

*Cliveden:
Legacy of the Chew Women
Of Germantown*



by

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Preface

I began this research project with simple instructions—to find out whatever I could about three particular women who lived at Cliveden, and compress it into one comprehensible paper. As my guides, I had a very concise and thoroughly researched site report by Nancy E. Richards, and an even more precise and detailed Historic Structures Report. They formed the backbone of my research, and I am immensely indebted to both. I discovered, however, that I was not getting “the feel” of these women as people, as personalities in and of themselves. The site report teased me with Anne Sophia Penn Chew’s clear and adamant opinions about the Civil War and about her new niece-in-law; about the vulnerability behind Mary Johnson Brown Chew’s rigid adherence to the laws of Philadelphian society; and about the easy-going Elizabeth Brown Chew, who, in her unmarried state, enjoyed liberties denied to other women of her time.

After reading through the letters and documents left by the Chew family, I came to see these women in a more rounded way—as people with unique gifts, dealing with problems that were often commonplace, but sometimes quite heart-wrenching. They lived during some of the most tumultuous years of American history, and their observations give the modern scholar an intriguing insight into the political and social issues of the time.

Between them, these women cover all aspects of womanhood in the 19th and early 20th centuries—childhood, spinsterhood, motherhood, and widowhood. They were, all three, members of Philadelphia’s aristocracy, enjoying the privilege and power behind the Chew name, while at the same time perpetually hounded by financial difficulty. They were, all three, forged from domestic tension, the untimely loss of loved ones, and the ever-changing landscape of Philadelphia and Germantown. While these three women developed vastly different personalities, interests, and lifestyles, the one constant in their lives was a devotion to the preservation of the Chew homestead, Cliveden, and the pressing need to keep it linked with the Chew family. The mansion is the star around which these women revolved.

While this project is necessarily about Cliveden, it is centered on “Anne Sophia,” “Mary,” and “Bessy.” *They* are the focus, but Cliveden is certainly the stage upon which their lives played out.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people who helped me so much during my time at Cliveden. Anne Roller, first and foremost, for being my mentor, editor, and most of all for letting me know when I was gaily leaping outside the scope of the project. I would also like to thank Phillip Seitz, whose editing I greatly appreciate, and whose patience and trust as I pored through irreplaceable materials can never be over-emphasized. Also, I am grateful to Kris Kepford-Walker at Cliveden and Dr. Charles Hardy III from the West Chester University Department of History, for organizing my internship. Finally, to the entire staff at Cliveden of the National Trust, for being so helpful and encouraging during my research.

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Anne Sophia Penn Chew (1805-1892)

Anne Sophia Penn Chew was one of thirteen children born to Benjamin Chew, Jr. and Katherine Banning Chew, and the longest-lived—four did not even make it to their eighteenth birthday, and a further three predeceased their father, leaving six to divide between them the estate that their father and grandfather built.

Cliveden was the impressive colonial country house built by Anne Sophia's grandfather, Benjamin Chew, and expanded upon by her father. By the time of Benjamin Jr.'s inheritance in 1810, the property had grown to more than twice the size of the original estate, and he proceeded to purchase additional tracts of land and invested a considerable amount of money in improving the physical condition of the grounds and buildings. In the 1830s, however, Benjamin Jr.'s fortunes began to wane. Investments soured, and he still owed his siblings the inheritance left to them by his father. His own children borrowed money against their anticipated inheritance upon his death, leaving him financially strapped. By the time of his death on April 30, 1844, the estate was in distressing shape. The situation was made worse by an increasingly bitter dispute over the execution of Benjamin Jr.'s will, which left Anne Sophia in a distinctly uncomfortable position.

Benjamin Jr.'s will clearly stated that Katherine Banning Chew was to be permitted to reside at Cliveden for the remainder of her life, with an annuity of \$2,250 to be paid quarterly, and the stipulation that she make Cliveden her permanent residence (for most of Benjamin Jr.'s life, Cliveden was used only as a summer retreat from the heat and disease of the city of Philadelphia, where the Chews kept a townhouse). This stipulation was meant to compensate for the financial difficulties associated with maintaining two separate residences. As he stated in his will, "I have already experienced that the use of that part of my estate as a summer residence merely, is attended with much expense and inconvenience." Another option was for the executors to sell all or part of the estate to pay Katherine's rent, should she choose to take up residence elsewhere.¹

¹ Martin J. Rosenblum, R. A. & Associates, "Cliveden: Historic Structures Report" (Philadelphia, June 1994), Volume I, p. 193. Hereafter referred to as "HSR."

Anne Sophia, Benjamin Jr.'s "dear and excellent daughter," was willed \$16,000 in lieu of the Hunterdon County farm in New Jersey, which he had been forced to sell. The remainder of the estate was to be divided up between the remaining children—adjusted, of course, for the advances Benjamin Jr. had given them—with the eldest son, Benjamin III, receiving an additional \$4,000 in return for his management of the Chew lands.²

With eerie foresight, Benjamin Jr. set certain stipulations on the execution of his will. First, he mandated that "in case any one of my said children legatees or devisees shall dispute contest or litigate any devise bequest or other testamentary provision contained in my said will or in any codicil thereto or shall seek at any proceeding at law or otherwise to invalidate my said will or any part thereof or any codicil thereto, they and in such case I hereby revoke and annul all and every devise legacy or other provision whatever in my said will or in the codicils thereto contained in favour of such person."³ Further, he warned in a codicil of 1843 that land and tenements purchased as part of the settlement of a dispute with the merchant partnership Nicklin and Griffith were bought with Benjamin Jr.'s money and did not belong to Benjamin III, as the eldest son claimed. Further, he reiterated that his son's services in managing the Chew lands were worth no more than the \$4,000 he dispersed, and that any further claim was to be taken from his share of the estate.⁴ Tellingly, it was Benjamin III, called "Bad Ben" by his relatives, who caused many of the problems Anne Sophia and her other siblings encountered while attempting to settle their father's estate.

Disputes broke out almost immediately after Benjamin Jr.'s death, with Bad Ben denying his siblings access to family papers and refusing to meet with them, under the belief that they were trying to exclude him from the estate. Anne's loyalty to the majority of her siblings is evident in a letter she wrote in July of 1844, most likely to her lawyer, Mr. Mundy: "I need hardly add that I have urged every plea that affection could dictate and every argument that my feeble powers could command to persuade him to spare us the annoyance, the discredit, the pecuniary inconvenience that must ensue if compelled to resort to redress in a public tribunal....It is desirable to ascertain....whether any one

² HSR, Volume I, 193.

³ HSR, Volume I, 194.

⁴ HSR, Volume I, 193.

executor has an exclusive privilege and right to the possession or custody of papers &c belonging to the estate.”⁵

Bad Ben refused a court order to open the papers, and in November 1844 the Orphan’s Court removed him as an executor of his father’s will and ordered him to turn over all papers. Thus began the division of the inheritors, as Katherine Banning Chew took her eldest son’s side against the rest of her children. Ben’s attempt to keep his father’s papers out of the possession of the other Chew children—but an equally ardent attempt to avoid a contempt citation—led him to turn them over to his mother. When the children traveled to Cliveden to collect them, Katherine feigned ignorance of the entire matter and pretended to have lost the keys to the trunks containing the materials. In March 1845 the three remaining executors to the will—Henry Banning Chew, William White Chew and Eliza Chew’s husband James M. Mason—went to court, and in March 1845 succeeded in having Katherine removed as executor.⁶

As the contests continued, Anne’s home life became increasingly stressful. In 1844 and 1845 the house was inhabited by Katherine, Bad Ben, William, Anthony and Anne, with meals being served separately to the three siblings in the dining room, and Ben and Katherine in Ben’s office. The winter of 1844-1845 witnessed ballooning tensions among all the family members, especially the Chew siblings and Ben, and one violent altercation between a drunken William and his mother which forced Robert Alsop, who served in the Philadelphia sheriff’s office, to remove William from the house.⁷ Katherine also developed a paranoid fear of Anne, who noted that, “Mama says she is afraid to go to bed; as she lays there she is afraid of me. I asked her what she is afraid of—my coming and strangling her.”⁸ Anne bemoaned the shift from a close relationship with her mother—one in which Katherine and her daughter had talked regularly—to one fraught with fear, anger and paranoia, which Anne blamed on Ben’s deceitful attempts to turn his mother against her other children.⁹

The threat of piquing Ben’s temper was a constant source of concern for Anne. On one occasion, she claimed that “Ben got affronted at something I said at the dinner table so he came to supper with his coat flung open & a dagger conspicuously exhibited

⁵ Nancy Richards, “Cliveden: The Chew Mansion in Germantown,” (Dec. 1993), 37.

⁶ HSR, Volume I, 194-195.

⁷ Richards, 38.

⁸ Anne Sophia Penn Chew memorandum, December 16, 1844. From Richards, 39.

⁹ Anne Sophia Penn Chew memorandum, December 5, 1844. From Richards, 39.

in his breast pocket.”¹⁰ On another occasion, Anne reported that “The day before yesterday the 4th Ben was very rude to me at the dinner table. Told me I had a very rude way of staring. I said I was not conscious of staring & asked him how he knew I stared (for I thought if he knew I stared he must be staring too). He said he felt it like the glance of a rattlesnake or some venomous animal....He said he would not permit it. I asked how he would help it. He said he would throw the soup in my eyes. I said he would hurt himself more than me, and Anthony said that he would not do it; he would not dare to do it. Ben turned and said I’ll do it in yours too. Anthony said no you won’t, you would not dare to do it; you have not the courage of a louse to do it. Then mama broke in & abused us & said she had observed my disagreeable looks. I said it was not my fault if my looks were disagreeable.”¹¹

The tension finally reached the breaking point in the summer of 1845 when Katherine leased Cliveden to Ben for two years, claiming that she was unable to manage the estate herself. The lease gave Ben control over the buildings, household furniture, farming and gardening utensils, and carriages, while Katherine retained the right to use all or part of the house as her own residence. In response, Anne informed her mother that, if Ben was to become master of the house, she would not suffer living there any longer. At this point Katherine displayed a remarkable turn of opinion, claiming that Anne’s departure “would be the death” of her.¹² Nonetheless, Anne left Cliveden and took up residence a block or two from her childhood home, where she was joined by her brothers William and Anthony, as well as the Chew’s coachman, James Smith.

While Katherine and Ben remained at Cliveden, the executors assumed control over the rest of Benjamin Jr.’s estate and began the tedious job of paying the debts levied against the Chews and their estate. Around the same time that Katherine died in March of 1855, Anne moved into town, and did not return to Cliveden until 1857. Ben, meanwhile, claimed sole possession of the house and grounds under a clause in Benjamin Jr.’s will that allowed heirs to the estate to substitute land for cash. The executors went to court to have Ben evicted, and the courts ruled that Cliveden’s worth was between \$120,000 and \$180,000—much more than Ben was entitled to—and ordered him evicted from the property. When Ben left Cliveden he took most of the

¹⁰ Anne Sophia Penn Chew memorandum, November 7, 1844. From HSR, Volume I, 196.

¹¹ Anne Sophia Penn Chew memorandum, April 4, 1845. From HSR, Volume I, 196.

