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Osgood Bradbury

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By FRANCESCA J. RUGGIERI

Osgood Bradbury (1795-1886), a native of New Gloucester, Maine, was the author of more books than any other Maine native, and yet, is almost completely unknown in Maine literary circles. Fifty-five of his books have been identified by title and date from Lyle Wright's bibliographical study of American fiction and the National Union Catalog, Pre-1956 Imprints.

Many elements in his own life are as mysterious and nebulous as many of the characters of his stories. Even the date of his birth is suspect. It would seem that he apparently strove for anonymity in life, yet at one time he was a member of the Maine Legislature, practiced law in Maine, Massachusetts, and New York, and was associate editor and later editor of the Portland Advertiser.

His obituary was as fleeting as his fame for it occupied only eight lines in the Boston Evening Transcript. These facts are sufficient evidence that Osgood Bradbury did exist, had a respectable education, and was a prolific writer.

Born in New Gloucester

The Bradbury Memorial, which is a genealogical record of Thomas Bradbury and his descendants, states that Osgood Bradbury was the youngest child in a family of six born to William and Hannah Tufts Bradbury. His birth date is set in 1798. The town records of New Gloucester, his birthplace, state that he made his appearance in this world in 1795.

William Bradbury, his father, was a leading and influential citizen of New Gloucester and among the first settlers. The remaining children were Hannah (b. 1781), who later married Doctor William Brigham and settled in Buckfield; William (b. 1783) married Sarah Merrill, was a justice of the peace, and served as the New Gloucester representative to the Legislature in 1822; John (b. 1785) who married Sarah Tufts; Benjamin (b. 1792) who died young and no date of his death recorded; Jabez (b. 1789) married Priscilla Joselyn and moved to Hodgdon, Maine; and Osgood, who bore the surname of his aunt Sarah's husband, Nathaniel Osgood.

The only other Bradbury with the Christian name Osgood was

a distant cousin who was also a professional man. Doctor Osgood Nathan Bradbury was graduated from the Maine Medical School in 1864. He became an assistant surgeon in Augusta and then assumed charge of Cory Hospital until it was discontinued, July, 1866. He also served in the Maine Legislature as representative from Springfield and two terms as the Senator from Penobscot County.

Letter Found

No concrete evidence could be found of the whereabouts of Osgood Bradbury from his birthdate until 1823, but in a search through the papers of the Chandler Family of New Gloucester was found a letter, in Bradbury's handwriting, directed to Solomon Chandler, "probably the wealthiest citizen the town ever had, a man of great energy and business ability," who was then the owner of New Gloucester's only store. Bradbury writes:

Lewiston Dec. 2nd, 1823

Friend Solomon,

You have reason to expect by mail some money from me, but I shall not send it today. I have in my pocket book now fifty dollars which I found enclosed in a letter

in the post office to me from Union Monday morning when I returned from New Gloucester. Knowing what use you make of money I have concluded the disappointed (sic) to you would not be a greater damage that I can afford to make up, and whatever the damage may be you shall be satisfied. There are two or three stands ready to take a part of the money I have on such conditions as will enable me to indemnify you. You must not consider me as wanting promptness nor too apt to break my promises because I will make you ample satisfaction before long.

"I shall see you before a great while. I have come to the conclusion to leave Lewiston. I have this morning struck up a bargain with Little and he is to have the new office I was to occupy. In two or three weeks I shall removed to Danville Corners. You will be pleased not to mention this immediately. I think I shall better my condition and do more business that I can here because I shall have business from this place to. (sic)

Yours Vt

Osgood Bradbury

The "Little" referred to was probably Edward T. Little who later became an Attorney of the Supreme Judicial Court.

Further Facts

Books of account containing fees for services rendered to Solomon Chandler in Bradbury's handwriting attest to the fact that Bradbury must have had lucrative dealings in the legal profession in New Gloucester from 1826 to 1840. A receipt for rent due dated September 19, 1826, indicates that he probably rented rooms from Solomon Chandler.

Another discovery which bolsters conviction that Osgood Bradbury lived in New Gloucester at this time is an item discovered in the Maine Register for 1837 listing "William Bradbury, Jacob Hill and Osgood Bradbury" as Counsellors at Law in New Gloucester. He was also qualified as a Justice of the Peace.

Bradbury's presence in New

Elected Representative

In 1838 and 1839 we know that Osgood Bradbury was an elected representative to the Maine Legislature. Evidence of this is to be found in the New Gloucester Centennial in a list of "Representatives to the Legislature from New Gloucester." Further proof is to be found in the following excerpt from the October 17, 1838, issue of the Kennebec Journal:

LIST OF MEMBERS

Elected to the House

of Representatives

For the Year 1839

Cumberland County, entitled to 27.

