

A Spirit in the Hills:

Alice Van Leer Carrick at Dartmouth, 1901-1930

Mary Ann H. Harris

Independent Study -- Mary Kelley

March 12, 1982

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To Margaret and Chince,
With many thanks for all
your help and support with
this project. And with love -
MaryAnn

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Alice Van Leer Carrick lived in Hanover from 1901 when she arrived as the bride of Dartmouth professor Prescott Orde Skinner until her death six decades later, in 1961. In her first thirty years in Hanover she raised three children and published more than 100 articles and six books on early American houses, furniture, and decorative arts. She became known for her expertise in documenting the authenticity of antiques. She was in demand from New Hampshire to Texas as a lecturer on her experiences collecting antiques which she characterized as "high, incomparable adventures." ¹

Despite her prolific writing career Alice Van Leer Carrick has been invisible historically. She was described by Francis Lane Childs in his lecture-pamphlet Webster Cottage and Those Who Lived There but she received no mention in The History of Dartmouth College, The College on the Hill, nor in The Hanover Bicentennial Book. ² In this anonymity she shares the fate of many other Hanover women whose husbands paraded prominently through Dartmouth's past. The few women mentioned by historians either played supporting roles as wives and daughters of Dartmouth presidents or were notably eccentric town characters. The absence of women's names in local histories emphasizes that in the life of Dartmouth College women's stories have had their setting in the homes, not the halls, of the community.

As the wife of a Dartmouth professor and the mother of children growing up in Hanover, Alice was part of the female, home-oriented culture. But in her dedication to a career which took her beyond the home she set herself apart from other faculty wives. She further deviated from accepted female roles by her interest in women's rights and her belief that women's lives, both historical and contemporary,

were as important as men's. She was an early advocate for recognition and definition of women's contribution to their culture and for their significance historically. Some fifty years before the current widespread interest in women's history she described the skills and artistic vision of both Colonial and contemporary domestic women who created folk art in their homes. She argued that the appreciation of these women's lives and their "domestic histories"³ gave meaning and vitality to an understanding of the past.

Alice Van Leer Carrick is a link in the long line of women who have been part of their culture and yet stood apart from it to record it, whether through letters and diaries or through artifacts and art forms which have survived. By understanding her life and the lives of others she described, we can begin to grasp the complexities of women's lives, both within their homes and as public participants in communities.

* * * * *

Alice had been born in 1875 in Nashville, Tennessee, the youngest of three children of a Yankee father and Southern mother. In 1880 the Carrick family moved north when John Carrick's shoe business failed. Settling his young family in a large house in Somerville, Mass., where he and his wife lived out their days, John supported them by returning to shoe manufacturing. For Alice's mother, Mary Frances Clark, the uprooting from Nashville to New England must have been a difficult change. She had been brought up on a large, prosperous plantation, part of a "wealthy family which became impoverished by the Civil War."⁴ Mary Clark Carrick's granddaughter Margaret Skinner Hancort today recalls

stories of Union soldiers raiding the Clark homestead, pulling open bureau drawers and dumping the contents on the floor. She herself was willed a beautiful gold and ruby ring which belonged to her great-uncle who fought in the war.

Alice alluded to the prosperity enjoyed by her maternal ancestors when she wrote, "One of our family traditions is my grandmother telling Claiborne, the small dining-room boy, always to polish the table until he could see himself grin in it."⁵ She referred to a coverlet as one which was "woven in East Tennessee by my great-grandmother's slaves"⁶ and to a worktable which was "my one piece of southern mahogany, a table of my grandmother's, made in 1802."⁷ Probably, too, her family was prominent in Nashville politics and society, for Alice described a plate in her possession which once belonged to Andrew Jackson and was part of a set given by him "to my grandfather, a neighbor and close friend in those early Nashville days."⁸ And the necklace worn by Alice's grandmother when she danced with Lafayette on his second visit to the United States was still in existence. She said, "I still have the parure of jewels she wore that gilded night, wine-dark topazes set with pearls. From her portrait she must have been so young and lovely then, dark curls and lustrous eyes, and a filmy lace fichu folded over gracefully sloping shoulders."⁹

Alice Van Leer Carrick kept her ties with Nashville. In the late 1920's when she was lecturing on antiques throughout the east and south she returned numerous times to her birthplace. One clipping from the Nashville Banner announcing her upcoming lecture notes that "Mrs. Alice Van Leer Carrick.....is widely known in Nashville, where she has many relatives and friends."¹⁰ Another reports that "The speaker graciously

expressed her pleasure at being in Nashville, her former home." ¹¹

Although Alice left Nashville at a young age, her roots there were important to her.

Alice graduated from high school in Somerville, probably around 1893. According to another clipping she began writing when she was eighteen years old, publishing at first "verses and articles, and a year later she began writing stories for children, which she kept up for several years with considerable success." ¹² She had also demonstrated an interest in young working women in an article published between 1897 and 1900. ¹³ One of her daughters believes that at this point Alice "separated herself from her family," and if that is so, she must have realized some income from the sale of her stories.

There is a brief glimpse of Alice's personal life, available from a number of notes and sketches she received from Charles Thurston between 1895 and 1897. Thurston was an artist whom Alice probably met through her sister Mary, for Thurston and Mary were later married. Apparently Alice asked Charles to illustrate a book she was writing, to be called Fables of the Town. In a note to her dated Sept. 2, 1897 he wrote, "here is my first idea for the illustration for your Fable. If you do not like it we will put it on the table. From your friend, the Poet." Along with two sketches, one of an artist, the other of a court jester, he included a sketch for the title page.

Thurston's notes and sketches to Alice, saved by her for seventy years in a small manila envelope, indicate both Alice and Charles' wit and sense of fun. She called him Willy; he referred to her as Arabella. His notes are imaginative and filled with fantasy, as can be seen from this example dated Dec. 29, 1897.

Dear Miss Arabella:

I wish that you could see my cat, "Tom." He will stand on his hind legs, put his two paws on my leg, and coax me to pet and play with him.

While writing this he has rolled over three times turned round twice and now is trying to get into my lap --now he is trying to take the nap from my trousers, besides singing all the time. Here he is!

The claws I draw as they feel.

My mother will not think of my using the pen-wiper. It is very artistic and effective.

You must know that it is very hard for Papa to write out of the water -- so I will make a drawing of myself and then take a long swim among the lotus buds.

Your kind and affectionate

Picture of papa ages 1764 years ¹⁴

Several sketches give us Thurston's view of Arabella. She was portrayed as tall, stylish, with a nipped-in waist and upswept hair. One view, dated October 6, 1895, shows a young woman with expressive eyes and hair cut softly around her face. The sketches and notes indicate the mutual respect and fondness between the two. They emphasize Thurston's view of Alice as an equal whose opinions he valued. He respected her talent as a writer and was thus willing to devote time to illustrations for her book.

It was at about the same time that these notes were being written that Alice met Prescott Orde Skinner. He was acquainted first with her sister Mary; probably all four were part of a larger Harvard-Boston group. Born in Dorchester, Mass. in 1867, Orde had graduated from Boston Latin School in the mid-1800's with "lots of medals," ¹⁵ then worked in a "business of some sort" ¹⁶ for about ten years. In 1892 he entered Harvard, graduated in 1896 as a member of Phi Beta Kappa. In 1897 he completed a Master's degree in Romance Languages and taught at Harvard for two years until the Sheldon Traveling Fellowship enabled him to go to Europe. When Dartmouth College offered him a job as instructor in Romance Languages an an annual salary of about \$1,000. he accepted.

