

September 2015

# Grace Donworth Correspondence

Grace Donworth 1857-1945

Grace C. Self

F.D. Self

Carol Gold

Hilda McLeod Jacob

*Maine State Library*

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DONWORTH, GRACE.

Born Machias, Maine, July 22, 1857 - November 25, 1945

Donworth, Grace, author and artist; b. Machias, Me.;  
dau. Patrick Enright and Mary Eliza (Baker) Donworth;  
ed. Machias H. S.; unmarried; artist in etching,  
charcoal drawing and painting. Pub. "Letters of Jennie  
Allen to her friend, Miss Musgrove," 1908; "Down  
Home with Jennie Allen," 1910; contbr. to mags. Mem.  
D.A.R., Boston Authors' Club, Women's Republican Club  
of Mass., Cath. Rep. Home (summer) Machias; (winter)  
380 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, Mass.

Source: Brief Biographies Maine 1926-1927.  
Who's Who in New England 1938.

June 12, 1944

Miss Grace Donworth  
Machias  
Maine

Dear Miss Donworth:

There is brief biographical information about you in our files (although we lack the birth date); but your books do not seem to be represented in the Maine Author Collection.

They have circulated in our traveling libraries, and brought pleasure to many readers; but we regret very much that the collection should be unable to claim the inclusion of these volumes.

You perhaps know of the exhibit, comprising about fifteen hundred books, written by Maine people, inscribed and presented by them. The books themselves of course present a fascinating array of Maine's contribution to literature; and the inscriptions lend distinction. They are sometimes in the form of tributes to Maine; bits of original verse appear; occasionally we find an author who, like you, is also an artist, and then the books are enriched by pen-and-ink sketches or a special watercolor page. Whatever the form, the inscription is prized.

We also preserve correspondence, biographical information, articles and pictures of our authors. Contemporary visitors find the collection of great interest, and future students will regard it as invaluable.

That so gifted a daughter of Maine should not be represented in the Maine Author Collection is indeed distressing; and we shall hope that you may want to inscribe and present your books for this purpose. They would be a delightful and important addition.

Sincerely yours

hmj  
Encls.

Secretary

Machias, Maine.  
July 14, 1944.

Mrs. F. W. Jacob  
Secretary, Maine State Library  
Augusta, Maine

Dear Mrs. Jacob:

Your letter asking for data concerning the life of Miss Grace Donworth of Machias, Maine has been referred to me as Miss Donworth has been very ill for the past eight months.

I am enclosing a copy of some information we compiled last February which I think may be of some help to you. May I add that Miss Donworth descends from two families, Baker and Donworth, who were very prominent in the pioneer days of the State of Maine. Richard Baker came to Dorchester, Massachusetts from England in 1635. Two ancestors from the families of Bakers and Youngs, served in the Revolutionary War.

In the early days of the Donworth family life in Maine, they owned and operated large timber lands. The younger generation have made themselves famous as lawyers and writers. Hon. Albert Donworth of Houlton, Maine, a brother of Miss Donworth, is a lawyer and writer and has published recently a book entitled "Why Columbus Sailed". He is a veteran of the Spanish American War and is listed in Who's Who in New England and Who's Who in the East. You will note in my letter attached, reference to her other brother, Hon. George Donworth, who is a Federal Judge and is very prominent in civic affairs in Seattle, Washington. You will find details of his life in Who's Who in America.

Miss Donworth, herself, not only is listed in Who's Who in America, but in several other prominent biographical works, including Brief Biographies Maine 1926-27, Who's Who in New England 1938, and Who's Who in the East 1930.

She has completed some very lovely oil paintings of scenes along the Machias River on the walls in one room in her home. She has also finished other singular paintings and a number of etchings of landscapes.

Mrs. F. W. Jacob

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On May 9, 1944, Miss Donworth was highly honored in receiving an award of Honorary Membership in the International Mark Twain Society, St. Louis, Mo. Some of the very distinguished members are Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Madame Chiang Kai Shek, Gen. DeGualle, Gen. Montgomery, Gen. Eisenhower, and others.

