

*The Sarah Morgan Bryan Piatt Recovery Project*

Interview about Sarah Piatt with Margaret Piatt by Dr. Elizabeth Renker  
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**ER:** This is Professor Elizabeth Renker from The Ohio State University Department of English. It is Saturday, February 27, shortly after noon, and I am talking to my friend and colleague Margaret Piatt, who is the director of Piatt Castle Mac-A-Chee out in West Liberty, Ohio. We're talking today as part of our series of oral histories about the recently recovered woman writer and American poet Sarah Morgan Bryan Piatt. Sarah's acquisition of the name Piatt came through marriage, of course. She was not born into the Piatt family, she married into the Piatt family. Her husband, John James Piatt, was often known as J.J., and J.J. was a first cousin to Donn with two n's, D-O-N-N, and Abram Piatt, who lived at the town where Margaret now resides. And one of the things Margaret's going to talk to us about today is her family connection to the Piatts, to the family that Sarah married into. And so, please allow me to introduce Margaret. Margaret, thank you very much for talking with us today.

**MP:** You're most welcome. I'm delighted.

**ER:** Now, I thought for starters, Margaret, maybe you could tell us a little bit about the Piatt Castle, a little bit about the family and the land, and then we'll move into talking about how Sarah entered the family.

**MP:** Great, I'd love to. Let's start with the land. It's a very beautiful landscape near West Liberty, hilly with a pretty stream that runs through it, that was named Mecoche from the Shawnee people who had lived here before. And my great-great-great grandfather Benjamin Piatt who lived in Cincinnati actually ended up receiving a parcel of land as a result of a law fee. So he came up and looked at this land. He had grown up on a farm in New Jersey. He thought he wanted to return middle-aged to some type of agricultural life, so he began selling land in Cincinnati and buying parcels around this other piece that he received. He ended up with a 1700-acre farm that included a gristmill, a sawmill, a large orchard, tenant houses, all kinds of activities. He was an entrepreneur and a lawyer who kept a law firm in Cincinnati as well as one here. So that's the land. He and his wife named their farm Mac-O-Cheek, and they anglicized it with hyphens and changed the spelling. Of course, no one knows. The Shawnee didn't spell it, and I can't really pronounce it in the correct way. But it was written as "Mecoche," and then they turned that to Mac-O-Cheek. And they built a relatively modest home, and that's where they brought their family in 1828. So, Abram, who was their 10<sup>th</sup> child, and Donn just before him. So Abram and Donn were the youngest two, and I'm descended from Abram. So, every generation of Abram's descendants, most of them grew up on this land, including me.

**ER:** Wow. So, one of the things I'll mention for our listeners today, is that one of the ways you ended up coming into this whole story about the rediscovery of Sarah Piatt is simply by way of the shared last name. So I thought I would mention to our listeners that—and then we'll back

up into more of the history—as someone who has been teaching Piatt now for 20 years, and teaching her as a writer that mostly people have not heard of before, and of course that’s because she fell out of history, and so she’s among this group of women writers who are undergoing very energetic recoveries now, and people are very interested in those stories of loss and recovery. But one of the things I’ve noticed over the past 20 years teaching Piatt and talking to people about her, is people in Ohio will often correct how I’m pronouncing the name. They recognize through the way I talk that I’m not an Ohio native. And I’m not, I’m from New York, although believe it or not, I’ve lost a lot of my accent. They can tell I’m an outsider and they say, “Well, here we say it Piatt (PIE-it).” And what I usually say to them, and this comes from my own work with the first-wave of Piatt scholars, including Paula Bennett and Larry Michaels, and also just from getting to know you, Margaret, over the past 20 years, is that in the academic world where Sarah Piatt has been rediscovered, everyone says Piatt (PEE-aht). So as Sarah becomes a canonical writer, she’s becoming canonical under that pronunciation of the family name. But I say to my students, I *know* a Piatt descendant and here in Ohio this family says Piatt (PEE-aht). So Margaret, I’m throwing it to you, please tell us about the pronunciation debates.

**MP:** It’s a conversation I’ve probably had about a billion times.

**ER:** [laughs] I bet, me too!

**MP:** Well, you know growing up here, there was the divide already. Some of the descendants said Piatt (PEE-aht) and some of the descendants said Piatt (PIE-it), and in both camps, some of them were capable of getting quite riled up on the topic.

**ER:** Oh, nice. Interesting.

**MP:** Yes, and I never really enjoyed that debate, but we were often referred to as snobbish for using the pronunciation of Piatt (PEE-aht). My father would retort that that was the French pronunciation, and that the family came from France, so in his mind that was the correct pronunciation. Now, I have come to believe that nobody can pronounce their own name incorrectly.

**ER:** Yes, that’s my take.

**MP:** So, however you choose to pronounce it is fine. And, as a young person, I moved to Massachusetts, so also like you, I got away from the Piatt (PIE-it) sound. My brother moved to California, and one thing that was interesting to us was that in both of our experiences for all the decades which we lived in those other states on the coasts, everybody we met either said Piatt (PEE-aht) or they said, “How do you pronounce your name?” So nobody said Piatt (PIE-it). But then I began to observe that it wasn’t only Ohio but Indiana and Illinois, the whole sort of midwestern section, they said Piatt (PIE-it). And then later on in life, I learned that there are a lot of origins for this name. There’s an Italian name, Piatti, with two t’s and an i.

**ER:** Sure.

**MP:** The French name is P-I-A-T, not with a double t. We do know that the original Piatt—or who knows, they make a big deal about the *original* Piatt like there was only one ever who came to this country. But, John, they called him John of France. He left France and lived for a period of time in Holland, where there is the name P-Y-A-T, P-Y-O-T, you know, PIE-at, Pie-aht. So when we end up with a name that has two t's and an i—ia, two t's—I don't quite know if the second t would change the way the double vowel sound is made. But you know, we have Pyat, Pyot, Piatt, Piatti. It just seems like there's a lot of variation. So I came to believe that it was more cultural and that maybe more people in the central Midwest said Piatt (PIE-att) because there were more people here who had come from Dutch and German ancestry and so that sounded more correct to them. Now, I cannot prove this theory, but this is something I came to wonder. But ultimately, I have just said to anybody who asks, you know, there's just a lot of different ways to say a name.

**ER:** Yeah, okay, that's so helpful. And I have to say my thinking about it, of course as an outsider to the family, but someone who cares about how we introduce Sarah to the public, I'm really compelled by your account, which is nobody can mispronounce their own name. And you are a direct descendant of Abram, and Abram was J.J.'s first cousin. And do you think it's extremely likely that the pronunciation you inherited came through your dad and his ancestors, and so on?

**MP:** Well, I think it comes from my dad, and then one of the things I wonder about is the generation before that. I know a little about my grandparents. They died in the influenza epidemic.

