The Hart Nichols Collection
1730-1930

Louisa Adelia Nichols
1818-1892

Vignettes of her life
Louisa Adelia Nichols life’s work was preserved in the Hart Nichols Collection 1730-1930. It includes personal letters, art work, textiles, recipes, short stories, poems and ephemera. Louisa was the fifth child of Gideon and Elizabeth Nichols of Hempstead, New York. She never married or had any children. The women in the Hart and Nichols families were responsible for saving and preserving these items.

The Robert D. L. Gardiner Foundation generously provided a grant to Hofstra University to process and archive this collection.

Artist: Louisa Adelia Nichols. Pencil drawing of a rose, c1880. Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
The Nichols family

Gideon Nichols lived on his farm in Hempstead with his wife and six children. In 1825, he and his eldest son Walter and daughter Mary Amelia died of typhus fever.

In 1839, the widow Elizabeth (Smyth) Nichols and daughter Louisa Adelia Nichols moved from Hempstead to LaGrange in Dutchess County. They lived with Elizabeth (Nichols) Hart and her husband Benjamin Hall Hart on their farm named Heartsease.

Walter Nichols (1804-1825)
Mary Amelia Nichols (1807-1825)
Gideon Smyth Nichols (1810-1894)
Elizabeth Nichols (1812-1897)

**Louisa Adelia Nichols (1818-1892)**
Rev. Edwin Augustus Nichols (1821-1888)
Louisa Adelia Nichols

Louisa was born in Hempstead, New York on March 21, 1818. She was the second youngest child to Gideon and Elizabeth Nichols and she had five siblings. Like her mother, Louisa became deaf at an early age; she bore it with grace and dignity.

During her school years, she boarded at a private institution in Flushing, New York. Her studies included French, Religion, Art, and Botany.
The Church

The church had a prominent role in Louisa’s life as with the rest of the Nichols family. They worshipped at St. George’s Church in Hempstead, NY.

On April 8, 1831 Louisa was confirmed at St. George’s Church by the Bishop Onderdonk.

She was a devote member of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

Confirmation certificate dated 8th day of April, 1831.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
Spiritual Contemplations

Louisa kept a journal where she regularly wrote about life, death, and spiritual meditations. Even at the young age of fifteen she worried about her immortal soul and averting the temptations of sin.

“This is my fifteenth birthday. God has spared me now for fifteen years in the midst of danger. Twice have I evidently been in danger and twice preserved. Why is it that I am safe while so many perish around me? Surely it is because thou O God art with me thou keepest me safe from all the darts of death. O Almighty Father do thou be mercifully pleased to keep me in like manner safe from the temptations of the world from the snares and delusions of Satan; or else give me grace and strength to overcome them all, to live accordingly to thy holy will – ‘Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.’”

Author: Louisa Adelia Nichols
Journal entry, March 1833.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
This evening the store at the corner of Cliff and Fulton streets fell. It was six stories high and filled with goods. Several persons were killed. Oh how dreadful to be thus in one instant to be called from health in the vigor of life and in the midst of this world's pursuits to sudden death to stand before our maker and Judge. Must not this be a warning to us all to prepare for death a proof of the uncertainty of life and the instability of all worldly prospects. Who knows but those unfortunate persons, who were buried beneath the ruins were indulging high hopes of future greatness alas if so how soon are all their prospects destroyed how vain were their expectations in the twinkling of an eye they are changed from the bustle of life to the dreadful death of being crushed beneath a load of stones and perhaps they were not prepared. Oh my soul learned from this to “boast not thyself of tomorrow”.

Author: Louisa Adelia Nichols
Journal entry, May 4, 1832.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
Sunday Aug 16th.  
Eternity! To live forever—That is an awful thought.  
To live on & on, and still be living—and still to think that we must live & live, and live. An never, never cease to exist—Oh yes, it is indeed an awful thought—Even to live in Heaven seems a fearful task. I can’t bring myself to look joyfully on death.
Spiritual Contemplations

Drunkenness

“A few days ago I saw one of the most disgusting and distressing sights that I almost ever witnessed. It was an old man, his hair grey, and supporting himself with a cane, and so intoxicated that he could hardly stand – indeed he could not stand.”

