Rebecca Patterson

Letters to

Irene Grasemann,

daughter of

Florence Dickson Statham

1948-1950
Dear Mrs. Grasemann,

Your brother has most kindly informed me that he referred my letter to you and has suggested that I write to you directly. I had told him—but it was difficult to be detailed in a letter—that I was attempting to collect material for a life of Mrs. Anthon (because of her influence on the American poet, Emily Dickinson), and that your mother played no inconsiderable part in that life. In conclusion, he wrote: "I do not at all mind your using my Mother’s or my Father’s name or their letters. I am sure it will be done with discretion."

I am grateful for the trust implied, but naturally I would not use any of the material I have without first making sure that the treatment accorded with family wishes. I know Mrs. Anthon very well through her letters and diaries—and the poetry of Emily Dickinson. She was, of course, a devoutly religious woman, of high moral principles and great generosity. She was also remarkably emotional and given to fervent expression. It was this emotionalism and almost childlike fervor that I particularly wanted to illustrate, because they fitted the person described in the poems.

Her devotion to Mrs. Statham was more like that of a mother than of an acquaintance. Mrs. Anthon was very fond of children and young people; she badly needed children of her own, which she was never able to have. It would appear that as a young girl your mother was the recipient of a very great and long-thwarted maternal devotion. I have a diary which gives a rather touching picture of the zeal with which Mrs. Anthon sewed for her, doctored her colds, read to her, arranged for and worried over her comfort and that of Mrs. Dickinson. I do not know how it would impress you. To me it was unusual but altogether beautiful.

In a letter acknowledging Mrs. Anthon’s best wishes on the occasion of his engagement, Mr. Statham wrote: "There seems to be something very unusual in the love between you and her. I think I must love you a little too." Mrs. Dicken was always very fond of her, as were Lady Hogg and your cousin Mr. Maclean and his mother. I should like to find some one who knew her well enough in life to explain a little of her unusual charm. I can feel it in the letters to a considerable degree, but there was certainly more than that. She was so old and it has been so many years that I suppose you remember her dimly, if at all. She spoke of you often and affectionately, but I think she remained closely confined to Grasmere after 1906. Her last reference to a visit from your mother was in 1906, although I am sure there were later visits. Any memories, any letters or notes or inscriptions in books from Mrs. Anthon to members of your family, or any mention of her that you recall would be very helpful to me. Whatever you intrusted to me would be used in the manner directed by you.
I should like very much to show you the material I have. It is too bulky to send and too disconnected, without the knowledge I have accumulated during months of patient research, to make complete sense by itself. Perhaps it will be possible for me to come to England next year. There are other reasons that incline me toward the journey. Not the least of these is the wish to see if the countryside can possibly answer to Mrs. Anthon's beautiful descriptions.

May I ask if you will see me? May I ask, too, if you will write me your recollections and something about the material you have?

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]

Mrs. McEvooy Patterson
September 15, 1948

Dear Mrs. Grassmann,

Your very interesting letter followed me to California, where I have settled, or to be more accurate, temporarily sighted. It is our Riviera, you know, but there will be no idling on the beaches for me. I am hard at work in Stanford University. The work should end by late spring, and then I promise myself the pleasure of calling on you in London. It will be a somewhat sentimental pilgrimage. I have Mrs. Anthon's travel diaries and letters and wish to follow in her footsteps as far as I may.

Your memory is astonishing. I saw the jet ornaments, probably the very same, in the possession of her grand-niece. While I was quietly turning them over, Mrs. Wood returned to the room and placed in my hand a handkerchief that had belonged to her great-aunt, saying that I would probably like to have it. I was deeply moved. As you see, it has proved impossible to maintain a scholarly detachment about these people. I simply fell in love with every one of them. I ransacked the Scott house for your mother's picture taken in Florence in 1880, but it was gone. Do you have any pictures of Mrs. Anthon that belonged to your mother? I have two, one as a schoolgirl and one made in 1891.

Waking in the night, I thought of your letter and suddenly remembered a poem:

A muse to move a queen--
Half child, half heroine--
An Orleans in the eye
That puts its manner by
For humbler company
When none are near--
Even a tear
Its frequent visitor.
A bonnet like a duke--
And yet a wren's periwig
Were not so shy
Of passer-by--
And hands so slight
They would elate a sprite
With merriment.
A voice that alters—low—
And on the ear can go
Like set of snow,
Or shift supreme
As tone of realm
On subject's diadem—
Too small to fear,
Too distant to endear,—
And so men compromise
And just revere.

Not a great poem, certainly, but rather charming as a tribute to a friend. Does it suggest Mrs. Anthon to you? It does to me, after reading your description of her. I had not previously known about her tiny, expressive hands. And the "very very dark eyes" and "deep ivory complexion"—do they suggest:

I of a finer finance
Deem my banquet dry
For but a berry of Domingo
And a torrid eye.

