



ARCHIVE

An Undergraduate Journal of History

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The cover image depicts balloons being released over University Avenue near George L. Mosse Humanities Building, where UW-Madison's Department of History is housed. Image courtesy of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives.

Table of Contents

Editor's Note	4
Living as the "Entombed" <i>The Case of Anna May Wong</i> Anna Kozloski	6
"No Civilised Country" <i>Women, Infanticide, and Autonomy in Victorian England</i> Zoe McGuirk	18
Purple Hazing <i>Witchcraft Accusations and the War of the Roses</i> Jaden Miller	48
"One Star in the Celestial Firmament of Workers" <i>The Life and Career of Astronomer Harriet McWilliams Parsons, 1892–1986</i> Arianne Nguyen	68
Editors' Biographies	98

A Note from the Editors,

The ARCHIVE 2024 Editorial Board is proud to present our 27th volume. This year was especially challenging for us as a board. We received a record-breaking number of submissions, and each one was written about a different and interesting area of historical scholarship. This made our selection process arduous with a comparatively smaller board, but reading each article with due thoughtfulness and consideration was a delight, and taught us about how to approach our own research and writing. We also faced complications in selecting the articles to publish, but at every obstacle, the tenacity and resolve of each editor was apparent. To all who submitted their work to us for consideration, thank you.

In selecting our finalists, a common theme became apparent: scholarship on how women's agency has been constrained at various historical conjunctures. This was not a deciding factor in our selection process, but it would be remiss of us not to mention it. Each article brought a different perspective to light, and has contemporary relevance.

We begin with Anna Kozloski's "Living as the Entombed: The Case of Anna May Wong." Kozloski's research explores how the aesthetic ornamentalism of interwar Hollywood circumscribed Anna May Wong's cinematic expression of her subjectivity within the confines of racialized conceptions of Asian femininity—a condition she was later able to outmaneuver to foster Asian American visibility and cultural citizenship. Kozloski's work offers a view of history that is both unique and essential to understanding the intricate entanglement between cinematic praxis and Asian women's agency.

We then turn to Zoe McGuirk's "'No Civilised Country': Women, Infanticide, and Autonomy in Victorian England." Consulting late 19th-century British court documents, McGuirk explores how infanticide and concealment of pregnancy reflect the social customs and values of Victorian England. McGuirk asserts that communities of women emerged from practices to unwanted children, and within courts of law. By looking at how these practices challenged patriarchal oppression, McGuirk's article prompts the reader to rethink the relationships between social expectations, female agency, and reproductive rights.

Next, we move on to "Purple Hazing: Witchcraft and Intrigue

in the Wars of the Roses” by Jaden Miller. By reappraising the power dynamics embedded in witchcraft trials during the War of the Roses, Miller unpacks the role of these trials as sites of contentious politics.

Our journal ends with “‘One Star in the Celestial Firmament of Workers’: The Life and Career of Astronomer Harriet McWilliams Parsons, 1892–1986” by Arianne Nguyen, which explores the significant contribution of Harriet Parsons to early 20th-century American astronomy. By examining the systematic challenges women in astronomy have encountered, Nguyen’s work enriches both the fields of history of science and gender history.

This preamble would be incomplete without expressing our indebtedness to our tremendous Editorial Board, whose creativity, collaborative spirit, and steadfast efforts have been pivotal to the production of this issue. We cannot thank you all enough for your outstanding work. We would also like to thank our faculty advisor, Giuliana Chamedes, whose expertise and encouragement were essential to guiding our conversations and informing our decisions. Without Professor Chamedes, we would not have been able to elevate the journal’s quality to its current level. In addition, we would like to thank each of our authors for their patience and dedication. Thanks also to faculties and staff in the University of Wisconsin–Madison History Department for their unwavering support. With that, it is our pleasure to present Volume 27 of ARCHIVE.

Sincerely,

Zhengzai Pei and Thomas Harb
Editors-in-Chief, **ARCHIVE 27**

ARCHIVE

Living as the “Entombed”

The Case of Anna May Wong

Anna Kozloski



Image: Anna May Wong appears as a Mongol slave in *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940). Photo courtesy of Wikipedia Commons

Anna Kozloski is a third-year undergraduate at Vassar College double majoring in History and Italian. Outside of the academic sphere, Anna is an artist, illustrator, creative writer, musician, costume designer, and stage technician. During her sophomore year, her creative and historical interests inspired her to investigate the intersection of Asian American history and Hollywood films.

Adorned with a mesh patterned headpiece, an embroidered halter bra, and stacked silver wristlets, Anna May Wong captured her audience's attention as she slinked onto the stage as the Mongol slave of *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924).¹ Despite being born in America, Anna May Wong would continue to be cast by Hollywood producers as the bewitching, "exotic," dark beauty of the East for the majority of her early films. Though published in 2018, Anne Anlin Cheng's essay, "Ornamentalism: A Feminist Theory for the Yellow Woman," provides a relevant framework to deconstruct such representations of Asian women in early 1900s American films. As Cheng notes, "opulence and sensuality are the signature components of Asiatic character."² Addressing the centrality of ornamentation in Western conceptions of Asian femininity, she offers ornamentalism as the nuanced converse of orientalism. Unlike the latter, which reduces Asian women to things, the former describes the process by which "sartorial," "prosthetic," and "decorative" gestures recall the personhood of their subjects.³ Ornamentation subsumes the Asian woman's identity into a derogatory catch-all: the "yellow woman."

She performs her "yellowness" through her clothing, accessories, and material surroundings. In this theatrical setting, her personhood is forgotten and disposed of except when under an essentializing, artificial spotlight. Such an "amalgamation between inorganic commodity and Asiatic female flesh" precludes her from any notion of "uncompromised liberty" and instead bestows upon her the "task of existing within [an] entombed shell."⁴ The "yellow woman [...] brings into view an alternative form of life, not at the site of the free individualist modern subject, but, contrarily, at the encrusted edges and crevices of defiled, ornamented bodies."⁵ In other words, to live an "alternative life," she reclaims ornamentation and artifice as means of defining her own identity. Indeed, if a spotlight must follow her, then she will wield it to her advantage as a weapon of visibility and self-expression. In this essay, I argue that Anna May Wong is an early and concrete example of how Asian American women might live such an "alternative life" in the face of imposed aestheticization. Although Hollywood's ornamentation of Asian femininity circumscribed Anna May Wong's agency in her early acting years, her sojourn in Europe reversed her career's trajectory. While and after going abroad, Wong asserted Asian

American visibility and cultural citizenship by adapting ornamentalist logic on her own terms.

Before delving into Wong's career, one must first consider the historical forces that situated Asian American actresses as dark, sexually alluring manipulators in Western cinema, otherwise known as "dragon ladies." As early as the 1850s, the association between Asian women and sexual service was already impressed upon the American conscience. While the economic allure of the Gold Rush stirred many Chinese men to immigrate to the U.S. during the mid-19th century, patriarchal values, economic constraints, and discriminatory legislation dissuaded most Chinese women from accompanying their husbands to the States.⁶ Emerging "bachelor societies" of Chinese men in San Francisco hastened the development of prostitution industries in mining camps and boomtowns.⁷ Although prostitution was widespread among many nationalities, and white prostitution was more prevalent, Chinese prostitutes were singled out as uniquely "debased," "lewd," and "degraded."⁸ Concerns about "coolie" labor becoming permanent rivals of white male labor, compounded with fears surrounding the "moral debasement" of Chinese women, foreshadowed America's first experiment with the direct federal regulation of immigration.⁹ In 1875, President Ulysses S. Grant signed the Page Act into law. The policy prohibited the entrance of any unfree laborers and women of "immoral purposes" into the United States, which U.S. immigration officials baselessly interpreted to mean all Chinese women.¹⁰ Through the regulation of Asian American sexuality, the Page Law simultaneously addressed moral panic over sexually "depraved" Asian women, capitalist concerns over a "productive Chinese proletariat" with rooted families and national fears of "corrupting" the white nuclear family unit.¹¹ Most impactfully, the act codified the archetype of the exotic, sexually submissive Asian woman.