He had been at Dartmouth for one year when he and Alice were married on July 10, 1901.

Before coming to Hanover Alice had experienced the freedom which life in Boston offered young women. With the founding of a number of women's colleges higher education was becoming a possibility for the first time. For those, like Alice, who couldn't afford college, there was more freedom than ever before to earn money and to challenge traditional stereotypes of women's place. In the 1880's and 1890's increasing numbers of women were beginning to infiltrate the predominantly male professions of medicine and law, women were teaching in preparatory schools and colleges, working in libraries, writing for newspapers and magazines and publishing novels.

The Dartmouth College to which Alice came at the beginning of the twentieth century did not present any of these opportunities to women. It was, as she later told a friend, "just a small church school." Every president, including William Jewett Tucker who held the office when the Skinners moved to Hanover, had been a minister "supposedly, and generally really, inspired by the scholarly tastes which all men of that profession are assumed to have formed."¹⁷ Tucker "regarded in very serious light his responsibilities as the moral leader of the college" and in his weekly Vespers talk to the entire study body on the theme of student obligation, "the continuing call was that of duty, the duty of the college man to form for himself ethical standards in consonance with his opportunities for intellectual advance."¹⁸

Because of its historical Christian mission and the religiosity of its leadership, Dartmouth presidents and faculty strove to keep the all-male population on the spiritually and morally upright path. In an address to the students at the opening of college on September 18, 1902,

one year after Alice Van Leer Carrick moved to Hanover, Tucker's subject was "college spirit" and more specifically the "spirit of the gentlemen." He urged the college to "make it its business.... to stamp out vulgarity. Vulgarity in a college is a social crime. It soils the whole body." 19

Nevertheless, perhaps because of its isolation and lack of contact with the world beyond Hanover, Dartmouth students often found diversion in rowdiness under the name of practical jokes which at times bordered on aberrant and sadistic behavior. In the late 1880's student antics in the chapel of Dartmouth Hall reached crisis proportions. The chapel at that time had several uses. It was the only auditorium at the college and was thus in demand as a meeting room for classes, professors, lectures, and political meetings. Sometimes freshmen or sophomore classes

coming to morning chapel found their seats smeared with grease or oil or molasses; an animal was occasionally found in the room, as once when the students came to rhetorical exercise they found a donkey securely tethered on the stage or, worst of all, a body was once stolen from the dissection room and placed on the floor under the seats of the freshmen. 20

The all-male culture in a remote setting perpetuated the myth of the strong independent Dartmouth man. The students' general sloppy appearance around 1900 was "part of the pose, a part of the conception that unconventionality of attire, roughness of manner, boisterousness and over-assertiveness, were accompaniments of virility and strength." The students considered their institution "par excellence the college of he-men." 21

President Tucker's vision, however, was different. By the end of his presidency, which lasted from 1893 to 1909, he had succeeded in altering somewhat the "unsavory" 22 behavior which had become a way of

life for Dartmouth students. New traditions with emphasis on class and school spirit were initiated with an attendant improvement in morale and attitudes.²³

Just as Tucker's tenure saw a transition to more acceptable behavior among the students, so too the Dartmouth to which Alice and Orde Skinner moved in 1901 was experiencing a time of transition from Victorian horse and buggy days, outdoor plumbing and lamplight to the coming of the first motor cars and electricity. None of these refinements, however, made the college less male in its orientation. Its students, of course, were all male, and the decision-making and power were firmly in the hands of the all-male faculty, trustees, and administration. In the town of Hanover, too, the influence of men can be documented. All elected officials, from tree wardens to school board members, were men.

A survey of the "Local Interest" columns of the Hanover Gazette of 1901 reveals which men's activities were considered most interesting and important. Attention is given to Dartmouth professors taking carriage trips to nearby inns; to the success or failure of Dartmouth athletic teams; to how many bass or trout were taken the preceding week and which fishermen caught them. For the women the most space is used to tell of relatives and friends visiting from neighboring towns, of the dates and times of the Women's Foreign Missionary Club's meetings. Women probably attended the many auctions described and enjoyed sleigh rides with the Fortnightly Club and skating on the broad expanse of the frozen Connecticut River, although no names are given of participants in these activities.

This, then, was the male-dominated culture in which Alice Van Leer Carrick found herself in 1901. From her acceptance as a woman and her

success as a writer in Boston she moved into the completely different role of faculty wife in a remote, rural setting. Despite the small size of the town, life at the college was totally separate from life in the town or the homes. Professors spent their days teaching, interacting with students, meeting with colleagues, reading, exercising, and enjoying a social life which was often apart from women and the rest of the town. Here where the business at hand was the education of young men and the advancement of instructors to professors, women were expected to stay in the domestic sphere, running the households, providing a comforting environment for their professor-husbands, overseeing the upbringing of children, and arranging entertainment for themselves and the community. Hanover women found outlets for their energy in ways that were acceptable to the male establishment. Those who could afford maids entered into a busy social life which supported their needs for companionship and activity. They attended teas, hosted card parties, and went out to dinner parties or occasional concerts and plays in the evenings with their husbands. A small group of women augmented their husbands' "starvation salaries" ²⁴ with acceptable paid work as music teachers, student tutors, secretaries in college offices or clerks in Main Street stores. As long as a woman stayed within the female culture, busying herself with home and friends, supporting the church through volunteer work, or even earning money in unobtrusive ways, she received the approval and support of the community.

The majority of faculty wives in Hanover in the early part of the twentieth century were housekeepers with all of the responsibilities and chores which that word suggests. One Hanover native recalls today that most families didn't own a car and if they did, women certainly didn't

drive. Every morning after breakfast the typical faculty wife sat down and telephoned Guyer's store to make her grocery order. Every few days Mr. Lewin came with his meat truck and Tanzi's store delivered fruits and vegetables. These women had what one son describes as "an active social life."²⁵ His mother played bridge with her friends; she loved antiques and took trips into the countryside to collect them at shops and auctions; and by 1920 or so she was probably a member of some of the several clubs which existed -- the Women's Club, the Walking Club, the Arts Club, or the Fortnightly Club.

Tea time was an important social interlude for many Hanover women. For some the serving of tea was a daily formal and ceremonial affair at which delicate sandwiches and small delicious cakes were served. The teas were attended sometimes by men as well as women -- professors, Dartmouth students, and visiting writers or lecturers -- and they were an integral part of the domestic and academic scene.

Two other people who grew up in Hanover remember that their mothers enjoyed "antiquing." One, whose father was a doctor, says he was often paid with pieces of old furniture instead of money; another recalls that a good day of entertainment for her mother and friends was going out in the countryside to attend auctions. One well-known story in Hanover is of the time Mary Fletcher was out for a ride and saw an old sideboard on the piazza of a farmhouse. It was filled with chicken feed. Miss Fletcher offered the farmer \$5.00, brought the antique home, had it refinished, and it graced her dining room for years.