It was impossible to be certain from the photographs about the color of her eyes or her complexion, although they looked dark. But her father had blue eyes, as I knew from an oil painting. Incidentally, Mrs. Anthon had a younger sister and brother, both of whom died tragically, as did her two husbands. It was an ill-fated family.

Did her voice impress you? I have tried so hard to get a description of her voice.

These details must sound like trivia to you, but every one of them is important and meaningful to me. For instance, you told me that she was small, and I knew instantly, and for the first time, why Emily Dickinson, herself of average height, playfully called her friend "Goliath." Emily also spoke of being some one's "scholar." It has been too readily assumed that she meant some solemn, bearded professor or minister. But your mother paid high tribute to Mrs. Anthon's ability as a teacher, which I take to mean not merely cultivation but the far rarer gift of being able to communicate one's enthusiasms. The "phosphorescence of learning," Emily would call it.

You see, I am still working for the most part in darkness—a darkness that is illuminated by just such letters as yours. If they are not too personal, I
should like very much to read your mother's memoirs. They would undoubtedly straighten out some of Mrs. Anthon's itinerary for me. And I am sure you would like to read the diary Mrs. Anthon kept in 1880-81. For the most part, it is rather impersonal and matter-of-fact—the state of the weather, the quality of hotel beds and cooking, and a meticulous account of letters written or received. Such items as "Florrie had a great time washing her hair" would not excite general interest but might give you a tender memory.

I can never think of your mother as growing old. To me she will always be the happy young girl who had such a glorious time in Florence. And Mrs. Anthon was obviously so proud to have such a daughter—even on a temporary loan. It is great pity that she never had children of her own, she loved children and young people so much. She was indeed devoted to Colonel Maclean. No letters from your mother were preserved, but she did occasionally write affectionate or nonsensical notes in the diary. Mrs. Anthon was in general very scrupulous about destroying her correspondence. As a result I often feel a considerable hesitation or delicacy about prying into her own preserved diaries and letters, but I tell myself stubbornly that there is too little beauty in the world to let any of it perish, and that love and reverence atone somewhat for an unmanners curiosit.

While she was turning over her great-aunt's books, Mrs. Wood came upon an astronomy in French. "Oh, let me see it," I said eagerly. "I remember when she bought it." Mrs. Wood laughed in astonishment. "Were you with her?" After a moment, with a smile at myself, I answered, "Sometimes I think I was." I took the book away with me, and leafing through it some weeks later to the chapter "La Lune," I came upon this note in your mother's handwriting: "Rose over Lago Maggiore October 1, 1879, at 6:30." In that moment I saw the full moon rising over the lake as clearly as if I had been there. The sense of participation is at times uncanny, but I suspect that I have a lively imagination.

Sincerely yours,

Mrs. McEvoy Patterson

General Delivery
Stanford, California
a literary Sherlock Holmes, but the design is incomplete, and I confess that I do not fully understand it.

As a matter of sentiment, I should like also to see pictures of your mother and the memoirs (if I may), and I shall visit Mrs. Anthon's grave in Grasmere. These are probably all the matters that will detain me in England. From there I shall go to Switzerland and perhaps to Italy. Or I can reverse the order of my going if it suits your convenience, or indeed come to any place that you name. After the five thousand miles, more or less, from California to England, any added distance will seem trifling.

Sincerely yours,

Mrs. McEvoy Patterson

Dear Mrs. Grassemann,

When I wrote that I expected to be in England this spring, you were so kind as to say that you would see me. Unfortunately my duties at the University will delay me until almost midsummer, and I am very much afraid that you will then be gone from the city. I now expect to be in England or on the Continent from about July 15 to August 31. Can you see me for a few hours at some time during those six weeks? I have other matters to bring me to Europe, but they are trifling in comparison with my wish to meet you, and I believe I shall cancel the trip (for this season, at least) if you cannot conveniently see me.

I have already arranged for air passage about the middle of July. It is necessary to be unusually forehanded this year, for all air and steamship lines from my country threaten to be jammed. If you could let me know by return air mail what time would suit you best, I might still be able to push my reservations backward or forward as much as ten days.

I have continued to work at the diaries and letters, but with increasing bewilderment. There are many allusions, place names, and problems of all kinds which you might well clear up for me in a short conversation. It is much like a puzzle of which I have three-fourths of the pieces. I should like to show you my three-fourths and see if you can fill in the blank places. Much of the story is laid in my own country, and a very unusual and even tragic and beautiful story it is. I have worked at it like
Dear Mrs. Grasemann,

I have delayed answering your letter until I could write more definitely of my travel schedule. I shall leave New York by DOAC on July 10 and reach London some time the next day. Upon my arrival I shall either telephone or write a little note to ask when you can see me with most convenience to yourself.

My baggage will be chiefly books and manuscripts. There will be two large manuscripts which you will certainly wish to read, and I shall bring still others in the belief that your aroused interest will induce you to read them or permit me to explain them to you. It sounds rather formidable, and it will take many hours, but once you have begun, I believe you will be led on by the fascination of some very remarkable personalities and by the excitement of the search that I have conducted for the past two and a half years. I hope so. Indeed I do.