Whigs—Brunswick, E. P. Pike; Cumberland, R. Drinkwater; Falmouth, E. T. Bucknam; Freeport, Nathan Nye; Gorham, C. Hodson; Harpswell, W. Garcelou; Harrison, Ec., H. Blake; New Gloucester, O. Bradbury

The Maine Washingtonian Journal of December 21, 1842, in an announcement published a week before the meeting of the Washingtonian Total Abstinence Society in New Gloucester, shows Osgood Bradbury as a delegate from Gray. He was one of the lecturers at the initial meeting:

In the afternoon the meeting was addressed by various delegates including Osgood Bradbury of Gray on various subjects connected with the development of the Washingtonian societies within the county.

Listed in Boston Directory

Further investigation reveals the fact that Osgood Bradbury was listed in the Boston City Directory for 1844, 1845, 1846, and 1847 as a "counsellor" with an address of 14 State Street, Boston. From 1848 to 1860 he was not found in city directories for Boston and surrounding communities, or for New York City, where a number of his novels were published.

Yet, strangely enough, and in character, in the National Union Catalog Pre-1956 Imprints, it was noted that Bradbury's "Mettallak" (Boston: F. Gleason, 1849) was written by a "member of the Suffolk Bar." I was unable to find any additional information through the Boston Bar Association (Suffolk Bar no longer in existence), the Social Law Library, or the State House Library.

In 1845, at the age of 50, romance entered Bradbury's life in the person of Mary Mourira Dinsmore, a much younger person, age 22, whom he married in Burlington, Vermont, October 2, 1845. Proof of this marriage is found in Vital Statistics from the Paper "Maine Farmer" for the Period 1833 to 1852 as compiled by Clarence A. Day.

Gloucester in 1826 is further verified through a letter to the writer from Mr. Roger L. Gowell of Auburn, dated July 10, 1972:

I was looking up some Masonic History on Bradbury membership in Cumberland Lodge No. 12 which was organized in 1803. I find that Osgood Bradbury did not join our Lodge originally, but became a member August 14, 1826, and was elected to the

office of Worshipful Master in 1828 and served for one year. The history does not state how long he retained his membership in the Lodge.

One might speculate, that because of the similarity of his wife's name, Mourira, and the heroine, Monira, of his novel, "Monira; or, The Wandering Heiress" published in 1845 the same year of his marriage, that the honeymoon set the background for the development of the novel.

Hunted And Hunted:

Endeavoring to fill in the blank years, 1848-1860, I con-

tacted the Research Department of the Portland Press-Herald in the hope that their files for those years might list his name on the editorial staff of one of the Press-Herald's predecessors, the Advertiser; and also personally examined the printed issues for those years as retained in the Bangor Public Library. These sources provided no mention of his name.

Again, on the chance that he might have taken up residence in the birthplace of his bride, Burlington, Vermont, a request was directed to the Vermont State Library for, and received the microfilm reels of the Census for that period. Again, no success. Apparently he was not a resident of Boston or New York and so Mary Noel simply states

in her book, "Villains Galore," that "Mr. Bradbury returned to Maine in 1862, where he became associate editor of the commendable newspaper the Portland Advertiser, and later its editor."

Spoke at 1874 Centennial

In 1874, on the occasion of the Centennial Celebration of New Gloucester, Osgood Bradbury came from Portland to his birthplace to deliver the following

tribute to men and women of the past and present generation:

"Strange as it may seem to the young men and maidens present on this interesting occasion, I do not feel as if I had lived in this breathing world more than three-quarters of the time since this good old town was incorporated one hundred years ago, and yet the town records show the stubborn fact. I take it for granted that the younger portion of this audience look upon me as an old man, but while watching the progress of events, hearing the hard breathing of the iron horse, the rumbling of the cars, the tell-tale ticking of the telegraph, and forgetting the numerous milestones which I have passed

on my journey of life, I feel as if I had just commenced to live.

While standing here under this spacious tent, and on ground ever to be remembered, where our forefathers assembled in the Blockhouse so well described by the Orator of the day, and calling up in memory the Old Church that once stood on the hallowed spot where the new one now stands, erected by the zeal and enterprise of our Fathers; and especially while remembering the high old-fashioned pulpit and the jolly good old fat parson that stood on it, with the sounding-board over his head, and the big Bible before him on the cushion which our good grandmothers had made to adorn the sacred desk and make the good book rest easy; and while I so well remember closing his eyes on the night of his death, assisted by Deacon Marsh, who dug so many graves in yonder cemetery, and conducted so many funerals of those near and dear to us all; and again, while looking over this audience, and seeing countenances familiar to me many, many years ago, thinking of the hundreds of men, women and children who were wont to listen in the Old Church to the venerable Foxcroft and the good-natured Mosely, but whose bodies now rest in yonder city of the dead, I feel — I know — that those who call me an old man are not far out of the way.

