

e die
american girl

**BY JEAN STEIN
EDITED WITH
GEORGE PLIMPTON**



EDIE

American Girl

by Jean Stein

edited with George Plimpton



Grove Press
New York

Cover image from the film *Ciao! Manhattan*

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At the back of the book, among the Addenda, are a Sedgwick family tree, an afterword,

acknowledgments, and biographical notes.

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JOHN P. MARQUAND, JR. Have you ever seen the old graveyard up there in Stockbridge? In one corner is the family's burial place; it's called the Sedgwick Pie. The Pie is rather handsome. In the center Judge Theodore Sedgwick, the first of the Stockbridge Sedgwicks and a great-great-great-grandfather of Edie's and of mine, is buried under his tombstone, a high rising obelisk, and his wife Pamela is beside him. They are like the king and queen on a chessboard, and all around them like a pie are more modest stones, put in layers, back and round in a circle. The descendants of Judge Sedgwick, from generation unto generation, are all buried with their heads facing out and their feet pointing in toward their ancestor. The legend is that on Judgment Day when they arise and face the Judge, they will have to see no one but the Sedgwicks.

Judge Sedgwick moved to Stockbridge right after the Revolution. I'm afraid he is going to smite me down if I go on talking this way, but he certainly did ingratiate himself with the movers and shakers of his day. He was a political ally of Alexander Hamilton and George Washington, and he became Speaker of the House of Representatives. He wasn't a signer of the Declaration of Independence but he was in with all those people. There's a picture in the old Sedgwick house of Martha Washington's first reception and Judge Sedgwick and Pamela are in this picture. Poor woman, halfway through her life she went mad.

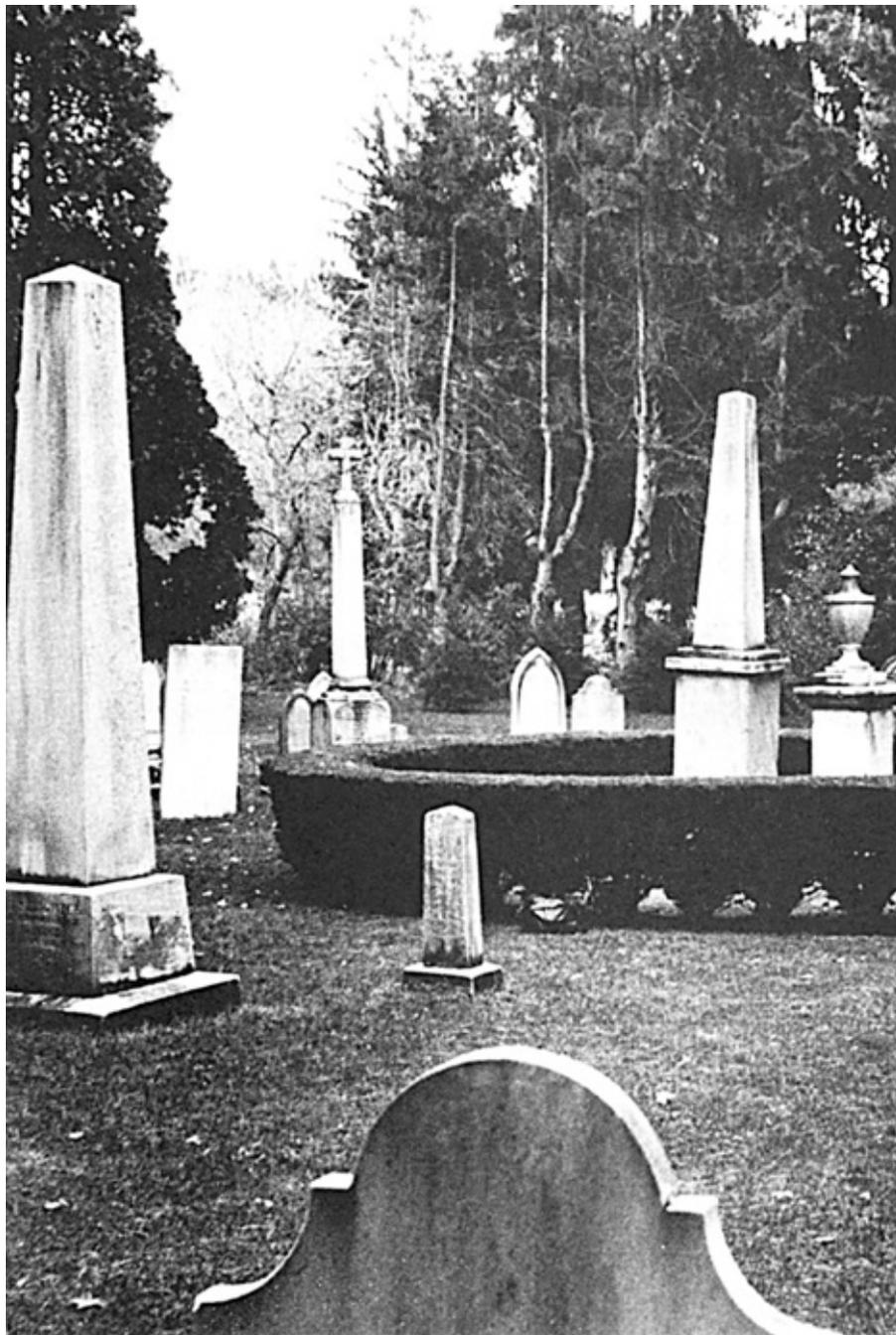
As a child I heard that her condition was due to having been left alone in Stockbridge through many winters while the Judge was politicking in New York and Philadelphia and Washington. Pamela Sedgwick may have been one of the first American wives to be the martyr of her husband's political ambitions. The epitaph on her grave is sad testimony:

SHE LONG ENDURED AND WITH PATIENCE SUPPORTED
UNPARALLELED SUFFERINGS:
A BRIGHT EXAMPLE
OF
CHRISTIAN PATIENCE AND RESIGNATION

Anybody who is a descendant of the Judge may be buried in the Pie. But at the Judge's feet lies a woman named Elizabeth Freeman, known to the family as Mumbet. She is supposed to have been the first freed slave in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The story goes that she happened to hear the Declaration of Independence read aloud at a town meeting. I recall reports that Mumbet's owner treated her cruelly, that he beat her up with a warming pan, that sort of thing. She ran away and sought out Judge Sedgwick and said, "Sir, I heard that we are all born equal and every one of us has the right to be free" and Judge Sedgwick was so impressed that he argued for her freedom. Mumbet stayed with him in gratitude for the rest of her life. An odd detail is that close by Mumbet's grave another grave is marked with the bronze figure of a dog that lies beneath it. I never learned precisely who owned that dog.

or whether the Judge had not also set it free.

Lying next to Mumbet is Judge Sedgwick's daughter, Catharine. She was a spinster and novelist in the early 1800s and the author of *A New England Tale* which was widely read at the time. Catharine used to give literary parties in the Old House—I've heard that Hawthorne and Melville came to tea. Despite her literary propensities, Catharine Sedgwick remained intensely loyal to her many brothers and sisters and to Stockbridge. Someone is supposed to have told her that she spoke of Stockbridge as if it were Heaven, to which Catharine replied, "I expect no very violent transition."



Catharine's brother Charles lies next to her in the Pie. He was an addled man who wandered about giving speeches to his livestock, especially to a favorite cow. One of his servants is thought to have said: "Ah, I'd rather be Mr. Sedgwick than anybody else in the wide world, and next to that I'd rather be Mr. Sedgwick's cow!"

SAUCIE SEDGWICK Although Judge Sedgwick lived in Boston toward the end of his life when he was Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, the family was always

based in Stockbridge, where the Judge had built the Sedgwick mansion just after the Revolution. It has always been the Old House to the family, and a real haven and home. They lived rather quietly, always well educated and fairly well off, brought up to think of themselves as neither rich nor poor.

JOHN P. MARQUAND, JR. It's important to think of the Sedgwicks not as Bostonians but as from Western Massachusetts—what the Kennedys call “the Western *paht* of the state”—Berkshire County about fifteen miles below Pittsfield, which is the main metropolis in that area. The only Sedgwicks who could even remotely be called Bostonian were those who married into Bostonian families. Historically, this part of the state was once heavily populated with the Stockbridge Indians, who were much more interesting than anybody else, including the Sedgwicks. Jonathan Edwards, the great Calvinist divine and hellfire-and-brimstone preacher, was sent up there to establish a mission when he fell into disgrace with the Hartford establishment of the church. He was sent to Stockbridge to do penance, and it may be that the Indians were the first to hear his famous sermon about man's soul ... the one where he says that the grace of God is the strand of web which keeps a man suspended above the fire of hell. Robert Lowell wrote a beautiful poem about that—“Jonathan Edwards in Western Massachusetts.”

The irony is that today on the site of Jonathan Edwards' residence is the Riggs Center, a very fancy nut house for young people. Some of the Sedgwicks passed through there. It's right across the street from the Old House.

Stockbridge and the Sedgwick tradition can be somewhat intimidating. One year I took Norman Podhoretz, the editor of *Commentary*, up to see Stockbridge and the Sedgwick Place and the rest of the Sedgwick world ... a sort of cultural exchange in which I was going to take him on a tour of Waspland. I told Norman that it was going to be like taking a trip to the other side of the moon. To give him a bit of a foretaste of what he might be running into, I had him read *In Praise of Gentlemen*, written by my great-uncle Henry Dwight Sedgwick, who was called Babbo in his family. It produced quite a reaction. As Norman and his wife, Midge Decker, were putting their suitcase in the trunk of our car, he said, “Look, I've got to tell you before we go anywhere that I *hated* that book by your uncle. I don't think I'm going to like any of those people or anything else if it's like that book. There's no excuse for such views.” I tried to calm him by saying that the old gentleman was from another era, and besides he was dead. Norman kept saying, “That doesn't matter, there's just absolutely nothing to be said in defense of a book like that. He's taking the view that the only people who have made it are God's gentlemen and that *they* don't have to try any more—that's a tremendous insult.”