In the midst of my keen anticipation, I am reminded, with rueful tenderness, of my first meeting with the grandniece of Mrs. Anthon. Neither had the remotest idea what to expect in the other, and my arrival was so involved and belated that we almost did not meet. So—I am shy (but I believe most people are), verging on middle age, entrenched behind glasses and a large, inquiring nose, and derived by ancestry from every part of the British Isles (what is known, in my own country, as a hundred-percent American). I have two children, a boy of nine and a little girl of five, who are callously resigned to doing without me this summer but not at all resigned to being done out of a trip. The baby draws me a world of maps, in which the "Yeerp roads" and the "England roads" all lead off conveniently from the "California roads." As I am very deficient in the art of finding my way around, her maps will probably do me as much good as any others.

I am looking forward tremendously to seeing you.

Sincerely yours,
June 7, 1949

Dear Mrs. Grasemann,

Please do forgive the horrid stationery. Everything is packed, the place in a mess, and this was all that I could find.

I have just received my passport and plane ticket, and we shall be on our way by day after tomorrow—a rather hurried, skipping journey. I shall give you my itinerary as best I know, with a request that you let me know by airmail if anything occurs which would make difficult or impossible your seeing me this coming July. As I explained in an earlier letter, you are the principal object of my journey, and if you are unable to see me this summer, I shall postpone my trip until a time when I can make it a more leisurely affair.

From about June 11 to June 20 I shall be at the following address:

Care P. H. Coy
Route 3, Box 306
Amarillo, Texas

From about July 2 through July 6 I shall be in Cooperstown (Mrs. Anthon's old home):

care Margaret S. Johnston
Scott House
River Street
Cooperstown, New York

From about July 7 to July 10 I shall be in New York city:

Times Square Hotel
New York, N. Y.

On the night of July 11 I shall be in London at the Mount Royal, wherever that may be. I am assuming that I shall be too tired—and probably ill—to present myself at anybody's door, but my powers of recuperation are great, and if you can see me on the following day, I shall be most happy.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]

Mrs. McEvoy Patterson

I look vaguely like the enclosed picture. It will help you to recognize me.
Dear Mrs. Grasemann,

My conscience has gnawed at me steadily, even though I felt that a knowledge of my circumstances would incline you to be forgiving. Since I wrote you my little farewell note from the London airport, I have gone at such a breathless pace that there was literally no time for letters.

The flight to New York was funny and harassing. We were an hour late in taking off, and in fact we weren't airborne until eight o'clock. I had thoughtfully fortified myself with sandwiches at the buffet and was not quite so ravenous as the other passengers when we landed at Shannon for dinner two hours later. There we were told of a change in flight plans. Instead of going direct to Gander, Newfoundland, we were to make a triangular hop to Iceland to refuel and avoid strong head winds. Somewhat pleased with the idea of seeing a new country, we all settled back in our seats except for the usual group collected around the bar at the rear of the plane.

As I could not sleep, I entertained myself picking out constellations, with an amused recollection of our talk about astronomy. I had just made out Capella and her Kids when it occurred to me that this was a most extraordinary constellation to be seeing in that position on a flight to Iceland. At the height of my bewilderment the stewardess came along soothingly with the news that fog had closed in the Keflavik airport and we were turning back to Shannon. A few minutes later I glanced out the porthole and saw the unmistakable outlines of the Big Dipper. Just as I was bouncing out of my seat, the stewardess informed us that Shannon was fogbound and we were already en route to Scotland. At this point I gave up and joined the party at the bar for a whiskey and soda. We had, in fact, a rather good time of it. The betting was even that we would end up at the Paris airport.

We landed at Prestwick, however, at three o'clock in the morning and immediately had breakfast. I can't say that I was hungry, but I followed the excellent practice of eating whenever possible. Then came two dreary hours of immigration formalities and a long bus ride before we were settled in our hotel. Next morning everybody was called at nine o'clock except me and my roommate, so we missed second breakfast. Two hours later we were airborne once more for Iceland. At one-thirty the stewardess asked if I would like breakfast, and I would and did. At two-thirty we landed in Iceland and had--lunch! The rest of the flight was uneventful, and we had dinner in Gander at something like a reasonable hour.

About nine o'clock some one exclaimed, "Look! The lights of Boston!" We all looked down, and I saw the most beautiful thing in my life. It is a commonplace experience, I know, but I am not a wearily air traveler. To me the lights of Boston were like glittering strings of jewels--red, yellow, green--and still more fascinating, the light seemed at times to flush out through the darkness along a line. I watched them until they vanished in the dark backward and abyss, and then I recalled, for the first time, and with surprise, "My own, my native land."

