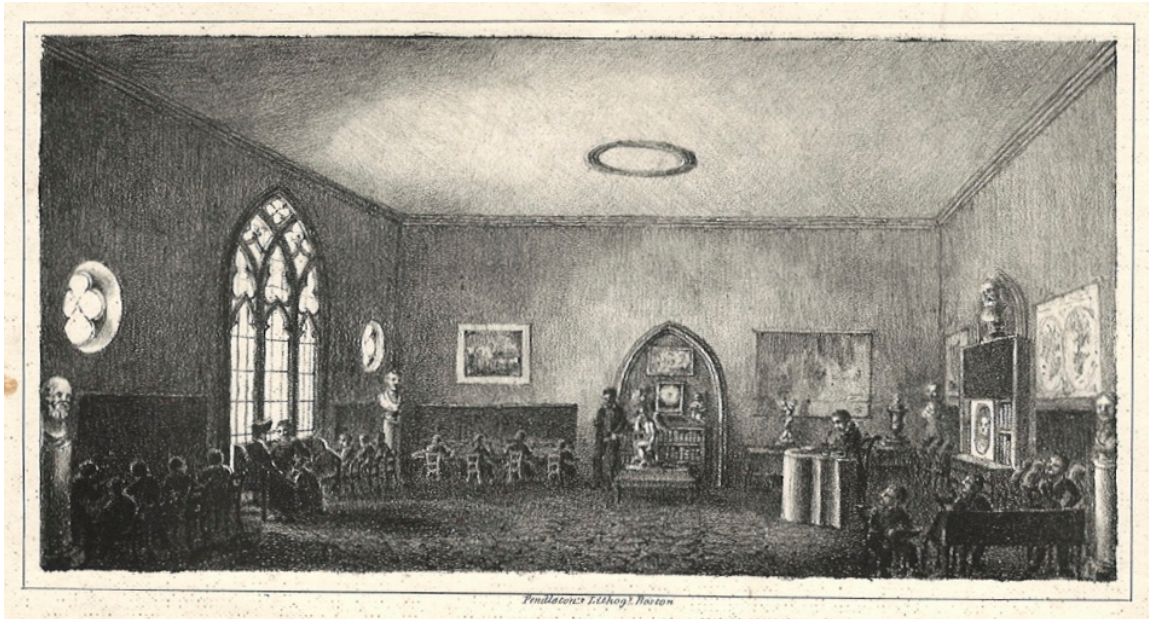
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<sup>101</sup> Frances Henshaw, *Book of Penmanship*, 1823, title page, David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, <http://www.davidrumsey.com>.

<sup>102</sup> Thomas A. Barlow, *Pestalozzi and American Education* (Boulder, Colorado: Este Es Press, 1977), 127.

<sup>103</sup> Diary of Martha Anne Kuhn, March 5, 1836, The Bostonian Society (Boston, Massachusetts).





Interior of the Temple School's classroom, loose card found in Martha Anne Kuhn's Diary.  
Image courtesy of the Bostonian Society.

Alcott structured his curriculum to address the three main “faculties” that he believed were necessary to a child’s education: the spiritual faculty, the imaginative faculty, and the rational faculty. Alcott considered geography to be part of the imaginative faculty. On Tuesdays, students would devote almost the entire day to this subject. At nine o’clock, they would begin their study of geography and sketch maps in their journals. At ten they would recite their lessons and engage in “picturesque readings and conversations.” After a short break, they would once again take out their journals to begin drawing from nature.<sup>104</sup> Like his friends Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, Alcott’s ideas regarding education were greatly influenced by the emerging Romantic Movement. As a result, he fostered his students’ natural curiosity and encouraged them to interact with and learn from

<sup>104</sup> Loose card found in Kuhn’s diary.



nature.<sup>105</sup> Although Alcott devoted time to both the written and visual components of geography, he placed a special emphasis on the visual. Under his instruction, students would learn how to draw the American landscape from both an overhead and on-the-ground perspective. For Alcott, geography was a “picturesque” study; he even listed it as such in the class schedule that he distributed to his students. As its name implies, the picturesque was a movement that encouraged individuals to view the landscape as a picture. Inspired by the aesthetic of the French painter Claude Lorrain, devotees of the picturesque would often attempt to compose their view of the landscape to resemble a painting. Some went so far as to use small, black mirrors known as Claude glasses to frame their view and recreate the golden hue of Lorrain’s paintings.<sup>106</sup> Although it is unlikely that Alcott’s students used Claude glasses, they did learn to view the landscape as a single, cohesive image.

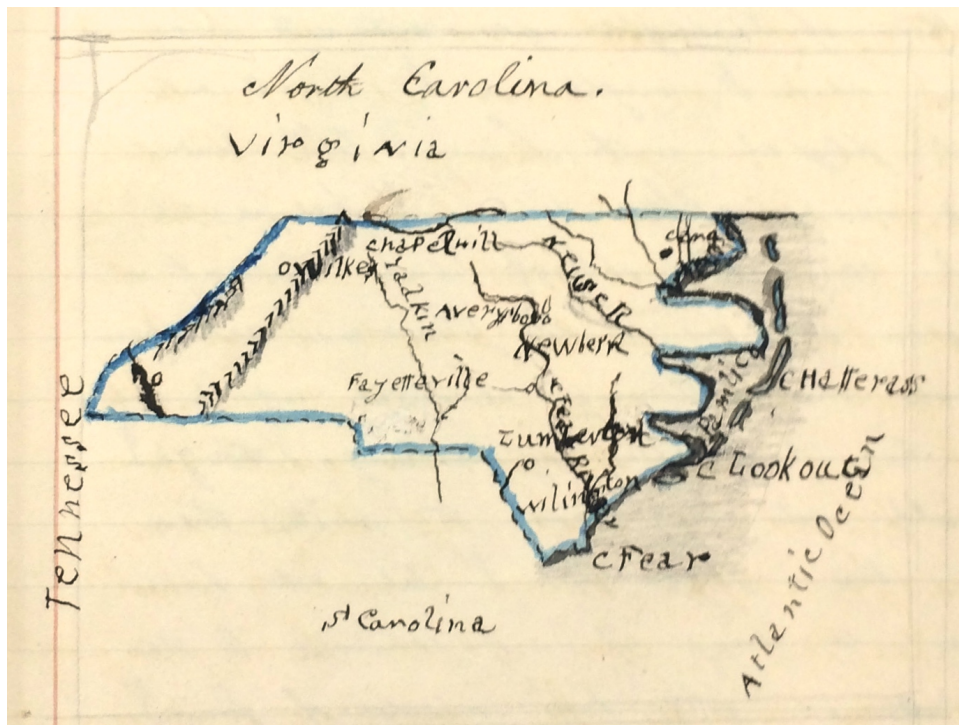
While attending the Temple School, Kuhn learned to view the landscape from both a cartographic and a picturesque point of view. In her journal, she drew a total of fifteen maps, each of which portrayed either an individual state or a group of adjacent states. Although she did not include any maps of New England, it is likely that she drew maps of this region in another journal. Although Kuhn drew her maps with pen and shaded them with pencil, she outlined some with bright shades of watercolor. By including this colorful detail, she mimicked the style of “real” maps

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<sup>105</sup> For more on the friendship between Alcott, Emerson, and Thoreau see *the Concord Quartet: Alcott, Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau and the Friendship that Freed the American Mind* by Samuel A. Schreiner Jr. (Wiley, 2006). For more on the relationship between the Romantic Movement and education see “Romanticism” in *Philosophy of Education: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Joseph James Chambliss (Taylor and Francis, 1996).

