




The Youthful Artist

ANNA HEYWARD TAYLOR'S FAMILY had a strong influence on her life and character. She was fortunate to have grown up in a large, close-knit family. There are no letters from her father, but we do have a few from her mother. This paucity reflects closeness, not estrangement. Her correspondence was fulsome when she was away from home and diminished when she was near.

Taylor's parents came from prominent families, displaced by the Civil War with their livelihoods in ruins. She was born shortly after the end of Reconstruction, and her early years were marked by her family's struggle to recover from debt and decline. Her mother, Mariana Heyward Taylor (1844–1907), was one of the lowcountry Heywards, a family that had produced statesmen and political leaders in every generation of South Carolina history.

Taylor's father, Dr. Benjamin Walter Taylor (1834–1905), was the grandson of Col. Thomas Taylor, a Whig patriot in the American Revolution, and the son of Benjamin Franklin Taylor (1791–1852). Dr. Taylor's life was governed by his sense of duty and honor. He entered Confederate military service before the state attacked Fort Sumter and battled the army of General William T. Sherman even after General Robert E. Lee had surrendered at Appomattox in April 1865. A battlefield surgeon, he was always found among wounded Union and Confederate soldiers in the tremendous battles in Virginia. It was said of him that for four years, "Where the wounded were, there was Dr. Taylor." At the war's end, Dr. Taylor returned to civilian life and helped rebuild his shattered state. He took the lead in establishing the first Columbia Hospital and in reorganizing the State Mental Hospital. President of the Medical Society of South Carolina, he was also a founder of the Southern Surgical Association. Anna Taylor inherited his energy.

When arguments erupted around the dinner table, Dr. Taylor restored calm by rapping on the table and commanding, "Talk art—talk art!" What that order means is lost to posterity, but perhaps it is a clue to the way Anna Taylor discovered her life's work. 

Ellen T. Elmore to Dr. Benjamin W. Taylor
Columbia Home School, Laurel Street, Columbia, S.C.
 1886

You will not deny me one of the greatest pleasures I can know, that of believing I am doing something for the dearest friend I have in the world. It has been a delight to me to feel someone belonging to you near me, & getting into my heart; & I want to keep her there all the time.

It is needless to say I love you & yours with a love beyond what I can say, & to be of use to you in any way makes me happy. Let me think I can be so in this small matter.

Anna is no trouble to me, & her sweet little pure face goes right home to my heart & makes me feel warm & comforted, when I have cause to be otherwise. You must let her be my own little girl as long as you think I am doing for her all that ought to be done; as long as my ability to teach her lasts. When she requires other teaching, I shall be willing to surrender my place to one more able.

From Eliza Rhett
 June 7, 1894

I am so very sorry that they are changing Trinity Church. I always like to think of it as being the same as when I left Columbia. You don't know how surprised I was to see that you had received a prize for drawing. I have never seen any of your drawing except what you used to do in school. Don't you remember what ridiculous ones we used to draw! I wish I could draw. The only thing I can draw decently is maps and I like to draw those very much. I expect some day I will see you mentioned in the paper as a celebrated artist.

TAYLOR'S MOTHER HAD A SHARP SENSE OF HUMOR and was sometimes hard on those she loved. She and her upcountry husband, Dr. Benjamin Walter Taylor, were pillars of Trinity Episcopal Church and, on Sundays, filled pew number 52 with their four sons, Anna, and Nell. After church Mrs. Taylor climbed into her buggy and distributed food to the needy in her neighborhood. Portraits of her and her husband, painted by William Merritt Chase, hang in the Columbia Museum of Art.

Summers in Columbia are hot, and a century ago, when these letters were written, were without the respite provided by air conditioning. Cooler by far were the North Carolina mountain towns of Saluda, Flat Rock, and Blowing Rock, so gentry women spent the hot months there, boarding in private homes. ∞

From Mother
Columbia
 Wednesday Aug. 4, 1897

If you get tired of Blowing Rock, why not see if you can get in at Saluda & come down there. There is plenty of walking in Saluda, but, the surroundings can not compare with where you are. Did you actually pay six dollars for your staging coach from Lenoir to Blowing Rock? I don't remember what I paid when I carried all of you up, but, I remember paying

only ten dollars to carry all of you & a wagon with our trunks besides, to Brevard from Hendersonville.

