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# "She had ceased to offer her stories for publication": Louise M. Thurston and the Unfinished Charley Roberts Series

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**"She had ceased to offer her stories for publication":  
Louise M. Thurston and the Unfinished Charley Roberts Series  
By Deidre A. Johnson**

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Introductory note: In contrast with professional, prolific juvenile authors such as Oliver Optic (William Taylor Adams) or Sophie May (Rebecca Sophia Clarke), some writers produced only one series for children – and often published little beyond that. Their limited output meant that biographical dictionaries frequently contain minimal, if any, information about their lives, yet their contributions helped series fiction flourish in the last third of the nineteenth century. Their histories provide insight into another type of writer's experiences as well as greater awareness of the ways in which authors' lives shaped their fiction.

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One of the unsolved mysteries of series fiction is that of Louise M. Thurston, a promising author who wrote part of a series about siblings for Lee & Shepard -- then, apparently, just stopped writing. Thurston's brief career covers the four years between 1868-1872 and intersects with two significant trends in 19th-century children's publishing, the growth of Sunday-school libraries and the practice of issuing children's books in series. Her career illustrates in microcosm the markets for beginning writers, and its early termination raises questions about some of the problems they might have encountered. Entwined with Louise's history is that of her own sibling, Clara W. T. Fry, who also wrote for children -- even more briefly than did Louise -- and whose fiction, like Louise's, displays autobiographical elements (albeit of a different nature than her sister's). Adding to the mystery surrounding Louise Thurston is the paucity of information about her later years, leaving her biography, like her series, incomplete.

Vital records and family genealogies make it possible to reconstruct the outlines of Thurston's childhood. The picture that emerges is one of financial stability but emotional upheaval. Louisa (later Louise) Millicent Thurston was born in Lancaster, Massachusetts, on September 19, 1842. Her father, Wilder Stoddard Thurston, had been "a wholesale dry goods merchant in Boston," who returned to his home town of Lancaster in 1840 and ran "a country

store" there for seventeen years.<sup>1</sup> He had married her mother, Rosanna Melicent Pierce (known as Ann), on October 27, 1836; the couple had their first child, Clara Wilder, on June 19, 1838, and a second child, Russell Gates, on May 29, 1840. Russell died April 17, 1841, seventeen months before Louisa's birth; her younger sister, Ellen Elizabeth (Nellie), was born on March 31, 1845. Less than two years later, when Louisa was four, her mother died of consumption.<sup>2</sup> Wilder Thurston remarried shortly after Louisa's sixth birthday -- but thirteen months later, Louisa also lost her new stepmother, Caroline M. Laughton Thurston, to consumption.<sup>3</sup> On September 29, 1852, Louisa acquired yet another stepmother when Wilder married for a third time; his spouse, Susan Dodge, was a 38-year-old woman who is recorded as having been with the family during the June 1850 census.<sup>4</sup> (The records do not explain her presence nor is there any apparent family connection between Susan and Caroline or the Thurstons.)

Census records establish that the Thurstons were secure financially. In 1850, Wilder claimed real estate valued at \$6,000. The family may have had a large residence, for the household consisted not only of Wilder, his three daughters, and Susan Dodge, but also five others, presumably boarders.<sup>5</sup> In 1857, the Thurstons moved to Lynn, Massachusetts, where Wilder "continued his mercantile life until 1872."<sup>6</sup> The 1860 census confirms the family's

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1 Brown Thurston, *Thurston Genealogies*, 2nd ed. (Portland, ME: Privately printed, 1892): 238-39, Google Books. This work is the source for most of the genealogical information about the Thurston family, supplemented with information from Richard L. Pierce's online genealogies, "Thomas Pierce of Charlestown, Mass.," RootsWeb's WorldConnect Project, July 15, 2010, <http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/>; Louise's full name appears in Massachusetts Town and Vital Records, 1620-1888, Ancestry.com. Abijah P. Marvin's *History of the Town of Lancaster* adds that Wilder's shop was in a "brick store on the corner opposite the Evangelical church" (Lancaster: "Published by the Town," 1879): 603, Google Books.

2 Thurston, 238-39. Rosanna is listed as "Ann M." in birth and death records in Henry S. Nourse, *The Birth, Marriage and Death Register, Church Records & Epitaphs of Lancaster, Massachusetts 1643 to 1850* (Lancaster: N.p., 1890): 260, 267, Google Books. Rosanna died December 14, 1846; her cause of death is from Nourse, 267. Her name also appears as Ann M. on her gravestone, which bears the inscription, "In memory of / Mrs. / Ann M. Thurston / wife of / Wilder S. Thurston / who died / Dec. 14, 1846 / aged 29 years / 'Blessed are the meek.' / Those who knew her need no / sounding phrase to tell her virtues, / To those who knew her not, / No sounding phrase can tell them" (Nourse, 441).

Ellen is called Nellie in the dedication in [Louise M. Thurston], *Charley and Eva Roberts' Home in the West* (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1870); she appears as Nelly (Leonard) in the 1870 census (1870 United States Federal Census, Hyde Park, Cook, Illinois; Roll M593\_212; Page: 195B; Image: 395; Ancestry.com).

3 Wilder Thurston married Caroline M. Laughton on September 26, 1848; she died November 2, 1849. Thurston, *Thurston Genealogies*, 238; Nourse, 239.

