



# Catharine Maria Sedgwick Society Newsletter Fall 2022

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It has been a privilege to serve the Catharine Maria Sedgwick Society as its president for four years. The CMSS and its symposia have been my most consistent scholarly home since I was a Ph.D. student in the mid-1990s. The pandemic has certainly presented challenges for the CMSS as it has for other author societies and scholarly organizations, including the need to reschedule and relocate our symposium. Before the symposium, Ashley Reed organized two panels for the American Literature Association at the Palmer House in Chicago in May, one on “Inventing the Novel in the Nineteenth Century” and the other on “Woman’s Care/Women’s Work in the Nineteenth Century.” to take place in Chicago in May 2022.

Our in-person symposium at the Red Lion Inn at Stockbridge in June was smaller than in previous symposia but nevertheless intellectually rewarding and rich in community. Panels of conference papers generated robust conversation, and we enjoyed celebrating with keynote speaker Gretchen Murphy the publication of her 2021 book *New England Women Writers, Secularity, and the Federalist Politics of Church and State*. Arthur and Ginger Schwartz yet again graciously allowed us to enjoy the interior and grounds of the Sedgwick family home built by Catharine Sedgwick’s father. With case rates on the rise but no local mask mandate, we asked participants to consider masking. The compliance with this request was beautiful to see—the pictures inside this newsletter of maskless smiles were taken outdoors or during the indoor meals where removing masks was a necessity. I have heard many reports of covid spread at academic conferences in fall 2021 and spring 2022, but as far as I am aware, we kept each other safe. Thanks to Jenifer Elmore for all of her hard work in making the symposium a success.

Although I am not standing for election for a second term as president, I am excited by the future of Sedgwick studies. The emergence of what is likely a portrait of Sedgwick by a British painter, reported in an article from a British antiques trade magazine reprinted in this newsletter, makes clear how much more there is to learn about her European tour. And we all look forward to seeing the fruits of the labors of Pat Kalayjian, Deborah Gussman, and Lucinda Damon-Bach as editors of the *Catharine Maria Sedgwick Online Letters*.

Melissa J. Homestead  
University of Nebraska, Lincoln

## Portrait Could Be of U.S. Author Sedgwick

By Alex Capon

Originally published in *Antiques Trade Gazette: The Art Market Weekly* (Aug 29, 2022)  
<https://www.antiquetrade gazette.com/print-edition/2022/september/2557/auction-reports/portrait-could-be-of-us-author-sedgwick/>

A small portrait of a woman that was pitched at £100-150 drew a bidding battle that carried it over 10 times estimate.

This was seemingly on account of its rare and historical subject. The back of the picture offered at **Aldridges of Bath (20% buyer's premium)** on July 26 had an old and somewhat faint inscription: *Portrait of Miss Catharine Sedgwick*.

Catharine Sedgwick (1789-1867) was an American novelist who is regarded by scholars as an important figure in the emergence of a distinctly American literary tradition.

Painted by an unknown hand, the 10½ x 9¼in oil on canvas was catalogued simply as 'English school, 19th century' and given a two-line entry. It came to auction as part of a deceased estate from a house in a small town near Bath, and the family were unaware where or how their late father may have acquired it.

It had a few knocks as well as some areas of paint loss and craquelure.

On the day, the bidding opened at £300 and the lot drew competition between a Home Counties client, a New York bidder and a buyer from the West

Country who eventually won out at £1650.

### American classics

Sedgwick was born in Stockbridge, a town in Massachusetts surrounded by the Berkshire Mountains that provided the setting of her 'breakthrough' novel, *A New England Tale* from 1822.

Her 1835 novel *The Linwoods*, which deals with themes relating to the American character and national identity in the years of early republic, is arguably her most recognised work.

ATG contacted Prof Melissa Homestead of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the current president of the Catharine Maria Sedgwick Society, in order to gauge whether the current picture might be a significant discovery. She felt that the painting did "plausibly" look like Sedgwick and pointed out that the author had made a trip to England in 1839 which was documented in her book *Letter from Abroad to Kindred at Home* (1841).

While images of Sedgwick are well known from the engravings that adorned her books, original portraits are extremely rare. Most of the engravings, including those made by the celebrated

US artist Asher Brown Durand (1796-1886), are based on a portrait of her by Charles Cromwell Ingham (c.1796-1863), an Irish portrait painter who emigrated to the US in c.1816. The original remains with the Sedgwick Family Society and Trust and hangs in the family house in Stockbridge where the writer's descendants still live.