New York wasn't half so exciting, and the wait at the customs was downright exhausting. I got through and to my hotel and in bed by one o'clock--six o'clock.
your time and, of course, the time my system was still traveling on. I woke with the first light of dawn and couldn't go back to sleep. As soon as it was a decent hour, I telephoned one of the people I had to see. He suggested that I get a good rest first, but I assured him plaintively that I was so wound up I couldn't wind down that day. So we had our interview—hours and hours of talk, in the course of which we forgot all about luncheon. I had just time for a sandwich before going on to my next appointment. Then a hasty dash to Cambridge and Boston, back to New York for more interviews, and finally a night train to St. Louis, another night train to Oklahoma City and Norman, where I supposed my husband would be waiting. He was not.

I called long distance and discovered that I was expected in Amarillo. Oh dear! I thought wearily of another sleepless night on a train (the third in a row!) and decided that I would be more dead than alive upon arrival. My husband said sensibly, "Catch a plane." Such a solution hadn't occurred to my addled brain. As it was, I had to wait around for the rest of the afternoon, but the hour and a half flight to Amarillo was delicious. I am wholly converted to the air age.

And now, dear Mrs. Grasemann, I am in a box, and it is all on account of the Golden Hind. When the plane settled down at Amarillo, my son Tommy was at the barrier, radiant with expectation. Matters were not improved when I brought out a doll, coral beads, and other trinkets for the little girl, and only some unimpressive Swiss flags for Tommy. So I told the first story that popped into my head. I explained that I had met a kind gentleman in London who owned a factory that actually manufactures models of the Golden Hind. Of course, the model would have been too bulky to bring on the plane (I have no doubt of that), but it would be sent on from England. Commander Ingolfeld (I do hope I am not misspelling his name too badly) had suggested something like that, but I fully expected to attend to it myself. Unfortunately I was so rushed in my last few days in London, as well as disappointed in my inquiries at several shops, that I let the matter slide. Now do you suppose your good friend could send me a model kit of the Golden Hind without too much trouble to himself? I should be immensely grateful, and a little boy would be very proud and happy.

I hope you are having a most pleasant time sailing. Whenever I bump my head on a low door, as I did a few minutes ago, I think of your boat. Hope that you are not so forgetful as I and that your head has been spared. Tell Mr. Grasemann that I am industriously introducing the word "spliv" and that I read all foreign news with a jealous eye for the good treatment of my friends abroad. I am sure we will do the sensible thing and only regret that we must do so much fussing about it first. I have not been settled in Oklahoma long enough to take full advantage of my "strategic location" at the heart of the States, but I shall pass on my discoveries as they occur. The cartoon about the "Health Service wigs" (please tell the Commander) has answered all of his expectations.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]

[Name]
Dear Mrs. Grasemann,

Now I have been! But the good will and the kind remembrance went well ahead of the letter, you know. Since my return I have been extremely busy and suffering from the letdown and exhaustion that I suppose were inevitable after my hard trip. I did not guess how wearying it had been until I stopped, and then I wondered sometimes whether or not I would succeed in starting up again. I wouldn't take a fortune for the experience—or repeat it for another fortune. Next time I shall be more leisurely.

Haven't the plane accidents been dreadful of late? I should be almost afraid to go by plane now. You spoke of the Arabian Nights-flying carpet character of modern travel. I remembered the wonder I felt one night in Gander, Newfoundland, when a plane dispatcher came in with a message for "all those going to Palestine" to assemble at Gate 4. Yet my brother has flown nearly around the world, and I knew men during the war—men engaged in transporting planes to the battle front—who might go off to India for the weekend but brought their laundry home for their wives to attend to. A bewildering world, and rather terrifying. We remain in a state of great uneasiness about the Russian Beria bomb.

You may already have received, through the Chase National Bank of New York, a money order from me in the amount of three pounds. I suppose you guessed it was for the little boy's ship model. We thought he had forgotten, but no such thing. He is still expecting. You wrote after the pound was devalued, and I hope the sum is enough to pay for the model and the freight. If not, let me know. It is most kind of you and Mr. Grasemann to take the trouble.

I sent an order at the same time to Jonathan Cape, Ltd., asking that they mail you a copy of E's Poems. If it doesn't reach you promptly, please tell me so that I can check with them. Again, for my remissness in keeping promises, the same excuses as above.

I thought I should tell Mr. Grasemann why we live on Sooner Drive. Oklahoma, you may know, was once Indian Territory, that is, it was set aside as a reserve for the five civilized tribes, whose names we used to employ in our high school football yells: "Chickasaw, Choctaw, Cherokee, Creek, Such-and-such High School can't be beat," omitting the Seminoles because they didn't fit the rhythm. I believe they could read and write, and for this reason were called civilized. I have good friends who are part Indian, and in fact Indian blood (if not too much) is considered a mark of distinction in Oklahoma. In some other parts of the country the Indian is treated rather like the Negro.