<sup>106</sup> David M. Shapard and Jane Austen, *The Annotated Sense and Sensibility* (Anchor Books, 2007) For more on the Claude Glass see “Drawing Techniques,” Victoria and Albert Museum, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/d/drawing-techniques/>.

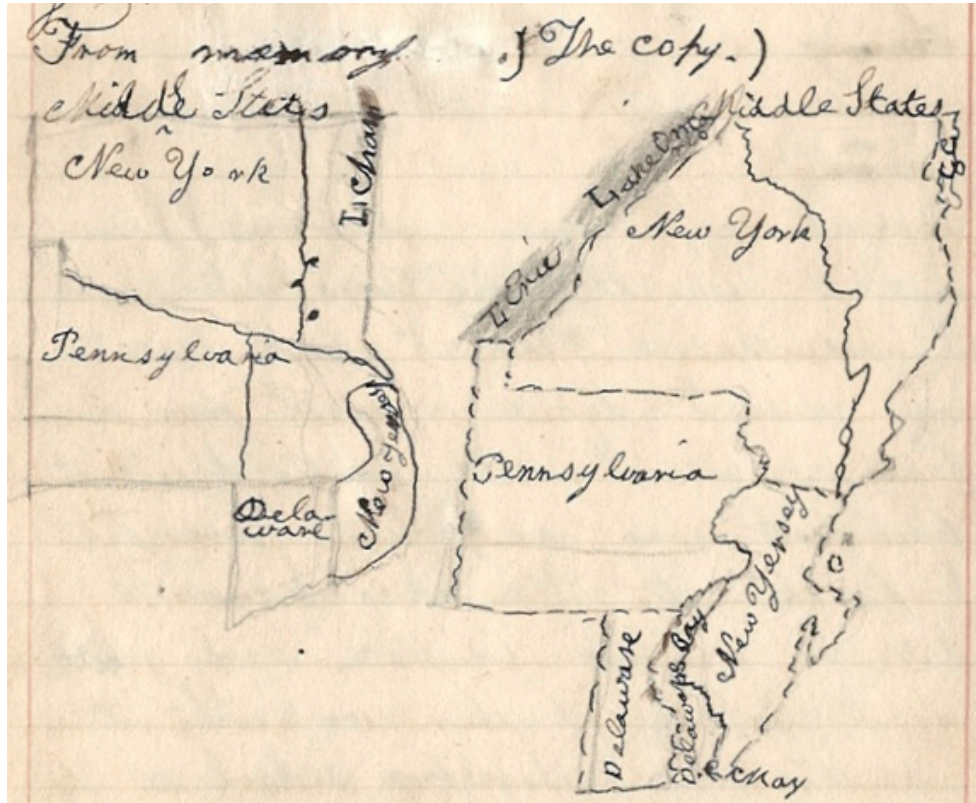
while also emphasizing the aesthetic quality of her drawings. In her maps of individual states, she would label important cities and landmarks while also making note of the states that surrounded it. By arranging the names of the adjacent states around each map according to their actual spatial relationships, Kuhn's maps resembled the word maps that Henshaw and Baker had produced two decades before.



Map of North Carolina from the Diary of Martha Anne Kuhn.  
Journal courtesy of the Bostonian Society. Image taken by author.

Although Kuhn may have copied these maps from an atlas, it is also likely that she used one of Alcott's wall maps for inspiration. Sometimes, she would attempt to reproduce the map from memory. While studying the Middle States, Kuhn drew two maps, one from memory and another using a reference. Although Kuhn could not reproduce the map's exact features from memory, she was able to remember the

rough size and shape of each state and correctly arrange them in relation to each other.



Two maps of the Middle States from Martha Anne Kuhn's Diary.  
Image courtesy of the Bostonian Society.

Each map that Kuhn drew was accompanied by a written lesson. For most of her lessons, she would begin with a brief description of the state followed by a series of questions pertaining to the state's geographical features and social landscape. Her lesson on Georgia, for example, reads as follows:

A few minutes after I got there the alarm was given and I took my seat and commenced my journal I finished it at half past of and then I drew the following map of Georgia which is on the next page. I did not finish my map but I studied my lesson because I was afraid I should not have time to get it. When I had studied my lesson I wrote it down. As follows.

Georgia is one of the largest states in the Union, but the most thinly settled of the Atlantic states. The climate of Georgia is so warm, that it produces coffee

and sugar in the southern part. Snow rarely covers the ground, except in the mountains.<sup>107</sup>

After she had provided a brief description of Georgia's size and climate, Kuhn answered thirteen questions regarding the state's social composition and natural landmarks, for example:

Q What are the chief rivers emptying into the Atlantic O.  
A Savannah. And Oakmulgee.

Q What towns on the coast below Savannah  
A Sunbury. Brunswick.

Q What colleges in Georgia  
A One at Athens

Although each student would study her geography lesson individually, the class would answer the questions as a group. As Kuhn wrote, "I studied my lesson till Mr. A gave the alarm. And then we turned round. And then Mr. A asked us questions on the map and some whose answers we found in the book."<sup>108</sup>

After they had studied the American landscape from a cartographic perspective, the students joined their drawing instructor, Mr. Graeter, to study the landscape from an on-the-ground perspective. Although they sometimes remained inside for their drawing lessons, when weather permitted they would venture out to observe and record their surroundings.<sup>109</sup> One spring day, Kuhn and her classmates walked to the Boston Common to draw the "great tree."<sup>110</sup>

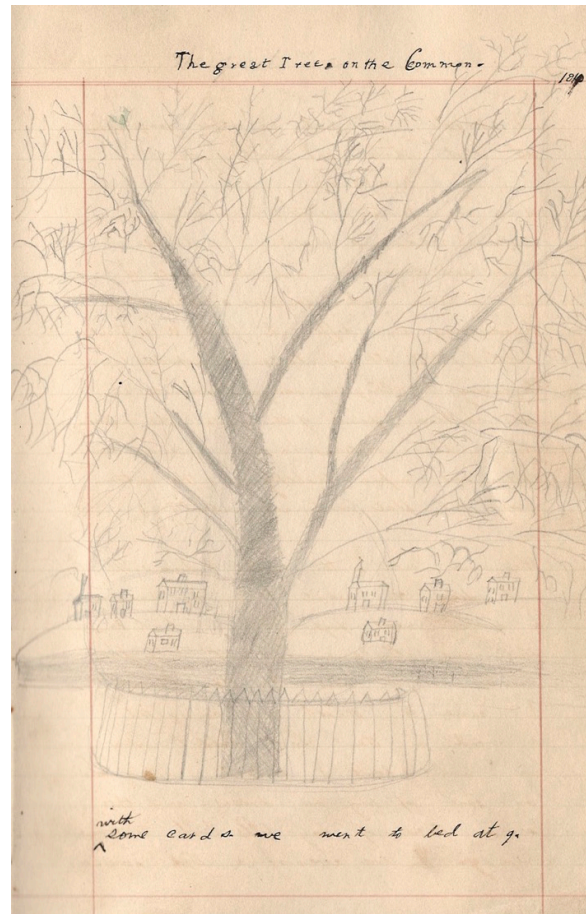
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<sup>107</sup> Kuhn, April 26, 1836.