As we drove along, Norman wouldn't even help with the directions. I'd say, “Ask this guy which way to turn,” and he'd say, “*You* better do it, these are your people.” He began to get more and more apprehensive the closer we got to Stockbridge, as if we were going into some sort of enemy world. In fact, I heard afterwards he told somebody that he and Midge felt like—it was some Russian reference—yes, that they were like little people hiding in the snowdrifts from the Cossacks. The Cossacks were going to pour out of the Sedgwick house and just beat up on everyone.

The weekend turned out to be a collision of cultures. I remember at one point Norman asked me where all the Sedgwick money came from—a question he never would have asked

if he had read Babbo's book carefully: you're not supposed to ask things like that. And that what I told him—that I didn't really know, it's just *there*, and that he shouldn't ask, which made him furious at my implicit arrogance. But it's a question which would occur to anyone, particularly a very intelligent man like Norman and a journalist to boot. Anyone would want to know where all that loot came from. No, it wasn't at all easy for Norman.

I took them to see the Sedgwick Pie. It was winter with a heavy snow on the ground so that the Pie became rather more impressive or oppressive, depending on what you thought of it, with evergreens all around and this great drooping snow everywhere. Norman was trying to suppress a great deal of hostility and handle it nicely because we were friends. I pointed out a cousin of mine named Kate Delafield who was buried there, saying, "And that's my cousin Kate." Upon which Norman began to sing ... he did a strange little dance ... snapping his fingers to the rhythm of "I wish I could shimmy like my sister Kate!" Lillian Hellman, who had come along for the fun, wasn't interested in the Sedgwick Pie. She wanted to get to the Ritz in Boston. She kept asking: "When are we going to get to the Ritz?"

Even family feeling is not unanimous about the Pie. I've heard of a quarrel which took place on the main street of Stockbridge. A Cabot shouted across the street at her Sedgwick sister-in-law, "At least *my* family's graveyard isn't the *laughing stock* of the entire Eastern seaboard." But most of the Sedgwicks take it very seriously. In 1971 my cousin Minturn Sedgwick, Edie's uncle, wrote a letter to the town Selectmen asking the town to return some property next to the Pie which the family had donated to the community. By the year 2100, he prophesied, the Pie would be overcrowded with Sedgwicks, and if more land was not made available, the Sedgwicks would have nowhere to go. The Selectmen considered all this carefully and replied to Minturn that since the Doomsday date for the family was well over a century away, his anxiety seemed premature.

Minturn had always been very much involved in the traditions of the Pie. For a long time, I remember, he'd been looking for the family pall, a deep purple cloth that's put over the casket. Apparently it was missing. The tradition was that the casket, with the pall over it, was taken about Stockbridge not in a hearse but in an open cart, like a gun carriage, drawn by a black horse and hung with hemlock and a few white lilacs. An elderly mailman, Thomas Carey, led the horse on foot. They'd leave the funeral services in the small Episcopalian stone church, St. Paul's, and the family and friends would walk along behind the cortege. When the procession passed the Sedgwick house, it stopped for a moment of silence, and then everyone continued on up the main street to the graveyard and the Pie.

Three or four days after John F. Kennedy's funeral I received a letter from Minturn which I gave to my aunt, who took one look at it and said, "Oh, no, no, no ... it's got to be *burned*." Minturn's letter reported that he had heard from a cousin, Charles Sedgwick, who for a brief period had done some interpreting in French for President Kennedy, that Kennedy knew a little about the Sedgwick Pie, and Minturn wondered after having watched the sad but impressive events of the Kennedy funeral on television—the casket on the horse-drawn cart, the widow and the mourners walking along behind, and so forth—if perhaps Mrs. Kennedy had "borrowed" the idea from us. That was the way he put it: "borrowed"—with quotes around it. Such was Minturn's curiosity that he sent a self-addressed stamped postcard on which he was to inform him whether it was indeed true that Mrs. Kennedy had "borrowed" our funeral

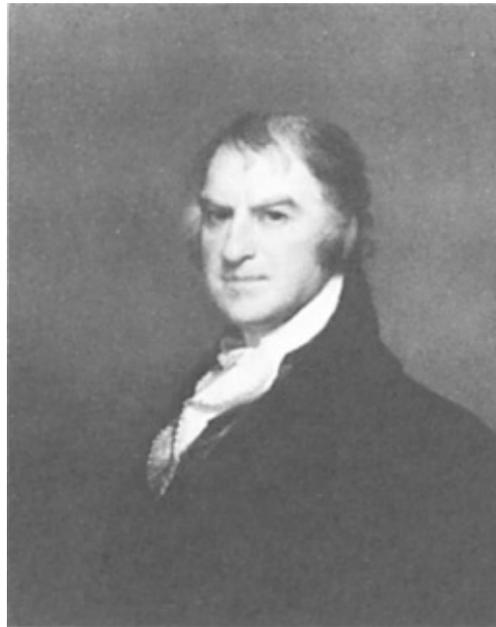
procedures.