She regrets very much that she has no more copies of her books,. They are out of print now and the publishing concern liquidated many years ago. I am attaching a small photograph of Miss Donworth.

Trusting this information will be of some value to you and hoping to hear from you in the near future, I remain

Very truly yours,

(Mrs. F.D.) *Grace C. Self*  
Secretary

Your letter addressed to Miss Grace Donworth asking for interesting facts in her life has been referred to me for a reply as she has been very ill for the past three months.

Miss Donworth was born in Machias, Maine, where she still maintains her home, "Elmstead", which overlooks the Machias River and next door to the spot where the First Liberty Pole was raised which commemorated the winning of the first Naval Battle of the Revolutionary War.

She is the daughter of Patrick Enright and Mary Eliza (Baker) Donworth. She was educated in the Machias Schools and attended the Notre Dame Academy, Boston, Massachusetts, from which she graduated. She also studied art from prominent artists in Boston and has produced many beautiful oil paintings as well as etchings in charcoal. She taught in the grade schools in Machias, Maine and Revere, Massachusetts. Also, she has given public readings and humorous recitations.

During 1906, Miss Donworth was doing relief work at the Old Armory in Providence, R. I. Many articles of clothing and food were donated and these were prepared for shipment to disaster sufferers of the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire. One evening after returning home, she felt inspired to write a letter to Miss Stockbridge, a cultured lady who was also in the same work. She wrote as if she were Jennie Allen and in her ignorant grammatical construction and spelling, she related how she had brought to the work room a dress belonging to her sister Mamie and now that Mamie had discovered it she was much provoked and demanded its return. So she, Jennie Allen, asked Miss Stockbridge to put it aside and later she would call for it. She also told a bit of her family in her own language. This letter interested Miss Stockbridge, so one day she read it to Miss Donworth and remarked she intended answering it, which she did. Jennie Allen replied and eight or more letters passed between them, all unidentified. Miss Stockbridge read some of these letters at a Daughters of the American Revolution meeting. They were so real, sparkling and clever that she loaned them to her brother, who was a prominent lawyer in Boston, and entertained his friends with them. Soon it was that Miss Donworth became known as the real Jennie Allen

Miss Stockbridge's brother took them to read to his friend Mark Twain with the promise he would not use them in his writings and in Mark Twain's biography by Albert Paine is the following:

"One day a friend gave him two examples of the most deliciously illiterate letters, supposed to have been written by a woman who had contributed certain articles of clothing to the San Francisco sufferers, and later wished to recall them because of the protests of her household. He was sure that the letters were genuine that he included them in his dictations, after reading them aloud with great effect. To tell the truth, they did seem the least bit too well done, too literary in their illiteracy; but his natural optimism refused to admit of any suspicion, and a little later he incorporated one of the Jennie Allen letters in a speech which he made at a Press Club dinner in New York on the subject of simplified spelling - offering it as an example of language with phonetic brevity exercising its supreme function, the direct conveyance of ideas. The letters, in the end, proved to be the clever work of Miss Grace Donworth, who has since published them serially (Ladies Home Journal) and in book form.

Clemens was not at all offended or disturbed by the exposure. He even agreed to aid the young author in securing a publisher and wrote to Miss Stockbridge, through whom he had originally received the documents:

Dear Miss Stockbridge (if she really exists),  
257 Benefit Street (if there is any such place):

Yes, I should like a copy of that other letter. ~~This whole fake is delightful~~ and I tremble with fear that you are a fake yourself and that I am your guileless prey. (But never mind, it isn't any matter.) Now as to publication --

He set forth his views and promised his assistance when enough of the letters should be completed.

Mark Twain added, "Here is a letter written by a woman right out of her heart of hearts. There's no spelling that can begin with it on this planet outside of the White House."