¹² Richards, 39.

furnishings from the house, which his mother had bequeathed to him in her will. When he died, he in turn willed them to his housekeeper, Mary Bowman, who died the month after. When Bowman died, her people removed the items that Ben had left her, and a great deal of paper and books were destroyed, despite the attempts of the Chew family to salvage them. As for the rest of the furnishings, Chew family tradition maintains that some of it went to auction and was purchased by Samuel Chew III, son of Henry Banning Chew, and remains in the house to this day.¹³

Anne moved back into Cliveden in 1857, at which point the executors were free to complete the settlement of the estate. They divided the part of the property that ran along the southeast side of Johnson Street from Germantown Avenue to what is now Magnolia Street into roughly 150 square-foot tracts and put them up for sale. Other sales followed, and in 1871 the remaining land was divided equally among the remaining heirs. Thus, Benjamin Chew, Jr.'s estate was finally settled, twenty-seven years after his death.¹⁴

When Anne arrived at Cliveden, she discovered that the years of family bickering and Ben's woeful disregard to maintaining the house had left Cliveden in a deplorable condition. While the house and the property on which it stood were owned jointly by all of Benjamin Jr.'s heirs, only Anne and Ben were still living in Philadelphia. Her sister Eliza had married James Murray Mason, one of the executors and a Senator from Virginia. Her brother Henry lived outside of Baltimore with his wife and family. The rest of her siblings were deceased by this time. Therefore, the responsibility for caring for Cliveden fell to the unmarried Anne, who began repairing the house out of her own pocket and proceeded to purchase shares of the house from her siblings and their heirs. The purchase was completed in September 1862, at a total cost of \$13,200.¹⁵

Repairing Cliveden was a monumental task for Anne. In a letter to her brother Henry, she said, "I am afraid you will think I have done very little—though I think I have done a good deal considering all things—for in the first place I am not smart—& in the second place the means wherewithal are small—& in the third place it is not as easy to obtain help here as in town & then we have a good deal of company—a good many visitors—& a good many promises of visits which required the house to be in a state for their reception. Sometimes they came when expected & some times they did not come

¹³ Richards, 42.

¹⁴ Richards, 43.

¹⁵ Richards, 45.

when expected, but whether they came or did not come I had to be ready all the same—and that of course impeded progress in other work.”¹⁶ From 1857 to 1867, Anne completed numerous small repairs such as new window glass, new stoves for the kitchen, dining room, and two other rooms, and house bells hung in four rooms. There were minor repairs to the roof and privy, and the gardens, grounds, and grape arbor were maintained.

However, Anne had many other things on her mind at this time. In 1859, Anne’s nephew, Samuel Chew III, whom she loved dearly and to whom she intended to leave her estate, met Mary Johnson Brown, the daughter of a wealthy Philadelphia dry goods merchant and textile manufacturer named David Sands Brown. Sam, the third son of Henry Banning Chew, had moved to Philadelphia from Maryland to seek his fortune, and found employment as a lawyer. In Anne’s opinion, her nephew’s match left a lot to be desired. Of Mary, she said, “Nobody seems likely to profit from this match. My lady thinks she gives up a great deal for him, yet he don’t get much by it. And I think he sacrifices much by linking himself to her & her family, & thus far I don’t see what he gains or is to gain. She seems to be a poor little body brought up with luxurious habits & thus totally unfit for the home that awaits her. Totally incapable of managing an old fashioned house like this, even if she were mistress of it. I daresay she could keep well enough one [*sic*] accommodated with all the modern improvements if she had plenty of money to pay for what she is accustomed to think everyday requirements. But where is all the money to come from.”¹⁷ Obviously Anne intended Sam and his family to reside at Cliveden, and felt that Sam’s choice for a wife was highly unsuited to his future familial situation.

Regardless, Sam and Mary married in 1861 and continued to spend part of the year with Anne at Cliveden, dividing the rest of their time between the fashionable town home in Philadelphia owned by Mary’s father, and the Brown family country estate of Vanor, in Radnor.

For Anne, more difficulties followed. In 1861, the Civil War began, effectively severing Anne’s ties with her sister Eliza, who was married to James Murray Mason, a Virginia Senator and one of the executors of Benjamin, Jr.’s will. Before the collapse of the Union, Anne had maintained a regular and active correspondence with her sister

¹⁶ Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Cliveden) to Henry Banning Chew (Towsontown, MD), December 17, 1857. From Richards, 46.

¹⁷ Anne Sophia Penn Chew memorandum, 1860. From HSR, Volume I, 203.

and brother-in-law, often discussing political events. “My hope was that such as you might find a way to set things right—to throw oil on troubled waters. Are all the ‘shining lights’ of our country going out? Is there not one remaining to offer compromise & put aside the frightful contingency. It seems to me that the North & South do not understand each other thoroughly. You assert that the election of Lincoln turned on one issue. Yet within a week past I have heard of three moderate men—visitors in our own little circle—men opposed to the attack upon slavery—whose reason for giving their votes to him was for the sake of the tariff which they considered necessary to the interests of Pennsylvania & to their individual interests. But Heaven knows that the tariff cannot do Pennsylvania merchants & manufacturers good if there is to be a domestic war & a general disturbance of business confidence.”¹⁸

In a letter to Eliza on February 11, 1861, Anne displayed a keen understanding of the reasons for war and the devastation it might wreak. “I love the Union, for what it is worth to us as Americans in that point of view I glory in it. & I value it now for the sake of our family & our individual interests. But I depreciate the course of the North in the attempt to sacrifice millions of white men for an idea—or for the Negroes—for weighing in the balance the work of ...our Country, United, with the Abolition of Slavery. I have objections to the institution because it admits of abuse....But if it cannot be remedied without the sacrifice of lives by Civil War, of financial credit by the disturbance of commercial exchanges & trade, of peace [&] plenty at home & the influence abroad which attaches to permanent institutions & a long lived government, the choice is in favor of these latter precious possession & I consider it the silliest of all policies to sacrifice the greater good for the less.”¹⁹

Anne’s clearly defined view of a conflict that would cost the lives of “millions of white men” contrasted sharply with a majority of her fellow countrymen, both north and south, who believed that the tension would be resolved in the aftermath of a single battle. Even after the Union loss at the Battle of Bull Run (First Manassas), neither side quite comprehended that the first skirmishes were merely an opening act, and certainly very few in the country thought that the Civil War would last four years and claim the lives of three million men. Anne proved to be eerily prescient about the true costs of the

¹⁸ Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Cliveden) to James Murray Mason, December 1, 1860. From Richards, 56.

¹⁹ Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Cliveden) to Eliza Chew Mason, February 11, 1861. From Richards, 56.

war, despite writing her letter on February 11—two months before the first shot at Fort Sumter was fired on April 11.

Anne's opposition to slavery, evident in the same letter, also presents an interesting quandary, as both her grandfather and father had owned slaves.

On April 17, 1861 Virginia seceded from the Union—in effect making Anne's sister Eliza and her brother-in-law James the enemy. Anne had been aware for some time what the political division between the North and the South would mean for her family. She wrote to Eliza, "It is...quite impossible for us to meet for some time to come. Not until the Country is settled & at peace again. I will not write about public affairs. I never was much of a politician & differences of opinion have nothing to do with affection...."²⁰ Anne wrote that letter on May 2, 1861, and within a matter of months correspondence between Anne and the Masons became impossible. They would not see each other again until 1866, but were at least able to write to each other when the war ended. In 1867, Anne shared with Eliza her thoughts about the physical scars left on the country by the conflict: "I think harm enough has been done for one century—more than can be repaired in two—more than can ever be repaired—in the loss of such treasures—such vestiges of by gone times as have been destroyed during the war."²¹

In the meanwhile, Anne's desire for Sam, Mary, and their children to spend more time at Cliveden met with stiff resistance on Mary's part. Mary, whose health had always been poor and grew poorer with the birth of each of her children, wrote to Anne in May 1867 to inform her that the family could not possibly live at Cliveden unless alterations were made to the house to make it more hospitable—in other words, to install a furnace, gas lights, and carpeting. In a letter to her niece, Ida, Anne said, "I have always wanted these accommodations myself but should have lived & died without them rather than tear away the old landmarks as I must do to put them up. But there seemed to be no help for it. Mary's health is so delicate that she cannot be comfortable here without various changes which I shall be compelled to attempt."²²

Always careful to preserve the historic nature of the property, Anne chose to build an addition onto the house rather than alter the house itself. Thus, Anne completed one of the most major changes to the property—the construction of a two-

²⁰ Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Cliveden) to Eliza Chew Mason, May 2, 1861. From Richards, 57.

²¹ Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Cliveden) to Eliza Chew Mason, December 20, 1867. Cliveden Manuscripts, ASPC, Box 1.

²² Anne Sophia Penn Chew to Ida Mason, September 1867. From HSR, Volume I, 214.

floor addition, containing a schoolroom for Sam's children on the first floor, and a bed chamber, bath room, and water closet on the second floor. The new rooms boasted the luxuries of a coal-fired "air tight radiator heater," piped hot water for the tub and shower, and gas lighting. The carpeting Mary requested was not added until 1870.²³

Always financially strapped, Anne still refused Sam's offer to pay for part of the cost of construction, writing her sister Eliza that Sam was no more able to afford such an expenditure than she. In the end, the addition cost Anne roughly \$5,000, in addition to the \$2,000 she had already spent to repair the roof and redo the kitchen. Part of this cost was due to the skyrocketing inflation left in the wake of the war. According to Anne, "That horrid old war has made everything so abominably dear that it costs twice or thrice as much to do anything now as it would have done in 1860."²⁴

In addition to the cost, the experience was personally unpleasant for Anne, and another letter to her sister, Eliza, displays her continued discontent with her nephew's wife: "I have rarely had so disagreeable a duty to perform as that in which I have been engaged this summer... & individually I have little prospect of being benefited by it in any way. & in fact I doubt whether any but one [Mary] will profit much by the addition I have felt myself compelled to make. & that one will not be half satisfied with that or anything else that I can ever do."²⁵ Anne's difficulties with the construction workers were similarly noted: "I am worried to death by the carpenters and masons who have not done with me yet & who talk me out of everything I want & will pester me to have things done that I don't fancy at all."²⁶ Nevertheless, Anne finished the addition, and Sam, Mary, and their children returned to Cliveden in June of 1868.

Having never borne children of her own, Anne reveled in the presence of her grand-nephews and grand-nieces. The halls and rooms of Cliveden were once again filled with laughter and happiness and, despite the added confusion and labor involved with caring for the new residents, Anne was delighted with them. Even before the children made the permanent move to Cliveden, she wrote to Mary that, "My little angel, David Jr., is the best & loveliest little fellow in the whole world... He is perfectly well & as

²³ Richards, 70.

²⁴ Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Cliveden) to Eliza Chew Mason (Montreal), September 4, 1867. From Richards, 62.

²⁵ Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Cliveden) to Eliza Chew Mason (Canada), draft, October 6, 1867. From HSR, Volume I, 216.