<sup>108</sup> Kuhn, April 5, 1836.

<sup>109</sup> Kuhn drew other features of the classroom as well, including a bust of Sir Walter Scott (March 22, 1835) and a large, Gothic Revival style window (May 7, 1836).

<sup>110</sup> Kuhn, May 10, 1836.



Drawing of the "Great Tree on the Common" from Martha Anne Kuhn's Diary.  
Image courtesy of the Bostonian Society.

By drawing her surroundings, Kuhn learned to interpret the landscape according to her own observations. Although the maps that she drew helped her envision the nation on a broader scale, her drawings reflected her personal experience of the landscape. While copying maps helped her to improve memory, drawing landscapes taught her to exercise her judgment.

While Baker, Henshaw, and Kuhn used maps and atlases for inspiration, others attempted to create exact replicas of these teaching tools. Often these projects took the form of large, pen and watercolor maps that students could display in their homes. Unlike the maps that students drew in their journals on a daily basis, these projects were more elaborate and would often serve as a capstone for a

student's education. Because students had already perfected their drawing and penmanship skills by the time they undertook these projects, the maps that they created were often finely executed and incredibly detailed. One especially refined example is a map of the United States drawn by an unidentified student in 1821. In this map, the borders of each state are carefully delineated by dotted lines and highlighted with restrained strokes of watercolor. The rivers and other topographical features are rendered using a variety of pen strokes while lakes and coastal areas are identified by washes of gray ink. Each notable town or natural landmark is labeled according to its importance. In some places, especially the small New England states, place names begin to overlap each other, some even spilling into the Atlantic Ocean. The Western Territories, by contrast, are relatively empty. Besides an occasional note referring to a Native American tribe, this space appears uninhabited. One section of the West Coast is even labeled as "unemployed country." The mystery embodied by this empty cartographic space would have likely intrigued the student, perhaps prompting her to fill it with her own imagined detail. By portraying this space as uninhabited, the map also implies that the West was open to Euro-American expansion. Although this map was drawn less than a decade before the Indian Removal Act of 1821, it entirely ignores the contestation that surrounded the western territories.





*Map of the United States, Unidentified Student, 1821.*  
Image courtesy of the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.

In 1836, another student named Anna Bullard drew a similar, although significantly less detailed, map of the world. In her map, Bullard outlined each continent with thin pen strokes and dashes of watercolor. Although the map does not contain any political boundaries, major cities, countries and regions are noted

according to their approximate location. Although she drew every region of the world, Bullard gave special attention to the United States. The nation's name, for instance, is among the largest on the map. Furthermore, the words "United States" are positioned squarely on top of the nation's capital. England, on the other hand, is not even labeled. Although it is likely that this bias was present in the map that Bullard copied, the privileged place that the United States holds is indicative of the nationalism imbedded into the maps and textbooks that American students used during this time.

When viewed from a distance, both maps would have appeared almost identical to their originals. To emphasize this similarity, Bullard mounted her map onto rollers while the other student attached silk loops to the top so that it could be hung from a wall. It is very likely that these maps would have been proudly displayed in the students' homes to communicate their artistic skill, geographical knowledge, and patriotic feelings.





*Map of the World, Anna M. Bullard, Boston, 1836.*  
Image courtesy of the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.

Although it was more common for female students to complete large-scale artistic projects such as these, there are several instances of male students drawing maps as well. As is evidenced by a map drawn by a student named Scott Bradford in 1816, male students did not devote as much time or energy to these artistic endeavors. Although Scott's map is not as refined as those created by his female contemporaries, his work retains an individuality that is not as present in other map drawings. While his lines move freely across the page, his choice of bright, contrasting colors communicates a sense of unrestrained exuberance. Although Scott lacked the same skill that is evident in maps drawn by female students, this is

likely because the typical curriculum for male students did not place as much emphasis on drawing, thereby denying him the opportunity to improve his skill.<sup>111</sup>



*Map of North America, Bradford Scott, 1816.*  
Image courtesy of the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.

Many students also created embroidered maps. Like the maps that they drew using pen and watercolor, these maps provided students with the opportunity to practice a practical skill while also improving their knowledge of geography. Although this practice was already well established in England, this type of embroidery did not become popular in America until the early nineteenth

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<sup>111</sup> The quality of maps drawn by male students during the early nineteenth century varies. Although some examples are not very refined, others exhibit a high level of accomplishment.

century.<sup>112</sup> Before the American Revolution, embroidery had typically been used in conjunction with alphabet and spelling lessons. Often, students would embroider their samplers with rows of letters and numbers accompanied by decorative imagery and pithy phrases. Not only would this exercise help improve a student's literacy, but it would also prepare them to complete practical household tasks such as marking linens. In the 1790s, as literacy and geography became more closely entwined, instructors began to use embroidery to instill geographical knowledge in the memory of their students.<sup>113</sup> At the same time, a new genre of embroidery known as pictorial needlework was becoming increasingly popular in schools. Unlike samplers, pictorial needlework was not divided into rows of letters or numbers; instead, each piece was composed as a visually unified whole. This transition from alphabetically based samplers to pictorial needlework occurred alongside the broader pedagogical shift from text to image during the early nineteenth century.

One particularly fine example of an embroidered map from this time is a map of North and South America created by a student named Mary M. Franklin in 1808. Although the map encompasses the entire Western Hemisphere, Franklin paid special attention to the United States. Although she did not include many political boundaries on her map, the United States is prominently outlined in green thread. Although Franklin would have copied almost every detail from an existing map, the cartouche appears to be an original addition. Here, Franklin has inscribed her own name followed by the name of her boarding school and the year. By replacing the

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<sup>112</sup> Peterson, *Stitching Empire*.

<sup>113</sup> Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America*, 137-138.



name of the original cartographer, Franklin claims this map, and by extension the national space that it embodies, as her own.



*Map of the Western Hemisphere, Mary M. Franklin, New York, 1808.*  
Image courtesy of the Winterthur Museum.