A letter sent around 1912 from Martha Haskell Clark, a young faculty wife, to "Connie Lou" illustrates the round of social activities that many women enjoyed:

Last Thursday...I had invited some friends to a

special show at the movies and then there was a church supper and annual meeting. That was over with by nine so the Bills came back with us and we played cards till late. Friday there was a big dinner party at the Fred Lord's and we had a lovely dinner and evening. Saturday Mrs. Keyes was in town so I had two tables of bridge in for her in the afternoon and had all the big bugs I'm scared of...They stayed till about six. Then we had to hustle down to the Hanover Inn to supper with the Lingleys, and out with them to a show at Webster Hall in the evening. Monday I was invited to the movies and coffee at the Green Lantern after it by Mary Marsden, and in the evening went to a big card party at Mrs. Hazleton's where it was so cold I froze all the evening but had a good time. Tuesday I had a small tea party for Grace Tibbetts who is taking her husband south next week if he lives to go...In the evening was a perfectly scrumptious party at Elsie Hartshorn's. She always has splendid ones...Tomorrow night we are having a dinner party and then on to hear Bliss Carmen at the Little Theatre. The next night is Mabel Garrison's concert and Saturday night is not yet taken but is always sure to be. Hanover is some lively little place to life in, and I'd rather live here than any place I know. 26

Martha's letter indicated that women did not need to be isolated even though Dartmouth itself was far from other educational, cultural centers. While men were leading their lives away from the home, women were enjoying contacts with people of similar interests. There are further glimpses here of a female culture that cared for others in Martha's description of a card party for the visitor, Mrs. Keyes, and her concern for Grace Tibbetts and her ailing husband.

Martha Clark is important as more than the author of this letter, for she was publishing articles on gardening and religious and nature poetry from about 1905 until her early death in 1922. Her husband, Eugene F. Clark, was a German professor as well as president's assistant at Dartmouth. Her father-in-law was Dr. Francis E. Clark, the founder of the Christian Endeavor movement and editor of Christian Endeavor World. Some of Martha's poems were published in his journal; her

articles appeared in House Beautiful and Country Life, the same magazines which were publishing Alice's work. Here was a woman who was deeply involved in an active social life yet managed to express her individuality through a prolific production of publishable writing.

There were some similarities between Martha Haskell Clark and Alice Van Leer Carrick. They were about the same age, both were faculty wives living in Hanover in the early part of the twentieth century, both used their maiden names, although Martha added her husband's name on her manuscripts while Alice never did. The similarity probably ends there. Martha had been the only daughter of William E. Haskell, owner and publisher of the Minneapolis Star, she was a college graduate, and she and Eugene lived in a spacious house they built on Rope Ferry Road. More important, Martha functioned comfortably within the accepted cultural boundaries. By contrast, Alice was already establishing herself as someone who did not conform to the stereotyped role of faculty wife.

* * * * *

In 1902 Alice and Orde moved from their first home, an apartment in the Howe Library on West Wheelock Street, to a small college rental, a house built in 1790 by Sylvanus Ripley on a lot given to his wife Abigail by her father, Eleazar Wheelock. The house was located on the southwest corner of Main Street and Webster Avenue and had been "somewhat modernized" from its nineteenth century days as a boarding house. ²⁷ The Skinner's new house and their first child, Margaret Van Leer, came at about the same time. Two more children were born in the next seven years, John Carrick in 1905 and Alicia Prescott in 1909.

With reference to the move Alice, writing in the Preface to Next-to-Nothing House, recalled that

I am glad that when we went to housekeeping we... "were inconveniently poor." Otherwise I know what we should have done: we should have filled our house with furniture which, in later days, would have been a remission of sins just to look at --debased, ungainly sleigh-front bureaus, the lower part of highboys bought under the ingenuous impression that they were lowboys, and many plates of the too-ubiquitous willow-pattern. We might have been comfortable, but we certainly shouldn't have been beautiful, and truly there is no bliss in ignorance when it touches our own lives. And instead of all these misfortunes, we moved into a little modest white cottage befitting our modester income, and allowed its eighteenth-century loveliness to be our gradual education. 28

Being "inconveniently poor" meant that the Skinners could not furnish the house on Orde's meagre faculty salary supplemented by the few dollars Alice was earning as a writer of children's fiction. It was Alice who discovered the alternative to buying furniture at the expensive retail stores on Hanover's Main Street. Searching through second-hand shops and becoming acquainted with various junkmen around Hanover, she began to locate pieces of furniture which others had discarded as out of style or in need of repair -- eighty year old tavern tables, Windsor chairs, Constitution mirrors, hand-woven rugs. As she learned about the old pieces she was finding and as she researched their origins and history, she realized there were many other people equally as interested as she but uninformed. Her previous success as a writer encouraged her to put her skills to work and share her growing knowledge of authentic American antiques with an audience beyond Hanover. In 1915 six articles were published in Country Life, House Beautiful, and Ladies Home Journal. This production continued until 1926, with at least ten articles every year as well as the publication of four books, several of

which were compilations of articles. By 1920 Alice's frequent contributions were anticipated by readers who recognized her as an authority on early American furnishings and decorative arts. She began to travel throughout New Hampshire and Vermont to locate eighteenth century furniture and help others decorate their homes. One woman who moved to Hanover around 1920 says that Alice took her to Boston where there was an old church filled with antiques somewhere along the river. "She showed me what to buy. I never dreamed of picking anything out without her advice."

Alice's earliest articles on discovering antiques in the untrodden pathways of the North Country were gathered in her first book Collector's Luck, published in 1919. Her second book The Next-to-Nothing House, which detailed the furnishing of the Skinner home on North Main Street, was published in 1922 with a second printing in 1923. The first sentence of the book set the tone:

Somewhat back from the village street it stands, the little, low eighteenth-century cottage of ours; white-walled, green-shuttered, peeping at you from behind a screen of lilac and syringa bushes... 29

The image of a small frame house peering coyly out at passerby appealed to hundreds of readers. In the book Alice issued an invitation to any who wanted to see the house described in her articles and books:

Everybody is always coming, and I love to have them come; and since my welcoming tablet has been placed beside the door, the public believe that the house is a museum, and "lift up the latch and walk in." It's fortunate that I positively adore showing my house; that at almost any time I am ready to drop my daily tasks and expound historical fact to congenial people. 30

Every Thursday the house was open to visitors. As Alice's daughter Margaret said, "An awful lot of people came. If my father could do it,

he beat it out of the house and went to the library." But if visitors came on some day other than Thursday, Orde might be caught and pressed into entertaining total strangers. Alice related one time when a visitor stopped in without warning. She was far too busy in the kitchen "a-spicing marmalade" to stop her work, so Orde was forced to be the tour guide.³¹ Alice's youngest child Alicia, to whom she referred often in The Next-to-Nothing House as "Littlest Daughter" recalled packages of cookies which arrived in the mail, marked simply "Littlest Daughter, Hanover, N.H." and she remembered families who came by simply to get a photograph of their children with Alice Van Leer Carrick's daughter.

Alice's willingness to show her house to any and all visitors and her general openness to strangers was an anomaly in a town where most people welcomed only family or very close friends into their lives and homes. Her friendliness was further reflected in the kind of entertaining she and Orde enjoyed. On Tuesday Alice was "at home" for any who cared to come for tea. Very often her parlor was filled with Dartmouth student friends -- young men whom she had met through Orde or at concerts, play readings, lectures, or perhaps the Episcopal Church. Alicia recalled times that Dartmouth students would arrive with original plays which her mother would help them stage in the Skinner living room; at other times there were poetry readings and good conversation.