Fears of the dragon lady "corrupting" white families evidently pervaded Hollywood's conscience. Anxious to regulate depictions of mixed relationships in films, movie producers introduced the Hays Code in 1930. Under the policy's guidelines, white men were forbidden from kissing non-white actors like Anna May Wong on the silver screen.¹² In compliance with the code, directors often skirted around depictions of interracial sexual relationships by killing off Wong's character before she could pursue a relationship with a white love interest. When asked about this, she famously quipped, "When I die, my epitaph should be: I died

a thousand deaths. That was my film career.”¹³ Ultimately, the Hays Code preserved imperialist conceptions of Western supremacy by denying Asian American actresses the opportunity to act on equal terms with their white costars. The lack of representation of interracial relationships with Asian women in American films was not a haphazard coincidence but part of a conscious effort to address deep-rooted fears of exotic “dragon ladies” corrupting white America and undermining its imperial authority.

Hollywood’s portrayal of Asian women as the historicized, sexually intriguing colonial subject or “other,” had dire implications for Wong’s agency in her early career. Always relegated to playing slaves, prostitutes, seductresses, and ill-fated love interests, Wong lamented that “when you are just starting out, you don’t have much choice about the roles you get to play.”¹⁴ *The Toll of the Sea* (1922) exemplified her frustrations. Throughout the film, Wong wore silk Chinese clothing.¹⁵ When Captain Allen, the protagonist, announced his intention to return to the U.S., however, her character donned humorously outdated, 19th-century American garb in hopes that he would take her with him.¹⁶ Her blunder emphasized the “primitiveness” of the East and recalled her status as a nonmodern, colonial subject.¹⁷ Ornamentation was essential to delineating Asia’s subordination to America. Similarly, in *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931), Wong graced the stage in a glittering “goddess gown” while sporting an equally glamorous headdress.¹⁸ She played the seductive but murderous Princess Ling Moy. Although *Daughter of the Dragon* catapulted Wong into stardom, its reliance on ornamentation and the “dragon lady” archetype to convey “Chineseness” was limiting. As Hanying Wang notes in her article “Portrayals of Chinese Women’s images in Hollywood Mainstream Films,” Princess Ling Moy’s attraction laid “in her very Orientalness, expressed through the character’s clothing, language and attitudes.”¹⁹ Exoticizing “authentic” Asian femininity in this manner allowed for Western attraction to Asian women without actually risking any cultural transgression that might suggest an equal relationship between the West and the East.²⁰ Furthermore, such highly-decorated depictions perpetuated the myth of Asian American women as perpetual foreigners by “physically, socially, and psychologically distancing” them from their white counterparts.²¹ Clearly, Asian American actresses’ fame in Hollywood did not preclude them from the same stereotyping and discrimination that afflicted the broader Asian American community.

Wong's frustration with the shallowness of Hollywood's racial typecasting ultimately prompted her to seek alternative avenues of liberation in Europe in 1928. Historian Shirley Jennifer Lim argues that her sojourn abroad was pivotal in gaining her access to modernity.²² According to Lim, it was in London that Wong gained the "upper-class social skills and acting polish" necessary to grow her career when she returned to America.²³ Indeed, while in Europe, Wong took elocution lessons and developed an "impeccable English accent with a slight continental inflection and air of European sophistication and elegance to go with her natural grace and beauty."²⁴ In her article, "Anna May Wong's Daring Talkie," from London's *The Film Weekly*, Nerina Shute described Wong in raptures, writing, "she is perfectly natural [and] almost alarmingly attractive. You like her deep voice. You shiver before her nails. You fall immediate victim to her charm."²⁵ Ornamentation of Asia was evidently just as prevalent in Europe as it was in America, and producers in London, Paris, and Berlin still showcased Wong as "the desired female colonial body" in their films.²⁶ However, the way in which Wong navigated ornamentalism abroad was notably different. In the same article, Shute noted that in *The Road to Dishonour* (1930), which was produced both in English and German, Anna May Wong "was the only member of the company sufficiently a linguist to appear in the two casts" and that "she sp[oke] like a native."²⁷ Similarly, an article called "The Real Anna May Wong" from London's *Picturegoer Weekly* declared that Wong looked "utterly Celestial, and when she sp[oke] you expect[ed] (unless you kn[e]w her) a torrent of Chinese—and instead you g[o]t pure Californian."²⁸ While Wong's appeal in America emphasized only physical manifestations of her "Chineseness," the advent of "talkie" films meant that ornamentation abroad could expand to include performances of modernity via dialect and accent.

Yes, Wong still appeared in European films in highly ornate costumes, but she also spoke in a manner that commanded the respect of her audiences. An article entitled "A Chinese Puzzle" from a British publication marveled that "by the time you talked with her for five minutes you forg[o]t that she [wa]s Chinese" and "that her Oriental background drop[ped] completely away" among her fellow Americans.²⁹ By simultaneously performing "Chineseness" through physical decoration and "modernity" through verbal affect, Wong demonstrated that the two were not mutually exclusive. She graduated from the "primitive" punch-

line of the American silent film, *The Toll of the Sea* (1922), to an exoticized but captivating actress. European newspapers' apparent surprise at Wong's upper-class, English intonation betrays her deftness in manipulating Eurocentric standards to her advantage.

Although Wong realized she could forge Asian American visibility by adapting ornamentalist logic to her own needs in Europe, her rebellious spirit transcended borders. Indeed, upon her return to America in 1931, Wong wielded the stage as a platform for cinematic activism. Determined never to play the one-dimensional dragon lady to never play the one-dimensional dragon lady again, she became much more assertive about what she would tolerate in Hollywood portrayals of Asian women. In an interview about her role in *Daughter of the Dragon*, Wong asked, "Why is the screen Chinese always the villain of the piece?"

And so crude a villain—murderous, treacherous, a snake in the grass. We are not like that. How should we be, with a civilization that is so many times older than that of the West?"³⁰ In *King of Chinatown* (1939), Wong doubled down on this sentiment. She strayed from the dragon lady archetype, instead starring as Dr. Mary Ling, an acclaimed surgeon who saved the life of a white gangster named Frank Baturin.³¹ Similarly to when she was in Europe, her "British-inflected upper-class tones projected vocal authority" throughout the movie, and her dress "ensured that while on screen and stage, all eyes would be focused on her."³² Also noteworthy was that rather than killing Wong's character, as traditionally done per the Hays Code, director Nick Grinde killed Baturin, the white love interest, instead.³³ Dr. Mary Ling's prestigious career, upper-class accent, and triumph over her white male co-star was an example of how Anna May Wong exercised more control over the representation of Asian women in films when she returned from Europe.

King of Chinatown was also noteworthy for hybridizing Western and "Oriental" dress through Anna May Wong's costumes. Throughout the film, she sported hats and jackets that conformed to Western fashion trends while still incorporating Chinese accents.³⁴ As Shirley Lim notes, such attire crafted "a new type of 'modern' through hybridity" and rejected the exoticized and ancient costumes that denoted Asians as "backward and non-modern."³⁵ Anna May Wong's costumes in *King of Chinatown* were a perfect example of the hybrid, "alternative form of life" Anne Anlin Cheng speaks to in her essay on ornamentalism. Certainly, Hollywood producers were still infatuated with Anna

May Wong's "Chineseness," but the combination of Western and Eastern fashion influences complicated their approach to representations of Asian women in film. Person and artifice melded in the *King of Chinatown* in a manner that subverted previous conceptions of Asian femininity. Many young Chinese American women looked to Wong for guidance on the latest fashion trends and mimicked her dress.³⁶ Wong thus claimed cultural citizenship for Asian American women through ornament. Ornamentalist logic still applied, but not in the same oppressive way that dominated Wong's early career.