**ER:** Wow. Oh, how timely today.

**MP:** I know, I know. I feel it all the time. And he was raised by his two aunts. Listen to me say aunt (ahnt), that's not how you say it in Ohio. [laughs] He was raised by them, and I have had people come up and say, "Well you know, they said Piatt (PIE-it)," and I've heard other people say "Well you know, they said Piatt (PEE-aht)." So, I don't know, I think that, in some ways, people enjoy continuing on the debate and the argument. But my father was pretty vehement about it being Piatt (PEE-aht). Some have suggested to me that it was my mother who wanted the French pronunciation, and if that is true, I have to say, she would be smiling upon me right now, because she was an English professor. And so, if through another English professor, her pronunciation, wins, well, I think she would be very, very happy.

**ER:** [Laughs]

**MP:** But I would say, one of the things I can think of is, as persuasive as my mother could be, it's hard for me to believe that she could convince my father *and* his brother to change the pronunciation of their names to satisfy her. So, all I could say is that all three of them—my father's brother lived with us—so I was raised with these three adults, and they also Piatt (PEE-aht). So that's what I say. And I'll also admit, quickly, that I don't really know what Sarah and J.J. said. I don't know what Donn and Abram said. I don't know how this split occurred. And I

wouldn't think that it was so important if it were just what other people said, but if you ask descendants, some of Abram's descendants say Piatt (PIE-it) and some say Piatt (PEE-aht).

**ER:** Interesting.

**MP:** I would love to know how that split occurred. And at one point I said to my daughter, whose last name is Piatt-Eckert with a hyphen, I said to her, "If we learn someday, that Donn and Abram and the ones we study all the time really said Piatt (PIE-it), what do you think we should do?" And she said, "I'm still a Piatt (PEE-aht)." Well I'm taking it to my grave, too.

**ER:** We're going to consider that the final word, at least for today.

**MP:** All right.

**ER:** And, of course, Margaret, I'll just say for our listeners, you and I are in regular touch as new family letters turn up and so on as part of this recovery. If I ever stumble on anything where people are talking about pronunciation in a letter we hadn't known about, I will be sure to share it.

**MP:** May I interject something? There *is* one thing. There is a cartoon of Donn Piatt, a derogatory cartoon by [Thomas] Nast—the famous cartoonist Nast—in which he calls him "Donn the Pirate." And that made me wonder, because "pirate" sounds a lot more like "Piatt" (PIE-it) than it does like "Piatt" (PEE-aht).

**ER:** Very interesting.

**MP:** So that's the thing that first made me question my mother and father's dominance in their pronunciation. But I still think, you know, it was a French family, and so I'm keeping the French pronunciation.

**ER:** All right, well, let's go on to our next topic, then. This is often in these interviews one of the early questions I ask everybody, which is: you're a public historian, Margaret, and you're living there on these lands that belonged to family members, but how did you first become aware that Sarah Piatt was somebody? And tell us that story, it's always very interesting to listeners.

**MP:** I will, I feel like I almost always knew it. Well, when I talked before about Benjamin and Elizabeth and their land, their two sons, Donn and Abram. When Donn and Abram were middle-aged adults, they each built large Victorian homes on this land made out of limestone, which was quarried from the farm. So, these are mostly organic buildings, in a sense that they sit on hilltops on ridges opposite each other with a beautiful valley between them, with a wonderful creek, which ends up being in lots of the poetry and paintings that are part of what we have here. And they named their homes Mac-O-Cheek and Mac-O-Chee, so further derivations of that original Shawnee word. And so these homes, I mean they're Victorian houses, but because they're stone and they have towers and they sit on hills, they looked to people like castles. So early on, they were referred to Piatt's Castle or Piatt's Castles.

**ER:** What year are we talking about? What year were they built?

**MP:** The older one, the one where I am sitting right now, was started in 1864 and finished in 1871, and that was Abram's home. Abram was married. He had eight children, his wife died, the Civil War began, he fought in the war, and he came back to return to farming. He remarried and then he built this house. So it was in the later part—he was 50 years old when it was finished. Actually, it was finished 150 years ago this year.

**ER:** Oh, exciting.

**MP:** And he was 50 at the time. So, he's the younger brother, but he built his home first. Now, his older brother Donn, who was the well-known writer, Donn had a small piece of the family estate. When the farm got divided, Abram got the lion's share, as he went into farming. Donn traveled extensively, lived in other places, and had a small portion of where he built a home he named Mac-O-Chee. And then, his first wife died, he later married again, spent time in Washington, DC, and at some point, decided he was going to retire from that public life, and then he came back and added a stone front onto this lovely Gothic cottage that had been built before. And so the Gothic cottage was built in 1866. The stone front with two towers was begun in 1879 and finished in 1881. So the quick answer is they were finished 10 years apart. So they're very contemporary, but they have very different styles to them. To many people, they look the same because the stone unifies them, but their outside, their architectural details are different, and their interior designs are different. So my family, my father and uncle, ended up being the two who owned this building, and they were already the third generation to give tours of this house. Sometimes when I talk to our visitors, I will say, "Think of it as a family with seven generations on a piece of land. Five generations lived in this building, but four of them lived in it while it was open for tours." And at that point, it stops being normal. That's just an unusual way to grow up. It's a self-conscious way to grow up, I would say.

Now Mac-O-Chee had a very different history. Donn and Ella did not have any children. Donn died, and Ella, his widow, kept it for a few years. Ella Kirby Piatt, I should say, she was a remarkable person that we'd love to have more people discover her drawings and her interests, her influences. She kept the building for a few years and then sold it and built another house, and then gave that away, and built another house. Ella loved architecture. And then, towards the end of her life, she ended up in the original house with her husband's nephew's family, and for that reason her papers came here, a lot of her possessions came here, a lot of things that belonged to Donn and Ella came here. Meanwhile, the building, the first owner had it as a sanitarium for people to go and relax. It was not a tuberculosis sanitarium, it was for people who were suffering for neurasthenia or stress. It was lovely. You could play croquet, you could relax, you could read, you could chat. That only lasted for a few years, that was Dr. Solomon from Columbus. When he died, the property was sold to a man named Graham Denmead, who was a farmer, who was interested in the farmland. He didn't really have an intention with the building, but by that time Mac-O-Chee had already opened for tours, so eventually Mr. Denmead gave in and opened Mac-O-Chee for tours as well. And I think, all while my father was

growing up, there was this quest to have both buildings, to tell the stories of the two families together. That finally became available in 1956 when the next owner, a wonderful, interesting woman named Cameron Turner, who was a collector, and she purchased the building from Mr. Denmead. He kept the farmland, but she purchased four acres around the building as a museum, and as a museum of her collections of things. When she died, my parents and uncle bought the property—the four acres and Mac-O-Chee—and I was at that time, five years old.