Although Franklin's map clearly demonstrates her knowledge of geography as well as her artistic skill, it also would have communicated her family's wealth to everyone who saw it. Franklin completed her map while attending the Pleasant Valley Boarding School in New York. According to an advertisement that the school published in the *New York Spectator* in 1806, instruction in "Plain and ornamental Needlework, reading, writing, grammar, and arithmetic," would have cost twelve pounds per quarter. By contrast, lessons in "Epistolary composition, filigree and

pencil work, embroidery and working of maps, drawing in Indian Ink, painting in water colors, geography, the use of the globes, [and] construction and delineation of maps” would have cost fourteen.<sup>114</sup> In addition to the cost of her education, Franklin’s parents would have needed to purchase a sizeable piece of silk, various colors of thread and paint, needles, brushes, and other equipment necessary to complete the work. Finally, they would have employed a framer to frame the piece and add some final, painted touches.

In 1809, another student named Celia Lewis embroidered a map of the United States that bears a striking similarity to the map completed by Franklin just one year before. This similarity is unsurprising since both Lewis and Franklin attended school in New York. Even if they did not attend the same school, it is likely that their instructors would have known and communicated with each other. Although Lewis embroidered the boundaries of each, individual state, the main focus of her map is the national outline. Unlike lines drawn with pen and ink, embroidery allows viewers to trace the map’s outline through touch as well as sight. By physically tracing the nation’s outline over and over again, Lewis would have become intimately familiar with its shape. Outside of the United States however, Lewis did not provide many lines to guide the viewer’s eye or hand. Without these embroidered paths, the viewer would become lost in a wilderness of ivory silk. One line representing the Mississippi River extends into this unknown territory, carrying the viewer’s eyes and hands westward. The main features of this empty space are flowing lines of text that identify the regions surrounding the United States. Written

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<sup>114</sup> “Female Tuition at Pleasant Valley Boarding School,” *The New York Spectator*, August 20, 1806, America’s Historical Newspapers.

in ink, these markers follow the contours of the landscape. Like the word maps created by Henshaw and Baker, these words do not conform to the strict left-to-right format of printed text but are instead arranged according to actual spatial relationships. In her analysis of Lewis' map, the historian Mary Zundo Peterson suggests that Lewis intended her map to be read from right to left, following the path of westward expansion. In this context, the map not only portrays nation's present state, but also embodies its destiny.<sup>115</sup>



*Map of the United States, Celia Lewis, New York, 1809.*  
Image courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society.

Over the course of her life, Lewis witnessed westward expansion first hand. At some point between 1850 and 1854, Lewis moved with her family to Madison,

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<sup>115</sup> Zundo Peterson, *Stitching Empire*.

Wisconsin. Although Lewis would have likely needed to abandon many of her possessions as she prepared for her journey, she did not part with her map. On her journey westward, Lewis would have crossed through the uncharted territory of her map, forging her own path through the silken wilderness. By making this journey, Lewis helped to fulfill the map's promise of expansion and took part in shaping the nation's destiny.

Another map, completed in 1799 by a student named Lydia Withington shows how embroidery was also used to teach local geography. In her map of Boston Harbor, Withington embroidered locations that would have been familiar to her from personal experience. Although we do not know where she was originally from, we do know that Withington lived in Boston while attending school under the instruction of Susana Rowson. Each line on Withington's map consists of seven tightly stitched rows of thread. By tracing the contours of Boston Harbor seven times over, Withington would have become familiar with every island and inlet. The multitude of islands on this map would have also allowed Withington an opportunity to practice non-linear embroidery. In the lower left-hand corner, an eagle looms over the map's cartouche accompanied by an American flag and a banner containing the nation's motto, "E Pluribus Unum." The inclusion of these symbols would have situated the map within a national context and reminded viewers of the key role that Boston played during the American Revolution, specifically the famous Tea Party that took place in its harbor. In this way, Withington presents Boston as a small piece of a larger whole.







Although many young women did not have the opportunity to travel beyond the borders of their own states, their lessons in geography allowed them to embark on imaginary journeys across the globe. By moving their pen across a blank page or threading their needle through a piece of silk, students mimicked the physical act of traveling through a landscape. Furthermore, the repetitive nature of these tasks allowed students to become intimately familiar with the national landscape. Through this newfound knowledge, students could expand their perspective beyond the borders of their own town or county and place themselves within a broader, national context. Finally, the communal nature of geography instruction gave students the opportunity to forge connections with their peers. Through their common curriculum, students established social and intellectual networks that expanded beyond their town, creating an invisible map that connected citizens through shared experience.

## **Chapter Four: Through the Needle's Eye**

Although geography encouraged young women to learn about and imagine places they had never been, it did not allow them to reflect upon the landscapes that they inhabited on a daily basis. To fill this need, students fashioned elaborate, embroidered landscapes that spoke to their personal experiences. Unlike maps copied from geographical texts, these embroideries allowed young women to record their personal experience of the landscape. By adopting an on-the-ground perspective, these pictures allow the viewer to stand within the landscape rather than view it from above. As a result of this shift in perspective, women were able to highlight elements of the landscape that held personal significance. In this way, this type of needlework provided young women with an opportunity to record their worldviews for posterity.

Although each landscape reflected an individual's unique experience, they generally fell under four major categories: national, local, domestic, and intellectual. As we will see, each type of landscape allowed young women to explore a different aspect of their experience.

### *Transition from the Samplers to Pictorial Needlework*

Although the term "sampler" is often used to describe any two-dimensional piece of decorative needlework, this broad definition fails to acknowledge the wide range of styles that existed within this craft. According to the needlework historian Susan P. Schoelwer, a sampler can be distinguished by the "inclusion of alphabets or

other lettering” and “the use of stitches oriented to the grid of the underlying ground fabric.”<sup>116</sup> The stitches that students exhibited on their samplers could be used for practical, domestic tasks such as marking linens or mending clothing.

Around the turn of the nineteenth century, a new form of embroidery, known as pictorial needlework, came into fashion. As its name suggests, this new genre of embroidery privileged image over text. These elaborate compositions were often embellished with metallic threads and glittering spangles.<sup>117</sup> Often, parents would hire itinerant artists to finish their daughter’s work by painting in fine details that could not be rendered with thread. While samplers exhibited the quality and craftsmanship of a student’s stitches, pictorial needlework was primarily meant to display a student’s refined taste and artistic skill.<sup>118</sup>

The distinction between samplers and pictorial needlework can be observed by comparing a sampler worked by a young woman, Mary Ann Hoover, in 1818 and a silk-work picture created by Ann Folwill in 1804. In both, we see two domestic landscapes, complete with farm animals, rows of neatly planted trees, and people strolling outside. While Folwill dedicated her entire piece to the landscape, Hoover placed hers alongside a cross-stitched element and selected text passages.

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<sup>116</sup> Schoelwer, *Connecticut Needlework*, 25.