Recalls Spinning Wheel Days

"Once more: when I look at the dresses now worn by daughters and their mothers too, even in this audience, and compare the furbelows, flounces, plaits and endless trimmings, almost all of foreign manufacture, with the plain gowns of the past generation, spun and woven by the weavers themselves, dressed in the old fulling mill on Royal's River and dyed a London smoke or brown, I am forcibly impressed with the belief that I have lived long enough to witness many and foolish changes in the fashionable world. Yes, I must be quite old in spite of all my youthful emotions.

"What chambers now resound with the music of the old spinning wheels which were wont to be turned by fair hands? Ah! well do I remember such "chamber music" made by the fair daughters, and the buzz of the linen wheel turned by the feet of their good mothers; and how industriously the girls would spin and weave to get the cloth early to the fulling mill, so that they might have new dresses to wear to school, and how neat and tidy they looked in their home-made London browns; no flounces or furbelows disfigured their well pressed shining surface, and no false bundles upon their backs to destroy the symmetry of their forms. Such dresses proved the truth of the saying that "Beauty unadorned is adorned the most," and so it is and always will be.

"Nature does her work perfectly, and the less we try to improve it the better for us. All the dressmakers in Paris, Berlin or the world can't improve a beauteous form, but they have the power and skill to make it look ugly, and that is now done with a high hand. We live in an extravagant age, and how long foolish and hurtful fashions will continue to disfigure the form and try the depths of the parental purse is a problem not yet solved.

New England Rum

"Let me allude to the temperance cause which has taken fast hold upon the inhabitants of this ancient and honorable town; it was not so in years gone by. I can well remember when I was a boy in a store at the Upper Village, and saw how the master of the establishment prepared the New England rum before it was dealt out to customers at fifty cents per gallon, or three cents per glass. After a cart

would be driven to the store laden with iron-bound white oak hogsheads of the liquid fire, they were rolled in, but before they were tapped the master would appear with a small proof glass with a string tied round its neck. Down he would plunge it through the bung-hole into the choice beverage, draw it up, shake it, examine the bead closely, and then say, "Osgood, this will bear more water."

"My duty was to go to the pump and bring in the water, which was mingled with the rum and reduced it to a certain proof ascertained by another plunge of the glass and another look at the bead. Those hogsheads of rum were invariably thus treated before they were placed on tap. When I look back upon those days I am astonished at the amount of intoxicating liquor which was then sold in this single store by the gallon and the glass, and yet the Anti-Maine Law people say there is as much rum drank now as ever. It is not so by a long shot, where there is one gallon drank now there were hogsheads drank then.

"In the haying season oceans of it were guzzled down, no buildings could be raised without it, and alas! at funerals decanters and tumblers were placed upon tables in the room adjoining that in which the mourners sat; all who wished to imbibe helped themselves; a majority were thus inclined, and the decanters run low before all left the house of mourning. Oh! how few in those sad days clearly saw the untold miseries of intemperance! and how could they when their opinions took their hues from their stomachs.

"I was once riding with the son of a physician in this State — he then resided in Taunton, Mass. He was a talkative young man, and introduced the subject of temperance; he remarked that it was a good and glorious cause, but thought the people of Taunton were driving it a little too hard. I told him I anticipated his opinion as soon as he broached the subject. "How so," he inquired, expressing some surprise at my intuitive knowledge. "Because I smelt your breath," I replied very deliberately. He dropped the subject. So it is the world over; our stomachs do influence our opinions and hence we must be careful what we eat and drink."

From 1860-1870 Osgood Bradbury engaged intermittently in writing his novels, the last of which was "Red Plume; or The Young Iroquois" (New York: R. D. DeWitt, 1870).

Returned to New Gloucester?

Between 1874-1880 he must have returned to New Gloucester as the United States Census of 1880 showed that he was in residence there with Mary Mourira, his occupation being listed as "Lawyer."

Obituary

An obituary section in the Boston Evening Transcript, dated November 30, 1886, has this notice:

Osgood Bradbury died at Upper Gloucester, Me., Monday aged ninety-one years. He was a member of the Maine Legislature in 1838 and 1839. In 1840 he came to Boston, where he was connected with newspapers and did other literary work. He reported the first lecture of John B. Gough in Boston. In 1862 Mr. Bradbury was associate editor of the Portland Advertiser, and later was its editor.

Why The Mystery?

For a man born into a family whose coat of arms bore the motto, "Tempus et Petentia" the contradictory and puzzling element of mystery pervades the life span from beginning to end. Though history records the definite date of birth for his brothers and sister, his remains indefinite.

