

Reading Antebellum New York Dailies Against the Grain: The Case of Almira C. Loveland

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Résumé de l'article

L'article qui suit s'intéresse à des expériences de lecture associées aux quotidiens des années 1830 et 1840. Il s'attarde notamment à la carrière de la New-yorkaise Almira Loveland, qui, par ses activités de poète, d'éditrice et de militante réussit à transformer ce qu'on trouvait dans ces mêmes journaux pour le retourner, tout autre, à la sphère publique : ce qui était hier à jeter valait désormais la peine d'être conservé; ce qui était confiné au monde des hommes se frayait un passage jusqu'à celui des femmes; ce qui était sensationnaliste devenait authentique. Le cas de Loveland est, à n'en pas douter, hors du commun, mais suggère néanmoins que les modes de lecture et de mobilisation suscités par les journaux de l'époque n'étaient pas nécessairement soumis à la grandiloquence éditoriale toute masculiniste affichée par ceux-ci. Il invite également à explorer des expériences de lecture très diversifiées, mais dont on trouve peu de traces dans les archives.

READING ANTEBELLUM NEW YORK DAILIES AGAINST THE GRAIN:

The Case of Almira C. Loveland¹

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ABSTRACT

This essay describes some of the challenges in understanding reading experiences associated with daily newspapers of the 1830s and 1840s. It then explores the scrapbook, poetry, and editorial career of New Yorker Almira Loveland, revealing how Loveland translated and transformed newspaper material from disposable to keepsake, man's world to woman's world, and sensational to sincere, ultimately returning it in new forms to the public sphere through her work as poet, editor, and activist. While her case is no doubt a special one, it suggests that the masculinist editorial bombast of these papers is not determinative of the modes of reading and mobilization they enabled, and it offers an invitation to imagine a diversity of reading experiences little documented in the archives.

RÉSUMÉ

L'article qui suit s'intéresse à des expériences de lecture associées aux quotidiens des années 1830 et 1840. Il s'attarde notamment à la carrière de la New Yorkaise Almira Loveland, qui, par ses activités de poète, d'éditrice et de militante réussit à transformer ce qu'on trouvait dans ces mêmes journaux pour le retourner, tout autre, à la sphère publique : ce qui était hier à jeter valait désormais la peine d'être conservé; ce qui était confiné au monde des hommes se frayait un passage jusqu'à celui des femmes; ce qui était sensationnaliste devenait authentique. Le cas de Loveland est, à n'en pas douter, hors du commun, mais suggère néanmoins que les modes de lecture et de mobilisation suscités par les journaux de l'époque n'étaient pas nécessairement soumis à la grandiloquence éditoriale toute masculiniste affichée par ceux-ci. Il invite également à explorer des expériences de lecture très diversifiées, mais dont on trouve peu de traces dans les archives.



Figure 1. "The Appeal of the Sailor's Widow," Loveland Scrapbook

Periodicals present their own particular problems for the historian of reading. As we all know, only the desperately bored or compulsive reader actually reads every article and advertisement: the periodical is made for sampling, scanning, and skimming. With regard to this genre, the claim that each reader reads a different text is empirical, not metaphysical as it might

be if we were talking of novels. The existence of multiple periodical reading experiences is indisputable.² And beyond individual variation based on taste, purpose, and circumstance, there is the question of how the social position of readers affects their reading habits and experiences. For example, to assume that a daily newspaper's readership lines up with its stated political affiliation and editorial positions is to give too much weight to that one component of the paper. In the antebellum American city, papers were numerous and ubiquitous, found on saloon and parlour tables alike. Even though they rarely explicitly framed varied readerships through specialized sections, their diverse content indicates that they aimed to appeal across demographic divides to the man of business, the sensation seeker, the humble job seeker, the sentimentalist, and the practical housewife. Each different set of social and cultural circumstances would make likely if not determine a different reading experience. Furthermore, it is in the nature of all periodicals that they are ephemeral and that every issue is read in a moment or context slightly different than the one before. All in all, then, periodicals remind us of the difficulties of knowing who read, what they read, and how they read, but they also usefully provoke attention to these interesting and important questions.

This essay describes some of the challenges in understanding reading experiences associated with New York City daily newspapers of the 1830s and 1840s. It then explores the scrapbook, poetry, and editorial career of Almira Loveland, revealing how Loveland translated and transformed newspaper material from disposable to keepsake, man's world to woman's world, and sensational to sincere, ultimately returning it in new forms to the public sphere through her work as poet, editor, and activist. While her case is no doubt a special one, it suggests that the masculinist editorial bombast of these papers is not determinative of the modes of reading and mobilization they enabled, and it offers an invitation to imagine a diversity of reading experiences little documented in the archives.

