



MABEL LOOMIS TODD (1856–1932)

Undated photo.

Mabel Loomis Todd:

The Civic Impulses and Civic Engagement of an Accidental Activist

JULIE DOBROW



Abstract: *Today Mabel Loomis Todd is remembered principally as Emily Dickinson's first editor. However, her life and her own work also provide a case study of nineteenth century women's civic engagement. She was involved in a plethora of local and state organizations and utilized her artistic talents to champion many causes. Although some of her civic work occurred within traditional nineteenth century "women's spheres," her environmental activism pushed the boundaries and lay the groundwork for projects her daughter would later complete. This article examines Mabel's personal and professional motivations for civic work, contextualizing it within broader frames of nineteenth century civic engagement and women's social reform and club movements in Massachusetts. Julie Dobrow is the author of the forthcoming mother/daughter biography, *Outside Emily's Door: Mabel Loomis Todd, Millicent Todd Bingham and the Making of America's Greatest Poet* (W.W. Norton and Company, 2017).*

* * * * *

“To those of you who knew her, and remember her vividness, her love of beauty, her ceaseless activity and her joy in the things she did, what she was is undoubtedly more than anything she did . . . But . . . her spirit saw ten ways in which to express itself, for every one that could materialize,”¹ wrote Millicent Todd Bingham in 1934, in memory of her mother, Mabel Loomis Todd and her plethora of projects. The occasion was the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Mary Mattoon chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), one of several organizations in Amherst that Todd had helped to found. Everyone in the small college town was acutely aware of her many local contributions and activities. However, not everyone had positive associations with Todd and her seemingly boundless energies.

Millicent’s efforts to promote her mother’s civic legacies in the mid-1930s came amidst lingering controversies about Todd’s thirteen-year-long extramarital relationship with Austin Dickinson, scion of the venerable Dickinson family and brother of the poet Emily Dickinson, which began in the late 1880s. Millicent sought not only to honor her mother, who had died suddenly in 1932, but also to rehabilitate Todd’s reputation as the pioneering editor of Emily Dickinson’s poetry and letters at a time when Emily’s one surviving family member, niece Martha Dickinson Bianchi, was laying sole claim to Emily’s literary legacies.

In casting her mother as a veritable doyenne of Amherst civic engagement, Millicent wasn’t exactly overstating Todd’s role or the impulses from which her activities emanated.

But Todd was an accidental activist. Unlike some women of her era, she did not set out to become involved with social reform movements, and much of the civic work she undertook perhaps more easily fits under the heading of community organizing. On the other hand, the work she did for numerous local, state, and national organizations constituted social and environmental activism. Examining the influences that led her to become civically engaged, and exploring the forms of her engagement, sheds a new light on the woman most known today principally as either Emily’s editor or Austin’s lover, while also underscoring the forms of civic participation of nineteenth-century women generally.

Todd’s civic activities ranged widely, from the establishment and leadership of local Amherst clubs and organizations to fundraising for social causes to participation on national boards. She used her platforms as a writer and public speaker to promote some of her civic work, and she often utilized her talents as an artist and musician to extend its reach. Although some of

these endeavors were located primarily within traditional “women’s spheres,” Todd pushed the boundaries of stereotypically gendered civic work, laying the groundwork for important environmental activism which was more typically undertaken by men. Her daughter would later affirm and cement her legacy as an environmental pioneer. Some of Todd’s civic impulses were inspired by deeply personal issues of family, love, and social ambition. However, they also developed and were nurtured within larger historical contexts: the general impetus for civic engagement in nineteenth-century Massachusetts, the specific culture of engagement in Amherst, and the growing civic and social activism of women that percolated in the second half of the nineteenth century.