<sup>117</sup> Susan Burrows Swan, *Plain and Fancy: American Women and their Needlework, 1650-1850* (Austin: Curious Works Press, 1995), 184.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 171



*Sampler*, Mary Ann Hoover, Pennsylvania, 1818. Image courtesy of the Winterthur Museum.



*Needlework Picture*, Ann Folwill, New Jersey, 1804.  
Image courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Although the transition from samplers to pictorial needlework brought a decline in craftsmanship, this new fashion also elevated needlework into the artistic realm. Some schools even began to hold public exhibitions of their students work, displaying the artistic taste and “genteel sensibilities,” of their students.<sup>119</sup>

### *A Symbol of Refinement*

Like embroidered maps, pictorial needlework was unique to female education. Although most schools taught at least the most basic forms of needlework, more advanced instruction often came at an additional cost. In 1794, a preceptress known as Madam Bancel advertised that, in addition to her own lessons in “sewing, marking linen, knitting, and tapistry [*sic*],” her daughter would teach scholars to embroider in a style that “imitates nature,” for an extra two dollars per month.<sup>120</sup> In a similar advertisement published in 1819, the instructors of a female academy offered lessons in “embroidery, drawing, and painting,” for nine dollars per quarter while instruction in “writing and plain sewing” cost only four.<sup>121</sup>

In addition to the cost of tuition, students would require an array of sewing tools and other accessories. Until the mid-eighteenth century, a typical collection of sewing equipment would have consisted of pins, scissors, needles, and thread. After the American Revolution, however, a variety of furniture and tools designed

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>120</sup> “A Boarding School at Madam Bancel’s,” *The Daily Advertiser*, January 11, 1794, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>121</sup> “Young Ladies Academy,” *Cincinnati Advertiser*, January 26, 1819, America’s Historical Newspapers.



specially for needlework came onto the market.<sup>122</sup> Among these new accessories were sewing boxes, whalebone yarn winders, needle holders made of carved ivory, silver, or mother of pearl, silver filigree tools, chatelaines, knitting needle holders, and other specially designed trinkets. To store their new abundance of sewing accessories, women acquired a new furniture form known as a work or sewing table. These tables, which were likely the first furniture form designed specifically for use by women, usually included several drawers and a large cloth bag that could be used to store tools and unfinished projects.<sup>123</sup>



*Worktable*, Massachusetts, 1800-10.  
Image courtesy of the  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



*Sewing Box*, 1810.  
Image Courtesy of Historic Deerfield.

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<sup>122</sup> The increased availability of specialized goods was a result of the Consumer Revolution, which took place in America and Britain during the eighteenth century. For more information see T.H. Breen, "Baubles of Britain": The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century," in *Past & Present* 119 (May, 1988).

<sup>123</sup> List of tools and information on worktables from Swan, *Plain and Fancy*, 169.

In addition to acquiring these new tools and furniture forms, a fashionable young woman would also have needed to know how to use them. In this respect, sewing became a performative act that reflected a young woman's refinement in addition to her technical skill. In a portrait painted by Gilbert Stuart between 1790 and 1791, we are able to see this performance in action. Here, a young woman named Anna Dorothea Foster occupies herself with tambour work (a form of chain-stitch embroidery) while her cousin, Charlotte Anna Dick, holds a pattern for her to copy. As she looks up from her work, Foster engages the viewer, inviting them to admire her skill. Her pose is characterized by an effortless refinement. Although it would have taken her several years to perfect her skill, she holds the tambour needle as if it was second nature. It is clear from this picture that Foster had mastered both the technical and performative aspect of needlework.



*Portrait of Anna Dorothea Foster and Charlotte Anna Dick, Gilbert Stuart, 1790-1791.*  
Image courtesy of the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery.

The skill and refinement that Foster displays in this portrait would have clearly indicated her high social standing.<sup>124</sup> Not only was her family able to pay for her education, but they were also able to purchase an array of fashionable sewing equipment and pay a respected artist to immortalize her performance in a portrait. Furthermore, as a gentlewoman in training, Foster would have been allowed ample time to perfect her skill. Despite America's egalitarian fervor, a person's social standing could still be conveyed through rituals that displayed their wealth, education and refinement. In this portrait, Foster displays all three.

Once this performance had been completed, the finished piece of needlework would be framed and prominently displayed within a young woman's home. In 1807, the father of a young woman named Caroline Stebbins spent five dollars on a frame for his daughter's embroidery. To put this sum in context, the same amount would have covered half a year of tuition at the Academy where Stebbins attended school.<sup>125</sup> Judging from the expense of this purchase, it is likely that Stebbins' father intended to hang his daughter's embroidery in the formal parlor, where it could be admired by visitors, especially potential suitors and their families. In this location, Stebbins' picture would have exhibited her family's wealth in addition to the skills that she had acquired at school.

It is important to note that although middle and upper class women were able, and often expected, to create decorative embroideries, this craft was

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<sup>124</sup> Anna Dorothea Foster was the daughter of John Foster, Speaker of the Irish House of Commons.

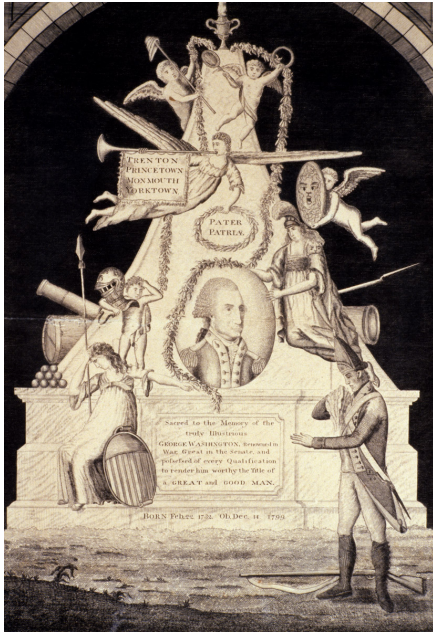
<sup>125</sup> Notation on *Mount Vernon* by Caroline Stebbins Sheldon in the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Digital Collections, <http://americancenturies.mass.edu/collection/itempage.jsp?itemid=5988>.



inaccessible to a large portion of the population. As a result, pictorial needlework reflects a limited perspective, one that is circumscribed by social class and economic standing.

### *Crafting the Landscape*

Although students drew upon their personal experience of the landscape while crafting their embroideries, they also looked to outside sources for guidance and inspiration. Often students would copy images found in the print culture of the day, reworking these black and white compositions in colorful thread. This practice is evident in a needlework picture worked by a student named E.S. Sefford. The centerpiece of this picture, an imaginary monument dedicated to the memory of George Washington, sits within a pastoral landscape. Although the landscape appears to be original, Sefford copied the monument from a popular illustration entitled *Pater Patriae*. By incorporating this image into her needlework, Sefford demonstrated her patriotism as well as her knowledge of current artistic trends.



*Pater Patriae*, Enoch Gridley after a painting by John Coles Jr., Massachusetts, 1800-1825.  
Image courtesy of the Winterthur Museum.



