

**Making the Past Present: Contemporary Issues Discussion Series**  
**May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019**  
**1014 Tisch Hall, 12 p.m.**

The William L. Clements Library collects and preserve primary source materials for the study of American history, makes them available for research, and supports the investigation of our nation's past.

The letter transcribed below comes from our Bradford Family Papers, a collection of eight letters written between family members living in Ohio and Massachusetts. Maria and Claudius Bradford were married in 1830 and shortly thereafter moved west from their native Duxbury, Massachusetts, to Cincinnati, Ohio, where Claudius taught languages at a local school. On October 22, 1831, Maria gave birth to their first child, Sarah Hickling Bradford. The letter featured here was written by Maria one month after her delivery and describes her childbirth, postpartum recovery, and longing for her family back in Massachusetts.

What is your initial response to this letter? What feels familiar or foreign to you? We're looking forward to discussing this together.

Maria Bradford's letter to her mother, Sarah B. Bradford

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Cincinnati Nov<sup>r</sup> 21<sup>st</sup> 1831

My dear Mother,

Claudius wrote to you on the birth of our child, but he did not inform you of all the particulars, which I know you are anxious to hear, I walked out friday evening 2 miles, and felt perfectly well; in the night I was taken with a slight pain, which I concluded to be the cholic<sup>1</sup>; it increased from that time till after dinner, but was not so bad but that I could sit up and work, till about an hour before the child was born when I had a more severe pain than any of the others and I found it was caused by the water breaking; I sent for Mrs Tucker, who put me immediate

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<sup>1</sup> Cholic - medical term generally referring to bile; or, colic, referring to abdominal pains and cramps or stomach and bowel complaints

into the bed; when in about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour afterwards the child  
was born; the Doctor arrived just in time to bring her into  
the world; the pains for the last  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour were exquisite  
but very short; I had scarcely got through one before I had  
another; Mrs Tucker and Claudius were the only persons with  
me; they stood on each side of the bed and the Doctor at  
the foot; as soon as I heard the child cry I began to laugh;  
but the Doctor said I must not laugh or talk for a day  
or 2, as it would disturb my whole system. I sat up the 2<sup>nd</sup>  
day and went down stairs the 11<sup>th</sup>; and walked out in just 2 weeks;  
every body wondered how I could be so smart, and predicted  
that it would not last, but it did last and I had no ague<sup>2</sup> in  
my breast as is often the case; the little girl has been remark  
ably well since she was born; she never cries, and has very little  
of the cholic, which I soon cure with catnip tea<sup>3</sup>, which I took  
also instead of spirits; the Doctor would not let me take a drop  
though the nurse urged it with all her might, and would  
have put it into my food every day if I had let her; the  
Doctor gave me cold water as soon as she was born; he  
says that spirits cause a fever in the breasts, which is the  
cause of so many people's suffering from the ague &c-- the  
little girl was weighed when she was 4 weeks old and had  
gained 2 1/4 pounds; she is very fat and strong; and is allowed by  
every body to be perfectly beautiful; her form and features are so

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<sup>2</sup> Ague - medical term referring to fever or recurrent chills

<sup>3</sup> Herbal tea intended to act as a mild relaxant and to help with stomach or digestion complaints

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perfect, Mr Smith, a man, who says he never said in his life  
what he did not think, as soon as he saw the little one  
said she was the most perfect child he ever saw; My friends  
in Cincinnati have been very kind, particularly Mrs Putnam,  
who called almost every day whilst I was sick; but,  
my dear Mother, though we have many kind friends;  
what are they all in comparison with you; if I could on-  
ly see you, and have you with me! Oh, how glad I should  
be! how much I have to say to you, and how many things  
I have to ask you! I know you would love the little creature, as  
we both do; we have not yet found a name for her; Claudio  
thought of his Mother's name, but we are not decided; I want  
her named for you; I thought you would like a namesake, and I have  
often heard you say you never had one; Claudio inclines  
to your name; I wish him to have whatever name he prefers  
there is now no Sarah Bradford but you, though there are  
a great many Sarah's in the family; if we choose your name  
do you wish to have it Sarah Hickling or Sarah only?  
We wish you to think of this and write us about it; we  
now call her the nameless dear; some one asked me why  
we did not call her Cincinnati? tell Lucia<sup>4</sup> we like  
her name; but there is none that pleases me so well  
as my dear mother's. The Doctor calls our daughter a

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<sup>4</sup> Lucia Bradford, Maria's sister. In 1834, Lucia moved to Cincinnati to assist Maria when she delivered another child. Lucia remained with them until the family returned to Massachusetts in 1835.

little Buck-eye; (a name given to the Western country people)

