

SPIRITUAL MOTHERS EDUCATING REPUBLICAN DAUGHTERS: ELIZABETH
BAYLEY SETON, THE SISTERS OF CHARITY, AND ST. JOSEPH'S ACADEMY FOR
GIRLS

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ABSTRACT

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In 1809, Elizabeth Bayley Seton founded the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's, the first American community of women religious. A year later, she and the sisters established St. Joseph's Academy and Free School in Emmitsburg, a small agricultural community in northern Frederick County, MD. Seton is credited with founding the parochial school system in the United States. She and the Sisters of Charity also contributed to society in the early republic by educating a new generation of republican women.

American philosophers developed the concept of republican motherhood following the Revolutionary War to reconcile republican values with how women perceived their relationship to the state. Reformers like Judith Sargent Murray and Benjamin Rush argued that women needed to be better educated to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers in the new republican society. In response, ladies' academies began to open throughout the country. Particularly successful were the institutions established by Catholic women's religious communities.

Although not mothers in the traditional sense, the members of the Sisters of Charity had a unique opportunity to educate girls about republican values. Practicing a "maternity of the spirit" that stems from their marriage to God rather than a mortal man, the sisters could act in an independent manner unavailable to many other women, as evidenced by their financial records, organizational documents, and correspondence. An analysis of these documents will provide a new perspective on how Seton and the Sisters

of Charity impacted society through the education of young women in the early nineteenth century.

KEY WORDS: Elizabeth Ann Seton, Daughters of Charity, Republican motherhood, Early national period, Women's education.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Elizabeth Bayley Seton founded the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's in 1809. The French Sulpician priests who helped Seton establish the organization modeled the community after the Company of Daughters of Charity. St. Vincent de Paul, along with St. Louise de Marillac, founded the Daughters of Charity in 1633 to serve the sick and poor in Paris. Although a proposed union with the Daughters of Charity failed in 1811-1812, the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's joined the international organization in 1850. At that time, the Sisters of Charity changed its name to the Daughters of Charity.

This study employs the following terminology that the Daughters of Charity uses to discuss its members and their work. The terms are relevant to Elizabeth Seton and her community.

Women religious is a generic term used to describe women who have taken religious vows, typically ones of chastity, poverty, and obedience. Daughters of Charity take annual, not perpetual vows. Therefore, they are *sisters*, not nuns. Also unlike nuns, who are cloistered, sisters practice charitable work in society. They reside in *houses*, not convents. Sisters call their organization a *community* or *company*, not an order. Finally, the Daughters of Charity refer to their ministries as *missions*. For example, taking over the management of an orphanage in Philadelphia in 1814 was the Sisters of Charity's first mission outside Emmitsburg. The sisters chosen to serve in Philadelphia were *missioned* to the orphanage.

Source: Hannefin, Daniel, D.C. *Daughters of the Church: A Popular History of the Daughters of Charity in the United States 1809-1987*. (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1989). Accessed February 3, 2015. http://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentian_ebooks/17.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

On June 9, 1808, Elizabeth Bayley Seton stood on the deck of the *Grand Sachem* as the ship departed New York harbor bound for Baltimore and watched as memories of her life as a young, high-society matron slipped away in the boat's wake. Her three daughters Anna Maria, Catherine, and Rebecca stood at her side. She would soon see her sons, William and Richard, who attended school in Georgetown. In just five years, Seton had lost practically everything. Her husband William's family business had failed in 1800. Her beloved father Dr. Richard Bayley had died of yellow fever in 1801. Just two years later, William died of tuberculosis in Italy, where he had traveled with Elizabeth and their oldest daughter Anna with the hope that the climate would improve his health. Seton's conversion to Catholicism in 1805 resulted in the loss of her social status in New York society and threatened relationships with her family and friends.

Elizabeth Seton relied on the assistance of family members and friends to care for herself and her children when she returned to New York following her husband's death. A widow with no income, she struggled to survive as a Catholic in a Protestant world. Two attempts to open boarding houses in conjunction with schools failed. By chance, Seton met Rev. Louis William Dubourg following services at St. Patrick's Church in 1806.¹ Hearing her desire to retire from the world and perhaps teach, the enterprising priest invited her to establish a school for girls in Baltimore. Elizabeth Bayley Seton accepted his offer. She rented a house on Paca Street and opened a school with an initial enrollment of seven students, including her three daughters. At the same time, Seton

¹ Although priests are familiarly called "Father," the formal salutation is "the Reverend."

founded the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's, the first American community of women religious.²

The school and sisterhood grew quickly. Elizabeth Seton wanted to build on the lot originally promised to her by Dubourg, but did not have the funds to do so. On the same day that she asked Dubourg for advice about the matter, Samuel Sunderland Cooper came to her aid. Cooper, another convert who had recently entered St. Mary's Seminary, offered to invest \$10,000 in Seton's endeavor as long as she built the institution in Emmitsburg, a village over fifty miles northwest of Baltimore near Mount St. Mary's College. In 1810, Elizabeth Bayley Seton and the Sisters of Charity opened St. Joseph's Free School and St. Joseph's Academy for girls. Seton thus became the founder of the parochial school system in the United States.³ What receives less recognition is her preparation of young women from elite families for life as republican wives and mothers in early national America.

Elizabeth Bayley Seton fit the profile of a republican woman. Borrowing Linda Kerber's words, she "was competent and confident. She could ignore the vagaries of fashion; she was rational, benevolent, independent, self-reliant."⁴ Much of the scholarship written about Seton, who was the first American to be canonized as a saint in 1975, focuses on her life and accomplishments from a religious point of view. Many biographers chronicle the events of her life according to how they fit in with the

² *Women religious* is a generic term used to describe women who has taken religious vows, typically ones of chastity, poverty, and obedience. Daughters of Charity, as the Sisters of Charity are now known, take annual, not perpetual vows. Therefore, they are *sisters*, not nuns. Also unlike nuns, who are cloistered, sisters practice charitable work in society.

³ Mary Regis Hoare, A.M., *Virgin Soil: Mother Seton from a Different Point of View*, (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1942), 101.

⁴ Linda K. Kerber, *Toward an Intellectual History of Women*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 28.

evolution of her faith, first as a Protestant then later as a convert to Catholicism. This emphasis limits Seton's historical significance. For example, scholars glance over her experiences as a debutante and young matron in elite New York society at the turn of the nineteenth century. Born on the eve of the American Revolution to the distinguished doctor Richard Bayley and his first wife Catherine, Seton descended from wealthy Huguenot refugees who founded New Rochelle, New York. Having attended Madame Pompelion's dame school with her sister Mary as a child, Seton was well-educated. She read and spoke French fluently and was also a skilled pianist. She shared a love of music with William Magee Seton, the son of a wealthy New York businessman. The young couple married in 1794. Along with Isabella Graham and Graham's daughter Joanna Bethune, Seton in 1797 established the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children, the nation's first charitable organization run by women. For several years, she served as treasurer of the organization and, through her involvement with the association, met and became friends with Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton, the wife of Alexander Hamilton.⁵ Elizabeth Seton also educated her children at home, and, after her father-in-law's untimely death, her husband's siblings as well.

Seton pronounced her first vows in front of Archbishop John Carroll in spring 1809 and from that time became known as Mother Seton.⁶ Members of the Sisters of Charity referred to her as Mother, but others, including clergy and laypeople, called her Mrs. Seton, an address that reflected a return to her social status as a high-class matron

⁵ Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 104.

⁶ Rev. John Carroll was appointed the first bishop of Baltimore when the Holy See established the diocese in 1789. Carroll was elevated to Archbishop when Baltimore was named an archdiocese in 1808. This study refers to Carroll's title depending on the time under discussion.

after her relocation to Maryland. Anne Boylan writes about her: “Seton’s warmth and humor enabled her to lead the Emmitsburg community with easy grace and a democratic style, but her ability to command patronage through the possession of high social status contributed significantly to her success.”⁷ Though she was fervently dedicated to her new Catholic faith and lamented her younger days of idleness and frivolity, Elizabeth Bayley Seton, as well as many of the founding members of the Sisters of Charity, was a republican woman.⁸ She and the sisters passed along the values of elite society women living in the early national era to the girls they taught at St. Joseph’s Academy.

What is a republican woman? Linda Kerber coined the phrase “republican motherhood” in 1975. Americans adapted the ideas of Enlightenment philosophers to formulate a New World republicanism that espoused liberty and freedom for its citizens. However, republicanism, with its focus on the rights of man, forced Americans to decide where women fit into the new society by redefining their relationship to that society in terms of civic virtue and liberty. In the era of nation-building following the War for Independence, republican motherhood filled the gap between the libertarian language of republicanism and a woman’s role in civil society. Americans had combined the ideas of Rousseau and Condorcet to provide women a way to participate politically while remaining within the thresholds of their homes. They acknowledged Condorcet’s belief that women were equal to men in intellectual, reason, and moral character, but reluctantly accepted the deference to men favored by Rousseau and other European intellectuals. Republican motherhood gave women a political function in American society by assigning them the responsibility of raising virtuous and patriotic citizens. Such women

⁷ Boylan, 121.

⁸ Rose Maria Laverty, S.C., *Loom of Many Threads*, (New York: Sisters of Charity, 1958), 140.

were also responsible for ensuring their husbands did not stray from their own virtue. Joan Landes calls the home the “nursery of the state.”⁹ The republican woman was a wife, a mother, a governess, and a teacher.

Women’s position in civil society remained unclear following the Revolution. However, women had pushed the boundaries of traditional, colonial gender roles into the public, political realm through their contributions to the American Revolution. They boycotted British goods, including tea and textiles. Although ridiculed by men for their actions, fifty-one women in Edenton, North Carolina, signed a “non-consumption” agreement in 1774.¹⁰ Before the war, “religious women” in New England gathered for spinning meetings. They contributed to the patriot effort by spinning yarn for homespun cloth, thus reducing the reliance on imported textiles. They also made a political statement by exhibiting how they controlled their own labor and, to some extent, the raw materials with which they worked.¹¹ During the Revolutionary War, Esther DeBerdt Reed established the Ladies Association in Philadelphia. She and other women belonging to the city’s social elite walked door to door to collect money to support the troops in the Continental Army. Chapters of the organization soon sprung up in other colonial cities.¹²

Some historians, including Kerber, claim that republican motherhood represented a regression from the freedom women had exercised during the Revolution. Overt

⁹ Joan B. Landes, “Women and the Public Sphere: A Modern Perspective,” *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 15, Gender and Social Life (August 1984): 25, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23169275>.

¹⁰ Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America*, (New York: Free Press, 1991), 49-50.

¹¹ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, “‘Daughters of Liberty’: Religious Women in Revolutionary New England,” in *Women in the Age of the American Revolution*, eds., Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1990), 222.

¹² Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 180-184.

political actions like soliciting money and signing petitions were no longer socially acceptable. Women in post-Revolutionary America, however, learned to work privately in public. Through civic activism, such as the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children, women “pursuing ostensibly ‘private’ concerns as wives, mothers and daughters took family interests into the nominally ‘public’ arenas of politics and the economy.”¹³ Landes likewise writes that women traded freedom for moral authority that they demonstrated through their own civic virtue and by instilling the same values in their families.¹⁴

Other historians have presented their own versions of the republican woman since Kerber first wrote about republican motherhood over forty years ago. Jan Lewis offers the concept of the “republican wife” in contrast to Kerber’s republican mother.¹⁵ Lewis posits that the patriarchalism associated with colonial American society had decayed as Americans began to embrace republican ideals. Republicanism pervaded all aspects of society, including marriage. Before the American Revolution, parents had chosen spouses for their children, primarily to acquire “wealth, prestige, and political power.” Following the war, young people began to choose their own partners, for love.¹⁶ While in Italy, William Magee Seton complained in a letter home that “marriages abroad were always made for fortune and never for love.”¹⁷

¹³ Boylan, 12.

¹⁴ Landes, 28.

¹⁵ Jan Lewis, “The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 44, no. 4, Third Series (October 1987): 690, accessed April 18, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1939741>.

¹⁶ Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984), 17.

¹⁷ Annabelle Melville, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton*, (New York: Scribner, 1951), 48.

Companionate marriage in the republican era focused on shared activities and joint decision making that gave women “greater power, greater autonomy, and a strong equal voice in family affairs.”¹⁸ Lewis writes, “Marriage was the republic in miniature; it was chaste, disinterested, and free from the exercise of arbitrary power.”¹⁹ Companionate marriage required the political involvement of women. As moral arbiters, women were responsible for securing the civic virtue of their spouses.

Republican motherhood can be examined in a larger context than the role of women in American civil society following the Revolutionary War. Discussing the concept’s intellectual origins, Rosemarie Zagarri broadens the ideology of republican motherhood to an “Anglo-American womanhood” created by a compromise between European Enlightenment philosophy and American revolutionary rhetoric. According to Zagarri, republican motherhood “was actually part of a broad, long-term, transatlantic reformulation of the role and status of women” that predated the American Revolution. Women’s contributions to the fight for independence propelled the transformation of their role and status in society by revealing the disparity between the rights given to men and the dispossessed state of women. Revolutionaries turned to Enlightenment philosophy to find a “rhetorical resolution to their intellectual conundrum” that “extended a kind of equality to women, but at the same time justified the status quo.” This study uses the term republican womanhood to encompass the ideas of all the aforementioned women’s historians and include all women who lived during the early national era regardless of their status as wives and mothers.²⁰

¹⁸ Lebsack, 17.

¹⁹ Lewis, 710.

²⁰ Rosemarie Zagarri, “Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother,” *American Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (June 1992): 193, 210-211, accessed March 17, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2713040>.

An important aspect of republicanism was the education of the populace, including women. Lucia McMahon writes that female education was part of the republican experiment. “Society *was* the republic writ large, and properly educated women were the key to its success,” she explains. Setting an example through their wisdom, virtue, and piety, educated women came to play complementary roles in early American civil society. First, they preserved “social harmony” during a period when the new country was trying to define itself. Second, they became the moral arbiters at home, where they were expected to raise virtuous sons loyal to the new republic, all the while ministering to the virtue of their husbands.²¹

Late eighteenth-century writers espoused the need for female education. English author Mary Wollstonecraft, whose forthright *Vindication of the Rights of Women* created waves on both sides of the Atlantic, recognized the “economic basis of social freedom.”²² Women should be able to support themselves, she wrote, and education would give them the ability to do so. Although Judith Sargent Murray also promoted women’s education for the goal of personal improvement, other American writers remained more conservative about the purposes of educating women. In the minds of men like Dr. Benjamin Rush and Noah Webster, women should be educated to serve society, not necessarily to improve their own lives. Education gave women the tools they needed to fulfill their roles as the moral authority of the new nation. As such, female education became pivotal to the success of American republicanism.

²¹ Lucia McMahon, “‘Of the Utmost Importance to Our Country’: Women, Education, and Society, 1780-1820,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 29, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 498-500, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40541858>.

²² Janet Wilson James, *Changing Ideas about Women in the United States, 1776-1825*, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1981), 100.

Although distinctly feminist, Judith Sargent Murray's views reflected late eighteenth-century societal values. Best known as the author of *The Gleaner*, which she published under a male pseudonym, Murray argued for a practical education that expanded a woman's opportunities in life. Ornamental educations that included the study of French, music, dancing, and drawing prepared a woman for little more than securing herself an upwardly mobile marriage. Murray contended that men and women were unequal only due to the lack of women's educational opportunities. However, Murray accepted the deference of women in the republican society that restrained their political role to the home.²³

Rush and Webster supported useful educations for women that taught them the skills needed to manage her household, educate her children, and assist her husband with his responsibilities. Ornamental educations did not prepare women for lives as republican citizens. Lessons in English, bookkeeping, geography, history, Christian principles, some science – with and dancing and singing for exercise, would prepare them for marriage and motherhood, according to Rush. An educator and author, Webster pointed out, "By their influence on manners... women set the moral tone of society. As mothers, moreover, they molded the character of youth during the formative years; 'their own education should therefore enable them to implant in the tender mind, such sentiments of virtue, propriety, and dignity, as are suited to the freedom of our governments.'"²⁴

²³ Linda Kerber, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment-An American Perspective," *American Quarterly* 28, no. 2, Special Issue: An American Enlightenment (Summer 1976): 203, accessed March 17, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2712349>.

²⁴ James, 79-81.

Webster and Rush advocated female education so women could raise the next generation of patriotic citizens, but not to improve themselves.

Answering the need for the education of young women, the first female academies in the United States appeared in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The secular Ladies Academy of Philadelphia opened in 1787. However, many of the first female educational institutions in North America were established by communities of Catholic women religious. The Ursuline sisters, who emigrated from France in the early eighteenth century, preceded Elizabeth Bayley Seton and the Sisters of Charity by almost a century in establishing an academy for girls in New Orleans in 1727. Several other Catholic religious communities later opened girls' schools during the early nineteenth century.

Carol Mattingly attributes the rise of Protestant academies in the 1820s in part to anti-Catholic sentiment. These denominational academies grew rapidly in the early years of the nineteenth century. Since the academies attracted both Protestant and Catholic students, Protestants feared that the schools operated by Catholic women religious would contribute to the rise of Catholicism in the United States.²⁵ The Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's supplied religious instruction to students, but were careful not to proselytize to them.²⁶ Curiously enough, Protestant academies like the Troy Female Seminary opened by Emma Willard in 1821 and the Hartford Female Seminary opened by Catherine Beecher two years later, modeled their academies on these first schools for girls.

²⁵ Carol Mattingly, "Uncovering Forgotten Habits: Anti-Catholic Rhetoric and Nineteenth-Century American Women's Literacy," *College Composition and Communication* 58, 2 (December 2006): 162, accessed September 5, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20456933>.

²⁶ Melville, 286.

Elizabeth Bayley Seton said that she never intended to open St. Joseph's Academy. In 1817, she confessed to her friend and benefactor Anthony Filicchi that she had only wanted to teach poor children, but "it seems it is to be the means of forming *city* girls to Faith and piety as wives and mothers."²⁷ However, she needed the tuition and fees collected for the institution to finance the charitable missions of the Sisters of Charity. St. Joseph's Academy played an important role in educating young women at a time when an educated citizenry, including women, became an important part of post-Revolution republican society. St. Joseph's Free School for the poor children of the Emmitsburg community opened on February 22, 1810. The first five boarders for St. Joseph's Academy, who lived in Frederick County, arrived in May of the same year. Enrollment grew steadily in the schools' first years of operation. By 1822, the year following Seton's death from tuberculosis, enrollment at St. Joseph's Academy and Free School had grown to eighty boarders, forty charity students, and six orphans.²⁸ The academy attracted students from Protestant and Catholic families from throughout the United States.

St. Joseph's Academy offered a rigorous program. In 1813, the curriculum at the academy included catechism, English (including grammar, spelling, and parsing, and reading), writing, arithmetic, bookkeeping, ciphering, history, and geography. Students could take French, music, drawing and painting, and embroidery classes for an additional fee.²⁹ Elizabeth Seton herself taught classes in history and religion when the school first opened. The academy gradually added more advanced courses and began to confer

²⁷ Elizabeth Seton to Antonio Filicchi, June 1, 1817, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, ed. Regina Bechtle, S.C., and Judith Metz, S.C., (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), 479, accessed February 8, 2016, http://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentian_ebooks/11.

²⁸ John Mary Crumlish, D.C., "The History of St. Joseph's Academy, Emmitsburg, Maryland, 1809-1902" (M.A.--Ed thesis, Catholic University of America, 1945), 7.

²⁹ Crumlish, 53-55.

degrees in 1902.³⁰ St. Joseph's College educated young women until 1973, when the sisters closed the institution for financial and staffing reasons.³¹

Although Seton originally accepted boarding students to help fund the operations and missions of the fledgling women's religious community, St. Joseph's Academy prepared elite young women for their roles as republican women in early national America. This thesis will examine how Elizabeth Bayley Seton and the founding members of the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's represented the ideals of republican womanhood through the education they provided to these upper-class girls at the academy. The curriculum of the academy mirrored those suggested by late eighteenth-century proponents of female education like Judith Sargent Murray, Benjamin Rush, and Noah Webster. All three writers promoted practical areas of study that would prepare young women to take their places as the moral arbiters of republican American society.

Elizabeth Seton and the founding members of the Sisters of Charity were well-suited to tutor their students as republican women, because many of them were well-educated and members of society's elite. For instance, Cecilia O'Conway was educated by Ursuline nuns and fluent in French, Spanish, and Italian. Both Susan Clossey's and Rose Landry White were likewise well-educated. Mary Ann Butler was an artist and poet who composed devotional hymns used by the community.³² Born into a blue blood New York family and married into another, Elizabeth Seton danced at a ball in celebration of George Washington's birthday, attended the theater, read Rousseau, and joined a relief

³⁰ "St. Joseph College History: Legacy of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton," St. Joseph's College Alumnae Association, 2008-2017, accessed February 3, 2015, <http://www.sjcalumnae.org/history/college-history>.

³¹ Roger Morris, "Saint Joseph College is Dying," Emmitsburg Area Historical Society, accessed January 22, 2016, http://www.emmitsburg.net/archive_list/articles/places/schools/st_joes_closeing.htm.

³² Judith Metz, S.C., "The Founding Circle of Elizabeth Seton's Sisters of Charity," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 14, no. 1, Beyond the Walls: Women Religious in American Life (Winter 1996): 21-22, accessed September 3, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25154539>.

society as a young wife.³³ Even after taking her vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, Seton retained her status as a matron of upper-class society. She was still a republican woman. Management of the Sisters of Charity was not much different from her work for the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children. Seton used her social ties to launch and promote St. Joseph's Academy. She passed along her republican values to the young women she educated there.

This study begins in Chapter 2 with an exploration of the literature written about Elizabeth Bayley Seton, republican womanhood, and female education in early national America. Chapter 3 tells the history of Seton's life and the founding of the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's. Chapter 4 traces the evolution of republican womanhood from its roots in Enlightenment philosophy to its practice as a "gendered republicanism" and discusses the importance of female education to the success of society in early national America.³⁴ In Chapter 5, this thesis brings together the information from Seton's biography, the discussion of republican womanhood, and primary sources to demonstrate how Elizabeth Seton and the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's exemplified the ideal of republican motherhood by educating young women at St. Joseph's Academy. Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes the research and briefly explores the transformation of republican womanhood to the canon of domesticity and the legacy of female education in post-Civil War America.

Historians credit Elizabeth Bayley Seton with the founding of the parochial school system in the United States. Most focus on her religiosity. However, Seton was

³³ Joan Barthel, *American Saint: The Life of Elizabeth Seton*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2014), 50; Melville, 63.

³⁴ Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand & Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 25.

also a woman of her time. “She became a charter citizen of the new nation at the age of two,” one biographer writes. “She might be considered the prototype American: her blood lines were Old World...; but her roots were New World... She was part of the social history of the times, the infant times so important to the future.”³⁵ Following her conversion to Catholicism, she transformed her republican womanhood to what Joseph Mannard calls a “maternity of the spirit” that was “derived from the nun’s status as a spiritual ‘bride of Christ’ and from her works of teaching, nursing, orphan care, and moral reform.”³⁶ Elizabeth Seton deserves a place in history among women like Abigail Adams, Judith Sargent Murray, and Mercy Otis Warren who contributed to the founding of the United States. Through this spiritual motherhood, Seton and her community contributed to the society in early national America by teaching young women the skills they needed to prepare them to take their places in society as republican women.

³⁵ Joseph I. Dirvin, C.M., *Mrs. Seton: Foundress of the American Sisters of Charity*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1962), ix-x.