It was not long before Indian Territory began to tempt the whites, and in the last decade of the previous century a law was passed opening the territory for settlement on a certain day. The night
before—in some instances, days before—the more camp settlers slipped over the line, prospected the country, and staked out the most desirable tracts. When the starting gun sounded, those informed persons knew just where to go, and they were called Sooners because they got there sooner than anyone else.

You would suppose that such a disgraceful incident would be buried in deep embarrassment. Not at all. It became a curious matter of pride. Oklahoma is called the Sooner State. The inhabitants are Sooners. The state university football team is called the Sooners. There are Sooner Cities, Sooner national banks—and Sooner Drives.

Oklahoma has another dubious claim to fame. In the great drought of the thirties much of this state and the surrounding states became uninhabitable, and in one of these strange folk migrations that perplex the historian the starved-out farmers loaded up their battered automobiles and drove in herds to the golden land of California. Although they came from Texas, Arkansas, and Kansas, as well as Oklahoma, they were called the 'Okies'—and they became still more famous as a result of John Steinbeck's sensational Grapes of Wrath.

California was not appreciative. It was unable to absorb the vast new population and herded them into something resembling concentration camps, disrespectfully called "Hoovervilles" on account of President Hoover's unpopularity. The Okies were ridiculed and maligned. My aunt and uncle, prosperous Oklahoma oil people, were much embarrassed by the amount of comment their car license received while they were touring California.

Then the war came, and the Okies found well-paying jobs in the new California war plants. The war ended, the rains fell on the southwest, California experienced a severe drought—and the Okies began to drift home again. As they now had California license plates, they were nicknamed the "Cal-Okies." When we left Texas this fall bound for Oklahoma—our station wagon loaded with household goods and bearing a California license plate—my sister said gleefully, "Ah, another party of Cal-Okies!"

A third mark of distinction: Oklahoma is one of the two remaining "dry" states of this country. The matter was recently tested in a state election, and as one disappointed voter said, "Well, prohibition is better than no liquor at all." In short, it is wringing wet, bootleggers are gentlemen, sots like us get our liquor, and the church people are happy. Flushed with victory, the sects are planning a drive against legalized beer and a campaign to eliminate drinking scenes from the motion pictures. Our national vice of hypocrisy is in a flourishing condition.

We are all well—and very busy, as you have probably gathered. I am trying to write. Thank you for your goodness to my manuscript. It seems dreadful stuff to me at times, but I suppose that is the unhappy fate of the writer. A publishing company has just blessed me with a 500.00 award to encourage me to finish it. With such a responsibility to live up to, perhaps I shall.

Sincerely yours,
Dear Friends,

The boat came and filled a little boy's heart with joy and pride. Tommy said to a friend, "Did you see the English stamps?" There is something about a voyage across the seas that adds distinction. His father looks somewhat baffled, but with the help of our model-building friends, I am sure the boat can be assembled. As far as I am concerned, it has already served its purpose and redeemed a mother's hasty promise.

You saw a photograph of my little boy. You should see him with his violin—but not necessarily hear him. Though I glow with pride when I watch the soft chin snuggling the violin and the little hand raising the bow, I must confess that he is not yet a virtuoso. The other day he had a new piece, and I was commanded to remain in another room and guess the title. After some minutes of painful thought I said uncertainly, "Well, son, it sounds a bit like 'America' [God Save the King, to you!]." "It's 'Hark, the Herald Angels Sing,'" he answered, more in sorrow than in anger. You see!

Last night we took the children to a concert given by the Oklahoma State Symphony. Tommy, who is nine, had attended earlier in the season, but it was a first experience for five-year-old Anne. I tried to explain the proceedings and point out some of the instruments. She looked at me with contempt. I began to describe the functions of the conductor. "I know what a conductor is," she said. "He signals." Then I discovered that in the very progressive school she attends she had been instructed in the composition of symphony orchestras. "You'd better hush," said my husband to me. "She'll be exposing your ignorance." Anne held out very well until the last twenty minutes—she was particularly attracted to cymbals, but Tommy was all for the trombones—and then the little head began to nod. She was blown awake, however, when Miss Eva Turner came back to the stage to sing her last aria.

Miss Turner, I believe, used to be with the Covent Garden Opera. The University has employed her—and hopes to keep her—as a member of its voice department. When she arrived this fall, the local paper (famous for its howlers) reported that she would serve as Associate Professor of Voice! (I have been planning over since to sign up for that course.) The reporter went with fear and trembling to Miss Turner, only to learn that she was so delighted she had ordered several copies of the paper to send to her friends in England.

The University of Oklahoma is one of the larger state universities—between twelve and thirteen thousand students, I believe. When compared with the University of California at Berkley (25,000) or Columbia University (30,000), it may not look so big, but it
is large enough. The buildings are red brick, impressive, and faintly reminiscent of buildings that I saw somewhere in England. Perhaps I am thinking of Hampton Court. The campus is perfectly flat and featureless, like the surrounding country, but is pleasantly green. The new dormitories look like model apartment dwellings with acres of glass. Unfortunately the university has grown so rapidly that some departments and many students have had to be housed in the temporary wooden buildings erected by the Navy during the war. Last spring a tornado struck the north campus and blew some of the buildings and quite a few people about. Two weeks ago the old Bachelors Officers Quarters burned to the ground, and with it, all the papers, books, clothes, and other possessions as well as three of the students. All the surviving students appear to be recovering.