²⁶ Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Cliveden) to Eliza Chew Mason (Canada), October 12, 1867. From Richards, 68.

merry as a gig, improving every day in looks & in intelligence & in a thousand winning ways.”²⁷

The servants were less delighted with the increased work load. In town, Catherine, the children’s nurse, always had other servants to call upon for help. Cliveden, however, had only a small staff—two gardeners (who also tended the livestock), a cook, and two maids—and hiring new help proved difficult. A new cook hired by Anne became combative with her other longtime servants, and left after a week of service.²⁸ Mary feared that Catherine would quit, and she and Anne were perpetually engaged in subterfuge and compromise in order to keep her service, including misleading the nurse to believe that Anne paid for the services of one of Mary’s maids, while Mary actually supplied the funds. The cause of this deception is uncertain, but it might have been another of Mary’s attempts to placate her seemingly mercurial nurse.²⁹

For much of Anne’s life at Cliveden, she was intensely focused on keeping the house and grounds in shape. She accomplished a myriad of small and larger renovations and repairs, both inside the house and outside. She also enjoyed entertaining guests at Cliveden, especially once her beloved grand-nieces, Anne and Bessy, reached the age at which they enjoyed socializing. By the mid 1880s, Anne and Bessy had become integral parts of Philadelphia society, and David Jr. was studying law. Her financial situation, however, was never far from Anne’s thoughts. Simple yearly operation of the house, without costly construction projects, was an estimated \$2,000-\$2,500, in addition to the \$1800-\$2000 spent to maintain the stable and gardens. Anne blamed the high cost of operation at least partially on Mary: “I have means sufficient for my own requirements but not sufficient to entertain as I would like to do...and not sufficient to keep house in a way to satisfy the tastes of the inmates of my house.”³⁰

Anne’s difficulties with Mary were also agitated by a difference of opinion about how the household was to be managed. One of Anne’s memoranda lists the complaints about her management of Cliveden: “Memo. Of the causes of dissatisfaction of the family who are living with me. My bad management in every department of housekeeping. Extravagance in my table and yet distasteful preparation of the food.

²⁷ Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Cliveden) to Mary Johnson Brown Chew (Atlantic City, NJ), July 27, 1866. From Richards, 58.

²⁸ Richards, 63.

²⁹ Richards, 81.

³⁰ Anne Sophia Penn Chew memorandum, October 27, 1878. From Richards, 87.

The food bought is not properly taken care of but wastefully misapplied. Yet I pay the butcher out of my own funds. The meals are messy, inelegantly served and generally ungentle in all the appointments, not satisfactory to those who have been more genteely [*sic*] brought up....My servants are thought hateful and I have been advised to manage them better....Mrs. Chew [Mary] was pleased to say that she thought I did not like anything to be given away, an opinion which is entirely erroneous and not very gracious in its application. I did not think it worth while to combat the idea, indeed I find myself very often passing over in silence remarks of hers.”³¹

The 1870s and 1880s brought Anne considerable personal sorrow. In 1874, her sister Eliza—Anne’s last remaining sibling—passed away. Her nephews—and Sam’s brothers—Charles Ridgely Chew and Benjamin Chew IV died in 1875 and 1885, respectively. Mary’s father, David Sands Brown, died in 1877, her mother two years later, and her only brother, J. Johnson Brown, in 1885. Finally—and most tragically for Anne—Sam passed away in 1887, at the age of fifty-five. Sam’s will bequeathed to Anne a \$2,000 annuity, and left to Mary the carriages, horses, and stable equipment at Cliveden and at Sam’s Maryland property. The will also forbid Mary from selling his “lots in the Home block at Cliveden during the lifetime of my Aunt unless the necessity of the family should require the sale.” Further, he urged his wife and children to “cherish my said dear Aunt and that she will foster them. I believe that continual intercourse will be a comfort to her and a delight and improvement to them. I beg that they will be much together and remember how I loved them all and let this remembrance be a tie. My said Aunt’s loveliness and excellence in everything that adorns womanhood has been a great blessing in my life....”³²

Sam’s loss was devastating to Anne, who had always adored and doted on him, and seemed like the final blow in a long line of personal losses. She remarked to a friend that “The loss of my dear nephew—so kind & so good as he was is a sad grief. My nearest & dearest friends have all departed.”³³ She also fretted over the future of her grand-nephews and grand-nieces, who were all still so young—Oswald, the youngest, was just seven years old—and were now forced to grow up without their father. Additional concerns revolved around the perpetual lack of funds to keep Cliveden operating. Anne’s own income was modest, and Mary’s contribution had

³¹ Anne Sophia Penn Chew memorandum, October 27, 1878. From Richards, 88.

³² Will of Samuel Chew, written June 13, 1881. From Richards, 90.

³³ Anne Sophia Penn Chew to “My Dear Margaret,” January 31, 1887. From Richards, 90.

never been substantial, usually included in what Sam gave his aunt. Anne was unable to refuse the aid offered by Anne, Bessy, and David in the same way she had refused their father. She wrote David that “I can only repeat what I then said, that my fortune has been lessened to such a degree that my resources are inadequate for the maintenance of such an establishment as I have hitherto kept up. And therefore—without entering into the pros and cons—I have decided to accept for the present the offer of yourself & your sisters to aid me in defraying the household Expenses—Though in truth—I do dislike very much [having] to accept money from any of you.”³⁴

Mary adhered to Sam’s request that she and the children spend at least part of the year with Anne at Cliveden. Even as the children began to engage in activities and careers of their own, most visited their Aunt Anne or lived at Cliveden for periods of time. As Anne grew older, signs of Mary’s future position as mistress of Cliveden began to emerge. Due to Sam’s efforts through much of his life to have Cliveden named a national historic landmark, in the late 1880s his efforts began to show fruit. In March 1889, Thomas Millhouse, acting for the Common Council of Germantown, wrote a letter to Mary with regard to the future of the house: “As long as I am in Councils I am sure no step will be taken that would in any way be in line of compelling you or Miss Chew to part with Cliveden. It might, however, be worth considering whether any thing could be done by which the city could take it, by your permission, in the far (I fervently hope) future....I am sure nothing would please you better than to have it kept as it is forever. You could not bear to think of the possibility of its being destroyed. It has always seemed to me that some way might be found by which it could be placed on the city Plan by an act of Council, and yet differed to remain absolutely yours as long in the future as you might prefer, on some terms that might be alike favorable to you, your family, and the city.”³⁵

Anne, of course, had always determined to keep Cliveden in the Chew family, no matter what financial hardships she had to face in order to keep it a family estate. Ironically, Mary also appears to have rejected any suggestion of allowing Cliveden to leave Chew family possession, despite her many years of complaints, her combative relationship with Anne, and the premature loss of her husband. There is, in that respect, a hard core of similarity between the two strong-minded women that served in

³⁴ Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Germantown) to David Sands Brown Chew, March 4, 1887. From Richards, 91.

³⁵ Thomas Millhouse Common Council (Germantown) to Mary Johnson Brown Chew (Philadelphia), March 20, 1889. Cliveden Manuscripts, MJBC, Box 3.

concert to save Cliveden from destruction. Anne had rescued it from loss after the legal squabbles with her brother and mother had left the elegant manor in such woeful dilapidation, despite having only a small income of her own to finance repairs. Having no children of her own, she intended to leave the house to her nephew and a niece-in-law that she believed wholly incapable of managing the property.

Anne died in 1892, just five years after her beloved nephew. Her obituary read, “Her manner of life for many years was thoroughly conformed to her disposition—quiet, retired, and wholly apart from society. Extremely well-favored in appearance, she retained to the last traces of the striking beauty for which she was famed in her younger days.”³⁶

Anne left her share of Cliveden to Samuel Chew IV, the second son of Sam and Mary, and her nephew’s namesake. Sam IV was still an undergraduate at Harvard College when he inherited the property, and he rented the house out to family members rather than live there himself. After thirty-five years of Anne’s constant occupation, there was suddenly no full-time resident at Cliveden. Mary, Anne, Bessy, and Oswald continued their practice of dividing their time between the three family residences, spending mainly summers at Cliveden. Even though Mary’s time at Cliveden was intermittent, she still managed to make her mark on the evolution of the property.

³⁶ Unidentified newspaper, 1892. Cliveden Manuscripts, ASPC, Box 1.

Mary Johnson Brown Chew (1839-1927)

Mary Johnson Brown (1839-1927) was one of three children of David Sands Brown, a Philadelphia dry goods merchant and textile manufacturer, making her a member of the American industrial “haute bourgeoisie,” or a family with copious wealth but little or no aristocratic background. On the other hand, Samuel Chew III was from a family with an impressive aristocratic colonial background, but he had no incredible wealth to offer. Whether or not Mary was interested in Samuel’s blue blood, or Samuel in Mary’s deep purse, we cannot know for sure. But the irony did not escape the attention of Sam’s aunt, Anne Sophia Penn Chew, who noted, “I have brought my wares to a very poor market. I have spent my money to very little purpose, when it could do no better than supply Mr. David S. Brown with a son in law. When it could do no better than give David S. Brown’s daughter a gentleman for a husband. Nobody seems likely to profit from this match.”³⁷ The Historic Structures Report on Cliveden suggests that the first sentence, “I have brought my wares to a very poor market,” may be read to mean that Anne herself was attempting to use Cliveden as bait for Sam to marry into a wealthy family, and thus maintain the financial solvency of the historic Chew property.³⁸

Even friends and neighbors thought of the pair—especially Mary—as unlikely inheritors to the Cliveden property—a place virtually synonymous with the Chew name. As Sarah Wister noted, “Went up to call on the young bride, Mrs. Sam Chew (Daughter of David S. Brown). Several people were there & the whole thing struck me very strangely, the imposing old house with its mutilated statues & grim stone lions, the slipshod Irish chamber maid who ushered us in, the fine large room almost destitute of furniture, in which the few heavy, shabby old articles contrasted strangely with the one or two little modern knick-knacks, wedding presents I suppose, it seemed such a strange old place for two young people to be beginning their lives in; & Miss Ann [*sic*] Chew with her handsome, sad face & simple high breeding, & the little insignificant, chattering chirping bride. (I knew better afterwards, an amiable, admirable woman she turned out.)”³⁹

³⁷ Anne Sophia Penn Chew memorandum, 1860. From HSR, Volume I, 202.

³⁸ HSR, Volume I, 202.

³⁹ Fanny Kemble Wister (ed.), “Sarah Butler Wister’s Civil War Diary.” From Richards, 48.

