

# Philanthropist Women of the 19th Century in the United States of America and Georgia: Parallels of Philanthropy

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Beginning from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century until obtaining the right to vote the middle and high -class American women found charity as an only safe road to self-realization and involvement in social activities in and they did it with great success. The establishment of a new civil society organizations fighting for social change, creating new perspectives in terms of employment and education, missionary activities, medical and protection of educational institutions; this is the list of incomplete progressive steps, which were carried out as a result of women's charity project.

Particular attention towards this period is arisen due to the fact that at this time the legislative changes occurred and the principles of philanthropy and patronage of art were founded, which raised the prospect of overcoming the barriers of gender and consequently not only women's rights increased, but played an important role in the following progress of the American society.

Despite the historical and social differences, the 19<sup>th</sup> century philanthropist women activities in the USA and Georgia had a lot in common. The first and most important perhaps was that women in both countries recognized the need for change and began fighting for their rights. In America this process was documented in 1848, when in Seneca Falls on the meeting of women's rights Elizabeth Stanton's "Declaration of Sentiments" was signed. In Georgia, approximately at the same time, Barbare Jorjadze wrote a verse on women's rights. Despite the differences in scale and importance, both share similar spiritual aspiration.

Elizabeth Stanton's and Barbare Jorjadze's work in Georgian-American Philanthropy of this time is not the only example to draw parallel between. In this respect the philanthropic activities of Sarah Worthington King Peter, Sarah Hale, Candy Wellers in America and in Georgia Anastasia Tsereteli's, Ekaterine Gabashvili's, Ekaterine Kipiani's, Ekaterine Mesxi's philanthropic activities are rather interesting. These parallels are not exact and in some cases are characterized by chronological errors but it could be argued that despite the geographical distance and a number of differences, the women of these two countries share one vector and goal. If not for the beginning of the last century and its historical reality, these philanthropic traditions would have had a totally different influence on the development of the country's social and cultural institutions, and they would have undoubtedly established in a different way.

The daughter of Ohio governor, Sarah Worthington King Peter, from an early age was actively involved in philanthropic and intellectual activities. Her initial spheres of interest were church activities, sewing circles, art, studying French and hosting literary meetings. In 1833 her son died due to cholera epidemic, after which she founded along with other women Cincinnati Orphanage and was actively involved in issues concerning this Orphanage. Later, along with his friend Sarah Josepha Hale, she met with great enthusiasm the new opportunities opening for women's employment: in 1848 she personally collected the first 20 students and on the third floor of her house and opened America's first School of Design for Women. A successful experience for this existing in the homeland of Sarah Worthington's husband was a major incentive for her. The School of Design in America was quite successful for several reasons: public support, funding and existence of stable orders from the textile industry. Of great importance were the results as well. The initiative was successful and charity became united with artistic principles and moreover, this form of women employment was adapted to the social norms of that time. Like writing and needlework, this activity could be carried out at home and in addition can meet this organization's main demand, tastes, and goals. Sarah Worthington Peter while touring Europe discovered the world of Fine Art, where she studied history, bought some antique statues and ancient European art pieces. At this time the idea of making a gallery was outlined as well. This time, instead of using her own funds Sarah Peter gathered co-operators and in 1854 they opened Women's Art Academy, which to use contemporary terminology was a multi-profile organization oriented on the development of Art. This facility functioned as a repository of copies of European paintings, the gallery consisted of drawings loaned by collectors, there was a centre for reading literature and design school for poor women. All of this was carried out by using the experience gained from the orphan's shelters and by collecting funds. After eight years of operation the project is closed due to the lack of financial support.

Although such organizations were set up in many cities, which in essence was very important, but her biography is a proof that if during this period women's charity and reforms did not involve rational, pragmatic goals they were seen as too much luxurious and could not find necessary public support, and in a number of cases was even subject to criticism.

The period before the civil war saw another sphere of activity where women were actively involved, and which had a great influence on the development of ideological principles that in the end got a form of a solid trend. One of the women actively involved in this direction was Sarah Josepha Hale – writer, influential publisher and the inspiring force to establish America's National Holiday, Thanksgiving Day.

The family of Sarah Hale believed that children, despite their gender, has the right to education and correspondingly Sarah and his brother were given one and the same opportunity of education. Sarah became a widow at an early age and to get a financial support enabling to raise her five children, friends suggested to publish a collection of verses "*Genius of Oblivion*" and later a novel "*Northwood. Life North and South*".<sup>[1]</sup> It is noteworthy that Sarah was the first writer who addressed the issue of Slavery.

