

**Marian Clarke Nichols: A Life in Service, Served Well**

Toni Armstrong

2024 Julie Linsdell and Georgia Linsdell

Enders Research Fellow

Nichols House Museum

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Marian Nichols lived a long and dedicated life. She spent her adult years advocating for civil service reform, women's suffrage, and the preservation of her beloved Beacon Hill neighborhood. As a young woman, she traveled extensively, keeping a careful diary of her travels to Spain, France, Germany, Switzerland, and more. She had a voracious appetite for knowledge as evidenced by her education – extensive, especially for a wealthy woman of her era – and a tenacious dedication to collecting information. While her older sister Rose's work as a landscape architect and garden designer and efforts to establish the Nichols House Museum have led to greater attention, Marian's political and personal advocacy projects merit recognition. Though she has been overshadowed by her sisters in the years since her death, she was certainly not ignored during her lifetime. Born in 1873 to Dr. Arthur Nichols and Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols, Marian was the second of three daughters.<sup>1</sup> This portrait of Marian from her later life indicates the tenacious dedication she brought to every aspect of her life, from her personal growth to the improvement of society around her (fig. 1). Like other wealthy white women of her era, Marian traveled extensively. She was well-educated and continued to seek new opportunities for learning throughout her life. Perhaps most notably and certainly for the longest period of her life, Marian was involved in challenging, reforming, and advancing the work of the federal and local government, at times to the chagrin of her neighbors.

In 1873, Arthur Howard and Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols lived in Roxbury, Massachusetts, at a comfortable two-story house on 130 Warren Street.<sup>2</sup> On December 21, Elizabeth gave birth to Marian Clarke Nichols, their second child. Their property in Roxbury was

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<sup>1</sup> Note that Marian's birth year is recorded as 1873 in *At Home on Beacon Hill*, which is confirmed by various census records. See for example, Department of Commerce, *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, January 22, 1920 (district 6, enumeration 227, sheet 27). Via FamilySearch.com.

<sup>2</sup> This house is still standing. Today it is home to the Center for Teen Empowerment, working to offer programs and education for teens on social justice, job skills, public speaking, a mission Marian certainly would have supported.

spacious and almost suburban with a stable in the backyard and not far from Elizabeth's parents.<sup>3</sup> In an atlas from 1884, it's clear that the Nichols property was sizeable, even amongst other houses nearby (fig. 2). At the time, Roxbury was a thriving commercial area full of new immigrant populations, especially Irish and Jewish families. It was connected to Boston via horsecar, an early version of a public bus, drawn by horse and conductor. In the early twentieth century, Black populations leaving the South had begun to settle in Roxbury, drawn to its factory and mill systems that offered accessible employment for new residents.<sup>4</sup> We can imagine the city — at the time, smaller than today's bustling Roxbury — as an exciting place to be a child balancing the comforts of a large home and the noise of streets and shops. The Nichols family spent summers in Rye Beach, New Hampshire, to get away from the city, delightfully illustrated by a letter from a young Marian (fig. 3). She describes her activities in detail to her mother, recounting learning to knit, playing with a squirrel, and losing a tooth. Her childhood in Roxbury must have been joyful with time spent at her grandparents' house, adventuring to the sunshine and leisure of Rye Beach, and watching the horse-carts pass by their home on Warren Street.

The Nichols family was made up of five people: Elizabeth and Arthur, Marian, and her two sisters, Rose and Margaret (fig. 4). Arthur was a physician, seeing patients at the family home throughout Marian's life. He grew up in the North End of Boston and studied medicine in Paris and at Harvard. Perhaps an inspiration to her daughter, Elizabeth Homer was a dedicated student both as a child and as an adult; Elizabeth collected antiques, participated in social charities, and managed the Nichols estates. While *At Home on Beacon Hill* records that Elizabeth and Arthur's manner of meeting is not known, it is likely that the two circulated in the same

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<sup>3</sup> B. June Hutchinson, *At Home on Beacon Hill: Rose Standish Nichols and Her Family* (Boston: Nichols House Museum Board of Governors, 2011): 11-12.

<sup>4</sup> "About Roxbury," *Roxbury Historical Society*, published 2023. Via <https://www.roxburyhistoricalsociety.org/about-roxbury>.

social circles. Elizabeth and Arthur married in 1869, bringing together two wealthy families who valued education for both men and women, still uncommon at the time. Rose was their first child, born in 1872, with Marian close behind in late 1873. Between Marian and Margaret, Elizabeth had another child, Sydney Homer, who died of diphtheria at age five on July 6, 1881. While there must have been grief amongst the family and certainly between Arthur and Elizabeth for Sydney's early death, neither Marian nor Margaret record great feelings of loss.<sup>5</sup> Finally, Margaret Nichols was born in 1879, the third and final Nichols daughter.<sup>6</sup>

In 1885, the family moved to Beacon Hill, on the far side of Boston from Roxbury.<sup>7</sup> By the late nineteenth century, Beacon Hill was already considered an old neighborhood, full of aging brick houses, the still-familiar cobblestone road, and narrow streets. While Boston as we know it today is full of art and culture, the 1870s and 1880s was the period that this character of Boston was developing for the first time. The Museum of Fine Arts was founded in a small building in Copley Square in 1870.<sup>8</sup> The museum only moved to its modern-day home on Huntington Avenue in 1907, after other cultural institutions like Mechanic's Hall (a now-demolished former event space) and Symphony Hall, which opened in 1900.<sup>9</sup> Isabella Stewart Gardner, a fellow wealthy Boston socialite and international traveler, broke ground on her fashionable new home (and future museum) in Back Bay in 1899.<sup>10</sup> By choosing the Beacon Hill neighborhood, the Nichols family associated themselves with Boston's older history, neatly

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<sup>5</sup> See Margaret Homer Shurcliff, *Lively Days: Some Memoirs* (Alice Shurcliff, 1965, reprinted by Boston: Nichols House Museum Board of Governors, 2011): 2.

<sup>6</sup> Hutchinson, *At Home on Beacon Hill*, 15.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>8</sup> Boston Museum of Fine Arts, "Architectural History," *Boston Museum of Fine Arts website*. <https://www.mfa.org/about/architectural-history>.

<sup>9</sup> See Ted Clarke, *Beacon Hill, Back Bay, and the Building of Boston's Golden Age* (Arcadia Publishing, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> See Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, "Isabella Stewart Gardner," *Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum website*. Via <https://www.gardnermuseum.org/about/isabella-stewart-gardner>. For more on the Boston art scene of the nineteenth century, see Hina Hirayama, *"With éclat": The Boston Athenaeum and the Origin of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2013).

illustrated by the presence of the Boston Athenaeum, which moved to Beacon Hill in 1849. The Athenaeum established itself as a repository of books, antiques, and art, and even in 1885 was a beacon of Boston's revolutionary history. While Marian was only twelve when the family moved to the Beacon Hill neighborhood, she carried the value of history with her throughout her life, even as she fought to improve contemporary society.