I am sorry she is not a Yankee but hope she will  
be ~~before~~ some time; she wears no caps; the Doctor  
said she would be better without; but it is a new fash  
ion here; every body exclaims against it; some say she do'nt  
look so pretty without; but it is thought generally that it will  
ruin her health, particularly if she wears no night caps,  
but I say to them; "I do just as my mother did." I have  
just received "The Token" from cousin Alden Weston; and  
a beautiful present it is; it is almost too pretty to read; the  
little one has had an annual presented to her by Chauncy  
Bradford; it is "Affection's Gift," published also in Boston.<sup>5</sup>

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Claudius began school 2 days after the little was born,  
it is a fine establishment; I only wish it was a little nearer  
home. How I wish to be with you next week, Thanksgiv  
ing, and help eat the mince pie! Give my love to father and  
the girls; tell father I wish he could see his little grandchild,  
I know he would like her; she is so good and pretty; tell  
the girls how much I wish to see them; how I should  
like to have one of them with me now! my time is so  
entirely occupied that it seems as if I had no time to do  
any thing; she is now in my lap; and occasionally makes  
a noise to inform me that she is hungry; I have a

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<sup>5</sup> *The Token* and *Affection's Gift* were gift-books, a popular 19<sup>th</sup>-century literary form of collected essays, fiction, or poetry that could be given as presents, especially during the holiday season. They often came in beautiful bindings or contained engraved illustrations.

plenty of milk, and think it must be wholesome, as her  
bowels are in such good order and she is so good natured  
I am glad she do'nt cry as Eloise did after she was first  
born. I wish, my dear Mother, that you would  
write and give me any advice you think neces-  
sary in taking care of the child or any thing else;  
it [is?] now one of my greatest pleasures to do as you  
did, and I wish to remember everything that you  
have said to me; How much, and how often I  
thought of you, particularly of late; how many nights  
I have laid awake, thinking of you, and of the care  
and trouble I was to you; after I was first confined<sup>6</sup>  
I used to lie and cry of nights; my nerves were weak;  
Claudius was not with me, as I had the nurse and felt  
so lonely; then I thought of my child, and that 27 years  
ago I was in your arms, just as helpless, and dependent; so  
that you see that every day I love you more, and I often  
think I have not done enough, no not half enough  
to repay your kindness and affection, (as you said); I now  
know what it is to be a mother, and I hope and  
pray to God that I may make as good a mother as

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you have been to me; and I hope my child will love me  
as well as I do you; if I have not always shown that af-  
fection as I ought; I hope and trust, my dear mother that we

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<sup>6</sup> Period of rest following childbirth

shall meet again; and a happy meeting it will be to me; I  
have suffered much since I left you, but I have a good and  
kind husband, who supplies your place, as far as any one can  
supply the place of mother to a child; yes Claudius has been  
every thing to me as he promised; father, mother, sister and brother  
and I do'nt repent the great sacrifice I have made for him  
in giving up my home and all my dear friends there.

I wish any thing could induce you and father to come  
out to this country; you know, mother, Grandma kept  
a boarding house in Boston; Cincinnati is a fine place  
for a boarding house; now I wish you could come  
here and set up a large establishment, and we could board  
with you; do think of it; if you were only all here I should  
not care so much about going back. Give my love  
to Aunt Jerusha and all my friends in Duxboro! I sent  
a large package of letters last week. Your dear child, Maria

Claudius sends his best love, and Mother  
sends her little girls, who does not yet  
know the dear [ ] she has in the Old Colony.

Cincinnati Nov 21<sup>st</sup> 1832.

My dear Mother,

Blanchard wrote to you on the birth of our child, but he did not inform you of all the particulars, which I know you are anxious to hear, I walked out Friday evening 2 miles, and felt perfectly well, on the night I was taken with a slight pain, which I concluded to be the cholic; it increased from that time till after dinner, but was not so bad but that I could sit up and work till about an hour before the child was born when I had a more severe pain than any of the others and I found it was caused by the water's breaking, I sent for Mrs. Lucker, who put me immediate into the bed, when in about  $3\frac{1}{4}$  of an hour afterwards the child was born, the Doctor arrived just in time to bring her into the world, the pains for the last 1/2 hour were exquisite but very short, I had scarcely got through one before I had another, Mrs. Lucker and Blanchard were the only persons with me, they stood on each side of the bed and the Doctor at the foot, as soon as I heard the child cry I began to laugh, but the Doctor said I must not laugh or talk for a day or 2, as it would disturb my whole system. I sat up the 2<sup>d</sup> day and went down stairs the 11<sup>th</sup>, and walked out in just 2 weeks, every body wondered how I could be so smart, and predicted that it would not last, but it did last and I had no ague in my breast as is often the case, the little girl has been removed ably well since she was born, she never cries, and has very little of the cholic, which I was cure with catop tea which I took also instead of spirits, the Doctor would not let me take a drop though the nurse urged it with all her might, and would have put it into my food every day if I had let her, the Doctor gave me cold water as soon as she was born, he says that spirits cause a fever in the breast, which is the cause of so many people's suffering from the ague &c - the little girl was weighed when she was 4 weeks old and had gained  $2\frac{1}{4}$  pounds, she is very fat and strong, <sup>and</sup> allowed by every body to be perfectly beautiful; her form and features are so

