

# Paper doll trail leads to Westford families

## Minister's daughter achieves prominence in pages of Ladies Home Journal magazine

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This story is about a girl gifted with imagination and a natural talent which she shared with thousands of people in a very unique way. Her name is Sheila Young and she became famous for her painting of paper dolls.

Every month from 1909 to 1920, she featured a page of her paper dolls in the "Ladies Home Journal." The pages included entire families, as the Lettie Lane Paper Family or the Betty Bonnet Family, with all their activities. Many were copied and reprinted in children's magazines.

They are almost impossible to find today, as they were literally worn out by the children and mothers of that day.

In 1912 the "Ladies Home Journal" offered an 18-inch Daisy Doll from Germany as a reward to any girl who made three new subscriptions. Young designed the wardrobe for these dolls. The Polly Pratt Paper Doll series is another of her creations.

Because of the early connections of her parents with the town of Westford, the story would not be complete without telling about them also.

Her father, Rev. George H. Young, graduated from the Theological School in

Meadville, Pa. in June 1866. He was ordained in the Unitarian Church (now First Parish Church United of Westford), on Oct. 25, 1866. His salary was \$900, and after the first year, \$1,000, paid in quarterly payments. The records tell us that when he asked permission to preach Sunday afternoons during the summer at the Graniteville church (part of Westford) it was granted with the understanding that any money received was to be deducted from his regular salary.

During his ministry in Westford, many important changes were made in the life of the church. It was voted to admit female members, as authorized by Chapter 246, Acts of 1869.

A major change was made when the town was asked to cease using the vestry of the church for town meetings. This resulted in



FROM THE LATE ALLISTAR MACDOUGALL COLLECTION, PUBLISHED IN WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS BY JUNE W. KENNEDY

Sheila Young's paper dolls made a 'cameo' appearance in the an early Amos Mark Griffin production 'Dust and Ashes of Embers and Dreams' co-starring Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin. The paper doll, from Betty Bonnet's Halloween Party, appeared in the October 1917 Ladies Home Journal.

Westford building its own Town House in 1870, and the Meeting House being used exclusively for religious purposes. To make the change complete, the town was asked to remove the hearse house on the east side of the church. Its new location was opposite the Town Hall, where the building served as a garage. The structure was torn down in the 1990s.

### The Young family

When Rev. Young came to Westford to start his career as a minister, there resided in town the family of Phillip Southwick. They lived in the three-story, brick-end house on Main Street built by John Abbot in 1801. Southwick was an instructor of anatomy at Harvard College and at one time Boston's City Physician. He was also a naturalist of some note and was particularly fond of flowers.

The Westford house was used by Mr. and Mrs. Southwick more or less as a summer house, with a housekeeper during the winter in order that the older of their eight children could attend the Academy.

The young minister married Abby, the fifth child in the Southwick family, on July 18, 1870. Their first daughter, Ann, was born in Boston in 1871, while they were living in Westford. Their second daughter, Sheila, was born on Dec. 6, 1874, after they moved to Troy, N.Y.

Following her mother's death in California when she was but 4 years old, Sheila and her father came back East. While living in

Lawrence, she studied painting under Benjamin Chapney, a famous painter of that day. She later continued her studies in North Conway, N.H., and also attended the Cornwall Art School located in Boston's Bay Bay.

Young lived most of her life in Boston and did a great deal of her professional work in that city.

The Southwick family and its long association with Westford often brought Young back to visit her aunts and cousins. (Amm, the oldest, was said to be the youngest nurse in the Civil War. It is claimed she also had the distinction of being the first white woman to cross the Sahara Desert.)

Many of her cousins were Abbots and Camerons of the Abbot Worsted Company, the company which was long Westford's leading industry.

Besides her paper dolls, Young often sketched or painted illustrations for magazines, sometimes telling the story of her pictures by writing original poems. She painted and wrote verse for Christmas cards for a Miss McNicol. Many of her salutations on these cards were great favorites, the best-known being:

*Little prayer go far and wide,  
Bless all our friends this Christmas Tide.*

In one scene of the motion picture "Dust and Ashes of Embers and Dreams," featuring Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford is cutting out one of Young's paper dolls.

Presently there is a Lettie Lane Paper Doll Club of California,



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The Lettie Lane Paper Family (above) and the Betty Bonnet Family were the popular work of Sheila Young, daughter of the Rev. George Young of First Parish Church United of Westford. The dolls regularly appeared in the Ladies Home Journal from 1909 to 1920.

with membership in at least 17 states. Every year a convention is held on the Pacific Coast.

Locally, Boston Road resident Allister MacDougall (1891-1989) had been an honorary member. His collection included 12 sheets of Young's paper dolls; a small original painting that she gave to her cousin Lucy Abbot Cameron

and Mrs. Cameron, in turn, passed on to MacDougall's mother; a picture given to him by Young showing Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin and one of the paper dolls.

Reprints of Sheila Young's Paper Dolls have been available at area museum gift shops and would make unique gifts for

Westford's younger set. Check at the Westford Town Museum for availability.

This updated article originally appeared in the Westford Eagle on Dec. 24, 1987. Material from the late Allister MacDougall was used in the preparation of this article, which is the second in an ongoing series by Westford resident June W. Kennedy.