

# WILSON MUSEUM BULLETIN

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## Diaries Reveal Influential Educators of Castine's Sea Captains and Youth

Picture a small-featured, slender, Castine lady dressed in mid-1800s linsey-woolsey morning-gown answering her door with brown curls bobbing. This pink-cheeked Grecian character, in the heat of the subsequent argument with a Bible salesman, said, "I am beyond the Bible."<sup>1</sup> True, she was a bit of a pagan and decidedly a free thinker, but she could be stirred to deep meditation. Naturally, she was committed to her family, friends, and country but also to her creator. Indeed she had a thorough knowledge of the Bible and "asserted to the salesman that Moses was a smarter man than Jesus, though not as holy, and cited as proof, his laws and successful leadership of men."<sup>2</sup> Although throughout her lifetime she attended services in all Castine churches she was not what one today would call religious. She voraciously read volumes on science, history, philosophy, astronomy, education and literature; she gardened; she traveled; she wrote books of poetry as well as local history; she played whist; she purchased a bottle of whiskey now and then, and she tried to make beer one day but the demijohn burst.

Abigail Almira Hawes was not domestic but was found one evening around 9 p.m. leaning over a large griddle on the kitchen stove, a bit exasperated before the hot fire. Upon questioning by the late visitor she said: "Well, you see I started to make hot gingerbread for supper, and when I mixed my batter, I found I was out of molasses, so I turned it into muffins, but I was so busy reading Montaigne's Essays that I forgot to heat my oven, and so I have decided to fry the mixture for griddle cakes."<sup>3</sup> Abigail Almira was not only a make-do Mainer, but she was also frugal to the core. She never wasted a match but kept the half-burnt ends in a saucer on the mantle. With tongs she lighted these sticks again from live coals in the stove fire. As a teacher, a landlady, a shrewd investor and by engaging in lifetime economies, she and her sister



April 22, 1890, diary entry: *Have my photograph taken at 10 ½ A.M. Mrs. Noyes goes with me . . . In ev'n'g Mr. Tuttle pays \$10*

supported themselves throughout Castine's "golden age" and beyond the Civil War well into Victorian times. The money she saved she left to the town in various funds.





*The Mullet Block, was located on the corner of Main and Perkins Streets. Wheeler states that during the British occupation (1814 -1815) the officers of the 29<sup>th</sup> Regiment of His Britannic Majesty held their mess here. This building was torn down between March 17 and 18, 1894, and replaced with what is now the Pentagöet Inn.*

Abigail Almira and her sister Sarah Hawes were two remarkable, distinguished women of original ideas and literary knowledge who lived in Castine during the 1800s. They were the daughters of Captain Richard and Abigail C. Warren Hawes and lived during an age which could be called "golden" for all the prosperity, commercial enterprise, and focus on the education of youth which then occupied Castine's citizenry. In the early 1800s, the town thrived with grist mills, a tannery, custom house and county courts, seven warehouses, a rope walk, and sail lofts. Shipbuilding and fishing businesses allowed prominent families to prosper. Later, after the end of the Civil War, westward expansion with the building of railroads and steamships all contributed to the waning of Castine's wealth. The Hawes sisters survived through it all.

Born in 1808 (Abigail Almira) and 1810 (Sarah), the Hawes sisters were teachers for about fifty years mostly in Maine but also in other states during their early travels. They both had keen intelligence, a sense of adventure, and curiosity about the workings of the world. They were most likely educated at home by their parents and their community. Their father Richard Hawes was

primarily a trader, a shop keeper, but also had "pursuits in the area of money lending, land and timber speculation, and livestock. He served as Deputy Sheriff . . . was an apothecary, shoemaker, and mariner"<sup>4</sup> . . . and served in numerous town official positions such "as sealer of leather, inspector of lime, hog reeve (sic), pound keeper (sic), culler of fish, fireward, tythingman, and surveyor of highways"<sup>5</sup> . . . as Coroner for the County . . . and "was one of six constables in 1834."<sup>6</sup> Richard Hawes probably provided his daughters with an introduction to mathematics, science, navigation, and astronomy, subjects common to men who had an association with the sea. Also, vocabulary, reading and writing were of great importance in their home where Abigail and Sarah read extensively the Bible, classical Greek, philosophical literature, and studied the natural world. Throughout their later travels they attended lectures, seminars, and church services of many denominations whenever possible.