The most unusual parties, however, were the Sunday night suppers. The group which gathered was often the same from one time to the next, people who belonged to a "newer set, bohemian, the intellectuals," according to one long-time Hanover resident. One couple recalled that when they first arrived at Dartmouth around 1919 "Alice Skinner was a name of great interest. People would say, 'A party is no good without the Carletons, Burtons, Skinners.'" Alice would prepare unusual dishes

--"she wasn't interested in laying on the beans; she used the chafing dish" -- recipes gathered from her collection of old cookbooks and her research into yellowed newspapers. The house was lighted by candles, wine would flow, conversation was witty and sophisticated, and friends recall that on at least one occasion Alice became so involved in the enjoyment of her own party that she forgot to serve the main course. No one left until the brandy was served and Orde proposed a toast for a wee "deoch an doruis," the Gaelic version of "one for the road." The parties often continued until midnight, an unusually late hour for Hanover. Another social outlet important to the Skinners and their friends was the Arts Club, founded in 1914. The group met in an upstairs room in Robinson Hall and poets like Edna St. Vincent Millay, Robert Frost, and Franklin McDuffie visited and read their poetry. The Arts Club was considered by many members of the community to be "far out, bohemian." To be invited to join was a great honor.

Even within these unusual groups Alice was different. She had a "distinguished, exotic quality," according to an acquaintance. She was tall and large-boned with aquiline features, and her long dark hair was usually arranged in a bun. While most women wore short shirt-waist dresses or crepe-de-chine trimmed with lace, Alice often dressed in long wool skirts, canvas espadrilles, a turban around her head. Says one friend, "She was not fashionably dressed but interestingly. She had her own style. She wore just anything she happened to have." Like other women whose clothing does not conform to the prevailing styles, Alice expressed through her appearance her individuality and her inability to accept the stereotyped expectations and roles.

Alice also deviated from the Dartmouth ideal of the proper role for women by refusing to exist solely in the female, private sphere. Her

desire to fulfill her responsibilities as a wife and mother as well as have a writing career set her apart from other women. One of her friends said, "Many people thought she was eccentric because she was a writer. That set her apart. She didn't do the things other women did." Because she successfully combined two careers Alice broke through the boundaries of proper, acceptable behavior for women. The town perceived her as eccentric, but the image was a distorted one, seen through the lens of conformity to existing female stereotypes.

It was not simply Alice's writing which "set her apart" from much of the Hanover society. After all, there were other women writers, among them Martha Clark, who functioned within both the private female sphere and the public wage-earning sphere. More than her literary success, Alice's persona challenged the prevailing ideology of woman's nature and woman's place. Women were supposed to be passive, deferential, supportive of male egos and ambitions. Alice was outgoing, spirited, ambitious for her own recognition and success.

Alice's ambition alienated her from the more traditional members of the Dartmouth faculty and their wives. One said, "She was on the way up, willing to change her circumstances." She and Orde needed money to improve their standard of living, and Alice worked hard for the recognition that would provide it. Furthermore, her friends admit she was not over-modest. "She had a realistic view of herself" and was glad to take credit for her accomplishments. One acquaintance said of her, "Yes, she was successful, but perhaps it would have been better if she hadn't talked about it so much." Men could talk of their publications, awards, recognition; the same behavior in women was unfeminine, unacceptable.

Alice's voice, as well as what she said, was considered unfeminine, The acceptable women's voices were soothing, supportive, modulated to life in the house. Alice's voice was "shrill -- not a New England way of talking; we might have called it affected." Others say her "sense of the theatrical" and "sense of humor verging on the raucous" were totally atypical of other Hanover women.

Atypical also was Alice's willingness to speak out on issues of concern to her. One of her favorite topics was the lack of opportunity for women at Dartmouth. One friend says, "She saw the chauvinistic men in this town and she rebelled against them. Their attitudes were unjust and she spoke up. She was against discrimination in any form, whether it was hiring practices at Dartmouth or a petty little man at the library who wouldn't allow her to borrow books. She was an activist by nature; she would 'do'; and she had the courage to do what she thought."

Alice was willing to take a stand, both in her writing and in the Hanover community, on issues which were clearly controversial. Her final words in The Next-to-Nothing House dealt with her belief that women must be economically independent. She argued that even though women were confined at home their routine could be "creative," either through writing as she did or by making handwork and selling it or by collecting discarded "junk" which was actually salvageable art. She said:

Turn to your "Proverbs," and read about the woman whose price was "far above rubies," whose valiant soul resembled a merchant-ship. "She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands... she maketh fine linen, and selleth it...she considereth a field, and buyeth it." Her routine was creative; her household was well worth careful guidance. Figuratively speaking, I behold you diligent with spindle and loom; but what I want is to see you considering a field, and buying it if you want to! 32

In a newspaper interview she was quoted as saying

"Of course, men don't really encourage the economic independence of women even though it makes us so much more reasonable and understanding. I live in a town which is made up of mostly men, and I'm sure that no man is ever really a feminist at heart. 33

Having herself tasted the freedom which comes from earning money and contributing to the support of a family, Alice appreciated the liberating effect of "economic independence" for women, of "considering a field and buying it." Yet she also believed that "no man is ever really a feminist at heart" particularly in a community "made up of mostly men." She could see that her views of women's freedom were a threat to the establishment in Hanover. If women had their own incomes and thus more control over their own lives, they might forsake the passive, supportive roles which sustained the male culture and demand an active part in the decision-making public life of the community.

Because of Alice's stands on women's right to economic independence and the example of her own life which argued for female autonomy she was perceived as not possessing the dignity and refinement basic to a truly womanly nature. A faculty member who knew the Skinners in the early 1920's expressed surprise when told that Alice had published such a large volume of articles and books. He commented, "Most people weren't aware that Alice Skinner was an author. We weren't interested. We knew her as a dominant personality." To many people in the Dartmouth community, Alice was memorable because of her "dominating" ways and her deviance from the accepted female role. Many could not and would not accept her as an individual whose work was original and whose ideas were worthy of consideration.

While some dismissed Alice's writing as not "interesting," others maintained that in the private, homemaking sphere she was not successful

either. After all, how could she tend properly to her family if she was spending so much time collecting antiques and writing about them? The only answer had to be that she dominated Orde, coerced him into helping out at home, and that she neglected her children.

Orde Skinner was a good candidate for the stereotyped hen-pecked husband. In contrast to Alice who was tall, he was of medium height and build. Alice was loquacious, outspoken, out-going; Orde was quiet with strangers and somewhat ill-at-ease. Although he was a respected professor at Dartmouth for forty-five years, today he is remembered primarily for the long walks he took every afternoon with two other members of the Dartmouth faculty, Ernest Green and Louis Dow.

One sees them now in memory setting out or returning from their five- and ten-mile walks: Dow with a cane striding majestically along, Skinner, shorter and more agile, ambling with twisting shoulders beside him. 34

Local people also remember Orde's strolls down Main Street. One Hanover merchant said it must have taken him two hours to walk from one end of the street to the other, for he stopped to visit with everyone. Compared with Alice, with her energy and drive, he was unassuming and retiring. Yet one Dartmouth professor tells of "being in Orde's society, hearing him talk quite a lot," and respecting the man for his achievements and ideas. Both Dow and Orde "were members of a small group of men, dubbed by an outsider who suspected them of being subversive, the Anarchists, who met to discuss the latest figures in the world of ideas: Nietzsche, Bergson, Einstein, Freud..."³⁵

Adding fuel to the myth that Orde was "hen-pecked" was the fact that he was the stereotype of the absent-minded professor. Said one friend, "I think he was a hard man to hen-peck -- he wasn't really 'there.' He must have been annoying." Several stories exist about Orde

Skinner's vagueness. One time when Alice was master-minding a food sale for the Episcopal church, a woman came to deliver her cake. Orde answered the door, gave her a vacuous stare as she explained why she was there. After an embarrassed silence he took the cake and finally spoke. "Oh, what a nice cake," he said. "So nice and heavy." Another time as the Skinners were going up the gangplank on one of their periodic summer trips to France Alice said, "Orde, do you know where the tickets are?" "Why yes," he replied. "They're in the second volume of Moliere on the third shelf of my closet."