In *Lively Days*, Margaret wrote about attending private schools held in local homes: Mrs. Shaw's School on Marlborough Street, then Miss Folsom's School for further study in her teenage years.<sup>11</sup> Marian attended Mrs. Shaw's school for at least some of her education. Formal education was still in its early stages in the late nineteenth century, as traditional secondary school education would not become common until at least 1910.<sup>12</sup> As she would continue to do throughout her life, Marian likely studied with various neighbors, learning to read, write, and study languages like Latin in small, personalized classes. She also participated in various social learning spaces that would contribute to her status as a well-rounded, wealthy young lady: She studied dance at Papanti's Hall, joined a horseback riding club in the Fenway area, and participated in a Beacon Hill neighborhood sewing circle. Years later, the sewing circle would hold a reunion celebrating the '92 group, indicating that the relationships built in Beacon Hill remained strong later in Marian's life.<sup>13</sup> While her sisters continued on with less bookish (though no less significant) learning – Rose to landscape design and Margaret to woodworking – Marian

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<sup>11</sup> Shurcliff, *Lively Days*, 10-13.

<sup>12</sup> See Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz. "The shaping of higher education: The formative years in the United States, 1890 to 1940." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 13, no. 1 (1999): 37-62.

<sup>13</sup> See various notes from friends Marion Hubbard, Luisa Wells, Julia Hunnewell, Madeline Lawrence, Katherine White, and others in Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, 1780-1953, A-170 folder 136. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. Henceforth referenced as "Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family." Margaret Nichols married Arthur Asahel Shurtleff in 1905. In 1930, Arthur changed the spelling of the family name to "Shurcliff" to match the Old English spelling. The collection at the Schlesinger Library retains the original spelling of the name.

remained dedicated to academic pursuits, continuing her education at Radcliffe and Newnham Colleges and studying language wherever she could find a teacher.

Marian's relationships with her family – especially her parents and Rose – were relatively close: She wrote to her mother frequently, spoke highly of her father's guidance, and appreciated Rose, even if the two did not always get along. In an 1896 letter to her father, Marian writes the following:

You have started in me good habits for every morning. I am wide awake at six o'clock. Yesterday I made use of the time I was waiting for my hot water in reading but this morning I am going to write to you. When I left you Sunday morning I went by omnibus to Notre Dame where high mass was being celebrated. I sat there for some time listening to the beautiful music and noticing the details of the cathedral.<sup>14</sup>

Her grateful reflection on her father's guidance for good habits and appreciation for the art, music, and religious experience of Notre Dame and Paris, even without the company of her father, suggests that she continued to think fondly of all Arthur had given her as a child. Marian and Arthur traveled to Spain together in 1896 and 1899, working "together and separately" on Spanish language skills and exploring everything from Andalusia to Madrid.<sup>15</sup> At the time of Arthur's death in 1923, Marian received countless letters from friends, colleagues, and local associations, echoing what a great loss it was for Arthur to have passed and indicating how close the two must have remained, even at the end of Arthur's life.<sup>16</sup>

As for her relationship with Rose, it seems that Marian and Rose spent time feeling both close and at odds with one another. The two were very close in age – only a year apart – and therefore must have struggled with competitiveness and comparisons from each other and their

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<sup>14</sup> *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Arthur Howard Nichols*, August 31, 1896. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols*, August 10, 1896. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 107.

<sup>16</sup> Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 128.

parents, whether intentional or not. Unlike Margaret, neither Rose nor Marian married, pursuing independent lives. In a letter to Rose in 1905, Marian reflects on their early relationship as follows, describing Marian's appreciation for Rose as an authority figure in her early life:

We are so much alike in certain ways and so different in others that it has been harder than it would have been otherwise for us to always hit it off smoothly. You are the only person to whom I have ever submitted as an authority. You know when I was small, I had absolute confidence in your judgement and your ability to do anything. It was that bad copy of *Little Francis* which first broke its charm but still I believed in you pretty firmly for many more years.<sup>17</sup>

In this letter, Marian goes on to say that it felt important to establish her own personality and find her own guideposts outside of Rose when Marian was a young adult. She describes how Rose's guidance had "in many ways been a good help" in pursuing an expansive, socially aware life, and indicates that she regretted having "hardened my heart against you."<sup>18</sup> The sisters shared values of peace and women's suffrage, a commitment to the Beacon Hill neighborhood and an interest in social reform, so while their personalities may have clashed, this letter suggests that they could still find kind thoughts for one another. After Arthur's death in 1923, the two necessarily corresponded about the division of his will and properties, which seems to have fallen largely on Marian, though the complexities of the property division (and their emotional relationships with each piece of property) merit further research.<sup>19</sup>

In 1893, on her twentieth birthday, Marian Nichols wrote the following in her diary: "If I have been wasting these years, shall I find anything better to do with myself in the coming years? Well, I most sincerely hope so" (fig. 5).<sup>20</sup> Marian wrote this as she spent time traveling in Italy

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<sup>17</sup> *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Rose Standish Nichols*, July 28, 1905, Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 117.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 117.

<sup>20</sup> Marian Clarke Nichols, "Thursday, December 21," in *Diary*, 1893. Eugenie Homer Emerson and Marian Clarke Nichols Papers, 1806-1953, MC 212, volume 6. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. Henceforth cited as "Emerson-Nichols Papers."

with her father, sister Rose, and family friends. In the pages before this reflection, she describes meeting Oswald Villard, a social reformer and an inspiration to Marian's later efforts. Age twenty seems to be a turning point: Before this reflection, her letters indicate ordinary interests in art, fashion, and travel. In the later 1890s, Marian took up a far greater dedication to education and her travel seems to become more concerted. She visited museums, dedicated herself to language, attended lectures, and maintained and developed new social relationships everywhere.

In the late nineteenth century, women had some access to secondary education, although it was not nearly the same access as their male counterparts. By 1900, women made up about thirty percent of the student body in higher education.<sup>21</sup> Women-only colleges like Vassar (founded in 1861), Wellesley (founded in 1870), Smith (founded in 1871), and Bryn Mawr (founded in 1885) led the charge to open secondary education to female students and demonstrated that women were just as competent in the classroom as their male counterparts. Marian entered Radcliffe College in 1898 as a special student, advancing quickly through her final year of education to graduate in 1899. Radcliffe College was a member of the "Seven Sisters," founded in 1879 in association with Harvard University.<sup>22</sup> Marian poses here with the rest of her graduating class in the traditional scholars' robes worn at the college at the time (fig. 6). There is no evidence of her involvement in other campus activities beyond coursework during her time at Radcliffe, but she held the college in high esteem as she later created an annual scholarship.