Mary was certainly marrying a man deeply devoted to another woman—namely, his Aunt Anne Sophia, who likewise held a low opinion of Mary—but unlike Sarah Wister, Anne’s opinion was much slower to change. Samuel’s relationship with his aunt more closely resembled the traditional mother-son bond than that of an aunt and nephew. Sam was the third son of Anne’s brother Henry Banning Chew, and had lost his mother when he was three years old. Anne, having no children of her own, developed a special affection for her young nephew, and often complained of his absence from Cliveden: “Sam returned home yesterday afternoon much to my satisfaction....I am not apt to feel lonesome, but it is much more agreeable to have him back again.”⁴⁰ Anne certainly expected that Sam would one day inherit Cliveden and make it his home, and was clearly disappointed when he introduced his beloved aunt to his future bride: “She seems to be a poor little body brought up with luxurious habits & thus totally unfit for the home that awaits her.”⁴¹ Thus we see the beginnings of a difficult balancing act for Sam, who had to maneuver between the wants and needs of both his aunt and his wife, who clearly loved him but disliked each other. Sam must have commented on the strain to his aunt, because in November 1860 she drafted a note to Mary saying “My nephew thinks that my manner to you is less warm, less kind, less something or other than it ought to be. Perhaps the idea comes from you....You must remember that my first impression was not that you loved him, but that you did not love him; not that you appreciated him, but that you did not appreciate him; not that he was happier for loving you but that he was disappointed & dejected....”⁴² In a letter that Anne sent to Mary in January 1861, she includes a thinly veiled warning about how she perceived Mary to be disregarding the close bond between aunt and nephew: “With great diffidence I venture to suggest to her who has engaged to be the future companion of a nephew whom I love esteem above all others that it is not wise to make him dissatisfied—discontented with one who has his welfare & his happiness much at heart. Who has hitherto been to him, next to his own father, his nearest & dearest friend, & the most considerate of his interests...If a distance is to be created between us, if an end is to be put to my relations with him, I shall deeply deplore it & pray Heaven that you may be able & willing to compensate him for what he loses in me. I

⁴⁰ Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Cliveden) to Henry Banning Chew (Baltimore), May 24, 1860. From Richards, 47.

⁴¹ Anne Sophia Penn Chew, diary notes, October 1, 1860. From Richards, 52.

⁴² Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Cliveden) to Mary Johnson Brown (Philadelphia), draft of letter, November 9, 1860. From Richards, 53.

feel much hurt to find that my every word & look & action is jealously scrutinized & weighed & measured & found wanting. I have had no intention to offend. I wished & endeavored to do what is right. I sincerely regret having failed to give satisfaction.”⁴³

Mary was fully aware of Anne’s unfavorable opinion of her, and at least superficially endeavored to present herself to her aunt-in-law in the best possible light. In her diary entry for April 17, 1861, she noted: “Miss C. came on Monday to see us—a short but on the whole pleasant visit—her manner was neither warm nor cold and I am trying to make myself believe that were I more humble, the trouble & neglect which I have imagined and I have smarted under all winter would make me much less unhappy than it has done heretofore...”⁴⁴

The terrible possibility of Civil War loomed on the horizon, darkening Mary’s diary entries. “...how dark the future when citizens of the same glorious, free country take up arms against each other. What a boast for tyrants that we have quarreled, that discord has found its way into the glorious confederacy, which but a few months ago seemed to defy the world by the colossal proportions any [and?] cyclopean strength. Alas for Freedom if we should dethrone her—Woe, woe and shame to us, the champions for nearly a century of liberty that we should strike her death blow.”⁴⁵ Interestingly, Mary’s emphasis was on the philosophical and geopolitical scope of her concerns, as opposed to Anne’s worry about the economic and social devastation war would create within America itself. It is also telling that, at least in this particular entry, Mary consistently uses “we,” not “the North” or “the South.” In her regard, the tension seems to have been caused by actions on both sides, and both sides would be responsible for the outcome.

Mary’s thoughts about her upcoming nuptials were also troubled. She fretted about the new life she was about to begin, “S. [Samuel] wishes our marriage to be in June but hesitating still, I shrink from the decision. The responsibility I am about to assume is so great that it awes [?] me, and with a timidity which follows me always, I shrink when at the point from the assumption of it yet I am happy, most happy in the love which I give and receive...”⁴⁶ She also reflected about stepping into the next stage in her life, her tone at times sorrowful and resigned: “I believe I am doing right—that I

⁴³ Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Cliveden) to Mary Johnson Brown (Philadelphia), January 15, 1861. From Richards, 53.

⁴⁴ Mary Johnson Brown, Diary entry, April 17, 1861. Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Chew Papers, Box 233.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

may ask a blessing as I go onward. But oh what a ___ point is this which my life has now reached, looking back into girlhood on one side and on the other one on into an unknown future. That responsibility rests upon her head who undertakes to be the helpmate of another immortal soul—How many marry ___ for the right fulfillment of her duty.”⁴⁷

Additional strain—this time physical—was placed on Mary as the couple set about starting a family. Mary’s health had always been poor, and the birth of each child seemed to pull more and more strength out of her. Her first child, a daughter named Anne Sophia Penn Chew, in honor of Sam’s aunt, was born in June 1862. Their second child, named Elizabeth Brown Chew after Mary’s mother and nicknamed “Bessy,” was born in November of the following year. Their first son, David Sands Brown Chew, named after Mary’s father, was born in March 1866, and was a cause for celebration even as Mary’s health plummeted and recuperation proved long and difficult. Mary’s despair and bitterness is apparent in a letter she wrote to Anne: “So far as I can make out, I suppose it must be a woman’s duty to go on having children every year—even if it kills her & she knows it will do so & if the Almighty wills it no one ought to complain—but it requires an effort to be resigned.”⁴⁸ One letter Mary wrote to Sam in the year after David’s birth details the extremity of the situation: “My dearest Love, If it should please God not to prolong my life—but to remove me from this world while my children are still young—I rejoice to feel that my little ones will be surrounded by those who will strive to lead them in the way which I pray their precious little feet may tread...” She goes on to acknowledge Anne’s pivotal role in the family. “I know that it is not necessary to commend my darlings to the care or consideration of your Aunt for I feel sure that she will freely give them all the love & tender care which I could desire for them....”⁴⁹

Mary recovered from David’s birth and continued to fulfill her role in what historian Barbara Welter calls the “Cult of True Womanhood”—the narrow and sometimes suffocating realm revolving around taking care of the house and bearing children for the family.⁵⁰ Mary bore a further three children—Samuel in 1871, Benjamin in 1878, and Oswald in 1880. It is perhaps useful here to remark on the stark contrast

⁴⁷ Ibid., June 1, 1861.

⁴⁸ Richards, 54.

⁴⁹ Mary Johnson Brown Chew to Samuel Chew III, September 1867. Cliveden Manuscripts, MJBC, Box 1.

⁵⁰ Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly*, XVIII (1966), 151-174.

between Anne Sophia Penn Chew, the pedigreed and childless mistress of the house, with Mary, who seemed to be the very soul of Victorian motherhood and wifehood.

In keeping with her 19th century role as a wealthy wife and mother, Mary had very little regular contact with her children. Her illness during pregnancy and prolonged recuperation after birth only added to the social custom of the children being tended not by their mother, but by nurses. For example, when Sam and Mary went to Cape May, Atlantic City, or Long Branch, for the summer, the children stayed with their nurse at Cliveden. Mary was understandably concerned about the welfare of her children, as Anne states in a letter to Mary that, “You made me promise to send you a daily bulletin of the state of Bessie’s health &c..”⁵¹ Anne also recounted in a letter to Sam how, when the infant Samuel became terribly sick, “Mary & I staid [*sic*] with him during the night—& indeed Mary is with him all the time...”⁵²

Social custom demanded that Mary absent herself from the menial labors involved in childrearing, and there were always numerous servants in the Brown households to take care of such things. At Cliveden, however, Anne’s staff was small and Mary requested that some of Anne’s maids assist the children’s nurse, a woman named Catherine. Duties included bringing the children meals, making beds, sweeping their room once a week, taking them for walks, bringing their bath water and bathing them as necessary, and helping Mary care for them on Sunday, should she be present.⁵³

Mary was well aware of the affection Anne held for the children, and sent regular reports to Cliveden from Philadelphia. She also frequently asked Anne to venture into Philadelphia to see the children: “The children are well and very lively and attractive. I have only to repeat my often echoed wish that you could see them. Can you not drive in and spend the morning with them? I am sure you would find them so sweet that it would not be a bore.”⁵⁴ No matter what the two women felt about each other, Anne’s solicitude toward Mary’s children was one of their common links. Another common link was their need to conspire together to keep the children’s nurse, Catherine, in their service. As Anne stated in a letter to her sister Eliza, “Mary cannot be bothered with the care of the children & has a nurse who is able to relieve her entirely of the charge of

⁵¹ Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Cliveden) to Mary Johnson Brown Chew, July 5, 1865. From Richards, 55.

⁵² Anne Sophia Penn Chew to Samuel Chew III, July 14, 1872. Cliveden Manuscripts, ASPC, Box 1.

⁵³ Richards, 58.

⁵⁴ Mary Johnson Brown Chew (Philadelphia) to Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Cliveden), January 4, 1867. From Richards, 59.

them.” Of Catherine, Anne called her “a valuable creature in regard to her care of the children,” but that the nurse had “to be humored to the fullest extent of her humors—for every little worriment in the nursery or dread of losing the services of the head nurses throws poor Mary back & makes her nervous & sick.”⁵⁵ Mary seems to have been constantly concerned that Catherine would quit and leave her alone to tend the children. Mary even submitted a list of daily activities to Anne that she had passed along for approval to Catherine, whom she referred to as “the higher powers.”⁵⁶

Sam, Mary and the children spent the winters in Philadelphia, at the fashionable Walnut Street town house belonging to Mary’s father. There, Mary was able to indulge in the social activities she enjoyed so much. While Sam took advantage of the new railroads linking Philadelphia and Germantown to see his aunt, Mary preferred to visit Cliveden sporadically, especially in winter, when illnesses could potentially lay her low.⁵⁷

By May 1867, Mary’s poor health finally interfered with the time she and her family spent at Cliveden. The birth of her son, David, had taken an enormous toll on her health, and Mary put her foot down about Anne incorporating into Cliveden some of the amenities Mary was accustomed to, including furnace heat and carpeting in the house.⁵⁸ While this letter was severely upsetting to Anne, who balked at any modernization that would alter the historic integrity of the house—modernizations which the struggling woman could barely afford in the first place—she could not bear the thought of not having Sam and the family at Cliveden any longer. So Anne built an addition onto the back of the house, which provided Mary and the family a bedchamber, schoolroom, bath room, and water closet that were centrally heated, with hot running water for the tub and shower, and gas lighting. Mary seemed to have been pleased with the improvements, which were completed by the next summer, because she and the family spent more time at Cliveden.

Sam was well aware of Cliveden’s status as a landmark of the Revolutionary War, and he promoted it in that respect as much as possible. He documented the site photographically, and recovered as many artifacts from the time as he could that dealt with both the military aspect of the period and his own family history. Sam commissioned Edward Lamson Henry for two paintings, one of the Battle of

⁵⁵ Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Cliveden) to Eliza Chew Mason (Canada), September 4, 1867. From Richards, 62.

⁵⁶ Mary Johnson Brown Chew to Anne Sophia Penn Chew, May 20, 1867. From Richards, 62.

⁵⁷ Richards, 55.

⁵⁸ Mary Johnson Brown Chew to Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Cliveden), May 20, 1867. From Richards, 66.

Germantown and one of the reception for the Marquis de Lafayette at the Chew house—which his Aunt Anne had attended on July 20, 1825, accompanied by Miss Ann Johnson, who lived in the house across the street, now called Upsala. The Henry paintings caused a national sensation, and were largely responsible for Cliveden finally being recognized as a historical monument. They still hang in the house today.