4 Thurston, *Thurston Genealogies*, 238; 1850 United States Federal Census, Lancaster, Worcester, Massachusetts; Roll M432\_343; Page: 172A; Image: 344, Ancestry.com.

5 1850 United States Federal Census. The five others were Benjamin Morse, a 54-year-old manufacturer; Benjamin F. Tidd, a 60-year-old farmer; Nancy Tidd, his wife; Timothy Hager, a 19-year-old laborer; and 75-year-old Isabella Ingelsbee.

6 Thurston, *Thurston Genealogies*, 238.

increasing prosperity: Wilder's real estate was valued at \$18,000 and his personal property at \$8,000. The household still included boarders -- three young salesmen, ages 17 to 26 -- and the family had acquired a servant. Clara was teaching at a public school, and Ellen's entry recorded that she had "attended school within the year." No additional information about 17-year-old "Louisa M" was included.<sup>7</sup>

Soon after 1860, the household began to change. In October 1862, Clara Thurston married Thomas Ellwood Fry; she later had a son and moved, first to Brooklyn, then, in 1865, to Chicago. Nellie Thurston accompanied Clara and her husband to Chicago and worked as a secretary and clerk at Root & Cady's music store before marrying Myron Leonard in August 1868.<sup>8</sup> Louisa followed Clara's career choice: she attended the State Normal School in Salem and graduated in July 1862, contributing a patriotic song to the commencement exercises.<sup>9</sup> By 1863, she was employed as a teacher. That year, Louisa and a colleague presented essays "on the question, 'Why does Study so commonly terminate with the School Period, and what can be done to prevent this?'" at the semi-annual meeting of the Essex County Teachers' Association.<sup>10</sup>

While Louisa was working in the school district, a situation that would lead to her first publication was developing in the Unitarian church. In the early 19th century, churches began establishing Sunday-school libraries, often using borrowing privileges to reward pupils for good behavior and faithful attendance.<sup>11</sup> (For many children, such arrangements offered almost the only option for access to a selection of free reading material outside the home.) So popular was this concept that by 1870 the census showed more than 33,500 Sunday-school libraries with

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7 1860 United States Federal Census, Lynn Ward 4, Essex, Massachusetts; Roll M653\_495; Page: 698; Image: 201, Ancestry.com.

8 Clara and Thomas married in Lynn on October 30. *Thurston Genealogies* states the couple "lived for three years in Brooklyn, N. Y., and then removed to Chicago" and that their son Thomas Wilder Fry was born in New York on September 23, 1863 (239). The 1870 and 1880 census records for the Frys, however, give his birthplace as Massachusetts. That may be the census takers' errors, since both parents were from Massachusetts. (1870 United States Federal Census, Chicago Ward 19, Cook, Illinois; Roll M593\_211; Page: 255A; Image: 83; 1880 United States Federal Census, Chicago, Cook, Illinois; Roll 199; Page: 362B; Enumeration District: 187; Image: 0209, both Ancestry.com). Thomas's middle name is from his entry in Pierce [ID: I07020].

According to *Thurston Genealogies*, Myron and Ellen were married in Lynn and lived in Indianapolis from 1872-76, before returning to Chicago (239).

9 "State Normal School in Salem," *Salem Register*, July 24, 1862: 1, GenealogyBank; the article includes the lyrics (which begin "Sing for the praise of Our Country,/ Echo her glorious name").

10 "Essex County Teachers' Association," *The Massachusetts Teacher* 16 (June 1863): 117, Google Books.

11 Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988): 48.

combined collections of over 8,300,000 volumes.<sup>12</sup> To reach this market (which lacked professional staff for book selection), religious and secular publishers advertised a variety of titles as "Sunday school books" or packaged multi-volume sets for Sunday-school libraries<sup>13</sup>-- with perhaps predictable results.

In 1865, concerned about the quality and content of books in Unitarian Sunday-school libraries, the Secretary of the Unitarian Association recommended that a committee be formed to "consider the subject of our Sunday-school libraries" and "to encourage the preparation, and to facilitate the selection, of better books."<sup>14</sup> For about a year, the newly formed Ladies' Commission on Sunday-school Books read and evaluated more than 1200 books -- ultimately finding barely 200 suitable for inclusion.<sup>15</sup> One of the effects of their discovery -- the one most relevant to Louise Thurston -- was the Unitarian Sunday-School Society's decision to take an active role in ensuring that more books suitable for Unitarian Sunday-schools (which differed doctrinally from most denominations) were published. Consequently, in 1867, in an attempt to generate "a distinctive denominational literature for the young," the Society offered premiums "for the best three manuscripts of books calculated for Unitarian Sunday-school libraries and adapted to children under ten years of age."<sup>16</sup>

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12 Frank Keller Walter, "A Poor but Respectable Relation -- The Sunday School Library," *Library Quarterly* 12 (1942): 736.

13 See, for example, the American Sunday-School Union's advertisement, "Select Libraries," in the *American Literary Gazette and Publishers' Circular* 6 (March 15, 1866), which lists four different "Sunday School and Family Library" collections: "No. 1. Consists of 100 select volumes, from 72 to 252 pages"; "No. 2. Contains 100 select volumes, from 72 to 270 pages"; "No. 3. . . . contains 100 select volumes, from 72 to 287 pages"; "No. 4. 100 volumes . . . from 80 to 270 pages." Each retailed for \$16; no titles are mentioned in the ad (289). A Lee & Shepard advertisement, "Excellent Books for Sunday School Libraries," provides one example of a secular publisher trying to reach the same market (in *Minutes and Register of the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Providence Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Held at Bristol, R. I.* [Boston: James P. Magee, 1866]: 47).