³⁶ Joseph Mannard, “Maternity... of the Spirit: Nuns and Domesticity in Antebellum America,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 5, no. 3/4, Women in the Catholic Community (Summer-Fall 1986): 316, accessed September 5, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25153767>.

CHAPTER II

Literature review

Both historians of American women and the early republic have often overlooked the true historical importance of Elizabeth Bayley Seton. Catherine O'Donnell writes that despite her status as the first American to be canonized a Catholic saint, non-Catholic historians have "largely ignored" Seton.³⁷ She is credited with founding the parochial school system in the United States. A descendent of St. Joseph's Free School, known as Mother Seton School, continues to exist today in Emmitsburg, MD. She also founded the first American community of women religious in the United States. Elizabeth Bayley Seton and the founding members of the Sisters of Charity can thus be given their place in history by considering them as women of their time: republican women dedicated to educating future generations.

This thesis examines Elizabeth Seton as a product of both nineteenth-century Catholic culture and American-style republicanism. Working within the framework of a Catholic women's religious community, Seton and her associates taught republican ideals to their female students at St. Joseph's Academy. This study places Seton in the context of the period in which she lived by examining contemporary, popular histories written about her, the Sisters of Charity, early American Catholicism, and Emmitsburg. Comparing such histories with literature written about women's roles in early national America, especially the socio-political ideology of republican womanhood, rounds out the development of Seton's character. Finally, an analysis of primary sources, in

³⁷ Catherine O'Donnell, "Elizabeth Seton: Transatlantic Cooperation, Spiritual Struggle, and the Early Republican Church," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 29, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 1, accessed September 3, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/cht.2011.0005>.

particular Seton's own writings, will demonstrate how she and the Sisters of Charity acted autonomously as an organization and imparted their values to a new generation of republican women.

Several authors have written monographs and articles about the life of Elizabeth Seton. Most Seton biographers are either Catholic historians, clergy, or women religious and write from a decidedly religious perspective. Originally published in 1951 and reprinted several times since, Annabelle Melville's *Elizabeth Bayley Seton, 1774-1821*, is considered the definitive biography of the saint. Many biographies about Seton are also dated. Charles I. White published the first edition of *Life of Mrs. Eliza A. Seton* in 1853. Joseph I. Dirvin originally published *Mrs. Seton: Foundress of the American Sisters of Charity* in 1962. These books laid the foundation for contemporary works about Elizabeth Seton's life.

Finally, Joan Barthel, who writes popular non-fiction, published a recent biography of Seton, *American Saint: The Life of Elizabeth Seton*, in 2014. Written in a narrative form that is simultaneously informational and accessible, Barthel tells the story of Seton's life with a decidedly feminist bent from a layperson's perspective. The author acknowledges Seton's dedication to her faith and mission, but also portrays her as a high-society matron living in post-Revolutionary America. Anne Boylan likewise offers a poignant biography of Seton in *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (2002). Like Barthel, Boylan depicts Elizabeth Bayley Seton as a republican woman, who, as a Catholic sister, used her social status and experience as a member of the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children to promote her religious

community's activities. Both authors portray Seton in context to the period in which she lived and not just as a Catholic saint.

Not surprisingly, several women religious have written biographies of Seton. Sister Mary Regis Hoare depicts Elizabeth Seton as the founder of the "American Catholic Parochial School System" in *Virgin Soil: Mother Seton from a Different Point of View*.³⁸ Although still focused on Seton's piety, the author argues why Seton, rather than others who opened religious educational institutions prior to St. Joseph's Academy and Free School, founded the first parochial school in the United States. Hoare also traces Seton's influence on the nation's religiously-based school system. In *Loom of Many Threads*, Sister Rose Maria Laverty examines Seton's life through the influence of her French and English ancestors. This book also provides more information about Seton's early life than previously mentioned biographies, which focus heavily on her conversion and life as a woman religious. The works of Laverty and Hoare broaden the understanding of Seton's life by exploring both her heritage and her legacy.

There have been limited attempts to place Seton in a cultural context. Three authors assert that Seton was influenced by the republicanism of her era. In "Elizabeth Seton: Transatlantic Cooperation, Spiritual Struggle, and the Early Republican Church," O'Donnell studies both Seton's role as a pioneer of the American Catholic Church and her personal determination to chart her own spirituality. Sister Judith Metz analyzes Seton's influence on the church through her relationships in "Elizabeth Bayley Seton: Animator of the Early American Catholic Church." In *Feminine Spirituality in America*, Amanda Porterfield compares Elizabeth Seton to Catherine Beecher, a Protestant activist

³⁸ Laverty, 15.

for female education. Both she and Seton used women's influence as spiritual leaders to foment social reform. Seton, Porterfield writes, possessed the "grace of saintliness" and through her spiritual connection with Mary nurtured republican women through education.³⁹ Even if these portraits of Seton are primarily religious, they emphasize the cultural confines of her religiosity.

Like biographies of Elizabeth Seton, histories of the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's have been written primarily by members of the Catholic community. Ellin M. Kelly, DePaul University Emeritus Professor, edited a two-volume history of Seton and the Sisters of Charity called *Numerous Choirs: A Chronicle of Elizabeth Bayley Seton and Her Spiritual Daughters*. Using excerpts from Seton's writings, Kelly documents the lives of Seton and her followers from 1774 until 1865. A short synopsis of the main historical events on a national level at the beginning of each year provides a context for what happened in Emmitsburg.

Several members of the Daughters of Charity have also written about the history of the community.⁴⁰ Commissioned by the Vincentian Studies Institute, which promotes the heritage of Catholic organizations that practice the tradition of St. Vincent de Paul, Sister Daniel Hannefin authored *Daughters of the Church: A Popular History of the Daughters of Charity in the United States, 1809-1987*. This is a straight forward narrative of the history of the company, which Hannefin says is "intended primarily for use of the Community, particularly in formation, and for those who collaborate with the sisters or

³⁹ Amanda Porterfield, *Feminine Spirituality in America: From Sarah Edwards to Martha Graham*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 110.

⁴⁰ The Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph adopted the name Daughters of Charity when the community joined the French Company of the Daughters of Charity in 1850.

wish to know more about them.”⁴¹ Sister Betty Ann McNeil, former provincial archivist for the Daughters of Charity, has written several articles about the history of the community. She essentially rewrites journal entries of founding sisters, including Rose White and Cecilia O’Conway, in narrative form. Sister Judith Metz’s article “The Founding Circle of Elizabeth Seton’s Sisters of Charity” also documents the lives of the first women to join the religious community. The sisterhood’s importance has been demonstrated, though often in parochial form.

It is also important to place the Sisters of Charity in context to its surroundings. Emmitsburg had been settled for only about a generation when Elizabeth Bayley Seton, her daughter Anna, and three other women arrived from Baltimore in the summer of 1809. The Sisters of Charity and the organization’s missions would become an integral part of the small north central Maryland community, a legacy that continues today. Helman’s *History of Emmitsburg* has long been the accepted history of the town. While not a formal history, the monograph, published in 1906, intermingles facts and stories. Emmitsburg Historical Society head Michael Hillman has contested the information presented in Helman’s *History* and other sources in an article published on the website www.emmitsburg.net, an Internet portal that publishes articles on history and culture of the Emmitsburg region. In 1976, Emile and Mary Nakhleh edited *Emmitsburg: History and Society*, a book of essays that includes an article written by former Daughters of

⁴¹ Daniel Hannefin, D.C., *Daughters of the Church: A Popular History of the Daughters of Charity in the United States 1809-1987*, (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1989), ix, accessed February 3, 2015, http://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentian_ebooks/17.

Charity archivist Sister John Mary Crumlish about Elizabeth Seton's relationships with the Emmitsburg community.

By reading the histories of Emmitsburg's churches, one can glean bits and pieces of the town's history. In the late 1700s, the population was approximately half Catholic and half Protestant. Catholics immigrated to northern Frederick County from points south and west to escape religious persecution. Some settled south of town and established St. Anthony's Parish. Others moved to Emmitsburg proper and built St. Joseph's Church. The priests who led these parishes also helped oversee the Sisters of Charity. St. Joseph's Church published a history of its parish in 1968. Mount St. Mary's University President Monsignor Hugh J. Phillips, contributed an essay about St. Anthony's parish to the Nakhleh anthology. The histories of St. Anthony Church and St. Joseph's Church tell the stories of those Emmitsburg area residents and set the stage for the arrival of Elizabeth Seton and her small community in 1809. A history of Mount St. Mary's University written by Mary Meline and Rev. Edward McSweeney in 1911 begins with the immigration of the Elder family to the Emmitsburg area around 1728. Rev. John Dubois, the founder of Mount St. Mary's, played a pivotal role in organizing the Sisters of Charity. He also served as the community's third superior.

A refugee of the French Revolution, Dubois became a pioneer of American Catholicism. He was a missionary priest based in nearby Frederick before he settled permanently in Emmitsburg. As the founder of the first American community of women religious, Elizabeth Bayley Seton was also a pioneer of the church. Several authors have discussed the origins of the Catholic Church in the United States and, specifically, Maryland. Jay Dolan discusses Catholics in American society and how they perceived

socio-political ideals through his work *In Search of An American Catholicism*. In *The American Revolution and Religion*, Thomas Hanley expands his history of American Catholicism by relating Catholics to Protestant congregations and how both fought together in the War for Independence.

Catholicism's role in American history, especially early Maryland, has received increased attention. John Carroll is considered the father of the American Catholic Church. A Maryland native, he petitioned the church to establish a See in the United States. He was elected this country's first bishop in 1789, then archbishop in 1808. Although skeptical at first, Carroll accepted Elizabeth Seton's conversion and presided over the proclamation of her first vows. Carroll helped Seton establish the Sisters of Charity and its missions in Emmitsburg. He and Seton shared republican ideas about the future of the church. Thomas Spalding, writing in "The Maryland Tradition" and *The Premier See*, discusses John Carroll's contributions to the American Catholic Church and his perspectives on the institution. His views on the early church strongly impacted his relationship with Seton and her community.

With a lack of American-born priests and no seminary at which to train them, John Carroll looked to Europe to recruit clergy. Tension often arose between Carroll and the members of the French Society of Saint Sulpice over differing opinions about the church. Charles Herbermann published *The Sulpicians in the United States* in 1916. In his 1935 doctoral thesis published as *Beginnings of Saint Sulpice in the United States*, John Ruane calls Herbermann's book "incomplete and poorly written."⁴² Despite their differences, both authors offer a basic narrative of how the Sulpicians came to the United

⁴² Joseph William Ruane, *The Beginnings of the Society of St. Sulpice in the United States (1791-1829)*, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1935), 218.

States and became involved with the church in this country. Finally, Sister Betty Ann McNeil provides an insight into the sisters' relationship with the Sulpician priests and the roles the priests played in the community in "The Sulpicians and the Sisters of Charity." More than a history, McNeil's article examines the mission of the Society of St. Sulpice in the United States and how that related to the formation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's and the community's later union with the French Daughters of Charity.

A brief review of the men who oversaw the Sisters of Charity rounds out the stories of Elizabeth Seton and her community. Annabelle Melville published biographies of both Rev. William Dubourg, who first encouraged Elizabeth Bayley Seton to move from New York to Maryland, and John Carroll. John Gilmary Shea and the other Catholic historians have also written about the first American Archbishop. Richard Shaw depicts Rev. John Dubois as an authoritarian with a tender side who shared a prickly relationship with Seton. Theodore Maynard presents a portrait of Seton's spiritual advisor Rev. Simon Bruté in *The Reed and the Rock*. In *Simon Bruté de Rémur: First Bishop of Vincennes*, Sister Mary Godecker offers a comprehensive biography that unfortunately glosses over his relationship with Elizabeth Bayley Seton and the Sisters of Charity.

Many scholars have lamented the lack of research of women's history in the early national era. However, studies abound on the subject today. Linda Kerber, Nancy Cott, and Sara Evans have written more general histories, whereas other scholars have studied specific aspects of women's lives. Jeanne Boydston writes about the evolution of housework in *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic*. In *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England*, Susan Juster discusses women's position in religious

society in America. Rosemarie Zagarri focuses on how women took advantage of the social upheaval of the American Revolution to act politically, albeit for a brief period, in *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic*. These women's historians do not discuss Catholicism or women religious, for the most part. Anne Boylan, in *The Origins of Women's Activism*, mentions the exclusion of women religious from the feminine sphere in early national American society – their vows to celibacy being in opposition to the idea of producing patriotic citizens. Looking at the scholarship together provides a rich and comprehensive picture of what it meant to be a republican woman in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War.

Authors look at republican motherhood in different ways. Linda Kerber first published the term in 1976 in her article “The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment – An American Perspective.” Republican motherhood, she writes, gave women a political role in the new republic while still relegating them to the domestic realm. “The Republican Mother’s life was dedicated to the service of civic virtue; she educated her sons for it; she condemned and corrected her husband’s lapses from it.”⁴³ Jan Lewis discusses the republican wife in her 1987 article “The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic.” The ideal republican woman was more than a mother, she was also a wife. She was a chaste and virtuous woman who used her feminine faculties to lure a man into a companionate marriage and help him maintain his virtue. Ruth Bloch describes the transition of a woman from a man’s helpmeet to the arbiter of social mores in “American Feminine Ideals in Transition.” During the early

⁴³ Kerber, “The Republican Mother,” 202.

national era, virtue transformed from a male trait to a female one. This transition resulted in a ““gendered republicanism”,” at the center of which was republican motherhood.

Both Joan Landes and Rosemarie Zagarri discuss the philosophical basis of republican motherhood. In “Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother,” Rosemarie Zagarri examines the intellectual origins of what she calls “Anglo-American womanhood.”⁴⁴ Zagarri writes that, to understand republican motherhood, it is important to trace its roots from the philosophy of the Enlightenment and the changes in American society during the Revolutionary era. Landes writes about how republican motherhood evolved to resolve the ambiguity of women’s involvement in politics in late eighteenth-century Europe and America in “Women and the Public Sphere.” Landes and Zagarri contend that republican motherhood was an international phenomenon that developed throughout the eighteenth century and found a foothold in America following the Revolutionary War.

Several historians offer countering views to republican motherhood. Susan Branson disagrees that republican womanhood and the concept of separate public and private spheres limited the civic activities of women. In fact, she writes that republican motherhood gave women the opportunity to participate in the political world through print media, theater, public ceremonies, and salons. Mary Beth Norton in “The Evolution of White Women’s Experience in Early America” and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich in “Daughters of Liberty,” published in *Women in the Age of the American Revolution*, both write that religious involvement gave women a political voice and the opportunity for participation in society outside their families. The only difference between Branson’s

⁴⁴ Zagarri, “Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother,” 211.

“fiery Frenchified dames” and Norton’s and Ulrich’s churchgoers was the venue of their activism.

Contemporary authors have built on the arguments of Judith Sargent Murray, Dr. Benjamin Rush, and Noah Webster to describe the development of female education and its importance to republicanism in early national America. Lucia McMahon calls education of women part of the republican experiment in ““Of the Utmost Importance to Our Country.”” Other writers contend that women took advantage of republican ideology to secure education for themselves. Mary Kelley writes about the rise of female academies in the nineteenth century in *Learning to Stand & Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*. However, Carol Mattingly contends that “convent schools” pioneered women’s education with the formation of female academies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In “Uncovering Forgotten Habits,” Mattingly attributes the rise of academies like those described in Kelley’s monograph in part to anti-Catholic sentiment.

Descriptions of ladies’ academies in the early republic offer a look at how educators applied the doctrine of early advocates of female education. Sister M. Benedict Murphy researched Catholic female academies, including St. Joseph’s Academy, in early national America for her 1958 doctoral dissertation titled *Pioneer Roman Catholic Girls’ Academies*. Mary Johansen writes specifically about female academies in the Upper South in her dissertation, “*Female Instruction and Improvement: Education for Women in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia, 1785-1835*,” and how, due to the region’s unique burgeoning urban but strong slaveholding agricultural character, education evolved differently there. She describes St. Joseph’s Academy’s curriculum as

primarily religious and mentions the discrimination in educational opportunities afforded boarding students and their charity counterparts. Anne Gordon discusses the Young Ladies Academy of Philadelphia in a chapter of the same name in *Women of America: A History*. The non-secular Academy, which opened in 1787, was founded by city leaders who believed that women required educations to prepare them for marriage and motherhood, writes Gordon. These disparate institutions, scattered over the United States, all shared the goal of the trustees of the Philadelphia Young Ladies Academy.

Understanding the relationship between the ideology of republican womanhood and women religious requires a knowledge of sisterhoods in early national America. In her history of women religious, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia*, Jo Ann McNamara writes how women who founded American religious orders invented themselves as they went along. The Sisters of Charity, for instance, did not have the benefit of an established organization such as those who transferred sisters from Europe upon which to model themselves and had to start completely from scratch. She describes them in light of contemporary societal trends, their relationships with the male-dominated church, and how they envisioned themselves as sisters and communities of women religious. Sister Mary Ewens' study of American women religious examines changing relationships between American women religious and their European counterparts. Ewens focuses on the role of the sister in the United States and discusses role conflicts, particularly those roles that arose between medieval canon law and nineteenth century American women religious. Like McNamara, Ewens writes that American communities of women religious were forced to adapt traditional practices to succeed in the United States. Rather than joining the French Daughters of Charity, the Sisters of Charity

amended the rules of the European community to allow them to collect tuition from students to support their operations. The Rule was also adapted to allow Elizabeth Seton to retain custody of and care for her five children. The Sisters of Charity eventually joined the Daughters of Charity in 1850.

Religious historian Joseph Mannard has written two articles and a dissertation that study the connections between women religious and social trends of their time. In “Widows in Convents of the Early Republic,” he theorizes that widowed sisters, who he says have been left out of histories of women religious, played a role in female activism in the nineteenth century by taking leadership positions in their communities. Elizabeth Bayley Seton was a widow, as was Rose Landry White. White, one of the founding Sisters of Charity, managed the Sisters of Charity’s first mission outside Emmitsburg and succeeded Seton as Mother of the community.

In his 1986 journal article “Maternity... of the Spirit: Nuns and Domesticity in Antebellum America,” Mannard investigates the relationship between women religious and the antebellum ideology of domesticity. Although the study focuses more on the ideology of true womanhood that arose in the 1830s than republican womanhood, Mannard discusses Protestant opposition of Catholic academies and describes how sisters did and did not teach social ideals to students attending their schools. Several parallels may be drawn between Mannard’s 1989 doctoral dissertation “*Maternity of the Spirit*”: *Women Religious in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, 1790-1860* and this study. Using communities of women religious founded in the Baltimore-Washington, DC, region during the early national era as a case study, the author explores the “maternity of the spirit,” a sister’s answer to republican womanhood. A sister was the “bride of Christ” and

fulfilled her responsibilities as a republican woman through her charitable works.⁴⁵ Like republican womanhood, “maternity of the spirit” gave women religious the opportunity to participate in republican society in early national America while at the same time reinforcing existing gender roles.

A study of primary sources will demonstrate how Elizabeth Bayley Seton and the Sisters of Charity exemplified the ideal of republican womanhood by establishing St. Joseph’s Academy for girls in the early national America. Seton was a prolific correspondent. In her later life, Seton also wrote meditations and translated religious tracts from the French. Through the Seton Writings Project, Sisters of Charity Regina Becthle and Judith Metz have spent more than a decade compiling Seton’s writings from multiple archives into several volumes called *Collected Writings*. The sisters continue working on Phase Two of the project, which encompasses documents written to and about Elizabeth Seton. Other sources of Seton’s writings include letters written to lifelong friend Julianna Scott edited by Monsignor Joseph Code and *Elizabeth Seton: Collected Writings* edited by Ellin Kelly and Annabelle Melville.

The records of the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph’s are held by the Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louise Archives in Emmitsburg. These documents include annals chronicling activities of the community. Ledgers that list names of students who attended St. Joseph’s Academy will reveal information about the demographics of the girls who boarded at the school. Ledgers, receipt books, and daybooks from the period between Seton’s arrival in Emmitsburg and her death in 1821 that document financial activities will show that the Sisters of Charity conducted business as independent agents with local

⁴⁵ Mannard, “Maternity... of the Spirit,” 316.

merchants and artisans. Elizabeth Seton's writings include an early curriculum for St. Joseph's Academy. Later prospectuses show the evolution of the curriculum of the academy that is to those of the Protestant academies that sprung up a decade later.

Finally, organizational documents, including the Rule and Constitutions of the community provide background about the organization. Though they regulate their actions, the documents also empower the sisters to act on their own behalf. The original American Rule is part of the collection of the Daughters of Charity archives. Ellin Kelly has compiled the Rule and Constitutions into a comprehensive document in *Numerous Choirs*. The community's incorporation act of 1817, which lists members of the Sisters of Charity but not their superiors as responsible parties, gave the sisters the authority to operate their organization autonomously. Organizational documents for the Sisters of Charity can also be found in Seton's *Collected Writings*.

Reading the records of the priests involved in the formation and management of the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's chronicles the history of the community, but more importantly perhaps, reveals the relationships between Elizabeth Bayley Seton, the Sisters of Charity, and the male leaders of the church. Thomas O'Brien Hanley has compiled Archbishop John Carroll's records into *The John Carroll Papers*. In 2000, Thomas Spalding edited the second volume of Carroll's records, *John Carroll Recovered: Abstracts of Letters and Other Documents Not Found in the John Carroll Papers*. The papers of Carroll and members of the Society of St. Sulpice are held at the Associated Archives at St. Mary's Seminary. Due to their tenures as president there, some papers of Rev. John Dubois and Rev. Simon Bruté are preserved in the Rhoads

Memorial Archives at Mount St. Mary's University. However, their usefulness is limited, because the Sulpician priests often wrote to each other in French.

Most of the literature written about Elizabeth Bayley Seton and the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's focus on the religious significance of their charitable activities. Like O'Donnell has pointed out, historians outside of the Catholic world have overlooked Seton. Seton and her followers made an important contribution to women's history in early national America. Embodying the "maternity of the spirit," these women acted as surrogate mothers to imbue another generation of American women with republican values. This study will place Seton and her community in a historical context by comparing histories about them with the historiography of early national America, then reveal their words and deeds through the exploration of primary source materials.

CHAPTER III

History

Born August 28, 1774, in New York, Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton was the second daughter of Dr. Richard and Catherine Carleton Bayley. No record exists of her baptism, although it is likely that she received baptism at the Episcopalian Trinity Church.⁴⁶

Seton's roots sprang from Huguenot refugees who fled from religious persecution in France and helped to found New Rochelle. Seton's mother died shortly after giving birth to a third daughter when Elizabeth was three years old. The infant Catherine died two years later. Shouldering the responsibility for his young daughters and a burgeoning medical career, Richard Bayley quickly remarried in July 1778. Life in the Bayley home was not a happy one for Elizabeth and her sister Mary. Charlotte Amelia Barclay, whom Seton would always call Mrs. Bayley, was too absorbed with taking care of her own children to pay much attention to her husband's two older daughters. Sometime during her sixteenth year, an unidentified family conflict occurred that left Elizabeth without a permanent home until her marriage three years later. A gifted and accomplished physician who was appointed the state of New York's first health officer, Richard Bayley was an itinerant father for most of Elizabeth's childhood. During his multiple trips to England, Bayley left Elizabeth and Mary with his brother William's family in New Rochelle. Despite such frequent absences, Elizabeth developed a close relationship with her father. His death from yellow fever in summer 1801 affected her deeply.⁴⁷

Regardless of his infrequent presence in their lives, Richard Bayley provided for the education of his eldest-born daughters. They attended Mama Pompelion's dame

⁴⁶ Melville, 412 n90.