“May God suffer none of this family or any one with whom I may be connected, to be guilty of this degrading sin.”

Author: Louisa Adelia Nichols
Journal entry, September 6, 1835.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
Philanthropy

Louisa’s devotion to the church and her family was evident in her many philanthropic activities. Her nephew James H. Smith had his education at St. Stephen’s College in Annandale, New York paid for by his aunt Louisa.

Tuition receipt.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Photograph from Reminiscences of St. Stephen’s College.
Retrieved from archive.org
Philanthropy

In a letter dated April 5, 1872, James H. Smith wrote his aunt telling her about his college life.

Photograph from Reminiscences of St. Stephen’s College. Retrieved from archive.org
Philanthropy

Louisa Adelia Nichols’ charity extended to support the second family of her bigamist grandfather. She provided financial assistance on a regular basis.
In 1874, Louisa Adelia donated $10,000 for the construction of a memorial chapel at the hospital and $500 towards a stained glass window.

Louisa also extended her artistic talents and contributed to the design of the memorial chapel windows in dedication to her beloved family.
The corner-stone of the permanent new building was laid by the Bishop on St. John Baptist’s Day, 1877. $10,000. given by Miss Louisa Nichols, had been in bank some three years for the erection of a memorial chapel, and she consenting, the money was expended on the chapel attached to this hospital building.

To this fund have been added and expended, for chapel and Hospital, $90,000 more. It was opened for patients November 1st, 1882.

Schedule of Fixtures, Furniture and Decorations to St. John’s Hospital, with the Names of the Donors.

Stained glass south window, by Miss L. A. Nichols..... $500 00
The chapel sat 400 people and was centrally located within the hospital and was accessible to all the wards.
On November 16, 1882 the chapel that Louisa helped build was consecrated.
A patient wrote a letter to Louisa about “the first Easter in the Chapel.”

Louisa wrote to Sister Julia her heartfelt thanks and gratification and wished she was able to see the chapel in its Easter dress.
Business Affairs

Louisa was also a woman of business. She invested in a variety of enterprises including real estate, rail roads and mortgage securities.

Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
Business Affairs

Louisa’s real estate transactions included her younger brother Edwin A. Nichols. They held and maintained several properties on Rivington and Essex streets in New York City.

Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
Business Affairs

Louisa invested some of her money in farm mortgages with her nephew George G. Nichols.
Louisa tenderly cultivated the family gardens. She grew several types of flowers and vegetables, many from seeds.
Domestic Life
Gardening

Pages of seed catalog, 1883.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
Domestic Life
Cooking Recipes

To make ginger cake
Take up the butter, 1/2 lb. sugar, a pint of molasses, two large tea spoon full of ginger and mix all in flour, kneading it to a soft dough.

To make gingerbread
Take a tea cup once full of butter, twice full of milk, twice full of sugar. Spice it with caraway seed, soon put in a little peckwash put them in flour and knead, mix, in bread it a good deal, then roll the cakes thin to bake.

To make sulton cake
Take a tea cup once full of milk, twice full of cream and three times full of molasses, a tea spoon twice full of ginger, six times full of dissolved peckwash, knead it pretty stiff in the flour.

Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
Prevention of infection from Typhus fever.

Six drachms of powdered salt petre, six drachms of oil of vitriol — mix them in a tea-cup; by adding one drachm of the oil at a time, the cup to be placed during preparation, on a hot hearth or plate of iron, and the mixture to be stirred with a tobacco pipe; the cup to be placed in different parts of the sick room.

Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
Remedy for Scarlet Fever:

For adults: 1 tablespoonful of good, brewed yeast in 3 tablespoonfuls of sweetened water, 3 times a day. If the throat is much swollen, gargle with yeast, and apply to the throat mixtures prepared with Indian meal. Use plenty of catnip tea, to keep the cramps out of the skin, for several days.

For Small Pox:

Use the above doses of yeast, 3 times a day, and a milk diet throughout the cutaneous disease. Nearly every case can be cured without leaving a scar mark. — Spectator from Dr. Wood's Field, of Williamsburg.