Beyond reclaiming the representation of Asian women in *King of Chinatown*, Wong also became outspoken about Hollywood's practice of yellowface in films after returning to America. Throughout the early and mid-1900s, it was not uncommon for white actors to play Asian characters in American films.³⁷ This was not a mere coincidence. By physically removing and replacing Asian actors with white ones, the stage became a vacuum for Eurocentric propaganda; white actors playing white characters reflected the supposed greatness of their race, while white characters playing Asian characters (in yellowface) demonstrated the lack thereof in their Eastern counterparts. For example, an article from Los Angeles' *Variety* newspaper described a movie in which a white woman, Florence Reed, *overshadowed* Wong and played a Chinese grandmother "to the letter" where Wong seemed "not a whit Chinese."³⁸ Later, when MGM cast the white actress Luise Rainer as O-lan, the Chinese lead character of *The Good Earth* (1937), and asked Wong to play Lotus, a home-wrecker, she was understandably frustrated. Wong retorted, "If you let me play O-lan, I'll be very glad. But you're asking me—with Chinese blood—to do the only unsympathetic role in the picture featuring an all-American cast portraying Chinese characters."³⁹ Cognizant of her newly elevated role as a symbol of Asian American identity and femininity, Wong rejected the role. While she could adapt ornamentalist thinking to advance Asian American visibility, the same could not be said for white actors. To allow a white actress to play O-lan would be to enable the reduction of Asian femininity to an aesthetic that anyone could adopt. Empowered by her new international acclaim, Wong would not stand by such depictions any longer.

Victim-focused narratives of her life, unfortunately, eclipse the assertive, empowered side of Wong described above. She is often remembered as a helpless actress who was abused and then

conveniently discarded by Hollywood producers. For example, her obituary in *The Stage and Television Today* mourned that a woman of such “remarkable intelligence and insight, [...] exotic beauty, and sensitive understanding” was “neglected by those who could so easily have made use of her talents.”⁴⁰ It is true that to some extent, Wong was underappreciated by the community around her. After *The Good Earth* controversy, Wong visited China for the first time only to be condemned by a Shanghai tabloid as a “female traitor to China” for the various prostitute roles she played.⁴¹ Similarly, many Asian-American activists “disowned” her after she died for “demeaning the race by her negative screen roles.”⁴² Historian Jeffrey Richards claims that the intelligent, modern women Wong played in the late 1930s were insufficient to vindicate her from her previous complicity in negative stereotyping.⁴³ Her exclusion from the Hollywood Bowl at the request of Madame Chiang Kai-Shek apparently “signaled the end of her career as a film star” and marked Chiang Kai-Shek’s succession as the “new image of China.”⁴⁴

While some truth may underlie Richards’ argument, to ignore the advocacy work Wong did for the Asian American community would be a grave mistake. Though she often played the lone, exoticized “yellow woman,” it was precisely through Wong’s unique circumstances of being one of the (if not the) only Asian American actresses in Hollywood films that she leveraged power and gained visibility for Asian American women. A 1926 article from *The Billboard* described the up-and-coming Anna May Wong as “the first woman of Oriental origin” to perform in vaudeville, others having limited themselves to musical, singing or dancing roles.⁴⁵ In 1925, Wong reflected on her career saying, “I couldn’t give up my work, to live the life of an average Chinese woman [...] Not long ago I visited some Chinese friends in San Francisco [...] the women didn’t do anything but sit around and talk about their husbands and their babies, and their housework. I couldn’t live such a narrow life.”⁴⁶ Even if she played stereotypical “dragon lady” roles in her early career, Wong still actively fought against patriarchal and racist ideologies by taking space as a Chinese American actress. She refused to be relegated to musical and dancing side roles by Hollywood casting directors. Similarly, she rejected what she deemed the oppressively domestic life of the “average Chinese woman.” Wong had to carve visibility for herself as a Chinese American woman struggling within a racist and sexist

film industry before she could garner visibility for the broader Asian American community in movies like *King of Chinatown*. Temptress, prostitute, and slave girl roles, though demeaning, gave Wong the necessary foundation to demand better representation of Asian women later on in her career.

Ultimately, Wong's legacy lies in the enormous strides she made in reimagining a future for Asian American women. When evaluating her cinematic career, one must be wary of holding Wong to 21st-century standards. Dismissive narratives of Wong "betraying" Asian Americans and Asians fail to account for how Wong's early career situated her as a leader of Asian American visibility and cultural citizenship in her later career. She sprung into the spotlight at a time in which very few other Asian Americans were able to do so. Negative characterizations of the "yellow woman" on the silver screen were less indicative of Wong's supposed apathy than they were of a society overwhelmingly hostile to a growing Asian community. These diminutive narratives also fail to acknowledge that modern Hollywood representations of Asians and Asian Americans are not without their problems. In the movies *Aloha* (2015) and *Ghost in the Shell* (2017), casting directors chose the white actresses Emma Stone and Scarlett Johansson to portray characters of Asian descent. Are we to blame Anna May Wong for "consenting" to derogatory representations of Asians in the early 1900s when many modern directors still insist on whitewashing their films? Challenging Hollywood's tenacious history of racism and misogyny required (and requires) courage. Once empowered to do so, Wong repudiated roles that enabled the marginalization of Asian Americans through practices like yellowface. She rejected the notion of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners and instead asserted the futurity of an agential, assertive "yellow woman" through ornament. Her willingness to don and manipulate ornament did not signify her acquiescence to oppressive industry practices but her dedication to redefining agency for those who exist within ornamentalism's "entombed shells." Wong was ahead of her time. She navigated the enmeshment of inorganic ornament with "Asiatic female flesh" before Anne Anlin Cheng had even articulated what an "alternative form of life" meant for Asian American women.

Endnotes

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- 13 "Anna M. Wong, Film Siren of Mystery, Dies: Career Story: She Died a Thousand Deaths," 33.
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- 15 Lim, "'I Protest': Anna May Wong and the Performance of Modernity," 54.
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- 21 Wang, "Portrayals of Chinese Women's Images in Hollywood Mainstream Films," 77.
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27 Shute, "In British Studios: Anna May Wong's Daring Talkie," 11.

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35 Lim, "'I Protest': Anna May Wong and the Performance of Modernity," 80.

36 Lim, "'I Protest': Anna May Wong and the Performance of Modernity," 88.

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38 Hobe, "Radio-Reviews: Anna May Wong, Florence." *Variety*, Jun 02, 1937, 38.

39 Lim, "'I Protest': Anna May Wong and the Performance of Modernity," 62.

40 "Obituary," *The Stage and Television Today* (Archive: 1959-1994), Feb 9, 1961, 17.

41 Richards, "Fu Manchu's Daughter: The Unique Career of Anna May Wong," 73.

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44 Richards, "Fu Manchu's Daughter: The Unique Career of Anna May Wong," 79.

45 "Chinese Girl to do Playlet," *The Billboard* (Archive: 1894-1960), Dec 04, 1926, 17.

Living as the Entombed

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Aloha, directed by Cameron Crowe (Sony Pictures Releasing [United States/Canada], 2015); *Ghost in the Shell*, directed by Rupert Sanders (Paramount Pictures, 2017).

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“No Civilised Country”

Women, Infanticide, and Autonomy in Victorian England

Zoe McGuirk



Image: *Working Convict Invalid Prison: Five Women Prisoners Convicted of Infanticide*, process print after Paul Renouard, 1889. Photo courtesy of The Wellcome Collection, London.

Zoe McGuirk is currently a Junior at Dartmouth College, where she is majoring in History and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and minoring in Government. Her research focuses on the intersections between identity, politics, and the law, primarily concerning reproductive health access and rights. She plans on attending law school after completing her B.A. to pursue impact litigation work.

In 2023, forty-four-year-old mother of three Carla Foster was sentenced to twenty-eight months in prison for procuring a late-term abortion. She was prosecuted under Great Britain's antiquated 1861 Offences Against the Person Act (OAPA).¹ The OAPA criminalizes abortion, concealment, and infanticide, making these three actions illegal without exception. During the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown, Ms. Foster procured abortion pills by claiming she was only seven weeks pregnant; in fact she was by that point thirty-two weeks pregnant. On May 11, 2020, her child was born not breathing and was declared dead shortly thereafter. In June of 2023, Ms. Foster was found guilty of illicit abortion. The verdict sparked global outcry, resulting in heated attention from both ends of the spectrum: those who disavowed Ms. Foster's actions as well as those who called for national abortion law reform to prevent similar cases of desperation and cruel prosecution.² Carla Foster's case called to relevance a law seen by many as outdated and out of touch with contemporary values.

This modern case can be seen as part of the continuation of the centuries-old fight for reproductive autonomy and equitable health access. While acknowledging that not only female identifying people can become pregnant, this article will employ feminine pronouns and terminology because for the period under analysis it was women's reproductive capacities that were under scrutiny and close regulation. Victorian Era England was one site of drastic change as society continued to clamp down on reproductive rights. 1861 witnessed a turning-point in women's struggle for reproductive freedoms after the passage of the Offences Against the Person Act.