⁴⁷ Lavery, 169.

school in New York where they learned reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, grammar, and what women's history scholar Anne M. Boylan calls the "accoutrements of gentility."⁴⁸ Typically operated by women who sought to support themselves financially, dame schools were popular among urban upper-class parents who wished to improve their daughters' chances in the marriage market. Bayley also insisted that his daughters learn French and music. Seton continued to study on her own in copybooks after she left Mama Pompelion's.⁴⁹ At age eighteen, "she was able to converse fluently in French, had read and even translated some of the classics in that language; she could write passable poetry, was an accomplished musician, and was deeply interested in religious and philosophical subjects."⁵⁰ Her education as well as her success in the New York social scene would help her later when she founded St. Joseph's Academy.

Elizabeth Bayley was the "darling of New York society" during her teen years.⁵¹ A frequent visitor to the homes of the city's most prestigious families, she enjoyed horseback riding, dancing, attending the theater, and performing music. Quick-witted and vivacious, but prone to depression, she was described as an attractive woman: petite with brown, almost black curly hair, an oval face, and large, round brown eyes. Elizabeth caught the attention of William Magee Seton, another New York blue blood six years her senior. If Elizabeth Bayley was a sweetheart of New York society, the tall and fair-complexioned Seton was one of its most eligible bachelors. Born on board the *Edward* on April 20, 1768, and educated in England, he worked as a cashier for the Bank of New York, then later for his father's shipping firm, Seton, Maitland, and Company. He met

⁴⁸ Barthel, 22; Boylan, 102.

⁴⁹ Barthel, 158.

⁵⁰ Lavery, 159.

⁵¹ Lavery, 139.

Elizabeth in 1790 while home from school to attend his sister's wedding. Determined to wed for love and not for money, William Seton married Elizabeth Ann Bayley on January 25, 1794, at the home of her sister, Mary Post. Their father did not attend. The reason for his absence is unclear. Barthel writes that Dr. Bayley, who was in nearby Newark, NJ, had sent a letter to Elizabeth the day before that did not mention the wedding, but chastised his daughter for not writing and requested a French translation from her.⁵²

Marriage and motherhood brought great fulfillment to Elizabeth despite frequent challenges and grief. A note in her "Dear Remembrances" is often quoted: "my own home at 20 – the world – that and heaven too, quite impossible!"⁵³ She and William Seton had five children. Anna Maria was born May 3, 1795. Their first son William followed on November 25, 1796. After William's father died in June 1798, the couple became the guardians of six of his half-brothers and sisters. Caring for the additional family members and assisting her husband with family and business affairs placed a heavy burden on the shoulders of a pregnant Elizabeth. The combined stress nearly cost the lives of Elizabeth and her third child Richard Bayley, who was born on July 20, 1798.⁵⁴ The Setons spent the summer of 1800 with Elizabeth's father in the house adjoining the quarantine hospital built by Dr. Bayley on Staten Island where, on July 1, Catherine Josephine was born. Two months later, Elizabeth's father was dead from the very disease he had built a career on treating. Almost two years later to the day of Dr.

⁵² Barthel, 45.

⁵³ Dear Remembrances, in Elizabeth Ann Seton, *Collected Writings*, vol. 3a, ed. Regina Bechtel, S.C., and Judith Metz, S.C., (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2006), 513, accessed February 8, 2016, http://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentian_ebooks/12.

⁵⁴ Melville, 55-57.

Bayley's death, on August 20, 1802, Elizabeth delivered her fifth and final child Rebecca.

Death was a frequent companion for Elizabeth Seton. She buried three of her sisters-in-law and two of her children. Her sister-in-law Harriet Seton died unexpectedly of "an inflammation of the brain" in December 1809.⁵⁵ Two other sisters-in-law and two of her daughters all succumbed to what Seton called the "Seton complaint." Rebecca and Cecilia Seton suffered from the symptoms of tuberculosis for several years before dying in 1804 and 1810, respectively. Seton's two eldest daughters died after she had founded the Sisters of Charity and St. Joseph's Academy in Emmitsburg. Elizabeth suffered a "severe, long-lasting grief" following the March 12, 1812, death of her eldest daughter Anna, who had joined the sisterhood and took the community name Annina that January.⁵⁶ During the same year, Rebecca fell on the ice while playing and injured her hip. Though tuberculosis is most commonly known as a respiratory illness, it can also infect a patient's joints. The disease eventually settled into Rebecca's hip, and the young girl died on November 3, 1816. After taking care of her dying daughter for months, Seton quickly threw herself back into the work of managing the community and school.

Of her surviving offspring, Seton's two sons, whose futures were a source of constant anxiety for Seton, both served in the military, while her youngest daughter discovered a vocation for the church. Catherine, who lived with family and friends following her mother's death in 1821, joined the Sisters of Mercy in New York in 1846 and served in prison ministry. Catherine was 91 years old when she died in 1891. Elizabeth Seton worked endlessly to secure the futures of her two sons. "Until the day she

⁵⁵ Barthel, 148.

⁵⁶ Dirvin, 36, 321.

died, they would be her greatest personal worry and the worry would be largely unrequited,” one biographer observed.⁵⁷ Having rejected a career as a merchant, William served in the US Navy from 1818 through 1834 and died in 1868. Restless and spendthrift, Richard served in the US Navy in 1822 and 1823, after which he became US assistant agent in Monrovia. He contracted an illness while caring for the first American consul in Liberia and died aboard the *Oswego* on June 26, 1823.⁵⁸

William Magee Seton was already consumptive when he met Elizabeth Bayley, and his health began to decline in 1799. That, combined with his lack of business aptitude and the impact of the conflict between England and France on the Atlantic shipping trade, undercut the success of the family merchant business. Seton, Maitland, and Company, lost two ships at sea, one carrying coined money, the other valuable cargo from Amsterdam.⁵⁹ William Seton’s London partner stopped paying his bills and went to debtor’s prison. Seton, fearing the same fate, declared bankruptcy. In December 1800, a bankruptcy commissioner inventoried the Setons’ possessions, and William handed him the keys to the business.

Three years later, in October 1803, William, Elizabeth, and their oldest daughter Anna traveled to Leghorn, Italy. They planned to visit the Setons’ business associates, the Filicchis, and hoped that the climate there would restore Will’s health. Because their ship possessed no “bill of health,” they were confined for a month to a “dungeon-like” lazaretto, a building used for quarantine purposes.⁶⁰ William died on December 27, days following their release. Elizabeth relied on her spirituality to cope with her husband’s

⁵⁷ Dirvin, 347.

⁵⁸ McNeil, n19.

⁵⁹ Barthel, 72.

⁶⁰ Melville, 100.

quickly deteriorating health during the long days in the lazaretto. She immersed herself in her Bible, prayer book, and commentaries. She prayed and sang hymns with her family. Elizabeth would eventually find solace from the grief of her husband's death and a resolution to her troubled relationship with God in a new religion.

Always introspective and intellectually inquisitive, Elizabeth Seton's spirituality steadily intensified during her marriage through religious study, meditations, and prayers. She wrote to her close friend Julia Scott in November 1802, "...my habits of both soul and body are changed, that I feel all the habits of society and connections of this life have taken a new form and are only interesting or endearing as they point the view to the next."⁶¹ However, Seton's spirituality was a heart-wrenching struggle. She battled continually to rectify her sense of unworthiness as a sinner with God's greatness. In a journal kept for her sister-in-law Rebecca Seton during her trip to Italy, Elizabeth Seton lamented her sinfulness and begged for God's mercy. "Oh that I could wash out my sins with my tears, and expiate them with my blood," she wrote. "I know I deserve death as the punishment of my sins, and therefore accept with submission the decree of thy justice; let this body formed of the earth return to the earth, but oh, let the soul created in thy image, return again to thy bosom."⁶² Seton was not alone in her tumultuous relationship with God.

In fact, there was a long spiritual pedigree for this sentiment. Catherine O'Donnell likens Seton and her spirituality to Jonathan Edwards, a leading force in the First Great

⁶¹ Elizabeth Seton to Julianna Scott, November 16, 1820, in *Letters of Mother Seton to Mrs. Julianna Scott*, ed. Joseph B. Code, S.T.D., (Baltimore: The Chandler Printing Company, 1960), 103.

⁶² Journal to Rebecca Seton, April 24, 1804, in Elizabeth Ann Seton, *Collected Writings*, vol. 1, ed. Regina Bechtle, S.C., and Judith Metz, S.C., (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2006), 302, accessed February 8, 2016, http://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentian_ebooks/9.

Awakening, and his “painful abasement before God.” As O’Donnell writes, “This twinned consciousness of sinfulness and of God’s greatness birthed acute misery until – for Seton as for Jonathan Edwards – the moments when it produced almost unspeakable gratitude and joy. It was in these years of domesticity that Seton first felt such rapture.”⁶³

A reflection written by Elizabeth Seton on a spring morning in 1802 reads in stark contrast to the entry in her Italian journal:

It is true the Journey is long, the burthen is heavy, but the Lord delivers his faithful servants from all their troubles, and sometimes even here allows them some hours of sweetest Peace as the earnest of eternal blessedness. Is it nothing to sleep serene under his guardian wing, to awake to the brightness of the glorious sun with renewed strength and renewed blessings, to be blessed with the power of instant communion with the Father of our Spirit the sense of his presence, the influences of his love, to be assured of that love is enough to tie us faithfully to him and while we have fidelity to him all the surrounding cares and contradictions of this Life are but Cords of mercy to send us faster to Him who will hereafter make even their remembrance to vanish in the reality of our eternal felicity?⁶⁴

Seton’s spirituality vacillated until the Filicchis introduced her to the Catholic faith.

After Will’s death, Elizabeth and Anna remained in Italy with the Filicchi family for several months. During this time, the Filicchis took Seton on a tour of Florence and visited several Catholic churches. In the angst of her grief, she was captivated by the beauty and opulence of the churches. Elizabeth Seton was also intrigued by Catholic rituals, such as fasting and signing the cross. In her journal to Rebecca, she writes, “All the Catholic Religion is full of those meanings which interest me so.”⁶⁵ For a woman constantly struggling with her spirituality, the rituals of Catholicism brought religion to

⁶³ O’Donnell, 8.

⁶⁴ Reflection, 1802, in *Elizabeth Seton: Selected Writings*, eds. Ellin M. Kelly and Annabelle M. Melville, (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 85.

⁶⁵ Journal to Rebecca Seton, April 18, 1804, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 1, 296.

life. Seton's worship became an active, participatory practice, whereas Protestant doctrine often left her with questions about the surety of her faith.

Although Seton made no formal acceptance or rejection of the Catholic Church while staying in Italy, Dirvin writes that she was "*intellectually convinced*" to convert to the Catholic faith.⁶⁶ Antonio Filicchi sailed back to the United States with Elizabeth Seton and her daughter. Seton's reflected on Antonio's parting from his wife Amabilia: "My savior! My God? Antonio and his wife their separation in God and Communion. Poor I *not* but did I not beg him to give me their Faith and promise him *all* in return for such a gift? Little Ann and I had only strange tears of Joy and grief."⁶⁷ Once returning to New York, Seton struggled for months trying to decide whether to leave the Protestant church. Filippo Filicchi and Trinity Church pastor Rev. John Henry Hobart battled relentlessly over her faith with a war of words. They each bombarded Elizabeth Seton with a barrage of letters and treatises to prove that he offered the true faith.

Filippo Filicchi, who had traveled to the United States several times in the 1780s and married Mary Cowper of Boston, was very interested in promoting Catholicism in this country.⁶⁸ Although the number would increase following the Revolutionary War, only about 25,000 Catholics lived in the colonies in the 1780s. Appointed bishop in 1789, John Carroll tasked himself with building his "small, poorly organized denomination" into a national church based on republican principles.⁶⁹ The addition of an upper-class New York matron like Elizabeth Seton to its rolls would be a boon to the fledgling

⁶⁶ Dirvin, 140.

⁶⁷ Journal to Rebecca Seton, April 18, 1804, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 1, 298.

⁶⁸ Filippo Filicchi's Exposition of the Catholic Faith for Elizabeth Seton, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 3a, 585 nl.

⁶⁹ Jay Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 14-15.

American Catholic church, which also included prominent congregants Matthew Carey and Charles Carroll of Carrollton. O'Donnell writes, "Seton was both an instrument of Filippo Filicchi and the mistress of her own spiritual fate."⁷⁰ Filicchi engaged the assistance of Carroll, for whom the Filicchi family had served as a courier, and Rev. John Cheverus of Boston to convince Elizabeth Bayley Seton to join the Catholic Church.

John Henry Hobart had been recently ordained when he was hired as assistant pastor at Trinity Church in 1803. Unassuming in person, Hobart's evangelical preaching style had made him the "sensation of the day" in New York.⁷¹ He rose through the American Episcopal Church and became bishop of New York in 1816. His vibrant and energetic religiosity matched Seton's own, and the two developed a close friendship. Whereas Filicchi focused his argument on Elizabeth's salvation and presented his case succinctly and dispassionately, Hobart appealed to Seton personally and emotionally. He writes in his answer to his opponent's treatise: "I there saw you over the wreck of your dying husband, yourself vigorous and triumphant, bearing up his sinking spirit with the notes of heavenly consolation. And I ask whence did you derive this sacred resolution, this pious and holy ardour?"⁷² Hobart referred to the Bible and prayer book which Elizabeth Seton had taken with her to Italy.

Seton eventually decided to set aside those volumes and pick up a Catholic catechism. In early 1805, she wrote in a journal to Amabilia Filicchi:

Now they tell me take care I am a Mother, and my children I must answer for in Judgment, whatever Faith I lead them to. That being so, and I so unconscious, for I little thought 'till told by Mr. H[obart] that their Faith could be so full of consequence to them or me, I WILL GO PEACEABLY and FIRMLY TO THE

⁷⁰ O'Donnell, 9.

⁷¹ Melville, 88-89.

⁷² Rev. John Henry Hobart's Response to the Filicchi Manuscript, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 3a., 617.

CATHOLICK CHURCH. For if Faith is so important to our Salvation I will seek it where true Faith first begun, seek it among those who received it from GOD HIMSELF, the controversies on it I am quite incapable of deciding, and as the strictest Protestant allows Salvation to a good Catholick, to the Catholicks I will go, and try to be a good one...⁷³

Religious doctrine aside, Seton craved a more active participation in her faith that would bring her closer to God. Communion and confession allowed her to do that. Two months later, in March 1805, Elizabeth Bayley Seton joined the Catholic Church.

Seton's expression of interest in conversion did not immediately result in her ostracism by family and friends as is often believed. Nor did friends and family refuse to help the destitute widowed mother of five. While they continued to support her and her children, Seton's friends, family, and associates attempted to change her mind, and not always for altruistic reasons. "Everyone, it seemed, rushed to dissuade her, for diverse reasons; her true friends, to save her from folly; some of her in-laws, to save the family from disgrace; and Henry Hobart, from sincere religious horror and a measure of ministerial pique."⁷⁴ For Seton's friends and families, her interest in Catholicism betrayed the very fabric of their society.

In the early nineteenth century, the Catholic Church in New York was associated with poor immigrants. Affiliation with the church lowered Seton's social status, and friends and family slowly distanced themselves from her. "They remained on speaking terms, but a subtle though distinct change had taken place, and their patronizing airs infuriated her."⁷⁵ However, when Elizabeth's sixteen-year-old sister-in-law Cecilia announced her intention to convert to Catholicism in 1806, friends and family lashed out

⁷³ Journal to Amabilia Filicchi, January 1805, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 1, 374.

⁷⁴ Dirvin, 149.

⁷⁵ Dirvin, 171.

against Seton, whom they blamed for encouraging the girl to leave the Protestant church. While the people in Seton's life tolerated – even pitied -- the grief-stricken widow for her Papist ways, they would not tolerate her proselytization of someone else. Elizabeth Seton's uncle John Charlton and godmother Sarah Startin cut Seton out of their wills. The Seton family threatened to ruin Elizabeth. They also threatened to disown Cecilia and send the girl overseas. Cecilia fled, then later returned to her widowed brother to keep his house and care for his children. As Seton's family and friends ostracized her, she soon replaced them with people like the Barrys and the Foxes, whom she met in New York's small Catholic community.

Elizabeth Seton faced more than a struggle with her faith when she returned to New York. She had to figure out how she was going to take care of herself and her five children, one of whom was still an infant. At first, she relied on the charity of friends and family for food and housing. Her brother-in-law Dr. Wright Post, her father-in-law's business associate John Wilkes, and her godmother Startin all assisted Elizabeth and her children. Seton initially rented a small house with the intention of leasing the lower floor. Over the next several years, she joined two ventures where she taught or operated a boarding house for students in conjunction with a school. Both projects failed. Seton collaborated with Patrick White and his wife in a school where she served as an assistant teacher in return for educations for her children and a small stipend, but the lack of students and poor financial management soon ended that enterprise. Elizabeth Seton then established a boarding house for students who attended a school opened by Episcopal minister Rev. William Harris. However, dwindling enrollment ended that venture as well. Poor business practices by her partners notwithstanding, Seton's Catholicism cast a

shadow over the boarding schools' potential success. Dirvin calls her "a sort of Jonas" whose choice of faith drove away students.⁷⁶ Antonio Filicchi offered to pay for the education of Elizabeth's sons William and Richard and suggested a school in Montreal. Seton considered moving there with them, where she could retire from the world and teach school. The idea became increasingly more desirable as the boardinghouse failed. Boston priests Cheverus and Francis Matignon, both of whom had advised her during her conversion, encouraged Elizabeth Seton to wait until an appropriate situation – in the United States – could be found for her and her family.

In 1806, Rev. Louis William Dubourg met Elizabeth Bayley Seton following services at St. Peter's Church. Born in 1766 in San Domingo, Dubourg was educated in France and fled to the United States during the French Revolution. The Sulpician priest served as the third president of Georgetown University and helped found St. Mary's Seminary and College in Baltimore in 1799. A "man of enlarged views and remarkable enterprise," Dubourg seized the opportunity to help Seton realize her ambition to retire from the world and teach.⁷⁷ Dubourg had discussed Elizabeth Seton's situation with Cheverus and Matignon, and they decided that she could best serve the church in Baltimore. In 1808, Dubourg offered Seton a lot on which to build a house for a girls' school. He guaranteed her an initial enrollment of six students, then as many as she could handle. William and Richard could attend St. Mary's College for a nominal fee.⁷⁸ As friends died and moved away from the city, Seton's ties with New York were falling

⁷⁶ Dirvin, 178.

⁷⁷ Charles I., White, Rev., D.D., *Life of Eliza. A. Seton, Foundress and First Superior of the Sisters of Daughters of Charity in the United States of America*, (New York: P.J. Kenedy and Sons, 1904), 199.

⁷⁸ Melville, 172-173.

away. After receiving approving counsel from clergy and friends, Elizabeth Bayley Seton decided to move to Baltimore.

Seton received a warm welcome in the South's largest city. Whereas she was pushed out of New York's elite society, she was embraced by upper-class Marylanders. In the early nineteenth century, 16,000 Catholics lived in Maryland, compared to 1,500 in New York. These upper South Catholics were members of the landed gentry and an educated, prosperous middle class.⁷⁹ Elizabeth Seton was one of their own, and the city's prominent families soon called on Elizabeth Seton at the small brick house she had rented on Paca Street.

When Seton moved to Maryland, she found herself in the birthplace of Catholicism in America. Historians argue over the Calvert family's motivation for establishing the Maryland colony. Some contend that the first Baron Baltimore George Calvert, who was a convert, pursued a charter to create a refuge for Catholic dissidents in the New World. Others maintain that the colony was purely a business venture. Still others claim both. Thomas Spalding writes, "The colony was meant to be more than a haven for persecuted Catholics. It would be a feudal domain from which the lord proprietor would derive both power and profit... A neutral state in matters religious was essential to the success of their plan."⁸⁰ The Calvert family believed in the separation of church and state.

In 1649, the Colonial Assembly passed the Act of Toleration that gave Christians the right to religious freedom. However, that freedom would end when the English Civil

⁷⁹ Barthel. 121.

⁸⁰ Thomas W. Spalding, *The Premier See: A History of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, 1789-1989*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 2.

War spilled over into the colonies. Puritan rebellions overthrew proprietor Leonard Calvert and Maryland came under English rule. Anglicanism became the state religion in 1692 and anti-papist laws made practicing Catholicism a crime. Catholics continued to worship – in secret. Missionary priests traveled from private chapel to private chapel to deliver Mass. Not until after the American Revolution would Catholics regain the freedom to practice their faith, when Maryland Catholics like Charles Carroll of Carrollton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a delegate to the Continental Convention, would help lead the charge for independence.

Elizabeth Seton used her connections with upper class Maryland Catholics to support the Paca Street school and the consequent move of her religious community to Emmitsburg. Her unpretentious plans quickly grew beyond what she had imagined when she had first decided to move to Baltimore. In October 1808, four boarders and her three daughters attended the school that adjoined St. Mary's Seminary and College. Three more enrolled that December. Tuition cost \$200 a year and the curriculum included reading, writing, arithmetic, English, and French. Seton offered music, dancing, and drawing for an additional fee.⁸¹ The Rev. Pierre Babade provided religious instruction that included a devotional exercise each Friday.

From Seton's Paca Street school evolved the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's. Dubourg and his associates had apparently intended to establish a community of women religious in conjunction with the school from the inception of the Baltimore plan. They had already chosen Seton as the sisterhood's leader. Seton officially gave herself to the service of the Catholic Church when, on March 25, 1809, she pronounced simple vows of

⁸¹ Barthel, 127.

chastity, obedience, and poverty, valid for one year, in front of Archbishop John Carroll. She was recognized as the leader of the first American community of women religious, and, from then on, was known as Mother Seton.

Women had already arrived in Baltimore to join Seton's new community. Her first companion, Cecilia O'Conway, arrived from Philadelphia in December 1808. O'Conway's father told Seton that he had "had brought his daughter to offer her to God."⁸² The following spring, Mary Ann Butler and Maria Murphy, niece of Matthew Carey, also arrived from Philadelphia. Susan Clossey arrived from New York in June. Having overcome opposition from her family and pastor, Cecilia Seton, along with her sister Harriet, finally arrived on June 12. Ellen Thompson wrote from Emmitsburg to request admission to the community that May. On June 1, Seton and her small community attended Mass in their habits for the first time. Their clothing was similar to the "widow's weeds" or mourning garments that Seton had worn since her husband William's death. A woman who had once worn silk gowns and monogrammed satin slippers now donned herself in a black dress with a short black shoulder cape, white muslin cap that tied under the chin (the sisters would later change to a black cap), and a black rosary attached to a leather belt.⁸³

Her little community and school rapidly growing, Elizabeth Seton wanted to construct a building on the lot that Dubourg had promised to her. However, she did not have the money to complete the project. Several letters to her benefactors the Filicchis went unanswered, because the Napoleonic Wars and American Embargo Acts had delayed the mails. In late 1808, Seton sought Dubourg's counsel about obtaining funding.

⁸² Dirvin, 225.

⁸³ Barthel, 133.

He suggested that she contact Samuel Sunderland Cooper, a former seaman and wealthy convert who had recently entered St. Mary's Seminary. That same day, without having spoken to Seton, Cooper approached Dubourg and offered to invest \$10,000 in a Catholic school for young women with two conditions.⁸⁴ First, in addition to the school, the community would "extend the plan to the reception of the aged and also uneducated persons who may be employed in spinning knitting, etc. etc. so as to found a manufactory on a small scale which may be very beneficial to the poor."⁸⁵ Second, Seton would locate her community about 50 miles northwest of Baltimore in Emmitsburg.