Eye wash: 1 teaspoon brandy, 1 ounce water, 1 ounce laudanum.

Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
Louisa sewed her own clothing and accessories.

This blue silk over dress has iridescent buttons. It has long sleeves and a hook and eye enclosure on the bodice and sash. (c1870-c1890)

Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
Domestic Life
Sewing

Louisa wore this sheer black silk fichu.
(c1838-c1892)

Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
Early book of poetry by Louisa Adelia Nichols, 1826

Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
“How happy O! that God must be,
Who lives so very high.
My God, my Saviour may he be,
He dwells above the sky.”

“There in the chrystal courts above,
Where Jesus dwells so fair,
High on a throne and angels love,
The angels bright Oh there!”

“Then let us join the heaven by,
And sing my Saviours praise,
With angels sing forevermore,
My voice on high, I’ll raise.’

- Louisa Adelia Nichols
  September 18, 1826

Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
The Writer

Author: Louisa Adelia Nichols. Example of poems

Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
Many of Louisa's poems and short stories were published in local papers and religious publications like the Hempstead Inquirer, the Poughkeepsie Eagle, the Queens County Sentinel, and the Church Journal.

THE PECLED TREE.
They're not the old tree down,
The tree which was entwine.
With a thousand pleasant memories
Of childhood in my mind.
Alack a day! what joy
We found with the leaves that tree!
The goal of many a children race,
The resting place of glees.
'Twas not a sturdy eel,
Nor waving on a hilltop side,
Nor yet a satelly another,
Nor graceful elm, nor pine.
Twas an old apple tree
Without a sign of pride;
That stanch knot was crooked, grow
Upon a hilltop side.
And there alone it stood,
Yet spread not wide and free,
I was sure not want of room,
What's the cause might be.
And precious fruit it bore,
Bass seldon, I SALE.
As apple ripened on the boughs,
Its greenness was so fine.
Ah! how my harvest eye,
Each bough and knot surveyed,
Which there the careful squirrel tooth,
Or stronger time had made.
Not richer felt the youth,
His fairy hand to wield,
Then I ponder on the trunk,
And wild conjectures build.
But now, throughout the space
I look for it in vain,
What's the thought of summer day?
It's all but lost to me,
I miss that loney air.
For oft, while passing there,
I wish I could let me back its shade.
And breathe the cooler air.
I grieve that it is gone;
Perchance I wrongly feel,
It may have warness of the writing time,
And used the longest for meal.
Yet hardly could it yield
More joy then when it threw,
It shadow over the simple spots.
My careless childhood knew—
Hempstead, August 20th, 1845.

THE CHRISTMAS TREE.
Beside a village schoolhouse, when Autumn leaves were gay,
A group of merry children beguiled their hours of play.
But not with sportive pastime was their enjoyment fraught.
Some theme of vast importance absorbed their every thought.
The sunlight seemed to brighten as they their hopes expressed—
Their glad anticipations—the sunshine of their breast.
That morning did their teacher such pleasing news impart—
The wondering contemplation now filled each eager heart.
O glad expectant children! sweet words revealing them—
"A tree we'll see at Christmas, the like we never have seen.
A tree within the church-door, more beautiful and bright.
Then Autumn leaves—those fruiter of all our hearts delight.
O Time, sped on thy pinions! How long to Christmas-tide!
Too slowly to those young hearts the short days seem to glide!
The Winter's storms were welcomed, December, dark and drear.
And then the green tinsel king, as bringing Christmas near.
At length the hour they waited,—the wish for evening time,
Assembled them with call of the church bell's sweetest chime.
When, entering the doorway, enchantment was the scene.
There stood within the portal a splendid scene,
From every twig ascended a tinsel's luminous mast,
From every twig depended a gift with some child's name.
A book, a toy, a bonnet, O joy beyond compare!
For each child some love token—not one forgotten there!
What people of admiration, what glances met the view.
Each upturned eye seemed holding a lighted candle too.
As with their heart-touched voices, encircling it with glees,
They sang this song in honor of that their Christmas Tree.

