

Site Introduction

Work on the DearHenryJames.org web site began by accident. As part of the project to edit for publication *The Complete Letters of Henry James*, the co-general editors, Greg W. Zacharias and Pierre A. Walker, found that Henry James frequently responded to specific information and gossip when answering letters, especially personal ones. In order to understand who or what he was talking about, and in some instances in order to be able to read the names he mentioned, we found we had to consult the letters he was answering. In order to have convenient repeated access to the content of those letters to him that weren't published, we began transcribing them, with no intention of publishing them, at least for the time being. But as we transcribed more and more letters, it began to make sense to complete the process by transcribing and proofreading *all* the available unpublished letters to James for the same years that the first printed volumes of *The Complete Letters of Henry James* will cover (currently up to 1874). Thus was born the idea of presenting those transcriptions, edited carefully for accuracy, on this web site.

Given the large size and scope of *The Complete Letters of Henry James*, there have never been plans to include in that edition letters *to* the novelist. Many of the letters to James by important historical figures have already been issued in book form, for instance those by William James, William Dean Howells, John Hay, Henry Adams, and Edith Wharton. Although there is no question that it would be convenient to students, scholars, and readers interested in Henry James to have all of *those* letters collected in one edition, it does not strike us as anywhere near as urgent as making available the over seven thousand surviving letters by James that have never been published in any form

and accurate, reliable versions of the roughly three thousand letters by James which, by the middle of 2005, have been published (though too often sloppily edited).

DearHenryJames.org is, therefore, limited to presenting early, unpublished letters to James. (Unpublished in books of collected correspondence—letters to James by Minnie Temple, already included, and Ivan Turgenev, which will be added later, have been published in scholarly articles and many of the letters included in DearHenryJames.org have been quoted at length in biographical and critical books and articles.) By using DearHenryJames.org, the previously published letters to James, and the volumes and internet edition installments of *The Complete Letters of Henry James*, as these appear, readers will be able to piece together the entire extant correspondence, both to and from James. For this purpose, the informational notes to the individual letters in *The Complete Letters of Henry James* and DearHenryJames.org always provide cross-referencing citations whenever the letter writer refers to another known, extant letter.

One of the things that makes DearHenryJames.org possible is that while James was a prolific letter writer, he also destroyed the great majority of the letters he received. Slightly over 10,400 letters *by* James have survived of the anywhere from twelve to forty thousand total letters James may have written during his life (estimates vary considerably). While James must have received roughly as many letters as he wrote, a far, far smaller number of the letters he received survives. A complete inventory has not, as yet, been established, but there are almost a thousand letters to James in the James family papers at Harvard's Houghton Library. The largest group of these, the 429 letters by William James, has been published in the three-volume edition of the James brothers' correspondence edited by Ignas Skrupskelis and Elizabeth Berkeley.

James is known to have destroyed most of the letters he received out of fear of what would be done to them after his death. In his 28 March 1914 letter to Maud Broadwood Story, James mentioned how, in 1910, prior to leaving England for what would turn out to be his last visit to the United States, he burned "many" papers. He believed that, as he had been ill, there was a chance that he would never return, and he was concerned about what would become of papers that would "fall into any chance hands."

While we understand, therefore, why many of the letters James received did not survive, we understand less why the particular letters that do survive escaped burning. In the case of the earliest letters that have survived, those he received while in Europe during his first two adult trips there, in 1869-1870 and 1872-1874, were probably left at the James family home at 20 Quincy Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts after James's return to the United States. There they must have remained among the thousands of other James family papers that survived the deaths of James's two parents, the sale of the house at 20 Quincy Street, and the sale of the new home at 131 Mount Vernon Street, Boston, where Alice James and her father lived in 1883. All these James family papers eventually made their way to the house William James built at 95 Irving Street, Cambridge, where they remained until William's four children donated the papers to Harvard University.

According to Alfred Habegger's *The Father: A Life of Henry James, Sr.* (New York: Farrar, 1994), Catharine Walsh, or Aunt Kate, as she was known in the family, the sister of Mary Walsh James (mother of William, Henry, and Alice James), sorted through many of the family papers after the deaths of her sister and brother-in-law, and in the

process destroyed many letters (6, 155, 500). This may explain in part why, for instance, virtually no letters by Alice James to Henry James survive, and why letters by the parents to Henry James before 1875 survive, but almost none after.