Once Carroll decided to accept Cooper's offer, Elizabeth Seton wasted no time to prepare for the move. On June 21, 1809, she left Baltimore with Anna, Cecilia, Harriet, and Maria Murphy. Rose Landry White, a widow who had recently joined the community, followed with Seton's remaining daughters Catherine and Rebecca, Seton's sons, Cecilia O'Conway, Mary Ann Butler, and Susan Clossey several weeks later. The sisters traveled much the same route from Baltimore to the small northwestern Frederick County community in use today. It took Seton and her group four days to make the trip.⁸⁶

When Elizabeth Seton walked through Emmitsburg on the way to her new home in what she would call St. Joseph's Valley during the summer of 1809, she found a bustling little town. Rev. Simon Bruté wrote that, in 1810, the population of Emmitsburg was 700, half of whom were Catholics, the other half Lutheran and Presbyterian.⁸⁷ The

⁸⁴ Dirvin, 227-229.

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Seton to Filippo Filicchi, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 54.

⁸⁶ Dirvin, 241.

⁸⁷ Mary M. Meline and Edward McSweeney, *The Story of the Mountain: Mount Saint Mary's College and Seminary, Emmitsburg, Maryland*, vol. 1, (Emmitsburg: The Weekly Chronicle, 1911), 41, accessed February 8, 2016, Hathi Trust.

village boasted a tavern, several merchants, and artisans, including a blacksmith, several tanners, hatters, miller, wheelwright, and a tailor.⁸⁸

Emmitsburg was originally a part of the Maryland colonial patent called Toms Creek Hundred. The Calvert family sold 5,000 acres of the tract to Charles Carroll of Annapolis. Carroll subsequently sold 2,250 acres of the property, called Carrollsburg, to Samuel Emmit on May 13, 1759. Samuel Emmit, having signed agreements with several subscribers on March 5, 1785, sold 35 acres of Carrollsburg to his son William on August 12 for the specific purpose to divide into lots and establish a town. William Emmit sold lots for two pounds, 10 shillings, and required that the owner build a house on the property within two years.⁸⁹ Merchant Captain Richard Jennings built the first house, a single-story log cabin on the town square.⁹⁰

James Hughes settled in town in 1786. He built a brick house on the northeast side of the square where, in a large room, he and other Catholics worshipped. This room became the “Cradle of the Emmitsburg parish.” At the suggestion of missionary priest Rev. Matthew Ryan, James and his brother Joseph donated two lots for the construction of Emmitsburg’s first Catholic church. St. Mary Church was built in 1791 once the ratification of the Constitution allowed Maryland Catholics to practice their faith freely again. The parish changed the name to St. Joseph Church in 1810 after Rev. Charles Duhamel became the priest there.⁹¹

⁸⁸ James A. Helman, *History of Emmitsburg, MD*, (Frederick: Citizen Press, 1906), 61.

⁸⁹ Michael Hillman, “Setting the Record Straight: The Real History of Emmitsburg’s Founding,” accessed April 26, 2015, http://www.emmitsburg.net/archive_list/articles/history/setting_the_record_straight.htm.

⁹⁰ Helman, 20.

⁹¹ *St. Joseph Church, Emmitsburg, Maryland*, (South Hackensack, N.J.: Custombook, Inc., 1968), 6-7.

Around 1728, over 50 years before the founding of Emmitsburg, William Elder settled about five miles south of town at Zentz's Mills.⁹² Originally from St. Mary's City, Elder and his family struck out onto the frontier where they hoped to practice their faith with less fear of persecution. Elder established a parish at Elder's Station in 1741. He built a chapel disguised as a smokehouse. It is likely that Catholics from Emmitsburg also worshiped at this early church. Not allowed a bell, congregants used a boatman's shell to call people to Mass.⁹³

Samuel Cooper purchased 269 acres about a mile south of town from Robert Fleming for Seton's community.⁹⁴ His name, as well as those of Dubourg and the Rev. John Dubois, president of nearby Mount St. Mary's College, were on the title for the property. Renovations to the farmhouse on the property, known as the Stone House, were not yet complete when Elizabeth Bayley Seton arrived, so the women spent their first month in a cabin built as a retreat for Baltimore Sulpician priests and known as "The Cot."

All the sisters from Baltimore were reunited in the Stone House on July 31, 1809, that date that marked the founding of the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's. Sixteen people, most of whom were adults, lived in the house, which consisted of four rooms, two on the main floor and two upstairs. The sisters used one of the downstairs rooms as a chapel. They soon started to build a bigger home to house themselves and their school. The community moved into the White House in February 1810, although construction continued until that summer.

⁹² Meline, 2.

⁹³ *St. Joseph Church*, 6.

⁹⁴ Barthel, 131.

During the first years after the community's founding, Seton and the sisters faced sickness and death, not to mention primitive and uncomfortable living conditions to which many of the gentlewomen were unaccustomed. "The upstairs (of the Stone House) was in reality a garret where winter snow sometimes sifted over the women sleeping on the floor."⁹⁵ The sisters only had two cots, which were reserved for the sick.⁹⁶ The rest of the women slept on mattresses on the floor. The two cots were hardly enough. Sickness plagued the community during its first winter in Emmitsburg. Not long after Harriet Seton died, two community members, Anna, and Elizabeth all fell seriously ill. Seton wrote to Archbishop John Carroll on January 19, 1810: "I really began to think we were all going."⁹⁷

Life in the Maryland countryside had few of the conveniences of an American city in the early nineteenth century. Laundry was an all-day event and a chore for which a sister was assigned responsibility. The sisters carried their clothes and linens to nearby Toms Creek and washed them in tubs under the shelter of a tree. Sister Rose White writes in her journal that, while giving the sisters their first retreat, Dubourg advised the women to grow plenty of carrots "in order to make use for coffee, which we used – that and rye were our morning and evening beverage for breakfast and supper."⁹⁸ Dirvin contends, however, "much has been said of the Sisters' poverty, which was real enough, but it was not destitution." He cites an account book of the community that lists purchases of flour, bacon, coffee, tea, several different types of fish, butter, milk, and eggs. By 1811, the

⁹⁵ Melville, 206.

⁹⁶ Melville, 206.

⁹⁷ Seton to Archbishop John Carroll, January 19, 1810, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 102.

⁹⁸ McNeil, "The Journal of Mother Rose White," 33, 35. A retreat involves the retirement for religious exercises.

sisters had started to farm the Fleming property and raise livestock, including cows, chickens, and pigs.⁹⁹

The Sulpicians accepted ecclesiastical authority from Rev. Francis Matignon of the Sisters of Charity in January 1809. Due to the failing health of Rev. Charles Francis Nagot, superior of the Society of St. Sulpice in the United States, Dubourg was named director. A conflict soon arose between the new director and Elizabeth Bayley Seton over communication with the priest Rev. Pierre Babade. Dubourg forbid correspondence between the sisters and Babade, who had taught at the Paca Street school and served as confessor for the sisters. The Sulpicians bristled at what they perceived as Babade's interference in the community's affairs, although Babade maintained that he was only attending to the sisters' spiritual needs. After a strong-worded letter to Archbishop John Carroll about the situation resulted in Dubourg's resignation, an abashed and remorseful Elizabeth Seton pleaded for his return.¹⁰⁰ Instead, Nagot named John Baptist David as the second superior of the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's.

Seton's relationship with David was contentious from the start. "But that David intended to rule, and that Mrs. Seton found her superior's attitude unpleasant cannot be denied,"¹⁰¹ as Melville explains. David's "rigidity" would "freeze Elizabeth, despite herself, into a like rigidity of resistance."¹⁰² For instance, he developed plans for the school without consulting the sisters. He told Seton that he would put together regulations, send them to the Sulpicians for review, and then forward them to her for any revisions. David's short tenure as superior was tempestuous for the entire community.

⁹⁹ Dirvin, 278, 322.

¹⁰⁰ Melville, 223.

¹⁰¹ Melville, 229.

¹⁰² Dirvin, 269.

For several months, Seton's continued status as head of the sisterhood was questionable. David may have intended to replace Seton with Sister Rose White, who had met the priest after her husband was lost at sea. Rumors also persisted that the superior planned to move Seton and a few sisters back to Baltimore to start a mission there. When David resigned to join the newly appointed Bishop of Bardstown Benedict Flaget in Kentucky, all plans concerning the reorganization of the Sisters of Charity evaporated. What exactly David intended to do and what the roles of the priests and Sister Rose White in his plan are unclear due to the secrecy surrounding the situation. "Elizabeth knew very little, and even the Archbishop scarcely more; while David, after the first shocked reaction to the news, kept his counsel."¹⁰³ David apparently took his plan with him to Kentucky, where he helped found another women's religious community.

David resurfaced in 1813, when he requested a sister to act as superior of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, a community of women religious he had established in Kentucky. The Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's in Emmitsburg were willing to work with David, until he refused to allow their council to approve his novices. They then refused any further collaboration with David's fledgling group.

Meanwhile, a struggle over how the sisters would be governed ensued. Since Dubourg's retreat in 1809, the sisters had operated according to thirteen provisional rules under the direction of a council elected by the membership. The origin of the provisional rules is "obscure."¹⁰⁴ Sulpician leaders had modeled the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's according to the principles of the French Company of the Daughters of Charity. They

¹⁰³ Dirvin, 275.

¹⁰⁴ Melville, 437 n69.

looked to that organization for a permanent solution to govern the new sisterhood.¹⁰⁵ Several factors impacted how the French rules were adapted to meet the needs of the American community and why an attempted union with the French community failed early in the history of the Sisters of Charity. First, Elizabeth Seton insisted that she maintain custody of her children. Second, whereas the French Company of the Daughters of Charity served mainly the sick and poor, education would be the Sisters of Charity's primary mission, on which they would depend for income. Finally, even though the Society of St. Sulpice had originally accepted responsibility for the sisters in 1809, church leaders disagreed about who supervised religious orders and communities in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, which had been elevated from a diocese by Pope Pius VII in 1808. The Sisters of Charity also lacked clear leadership at a local level. For several months in 1811, the sisters operated without a superior. David resigned and left for Kentucky in May. John Dubois was not appointed third superior of the community until at least that fall. Ultimately, the conflict between Seton, Carroll, and the Sulpician priests was rooted in the differences between the needs and missions of the burgeoning American pioneer church and the established European institution.

Cultural differences bred dissension between the Archbishop and Sulpician priests. American born himself, Carroll believed strongly in republican ideals and his administration of the early American Catholic Church reflected those beliefs. He – and Elizabeth Seton – often clashed with the French émigré clergy over traditional church values and how to apply them to the frontier church. Management of the Sisters of

¹⁰⁵ St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac founded the French Company of the Daughters of Charity in 1633. Although the French priests modeled the community according to Vincentian principles, but the two groups had no official affiliation until the Sisters of Charity joined the Daughters of Charity in 1850.

Charity of St. Joseph's was no exception. In general, the French priests supported a union with the French Company of the Daughters of Charity and "strict application" of the institution's Rule of St. Vincent, Carroll, Dubois, and "to a lesser extent," Cheverus did not.¹⁰⁶ In the end, once Flaget and David left for Kentucky, the remaining priests decided the fate of the Sisters of Charity.

Dirvin pictures Elizabeth Bayley Seton as someone who was willing to accept the authority of male church leaders as long as their decisions meshed with her goals. She did not object to the Common Rules or the union with the French community. Seton had questions: she wanted to ensure the care for her children and provide for the good of the community.¹⁰⁷ On May 13, 1811, she wrote to Archbishop John Carroll concerning the impending arrival of sisters from the Daughters of Charity:

...what authority would the Mother they bring have over our Sisters (while I am present) but the very rule she is to give them? And how could it be known that they would consent to the different modifications of their rule which are indispensable if adopted by us. What support can we procure to this house but from our Boarders, and how can the reception of Boarders be sufficient to maintain it accord with their statutes. How can they allow me the uncontrolled privileges of a Mother to my five darlings? Or how can I in conscience or in accordance with your paternal heart give up so sacred a right.¹⁰⁸

Flaget brought the Rule of the Daughters of Charity from France in late 1810. He had also intended to bring back to the United States three French sisters to join the American community. They never arrived, presumably because they could not obtain passports. The Sisters of Charity would not adopt their own Rule and Constitutions until January 1812. Two primary differences between the French and American communities required amendment of the French Rule for use by the American sisters and likely led to

¹⁰⁶ Melville, 214.

¹⁰⁷ Dirvin, 304-305, 309.

¹⁰⁸ Elizabeth Seton to Archbishop John Carroll, May 13, 1811, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 185.

the failure of the union between the two sisterhoods: Elizabeth Seton's guardianship over her children and the difference in "emphasis" of missions.¹⁰⁹ According to the French Rule, Seton could not continue to manage her children's finances and maintain her vow of poverty. Seton may have become the religious mother of the many daughters of her community, but, primarily, she was the mother of her children. She wrote to family friend George Weis in 1811, "...the only word I have to say to every question is, *I am a Mother* ..."¹¹⁰ She would relinquish her position as Mother of the community before giving up her duty to her children. The French Daughters of Charity and American Sisters of Charity also differed in the charitable works they performed. While the French sisters focused on treating the sick and serving the poor, the American sisters taught children. Furthermore, unlike their European counterparts, the Sisters of Charity relied on the income from their educational services to support the community.

John Dubois was tasked with the translation and adaptation of the French Rule for the use by the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's. Of all the priests associated with the community, he likely had the most influence on the establishment of the Sisters of Charity. Born in 1764, Dubois served as chaplain in a Daughters of Charity asylum in the St. Sulpice parish in Paris before escaping France during the Revolution with the assistance of former schoolmate Maximilien Robespierre.¹¹¹ In 1794, Carroll appointed Dubois as a missionary priest in Frederick. Dubois served Mass in Emmitsburg about once a month and settled there permanently after founding Mount St. Mary's College on land he purchased from the Elder family in 1808.

¹⁰⁹ Melville, 217.

¹¹⁰ Elizabeth Seton to George Weis, April 27, 1811, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 181.

¹¹¹ Richard Shaw, *John Dubois: Founding Father*, (Yonkers: US Catholic Historical Society, 1983), 16.

Preserving most of the French Rule, Dubois made three fundamental changes to the document to create what has come to be known as the American Rule. One permitted Elizabeth Seton to maintain guardianship of her children, as well as serve more than the maximum two terms as Mother of the community. Another modification made education of the young a primary mission of the community. Finally, the American Rule gave sisters the ability to take in boarders. The sisters ratified the rules and constitutions and elected a new council in January 1812.

St. Joseph's Free School opened February 22, 1810, with three pupils from St. Joseph's parish in Emmitsburg. In addition to the charity students, the sisters also accepted paying day students, or "externals."¹¹² The charity and externals in "St. Joseph's class" received separate instruction from the boarders, the first of whom arrived on May 14, 1810:

The policy of the Sisters of Charity at this time seems to emerge rather clearly as one based on the ability-to-pay theory. Wealthier girls went among the boarders and were entitled to an education suited to their social and economic status. Those girls who could pay less went into St. Joseph's class to be taught simultaneously with the free students. Even the poorest were encouraged to be economically independent by the promise of work when they were able to engage in it.¹¹³

The sisters offered a similar curriculum to that taught at the Paca Street school: reading, writing, spelling, grammar, geography, and arithmetic. Seton was headmistress, but also taught history and religion when the academy first opened. Tuition at St. Joseph's Academy started at \$100 a year, but rose to \$125 a year following the War of 1812. Lessons in music, needlework, and languages cost an additional five to eight dollars. St.

¹¹² Melville, 272.

¹¹³ Ellin M. Kelly, ed. *Numerous Choirs. A Chronicle of Elizabeth Bayley Seton and Her Spiritual Daughters. Volume I: The Seton Years 1774-1821*, (Evansville: Mater Dei Provincialate, 1981), 139.

Joseph's Academy attracted students from some of the most distinguished Catholic families of the time and daughters from elite Protestant families as well.

Rev. Simon Bruté Dubois' assistant at Mount St. Mary's and Seton's close friend and spiritual advisor, reported in 1813 that fifty children and eighteen sisters resided in the White House. Thirty-two boarders financed the operation as well as paying day students, whose numbers varied depending on the time of year.¹¹⁴ Despite increasing enrollments, the Sisters of Charity faced financial difficulties during the first years of operation. American statesman Robert Goodloe Harper, whose three daughters attended St. Joseph's Academy, served as Elizabeth Seton's financial and legal advisor. She wrote to Harper in December 1811,

the promising and amiable perspective of Establishing a House of plain and useful Education... is I fear now disappearing under the pressure of debts contracted at its very foundation... must it be so – or will a friendly hand assistant us, become our guardian protector, plead our cause with the rich and powerful, serve the cause of Humanity, and be a Father to the Poor.¹¹⁵

Seton suggested to Bishop John Cheverus that she embark on a "begging tour" to raise money, but the priest discouraged what he thought would be an unproductive effort. It soon became obvious that the ladies' academy would finance the community and its charitable efforts, and, to bring in enough income to do so, the boarding school would cater to the rich.

Even while the War of 1812 raged around the religious community in Emmitsburg, Seton and the sisters were little affected by the conflict, save for continued sporadic contact with the Filicchis. "Tucked away in her Valley, Elizabeth scarcely knew

¹¹⁴ Melville, 272.

¹¹⁵ Elizabeth Seton to Robert Goodloe Harper, December 28, 1811, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 206.

there was a war, except when prices rose to worry her,” Dirvin notes.¹¹⁶ Despite the war, the community began to expand its missions. The managers of the St. Joseph’s Asylum of Philadelphia requested three sisters to operate the orphanage for \$600 a year. Sisters Rose White, Teresa Conroy, and Susan Clossey left on the Sisters of Charity’s first mission outside Emmitsburg in September 1814. The following summer, three more sisters -- Ann Gruber, Bridget Farrell, Anastasia Nabbs, and, later, Angela Brady, were missioned to nearby Mount St. Mary’s College to assist Dubois in the infirmary and with domestic duties. The Sisters of Charity assumed management of a New York City orphanage, which was later expanded to include a school, in 1817, and a free school in Philadelphia in 1818.

Robert Goodloe Harper, a benefactor of the Sisters of Charity and whose daughters attended St. Joseph’s Academy, sponsored legislation in the Maryland Senate in 1817 to incorporate the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph’s. The incorporation gave the sisters the legal authority over their community and resulted in the transfer of the deed of the Emmitsburg property to the organization. It also empowered the women to act in a business world normally restricted to men. The charter listed the purpose of the community as “the care of the sick, service of aged, infirm and meritorious persons, and the education of young girls. It limited the community to 800 acres of land and capitalization/estate to no more than \$50,000.” Twenty-two sisters were listed as members of the organization.¹¹⁷

In the same year that the Sisters of Charity expanded their missions in New York and Philadelphia, Elizabeth Seton fell ill, another victim of the “Seton complaint.” She

¹¹⁶ Dirvin, 334.

¹¹⁷ Melville, 321.

had developed an abscess in her chest, for which a doctor bled her in both arms. Seton recovered, but, on a windy day in August 1820, she developed a fever after Dubois insisted that she inspect the construction of the new day school. She became so ill that Dubois anointed her and gave her last communion.¹¹⁸ Elizabeth Bayley Seton lived for another three months. Only 46 years old, she died January 4, 1821.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Dirvin, 446.

¹¹⁹A Cause for Beatification and Canonization of Elizabeth Bayley Seton was introduced in February 1940. Seton was beatified in 1963. Pope Paul VI canonized her as the first American born saint on September 14, 1975. Her remains are entombed in the Basilica located at the National Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Emmitsburg.

CHAPTER IV

Republican womanhood

The Declaration of Independence signified more than a statement of American colonists' grievances against the British king. The document also represented their rejection of the British way of life. In the simplest terms, republicanism in post-Revolutionary America meant a political system that promised opportunity for most social classes. Americans broadened the concept to create a republican culture. They adapted the ideas of Enlightenment philosophers Locke, Condorcet, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and writers in the Scottish jurisprudential school, all of whom emphasized the importance of the public good, perpetuated through civic virtue. Although scholars discussed the need for women's political and social rights before the American Revolution, for the most part they were unclear on what role a woman would play in a republic. That coupled with colonial women's active involvement in revolutionary activities both before and during the War for Independence left female patriots in an ambiguous position in relationship to the new polity. Americans devised a political role for women through the concept of republican womanhood, which allowed women to participate in civic society while relegating them to the private, or domestic, sphere.

Historian Linda Kerber first coined the term republican motherhood over 40 years ago. Republican motherhood, or republican womanhood, as this study refers to the concept, filled the intellectual gap between Enlightenment philosophy and how a woman perceived her role in civic society.¹²⁰ A republican woman was responsible for instilling virtue in her children and safeguarding the virtue of her husband. As wife and mother, the

¹²⁰ Kerber, "The Republican Mother," 196.

republican women became moral arbiters of early national American society. This civic responsibility, although vital to the success of the American republican experiment, yielded no social or political equality for women. Some historians argue that women relinquished the tentative freedom they had achieved through their activism during the revolution. In fact, many women learned to use their newly defined roles to their advantage through civic involvement and the pursuit of education. Republican womanhood would also set the foundation for women-led social reform movements later in the nineteenth century.

Education of the populace, including women, was an important principle of republican philosophy. Only properly educated citizens could make appropriate decisions for the common good. Women's education, often limited to reading, writing, and arithmetic, lagged behind that of males in pre-Revolutionary America. American revolutionary thinker Dr. Benjamin Rush justified female education for its "social utility."¹²¹ According to Rush, women required education to fulfill their responsibilities of preparing their children for participation in civic society and managing their households. Rush and his contemporary Noah Webster dismissed as vacuous the ornamental educations that taught social accomplishment to upper-class young women. Instead, they recommended the study of more practical subjects like English, math, history, geography, and some science. Although writers like Rush believed that "the proper education of women was meant primarily to serve society and, in the process, the nation at large,"¹²² others including Mary Wollstonecraft, Judith Sargent Murray, and

¹²¹ Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: 'Woman's Sphere' in New England, 1780-1835*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 105.

¹²² McMahon, 478.

Mercy Otis Warren believed that women had the right to education so they could function autonomously in republican society.

One of the earliest schools for girls, the Young Ladies Academy of Philadelphia opened in 1787 and offered lessons in the practical subjects espoused by Rush and Webster, thus providing an education akin to that available to young men at the time. Ten years later Susanna Rowson opened a school for girls in Boston. Catholic girls' academies, including St. Joseph's Academy operated by Elizabeth Bayley Seton and the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's, proliferated throughout the south and west in the early nineteenth century. The Catholic academies proved popular with both Catholic and Protestant families. Fueled by increasing nativism throughout the nation, Protestants' threatened reaction to the institutions' financial success and their ability to provide rigorous educations to young women contributed to the establishment of proprietor academies in the 1820s.

Republicanism in America

During the eighteenth century, a democratic revolution swept through the western world. The front broke first on American shores. With a flat social hierarchy devoid of either aristocratic or massive impoverished classes found in European nations, the lack of an organized state religion, and a weak state authority, the colonies were "primed" for republicanism.¹²³ Republicanism led not only to a complete overhaul of American government but also of American society, because the former colonists would have to forge new ties to each other to replace the political, economic, and social bonds broken

¹²³ Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 112, 123.

with the British monarchy by the Revolutionary War. Independence with Great Britain resulted in the overthrow of the colonial social elite and the growth of a middling class that offered Americans new social opportunities.