perfect, Dr South a man, who says he never saw in his life  
what he did not think, as soon as he saw the little one  
said she was the most perfect child he ever saw; my friends  
in Cincinnati have been very kind, particularly Mrs Putnam,  
who called almost every day whilst I was sick, but  
my dear mother, though we have many kind friends,  
what are they all in comparison with you; if I could only  
by see you and have you with me, oh, how good it should  
be! how much I have to say to you, and how many things  
I have to ask you; I know you would love the little creature, as  
we both do, we have not yet found a name for her, Clarendon  
thought of his mother's name, but we are not decided, I want  
to name her for you, I thought you would like <sup>the name</sup> ~~the name~~ <sup>to</sup> have  
after heard you say you never had or, Clarendon inclines  
to your name, I wish her to have whatever name he prefers.  
there is now no Sarah Bradford but you, though there are  
a great many Sarah's in the family; if we choose your name  
do you wish to have it Sarah Shuckley or Sarah only?  
I wish you to think of this and write us about it; we  
now call her the nameless dear, some one asked me why  
we did not call her Cincinnati, tell Lucia we like  
her name, but there is none that pleases me so well  
as my dear mother's. The Doctor calls our daughter a  
little Buck eye, (a name given to the Western country people)  
I am sorry she is not a bonner but hope she will be  
before some time, she wears no caps, the Doctor  
said she would be better without, but it is a new fash  
won't see, every body exclaims against <sup>it</sup> ~~it~~ <sup>some say</sup> she don't  
look so pretty without, but it is <sup>generally</sup> thought that it will  
ruin her health, particularly if she wears no night caps,  
but I say to them, "I do just as my mother did." I have  
just received "The Baker" from cousin Alden Weston; and  
a beautiful present it is; it is almost too pretty to read, the  
little one has had an armful presented to her by Charley  
Bradford, it is "A Peeler's gift", published also in Boston.

Blondie began school 2 days ago the little was born,  
it is a fine establishment, I only wish it was a little nearer  
home. How I wish to be with you next week, I think you  
are, and help eat the nice pie! Give my love to father and  
the girls, tell father I will see his little grandchild,  
I know he would like her, she is so good and pretty, tell  
the girls how much I wish to see them, how I should  
like to have one of them with me now! my time is so  
entirely occupied that it seems as if I had no time to do  
any thing, she is now in my lap, and occasionally makes  
a noise to inform me that she is hungry, I have a  
plenty of milk, and think it must be wholesome, as her  
bowels are in such good order and she is so good natured  
I am glad she don't cry as Elvira did after she was first  
born. I wish, my dear mother, that you would  
write and give me any advice you think necessary  
in taking care of the child or any thing else,  
it is now one of my greatest pleasures to do as you  
did, and I wish to remember every thing that you  
have said to me; How much, and how often I  
thought of you, particularly of late, how many nights  
I have laid awake thinking of you, and of the care  
and trouble I was to you; after I was first confined  
I used to lie and cry of nights, my nerves were weak;  
Blondie was not with me, as I had the nervous, and felt  
so lonely, then I thought of my child, and that 27 years  
ago I was in your arms, just as helpless, and dependent, so  
that you see that every day I love you more, and I often  
think I have not done enough, no not half enough  
to repay your kindness and affection (as you say). I now  
know what it is to be a mother, and I hope and  
pray to God that I may make as good a mother as

you have been to me, and I hope my child will love me  
as well as I do you; if I have not always shown that of-  
fection as I ought, I hope and trust, my dear mother that we  
shall meet again, and a happy meeting it will be to me, I  
have suffered much since I left you, but I have a good and  
kind husband, who supplies your place as far as any one can  
supply the place of mother to a child, yes Blandine has been  
every thing to me as he journeyed, father, mother, sister and brother  
and I don't regret the great sacrifice I have made for him  
in giving up my home and all my dear friends there.

Yours affecly  
John C. Blandine

John C. Blandine  
Dear Captain and Mrs. C. B.  
I hope you will be  
happy & always



Aug 25, 1881  
yesterday  
2881 very well

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Blandine sends his best love and mother  
send her little girls who does not yet  
know the dear han

I wish any thing could induce you and father to come  
out to this country, you know, mother, Grandma kept  
a boarding house in Boston, Cincinnati is a fine place  
for a boarding house, now I wish you could come  
here and set up a large establishment, and we could board  
with you, do think of it, if you were only all here I should  
not care so much about going back. Give my love  
to aunt Gerusha and all my friends in Duckboro! I got  
a large package of letters last week. Your dear child, Maria

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