

Woman with ties to Westford creates fanciful world of paper doll families to stretch girls' imagination

By June W. Kennedy
Eagle contributor

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 1909-1920, she featured a page of her paper dolls in the *Ladies Home Journal*. They included whole 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 their mothers of that day.

In 1912 the *Ladies Home Journal* offered an 18" Daisy Doll from Germany as a reward to any girl who made three new subscriptions. Sheila 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 father and mother with the Town of Westford, Massachusetts, the story would not be complete without telling about them also.

Her father, Reverend George H. Young, graduated from the theological school at Meadville, Pennsylvania, in June of 1866. On Aug. 1 of that year, a town meeting article was considered in Westford "to see if the town will concur with the church [presently First Parish Church United of Westford] of said parish in giving Mr. George H. Young an invitation to settle with them."

It was voted unanimously and he was ordained in the church, Oct. 25, 1866. His salary as voted by the Town 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. It is interesting to note that it was voted to rent the pews by auction.

A major change was made when the Town was asked to cease using the vestry of the church for town meetings. This resulted in Westford's building its own Town House in 1870, and the Meeting House being used exclusively for religious



SHEILA YOUNG'S CREATIVITY made the silver screen when, in an early Amos Wark Griffin production, "Dust and Ashes of Embers and Dreams", Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin used a paper doll from Betty Bonnet's Halloween Party that was printed in *Ladies Home Journal* Oct. 1917. (From "Westford Recollections" by June Kennedy)

purposes. To make the change complete, the town was asked to remove the hearse house on the east side of the church. Its present location is opposite the Town Hall, where it serves as a garage.

When Sheila's father 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. Mr. 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 home with a housekeeper during the winter in order that the older of their eight children could attend the Academy.

The young minister, George Young, 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. Sheila, the second daughter, was born on Dec. 6, 1874, after they moved to Troy, New York.

Following her mother's death in California when she was but four, Sheila's father came back East. Sheila studied painting while living in Lawrence, under Benjamin Chapney, a famous painter of that day.

She later continued her studies in North Conway, New Hampshire, and also attended the Cornwall Art School located in the Back Bay section of Boston.

Sheila 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 Sheila back to visit her aunts and cousins. (Amna, 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, long Westford's leading industry.

Besides her paper dolls, Sheila often sketched or painted illustrations for magazines, sometimes telling the story of her pictures by writing original poems. Miss Young 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 so 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 Sheila Young's



SOMETHING TO TICKLE the fancy of little girls in the early part of this century — paper dolls and clothing — were printed in the *Ladies Home Journal* 1908-1920. The Lettie Lane Paper Family (pictured above) and Betty Bonnet dolls were the creation of Sheila Young, whose father Rev. George Young was pastor of First Parish Church United of Westford 1866-1872. (From "Westford Recollections" by June Kennedy)

paper dolls.

Presently there is a Lettie Lane Paper Doll Club of California, with membership in at least 17 states. Every year a convention is held on the Pacific Coast.

Locally, Boston Road resident Allister MacDougall has been made an honorary member. He has in his collection 12 sheets of Miss 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 his mother; a picture given him by Miss Young showing Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin and one of the paper dolls.

Reprints of Sheila Young's Paper Dolls have been for sale at area museum gift shops and would make unique gifts for Westford's younger set.

With credits to Allister MacDougall for sharing the information for this article.