This research primarily examines the experiences of women charged with infanticide in the years following 1860 through the analysis of court records. However, this history would be incomplete without other assertions of autonomy, such as concealment of births, pleading insanity, baby-farming, wet-nursing, juries of matrons, and female witness testimony. These methods served to undermine the patriarchal system that constrained women's reproductive rights. Ultimately, nineteenth-century Britain witnessed the proliferation of female connection as women formed vital networks of support and communication while navigating a society that severely restricted their agency and autonomy.

Breaking Boundaries in Existing Scholarship: The Human Experience

Many studies of this period afford great attention to broader trends in fertility and births. Some scholars, such as Sally Sheldon,³ R. Sauer,⁴ and John Maurice (J.M.) Beattie,⁵ have studied abortion, concealment, and infanticide. Each generally agrees that due to abortion's high lethality and the widespread lack of knowledge on women's health, abortion occurred with much less frequency than infanticide or concealment during the 1880s. Fewer scholars have examined the personal experiences of the women who were forced to make such consequential choices. As primary source documents written from the women's point of view are rare, this goal proves difficult. It is even more challenging to identify sources where women speak explicitly about pregnancy and motherhood, let alone attempts to evade maternity via abortion, concealment, and infanticide. Therefore, this research takes court documents and reads them "between the lines" so as to understand women's unique and deeply personal experiences as they navigated maternity, reproduction, as well as their social and legal status.

Previous works of scholarship also only marginally describe or acknowledge women's role in Britain's court system. These authors repeatedly suggest that women only operated in limited capacities and very rarely as witnesses or prosecutors.⁶ While this may be true, historian Jessica Gibson argues that female witnesses were "critical in giving character statements or providing testimony that helped the court reach its verdicts."⁷ Indeed, the networks that women formed proved vital to the function of the English court system. Witnesses were called to provide character judgements, mainly aiming to determine the respectability of the defendant or lend credibility to the defendant's testimony, all of which helped determine a verdict and sentencing.⁸ In a society where women were not legally represented nor empowered, they found autonomy as witnesses in the courtroom.

This research investigates the experiences of women prosecuted for "offences against the person"—particularly infanticide and concealment—via witness and defendant testimony in assize court documents chosen primarily from the years between 1860 and 1870. These years were chosen for their saliency, considering that the Offences Against the

Person Act was passed in 1861 and these cases represent the impact of the OAPA on women's reproductive decisions. This paper is limited, however, in its capacity to look at the years prior to the OAPA or the lasting impacts beyond the year 1870 (except for select cases identified electronically) due to physical and time constraints during the research period. The years 1860–1870 act as a case study for Victorian reproductive rights and a starting point for subsequent research concerning other decades.

Assize court (English criminal courts which operated until 1972) documents housed in the National Archives in Kew, United Kingdom, reveal just a glimpse into the experiences of women prosecuted for “offences against the person,” or reproductive crimes. The documents pulled from the National Archives were primarily court records, scrolls and papers loosely tied together with ribbon and string. These cases consist almost entirely of witness testimony and often lack case outcomes and contextual details. As many of these documents are not filed by offense but by year, identifying relevant records required sorting through several boxes of miscellaneous criminal cases. Often, relevant cases were described as charges against women of murder and concealment of birth—would be implied via witness testimony. These records, although brief, expose potential motives for these crimes, as well as the extensive networks of female communication and connection that came to define women's reproductive and legal experiences. It is also worth noting the gruesome nature of many such records. Although this article seeks to examine the circumstances underlying infanticide and concealment—often not autonomous choice but coerced desperation—the details recounted in court testimony and this paper are frequently violent and gory. This article intends not to gloss over the nature of these crimes but to examine them in full.

Combing through a variety of archival sources is crucial to gaining a holistic understanding of the experiences of marginalized communities throughout history. In my research, I supplemented work with physical documents at the National Archives digitized documents available at Old Bailey Online and other online databases. Old Bailey Online is an online database that provides digitized versions of the Old Bailey Central Criminal Court's records, which tried cases like those tried in assize courts. The British Newspaper Archive, which

provides digitized versions of thousands of historical British newspapers, was another important resource for my research. Newspapers aid in locating the outcomes of criminal cases, descriptions of ongoing trials of infanticide and concealment, and historic social and political attitudes. Overall, while testimonies in criminal court cases reveal details in the lives of those standing before courts and the circumstances surrounding crimes and reproduction, newspapers illuminate social and political values, attitudes, and behaviors.

These archival records, coupled with secondary source research on reproductive trends and women's role in Victorian society, illuminate a world of female communication that preserved autonomy amidst a highly regulated legal environment. Through a more human-focused approach to studies of historical reproductive trends and crime, combined with a gender-based analysis of Britain's criminal courts, this research provides an original perspective to existing scholarship. This new, deeper exploration of the Victorian female experience enriches our contemporary understanding of history and its many connections to current reproductive rights debates.

Background and Historical Context

Nineteenth-century England witnessed a wave of legislation intended to limit the reproductive freedoms of women alongside ever-changing trends in abortion, infanticide, and concealment of births. Infanticide refers to the deliberate murder of infants under one year old, while concealment of births involved the obscurement of pregnancies and births, sometimes preceded or accompanied by infanticide. Abortion and infanticide were two methods of dealing with an unwanted child for women in the 1800s who did not yet have access to either contraceptives to prevent pregnancy or welfare services to provide for children. As safe and legal abortion was inaccessible in the early to mid-1800s, "if a woman was afraid or unable to obtain an abortion she might resort to infanticide," in the words of historian R. Sauer.⁹

English law during the nineteenth century gradually tightened its grasp on the reproductive rights of and methods of prosecution taken against women. From 1624 through 1803, suspected infanticide was prosecuted under one statute, which assumed the female defendant guilty of infanticide if it was proven that she had concealed or intended to conceal her

pregnancy and birth and the child was proven to have been born alive. This statute was the only one of its kind in English law that imposed the burden of proof on the accused, not the state.¹⁰

In 1803, the Ellenborough Act repealed the earlier 1624 statute, shifting the burden of proof from the defendant to the state and making a formal distinction between the charge of concealment of birth and murder of an infant. A woman could then, however, be sent to trial on one charge (e.g., infanticide) and later found guilty of a separate offence (e.g., concealment) that had not originally appeared on her indictment.¹¹ The concealment charge was also more convenient for prosecutors, as concealment was easier to prove or reasonably suspect than most infanticide cases, which were often cryptic or obscure.

This is evident in the case of Eliza Burrow and her sister Rebecca Burrow who were both charged with child murder and concealment of birth in 1859. Eliza had given birth and concealed it with Rebecca's help, and both women were charged with both crimes.¹² Although the outcome of their case is unknown, their narrative serves as a testament to the intricate historical and legal nuances tied to concealment charges during the nineteenth century. After 1803, women and their accomplices faced the prospect of being prosecuted for two offenses, thereby heightening the potential consequences they might encounter.

In 1838, another piece of legislation was passed. The Infanticide Act introduced distinctions in sentencing for women thought to be "insane." If a woman's mind was considered "disturbed" because of giving birth, she could not be held as guilty of murder, but as guilty of manslaughter. The term "disturbed" suggests extreme emotional distress was not defined or described alongside qualifying criteria, so the cases involving insanity inevitably proved to be ambiguous. Pleading insanity, however, could mean the difference between a life sentence and a lesser penalty.¹³ The last significant piece of legislation from the nineteenth-century on this matter was the Offenses Against the Person Act (OAPA) of 1861, which codified earlier abortion restrictions into formal legislation across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. In sum, the laws dictating reproductive autonomy shifted in response to the clarification of ambiguities in older legislation and changing social and moral values.