The first time—I mean, I am not aware of remembering the building before then, but I do remember going over to Mac-O-Chee while they were settling the deal, and playing outside and exploring the rocks and really enjoying it. It wasn't too much later than that, maybe by the time I was six or seven years old, that they had opened it up for tours. And there in the library ceiling were four portraits, and I was told—as a six-year-old, with great authority—I was told that one of them was Bret Harte, who was a very popular writer, and I should read him someday. And the other three were family members: Donn's first wife Louise, who was a writer, his cousin John James, and John James's wife Sarah, and they were both poets. So one of my earliest memories was to look at those paintings in the ceiling and be told these people were poets. I didn't really think what that meant to me, but in retrospect, being told these people are important *because they're poets* is really pretty nice.

**ER:** Wow, that's great. Especially for me, you know with my book of poetry, it's really exciting to hear that story. Do we know who painted those?

**MP:** Oliver Frey was the fresco artist, and he actually painted the ceilings in both buildings. Now, he didn't work alone, he had a crew. I can't verify that he was the one who did the portraits because, they're portraits, they're not stencil designs or trompe l'oeil designs or any of the other kind of methods that he used in both buildings. It is the *only* space in these two buildings with multiple rooms that had fresco art. It is the only one that has portraits in it, and they're clearly in the library.

**ER:** Do we have any, is there any record, any comment by Abram or Donn about deciding to paint those portraits?

**MP:** I have not found it. I frequently read and reread and go back to sections of the original biography written about Donn, which his widow, Ella, commissioned, and it was published through Belford, his publisher—

**ER:** I'm just looking at my bookshelf quickly, because I was going to pull that out. Are you talking about the Miller biography?

**MP:** Yes.

**ER:** Okay. Yes, and of course let's just mention, for those who are interested, that we have a recent biography of Donn by Peter Bridges.

**MP:** Yes. The original biography has a whole chapter on Mac-O-Chee, and it does describe many details, but it doesn't really say anything about the portraits. Then Peter Bridges, who became interested in Donn because of Donn's brief work with the American legation in France in the 1850s. Peter was interested in ambassadors, he was writing about ambassadors, thought Donn was a complicated and interesting fellow and decided to write a biography. This is so wonderful for all of us, because he went all over the country looking up sources about Donn. Now Donn was his subject, but, of course, in the process, he brought to light a lot of other documents that have helped us in a number of ways.

**ER:** Yes, and before we turn back to the question about—I appreciate hearing that story about when you first heard about Sarah when you were just a child. We'll come back to that in a second. But let me just mention, because this is an opportune moment, that when we look back at the Piatt family members and in-laws and descendants and so on, the point you're making about Donn and what an influential writer he was in his own day. He's another figure who has fallen out of cultural memory and *really* deserves to be rediscovered and discussed. And so that's one of the reasons why I think that Peter Bridges biography is just such a great addition to what we know. And let me just add now, because we're about to turn to Sarah and J.J. You know, J.J. was a diplomat. Eventually, he was sent by the United States government as U.S. Consul to Cork, Ireland. And because he and Sarah already had multiple children who moved with them to Ireland, several of their sons stayed behind when Sarah and J.J. came back in 1893. They also became diplomats. An Irish scholar has published an important essay—this goes back to what you were saying about Peter Bridges—about the diplomatic service in Ireland and the Piatts come up in her story. So, in that case it's not only J.J., it's also several of their sons. There's this whole international world that the Piatts were involved in with diplomacy and journalism and so on. It is just so interesting, and their stories well worth telling.

**MP:** I think, so too.

**ER:** And I'll share in case I haven't said it to you, that I was having a discussion at one point with a Civil War historian. I mentioned who I was working on and he said, "Is that the Donn Piatt family?" And I said "Yes," and he said, "Oh, Donn Piatt was at the center of everything in that era and nobody knows who he is anymore." Anyway, let's come back to Sarah now. So you had heard Sarah's name as a little kid because of those portraits. Then tell us the story about how during the "Sarah Piatt is a great poet" rediscovery period, you started hearing her name in a new way.

**MP:** Well, you know, I said her name a lot of times because I became a teenage tour guide.

**ER:** Ahh, okay.

**MP:** And that's an important part of my life. I didn't really like history. I liked story, I liked literature, I liked storytelling, I liked theater. I didn't like history. I thought it might be because I was forced to pretend to like it, but in fact, I said these words over and over again, so I can't even tell you how many times I told other people that she was a well-known poet in the 19th

century. Occasionally, I would poke around in the library and Howe's *History of Ohio* [Historical Collections of Ohio by Henry Howe] has a little profile on J.J. and Sarah, so that that gave me some confidence I wasn't just lying, because by the time I was a teenager I began to believe that my father exaggerated. In fact, he told me once that Donn Piatt was famous, and I just decided that might not be true. And I will come back to what you asked, but let me just digress for a second.

Many years later, when I began looking at primary sources and came across a scrapbook that Ella had kept of obituaries of Donn, and they were published in every major newspaper in the United States, all the way to California, Oregon, you know, everywhere. I suddenly thought Donn Piatt was famous, and Daddy did not exaggerate, so these other poets must be great, too. Well, when I got out of high school, I just wanted to get away from this as fast as possible. After college I went to Massachusetts, where I thought I would teach or direct theater, that was my passion and my subject matter, not history. I ended up finding a job at Old Sturbridge Village, which is a living history museum in Sturbridge, Massachusetts, and I just *fell* for the place. We were an excellent match. I stayed there for a while and went to graduate school, worked in other places, and then came back. I just mention that because I spent 20 years working in that museum, and I felt a strong association with the place for 35 years.

During that time period, right after college, I joined a literary group. We were afraid that now that we were out of college, we would not continue to read. So we joined this group, and we took turns picking pieces. I started that in '73, came back after graduate school, joined it again, it was still going. It is *still* going. It has been going since 1973, and I miss it. But in 1990 we read a mystery. It was a story by A. S. B—excuse me, I'm sorry—

**ER:** A. S. Byatt?

**MP:** A. S. Byatt [*Possession*], and I was so taken with it because I actually really love English murder mysteries. But the two main characters in this were an American and an English scholar, who were chasing around after some important documents trying to discover important information about individuals, and it eventually gets them connected, working as a team. They arrive at this large stone mansion on a hillside in the country where some strange, ancient descendants live. They come to this place, and they knock on the door, and they want to talk to the descendants. The descendants, who have gotten sick of people wanting to come and talk to them, bar the door and will not let them in.