Mary was also deeply invested in historic preservation, but on a much larger scale. Sam's interest and work revolved around Cliveden and the Chew family. While Anne took an interest in preserving Cliveden's historical integrity, she held little interest in Sam's activities, and presumably even less interest in preserving other landmarks. Mary, on the other hand, took part in the Independence Hall restoration project—which proposed to return the Assembly room to its original appearance and set up a museum of portraits and artifacts detailing the history of the nation. Mary was asked by Sam's friend Frank Etting to serve on the Board of Lady Managers for the project, and in February of 1875 the Women's Centennial Executive Committee asked Mary, along with Anna D. Scott and Catherine K. Meredith, to organize an exhibit about the domestic aspects of American life. Later in her life, Mary participated in the effort to save "Stenton," the country seat of James Logan in Germantown, and maintained that association until the time of her death.

In addition to her volunteer and civic work, Mary was among the most prestigious and glamorous socialites in Philadelphia, with her events and receptions mentioned frequently in Philadelphia society pages and her guest lists including some of the wealthiest and most powerful personages in the area. An 1883 "Society" column described one of her events: "Mrs. Samuel Chew's german [a party at which dance is featured] on Tuesday evening was one of the most enjoyable and successful balls that has been given in Philadelphia for many seasons....The house was fragrant with flowers. Very large baskets of roses and other choice blossoms were placed on occasional tables, and buds and flowers met the eye in every direction among the vases and bric-a-brac....The favors were beautiful and costly, being ostrich plumes, tambourines, hand-painted with ribbons, bangles and other graceful articles....A handsome supper was served."⁵⁹ Another article noted that "Mrs. Samuel Chew's reception on Wednesday evening was, with the exception of the Assembly, the most recherché social event of the week." The article goes on to mention that Mary served

⁵⁹ Unidentified newspaper, "Society" column, 1883. Cliveden Biographical Files, MJBC.

as the representative of “one of the oldest Quaker families in the commonwealth” but that “they have long ago forsaken the staid manners and sober attire of the order of friends, and their entertainments are now among the most exclusive and brilliant of the season.”⁶⁰ No doubt, the newfound social lavishness and prestige was more Mary’s accomplishment than Anne’s, who rarely left Cliveden.

Mary suffered an unexpected blow in January 1887, when her husband Sam died at the age of fifty-five, leaving behind six children ranging in age from twenty-four (Anne) to seven (Oswald). Sam bequeathed to Mary the carriages, horses, and stable equipment at Cliveden as well as his Maryland properties, which he urged her to sell for the best price. But he forbid her to sell his share of Cliveden, unless “necessity of the family should require the sale.”⁶¹ With the loss of Sam’s income to help support Anne’s upkeep of Cliveden, Mary’s three eldest children—Anne, Bessy, and David—stepped in to assist in maintaining the property.

It was shortly after Sam’s death that Mary was approached by the Common Council of Germantown, with regard to the possibility of turning the property over to them at some point in the future in order to keep the house and grounds as a historic property. Despite her complaints about Cliveden’s lack of modern amenities, and her perpetual tension with Anne, Mary seems to have been genuinely intent on keeping her deceased husband’s family seat from leaving Chew hands. In this matter, at least, Anne Sophia Penn Chew and Mary Johnson Brown Chew formed a united front.

Anne died in 1892, leaving the Cliveden mansion to Sam’s second son and namesake, Samuel Chew IV, while Mary still maintained ownership of a second lot diagonally across from it. In a 1912 letter to her son, Sam, Mary reminisced about Anne’s last birthday, her eighty-seventh. It is in this letter that Mary’s respect for Anne shows clearly, even twenty years later, and despite the rough beginning the two women had. “This (the 18th of March) is dear Miss Chew’s birthday, --twenty years ago today was her last one—I shall never forget how lovely she looked surrounded by the flowers every one had sent her and Oswald a small boy dressed in black velvet at her side—the most beautiful ‘picture of age & truth’ . . .”⁶²

Samuel IV did not stay at Cliveden, preferring instead to rent it out to his siblings. Mary, Bessy, Anne, and Oswald lived there intermittently, following their accustomed

⁶⁰ Unidentified newspaper, (1883?). Cliveden Biographical Files, MJBC.

⁶¹ Will of Samuel Chew, written June 13, 1881. From Richards, 90.

⁶² Mary Johnson Brown Chew to Samuel Chew IV, March 18, 1912. Cliveden Manuscripts, SC4, Box 4, Folder 2.

pattern of dividing their time between their three family residences. Mary oversaw the repairs to the house suggested by her son, which included a thorough cleaning and refurbishment of the drawing room and dining room.⁶³

It was at this time, with her childbearing years behind her, that Mary was able to thoroughly enjoy motherhood. Her youngest son, Oswald, was only seven years old when his father died, and Mary was able to develop a closer relationship to him as well as the rest of her children. She encouraged Oswald's interest in photography, giving him a little over eighteen dollars to buy a camera, and together they also read books on a variety of topics, especially Bible passages, and often ended the evenings with conversation. In her diary entry for February 3, 1894, Mary noted, "I love these little talks at bedtime. We...[say] our prayers together."⁶⁴

Mary maintained her active social life. Unlike Anne, Mary seems to have greatly enjoyed socializing outside of Cliveden. Her habit of staying in different homes and her youth spent as a Philadelphia socialite probably engendered that desire. With her daughters Anne and Bessy of appropriate age to socialize, she often entertained friends of theirs. She and her sister, Martha Morris Brown, "received" at the Walnut Street house about once a week. Mary regularly attended concerts, art exhibits, and lectures. When Mary's daughter, Anne, married British judge Vere Speke Alston on September 2, 1898 it was the most important event in Cliveden's history. The only other wedding to take place at Cliveden was the marriage of Eliza Chew to James Murray Mason in 1822. The guest list for the event included family relations, and an impressive array of the most prominent members of Philadelphia society, among them Newbolds, Ingersolls, Cadwaladers, and Copes.

Mary's interest in historic preservation included Stenton, the Colonial Dames, and the Site and Relic Society of Germantown (now the Germantown Historical Society). She was also actively interested in government, and in 1894 she became a member of the Civic Club of Philadelphia. Her interest in government is most likely tied to the fact that her son David was elected to City Council that same year.

While Mary did not actively participate in promoting Cliveden as a national historic landmark, and did not seek to reacquire artifacts like her husband Sam did, she did respect the house and appreciate its history. One important acquisition can be

⁶³ Richards, 96.

⁶⁴ Mary Johnson Brown Chew, daily journal, 1894. Cliveden Manuscripts, Closet Flat Storage.

attributed to her—Major John Andre’s handwritten description of the “Mischianza”, the farewell party for General Sir William Howe, which Andre had presented the day after the event to his escort for the evening, Sam’s Great-Aunt Peggy Chew. Mary purchased the description from one of Peggy’s descendents, James R. M. Howard, for \$300.

When in 1897—five years after Anne’s death—Congressman Hammer introduced a bill that would make Cliveden and a portion of neighboring Upsala a national park, the Chew family rallied against it. The bill asserted that “while the family take a strong pride in maintaining the historic old house as it was, the feeling of thousands of persons is that it should be a public domain, and there is an impression that the living members of the Chew family, through their very love for the place, and their desire that the property be preserved, would not seriously object to its passing into public control for park purposes. The feeling that the battle ground should become public property is strengthened by the fact that a good portion of the original site some years ago passed into other hands and was built upon. There is no likelihood that the present owners of the remainder will dispose of any more, but no one can tell what might be done by those who come after.”⁶⁵

The Congressman obviously made a severe error in judgment about the intentions of the Chew family, especially Mary Chew who, upon Anne Sophia’s death, became the mistress of Cliveden. Similarly, Mary rejected a proposal to erect a Revolutionary War monument on the Cliveden property, stating that “I am interested in all matters of historical interest in Germantown, being a member of the Germantown Site and Relic Society, but I really think that the Battle of Germantown is a monument in itself.”⁶⁶

The Chew family, with Mary as its figurehead, continued to weather attempts to wrest the mansion away from their control. In 1901 Mary attended a meeting of citizens organized to encourage support for the U. S. Government’s proposed acquisition of Cliveden and Upsala. She protested the plan, saying that, while she supported movements to perpetuate the memory of the Battle of Germantown, she told those assembled that “I think it but fair to you that you know that the Chew property is not available. It will positively not be sold. The family has held the property for over a

⁶⁵ Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, June 2, 1897. Cliveden Manuscripts, SC4.

⁶⁶ Unidentified newspaper, 1903. Cliveden Manuscripts, MJBC.

century and it remains intact. I will co-operate with any plan you may decide upon that does not include the purchase of the Chew property.” William E. Chapman, secretary of the Site and Relic Society of Germantown, also opposed any plan to forcefully remove Cliveden from Chew ownership. However, a handful of prominent men spoke briefly in favor of the acquisition, and one of them must have seemed especially foreboding to the embattled Chew family. General Louis Wagner reminded the Chews that, if the government wanted the property, there was very little the family could do to stop the acquisition. He reminded those present that Congress was legally empowered to pass an act confiscating the property by right of eminent domain, as had been the case with the Gettysburg battlefield. Further, he stated that “It is the Chew family’s misfortune to hold property upon such a site. If their ancestors had locked the door and kept the British out there would have been no reason to preserve the place.”⁶⁷

Mary’s defiance, as well as support from other Chew family members, the Johnson family (which owned Upsala and was equally adamant in refusing governmental acquisition of their land), and William E. Chapman of the Site and Relic Society of Germantown, seems to have been sufficient to cause the government to back down. The house remained in Chew family possession until January 1972, when Samuel Chew V sold the property to the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Mary was soon to find, however, that the difficulty of maintaining Cliveden was only going to increase.

By the early 1900s, Mary and Bessy were the only Chew family members who lived at Cliveden for any length of time. All of Mary’s children had grown up and started lives of their own—even little Oswald was by now an undergraduate at Harvard, and when he went on to study law at the University of Pennsylvania he took up residence at the Walnut Street house until his marriage in 1908. With only two people living there for any length of time, Mary ultimately dismissed six of the ten servants, keeping only a gardener, coachman, cook, and maid as regular help, and hiring part-time help as needed. This lack of help led to a gradual decline in the house’s appearance, which Mary attempted to correct. Again, the issue of finances returned inevitably to the forefront. Mary’s income was large by contemporary standards, coming primarily from her father’s large Brown estate—which she shared jointly with her sister, Martha—and from Sam’s estate, which she shared with her six children. She also counted profits on

⁶⁷ Unidentified newspaper, 1901. Cliveden Biographical Files, MJBC.

stocks, prime real estate holdings, and commercial ventures. But the impressive costs of maintaining Cliveden, as well as the other two family residences on Walnut Street and at “Vanor”, in Radnor, were a drain on Mary’s finances. In addition, her father, David S. Brown, had bequeathed \$10,000 each to David and Bessy, but had left no similar legacy for her other four children. Therefore, Sam and Oswald found themselves somewhat financially strapped, and had to ask their mother—who they thought fairly financially comfortable—for assistance. When she was reluctant to help them, due to her own economic constraints, they viewed her as miserly. Even David commented on this fact in a letter to his brother, Sam, describing the run-down condition of the family residences: “If you were here now you would find Cliveden and town both anything but what you imagine them in your dreams. The servants at Cliveden are insubordinate to an intolerable degree, every thing looks as though it was going to the dogs and it always gives me the blues to go out there....1716 [Walnut Street] is being run in a sort of one horse fashion and...the whole atmosphere is lamentable in the extreme....You would not be allowed to go to the theater or indulge in any entertainments. You will find Mamma rigidly stingy. I have scarcely enough money to pay my way....”⁶⁸

In order to protect the house and property, in 1906 Mary’s son, Sam, proposed setting up the Cliveden Trust, which would hold the property during Mary’s lifetime and that of her children, and ensure that the house pass down through the Chew line. Expected contributions from members of the Chew family would maintain the property and keep it ready year-round for occupancy. Those occupying the house would be subject to a proportionate amount of expense for the upkeep.