Marian spent time at Newnham College, part of the University of Cambridge, in 1897 – before formally attending any university – and returned as a formal student between 1901-1902.

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<sup>21</sup> Mariam Chamberlain, *Women in Academe: Progress and Prospects* (Russell Sage Foundation, 1988): 3-10.

<sup>22</sup> The college remained separate from Harvard University until 1999, over one hundred years after the college's original founding. Until this time, undergraduate degrees were awarded only from Radcliffe, or then as joint degrees between Harvard and Radcliffe.



Her 1897 visit seems to be brief and part of her tour in London with her sister but set the groundwork for her return. Like Radcliffe, Newnham was a college for women. It was founded in 1871, but college histories note that the female students felt that their education was not prioritized compared to their male counterparts until World War I left the university in dire need of tuition from less traditional students.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps reflecting this sentiment, in a letter to her mother, Marian unfavorably compared Newnham to Radcliffe, writing that Newnham lacked “argumentative training” and paid “little attention... to literature or composition.”<sup>24</sup> Still, Marian’s various visits to Newnham College included attendance at various lectures, debates, and dinners, which indicates the breadth of knowledge and social connection she gained during her time abroad. In 1897, for example, she described a debate about “whether anarchism ought to be suppressed.”<sup>25</sup> Although this letter to her father does not indicate her own views on anarchism, her tongue-in-cheek description of the affirmative side might allude to her opinion: “The affirmative side took the view that the best way of suppressing anarchism was to send all the anarchists to an isolated island where they would have a chance to test the practical value of their doctrines.”<sup>26</sup> Anarchism was a key issue at the turn of the twentieth century, initiated by a manifesto published in Italy in 1876; among other symbolic attacks, President William McKinley was assassinated by an anarchist in 1901.<sup>27</sup> She also attended a lecture on urban renewal and improvements for neighborhood conditions in London by Albert Grey, a British politician and

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<sup>23</sup> Newnham College, “History of the College” *University of Cambridge website*. Via <https://newn.cam.ac.uk/about/history>.

<sup>24</sup> *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Arthur Howard Nichols*, January 2, 1897. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 105.

<sup>25</sup> *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Arthur Howard Nichols*, September 5, 1896. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 105.

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

<sup>27</sup> Arif Dirlik, George Woodcock, Martin Miller, and Franklin Rosemont, “Anarchism,” *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2024).

nobleman.<sup>28</sup> Finally, Marian dined with and attended lectures by George Darwin, geologist and astronomer and the son of the renowned biologist Charles Darwin.<sup>29</sup>

In 1901, Marian elected to remain at Newnham at the conclusion of her Spanish tour with her father, likely drawn to the college by her earlier experiences and her continued interest in learning. In a letter to her mother, Marian describes her lodgings, a valuable insight into her impression of the college – and life with many housemates – as well as the experience of a woman’s private housing abroad:

I am at last really comfortable. My sitting room is a good sized room facing east and overlooking fields and gardens with the Cambridge towers just seen through the trees. It has a cheerful yellow wallpaper, blue curtains, pretty furniture and plenty of it, and electric lights. A fire is started at seven o’clock in the morning so that I can finish my dressing by its warmth. There is also a fireplace in my small open bedroom which opens out of the sitting room. The bed is comfortable and I have plenty of drawers. As there is no room above it or on the other side the only noise comes from people walking in the passageway.<sup>30</sup>

While dorms of today are small, it is easy to imagine Marian feeling comfortable in a room with such familiar furnishings. The spacious accommodations were also necessary as Marian was frequently unwell in Cambridge; she remarks that she has “given up expecting to feel well,” and concluded her time by doing only what was required by her “duty.”<sup>31</sup> It is unclear how much Marian valued her time at Newnham, given her early feeling that “very little attention is paid here to literature or composition,” especially as compared to Radcliffe.<sup>32</sup>

Marian was interested in art and culture throughout her life, but this is especially evident during her travels abroad in her twenties. This interest was encouraged by her family

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<sup>28</sup> *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Arthur Howard Nichols*, September 5, 1896. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 105.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols*, February 11, 1902. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 109.

<sup>31</sup> *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Rose Standish Nichols*, February 28, 1902. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 116.

<sup>32</sup> *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Arthur Howard Nichols*, September 5, 1896. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 105.

background: Her uncle was Augustus Saint-Gaudens, a widely known American sculptor of the late nineteenth century. The family's summer home in Cornish, New Hampshire, also brought the entire family in contact with Saint-Gaudens' artistic circle, known as the Cornish Art Colony.<sup>33</sup> In 1896, Marian describes a visit to Cornish member Thomas Wilmer Dewing's studio, where the artist was working on a "portrait of a model for the exhibition here."<sup>34</sup> Marian and Rose also posed for Dewing's painting, *A Reading* (1897), which features two young women seated across a table. Later in her letter to her mother, Marian references her plan to tutor Dewing's daughter Elizabeth in Latin, demonstrating the familiar relationships Marian held with artists of this region.<sup>35</sup> Of course, Marian's sisters were artists in their own right: Rose was a landscape architect, and Margaret successful in wood-working and bell-ringing. Rose got her start as a garden designer at Mastlands, the family estate in Cornish, a region clearly helpful for Rose's artistic development. While contact with members of the Cornish Art Colony and her uncle perhaps initiated Marian's interest in art, music, and culture, she continued to pursue it on her own. She attended lectures at the Metropolitan Museum of Art by John Charles Van Dyke, and visited museums in every country she visited – "I spent some time at the Louvre and realized more than before how the Madrid gallery surpasses all others in the number of its wonderful portraits," – and wrote at length about her observations in her diaries and letters to family.<sup>36</sup> She carried a social and personal interest in artists as well, as she pursued friendships with artists throughout her international travels. For example, in 1896, she made plans with Amy Lowell in

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<sup>33</sup> Hutchinson, *At Home on Beacon Hill*.

<sup>34</sup> *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols*, March 13, 1896. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 107.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Arthur Howard Nichols*, August 31, 1896. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 105.

