

EMILY DICKINSON: Transcendental Snapshots

The "strange lady" of Amherst, Massachusetts, as she eventually became known was second of three children born to Edward and Emily Norcross Dickinson.

The year was 1830.

As was the case with her siblings - William Austin and Lavinia - she spent nearly her entire life within the confines of the Family Compound on Main Street in Amherst.

Her father - Squire Edward Dickinson - was an esteemed attorney and politician in the State of Massachusetts as well as being Treasurer of Amherst College as had his own father - Sam - before him. Grandfather Dickinson had in fact been instrumental in establishing this school as an institution dedicated to the preservation and proliferation of Calvinist Doctrine. Of significance here was the trend to teaching Unitarian Doctrine in Eastern Massachusetts at Harvard University. Emily's Dickinson and Norcross ancestors had all been of staunch Puritan-stock.

Emily's formal education included approximately seven years at Amherst Academy followed by a year at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary located in nearby South Hadley.

As was the case with her namesake mother Emily was plagued throughout her fifty-six year lifespan by recurring health problems. At least two of her rare excursions outside Hampshire Township were occasioned by her need for medical treatment in Boston while visiting her Norcross cousins.

It was in fact while beginning her abbreviated career at Mount Holyoke following a sojourn in Boston that indications of her nonconformist attitudes toward Theological Issues began appearing.

Unlike the majority of her fellow students, Emily adamantly refused to declare herself a professed member of the Congregational Church espoused without question by the rest of her family. Squire Dickinson was thus prompted to commence measures designed to reconfigure his oldest daughter's proclivities.

SCENE 1: South Hadley, Massachusetts 1848

Emily Dickinson

Benjamin Newton

Newton: GOOD AFTERNOON, Miss Dickinson.

IT IS MY GREAT PLEASURE

TO MAKE YOUR ACQUAINTANCE!

Dickinson: I AM FLATTERED, Good Sir,