*Memorial Picture*, E.S. Sefford, New England, 1800-1810.  
Image courtesy of the Winterthur Museum.

While it is possible that Sefford copied this illustration herself, she may have also relied upon her instructor or a hired artist to outline the composition for her. This was a common practice at the time since it allowed young women to exhibit their needlework even if they were not proficient in drawing. For example, in 1796, a preceptress named Mrs. Levy advertised that, in addition to teaching “every branch of useful and ornamental needle work” she would “[design] the work and [execute] the drawing herself, without an additional expence [*sic*].”<sup>126</sup> Several years later, an artist named Samuel Folwell offered to sell “drawings on Silk and Satin, for Young

<sup>126</sup> “Mrs. Levey,” *The Washington Spy*, January 11, 1794, America’s Historical Newspapers.

Ladies, done agreeable to the...fashions in the first schools in Philadelphia, and all of her capital towns in America."<sup>127</sup>

Although students received help from their instructors and borrowed from the visual vocabulary of popular prints, the images they created were, first and foremost, expressions of their artistic imagination. As is evidenced by Sefford's picture, students did not simply copy images verbatim. Instead, they reworked these images in their own idiom, adding or changing certain elements to fit a unique aesthetic. In doing so, students exerted their artistic authority over the final piece.

### *National Landscapes*

To portray the nation through the medium of pictorial needlework, students embroidered landscapes that communicated the nation's spirit. Sefford's memorial picture is one example of how young women were able to incorporate the national landscape into their needlework. Although the elaborate stone monument effectively communicates the picture's narrative, the surrounding landscape provided Sefford with an opportunity to carry her message even further. While crafting her landscape, Sefford invoked the visual vocabulary of mourning. The two most prominent features of the landscape, the willow tree and the winding brook, are commonly found in mourning pictures produced during the early nineteenth century. While the willow tree represented grief, the brook symbolized the passing of time.<sup>128</sup> Although the landscape is highly idealized and not recognizable as

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<sup>127</sup> "Samuel Folwell from Philadelphia," *The Times, Charleston, South Carolina*, May 31, 1805, America's Historical Newspapers.

<sup>128</sup> Kim Ivey, interview with Lloyd Dobyns, <http://www.history.org/media/podcasts/012609/MourningArt.cfm>.

“American,” Sefford uses the memorial’s physical environs to capture the nation’s collective grief. In doing so, the landscape becomes a physical embodiment of the nation’s spirit.

In addition to stone memorials dedicated to Washington’s memory, students also embroidered scenes depicting his home at Mount Vernon. Although Mount Vernon was a private estate, its image was frequently circulated in print media. Often, students incorporated these images into their needlework. One example, worked by a student named Caroline Stebbins in 1807, shows Mount Vernon from a distance. Situated within a bucolic landscape, the house itself occupies a relatively small portion of the composition. A large yard, presumably used for grazing livestock, stretches out behind the building’s east façade. In the distance, a small cluster of ships sail peacefully on the Potomac River. In her embroidery, Stebbins presents an ideal vision of the American landscape. Here, the landscape’s picturesque beauty is linked to its productivity. Despite this connection, Stebbins makes no allusion to the presence of slavery on Washington’s estate. By erasing the presence of enslaved people, Stebbins deliberately abstained from engaging in a political and moral discussion that threatened to tear the newly united nation apart. Shaped by human endeavor, the land serves as a resource for agriculture and commerce. Without Washington’s guiding hand however, the land would, once again, degenerate into what Euro-Americans perceived as “untamed wilderness.” According to this interpretation, the landscape becomes an allegory for the nation. Under the guidance of a strong, central government, the nation would prosper. Without this influence however, it would descend into darkness and chaos.

Stebbins copied her picture from an engraving by Francis Jukes, who, in turn, had copied a painting by Alexander Robertson. Published in March of 1800, just three months after Washington's death, it is likely that this print would have served as a memorial.<sup>129</sup> By choosing a scene from Washington's private life, Jukes celebrated the President's decision to retire rather than become a monarch for life. The domestic nature of this image made it an appropriate choice for Stebbins, especially since her final embroidery was displayed in her own home.<sup>130</sup>

In both embroideries, the landscape becomes a representation of the nation's collective spirit. United around the central figure of Washington, these pictures present the American landscape as a cohesive whole. As they completed their embroideries, Sefford and Stebbins would have reflected upon this landscape, thinking of the nation, not as a loose federation of individual states, but as a single, united entity. By engaging with the American landscape through their needlework, Sefford and Stebbins could also begin to identify their place within this newly nationalized space.

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<sup>129</sup> Lydia Mattice Brandt, "Early Views of Mount Vernon," George Washington's Mount Vernon, "<http://www.mountvernon.org/research-collections/digital-encyclopedia/article/early-views-of-mount-vernon/#note1>."

<sup>130</sup> Stebbins father paid five dollars to have her picture framed, indicating that it was hung prominently within their home. For more, see Notation on *Mount Vernon* by Caroline Stebbins Sheldon in the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Digital Collections, <http://americancenturies.mass.edu/collection/itempage.jsp?itemid=5988>.





*Mount Vernon, Caroline Stebbins, c. 1807.*  
Image courtesy of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association.



*Mount Vernon in Virginia, Francis Jukes after a painting by Alexander Robertson, 1800.*  
Image courtesy of the Library of Congress.