London, who would become a successful poet back in Boston.<sup>37</sup> Her diary records an endearing moment in Austria when Marian wrote of her hope to see Johannes Brahms or Johann Strauss while in Austria in 1894.<sup>38</sup>

In all her travels, Marian spent time noticing the world around her. Reflections in her extensive diary recordings and her letters to her mother, father, and sisters demonstrate a deep love for nature and an unrelenting sense of adventure. During her trip to Italy, Marian quotes the ancient author to give words to the awe she felt at the nature around her:

‘Nothing in the world can compare with the lovely bay of Baiae,’ Horace writes of this beautiful place. Baiae must have changed a great deal since that time when the bay was lined with villas but nevertheless, I feel as if I could almost agree with Horace as I sat there looking over the water.<sup>39</sup>

The ancient Roman town in the Gulf of Naples remains a tourist destination even in 2024, known for its impressive extant temples. While Baiae is a site for extensive underwater archaeology today, it was known as a romantic ancient location even in Marian’s time: John Keats references it in “Ode to Maia” (1818), among other literary references. She recounts museums and countryside landscapes alike with passion and detail, perhaps indicative of her interest in writing. She describes a sculpture of Psyche, “Her lovely face, bending forth seems almost alive, her expression is charming and altogether so much of this statue it seems complete in its beauty to me.”<sup>40</sup> In the same tone, now speaking with her mother as an audience, she describes an Italian landscape: “Just now the spring flowers are beginning to come out...English daisies and narcissi grow wild here in great abundance...Every available piece of land is cultivated with vineyards

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<sup>37</sup> *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Arthur Howard Nichols*, September 5, 1896. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 105. See also Claire Healey, “Amy Lowell Visits London.” *The New England Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (1973): 439–53.

<sup>38</sup> Marian Clarke Nichols, *Diary*, July 9-10, 1894. Emerson-Nichols Papers, volume 9.

<sup>39</sup> Marian Clarke Nichols, *Diary*, November 21, 1893. Emerson-Nichols Papers, volume 6.

<sup>40</sup> Marian Clarke Nichols, *Diary*, November 11, 1893. Emerson-Nichols Papers, volume 6.

and olive trees, with vegetables growing among them.”<sup>41</sup> Her language is detailed and draws an expressive picture for her readers, both those imagined in her diaries and actual correspondents.

Discussion of Marian’s personal life would not be complete without noting one more important relationship: with Elise Pumpelly Cabot (1875-1958). The Pumpelly sisters – Daisy and Elise – were close in age to Rose and Marian, and the two families traveled together at least once to Italy. It was during this first trip to Italy in 1893 that Marian and Elise first began to grow close (fig. 7). Their relationship would continue to develop, moving beyond the bounds of an intimate friendship and into something more akin to romance. Like her older sister, Marian never married and showed little interest in other romantic relationships. Elise married Thomas Handasyd Cabot in 1898, an event which Marian supported: “the more I hear of him the more suited he seems to Elise.”<sup>42</sup> While contemporary readers might view this marriage as evidence that Marian and Elise could not have had an intimate relationship, Elise’s sister Daisy disproves this conception, as Daisy was married to a man but lived with a female partner in Greenwich Village for much of her life.<sup>43</sup>

The story of Marian and Elise’s relationship began in Marian’s private diary entries before spilling over into letters between the two dating as late as 1932. In one of Marian’s early entries about time with Elise, she writes:

Before dinner Elise and I had quite a long serious talk, chiefly about the discouragingness of life. It is queer that Elise and I do not get many chances to talk with each other, though of course we are together a great deal. I suppose that darkness helps in confidences for always benefitting we have had long talks together at night. But today we had more time than

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<sup>41</sup> *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols*, February 2, 1894. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 106.

<sup>42</sup> *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols*, January 1, 1897. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 107.

<sup>43</sup> See Alan Bryson (@roused), “Juliet & Daisy – Artists & Independent Women,” *Steemit.com*. Via <https://steemit.com/art/@roused/juliet-and-daisy-artists-and-independent-women>.

usual for in the evening we washed our hair, and then dried it by the fire in my room.<sup>44</sup>

Marian's reflections on time with Elise continue as they share space in their trip to Capri and Naples, Italy. The travel party included Marian and Rose with their father Arthur and Elise and Daisy with their parents, with others joining and departing throughout.<sup>45</sup> It seems that the two sets of sisters paired off: Marian and Elise spent time visiting small towns, talking in the woods, and watching the sea, while Daisy and Rose spent time creating art together. Marian writes, for example, about how she and Elise were "together in our double bed" on Christmas Eve, having wrapped all their presents, "talked about each other until two."<sup>46</sup> On another moment together on the shores of Naples, Marian describes yet another of their conversations:

There we talked while gazing at the beautiful scene around us, on the same old subject, our faults. The loveliness of nature here seems to have the same effect on both of us, it makes us melancholy. But it is a pleasanter kind than that I feel when around people.<sup>47</sup>

Marian's admiration for Elise range from her looks: "he probably never had met as attractive a girl as Elise and I am afraid that he never will again" to her art: "Though I have known her so long, I have never before heard her sing, so I was glad to have the chance to hear her voice, which is sweet and clear."<sup>48</sup> Elise taught Marian tennis. The two played together throughout their travels, Marian improving as she continued to practice with and without Elise as a doubles partner. In one story, recounted by Marian in her diary and in a letter to her mother, a gentleman named Herbert Jackson took an interest in Elise, going as far as to propose marriage to her. Elise

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<sup>44</sup> Marian Clarke Nichols, *Diary*, December 15, 1893. Emerson-Nichols Papers, volume 6.

<sup>45</sup> This seems to be the trip during which Daisy Pumpelly painted Rose, although the only notes I have uncovered of Daisy's art process is in a letter to Elizabeth, "Daisy and Rose are going to do some painting and sketching here. Rose has found a very cunning little girl who will pose for five sous a morning." Via *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols*, January 10, 1894. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 106.

<sup>46</sup> Marian Clarke Nichols, *Diary*, December 24, 1893. Emerson-Nichols Papers, volume 6.

<sup>47</sup> Marian Clarke Nichols, *Diary*, December 1893. Emerson-Nichols Papers, volume 6.

<sup>48</sup> *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols*, January 28, 1894. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 106. Marian Clarke Nichols, *Diary*, November 1893. Emerson-Nichols Papers, volume 6.

declined, which gave Marian exceptional glee: “it was all I could do to act naturally I was so excited” that Elise had turned him away.<sup>49</sup>

If the evidence of Marian and Elise’s relationship were limited to what Marian had written in her diary, it would be enough to say that they had a close, intimate friendship, in line with some “romantic friendships” between women of the era.<sup>50</sup> The two formed a strong bond during this trip. In their final days abroad, now in Austria, Marian discovered that her family had planned to leave sooner than she had expected. Startled at this sudden change of plans, Marian wrote:

I could not bear to go away without really seeing Elise again and yet I knew it was absurd to ask the others to stay because I had not talked with her enough in these four days. Finally I arranged that as there was no room for her at our place, I should sleep with Elise at the Schwingerhaus. Of course we talked until a late hour.<sup>51</sup>

Yet, it is Elise’s letters that betray a further intimacy beyond platonic love between the two women. Her letters are far more explicit, outlining an almost desperate love: “Oh Marian dear I long to see you to have a long talk with you and now while you are reading this letter you are hurrying away from me. You heartless girl. Doesn’t it pain you a little?”<sup>52</sup> Elise’s letters contend with Marian’s for their length and detail, as Elise describes nearly every aspect of her social life, interests, and personal failings. Again and again, however, Elise returns to her feelings of love for Marian: “Oh know I hate to have you away from me so long dear Marian, what a lovely time we had together, and we were beginning to know each other better at least to talk more freely. I wish I had you to talk to now.”<sup>53</sup> In her most explicit declarations of romance, Elise writes:

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<sup>49</sup> Marian Clarke Nichols, *Diary*, November 1893. Emerson-Nichols Papers, volume 6.

