

Making the Past Present: Contemporary Issues Discussion Series
May 9th, 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^r 21st 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 cholic¹; 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

¹ 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 2nd day and went down stairs the 11th; 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 ague² in my breast as is often the case; the little girl has been remarkably well since she was born; she never cries, and has very little of the cholic, which I soon cure with catnip tea³, 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 $\frac{1}{4}$ pounds; she is very fat and strong; and is allowed by every body to be perfectly beautiful; her form and features are so

² Ague - medical term referring to fever or recurrent chills

³ 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 only 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; Claudius 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; Claudius 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 Lucia⁴ we like her name; but there is none that pleases me so well as my dear mother's. The Doctor calls our daughter a

⁴ 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.⁵

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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

⁵ *The Token* and *Affection's Gift* were gift-books, a popular 19th-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 confined⁶
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

⁶ 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.

[1831]
Cincinnati Nov 2nd 1832.

My dear Mother,

Clarius 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; 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. Sucker, who put me immediately into the bed, when in about $3/4$ 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 2 hours were exquisite but very short; I had scarcely got through one before I had another; Mrs. Sucker and Clarius 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^d day and went down stairs the 11th, 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 heart as is after the case; the little girl has been remarkably well since she was born, she never cries, and has very little of the cholic, which I soon cure with catnip 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 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

perfect, Mr 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 on-
ly see you and have you with me! Oh, how good 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, Claudius
thought of his Mother's name, but we are not decided. I want
you named for you; I thought you would like ^{a namesake} and I have
after heard you say you never had one; Claudius 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 Chickling or Sarah only?
We wish you to think of this and write us about it; we
now call her the namesake dear, some are asked me why
we did not call her Cincinnati, I 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 Peckeye, (a name given to the Western country people)
I am sorry she is not a Quaker but I 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 don't
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.

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, I think you
ing, and help out the nurse first! 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
flenty 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 not 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 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 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;
Claudius was not with me, as I had the nerve, 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

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
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 Elizabeth has been
every thing to me as he promised, father, mother, sister and brother
and I do not regret the great sacrifice I have made for him
in giving up my home and all my dear friends there.

Elizabeth

Mrs Sarah B. Bradford

Care of Capt. Gordon Bradford

Duchess

Mass



Mail

Received Nov 18 32

Elizabeth sends her love, and mother
sends her little grandchild, who does not yet
know the dear father, he lives in the old country

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 Sarah and all my friends in Duchess. I sent
a large package of letters last week. Your dear child, Maria