The “Foul Current of Life”: Infanticide’s Rise and Fall

Whereas infanticide remained common through the nineteenth century in Britain, abortion was rarer due to women’s fears of resulting harm or death. Before the 1800s, abortion was seen as a serious sin but not a consequential legal offense, with common law only prohibiting it after the fourth or fifth month of pregnancy when the fetus was believed to quicken or show proof of life. However, the Ellenborough Act of 1803 criminalized abortion at any stage of pregnancy, with even the earliest abortions punishable by fines, imprisonment, or up to fourteen years transportation (i.e., banishment to another country or English colony), and post-quickening abortions potentially punishable by death. An 1837 amendment declared abortion at any stage as a punishable offense, now with a maximum sentence of banishment.¹⁴

It is speculated that abortions remained infrequent compared to infanticide in the early 1800s, although ascertaining rates of abortion is difficult, because “it is always the case that when abortion is illegal, it is driven underground.”¹⁵ One estimate suggests typically no more than fifteen people were held for trial for abortion in any given year of the 1800s.¹⁶ The danger of instrumental abortion and concerns that herbs or similar abortifacients were ineffective contributed to its relative infrequency. Underground abortion often involved the use of dangerous instruments (e.g., knitting needles, hairpins, scalpels, and other instruments) that could result in lacerations, puncture wounds, inflammation, and serious infections. Other abortifacients (e.g., drinking concoctions of poisonous chemicals) often caused severe sickness that resulted in abortion as a side effect.¹⁷ Low income women who were unable to care for a child or additional child (as birth control was not yet available) and illegitimately pregnant women are suspected to have more commonly attempted abortion, infanticide, and concealment of birth than women of higher statuses.¹⁸ Endangering their own lives and risking criminal prosecution further marginalized these already vulnerable women.

Due to fears over the health effects and high lethality of abortion during the early-to-mid 1800s, it was not a viable option for many Victorian women. Infanticide, by contrast, was practiced more commonly. According to R. Sauer, seventy-six children under the age of one were murdered in England

and Wales from between 1838 and 1840, constituting thirty-four percent of all murders during that period.¹⁹ Scholars believe the true rate of infanticide was much higher because coroners tended to only declare infanticide in cases of clear violence, such as stabbing and beating. Other likely cases of infanticide involving smothering, poisoning, and neglect were undeclared.²⁰ In the 1840s and 1850s, recorded rates of infanticide rose significantly. The number of infants that were declared to be murdered increased from an average of seventy-eight per year from 1852–56 to 166 per year in 1866, with over 1,100 inquests held in London alone on the deaths of infants under two years old.²¹ Concealment of birth cases also rose from just seven per year in the 1820s to sixty two per year from 1857–59.²² Infanticide soon garnered much popular attention.

One vocal faction of Victorian society began to present infanticide as a “foul current of life, running like a pestilential sewer beneath the smooth surface of society.”²³ This statement, from a passionate *Saturday Review* article, represents a common ideological camp that saw infanticide as an unnatural crime, both immoral and a contradiction of traditional feminine and maternal qualities. This source also highlights the crime’s notoriety. By the 1840s, much of medical and popular press extended unfavorable coverage to infanticide. Around the time the OAPA was passed, infanticide was presented as a “national stigma and social evil,”²⁴ and it was argued that “the crime of infanticide is as prevalent now, or even more so, than at any previous period of our history.”²⁵ Abortion was similarly stigmatized.

Although legislation such as the OAPA continued to underscore the criminality of abortion, it did little to curb abortion in the following decades. As available court and newspaper records show, there was a flourishing underground abortion market, with one manufacturer spending £2,800 on ads for abortifacient products in a single year. An 1898 trial uncovered that one source had provided alleged abortifacients to some 12,000 women in just thirty months.²⁶ Although the true rates of abortion are impossible to ascertain, these two anecdotes suggest that the frequency of abortion likely increased during and after 1861, rather than decreasing as the OAPA intended to accomplish.

Alongside these rising abortion rates, infanticide remained

a very common occurrence. At its peak, infanticide by commission (e.g., strangulation, suffocation, poisoning, etc.) reached several hundred instances per year. High mortality rates among illegitimate infants and those placed under third-party caretaking (e.g., baby-farming) suggest that the more non-violent and neglectful form of infanticide by omission may have numbered at over a thousand cases per year.²⁷ The OAPA targeted crimes after they were committed without consideration for preventative services aimed at curbing infanticide and abortion. Therefore, this piece of legislation did not have the intended impact on rates of infanticide and abortion amongst the English population.

While illegal abortion persisted and increased following the OAPA, the latter decades of the nineteenth century saw a dramatic decline in infanticide and birth concealment rates. The overall birth rate indeed fell by over twenty percent between 1880 and 1890, and the illegitimacy rate fell by fifty percent between 1870 and 1900. This shift is attributed in part to the choice among more women from all classes to restrict the number of children they had. Concealment of birth cases also dropped by half, from an average of 103 per year from 1871–75 to just forty-four per year between 1896 and 1900.²⁸ This dramatic change suggests a similar decline in cases of infanticide, as the two charges typically coincided. The falling infanticide numbers have been attributed not primarily to legislation like the 1861 law, but rather to improved social welfare programs, increased access to contraception, and safer illegal abortion procedures that offered desperate women alternatives to killing newborns.²⁹ By the end of the century, infanticide had virtually disappeared from the public discourse, supplanted largely by contraception and abortion as the covert means of family planning and family size control in the United Kingdom.

The Socioeconomics of Reproduction

Most women apprehended for abortion and infanticide during the 1800s were single women; some were “abandoned women,” meaning their partner had left them after becoming pregnant or shortly after childbirth, who held or wished to hold high status in their community but feared the stigma of bearing illegitimate children.³⁰ Defense counsels would often suggest that a defendant charged with infanticide had done so after having been “deceived by the promise of marriage” and “had

been left in a precarious position by the deceitful father of the child.” One attorney, Mr. Keys, while defending an unnamed woman charged with the murder of her illegitimate child, fiercely insisted, “I always believe and say the real culprit is not in the dock. The real culprit, I say, is that beast — that brute, who first destroyed this woman[’s] virtue.”³¹ The woman had been charged with the murder of her three-month-old infant but was acquitted at the judge’s direction, who was perhaps sympathetic to her condition.³² This anecdote was no rarity; indeed, it represents the all-too-common plight of women (and their children) who solely faced the consequences for male indiscretion.

Statistical disparities further illuminate the intersection of illegitimacy and infanticide. In 1866, twenty-nine percent of inquests on infant deaths related to illegitimate infants, but only six to seven percent of all registered births were illegitimate. Further, a survey of three London parishes in 1857 revealed that 392 of 877 illegitimate children died soon after birth.³³ Certainly not all these deaths were the result of intentional infanticide, but the rate is so high among this population to raise considerable suspicion. Other scholars, like Sarah-Anne Buckley³⁴ and Elaine Farrell,³⁵ agree that poverty was a primary motivator for infanticide and reducing numbers of dependent children. And often, illegitimacy and poverty overlapped, dually challenging women who also lacked essential family planning knowledge and resources.

One such example of this uncertainty can be found in the hearing of a domestic servant named Mary Hobbs for the murder of her infant child, which was suspected to be illegitimate, in 1864. In his witness testimony, a surgeon called to the house recalled that after having found a large amount of blood on the kitchen floor, he suspected childbirth. Although Ms. Hobbs denied having given birth, “she said something had come away.” When the surgeon asked Ms. Hobbs if it was a child, “she said ‘no I don’t know what it is but whatever it is it is in the garden’—The child soon after died of exposure to the cold.”³⁶ The vague testimonial from the surgeon on behalf of Ms. Hobbs, for she did not provide her own statement, and conflicting perspectives demonstrate how difficult it was to prove intention in cases of infanticide by omission. Was Ms. Hobbs honest, did she not know she had given birth? Had her judgement been clouded by the shock of having just given

birth? Or, had she knowingly committed infanticide because illegitimate motherhood put into peril her status as a domestic servant and her social reputation? Even though neither the answers to these questions nor the outcome of Mary Hobbs' trial are known, this case highlights the vulnerable position of women—notably, domestic servants—and the ambiguities surrounding infanticide cases.