However, a later painting of Sedgwick by Ingham thought to date from c.1836

more closely resembles the painting in Bath. The current location of that Ingham painting is untraced but it is known through a photograph that was reproduced in *Remembering* by Nathalie Sedgwick Colby (published in 1938).

With regards to the portrait at Aldridges, if a stronger connection can be established to the US novelist the price at the auction would surely prove to be a notable bargain.



Portrait thought to be of Catharine Sedgwick catalogued as 'English school, 19<sup>th</sup> century' - £1650 at Aldridges of Bath.





### **Paperback Edition of *Redwood***

The new paperback edition of *Redwood: A Tale* (edited by Jenifer Elmore, Edinburgh University Press, 2021) is now available for pre-order for \$29.95 and will ship in February 2023. The novel is also available in hard cover and for immediate reading as an ePub or PDF. All versions may be previewed and purchased at <https://edinburghuniversitypress.com/book-catharine-sedgwick-redwood-a-tale.html>

### **Exhibit Inspired by Elizabeth “Mumbet” Freeman at MAAM**

The MassArt Art Museum (MAAM) in Boston has an exhibit by Portuguese artist, Joana Vasconcelos, which honors Elizabeth "Mumbet" Freeman. The exhibit, "Valkyrie Mumbet" is free and open to the public through 2022.

<https://maam.massart.edu/exhibition/joana-vasconcelos>

Curator's video which introduces the exhibit:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orHrLNX\\_80](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orHrLNX_80)

### **Elizabeth “Mumbett” Freeman Statue**

A statue of Elizabeth "Mumbet" Freeman was unveiled in Sheffield, MA on August 21st. The artist of the statue, Brian Hanlon, also sculpted Susan B. Anthony's statue in Adams.



A rendering of the statue before it was bronzed.

## Finding Home with Elizabeth “Mumbet” Freeman in Stockbridge

By Jordan Von Cannon

In June 2022, I traveled to Stockbridge, MA for the second time after my very first visit (and CMS Symposium) in 2007. After several wonderful Sedgwick-filled days listening to interesting presentations and a visit to the Sedgwick Family home and Sedgwick Pie, my thoughts turned to Elizabeth Freeman’s Stockbridge. What did her home look like after she left the Sedgwick family’s employ? Given that plans were already well underway for [erecting a statue of Freeman](#) in nearby Sheffield, MA, I was intrigued by the lack of physical markers of her presence and life in Stockbridge. Where exactly did she live? How far was her home from the center of town, the church, the cemetery, and the Red Lion Inn?

In 2008, the African American Heritage Trail produced a [“Mum Bett’s Trail”](#) pamphlet guide that highlights several significant sites in Stockbridge and Sheffield related to Freeman and her descendants. A related 2010 book, *One Minute a Free Woman: Elizabeth Freeman and the Struggle for Freedom*, by Emilie Piper and David Levinson sponsored by the same Housatonic Heritage organization, details the authors’ efforts to pinpoint the site of the home Freeman purchased as a free woman. After scouring property and tax records, they concluded that Freeman’s home most likely stood somewhere along Cherry Hill Rd. as it approaches the intersection with Castle Hill Rd, which to my surprise was a short seven-minute walk from the AirBnb I was staying in with my family. We set out on a pilgrimage to walk to the proposed site of Freeman’s former home.



The corner of Cherry Hill Rd. and Castle Street contains a grass field spotted with a few trees and some gentle slopes. The nearest home sits about 300 feet down Cherry Hill Rd and seems to have recently been moved to that location. There are no historical site or heritage markers that note it was the site of Elizabeth Freeman’s home.

In their book, Piper and Levinson discuss walking what is now the private property that extends from the corner (pictured left)

up to and into the tree line as it continues up the hill running along Castle Street.

“Elizabeth Freeman became a property owner on September 29, 1803. She bought five acres and twenty-three rods for seventy-five dollars ‘on the road leading westerly to Clarks mill’ from a Black man named Thomas Peters. [...] The road was Cherry Hill Road” (143). Despite their searches over two days, they were unable to locate any