Republican values had long been enmeshed in British monarchical society. In fact, republicanism and monarchalism would become virtually indistinguishable in Great Britain by the 1700s. Home, state, and society were intricately intertwined in eighteenth-century British society. The king represented the titular father who nurtured his submissive children, the English people. The rigid social hierarchy dictated a place for everyone in society, from the monarch to the peers to the meanest servant. Authority was based on personal relationships. During the 1700s, particularly in the American colonies, republicanism was beginning to erode the principles of monarchy: inequality, hierarchy, devotion to kinship, dependency, patronage, and patriarchy.¹²⁴

Americans developed their form of republicanism from a combination of traditional classicism and European Enlightenment philosophy that replaced the paternalism of monarchy with a collective socio-political culture that valued the interests of the public good over the individual while still offering liberty and opportunity to its citizens. American colonists living in the mid-eighteenth century were enamored with life in ancient Greece and Rome, and their interest in these societies would help to shape post-colonial values and ideas. As Gordon S. Wood notes, “It was as if these Latin writers in their literature of critical lamentation and republican nostalgia had spoken directly to the revolutionary concerns of the eighteenth century.”¹²⁵ As they read

¹²⁴ Wood, *Radicalism*, 96.

¹²⁵ Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1969), 51.

translations and adaptations of ancient texts that described the demise of these civilizations, especially the Roman Republic, Americans began to draw parallels to their own situation.

Drawing from Enlightenment scholars like Locke and Montesquieu who wrote about the natural rights of man and his relationships to law and government, American thinkers centered republicanism around the idea that individual interest is subsumed for the public good. In a republic, government was by the people, the land-owning white people, that is. To protect the rights of the whole against the interests of rulers, the collective people became an entity unto itself. Hence, a person's civil liberty stemmed from the public good. The public good also carried an implicit promise of equality among the white American citizenry. Realistically, not all Americans would be equal, but the dismantling of the caste-like colonial hierarchy would afford Americans better chances to make successful lives for themselves. "Thus equality of opportunity would help to encourage a rough equality of condition," at least for growing numbers of white Americans.¹²⁶

One of the most important themes of American republicanism was civic virtue. According to Montesquieu, "all governments rested on their subjects, what make the law effective in despotic governments is fear; what make the law effective in a republic virtue."¹²⁷ Virtue can be traced back to the classical and early modern republican periods when the term referred to "male public spirit,... the willingness of citizens to engage actively in civic life and to sacrifice individual interests for the common good." Virtue

¹²⁶ Wood, *Radicalism*, 234.

¹²⁷ Linda Kerber, "The Republican Ideology of the Revolutionary Generation," *American Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (1985): 478, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2712578>.

was also derived in part from traditional Protestant ideas. Following the American Revolution, the definition of virtue underwent a transformation from a political and male ideal to a moral and female one.¹²⁸ The responsibility of protecting the virtue of Americans would be placed in the hands of the republic's women.

The decline of paternalism contributed significantly to the colonists' decision to declare independence and would also affect gender roles in America. Changes that occurred in the familial social order echoed revolutionary forces that were propelling the American colonists toward rebellion. A decrease in available land left fathers unable to give property to their sons or provide dowries for their daughters.¹²⁹ "More portable forms" of capital gradually replaced land as the principle medium of value, and family members, who once shared property, were able to settle at farther distances from each other.¹³⁰ As Mary P. Ryan argues, "As new avenues of employment opened up within the more diversified economy, young men and women could plot out their futures alone, and women could negotiate directly with their prospective spouses."¹³¹ Companionate marriage evolved, where parents possessed less authority over the selection of their sons' and daughters' spouses, and young people married for love, not advantage. Companionate marriage would play a significant role in the development of republican womanhood.

Americans were on the move in many ways during the mid-eighteenth century. The scarcity of real estate set them moving, not only between the colonies, but also into

¹²⁸ Bloch, "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue," 38, 48.

¹²⁹ Mary P. Ryan, *Womanhood in America: From Colonial Times to the Present*, (New York: Franklin Watts, 1983), 98.

¹³⁰ Jay Fliegelman, *Pilgrims and Prodigals: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 10.

¹³¹ Ryan, 98.

the frontier. The First Great Awakening, led by preachers Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, encouraged independent religious views in a society that lacked a unified church. American colonists, who once produced goods only for their own consumption, began to produce them for market. Selling their products gave them currency to purchase “luxury” goods. Instead of trading solely with Great Britain, colonists began trading with each other and demanded paper currency with which to complete these transactions.¹³² All these factors changed how the Americans perceived their relationship with the British crown. They began to see their relations with the state as more of a contractual agreement than a familial affair. This breakdown of patriarchal society and the increase of individualism would eventually unite the colonists to sue for independence from King George III and Great Britain.

These economic and social factors also altered how American colonists related to each other. According to Alan Taylor, changes in the American colonial economy and society not only caused discontent between Americans and the British, but between the colonists themselves. Although the social hierarchy in America was relatively flat, a distinct class system existed that differentiated between the landed gentry and common men, as well as Native Americans, freed blacks, and slaves. Just because the gentry was at the top of that hierarchy did not mean that they controlled the other classes. With the expansion of settlement into the frontier and increased economic productivity, for example, working men began to strain against the class stratum. Each of those groups “had its own ability to pull strings,” writes Woody Holton.¹³³ The gentry used

¹³² Wood, *Radicalism*, 125-145.

¹³³ Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), xvii.

republicanism and its promise of equal opportunity to convince farmers and artisans to support the independence effort and new government.¹³⁴

A ““gendered republicanism””

Since republicanism espoused liberty and equal opportunity, where did women fit into this vision of a new civil society? American intellectuals combined the ideas of European Enlightenment philosophers to rationalize the political role women had carved out for themselves during the revolution. They modeled the republican woman after the classical “Spartan mother who raised sons prepared to sacrifice themselves to the *polis*.”¹³⁵ Women made their contributions to society by raising virtuous children and enforcing the virtue of their husbands through the example of their own behavior. This ideology was the centerpiece of what Mary Kelley has called a ““gendered republicanism”,” which created separate roles for men and women. Nancy Cott has termed these differing roles “spheres,” with men operating in a public realm while women were restricted to a private, domestic one.

Although the term “man” is generally understood to refer to humankind, Linda Kerber writes that, for writers of the Enlightenment, “the use of *man* was in fact literal, not generic.”¹³⁶ Kerber contends that scholars did not specifically address women’s relationship to the republic, but acknowledges how these men included women in their discussions of republicanism. Rosemarie Zagarri agrees with Kerber that philosophers many have not explored women’s contribution to the polity, but their discussions of

¹³⁴ Alan Taylor, *American Revolutions: A Continental History, 1750-1804*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2016), 354-356.

¹³⁵ Kerber, “The Republican Mother,” 188.

¹³⁶ Kerber, “The Republican Mother,” 188.

women's relationship with society laid the foundation for understanding their relationship with the state.¹³⁷

According to Kerber, Enlightenment thinkers only discussed the role of women in the polity "by implication" in their texts. Philosophers described women's relationship to the political realm in terms of their relationship to men or family. While some scholars placed women in roles strictly deferential to men, others recognized that women possessed rights as individuals. Rousseau excluded women from the political realm by avowing that they had only moral and physical, but no political relationships to men. Henry Home, Lord Kames, a member of the "Scottish civil jurisprudential school," argued that women's "relationship to their country is secondhand, experienced through husbands and sons, and they therefore have 'less patriotism than men.'"¹³⁸ Women's patriotism was limited to the home.

Even those philosophers who espoused women's rights did so in terms of their relationships with men and their families. Locke enumerated a women's rights and powers at home: "mothers have a right to the respect of their children that is not dependent on the husband's will; mothers have their own responsibilities to their children; women ought to control their own property."¹³⁹ French humanist and early political scientist Nicolas de Condorcet proffered that women had any rights to participation in the state by claiming their equality to men as "sensible beings, capable of reason, having moral ideas."¹⁴⁰ English writer Mary Wollestonecraft took advantage of the social upheaval of the French Revolution to champion women's rights. She

¹³⁷ Zagarri, "Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother," 193.

¹³⁸ Kerber, "The Republican Mother," 196.

¹³⁹ Kerber, "The Republican Mother," 190.

¹⁴⁰ Kerber, "The Republican Mother," 191.

challenged traditional gender roles by writing that women should be treated as equals to man and function independently both financially and legally. However, Susan Branson points out that Wollstonecraft “wished to reinforce domestic roles rather than diminish or abandon them.” She believed that good families, which were nurtured by women, were necessary to good government.¹⁴¹

Zagarri examines how the theories of the Scottish civil jurisprudential school helped to redefine the status and role of women in the eighteenth century. Examining the family from a sociological perspective, the civic jurisprudential school identified family as a core influence on an individual and his or her beliefs. “The Scots maintained that the family represented a primary transmitter of customs, habits, morals, and manners,” Zagarri writes. “Arguing that women acted as both the means and beneficiaries of social progress, they claimed that women softened men’s brutal passions and rose in stature as society improved.”¹⁴² Women influenced men and her family by improving and refining their “manners.”¹⁴³ Like other Enlightenment scholars, the Scottish philosophers defined manners on a societal level. Manners transcended polite standards of social behavior to include a person’s morality and character. American republican scholars would rename the concept of manners as “virtue.”

The transition of virtue from a communal and masculine definition to a more personal and feminine meaning throughout the eighteenth century was an important component of “gendered republicanism”, the essence of which was republican womanhood. Ruth Bloch writes that this transition of virtue occurred due to both political

¹⁴¹ Susan Branson, *These Fiery Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 36.

¹⁴² Zagarri, “Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother,” 193-194.

¹⁴³ Zagarri, “Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother,” 201.

events and changes in gender-based symbols during the Revolutionary era. Once the American government had been established and its principles codified with the ratification of the Constitution, virtue was relocated outside the state and into society, particularly the home and feminine realm. Instead of in the military or participatory government, virtue would be found in churches, schools, and families. As social companions, wives, and mothers, women assumed the responsibility for instructing men to be virtuous.¹⁴⁴

“gendered republicanism” accentuated the division of society into two spheres: the public and private. The spheres were defined on ideological grounds rather than objective logic and made assumptions based on people’s social interactions. Nancy Cott writes that America underwent a tremendous socio-economic transformation between 1780 and 1830 that included dramatic economic growth, urbanization, expansion of education, changes in the distribution of wealth, rise of the democratic political process, and legal changes. This transformation spurred a reformulation of the idea of domesticity.¹⁴⁵ At first defined on the notion of work, the definition of the spheres changed as consumer goods became available commercially and women spent less time producing those items for her family. An increasing number of early nineteenth-century American men had visualized women’s “work” separately from their own. Working outside the home, they saw themselves as providers for their families while in many ways discounting the contributions of their wives, who kept house and essentially managed domestic factories. As Cott argues, “Women’s sphere was ‘separate’ not only because it was at home but also because it seemed to elude rationalization and the cash nexus, and

¹⁴⁴ Bloch, “The Gendered Meanings of Virtue,” 38, 54-55.

¹⁴⁵ Cott, 3.

to integrate labor with life.”¹⁴⁶ The ideological emphasis of the spheres intensified during the Revolutionary era, as civic virtue began to transition from men to women, who became responsible for raising children loyal to the Republic.

Women’s involvement in the events leading up to and including the American Revolution and the egalitarian republican ideology had forced Americans to examine women’s role in the polity. Colonial American women “had been viewed as wholly domestic beings whose influence in the world was confined to their immediate families.”¹⁴⁷ Late eighteenth-century women, in contrast, proved through their participation in the boycott of British goods, management of farms and businesses for their husbands at war, and organization of war relief efforts, that their influence extended beyond their sitting rooms. Success of pre-war nonimportation policies depended on the participation of colonial women. After the passage of the Townshend Act of 1767, women responded by abstaining from the consumption of tea – except in cases of illness. Some women documented their protest. In 1774, fifty-one women in Edenton, NC, signed a statement vowing their commitment to support the public good.¹⁴⁸ Women’s consumer activism continued during the American Revolution as mobs attacked merchants whom they thought were hoarding goods. The women sometimes seized the commodities as they struggled against wartime scarcity and inflation.¹⁴⁹

The colonists also replaced their British cloth with homespun. “One of the most common, and indeed, most tedious, household tasks took on a high social and political

¹⁴⁶ Cott, 62.

¹⁴⁷ Mary Beth Norton, "The Evolution of White Women's Experience in Early America," *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (1984): 616, accessed September 21, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1856118>.

¹⁴⁸ Norton, *Liberty's Daughter*, 161.

¹⁴⁹ Evans, 54.

value for the first time,”¹⁵⁰ writes Mary Beth Norton. The spinning meetings that proliferated in the mid-1700s typically occurred in a religious setting. Women often met at a minister’s house and spun for the day. In addition to supporting the protest of British taxes, the meetings represented “a visible manifestation of benevolence” as women donated their labor and fiber to produce yarn. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich calls the spinning meetings early forms of women’s religious or charitable activity that would flourish after the revolution.¹⁵¹ The politicization of consumption gave women the opportunity to act publicly.¹⁵²

Women continued their benevolent – and public – efforts during the Revolutionary War. In 1780, elite Philadelphia matrons Esther De Berdt Reed and Sarah Franklin Bache initiated a door-to-door fund drive to raise money for troops serving in the Continental Army. In a little over a month, the women had collected \$7500, which was used to buy linen with which to sew shirts.¹⁵³ The Ladies Association expanded their campaigns to additional cities throughout the middle colonies, including Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, and Virginia. Although some loyalist women participated in the war effort for the British by acting as spies and assisting British troops, many either fled their homes or remained quiet about their political beliefs. For the most part, the priority of both patriot and loyalist women during the War for Independence was their families and homes.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, 165.

¹⁵¹ Ulrich, 222.

¹⁵² Evans, 54.

¹⁵³ Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, 181.

¹⁵⁴ Norton, 176.

As their husbands and sons marched off to war, their wives and mothers in many cases remained behind to run households, farms, and businesses. These war widows developed a new confidence in themselves as they took on responsibilities typically handled by their spouses. Men also developed a new confidence in the capabilities of their wives. Timothy Pickering had initially patronized his wife Rebecca White when asking her to run their farm while he served in the Continental Army. However, once she successfully negotiated a complicated financial transaction for him in 1780, Timothy began to rely more heavily on her.¹⁵⁵ Following the revolution, women would not easily relinquish the equality and autonomy that they had gained in their relationships with men.

Parents had once chosen spouses for their children, whether for wealth, prestige, or even political power. However, with the decline of patriarchies in the eighteenth century, young people began to choose their own marital partners – for love. Based on “‘rational friendship’” and “‘mutual respect,’”¹⁵⁶ these consensual unions echoed the egalitarianism of the republic. In a 1795 letter, Margaret Coalter told her husband John that she expected to “be treated with respect, as an equal and as a partner.”¹⁵⁷ “In companionate marriage, the old habit of male command was replaced by shared activities and joint decision making. The result for women was enhanced status – greater power, greater autonomy, and a strong, equal voice in family affairs.”¹⁵⁸ Marriage was to be as egalitarian as the new nation.

Suzanne Lebsack cautions that, although marriages were moving in the direction of companionate marriage in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such unions were

¹⁵⁵ Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 221.

¹⁵⁶ Ryan, 101.

¹⁵⁷ Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 232.

¹⁵⁸ Lebsack, 17.

not so easy to achieve. Men still retained much of the authority and responsibility in the relationship, and the expectation of affection and the ability of a woman to make decisions led to disappointment and conflict. Lebsack also writes that although companionate marriage brought women enhanced status, it did not bring them greater power, much like republican womanhood gave women in early national America a moral authority but no additional rights outside the home.¹⁵⁹

“The model republican woman was a mother.”

The concept of republican motherhood has become a widely-accepted way to describe how early American thinkers reshaped gender ideology to give women a political role in the new republic. Linda Kerber writes that republican motherhood fills an intellectual gap between Enlightenment theories about republicanism and how American women might envision herself in relationship to the state by trying to “bring the older version of the separation of the spheres into rough conformity with the new politics that valued autonomy and individualism.”¹⁶⁰ Republican motherhood offered women citizenship in the republic that was firmly rooted in the home.

What American thinkers like Judith Sargent Murray, Susannah Rowson, and Benjamin Rush came up with was what Kerber calls “an ironic compromise” that blended the ideas of Condorcet and Rousseau. Condorcet purported that women were men’s intellectual equals. Just as sensible, capable of reason, and moral as men, women could claim the same right to political participation in the republic. Rousseau disagreed. While he had recognized women’s place in government in *The Social Contract* – “If it is

¹⁵⁹ Lebsack, 28, 53.

¹⁶⁰ Kerber, *Toward an Intellectual History of Women*, 174.

obvious that women are among the rules, ought not they also be among the legislators?" – he also denied their participation as citizens in the public realm. "Women have moral and physical relationships to men, but not political ones; nor do they relate to any women other than their mothers." He espoused the softness and complacency of women. Any involvement in the political community threatened her very sexual identity. Kerber writes, "The model republican woman was to be self-reliant (within limits); literate, untempted by the frivolities of fashion. She had a responsibility to political scene, though not to act on it... Her political task was accomplished within the confines of her family. The model republican woman was a mother."¹⁶¹ She was a mother who recognized her innate right to political participation, but accepted that her participation was limited to her domestic role.

The republican mother embodied the ideal of virtue that was so vital to the success of the republic. Mercy Otis Warren believed that women preserved civic virtue "by subordinating their own self-fulfillment to the needs of the republic." After the tumultuous years of rebellion and war, republican mothers "played a conservative, stabilizing role, deflecting the radical potential of the revolutionary experience."¹⁶² Women would become the moral arbiters of post-war American society. However, their authority would end at their own front doors.

Other historians have offered their own perspectives on the ideology of republican motherhood. Jan Lewis argues that the concept of the republican wife, rather than Kerber's republican mother, defined the political role of women in early national America. Lewis calls marriage the "republic in miniature," a politicized union which

¹⁶¹ Kerber, "The Republican Mother," 191-195, 199, 202.

¹⁶² Kerber, "The Republican Ideology of the Revolutionary Generation," 483-484.

inherently required the political involvement of women through virtue. Women were encouraged to use their sexuality to tempt men to do good. Lewis explains, “Once she had seduced him into virtue, the married woman’s task was to preserve her husband in the exalted state to which her influence had raised him.”¹⁶³ The concept of companionate marriage gave a woman the autonomy to exert her moral influence on her partner.

Rosemarie Zagarri refers to the concept of republican motherhood as “Anglo-American womanhood.” She calls Anglo-American womanhood, which finds its roots in the four-stage theory of history developed by Scottish Enlightenment scholars, a transatlantic reevaluation of perceptions of women that, having begun before the Revolutionary War, preserved the traditional gender roles for women while at the same time created for them a new, political one. Women participated in politics by overseeing “manners,” a behavior which extended beyond politeness to encompass an individual’s morality and character and which would become defined as virtue in republican America.¹⁶⁴

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich contends that women’s political role in society preceded the Revolution through their participation in religious activities. Unlike republican womanhood, “the contribution of evangelical women was not gender-specific, at least in theory, nor was it coextensive with practical duties. Because faith and prayer were universal weapons, a woman did not have to be a wife or mother to defend her land.” Women behaved politically through participation in events such as spinning meetings, forty-six of which Ulrich has documented in New England between the years 1768 and

¹⁶³ Lewis, 699-702, 710

¹⁶⁴ Zagarri, “Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother,” 192, 210-211.

1770. Spinners often donated the produce of these meetings to people in need.¹⁶⁵ Mary Beth Norton agrees with Ulrich. Throughout the colonial period, involvement in some Protestant congregations allowed women a measure of independence from and equality with men, albeit on spiritual terms.¹⁶⁶ Women assumed leadership of their family's religious practices following the American Revolution as more men left home to work.¹⁶⁷ With the disestablishment of Protestant churches in the 1780s and 1790s and subsequent loss of political status and tax revenues and increasing female participation due to the Second Great Awakening, churches looked to women and their benevolent organizations for support.

Women assumed the mantle of both religious and secular charitable and benevolent organizations in the late eighteenth century. Through the melding of evangelical and republican ideals, women ensured their volunteerism appeared in congruence with familial interests.¹⁶⁸ In 1797, Elizabeth Bayley Seton, along with Isabella Graham and her daughter Joanna Bethune, founded the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children. Joseph Dirvin calls the association "a society with a host of modern counterparts: a high-minded civic and religious organization of charitable women." Seton served as treasurer of the society from its inception until 1804.¹⁶⁹ "In forming female-based organizations, women reenacted in church work the supposedly parallel world of their familial roles; they saw themselves as partners with their ministers

¹⁶⁵ Ulrich, 213, 215, 222.

¹⁶⁶ Norton, "The Evolution of White Women's Experience," 615.

¹⁶⁷ Mary Carroll Johansen, "'Female Instruction and Improvement': Education for Women in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia, 1785-1835," (PhD diss., The College of William and Mary, 1996), 62, accessed March 17, 2015, <https://ezproxy.shsu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/304284383?accountid=7065>. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

¹⁶⁸ Boylan, 8.

¹⁶⁹ Dirvin, 55.

and husbands, adopted a complementary rather than equal model of gender relations, and readily embraced a separate arena of action in collective association.”¹⁷⁰ Women used participation in charitable associations to behave publicly from their private realm.

Because women’s involvement in these organizations was closely tied to their roles as wives and mothers, single women were not afforded the same opportunities for participation that their wedded and widowed companions were. Particularly troublesome for some Protestants was the involvement of Catholic women religious in charitable work. Catholics valued celibacy over marriage, but Protestants saw sisters and nuns’ deliberate rejection of marriage and motherhood as anathema to the gender ideology of the period. As Catholic girls’ schools burgeoned throughout the country in the early 1800s, Protestants feared that women religious would destabilize the institution of Protestant marriage and coerce their daughters into joining their communities and convents.¹⁷¹

However, remaining unmarried and celibate offered women religious opportunities not available to other females. They were

at one and the same time subordinate and authoritative. Nuns’ vow of obedience guaranteed their subjection to male authority within the church’s gender hierarchy; their dedication to others through lives of poverty, chastity, and service constituted them as a special class of women permitted to run their own affairs and admired for their selflessness. As teachers, nurses, and orphans’ caretakers, they became surrogate mothers while also training young women for actual motherhood and domesticity.¹⁷²

Joseph Mannard has called this idea of a woman religious as a temporal mother the “maternity of the spirit.” Nuns were spiritual “brides of Christ” who nurtured given into

¹⁷⁰ Boylan, 7.

¹⁷¹ Boylan, 60-61.

¹⁷² Boylan, 120.

their care. Elizabeth Seton was particularly appropriate to fill this role. A widow with five children and Catholic convert, she represented both the biological and spiritual mother as the mother superior of the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's. Seton used her status as an upper-class matron to help promote her community and schools, but she also capitalized on the autonomy that the religious life offered her.