P.S. Don't take such long walks in the morning, & never take them twice, you will injure yourself.

From Mother

Monday August 19, 1897

The only book Ben took out of your box was one on pronunciation, &, according to that author our lower country pronunciation is the most correct. I mispronounced thirteen out of fourteen words, by following you up-country people. I think I shall take the present book cases from up-stairs & have a book case made the whole length of the passage, for the guest room cannot be given up. I cannot have strangers up-stairs, & you know you will want some girls to visit you; now I wish to have Elise Lewis this Fall, &, may be, Julius will want some young man, & where would you put them?

We found a lovely walk, which we want you to enjoy when you come up. Every morning I wish for Edmund [her youngest and disabled child] to play ball with the boys on Helen Coles' lawn.



Anna Heyward Taylor, studio photograph. Courtesy of South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia

It is raining today, & the shed has not been fixed yet, however I am in the nursery, so when your father's nose is mashed flat by the plastering tumbling down, I presume, he will consider the propriety of having it looked after, in the mean time I am "possessing my soul with patience" outside, but very much terrified inside, as, when the weather is good, he will not think of the leaks & when it is bad, it is too late.

TAYLOR NEVER MARRIED, but she attracted and reciprocated the attention of marriageable men throughout her life. Lee Hagood (b. 1877) was one of the first whose eye she caught. Her letters are filled with the names of men who interested her, and she recounted her friendships with men throughout the world. By 1899 Taylor was an art student at the Art Students League and the New York School of Art, where the painter William Merritt Chase taught. ∞

*From Lee Hagood**
Fort Preble, Portland, Me.
Dec. 31, 1899

A few weeks ago I received quite a nice surprise in the shape of an express package containing quite a quantity of caramels. A strange part about it was that there was no indication whatever of who the donor of the delightful contents was, further than on the card enclosed was scribed "Should old acquaintance be forgotten." The mystery, however, was cleared up a couple of days ago when Beverley Herbert told me that you had sent them. I can express a most hearty thanks for they were greatly appreciated and enjoyed. Guess you spent a very pleasant Christmas. Julius, I believe, was home wasn't he? Well, I certainly would have liked to have been there too, I know you all had a great time.

* This letter was addressed to Taylor at 153 East 62nd St., New York, N.Y.

From Mother
[1900]

Poor fare is not conducive of a very rosy complexion, & I neither believe that you are feeling or looking well, & as the Winter advances & the weather becomes severe, & your throat still worried, I don't care for you to stay North. Another winter, like the past one, will reduce you to bones, only, & all the train of evils, belonging to that condition.

It would be well if you went every day to a soup house, or some place where you get a cup of coffee & slice of bread for a few cents. I have heard people talking about those places.

I don't understand what you say about your water paintings. Is it that you are doing so badly in oil that they do not see how you accomplished any thing in water-colours? You must be very discouraged. Do you know whether you have any talent for your work, or can you not find out yet?

From Lee Hagood

Fort Preble, Portland, Me.

Nov. 30, 1900

I am told you are in New York studying art. You mentioned in your letter that you were going there but I wasn't sure as to your purpose. I know you must be delighted for I understand that you are under quite a famous teacher [William Merritt Chase]. Then, to be in New York must be simply elegant [*sic*]. I stopped over for a few days when I passed through and have ever since desired to get back again. No doubt you are taking in all the operas and plays.

How long are you going to be in New York? Do you expect to visit Boston? If so let me know and I will run down to see you. I think we could have lots of fun sight-seeing. And it would be no small pleasure either for me to see some one from home, especially one whom I have so nearly grown up with.

From Lee Hagood

Fort Preble, Portland, Me.

Dec. 24th 1900

I wish you a very happy Xmas! You have my sincere sympathy for having to be away from home on this occasion. This is the second one that I have spent up here so I have a fellow-feeling for you and can realize keenly what it is.

Dec. 26th

We have met some nice girls up here whom we on the quiet go to see. They are very much interested in our welfare and treat us royally. I didn't know how much I was dependent on petticoats for a lot of happiness until I got up here. We had a good many opportunities offered to meet some nice girls but we felt that it would be humiliating to meet nice girls while occupying the position in society of a soldier. Finally, a young girl from Maryland sent us word that she would be pleased to meet us, she didn't care whether we were soldiers or not, the fact that we were Southerners alone made her crazy to meet us. Now, who could resist such a temptation as this, and coming from a girl who was as pretty as a peach!