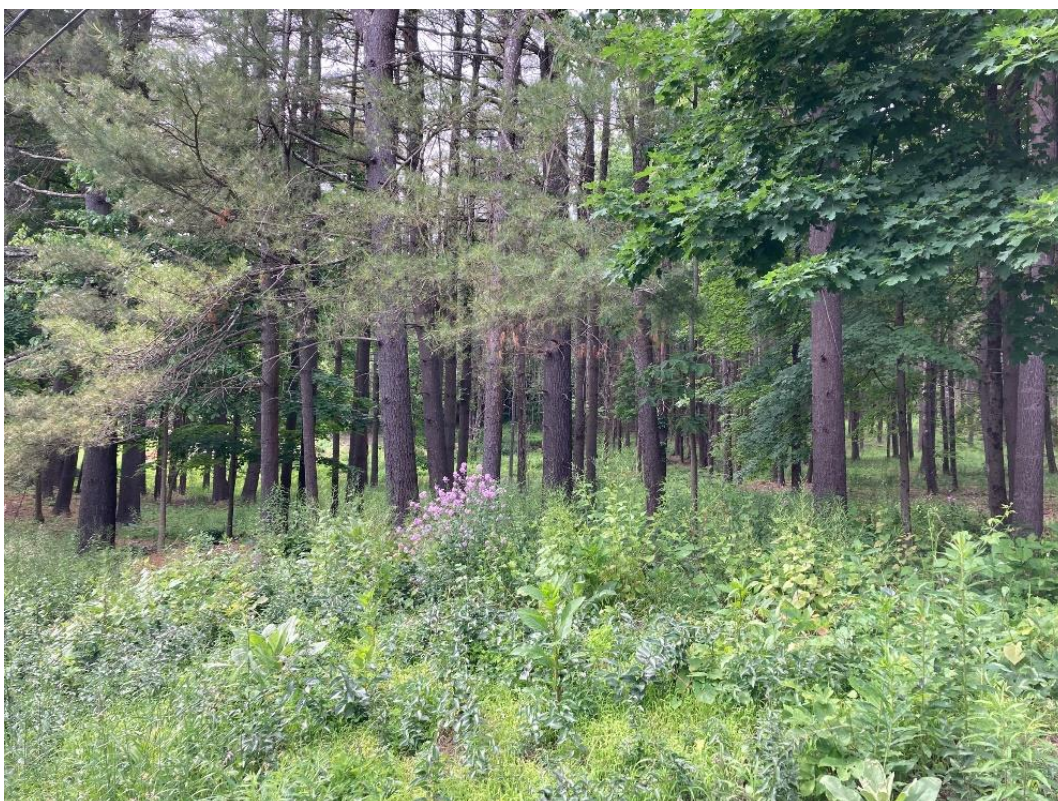
features of Freeman's home either the ruins of a foundation, a stone fireplace, or evidence of a forgotten cellar. They observe: "It could be there are no remains to be found, for any one of a number of reasons: the houses may not have had cellars or stone foundations; the road may now run over the house site; or the remains of the house may have been carted off or left to rot and the stones taken for walls or for foundations of houses elsewhere in the neighborhood (147).

From our walk, we observed one partial stone wall, overgrown and set a reasonable distance back from Cherry Hill Rd. There is no evidence to suggest these are the remains of Freeman's house, and given that Piper and Levinson make no mention of it in their book, perhaps it was created after Freeman's residence; however, it was probably not built too recently. The age of the stacked stones holding up the earth behind it seems to reach far earlier than the 2010s. There is a chance, this wall was there in 2009 when Piper and Levinson visited the site, but it was rendered invisible by the grass and overgrown plants.



Even now, Cherry Hill Rd. feels peaceful and decidedly separate from the traffic and visitors that flock to Stockbridge in the summer. Despite the fierce ticks out and about, we enjoyed the glorious June weather, as we looked for signs of Freeman's past in a seemingly empty field and hoped for the day when we might walk this same road and stop at a historical marker honoring the woman who made Cherry Hill home.







## Sedgwick Society Conference Photos 2022



Deborah Gussman and Pat Kalayjian



Lucinda Damon-Bach and Deborah Gussman



Sedgwick Society Executive Committee: Jenifer Elmore, Melissa Homestead, Jordan Von Cannon, Jill Kirsten Anderson



Lucinda Damon-Bach and Mary Kelley



## **Membership**

Please join or renew your Sedgwick Society membership at:

<https://cmsedgwickociety.org/membership/>

## **Newsletter Items**

Please send items for the newsletter to the VP of Communications: Cynthia Smith (casmith1800@gmail).

- Short essays about Sedgwick and her contemporaries
- Notes and discoveries from the archives
- CFPs
- Descriptions of recent conference presentations on Sedgwick
- Experience teaching Sedgwick
- Just Read One Sedgwick Story Challenge.

## **Have You Seen Us Online?**

Visit <https://cmsedgwickociety.org/> for the most up to date information on Sedgwick Society happenings, upcoming symposia and conferences, and other events. Our website also includes an extensive timeline and bibliography for everything Sedgwick, as well as pedagogy resources for teaching Sedgwick in the classroom.

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