14 "Ladies' Commission on Sunday-School Books," *The Monthly Journal of the American Unitarian Association* 7 (1866): 123.

15 "Meetings of the Executive Committee," *The Monthly Journal of the American Unitarian Association* 7 (1866): 568.

16 "Publishers' [sic] Note," in Louise M. Thurston, *Forrest Mills: A Peep at Child-Life from Within* (Boston: Sunday-School Society, 1868): n.p.

Another effect of the Ladies' Commission's work was the publication of a catalogue of recommended titles for Sunday School libraries, which received regular supplements ("The Ladies' Commission on Sunday-School Books," *Unitarian Year Book 1902* [Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1902]: 112). The catalogue actually contained three lists: first, books "recommend[ed] to Unitarian parents and superintendents of Sunday schools" -- "without qualification"; second, books "we could not spare," but with "some objectionable phrase[s]" or doctrines; third, books considered "valuable and profitable, though not so fully adapted to the purpose of a Sunday-school library." The commission went on to explain that in the work of many authors who were not Unitarians "words and phrases occur, often Biblical phrases, that have been quoted always in a certain doctrinal sense. . . . They are puzzling to children who have not heard them so used"; moreover, "such adaptations of Scriptural phrases are

Louisa was one of twenty-nine aspiring authors who responded to the Sunday-school Society's call for manuscripts. Unbeknownst to her, Clara was another who submitted a story.<sup>17</sup> When the results were announced, Louisa's *Forrest Mills: A Peep at Child-Life from Within* received third prize (a \$25 premium), and second place went to *Little Spendid's Vacation* "By Mrs. C. W. T. Fry, Chicago, Ill." -- her sister Clara. The Unitarian Sunday-school Society published the winning titles in 1868, with a publisher's note providing background about the competition (but with no indication that two of the winners were related). About this time, Louisa may have decided on an unofficial name change, for her first name appears as Louise on the title page and in the publisher's note, and she remains Louise in all subsequent records.

Both sisters drew on their own experiences when writing their stories -- but with diametrically different results. The title page of *Forrest Mills: A Peep at Child-Life from Within* bears the epigraph "'O, wad some power the giftie gie us, to see ourselves as' *children* 'see us!'" and the focalizing characters for the majority of the narrative are ten-year-old Bianca and, to a lesser extent, her seven-year-old sister Rosebud. The girls' lives are colored by the loss of their mother, whose place in the household is occupied by their strict Aunt Rowe. Aunt Rowe provides physical -- but not emotional -- sustenance for the children. She lacks "a mother's tenderness, sympathy, and thorough understanding of [their] little hearts," and the girls often respond to her directives with defiance or deceit.<sup>18</sup> When their mother's younger sister Kittie replaces Aunt Rowe as caretaker for a time, the girls' lives and characters improve under her more sympathetic tutelage, though they still struggle to overcome character flaws that have developed over the years. *Forrest Mills* introduced two plot elements that resonated with Louise and reappeared in most of her series fiction: a pair of motherless siblings, the elder of whom provides protection and emotional support for a slightly undisciplined younger child; and a young woman who serves as surrogate mother by supplying love along with behavioral and moral guidance.<sup>19</sup>

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considered incorrect, -- perhaps even blasphemous, -- by Unitarians." Examples of problematic doctrines included "plac[ing a character's] misdeeds upon Adam's fall or a personal devil" and "[t]he appeal to Christ as to God" (rather than "show[ing] . . . a belief in one God only") ("The Catalogue of the Ladies' Commission on Sunday-School Books," *The Unitarian Review and Religious Magazine* 1 [1874]: 468-69).

17 Thurston, *Thurston Genealogies*, 239.

18 Thurston, *Forrest Mills*, 18.

19 It's perhaps worth noting that the age difference between Bianca and Rosebud corresponds to that of Louise and Ellen; *Forrest Mills* concludes with the discovery that the girls' father has married Kittie, and the girls' ages are about the same as those of Louise and Ellen when their father married Susan Dodge. One of the minor conflicts in

In contrast, *Little Splendid's Vacation* is an idealized account of the summer activities of a little boy -- a thinly disguised version of Clara's three-year-old son, Thomas (the "Little Splendid" of the title) -- seen through the eyes of his dotting mother. Although Clara never explicitly states the child's name ("but I could not think of telling *that*, of course," the narrator exclaims coyly at one point),<sup>20</sup> family members would have recognized the similarities -- and themselves -- easily. The title character is a "very dear little boy living in a great city by the water, who is too small to go to school" (v); the household consists of "papa and mamma and Aunt Mellie" and a servant -- essentially, the Frys' home (including Nellie Thurston). Splendid's "Uncle Ivan," "Aunt Pleasant," thirteen-year-old cousin "Enrico," and "a wee baby-cousin" live down the street along with "Aunt Marion," "Uncle Souther," and "Aunt Regna" (12-13) -- as did young Thomas's Uncle John Fry, his wife, their thirteen-year-old son Henry, and their infant son, along with three of Thomas's other aunts and uncles: Mary Fry, William Southwick, and Sarah Fry Southwick.<sup>21</sup> Louise was not forgotten, for Splendid's "Aunt Lulu Faraway" stays with his "grandpa and grandma . . . a long way off" (13). Most of the story focuses on the daily delights of Little Splendid, but a few scenes also suggest a close relationship between Clara and Louise: Splendid's mother keeps "a little picture of Aunt Lulu fastened into her work-basket, so as to make it seem as if she lived with them," and Lulu sends Splendid and his mother frequent letters (which "were just as good as her stories") (115-16).