Despite the apparent difference in temperament between Alice and Orde, they had a close, supportive marriage, according to one of their daughters. "I don't remember any arguments. If things got intense, he could withdraw to his study." The daughters both remember their parents taking walks together, snowshoeing, gardening. They also recall with obvious affection that Orde did his share of the parenting, going for walks with them to find acorns, taking them swimming, talking with them before bed. Throughout Next-to-Nothing House Alice gave Orde credit for his help with the repairing and refinishing of furniture as well as help in providing many of the literary allusions and French quotations. One friend says that "Alice learned a great deal about literature from her husband. She used to quote literary bits from him." A Dartmouth professor said that the reason he knew about Alice's accomplishments was because "her husband used to talk about her. He'd tell us 'she has these skills...she knows about this or that.' He was a very admiring husband." Orde supported Alice in public and also gave her the physical and emotional space to write. It was he who put up with the idiosyncracies of Alice's collecting mania, who sometimes showed strangers around the cottage when Alice was "a-spicing marmalet." The

public perception was that Orde was dominated by his wife, but the private reality was that theirs was a relationship of shared cooperation, both within the home and in the outside world of paid work.

Hanover natives who grew up with the Skinner children remember envying Margaret, John, and Alicia for an environment which many of them felt was exciting. Granted, Alice Van Leer Carrick's children were "suspect because they didn't put on long underwear like the rest of us on November 12," and "my parents always felt the Skinner children were undernourished," the attraction of a mother who wrote stories and was herself an unusual figure outweighed any parental disapproval.

Many people remember how Alice used to tell stories at the Howe Library story hour and in Alicia's class at school. They remember, too, playing in the house on North Main Street when Alice would sit down in the middle of the morning and weave long tales of the bear family, "Rosie, Mousie and Bye-Bye (Rosamund, Millicent and Bernard), Golliwumps the Governess, Chow-Chow and Amelia Wright who lived across the street." They also remember being afraid of Alice, for her first concern was often for the valuable and irreplaceable furniture and the appearance of the house. One friend recalled making the mistake one time of bouncing a rubber ball in the hall. "Mrs. Skinner yelled at me. I was always scared of her after that, but I still admired her." Another remembers the time when he first "began to realize the Skinner's house was different from our house where nobody was too worried about the furniture. The furniture there was fragile, valuable. One had to be careful. One this particular birthday party somebody pushed Eustace Douglas Dow forcibly through an antique chair which disintegrated onto the floor. For the first time Mrs. Skinner's poise vanished and she was

visibly upset. She was nice about it, but she was upset. After that when we came maybe it was tied with strings; I'm not sure about that."

Living in a house filled with what had once been cast aside by others but had now become irreplaceable furniture made its demands on Orde and the children. Alice recognized this when she wrote of one chair that it was

the most comfortable chair in the world...I am sure of it because the family, who often revile me for my straight, uncompromising, old-fashioned chairs, all fight to sit in this one. 36

She recorded that Orde wanted a "Morris chair" in his study and that she bought him off with her idea of a compromise:

Beyond any other piece of furniture I detest a Morris chair: I detest it on principle, and, besides, I knew that in this little study it would sprawl all over the floor in most unseemly fashion. So I said to O___, "What a pity it is that we haven't room for both a Morris chair and a couch. Still, since we must choose, I do think a couch will be more useful and comfortable. And so we compromised on a couch. 37

Her couch was a day-bed with a blue and white woven coverlet. It may not have been Orde's idea of a comfortable lounging chair, but Alice prevailed.³⁸

Despite the travails of living in a museum with its curator, the daughters remember that they were proud of their mother. One of them said, "It impressed me that she went out collecting and lecturing and did all that writing. She felt that women should have more of a place in the world. Everything she preached I believed then and I do now. I was glad she was that way. I always felt she should have a life of her own as well as my father, and not live in his shadow."

Alice's "preaching" made a positive impression of her daughters. One of them remarked, "She would never join a woman's club, never, and neither would I. It's a waste of time." Both went to women's colleges,

Margaret to Wellesley and Alicia to Smith. Alice's ideals of autonomous lives for women have been carried on in her granddaughters, two of whom have advanced degrees and are working in academic settings, while the third operates a business with her husband.

Despite the support of her family it must have been difficult for Alice to reconcile her desire to write with the demands of her husband and three children. Her earliest pieces, which reflected a tremendous amount of research and countryside collecting, were written in 1914, when the children were twelve, seven, and four years old. By then Margaret, the eldest, helped take care of John and Alicia. She still remembers cutting the crusts off endless pieces of bread to prepare cucumber sandwiches for teas. Alice often referred longingly to the desire for a maid. She described the room where the maid might live and said, "When my friends, considering all my writing and all my letters say, 'My dear, you ought to have a good secretary,' I answer meekly, 'Oh, please, I'd so much rather have a good cook.'"³⁹ In truth, the Skinners seldom had domestic help, either because they couldn't afford it or Alice couldn't find anyone to meet her standards. Thus "the domestic pauses between maids grow greater and greater"⁴⁰ and Alice fulfilled her domestic responsibilities while continuing to collect, research, and write about antiques.

Like other artists and writers working in their own homes she was plagued with interruptions from a number of sources: the children were hungry or unhappy or bored; the fires needed to be stoked, the clothes washed, the phone answered, the food ordered and prepared; Orde was home for lunch or looking for his walking shoes.⁴¹ In the "next-to-nothing house" there were added responsibilities imposed by Alice herself. She insisted that the rooms be kept in perfect order, clothes in closets,

personal belongings in cupboards, for often strangers stopped by to view the cottage and meet the author. Although she protested that she enjoyed such visits, she did remark in an interview, "The trouble with tourists is that they come at such unearthly hours! Does it never occur to them that a housekeeper and family can scarcely have a house ready to show on eight o'clock of a Sunday morning?" 42

When Alice was writing she composed on "an inconsistent machine"⁴³ set up on a "Hepplewhite..table" in her Hepplewhite bedroom. She wrote from extensive notes, often needing only two drafts to complete an article or chapter. She apparently did much of her culling and organizing on the couch in Orde's study, then secluded herself with her typewriter. Reference to this process was made by a woman who went to visit Alice Van Leer Carrick and was given a tour of the cottage. She wrote:

She had taken me through the cottage....and, when we came to the study, she pointed with a shrug at a big old sofa. "My workshop," she said with a laugh. It was...overspread almost from end to end with books and pamphlets, some of them open, others bursting with markers covered with notes. It was, I remember, neat. 44

Alice longed for more time and a private place where she could work. In an interview she stated:

I do sometimes think that if I could just have three hours of uninterrupted time every morning, I would not only have my work done with ease, but I'd have few things left to ask of life. 45

She also wrote:

For myself I'd like a sewing room. When I remember the modiste that was lost in me just because I never had a real place where I could experiment, where I could cut and fit to my heart's content and turn the key in the door and leave my ideas until I was ready for them again; I feel an intense sympathy for the mother with little children who can't have such

a separate space. 46

Although speaking here of the need for a sewing room, and thus making her ideas relevant for women in the domestic sphere, Alice was really arguing for the need of a place to create which was apart from the rest of the house, a place to "leave my ideas until I was ready for them again." It isn't surprising that the growing Skinner children didn't get into their long underwear before the first snow, that Alice was often dressed in "whatever was at hand," and that when Orde came home for dinner he sometimes found a note saying, "Dinner is on the stove." The surprising thing is that Alice produced the volume of writing she did in those demanding years.