Reading the Dailies: Extant Evidence

The most plentiful evidence of how people read the antebellum New York City dailies lies in their form and content. Although they are all four pages in length, they range from huge "bedsheet" commercial papers that sold for six cents to compact penny papers. Whatever the format, about half the column

inches are devoted to advertisements, including, usually, the entire front and back pages. The first few columns of the second page air editorial and political matters. Papers with a strong party affiliation include notices and reports from Whig or Democratic rallies, and reports from sister party publications upstate or in other Eastern seaboard cities. But other papers proclaim their political neutrality, and attention to format and ratios of content suggests that people may have chosen a paper as much for its ads as its politics, or at least for the whole reading experience rather than only one component of it.³ In any case, politics quickly give way to fragments of news elsewhere in the country (floods or drownings were popular), police reports, market information, and ship arrivals. An occasional fiction serial or poem appears. A mixture of international news (upon arrival of transatlantic ships) and tidbits of jokes and anecdotes gleaned from other papers makes up the balance of the content.

Overall, the papers are markedly masculine, as a sample of New York City dailies published on 1 September 1840 will illustrate.⁴ The bulk of the advertising appeals to men of commerce. Thus the *American* advertises wholesale gold sherry, goat skins, “noreiga segars,” gunny bags, brass kettles, “english sheathing copper,” feathers, opium, and horse hair. Advertisers in the *Courier and Enquirer* offer houses and farms for sale, or seek “a double Compting Room, furnished with a loft and a large cellar for storing wines and liquors to bond, for which a fair rent will be paid,” As for editorial content, the election looms large, a forum from which of course women were excluded. The *Standard* reprints a questionnaire from the *Richmond Enquirer* grilling President Van Buren on his positions on standing armies, Abolition in the District of Columbia, subventions for railroads and canals, and the US Bank. The *Evening Post* defends the Democrats’ relaxed election strategies: “He who would leap a five-barred gate should not begin to run at so great a distance as to be out of breath when he arrives at it...” Gleefully non-partisan except when it comes to its own prospects, the *Herald* reports in “News for England” that “The country is healthy; the politicians of both parties are running over the country, making stump speeches; there is as much drinking as ever; the Whigs are in high spirits; the locofocos are no less sanguine of success; the Wall street papers are going to destruction; the New York Herald never was more flourishing; and every body is happy, except a few miserable politicians, and disappointed office seekers.” This tone of cheerful masculinity carries through into crime

reports. Under the heading “A Vixen,” the *Daily Express* reports that “Mary Robinson, a regular spitfire, was charged by Sophia Mitchell with having taken most unwarrantable liberties with her, to wit: blacking both her eyes, and tearing to pieces a ‘span new’ silk hat, and to ‘cap the climax’ walking off with her man.” In general, behaviour of the poor is a frequent source of entertainment in these papers, given an extra frisson when they are female, black, or speak (or can be represented to speak) in dialect or slang. Thus it is not only in content but in tone that the papers exult in the bravado of the (white, Protestant, educated, middle class, “American”⁵) man, archly observing the life of the city as he moves from one business opportunity to another.

And yet although the papers model their primary implied reader in the figure of the urbane Editor, they are designed like today’s news broadcasts and websites to cast their net wide: they seek maximal circulation, after all. We can find many items to appeal to more humble or genteel readers, some of them even women. The *Evening Post* on this same September day prints a list of all letters left at the post office for collection, organized by gender. The *Courier and Enquirer’s* extensive want ads seek “100 young men, Americans, to go on whaling voyages of various lengths, from one to four years,” “a girl to do the work of a small family; an American would be preferred,” and “a good Cook—one who understands her business,” and “a situation as Governess.” Along with its segar ads the *American* invites readers to buy *The First Book of the Piano Forte*, “Splendid English Bibles,” and *Master Humphrey’s Clock*; it includes notices for various private schools; and it features an account of a visit to the House of Lords followed by a very poetic description of the view from the dome of St. Paul’s cathedral. The *Sun* addresses women directly in one ad:

Look out girls!—The public are cautioned against a tall, awkward fellow, named Samuel Burbank—said Burbank was married in March, 1835, at Lowell, Mass, to Ann S. Kendall, with whom he lived occasionally, until the fall of 1836, when he came to Cumberland, R.I., where he was married to a young woman who is now living at Blackstone, Mass. He has now deserted both his wives, and this notice is given to prevent the villain from practising any further deception.

The *Commercial Advertiser* features notices for two products explicitly promoted to women: Mother's Relief ("This medicine is said to be an invaluable auxiliary to ladies in certain circumstances, and has been used by numerous people with decided satisfaction") and Roman Halcyon "for removing pimples, freckles, tan, sunburn, blotches." Beyond this, it contains many items of interest beyond the commercial and electoral, ranging from an account of the installation of a popular singer as a Huron Chief to a report of a blind student admitted to Harvard and a sketch of travels in upstate New York. There is a distinct moralizing tone to a number of stories, including for example the obituary of one James Greenleaf Jr. After a very eventful life, Greenleaf died by accidentally falling through a trap-door, which occasions the remark that "in a moment of security, in an hour when no danger threatened, behold the summons is at hand! a false step, and his eventful career is terminated, and he is called, without a moment's warning, to the presence of his Creator." Thus there are certain small spaces of Christian contemplation even in rough and tumble world of news.