SETTING THE STAGE

As R. Claire Snyder has argued, “During the nineteenth century, both a strong sense of civic virtue (public-spiritedness) and a socially-engaged interpretation of Christianity . . . among economically-secure women spurred them to leave the private realm of the family and take public action with others to address social problems.”² At this time a wave of civic and “women’s benevolent associations” swept across America. The organizational foci diversified as the number of organizations grew. Initially, many women’s civic groups sprang from the Great Awakening and similar religious impulses and were concentrated in the larger cities of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. As of the mid-nineteenth century, they addressed issues ranging from poverty to abolition to education and literacy. By the late nineteenth century, the issues of temperance, immigrant conditions, and Native American and women’s rights also found voice through some of the new civic organizations. No longer just the province of urban areas, women’s civic groups sprang up across the country, in towns large and small.³

Similarly, the women’s club movement of the nineteenth century provided opportunities for an increasingly educated population of women to meet, gather together, and become involved and engaged. Noting that “there are no reliable figures on the numbers of women who joined . . . clubs in the second half of the nineteenth century,” historian Karen Blair has pointed out that this was an era in which club membership was often linked to social movements like suffrage and temperance.⁴ Women’s clubs, even those ostensibly formed to discuss art or literature often became conduits for women to become involved in social and civic causes in their communities. The clubs provided both connections and an infrastructure for women who derived personal satisfaction from their work outside the home. Clubs gave

women the opportunity to further develop their skills and the inspiration to get involved with other issues or causes.

Massachusetts, argues historian Susan Porter, proved an ideal location for the growth of women's civic activities. As a state that had experienced rapid population expansion combined with an enormous economic transformation caused by the shift from agriculture to industrialization and the textile industries, Massachusetts fairly quickly developed a large manufacturing base that required influxes of cheap labor. This paved the way for immigration, but also resulted in significant immigrant "poverty, which in turn spawned social reform movements."⁵ In addition, the large number of educational institutions throughout the Commonwealth, increasingly open to women in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, effectively encouraged the development of progressive ideas and provided fertile ground for work in various social reforms as well as civic engagement opportunities of all kinds for women.

Despite being across the Commonwealth from the civic hub of Boston, many civic organizations were already operating in Amherst in the last half of the nineteenth century. These included the Hampshire Association (formed in the mid-nineteenth century and devoted to discussion of myriad issues including "slavery, intemperance and the Mexican war"), the North Amherst Abolition Society (founded in 1839), a branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) that started in 1876, and the Amherst Indian Association, dedicated to school reform for Native Americans.⁶ Other civic organizations devoted to local issues, such as the Amherst Grange (dedicated to agricultural advocacy and its political and economic ramifications in communities) also flourished. By the 1880s this small town, whose year-round population was just shy of 4,300, was brimming with various civic organizations.

It was within this era of burgeoning organizations and civic issues of different types that Mabel Loomis Todd came to western Massachusetts in the fall of 1881. Amherst, in particular, was a town that provided a civically fertile environment. The 1880s were also a propitious moment due to the increasing opportunities for educated women to convene and utilize their talents through civic work.

PERSONAL MOTIVATIONS FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Arriving in Amherst, Todd initially focused not on civic work, but rather on her fears about being socially and artistically isolated. She and her husband, David Peck Todd, had relocated to Western Massachusetts from Washington, D.C. after David accepted an offer to become an instructor

in astronomy and director of the observatory at his alma mater, Amherst College. An accomplished artist and a talented musician, Todd feared that the small college town would prove too provincial and wouldn't afford the kinds of opportunities and whirlwind social calendar to which she was accustomed. Leaving her eighteen-month-old daughter Millicent behind in the care of her parents did not help matters. But as soon as Todd met Susan and Austin Dickinson, her life quickly began to change.

A nineteenth century "power couple," Susan and Austin were clear leaders in the Amherst social and political culture who stood at the epicenter of its civic world. Susan made their home, The Evergreens, a salon for writers and intellectuals passing through the small college town. Harriet Beecher Stowe, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Helen Hunt Jackson were among those who dined at her table. An art collector and music lover, Susan used her social standing in Amherst to connect her family to the cultural life in town.