**ER:** [laughs]

**MP:** I remember when we read this in my literature group, I said—because by that point, I had embraced the love of scholarship and I worked with lots of historians and I realized I adored history. I understood that all of this that I had grown up with had a lot more complexity to it than I knew, and I kind of craved to get back into it at some point. I said to my friends, “Someday, some scholars are going to come to *my* door, and I'm going to let them in.” That was



really the beginning, because Paula Bennett came to my door. I wasn't at the door. I was still in Massachusetts, but she came to me. I'm trying to remember how she even approached me—

**ER:** Well, you know I can share what Paula has told me, if you would like to hear that story.

**MP:** I would, I'd love to hear it.

**ER:** Yes, and let's remind our listeners, too, because so much of this oral history series is about, you know, how do you acquire knowledge? What does it mean, especially when you're talking about something like a recovery project like this, where basically nobody knows anything, and you have to reach back into the past. How do you acquire knowledge? I mean, it's a such an important question, and especially when there's kind of a default understanding, I think, among a lot of people today, that the way you do that is you just Google it. Of course, most stuff isn't on Google, right? So, how do you create knowledge? Now, we're all historians, we're all interested in literary history, and American history, and world history and so on, when we end up doing these interviews. I just want to flag the fact that, right now, what I'm stating is not something I experienced. I'm telling a story that I got from Paula Bennett. And when I tell the story, Margaret, we'll see if it's the way you remember it, too.

**MP:** It'll help me remember it.

**ER:** I'll also mention that my colleague, Curator Jolie Braun, also interviewed me for this series, and I told the story about how I came to start working on Sarah Piatt and how I met Paula Bennett. Paula Bennett's story is that she was taking a road trip and driving across the state of Ohio, stopped at a fast-food restaurant. In the stack of brochures on the table, you know, with the salt and pepper shakers, there was a brochure for Piatt Castles.

**MP:** [laughs] I don't think I knew that.

**ER:** She already had her eye on Sarah Piatt, and she picked up the brochure. She now says she thinks it was fate. She picked up the brochure, and she thought, "I have to get in touch with these people and see if there's a connection with Sarah." That was what led her to you. That's Paula's story.

**MR:** All right, that's really interesting. That is *so* interesting.

**ER:** She may not have talked about the brochure when she actually contacted you, but that's the story she told me.

**MP:** Well, you know, I don't remember the brochure part, but I really love that. If the pronunciation of Piatt would make my mother happy, a brochure on the highway would make my father happy. [laughs] Because he was a total tourist booster, and you can't promote enough. So, there you go. Another little part that I recall: there was a scholar at Sturbridge named Caroline Sloat, who left to go work at the American Antiquarian Society. And I think that she had known about my willingness to open the doors to scholars. Paula went there at the point when Caroline was working there, and I think Caroline had only recently begun. She was

greeting Paula and they were organizing how her first day was going to be. And then Paula mentioned to her that she was studying Sarah Piatt. Caroline was so excited and so thrilled, and she had heard that story and then she knew me, and so I remember, there was that connection, too.

I feel like I had a live conversation with Paula, but I think it was actually years before that happened. She and I began to communicate and, of course, at that time, my father had died. My brother was in charge, but he wasn't living here, either. We had resident managers, and so I made arrangements with them to let her in. So all the time that she was here. We had started an archive, I mean that had happened earlier, my brother and some of his friends had really just gone through the third floor and begun gathering things. Both of us shared this quest to want to know more. Then in a phase of a project that we called "Get the Documents out of the Dirt," we both eventually began trying to organize things and then moving to have an archive. If that hadn't already started, I'm not sure that Paula would have had too much to look at, but she came here, and she began going through Donn Piatt's, probably *The Capital*, which was his Washington, DC newspaper, but also probably the *Mac-a-Cheek Press* to some degree, and any other of his papers that we had. So, it started with Paula, and then—I *do* not like to admit that my memory is now failing me, because I used to be so sharp on these kinds of details—but through her, I think did I come to you next or to Larry Michaels next?

**ER:** Yeah, let's talk a little bit for our listeners who might not have been able to listen to all the other interviews yet. But it turns out that several researchers and scholars, independently of one another—this is an important part of the story—*independently of one another*, but all around the same time got interested in Sarah Piatt, and they *all* pegged her as what one of them called the "Great undiscovered poet of the American 19th century." Now, this is a fantastic story. My students love it. They say, "Why? Why did this all happen at the same time?" And I say, all I can do about that is speculate. My hunch is that, first of all, you already had, starting really with a lot of energy in the early 1980s during the canon wars, you had this robust effort to go back into the past looking for women writers who had fallen out of history. By the mid-90s, which is when this happened, when independently people start saying all these women writers are important, but *this* one is important in a unique way. That's the mid-90s. And my own hunch is that there had been enough recovery by that point that people had started to recognize patterns in women's voicing and so on, and saw the ways that Sarah was different.

But whatever was the case, around the mid-90s, you had several people independently honing in on Sarah. Larry R. Michaels published a selected edition of Sarah's poems in 1999. Paula Bernat Bennett, who was also working on a selected edition of Sarah's poems, published hers in 2001. And a faculty member at Dartmouth and one of his undergraduate students—this is also a great story—so this is William Spengemann at Dartmouth and his undergraduate student Jessica Roberts, who will be doing an interview in this series, an upcoming one. As an undergraduate, she was working with Spengemann as her advisor. One of the things this led to

was not only Jess Roberts's undergraduate thesis, but they co-authored a Penguin paperback edition of 19<sup>th</sup>-century American poets and included a section of Piatt, and that's 1996. All these things happened at the same time. It's a great story, and I say to my students, the only analogy I can give you from history is that all the histories of mathematics say that the calculus—they call it "*The Calculus*,"—which I love, the calculus was independently discovered at the same time by Leibniz and Newton. First of all, as a non-mathematician, I love the idea that something in math is discovered and also, they discovered it at the same time. So that's my analogy for what happened with Sarah. So, Larry, I can only guess, Margaret, but I'd like to hear your recollections. My thought is with the dates that those editions came out, Bennett's in 2001, Larry's in 1999, they *must* have been coming to the Castles around the same time.

**MP:** I think, well, I think the Paula was here earlier.

**ER:** Oh, okay.

**MP:** I think she was because I don't recall ever being here when she was here, and I do recall being here with Larry.

**ER:** I see, okay.

**MP:** But one other thing I want to say, it just goes back to that novel *Possession*, because there were those scholars who came to the same topic at the same time and that's in 1990, and then here we have the reality matching the literature of the 90s. But I think that your analysis of the rediscovery of women's poets makes great sense, too. I think the 90s were a really important time in my life, where I became more and more engaged in thinking about women's history and the anti-slavery movement and the suffragette movement, and so much of those were the topics that we were exploring at Old Sturbridge Village. But then I always still loved the literature, and so this all just, it just kept expanding. Now I had a really busy life at that time, but already my husband and I were focused on the fact that at some point, and before we hit the bicentennial of Ohio statehood, some point by then we were going to move to Ohio. So also in 1999, we bought the house next door to Mac-O-Chee, and this is a house that had connections to the property, which I don't need to go into, but we bought it, and Jim began working on it in 1999 and spending more time out here, and then we moved in February of 2002. I had stopped working at Sturbridge Village and worked as an educational consultant. In the late 90s, and in the early aughts, I traveled a lot and had a lot more free time to come here. And my mother was here in a nursing home and not very well, so I came to Ohio often, and I think when one of those times I met Larry, and to meet Larry is to love Larry.