Poetry is also a ubiquitous feature of the dailies in this period.⁶ Bennett of the *Herald* responds to the claim that "there is no poetry in modern times" with the observation that "we think there is a little—a devilish little—and that it exists in specie and woman—the bright beautiful eagles, and the bright beautiful angels."⁷ In 1835, after a fire destroyed the offices of the *Herald*, Bennett writes, "The Ann street conflagration consumed types, presses, manuscript, paper, some bad poetry, subscription books—all the outward material appearance of the Herald, but its soul was saved—its spirit as exuberant as ever." Yet despite this dismissal Bennett does publish poetry, leaning towards sentimental titles like "Sensitive Heart" and "The Soul's Disquietude."⁸ For much of the 1830s there is one such on every day's front page. Other papers included poetry as well, often in a regular space on a particular page. From the vantage point of later centuries, it is not uncommon to presume that poetry was used in these contexts as "filler." Indeed that may have been how the compositor sometimes saw it. But other notices and squibs would have shared that handy status: to a compositor, almost the whole paper other than paid advertisements is "filler." Singling out poetry as anomalous or optional would say more about our present-day sense that poetry does not belong in a newspaper than it would about the newspaper genre as it was before the Civil War.⁹

The multiple reading experiences enabled by the daily papers are particularly dramatically displayed in the *Standard* of 1 September 1840, which is dominated by Democratic bluster: “The Empire State is in the hands of the enemies of the people; it must and will be rescued and redeemed if the people are true to themselves,” it declares. However, the editor precedes his manifesto with an epigraph taken from Felicia Hemans’ 1823 dramatic poem, “The Siege of Valencia.” This poem, which would have been familiar to many readers of the day, speaks among other things of the cost to mothers of men’s political passions, so it would present a rather odd subtext to the reader inclined to notice. More explicitly, however, the paper stages a conversation between male and female perspectives by publishing (amidst notices of Indian attacks in Florida, Vermont election results, and fresh oysters on Broad Street) the poem “Woman” by “the Hon. Mrs. Norton.” Caroline Norton, a British poetess who lost custody of her children when she left her abusive husband (a Member of Parliament), became increasingly outspoken about women’s rights, and this poem is certainly no exception:

Warriors and statesmen have their meed of praise,
And what they do or suffer men record;
But the long sacrifice of woman’s days
Passes without a thought—without a word:
And many a holy struggle, for the sake
Of duties sternly, faithfully fulfilled—
For which the anxious mind must watch and wake
And the strong feelings of the heart be stilled—
Goes by, unheeded as the summer wind,
And leaves no memory and no trace behind!
Yet, it may be, more lofty courage dwells
In one meek heart, which braves an adverse fate,
Than his, whose ardent soul indignant swells,
Warm’d by the fight, or cheer’d through high debate.

The poem goes on to suggest that many men commit suicide rather than “nerving themselves to bear” the kind of isolation routine to both rich and poor women. It is certainly a striking counter to the world and tone otherwise represented in the paper.

Still, we do not know how many people even stopped to read Norton’s poem, let alone what they thought of it. If to some extent we can read the papers themselves for evidence of reading experiences, this approach is in the end highly speculative and prone to researcher bias. We can sketch

readings that the papers made possible, but we do not know if they were actually performed, and in any case it is difficult from this temporal and cultural distance to be anything like complete in the readings we ourselves can perceive. Documentation by individual readers would be more concrete and intimate evidence, but we have very little of that. The most ample document for New York City in the period is the diary of Philip Hone, a wealthy auctioneer who served briefly as New York's mayor (1826–27). In entries written throughout his long and well-connected life, Hone routinely quotes from newspapers, sometimes copying out lengthy passages. Arrival of ships from Britain is always of interest to him, both for political and commercial information contained in the papers they carry, and for political and social possibilities offered by their passengers, as we see when the *Great Western* arrived on 20 June 1840:

I observe in the list the name of Genl Murray of the british army his Lady and Daughter, and many others Englishmen and Americans. There does not seem to be much important news by the great Western. Cotton has fallen still lower. American Securities still in bad repute. Money very plenty, the weather fine, and prospects of an abundant Harvest.¹⁰

Like a newspaper editor, Hone often uses borrowed material as a springboard for commentary. On 9 August, the arrival of the *Great Western* once again “as punctual as a lover” prompts extrapolations about American election prospects:

The most important Commercial News is the rise in England of bread stuffs. from an apprehended scarcity in England and Ireland. this may be well for the Speculators in Flour, but exceedingly bad for the Merchants generally, if Flour rises. Cotton the great Staple and American Securities must fall, and what is worse than all, the prospects of Genl Harrison's election will be obscured. pay the Farmers a good price for their wheat. and they will throw up their caps. and shout Huzza for Van Buren. such is the voice of the people.

Sometimes Hone's musings expand to the length of essays: for example, on 23 June after a meeting of the Commissioners, he explores the question of how and when “federalism” has become a dirty word; on 22 July he writes about the Louisiana election and the “Sub-treasury Jubilee.” It is not far-

fetched to see Hone's diary as continuous with the newspaper genre: often his whole day's entry consists of the day's news, sometimes with commentary. He even uses headline-like headings, and places lines between different news items, mimicking the layout of a newspaper. Thus the form of the diary shows his comfort and confidence with the newspaper form and political rhetoric of the day; his diary persona is quite similar to the persona of a newspaper editor.