Some—The Christmas Tree.
The earth of her abundance unnumbered gifts bestows,
Like gives the modest pastry, the lily, and rose,
And trees, with bounteous foliage, cooecbranching wide and tall,
But this which stands before us is dearer far than all:
How varied, sweet, and fair,
The fruits its branches bear,
And therefore, gladly, we behold the Christmas Tree.

Our Nile's fertile valley how graceful bends the palm,
The spicy groves of Ceylon with their groves of balm.
The downward branching banyan as India's pride may stand,
And for the sugar oak tree a shadow Albinon's hand.
Gay smiling France may hold forth the clusters of her wine,
Or German forests boast of their wealth of fragrant pine.
Or Lebanon's famed cedars, with spires we may see,
But higher still than all these we prize our Christmas Tree.

For as the taper's radiance illuminates the boughs,
So love around its branches a cheerful light throws.
Whose kindly hands have wreathed them with offerings that tell
Of kindred hearts which prompted these gifts which please us so well.
But holier reasons still
Our hearts' emotions thrill,
And therefore thankfully,
We praise our Christmas Tree.

O children, have received all these with thanksgivings.
Remember Him Whose coming we celebrate today.
He came a Child all tended from Heaven's hand,
And gave Himself for us as a place in Heaven's land.
Of this let it remind us, and in our hearts awaken
True love to all around us for Christ our Saviour's sake.
The Writer

Working copy of ‘The Old Chestnut Tree’ poem and the published version.

The Old Chestnut Tree

In the woods on my father’s farm, about one mile south of the village of Hempstead, Long Island,

Her form and strong it stands—

That tree of many years

Like some sacred giant’s stalwart form,

Whose branches know no fear,

The rugged trunk, the hollow root,

The guarded and massive limb,

In language eloquent, though mute,

Tell of past ages gone.

How changed around it is the scene,

How changed the race it knew

When it, adorned with young leaves green,

A fragrant-scented sapling grew.

How pleasantly it stands,

When noonday heats prevail:

Its countless leaves—a marvel each—

Spread out to form a shade.

The squirrel leaps, in merry mood,

From awaying cough to cough,

Andaticon the prickly coated food,

Long, long ago, as now;

And eager children sought, beneath,

The kernels sweet to find,

While from the branches seemed to breathe

Instruction for the mind.

How hopefully it stands,

When Spring’s fair hands unfold

On every twig the silken buds,

So beautiful to behold.

Then, whispered, from each opening leaf,

This lesson seems to flow:

"O, ye with term of life so brief,

True wisdom learn to know,

And seek thy heart and deck thy mind

With fruits of purest joy,

Which coming seasons shall rekindle,

And time can never destroy."

How beautiful it stands,

In its majesty,

When Summer throws her drapery

Aotted it loveliness white,

Then seems, throughout its rustling height,

And clustered yellow blooms,

To swell a song of calm delight.

Through all the sunny hours;

"O, mortal! to whose blessings share,

Your grateful voice raise,

For cheering light, for healthful air,

To our Creator’s praise."

How kindly there it stands;

When, like a giver free;

It makes the breathing chestnuts glow

For all beneath the trees.

Then, glad in robe of golden hue,

A period and stately song,

If drinks, storm, the Autumn dew;

Or wrestles with the storm,

And seems to spread its news abroad

To teach the ( gospel plan ;

"O, ye who boast your love to God!

P raise be good to man."

How solemnly it stands,

When Winter strips it bare

Of its enchanting garb,

With grace that will not depart.

Then, glistening through the hunter boughs,

Deep voices seem to cry:

"O, Christian! think upon thy vows;

Prepare thee for that day

When from thee all that earth holds dear

By grief or death are riven,

And since thy heart and treasure where

They enter not—in heaven."

L. A. N.

Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
The Writer

Working copy of lines for the Orphans Asylum and the published version.

Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
Louisa also wrote a small series of ‘Tea Kettle’ short stories.