Dickinson, for his part, was at the forefront of Amherst civic life. A graduate of Amherst College and Harvard Law School, he maintained a robust legal practice in town and was active in Amherst's public affairs, serving as Town Moderator for fourteen years. He was also a founder of Wildwood Cemetery and succeeded his father as treasurer of Amherst College in 1873. Dickinson was passionate about landscape design; as president of the Amherst Village Improvement Society one of his major coups was to convince Frederick Law Olmsted to design a new plan for the town common. Millicent once reflected that "shrubs seemed as important as people" to him.⁷ Dickinson had a hand in everything from the Amherst Library Association to the First Congregational Church to efforts to bring public water, better roads and lighting to Amherst. He was so much a part of the fabric of the civic life of the community that historian Polly Longworth wrote, "In truth, it was more accurately Austin Dickinson than his poet sister, Emily, who might have used as signature, 'Amherst'."⁸

The attraction between the young Todd (age 25) and the older Dickinson (age 53) was evident soon after they met, though it took a full year for them to admit to one another that they had fallen in love. Once they had done so in the fall of 1882, however, their lives, and the lives of their extended families, forever changed. In the beginning, Todd and Dickinson took great pains to conceal their developing love, exchanging letters delivered inside of folded newspapers and taking long carriage rides off into the countryside of the Pioneer Valley. But their secret did not remain one indefinitely; Dickinson's oldest son, Ned, tipped off his mother, and David Todd was well aware of the developing relationship unfolding between his wife and one of Amherst's most prominent citizens. He did nothing to prevent it, possibly



William Austin Dickinson (1829–1895)

The husband of Susan Dickinson and brother of poet Emily Dickinson was 53 when he met Mabel Loomis Todd, who was 25.

as cover for his own ongoing infidelities, or perhaps because Dickinson, as treasurer of Amherst College, was the person who signed his paychecks. There is some evidence that David went beyond about Mabel and Austin's affair and actually enabled it by suggesting that Dickinson join the Todds in Boston and then departing, by helping Mabel and Dickinson exchange correspondence, and even by cueing them as to his return home from late nights at the observatory by whistling a particular tune as he approached the house (a routine of which their daughter Millicent was aware, but whose significance she failed to grasp until later in her life).

The unorthodox relationship between Todd and Dickinson was certainly something that other residents in the village of Amherst noted as well. Some contemporaneous letters written by Amherst residents allude to it, as Emily Dickinson biographer Richard Sewall noted. In her diaries and journals, Todd discussed the whispers and the subtle ostracism she experienced, attributing without evidence its root not to her own behavior, but to the behind-the-scenes efforts of Susan Dickinson. Perhaps the clearest expression of the widespread intrigue and disapproval members of the local community had about the Todd/Dickinson relationship came after Dickinson's death. Lavinia Dickinson, Emily and Austin's surviving sibling, sued Mabel and David over a strip of land Austin had intended to deed to the Todds. He never executed the deed, and Mabel convinced Lavinia that she should. But Lavinia reneged. The resulting fraud trial in 1897-98 was a sensation, receiving extensive press coverage and attracting many spectators and much speculation. Mrs. Todd and Mr. Dickinson's illicit relationship was a clear subtext in the case, which the Todds eventually lost.⁹

Other works have delineated the personal and familial consequences of this relationship and its eventual effects on the editing and publishing of Emily Dickinson's poetry and letters, as well as the dispersal of her papers.¹⁰ Their affair quickly became public and has been well-documented, for example in Polly Longworth's *Austin and Mabel: The Amherst Affair and Love Letters of Austin Dickinson and Mabel Loomis Todd* (1984) and my own recent study, *Outside Emily's Door: Mabel Loomis Todd, Millicent Todd Bingham and the Making of America's Greatest Poet* (2017).