After the publication of the book she became so popular that was offered the place of an editor of the journal, where she worked for 40 years. Sarah Hale retired from this job when she was nearly 90 years old and during all these times was actively involved in public life. The journal at those times published the works of Nathaniel Hawthorn, Washington Irving, James Kirk and many others, including women writers. Sarah Hale became the arbiter of American taste and not only in just fashion and cooking, but also for home decoration, architecture and literature. Her name is linked to a list of impressive steps carried out for the benefit of women: she was a propagandist for women to get higher education; this issue was discussed in her journal and more than seventeen article and critical essays were dedicated to it. *Employment for Women* - was a column in the journal existing from 1852 and where severe discussions were held on those issues which mattered too much for the country. Neither was the notion of nationhood unknown for Sarah Hale. She favored the principle of unity and for her commitment towards her national interests was expressed in the promotion of American authors and covering American problems in her journal. The same purpose, the idea of unity, served the putting up of the Bunker Hill Obelisk<sup>[2]</sup> a symbol of independence, whose financial support was gathered through Sarah Hale's Journal. Finally, in 1863, after 17-year-long correspondence and fight, Thanksgiving Day was declared as a national holiday and became an important symbol one of the country's unity.

The long-term activities of Sarah Hale had a great influence on the self-assessment and self-affirmation of women. The discussions in the journal revealed the trends whose deepening significantly increased women's role in society.

Candance Thurber Wheeler was a prominent figure of American social and cultural life in the post-Civil War period. Her initiative of supporting decorative arts movement, spread throughout the country, and founded by women, strengthening their interests, was the first large-scale successful initiative. Design schools fully reflected the interests of women, as it unified together the idea of house decoration and career opportunities, and therefore, it was a logical continuation of the School of Design by Sarah Peter.

The researcher of American Women Philanthropists Cathleen McCarthy writes in her monograph that in contrast to Sarah Worthington King Peter,

Candance Thurber Wheeler was not suitable for this role. Wheeler was born in a deep religious family and was brought up strictly [McCarthy, 1991:38 ]. Later, when Wheeler described this period in her memoirs, she stated that she could not even dare to imagine that his grandchildren might be raised on a plain farm, within the walls filled with literature of religious character [Wheeler,1918: 49]. Candance Thurber who came from such a traditional family, married an educated engineer from New York, Thomas Wheeler and her life changed radically. Wheeler showed his wife the cultural life of New York. During the same period Candance Wheeler became actively involved in the activities of Sanitary Commission[3].

In 1877 Candance Wheeler and several of her comrades founded the New York Society of Decorative Art (NYSDA), which was inspired by the hand-made items seen in South Kensington Museum[4] and was inspired by the successfulness of the likewise project in England. Like the predecessor institutions, Wheeler's Society was a mixture of Arts and charity. The objective was to improve the quality of arts and crafts and to the level of perfection. The organization developed specific plan to achieve these goals: financing embroidery, sewing or other types of needlework courses, marketing of Women's created high-quality products and holding exhibitions, lectures, moving displays to promote Women's such activities.

The women affiliated with this organization were united by an idea: use decorative arts for the development of women's career opportunities and expansion of cultural influence. Decorative Art Society gained unprecedented popularity across America in the 1870-1890s. Interest in education, the need of massively increasing the level of taste and desire were the factors that contributed to the popularity of this society.

The Decorative Art Society brought a number of positive changes: a) women's activities went beyond the scope of interests in only housing, religion and charity boundaries. B) The activities within these organizations did not oppose the norms of public life and therefore women involved in it were no longer subject to criticism. C) Decorative Art Society created new opportunities for women and, as she Wheeler said it looked like a transition to a new reality, and in spite of the restrictions was still a step forward in this movement. This movement opened doors towards new possibilities for women. However this door was only a bit open, but still the positive side of it was that such a door existed [Wheeler, 1918: 215.].

In Georgia, at about the same period, in the second half of the 19th century, women came actively on the public arena that can be explained due to the public needs. The National oppression and terrible political situation of the country stipulated the desire for unity and necessity of national front as a means to fight against unjust. Akaki Tsereteli expressed public opinion, when in

"The Times" he wrote: "I have said earlier and I will repeat now that women in many countries have not been on such a high level as it is in Georgia. I do not see spring as spring when a swallow due to cold weather does not come. Correspondingly, I do not be in public awakening when women are asleep" [Chikhladze, 1876:5].