<sup>50</sup> See Lillian Faderman, *Odd girls and twilight lovers: A history of lesbian life in twentieth-century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>51</sup> Marian Clarke Nichols, *Diary*, August 4, 1894. Emerson-Nichols Papers, volume 9.

<sup>52</sup> *Letter from Elise Pumpelly to Marian Clarke Nichols*, September 5-7, 1894. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 133.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

Do you think of Capri and the lovely time we had together there? What a mistake we made by not sleeping together more when we could have. Well we will know how to act in the future... I long to give you a kiss, 'dear dear' Marian.<sup>54</sup>

In another letter, again sent soon after the conclusion of their trip to Italy and Austria, Elise writes that "I know that nothing could come between us. I love you so deeply. It is the greatest pleasure to simply think of you and feel that you are in almost perfect sympathy."<sup>55</sup>

Other wealthy women of this era had similar brief romances in their childhood – Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, wealthy art collector and eventual founder of a museum in New York had a brief love affair with a woman between 1896 and 1901 – before moving on to marry men. Yet, Elise and Marian's intimacies did not conclude with the end of their travels abroad.<sup>56</sup> When Elise became pregnant with her first child in 1901, she wrote to Marian with the news before sharing it with anyone else, including her family and husband.<sup>57</sup> Even in 1932, Elise wrote to Marian that "being out of touch with you for so long is all wrong," and that "you are the same person and I the same, now even when interests intervene."<sup>58</sup> She concludes this letter with the declaration that "I'm grateful that you still care for me... as always I do just the same. And I would hate to think I had lost you."<sup>59</sup> In the early twentieth century, sex between two men was illegal in every state, resulting in imprisonment, fines, and social isolation. Physical and romantic relationships between women were not illegal but were often inaccessible because women often depended on men for financial security. While Marian does not offer her opinions on sex or relationships with

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<sup>54</sup> *Letter from Elise Pumpelly to Marian Clarke Nichols*, September 5-7, 1894. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 133.

<sup>55</sup> *Letter from Elise Pumpelly to Marian Clarke Nichols*, October 30, 1894. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 133.

<sup>56</sup> See Avis Berman, *Rebels on Eighth Street: Juliana Force and the Whitney Museum of American Art* (New York: Athenaeum, 1990).

<sup>57</sup> *Letter from Elise Pumpelly to Marian Clarke Nichols*, August 23, 1901. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 130.

<sup>58</sup> *Letter from Elise Pumpelly to Marian Clarke Nichols*, March 1, 1932. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 137.

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



either men or women in the extant archive, she did associate with people who were in lesbian relationships, like Amy Lowell and Daisy Pumpelly. It is possible that Marian and Elise maintained a romantic or physical relationship during Elise's marriage, since the marriage and Marian's inheritances allowed each financial stability. Or perhaps the two carried out a romantic entanglement in their young adulthood, with the romantic aspects left behind but maintaining a close friendship long into their lives after Elise's marriage. While Marian's letters do not indicate any other romantic relationships with women, it is also possible she pursued these with others more privately, especially because Marian's letters to Elise and others outside of the family are not extensively preserved in the current archives.<sup>60</sup>

The women's suffrage movement may have been Marian's first political pursuit, although she seems to have been involved as more of a follower than a leader. She affiliated with various women's clubs like the Women's Industrial and Civic League, the Consumer's League of Massachusetts, the Boston League of Women Voters, and the Women's Auxiliary Massachusetts Civil Service Reform Association, among others. In one letter to her mother, she remarks that two friends (the Becks) have "become rabid suffragettes...and wanted to talk of little else."<sup>61</sup> The three Nichols sisters were interested in suffrage in different capacities: Margaret was a sustaining member of the Boston Equal Suffrage Association for Good Government, and Rose was involved with the women's movement for peace. In 1907, Marian participated in an exhibition in the social economy building at the World's Fair in Jamestown, Virginia, perhaps as part of her membership in the Industrial and Civic League or with the Consumer's League of

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<sup>60</sup> Marian and Elise's relationship, and indeed Marian's other relationships, certainly indicate a place for further research. Marian maintained relationships with other women, like Grace Hooker and Evelyn Hunter, about whom I do not yet know anything of significance. Queer women were an important part of the suffrage movement, so it is possible there is a larger women's scene to discover in early twentieth-century Boston.

<sup>61</sup> *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols*, August 24, 1910. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 111.

Massachusetts.<sup>62</sup> Each of these groups organized women to fight for legislative change, regulations on industry and production, and improvement for education. While earlier suffragettes dedicated themselves to enfranchising women voters, Marian's involvements were about improving the function of government for all. 1920 was the first year that women could vote in the United States, as the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was passed in June 1919 and ratified in August 1920. In this year, Marian "marched in the Suffrage Parade" in the afternoon then went to a session for the Women's Industrial and Civic League in the same day, as she recounts: "our last suffrage celebration and my first political speech."<sup>63</sup> This speech, of course, was part of her first campaign for political office.

Marian ran for political office at least twice. Although both campaigns were unsuccessful, they indicate her continued commitment to enacting political change through any legal means necessary. She also is noted as one of the first women to run for political office in the United States. In 1920, Marian ran as an independent candidate as a Representative for Ward 8 in the Massachusetts House of Representatives. The 1920 Massachusetts House of Representatives had 240 House Districts, which were then subdivided by wards (hence Marian's campaign in Ward 8).<sup>64</sup> While other women had run for political office before – Elizabeth Cady Stanton unsuccessfully ran for the House of Representatives in 1866 – this was the first year that women were enfranchised as both voters and candidates.<sup>65</sup> Marian's 1920 campaign advertisements echoed what she advocated elsewhere: "Public Office is a Public Trust," a phrase

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<sup>62</sup> *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols*, July 2, 1907. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 111.

<sup>63</sup> *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols*, September 1920. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 112.