Of the letters that Henry James received after he settled permanently in London in late 1876, it would seem that he made conscious decisions about which to destroy and which to save. Given how many letters he must have burnt in 1910, the fact that he did not burn five hundred letters from his brother, William, suggests a conscious decision to hold on to them. He must have received hundreds of letters from close friends and correspondents such as Grace Norton, but none of these survive. Presumably James was concerned that so many personal letters might one day fall into strange hands, but why, then, did he not destroy so many of his brother's letters? And why did he hold on to the three last letters he received from his beloved cousin, Minnie Temple, in 1869? The natural assumption is that the survival of these letters has something to do with their significance to him, but the fact is that we can only speculate as to why some letters survive and others don't.

In any case, any reader of the letters that James received must be aware that the record is far from complete.

The initial release of DearHenryJames.org consists of sixty-five letters, all written between 1869 and 1874. Forty of these letters, almost two-thirds of the total, are by Henry James's parents, Mary Walsh James and Henry James, Sr. They are here published in their entirety and as a group for the first time. Two of these letters, both by Mary Walsh James, are actually addressed to Alice James, but they were written during the summer of 1872, while Alice and Henry and their Aunt Kate were traveling together in

Europe. James's own letters home from Europe, both in 1869-70 and 1872, indicate that while he alternated directing his letters home between his parents, William, and his sister, he was aware that everyone in the family, including those not living in Cambridge, read his letters. His parents also sent him letters they had received from other distant family members, particularly from his other brothers, Wilky and Bob. Thus the family knew that letters written at this time were shared, and therefore it is almost certain that while they were traveling together Henry and Alice James shared with each other and with their aunt the letters they received. For this reason we have included these letters to Alice in DearHenryJames.org and plan in a later release to add her father's letters to her written at the same time. In addition, two of Mary Walsh James's letters included here are explicitly addressed to Henry and one of his siblings. Mary Walsh James addressed her [9 July 1871] letter to "My darling boys," who, through a process of elimination we know to have been the two middle James brothers, Henry and Garth Wilkinson (Wilky) James (William and their youngest brother, Robertson, or Bob, were elsewhere at the time). And Mrs. James addressed the 26 July [1872] letter to "my darlings both," i.e. Henry and Alice.

Aside from the letters by Mary Walsh James and Henry James, Sr., the largest subset of this group of sixty-five letters to Henry James included in the initial release of DearHenryJames.org (eleven letters) is by Charles Eliot Norton. These include Norton's 28 March 1872 letter, which, along with Mrs. James's [9 July 1871] letter to Henry and Wilky James, are the only letters included in this initial release of 65 letters that were not sent to James (or to Alice) while he was traveling in Europe. They are a small but significant part, therefore, of the few documents that survive about Henry James's

residence in Cambridge between his 1869-1870 and 1872-1874 trips to Europe. Wider availability of Norton's letters to James will, we hope, help clarify the nature of Norton's influence on James's career.

DearHenryJames.org also includes four letters to Henry James by Catharine (Aunt Kate) Walsh. We know from references in other letters that Aunt Kate and her novelist nephew wrote each other many more times, so these few surviving letters provide a glimpse of their otherwise poorly documented relationship.

Certainly the most poignant letters included in DearHenryJames.org are the three surviving letters by Minnie Temple. Minnie was very ill with tuberculosis when she wrote these letters, and she would die within nine months of writing the first of them and four of writing the last. The letters Henry James wrote home after he learned of his cousin's death (26 March [1870] to Mary Walsh James and 29, 30 March [1870] to William James) are among the most often quoted and best known of James's letters. Minnie, most James scholars believe, became a strong and enduring influence in James's artistic career; some of his most famous heroines—Daisy Miller, Isabel Archer, and Millie Theale—are supposed to have been inspired by Minnie, and these two letters of March 1870, provide important evidence of what the image of Minnie would become to her surviving cousin. But the three surviving letters *by* Minnie *to* Henry (the only survivals of their correspondence, for all of his letters to her have disappeared) provide a most vivid glimpse of Minnie's personality and of the character of her relationship with her cousin Henry.