**ER:** Yes, absolutely. [they laugh]

**MP:** He is such a deep and kind person, and so I was quite taken with him. My real love is public programming, and I think of myself as a museum educator, and this is the blend of history and theater. So I always want to try to figure out how to make things happen, and how to make things happen in historic settings is even more exciting. I do recall that we very early on—and I

don't recall the date, but it was probably around that time—we invited Larry to do a poetry reading. It was after we moved here, and I know we were living in the house next door, so it was after 2002. It was in the summertime, and it was a very dramatic moment because we were going to have it on the west side of Mac-O-Chee where the sun would be setting, and it had been a very dry summer, and it never rained at all. About 30 minutes before we were to begin, the fellow who lives up on the hill came down and told me that the *Farmers' Almanac* said it was going to rain, and I poo-pahed it because there was a blue sky. Then five minutes before we were to begin, the sky blackened. So we rushed all the chairs inside the building, and I instantly figured out how to do this. I filled up this large front hall and a secondary hall and put Larry at the apex with the doors open to the sunset, and Larry began to recite poetry. He had such a beautiful manner. I'd never seen this done before, where he would read some of it, step out of it, explain a little bit, but never too much, just enough, to keep you in the rhythm of the poem and then take you back to it.

**ER:** He does that.

**MP:** He was reciting a poem, and I don't know which one was. Maybe Elizabeth who has his book here is going to be looking it up. But he was talking about Sarah on some level defying God for taking her children away from her. And he was discussing how, through these poems, she addressed topics that women weren't supposed to write about, weren't supposed to say. I was so taken with this. And he just came to a line about her saying in essence God doesn't need my children, I need my children. And at that moment, BOOM! There was this giant crash, and the lights went out in the building. And because I had closed the doors to the rooms—because I didn't want people distracted looking into the rooms—this entire audience is sitting in total darkness. Larry, without missing a beat, said a little joke about maybe God was listening, and then he went over to the door and finished the poetry reading with the light as we sat during this thunderstorm. So that was my first of many Sarah Piatt public programs at Mac-O-Chee.

**ER:** Wow, that's an outstanding story. You're right, I was ferreting in my books while you were telling that story, because one of the things that I've started doing in these interviews is, as people recall different poems, a lot of times I say, "Oh, I think, maybe I know the one you're talking about." And it gives us a chance to introduce listeners to some of the poems. As you know, in our public culture today a lot of people are unfamiliar with poetry, and so this is a great opportunity to get them connected with some of Sarah's individual poems and why they're so great. So I'm pretty sure, Margaret, that the poem you're talking about is one called "No Help." It's a poem that I know—Larry is of course a dear friend and colleague of mine—and I know that Larry *really* loves this poem in particular. The context in the poem is that the speaker of the poem has lost an infant, and it's a poem of mourning and it's a poem of rage against God. I think the lines that you're recalling, Margaret, possibly, tell me if the sounds right. At the end of the poem, the speaker says, "...do I want a little angel? No, / I want my Baby." She's responding here to the standard consolations of the day when you suffered the

loss of a child, which was, of course, extremely common at this time, that people would offer the Christian consolation that your child was in heaven.

**MP:** Yes.

**ER:** And Sarah's rejecting that. Does this sound like the right one?

**MP:** Absolutely. And it goes back to what I was describing, his reading style. Because I remember the line as you say it, but then I remember him commenting on it, and it was absolutely the sort of rage of "Don't you tell me that this is what God wants." But Larry would read the line and then pause and let you *feel* it—

**ER:** Yeah.

**MP:** —And then he would comment on it by just sort of restating it, and I've so blended his style together in my memory of that experience because I was with Sarah on this argument, but we weren't sure what the thunderclap and the blackness meant. But it turned out to be really an interesting night. And another thing I'd like to say about Larry: he was really the first one to introduce me to the individual poems. It's because he's just such a gifted and natural teacher. We made the discovery that my daughter and Sarah Piatt were born on the same day, August 11, and he was very sweet about that. Then, he would start suggesting a poem that maybe she would like, depending on how old she was at the time that we would talk about this. There was one called—I think that she was in high school—and there was a poem about a dress, a dance dress.

**ER:** "Her First Party." It's a great poem.

**MP:** It's a very great poem. He made a copy of that and gave it to me to give to her from him, which was also so smart because she was a teenager so she liked it because it wasn't from me. But it's really about a mother and daughter, and it's very funny. Another one that he told me about is "The Ghost." We developed a literature-based Halloween program at Mac-O-Chee that was called "Ghosts and Goblins: Literature to Scare and Delight." We frequently, if almost every year, performed "The Ghost" in one way or another, and it's also a quite enchanting poem that helps you discover where fear really is.

**ER:** Well, this is another opportunity to make another comment about the poem about the party, in different publications it was called "The First Party" or "Her First Party," but it is hilarious. It is not only really deep, *very* deep about the relationship between a mother and a daughter, but it's *funny*. And I want to say that to our listeners, because you know we just talked about a poem of tremendous grief and mourning, and Sarah's an incredibly intense person: very emotionally deep, very emotionally aware. She writes out of those depths, but she's also hysterically funny, and you see the range in her poems. It's another way of remembering, she was a popular poet. I mean, she spoke to her age, and these are some of the kinds of voices we can bring back to readers today, and they find that very powerful. But, Margaret, I want to back up a minute to something you said a few minutes ago. It came out of

you, naturally, as an inhabitant of the family home, but our listeners won't know what you meant. You said something like, "Paula went up to the third floor."

**MP:** Okay. [laughs]

**ER:** I've been on the third floor, tell us about the third floor. It sounds like there might be ghosts there!

**MP:** Oh well, there probably are. Well, again, to help people to not get too confused between the buildings, and I say that because people who are standing there get confused between the two buildings. So, Mac-O-Chee is the home where Donn lived, and that's where Larry gave the poetry reading and we had this dramatic experience. I think we'll want to come back to that and talk about some of the other programs related to Sarah's poetry that we had at Mac-O-Chee.

**ER:** Good idea.

**MP:** Now, Mac-O-Cheek is the first castle where the multiple generations lived, and it's an interesting building. It's sort of a blocky kind of building. It has three floors, and there's some sections that have sort of low ceilings with two floors, other sections that have high ceilings with two floors, and then one section that has a third floor, and then a tower. It would be a good castle to make out of Legos, because it's just very blocky, and the heights of it keep changing. Its real design comes in the roof treatments, which are these sorts of empire-style roofs with windows that come out of slate sided slants.