Mach had one student in a playwriting class who lost the play he had been working on all fall. My husband had seen most of it and thought it no great loss. It was typically adolescent, very cynical and disillusioned. Now the student fears that he cannot rewrite it. He was given money and clothes, one man stripped off an overcoat and handed it to him, and he no longer feels disillusioned and cynical. That is the only charming anecdote of the fire that I have heard.

For Mr. Grasmann I should like to have something to say about the climate of opinion in this central state, but it is chiefly conspicuous by its absence. My husband gets quite vexed with the local papers, but I say that he is spoiled by the New York Times. He is also a Democrat, and the Daily Oklahoman is Republican. Lately it has discovered that every citizen works 47 days a year for the Federal government as compared with a few hours in the regime of George Washington or somebody like that. The implication is that we could return to the good old days by throwing the Democrats out of office. I have been longing to write to the editor and challenge him on his statistics. I don't doubt the 47 days, but as nearly all of our budget is for wars, past and to come, I wish to tell him that I would gladly work, not 47 days, but twice 47, or the whole year round, to avoid working for Stalin. We feel sure that there will be a war. Not a very cheerful thought, is it?

I had hoped the book of poems would reach you by Christmas, but Jonathan Cape or the devaluation of the pound has defeated me. Some days ago I was informed by airmail that the publisher had no more copies on hand and not much hopes of getting any from America since devaluation. He would return my draft. He has not returned it, but I hope soon to get the matter straightened out. If no English copies are available, I shall ask the Boston publisher to send you one.

Through a good part of the autumn I thought of you bumping your head on your boat. Lately I have put my imagination to the unfamiliar task of dividing a house into flats. But I do hope all that tedious work is behind you.

The very best of holidays for you both--a bright and happy New Year--and may we all meet again soon!

[Signature]
541 Sooner Drive  
Norman, Oklahoma  
February 17, 1950

Dear Mrs. Grasemann,

This dreadful cartoon illustrates my feelings. I had delayed writing, even to thank you for the charming Christmas card, in the hope that the international situation would improve, and my spirits with it, but have decided that my spirits had better not wait on the international situation. So here we are. Sometimes I am optimistic. It is hard to believe that the beloved self could be extinguished in the twinkling of an eye, and it is incredible, absolutely devastating to the ego, that the world should ever be a smoking cinder with no surviving souls even to mourn the beloved self. I insist on being remembered.

We talk of going to North Carolina. It is an old university, as universities go in this country, has a beautiful campus, and is next door to Virginia. Mr. Grasemann will think we have gained caste. As a matter of fact, I have a charming cousin who married a Virginian (of the First Families of), and the latter's airs and graces had given me an unfortunate dis-taste for the state. I shall try to overcome the petty personal. It is truly a very beautiful part of the country and civilized beyond comparison with this concentrated essence of the Bible Belt in which I am now living.

If it will help, do tell Mr. Grasemann that I am a Virginian by descent. My remote grandpapa was first governor of the state, but he was more famous for his orations, in which he said things like, "I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death." The family have kept on saying it right down through the years, and I, for one, am getting very tired of having my liberty interfered with by a group of nosey, hypocritical--I quote one of the racier lines from my husband's plays--"Bible-spoutin', Baptist bastards." All my life I have been an abstemious person, content with a glass of wine or a modest cocktail. Now I go to Texas with my tongue hanging out. Of course there are bootleggers, but I'd rather just move away. Wonder how long we can keep moving away from the enemies of personal liberty.

Did your newspapers have any account of the marathon prayer-meeting at a small mid-western college? Some three thousand students wept and prayed and gave testimonials for a period of thirty-six hours. Oklahoma thinks it was wonderful. I think it was mass hysteria, but of course it was pitiful, too, as evidence of the muddle we have got ourselves in.

You are in the midst of elections, which we follow with keen but uninformed interest. Mr. Churchill has a reassuring
personality (I wish he were younger)--somewhat like the doctor who tells you this is going to hurt but you will be all right afterwards.

You ask if we are coming to England. I wish very much that we could come, and perhaps it will be possible. My days of wandering around London are still a source of the keenest delight.

I have written very fiercely to Jonathan Cape, Ltd., either to return my money or to send you the book I ordered. Some day it will all be straightened out, but the delay is annoying.

Please remember me to the Commander. I went to Mississippi over the Christmas holidays and had a second laugh with my brother-in-law, the young judge, over the cartoon about the wigs.