As I say, that would have been just like Minturn. The Pie meant a great deal to him. He stocked up on simple coffins—ornate mahogany coffins with gold handles just aren't used by the Sedgwicks. But it's very difficult to buy a simple coffin: if you ask for just a plain Puritan pine box, the undertakers look at you with disgust and they say, "Oh, we have those for the potter's field, Mac—for paupers, city cases." Minturn persisted, apparently. He got a whole stack of simple pine boxes up in Pittsfield somewhere—certainly enough for his immediate family. A Stockbridge woman friend of mine who plays the organ at the church and is hired to perform at funerals told me that the local undertaker simply couldn't understand this man, Minturn Sedgwick, who not only insisted on these plain boxes but got into them and "tested" them. He was a big man, a famous Harvard football player, and he got into his box to make sure it was long enough and would accommodate his shoulders.

ALEXANDER SEDGWICK There's a General William Bond in the Sedgwick Pie who may be somewhat surprised to find himself rising and facing Judge Sedgwick on the Day of Resurrection. He was one of the few field generals killed in the Vietnam War—he was picked off by a sniper as he was climbing out of a helicopter to take over his command—and he probably would have ended up in the Arlington cemetery if it hadn't been for his Sedgwick wife, Theodora, who felt that since the General was married to a Sedgwick he ought to be buried up in Stockbridge. Theodora was a very staunch Sedgwick. She was once overheard saying to a companion at the bar in the Red Lion Inn in Stockbridge: "I was a Sedgwick therefore I *am* a Sedgwick." So it wasn't surprising that her husband would end up in the Pie. Actually, there were *two* funerals—the first at the military cemetery at Arlington, a service full of pageantry—a riderless horse with the stirrups up, and General Westmoreland there—and suddenly, just at the point when the coffin would normally be lowered into the ground, a hearse drove up and the coffin was transferred into it ... almost as if the Sedgwicks were plucking the General from his sleep among the military heroes and hauling him back to the bosom of the family. The Army didn't let go of him easily. It sent a detachment of Green Berets to Stockbridge as part of the honor escort. They caused quite a stir. The troops—almost a company of them—marched up and down the village streets and scared the life out of the hippies who were thronging the place in the 1960s, a lot of them draft-dodgers who must have assumed the Berets had been sent to get *them*.



Elizabeth Freeman (Mumbet, 1742?-1829) by Susan Sedgwick



Judge Theodore Sedgwick (1746-1813) by Gilbert Stuart



So General Bond was seen to his hero's funeral in the Sedgwick Pie. He's buried right behind Ellery Sedgwick, his wife's father.

JOHN P. MARQUAND, JR. My great-uncle Ellery Sedgwick is one of the best-known members of the Sedgwick clan. He became the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* in about 1905 and maintained influence and status during the Twenties and Thirties. I always thought him a pretentious rather arrogant man with an enormous ego. He was born in New York in a house where Radio City Music Hall now stands, about which he says in his memoirs, *The Happy Profession*—one hopes jokingly—“What an appropriate memorial to me!” Toward the end of his life he became very reactionary—a friend of Generalissimo Franco and so forth. He was quite a snob, which was not surprising for a Sedgwick. The Sedgwicks always looked down on my father when he married into the family—they just didn't like the idea of their darling daughter Christina throwing herself away on a penniless nobody they must have thought of as a beatnik—but when my father made it as an author, Ellery began to suck up to him. I always felt my father never should have given in to this sort of behavior, but at the end of his life he was always delighted to lunch with Ellery in Boston at the Somerset Club. When my father was young he was very insecure among them—so he must have found it comforting when they accepted him.

The Sedgwick my father was most impressed by was Minturn Sedgwick, and that for his athletic prowess—he was a Harvard legend. He was on the team that won the Rose Bowl against Oregon. When I was a little boy running around between people's legs at a cocktail party, I remember my father calling out, “Minturn, show us how you did it”—really terribly interested—and he'd go on, “Minturn, how did you get down there and *crouch* in the line, mean when you were playing against Princeton, what position did you assume? How did you charge?”... and they'd get Minturn down in his football stance at that party, charging up and down among the guests standing there drinking cocktails.

Of course, my father wasn't above getting some mileage out of the Sedgwicks for his book—the Sedgwick Pie, for example. In *The Late George Apley* there's an old-maid cousin, a distant family connection named Hattie, who gets buried in the wrong place in the family plot, indeed in what George Apley considers his *own* segment, and there's quite a lot of correspondence about whether Cousin Hattie shouldn't be dug up and moved to where she might more properly belong. I don't know what the Sedgwicks made of this fun at the expense—it didn't keep Ellery from asking father to those Somerset lunches. But Ellery was a very smart man.

HARRY SEDGWICK Ellery was a dominating, difficult, and exciting man, lacking none of the outstanding Sedgwick male quality, charm. He was very different from his older brother Babbo, who was Edie's and my grandfather: Babbo the dandy, the scholar, epicurean, lover of beautiful countries—France, Spain, and Greece—beautiful literature, and, last but by no means least, beautiful women. Ellery was the hard-headed, tough businessman. Though his business was literature, he always knew how to get things done, understood the workings of power, and always had his eye on the “bottom line.” Ellery's second wife, Marjorie, put it very well: “Your grandfather Babbo was the most charming man that ever lived, but you

uncle Ellery has more solid virtues.”