The sisters differed in their responses to being published. Although Clara placed higher than Louise in the competition, she had either less interest or less success in following up her initial publication. Only one other item by her, a one-page fantasy titled "The King and the Princess" from the March 1869 *Independent*, has been identified (though it is possible that she published other material in local, less accessible papers). In contrast, Louise soon set to work on

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the story occurs over Rosebud's name -- she prefers to be called Buddie, dropping the "Rose" element, just as Louise's mother preferred Ann rather than Rosanna.

One of the unsolved mysteries about *Forrest Mills* is the dedication: "To My Sister's Children, The six little boys and girls who are nearest and dearest." At the time the book was written, Clara had one child and Nelly had none.

<sup>20</sup> Mrs. C[lara]. W. T[hurston]. Fry, *Little Splendid's Vacation* (Boston: Sunday School Society, 1868): 22 Google Books. Future citations from this work will be parenthetical in the text.

<sup>21</sup> Information about Clara Fry's in-laws is from John Fry's entry in the United States Federal Census, Chicago Ward 20, Cook, Illinois; Roll M593\_211; Page: 394B; Image: 362, Ancestry.com, and from entries for the Fry family in Thomas Ellwood Fry, "Eddy Family," Public Member Trees, <http://trees.ancestry.com/tree/13919074/person/18177308?ssrc=>, Ancestry.com, accessed 24 July 2010, and in *Vital Records of Bolton, Massachusetts, to the end of the year 1849* (Worcester, MA: Franklin P. Rice, 1910): 29-30, Google Books.

another book. Once again, events in the publishing world affected her writing career.

About the time the Unitarian Ladies Commission was embarking on its reading project, a recently established Boston publisher was expanding its line of children's books. Founded in 1862, the firm of Lee & Shepard had experienced almost immediate success with series by two pseudonymous authors, Oliver Optic (William Taylor Adams) and Sophie May (Rebecca Sophia Clarke).<sup>22</sup> The pair -- who ultimately ranked among the century's most popular children's writers -- came to Lee & Shepard from different backgrounds. Optic had published several children's books which languished until Lee & Shepard bought the plates from a defunct publisher and successfully repackaged them as a series. May had written magazine stories but never a book; her first effort -- the six volumes of the Little Prudy series, each of which Lee & Shepard purchased outright for \$50 -- earned immediate acclaim and sold over 100,000 copies within a decade.<sup>23</sup> Such popularity and profitability encouraged the firm to devote more resources to acquiring children's books, in part by accepting manuscripts from new authors. Perhaps because of its initial success packaging the Optics and Mays as six-volume sets, Lee & Shepard expected other writers to produce a similar number of volumes and regularly advertised new titles as part of a series "to be completed in six volumes." While this method made it convenient to bundle the books in boxed sets and sell more titles simultaneously, it also meant that authors had to produce six volumes' worth of material -- and to do so fairly rapidly, so that the books could be marketed and sold as a set. One result of this practice was that within a decade, Lee & Shepard's list had swelled to the point where *American Literary Gazette* credited them with "publish[ing] a larger number of juvenile books than any other house in the country."<sup>24</sup> Another less admirable result was that several of the newer authors caught up in Lee & Shepard's push for series found themselves struggling to develop stories against tight deadlines and, after completing their series, never published with Lee & Shepard again. Thurston is one of the most

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<sup>22</sup> Raymond Kilgour, *Lee & Shepard, Publishers for the People* (N.p.: Shoe String Press, 1965): 25. Kilgour notes that some sources give an 1861 date for the establishment of Lee & Shepard, but feels 1862 is correct (286n2). "Lee & Shepard, Boston," a brief history of the firm, is one of the sources with an 1861 date (*American Literary Gazette and Publishers' Circular* 17 [July 15, 1871] : 150).

<sup>23</sup> Kilgour, 28-35, 40-45. According to "Lee & Shepard, Boston," May's three series -- consisting at the time of Little Prudy, Dotty Dimple, and the first three volumes of Little Prudy's Flyaway -- had sold 300,000 copies, so it is reasonable to assume that at least one-third of those sales were for the series that had been available for the longest period (150).

<sup>24</sup> "Lee & Shepard, Boston," 150.



extreme cases.<sup>25</sup>

At some point in 1868 or 1869, Thurston must have communicated with Lee & Shepard about a manuscript for what would become the first volume of the Charley Roberts series, *How Charley Roberts Became a Man*. A partial record of her half of the correspondence regarding the series' next two volumes survives in the Lee & Shepard Papers and chronicles a series of problems with almost every stage of the process. The earliest letter, dated July 29, 1869, acknowledges receipt of the proofs of the second volume, *How Eva Roberts Gained Her Education*, then explains that Thurston is behind schedule on the manuscript of book three because "the Lynn High School was deficient in its corps of teachers" and she was asked to fill in for a time.<sup>26</sup> The temporary position lasted longer than expected -- the entire term; consequently, although the next volume was "underway," she doubted it would be finished before mid-September. The letter ends on a placatory note: "Meanwhile it has not lain idle in my brain . . . and I hope the [resulting] enlargement and improvement . . . may compensate for its going to press a little later than we could have wished."