It was an eighteen-hour drive, which we do not consider far. We simply got into the car one day at noon and drove all afternoon and all night until we got there--about six the next morning. There was quite a gathering of the clan. My father-in-law, who is a widower, has four sons, two of whom live with their families in the small southern town in which they grew up. The youngest practices law with his father, and the next youngest is the judge. Our first duty, after we had rested, was to rush over to a small airport in a neighboring town to pick up the third son, who was flying his plane down and bringing his bride of two days. It looked hazardous. The little airport had been abandoned and was all overgrown with weeds. We paced anxiously about, looking for concealed ditches and other obstacles during the five minutes before the plane was sighted, but the landing was uneventful.

While the pilot and the judge pushed the plane into the hangar and wired it down for the night, my husband and I sympathized with the young bride, only to find that she considered jaunting across the country during wintry weather in a little grasshopper of a plane was the healthiest sport in the world. I'm oldfashioned.

Like all Southerners, they are leisurely people--never too busy to take the dogs out for a day's hunting or to go down to New Orleans for dinner. We did both. New Orleans is about a hundred miles south--just good dining distance, you might say. It is an ugly, slatternly city with an enormous appeal for me. I can't say why. The restaurants are very good. We ate at Galatoire's, and I wished for you. I think you would have liked it. The day was warm and springlike (but it is never cold in New Orleans), and the banana plants were putting out little green fingers. We bought pralines and trotted all through the French Quarter and up and down the wharves, then bought ferry tickets and rode back and forth across the Mississippi until we were tired. Afterwards we looked up an old friend and drank Cuban highballs until train-time. In fact, we made our train in a breathless run about ten seconds before it pulled out. Oklahoma looked more barren than ever on our return.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]
Dear Friends,

It was delightful to hear from you, and most delightful to see your names joined in a letter. Mr. Grasemann writes as he talks, which is very good indeed. If my actions had responded to my inclination, you would have had an answer long ago. But I have been very busy -- and of late, much distressed by the new war.

We ended our school term in Oklahoma on June 1. I came home a little early in order to make a speech and get ready for a trip east. The first three weeks of June were a mad rush for me. I traveled from Texas to Chicago and from Chicago to Philadelphia -- two nights and a day sitting up most uncomfortably. In Philadelphia, I had a night's rest before taking a very early train to Washington, where I spent two busy days. Then back to Philadelphia for another brief rest, on to New York, to Boston (where I stayed two nights and a day), to a village in New York State, where I had a week of hard work interspersed with some pleasant drives through country that reminds me very much of the English Lake District. Followed a weary ride to Michigan and then two good days of visiting with my brothers, both of whom teach in Michigan universities. Another day and night on the train, and I was home again. My husband and children and sister were waiting for me on the platform, all enveloped in one big grin. It was tremendously glad to see them and was waving frantically before the train stopped.

But no rest for the weary. I had been home only two days when my mother and sister left by car to visit the brothers in Michigan, and they handed me the responsibility of their little farm during their absence. I have been very bucolic ever since. Thank goodness, they are coming home this weekend, and if they can only be kept at home (I hear threatening rumors that they plan to leave almost immediately for the Rocky Mountains), I can return to my own proper work.

I would call this a gentleman's farm -- except for the weeds. It has all the other characteristics -- more expense than profit; a good deal of privacy, and very superior eating. It is my sister's hobby. She estimates that every pound of meat she produces costs her about twice what it would cost in the market, but then, she says, it is so good. And she likes to breathe freely, which is difficult in a town. To support her hobby she teaches in the local college and drives about twenty-four miles every day to and from work. I am not good at farm work, but I can do it. And speaking of work...

You spoke of the dilatoriness of our government. We have been acting lately with a speed that bewilders me, although I fear that our intention is still far ahead of our performance. I wonder if we weren't maneuvered into this. Perhaps it is better...
to overestimate rather than underestimate the cleverness and
covering of an enemy; but if Russia fights to the last Korean
and the last Chinese, we shall be kept busy a long time. We
lack a program. We do nothing but run around putting our fingers
in every leaky hole in the dike, and we shall run out of fingers--
worst of all, we can't stretch so far.

It is safer at the moment to be in Korea than on an American
highway. The death toll in traffic accidents over the Fourth
of July holidays has already passed 500, and heaven knows how
many were injured or how much property damage was caused. I
have been gathering in, with a sense of relief, those friends
who were rash enough to travel over the holidays. So far I have
not lost any. But I shall be much relieved when my mother and
sister are home.

My children enjoy country life very much. Anne, who will be six
next Sunday, feeds the barn cats and gathers the eggs, breaking
only a few (eggs, not cats). Tommy, the ten-year-old, has the
responsibility of feeding and watering the chickens, keeping the
irrigation system in operation, and wetting down the window boxes
at night. For this, he receives the grand sum of fifty cents a
day. He hoards it, I believe. Lately he has become an entrepreneur
and engages in business. He pays Anne five cents a day for some
undiscovered service. I think she turns the hydrants off and on
at command, but I am not sure. All I know is that her wages burn
a hole in her little pocket, and she has drawn on Tommy for a
day's advance. For her birthday she wants fingernail polish--
green, she says. The little savage.