The third floor is one large room, and we don't know what the original intention was. We do know that Abram Piatt, who was an active member in the Grange, held his Grange meetings in this room. One of the things I've learned from other sources is that oftentimes before there were many public calls, wealthier people who had big houses would often have a large room that became a place where people gathered for meetings. It was often on a second floor. We've wondered if in fact this wasn't why he wanted this on the third floor. Because I've since learned there was a big debate going on in town about the fact that there was no excellent hall to meet in. That eventually led to building an opera house. But at any rate, he had this large room, and it had a platform in the middle of it against one wall, maybe about eight inches up, so it was like a little bit of a stage. The strange thing about it, though: it was never finished. By that I mean, there's plaster walls, but they were never painted. They were never painted, they were never wallpapered, they were never decorated. It's not clear even how often it was used, maybe because that opera house was built. I never thought of that until I said that. We know the Grange went up there, and you get to the third floor by going up the tower. It's really an interesting, circular stairs that goes around a water tank that fed to a really early bathroom, and it's just such an interesting combination of art and science, you know, as you go up to this third floor.

Very early on it became the attic. If you start to examine the walls, you see that there's lots of Abram's grandchildren and great-grandchildren who wrote on the walls, and that stopped around 1909, right after Abram died. So, I'm curious about that, I'm curious if kids played up there, and it didn't become an attic until later. So I am still trying to understand that room. But it was above-ground archaeology, absolutely, because the older things were farther back and the newer things were later, including my things. So, there were just trunks of stuff. It would almost be like anybody else: you have something you don't want to throw away, you don't know what to do with it, you put it in a box and you put it in the attic. It's just that this space doesn't feel like an attic in some ways because it has about a 12-foot ceiling and it has these wonderful windows all around it. You look at it and imagine what a great New York loft this would be. It's still a fabulous space that has a future, I hope, that is beyond just storage. We've begun in fits and spurts to try to get all these documents out of there, and so much of it had gone into the archive that I described before. But there are still things, so Susan and Larry [Michaels] and others have come down and have helped us several times a year, just try to bring more things down. In the last couple of years we've probably brought about 500 more documents down. Most of these that we've looked at—I would really say all of these we've looked at—have been from later generations. There's an awful lot of material from the 1920s and 30s, which is interesting to me now, because I'm trying to write a history of the two castles as museums.

**ER:** Oh, outstanding.

**MP:** That's sort of my retirement job. But these are materials for that, but we keep hoping we're going to find more about Sarah and J.J., but we haven't yet. So, that's the third floor.

**ER:** One of my questions about that, and again as you know, I've been out and been in that space, we spent some days looking through boxes and trunks. Let's turn for a minute, if we can, to *The Capital*. Now, you mentioned earlier that Paula came out and looked at *The Capital*, and we can see that the Paula Bennett Papers are in our archive here at Ohio State, generously donated by Paula. One of the things you can see in those records is Paula and her graduate students, including Pamela Kincheloe, whom I hope to interview for this series as well, working on poems. Poems of Sarah's that Donn published in *The Capital*, including poems on the first page. I'm realizing, Margaret, one of the things I don't know about that story is when—and I know Larry also worked with *The Capital* poems at the Castles—but did you already know that *The Capital* was up there? I mean, did you point them to *The Capital*, or did they find it, or how did that go?

**MP:** Well, actually *The Capital* wasn't on the third floor.

**ER:** Oh, it wasn't.

**MP:** So they didn't go up there. The archive has been on the second floor, and initially, it was in the back section of the house where I am now and where we lived when I was growing up, and then those spaces later became offices.

**ER:** Okay.

**MP:** But *The Capital*, I knew about *The Capital* because there was a pile of these bound newspapers on the floor, and on top of the pile was a box. I don't know what these are called, but it's a box that had drawers with glass fronts, to hold different kinds of paper, foolscap and so forth. In a photograph that was taken for Donn's biography, it shows his den in Mac-O-Chee, and this box is in that photograph. And so, at some point, I think a detail I missed was the between—after college and a few years of working in the museum, and then after graduate school, and before the next job, I was back here for about a year. And that's when I started looking at the at the primary sources. I started looking at these photographs, and looking at what we had, and realizing that all of my life, this stack of newspapers had been in a corner in an exhibit room, in a room that people walked through, with this box on top of it. As terrible as that sounds, that box really in some ways helped because that weight holding it kept the dust out of these newspapers.

And I went to graduate school in Washington, DC. I went to George Washington for museum education, and I went to the Library of Congress to look up *The Capital* at that point. So, I already by that point was focused on Donn and his life in Washington, and *The Capital* being an important newspaper. And I knew that we had copies, and I knew they had copies, and I didn't think there were many anywhere else. The other newspapers that were in there were the *Mac-O-Cheek Press*. Now, there was one copy that my father always had out on exhibit, so we talked about that on tour in Mac-O-Cheek, and he would mention that Donn had this other paper called *The Capital*. So, at some point, we got the box off, we got them up off the floor, and we got them into the archive, and that's actually where Paula and Larry looked at them.

**ER:** I see. Okay, and so one thing I want to add at this point in our talk, both about *The Capital* and about something else you just referred to, the *Mac-O-Cheek Press*. Going back to what we said earlier about knowledge: how do we build knowledge, where does it come from? Let's mention for our listeners that *The Capital* is an extremely rare newspaper. Very few copies of it have survived. And I mentioned earlier that I entered the story of the Piatt recovery as what I call a second-wave scholar. I was standing on the shoulders of people like Paula Bennett and Larry and William Spengemann and Jess Roberts and so on. And after we were fortunate enough here at the Rare Books & Manuscripts Library at Ohio State to acquire Paula Bennett's research papers, followed by Larry Michaels's research papers, I turned to Paula at one point, I was trying to build these library collections and I said to Paula, "What should I do next?" And the very first thing Paula said to me was, "Get *The Capital*."

So, now, Margaret, you already know this story, but our listeners don't. I came to you because *The Capital*—there is not a substantial run of *The Capital* anywhere in the world, except for at your house. [they laugh] This is a great story to tell people about knowledge. So I came to you, as you know, and you very generously loaned us your full run of *The Capital* which exists nowhere else, just scattered issues here and there. You've got the whole thing. I don't know if you remember this, but it's a story I'll never forget. I was out at the Castles one day to research



with you, and as I was leaving, you said, “Wait a minute. I’ve got *The Capital* for you!” And you had all the boxes for me to take home in my Volvo station wagon. And when I got home—that was a Friday—and I tell people when I got home, I was so aware that I had this unique archive, irreplaceable, and I couldn’t deliver it to the library until Monday morning. So I put it in a spot in my house with tarps under and over it and multiple layers of protection in case there was some sort of surprise leak in my house or something like that. But then the Libraries was able to digitize that, and it’s now available free to the public, thanks to you. So please allow me to publicly thank you, Margaret. Irreplaceable and so important in Sarah’s early career, as well as a rare, important document about Donn’s life and about Reconstruction politics in Washington, DC.