Communication or mailing problems dominate the next few letters. At the end of August, Louise worriedly wrote to inquire why she had not yet received proofs for the third volume -- or even acknowledgement that her manuscript pages had reached Lee & Shepard. The story was almost completed -- she had "been sending . . . manuscript twice a week for a fortnight" and was "today mail[ing] copy that reaches to pages 203 of this volume, embracing ten chapters," the penultimate installment. She assumed the material already sent was "now going to press" and expected to mail the last pages in about a week, "hop[ing] that will be early enough for you to bring out the series for this year's holidays."<sup>27</sup> A gap in the correspondence leaves the fate of the manuscript a mystery: it did not appear in 1869, and eight months later Thurston was again

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25 Other authors who published their first series during this time period and then left Lee & Shepard and/or book publishing included Mary E. Bradley, Kate Neely, Harriet Nowell (May Mannering), and Mrs. S. B. C. Samuels. Kilgour includes Thurston in his discussion of "professional writers" and claims she "had written for the Massachusetts Sunday-School Society in the early 1860s" (93), but provides no citation or reference to prior publications, and none of the Thurston material in the Lee & Shepard records at the American Antiquarian Society, one of Kilgour's key sources, indicates Thurston had a publishing history beyond *Forrest Mills*. Kilgour may have confused Thurston's Unitarian Sunday-School Society publication (*Forrest Mills*) with the Massachusetts Sunday-School Society, especially since Lee & Shepard published the initial volumes of the Charley Roberts series as "by the author of 'Forrest Mills' -- a prize story."

26 Lee & Shepard Papers, Mss Boxes L, Box 11, Folder 1, Louise M. Thurston to Lee & Shepard, July 29, 1869, American Antiquarian Society. All quoted material in the paragraph is from this source.

27 Lee & Shepard Papers, Mss Boxes L, Box 11, Folder 1, Louise M. Thurston to Lee & Shepard, Aug. 28, 1869, American Antiquarian Society.

working on it. In the interim, Lee & Shepard had published the series' first two volumes, and in November 1869, Louise was in the small town of Brush's Mills (now Brushton), New York, expecting copies of her books. When none arrived, she wrote on November 3, 1869, to resolve the issue. Her tone was courteous, but somewhat formal -- more so than that of many of Lee & Shepard's other authors -- and (despite the *pro forma* apologies) perhaps a bit reproachful, suggesting the state of the publisher-author relationship. The letter opens by apologizing for not informing the publisher that the United States & Canada Express delivered in the area, adding "I supposed that you knew a great deal more about expresses than I do, and it would be a work of supererogation to say anything about it."<sup>28</sup> After observing that the postal service appeared to have lost the package (a common occurrence in that area), she continued by remarking that she or the Express would have been responsible had it been sent as instructed, adding "I will look yet for an express of copies, as I stated, and make the matter right with you as you may deem fair." (Lee & Shepard followed her instructions, and on November 8th she acknowledged receipt of the package, noting that the other still had not arrived.)<sup>29</sup>

The correspondence resumes in April 18, 1870, and deals primarily with the third volume, then titled "Home in the West." Louise was again sending a manuscript, with an understandable request that the publisher acknowledge its arrival.<sup>30</sup> Even at this stage, it appears that there was trouble with the story, for a subsequent letter, of which only the second page survives, ends with the statement that "it will make no difference with me" if the publisher preferred mailing the "proofs all at once, when complete. But I am particular to see them, before publication."<sup>31</sup> On July 8, 1870, Louise informed Lee & Shepard that she had received "the last proofs" of the third volume and was sending the final chapters, remarking, "I don't wonder you did not understand my plan of alteration. . . . I had forgotten the arrangement of the chapters & my plan was impracticable."<sup>32</sup> She explained that she had "cut" some material -- "enough to make room for the eight-page[s] . . . of the chapter you returned" -- and wondered whether she

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28 Lee & Shepard Papers, Mss Boxes L, Box 11, Folder 1, Louise M. Thurston to Lee & Shepard, Nov. 3, 1869 American Antiquarian Society. The next quote is also from this source.

29 Lee & Shepard Papers, Mss Boxes L, Box 11, Folder 1, Louise M. Thurston to Lee & Shepard, Nov. 8, 1869, American Antiquarian Society.

30 Lee & Shepard Papers, Mss Boxes L, Box 11, Folder 1, Louise M. Thurston to Lee & Shepard, April 18, 1870, American Antiquarian Society.

31 Lee & Shepard Papers, Mss Boxes L, Box 11, Folder 1, Louise M. Thurston to Lee & Shepard, undated [ca May 1870], American Antiquarian Society.

32 Lee & Shepard Papers, Mss Boxes L, Box 11, Folder 1, Louise M. Thurston to Lee & Shepard, July 8, 1870, American Antiquarian Society. The next quote is also from this source.

should review the final chapter after the revision had been inserted. That letter concludes with Thurston hoping the changes would be satisfactory.