One such woman, Anastasia Tumanishvili-Tsereteli (1849-1932), from an early childhood witnessed gatherings of public figures and well-known poets. In fact, her father, Michael Tumanishvili's (also famous figure) rich library and striving for learning played a pivotal role in shaping the character of Anastasia.

Anastasia was interested in foreign languages (German, French), music, and advanced pedagogical ideas of that time. In 1876 she went to Switzerland to learn subjects concerning the bringing up of pre-school aged children. Four months later, she returned to her homeland full of enthusiasm and ideas. Like American figures the Georgian activists were fully aware of the need of what they did. This can be proved by their personal and autobiographical records and letters. In Anastasia Tsereteli's autobiographical notes we read: "Four months later, after the trip I returned to my family, I came to Tbilisi, and then I found what my life's goal was: to work, continuous work for my people" [Gviniashvili,1959:7].

Anastasia Tumanishvili collaborated with representatives of various sectors of the culture, be it in the Georgian Theatre, Writing-Literacy Society, Women's School Organization or literary work.

Women's Society was established in 1872 under her leadership, and the members of it were Keke Meskhi, Elene Kipiani, Ekaterine Gabashvili and others, who at the same time were actively engaged in translation work and published their translations in a collection under the name of "Sweet translations published by Georgian Women. Stories and articles were specifically chosen due to their informative and patriotic nature. Introducing foreign literature for the broad masses was a way to become an integral part of the united cultural space of the world. These remarkable efforts did not remain unnoticed. Sergei Meskhi, the editor of "The Times" wrote about it: "The publication of such a book is an important event in our lives. Noteworthy is that this book is translated and published by Georgian women. It is a positive thing as women do not only think about marriage, dancing, and clothes but start to be actively involved in social live and want to do something for the society. We should be proud that there are women who do not seek balls and lotto as only means of entertainment and do something good for the society" [Chikhlaze1976:131].

Under the initiative of Anastasia in 1884 a mutual society for teachers and foster women's support was formed, which was involved in a great deal of

cultural activities. Under its guidance public lectures, Sunday schools, charity events were led and even a public library was opened.

In the same period in the village of Kheltubani a school and an orphanage was opened under the leadership of Anastasia Tumanishvili.

Despite the great importance of these initiatives, the crown of Anastasia Tumanishvili's achievement is considered the establishment of children's magazine "Jejili". On the way of development the journal saw a lot of difficulties like overcome censorship, the constant threat of closure, lack of financial support, but despite this the editorial work she started in 1890 she did successfully for 30 years. Public demand and interest towards this event was rather great, and as a proof of this serves Ilia Chavchavadze's assessment in the newspaper "Iveria" published December 31, 1890: "Good news for our readers is that: Today the first issue of the youth journal "Jejili" was given to subscribers, which will be published one in two months under the editorship of Anastasia Tumanishvili. A rather good thing is this first issue for the eye. The heart and mind are not forgotten either. There is enough for everything. The editors of "Jejili" have prepared an appropriate gift for the future generations. I read the issue and enjoyed it with full heart and spirit" [Gviniashvili, 1959:10].

Interest in teen literature and getting familiar with culture and customs of other people, stirring up with patriotic spirit, encouragement of writers, poets and women writers – this is an incomplete list of virtues that "Jejili" had.

Ekaterine (Keke) Melikishvili (1854-1928) was brought up in richness, she got a good education and had an opportunity to be in an outstanding environment, first in her family and then in her husband's, Sergei Meskhi, family. By the support of her family at the age of 19 she graduated from a gymnasium in Switzerland and then got higher education in the field of medicine. At those times Georgian Society had a positive attitude towards Women's education and tried to promote it. Ekaterine's fiancé, Sergei Meskhi, was happy by the fact that his fiancée would study in Switzerland and this is what he wrote: "Wait four years, think about the good days and think about the future, when you will return graduate and prepared and we both can work with united forces for our country which is our goal and aim in life" [Gviniashvili, 1959:144].

The years spent in Zurich were fruitful for Keke. She studied German and French, got acquainted with innovative ideas of that time, and also actively observed events going on in Georgia and in parallel studied medicine with great interest.