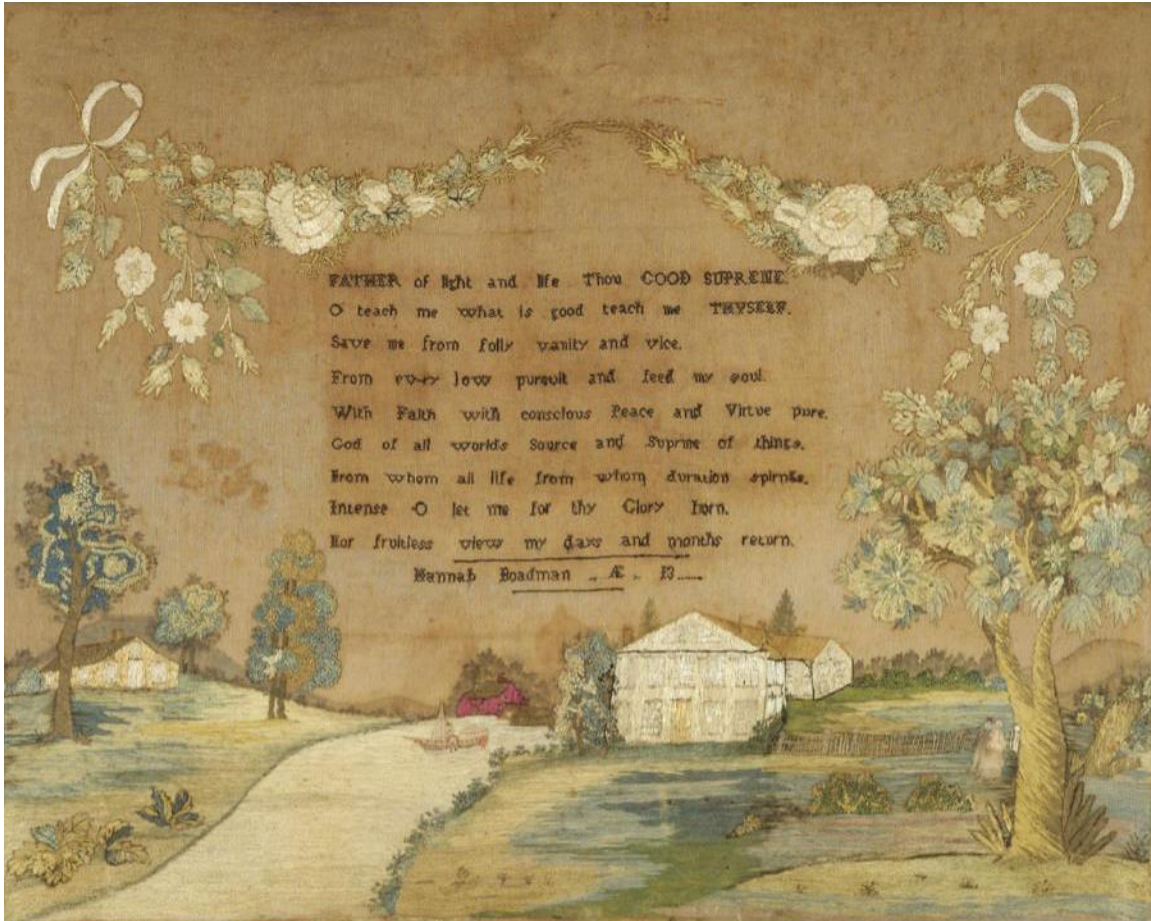
### *Local Landscapes*

Although less common, students also incorporated local landscapes into their needlework. One example, worked by a student named Hannah Boardman in 1820, shows a rural scene located in what appears to be the Connecticut River Valley. A native of Wethersfield, Connecticut, Boardman would have been personally familiar with this landscape. The most prominent feature of the landscape is a fashionable, federal-style mansion that sits alongside the banks of what appears to be the Connecticut River. Across the water, a more modest, saltbox-style house is nestled within a grove of trees. The landscape also includes signs of commerce, namely a dockside warehouse and steamboat, rendered in paper appliqué. Although Boardman may have imagined the arrangement of her landscape, she certainly drew inspiration from her surroundings. Although the landscape can be classified as pictorial needlework, Boardman combined this genre with the cross-stitch sampler tradition by including a religious verse taken from an eighteenth-century poem by James Thomson. In her analysis of Boardman's sampler, Susan P. Schoelwer suggests that the combination of an eighteenth-century religious verse with a nineteenth-century landscape indicates the important role that religion and the river played in Boardman's daily life.<sup>131</sup> Both of Boardman's parents were deeply religious and her father made a living in the shipping trade. By selecting features that were pertinent to her experience, Boardman crafted her own vision of the local landscape.

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<sup>131</sup> Schoelwer, *Connecticut Needlework*, 150.





*Needlework Picture, Hannah Boardman, 1820. Image courtesy of the Connecticut Historical Society.*

### *Domestic Landscapes*

In addition to national and local landscapes, pictorial needlework would often feature domestic scenes. This component of the landscape was central to a young woman's experience. In her diary, Sally Ripley would often comment on the "pleasures of retirement," complaining that "those who spend a great [illegible] of time in paying and receiving visits of ceremony, lose their relish for domestic enjoyments."<sup>132</sup> By engaging with the domestic space in their needlework, students celebrated this component of their experience. As with other forms of pictorial

<sup>132</sup> Ripley, September 1, 1799 and June 10, 1800.

needlework, many young women would copy their pictures from patterns given to them by their instructors. One such landscape, embroidered by Ann Folwill in 1804, shows a young woman riding her horse through the yard of a large mansion (see image on page 85). Although various features of the landscape, such as the young woman's dress or the mansion's architectural style, would have been familiar to Folwill, the landscape itself is imaginary. In addition to Folwill's piece, at least five other examples of this pattern survive.<sup>133</sup> Although Folwill's image is not original, its portrayal of domestic life would have reflected her own experience. Another example, worked by a student named Millsent Connor in 1799, was likely done without the help of a pattern.<sup>134</sup> The naïve quality of the landscape indicates that Connor, who was ten years old at the time, drew the composition herself. Because Connor was in charge of the design, it is possible that the house and landscape featured in her picture were drawn from life.

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<sup>133</sup> In addition to Folwill's picture, there are five extant pieces of needlework that follow the same pattern (Mary Antrim, Mary Shreve, Ann Stockton, Lydia Stockton, and Mary Bowker). For more, see Betty Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery: American Samplers and Pictorial Needlework, 1650-1850*, v. 2 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 467-471.

<sup>134</sup> Notation on *Needlework Picture* by Millsent Connor, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Digital Collections, <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1974.42>.





*Needlework Picture*, Millsent Connor, Massachusetts, 1799.  
Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

In addition to portraying the physical features of the domestic landscape, young women also showed the various activities that occurred within it. In one picture, completed sometime between 1800 and 1820 by a young woman named Alice Center, we see a mother helping her children with their school lessons. It is clear from this picture that the mother has also received an excellent education: not only does she present an air of gentility and refinement, but she is also able to guide her children through their lessons. This idealized domestic scene communicates the expectation that women would one day use their education to instruct their own children and in doing so, become models of Republican Motherhood. As Center

embroidered this picture, she would have likely reflected upon this expectation, imagining her future place in this domestic landscape.



*Needlework Picture, Alice Center, Massachusetts, 1800-1820.*  
Image courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Embroidered mourning pictures created during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries bear witness to another, more somber component of the domestic landscape. Students' diaries testify to the fact that the world they inhabited was defined by uncertainty. As Hannah Alvard Bliss wrote after learning that one of her neighbors had passed away, "we are warned by this instance of mortality, as well as by [others] which are continually taking place that life is



uncertain but Death is certain.”<sup>135</sup> Death, it would seem, was an inescapable feature of the landscape. According to the needlework historian Susan Burrows Swan, the mourning pictures created during the nineteenth century treated death with a sentimentality that had not been present in earlier embroideries. By indulging in what Swan terms the “luxury of sentimentality,” young women demonstrated their emotional sensitivity as well as their knowledge of current artistic trends.<sup>136</sup> In one picture created by Amelia Hayden in 1810, a group of mourners gather around a stone monument dedicated to the memory of Hayden’s father who had passed away five years earlier. Although their heads are bent in sorrow, each person can be recognized as a member of Hayden’s family. While the landscape surrounding the memorial is imaginary, Hayden also included features of the actual landscape including her home and the nearby towns of Essex and Saybrook, Connecticut. Although Hayden tailored her composition to reflect her personal experience, she also borrowed from an existing visual vocabulary. The group of mourners gathered around a stone monument was a common theme in mourning pictures from this time. She also made use of several symbols that were usually associated with mourning: the willow tree and stream are reminders of grief and the passing of time, while the oak tree and lighthouse symbolize strength and hope.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Clarke, May 1815.