During this period, Louise was living in Chicago and working for Root & Cady, the music store and publishing firm that had previously employed her sister Nellie. Since "Home in the West" was also set in Chicago, she may have relocated there to gather information for the story, or, like her siblings and characters, she may have been considering a fresh start "out west." If the latter, she soon decided in favor of the East, and, at some point after completing the manuscript, Thurston returned to Massachusetts. On July 8, 1870, she informed Lee & Shepard that she was moving from her current address on July 20, but was "not sure" what her new address would be.<sup>33</sup> (She is actually included with her parents in Lynn in the 1870 census, though she was clearly in Chicago at the time.)<sup>34</sup> The book was published in fall 1870 as *Charley and Eva Roberts' Home in the West*. Louise dedicated it to "Sister Nellie, whose dear companionship made 'home' for my childhood, and whose holier wifehood sweetens and brightens one 'home in the west'." <sup>35</sup> Although much of the tale could have been set in almost any city, her time in Chicago probably accounts for the inclusion of a "large music store," Slade & Murray, in the plot,<sup>36</sup> and perhaps for several references to specific streets and locations in the city.

By the time *Charley and Eva Roberts' Home in the West* appeared, the first two volumes of the series had already received favorable notice. *Arthur's Home Magazine* stated, "We know of few books . . . we can more heartily recommend than these." <sup>37</sup> The reviewer went on to commend the tone and overall content ("Strong, earnest, and healthy . . . inculcating lessons of

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33 Ibid.

34 1870 United States Federal Census, Lynn Ward 3, Essex, Massachusetts; Roll M593\_610; Page: 415A; Image: 98, Ancestry.com. Presumably, Louise had left the city before the October 1871 fire, which, according to *Thurston Genealogies* "completely stripped" the Frys "of all their household possessions" (239) and destroyed the building in which Root & Cady's store was housed (Dena J.Epstein, "Music Publishing in Chicago before 1871: Chapter VI, the End of the Firm, 1868-1871," *Notes*, Second Series 3, no. 1 [1945]: 85, JStor). Thomas Fry, incidentally, was an insurance agent -- fire insurance.

35 *Home in the West* and *Forrest Mills* were the only two volumes dedicated to family members. Two of the other volumes may have been dedicated to students Thurston knew. The dedication in *How Eva Roberts Gained Her Education* (1870) reads "To Annie H. Senter This Little Sketch of City Life is affectionately dedicated by the author"; while *The Children of Amity Court* (1873) is "Affectionately Dedicated to Andrew Chambre Campbell" In 1870, Annie Senter was the 16-year-old daughter of the principal of Dean Academy, and 13-year-old Andrew C. Campbell was one of the students there. *How Charley Roberts Became a Man* (1870) is "Dedicated, with hopeful affection, to Arthur H. Jewett"; while no Arthur H. Jewett appears in the 1870 census, he does appear in 1880 as a 25-year-old farmer in Franklin, Massachusetts, suggesting that he, too, may have been a student Thurston knew.

36 [Louise M. Thurston], *Charley and Eva Roberts' Home in the West* (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1870): 63. Google Books.

37 "New Publications," *Arthur's Home Magazine* 35 (Jan. 1870): 66, Google Books.

the highest practical morality"), adding that the stories were "never dull or uninteresting." Others also found the books' moral tone and interest level worthy of notice. "The moral purpose of the story is clothed in a pleasant garb of fictitious dialogue and adventure calculated to please the class for whom it is written," wrote a reviewer for *Western Rural* after receiving *How Charley Roberts Became a Man*, while *The National Temperance Advocate* felt *How Eva Roberts Gained Her Education* "ought to be put into the hands of every girl."<sup>38</sup> The trend continued with volume three. Critics who placed a premium on ethical lessons especially praised its content: *Herald of Health*, for example, called it "a clever story, showing how all may get on in life with honest endeavor, and honest willingness to work either the brain or the hands . . . [and] gives a testimony in favor of courteous manners, refinement of speech, and personal elegance."<sup>39</sup> While most journals contained brief reviews, *Literary World* devoted two full columns to the series. The reviewer categorized the books as "healthy, cheerful stories, not specially brilliant in conception or execution, but superior to the average 'juveniles'" because of their "air of realism," interesting a reader "in persons and things so nearly like real persons and things, that the pleasant lessons constitute a valuable preparation for the world."<sup>40</sup> Thus, despite delays, the series appeared to have a solid start.

The surviving correspondence between Thurston and Lee & Shepard ends with the July 8, 1870, letter, leaving only Lee & Shepard's ads and the fourth volume's publication date as clues to the remainder of the story. When the first two volumes appeared in 1869, the frontmatter advertised three titles, headed with the notice "to be completed in six volumes"; it gave no indication that volume three -- shown as *Home in the West* -- was not actually in print. Below the list of titles was the note "(Others in preparation)."<sup>41</sup> When *Charley and Eva Roberts' Home in the West* was published, it contained a series notice identical to that of its predecessors except that the title had been corrected: it still predicted a six-volume series and still lacked information about the fourth title.<sup>42</sup> Although most of Lee & Shepard's children's series received at least one

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<sup>38</sup> "New Publications," *Western Rural*, Nov. 11, 1869: 360; "New Books," *National Temperance Advocate* 4 (Dec. 1869): 190, both American Antiquarian Society Historical Periodicals.

<sup>39</sup> "Notices of New Publications," *Herald of Health and Journal of Physical Culture* 16 (Nov. 1870): 235, Google Books.

<sup>40</sup> "The Charley Roberts Series," *Literary World* 1 (Dec. 1870): 98-99, Google Books.