Keke before going abroad was involved in translation as well, and after coming home continued her activities. Within the frameworks of Anastasia

Tsereteli's Circle among with many other works she translated "American Women of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century", which is rather noteworthy. The works she chose for translation were distinguishable due to their social severance and actuality. She played a great role in the enrichment of children's literature with translations.

Ekaterine Gabashvili(1851 -1938) like Candace Wheeler came into the public arena from controversial social environment. The orphaned girl was raised by her grandmother who vehemently opposed broad education of women and wanted to teach Ekaterine only writing and reading and bring her up as a housewife. By her father's insistence, she received her secondary education at the famous boarding school, but because of the lack of opportunities and financial support she could not either go abroad or to get higher education. Nevertheless, Ekaterine was self-educated. Ekaterine got familiar with Russian and foreign literature, and sociology. She began teaching the poorest children free of charge at the age of 17. In 1895, she arranged a five-year school in her home where she taught women needlework which she led for 15 years. The school existed on the basis of Donation and also offered listeners secondary school subjects.

To the name of Ekaterine Gabashvili is connected the establishment of one rather important and difficult genre – novella – in Georgian Literature.

Ekaterine Gabashvili had 11 children, whose upbringing she could perfectly cope with. At her husband's family they did not favour women's public activities, women's writing was also considered shameful, but Ekaterine could not get used to domestic slavery, and, in spite of so many difficulties, the fledgling writer did not even think of abandoning her activities.

"Among the narrow walls, which is called being a housewife and in many cases absorbs the spiritual existence of a woman, I made a small peephole, from which I always observed the public growth and social progress of my country," she wrote [<http://www.pencenter.ge>: 20.03.2013].

In addition to writing and teaching activities, Ekaterine greatly contributed to the establishment of Georgian libraries and filled them with books. Along with her comrades she collected quite a variety of literature, and in a short time managed to open the first reading room, and later founded the city libraries in other districts as well, but the idea did not exist for a long time. The Society of spreading Writing and Literacy was unable to pay the rent and the householder threw out in the streets all the collected books. It was one of the most painful events in her life.

In the 1890s a small circle of women raised the issue of the establishment of Women's school, which was crowned by the opening of the school in the house of Ekaterine Gabashvili.

What the Charity works of Georgian and American women of the 19<sup>th</sup> century have in common is striving for European Traditions and Values and the desire to master European experience.

In addition, both the United States and Georgia, for the philanthropist women was equally important finding and creating workplaces for women, and therefore gain socially active status. Their efforts served and met the social needs of their country at the times of their rising: in America it to ensure the financial independence of widows and middle-class women during the period of the civil war, refinement of their taste, broaden opportunities of education and other. In Georgia the requirements were closely related to national interests and, therefore, their main activity was to spread writing and reading, to maintain education on the native language and education of the masses.

Among the similarities of the development of American and Georgian Charity there were several principle differences, out of which two should be outlined. In Georgia, differently from America institutionalization of Women Movement did not occur. In Georgia it had a character of unities and women circles. In America we can regard the Mont Vernon Ladies' Association as a peak of institutionalization, which was distinguishable with its large scale and state viewpoint. The organization established in 1853 was represented by women of all the states and their aim was to maintain the name and ideas of George Washington. It should be said that this organization exists even nowadays and still functions.

Second difference is that the Women Movement started in America went toward the development of decorative arts and not only women's career opportunities were opened but they spread their influence on culture too.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century four significant museums<sup>[5]</sup> were opened in New York founded by women and this museum boom spread other big cities and the whole America.

In Georgia Women's philanthropic development process, which was developing along with western trends, terminated with the Sovietisation of Georgia. The existence of such a deep tradition gives the hope that the political-economic normalization will give impetus to burst out the needs of Georgian women, and give them the will to offer assistance to their fellow citizens, and to strive for self-realization and making their own environment aesthetically beautiful.



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[1] The work describes the lifestyle of the South and the North and discusses issues of Slavery.

[2] Bunker Hill Monument was put up in the years of 1827-1834 in Charlestown in the state of Massachusetts. It was dedicated to the battle of 1775 between British Army and Colonial Armies.

[3] Sanitary Commission – Private organization set up in 1861, who declared support towards wounded and ill soldiers during the Civil war and aided them . The organization functioned in the North, gained financial support on its own and was run by volunteers.

[4] South Kensington Museum – Nowadays known as Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) was founded in 1852 and has the largest collection of decorative arts and design.

[5]Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, Contemporary Arts Museum, Whitney Museum of American Art and Guggenheim Museum.

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