The attorney George Templeton Strong is another midcentury diarist of New York who comments on the daily press. More literarily and musically inclined than Hone, he frames comments on economic and financial news with opinions on Tennyson and Wagner. But apart from the Hone and Strong diaries, which represent the experience of a very privileged male social position, extant evidence of newspaper reception in New York in this period is frustratingly elusive. A logbook of the eleventh regiment of the City Guard in the 1840s includes not only hand-written notes about lost objects, which uniform to wear, and times of committee meetings, but pasted-in newspaper clippings: reports of parades in which the regiment participated, jokes, and obituaries of the regiment's members. So we can see that the newspaper was a valued validation of the importance or glamour of this organization, but we are not privy to much more about its role in the lives of these young men about town.¹¹ Mrs. M. C. Todd wrote extensive diaries in the 1830s and 1840s, documenting prayer and family, explicitly dedicating the enterprise to her children. Occasionally she includes, attached with a straight pin, a lithograph, a leaf, or a newspaper clipping. The poem, "To my Friend. En Route for California," is loose in February 1845; it looks to be from a daily paper as it has advertisements for houses to let on the back. On another occasion we find the "Married" column of a daily, and in November 1848 we can read a report from the *Journal of Commerce* of a temperance meeting in Boston. So here we have a slight indication of women reading dailies, using them as resources for self-definition and information. But there is really not a lot that can be said about such occasional unannotated clippings.¹²

In this context of insufficient evidence of reading experiences, Almira Loveland's scrapbook becomes an especially important document. The scrapbook does not include explicit commentary about what its contents meant to its creator, but in examining Loveland's writing elsewhere, we can

plausibly posit a great deal. Its author hails from a relatively privileged position, and is clearly more invested in reading and writing—and social reform—than the bulk of the populace. Nonetheless, her scrapbook and her published writings together reveal nonobvious connections, resistant readings, and productive tensions that may provoke us to see how the popular news media, even today, may mean more than they know.¹³



Figure 2. Notices of Loveland's editorial position, loose in the scrapbook

Almira Loveland as Reader and Writer

Before it became a scrapbook, the New-York Historical Society's "BV Sun Log Book" began its life as the 1838–39 log of the ship *Sun*, which plied the waters between New York and Charleston. Methodical notations of winds and bearings can be glimpsed between the overlaid clippings, but in fact the book has been entirely repurposed. Poetry cut from periodicals makes up about 75 percent of its 66 pages of pasted contents. Examples include "On the Picture of a Child tired of Play," by N. P. Willis; "The Emigrant's Daughter" by Mrs. L. H. Sigourney; "To my Little son, two months old" by W. B. Tappan. The rest of the material is miscellaneous prose, fact and fiction, with a few cartoons and illustrations of literary characters, all clipped from periodicals. Two coloured broadsheets of poems printed for fundraisers for widows and orphans of seamen claim prominent place; one

is signed “Almira.” All in all, ten poems signed Almira or A. C. L. are included in the scrapbook, along with three notices of her appointment as “editress” of a temperance publication.

The scrapbook is untitled and unsigned, but I have concluded that it was made by Almira C. Loveland herself.¹⁴ Loveland (1813–65) was active over many years in various relief and temperance organizations. She wrote poetry, reports, and short prose pieces, and in 1842 was appointed editress of the Ladies’ Section of *The Organ of the Washington Temperance Benevolent Society and Auxiliaries*, a substantial monthly publication. In the late 1840s and early 1850s she was a regular contributor to *The Advocate of Moral Reform and Family Guardian*. She was instrumental in laying the groundwork for the establishment of the “Home for the Friendless”: as an obituary put it, “during the eight years of legislative lobbying, writing, hoping, fearing, she ceased not her untiring efforts.” In the 1860s she served as matron of the Sailors’ Snug Harbor, a home for about 400 aged sailors on Staten Island.¹⁵

So what are the sources of this scrapbook? Most clippings are not identified by publication or date (none are marked by the maker of the book). A few poems are labelled “For the Christian Intelligencer” or “For the Courier,” which indicates the source of the clipping, in contrast to those labelled “From the New Orleans Times” or “From the Ladies’ Companion” which provide information on origin but not about proximate source. Some materials not glued in are identifiable by information on their reverse. Thus while we cannot establish a statistical sense of the sources, we can see that one major source is the *New York Weekly Messenger*, a Christian paper. But the scrapbook’s creator also clearly read daily papers including the *Sun*, the *Tribune*, the *Courier & Enquirer*, and the *New Era*. Thus Loveland clipped the poem “Water—A Song” by one J. L.W., “a gentleman who, in consequence of intemperance, was once an inmate of Dr. White’s Lunatic Asylum,” only accidentally capturing on the reverse an advertisement for wholesale “Printed and Common ware” from Liverpool addressed to “Country Merchants,” a bankruptcy notice, and a notice for “Dr. Van Studdiford’s Vegetable Anti-Fever Pills.” Instead of the bank note table, she was interested in “The Infant Triad” by Holland, and “The Dying Girl to Her Mother,” by Miss Jewsbury. John Quincy Adams’s poem, “The Wants of Man,” seems to have attracted her attention rather than want ads for “a young lady to attend in a corset and fancy store,” “2 tailoresses to work on