Babbo lived until he was ninety-five. He could remember people shouting in the streets of Stockbridge that Abraham Lincoln had been shot. He was especially anxious to outlive his Harvard classmate Godfrey Cabot—known to his Cabot nephews and nieces as Uncle God—who was a teetotaler. Babbo always referred to him as a “disgrace to the class of ‘82,” and worried that if Cabot outlived his classmates he would credit abstinence from alcohol as the reason. I remember hearing about a class dinner at which five of them turned up. There they were, these wonderful old Harvard men in their nineties gathering for a reunion supper, and Cabot, who was the secretary of the class, had, of course, ordered no wine. This was more than Babbo could bear. He stood up on a chair and called out, “Champagne!” He reported afterwards that one of his elderly classmates, a man he could not recall having ever met before, looked over and said, “I’m so glad you came.”

There was a family rumor that Babbo had been offered the editorship of the *Atlantic* before his younger brother, Ellery. True or not, the *Atlantic* got the right man. Babbo was not a man of affairs, at least of a business nature. He practiced law in New York for nearly fifteen years and gave it up. He wrote about it: “I was mentally and morally uncomfortable, as if I were swimming in glue. I did not understand the law. It seemed to me to create most of the difficulties it professed to settle.”

Life must not have been easy for Babbo then. His courtship of my grandmother was not going well. She had declined his offer of marriage. He said, “I can’t take it any longer.” He bought ammunition, went back to his law offices, wrote farewell letters, and started to load the gun. The ammunition wouldn’t fit. He never knew if the clerk in the gun shop had made a mistake, or whether he thought my grandfather looked too high-strung and had slipped him the wrong ammunition on purpose.

He kept trying different jobs. He was the headmaster at the Brearley School in New York for a year. The demands of headmastering escaped him completely, and neither he nor the trustees were sorry to see him move on after the year. He wrote almost thirty books—histories and biographies. But his real career was his life: the people, places, and literature that filled it. He closed one of his letters to me, “Squeeze the flask of life to the dregs.”

FAN SEDGWICK Babbo was widowed in 1919, and he moved to Cambridge. My father, Minturn, a Harvard undergraduate, went to live with him. Then in 1924 my father married Helen Peabody, the daughter of Endicott Peabody, the founder and headmaster of Groton School, and she invited Babbo to live with them. My mother and Babbo were wonderful company for each other. They had lunch together every day. At dinnertime theirs was *the* conversation—often quite glittering and literate—with Daddy the quiet, benevolent brown bear at the end of the table. He didn’t seem to mind, and we children listened with some wonderment. Babbo and Mummy had a good time and loved to laugh, and we all laughed with them. One exceptional moment was when a conversation drifted (with Babbo’s guidance) into “Free Love.” Mummy’s face froze, and that was the end of *that* conversation. She had a superb sense of humor but her archetypal New England heritage imposed limits. Babbo really loved her. There had been troops of women in his life, but his daughter-in-law held a special place. She came down to Stockbridge from Murray Bay for young Tina Marquand’s wedding and was feeling especially well and she died during the night. I’ve heard that Babbo stood at her grave

at the Pie and he called out, "Oh, Helen, Helen, it should be I."

SAUCIE SEDGWICK Aunt Helen loved Murray Bay, and so did Babbo. It was the family's summer place on the St. Lawrence River in Quebec. It was the place where Babbo and my grandmother had always spent their summers. For Babbo it must really have been home. He would say, "I am very eager for another summer in that dear place," and "Beyond Murray Bay there is only heaven."

HELEN BURROUGHS STERN The first time I went to Murray Bay was with Harry Sedgwick, my new husband. Edie's first cousin. I was just married—a young farm girl from New Hampshire thrust suddenly into this incredible Sedgwick family as a young bride. Perhaps they were puzzled by me as I was by them. People from Boston used to say, "Where are you from?" And I'd say, "Manchester, New Hampshire," and they'd say, "Oh, way up north?" as if they thought I came from Alaska.

The Murray Bay house was large, with porches, and an enormous green lawn leading down to the water. The water was just freezing cold. The days were like the water—shining and scintillating. Everything smelled like summer cedar. The house contained the strange combination: beautiful braided rugs were everywhere, made in the local abbeys up there. glowing rooms with satiny walls and lovely lamps ... and yet the lampshades were bought down at J. C. Penney's and they had Mickey Mouses on them. Suddenly you found things that were totally tasteless. The Sedgwicks just didn't care about that sort of thing. I did passionately. It just killed me. I wanted it *all* to look wonderful.

The picnics, for instance, were *such* a tradition. Someone would announce in the morning "Now it's the time of year when we must go to the ..." and off we would go on these expeditions—pilgrimages, really—always to the same place year after year. The wicker picnic baskets had to be brought down. The thermoses had to be filled with syllabub, which was a kind of drink made out of claret and milk. The Sedgwicks would say, "Syllabub is like Clarinet Cup, only it's far better." This was apparently because it had cinnamon in it. Eugène, the Canadian who worked for the Sedgwicks, would launch these two Old Town canoes. I always imagined they had been hewn out of the trees by the Indians. Babbo would somehow get himself down the hill with his two sticks and get into one of them. He wore stockings that came up to his knickerbockers and folded over once, and what he always called his Cinderella slippers. He had a special seat for himself, and the women sat in some sort of raffia wicker seats placed in the bottom of the canoe. The men paddled like mad. I always remember the *feathered* their paddles—Minturn and Harry, my husband—after all, they had been Harvard crew men. Eugène would go ahead of us in the little rowboat to clear the ground where we were to picnic. He was always dressed in a striped waistcoat, a white shirt, a black tie over a celluloid collar.