<sup>64</sup> This was changed in 1974 when the house was reduced to 160 representatives. See "Pre-1972 History of Legislative Redistricting in Massachusetts," *MA Legislature website*. Via <https://malegislature.gov/Redistricting/ExcerptOf1977HouseBill5900>.

<sup>65</sup> "Milestones for Women in American Politics," *Center for American Women and Politics*. Via <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts/milestones-women-american-politics>.

originally used as President Grover Cleveland's campaign motto in 1884 (fig. 8). One of Marian's primary political ambitions was to root out corruption in public office, a theme that was also central to Cleveland's campaign against James G. Blaine. While Marian was affiliated with the Republican party, she likely registered as an independent due to her relatively late entry as a candidate in September (fig. 9). In a letter to her mother in September 1920, Marian writes "This morning I filed my nomination papers — the preliminary ones — for certification as to the names being duly supplied registered voters."<sup>66</sup>

Marian's second campaign in 1942 seems to have followed a similar path. This time, Marian registered as a Republican candidate and ran for a seat in the Governor's Council, now representing the Third District. She was unsuccessful again, losing to Frank A. Brooks in the primary election. The Governor's Council is a smaller coalition than the House of Representatives with less direct legislative power. The eight members of the Council – which still exists today – meet weekly, advise the Governor of Massachusetts, can act as chief executive in the absence of a Governor or Lieutenant Governor, and can approve certain judicial positions. Now twenty years later, Marian's campaign messaging carried a similar tone, emphasizing her "constant attendant and frequent participation at legislative hearings and investigations," her commitment to civil service reform, and her "long record of advocacy" in Boston.<sup>67</sup> Marian's campaign was covered repeatedly in *The Guardian*, a Boston-area newspaper with a primarily Black audience. *The Guardian* records her campaign and her beliefs as emblematic of "service and sacrifice not only in the fight for freedom of the colored race but also in the present world-wide struggle for democracy."<sup>68</sup> One article concludes with the following poignant call to

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<sup>66</sup> *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols*, September 1920. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 112.

<sup>67</sup> "Marian Nichols Candidate for Gov's Council," *The Guardian*, August 29, 1942, pg. 1. Via GenealogyBank.com.

<sup>68</sup> "Miss Nichols," *The Guardian*, September 5, 1942, pg. 4. Via GenealogyBank.com.

action: “Support for Miss Nichols is support for a fearless defender of human liberties as well as an active and often successful upholder of civic and social betterment.”<sup>69</sup>

Beyond her more formal efforts, Marian was consistently involved in civil service reform work. “Civil service reform” in the United States began at the end of the nineteenth century, with the passing of the Pendleton Act in 1883 after President Garfield’s assassination.<sup>70</sup> This act established a merit system, rather than a “spoils system” for those seeking government employment, thereby preventing people with political office from hiring their friends instead of those most qualified for the position. This act also led to the creation of a Civil Service Commission whose purpose was to offer merit exams and maintain the functioning of government offices. The next major legislative update to this reform bill did not occur until almost 100 years later, in 1978, when Congress passed the Civil Reform Act. The goal of the original bill was to unseat government corruption, allowing for a more fair and more equitable hiring of government workers to those who deserved the jobs, rather than those who had supported people currently in power. Marian first became affiliated with Civil Service reform around 1902, after her return from Newnham College. Marian had begun to develop reform-minded sentiments through conversations with Oswald Villard, a civil rights activist and anti-imperialist, and through her visits to settlement houses in London with friend Grace Hooker.<sup>71</sup> A letter from Ella Lyman Cabot suggests that her first role may have been as secretary

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<sup>69</sup> “Miss Nichols,” *The Guardian*, September 5, 1942, pg. 4. Via GenealogyBank.com.

<sup>70</sup> *An Act to regulate and improve the civil service of the United States*, January 16, 1883; Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789-1996; General Records of the United States Government, National Archives.

<sup>71</sup> *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols*, January 11, 1902. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 109. *Marian Clarke Nichols, Diary*, November 12, 1893. Emerson-Nichols Papers, volume 6.

for the Women's Auxiliary Massachusetts Civil Service Reform Association.<sup>72</sup> Cabot writes that this might be the "kind of work" Marian would enjoy and find successful.<sup>73</sup>

The creation of a merit system for government employment, while effective at reducing nepotism and favoritism, also provided a new path for exclusion. In 1940, for example, welfare workers were newly required to take the merit examination before being hired. Marian spoke out against this, arguing that this would favor "graduates of schools of social service" rather than others who would equally be qualified to provide aid to unemployed and elderly citizens in need of support.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, in positions where the exam was already required, women could be barred, as anti-discrimination laws did not yet exist. In an article titled, "Judge Begg Miss Nichols' Patience in Hearing on Test Barring Women," *The Daily Boston Globe* recounts Marian's fight for the cancellation of a Civil Service examination "from which women had been barred."<sup>75</sup>

Concerns over corruption and equal access to government positions formed the basis of much of Marian's civil service fights. In 1938, for example, Marian served as a volunteer investigator examining "alleged irregular appointments to the numerous staff of the State Unemployment Compensation Commission."<sup>76</sup> Similarly, in 1939, Marian led a petition to repeal a reorganization of the Massachusetts Civil Service Commission, speaking to the *Daily Boston Globe* as follows:

Under another administration the law could be used as a machine for a simplified spoils system. A dictator-director appointed by the order of a

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<sup>72</sup> Letter from Ella Lyman Cabot (Mrs. Richard Cabot) to Marian Clarke Nichols, November 27, [c. 1900-1909, exact date unknown]. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 133.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> "Welfare Workers," *Daily Boston Globe*, September 6, 1940, pg. 18. Via ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>75</sup> "Judge Begg Miss Nichols' Patience in Hearing on Test Barring Women," *Daily Boston Globe*, October 23, 1941, pg. 14. Via ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>76</sup> "To Decide Status of Miss Nichols: 'Volunteer' in Inquiry on Jobless Appointments," *Daily Boston Globe*, April 22, 1938, pg. 18. Via ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

new Governor could carry on in exaggerated form all the past abuses, since in the director's hands rests every affirmative act and decision in the administration of the Civil Service law.<sup>77</sup>

Marian's concern here extended beyond the current governor to how the law would apply to less equitable leaders in the future. Her investment in government was not only for the present, but for all those who would come after.