Single motherhood not only had ruinous social consequences, but also economic ones, as attested to in the December 1858 trial of Mary Newell, a servant who killed her three-month-old infant. As *The Times* reported, Ms. Newell had already admitted to the crime and was being tried to determine the circumstances of the case and subsequent sentencing. It was reported that she was “seized by a destructive impulse” that made her “destroy [that] to which [she] was most fondly attached.”³⁷ As context emerged, it was discovered that the father of Ms. Newell's child had refused to provide financial assistance, leaving her hopeless and economically desperate.³⁸

Extreme stigma surrounded women and their illegitimate children, not to mention the economic ramifications imparted upon women who received little or no paternal support and often had to work less or stop working entirely. Ascertaining intent in infanticide cases proved difficult. Cases of infanticide happened by omission far more often than by commission: infant deaths via starvation, suffocation, want and neglect, exposure, and natural disease occurred at ten times the rate of infanticide by commission. Given the lack of social services and access to healthcare during this period and naturally high infant mortality rates, it was often difficult to tell whether infant deaths were intentional or accidental.³⁹

People across England continued to observe that “the crime of infanticide has spread to a fearful extent and seems to be extending rapidly amongst the humbler classes of society.”⁴⁰ Rather than acknowledging the social problems and widespread poverty contributing to infanticide's frequency among the “humbler classes,” infanticide debates from this period focused more on women's individual responsibility to evade the effects of poverty: “poverty was seen as a powerful incentive for unmarried mothers to rid themselves of their babies. These women may be unfortunate, but they were also culpable for allowing themselves to be driven to such desperate measures.”⁴¹ Nineteenth-century English women were faced

with two fights: one to grasp at agency in a time when they were legally and socially disempowered and another to fight against the imposition of responsibility for their oppression. At the same time as consequences for infanticide increased during the nineteenth century, English Poor Laws provided less and less assistance for single mothers. The Poor Law Amendment of 1834 declared that single mothers had to provide evidence of paternity to receive paternal support for a child. In 1844, English society witnessed the first instance wherein a woman was required to pay a summons fee, a monetary sum one must pay to initiate a legal case, to issue a paternity suit. This fee contributed to the economic plight of single mothers.⁴² While social and economic policy provided less and less support for single and unwed mothers, stories like Mary Newell's became more common. The economic desperation that drove many mothers to commit acts of abortion, concealment, and infanticide represents a systemic problem that would not be treated as such for many decades.

While many noticed the relationship between infanticide and economic hardship, others insisted that the responsibility to remedy personal economic and social circumstances rested solely with the women in question, rather than the broader society itself.⁴³ An 1834 Report of the Commission on the Poor Laws responded to critics of a specific provision that denied women a claim to support for illegitimate children: "we do not believe that infanticide arises from any calculation as to expense. We believe that in no civilised country, and scarcely any barbarous country, has such a thing been heard of as a mother killing her child in order to save the expense of feeding it."⁴⁴ The authors of this report saw England as advanced enough, or so "civilised" to warrant the elimination of crimes like infanticide. Whether they believed that the Poor Laws provided sufficient support to eliminate infanticide is unknown, but still a possibility; especially given the absence of women's perspectives in policy and governance. The authors also view the issues of infanticide, poverty, and illegitimacy as ones of morality rather than society's responsibility to prevent via social support.

Claiming Agency Where Unsuspected: Weaponizing One's Oppression

Despite the expectation that women claim responsibility for improper procreation (i.e., sexual relations out of wedlock),

the courtroom often had a degree of sympathy to the women before them. Because illegitimacy was so stigmatized, it was often assumed that the mother had resorted to concealment or infanticide out of shame. The court sometimes believed that such crimes illustrated the woman's desire to conform to expectations of the time, that "she was sufficiently virtuous to recognise the shame that would follow her illegitimate birth."⁴⁵ As such, the social expectations of women that coerced them into committing crimes like infanticide could also elicit sympathy in the courtroom and a later acquittal.

The court may have been sympathetic for other reasons too. As children were often a burden on taxpayer resources and public expenditures, growing up in a single-parent household would result in unfavorable circumstances and inevitable social scrutiny. One judge remarked upon a jury's acquittal of an unnamed woman charged with the murder of her illegitimate child in 1896: "the verdict could only be arrived at on the supposition that in their [the jury's] eyes the life of an illegitimate child was of no consequence." As this was her second time being charged with this offense, the judge emphasized that if she were to appear in court again, she may not "be so fortunate in finding such a jury again so regardless of human life."⁴⁶ Although the judge did not agree with the jury, he effectively described the two camps of belief on illegitimate infanticide at the time: some justified the action as protecting the public good, others still considered the illegitimate child a full, human life and deserving of those protections under the law. Both perspectives shine light on the complex discourse surrounding female reproduction and agency during the nineteenth century. Sympathy also came from juries when men were not held equally responsible for their role in the reproductive process or consequences thereafter. After all, two parents were involved, even if one was absent. "The man in such cases, although he may have been originally equally, or more guilty than the woman, entirely escapes; while the poor unfortunate woman endures the pain, the misery, the shame, the exposure, and the risk of punishment," wrote the Medical Press and Circular in 1867.⁴⁷ This demarcation of responsibility merges the separate spheres of the masculine crime and the feminine birth, blurring these binaries and demonstrating the ever complicated nature of reproduction and prosecution of reproductive crimes. In

bringing offenses against the person to trial, English society was gradually moving towards a deeper understanding of the politics of reproduction, both masculine and feminine. Holding men newly accountable for their role in reproduction marked an era of progress in Victorian society.

Women and Insanity: Oppression or Empowerment?

Nineteenth-century England also witnessed rising rhetoric of “insane” women. “Insane,” “disturbed,” and “hysterical” have all been terms used throughout history to describe and confine women seen as overly emotional, difficult, or rebellious. As the diagnosis of “puerperal insanity,” or the onset of insanity during or after pregnancy, became increasingly frequent in cases of infanticidal mothers, the crime was not thought of as a social problem connected to poverty, healthcare, or oppressive gender relations, but instead became an individual issue, “a consequence of the deranged psychology of individual women.”⁴⁸ Women were simultaneously held solely responsible for widespread social problems and stripped of their personal agency as they attempted to navigate systemic inequities. On the other hand, pleading insanity could acquit women or reduce their sentences if convicted. Victorian England’s treatment of “insane” women simultaneously marginalized and liberated them as they navigated reproductive choices and the criminal justice system.

Being labeled as “insane” carried different consequences for different types of women, however. Married women were less likely to be prosecuted for infanticide or concealment, but when they were charged, their claims of temporary insanity were far more likely to be believed. “It was popularly believed that it was abandoned women—usually young servant girls—who would have been most strongly motivated to rid themselves of unwanted children, either by abortion or infanticide,” as scholars of English maternity Fatemeh Ebtehaj and Shelley Sclater have noted.⁴⁹ It was believed that because single motherhood, illegitimacy, and sexual promiscuity were socially offensive and intolerable, women of these categories experienced deep shame, driving them to commit infanticide. Although unwed mothers could claim insanity, their claims were often not taken as seriously as those of wed mothers who were generally believed to be more maternal and less likely to commit infanticide.

The case of Sarah Eliza Drew, who was charged with the

murder of her infant daughter in 1865, illustrates just one instance of this disparity. Mrs. Drew was thirty-five years old, married, and already had five children. Mrs. Drew's mother was staying in the household after the birth of her sixth child, Catherine. Mrs. Drew's mother recounted that a month after the child was born, "the prisoner [Sarah] came to me as I lay in bed;— [sic] she was in a very excited state... and said 'O mother my baby's down the walen closet'—I said 'O Sarah you don't say so!'"—She said 'I thought it would go to heaven.'" Mrs. Drew showed her mother where she had attempted to cut her left arm, but the knife was too dull, "as she wished to go to heaven along with it but the knife would not cut."⁵⁰ Sarah Drew's harrowing story tells of a married mother under extreme duress who experienced great tragedy, but—as she was acquitted of insanity—her story saw a far different conclusion than what many unwed mothers would have in court.