coats, to whom \$4 per week will be given,” and “an American woman to do the cooking in a refectory, with good recommendations”—even though her concerns with morality and social justice presumably made her familiar with the lives of the working poor. And rather than clipping a table of retail prices in the market, she clearly meant to save Thomas Paine’s famous “poetic effusion,” “From the Castle in the Air, to the Little Corner of the World.” This poem was much reprinted in this period partly because it did not seem to fit the prevalent stereotype of Paine as a mad atheist and was thus intriguing. In this instance, a reprint from the *New Orleans Times*, the editor, A. Z., notes that “however much we may condemn some of [Paine’s] writings, there is, I think, a degree of fancy and imagination in this poem that render it worthy of preservation.” Thus the poem is taken to articulate a contention embodied in the Loveland scrapbook, that imaginative retreat can moderate public life. Paine’s portrait of one such retreat could almost describe Loveland’s scrapbook: “The place was but small—but ‘twas sweetly serene, / And chequered with sunshine and shade.”

But if retreat is understood to be in dialogue with public life, there is a sense in which it is not retreat at all, in which even the most pretty and domestic poems can have a role in preparing and guiding public action. Furthermore, despite the prevalence of the sentimental, this scrapbook does not remove itself from the world. Many of its poems are highly topical and polemical. It includes some comic poems commenting on electoral politics (“Van Buren’s Lament,” for example, and a song, “When locofocos take to betting” to the tune of “When lovely woman stoops to folly”), and shows some interest in the Chinese Opium Wars and the economic situation. Most of the poems by Loveland herself address social issues. The two on coloured paper are “The Appeal of the Sailor’s Widow” and “Poem Written Expressly for the Fair in aid of the Destitute Families, the Widows and Orphans of Seamen, held in the Mariners’ Church, Oct., 1841.” A loose clipping reports that this fair raised an impressive \$935.55, “\$300 of which will be given if needs be immediately for the relief of the poor, and the remainder we hope to increase until we are enabled to open the contemplated clothing store.” “Reminiscences,” which like many of Loveland’s poems appeared in the temperance publication *The Olive Plant*, is the story of a daughter and sister to drunkards, who later married one despite her efforts to escape the scourge. It ends with the following invocation:

Come! rally round the standard bright,

In woman's weakness strong;
With cheering words and smiles of light,
And minstrelsy and song.
Come with a woman's pleading prayer,
Arrest the fiery flood;
Nor let it more its tribute bear,
Of tears, and sighs, and blood.

Embracing belittling stereotypes of both women and art in order to improve women's condition, the phrase "in woman's weakness strong" captures a paradoxical power.¹⁶ Thus poetry is not at all antithetical to politics in this scrapbook: it is often a vehicle for reform.

In addition to her poems, Loveland also clipped notices of her debut as an editress. In the flirtatious style that seems to characterize the figure of the editor in the period, one source anticipates "that *duets*, and other first rate performances may now be expected from the '*Organ*,' as the editorial organist has managed to haul up along side of his own, the stool of the musical, the fair, and the poetic '*Almira*.'" By mid-1842, when she assumed the editorial position at the *Organ*, Loveland had been publishing her poetry extensively in publications such as the temperance *Olive Plant*, and one of her poems had even been sent to the *New York Tribune* by Senator Thomas F. Marshall; Marshall presented the verses as "proof that Temperance is a nobler and richer fountain of inspiration to poetical genius than ever the wine cup afforded."¹⁷ Another clipping announcing Loveland's new position describes her as "one of the most gifted, and active Martha Washingtonians of New York," lauding her "poetic pen." The Washingtonian movement flourished wildly for a few years in the early 1840s, growing from the efforts of four working-class reformed alcoholics in Baltimore to half a million members three years later.¹⁸ Unlike other arms of the temperance movement, Washingtonianism valorized the personal experiences of those affected by excessive drinking, and championed the possibility of personal reform. Meetings proceeded through testimony and tears to induce those attending to sign the temperance pledge. The third announcement of Loveland's new editorial position included in the scrapbook notes that the first line of one of her poems, "Go feel what I have felt," is the "motto upon the badge of our Society." This poem, or indeed, even just this line of it, seems to have encapsulated the political

strategy, the cultural tenor, and the ethical call of the Washingtonian movement, and it made “Almira” into a kind of celebrity.

While it is not included in the scrapbook, this poem was reprinted just about every where else.¹⁹ It appeared in the *Liberator* in 1841, travelled to an Australian temperance journal in 1846, served as the epigraph to T. S. Arthur’s *Woman to the Rescue: A Story of the New Crusade* (1874) and, perhaps because it appeared in several anthologies and school resources, was widely parodied in later decades.²⁰ It is always published with some version of the preface that “a young lady of New York” was accused of being “a maniac on the subject of Temperance” because her “writing was so full of pathos, and evinced such deep emotion of soul,” “whereupon she wrote the following lines.”²¹ The poem is the testimony of a daughter of a drunkard. It concludes:

Tell me I hate the bowl!
Hate is a feeble word—
I loathe, abhor—my very soul
With strong disgust is stirr'd
Whene'er I see or hear or tell
Of the dark beverage of Hell!