Marian's tireless fight continued year after year, in cases large and small. Indeed, it would be an impossible task to collect every petition, suit, and argument she made in nearly fifty years of reform efforts. In a letter to her mother, she reflected on the challenges of civil service reform work: "our fight at the annual meeting of the Boston City Federation was so exhausting that the leaders were physically prostrated."<sup>78</sup> Her work frequently kept her from leisure time, as in one example when she writes that "every day seems to bring plenty of work for me here," and therefore would not be joining the rest of the family at Cornish.<sup>79</sup> Despite the exhaustion this work must have brought for her, she was much appreciated for her efforts by friends and colleagues alike. In one letter from an education reformer and friend, Theodore Clark Smith writes:

Your letter of last month reveals an enormously active life. You are still fighting the old battles against a tireless enemy, freshly born every time you kill him. And you are the one also to do the necessary unpleasant thing, involving friction with personalities, in the civil service reform league.<sup>80</sup>

Smith goes on to compare Marian to Theodore Roosevelt, a particularly touching reference as Roosevelt had died just months before he sent this letter and memorials must have been

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<sup>77</sup> "10 File Petition for Referendum on Civil Service: Bid for the Repeal of State Reorganization Measure Lead by Miss Nichols," *Daily Boston Globe*, June 24, 1939, pg. 2. Via ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>78</sup> *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols*, May 10, 1916. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 111.

<sup>79</sup> *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols*, June 29, 1916. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 111.

<sup>80</sup> *Letter from Theodore Clark Smith to Marian Clarke Nichols*, March 13, 1919. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 135.

abundant. Other letters reflect a similar appreciation for Marian's dedication, as one from "Mrs. Frank Bryant" records "I wish to thank you for the happiest days of our lives" following a visit from the Federation of Women's Clubs to Marian's home.<sup>81</sup> At Marian's departure from the Women's Auxiliary Massachusetts Civil Service Reform Association, she was gifted a pearl necklace with great thanks as she was "thought of...as a fixture and thus seems to me almost a necessity."<sup>82</sup> As above, it's clear that Marian's time spent dedicated to civil service did not end with her exit from the secretarial position. Indeed, this may have allowed greater time to be dedicated to her voluntary work, public speaking, and frequent appearances at the Massachusetts State House.

Perhaps inspired by her family's investment in antiques and care for their old house on Beacon Hill, Marian also dedicated herself to the improvement and preservation of the Beacon Hill neighborhood. In 1920, the city of Boston planned to repave the brick streets of Beacon Hill, which Marian fought, as recorded in the *Boston Herald*: "Woman Leads in Shovel Protest."<sup>83</sup> This so-called "battle of the bricks" led to the organization of the Beacon Hill Association, which would fight for the preservation of the neighborhood. The first meeting was held by Marian at the family home on Mount Vernon Street in 1922, several months after the battle of the bricks.<sup>84</sup> Marian became secretary, attending meetings for the following seventeen years, and was remembered as one of the most formative members of the group. Certainly her pre-existing experience with local government and tendency to advocate loudly for her beliefs would have encouraged the newly-formed Beacon Hill Civic Association (BHA) to rely on her expertise and

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<sup>81</sup> *Letter from Mrs. Frank Bryant to Marian Clarke Nichols*, October 6, 1913. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 134.

<sup>82</sup> *Letter from Rosamond Allen to Ella Lyman Cabot*, May 20, 1909. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 133.

<sup>83</sup> "Woman Leads in Shovel Protest," *Boston Herald*, October 9, 1920. Via GenealogyBank. See also Moying Li-Marcus, *Beacon Hill: the Life and Times of a Neighborhood* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2019): 47.

<sup>84</sup> Gail Weesner, *The History of the Beacon Hill Civil Association* (unpublished, 2013): 18.

candor. In one mid-life portrait, Marian poses on Mount Vernon Street, near her family home, illustrating the street's well-maintained brickwork and building structures (fig.10). The group's efforts included establishing zoning laws, protecting historic structures, and implementing new safety measures. The BHA advocated for measurement of levels of air pollution in 1933 when the city had decided to cease smoke inspections.<sup>85</sup> In 1937, she led the BHA to successfully advocate for the re-establishment of a police station on Joy Street to protect residents of Beacon Hill.<sup>86</sup> Her other preservation-related efforts included restrictions on the height of buildings in Beacon Hill and to limit the types of buildings permitted in the neighborhood. The association, which is still in place today, was successful in most of its efforts, as Beacon Hill's streets remain in their historic condition.

Marian remained in the public eye well into the 1950s, but ultimately moved into hospice care at the Smith Convalescent Home in Watertown, Massachusetts.<sup>87</sup> In her final years, she spoke out against the early stages of the Korean War and continued to file petitions for various civil service reform issues as she saw fit.<sup>88</sup> She passed away at the Smith Home in 1963.

Marian's obituary in the *Boston Record American*, describes her as a "militant crusader for good government," whose "vigorous campaigns for reform movements made her well-known at the State House and on a few occasions led to litigations."<sup>89</sup> Both Rose and Margaret predeceased Marian (Rose passed in 1960, Margaret in 1959), so the processing of Marian's estate fell to her

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<sup>85</sup> "Reveals Beacon Hill Saturated in Smoke," *Daily Boston Globe*, January 20, 1933, pg. 12. Via ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>86</sup> "Marian Nichols Victim of Robber, Fought for Joy St Station to Protect Women," *Daily Boston Globe*, July 7, 1938, pg. 1. Via ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>87</sup> Marian's obituary, published in the *Boston Record American*, notes that she passed away at a Watertown nursing home, corroborated by a *Boston Globe* obituary, recording the name of the Smith Convalescent Home. See "Marian Nichols, Reform Leader, Dies," *Boston Record American*, May 3, 1963. Via GenealogyBank; and "Miss Nichols, Reform Leader, Clubwoman, 89" *Boston Globe*, May 2, 1963. Via ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>88</sup> "Petition asks Mrs. Dacey to Return Fees," *Boston Herald*, March 6, 1952, pg. 29. Via NewsBank. "Declares MacArthur was Wrong on 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel," *Daily Boston Globe*, May 10, 1951. Via ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>89</sup> "Marian Nichols, Reform Leader, Dies," *Boston Record American*, May 3, 1963. Via GenealogyBank.



nephews, Sydney and William Shurcliff. Marian's will left funds to each of her six nieces and nephews, her books and papers to Harvard and the State Library, and a bequest for the care of a neighbor, Mary Jenkins.<sup>90</sup> Marian was laid to rest as the last member of the family plot at Mount Auburn Cemetery (fig. 11).

Today, Marian's legacy of commitment to social improvement, good governance, and anti-discrimination still rings true. The issues she championed are still relevant today. For example, in 2020, then-president Donald Trump created an executive order reclassifying certain government positions to allow hiring outside of the merit system, in direct opposition to the Pendleton Act's efforts of 1883. In *Beacon Hill: The Life and Times of the Neighborhood*, Moying Li-Marcus quotes Marian's reflection on herself: "My chief interest has centered in fights at the State House, and my chief satisfaction has been to find right sometimes overcoming might."<sup>91</sup> After 90 years of life, Marian's legacy can serve as a call to action for us all to consider what local petitions we might take up, what ways we might care for our own neighborhoods, and what ways we might look to the beauty and challenges of our own lives with the same passionate dedication.