Dr. George A. Wheeler, a physician who moved with his family to Castine in 1870, rented rooms from the Hawes sisters. Dr. Wheeler became especially close to Abigail Almira who was a romantic, a lover of poetry, art, and history.

Charming and graceful, Abigail's warm personality was delightful to all who remembered both sisters. In contrast, Sarah was more practical, preferring math, logic, and chess. Sarah was a rather large-framed, stout woman with a gruff voice. Of rougher manner, she was called "Man Hawes," being the ugly duckling of the two.

In writing his *History of Castine*, Dr. Wheeler often referred to Abigail Almira Hawes' notebooks as a basis for his work. As a prolific writer and budding historian in 1821, Abigail Almira interviewed various citizens regarding the period when the British were in Castine for the War of 1812. This sixty-page notebook was written when she was about twelve or thirteen years old. She also copied favorite poems and prose and wrote her own original poetry in several other notebooks. At this time, the Hawes family lived in Hawes Hall on the corner of Main and Perkins Streets, currently the location of the Pentagöet Inn. British officers took their mess hall in this building. In 1815, they gave Mrs. Hawes a beautiful Wedgwood platter (now in the Museum's collection) in appreciation for her hospitality.

Later, Abigail filled a forty-page notebook with material gathered on the siege of Penobscot (Castine) in 1779. According to Mark E. Honey, this may have been a part of a series of notebooks encompassing Castine's history from 1770 to 1836.<sup>7</sup> All of the known diaries from 1862 to 1890 as well as several of the Hawes notebooks from 1854 and 1856 are kept in the archives at the Wilson Museum. From a private collection we fortunately were loaned her 1821 "Napoleon" notebook for our research. Transcribing these documents is an ongoing process.

As life-long learners and remarkable women, the Hawes sisters "received the role of teacher by weight of proven ability and intelligence."<sup>8</sup> They continued a tradition of private education in Castine by teaching/tutoring in their home such subjects as math, science, astronomy, navigation, history, Greek, Spanish, and French, as well as English literature, spelling and penmanship. A good many 19<sup>th</sup> century Castine citizens were their students either as children or as young men preparing for college or life at sea as ship captains.

Dr. Wheeler writes that Sarah H. Hawes taught school in District Number Four or the Northwest District from 1830 to 1840.<sup>9</sup> After the death of their father in 1843, the Hawes sisters traveled to



*Wedgwood platter presented to Madame Richard Hawes by the H.B.M. 29<sup>th</sup> Regiment when they left Castine in 1815.*

southern states. In the fall of 1845, Abigail visited New York City for the first time with Mrs. Abel Rogers. Richard Hawes had left both the home property on Court Street and the store on Main Street to his two daughters. They sold the store in 1846 to Roland Bridgham and moved to Providence, Rhode Island on October 20<sup>th</sup> and taught school until 1847. In 1848 the sisters' names disappear from the Castine tax rolls not to reappear until 1859. They moved to New Jersey where Abigail taught school near Schooley's Mountain as later documented in her 1878-1879 diary. Nevertheless, Wheeler writes that Sarah Hawes taught school in District Number One or the Peninsula District from 1840 to 1850.<sup>10</sup> From 1851 to 1853 the sisters spent time in Maryland and Virginia, having visited Washington, D.C.'s public monuments and buildings on their way south.<sup>11</sup> Wheeler states "as young women they both taught in Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia and even as far afield as Chicago."<sup>12</sup> From 1854 to 1855 Sarah taught school in Pingree Grove, Illinois.

The next period of their teaching as mentioned in Abigail's diaries extends from 1862 to 1890 in Castine. The Hawes sisters taught school in their home on Court Street to about six children at a time, mostly boys, through terms lasting six weeks each. Abigail also visited the Normal School on "Examination Days" in the Abbott School building on the Common, no doubt to see how other students performed and to keep abreast of public school requirements. Dr. Wheeler credits the Hawes sisters with teaching generation after generation of Castine students. Also, "half of the sea captains here learned

their science of navigation from either one or the other of these remarkable women."<sup>13</sup>

Abigail rarely expressed her emotions in print. She hardly ever used exclamation points. Her diary entries are straightforward. Her deepest feelings expressed in print are during Sarah's illness and death during the fall of 1879. We must remember that these sisters had a special relationship having lived together all their lives. They were partners in life. As a team, Sarah was the investor, the math whiz, but Abigail kept track of correspondence with bankers, lawyers, and friends. Understandably the death of one partner would bring much grief and distress to the other. Abigail's writing at this period was not intended to be shared or published. "What I write is between me and my God."<sup>14</sup> However, it is thought that she wrote Sarah's obituary, found as a newspaper clipping in the back pocket of the 1882 diary.