Another such case concerns Eleanor Martha Browning, who was charged with the murder of her infant child in 1913. Mrs. Browning was married, already had one child with her husband, and was observed as being "cheerful," "happy," and a "fond mother."⁵¹ Mrs. Browning was found guilty of murdering her child, but insane at the time of the murder and thus not responsible for her actions. Mrs. Browning's case is complex, as it attributes guilt but not responsibility. Her case illustrates continued notions of female insanity and assumptions about femininity, as well as enduring trends in socioeconomic status, healthcare disparities, and women's involvement as witnesses. What ultimately proved vital to the verdict of Mrs. Browning's case, was her character description. In addition to being described as a "fond mother" by two nurses charged with her care, they also explained that her first child as healthy and well—a testament to her maternity. Moreover, one nurse said, "she was very worried and depressed, and complained of loss of milk, not being able to feed her baby... if a woman loses her milk after confinement it often has an effect on the mind."⁵² The nurse was confident in Mrs. Browning's desire to care for her children free of conscious malice. Married women who were observed as being "fond" mothers were more often acquitted or given lesser sentences as their unwed, and working-class counterparts. Rebecca Smith similarly claimed insanity, but her outcome was vastly different from either Sarah or Eleanor's. Mrs. Smith was found not insane and guilty

of infanticide. Her child-rearing history and life circumstances complicated her verdict, and she was executed in 1849. Mrs. Smith was much older than Sarah Drew or Eleanor Browning and had already delivered eleven children before her 1849 trial. Mrs. Smith confessed to poisoning eight of her children just a day or so after each of their births, two other children died of natural causes, and only the eldest survived.

Although she was married, Mrs. Smith was forced to work in the fields by day on account of her husband's drunkenness.⁵³ She was described in court as "undernourished and in poor health, living in abject poverty and almost illiterate."⁵⁴ Even though Mrs. Smith insisted she was trying to spare her children from their living conditions, the court found her guilty of infanticide and refused to consider her insane.⁵⁵ The consequences of Mrs. Smith's repeated attempts to save her children from a fate like her own were drastic, as she became one of few English women executed during the 1800s and the last woman to be executed for infanticide in Britain.⁵⁶ Rebecca Smith's story illuminates a life of struggle and inescapable poverty, ultimately ending with her execution after trying to spare her children from lives of similarly perpetual turmoil.

These three cases represent the spectrum of potential cases and their verdicts, each strongly influenced by the defendant's history, reputation, and observed "properness." What each case has in common, however, is the powerlessness of the women they concern. In a society without realistic alternatives to unwanted pregnancies and children, along with strict punitive measures taken against those who attempt to take control of their reproduction, women often resorted to pleading insanity. Fearing women's independence and sexuality, the label of insanity functioned as both a rescue from and a reiteration of women's powerlessness. Oftentimes, as shown by Rebecca Smith's case, the benefits of being labeled insane were only granted to those seen as worthy.

Pleading insanity, though giving in to the very stereotypes that constrained women, also served as a method of circumventing the consequences potentially facing women who dared to seek autonomy. For some women—often those seen as possessing "feminine virtues" like gentleness, sensitivity, and obedience, the instinct of maternal nurturance, or who demonstrated moral righteousness—pleading insanity could reduce sentences after a guilty verdict or produce a not guilty

verdict altogether. One such woman, Catherine Lees, was a domestic servant who had a baby out of wedlock whom she proceeded to violently murder in 1848. She was described in court as “border[ing] on insensibility” but “young, lovely, and innocent...” Ms. Lees pleaded insanity and her defense acknowledged that the “spirits taken in labour excites the head to a great degree.” Ms. Lees was found not insane and not guilty of any wrongdoing.⁵⁷ Catherine Lees’ case, although found not insane, exemplifies the importance of conforming to feminine ideals and how such a reversion to patriarchal standards can alleviate oneself from the consequences of rebellion against the patriarchy.

Networks of Female Connection and Communication

Networks of female communication and support emerged alongside the ever-evolving oppression of women and their reproductive autonomy. Many instances of these networks and forms of connection demonstrate larger themes of struggle as women navigated a society dually infringing upon their freedoms and charging them as responsible for their socio-economic positions. Practices like baby-farming and wet-nursing became more popular throughout the 1800s, demonstrating both female connection and desperation and suggesting more systemic patterns of infanticide and reproductive agency, or the lack thereof. At the same time, concealment of births often aided by close female relationships and female witnesses appearing in infanticide and concealment trials both played large roles in women’s lives. These connections among women reveal methods of seeking agency alongside those experiencing similar plights yet simultaneously expose the systematic ways in which women were disempowered.

Infanticide for profit became a reality of 1840s England and lasted into the mid-to-late century. During this time, the institution of baby-farming emerged and even prospered. Baby farming was a system where mothers would other women with the care of their children, whom they would pay a lump sum or weekly fee to care for the child. Baby-farming was used most often by mothers wishing to avoid the shame of illegitimate children and the economic consequences of having a baby, as this service allowed them to continue working. Many believed that baby-farming was a smokescreen employed to obscure its true purpose of “professional child

murder.” Baby farmers would collect what little disposable income these mothers may have had and then profit from the malnourishment and neglect of the children they were charged with caring. Charlotte Winsor, an infamous baby farmer was known to tell mothers, “get four pounds together dear, and your child shall die today.”⁵⁸ Whether or not baby-farming was intended by customers and practitioners to be infanticidal, it exemplifies the ways in which women faced the realities of motherhood in a society that actively disadvantaged single and unwed mothers. Baby-farming also demonstrates the relationship between women during this time, as those unable to care full time for their child would rely on other women to either administer care or end the child’s life. Wet-nursing, which involved middle and upper-class women outsourcing breastfeeding to poor and lower-class women, was another practice that became more popular during the Victorian Era. This practice highlights class differences, and illuminates the complex relationships shared between women. Among the wealthier and elite, wet-nursing was often a personal choice that displayed wealth and social status. In other circumstances, wet-nursing was necessary because of the high rates of infant abandonment and maternal mortality observed during the 1800s.⁵⁹ Interestingly, this inherently feminine and maternal process later evolved into a practice considered a threat to proper motherhood, essentially functioning as another form of infanticide by social reformists and politicians. Women who served as wet-nurses almost always had infants of their own, but these children, who were often born to unwed or poor mothers, died at alarming rates.⁶⁰ The children of wet-nurses were often sent to baby-farms or simply did not receive a great enough share of breastmilk compared to their higher-class counterparts, resulting in malnutrition and even death. It will never be known which share of these infant deaths were unintentional versus intentional via infanticide by omission, but the pattern is nonetheless indicative of larger social and reproductive trends. Both the wet-nurse and her customer were looked down upon for deviating from their traditional feminine roles: the wet-nurse abandoning her own child and profiting from her reproductive power, and the customer abandoning maternal nurturance in favor of comfort and glamor.⁶¹ This duality demonstrates both the significance of female connections as well as the impossible standards women were

expected to live up to.

Women also came together to conceal pregnancies and births. In lodging houses where women lived and worked, the houses employing domestic servants, and especially among their family units, women formed communities and took care of each other despite the state's reluctance to do so. The trials of Mary Ann Seaman and Louisa Woodham demonstrate the important role of relatives, often female, to the court's understanding of these cases.

Mary Ann Seaman's sister, Sarah Seaman, took care of her when she was ill, which was later revealed to be the period in which she was giving birth. Sarah testified that she had merely seen "something in her bed," when asked about evidence of Mary's birth during the trial. She continued, "I had no knowledge a child had been born... I had no idea she was in the family way."⁶² While Sarah outright denies any knowledge of Mary's pregnancy or birth, Louisa Woodham's sister, Esther Woodham, suggests some level of understanding and involvement. Esther insisted that she "noticed [her] sister being as [she] thought in the family way," which means she suspected pregnancy, but Esther said nothing more of her sister's pregnancy or birth. Esther, too, had already assisted in the care of Louisa's first child.⁶³ Without knowing for sure the extent to each sister's knowledge or involvement during pregnancy or birth, their testimonies suggest a great degree of familial involvement in the process as well as a degree of protection and privacy, even under oath. Communication between women undermined and even threatened the power structures which constrained their reproductive freedom. The existence of these networks and modes of autonomy railed against social expectations of women: "not only is a secret trade imagined involving covert systems of midwives, abortionists, baby-farmers, and wet-nurses, but a 'talismanic sort of communication' is said to inform women of the direction in which they are to seek these services."⁶⁴ In seeking agency and autonomy, women were subverting not only the patriarchal structures infringing upon their freedoms, but the larger social structures like gender and class. Indeed, infanticide and concealment breached all levels of society, "not only are poor, unmarried women imagined to get rid of their illegitimate children, but middle-class, married women are feared to be participating in this clandestine system as well."⁶⁵

Although committing infanticide and concealment effectively undermined power structures, these were not the only methods through which women exercised autonomy.