Little is known of Loveland’s family and childhood, other than that she was born in New York, her maiden name was Francisco, her mother’s maiden name was Kipp, and her father may have spoken Swedish.²² Whether or not her father was actually an alcoholic, the biographical note that came to be attached to the poem provides personal experience as validation: a lady could only be permitted to speak in such passionate terms if provoked by personal suffering. Holly Fletcher has argued that the temperance agitation of this period sought to shore up the family and gender roles (Gender and the American Temperance Movement 24); this poem may be seen in this light as a display of the kind of unseemly voice that women are forced to assume when men do not fulfill their proper roles. In any case, it uses this voice with bravado.

As editor at the *Organ*, Loveland continued to write poetry and songs for temperance choirs. She also wrote prose pieces such as “Have You Signed the Pledge?” and “Appeal to the Mercantile Community.”²³ By the later 1840s, writing for the *Advocate*, she was producing longer pieces on a

broad range of topics. In “Why Don’t they go the Poor-house?” she responds to both patronizing wealthy observers and snide crime reporters by attempting to represent the experience of poverty. “The facts in this case are these,” she writes: “This woman, now nearly ninety years of age, came from Stratford, Conn., to the city, when quite young: married at the age of sixteen, and has been the mother of nine children, all of whom are in their graves [...]” Instead of representing the woman’s words in humorous dialect, like newspaper crime reports, the article has the woman speak of the miseries of the poor house and why she came home, even with no support. Loveland concludes: “The two cases cited above, seem strong cases [...] yet, without question, there are thousands equally so, scattered through our city, who will never be reached.”²⁴ The journalistic impulse here is motivated by a desire for social justice. She wants to get the facts straight, and also to build empathy. Other articles are entitled “The Gathering at Hamilton: Its Objects and Responsibilities,” and “Scenes in the History of an Orphan Girl.”²⁵ As she is concerned with *preventing* crime and vice, Loveland is reporting stories that would never appear in the daily papers.

Just as Loveland’s poetry was connected to her practice as an editor, both were connected to the work she did as a “visitor” to the poor and board member of charitable organizations. The status of women in these organizations was tenuous in this period. As Holly Fletcher notes, in general, “Temperance work and membership in a temperance organization [...] combined male needs by allowing men to promote personal behavior pleasing to feminine sensibilities in a setting that gave women a scant role.”²⁶ The “Martha Washingtons” nonetheless carved out a place for themselves, making banners, writing poetry, and organizing alcohol-free entertainments. Almira Loveland’s life shows how this work then led to child welfare efforts and the establishment of services for the destitute, alternatives to the traditional “poor house” approach manifesting goals and attitudes we might associate with the “social work” that women pioneered later in the century. While such activities required male sponsors and advocates, Loveland was a key figure in the construction of the “Home for the Friendless” orphanage which opened on 30th Street in 1847.²⁷

All of this advocacy and enterprise was bound up with activities of reading, cutting, pasting, writing, and publishing. While an editorship of the “ladies section” of a minor temperance publication may not seem a groundbreaking

achievement, we have to think of it in context: as Sharon Harris points out, “even when a woman edited a conservative periodical, she cast doubts on constructions of women’s limited roles in society by the very act of being an editor.”²⁸ To be an editor was to publicly and assertively inhabit a role of forming public opinion. Within social reform movements, editors informed, inspired, and propagandized, and in so doing provided the foundation of fundraising to sustain projects, and the evidence to underpin efforts at legislative change. With this in mind, a particular page of the Loveland scrapbook seems quite sly. It features a cartoon of a debonair man holding a letter that appears to be addressed to “Broth Jonathan.” *Brother Jonathan* was a literary weekly of the period. A mail bag leans against the desk, and the man casually strews letters and newspapers over the floor. All in all, the figure suggests the role of editor: newspaper editors after all spent hours with scissors and paste pot perusing and selecting articles for repurposing.²⁹ And so did Almira Loveland. Pasted around this image are the poems, “The Cottager’s Home” by Mary Emily Jackson and “The Wife’s Prayer” (unattributed). Although Loveland’s choice of material may seem modestly domestic, she is participating in a collage strategy or aesthetic that is entirely continuous with the compendious newspaper made out of cut and pasted articles. We can see through the scrapbook a continuity between domestic and professional reading and writing activities, and a counterpart to Philip Hone’s diary journalism, which while private, rehearsed positions for public life. Almira Loveland used scraps to re-enter the world of political discourse. It is notable in this context that although in *The Advocate* Loveland and her colleagues warned fervently against the evils of novel reading, they never told ladies not to read daily papers, even though these were full of shocking stories and opinions. Loveland herself clearly read the dailies, on both sides of the page.