Although Alice wrote of her frustrations with the constraints of time and space in her life, there is no indication that she regretted in any sense the choices she had made. She and Orde were good companions and she depended on him both for his support of her writing career and his help with domestic responsibilities. She was devoted to her children, encouraging and helping them achieve some of the things she'd never had. Alice was stimulated by her environment and life in Hanover: picnics with friends, Sunday evening soirees, and contacts with Dartmouth students. But in reconciling the demands of two careers, one as a homemaker and hostess, the other as author and lecturer, her life was filled with conflicts and choices.

* * * * *

Alice Van Leer Carrick's extensive knowledge of early Americana as well as her dedication to understanding the craftspeople involved in creating these artifacts need to be examined in order to document her

contribution to women's cultural history. In the early articles, written from 1912 to 1915, she urged her readers to recognize the superiority of old furnishings over new in terms of design and workmanship. Even discounting the artistic merit of this craftsmanship, however, she emphasized the economic advantage of investing in items which were considered old-fashioned and out of date. In an article on the joys of collecting 100-year-old lustre teapots, cups, and creamers, she wrote,

When I tell you that by haunting through second-hand shops and the smaller antique shops I have often been able to buy them for a dollar apiece...you can see that old things are sometimes cheaper than new ones. 47

And, she went on to say, "The same amount [\$2.00], you know, would not bring you modern porcelain so well worth having."⁴⁸ Most satisfying, however, was the "collector's luck" which rewarded those who invested time in all-day drives and small town shops.

Some of Alice's greatest discoveries in the countryside were items made on the farms themselves, where the craft involved had been handed from one generation to the next. Among these were rugs made by several different processes -- hooked or drawn-in, braided, woven. Of one acquisition she wrote:

We discovered it because we were unlucky, because just as dusk in sharp October weather our machine broke down in front of a little cottage, and while repairs were being made, we went in to warm ourselves. All sorts of homemade rugs adorned the painted wooden floors, and this loveliest one of all was so old our hostess had lost interest in it. She didn't even know where it came from, and she was very glad to sell it. 49

Another time she told of a soft bed coverlet which she had

bought last fall way up in Vermont, at a little

white farmhouse on the top of the world. Below were mists, and the hillsides flamed with maples. I had just found a little stencilled footstool for fifty cents...and then the nice old farmer brought out this lovely thing, this coverlet as full of color as the autumn outside, and said, "Anybody give me three dollars for this spread?" I answered, "I will," so quick that I don't know how I did it, and as he passed it over to me he said, "A lady was by here last week, and she offered me two dollars for it, but I sort of thought I ought to get three." A dollar apiece, you see, for each color, for the red, white and blue that go to make up my coverlet. 50

Alice maintained that she was not an "avaricious collector," taking advantage of poor farmers. In fact, many of the country people from whom she and others bought antiques were early dealers themselves, augmenting their income with the sale of items gathered from around the countryside. Alice saw herself as part of an effort to preserve the heritage of New England, for very often the things she purchased had fallen into disrepair or were considered of little value by their owners. Of the woven coverlets, which one sees now at auctions for \$300., she wrote,

I have seen them used as careless covers on swinging hammocks, on ironing boards, for chair seats, even as the patching of an old carpet. See how many of them you can rescue; you couldn't find a worthier work. 51

Her words spurred on collectors all over the country, and they wrote to tell her of their discoveries and came to Hanover to talk with her and see themselves the things she described.

Alice believed that "furniture is tangible history"⁵² and much of what she wrote about particular periods and pieces illustrated her knowledge of both furniture and history. Her interest in furniture went far beyond collecting and writing. She didn't just wander the countryside, picking up articles here and there that appealed. Instead,

she brought to her career a professional commitment to study and research the development of styles as well as understand as completely as possible the historical times in which the artifacts were made. Today one retired Dartmouth professor refers to her as "a bit of a scholar;" women who knew her well say she was a voracious reader with a mind that was constantly eager to learn. When Dartmouth's library didn't have the books she needed, she would ask to have them ordered from another library; friends recall seeing her walking home with armloads of books; her daughter Margaret remembers that at one point her mother kept Cotton Mather's journals on her bedside table, reading them from beginning to end; she pored over old newspapers, making notes of advertisements, recipes, anecdotes -- anything which shed light on the period of which she was writing.

As Alice learned more about the furniture and folk art of previous centuries she became more interested in the people who had produced and used the tables and china and candlesticks she described. More than "dry facts," she wrote, history is

human beings...It's thrift, and energy, and the ability to understand the everydayness of existence-- if we but knew it, our richest inheritance. 53

In attempting to recover the "everydayness of existence," Alice was advocating a human approach to history. She argued that the "richest" part of our past is ordinary people and the way they lived their lives in the time they had. One way to understand these ordinary lives, she wrote, was to study and appreciate the artifacts they produced. In describing an attic Alice said it was

crowded thick with time past, stained with colored memories, with the everydayness of existence; all the good fortune and ill-luck that by-gone generations knew. 54

Her favorite rag rugs were the ones made from old clothes:

In it are blended our hopes and fears for years
past...just try saving your old rag rugs and
see what an account of the everydayness of existence
they will sum up for you. 55

One is reminded of family quilts which contain material left over from dresses of mothers and daughters, and of the memories, not of dresses alone but of family and childhood that come flooding back when you see the quilts. Alice described a counterpane

fashioned by my great-great-great-aunt Alicia...
In the centre is a lovable piece of copperplate
chintz, a quaint bouquet of tulips and roses and
sweet, forgotten blue flowers; and the many many
pieces are bits of ancient prints and percales,
dimothys, callimancoes and sprigged muslins --
the tangible testimony of dresses long ago worn
out. 56

By studying rugs and quilts, looking at the fabric used, the common muslins and richer percales, Alice believed one could get a glimpse into the lives of the women who wore those fabrics and sewed the remnants into lasting works of art.

It was by studying the artifacts created by women in the ordinariness of their days that Alice became an advocate for including women's stories in the study of history. She argued that for history to be meaningful, truly human, it must tell of the "everyday existence" of women. She urged her readers to consider the importance of past women:

Think of them working in the fields, and digging
clams on the shore when corn was scarce; planning
and saving and contriving in their households
and, in every way matching their wits with their
destiny just as the men did. 57

Alice was suggesting that women's contribution to history was equal to men's and thus should be recognized and documented. Women had planted the fields along with men, they had tended the homes, and most important had cared as much about their past, present, and future as had men.

Alice's research into the lives of Colonial women and her conversations with contemporary rural women also convinced her that women, past and present, found important outlets for their creative energies in fabricating their domestic art. She maintained that all human beings need purposeful activity and that creative work in the home provides such activity. She wrote humorously yet seriously that the trouble with the Garden of Eden was that neither Adam nor Eve had enough to do:

But if Adam had had to dig around the roots of that Tree of Knowledge, loosen the dark, sweet-smelling earth of springtime, mulch it and prune it and pick the apples and pile them in great, golden mounds, he wouldn't have had time for discontent. And if Eve had had to pare those apples and make them into luscious pies, or stir a bubbling cauldron of lucent amber sirups, she never would have harkened to that very subtle serpent. 58

Although she was speaking here of both Adam and Eve, Alice's real concern was with women. While men can get out, as Adam could, and dig, sow, reap, women have traditionally been confined to the home, where opportunities for purposeful activity are far more restricted. For women, whether in Eden or Hanover, N.H., the accepted role was in the limited domestic sphere.