The experience of Vermont matron Mary Palmer Tyler echoes the early life of Seton. Palmer's story depicts the reality of republican womanhood. Marilyn S. Blackwell describes Palmer:

A forerunner in articulating a mother's role in childrearing, Mary formulated, reshaped, and then implemented her republican ideology to meet practical needs. It was not the political aspect of republican motherhood that gave it importance for Mary, but the ways in which it helped her expand her moral authority in the Tyler family. In her view, republican motherhood meant taking responsibility for her family's future.¹⁷³

Both Palmer and Seton were born on the eve of the American Revolution to elite colonial Protestant families. Palmer married her husband Royall, a dramatist and jurist, out of love. She bore her eight children, who, like Seton, she often raised on her own while her husband traveled on business. In 1811, Palmer published her childcare manual *The Maternal Physician*, which related information about children's health conditions, education, and discipline. "While she believed the work might earn much needed cash, it also confirmed her role at home, fulfilled her sense of public service, and affirmed her status among the intellectual elite." By asserting a mother's responsibility for children's physical, moral, and intellectual development, Mary Tyler – like Elizabeth Seton -- embraced her role as a republican woman.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Marilyn S. Blackwell, "The Republican Vision of Mary Palmer Tyler," *Journal of the Early Republic* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 15, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3177453>.

¹⁷⁴ Blackwell, 19-20.

While republican womanhood reserved a place for women in post-Revolutionary civic society, the ideology did not offer them any additional social status or power. “The image of the republican mother had two sides; if one innovatively stressed the importance of women’s political role, the other conservatively emphasized the significance of their domestic role.”¹⁷⁵ American women became citizens of the republic, but they were not constituents. However, some upper-class white women used the limitations of republican womanhood as a point of departure.¹⁷⁶ They entered the public and political sphere through participation in print culture, charitable associations, salons, and social events.¹⁷⁷ These women also took advantage of increased opportunities for education to improve themselves.

Education of women in early national America

Both socio-economic and political changes necessitated improvements in female education following the Revolutionary War. During the colonial era, most women were only educated in reading, writing, and ciphering. Beginning in the middle of the eighteenth century, elite urban families instructed their daughters in “the social accomplishments with which a lady marked her status.”¹⁷⁸ These young ladies might also attend “dame schools” like Mama Pompelion’s where Elizabeth Bayley and her sister Mary learned reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and grammar. Although these institutions did offer academic classes, they were primarily finishing schools that prepared elite young women to enter society. By the end of the century, the first ladies’

¹⁷⁵ Norton, “The Evolution of White Women’s Experience,” 618.

¹⁷⁶ Kelley, 25.

¹⁷⁷ Branson, 144.

¹⁷⁸ Kelley, 36.

academies, including many operated by Catholic religious communities, opened to provide young women with a more practical education designed to train them for their future lives as wives and mothers.

Both the industrial revolution and the need for literacy to function in a more print-oriented world emphasized the need for better female education, but the most important factor was republicanism.¹⁷⁹ Lucia McMahon writes that proponents of women's education cited Enlightenment principles about women's capacity for reason, the "inherent usefulness and importance" of women's education, and, perhaps most importantly, the need to prepare women for their roles in civil society. Female education, she contends, was part of the republican experiment, because it was a "means of assuring political and social stability during the critical years of nation building." Although women typically operated from the private sphere, educators of the time placed female education in the public sphere, because their schooling prepared them to serve society.¹⁸⁰

Advocates like Dr. Benjamin Rush, Noah Webster, and Rev. Enos Hitchcock justified the need for better education for females by using their roles as republican mothers. They wrote that women would receive schooling, not for own sakes, but for the republic. "When prescriptive writers discussed the merits of women's education, they were less concerned with women's education as an *end* in itself for women, and more invested in the subject of education as a *means* to the greater ends of social and political

¹⁷⁹ Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 199-200.

¹⁸⁰ McMahon, 479, 487-488.

stability.”¹⁸¹ They justified female education in relationship to women’s relationships to men.¹⁸²

In his address “Thoughts upon Female Education,” Dr. Benjamin Rush proposed an education for females that supported their roles as wife, homemaker, and mother.

His reasoning was utilitarian; his plan for female education was functional... It would preserve the family as an agency of moral instruction, facilitate male entrepreneurship, and generalize frugality and economic discipline. Without threatening male dominance, it would make women more capable adjuncts of their husbands and families.¹⁸³

Rush, along with Webster and Hitchcock, disagreed with “dame school” ornamental educations in French, music, drawing, and dancing. Instead, he recommended a practical curriculum of English, bookkeeping, geography, history, “Christian principles,” a “smattering of science,” along with singing and dancing for exercise.¹⁸⁴

Writer Judith Sargent Murray, who believed that women were the intellectual equals of men, wrote that education gave a woman the opportunity to improve herself and broaden her opportunities in society.¹⁸⁵ However, she agreed with Rush that women’s educations should preferably support their roles as wives and mothers. She painted this picture of domestic felicity for the educated wife and mother in the new republic.

Without sacrificing a single feminine charm, they would relinquish the old frivolous pursuits for literary improvement and a cheerful and efficient performance of maternal and wifely duties. “A sensible and informed woman – companionable and serious – possessing also a facility of temper, and united to a congenial mind – blest with competency – and rearing to maturity a promising family of children – surely the wide globe cannot produce a scene more truly interesting.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸¹ McMahon, 478.

¹⁸² Zagarri, “Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother,” 206.

¹⁸³ Cott, 105.

¹⁸⁴ James, 80-81.

¹⁸⁵ Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 205.

¹⁸⁶ James, 110.

Surely education for women became part of the warp on which was woven the fabric of republican society.

By the close of the eighteenth century, female education became a duty that parents of the upper and increasingly middling classes owed their daughters and daughters owed themselves.¹⁸⁷ Elite young women attended the ladies' academies that were springing up around the nation – mostly in the north. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, middling-class parents began to send their daughters to day schools such as the one operated in conjunction with St. Joseph's Academy by the Sisters of Charity in Emmitsburg, MD.¹⁸⁸ The use of the term academy, which in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries referred to a school that was “neither preparatory for higher education nor equivalent to college,”¹⁸⁹ differentiated these female educational institutions from male colleges by emphasizing the limited scope of their programs tailored for preparation of young women. Most schools offered a similar curriculum that included reading, grammar, writing, history, arithmetic, geography, and sometime rhetoric. Girls typically entered an academy between the ages of twelve and sixteen and attended a three-year program.¹⁹⁰ The first secular female academy opened in Philadelphia in 1787. What makes the Young Ladies Academy of Philadelphia remarkable is that, unlike many other girls' schools which were founded and operated by women, this institution was established by men – local leaders that included ministers,

¹⁸⁷ Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 276.

¹⁸⁸ Johansen, 9.

¹⁸⁹ Ann D. Gordon, “The Young Ladies Academy of Philadelphia,” in *Women of America: A History*, ed. Carol Berkin and Mary Beth Norton, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979), 72.

¹⁹⁰ Kelley, 85-86.

doctors, and lawyers who recognized that the success of the republic depended on the education of its citizenry.¹⁹¹

Catholic female academies in the United States proliferated during the nineteenth century. The first Catholic school for girls was founded by the French Ursulines in New Orleans in 1727. Several academies would subsequently open in Kentucky as well as Indiana and Maryland during the early 1800s. Elizabeth Bayley Seton and the Sisters of Charity opened St. Joseph's Academy for girls in Emmitsburg, MD, in 1810. In addition to an academic curriculum, the sisters offered lessons in art, music, and embroidery for which parents were assessed an additional fee.

Catholic academies catered to both Catholic and Protestant students, of both elite and middling classes. Although all children were expected to attend religious services, Catholic academies were careful to avoid any suggestions of proselytization of their Protestant charges in fear of losing prospective students.¹⁹² Protestant parents enrolled their daughters in Catholic schools, because they appreciated the individual care shown to their children by the women religious.¹⁹³ In an 1815 journal recorded for spiritual advisor Simon Bruté, Seton wrote that, when enrolling his daughter at St. Joseph's Academy, one Protestant father "begged she might receive the strongest religious impressions."¹⁹⁴

The success of Catholic ladies' academies rankled many Protestant leaders as nativism began to build in the United States in the 1820s. They feared that, through these academies, Catholicism would overtake the country. Women's education reformers fed

¹⁹¹ Gordon, 71.

¹⁹² Mattingly, 174.

¹⁹³ Mary J. Oates, "Catholic Female Academies on the Frontier," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 12, no. 4, *Frontier Catholicism* (Fall 1994): 127, accessed September 5, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25154047>.

¹⁹⁴ To Rev. Simon Bruté, Journal 1815, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 329.

on this anti-Catholic rhetoric to garner support for the establishment of proprietor schools such as Hartford Female Seminary, Mount Holyoke Seminary, and Troy Female Seminary in the early 1800s. Mary Lyon, Emma Willard, and Catharine Beecher all denied the capability of Catholic academies to properly educate American women for the following two reasons. First, women religious were unfit to teach young women because they had renounced marriage and motherhood. Second, Lyon and her associates also contended that Catholic academy curriculums overemphasized the ornamental and domestic arts, thereby reinforcing ancient perceptions of ‘women’s place’ in society.”¹⁹⁵

Their argument criticizing the curriculum of Catholic academies was unfounded. Most Catholic academies offered curriculums similar to Protestant institutions in that time period.¹⁹⁶ At St. Joseph’s Academy for girls, sewing, music, and art were offered as elective classes. By 1828, the Sisters of Charity had expanded the course of study there to include rhetoric, philosophy, chemistry, botany, algebra, and astronomy.¹⁹⁷

By denouncing them as unfit to teach young women because they had rejected marriage and motherhood, Lyon and her associates denied the “maternity of the spirit” of Catholic nuns and sisters who operated ladies’ academies in the early national era. However, some women religious, including Elizabeth Seton and founding members of the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph’s, were widows. Many of them were also educated. Their temporal and spiritual motherhood and education would place these women in a

¹⁹⁵ Oates, 124.

¹⁹⁶ M. Benedict Murphy, R.S.H.M., “Pioneer Roman Catholic Girl’s Academies: Their Growth, Character, and Contribution to American Education. A Study of Roman Catholic Education for Girls from Colonial Times to the First Plenary Council of 1852,” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1958), 161-162, accessed March 15, 2015, <https://ezproxy.shsu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/301935921?accountid=7065>. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

¹⁹⁷ Crumlish, 9.

perfect position to teach republican values to young women in the early nineteenth century.

Advocates had justified female education by arguing that it would improve the quality of male citizenship by giving them the knowledge necessary to raise patriotic sons.¹⁹⁸ In the new republic, women took on new roles as republican mothers. They became American society's moral arbiters who, by their own example, taught virtue to their sons – and daughters, and protected the virtue of their husbands. Although republican womanhood did not improve their status in relationship to the state, women took advantage of their moral authority to behave publicly from their private realm.

Republicanism, with its roots in the natural rights of man and an emphasis on the public good, had required American intellectuals to define a political role for women. Their answer was a combination of Rousseau and Condorcet's Enlightenment theory that gave women a political responsibility in republican society while relegating them to the domestic realm. Republican womanhood is the embodiment of "gendered republicanism" that developed as changes in political ideas shifted the principle of civic virtue from the male and public sphere to the female and private sphere. Republican womanhood accentuated the idea of public and private spheres, and women blurred those boundaries through their involvement in social events, charitable associations, and print culture.

The development of print culture in post-war America, the industrial revolution, and, most importantly, republicanism, necessitated the need for improvements in women's education. Opposing the ornamental educations popular at the time, leaders like Benjamin Rush and Noah Webster espoused a utilitarian education that included English,

¹⁹⁸ Zagarri, "Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother," 206.

history, bookkeeping, and geography with singing, dancing, and the like, as electives courses of study. These practical subjects would enable women to run her household, teach her children, and assist her husband in his duties, but not threaten his dominance of the family.

To meet the demand for female education, ladies' academies began opening in the late 1700s, primarily in the northern part of the country. Catholic academies proliferated in the south and west in the early nineteenth century. Their financial success and ability to provide rigorous educations would soon come under attack by nativists who threatened a Catholic takeover. This anti-Catholic rhetoric led to the rise of proprietor ladies' academies beginning in the 1820s. Elizabeth Bayley Seton and the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's founded St. Joseph's Academy for girls in Maryland in 1810. Many of them republican women themselves, these founding mothers used the independence afforded them by their religious office to instill republican values in the young women who attended St. Joseph's Academy for girls.

CHAPTER V

Spiritual women educating republican daughters

Catholic historian Joseph Mannard calls women religious America's first professional women.¹⁹⁹ Having renounced marriage and motherhood, sisters and nuns embodied the "maternity of the spirit" and used their religious vocations as caregivers and teachers to enter the public realm and spread republican values during a time when a woman was expected to function from her drawing room. These women "disguised their entry into the professional world as a simple extension of their natural feminine talents" that was "reinforced by their innate purity."²⁰⁰ Taking vows did not necessarily restrict what a woman could do with her life. In fact, sisterhood afforded them opportunities not available to other women.

Religious communities like the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's founded by Elizabeth Bayley Seton existed under the auspices of male superiors, but managed most of the internal aspects of their own organizations. Governed by elected councils, the women administered their everyday affairs and earned their own income. The adoption of the rules and constitutions in 1812 gave the Sisters of Charity independence from the Catholic hierarchy. The incorporation of the sisterhood in 1816 further assured its financial and administrative sovereignty. This freedom to act allowed republican women turned spiritual mothers to teach republican values to the next generation of American women at St. Joseph's Academy for girls.

¹⁹⁹Joseph Mannard, "Maternity of the spirit": Women religious in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, 1790-1860," (PhD diss., University of Maryland College Park, 1989), 14, accessed March 15, 2015, <https://ezproxy.shsu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/303769581?accountid=7065>. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

²⁰⁰ Jo Ann McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns Through Two Millennia*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996), 625.

Seton had intended to focus her mission on educating the poor rather than to open a ladies' academy, but difficulty financing the operations of the community and its missions made it necessary for her to start soliciting boarders. St. Joseph's Academy for girls was one of several Catholic academies founded in the United States during the early national era. In addition to religious instruction, the academy taught practical subjects that contemporary reformers of women's education believed were most relevant to prepare young women for their responsibilities as futures as wives and mothers.

Elizabeth Seton and the founding members of the Sisters of Charity were well-prepared to take on this new mission of the community. Although the women came from disparate backgrounds, Seton and several other sisters were republican women. Several were also widows. These educated, upper-class women brought with them to the sisterhood a belief in civic virtue that was considered so important to the success of the republican experiment. They shared this belief with the students at the ladies' academy both through their example and their instruction. Though Seton and the Sisters of Charity had retired from the world, they did not retire from motherhood. Rather, they acted as surrogate, spiritual mothers to the girls who attended the academy. By educating young women at St. Joseph's Academy, Elizabeth Bayley Seton and the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's exemplified the ideal of republican womanhood.

“Maternity of the spirit”

Women who adopted the habit in republican America practiced a “maternity of the spirit” that replaced the maternity of the flesh. Joseph Mannard uses the Catholic definition of domesticity set forth by Charles Sainte-Foi in a series of essays called “The Mission of Woman” to explain the idea of “maternity of the spirit.” Although translations

of the essays were not published in *The Metropolitan* until the early 1850s, Sainte-Foi's ideas aptly describe women who joined religious communities during the early national era. Sainte-Foi described a Catholic woman whose primary responsibility was to raise moral children, but also participate with other women in charitable associations.²⁰¹ He also resolved how women who were not mothers could still play maternal roles in society.

Catholic conceptualizations of domesticity did not differ significantly from Protestant ones with the exception that Catholic doctrine values virginity over maternity. A religious life is a higher calling than a married one. Sainte-Foi reconciles the conflict between virginity and maternity associated with domesticity, by arguing that, first, most women had no vocation for the religious life, and, second, even virgins who did renounce marriage still embraced maternity in some way. Because women are maternal by nature, according to Sainte-Foi, if they were not mothers in the flesh, then they could become mothers of the spirit.²⁰²

Women in the post-revolutionary era chose to take vows for multiple reasons. Joining a religious community may have been a means to avoid spinsterhood or marriage and the dangers of childbirth. The concept of coverture remained relevant in the early nineteenth century. Assuming the religious life could "be viewed as an avenue for self-direction, a way for asserting one's independence of action and for preserving many of the freedoms lost upon marriage."²⁰³ Widows may have joined religious communities to

²⁰¹ Mannard, "Maternity... of the Spirit," 315.

²⁰² Mannard, "Maternity... of the Spirit," 316.

²⁰³ Mannard, "'Maternity of the spirit,'" 179.

avoid remarriage or to regain the financial and social security lost with the death of their spouses.²⁰⁴

However, joining a religious community was more than a way for women to avoid marriage or spinsterhood and still secure financial and social security for themselves. In a society divided into gender-based public and private spheres, temporal motherhood gave these republican women an opportunity to act in the public realm from the seclusion of their religious communities.

Those women who exercised their free will to answer this call affirmatively thereby chose a way of life that set them off from the rest of their kin and country in certain profound ways. They remained in but not of the world. At the same time, their voluntary submergence of individual identity to a larger corporate identity within the convent and Church itself provided them with both the reason and opportunity to act in the world to a greater degree than was permitted to most women or pursued by most men.²⁰⁵

Women who joined an active, versus cloistered, community like the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's were especially able to act publicly from an ostensibly private realm. Sisterhood gave women the opportunity to dedicate themselves to charitable purposes and literary practices. Because so many American religious communities taught girls and young women, sisters were allowed "to pursue lifelong literary interests that might not otherwise be available to them."²⁰⁶ Mannard writes that Catholic women religious were among the first women in the United States to work outside the home on a permanent basis in the nineteenth century.²⁰⁷ Characteristic of women of the period, sisters and nuns

²⁰⁴ Joseph Mannard, "Widows in Convents of the Early Republic: The Archdiocese of Baltimore, 1790-1860," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 26, no. 2, Catholics in the Colony of Maryland and the Early Republic (Spring 2008): 120, accessed September 3, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25156669>.

²⁰⁵ Mannard, "Maternity of the Spirit," 136-137.

²⁰⁶ Mattingly, 163.

²⁰⁷ Mannard, "Maternity... of the Spirit," 322.

accepted their deference to male religious leaders. However, “at a fundamental level, they depended only on God,” according to American religion historian Amanda Porterfield.²⁰⁸

Through sisterhood, women also realized a sense of belonging and purpose. “The convent served as an alternative to the nuclear household so central to the domestic ideal,” Mannard argues.²⁰⁹ Soon after moving to Emmitsburg, the Sisters of Charity established committees to complete household chores. For example, they formed a gang of women to carry laundry to a nearby creek to wash, a chore that took all day. Sisters Regina Bechtle and Judith Metz, the editors of Elizabeth Seton’s writings, note how “the early community exercised co-responsibility in fiscal matters.”²¹⁰ Seton writes to lifelong friend Julia Scott about her relationship with the other sisters:

Their care and attention to save me every trouble would appear even ridiculous to others who, not living with us, do not know the tie of affection which is formed by living in Community. perhaps you have no idea of the order and quiet which takes place in a regular way of life – every thing meets its place and time in such a manner that a thing once done, is understood by the simplest person as well as by the most intelligent...²¹¹

The women who joined religious communities in the early national era came from diverse backgrounds. For example, many of the founding members of the Sisters of Charity belonged to the urban elite, while others grew up in middling-class families. Women entered the novitiate at various ages. Some were maiden young women and others were widows. The latter did not make up a significant number of community populations. For example, between 1809 and 1860, thirty-six out of 1488 women, or 2.4

²⁰⁸ Porterfield, 123.

²⁰⁹ Mannard, “Maternity... of the spirit,” 322.

²¹⁰ 1812-22 Receipt Book, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 3b, ed. Regina Bechtle, S.C. and Judith Metz, S.C., (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2006), 166 n1, accessed February 8, 2016. http://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentian_ebooks/10.

²¹¹ Elizabeth Seton to Julia Scott, March 23, 1816, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 378-379.

percent, who joined the Sisters of Charity were widows.²¹² However, they often held important leadership positions in their communities, including the Sisters of Charity.

Mannard examines leadership positions held by widows in religious communities to make an interesting connection between Catholic religious communities and benevolent associations in early national America. The establishment of both voluntary charitable associations and Catholic religious communities flourished following the American Revolution. The organizations performed much of the same charitable work. “Whereas many American women found in Evangelical Protestantism the fervor and means to create a new institution – the voluntary association – to carry out their tasks, nuns were buoyed by their Catholic faith and looked to their Church tradition for an institution – the convent – that could be adapted to the new American environment.”²¹³ Many of the leaders of both organizations were widows.

In his study of the Carmelites, Sisters of the Visitation, and Sisters of Charity, Mannard found that widows were generally older than other entrants, American-born, converts, and more likely to take leadership positions.²¹⁴ Early Sisters of Charity who were widows include Elizabeth Seton, her successor Rose White, and Margaret George, an early treasurer who later founded the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati. The communities appear to mirror the benevolent associations studied by Anne Boylan, who found that “it seems clear that organized women of widely varying backgrounds shared common assumptions about qualifications for leadership: that marriage was superior to singleness, that it was desirable to have leaders whose lives were anchored in the daily

²¹² Mannard, “Widows in Convents,” 114.

²¹³ Mannard, “Maternity of the spirit,” 59.

²¹⁴ Mannard, “Widows in Convents,” 114.

experience or domesticity, and that tasks should be allocated according to marital status.”²¹⁵

Boylan’s idea of the collective power of women involved in benevolent associations can also be related to religious communities.²¹⁶ Harnessing the sense of belonging and purpose they found upon joining the sisterhood, American Catholic women religious effected social activism through their ministries much like members of the voluntary organizations did through their efforts to benefit women and children. As organizations, sisters invented themselves as they went along. They based their ministries on the needs of their communities. Teaching was the most common occupation for American women’s religious communities in the early nineteenth century. The sisters helped to meet the need for institutions to education females in the early republic. Tuition from St. Joseph’s Academy, in turn, helped the Sisters of Charity fund their charitable work with free schools, orphanages, and, eventually, hospitals.

Although Elizabeth Seton may not have been aware of it initially, Rev. William Dubourg and his Sulpician associates had apparently planned to use her Paca Street school to launch a women’s religious community. Seton wrote to sister-in-law Cecilia Seton in October 1808 that Dubourg “applies to me the Psalms in our Vespers ‘the Barren Women shall be the joyful mother of children,’ and tells me to repeat it Continually...”²¹⁷ To her friend, Antonio Fillichi, she wrote earlier that summer that the priests proposed “a small plan admitting of enlargement if necessary in the hope, and the

²¹⁵ Boylan, 55.

²¹⁶ Boylan, 135-136.

²¹⁷ Elizabeth Seton to Cecilia Seton, October 6, 1808, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 34.

expectation that there will not be wanting ladies to join in forming a permanent institution.”²¹⁸

Elizabeth Seton took on the new challenge with her characteristic determination and grace. Rose Maria Lavery writes about Seton: “She personally conducted the official business of the school and convent, keeping the account books, sending out tuition bills, and acknowledging the payments of them; she communicated with parents about their children, with her religious superiors about new building projects, and wrote out class schedules for her teaching staff.”²¹⁹ The French priests may have come up with the idea of the first American community of women religious, but she and the founding members of the sisterhood made the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph’s a reality. Soon after the sisters settled together in Emmitsburg, they met on August 18, 1809, to form a council to govern the community. Elizabeth Seton had been appointed Mother by Archbishop Carroll. Rose White was named her Assistant. In addition, the sisters elected three women to the council: Kitty Mullen, Cecilia O’Conway, and Cecilia Seton. Days later the council met to delegate responsibility for chores at the house that included cooking, laundry, ironing, and mending.²²⁰ From the beginning, education played an important part in the sisterhood’s ministries. According to a day book kept by Seton, by early 1811, the sisters had begun to hire women to do laundry and clean so that they could dedicate themselves to running the schools.²²¹ They eventually established a program to train teachers for the community’s mission schools in 1818.²²²

²¹⁸ Copy of letter from Elizabeth Seton to Antonio Filicchi, July 8, 1808, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 19.