We shall be here the rest of the summer. At first Mac talked
restlessly of going to Mississippi, but he has found that he can
work very comfortably in a cool, quiet room upstairs. Every
morning after breakfast he goes upstairs as punctually as a
businessman going to work, and writes away for three hours. As
a result, he has finished half of a new play, and I, who am not
so conveniently isolated from family duties and interruptions,
have done--nothing. I am lucky to find time for a few letters.
When my mother comes home--and if she doesn't go off to the
mountains--I have the promise of an apartment in town where I
can work undisturbed all day long. I am fretting to get at it.

Don't I deserve it? And you haven't been a bad sport.

Kindest regards to both of you. Are you yachting again? I hope
you are finding some pleasure.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]
Dear Friends, out of line so late but I thought I'd try to express in a letter something of what happened after my return home.

I have not stopped thinking about you, but since this war began I have felt almost too depressed to write. So much of what we had together came from the exhilaration of my first trip abroad and the mistaken but hopeful trust that this blundering globe would somehow work out its problems without war. I had hoped to be in London again last summer or, at the very latest, by next summer. I want very much to come, and I shall go on stubbornly planning the trip.

The move had not been easy for me or anyone else. The University lent us a rather slumlike flat with beds—but with so little else to recommend it that we preferred to spend the days in our own bare apartment and sally forth at night to our sleeping quarters some two miles away. From the University theater my husband borrowed enough theatrical props to take care of our needs during the day. Even now I feel rather nauseated when I go into the green room and see the familiar but uncomfortable chairs, settee, and tables which were our only furniture for a matter of two or three weeks. It is all the less bearable now that I find myself again a Joshua now. Even so, I think in the confusion. She was much amused by this resigned calm with which I accepted the furnishing of my house with theatrical props. When she had to leave us in order to resume teaching at her own college, she did so reluctantly, saying that she hated to miss the next installment of this cliffhanging movie serial. Two weeks later our own things arrived, and we were now quite comfortable.

The day after we got our furniture all set I began teaching fulltime at the University. I had been working like a mad woman ever since. My days are pretty well filled with teaching, conferences, study, and paper-grading. My husband helps loyally with the housework, and somehow I find time to mother the children, who are both in school and quite happy. At night I work on my book. My publishers would like to think that the book is finished, but I keep on painfully revising it. I have such a sense of obligation to the personalities I am describing that I am always afraid of doing them less than justice.
I wonder if you have found time to read a little in the book that I sent you and to find out a little more about the life of Emily Dickinson—if she can be said to have had a life! It was amusing and even more embarrassing to me to discover that I was trying to enlist your help and interest with respect to a woman of whom you had never heard. It seemed most impertinent of me. But I think you understood that I was not particularly interested in Emily Dickinson. It was Mrs. Anthon.

The other day, while turning through one of her commonplace books, I discovered this quotation in which Mrs. Anthon described herself: "That woman who was so sad in her own life she spent it all in making others happy." As soon as I became acquainted with her I knew that she was one of the most remarkable personalities I had ever met, and I wanted so much to recreate the woman I knew. Perhaps I am succeeding. My publishers write to me that they love her that they regret profoundly the fact that they never knew her—but begin to feel that they know her in my book. It was a tremendous relief to me. I was afraid they would want me to concentrate on Emily Dickinson, simply because she is a popular and romantically mysterious person. She is not at all mysterious to me. I wanted to use her only as a springboard to get into the life of Kate Anthon, and they not only consent, they are enthusiastic. It is Mrs. Anthon's book; they assure me.

I know there is a general feeling that private lives should be private, that the stuff of life should be reserved to fiction, but I can't agree. Why should a woman who has meant so much to me be forgotten and blotted out of memory just because she was alive and not a character in a play or novel? I can't consent to the waste of so much life and so much tragic, beautiful experience. I shall be challenged—bitterly—but I intend to fight for my belief that Mrs. Anthon's life is as valuable as Emily Dickinson's poetry.

You shall have a manuscript as soon as it is completed, and of course I want you to go over it carefully and satisfy yourself that I have treated Mrs. Anthon's English friends with respect and affection—and that I have avoided every detail which might reveal the identities of various persons.

I thought you would want to know the progress of a book that concerns you. I hope to have the manuscript in your hands shortly after Christmas. When I get time I shall try to tell you a little more about our life here.

Affectionately yours,

[Signature]
Re Mrs. Anthon

Mrs. McEvoy Patterson
Route 3, Box 306
Amarillo, Texas, U.S.A.

also
Patterson Patterson
Annings at dance
Monroe-Miss

is writing life of L.G. A.,
who was in great influence in
life of American poetess
Emily Dickinson

Send recollections

Harrow - Alex?

Mrs. Anthon's father - sight
spectacles

Shippin' Peter Robinson

Mother's health, Mrs. Anthon Jr.