Alice realized that "uncreative routine"⁵⁹ can squelch all spontaneity, creativity in life, and urged women to put their leisure time to use, not out of any Puritan belief that idleness is evil but because productivity gives one a sense of accomplishment and self-worth. Alice's commitment to this view was much like that expressed by another women write, Sara Willis Parton who said in 1867:

Write! to lift yourselves out of the dead-level of your lives...to lessen the number who are yearly added to our lunatic asylums from the ranks of misappreciated, unhappy womanhood, narrowed by lives made up of details. Fight it! Oppose it,

for your own sakes and your children's. 60

Sara Parton saw that boredom was the enemy of middle class housewives whose husbands were busy in the business or professional world. She also saw that "lives made up of details" are stifled by the uncreative sameness of their days. Alice Van Leer Carrick's answer to this sameness, the "endless monotony" ⁶¹ of "washing the same cup and hanging it on the same hook on the same shelf three times a day..." was that women must have some "material good to long for and look forward to and get!" ⁶²

While Parton advised women to write in order to raise themselves "out of the dead-level" of their lives, Alice said "collect," for collecting gives one a feeling of anticipation; "there is always something to want." ⁶³ Furthermore, collecting gets one out of the house, out of the boring domestic routine, and, if done seriously, it enables a person to learn of previous people and cultures. Alice also maintained that a domestic, home-bound life can be educational and rewarding if a woman collects and learns about cup plates and the events they portray, different styles and periods of furniture and the makers who fashioned it, or the processes involved in coverlet weaving or silhouette design.

To be the kind of collector Alice described required that a woman have free time and at least a little money. It also required that a woman be content with a traditional home-oriented role, and this Alice supported. She herself had chosen to be a wife and mother and she had experienced the rewards and gratifications of that life. But having tasted the excitement and stimulation of life in the public sphere, she could be objective about the problems inherent in domesticity. On the one hand she maintained that

I have never yet found anything that so taxed my physical and intellectual powers as well-done housekeeping. That's why I am so willing to recommend it as a career for women. 64

But she went on to say, housework has "always been underesteemed, underpaid, and lately, at least, highly uncreative." 65 She argued that housework must be reevaluated, leading to "an esteem which results in a fifty-fifty affair of family finances." 66 She could see the necessity for someone to take care of the home and could even see that life as a challenge, but she insisted that men must recognize the value to them of having women working at home. She said

There are still too many men who, viewing housework as a fitting occupation for their wives, regard it as degrading for them-

selves. And, regarding it as degrading, they unconsciously think of it as slight financial worth. 67

She recognized that men who feel housework is "degrading for themselves" are lending credence to the belief that people who perform that work are themselves degraded. She argued that men must acknowledge ^{the} importance of women's contribution and allow their wives an equal voice in family finances and decisions.

Alice justified collecting as an avocation by emphasizing that collectors were learning history and salvaging their heritage. But the very fact that she urged women to find this creative outlet for their time argues that some women had a great deal of leisure -- leisure growing out of time-saving washing machines and vacuum cleaners, out of affluence which allowed the hiring of a maid or children's nurse. In writing of Martha Washington's many accomplishments Alice said

She would have approved of modern washing-machines and dish washers, all the efficient equipment of household life that means better work. She would not have been concerned with

my leisure but with what I accomplished by
that leisure. 68

Alice's articles were consistently supportive of women who were working in their own homes at "underesteemed, underpaid" housekeeping. At the same time she urged them for their own sakes to turn their spare time into creative, meaningful channels.

Alice herself had experienced the dead space of life in Hanover, where many women were isolated in their homes, performing the same tasks day after day. Added to this loneliness was the physical isolation of Hanover from more populous areas, plus the role played by weather in this northern New England community. Leon Burr Richardson wrote that "the long cold season was regarded as one of the unfortunate liabilities of the college, unavoidable on account of its geographical situation, and much to be deplored." ⁶⁹ Richardson was writing of winter's effect on the quality of life for the all-male student body and faculty. For women, confined indoors much of the time the town was gripped in the unrelenting fist of bone-chilling cold, winter must have been an even greater burden than it was for men.

Alice, however, with her tremendous energy and spirit, saw the hibernating months as a potentially creative time for isolated rural women. As she visited farmhouses she met rugmakers and weavers who were using traditional family methods of creating what Alice described as enduring works of art. In a number of articles, written between 1915 and 1923 she told of the craft involved, particularly in rug making. She explained to readers how they might try the same methods, and then talked of the women who created these rugs and of their artistic sense, the things that set them apart from ordinary craftspeople.

Her appreciation for the situation of these women is illustrated best by a sentence written around 1919, with reference to a country woman who made rugs:

When I asked her how she ever managed to accomplish so much she told me of the white and drifted winters -- ah, don't I know them! -- not a neighbor near, and the hours that would be so lonely if it were not for her work. The beauty she created was her consolation. 70

Another woman, when complimented by Alice on her productivity, replied:

"Why, child, when it's winter and all my housework's done, what can I do but sit beside the stove to keep warm, and make rugs to keep busy?" 71

Undergirding the industry of these women was the craft, and Alice studied this in order to write about it more accurately. She believed that the only way to appreciate the past was by reconstructing it as closely as possible. To understand how her foremothers had coped with their housekeeping problems she made her own candles and soap, mended rugs and coverlets to see how they had been woven originally, and designed and hooked a rug. Of the mending of one coverlet she wrote:

Darning, always a pleasantly monotonous domestic task, becomes apotheosized, glorified, when the fabric you are working on is in itself beautiful. That was part of my joy. The rest was the way the years rolled back, and placed me in such close kinship with this long-ago ancestress by marriage who wove this wonderful web in the eighteenth century lowlands. 72

Alice experienced a mystical union with women who had gone before as she held the products of their work in her hand or used old methods to create every-day household necessities.

Although her friends agree she was clearly not a needlewoman of any sort, never given to sewing clothes for the children or knitting, she threw herself into rug making, beginning with the repair of a fifty cent

rug bought at a hillside auction. Next she found a carpenter who made her a rug frame, and then she set about dying old stockings and soft woolen cloths by using natural vegetable dyes which she devised herself after researching extensively "all the color lore that I could find throughout the countryside." ⁷³ She wrote

Today...our colors come to us so much more easily, but will they last into a faded loveliness as the old vegetable dyes have done? Besides, to go to a shop and buy a dye preparation can never be so romantic, I am sure. ⁷⁴

Alice's imagination was captured by the challenge of creating colors as her foremothers had:

Some day we may turn back into this pleasant path, become once more domestic alchemists, and get our yellows with smartweed boiled in an iron kettle and set with alum; our blues from the indigo plant; our roses from madder. Did you know that butternut bark makes gentle browns, a different shade for each month of the year? Or that those reddened spikes of sumach berries will color your cloth the softest drab? ⁷⁵

Along with an understanding of dyes and processes Alice learned how to distinguish designs and colors which would endure from those that were less good. She particularly admired the "naive," original rug designs, as opposed to the ones which came from "boughten" patterns. Of one woman she wrote

She has the skill and taste and feeling for the genre in which she works...Her patterns have all the old naivete, for she draws in her own designs. ⁷⁶

Combined with Alice's appreciation of design was her feeling for colors and what they represented in a work of art. She told of one woman

braiding a rug that was the finest work I have ever seen...the strips she had dyed herself and

the color scheme was a subtle interweaving of buffs and creams and blues that reminded me of an ancient, gorgeous fabric, a Kang-hsi rug that I once saw in a museum. 77

She described an old woven coverlet as a "soft, old blue, a 'watchet blue,'" another which had "stamina, vigor in the indigo and white," and a third in which "the background was a deep, dark blue, the motifs a pinkish ecru and a queer tawny orange." 78 Through Alice's use of language, her unusual choice of adjectives and nouns, the reader could experience colors without actually seeing them.