<sup>41</sup> [Louise M. Thurston], *How Charley Roberts Became a Man* (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1869), Google Books. The edition on Google Books was the publisher's gift to Harvard University almost immediately after publication (the bookplate shows a date of September 26, 1870) and thus contains the original advertisement.

<sup>42</sup> Thurston, *Home in the West*. Again, the edition on Google Books was the publisher's gift to Harvard

new book annually until they reached six volumes, such was not the case for Thurston's Charley Roberts series. Over two years elapsed before the fourth volume, *Children of Amity Court*, appeared in late 1872 -- an indication, perhaps, that Thurston was finding it difficult to complete another story or was impervious to the publisher's pleas for speed.

As at least one reviewer noted, *Amity Court* has only a tangential connection with its predecessors.<sup>43</sup> The previous volume concludes with Eva's marriage and departure for New York "where [she and her husband] intended to establish a happy home of their own, and where we hope, some time, to look in upon them, in years to come" (285). Rather than continuing Eva's story, however, *Amity Court* introduces new protagonists (another pair of siblings); they are the children of Eva's nurse from the opening chapters of the first volume. Although Eva is mentioned early in *Amity Court*, she does not actually appear until the penultimate chapter -- and even then, the book does not depict Eva's home "in years to come": instead, it presents her at the train station, newly arrived from Chicago, suggesting this volume may not have been the story Thurston originally intended to write. Unlike previous volumes, the book concludes with a note of finality and no hint about the contents of future stories -- which may have been Thurston's way of signaling she was finished with the series. If so, the publisher's ads gave no indication of it: other than adding *Amity Court* to the list of titles, the series notice remained unchanged, still optimistically announcing additional volumes as "in preparation." For over a decade, advertisements for the Charley Roberts series continued to include the line "to be completed in six volumes." It was not until about 1886 that Lee & Shepard finally began listing the books as a four-volume series, under a new title, "The Charley and Eva Stories." The publisher may even have lost touch with Thurston by then, for, inexplicably, her name appears in ads as "Miss L. C. Thurston."<sup>44</sup>

Unless Thurston adopted an undiscovered pseudonym, her writing career terminated in

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University almost immediately after publication (the bookplate shows a date of October 22, 1869) and thus contains the original advertisement. Future references to this work will be parenthetical in the text.

43 "New Publications." Review of *Children of Amity Court*. *Independent Statesman* [Concord, NH], Dec. 19, 1872: 91, America's Historical Newspapers.

44 Although the change appears to be a publisher error, it persisted in later advertisements. Circa 1897, when volumes one and three were moved into the twenty-five volume Pilgrim Series for Boys and volumes two and four into the companion Mayflower Series for Girls, their author was listed as "Miss Louise C. Thurston."

Part of the problem with Thurston's name may have occurred because it did not appear on the first three books' title pages. The first two volumes were published as by "the author of 'Forrest Mills' -- a prize story"; the third, as "by the author of 'How Charley Roberts Became a Man,' 'How Eva Roberts Gained Her Education,' &c." Only *Children of Amity Court* showed Louise M. Thurston as author, although the series was usually advertised as "Louise M. Thurston's Charley Roberts Series."

1872. During the period she was working on the Charley Roberts series, she also had at least three periodical publications. "Lame Betsy's Story" appeared in *The Chicago Magazine of Fashion, Music and Home Reading* in August 1871. Her only two works for adults (a short story, "Why He Did Not Fail," and a poem, "Womanhood") were published in the Universalist periodical *The Ladies' Repository* in March and April 1872; the timing suggests that, while working on volume four, Louise had also been sampling other markets.<sup>45</sup> Her reasons for abandoning the series -- and a writing career -- remain a mystery, though several passages from *Charley and Eva Roberts' Home in the West* offer one perspective. A character in that book, Noll, who bears some similarity to Thurston (one of three sisters, the others of whom have married) has previously enjoyed writing for her own and her family's entertainment, and

Fresh from school, she had tried writing for magazines. Putnam's, Harper's and the Atlantic had all experienced the honor of declining her stories. Yet she had not written for the mere vanity of it. . . . She had looked forward to doing much good, to setting forth honest truth in its own comely guise, and painting, in word-pictures, all virtues in their native loveliness. Leading magazines did not care for stray manuscript of an unknown writer. Many times her efforts were discarded when the very next number of the magazine contained a far inferior story . . . Such rebuffs discouraged her. She hated unfairness . . . [s]o she had ceased to offer her stories for publication.(150)

Financial necessity compels Noll to try selling her stories again, and, in Chicago, she is able to find a story-paper publisher who will take her work. She begins writing steadily to help support the household, but once the others are again able to shoulder more of the financial load, "Noll wrote less and less each week. . . . Writing newspaper stories had become a very irksome pastime" (210-11). She does try to work on a book, but the concluding paragraphs of the novel describe its fate:

Noll's book, on which she had expended considerable time and enthusiasm, was never published. Several firms declined undertaking it; and then Noll became suddenly disgusted with her own little story, and hid it away, with a sad, bitter, sore feeling, and never tried again to send it out into the world. The stern teacher, Necessity, that often calls out our best powers, had no hold upon Noll. Mortified that her story-book did not seem worth publishing -- for one publisher had read a few scattering pages of it -- Noll's

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<sup>45</sup> Louise M. Thurston, "Why He Did Not Fail," *The Ladies Repository* 47 (1872): 260-64; Louise M. Thurston, "Womanhood," *The Ladies Repository* 47 (1872): 371-72, both Google Books.