When Sam suddenly found himself unable to pay a \$248.80 bill for laying sewers on Chew Street, he applied to Mary for help, which she gave him. In order to avoid a similar predicament in the future, Sam asked his mother for more money. Her reply to him detailed the straits she found herself in. “About ten years ago I had in [the] bank a “principal” of about \$20,000. During that time my expenses exceeded my income about \$2000 a year, & I met my expenses from this “principal” lying in the bank....now I have no “principal” but am trying to live within my income....I would gladly give you each one of my children an allowance of \$5000 a year each, if my means would enable me to do

⁶⁸ David Sands Brown Chew (Philadelphia) to Samuel Chew IV (St. Paul’s School, Concord, NH), March 23, 1886. Cliveden Manuscripts, DSBC, Box 2.

so. But my income has been diminishing steadily ever since my father's death whilst my expenses have been increasing. At the end of this year I shall be better able to know what it will be in my power to do. I wish to act fairly by all of my children."⁶⁹

Her children, especially Sam, continued to comment on her perceived miserliness, even after repeated explanations that she could not give them money she did not possess. Her feelings toward her children were always warm, loving, and devoted, but Sam's feelings toward his mother are more ambiguous. In a letter to her, he stated, "I think if you took an interest in me I might amount to something. I am dependent however & am a domestic animal & need a lot of care & attention when at home & out of working hours, (not as much though as the little dog). Don't you think you could ever concentrate enough to give me what little I crave, instead of nursing the dog, & giving the rest of your very valuable energy & intelligence to Stenton & Independence Hall!"⁷⁰

Sam was also angry at what, to him, appeared to be his brother's attempts to usurp his birthright: "Above all things that I resent is Ben's proposition to take it [Cliveden] off my hands and lease it for ten years or more. Its like Jacob and Esau. I don't intend if I can help it to sell my birth-right. Ben got my horse and my saddle for a mess of pottage....At 44 years of age to be shorn of all my vested and inherent rights is rather too much." He ended the letter with a reminder of the dangerous waters ahead for Cliveden: "At least help me feel fairly safe about Cliveden. A trust fund might be established by you for the maintenance of Cliveden. I might feel sure...no matter what might happen to my fortunes....Cliveden is mine—it will be bound in my will and mine alone....Your obstinacy in facing the issue of Cliveden's future with me is only equaled by your attitude towards my suggestions."⁷¹

Appeals for financial aid did not stop with Mary's immediate family—distant relations also contacted her. In April 1913 Mary received a letter from the grandson of Colonel Benjamin Chew (Benjamin Chew III, Anne Sophia's disruptive brother). How much contact the bulk of the Chew family had with "Bad Ben's" descendents is uncertain. Anne wrote to a friend that her brother "had caused his family much sorrow in his lifetime & passed from this world without one word of reconciliation," but there

⁶⁹ Mary Johnson Brown Chew (Cliveden) to Samuel Chew IV, October 5, 1907. Cliveden Manuscripts, SC4.

⁷⁰ Samuel Chew IV to Mary Johnson Brown Chew, March 31, 1910. Cliveden Manuscripts, SC4.

⁷¹ Samuel Chew IV (Radnor) to Mary Johnson Brown Chew (Cliveden), October 6, 1915. Cliveden Manuscripts, SC4.

may have been communication between the Cliveden Chews and Bad Ben's family.⁷² In the letter, the grandson—also named Benjamin—comments on this rift while detailing his current predicament: "My grandfather, Col. B. Chew, of Cliveden, could well afford to indulge his eccentricities & family quarrels: he left everything to me, his property & along with it the family feud. I had neither the disposition nor the means to pursue such matters, & at this time I can scarce pay the rent of a small room....Until my good mother's death I was accustomed to every luxury & the contrast to=day [*sic*] is somewhat severe....Pray help me temporarily if you will & I shall be deeply grateful."⁷³ It is uncertain whether Mary assisted her erstwhile second-cousin-in-law, but given the fact that she found it difficult to raise more money for her own children, this is unlikely.

Still concerned about the future of Cliveden, Sam drafted his will in July 1916. He gave trusteeship of the house to his friend, Thomas Ridgeway, and authorized him to sell the property to any family member he chose. If no family member wished to buy Cliveden, it was to be given to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to be held in trust and maintained as a memorial to his ancestor, Chief Justice Benjamin Chew. Either way, he ensured that Cliveden would be kept safe.

When the United States entered World War I in April 1917, three of Mary's sons volunteered for active service. Ben was accepted into the cavalry, but Sam and Oswald were rejected and served instead with the Red Cross Ambulance Corps in France. When all three sons returned safe, Cliveden was in deplorable condition. Sam circulated a letter to family members stating that it would be better to give Cliveden over to the state, which would maintain it, rather than allow it to deteriorate. Sam's days, however, were sadly numbered. He died in July 1919, leaving ownership to Cliveden uncertain. At least one newspaper claimed that Sam had left the estate to an unknown beneficiary under secret seal instructions left to Thomas Ridgeway. In the end, Sam's stake in Cliveden passed down to his brother Ben's four-year-old son Sam; because Sam was a minor, Mary's daughter Bessy was named guardian of the estate until he reached the age of twenty-one.

Mary and Bessy continued to live at Cliveden intermittently, with regular visits from Ben's older children. Anne Chew Barringer, Ben's oldest daughter, recalled visiting Cliveden with her brothers Sam, Ben, and John, where she had formal meals

⁷² Anne Sophia Penn Chew to Katherine Gibbon, January 1865. From Richards, 43.

⁷³ B. Chew to Mary Johnson Brown Chew. Cliveden Biographical Files, MJBC.

“with finger bowls” and gathered in the front hall to hear her grandmother read *Bible Stories for Children*.

Mary died on July 27, 1927, leaving her lot at Cliveden to her spinster daughter, Bessy. Mary stands out as one of the most influential and important Chews to reside at the family homestead, not only for her gallant efforts to keep Cliveden in the family, but also for her personal hardships and victories. She entered Cliveden’s universe as a lovely young woman approaching a socially proscribed stage of her life, about which she was at times reticent and despairing. At times, the responsibilities of marriage troubled her, and the physical devastation of childbirth overwhelmed her, but she performed these functions with the same success she found in her flourishing social life. She was one of the premiere ladies of Philadelphia society, bringing glamour and extravagance to a family long associated with staidness and aristocratic breeding. Her determination to preserve Cliveden in the face of financial woes, increasing age, disparagements, and appeals for money by her own children show her to have possessed the sort of character Anne Sophia Penn Chew rarely credited her as having. As with Anne, Mary found her best comfort and joy with the Chew children—first her youngest son Oswald, and later with her son Ben’s five children.

Mary’s passion for historic preservation must also be admired. While Cliveden does not appear to have been her sole concern, historically speaking, she was an avid supporter of preservation projects in and around Philadelphia. Her work at Stenton, Independence Hall, and the Colonial Dames, as well as a myriad of other projects she participated in throughout her lifetime, are evidence of a conscious and deliberate concern for the integrity of the past. Many organizations and sites in the area benefited from her attention, and made possible much of what local preservation societies are doing today.

Mary’s obituary in the *Bulletin of the Civic Club of Philadelphia*, published in November 1927, praises her by saying, “In her both heredity and environment combined to mould a character firm yet kindly and generous, filled with patriotic purpose and eager to preserve for the city that she loved the best memorials of its past.”⁷⁴ This woman, first described as “the little insignificant, chattering chirping bride,” turned out to be one of the most significant people not only in Cliveden’s, but also in Philadelphia’s history.

⁷⁴ *Bulletin of the Civic Club of Philadelphia*, November 1927. In Cliveden Biographical Files, MJBC.

As Mary Johnson Brown Chew was, in personality and practice, a significantly different kind of woman from Anne Sophia Penn Chew, so too did her daughter, Elizabeth "Bessy" Brown Chew, cut a strikingly different figure from her mother. And while Bessy followed in her Great-Aunt's footsteps in remaining a spinster, in personality she could not have been more different.

Elizabeth Brown Chew (1863-1958)

Elizabeth Brown Chew, nicknamed “Bessy,” was born in November 1863, the second child of Samuel Chew III and Mary Johnson Brown Chew. She and her five siblings—Anne Sophia Penn Chew, David Sands Brown Chew, Samuel Chew IV, Benjamin Chew V, and Oswald Chew—divided their time between Cliveden and the other family residences at Vanor, in Radnor, and the town house at 1716 Walnut Street, in Philadelphia. The children usually spent part of the summer with their Great-Aunt Anne at the Chew family homestead of Cliveden. Anne Sophia, after whom Bessie’s sister was named, adored the children. Bessy and her siblings received from Anne Sophia the kind of close affection and contact which social custom and chronic ill health prevented their mother from displaying. Many of Anne Sophia’s letters to and from Mary made at least a passing mention of the children, often referring to them as “the pets.” After perpetual bad weather kept Anne from traveling to Sam and Mary’s town house in the city, she wrote, “How are the pets? I do want to see them so much but have not been able to accomplish my project of spending an afternoon with them. I hope soon to do so.”⁷⁵

With Mary forced to keep her distance from the children, and with Anne Sophia living at Cliveden, the only other regular female company left to young Bessy was her nurse, Catherine. Mary and Anne took such pains to avoid upsetting Catherine with any small thing that it seems the nurse was a mercurial—but highly valuable—person. In one instance, Anne Sophia and Mary conspired to deceive Catherine into believing that the chambermaid, Ellen, worked for Anne Sophia. “Mary supplies the money for Ellen’s wages,” Anne wrote. “& I hand it to her in order to humor Catherine with the idea that Ellen is my chambermaid.”⁷⁶ In a later memorandum, Anne wrote that Mary “is to return me this amount as she chooses to pay this girl though she has the name of being my chambermaid in order to suit the caprice of her nurse Catherine.”⁷⁷

Another female influence in Bessy’s life was the presence of her unmarried aunt, Martha Morris Brown—Mary’s younger sister. Anne Sophia was particularly fond of

⁷⁵ Letter, Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Cliveden) to Mary Johnson Brown Chew (Philadelphia), February 23, 1867. Cliveden Manuscripts, Box 1.

⁷⁶ Anne Sophia Penn Chew memoranda, February 5, 1870. In Nancy E. Richards, *Cliveden: The Chew Mansion in Germantown* (Research Project, November 1993), 81.

⁷⁷ Anne Sophia Penn Chew memoranda, June 1, 1870. In Richards, 81.

Martha, whom the children called “Aunt Mat.” As she told Bessie’s brother, Sam, Martha was “always welcome & always agreeable...[she] comes and goes ad libitum.”⁷⁸ Bessy and her siblings frequently petitioned Martha for the financial assistance their mother could not—or often, from their perspective, *would* not—give them. Sam, especially, considered his mother to be a stingy person, and David also made reference to what he perceived to be Mary’s miserliness.

