

# Alcott 'Cuse Connection

Louisa May Alcott's own parents and three sisters were the inspiration for her novel, *Little Women*.

And although they lived much of their lives in and around Concord, Mass., the family had strong ties to Syracuse.

Alcott's mother, Abigail, was the sister of noted Syracuse minister, the Rev. Samuel J. May. Samuel and his family lived on James Street. His modest home often hosted members of the Alcott family during the 1850s and 1860s. And the two families regularly exchanged correspondence.

The May House on James Street

OHA Collection, 321 Montgomery St.

The Alcott family often had financial struggles and Uncle Samuel tried to assist.



*Continued on page 3*

# LM Alcott's history at OHA

*Continued from front page*

Sometimes he loaned money. And, as Alcott's sisters came of age, he reached out to find them employment opportunities in Syracuse, generally teaching positions.

Both Anna (the inspiration for Meg) and May (the model for Amy) worked at different times as teachers in the New York State Asylum on the western edge of Syracuse. This was a model institution for the treatment of children with mental problems, run by the reformist Dr. Hervey B. Wilbur.

The Reverend May was a supporter of its progressive approaches, ones that emphasized education rather than simple incarceration.

The State Asylum at  
Syracuse in 1858

OHA Collection, 321  
Montgomery St.

Louisa's letters to her  
"dear" Uncle Samuel were



affectionate.

In one from Jan. 22 of 1869, she remarked that she had used many of, "the stories you gave me" as inspiration in her writings. She also noted that the recently published *Little Women* had allowed her to pay off some family debts.

In October of 1875, Alcott was once more in Syracuse attending a Woman's Congress convention at the Wieting Opera House with her Syracuse cousin, Charlotte, the Rev. May's daughter. Alcott was mobbed by a number of young girls clamoring to see her and obtain an autograph. The author of *Little Women* had become a celebrity.