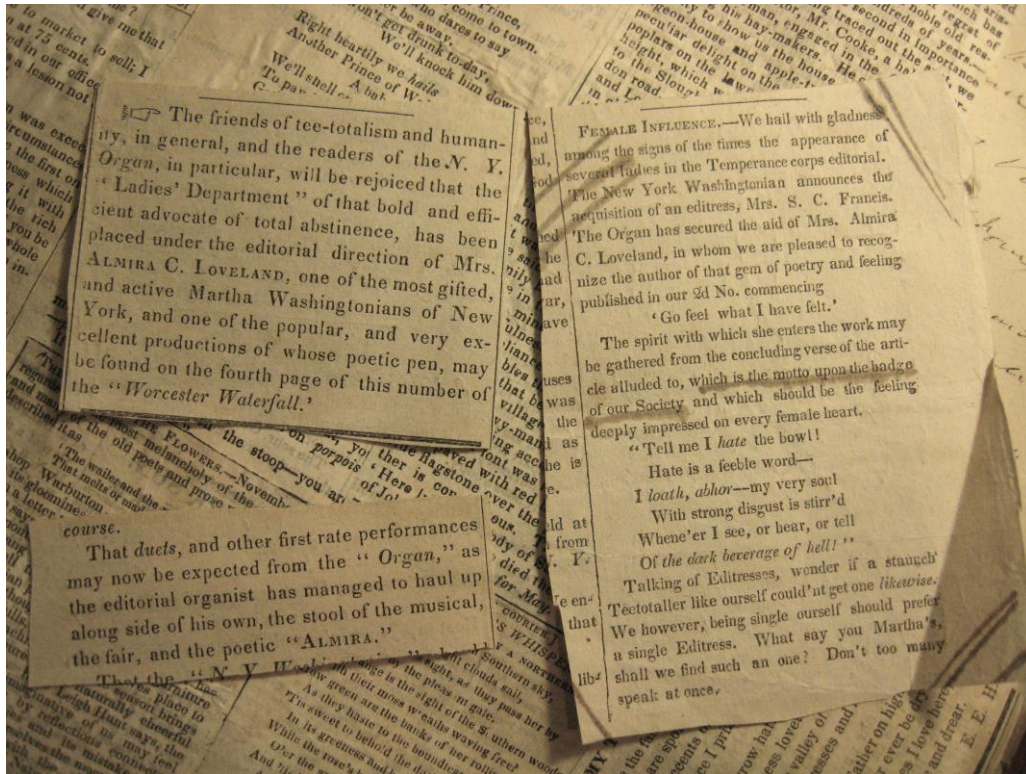


Figure 3. A page of the Loveland scrapbook showing an illustration of an editor at his desk and underlying ship's log

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Notes

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² The same claim would be appropriate with respect to encyclopedias, catalogues, and indeed any sort of miscellany or compendium, including, in our own day, the Internet.

³ In “The Rise of Periodical Studies,” Latham & Scholes noted the tendency of periodical studies to downplay the cultural meaning of advertising. Reflecting on the challenges posed to newspapers in the digital environment, Gurri suggests that “a newspaper competes, not on the quality of a particular article, but on the quality of the bundle it offers as a whole” (“Newspapers”).

⁴ I have examined ten dailies published on this day in New York City, but there were more. This is important to keep in mind in imagining the reading environment: since most papers were sold on the street rather than delivered by subscription—not to mention borrowed or left on oyster-house tables—many people would have read more than one paper. For more on the urban reading experience, see Henkin, *City Reading*.

⁵ “American” in this period meant “American-born” or “not Irish”: it was in this sense that many advertisements for servants specify that only “American” candidates need apply.

⁶ In an 1844 piece about the difference between magazines and newspapers, *The Columbian Magazine* observes that the dailies “good-naturedly afford space in their columns for the ambitious efforts of young gentlemen and ladies who labor under the mistake of believing that destiny calls on them to write poetry” (“The Editor.” [John Inman], “Magazine Literature.” *The Columbian Magazine* [New York] 1.1 (January 1844): 1-5). However, dailies often reprinted poems by well-known poets. My own perusal of hundreds of issues of daily papers in the 1830s and 1840s confirms Mott’s assertion that “Miscellany, or features, had a considerable space. When Dennie joined the staff of the *Gazette of the United States*, that paper promised ‘seven or eight columns a week to the motley tribe of miscellany readers’; but it gave much more than that. Essays of the lighter variety, anecdotes, and poetry were common fare in the newspapers of the day. Somewhere in the paper—usually on the first or fourth page—there was likely to be a poet’s corner with a fanciful departmental heading.... ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’ was first published in the *Baltimore American* a few hours after Francis Scott Key wrote it on a historic occasion” (Mott, *American Journalism*, 201). For a broad-brush account of the ubiquity of poetry in popular media of past eras, see Spaulding, “Poetry and the Media.”

⁷ *The Herald*, 4 October 1837.

⁸ *The Herald*, 11 January 1837, and 8 January 1837. Bennett is also a remarkably literary newsman, peppering his court reports with comparisons to and quotations from Shakespeare, Byron, and Pope.

⁹ For example, George Templeton Strong read Longfellow in the dailies, along with political news: he noted in his diary that “a little poem of his that I saw in a newspaper, taken from the *Southern Literary Messenger*, is really great, worthy of the author of *The Ancient*

Mariner. It is called *The Beleaguered City*” (12 November 1839). Literary authors were figures of debate in the news. In 1844, *after* having read commentary in the dailies, Strong “Read the article attributed to Dickens in the Foreign Quarterly on American poets, over which all the papers are going into severe paroxysms of patriotic wrath. Don’t see why they can’t keep cool” (Nevins and Thomas, eds., *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, 113–114, 225). For a fascinating study of reception of newspaper poetry in the Civil War era, see Garvey, “Anonymity, Authorship, and Recirculation.”