**MP:** Oh, I take your thanks, and I’m so appreciative. Having worked in professional museums, I realize in some ways what a mom and pop, two-bit place the Castles are, but I also realize what amazing gems they are, and it’s always been sort of frustrating to me. And this is what happened when I worked in all these other museums, I kept thinking: we have everything. We have all these stories, we have all these documents, we have all these objects. And what we just don’t have is the funding to run this as a more professional museum. And, if I can do nothing else but to get some of these papers into a more public way. So as awful as it sounds, and I’m just saying, “Here take these, put them in your car, go away.” I thought of you as more responsible than me. [they laugh] This woman will get to where they need to go! Right?

**ER:** Because you were willing to lend them to us, I mean, we now have this—it’s a contribution to history. It’s a treasure for the ages that’s out there for everybody now and free through the Ohio State University Libraries, so thank you again. And I wonder, because you and I have talked about this, you also just mentioned *Mac-a-Cheek Press*. Could you talk a little bit about what that is, that’s another one of these rare newspapers.

**MP:** I wish I had it in front of me, what the line is. It’s a family journal. *Mac-a-Cheek Press* was published by Donn and Abram at different times. It’s still a little confusing about who was in charge, when and where it was located. But Donn had some journalistic experience with his own paper before the *Mac-a-Cheek Press*, and then this is a family newspaper that they publish, and it’s about agriculture and politics and literature and general intelligence. I remember, after they go through this whole list of other subjects, “general intelligence,” like, because of everything else. So, it’s a wonderful kind of hodgepodge, and, you know, they wrote a lot of the material themselves, and it’s not always clear when it’s their voice, because they used other names. We tend to think that Donn did more than Abram, but I’m not sure we’re really correct about that. It was apparently located in different buildings at different times, we’re still trying to figure this out. I’ve been through our copies many times just in trying to learn more about local history, because it was a West Liberty newspaper, so there are ads. I’ve worked with the local historical society, there’s all kinds of information of who’s selling what, when, and that’s interesting. And then these fascinating political arguments and debates and discussions, so it’s a pretty wonderful piece. I remember when we celebrated 100 years of tours, we called it “A

Century of Tours.” I asked my daughter, who was by that time, a young adult, if she wouldn’t do a blog for us, and she didn’t initially want to. Then I was saying something about the *Mac-a-Cheek Press* and she said “So it was their own newspaper?” And then she said, “It’s a blog!” So, I now tell people it was their blog. This was how Abram and Donn got to tell anybody who they could get to what they thought, and of course J.J. worked on the *Mac-a-Cheek Press* and so...

**ER:** Yes. This has been a topic you and I have talked about multiple times just recently, and Ohio State is hoping to digitize the *Mac-a-Cheek Press*, another one of these publications that doesn’t exist anywhere else. So, I think we have a lot more to learn about that, and I’m very curious. I don’t know if you know anything about this at the present time, I don’t, but I’m very curious about how that paper might have circulated, how far the circulation might have gone.

**MP:** I don’t know how far the circulation went. I have a sense that it was regional but not beyond that. But I don’t really know that.

**ER:** But we might know more about that in the coming years.

**MP:** Maybe so. And, yes, we’re really pleased to have this. I’m having a little harder time letting this one go just because I keep looking things up in it. But they’re all boxed and ready, so they are ready. We’re now much more professional, so we make arrangements with the Rare Books Library, and we work with the archivists, but still Jim and I have taken things in our car down and dropped them off, so you know.

**ER:** That’s a high point for me, that day with my Volvo, getting to deliver that stuff and get that project moving. Now, let’s talk about some other projects we’ve done together, Margaret. How about that series of salons that you’ve run?

**MP:** Well, the salons are great because, again I say I love public programming, and partly I’ve been able to keep the Castles vibrant by seeking program grants. Rather, we weren’t really in a position to be seeking research grants. I was for six years on the board of the Ohio Humanities, and so one time I was going to be at a board meeting when Larry was coming down to speak to your students, I think, and so we, and Larry and his wife Suzi, the four of us decided we would have breakfast before your classes and my board meeting. I just remember a really wonderful restaurant, and we didn’t have very long, and we were flitting around on lots of different subjects. I do recall, we talked quite a lot about Reconstruction and our sort of frustrations at the lack of serious research on Reconstruction in so many different ways. By that point, I had been here for a while and had pretty much gotten sucked into all of these different topics that I wanted to know more and more about, and that was a strong one for me. So, I remember that, and then I was trying to say, “Shouldn’t we do some kind of program?” And this was hard, because each of us are thinking about that in different ways. Then it was in April, I believe, and we spontaneously decided we were just going to have this program, and we were going to do it over Memorial Day weekend because I had a grant that would give free admission, and we had picked a day for free admission. My big struggle as one running a museum is that I don’t want to close the museum, but on the other hand, we wanted to have discussions, and you offered

your graduate students to come and do their presentations. We kind of worked it out, so really, within 10 minutes we came up with this concept, and a date that was remarkably soon. I went home and kind of put it together, that's what I do, you know, put it together and figured it out. In my concern about keeping people out of a room too long, because I felt like, if people could be listening to the students and discussing this material actually in these rooms, it would be more poignant. But I didn't want to close the rooms for hours, so I decided that every speaker needed to be in a different room and we needed to keep moving around. Now, that just sounds ridiculous on some level, but it was so wonderful. I remember that they'd start in the library, then there would be 15-minute presentations, then people would talk for five or six minutes, and everybody would get up and go upstairs to another room. I remember at one point, walking upstairs, maybe for the second time, and hearing one of the participants say to another one, "I think I would have liked college better if I could get up and move every 20 minutes." [They laugh] That was funny, and it really became that.

I think we decided to call it a salon because that seemed like the perfect word, connecting what would have happened in the past and what happened in the present. At that point my daughter Kate was here, and she loves to design, so she designed a poster and called it "The Salon at Mac-O-Chee," and we pulled it off. It was our Free Admission Day, and hundreds of people came to the Castle that day. It was astonishing. This was in the afternoon, and I remember your students came, and they'd never been here before, and they couldn't believe there were this many people in this historic house museum. Most of the ones who participated in the salon came just for that, but I think we picked up a few extras and there would be some who would go to one session and not all of them, and some who stayed for all six, so we spontaneously created a format. Then a few years later, after you'd been to Ireland—isn't that the time you'd been to Ireland—

**ER:** Yes.

**MP:** —And we decided this would be a nice format for you to share your research, and you should talk a little bit about Sean [Sean Andres, Piatt researcher]. This is like a buddy film where people just keep adding on [they laugh]. Sean had added on at that point, and I remember he talked, so we did a second one.

