

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Robert F. Sayre, PhD

Sarah Kemble Knight (1666-1727)

The Journal of Madam Knight

Sarah Kemble Knight's Journal was not published until 1825, when it was brought out by Theodore Dwight (1796-1866). Dwight was a New York teacher and journalist who wrote travel essays, histories, and biographies, and who wanted, like others of his generation, to contribute to building American literature. His father, Theodore Dwight, Sr. (1764-1846), and uncle, Timothy Dwight, were grandsons of Jonathan Edwards and members of the Connecticut Wits. Knight's Journal, he said elegantly, would "please those who have particularly studied the progressive history of our country."

In his brief introduction to the 1825 edition, Dwight described Knight as "a resident of Boston, and a lady of uncommon literary attainments, as well as great taste and strength of mind," and he noted that "she was called Madam Knight, out of respect to her character according to a custom once common in New England..." The Journal, he said, was "a faithful copy from a diary in the author's own hand-writing, compiled soon after her return home, as it appears, from notes recorded daily, while on the road."¹

Unfortunately, the original text is now lost and little more is known about Knight. A modern editor, however, has learned that when she hastily began her journey, "she left behind a fifteen-year-old daughter, whose father was apparently travelling on business abroad, and an elderly mother.... The road she took was the established one between Boston and New Haven; just three months earlier Connecticut's governor, Fitz-John Winthrop, and his son and daughter had taken the same road from Connecticut to Boston. But it must have been the rare woman who undertook the journey alone."²

The text is from *The Journal of Madam Knight*, ed. Sargent Bush, Jr., in *Journeys in New Worlds: Early American Women's Narratives*, ed. William L. Andrews (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1990), Bush retained the footnotes of 1825, by Theodore Dwight, which have been modified for the present volume. Bush's own editorial commentary, however, which appears in brackets, has not been changed. In his introduction to the selection in *Journeys in New Worlds*, Bush summarizes what else is known of Knight, as well as other critical writing about her.

1. Theodore Dwight, "Introduction to the Edition of 1825," in *The Journal of Madam Knight*, ed. Sargent Bush, Jr., in *Journeys in New Worlds*, ed. William L. Andrews, p. 85.
2. Bush, "Introduction" to *The Journal of Madam Knight*, p. 69.

Reading

The private journal of a journey from Boston to New York in the year 1704
<http://archive.org/stream/privatejournalof00knig#page/n5/mode/2up>