The remaining letters in DearHenryJames.org are single letters to Henry James by Robert (Bob) Temple, Mary (Aunt Mary) Temple Tweedy, Elizabeth (Lizzie) Boott,

Francis Boott, Arthur George Sedgwick, John La Farge, and Thomas Sergeant Perry.

The letters by Bob Temple and Aunt Mary Tweedy are part of the larger James-Temple picture. Bob Temple was Minnie's good-for-nothing brother. After serving in the Civil War, Bob left the army under dubious circumstances, developed a drinking problem, sponged off relatives and friends, moved out west, and disappeared from the historical record. It is easy to dismiss Bob as a forgettable rogue, but his surviving letter to James, which strongly expresses Bob's character (or lack thereof), suggests that James might have been sensitive to mitigating circumstances in Bob's sorry career. For instance, we know from a letter James wrote Thomas Sergeant Perry in November 1863 that he and Bob Temple attended religious services together while James was visiting relatives in New York; in this letter James calls his cousin "the ever faithful Bob Temple" (see James to Perry, [8, 9 or 15, 16 or 22, 23 November or 6, 7 December 1863]). While Mary Walsh James's mention of Bob (in her 21 September [1869] letter) and his own letter to Henry James indicate that the family had become less enamored of Bob, James seems to have been more open to the dramatic possibilities of Bob's downward slide; writing to his sister on 6, [8] October [1869], he described Bob's letter as "a most characteristic & amusing one." James received at least one more letter from Bob (now lost), and he wrote his mother on 8 May 1876 that "I desire particularly to see it." What exactly did James know of Bob's sorry life, what did he really think of it, and how might it have been significant to him and to his writing? These are intriguing questions, and if it ever proves possible to answer them, Bob's surviving letter is where to start investigating.

Mary Temple Tweedy was Henry James's aunt by marriage. Her brother had married the sister of Henry James, Sr., and was the father of young Henry James's

Temple cousins. When Robert Temple and Catharine James Temple both died in 1854, their orphaned children lived for a while with their aunt, Mary Tweedy, and her husband, Edmund, who was a friend of Henry James, Sr. The Tweedys, who were otherwise childless, and Jameses, therefore, appear to have maintained relations. Unfortunately most of their correspondence has failed to survive, which makes Mary Tweedy's 7, 10 October 1873 letter a rare and significant document. Most significantly, perhaps, the Tweedys appear not to have been much support to their Temple nieces once they approached adulthood. Minnie and her sisters were taken in by distant older, Emmet cousins who lived outside New York City. In 1868, 25-year old Kitty Temple married 47-year old Richard Stockton Emmet, and the next year, nineteen-year old Elly Temple married his brother, Christopher Temple Emmet, who was himself then 47 years old. Mary Walsh James, Minnie, and Bob Temple express consternation over these marriages, and Henry James's own 28 July [1868] letter to Kitty Temple, congratulating her on her engagement, is a model in diplomatic tact. James biographers appear to think that the Tweedys could no longer afford to support their Temple nieces, thus leaving them to reside with and then marry their much older but well-off Emmet cousins and abandoning Minnie to the progress of her tuberculosis precisely at the time when costly travel to a warm climate might have enabled her to recover her health. And yet Mary Temple Tweedy's surviving letter to Henry James suggests that she and her husband could afford to live a life of leisure, and in the spring of 1874, the Tweedys would invite William James to visit them in Germany and help him to defray some of the cost of his trip there from Italy.

Lizzie Boott became a close friend of Henry James's after his return to Cambridge in 1870, and they remained close, writing each other often, until her death in 1888. The tone of her single surviving letter to James and of his many surviving letters to her suggest that their relationship contained some of the same affectionate, witty teasing in Minnie Temple's letters that characterized Henry James's relations with his cousin. It is unfortunate that only this one instance of Lizzie's letters to Henry James survives, for a reading of the letter she is answering and of his later answer to her (as well as of Lizzie's father Francis's letter to James) shows the delight that both letter writers took in playing off of each other.

John La Farge, Thomas Sergeant Perry, and Arthur George Sedgwick were not relatives of James but important, lifelong friends. Many of James's letters to Perry survive, but only a few to Sedgwick and La Farge. It is even more of a shame, though, that only these three letters by these three friends—one each per friend—survive.