Then, we come to the really sad circumstance that my husband, daughter, and I—we had faced long before the second salon was that we were really not able to keep both of these buildings, because we couldn't keep up with the maintenance. We couldn't keep up with the maintenance, let alone the restoration. So we had made a decision that we were going to sell Mac-O-Chee, and it was an easier sell than Mac-O-Cheek because it had been sold before. It was hard for me to give up the most dominant and interesting character, you know? If I look at it like a dramatist, Donn's the star of this property. Abram is a great man, and you know, plowed a lot of fields, but Donn is the political rabblouser. So we made a decision that we were keeping all of the Piatt family furnishings and all the papers. So anything that had been in Mac-O-Chee we brought back over to Mac-O-Cheek, and of course I had a lot of fears about

selling it. Fortunately, the people who bought it are working on restoring it. I'll come back to that in a second, but I just felt we had to do it in case we never got to do one again. We had to do the third salon at Mac-O-Chee, which we did very close to the end of our time there. I think that we sold it on October 19.

**ER:** Yes, the auction date was already established when we did the last salon there.

**MP:** Yeah, and so I think that was a little bit painful for all of us.

**ER:** It was hard.

**MP:** And I always felt that, if possible, I wanted you to speak in the library, so you could be under the portrait of Sarah.

**ER:** Thank you so much. Actually, for our listeners, Margaret, can you tell us: is there an image of those ceiling portraits of Sarah and J.J.? Were you able to get a nice image of that before leaving that could be accessible to a public viewer?

**MP:** Absolutely, yes. We took photographs of everything, and we have a lot of material.

**ER:** Yeah. All right, well, I have a couple of other things on my mind before we run out of time. And if you'd like to turn to any topics we haven't gotten to, let's do that as well. You mentioned a minute ago, Donn is a dramatic character compared to Abram. Do you have any records or family lore that indicates anything about that relationship? Was Abram a more private person? You mentioned he had fought in the Civil War. Do we know what unit he was in and things like that?

**MP:** We actually know a great deal about that information, and I should use this as an opportunity to say that on May 21, which is the 200th year since Abram was born, we are opening this building for free in that afternoon—it's a Friday afternoon—and we are going to be addressing Abram's life as a soldier, a farmer, an influencer, and a family man. Because he did also speak and he did write, and he wrote poetry, and he became a Grange lecturer and was quite interested in progressive farming.

Ella [Kirby Piatt] is of course influencing this [Donn's] biography, but it is filled with the connections for how close they were. One of my favorite quotes in this though, says that they're young boys together, they're separated for a lot of their adult life, they're older men living in these mansions a mile apart, and there is a reference to them walking or riding their horses to see each other in the afternoons and sitting in each other's libraries and arguing about politics. Both sides of the family truly, then and now, love politics and like talking about it.

**ER:** When I came out last time around and looked at your copies of the *Mac-a-Cheek Press*—and thank you again for allowing me to work with them—I was really struck with how involved Abram was with *Mac-a-Cheek Press*. Donn is famous as a journalist, but there was Abram, very much hands on with that paper, so I'm glad you're having a program about Abram, and I look

forward to learning more about him, as I work more in that newspaper which I hope to do in the coming years.

**MP:** Yes. I believe they were close, and I never liked it, people who have jumped to conclusions that they're competitive about buildings. I don't see competition between them. I see them as very complimentary.

**ER:** Sorry, we had to take a brief technical break. Margaret and I were just talking about the cultural appropriation issues as they come up with talking about these lands, and so Margaret let's get back into that topic.

**MP:** Well, it's a very important one to all of us, and, you know, I think the first step, as I said, is we're admitting it. We're calling it that. That's what it is. We are, right now, engaged in an interesting research project related to a cabinet of curiosities put in the Castle when it was first opened for tours by Abram's son. It is filled with artifacts connected to Indigenous people, and we are working to understand these artifacts and interpret the cultures that produced them, the experiences of those people. That has never been done here. We are approaching that. We have a Shawnee elder that we have worked with. We have grappled with the language, trying to get rid of the myths. Many of them started by my family, and you know, the legends. I can't say enough how important it is to me to be honest about the fact that the only reason I ended up here, or that any of these people we have been talking about had these fascinating lives on this farm, is because the United States government killed the Shawnee people who were here. And took the land from them. And that's the truth, so I present it that way.

**ER:** Well, what a timely topic. I could imagine some really great programming coming out of that, great programming for the general public as well as for scholars. Because we're starting to wrap up now, Margaret, I just wanted to share quickly that I don't know if you're familiar with this poem by Sarah—there's no reason you would be—but Paula Bennett's edition included only several poems, three poems that Sarah published before she married J.J. At that time, she was still Sallie Bryan and publishing—she was a celebrity poet in her age—publishing in two of the most important national newspapers of the time, *The Louisville Daily Journal* and *The New York Ledger*. Paula has later said that she thinks the single biggest mistake she made early in the Piatt recovery is that she didn't take the Sallie Bryan poems seriously. She thought of them as juvenilia, and later she came to realize that that was a big mistake, and these are very important poems. We at Ohio State have been digitizing the early poems. We've digitized all the poems in *The New York Ledger*, they're available free to the public. We would like to digitize *The Louisville Daily Journal* poems but again, very, very hard to find. I am not aware of *any* print copies left of that newspaper unless they're in somebody's attic. There is microfilm in one place that cannot be borrowed, and I can't go work with it until the pandemic's over.

But the reason I want to mention this now, is one of the three poems Paula included in her edition—and she chose it because Paula's entire argument about Sarah is that she was essentially a political poet—is a poem she published in *The Louisville Daily Journal* in 1857. Let's

note: she's 21. She crashed onto the scene in *The Louisville Daily Journal* at 17, right? At 17! Major national newspaper of the west. Anyway, this poem is called "The Indian's Inquiry," and it's a political poem about Indigenous people. I'll send it to you later, Margaret. She's writing this as a 17-year-old woman in Kentucky, who is a descendant, in various complicated genealogical ways, who has a complicated lineage by marriage, multiple times with Daniel Boone.

**MP:** Wow.

**ER:** And whose white ancestors came across the Cumberland Gap with Daniel Boone, and she knows it. There are other poems later, where she reflects on that that legacy in Kentucky, which was known as "the dark and bloody ground." So I just want to mention that poem since the topic came up. I really look forward to that programming, Margaret, and I'm sure I'm going to learn a lot from it, as will our other listeners. We know this, Margaret, we've known each other for a long time, we could just talk for hours and hours about all these topics. We have to wrap up and go live our lives and let our listeners go back to their jobs and so on. But thank you so much for spending time with us today on all this.

**MP:** You are so welcome, and thank you for asking me. It's really been a privilege.

**ER:** And I think, unless you have any final words, Margaret, we will wrap up for today, and thanks again for all your support for the projects we're building at Ohio State.

**MP:** Oh, I'm grateful to you.

**ER:** All right, Margaret, thank you so much. Bye, bye!

**MP:** Bye.