When we got to the island we'd spread blankets—lap-robies from cars, big plaid blankets from the football games—and the things would be brought off the canoes: the supplies, the thermoses, the syllabub. The food was really marvelous ... thin sandwiches with cucumbers in them, and watercress, and almost no mayonnaise and a lot of butter and no crusts. The sandwiches were cut in half, and each half was carefully and perfectly wrapped in wax paper. Everything was just so. Even the Sedgwick lemonade had to be made in a certain way. But it was a

taken for granted. It was that way because it always had been. Always Minturn would make scrambled eggs. It was the tradition—scrambled eggs *Minturn*. He would say: “I am going to make some scrambled eggs ... I don’t hear many huzzahs.” This was supposed to produce great cheer.

After the picnic Babbo would always read aloud—usually whatever was interesting him at the moment. P. G. Wodehouse was his absolute favorite, but if he found something in the *Letters of Marcus Aurelius* that really turned him on, he would read *that* to us, and he would say, “This is superbly couched, and you must listen, and you must remember it.” One was never allowed to say “memorize.” I used to say “memorize” and Babbo would correct me. “Commit to memory” was how it was supposed to be said. He would read for about half an hour, and of course it was dark by then and everyone took turns holding the *torch*, my dear, not a flashlight, so that Babbo could see the pages. And that was quite a privilege, right?

Tradition, that was all the Sedgwicks thought about. They were so involved with the past that the present was not real-seeming. If you could couch some phrase in a way that harked back to Herodotus, then they loved you ... because they loved history. They would spend hours talking about Cromwell, but as if he were their uncle! The best, dearest relative!

SAUCIE SEDGWICK Babbo, being a gentle scholarly person and a widower without a bean, was totally dependent upon his sons to support him—a most undignified position for a heavenly old gentleman. When he wasn’t with the children he lived terribly frugally. A friend of the family described staying with him when he was a widower in Cambridge and getting nothing to eat but boiled eggs. Obviously he preferred to stay with his sons, and it was while he was staying with our family on the ranch near Santa Barbara that he fell in love with Gabriella Ladd. My parents introduced them. She was staying nearby with friends of theirs and they invited her to come riding. Later she told me that my father made a pass at her that first day and she was horrified.

Gabriella was in her early forties then, never married, and Babbo was almost ninety. Her father was quite a well-known Boston pediatrician; her mother was a sculptress. Gabriella had been a champion high jumper at Vassar. At one point she decided to be a nun, and she might even have embarked on this course but when she met Babbo, they fell in love that first night. In the middle of dinner, Babbo was quoting some Greek verse—I think it was Anacreon—and when he hesitated over a line, Gabriella picked up where he left off and completed the passage—in Greek. She had the most musical voice—Babbo’s heart must have turned right over. Their courtship lasted five years, during which they wrote each other every day, sometimes several letters a day. I came across one of his recently which began, “I have a new name for you, it is Great Heart.”

MINTURN SEDGWICK Babbo made no bones about the fact that he was in love with Gabriella, but he said, “It’s ridiculous at my age getting married. We have this perfect relationship, and why spoil it?” But the lady had other ideas. She was determined. In Bermuda in the spring of ‘51 she wrote Babbo saying that there was a very attractive young man she was considering marrying. It worked. He flew to Bermuda, and within a day or two we had a cable saying, ALL IS WELL. SHE ACCEPTS.

HELEN BURROUGHS STERN I was in love with the idea of the two of them marrying. Babbo! I was infatuated with him. What was remarkable about him was what a romantic he was—especially for an older person. He called me “the barefoot angel,” and he always had strawberries on the breakfast table when I came down. He was an absolute fiend about how English should be spoken. He did not wear a tie; he wore a *cravat*. It was “knickerbockers” not “knickers,” and he wore them, too, with long woolen socks. Once I said something was *exquisite*, and he said, “How vile! I can’t believe that’s my granddaughter-in-law *speaking!*”



Henry Dwight Sedgwick (Babbo) and Gabriella May Ladd, on their wedding day, May 18, 1953