Perhaps another unintended consequence of their thirteen-year extramarital relationship was the inspiration it gave Todd to engage in a variety of civic endeavors. Interwoven into their extensive letters to one another and the long journal entries Todd penned from the time she met Dickinson until his death in 1895 are frequent indications of the ways in which Todd believed that Dickinson's influence affected and inspired her. "He calls out always my

highest, and meets me exactly at all points of sensitiveness and delicacy and fineness and intensity and strength,” she wrote in her journal in 1885.¹¹

There is no doubt that Todd believed Dickinson brought out the best in her. Her private writings demonstrate her belief that, because of their relationship, Todd wished to improve herself by focusing on her talents and utilizing them for the greater good, within the social and artistic realms that constituted the conventional “women’s sphere” of the era. As a talented painter, for example, Todd sometimes donated artwork to raise money for charitable causes. She was once so moved by a lecture about the plight of Native American children that she organized an art exhibition and raised funds for the Ramona School for Indian girls in Santa Fe, a school endowed by former Amherst resident, author, and Dickinson friend Helen Hunt Jackson with royalties from her novel *Ramona*, which featured a Native American heroine. Todd wrote in her diary in March of 1886, “We trust that all will attend this exhibition . . . in the interest of the school for Indian girls.” She went on to discuss her realization that her artwork could be used to help raise awareness about a cause, as well as raise funds to help support it.¹²

Todd was invested in issues of ethnic and racial equality in other ways as well. She was proud of her grandparents’ involvement with the abolitionist movement in Concord, Massachusetts, which she referred to in her journal on several occasions. But it wasn’t until long after the last shots of the Civil War had been fired that Todd herself became directly involved in promoting equal rights for African Americans. Her daughter Millicent told a story in a 1960 “Reminiscence” about how, in 1892, Todd discovered that “when two Negro boys invited their guests to Commencement . . . southern boys refused to go to the promenade if the Negro couples were permitted to attend.” Millicent goes on, “Having heard this, “my mother invited them as our houseguests . . . along with Katherine Garrison, granddaughter of William Lloyd Garrison – and had a reception” for them.¹³

It is clear that at least some of Todd’s civic work was undertaken because she felt that it would be of central interest to Dickinson, and this consideration influenced her even after his death in 1895. For instance, when she helped to create the Amherst Historical Society in 1899, her diary records that Dickinson would have heartily applauded this effort to “keep together and permanently, the relics and monuments of his dear town.”¹⁴ On numerous other occasions, Todd noted in her private writings that she viewed her work on behalf of the Historical Society, and her various civic endeavors, as having been inspired by her love for Dickinson.

Todd might also have become involved with various civic endeavors in Amherst because she viewed them as a vehicle for upward social mobility.

Indeed, contemporary research on the motivation behind civic engagement indicates that, for some, such activism provides a high sense of personal efficacy, a sense that one's actions matter. The impetus to civic engagement may also emanate from the belief or perception that it will align one with a high social status.¹⁵ Despite the rather humble economic circumstances in which Todd grew up and into which she married, she always aspired to something greater. She believed that because her matrilineal lineage could be traced straight back to John and Priscilla Alden, her family's social status should have been more "noble" than their economic circumstances suggested. Millicent Todd Bingham later wrote, in an unpublished paper entitled "The New England Way," that Todd's deep interest in civic work came from the Puritan roots her family so extolled. With that proud heritage came a sense of responsibility: "In the New England code, the rule that went deepest was this: do the best you can in any situation, irrespective of its importance, especially if the interests of other people are involved."¹⁶

A perfect example of the way in which Todd viewed her civic work as rooted in her background and related to her social aspirations was her work to create the Mary Mattoon chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) in Amherst. Founded in 1890 with the purpose of recognizing the "mothers of the Revolution" and "anyone who can prove lineal descent from a patriot of the American Revolution," the DAR was initially billed as a parallel organization to the Sons of the American Revolution, created a year earlier.¹⁷ But soon, as historian Carolyn Strange explains:

