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Letter to Mary Sibley from Miranda A. Smith, July 11, 1842

Miranda A. Smith

Madison

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Recommended Citation

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Madison July 11. 1842

My Dear Mrs. Sibley,

Once more I write a name familiar & dear. But why has it so long remained unwritten? The question I scarce know how to answer. I have not the cares & hindrances, & yet I seem to have fallen into the habits of married ladies, as respects letter writing. I am not conscious that my feelings have changed towards you, except that I believe my attachments are weakened towards all earthly objects. I have learned, (oh how bitter has been the lesson) that "to make idols is but to find them clay". I felt, (whether it were so or not,) that the removal of my dear Mary was a direct reproof to my ever idolizing affections, & I trust I have been enabled in some degree to renounce this easily. Besetting sin. I am spending a short vacation in Madison, with Mother & the babies, for brother & sister, little are of absent at the east. They attended the anniversaries of the benevolent societies at N. York & Boston, visited their friends in N. England, & are expected home in a week or two. A sister of Mr. Little's, a widow, is here, & assists Mother in the care of the children. Mother has been, & is still much occupied with the care of sister Mary's infant. Its health suffers from the warm season, cutting teeth, & want of suitable diet, but it is faithfully cared for & watched over, & we hope will be spared to us. We think she resembles her mother both in person & disposition.

I rec'd your letter, written in the winter, & was glad indeed to hear from you. I believe I have never written any thing respecting the school in which I am engaged. It is a public school, & a branch of quite a large establishment called Portsmouth Public Schools. There are four female teachers, (five including myself,) & one male teacher, who superintends the whole establishment, & as many schools as teachers. They are divided into grades according to the age & improvement. I have the care of the 1st grade, female department. The first grade of the male department is taught by the superintendent. His school & mine occupy each a separate room, on the first floor of a large brick building. This building is 2 ½ stories high, & embraces all the school. These schools are free to all the children & youth of the place within certain ages. They are patronized by all classes of the community & furnish the means of a good education to all who desire it. A situation as teacher in these schools is in some respects pleasant, in other not. There is a great want of punctuality in attendance. As a specimen, 70 named were enrolled on my list last term, while the average attendance was 37. There is also every want of character, Much strictness in discipline is necessary, & it is often the case that the parent instead of sustaining the teacher's authority takes the part of the child & array themselves in open hostility. An incident happened in my school which I should like to relate but it is too long a story to put on paper. On the other hand, the trustees are men of the right ___ & have both ability & disposition to sustain & protect teachers in the discharge of their duty.

The compensation received, in better times would be considerably small, and is too little even in these times. In my department it is \$20.00 per month, not including board. Board can be obtained at eight dollars per month. In the other departments the compensation is still less, excepting the superintendents which is greater. Payments are however punctually made, & they are made every month. Portsmouth is a pleasant, river town; containing four churches, a courthouse, bank, etc. The population is less than 5000. Old & new schoolism has not yet made a division in the church, & there is a good degree of harmony among its members.

This is the second letter I have written this forenoon, & Mother is beginning to enquire "why I keep myself up chamber so much"? when I told her I was writing letters, she enquired what I was doing

yesterday afternoon. I was studying music in which, by the way, I am taking lessons from a very accomplished performer. But it is vocal music, not instrumental music, I am studying. I am now trying to make a scientific business of it, or rather to understand and apply the scientific principles that belong to it.

I am much obliged to Mr. Sibley for his "love & galloping compliments" & shall endeavor to return at least as much as I receive, I know not whether I ever may look on Linden Wood again, but if I do I hope I have at least one walk to St. Charles, in his company. I wish every one had the ability and disposition to entertain people as he does. Don't tell him this, as he should think my compliments are not galloping. Love to your friends, especially Miss Roseseter, & remember me now as ever

Your attached friend,

Miranda A Smith