¹⁰ All quotations here are from the manuscript on microfilm at the New-York Historical Society. In abridged form the diary has been published: Nevins, ed., *The Diary of Philip Hone*.

¹¹ NY (State) Militia, Regiment 11th, City Guard Log Book, 1844–51, New-York Historical Society, Manuscript Collection.

¹² New-York Historical Society, Manuscript Collection.

¹³ A classic argument of this sort in the realm of television is Fiske, *Television Culture*.

¹⁴ An unobscured note at the end, confirming the ship *Sun*’s return from Liverpool, is signed “Samuel Loveland,” who was Almira Loveland’s sea-captain husband. The N-YHS also holds a travel diary Samuel kept in 1843, which he has entitled, “Incidents of a Tour through Western New York.” Following this account Loveland used the book for musings “at sea” on religious readings, and he records a couple of (unsuccessful) attempts to try to bring sailors to Christ. He does not show any interest in poetry other than that of his wife: he has copied out two of her poems. The Loveland estate donated a number of items to the N-YHS, including a number of books (as indicated by a loose note in the Samuel Loveland diary), and issues of *The Organ of the Washington Temperance Benevolent Society and Auxiliaries* during the time Almira Loveland was writing and editing there (Samuel Loveland’s personal stamp can be seen on the issue of 24 December 1842). Indeed, I do not have conclusive evidence to prove that Almira Loveland kept the scrapbook, and not her husband. My ascription of the scrapbook to Almira is based on the way it documents and contextualizes her published poetry and editorial career, and on the absence of any evidence to the contrary.

¹⁵ Loveland, J. B. and George Loveland, *Genealogy*.

¹⁶ See Bennett, *Poets in the Public Sphere*, on this contradictory movement of what she calls “difference feminists” of the period: “on the one hand, they embraced the domestic as the essential site for the production and staging of female values, both their difference and their power. On the other, they argued that this difference was what legitimated their own interventions into public affairs” (49).

¹⁷ The *Weekly Messenger*, 15 June 1842 reprints the poem and preface from the *Tribune*.

¹⁸ Maxwell, “The Washingtonian Movement.”

¹⁹ I have not yet identified the poem’s first appearance, though it is often sourced to the *Philadelphia Ledger*. A mere Google search of the first line reveals many republications, including an early republication in *Hymns to be sung at the annual meeting of the Southwark*

[Philadelphia] *Temperance Society*, March 28, 1836, and appearances as late as 21 August 1898 in the *Elmira* [New York] *Morning Telegram*.

²⁰ *Liberator*, 11 June 1841; *South Australian Register*, 8 April 1846. School resources include *The R. I. Schoolmaster* 2, no. 7 (September 1857), 207. Anthology appearances include Grace Townsend, ed., *Echoes of life: or, Beautiful gems of poetry and song* (Chicago: L. P. Miller, 1890), 431. The *Star* in Christchurch, New Zealand, prints a parody called “The Streets of St. Louis” on 28 November 1873: “Go see what I have sawn, / Go feel what I have felt; / Go out at early dawn, / And smell what I have smelt.” Another parody appears in the *Oelwein* [Iowa] *Register*, 18 September, 1890.

²¹ This version of the wording is taken from the *Colorado Citizen* (Columbus, Texas), 9 January 1858.

²² Loveland wrote some stanzas addressed to Jenny Lind that were said to provoke a donation of \$500 from the singer; her premise for approaching Lind was that her father had once helped a shipload of Swedes on the ship *Taperheiten* (Mrs. S. R. I. Bennett, *Woman’s Work Among the Lowly*, 188–90).

²³ 6 August 1842, 19 November 1842. No doubt as editor Loveland also wrote a number of the unsigned pieces in the *Organ*.

²⁴ *Advocate for Moral Reform*, 15 November 1848.

²⁵ *Advocate*, 1 October, 1851.

²⁶ *Gender and the American Temperance Movement*, 16.

²⁷ Later, a separate chapel was created as an adjunct to the home; in 1901 the home was moved to the Bronx, where it appears that its charitable impulse lives on as apartments for people living with AIDS. See <https://ephemeralnewyork.wordpress.com/tag/home-for-the-friendless/>, http://www.flickr.com/photos/emilio_guerra/4892603290/, and “A Decorator Show House for More than Show,” *New York Times*, 2 November 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/02/garden/02woodycrest.html?pagewanted=all>.

²⁸ Harris and Garvey, *Blue Pencils*, xxv.

²⁹ A colourful attestation of this fact can be found in the *Baltimore Sun*, November 23, 1838, under the heading, “A Monster”: “Yesterday,” the editor observes, “while we were engaged in overlooking our dry mail papers, to see what was going on in every part of the country,” a man came in with a pumpkin pie, whereupon “down went the pen, under the desk we pitched the exchange papers, and threw the scissors at the head of a ragged little urchin who stood holding the door wide open.”

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