The DAR and its sibling lineal patriotic societies, which emerged alongside it in the Gilded Age, were proselytizers of Revolutionary ancestor worship, which harmonized strategically with the era's retrogressive tone of patriotism. . . . As the meanings of blood multiplied, DAR members managed their blood identity by spotlighting the character and deeds of white founding heroes, and by following their example as nation-builders and defenders . . . the DAR helped fulfill white America's dream of rebirth after the Civil War by investing privately in blood and by trading publicly in character.¹⁸

Todd applied for membership in the DAR in 1894. She was soon confirmed as a Regent for a proposed chapter in Amherst, a position she held until 1903. She worked with others to organize this chapter, and convened its first meeting in January of 1895. In 1896, they named it "the Mary Mattoon Chapter in honor of the wife of Gen. Ebenezer Mattoon Jr., by far



The Strong House

The Strong House is the current home of the Amherst Historical Society and the Mary Mattoon Chapter of the DAR. Mabel Loomis Todd founded the chapter in 1895; it was named for the wife of a Revolutionary War general in 1896. Undated photo.

the most distinguished figure here during the revolution.”¹⁹ Todd worked tirelessly to secure a home for the nascent organization. Deciding that the Emerson homestead, one of the oldest buildings in Amherst, would be the most appropriate location, she wrote to several hundred friends and alumni of Amherst College and raised sufficient funds to procure the ell in the house for the “Mary Mattoon room.” Todd also worked to ensure that when the last surviving members of the Emerson family died, they made provisions in their wills to leave the house to the Amherst Historical Society so that the local DAR chapter could continue to meet there.²⁰ As a result, Todd practically and symbolically linked Amherst’s history with the Mary Mattoon chapter and its historical vision.

By 1897, Todd was already being recognized for her DAR work, an accolade she found “very gratifying.” “I am assailed on all sides to accept the nomination of State Regent,” she wrote in her diary in her typical manner. “The Boston ladies are determined upon it, and seem to be absolutely unanimous. They have already sent my name to Washington.”²¹ By the early 1900s, Todd, who had already made a name for herself as an excellent public speaker through her lectures on subjects ranging from her work on Emily Dickinson’s poetry to her world travels, also became an acclaimed spokeswoman for the DAR and gave many talks to various chapters. For Todd, DAR volunteer work was an important affirmation of the lineage she so revered, a way to connect herself to a social class to which she aspired to belong through civic engagement, and also a way to align herself with Austin Dickinson, whose social status she admired and whose love had inspired her. Even years after his death, Todd was painfully, poignantly cognizant of what her civic engagement would have meant to a man whose civic work so defined his life. “It makes my heart ache to think how splendidly my Austin recorded every effort I am making,” she wrote of her frenetic involvement in the Amherst Historical Society, the Mary Mattoon chapter, and the various clubs she had helped to found or had chaired.²²

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND PROFESSIONAL ASPIRATIONS

Although any number of Todd’s civic activities might have been rooted in her personal desire to do what she believed Dickinson would most value and to align herself with organizations as a perceived step toward upward social mobility, Todd also became involved with a host of local and state organizations because she viewed them as vehicles for her own professional aspirations. For instance, her work helping to organize the Amherst Woman’s Club in 1893 gave her an additional platform for speaking about her editing of Emily Dickinson’s poetry and other topics. Additionally, it facilitated her election to the state board of the Federation of Clubs, where she was able to network with members of wealthy families who could be “of use” to her in her own work, as she noted in her diary.

Of all her many activities and talents, the one Todd most wished to be remembered for was her writing. Around the turn of the century, she found another way to integrate her professional ambitions with her civic work. At a tea Todd hosted, she had a conversation with author May Alden Ward and journalist Helen Winslow which led to the formation of the Boston Authors Club, an organization that honored books and authors with Boston-area ties. Todd was one of the original officers of the BAC, along with Julia

Ward Howe, who hosted the first meeting at her home in Boston's Back Bay in 1900. The BAC's rules about membership included "resident" and "non-resident" author categories, the latter extending out in a one hundred-mile radius, which was clearly meant as a way of including people like Todd.²³ And Todd clearly wished to maintain her ties with the BAC, which she did for many years. It was not only a venue for getting together with like-minded people, but also a way of gaining recognition as an author. In fact, Todd continued as a BAC member for years even after she moved to Florida in 1917.