eager determination sank away like a flame among dying embers . . . (284-85)

Although Thurston certainly had more success than the fictional Noll, Noll's lack of enthusiasm once she is required to write regularly is perhaps telling, as are the comments about necessity as a source of motivation or inspiration. There is no record of financial arrangements between Thurston and Lee & Shepard, but the publisher's treatment of Sophie May -- purchasing manuscripts outright in the early stages of their relationship for a nominal sum -- probably reflects its arrangement with Thurston.<sup>46</sup> If so, Thurston may have decided that the time investment was not commensurate with the rewards, especially since her early correspondence suggests she had difficulty working on writing projects during the school term. In the years after 1872, Thurston may have invested more effort in advancing her teaching career. She joined the Massachusetts Teachers' Association in 1874<sup>47</sup> -- the same year the salaries of female assistants in the Boston high schools were doubled, to \$1000 per annum.<sup>48</sup> The following year, Thurston enrolled in the Massachusetts Agricultural College as a member of the "Select Class." Such students usually took instruction "in any of the studies for which they are qualified, during a single term or longer, as they please,"<sup>49</sup> and Louise may have been trying to improve her teaching credentials. By 1877, she was able to obtain an assistant's position at Boston's West Roxbury High School.<sup>50</sup> During much of this period, she was also apparently able to economize by living at home;<sup>51</sup> it was not until 1878, when she was earning a higher salary, that city directories suggest she began boarding elsewhere. The 1878 directory places her in a house in Forest Hills;<sup>52</sup> the 1880 census and Boston City Directory establish that she was then living in a boarding house at 293 Columbus Avenue.<sup>53</sup>

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46 Kilgour, 41.

47 "Alphabetical List of the Members of the Massachusetts Teachers' Association 1845-1880," *Abstract of the Proceedings of the Massachusetts Teachers' Association 1845-1880* (Boston: Massachusetts Teachers' Association, 1881): 195, Google Books.

48 *Annual Report of the School Committee of the City of Boston, 1874* (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, 1874): 32, Google Books.

49 Thurston's name appears as a member of the Select Class of 1876 in *Eleventh Annual Report of the Massachusetts Agricultural College* (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1874): 92-93; the listing also covers 1875. The quote providing additional information about the Special Class is from "New Publications" [review of Seventh Annual Report of the Trustees of the Massachusetts Agricultural College], *New England Farmer*: 166, Google Books.

50 *The Boston Directory* 73 (1877): 869, Ancestry.com.

51 *The Lynn Directory* 15 (1876): 267, Ancestry.com.

52 *The Boston Directory* 74 (1878): 868, Ancestry.com.

53 *The Boston Directory* 76 (1880): 953; 1880 United States Federal Census Boston, Suffolk, Massachusetts; Roll 555; Family History Film: 1254555; Page: 61D; Enumeration District: 660; Image: 0616, both Ancestry.com.

Little information is available about Thurston after 1882. That was the last year she worked as an assistant at West Roxbury High School, and it was the year she returned to her parents' home in Lynn. A short item in the *Boston Herald* states she was appointed a "special assistant" at Bowdoin in 1885.<sup>54</sup> After Wilder Thurston's death in 1883,<sup>55</sup> Louise and her stepmother Susan continued to share the family home until about 1889, when Louise moved to Winchester.<sup>56</sup> Susan Thurston remained in Lynn until at least the mid-1890s, after which point she may have moved to Illinois, leaving Louise the last member of the immediate family still in Massachusetts.<sup>57</sup> For about a decade, Louise occupied a house on Cambridge Street in Winchester. She is last listed in the Winchester City Directory for 1899<sup>58</sup> -- and, thereafter, disappears from all records until her death in 1917 in Lexington, where she had apparently been living in the Home of Aged People. She is buried in the family plot in Middle Cemetery, Lancaster, Massachusetts, her grave identified by a crumbling marker.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *The Boston Business Directory for 1882* (Boston: W. A. Greenough & Co., 1882): 559, Ancestry.com. The 1883 listing for the school shows a new assistant. "Boston School Committee," *Boston Herald*, May 27, 1885: 8, GenealogyBank.

<sup>55</sup> *Thurston Genealogies*, 238.

<sup>56</sup> *Lynn, Massachusetts Directory 1890* (Lynn: Murdock & Co., 1890): 0002, Ancestry.com

<sup>57</sup> Susan D. Thurston last appears in the Lynn city directory in 1894 (*The Lynn Directory*, 29 [1894]: 606). She was at Nellie's home in Illinois when she died in May 1899 ("Deaths" [Thurston obituary] *Chicago Daily Tribune* May 17, 1899: 5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers). Louise's sister Nellie Leonard (Ellen T Thurston) died April 11, 1903; Clara Fry, November 24, 1909 (Illinois Statewide Death Index, Pre-1916, via Stephen P. Morse, Accessing the Illinois pre-1916 Death Index in One Step, 2004, accessed December 26, 2009, <http://stevemorse.org/vital/illdeath.php>).

<sup>58</sup> Ellen Knight, Winchester Archival Center, email 19 July 2010. I am indebted to Ms. Knight for her kindness in checking the newspaper files and Winchester City Directories for information about Louise Thurston.

<sup>59</sup> "Thurston" [obituary], *Boston Herald*, Feb. 17, 1917: 13, GenealogyBank; "Louise M. Thurston," Find A Grave, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/68407142/louise-m-thurston>.