I have made a discovery since I have been up here that I was ignorant of before, and it is this, that Northerners hold Southerners in very high esteem. In the South we always look rather harshly on a Yankee and I thought they would return the compliment but they don't. Instead, they admire them very much, as I guess you have found out yourself. Perhaps, I am in no position to judge, but our men can certainly lay these in the shade when it comes to doing the polite thing towards a woman.

I am awfully glad to learn of your success in your study of art, and you have my deepest interest in your further development. And I know you to be the girl who will make a success of what you go at for you put your heart in it. It is hard indeed to leave home with its happy surroundings to follow up ones ambition. The road to success is generally very bitter and full of stumps. But once the goal is reached you are amply repaid for your suffering.

It seems you have struck your calling, and fame is in store for you if you just continue to work, work, work without ever allowing yourself to loose [*sic*] heart.

From Lee Hagood

Fort Preble, Portland, Me.

March 29th 1901

Your letter arrived O.K. tonight, and to show you how glad I was to hear from you I have answered so you will get this in the return mail. I had a lot of business letters to write tonight and I came very near leaving them all untouched, so much did you get possession of my thoughts.

The thought however of your thinking of me in connection with “the [Art Students] League Fake Dance” has an awakening influence. It is certainly sweet of you and I could k—s well I won’t say—for it. “Very disgusting. Learned that forwardness from those Yankee girls.” No doubt the above quoted is what you think, but never mind when I get under refining influences I may improve. How much longer will you be in N.Y.? It will be very dreadful if you leave before I pass through. In that case, can’t you manage to visit some friend in Boston? I could get a furlough and we could have a great old time.

So you are going to the Commencement after all. Don’t you worry about it for I am sure you will have a corking good time. Young lady don’t you realize what a stunning woman you have grown to be. Especially when you have on that fifty placket dress. Well, I have to ring off as it is getting late and I might say something foolish like Mr. Reamer if I continue on this subject.

W[illia]m M. Chase to Thomas M. Taylor

The Stratford, Philadelphia

Jan. 7th 1902

Your letter containing a check for \$1000—in payment for your Father’s portrait—reached me yesterday just as I was taking a train for Philadelphia. I thank you for the same. The frame for the picture will be ready by Saturday of this week when I will have it sent to you. In reply to your inquiry as to my coming south this winter, I will try to do so and if I do I shall take great pleasure in painting your Mother’s portrait. I will let you know later when I am likely to go to Charleston.

William M. Chase to Thomas M. Taylor

The Stratford, Philadelphia

Jan. 11th 1902

In reply to your favor of the 9th inst. my price for a copy of your Father’s portrait is \$800. It goes without saying that I could do it better than anyone else. My work would not be a copy but a replica. If you decide to have me do the work, please notify me as soon as you can conveniently so that I may manage my engagements so as not to interfere with the undertaking. The portrait I have painted of your Father meets with very hearty approval

and is considered one of the very best heads I have painted. The picture is in its frame now and looks very handsome. With kind remembrance to your Sister [Nell] and Father.

From Marie-Marguerite Frechette

315 West 58th St., New York

May 19th [1902]

I rejoiced most heartily to hear of your successes, but it is just what I would have expected you to do. And I was so glad to hear that you hadn't given up art altogether for science. I have simply not thought of anything except work this winter, & it has told. You know I began by getting 3 & 4 in concours [*sic*; écorché?], & every month since in Life class have had a pretty good number, & finally ended the year by getting 1. I was awfully surprised, & of course, delighted. In March I began to paint still-life, & fell hopelessly in love with it. It is so satisfactory. Then I tried portraits & got 5 on my first. I am painting half the day now, & part of the time in the Life class as well. Irving Wiles [1861–1948] criticizes the Portrait class, & I like him immensely. He has been very kind to me.