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<sup>90</sup> "Miss Marian Clark Nichols Estate Placed at \$185,000," *Boston Herald*, May 22, 1963, pg. 2. Via GenealogyBank.

<sup>91</sup> Li-Marcus, *Beacon Hill: The Life and Times of a Neighborhood*, 49.

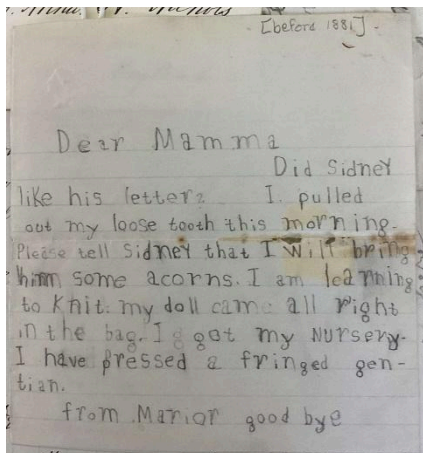
Appendix



**Figure 1: This portrait of Marian Clarke Nichols was taken in the later part of her life, but demonstrates her unwavering vivacity.** Bachrach Portrait Studio, *Portrait of Marian Clarke Nichols*, 1939. Nichols Family Photograph Collection, 1.55. Nichols House Museum.



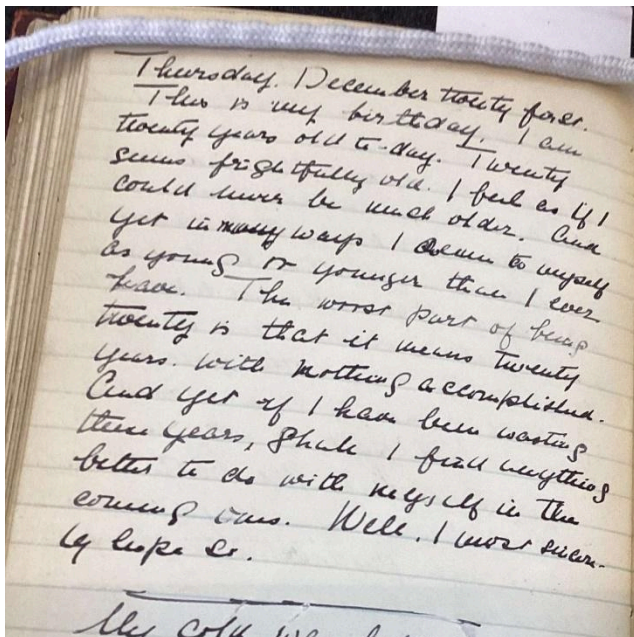
**Figure 2:** This atlas from 1884 shows the Nichols home in Roxbury, Massachusetts, where Marian grew up and lived until 1885. The family property was large – more extensive than most of those nearby, and set back from the road. *Atlas of the city of Boston: Roxbury* (G.W. Bromley & Co., 1884): plate G; and detail of *Atlas of the city of Boston: Roxbury* (G.W. Bromley & Co., 1884): plate G, indicating 130 Warren Street. Via Boston Public Library, Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center.



**Figure 3:** A letter from young Marian to her mother, likely sent when Marian was with the rest of the family at Rye Beach. *Letter from Marian Clarke Nichols to Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols*, [before 1881]. Papers of the Nichols-Shurtleff Family, folder 105.



**Figure 4:** Close in age, Marian and Rose maintained a relationship throughout their lives, though it was not without its ups and downs. *Rose and Marian Nichols*, ca. 1885. Nichols Family Photograph Collection, 1.127. Nichols House Museum.



**Figure 5:** In this entry, Marian writes about her anxieties: she is twenty years old and feels that she has “nothing accomplished.” We know now that she would go on to accomplish a



**great deal.** Marian Clarke Nichols, *Diary*, December 21, 1893. Emerson-Nichols Papers, volume 6.



**Figure 6:** Here, Marian poses with her classmates in the 1899 graduating class of Radcliffe College. Marian is seated, second from the right, in the second row from the front. *1899 Radcliffe Class Photograph*, 1899 Radcliffe Yearbook. Via Harvard Library Digital Collections.



**Figure 7:** Elise Pumpelly poses for a photograph for another artist in Capri, Italy, likely during the same trip during which time Elise and Marian first became close. *Elise Pumpelly*

in Capri, Italy, circa 1895. Nelson and Henry C. White research material, circa 1851-1961. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



**Figure 8: Grover Cleveland's campaign poster from 1888 shows an earlier edition of Marian's campaign slogan and a shared commitment to removing corruption from the government. Public office is a public trust [Campaign Poster], 1888. New York: Hitchcock's Steam Printing and Publishing House, 1888. Via Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.**

#### WOMAN TO RUN FOR HOUSE IN WARD 8

Miss Nichols Files Papers  
as an Independent

Miss Marian C. Nichols of 25 Mt. Vernon st., Boston, a graduate of Radcliffe College, has filed papers to run as an independent candidate for representative from Ward 8. Miss Nichols is well known through her activities in Civil Service and Legislative affairs in which various women's organizations have been especially interested.



MISS MARIAN C. NICHOLS

For several years she has been the executive secretary of the Women's Auxiliary of the Massachusetts Civil Service Reform Association, of which Mrs. J. Pecker Burr is now president. She has served as chairman of the Legislative Committee of the Boston League of Women Voters, The Boston City Federation and Massachusetts State Federation of Women's Clubs. One of her recent interests was the slow reorganization of various courts and for the appointment of women judges.

Miss Nichols is the daughter of Dr. Arthur H. and Mrs. Nichols, for many years residents of Boston City, and a niece of Mrs. Augustus Davis Gooden of Cambridge, N. H., widow of the distinguished sculptor.

**Figure 9: Marian's first campaign announcement highlights the startling fact that a woman would run for political office. It includes a photograph taken by the *Boston Globe* when she submitted her petition to run. "Woman to Run for House in Ward 8," *Boston Daily Globe*, September 23, 1920, pg. 11. Via ProQuest Historical Newspapers.**



**Figure 10: Marian Nichols was dedicated to protecting her Beacon Hill neighborhood, featured in this photograph of her in young adulthood. *Marian Nichols on Beacon Hill*, undated. Emerson-Nichols Papers, box 25.**



**Figure 11: Marian was buried in the family plot at Mount Auburn Cemetery in 1963, filling the last space on the shared headstone. *Photograph of the Nichols Family Headstone at Mount Auburn Cemetery*, 2024. Photograph by the author.**