His public life as lawyer, legislator, writer, newspaper

editor, seemingly would focus the spotlight of public interest sufficiently long enough on him to establish proof to later historians of where he lived and in what years. Yet again, mystery! Research fails to produce evidence enough to establish places of residence in areas where he plied his varied career. Again, his death in 1886 at the age of 91 provides historians with conflicting reports as to his place of death. The short and very simple obituary in the Boston Evening Transcript states that his death occurred in Upper Gloucester while the Bradbury Memorial and tradition records it in Sebago.

Nature, at times, plays many strange tricks on individuals. Osgood Bradbury, a victim of one of Nature's whims and contradictions, wore the mantle of mystery.

Born to greatness, he never achieved it. He was subject to sudden rises to heights of public recognition, then to sudden and complete plunges into obscurity. A writer of novels dealing with "free wheeling" living, in private life he was a puritanical critic of women and their mode of dress as well as a champion and Legislative representative for the Temperance Society of Maine.

With his death a cycle was complete and the shroud of mystery drawn tightly closed until now, when the curtain opens slightly to reveal a few facts of his life to the public, for which, perhaps, he has hopefully awaited with "Time and Patience."

Large Family of Novels

Although Osgood Bradbury left no children, he did leave a large "family" of novels, many of which are very revealing as to the character and personality of the man and his ardent involvement in the social and political scene of his time.

In his literary work, as in his life, very little has been known about him as an author until recently, for some of his earliest novels were either unsigned, or were signed in the following fashion: "by a member of the Suffolk Bar." It is also interesting to note that even the meticulous research of the Library of Congress has not been able to establish his birth and death dates, or complete bibliographical details for many of his works.

Crusader

In many of his novels, such as "Louise Kempton; or Vice and Virtue Contrasted" and "The Belle of the Bowery," we are aware of his whole-hearted personal crusade for temperance. He made his temperance novels vehicles for teaching. If the younger generation did not heed the voices of their elders, then the novels of the day would be charged with the gravity of drinking and all the evils that would come in its wake.

In "Agnes, the Beautiful; or The Gambler's Conspiracy" and other stories, he seems obsessed with the brothels of the day and prostitution, in general. Illegitimacy is also a recurring theme as evidenced in such novels as "The Mysterious Mother; or, The Theory of Second Love" and "The Eastern Belle; or The Betrayed One."

Other frequent social ills of the time revealed in his tales are the wretched plight of orphans and widows, in "Little Emma;" infidelity of husbands, as in "Female Depravity; or, The House of Death;" murder, "Julia Bicknell; or Love and Murder;" piracy, "The Spanish Pirate; or The Terror of the Ocean," "sale of human beings, as in "The Mysterious Mother;" and many others.

Although "Women's Lib" was one hundred years in the future, we find the seeds of it in the

women's right movement of Osgood Bradbury's day. We gather, as we read such stories as "The Modern Othello; or, The Guilty Wife" and "Little Emma," that Bradbury was not an ardent supporter of these militant women.

We are also impressed with the Christian character of Osgood Bradbury as we read his writings. In his novel, "Ellen Templeton," Bradbury expounds on the tenets of Emanuel Swedenborg. We speculate that he was influenced by the establishment and rapid growth of the Swedenborgian movement in Portland during his lifetime.

His religious nature is again revealed in "Mettallak" a truly spiritual novel, in which he expresses his firm belief in the brotherhood of man and the God of Nature, Who is also Nature's God.

Thus we see that in the writings of Osgood Bradbury we have a double-sided mirror revealing on one side the social and political scene of his era and on the other side, his own moral character, strong personality and convictions.

Case of "Vanishing Writer"

While reading the book, "Villains Galore," by Mary Noel, I first was intrigued by the mention of Osgood Bradbury, a Maine author who wrote light novels for popular family magazines in the early nineteenth century. When I was unable to find Mr. Bradbury mentioned in any of the bibliographic or biographic references in the State of Maine Collection in the Raymond H. Fogler Library of the University of Maine, I was determined to attempt to unravel the mystery surrounding this little known but prolific literary figure. Because I was presented here with the possibility of making an original contribution to the literary scene in Maine, I embarked upon this study.

I am particularly indebted to Lyle Wright's valuable and scholarly bibliographic work on American fiction, which enabled me to locate and verify the literary works of Osgood Bradbury. The novels were available to me only on microfilm, since few of them exist today in the original form.

Bangor Public Library, Bangor, Maine, is fortunate to own one of these stories in its original format.

Helping to unravel the mystery and clear away some of the obscurity from the life and work of Osgood Bradbury has been a most rewarding experience. Often the trail has been faint and sometimes completely obliterated. Libraries, historical societies, newspapers, letters, documents, advertisements and telephone calls have one day yielded treasures and another day nothing. However, when all clues have been assembled, we find that there has emerged a study based almost entirely on original research which brings to light an account of a Nineteenth Century Maine author who has been neglected and unrecognized far too long. Hopefully, at a future date, the missing links can be supplied through future research to make the story of Osgood Bradbury complete.