For Todd, as for many educated women of the late nineteenth century, the women's club movement was a socially acceptable form of civic engagement. Historian Karen Blair writes:

Women's hegemony over the world of culture was the result of a calculated effort to extend female influence into extra-domestic realms. . . . Considering the restrictions under which nineteenth century women labored, their goals were not modest and their success was extraordinary. The members of the literary clubs supported the growth of women.

Clubs also enabled women to gather together within socially accepted realms.²⁴ Mabel Loomis Todd's work with the Boston Authors Club, her roles as founder and founding president of local clubs in Amherst having to do with music and theater, as well as her work with the Amherst Woman's Club and the DAR, all gave her new platforms to exercise her considerable talents and to advance them. They allowed her to generate additional contacts and exercise her public speaking skills in a way that that benefitted both her sense of self and her career, and to be civically involved within the social, literary and artistic realms that were conventional and accepted for women in the late nineteenth century.

STEPPING OUT OF THE "WOMAN'S SPHERE"

But not all of Todd's civic work took place within the socially sanctioned sphere of traditionally gendered activities. A nature lover from earliest childhood, Todd, like John Muir, one of the nation's most preeminent philosopher/naturalist and environmental conservationist who inspired her, believed that preserving the environment was not only an ecological imperative, but a moral obligation.

Millicent Todd Bingham noted after her mother's death that "Mrs. Todd's love of fine trees sometimes led her into efforts which used up a good deal of her time." This included articles Todd wrote about the need to preserve forests, meetings she convened on behalf of saving various tracts of land around Amherst, and her service as chair of the Executive Committee of the Forestry Association. Presciently, in 1934 Millicent wrote, "I sometimes feel that the memorial she would value most would be a forest."²⁵

In 1909 Todd purchased an eighty-acre tract of land in Pelham, just outside of Amherst. "Pelham Knob," as it was known, was land that she and Dickinson had traversed many times. Keeping it safe from development was something Todd thought of as helping to preserve part of the Amherst that was so much a part of Dickinson's heritage and legacy. Years after his death, Todd believed this was a way of honoring the man she still thought of as her true soul mate.

Around the same time, Todd first laid eyes on Hog Island during a trip off the coast of Maine in Muscongus Bay. Bingham later wrote an essay titled "The Story of Hog Island" in which she told the story of Todd's interest in the island:

My mother, Mabel Loomis Todd, was a woman of wide interests and talents artistic, literary, civic and social – but most of all she was interested in the world of nature and in the preservation of forests and their wild inhabitants. As it happened, a short time before their visit . . . one of the strips of forest on Hog Island was cut. . . . There were threats that the entire island might be similarly cut over. My mother was shocked. "Oh," she exclaimed, "they must not destroy any more of it! This island is too wonderful, it must be preserved, what CAN we do about it?"²⁶

Todd thought she knew what to do. In 1909, she embarked on a complicated scheme that involved persuading her friend Edna Glidden, along with others, to purchase some parcels of land on the island. Todd and her husband David bought other parts of it. By the end of the year, Todd and associates were finalizing the deeds to three hundred acres of land in all. The Todds eventually gained majority ownership and control of the island. In the middle of that first summer, Todd wrote in her journal about how "dizzily busy" she had been, including her agreement to purchase half of Hog Island, which, she noted, "is a wonderful place, and Millicent was deeply interested."²⁷

