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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Inspiring future generations through the voices of children

Major digitization project makes texts written by children in the 1800s publicly available

Worcester, MA (June 10, 2024)—Children in the nineteenth century didn't have TikTok and Instagram to share their thoughts, comment on issues of the day, and express their creativity. Yet they recorded their daily lives, wrote stories and poetry, and expressed their beliefs and values in a variety of ways—from diaries to newspapers and books published on home printing presses. The American Antiquarian Society (AAS) has digitized and made publicly available more than 12,000 pages of texts written by American youth in the 1800s from its collections. The texts, which reveal their authors' lively imaginations and inquisitive minds, are now freely available on the organization's website. The project, [Historic Children's Voices, 1799-1899](#), begun in September 2022, is funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

A free, drop-in "Chat with a Curator" program on Wednesday, June 26, from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. will allow the public to get up close to many of the original materials that were digitized, talk informally with curators, and learn how to bind their own diary or booklet. Registration is required for the book binding activity only. Details can be found at americanantiquarian.org.

According to Lauren Hewes, vice president for collections at AAS, children in the 1800s were creating weekly or monthly manuscript periodicals that contained articles on race and politics, as well as poetry and artwork written by their peers. "They were keeping diaries about everyday life in their neighborhoods and schools, and they were printing amateur books on



tabletop presses and selling or swapping them via national networks of teenage publishers and distributors,” she says.

Examples of the original materials that were digitized include:

A small newspaper, called [*The Monthly*](#), edited by John Quan and created by J. Corr and Solomen Lee in Dingmans Ferry, Pike County, Pennsylvania, during 1866. About three inches square, the handwritten booklet was made from scrap paper bound together with string. It included short stories, jokes, and poetry, as well as illustrations and advertisements. [Image available here.](#)

The [*diary of Harriet “Hattie” Foster Hawes*](#), age ten, written from March 5 through April 25, 1865. Hattie writes about the weather, visiting with family and friends, deaths and sicknesses in her community, and social events. She also comments on the Civil War, the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, and the attempted assassination of William H. Seward and his son Augustus Henry Seward. [Image available here.](#)

[*The Young Folks’ HandBook of Flirtations*](#), published in Rockport, Indiana, by seventeen-year-old James Niblack in 1882. James wrote about the complex world of flirtation and courtship—including instructions on “how to kiss deliciously.” [Image available here.](#)

In addition to scanning and cataloging hundreds of newspapers, poems, diaries, and printed books and pamphlets written by children, the Historic Children’s Voices project includes a [comprehensive resource on the AAS website](#). Accompanying the digital library of scanned materials are research and teaching tools, lesson plans, guides on how to read handwritten manuscripts and newspapers, transcriptions of many handwritten texts, videos, and audio recordings for deeper exploration. Reflections by AAS curators on the missing voices in



nineteenth-century texts written by children address the lack of diversity among the youth represented, providing important historical context for researchers, educators, and students.

The Historic Children’s Voices project fills a significant gap that existed in the archives until now. While literature written for children is cataloged and retrievable, writings by children—a major population group—are difficult to find, in part because diarists’ ages are rarely included in the descriptions. “This project is significant, because the objects that were digitized are not works created by adults for children, but rather were written by children. Therefore, they form an archive not previously accessible,” says Hewes. “Making the thoughts, hopes, and dreams of nineteenth-century children available for all to read will enlighten and inspire future generations.”

About the American Antiquarian Society

Located in Worcester, Massachusetts, the American Antiquarian Society (AAS) is a national research library and community of learners dedicated to discovering and sharing a deeper understanding of the American past. The Society holds the world’s largest and most accessible collection of original printed, handwritten, and visual sources from before 1900 in what is now the United States. The library of over four million items includes books, pamphlets, broadsides, newspapers, periodicals, children's literature, music, and graphic arts material. AAS connects people across the globe with these collections through its digital catalog and resources, online exhibitions, and virtual learning experiences. In addition, it supports dozens of researchers, artists, and writers each year with a variety of fellowship programs. In 2013, President Obama presented the Society with the National Humanities Medal in a White House ceremony.



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The American Antiquarian Society is located at 185 Salisbury Street in Worcester, MA. The library is open Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Tuesdays from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The library is free and open to anyone with projects or interests related to the collections. All are welcome to join its free public programs held throughout the year. To learn more, visit americanantiquarian.org.

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