

Mary Johnson Brown Chew (1839 - 1927)

Preservationist & Victorian Womanhood

As a member of elite society in the late 19th century, Mary Johnson Brown was brought up in the “Cult of Domesticity,” a concept that emphasized a woman’s role as wife, mother and household manager. However, despite having a total of six children, Mary did not always agree with these ideals:

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 and she knows it will do so and if the Almighty will it no one ought to complain ~ but it requires an effort to be resigned.



In her later life, Mary turned her focus to the important work of preserving Philadelphia’s historic built environment. She served on the Board of Lady Managers for the preservation of Independence Hall and helped protect historic structures in Germantown as a member of the National Society of Colonial Dames and the Germantown Site and Relic Society.



Catherine Hendry (b. 1825)

Invaluable Caregiver

Dwellings whose names have been in the order of visitation.		The name of every person whose place of abode on the first day of June, 1870, was in this family.	DESCRIPTION.			Profession, Occupation, or Trade of each person, male or female.
1	2		Age at last birth-day. If under 15 years give weeks in fractions. Wks. 1/4	Sex—M or F.	Color—White (W.), Black (B.), Other (O.), Indian (I.)	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
		Chew Mary	30	F		
		.. Sophia	8	F		
		.. Elizabeth	7	F		
		.. David	4	m		
		Thorp John	30	m		
		Smith James	85	m	b	
		Hendry Catharine	45	F		
		Welsh Hannah	35	F		
		Sarvey Mary	25	F		
		Welsh Mary	21	F		
		Johnson Elizabeth	12	m		
		.. Mary	10	F		

Catherine Hendry served a key role in this “Cult of Domesticity” as a nurse of Mary’s young children in the 1870s. Among her duties were “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.” Catherine’s importance can be seen in letters between Mary and Anne Sophia Penn Chew where the two women continually discussed ways to keep Catherine satisfied.

above right: Mary Johnson Brown Chew (1887)
 above middle: A Chew Family Celebration (circa 1890)
 bottom: 1870 Census