²¹⁹ Lavery, 210.

²²⁰ Minutes of First Council Meeting, August 18 and 20, 1809, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 3b, 115-116.

²²¹ Elizabeth Seton’s Day Book, 1810-1815, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 3b, 145.

²²² Crumlish, 5.

An examination of the day book and ledgers for the years 1813 through 1825 demonstrate how the sisters managed their community and missions autonomously from male Catholic leaders. Although the day book shows an occasional donation, the community derived most of its income from tuition from St. Joseph's Academy.²²³ In Baltimore, Elizabeth Seton took advantage of the nearby St. Mary's Seminary to purchases goods at a discounted cost. The sisters would do the same with Mount St. Mary's College in Emmitsburg.²²⁴ The sisters also on occasion bartered goods and services for tuition, since many of the students' parents were merchants.²²⁵ Using the contacts of Sally Thompson, a sister who grew up in Emmitsburg and was named the first procuratrix of the community, the Sisters of Charity dealt extensively with local merchants, including grocer George Grover, butcher and tanner Lewis Motter, cobbler Thomas Radford, miller John Troxell, and merchant John Rowe.²²⁶ They bought goods like butter and eggs from local residents.²²⁷ In addition to the washwoman, they also hired area residents to perform various labor on the property, which had become a working farm by 1811. "While responsible for maintaining a free school and boarding academy, a sisterhood, and a farm, Mother Seton had much business contact with her neighbors, male and female, slave and free," writes John Mary Crumlish, a former

²²³ Elizabeth Seton's Day Book, 153- 60.

²²⁴ Ledger, 1813, 3-3-7:1, Daughters of Charity Provincial Archives, Emmitsburg, MD.

²²⁵ Ledger, 1835-1838, 3-3-7:10, Daughters of Charity Provincial Archives, Emmitsburg, MD.

²²⁶ Elizabeth Seton's Day Book, 145-147, 149; 1812-22 Receipt Book 163, 172. The Sisters of Charity used the term procuratrix to describe the sister who was responsible for obtaining goods and securing services for the community.

²²⁷ 1812-22 Receipt Book, 173; Ledger, 1813. Mrs. Troxell also did laundry for the community.

community archivist.²²⁸ As independent businesswomen, Seton and the sisters became a part of the Emmitsburg community.

The adoption of the American Rule and the incorporation both legitimized the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's as an independently-operated organization. Early on, Elizabeth Seton recognized the importance of a rule to guide the community. In an 1811 letter to her friend Catherine Dupleix, she explained that the sisters' vows and rules arise "from our living in community under such regulations as we have chosen ourselves, and without which so large a family could never be well governed, and my having as a matter of form, to enable me to exercise the authority my situation requires."²²⁹ The sisters followed provisional rules likely written by the first superior Rev. William Dubourg, until Rev. John Dubois translated and adapted the rules of the French Company of the Daughters of Charity for use by the community after 1810. At the same time, several of the Sulpician priests encouraged a union between the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's and the French Company of the Daughters of Charity, both of which practiced the tradition of St. Vincent DePaul. However, the requirements of the frontier church precluded such a juncture. The mission of the French community did not include education. Also unlike the European community, the American sisters could not rely on endowments to fund their missions and had to earn their own income. The question also arose about how Elizabeth Seton could serve as Mother and maintain custody of her five children. In the end, the "modification of the rules of St. Vincent appeared the more desirable, as it would extend the benefits of religious instruction to a class of society

²²⁸ John Mary Crumlish, DC, "Mother Seton and Her Neighbors," in *Emmitsburg: History and Society*, eds. Emile A. Nakhleh and Mary B. Nakhleh, (Emmitsburg, MD.: The Emmitsburg Chronicle, 1976), 119.

²²⁹ Elizabeth Seton to Catherine Dupleix, February 4, 1811, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 172.

which has the greatest influence on public morals, and which then possessed but scanty facilities in the United States for obtaining a solid and virtuous education.”²³⁰ The adaptation of the French Rule would allow the Sisters of Charity to meet the needs of American society in the early national era and educate a new generation of republican women.

Dubois brought the adapted rules to the Sisters of Charity in January 1812. Sister Rose White recorded the egalitarian nature of the meeting in her journal. “We were all at liberty to adopt these rules or not, free to retire, if we wished to from the Community. All were invited to stay notwithstanding bad health and other infirmities. Each was invited to raise her hand, if she were willing to adopt the rules. All were united but one voice.”²³¹ Concerned about the Sulpician influence over the administration of the community, Archbishop John Carroll lauded the American Rule. He said that “the sisters were now freed ‘from a state in which it was difficult to walk straight’; they were able to live by a permanent and acceptable plan.”²³² Adoption of the Rule gave the Sisters of Charity the sovereignty to govern themselves.

While the adoption of the Rule gave the Sisters of Charity independence within the Catholic church, the passage of the bill to incorporate the community in January 1817 by the Maryland State General Assembly assured the women the ability to operate as an independent financial and legal entity.²³³ The incorporation lists twenty-two women as members of the organization. On July 23, 1817, they met to elect the officers of the

²³⁰ Annals of the Community of the Sisters of Charity Established at St. Joseph’s, Frederick Co., Md., 1809 to 1846, vol. 2, compiled by Bernard Boyle, D.C., 7-8-1, Daughters of Charity Provincial Archives, Emmitsburg, MD, 234.

²³¹ McNeil, “The Journal of Mother Rose White,” 48.

²³² Melville, 220.

²³³ Kelly, *Numerous Choirs*, vol. 1, 73.

community and approve its bylaws. The sisters elected Seton Mother Superior, Elizabeth Boyle assistant, Margaret George treasurer, Johanna Smith procuratrix, and Angela Brady secretary.²³⁴ Like any group of private businesspeople, the community also took ownership of the farm purchased for their use by Samuel Sutherland Cooper and originally deeded to him, Dubois, and Dubourg.²³⁵

The incorporation provided a legal identity for the “maternity of the spirit” practiced by the Sisters of Charity. Like Protestant and even secular benevolent associations prevalent in the early national era, these women used their collective power to form an independent organization to achieve multiple goals, primary of which was education. Although they chose spiritual motherhood over motherhood of the flesh, they retained many parallels to their worldly contemporaries. Elizabeth Seton and several of the first Sisters of Charity were republican women.

Republican women, spiritual mothers

Born in 1774, Elizabeth Bayley Seton grew up among the elite of New York society to become a model republican woman. Although a successful physician, her father Richard Bayley lacked the wealth to admit his family to high society, so Seton derived her social success from her beauty and family connections. Upper class New Yorkers accepted the Bayleys “for what they were rather than for what they had.”²³⁶ Like many other elite young women in post-Revolutionary America, Seton enjoyed dancing and attending social events, including salons, parties, and the theater.²³⁷ At one of these

²³⁴ Incorporation, By-Laws, Board Minutes, July 23, 1817, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 3b, 116-120.

²³⁵ Kelly, *Numerous Choirs*, vol. 1, 197-198. Dubourg divested his interest in the property in 1815.

²³⁶ Lavery, 161-162.

²³⁷ Melville, 61; Barthel, 37.

events, she met William Magee Seton, a wealthy businessman's son, whom she would wed in 1794. Marrying for love, the Setons had five children. For a while, Elizabeth Seton also raised Will's orphaned step-siblings, whom she taught at home.²³⁸

Elizabeth Seton was what today we would call a lifelong learner. From an early age, one of her favorite pastimes was reading.²³⁹ After her education at Mama Pompelion's dame school, Seton continued her studies by copying histories and translating French works into copybooks given to her by her father.²⁴⁰ As an adult, she read the popular authors of the day. She was particularly enamored with Rousseau's *Emile*.²⁴¹ Although she would later rue her infatuation with his ideas as well as her frivolous behavior as a youth because such activities proved a distraction from her prayers, Elizabeth Seton maintained her character as a republican woman throughout her life.²⁴² In her later years, Seton became a scholar, translating French religious volumes from the library of her spiritual advisor Rev. Simon Bruté.²⁴³

In 1797, Elizabeth Seton and Isabella Graham founded the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children, the first benevolent organization operated by women in the United States. The association provided firewood, clothing, shoes, as well as work to any woman who could prove that they were widowed or that their husband was absent for at least a year. Elizabeth Seton, who Dirvin calls "a clubwoman in the best sense of the word,"²⁴⁴ served as the treasurer of the organization from its inception until 1804. Seton's experience volunteering for the widows' society would provide her with

²³⁸ Hoare, 40.

²³⁹ Lavery, 143.

²⁴⁰ Barthel, 158.

²⁴¹ Melville, 63-64.

²⁴² Lavery, 140.

²⁴³ Kelly, *Numerous Choirs*, vol. 1, 208-209.

²⁴⁴ Dirvin, 55.

the knowledge and skills needed to successfully establish and operate the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's and the community's missions, often under trying conditions. She faced the illness and death of sisters and financial strife while also trying to raise her children.

After the death of her husband left Elizabeth Seton struggled to support her family financially. Her subsequent conversion to Catholicism led to her ostracism from New York's elite society. Searching for a new direction in her life, Seton found personal and spiritual fulfillment operating a school in Baltimore. There, Archbishop John Carroll facilitated her introduction to the city's Catholic social elite, and Seton regained her status as a high-society matron. As in her youth, Elizabeth Seton became accepted for who she was and not what she had. "With her privileged birth and upbringing, and her continuing ties to Protestant family and friends, Elizabeth Seton moved easily between the worlds of her wealthy benefactors and pupils...Even after almost a decade of convent life, Seton carried herself in the fashion of an upper-class matron."²⁴⁵ Unlike other sisters, "Elizabeth's given name was never used, but only her family name; she was always referred to as Mother Seton or Mrs. Seton."²⁴⁶ That she maintained the title "Mrs. Seton" throughout her lifetime indicates how she retained her social status.

Although Elizabeth Seton respected the authority of the community's superiors, her willful character and republican ideals often put her at odds with the French priests who espoused Old World church principles and fought among themselves for control over the sisterhood. Seton used her status as a republican matron to stand up for what she believed were the best interests of the community. Seton's disagreement with Rev.

²⁴⁵ Boylan, 121.

²⁴⁶ Dirvin, 250.

William Dubourg over the permissible correspondence between the sisters and their spiritual advisor ultimately resulted in his resignation as the community's first superior. However, as "so weak a creature" she demonstrated feminine deference to the priest in a letter that lamented his decision.²⁴⁷ Elizabeth Seton bristled at what she saw as overarching control over the sisterhood by second superior Rev. John David. For a short time, Seton feared that tensions would lead to her replacement as Mother by her assistant Rose White.

Rev. John Dubois, who worked with the sisters on a day-to-day basis, probably got to know Seton better than any of the sisterhood's ecclesiastical leaders. However, the authoritarian but very caring priest known to his students at Mount St. Mary's College as "little Bonaparte" often butted heads with the persistent matron. Writing to Bruté about his assumption of duties as the community's spiritual advisor, Dubois suggests that Seton was excessively prideful and warns the priest not to flatter her, because "for these many years she has been flattered too much." Richard Shaw quotes the letter: "God grant that you may one day come to know this soul. What material. But like gold brocade rich and heavy indeed, but hard to handle."²⁴⁸ Despite their differences, Dubois remained devoted to Seton and her community.

She even sparred, albeit gently, with Archbishop John Carroll over the duration of her annual vows during the turmoil involving Rev. John David. "Tho' when in Baltimore you assured me that those which have been so un auspicious were no longer binding, and certainly I have made no renewal of them, and I intreat you... to relieve me from them if

²⁴⁷ Draft from Elizabeth Seton to Rev. William Dubourg, September 1809, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 86.

²⁴⁸ Shaw, 67, 73.

you think any obligation remains,” Seton wrote.²⁴⁹ An American-born Jesuit who transcended the squabbles of his Sulpician brethren, Carroll strongly supported Elizabeth Seton’s efforts and became her confidant during their nine-year relationship. “One suspects that he took on a paternal role on two levels, on the human level of an older, mature friend and on the Church level as the bishop who confirmed her community as he had confirmed her in 1806.”²⁵⁰ Carroll hoped to harness the ideals of the American Revolution to secure religious liberty for Catholics and believed in the importance of education in the new republic. Seton shared these beliefs. Carroll would “see in Seton a useful public face of Catholicism, and in an order headed by this attractive mother a kind of female benevolence compatible with American expectations of domesticity even as it adhered to essential elements of Catholic spirituality and cloister.”²⁵¹ The archbishop saw a republican mother in an ecclesiastical setting.

Elizabeth Bayley Seton earned the respect and dedication of not only her ecclesiastical leaders, but also her fellow sisters. Sister Judith Metz calls Seton “a charismatic leader who evoked strong loyalty and devotion from her followers.”²⁵² During the community meeting following the incorporation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph’s when the members adopted their bylaws and elected officers, Seton was chosen “by acclamation” to serve as mother superior. Minutes of the meeting read: “It was publicly acknowledged that her experience, prudence, and kindness, with which she had governed the Sisters of Charity from the commencement of the Society, that is from

²⁴⁹ Elizabeth Seton to Archbishop John Carroll, May 13, 1811, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 184-185.

²⁵⁰ Margaret Kelly, 342.

²⁵¹ O’Donnell, 2, 17.

²⁵² Metz, “The Founding Circle of Elizabeth Seton’s Sisters of Charity,” 24.

the 31st day of July 1809, fully entitled her to the confidence and respect of all the Sisterhood.”²⁵³ Seton served as leader of the Sisters of Charity until her death.

Women began joining the nascent community soon after Seton opened her girls’ school on Paca Street in Baltimore in 1808. Many of them, especially those who would be tasked with teaching at the free school and ladies’ academy, were educated women from well-to-do families like Seton herself. As Metz asserts:

These women were, for the most part, educated, mature, and independent. They were willing to break with the expectations of family and society to launch this new venture both for themselves and for the American Church. The pioneer spirit that was propelling the expansion and development of the nation energized them... Whatever their background, they brought a wealth of good will and personal talents.²⁵⁴

Sister Margaret George documented eighteen sisters in the community in July 1813. They included Seton, Rose White, Kitty Mullen, Ann Gruber, Elizabeth Boyle, Angela Brady, Cecilia O’Conway, Susan Clossey, Mary Ann Butler, Adele Salva, Louisa Roger, Margaret George, Sally Thompson, Ellen Thompson, Martina Quinn, Frances Jordan, Teresa Conroy and Julia Shirk.²⁵⁵

In a February 1811 letter to friend, Catherine Dupleix, Elizabeth Seton described the school sisters as “excellent mistresses from the best boarding schools in Baltimore.”²⁵⁶ Cecilia O’Conway, the first young woman to join Elizabeth Seton’s community, was a “true daughter of the expanding new nation.”²⁵⁷ Her father was a linguist and teacher, and, as a child, she lived in New Orleans, Havana, and Philadelphia.

²⁵³ Incorporation, By-Laws, Board Minutes, 119-120.

²⁵⁴ Judith Metz, S.C., “Elizabeth Bayley Seton: Animator of the Early American Catholic Church,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 22, no. 1, Religious Life (Winter 2004): 61-62, accessed September 3, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25154891>.

²⁵⁵ McNeil, “Memoir of Sister Cecilia O’Conway, 42-43.

²⁵⁶ Elizabeth Seton to Catherine Dupleix, 172.

²⁵⁷ Metz, “The Founding Circle of Elizabeth Seton’s Sisters of Charity,” 20.

She was educated by Ursuline nuns. Known as Sister Veronica, O’Conway spoke French, Spanish, and Italian, and taught those languages at the academy.²⁵⁸

Irish immigrant Susan Clossey joined the community by early 1809. Also a school sister, Clossey’s name appears on subscription lists for Catholic books in New York, “suggesting she was mature and well educated.”²⁵⁹ Fanny Jordan, who was born in St. Croix, spoke several languages and as a child had taught English to refugees who took shelter in her family’s home. She taught English, reading, and grammar at Emmitsburg and ran schools for German children on several missions.²⁶⁰ Jane Frances (Mary) Gartland, originally from Philadelphia, attended St. Joseph’s Academy from 1810 through 1812. Taking vows in 1814, she taught arithmetic, reading, and geography.²⁶¹

Elizabeth Boyle was a convert from Baltimore. She had a “fine education” and taught French. She also served as assistant mother and mistress of novices. Margaret Farrell George also joined the community with “a finished education.” One of the sisterhood’s first treasurers, she met Elizabeth Seton in Baltimore. After she was widowed and her infant daughter died, George joined the Sisters of Charity and taught history, bookkeeping, and French at the academy. She also oversaw the instruction of the younger sisters.²⁶²

Rose Landry White was a Baltimore native and widow of a ship captain lost at sea. She came from “‘highly respectable parents’” and “‘had enjoyed the benefits of a good education.’”²⁶³ Following the death of her husband, White became a penitent of Rev.

²⁵⁸ Murphy, 166.

²⁵⁹ Hannefin, 9.

²⁶⁰ Metz, “The Founding Circle of Elizabeth Seton’s Sisters of Charity,” 25.

²⁶¹ Regulations of the School of St. Joseph, circa 1812, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 3b, 125 n3.

²⁶² Metz, “The Founding Circle of Elizabeth Seton’s Sisters of Charity,” 25-27.

²⁶³ Metz, “The Founding Circle of Elizabeth Seton’s Sisters of Charity,” 22.

John Baptist David, who encouraged her involvement in multiple charitable endeavors. She was chosen to lead the first missions outside Emmitsburg: in Philadelphia in 1814 and New York in 1817. After Elizabeth Seton died of tuberculosis in 1821, the community elected White Mother of the community.²⁶⁴

The founding members of the Sisters of Charity contributed their multitudinous skills and experience to the community. Like Rose White, Kitty Mullen was from Baltimore. She served on the first council of the sisterhood. Mary Ann Butler, a Philadelphia resident, was described as “pious, talented and devout.” She was an artist and poet and composed several devotional hymns used by the community. Sally and Ellen Thompson were Emmitsburg residents who had solicited Seton for membership in the Sisters of Charity before her arrival there. “Big, strong and generous,” Sister Sally had worked at Mount St. Mary’s and was named as procuratrix and baker and leader of the laundry crew. Ellen was often ill and died in 1813. Louise Rogers, who came from France via Martinique, was responsible for sewing sisters’ habits. A Swiss immigrant, Ann Gruber worked in the kitchen, infirmary, laundry, and clothes room. She and four other sisters would be missioned to assist in the kitchen and infirmary at Mount St. Mary’s College in July 1815.²⁶⁵

Under the leadership of Elizabeth Bayley Seton, these women founded the first American community of women religious. Education of elite young women would become a primary mission of the sisterhood. Seton and the sisters would prepare the girls to take their places as wives and mothers in republican American society.

²⁶⁴ McNeil, “The Journal of Mother Rose White,” 21-25.

²⁶⁵ Metz, “The Founding Circle of Elizabeth Seton’s Sisters of Charity,” 21-25.

“I would wish... to teach you to how to be good mothers of families”

The establishment of Catholic ladies' academies burgeoned with efforts to improve education for females in post-Revolutionary America. Most early Catholic academies were established in the south and west, where many American Catholics had settled. The Ursulines opened the first academy for girls in New Orleans in 1727. The Poor Clares established an academy in Georgetown in 1790. After their mission faltered and they returned to France, the newly vowed Visitation nuns assumed operation of the school in 1816.²⁶⁶ Six years later, the Dominican Sisters opened an academy in Springfield, Kentucky. The Carmelites moved from Port Tobacco, MD, to Baltimore, where they opened an academy in 1831.²⁶⁷ The French Sisters of Providence established St. Mary-of-the-Woods in Indiana in 1841.²⁶⁸ The first indigenous American communities, the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's, Sisters of Loretto, and Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, the latter two in Kentucky, opened academies in 1810 and 1812, respectively.²⁶⁹

Catholic academies opened their doors to students of all socio-economic levels. Families paid what they could or nothing at all.²⁷⁰ In addition to boarding and day students, the Sisters of Charity educated orphans in reading, writing, and ciphering as funding became available. They also taught a Sunday school for black children.²⁷¹ Protestant as well as Catholic families enrolled their daughters in the academies. Catholic ladies' academies offered the same curriculums and espoused similar values as Protestant

²⁶⁶ Murphy, 63.

²⁶⁷ Mattingly, 161.

²⁶⁸ Murphy, 94.

²⁶⁹ Mattingly, 161.

²⁷⁰ Murphy, 149.

²⁷¹ Johansen, 47.

schools established in the early nineteenth century. Both types of institutions taught English, arithmetic, history, and modern languages, as well as music, drawing, and sewing. The goals of Catholic academies, like Protestant ones, were “to prepare for life than more specifically for college. Both stressed the principles of the Christian religion and morals; domestic training, maternal influence and social usefulness; training for the teaching profession, accomplishments, physical health, intellectual enjoyment, and mental discipline.”²⁷² These goals echo the arguments for female education espoused by advocates like Judith Sargent Murray.

The St. Joseph’s Free School opened on February 22, 1810, with three students from the local Catholic parish. The first five boarding students arrived from Frederick County on May 14 of the same year. By the end of the year, thirty boarders attended the school.²⁷³ St. Joseph’s Academy also offered courses to externs or day students, often young women of the middling classes whose parents might not be able to afford the boarding school. However, known as “St. Joseph’s class,” the students who did not pay full tuition were educated separately from the boarding students. Johansen writes that, because of St. Joseph’s Academy’s modest rates, white Protestant and Catholic girls who otherwise might not have attended school could receive an academy education.²⁷⁴ Tuition at St. Joseph’s Academy was originally set at \$100 per year, then rose to \$110, and again to \$125 during the War of 1812. Students could take courses in music, needlework, and

²⁷² Murphy, 111.

²⁷³ *Annals*, vol. 2, 212.

²⁷⁴ Johansen, 47.

languages for an additional \$5 to \$8 a quarter.²⁷⁵ Use of bed and bedding was \$3.50.

Stationary cost \$3 and doctor's fees were per private bill, or \$3.²⁷⁶

Elizabeth Bayley Seton had intended to establish a purely charitable mission in Emmitsburg. "The institution, however, according to its original design, was intended for the poorer classes rather than for the education of the rich; but the indebtedness of the house and the want of an adequate support, rendered the admission of the latter unavoidable."²⁷⁷ Tuition became the major source of income for the Sisters of Charity. Education of female children thus became a primary mission of the community. Seton told her students, "Your little mother, my darlings, does not come to teach you how to be good nuns or Sisters of Charity; but rather I would wish to fit you for that world in which you are destined to live; to teach you how to be good mistresses and mothers of families."²⁷⁸ She intended to train her students to become republican women.

The first students to attend St. Joseph's Academy were local girls, daughters of Catholic plantation owners and merchants.²⁷⁹ The roster boasted daughters of prominent judges, politicians, and businessmen. US Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger Brooks Taney's daughter Susan attended the school.²⁸⁰ "Some of the most famous Catholic names of the day appeared on the school roster" as well: Harper, Carroll, Brent, Barry, Chatard, and Godefroy.²⁸¹ The school attracted converts to the Catholic faith, including

²⁷⁵ Dirvin, 325.

²⁷⁶ Meline, 66.

²⁷⁷ *Annals of the Community of the Sisters of Charity Established at St. Joseph's, Frederick Co., Md., 1809 to 1846*, vol. 1, compiled by Bernard Boyle, D.C., 7-8-1, 212.