Bessy continued to spend the summers with Anne Sophia, and when she and her sister Anne entered into young adulthood, their aunt began to entertain more often at Cliveden. With Anne Sophia sponsoring games of cricket and lawn tennis on the grounds at Cliveden, and their mother hosting lavish and expensive balls and dinner parties at their town house on Walnut Street, the girls enjoyed an active social life, and became an important part of Philadelphia’s social set.

Tragedy struck Bessy and her family in 1887, when her father suddenly passed away, leaving her and her five siblings—the youngest, Oswald, being only seven years old—without a father. Bessy was twenty-four years old at the time, unmarried, and still living with her mother and siblings. Her father’s legacy to her was two paintings by E. L. Henry, *The Lafayette Reception* and *The Battle of Germantown*, as well as an equal share with her brothers and sister in Sam’s lots at Cliveden. The two paintings still hang in the house today.

Sam’s loss grated heavily on the entire family. Anne Sophia remarked that she felt “as if we were without a chart or compass. [Sam’s]...will & his judgement were our best guide.”⁷⁹ To the Chew family and its branches, Bessy’s father seems to have been the very pinnacle of gentlemanly behavior. In a letter to Bessy’s brother, Sam, Chew cousin Virginia Mason said “All through our lives, until he was taken to a better world, and I do not recall a single instance of misunderstanding or dis-agreement between us nor have I ever known a purer more unselfish noble character than his. You have inherited a rich legacy in having his name, and a heady responsibility to keep it untarnished as he did.”⁸⁰ Bessy’s father had endeavored through much of his life to ensure Cliveden’s place as a national historic landmark, and for the most part he had succeeded. Shortly after his death, the Common Council of Germantown approached

⁷⁸ Letter, Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Cliveden) to Samuel Chew IV (Cape May, NJ), August 7, 1889. In Richards, 91.

⁷⁹ Letter from Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Germantown) to an unidentified “Dear Friend,” February 12, 1887. In Richards, 90.

⁸⁰ Letter, Virginia Mason (Charlottesville, VA) to Samuel Chew IV, February 19, 1914. Cliveden Manuscripts, SC4, Box 8.

Mary with a proposal to transfer ownership of Cliveden, in order to ensure the survival of the property. While Mary resisted any plan that would take Cliveden out of Chew ownership, its historical significance had been publicly recognized. Now it would become the responsibility of Sam's children to safeguard the future of the property.

In April, 1895, Bessy and her brother Sam attended a reenactment of the famous "Mischianza" Ball, which was originally staged on May 18, 1778, as a farewell fete honoring Revolutionary War General Sir William Howe before he returned to London. Bessy and Sam's great-great aunts Peggy and Henrietta Chew attended the first Mischianza, and the children—now adults—acknowledged the legacy and represented their family by donning period costumes and taking part in the reenactment.

On September 2, 1898, Bessy's sister Anne married British judge Vere Speke Alston, who worked for the Court of Appeal of the Native Tribunal in Cairo, Egypt. Bessy served as her sister's maid of honor, with her youngest brother, Oswald, as Alston's best man. Of Anne's engagement to Alston, *The Evening Bulletin* deemed it "An engagement of more than ordinary interest to the social world, and of international importance..." Of the bride, the paper noted that "Miss Chew is a prominent figure, not only in Philadelphia society, but also abroad, where much of her time has been passed, and wher [sic] her charming manners and many accomplishments have made her a host of friends."⁸¹ The wedding was a small but elegant affair, witnessed by an assortment of Philadelphia's elite—including Coxes, Cadwaladers, Ingersolls, Rivinuses, Fishers, Newbolds, Rushes, Wisters, and Copes—and members of the Chew's socially prominent extended family. It was, as one newspaper called it, "a brilliant and fashionable affair."⁸²

It is worth noting that Anne, having been born June 17, 1862, was thirty-six years old when she married Alston, and Bessy—then thirty-five—never married. Bessy was born during an age when society expected women to be married and producing children by the age of twenty-five. Her mother Mary had mentioned in one of her letters that "So far as I can make out...I suppose it must be woman's duty to go on having children every year—even if it kills her & she knows it will do so & if the Almighty wills it no one ought to complain—but it requires an effort to be resigned."⁸³

⁸¹ *The Evening Bulletin*, Wednesday, August 3, 1898.

⁸² Unidentified newspaper, September 2, 1898. Cliveden Biographical Files, ASPCA.

⁸³ Letter, Mary Johnson Brown Chew (Philadelphia) to Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Cliveden), January 22, 1867. In Richards, 54.

It is probable at this point that Bessy had already made the conscious decision not to marry—for it is unlikely that a woman of Bessy’s pedigree and social status would have been considered wholly unmarriageable. The social prominence of Anne’s suitor, Vere Speke Alston, attests to the desirability of the Chew girls. *The Evening Bulletin* reminded readers that Alston “comes of a distinguished family in England and is regarded as one of the rising men of the day.”⁸⁴ Bessy’s true feelings toward her own potential for marriage and children are unknown, as no extant documents discuss the matter. Bessy, however, was in good company, and joined the ranks of several Chew women and relations who had managed to exercise control of their own lives without the supervision of men. Bessy’s aunt Anne was one example, and expressed her sentiments regarding marriage and family in a letter to her sister: “Old maid as I am, you see I never take into consideration the prevailing opinion that members of a family, a man & wife for example, rather prefer living together instead of pursuing the even tenor of their way apart. Convenience & appearance are the governing principle with such as I am. The affections go for little with me, excepting my darling Sister, in the case of you & me.”⁸⁵ Bessy’s maternal aunt, Martha Morris Brown, also remained unmarried. And Bessy’s mother, Mary, became a widow in her late forties and was able to exert real control over her own estate. In other words, Bessy spent her formative years surrounded by strong-minded, independent women, which most likely influenced the choices she made in her own life. Bessy’s niece, Anne Chew Barringer, remembered her as “a proper spinster daughter who lived with her mother wherever Mary lived.”⁸⁶

Like the rest of the Chew family, Bessy felt the weight of responsibility for the care and preservation of Cliveden. By the early 1900s, there was no one left in the Chew family to give Cliveden the attention it required. Each of Bessy’s siblings had their own homes and families, and none had the liberty to grant the old family homestead more than the occasional visit. Bessy’s brother David had his own establishment in Philadelphia. Ben and Oswald both stayed at the Walnut Street town house until they married, and Sam spent most of his time in the Boston area, preferring to stay at the town house when he was in Philadelphia. Anne was living with her

⁸⁴ *The Evening Bulletin*, Wednesday, August 3, 1898.

⁸⁵ Draft of letter from Anne Sophia Penn Chew (Cliveden) to Eliza Chew Mason, February 1, 1860. Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Chew Family Papers, Box 197.

⁸⁶ Richards, 109.

husband in Cairo, Egypt. With so few people spending time at Cliveden, only a gardener was kept year-round on the grounds, and the house began to fall into disrepair. Clearly both the house and the grounds at Cliveden required constant attention, but no one in the family seemed to be in a position to fulfill that obligation. Sam was the nominal owner of the house, but only Mary and Bessy spent any prolonged amount of time there. Decisions were made primarily by Mary, but usually with written authorization from Sam.

Bessy's relationship with her mother was obviously close and affectionate, as Mary's journal makes an almost daily record of her daughter's activities, and there is no evidence of tension with her brothers David, Ben, and Oswald. Bessy also seems to have been close to her niece, Mary Evelyn Chew, as letters from other members of the family make frequent mention of Bessy and "Evelyn" traveling together. The relationship between Bessy and her brother Sam was more fractious, as it seems to have been between all of the Chew family members and Mary's difficult second son. The nature of the tension appears to have been due in part to Sam's addiction to alcohol, but also partially because of a family dynamic at odds with the way in which Sam preferred to live his life. As the heir to his father's land, as well as his Aunt Anne Sophia's sizable estate, he was the majority owner of the house and grounds at Cliveden. He appears to have been especially protective of his inheritance and possessions, to the point of denying his siblings any right to stay at Cliveden. In a letter to his mother, he outlined his grievances: "A year ago you guaranteed then that was the last time they [David and his wife, Daisy] would ever apply to go there and David & Daisy knew you so guaranteed....It comes home to me acutely as it means nothing more or less than my having to move out of my own house for David and his strange wife. I have no other home where I can ask or entertain my friends without being nagged & superintended by Aunt Martha. It seems hard that at thirty-two I can not live quietly in my own house and ask those to dinner that I wish without being called upon to show my list of guests for approval like a minor child....I have long yearned for a home where I can find peace & quiet and do some intellectual work in the evenings and other hours of leisure when I could supplement my office work. This has never yet been practiced; but a gleam of hope had been given me in the family's continued preference to be away from Cliveden,—until the wild revolution in the tactics of David in professing his affectionate desire to pay his respects to the 'Dear Old Place' by making a three

months pilgrimage to the Mecca I had created by expenditure of considerable sums of money.”⁸⁷

David was not the only sibling Sam had trouble with. In 1914, Sam was hospitalized for an unknown affliction, and shortly after his release he wrote furious letters to Bessy, David, and Oswald regarding some form of intervention they took with his physician. To Bessy, he wrote “It has annoyed me especially that you & Olly [Oswald] saw fit to go several times to Dr. Sinkler’s office and chatter & gossip about me & that Olly should have written to Charley Winslow about me. I consider you both have intermuddled & interfered with my private affairs in an unwarranted [*sic*]. If you had been sincere—it would have been one thing,—for you did not go until I was in the hospital, and when I came out you never went to see him again nor have you done a solitary thing he advised. You accomplished nothing more than washing your dirty linen in public. If you did it on your mother’s account why don’t you follow her up, & observe that she has no cause for worry. Kindly look over your handy work & tell her what you have accomplished. Until then I feel too much hurt to speak to you unless you apologize.”⁸⁸

Sam complained to his mother about Bessy, David, and Evelyn again the next year. “For twenty years I have been exploited on account of David & his family. Several times they went to Cliveden against my known preferences but waived because of your requests. Bessie volunteered that she & Evelyn would not be a[t] Vanor until some time in June. Members of this family say one thing & do another....Evelyn & Bessy I am thoroughly out of patience with. If they don’t leave me alone, I shall go. If they are to have the Ford please let me know but they shall not exploit me any more....I don’t bear malice, but its absurd to ask me to be hand in glove with Evelyn who I consider was to[o] ill-behaved all round last winter.—I don’t want any thing to do with her, & I will not share in common with her & Bessy. I will not be snubbed by Bessie & treated the next day in a taken-for-granted manner, & slurred all over....She simply wants to use the Ford because I got it & Andrew into nice presentable shape & she

⁸⁷ Letter, Samuel Chew IV to Mary Johnson Brown Chew, June 16, 1903. Cliveden Manuscripts, SC4, Box 2.