Indeed, after Todd's death in 1932, her daughter knew that perhaps the greatest tribute to her mother would be to find ways of making her environmental protection efforts permanent. It took many years to achieve this, but Bingham eventually gave the parcel of land Todd had purchased in Pelham, Massachusetts, to Amherst College and deeded Hog Island to the National Audubon Society in perpetuity. When the "Mabel Loomis Todd Forest" officially became the property of Amherst College in 1961 for the purpose of providing a "living ecology laboratory" for students, President Calvin Plimpton noted, "the preserve's beauty is readily apparent, its aesthetic value is more than equaled by its importance to the ecologist . . . we can now proceed in the future with the certainty that it will remain undisturbed."²⁸

The island in Maine that Todd had wished to preserve "because she loved great trees most of all," as Bingham recalled, became the Audubon Hog Island Camp for Adult Leaders. Opening in 1936, the camp operated on the notion, radical at the time, that the best way to preserve the environment was to teach teachers ways to convey environmental knowledge to students experientially. The land purchases Todd made in the early part of the twentieth century may be seen as acts of civic engagement that went beyond those in which she had participated before. Outside of the "women's spheres" of art, literature, entertainment or the club world, Todd's early love of nature grew into a more sophisticated vision akin to John Muir's: the preservation of trees meant the preservation of environments. Without having the language to describe it precisely, Todd knew that saving forests meant saving the ecosystems within them. This became clear not only from Todd's desire to save forest areas in Massachusetts and Maine, but also from her work with the Audubon Society in Florida (where she resided for part of each year) and her leadership of a group committed to preserving the Everglades.

LEADERSHIP AND LEGACIES

In her paper about Todd's contributions, Millicent Todd Bingham stated:

Nowadays we should call it leadership – that quality by which any woman in the town who had anything to give was marshaled into line for service which was thenceforth rendered not grudgingly, under compulsion, but gladly, for the sake of the cause in question. As Mrs. Mills . . . said to me the other day, "Your mother was so inspiring – she got us all going."²⁹

Millicent was right – Todd was always elected chair or president of every organization of which she was a part.

Contemporary theorists in different disciplines have addressed the interesting question Millicent Todd Bingham implicitly raised years ago: why is it that someone like her mother was consistently elected or appointed to leadership roles in nearly every civic organization of which she was a part? One recent study suggests that there are ten personal characteristics that tend to define leadership; these include vision, enthusiasm, persistence, and excellent communication skills. In another study, researchers suggested that the same kind of flexibility, organization and willingness to divide labor that characterizes good team management also marks a good leader. A sociological study found that people with “applicable skills, available time and aligned motivations” are the ones most likely to seek and retain leadership positions.³⁰ Certainly all of these things could be said of Todd Loomis Todd.

The early impetus for Mabel Loomis Todd’s civic engagement was clearly intensely personal: her love and respect for Austin Dickinson, her belief in the importance of her lineage, and her desire to fortify her identity by aligning herself with people of a higher social status than her own. But Todd’s civic work was also born within the context of the era in which she lived and the prevailing social movements of the day. Although some of her work took place within the context of women’s clubs or through the arts or other societally sanctioned women’s realms, her later work pushed these boundaries. Her personal attributes of leadership, organization, and drive, as well as her many artistic and literary talents, thrust her into the forefront of many organizations. Todd, the accidental activist, was also in the right place at the right time. As Polly Longworth wrote, “The dominant note of the late nineteenth century was uplift, improvement, a belief that mankind, and Amherst in the bargain, was on the threshold of a better world of its own making.”³¹

HJM

Notes

1. Millicent Todd Bingham, “Contributions of Mabel Loomis Todd to the Town of Amherst,” Nov. 1, 1934, p. 1, Box 157, Folder 46, Millicent Todd Bingham Papers, MS 496D, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, New Haven, CT (hereafter cited as Bingham Papers).
2. R. Claire Snyder, “Radical civic virtue: women in nineteenth-century civil