The following evening found the young companions once more ranged round their venerable favorite as it thus commenced its recital on this occasion. The morning of that Sunday dawned, Advent Sunday, November 30th, 1803. As on the approaching mornings since that had been my home, there appeared, with the break of day, the glimmer of lights, and the sound of steps moving to and fro, intent on household duties, yet I noticed an unusual quiet which distinguished it from the ordinary stir of domestic proceedings. As the dawn arose in the brighter day, I was removed from my resting place of retirement, of which I may tell you at some future time. Having been previously thoroughly cleaned both without and within, it was not like the hypocractic epic and platte “deceitfully clean on the outside, but entirely full of excess and excess,” but entirely prepared and fitted to begin my course of duty on this holy day. And thus I say without certainty, but with all sincerity. Cleanliness, the saying is, “is next to godliness,” and my lady had an innate love of cleanliness, in which inclination I fully participated. Indeed it is of more importance than many may suspect, for as a certain writer has said, “when we consider how large a portion of the moral law relates to our duty to our neighbor and how much filthy habits are injurious to them, we surely need feel no hesitation in admitting the truth of the remark that cleanliness is next to godliness.”
Shepard Alonzo Mount

On September 18, 1837, Louisa wrote in her journal that “celebrated artist” Shepard Alonzo Mount was in Hempstead village.

At the time, Mount resided in Setauket on eastern Long Island. There he lived with his artist brothers William Sidney and Henry Smith Mount.

Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
Shepard Alonzo Mount

Louisa wrote that both she and her mother had their portraits painted. It took three weeks to complete both portraits.

Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
Shepard Alonzo Mount

It cost ninety dollars for both Elizabeth (Smyth) Nichols and Louisa Adelia Nichols portraits.

Receipt for painting signed ‘Shep A. Mount’.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
Shepard Alonzo Mount

*Elizabeth (Smyth) Nichols, 1837*
Oil on canvas, 30 x 24”
Gold gilt frame, 2 1/2”

*Louisa Adelia Nichols, 1837*
Oil on canvas, by. Approximately 11” x 9”.
Ornate gilt over gesso and wood frame.

Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
Daguerreotype

Louisa Adelia Nichols and her mother Elizabeth (Smyth) Nichols.

Photographer: Weston, N.Y. Louisa Adelia Nichols (left) and Elizabeth (Smyth) Nichols (right), c1845
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections
Louisa lent her artist talents during the construction of the chapel at St. John’s Hospital. She designed the stain glass chapel windows as a memorial to her beloved family.

Artist: Louisa Adelia Nichols. Pencil drawing of chapel, c1880
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
The Artist
St. John’s Hospital Chapel
Stain Glass Windows

The Good Shepherd
The Lamb of God
The Lion of the tribe of Judah

Artist: Louisa Adelia Nichols. Drawing of stain glass chapel windows, c1880 Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
The Artist
St. John’s Hospital Chapel
Stain Glass Windows

Artist: Louisa Adelia Nichols. Drawing of chapel windows, c1880
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
The Artist
Pencil Sketches

Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
The Artist
Pencil Sketches

Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
The Artist
Pencil Sketches

Artist: Louisa Adelia Nichols. Pencil drawing of man on cart and house, n.d.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
The Artist
Ink sketches

Artist: Louisa Adelia Nichols. Ink wash of castle, n.d.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
The Artist
Ink sketches

Artist: Louisa Adelia Nichols. Ink and watercolor of Three Angels, n.d.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
The Artist
Ink sketches

Artist: Louisa Adelia Nichols. Ink wash of house and mountains, n.d.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
The Artist

Watercolor

Artist: Louisa Adelia Nichols. Watercolor of horse and carriage, n.d.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
The Artist

Watercolor

Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
The Artist

Watercolor

Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
The Artist
Watercolor

Flower petals with aphorisms.

“Self-love”

Aphorisms are brief statements of principle.

“Not until you can command your temper”

Artist: Louisa Adelia Nichols. Watercolor of flower petals with aphorisms, 1834
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
Come visit Louisa Adelia Nichols at the Special Collections Department at Hofstra University. Her series and the rest of the Hart and Nichols Collection can be accessed by appointment. The Department is located in the Joan & Donald E. Axinn Library, Room 032. Please call (516) 463-6411 for an appointment or additional information.

Louisa Adelia Nichols. Carte de visite, c1850.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.
Resources


*Tenth Annual Report of St. John’s Hospital and the Atlantic Avenue Dispensary.* (1883). Brooklyn: Orphan’s Press-Church Charity Foundation.