

Onondaga Historical Association Curator of History to speak Wednesday about 'Little Women' author's ties to Central New York

By [The Post-Standard](#)

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Dennis J. Connors, curator of history at the Onondaga Historical Association, is speaking at Syracuse Stage at 1 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 9.

Details: The lecture will focus on Louisa May Alcott's connection to Central New York through her uncle, Samuel Joseph May, a well-known abolitionist and reformer. May Alcott's work "[Little Women](#)" is currently playing at Syracuse Stage.

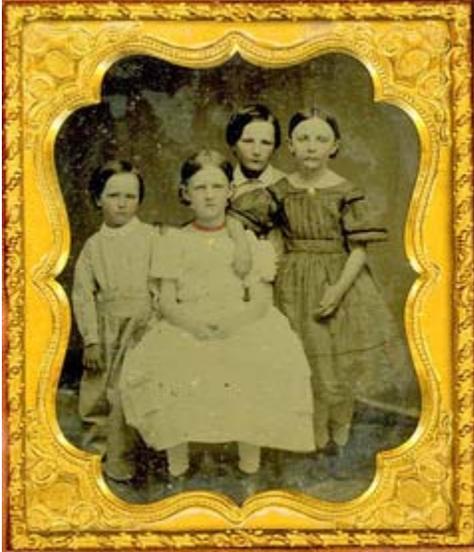
By **Dennis J. Connors**

Curator of History, Onondaga Historical Association

In the story of "Little Women," letters from Mr. March maintain important bonds for the family. That was very true for Central New York families during the Civil War, an age before text messages, e-mail or even telephones.

George Sager lived with his family on Syracuse's West Side. At age 22, he enlisted in the 149th NY Volunteers. This unit would see intense fighting during the war, including the battles at Gettysburg and Lookout Mountain, along with the capture of Atlanta and Sherman's "March to the Sea."

George and his family exchanged letters often. They regularly mention the state of each other's health, a constant worry in an era of primitive medicine. And sometimes the exchange touches on serious matters of war and politics. But usually the topics are narratives of daily activities. Today, these letters survive in the collections of the Onondaga Historical Association (OHA).



[View full size](#) Courtesy of the Onondaga Historical Association Emma Sager is seated in the center of this historical photo from the Onondaga Historical Society. Sager and her family lived in Syracuse during the 1800s. In one, Sager wrote to his 11-year-old sister, Emma:

“I read your letter over three times and don’t know how many more I shall read it before I am satisfied. You wrote just what I wanted to hear. I want somebody to write who can tell me just whats going on at home.”

One letter of Emma’s survives. It is dated Dec. 27, 1863. In it she tells her brother just what he sought. She relates her activities on that Christmas in Syracuse, 146 years ago:

Syracuse December 27th 1863

Dear Brother George,

It is a Sunday morning, and Father and me are all alone for Mother and Amasa (her brother) have gone to Church. I could not go because I not got my (flat?) yet. You asked me to write a little memorandums at spare times in School, but it is vacation now and I can not do that but you know I can at home. Now I will tell you about Christmas and the presents I got. in the morning when I got awake I said a merry Christmas to mother and Park (her older brother) (for you know I sleep in the same room that Park does) but Park sticks to it that he said Merry Christmas first.

Well Mother went downstairs and I got asleep again and kept dreaming about getting stockings in my bag for I hung up a bag or a sack. Well by and by I got up and went downstairs and got my bag and looked into it. I found a muff it was white with black spots on it. Then I got a portfolio which I am writing in now. I opened it and found an

indian pocket book in it. It was red merino lined with purple silk and on the out side it was worked with white and green beads. Then there was a pair of leggons (leggings).

The day before Christmas Ale sent me a brest pin with a piece of coral on it. the It was all carved. In the morning she came over and gave Mother a silver thimble and me a handkerchief it was hem stitched. After I had washed the dishes I went down to Katis (her sister Catherine) to take some popcorn for her and George (her brother-in-law). Then George went over to the book store with me because I had to buy some paper and pen.

After I had bought my things I told George I thought I should have to go but he told me not to be in a hurry so after awhile he bought me a book the name of it is Art and Artlessness. It is a real good book. The day before Christmas I went down street and got a bird for kittie and a pair of mittens & a stick of candy for her and grace & a shall (shell) pin for mother & a heart for Anna and Kate.

I shall be very happy when you can come home and enjoy the same pleasures that I do. Yesterday I went to a to a sewing school with Anna. There are over 14 poor children learning to sew. Anna (a sister) has got 10 girls in her class. They did not sew yesterday for the teachers and some other ladies gave them some apples and cake and 1 card apiece. Father is asleep in his chair. I drew a picture of him just now but I shall hardly dare to send it for fear you will not like but I may. I do not know yet.

Monday Abe & Rhonda came here last night. This morning about 15 minutes to nine Henry Porter came over and stayed to dinner it seems as though he did not know when to go home. I have not got done telling you about Christmas yet. Christmas eve Mother and me went to a Christmas tree at Mr Baums before we went to take Mrs. Vaugh a basket of things. Kate told us that she lived on Niagara street on the other side of the horse railroad going to Gedees, but when we got there we was two streets out of our way so we went back and found the house. Mrs. Vaugh was not at home but we left the basket there. Then we went to Mr. Baums. The tree looked very nice – Mrs. Sam Sharpley was there she had hung some of the presents because she was the only stranger they could get. That is all that I can tell you now. I thank you very much for the sketches.

Good bye from your Sister Emma

http://blog.syracuse.com/entertainment/2009/12/onondaga_historical_associatio.html