- society,” *New Political Science*, 26:1(2004): 51-69.
3. Keith Melder, “Ladies Bountiful: Organized Women’s Benevolence in Early Nineteenth-Century America,” *New York History* 48:3 (July 1967): 231-254.
 4. Karen Blair, “The Clubwoman as Feminist: The Woman’s Culture Club Movement in the United States, 1868-1914” (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 1976), 144.
 5. Susan L. Porter, “Introduction,” in *Women of the Commonwealth* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 4.
 6. Edward L. Carpenter and Charles F. Morehouse, *The History of the Town of Amherst, Massachusetts* (Amherst, MA: Press of Carpenter and Morehouse, 1896).
 7. Millicent Todd Bingham, “Notes on William Austin Dickinson’s Diaries,” Bingham Papers, series VII, box 102, folder 254.
 8. Polly Longworth, “The Growth of Civic Consciousness,” in *Essays on Amherst’s History*, ed. Theodore Greene (Amherst, MA: Vista Press, 1978), 153.
 9. See Richard B. Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Mabel Loomis Todd, “Journal” and “Diary,” various dates, Mabel Loomis Todd Papers, MS 496C, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, New Haven, CT (hereafter cited as Todd Papers); *Lavinia N. Dickinson v. Mabel Loomis Todd et al.*, The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Hampshire County Superior Court. 1897.
 10. See, for example, Polly Longworth, *Austin and Mabel: The Amherst Affair and Love Letters of Austin Dickinson and Mabel Loomis Todd* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1984); Julie Dobrow, *Outside Emily’s Door: Mabel Loomis Todd, Millicent Todd Bingham and the Making of America’s Greatest Poet* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2017).
 11. Todd, “Journal”, 11 May 1885, Todd Papers, series II, box 45, reel 7.
 12. Todd, “Diary,” March 1886, Todd Papers, series III, box 46, reel 8.
 13. Millicent Todd Bingham, “Reminiscences,” Todd Papers, series II, box 46, reel 10.
 14. Todd, “Diary,” 16 August 1899, Todd Papers, series III, box 40, reel 2.
 15. Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman and Henry Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).
 16. Millicent Todd Bingham, “The New England Way,” April 1949, p. x, Box 157, Folder 58, Bingham Papers.
 17. Daughters of the American Revolution, <http://www.dar.org/national-society/about-dar/dar-history> (accessed January 14, 2017).
 18. Carolyn Strange, “Sisterhood of Blood: The Will to Descend and the Formation of the Daughters of the American Revolution,” *Journal of Women’s History* 26 (3) (Fall 2014): 121.

19. Mabel Loomis Todd, quoted in Bingham, "Contributions of Mabel Loomis Todd," 21.
20. The Amherst Historical society still owns this building, and the current Mary Mattoon chapter of the DAR still meets in this location.
21. Todd, "Diary," 1 January 1897, Todd Papers, series III, box 47, reel 9.
22. Todd, "Journal," 10 November 1899, Todd Papers, series III, box 47, reel 9.
23. Boston Authors Club Collection, Thomas Wentworth Higginson Papers, Special Collections, Boston Public Library.
24. Blair, 161.
25. Bingham, "Contributions of Mabel Loomis Todd," 19.
26. Millicent Todd Bingham, "The Story of Hog Island," 1936, Bingham Papers, series VI, box 118, 71-72.
27. Todd, "Journal," 25 July 1909, Todd Papers, series III, box 43, reel 5.
28. Mabel Loomis Todd Forest dedication ceremony pamphlet, 21 May 1961, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections.
29. Bingham, "Contributions of Mabel Loomis Todd," 17.
30. James A. Tompkins, "The Characteristics of Leadership," *Material Handling Engineering* 48:11 (1993); Victor S. Sohern, "Leadership and Teamwork: Two Sides of the Same Coin," *Journal of Informational Technology and Economic Development* 4:2 (October 2013); Matthew Baggetta, Hahrie Han and Kenneth T. Andrews, "Leading Associations: How Individual Characteristics and Team Dynamics Generate Committed Leaders," *American Sociological Review* 78:4 (2013).
31. Longworth, 163.