Miss Sarah Hawes, who died October 27, at Castine, Me., aged sixty-nine has closed a life of extraordinary and useful activity. Gifted by nature with a clear, strong mind, a love of study, and early inspired with a passion for teaching, she was diligent in preparation, adding to her careful acquaintance with English branches a good degree of proficiency in Greek and Latin, French and German. With great fondness for mathematics, she mastered the four methods of navigation and the uses of the quadrant, and was the instructor of several young sea captains. For forty-five years she taught in her native place, in Providence, New York city, Maryland, Virginia, the Carolinas, Tennessee, Kentucky and Illinois. With a high and exacting standard for herself, she demanded much of her scholars, and found it hard to tolerate mediocrity. But with all her intellectual power and attainments, she was a person of rare modesty, deeply sensible of the magnitude of things beyond her grasp; and though shrinking from social contact, she was ever ready with womanly sympathy and help for the sick and sorrowing. All her labors as a teacher were shared by the much-loved sister who remains at an advanced age to mourn her loss.



*The Hawes' home still stands on the corner of Pleasant & Court Streets.*

It was during this mourning period that Abigail Almira wrote her last "Will and Testament" revealing a great deal about her own character. Through careful planning, cautious spending, and diligent management, the Hawes sisters built on the estate left to them by their father. Although this inheritance served them well enough in the early years, it was not enough to last their lifetimes. They had to work as teachers and later to rent out rooms in their home for income, a practice often employed by women living alone in large Castine houses.

From reading her will written during a time of intense inner struggle, we see a woman of generosity, compassion, consideration, and deep commitment to her community, church of choice, youth, and the "dissemination of Scientific knowledge"<sup>15</sup> and learning, as well as a woman who chose to provide for an impressive

family monument in the Hawes cemetery lot. In short, Abigail Almira left money in trust to unmarried women or widows, to the Sabbath School of the Unitarian Church, and to deserving indigent young men of Castine. Personal and special household items were left to various friends, and even a share of investment to Dr. Wheeler's 1896 edition of his *History*, among other stipulations. Dr. Wheeler was executor of the estate which totaled \$7,478.59.

Abigail died on November 1, 1890. In her final entries dated October 26 and 28 we read of weather reports, visitors, domestic chores, business conducted, commentary on the state of her health, and finally the anniversary of her sister's death:

October 26, 1890 Fine Sick with a very bad influenza—sneezing and blowing all day long Emerson girls in and Mrs. Noyes—

October 28, 1890 Not fine—wind and cold Grace washes—clothes dry Mr. Howard saws & splits 2 ft. wood—puts in a part of it—I pay him Fifty cts by Order on Mr. Shepherd—Think I have taken more cold—difficult breathing—Eleven years this night since Sister passed out of this existence—Whence, Where, Whither?



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www.wilsonmuseum.org

Three days later Abigail Almira Hawes passed away ending the unique contribution of two maiden sisters to this small 19<sup>th</sup> century maritime village. Through their teaching, cooperation, interdependence, and relationship within a community, these modest, skilled, and gracious individuals exemplified key characteristics of Maine women who survive: perseverance, determination, thrift, courage, and intelligence. By reading the diaries written by Abigail Almira Hawes, we recognize the standards she modeled, the values she represented, the faith and spirit she exemplified. She and her sister were early educators who helped to make Castine the unique place it is today. One feels surely that the Misses Hawes would have been decided treasures to meet in person.



1. George A. Wheeler, M.D., *History of Castine The Battle Line of Four Nations*. Bangor: Burr and Robinson, 1923, p. 431
2. Ibid
3. Ibid, p. 430
4. Ibid, p. 429
5. Mark E. Honey, B.A., A.A., Lois Moore Cyr, Editor, *Abigail & Sarah Hawes of Castine Navigators & Educators*. Private Printing, 1996, p. 32
6. Ibid
7. Ibid, p. 47
8. Ibid, p. 49
9. Wheeler, p. 126
10. Ibid
11. Honey, p. 51
12. Wheeler, p. 430
13. Ibid
14. Ibid, p. 431
15. Honey, p. 278

OTHER RESOURCE:

Ellenore W. Doudiet, *Majabigwaduce: Castine · Penobscot · Brooksville*, Castine Scientific Society 1978