⁸⁸ Letter, Samuel Chew IV to Elizabeth Brown Chew, July 27, 1914. Cliveden Manuscripts, SC4, Box 4, Folder 3.

thinks she will swoop down & enjoy the fruits of my infinite trouble & foresight. If you want the Ford handed over to Bessy write her & tell her. I won't share it with her."⁸⁹

By the tone of these letters, the tension between Sam and Bessy—the brother and sister who had represented their family at the Mischianza reenactment—had reached a fever pitch. When World War I started, Sam, Ben, and Oswald volunteered for active service. Ben joined the Cavalry, but Sam and Oswald were rejected and instead joined the Red Cross Ambulance Corps in France. Sam left for duty in late 1917, but not before scolding his mother for the sorry state Cliveden was in.

Whether or not Sam intended to take up full-time residence at Cliveden is unknown; however, he was obviously deeply concerned about the progressively grim future of the property. He urged his mother to set up a trust fund to ensure that Cliveden would be maintained, and consistently berated her for allowing the house to deteriorate. In March 1919, he circulated a letter to his family members insisting that, although no one was living in the house, the servants had to be engaged to care for the house and grounds, and these servants needed to be cared for and paid. He called the neglect “a betrayal of the trust left by Aunt Anne and Father...”⁹⁰

Tragically, Sam followed his father's dark legacy of dying at an early age—he was only forty-eight years old when he passed away in July 1919, barely four months after his letter to his family. His obituaries reported the cause as heart disease, the same trouble that also apparently afflicted his brother, Ben.* His ownership of the property passed to his nephew and namesake, Samuel Chew V—who was then only four years old. Because little Sam was a minor, Bessy—unmarried and without a home of her own—was named guardian of the estate until Sam reached the age of twenty-one. Still, Bessy's residence at Cliveden was restricted mainly to the summer until Mary's death in 1927. Mary's death left Bessy without any pressing family obligations. She no longer had to care for her elderly mother, had no children of her own, and had no other home to live in. Mary had left Bessy the Walnut Street town house, but she sold it in the early 1930s. In addition, with the one-sixth ownership of the estate left to her by her father, another one-sixth deeded to her after her brother Oswald's death, and

⁸⁹ Samuel Chew IV to Mary Johnson Brown Chew, May 20, 1915. Letter copy. Cliveden Manuscripts, SC4, Box 8. Note: Bessy seems to signed her letters using the “Bessy” spelling; however, family members used both “Bessy” and “Bessie,” as Sam's alternating spelling demonstrates.

⁹⁰ Cliveden Bulletin, March 22, 1919. Cliveden Manuscripts, SC4.

*Mary Johnson Brown to Samuel Chew IV, March 5, 1912. Cliveden Manuscripts, Box 4. “I do not think Ben is well his heart troubles him but I cannot persuade him to go see a doctor...”

the additional parcel on Germantown Avenue and Cliveden Street left to her by Mary, she owned a significant part of the grounds that Cliveden rested upon. It was logical for Bessy to take up permanent residence at Cliveden to look after little Sam's interests. Bessy took her responsibility very seriously.

One of Bessy's first actions as the new mistress of Cliveden was to set up a savings account in Sam's name to hold in escrow the rent she paid to him for living in the house, which he would receive when he turned twenty-one. When repairs or improvements were needed, she consulted her brother Ben (Sam's father), but paid for them out of her own pocket. Determined to leave Cliveden to Sam in better shape than when she had taken stewardship, she almost immediately set about repairing the damage to the house and renovating rooms that had not been updated since 1894.

Repairs proved to be considerable and expensive. In one case, Bessy hired architect Thomas Cope to remodel the rear section of the wash house, which had deteriorated considerably through many years of neglect. When Cope pulled off the plaster from the underside of the second floor, he discovered that two joists had rotted to the point where there was a real danger of it collapsing. He also advised Bessy to remove the old zinc bath tub from the second floor, which would destroy the tub and damage a portion of the second floor. The total cost of the renovation was \$556.⁹¹

Bessy also had the drawing room refurbished, including repainting, filling in cracks in the woodwork, and scraping the sidewalls. She also replaced the curtains and valances on four windows, and had the exterior woodwork on the house and wash-house dependency repainted. The plaster in the office was repaired, and the woodwork in several rooms was repainted, at considerable expense. Anne Barringer recalls the change in the appearance of the drawing room as "dazzling."⁹² Bessy also replaced the corroded water pipes that serviced the kitchen wing and the bath room on the east side of the house, and updated the central heating system. She likewise contributed some of the major changes to the landscape around Cliveden, which are still evident today, and the entire house received a new roof.

Even as a child, Bessy and her siblings had the privilege of extensive travel. A friend of Martha Brown's named "Sylvia" wrote, "It seems as if the Chew family had

⁹¹ Richards, 112.

⁹² Richards, 113.

become almost Europeans.”⁹³ As an adult, Bessy’s status as a spinster gave her a flexibility in lifestyle that many women of her era did not possess and, no longer burdened by caring for her mother, she continued to travel frequently. She visited her sister Anne in her homes in Cairo and the south of France, and even after Anne’s death in 1931 Bessy continued to take trips with her friends. While at home, Bessy visited friends or went into town, and invited friends and acquaintances to Cliveden for tea and dinner parties. Like her mother, she made a point of attending the opera when she could, and joined her mother and sister in becoming a member of the Colonial Dames (though Anne and Bessy joined a different organization than Mary, both of which operated under the same name). Unlike Mary, however, Bessy was never actively involved in historic preservation. Like her Great-Aunt Anne, she restricted her passion in that area to Cliveden. She appreciated Cliveden’s place in history and her family’s close ties to the property. To that end, she allowed visitors to tour the grounds, but drew the line at allowing anyone into the house. One exception to that rule was the sesquicentennial anniversary of the Battle of Germantown, held October 1-4, 1927, when members of the Chew family welcomed celebrants into the historic home.⁹⁴

Even when Sam reached the age of twenty-one, in 1936, Bessy continued to reside in the house, accompanied by a small staff of servants. Her nephew, Sam, and his wife Barbara chose instead to live on the family property at Radnor. Her niece, Anne Barringer, inherited Bessy’s interest in family genealogy and visited her at least once a week to hear stories about the Chew family. After World War II, her great-nephew, Lowry Stephenson, and his family moved in with her and took up residence in wash-house dependency, which Bessy had converted into a “Cottage” for their use. Lowry lived there until his second child was born, when—needing more space for his growing family—he traded houses with his brother David, who stayed at the Cottage with his wife until his job took him away from Philadelphia. After that, Bessy rented the Cottage out.

By 1953, Bessy, who was ninety years old and nearly blind, became increasingly unable to care for the house, and its condition deteriorated again. Anne Barringer remembered that the curtains in Bessy’s bedroom were tattered, and that the carpet on

⁹³ “Sylvia” (Milton, MA) to Martha Morris Brown, October 25, 1897. Cliveden Manuscripts, MMB, Box 1.

⁹⁴ Richards, 116.

the stairs was so threadbare that the parlor maid had to color the treads with red ink so that visitors would not notice its condition.⁹⁵

Bessy died in the summer of 1958, having successfully cared for and managed the family homestead for thirty years. While Sam owned the house and a large part of the property, he had shared the decision-making with his brothers Ben and John, and his cousins Lowry and David Stephenson. Bessy, however, had been responsible for efficiently carrying out those decisions, and she had wielded that day-to-day authority over the house and grounds with considerable success. Only old age and infirmity had laid low her meticulous attention to the upkeep of the mansion.

Bessy left all of her shares of the Cliveden estate to her nephew Sam, which, in addition to the house lot that had been left to him by his uncle, gave him majority control over the property. Upon Bessy's death, Sam, his wife Barbara, and his children decided to move from Radnor to the larger house at Cliveden, and so continued Chew stewardship of the mansion.

Bessy's contribution to Cliveden was considerable, as she almost single-handedly pulled the house and grounds out of the advanced stages of decay it had fallen into over the years of near vacancy. She herself bankrolled many of the repairs that were technically Sam's responsibility. She enjoyed life, unfettered as it was by personal obligations like children and marriage, and lived to the ripe age of ninety-four. She surrounded herself with friends and family, and kept the care of Cliveden always at the forefront of her thoughts, even after her guardianship ended. Her great-nephew, Lowry Stephenson, remembered her as "very easy going," with the house arranged for comfortable living, and nothing off-limits to the Chew children except for the admonition that the caned fancy chairs were fragile. She was usually dressed and ready for work by nine o'clock in the morning. For the lunchtime meal, she used the regular blue and white Canton china, but she insisted that dinner for guests be served on her mother and father's peach-banded wedding china.⁹⁶ Niece Anne Barringer recalled that Bessy had a little flower garden behind the house which, despite several attempts, never amounted to much.⁹⁷ All in all, Bessy's later years seemed to have been quite idyllic.

Edith Emerson, of the Woodmere Art Gallery in Chestnut Hill, wrote her condolences to Sam: "I was personally grieved when I heard of the death of dear Miss

⁹⁵ Richards, 118.

⁹⁶ Richards, 115-116.

⁹⁷ Richards, 114.

Elizabeth Chew, one of the most charming women I ever knew, an ‘unforgettable person,’” and she promised to “treasure my memories of her as a rare example of a true gentlewoman.”⁹⁸

With her freedom and casual nature, Bessy was very different from her predecessors at Cliveden. Anne Sophia Penn Chew had also never married, but rarely left Cliveden for any length of time, and was stricter and more traditional than Bessy. Mary Johnson Brown Chew, Bessy’s mother, was a socialite who never spent much time in any one place, and rigidly adhered to the laws and regulations of Philadelphia society. But all three women shared several important qualities—love of family, and devotion to the homestead known as Cliveden. For one hundred years, women had served as the proprietors of the property and as representatives of the illustrious Chew family, and they served with remarkable dexterity and aplomb. Though never quite free of male influence and supervision, the Chew women owned Cliveden in all but name (and Anne, who purchased much of the property from her siblings, owned a majority of it). They displayed financial acumen rarely attributed to their sex, and managed extensive holdings despite having a largely insufficient—and, at times, nonexistent—income.

Cliveden today stands as a testament to the ingenuity and drive of the Chew women, and a physical remembrance of the personal power of all women.

⁹⁸ Letter, Edith Emerson of the Woodmere Art Gallery in Chestnut Hill, to Samuel Chew V (Cliveden), August 26, 1958. SC5, Biographical Files, EBC.

Sources

Manuscripts Collection

Germantown, Pennsylvania. Cliveden. Cliveden Archives and National Trust Collection Records:

Without these sources, this project would have been virtually impossible, especially with regard to the sections on Mary Johnson Brown Chew and Elizabeth Brown Chew. The letters sent to these women, and by these women, offer a valuable insight into Chew family dynamics, and a glimpse into what life was like for these wonderful and fascinating personalities.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Chew Family Papers:

I did not have the opportunity to study the enormous collection of Chew miscellany as I might have liked; however, the materials I was able to access were invaluable to my work. Mary Johnson Brown's 1861 diary, which illustrated her perspective on the Civil War and her reticence and anxiety about her coming marriage to Samuel Chew III, was greatly helpful in understanding her personality, and the times in which she lived. The letters transcribed from HSP sources and kept at Cliveden, detailing Anne Sophia Penn Chew's strong feelings about the real causes and consequences of the Civil War, helped me to understand her as a woman gifted with a formidable intellect and an almost prescient comprehension of political issues that many of her fellow Americans only realized four years after the fact.

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