He said, “*Exquisite* doesn’t exist. *Exquisite* or nothing!” He had his way. At his wedding to Gabriella he came down the aisle alone, walking along with his two canes, wearing a lily of the valley in his buttonhole, a soft white shirt, a rose-pink cravat, and shiny shoes—I think he had the same pair of shoes for about thirty-five years and he shined them every day: they were what old leather was meant to look like, mellow, you know, mellow things encasing what he always referred to as his Cinderella feet, though they were *enonnous*—and in the ensemble he came down the aisle with the music blaring, and your heart just melted at the

sight of this old, old man moving down the aisle alone, with his two canes, toward his bride who was waiting at the altar in an unusual reversal of the normal procedure—quite a show. As the vows were being said, the minister, who was a spry young thing of about sixty-five, asked the bride and groom to repeat after him, “Thereto I plight thee my troth.” He pronounced it “trawth,” whereupon Babbo in a loud and insistent voice, projecting it in the way he had, boomed forth: “*Troth*, young man! *Troth!*” He banged his stick, brandishing the other, and then banged *it* down. He meant business! At the wedding dinner afterwards he got up to offer some toasts, but he wouldn’t allow anyone to stand up to join in them. He would not permit it. He said, “You only stand to drink someone’s health if they’re dead. It’s only for the dead that you rise. You must *sit* to the living.” He yelled: “Sit down! Sit down!” in the quite frantic way while guests sort of half stood up, glasses half raised, everyone looking at each other quite dazed. He kept banging his spoon on the table and insisting: “Sit *down!*” He must have been a fiend when he was younger. Can you imagine? Gabriella was not one to be overshadowed by anyone, but that was Babbo’s day.

JOHN P. MARQUAND, JR. My great-uncle Harry, whose descendants call him Babbo, and Gabriella had three very happy years together until he died peacefully in 1957 at the age of ninety-five. His funeral was in the winter. The Sedgwick Pie was covered with fresh snow. Gabriella stood there at the grave. She seemed to have envisioned her husband as having been transmogrified into some celestial lamb of God. Gabriella was a pious woman and free of the wry agnosticism of Uncle Harry, for all that he assiduously studied the Bible ... and in Greece at that. Gabriella believed in heaven and transcendence over evil. As you know, she was a really striking-looking ... eternal youth in her face, those black eyes and that radiant smile. She had on widow’s weeds, which made her look even more ethereal, particularly with the white snowdrifts in the background. I remember she turned to my wife and me: “I was saying to Babbo just the other day”—I would imagine when he was expiring—“When you get to Paradise, you’re going to *leap* and *leap* and *leap*.”

SAUCIE SEDGWICK Gabriella is in the Pie, too. She was cremated, so it’s not so easy imagining her rising up and facing the Judge on the Day of Resurrection. I persuaded my sister Kate to help me do something with Gabriella’s ashes, which made her very nervous when she thought about it. We took half of the ashes and scattered them in the ocean at Singing Beach on the North Shore of Boston. Do you know the beach? It’s called Singing Beach because the sand sings in this strange way under your bare feet when you run across it. Gabriella loved the place. But Kate thought: “What if we really *are* reassembled on the Judgment Day, and part of Gabriella is in the ocean off Singing Beach, and the rest in the ground at Stockbridge?”

JOHN P. MARQUAND, JR. There’s still a little room on the exterior of the Pie for the next generation of the Judge’s descendants. Edie was entitled to be buried there; so is Saucie and so am I. But being only collaterally a Sedgwick, I’ve chosen to be buried in Newburyport... I don’t know what my Sedgwick cousins will do. Edie’s grandfather, my grandfather, and most of all the Sedgwicks of that generation were of an old and vanished school—Stockbridge was their Mecca. They had this place and all the myths and traditions about it which had been cultivated over the years, and the Pie was the greatest of the Sedgwick illusions. Greater even than the illusion that on a summer’s night in Stockbridge the crickets sing *Sēdg-wick*, *Sēdg-wick*.

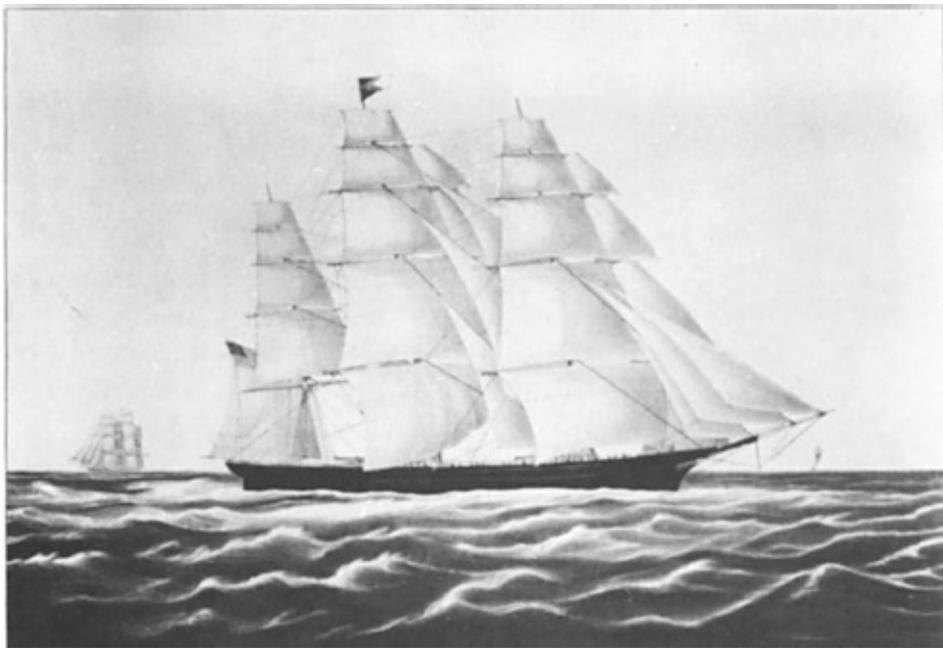


The four Minturn sisters (*left to right*): Mildred, Edith, Gertrude, and Sarah May (Edie's grandmother)

SAUCIE SEDGWICK Stockbridge has always been linked with New York rather than Boston ... and the connections were up and down the Hudson, by boat or stagecoach or horseback. In comparison, the trip to Boston was long and arduous. So although the men of my family went to Harvard, it was usually New York after college. They went there to work, and many of them married there. Babbo had gone to New York to practice law, and it was there that he met our grandmother, May Minturn.