<sup>136</sup> Swan, *Plain and Fancy*, 190.

<sup>137</sup> Notation on *Memorial Picture* by Amelia Hayden, Connecticut Historical Society Digital Collections, [http://emuseum.chs.org/emuseum/view/objects/asitem/search\\$0040/0/title-asc?t:state:flow=b19e27de-3da1-401e-b844-5696a0b0a445](http://emuseum.chs.org/emuseum/view/objects/asitem/search$0040/0/title-asc?t:state:flow=b19e27de-3da1-401e-b844-5696a0b0a445).



*Memorial Picture*, Amelia Hayden, Connecticut, c. 1810.  
Image courtesy of the Connecticut Historical Society.

Although it may have seemed natural to complete these mourning pictures after a loved one's death, these pieces were often completed years later. In some cases, young women would create mourning pictures before they were needed. In one example, created by a young woman named Lucy Nye, the memorial is inscribed with a sprightly verse celebrating the coming of spring. Apparently Nye created her picture before she had anyone to mourn.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Swan, *Plain and Fancy*, 168.



*Needlework Picture, Lucy Nye, Massachusetts, 1810-1820.*  
Image courtesy of the Winterthur Museum.

Whether celebrating the current domestic landscape or lamenting its inevitable change, needlework pictures elevated the domestic sphere into the artistic realm. In doing so, young women celebrated this component of their experience and situated it within the broader American landscape.

### *Intellectual Landscapes*

The final type of landscape found in pictorial needlework reflected the intellectual accomplishments that young women achieved over the course of their education. In one picture created by a student named Sarah Catherine Skinner Ward



in 1816, two Greek muses named Calliope and Clio demonstrate the range of accomplishments that a student would have mastered while at school. Clio, the muse of history, paints a portrait of George Washington while Calliope, the muse of epic poetry, writes a lengthy composition. A globe and books scattered across the ground represent music and geography. In the distance, an eagle soars over the newly constructed Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.<sup>139</sup> Although Samuel Folwell executed the design, each of the subjects he included would have been familiar to Ward.<sup>140</sup> The patriotic imagery, namely the eagle and George Washington's portrait, testifies to the important role that education played in shaping a student's national identity.

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>140</sup> This image also appears as the frontispiece to the *Philadelphia Reperatory*, v. 1 (Philadelphia, 1811).



*Calliope and Clio*, Sarah Catherine Skinner Ward, Pennsylvania, 1816.  
Image courtesy of the Winterthur Museum.

Another embroidered scene shows the allegorical figure of Wisdom instructing four young women in geography. Set within a classical landscape, this scene demonstrates the critical role that geography played in a young woman's education. Here, the students' ability to read the map placed in front of them not only demonstrates their skill at deciphering cartographic texts, but also indicates that they have achieved a high level of refinement and intellectual achievement. The inclusion of classical imagery would have signaled the student's knowledge of current artistic trends while also linking her piece to a broader visual narrative that linked the American and Roman Republics.



*Wisdom Instructing Youth in the Science of Geography, c. 1800.*  
Image courtesy of the Winterthur Museum.

Although imaginary, these landscapes express the pride that young women took in their studies. By engaging with this component of their experience, students emphasized the validity and importance of their intellectual accomplishments.

### *Completing the Map*

Through their needlework, young women exerted the authority of their perspective on the landscape, recording their worldview for posterity. By embroidering pictures of the spaces that they inhabited on a daily basis, students were able to celebrate their personal connection with the landscape. By grounding their perspective rather than adopting an overhead, cartographic view of the landscape, young women encouraged others to view the world through their eyes. In this respect, embroidered landscapes filled the spaces that cartographers left blank. By recording their unique perspectives and elevating them onto an artistic plane, young women challenged conventional views of the physical and social landscape. Although they drew from the pictorial vocabulary of print culture, this allowed them to integrate their work into existing discussions surrounding landscape and national identity.

## **Conclusion**

Maps are made of layers; artificial place names and political boundaries lie across the natural landscape while networks of roads wind their way through vast expanses of open land. The same can be said of the maps that reside in our imaginations. As we travel through our physical surroundings, we incorporate our perceptions and experiences of the landscape into our mental vision of the world. As we grow older and travel further afield, we are able to expand the horizons of our map; what may have begun as a vision of our home or neighborhood soon grows to encompass our town, county, state, nation, and continent. At school we learn how to contextualize these personal experiences within a global perspective. As we acquire knowledge of the world's political geography, we are able to situate ourselves within a set of neatly inscribed boundaries. As a result, our map becomes a latticework of lived experience and imposed knowledge. As we grow older and our memories fade, certain places on our map may grow dim while others are gradually obscured by a haze of nostalgia.

As young women read from their geography textbooks, wrote place names in their penmanship journals, or embroidered maps onto silk, they added this learned knowledge to their map imaginary. In doing so, they were able to situate their personal experience within a national context. These tasks allowed young women to ground the abstract concept of the nation in a physical reality. In this way, the



national landscape became a means through which students could develop and articulate their identity as American citizens.

Working within the boundaries of this national map, young women were also able to express their personal experience of the landscape. As they fashioned elaborate, embroidered landscapes, they were able to express and reflect upon their personal worldview. In doing so, students asserted the validity of their lived experience.

In 1861, the Civil War challenged the unity of the national map. The lines that had once connected a patchwork collection of states now threatened to divide them. The national outline that young women had once proudly embroidered in silken thread began to unravel. The issues that had led to this divisive conflict were present in the textbooks and maps that young women had consulted decades before; Northern prejudices against the South often found their way into geography textbooks, as did arguments regarding the institution of slavery. Prejudice and division had been part of the national map since its inception.

The metaphor of a disintegrating national map was often used to visualize the conflict that threatened to tear the nation apart. In 1860, one cartoonist showed Abraham Lincoln, Stephen Douglas, and John Breckenridge, three of the presidential candidates for that year, tearing the map asunder while the fourth candidate, John Bell, attempted to glue it back together. The link between national unity and the material existence of a national map testifies to the important role that these cartographic images played in realizing the nation.



*Dividing the National Map*, Anonymous, Cincinnati, 1860.  
Image courtesy of the Library of Congress.

By incorporating the nation's physical and social features into their imaginary maps, students helped to ensure its success. In this context, students did not simply accept and reiterate the knowledge they learned in their geography lessons. By repeating their lessons over and over again and reworking their newly acquired knowledge in their own idiom, students made the national map their own. After all, if a nation is to exist, it must first reside in the hearts and minds of its citizens.



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