²⁷⁸ White, D.D., 344.

²⁷⁹ Crumlish, "Mother Seton and Her Neighbors," 117.

²⁸⁰ St. Joseph's Academy and Free School Roster, 1809-1821, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 3b, 565-577.

²⁸¹ Dirvin, 324.

the Cloppers, Foxes of New York, and Gastons of North Carolina.²⁸² These young women would join the same rank of society as Seton and her founding sisters as adults. The number of students varied throughout the early years following the school's inception. An average of approximately thirty-four students attended St. Joseph's Academy between 1812 and 1821, the year of Elizabeth Seton's death. As many as forty-six girls attended in 1813 and as few as twenty-three by 1821.²⁸³

The students followed a rigorous daily schedule. Early regulations for the school that date circa 1812 are written in Elizabeth Seton's hand.²⁸⁴ Girls rose at 5:45 a.m. for morning prayers and mass. Morning instruction started at 8:00 following breakfast and lasted until 11:30. Girls were divided into several "classes" according to their knowledge and skills and rotated through several subjects depending on the day of the week. They enjoyed recreation after dinner until 3:00, at which time, after a brief religious service, they began afternoon classes. After a 7:15 supper, older girls listened to a reading from a spiritual book, while younger ones often went straight to bed.²⁸⁵

Seton recognized the importance of a practical education for young women living in early national America. In an October 2, 1818, letter to her close friend Julia Scott, Seton writes, "...you know my old notions Julia about the needle, that if girls are once turned to a reasonable cultivation of the mind, their good Sense and Pride will afterwards make them needle women and every thing necessary."²⁸⁶ According to school

²⁸² St. Joseph's Academy and Free School Roster, 1809-1821, 567, 569, 570.

²⁸³ St. Joseph's Academy Journal listing pupils, 1813-1860, 11-1-1-1, Daughters of Charity Provincial Archives, Emmitsburg, MD. Enrollment for 1818/1819 and 1820/1821 are listed together. When calculating the average number of students, they have been considered as a single year for the sake of simplicity.

²⁸⁴ Regulations of the School of St. Joseph, 124.

²⁸⁵ Dirvin, 325.

²⁸⁶ Elizabeth Seton to Julia Scott, October 2, 1818, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 582.

regulations, elective subjects could not interfere with academic studies.²⁸⁷ Seton responded to Basil Spalding Elder's request for music instruction for his daughter Elenora, "If you really wish her to learn music we will apply her to it immediately, but she must in that case sacrifice a part of the time allotted to needle work as by an arrangement of the classes made she could not be spared at any other time without too great a sacrifice of reading, grammar, spelling or arithmetic so essential at her age."²⁸⁸ Girls were also taught social deportment, including table etiquette, how to enter and leave a room, and how to curtsy.²⁸⁹

Elizabeth Seton established strict rules of conduct for students. Their progress was monitored monthly and recognized annually. They were expected to attend all classes, maintain silence, and refrain from any activities that might distract them from their studies. "Stubbornness and disobedience shall be punished immediately" and infractions could ultimately result in dismissal.²⁹⁰ Punishments could include loss of recreation, extra study periods, writing assignments, and fines (which were donated to the poor). For severe infractions, typically impudence, Seton required students to kneel from ten up to thirty minutes.²⁹¹ The school regulations read "... but on no account will a child be suffered to have her own way, that being the ruin of all subordination among the

²⁸⁷ St. Joseph's Academy Regulations, 1812, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Papers, 1-3-3-5:9, Daughters of Charity Provincial Archives, Emmitsburg, MD.

²⁸⁸ Elizabeth Seton to Basil Spalding Elder, January 18, 1813, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 237.

²⁸⁹ Murphy, 211.

²⁹⁰ St. Joseph's Academy Regulations, 1812, 1-3-3-5:9, Daughters of Charity Provincial Archives, Emmitsburg, MD.

²⁹¹ St. Joseph's Academy Regulations, 1812, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Papers, 1-3-3-5:12, Daughters of Charity Provincial Archives, Emmitsburg, MD.

others.”²⁹² On the other hand, Seton also rewarded students for exemplary behavior and academic achievement by issuing small certificates known as premiums.²⁹³

A prolific correspondent throughout her lifetime, Elizabeth Seton wrote frequently to the parents of her students. She “developed relationships with some parents who sent their daughters to St. Joseph’s. As a surrogate mother to these children, she shared a common bond with these men and women. These parents were grateful to Seton for providing a place where their daughters could receive a fine education as well as instruction in religious values.”²⁹⁴ Her letters doted on the children as if they were her own, although she was also frank about the girls’ behavior and progress with their studies. They reveal her conviction in the importance of practical education as shown in her letter to Basil Spalding Elder. They also reveal her dedication in forming these girls into republican women, if only indirectly.

Elizabeth Seton kept a notebook for her youngest daughter Catherine that offered advice about proper conduct and religion. One can assume that Seton taught these same values to the pupils at St. Joseph’s Academy. Seton wrote to her daughter, “Oh do try to be quite independent in Virtue. Take its true dignity, and never let impious emotion, or the shame of being laughed at, or even the contempt of unreasonable minds tempt you to treat any one with the least slight.” Later she counsels Catherine about reading choices, “Your mind was formed to be enlightened, and to shine on your countenance with the delicacy it has imbibed for *Purity and Truth*; form your taste then to what is good in itself, retain the empire of reason over your mind.”²⁹⁵ Without doubt, Seton was thinking

²⁹² St. Joseph’s Academy Regulations 1-3-3-5:9.

²⁹³ Certificates, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 3b, 135-137.

²⁹⁴ Metz, “Elizabeth Bayley Seton,” 56.

²⁹⁵ Catherine Seton’s Little Red Book, after 1816, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 3a, 490, 500.

about the days of her young matronhood when she was fascinated with the novels of Rousseau.

Elizabeth Seton maintained close relationships with several students after they graduated from St. Joseph's Academy. Seton treated these girls as if they were her own daughters. "For these young people she was mother, teacher, catechist, spiritual director, and counselor... They carried her influence with them for the rest of their lives."²⁹⁶ In an August 23, 1817, letter to former student Ellen Buckley Gottsberger, Seton shares the characteristics of the republican woman who nurtures the virtue of her family through her own example:

I wish very much to know if you make a *good Obedient wife* studying the happiness of your husband, as you wish him to study yours, and as a *true Christian* setting him the first example of a humble heart, and forbearing temper, if you take care of the Soul as well As the body of your servants who must find a Mother as well as a mistress in you – and if you prepare yourself to become a happy Mother of souls you will bring up to God by the faithful discharge of every domestic Virtue.²⁹⁷

Though Elizabeth Bayley Seton and the Sisters of Charity retired from the world when they decided to take vows, they practiced a "maternity of spirit." By the example of their characters and the knowledge and values they taught, Elizabeth Bayley Seton and the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's instilled in their students the values that exemplified the ideal of republican womanhood. Many of the founding sisters of the community were republican women themselves, members of the social elite and well-educated. Though they took vows of poverty, these women maintained their social status after retiring from the world and joining the sisterhood.²⁹⁸ They assumed the roles of surrogate mothers to

²⁹⁶ Metz, "Elizabeth Bayley Seton," 58.

²⁹⁷ Elizabeth Seton to Ellen Gottsberger, August 23, 1817, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 501-2.

²⁹⁸ Boylan, 121.

the young women who attended St. Joseph's Academy. They were temporal mothers whose conjugal relationship was with God, not any mortal man.

Women joined religious communities for several reasons. Young women may have feared of the dangers of childbearing and loss of their independence. Perhaps trying to avoid remarriage, widows sought the financial and social security they had lost after their husbands' deaths. Taking vows gave women the opportunity to pursue personal goals that otherwise might have been unattainable to them. The "first identifiable group of women in America to renounce consciously the domestic institutions of home, marriage, and motherhood," women religious also "became the first identifiable group of women to work outside the home on a permanent, full-time basis."²⁹⁹ In a society divided into public or political and private or domestic spheres, sisters and nuns were empowered to act publicly from their private realm.

In addition to the personal benefits of the religious life, sisters also benefited from working together collectively from within the community. In this way, women's religious communities mirrored the benevolent associations that blossomed in the post-Revolutionary era. The women drew support from each other, and as a group they could make a difference in their lives as well as the lives of those people they served. Although operating under the auspices of Sulpician superiors, the Sisters of Charity managed their community independently. The women governed themselves through their elected council, handled their day-to-day affairs, and earned their own income from tuition from the ladies' academy from the founding of the community in 1809. The adoption of the

²⁹⁹ Mannard, "Maternity of the spirit," 14.

American Rule in 1812 and incorporation of the organization four years later both legitimized the sisters' sovereignty.

Elizabeth Bayley Seton told her students that she intended to train them to take their places as "mothers of families" in elite American society. She taught them the same values that she had learned while growing up among the upper class in New York. Some of the students would graduate from St. Joseph's Academy to join religious communities, others would teach, still others became wives and mothers. Practicing the "maternity of the spirit" through the education of young women, Seton and the Sisters of Charity exemplified the ideal of republican womanhood.

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

The societal upheaval that resulted from the American Revolution brought to the forefront the disparity between republican values and women's lack of equality. Women had stretched their traditional gender roles and made important contributions to both the independence movement and Revolutionary War. After the war, women were reluctant to relinquish the limited political autonomy they had seized for themselves through boycotts of English goods, spinning homespun, wartime fundraising drives, and other efforts. To resolve this philosophical conflict, American scholars developed the concept of republican womanhood, which gave women a political function in American society that they performed from the private realm of their home. The ideology of republican womanhood represented a compromise between the Enlightenment philosophies of Condorcet and Rousseau. Americans recognized Condorcet's belief that women were equal to men in intellectual, reason, and moral character, but upheld Rousseau's argument that women defer to men. Linda Kerber defines the model republican woman as a confident, competent, benevolent, and independent wife and mother who served the republic by raising patriotic children.

Although not all middling sort and upper-class women were wives and mothers, many still embodied the characteristics of republican mothers through their contributions to nineteenth-century American society. Catholic women religious, even though they renounced marriage and motherhood, practiced the "maternity of the spirit." According to Joseph Mannard, their vows represented a marriage to Christ. Through that relationship of faith, they could act as temporal mothers. In the case of Elizabeth Bayley Seton and

the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's, they acted as spiritual and surrogate mothers to the students enrolled at St. Joseph's Academy for girls. As a widow with five children, Seton filled the roles of both spiritual and biological mother. Her status as an elite-society matron, enhanced by her fervent faith, engendered a respect for her, her community, and her schools, in both Catholics and Protestants alike. By the virtue of the "maternity of the spirit," she and the Sisters of Charity managed their sisterhood and its missions autonomously, albeit under the directorship of Sulpician priests, during a time when most women were wholly dependent on men.

American republicanism combined traditional classicism and European Enlightenment philosophy to replace the monarchical paternalism with a collective socio-political culture that valued the interests of the public good over the individual but still promised liberty and opportunity to the citizenry. One of the basic tenets of American republicanism was civic virtue, which, in its original definition, referred to the "male public spirit." Beginning in the Revolutionary era, the definition of virtue underwent a transformation from a political and male ideal to a moral and female one as Americans tried to reconcile the concept of civic virtue with the new constitutional government and rise of democracy. According to Ruth Bloch, "During the period in which the exigencies of war gave way to the politics of state, women were increasingly presented as indispensable and active promoters of patriotism in men. As mothers, young social companions, and wives, women came to be idealized as the source not only of domestic morality but also of civic virtue itself."³⁰⁰ A "gendered republicanism" evolved, at the center of which was the concept of republican womanhood.

³⁰⁰ Bloch, "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue," 38, 46.

Elizabeth Bayley Seton was a woman of this transformative period in American history. Even after retiring to a religious life, Mrs. Seton, as she was known, retained her social status as an upper-class matron. She had grown up in elite New York society and married William Magee Seton, the son of a wealthy businessman. Educated at a dame school, she also spoke French fluently and was a gifted musician. In 1797, Elizabeth Seton, along with Isabella Graham, founded the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children, the first benevolent association operated by women in the United States. Seton wrote about her volunteer work with the society: “Widows Society – delight in the continual contrasts of all blessings with the miseries I saw, yet always resigning them.”³⁰¹ Sadly, Seton would know personally the miseries of the women and children she served after the death of her husband in Italy in 1803.

The widowed Seton was left without an income to care for herself and her five children but with plenty of questions about her faith. While in Europe, she had been introduced to Catholicism by William’s business associates, the Filicchis. In the practice of communion and confession, Elizabeth Seton found a tangible religion that provided solace during this dark time in her life. After much emotional and psychological torment over which church represented the true faith, she finally chose Catholicism and made a profession of faith in March 1805. Over the next three years, Seton struggled to make a living to support her children and faced opposition to her conversion by family and friends, until she relocated to Baltimore. There, Seton finally found her vocation at the head of a women’s religious community and girls’ school.

³⁰¹ Dear Remembrances, 511.

Many of the women who helped Elizabeth Seton found the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's came from similar social backgrounds as she did. The school sisters, in particular, grew up in wealthy families and were well-educated. Some of these teaching sisters eventually took on leadership roles within the sisterhood or left the Sisters of Charity to establish new religious communities. For example, Rose Landry White, the widow of a ship's captain, managed the Sister of Charity's first missions outside Emmitsburg in Philadelphia and New York, respectively. She was later chosen as Mother of the community after Seton's death. All the women embodied the character of republican women through the "maternity of the spirit." Through their characters and the instruction at the academy, they imbued another generation of American women with republican values.

The sisters managed the day-to-day operations of the frontier community and its missions independently. As soon as the women settled in the Stone House in Emmitsburg, they elected a council and assigned work committees. Every sister accepted a responsibility, chosen according to her skills and ability. An examination of financial records for the community show that they conducted day-to-day business with local merchants themselves. Not only did they purchase goods from local businesses, but they also hired individuals to provide labor on the property and paid others for specific services, including farm work.³⁰² According to ledgers, the sisters received some donations, but the primary income for the community was tuition from St. Joseph's Academy. Although the Society of St. Sulpice accepted directorship over the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's when it was established, an uncertain parochial structure in

³⁰² 1812-22 Receipt Book, 171-173.

Emmitsburg in the early years of the sisterhood left the sisters to manage their community on their own.³⁰³

Although they operated under provisional rules from the establishment of the community in 1809, the sisters benefited from the acceptance of the American Rule in 1812. The acceptance of the Rule gave their organization legitimacy and provided them a formal measure of independence from the Sulpician priests. The incorporation of the Sisters of Charity in 1817 expanded their legitimacy legally and financially. At the same time, the sisters formally took ownership of the property on which they had lived for seven years. With coverture still firmly in place in the United States in the nineteenth century, the religious community offered Elizabeth Seton and the Sisters of Charity an opportunity to live independently that was unavailable to most American women.

During the early republic, Americans laid the political, social, and cultural foundation for their new nation. St. Joseph's Academy was one of several schools established during this time to prepare girls for their future lives as republican women. Mary Kelley writes that, between 1790 and 1830, 182 academies and at least 14 seminaries opened in the United States.³⁰⁴ Formal education did not exist for women in America before the mid-eighteenth century. Colonial American girls who received educations at all learned rudimentary subjects like reading, writing, and ciphering. Starting in the pre-Revolutionary era, young women in wealthy urban families received lessons in embroidery, French, music, and dancing in preparation for their entrance into society and, eventually, marriage. Dame schools which offered basic curriculums of reading, writing, geography, and history also became popular among the urban elite.

³⁰³ Melville, 290.

³⁰⁴ Kelley, 67.

The establishment of academies and seminaries throughout the country to teach to young women subjects more akin to those taught to young men grew in the late eighteenth century, largely in response to reformers who called for better educational opportunities for women. Advocates differed on the purposes of educating women, although, in the end, they all agreed that education should support a woman's role in the home. Writers including Mary Wollstonecraft, Judith Sargent Murray, Dr. Benjamin Rush, and Noah Webster all weighed in on educating young women in republican America.

Early American feminist Judith Sargent Murray supported education not only for the benefits it would afford the family, but also how it might benefit a woman. Marriage “might be woman's ideal role, should not feel that she must catch a husband at all costs,”³⁰⁵ according to Murray. An education would provide a woman the skills needed to live independently, if needed. Like Murray, Mary Wollstonecraft argued for the independence of women but also supports their traditional domestic roles. Wollstonecraft wrote that good government depends on good families, and good families in turn depend on women with “better education, more serious pastimes, and better physical health.” She believed that “self-control, rationality, order, and discipline were all necessary to producing good women capable of raising families, being good companions, and contributing to the polity.”³⁰⁶ According to Murray and Wollstonecraft, education served women in two ways: as individuals and as citizens.

Authors including Noah Webster and Benjamin Rush, on the other hand, contended that female education should solely support a woman's responsibilities as

³⁰⁵ Wilson, 107, 110.

³⁰⁶ Branson, 35-36.

wives and mothers. In an address presented at a quarterly examination at the Young Ladies Academy in 1787, Dr. Benjamin Rush told his audience, “The equal share that every citizen has in the liberty, and the possible share he may have in the government of our country, make it necessary that our ladies should be qualified to a certain degrees by a peculiar and suitable education, to concur in instructing their sons in the principles of liberty and government.”³⁰⁷ Female educational institutions were intended to prepare women not for further education or professional careers, but for their responsibilities as wives and mothers in the new republic.³⁰⁸

Although the Ursulines established a school for girls in New Orleans as early as 1727, most Catholic ladies’ academies opened in the early nineteenth century. The schools were located primarily in the south and west on the American frontier, where Catholics had immigrated prior to the Revolutionary War in search of religious freedom. As the academies increased in number and popularity, Protestants worried about the impact of Catholicism on their communities. Catholic academies accepted both Catholic and Protestant students. Protestant parents appreciated the care and attention their daughters received at Catholic academies, which were careful not to proselytize pupils in order not to deter enrollment by non-Catholic families.

Founders of Protestant proprietor schools played on this growing nativism in the United States to promote their own institutions. Mary Lyon, Emma Willard, and Catharine Beecher, for instance, argued that Catholic academies could not provide a

³⁰⁷ Benjamin Rush, *Thoughts upon Female Education, Accomodated to the Present State of Society, Manners, and Government, in the United States of America: Addressed to the Visitors of the Young Ladies’ Academy in Philadelphia, 28 July 1787, at the Close of the Quarterly Examination*. Eternity Ebooks, 2014. Kindle edition, Loc 33.

³⁰⁸ Gordon, 69.

proper education to America's young women. Lyon and her peers did not recognize "maternity of the spirit" of nuns and sisters and their ability to act as surrogate mothers to their pupils. Such Protestant women also erroneously claimed that Catholic academies offered primarily ornamental educations, when, in fact, the schools taught curriculums like that espoused by republican education reformers such as Dr. Benjamin Rush and Noah Webster.

On September 14, 1975, Pope Paul VI canonized Elizabeth Bayley Seton as a saint. It is as the first American saint that Seton is most popularly known. She is also credited with founding the parochial school system in the United States. Elizabeth Seton and the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's made another important contribution to American society with the establishment of St. Joseph's Academy. They educated another generation of traditionally Christian yet republican women. This reformation of education during the early national era helped to spark reform movements later in the nineteenth century.

Many women's academies would eventually become colleges. For instance, in 1828, St. Joseph's Academy for girls, the academy added more advanced classes to the curriculum: rhetoric, philosophy, botany, algebra, and astronomy, among others. In 1902, the Sisters of Charity obtained a charter change to allow the academy to confer degrees. St. Joseph's College educated young women until 1973, when the sisters closed the institution for financial and staffing reasons. Several of the proprietor schools, such as Mount Holyoke College and Troy Female Seminary – the latter renamed Emma Willard School, still exist today. Founders like Willard, Beecher, and Lyon established their schools on the belief that women influenced children "not only as republican mothers but

also as enlightened teachers.” Just as Elizabeth Seton told her pupils that she was training them for their roles as wives and mothers, Willard and her associates believed that “female character – effectively developed only through proper education – held the key to the success of the new republic.”³⁰⁹ Both Catholic and proprietor schools taught women the values that characterized the republican woman.

At ladies’ academies, young women began to see themselves as individuals. As individuals, they developed relationships with fellow students “different from those of their parents’ lives: wealth, religion, social circle, or location.” Young women who attended ladies’ academies found a sense of purpose and belonging not unlike those women who joined religious communities. According to Ann Gordon, “the girls became, in their own word, ‘sisters.’”³¹⁰ This sisterhood would continue once the women graduated from the academy as they joined reading circles, literary societies, and benevolent organizations such as the Sigourney Club (South Carolina), the Infant School Society (New York), Ladies’ New York City Anti-Slavery Society, and Female Moral Reform Society (Boston).³¹¹ These associations, which first became popular following the Revolutionary War, would resurge in the 1820s and 1830s.

In addition to how education changed the way women perceived themselves, the idea of republican womanhood would transform into the cult of true womanhood. With the growth of democracy and commercialization of the economy in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century, individual interest increasingly superseded the republican views of the public good and civic virtue. The gulf widened between public and private

³⁰⁹ Evans, 71.

³¹⁰ Gordon, 79.

³¹¹ Kelley, 128; Boylan, 219-226.

spheres. Virtue became ever more firmly entrenched in the feminine realm. With the evolution of what Nancy Cott calls the “canon of domesticity,” the home became a refuge from the hectic world centered on self-interest and the accumulation of wealth. At the center of this refuge was a woman for whom domesticity became a vocation.³¹² The self-reliant, rational, benevolent, and independent woman that Kerber described became “pious, pure, domestic, and submissive.”³¹³

Unlike republican womanhood, which referred to women who were members of American’s social elite, the cult of true womanhood or canon of domesticity was based on sex, not class, and, thus “consistent with democratic culture.” This new domesticity united American women. “Because it included ‘all’ women, and was endowed with social and political meaning, the domestic vocation gained pervasive strength. It gave many women a sense of satisfaction as well as solidarity with their sex.”³¹⁴ In the mid-nineteenth century, women would use their moral authority and once more break from the private realm into the public one with the launch of social reform movements that were both broader in scope and with more ambitious goals than the benevolent societies of the post-Revolutionary era.³¹⁵

Women pursued social reform through participation in the abolition, temperance, and suffrage movements. Women’s rights advocates like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton found interest in their causes among female professionals like teachers and journalists, women who were likely educated in ladies’ academies in the early nineteenth

³¹² Cott, 64, 74.

³¹³ Evans, 69.

³¹⁴ Cott, 98-99.

³¹⁵ Rosemary Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash Women and Politics in the Early American Republic*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 142.

century. The temperance movement blossomed in the late 1800s. Though women stepped over their thresholds and hit the streets to promote their causes, those causes were still cloaked in the rhetoric of domesticity. For instance, “protection of the home and family from the violence, financial irresponsibility, desertion, and immortality associated with drink and male abuse of alcohol became the keynote of the feminized temperance movement.”³¹⁶ Women used their roles as wives and mothers to legitimize their social activism.

These movements were made possible, in part, by the improvement of female education in the early national era. Catholic ladies’ academies, including St. Joseph’s Academy, filled the need for educational institutions for women in the United States. Elizabeth Bayley Seton and the founding members of the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph’s were republican women. Born to America’s social elite or not, these women embodied the ideal of republican womanhood through the “maternity of the spirit.” Through their characters and instruction, these surrogate mothers trained another generation of republican women in early national America.

³¹⁶ Evans, 124, 127.

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