I wish you could have been here for the S.A.A. this spring. It was better than usual. The other exhibitions have been very good, too. Last Monday I went up to the museum [Metropolitan Museum of Art] to hear Mr. Chase talk of the new pictures. (You know they now have [Peter Paul] Reubens' "Holy Family," "The Sower," several very fine Mesoniers [Jean Louis Ernest Meissonier, 1815–91], & a great many other good ones.) He was very interesting but I liked him best when he went back to the [Franz] Hals' portraits, & spoke of them. It was very amusing to see the way visitors gaped at the long group of students who trailed after the important little man & I heard various funny explanations which they made to each other, of what was being done.

I was so glad to hear of your brother's laurels. [John Mead] Howells, as usual(!) seems to be acquiring them, too.* He has just been reappointed for another year, to his demonstratorship. And he is no. 7 instructor in the surveying class as well. He asked after you in a late letter. I should be most charmed, if I can't be a sister to you, to be a cousin and I hope that fate will arrange it.

Anna, is there any possibility of your being in New York next year? I am coming back, & wish so much that we could be together. I expect to paint all next year, & can hardly wait. You know I am a member of the [Art Students] League now, so there are special inducements to come.

* Architect John Mead Howells (1868–1959) was the son of the writer William Dean Howells. Years later he was active in historic preservation in Charleston, South Carolina.

From Marie-Marguerite Frechette

87 MacKay St., Ottawa

June 20th 1902

You are to be congratulated indeed! And I do, most sincerely. A scholarship is ideal, or would be, should it bring you to New York. But even to Philadelphia, it is fine. Still I was

hoping that perhaps you would be back in New York, & that we might be together. Why don't you try & have it transferred to the [William Merritt] Chase school? Aren't both schools under the same management? Oh, I sympathize with you in the talk of marrying by your family, for mine has been talking to me in just the same vein, & it simply maddens me. I wish one could be left alone about that sort of thing. I shall never marry first because I am told it would be a good thing to do, & it just irritates me. You must have had a lovely time in Charleston. I wish I could have seen the pictures. Did you know that the Mr. [I. N. Phelps] Stokes painted by [John Singer] Sargent, is John's [John Mead Howells's] partner? It is perfectly lovely to hear of your brother's successes. "The Professor" is home for a few days & sends his kindest regards to you.

From J. D. Pierce

Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia

July 16, 1902

We regret very much that you find it impossible to accept the Scholarship for the coming season as we feel sure that you would be able to make very rapid progress with your work while here.

I am unable to give you any definite information in regard to the award of a Scholarship after this season. It is probable that the Scholarship to the College for Women will be continued next year but the choice of the candidate would, of course, be left to the authorities of that Institution. I have made a search for your drawings but so far have not been able to find them. I am investigating the matter, however, and if they can be found, I will forward them to you in a few days. It will give me great pleasure to receive you at the Academy Schools whenever you can make it convenient to come, and with best wishes for your success in art.

From Marie-Marguerite Frechette

"The Rockingham," 1748 Broadway, New York

October 5th 1902

Your second letter was waiting for me when I arrived at the League yesterday. I am simply delighted to know that you and Nell are to be here; & what a lively time you will have in Boston. Now Anna, you must let me know just when you are to be here, & where, for you must meet John [Mead Howells] this time; so I can have the South Carolina cousin, (since you won't be a sister to me). When did Miss Morrison expect to be here? Her beloved Du Mond [Frank V. Dumond, 1865–1951] has the morning life classes, but I have seen no sign of her. Walter Appleton Clark [1876–1906] has the Illustration Class & has brought up the attendance tremendously. I am monitor of the Portrait Class, & am only going to work half a day. I am doing some very interesting work beside, that I will tell you about when I see you. I really have not got settled down yet to work for my summer was so glorious that I haven't forgotten it yet. I was in Ottawa until the middle of August and never enjoyed a summer more. Then I went to Jefferson [N.Y.], & had a glimpse of dear old Isabel [Cooper]. She is the same calm old duck, & is settling down quite happily again. She is very busy with

her China-painting, & she has several pupils in drawing. From Jefferson I came to Long Island, where I spent a perfect fortnight with my cousin, Frank Howells. He has a perfectly lovely country place & the house was filled all the time with charming people. Frank is a dear. If I didn't like him so much I might love him.

How lovely that you are to go to Europe next summer. I only wish I could join you. I can't think of anything I would rather do.*

* Frechette addressed this letter to Taylor "C/O Mrs. Oliver Ames, 355 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, Mass."