The following are comments from some of the famous newspapers:--

Boston Herald -- "Grace Donworth has proved herself a public benefactor by creating Jennie Allen."

Boston Transcript -- "Jennie Allen is one of the loveliest, noblest, wisest and simplest characters in literature. In producing this book, the author has wrought a genuine work of art. The wisdom, the humor, the philosophy and the variegated spelling are all true to the character."

Springfield Republican -- "The author has created a character that will find many friends; in fact, Jim, Mame, Mr. Spenny, Jason and all the rest will prove friends, and worth more than a casual acquaintance."



Miss Carol Gold

- 3 -

Washington Star--"A book which for keen human interest, for subtlety of humor and for genuineness of tender feeling has rarely been equalled. A book that will make the reader see through tears in one page and shake with laughter in another has something out of the ordinary about it, something vital and genuinely human. This is such a book. If the author of this attention-compelling story does not soon have a large following of readers clamorous for more of her work, it will be because books that spell humanity are out of fashion."

Miss Donworth is a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, having been Regent of the Hannah Weston Chapter. She is also a member of the Boston Authors Club and Women's Republican Club of Massachusetts. She and her brother, George Donworth of Seattle, Washington, are listed in "Who's Who in America".

Miss Donworth is a very charming and cultured person, greatly admired and loved by all. She descends from a highly educated family--a family of prominent lawyers. Her keen sense of humore and wit have gained her a host of friends.

Enclosed is an autographed photograph of Miss Donworth. I hope you may find her books in your library. "Jennie Allen's Letters to her Friend Miss Musgrove" was published in 1908 and in 1910 "Down Home with Jennie Allen" followed.

I hope this information will be sufficient for your project, and I know, if it is at all convenient, Miss Donworth would greatly enjoy hearing of your success.

Most Sincerely Yours,

Secretary

July 19, 1944

Mrs. F. D. Self

Secretary  
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Sincerely yours

Secretary

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July 19, 1944

Mrs. F. D. Self  
Secretary to Miss Grace Donworth  
Machias, Maine

Dear Mrs. Self:

Thank you very much for sending us such a friendly, helpful letter, with its wealth of information. It is such biographical material about our Maine people -- so much more personal than a Who's Who entry -- that we like to have on file. We are especially pleased with a picture.

We regret that the books are out of print, but we shall hope to come upon them one day, and thus add them to the Maine Author Collection.

If Miss Donworth is able to receive messages, will you please convey our sympathy upon her illness, and our good wishes for her improvement.

We greatly appreciate your courtesy in writing to us, and we shall hope that you may call when you are in Augusta, so that you may see the Maine Author Collection.

Sincerely yours

hmj

Secretary

Maebias, Maine  
July 27-1944

Mrs. F. W. Jaot  
Maine State Library  
Augusta, Maine

Dear Mrs. Jaot:-

We are very delighted to be able to forward to you under separate cover one copy of each of the books Miss Grace Dowdath wrote. It was just by luck that we were able to locate these and Miss Dowdath wishes to present them to the Maine State Library - This will complete your file of this author, I believe.

Very truly yours.

(Mrs. F. D.) Grace C. Self.  
Sec.

August 1, 1944

Mrs. F. D. Self, Secretary  
to Miss Grace Donworth  
21 Court Street  
Machias, Maine

Dear Mrs. Self:

It is more than kind of Miss Donworth to take such an interest in the Maine Author Collection. She is generous to present autographed copies of her Jennie Allen books to this collection; and, because they are so difficult to obtain now, we value highly the effort they cost.

This has been a serious omission in the Maine Author Collection, and we are indeed fortunate to be able to include THE LETTERS OF JENNIE ALLEN and DOWN HOME WITH JENNIE ALLEN.

We deeply appreciate Miss Donworth's friendliness, and express to her and to you for your trouble our thanks and gratitude.

Sincerely yours

hmj  
Encl--17¢ postal refund

Secretary