MINTURN SEDGWICK The Minturns were very rich, successful shipping merchants. The swallowtail company flag was seen everywhere—most noticeably on the famous clipper ship, the *Flying Cloud*, which my grandfather Robert Bowne Minturn had purchased for \$90,000, a colossal sum in those days. The family's quite proud of the *Flying Cloud*. There's usually a framed picture of her hanging around somewhere in a Minturn house.

Then, just the year my mother was to have come out in New York with great fanfare, a dishonest agent for the family sugar plantations in Cuba got away with three quarters of a million dollars, which is worth at least three million today. It crippled the firm for a long time. So, as my mother used to say, instead of coming out in satin and pearls, she came out in cotton. I doubt it bothered her. She was an idealistic person, very interested in good work and education.



The clipper ship *Flying Cloud*, 1851



Saint-Gaudens' memorial on Boston Common honoring Robert Gould Shaw (Edie's great-great paternal uncle) and his black regiment that fought in the Civil War

The family lived near Gramercy Park. My widowed grandmother owned four brownstone houses on Twenty-third Street, forming a sort of Minturn compound in the heart of Manhattan. She was a very domineering lady, a kind of a Queen Bee dowager.

HELEN STOKES MERRILL Granny Minturn loved the children. She took such great interest and pride. She pulled out my tooth for me by tying floss silk to the handle and then slamming the door. I suppose I screamed. Well, they were much fiercer then, they really were. I remember my grandmother's Gramercy Park house, but, curiously, I don't remember the furnishings, except for the white druggets that were put over everything when we went away for the summer to Murray Bay in Canada. They were made of plain cotton or linen, and there was one which fitted the rug perfectly, so that the floor was suddenly white, and there was one for both these sofas, so that the room in the summer, the windows barred shut, was shrouded in white. In winter I remember how dark the rooms were—gas-lit, and when you left the room, you pulled the little chain and that cut the gas down so that there was just a little glow inside the lamp. It didn't quite go out. When you came in, you pulled the other chain and the light blazed up. It was the latest thing—like what we have now with the rheostat.

Granny Minturn kept a carriage, a coupé, a horrible thing. It was enclosed, lined with leather, and you rode backwards if you were little. I got seasick in it. Finally, at the end of her life, she took to hiring a car. She went for drives, always wearing—in such contrast to those widow's weeds she wore at home—a white, heavily starched muslin cap with little flutings down the side. It surprised me because she had such lovely silver hair. I remember the maid brushing it—the old maid who couldn't do anything else coming in to brush her hair. It took her half an hour to do it. Her name was Crocksey, just a tiny, wrinkled woman about four feet tall, and we loved her as children because she was about our size.

Granny Minturn's children—my uncles and aunts—just dropped like flies. A doctor once told me that the corsets of that time had a lot to do with it—they squeezed the vital organs

Granny seemed to be in mourning all the time. She was quite old when I remember her, but she carried herself beautifully and held her head up. By then she had become very tyrannical and high-strung. She had outlived her husband and all but two of her seven children. She stayed in the house and dwelt on the past and her passionate devotion to the dead. She was such a figure of sorrow. She kept a linen-covered table in the corner of her upstairs sitting room with the portraits of her family—so many of them gone—lined up in silver frames. I secretly called it “the dead table.”





Three of her children died within four years. The terrible tragedy of Granny Minturn's life was the death of her fourth child, Francis, who died of diphtheria at the age of six. She wrote about him in a book she had privately printed afterwards. The doctors had asked permission to perform a tracheotomy.

His father and I said we were willing; and they took our darling, laid him on a table, and lit gas-lights and candles all about him. He looked like a beautiful marble image as he lay there. Four doctors held him; they wanted us to leave the room, but we could not. As soon as the incision was made, he whispered in a frightened, hurried way: "Mamma, mamma, mamma, mamma!" And I ran to him and taking his dear hand, I said, "Frankie, darling, mamma is here, she will not leave you." Then he said to the doctors, "Please don't, please don't." Those were the last words we ever heard him say, for after this operation the voice was gone....

MINTURN SEDGWICK My brother Francis, Edie's father, was named after that Francis Minturn. There were four of us. The eldest was Henry Dwight Sedgwick, Jr., whom we called Halla. I was the second. Then my mother had a daughter, Edith, who only lived for a half a day or a day. I can remember picking flowers for her grave in the rain. Then two and a half years later

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