Finally, it was Alice Van Leer Carrick's ability to interpret the artistic vision of the farm weavers and rug makers that distinguished her writing. She said:

Once I wondered how these women in their lonely farms, their lives so isolated, got their fine sense of color. Now I know that dawn and dusk, the limitless sky and its myriad stars, the reddened autumn hillsides, and the sorrowful browns of November all, somehow, become incorporate in their vision, unconsciously part of the fabric of their lives. 79

She identified with the poetry in the souls of these women, identified so completely that she could describe the emotions they felt as autumn faded, their feelings of the rhythm of nature. And as they used fabric in their work, so the events of their lives were woven into fabric as well. In a similar image she told of a weaver whose favorite part of her work was when she cut the finished piece from the loom "'and the rug I've loved lies stretched before me..." she has the soul of an artist, that woman. But is it strange, with the blue mist-hung mountains for a background and the patterned fields of meadow-rue and purple clover that stretch before her door?" 80 The inspiration for the work of these folk

artists was the beauty of the "mist-hung mountains," the fresh colors of wild flowers, and the patterns suggested by the changing seasons.

In much the same way, these elements of country life inspired Alice as well. Her articles about historic houses, distinguishing characteristics of different periods of furniture or sets of china often contained long sections with metaphors particularly relevant to women's experience. In an article describing her preference for the country over the city she said:

And, ah, the changing seasons! Of course they come to the city too; it's hot or cold according to the time of year, but there's never some gilded morning when, suddenly, you know that spring is awake again; never do you see the first snow stretch white and unbroken to meet the horizon's distant hem; all the air so still, so

so still that the little houses seem to hang on straight cords of smoke, dependent from the sky. 81

To Alice's eye the horizon was the hem of the fields, smoke was a cord running from a chimney to the sky. In a similar way she described a fair in Rouen. As they stepped out of the door

we found out way barred by flowers, a bright patchwork of color; or rather it was like a huge stripe of embroidery with the repeated motifs of lilies, gernaiums, gilly flowers, dahlias, pinks, marigolds, and sweet peas. 82

"Patchwork" and "embroidery" are activities traditionally linked to women. Women can identify with the image of a quilt, they can picture flowers massed like the embroidery on a dirndl blouse or a handcrafted tablecloth.

Alice's understanding of fabric textures also added to the effectiveness of her writing. She described a trip along the Newburyport Turnpike with her first glimpse of "the blue rippled silk of

the ocean,"⁸³ and at her own cottage the roses looked like "folded bands of pink satin."⁸⁴

Her most effective and sustained metaphors were descriptions of houses as different ages and types of women. One was

the square-set yellow mansion, rather resembling an amiable, ample dowager receiving you in a billowing hoop-skirt of patterned damask. As stately as that, standing erect on her terraced dais. 85

While that house was full-blown, imposing, intimidating, the Webster Cottage was

like an old lady who has been very beautiful in her youth, and who must now go softly all her days. 86

To Alice's eye furniture also took on female characteristics. One of her Hepplewhite tables was "a slim, pretty lady, ready to drop a curtsy, and make a gracious speech."⁸⁷ For readers who couldn't distinguish between Hepplewhite, Chippendale, or Jacobean furniture, the image of the "slim, pretty lady" might leave a memorable picture. The Skinner bed was an antique four-poster for which she'd made a muslin canopy and "sheltering curtains." She described it as having a "stately" feeling, "like an old lady who, choosing to live simply, is grande dame none the less."⁸⁸

Houses and furnishings are traditionally associated with women and the domestic sphere. Alice's imagery made her writing particularly relevant for women who appreciated the colors in gardens filled with silk-textured roses and had themselves worked embroidered patterns and perhaps seen the connections between all these parts of their daily lives.

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Alice Van Leer Carrick said that being "inconveniently poor" provided the catalyst for her collecting and writing career in Hanover. But in private she admitted to a friend that when she first moved to Dartmouth she said to Orde, "We are imprisoned by hills and policed by gossip." Both the isolation of the setting and the disadvantages of living in a small town where people knew too much of others' private affairs motivated Alice to move beyond provinciality. Being "poor" was an acceptable excuse for the desire to earn money, and Alice's industriousness was accepted by Dartmouth people who themselves knew that a faculty salary was not a living wage. More than money, however, Alice needed a creative life apart from housekeeping. In the same way that Orde enjoyed the stimulation of contacts with students and daily interaction with professors, Alice responded to her own need to experience life outside of the domestic sphere.

Although the move from Boston to Hanover signaled a drastic change in the status of Alice's personal life and her environment, she herself didn't change simply because she had married and moved away from home. The correspondance with Charles Thurston shows that before coming to Hanover Alice had earned the respect of a man in a career similar to hers, at a time when most women weren't competing for jobs in the public sphere, weren't asking to be treated as equals. Thus Alice's need for a life independent of homemaking responsibilities was consistent with the needs demonstrated in her early twenties before her marriage.

Alice's dual careers, one in the private sphere, one in the public, developed over several decades and were continually modified by the circumstances of her life. In 1901 she became a wife, in 1902 a mother. She started furnishing her house with old furniture, never predicting that this occupation might grow into a hobby, a consuming interest, a career. Next she started writing about her discoveries, again not knowing where that direction would end. The writing led to increased involvement in historical research, publication of books, and requests to visit distant cities and to lecture. Slowly Alice developed a life of her own, independent of both Orde and the children. Yet she remained the dominant force in the family.

In some ways Alice Van Leer Carrick was a pioneer. Despite pressures to conform to female stereotypes she refused to exist solely as a homemaker. She could have had a public career that didn't have women as a focus. Instead, in her writing and her life she argued that women's voices must be heard; that the understanding of women's stories are central to the understanding of history. Her desire to recover women's culture and women's history was unheard of in 1920. Her argument that history is

people, and the things they've wrought with
their hands, and the things they've wanted
with their hearts! 89

was largely ignored. Only now, more than sixty years after the publication of her books, do we recognize the sense of what she said.

Alice wrote in 1919, "It's the spirit that counts." She was referring to foremothers who had survived isolation on farms, loneliness as widows, despair over dying children. Alice's own spirit enabled her to produce and prosper in an alien environment. Her spirit helped her

to reconcile the demands and expectations of the outside world with her own needs and goals and gave her insight into the complexity of other women's lives. Her own love of adventure, her enthusiasm and vigor gave her the will to live an independent life in a community dominated by men. She remains an inspiration to all women who would dare to define themselves, to fulfill their potential as individuals.



Alice Van Leer Garrick with daughter Margaret, 1904



Alice Van Leer Carrick, posing in front of woven coverlet.

Date unknown.



WEBSTER COTTAGE, the "Next-to-Nothing House"



Alice Van Leer Carrick, circa 1940