Finding Autonomy in the Courtroom

As women exercised their agency by weaponizing femininity and establishing female networks, they fought oppressive laws and criminal codes governing their reproduction. Their involvement in the judicial system, although far from comparable to men's roles at the time, demonstrates an impressive presence and influence within the courtroom. Women exerted agency as jurors sitting on "juries of matrons," which were exclusively female. Women also proved pivotal as witnesses to other women's infanticide and concealment trials, especially given their roles as sisters, relatives, coworkers, and neighbors. Some female defendants gave statements when charged for their crimes. The various roles of women in the justice system demonstrate their complex positions in Victorian society.

During this period, women participated in "juries of matrons." These special juries were convened after a verdict was reached but before sentencing was decided, or upon an appealed conviction. They were usually composed of twelve "worthy and discreet" married women who were chosen for their feminine and maternal qualities. Juries of matrons were regarded as experts in "the delicate questions about the female body" and were thus tasked with determining whether a woman was pregnant and, if so, if the child had yet quickened.⁶⁶ These juries were typically called in cases where a pregnant widow's inheritance was in question or to prevent execution after a capital conviction.⁶⁷ Despite their involvement not solely pertaining to infanticide or concealment cases, juries of matrons speak strongly to the role of women in the legal system and their often pointed, but still important, impact on cases and the women involved.

Juries of matrons proved significant to cases like Eleanor Kirvin's. Kirvin, who had been charged with forgery, "pleaded the belly" (i.e., claimed she was pregnant), so a jury of matrons examined her and found her "with quick child," and her sentence was respited.⁶⁸ This plea, like one of insanity, was a method of weaponizing the very methods used to oppress women, as "pleading the belly rarely resulted in execution after the woman gave birth; in essence, it became

a pardon.”⁶⁹ In “pleading the belly” and engaging a jury of matrons, women not only sought individual autonomy but also collective autonomy within the courtroom. Although these juries were defined by their femininity and the reproductive capacities of the women brought to trial, they mark a newly burgeoning female presence in courtrooms across nineteenth century England. These acts of agency forged and reinforced the networks of female connection that undermined the very structures which oppressed them.

While Victorian women lacked legal representation and empowerment, they could assert autonomy by serving as witnesses in the courtroom. Female witnesses to infanticide and concealment cases proved vital to the jury’s understanding and opinion of the case before them. The cases of Matilda Hammond and Mary Ann Seaman, again, demonstrate the importance of female testimony. During Ms. Hammond’s trial, several fellow maids and domestic servants from her residence of employment were called to testify. One such maid described Ms. Hammond as having bled on the floor but went to bed “very ill with the sick headache.” The next day Ms. Hammond returned to work and the maid insisted “she never told me she was in the family way... I did not hear any child cry in the prisoner’s bedroom. I did not see any child.” Another maid had noticed that the “prisoner increased in size,” but that they never spoke about it.”⁷⁰ Although the outcome of Ms. Hammond’s case remains unknown, her verdict rested upon the testimony of three women, who were fellow domestic servants, and one male coroner. This signaled the importance of female relationships to criminal trials.

Mary Ann Seaman’s case also relied upon the testimonies of her employer and fellow maids, further demonstrating the potential influence of female witnesses. Seaman’s employer, Ann Mary Mitchley, “had no knowledge she was in the family way.” Mitchley explained, “I did not know then the deceased was born... I heard no cry of the child.” Hannah Jackson, a fellow maid, as well as Mary’s sister, Sarah, also had no knowledge of the child. The doctor Joseph Savory, however, testified that the child had been born alive, “I have no doubt the child had breathed... I believe the child had died from suffocation.”⁷¹ This testimony was significant, but did not hold its intended strength in court, as Seaman was found not guilty of infanticide but guilty of concealing a birth,

although she was issued no punishment.⁷² The testimony of the women involved in both cases surely proved helpful to each case, if not integral. In Mary Ann Seaman's case, the male doctor's testimony appears trumped by the testimonies of Seaman's employer, sister, and coworker. Regardless of the witness' impacts, the frequency of female testimonials suggests the existence of an avenue through which they could exercise autonomy within an overwhelmingly disempowering environment.

The role of female witness testimonies and juries of matrons in the English criminal justice system was made ever-more significant by the lack of female defendant testimony or statements observed throughout assize court records available in the National Archives. However, there are a select few instances in which the voices of these accused women are made known. Of the nineteen cases prosecuting infanticide located in a sampling of assize court records between 1860 and 1870, a mere three included statements from the defendants themselves. These infrequent testimonies provide a glimpse into the lives of these women otherwise discussed by third parties; they allow an initial exploration into the ways in which women sought and exercised agency even while standing accused of a crime carrying the potential of life imprisonment or the execution. Three such statements will be explored below; two of these statements explain the circumstances of the women's births and subsequent events. The third statement is short, simply explaining the defendant's sister's innocence in aiding the concealment of the defendant's birth—representing both the difficulties with concealment charges and the complicated nature of female networks.

Clara Gamble Cox was charged with the murder of her illegitimate male child in 1886 after the male owner of the estate employing Ms. Cox found the infant's body. The infant was "found [with] no other external marks of violence," the court documents note. In his testimony, William Buswell recalled Ms. Cox telling him that "the child was born in the middle of the room and fell on the floor," which she reiterated in her own statement. Ms. Cox's statement was short but tells the story of a woman who had just undergone birth alone and without any support. "I am not guilty of taking the child's life away," she insisted,

I fell down and I do not know whether I slept or fainted.

When I felt better, I lighted a candle and held it to the child; I found it lying on its face, quite dead, a bit black in the face. I picked it up and looked at it, and found it was quite dead, I laid it down again. I fetched a bucket with some water in and took it away, and had it where they found it.⁷³

If taking Ms. Cox's statement as truth, which—as in many infanticide and concealment cases— can never be determined with certainty, Ms. Cox comes across as immobilized: condemned if she requested assistance and was found to have given birth to an illegitimate child (her status as a domestic servant further heightened this risk), and condemned if she was caught attempting to conceal her pregnancy and birth.

Louisa Woodham, the second defendant testimonial, was charged with child murder in 1870. Her incredibly short testimony demonstrates the ambiguous and female-centered nature of suspected offenses against the person. Woodham's sister, Esther, was also made to testify during her hearing, during which she said, "I noticed my sister being as I thought in the family way." Esther's involvement, despite asserting that she knew nothing beyond that, speaks to the importance of female networks and women themselves to judicial proceedings.⁷⁴ Female relationships were often the clearest window into the intimately personal matters surrounding infanticide and concealment charges. Louisa Woodham, in her statement, declared "I had got two more months to go before I ought to have been confined and I can take my oath before you furthermore that it was not born alive. That's all."⁷⁵ Woodham's testimony appears to say that her child was born prematurely, perhaps stillborn, but the absolute truth on this matter will never be known. It takes no effort to highlight the uncertainty of this case's legal grounds, and the significance of making personal and medical matters legal ones. Infanticide and concealment charges were made for cases that blurred the lines between the personal and public, and between personal and public responsibility.

Sophia Peer and Sophia Goodall's story further illustrates the importance of female connections, as well as the legal ramifications of such relationships. Both women were charged for the murder of Peer's newborn child in October 1868. As gathered from their testimonies, Goodall appeared to be a guest of Peer's around the time of her pregnancy and birth. Other witness testimonies offer competing perspectives

of Goodall's actual involvement in or even knowledge of Peer's birth, but both Peer and Goodall adamantly denied her knowledge of the situation. Goodall insisted, albeit vaguely, "I never knew she was ill that morning. I never saw the child." Peer's statement was a mere sentence: "my guest did not know anything about it."⁷⁶ Neither woman spoke of any specifics nor explicitly acknowledged the birth in any exact terms, but they maintained Goodall's noninvolvement. Once again, this case illuminates the ambiguity and importance of female relationships inherent to infanticide and concealment cases.

As the cases above demonstrate, women were not merely the victims of a legal crusade against female reproduction and bodily autonomy, but they were support systems for impacted women, caretakers of both women and children, jury members, legal witnesses, co-defendants, and even facilitators of infanticide and abortion. Overall, Victorian women existed in conflicting, contradictory, and controversial positions, never just simply existing as victims or maternal figures.

Conclusion

Victorian women faced social, legal, political, economic, and reproductive oppression. Potential circumventions of this control did not allow women full freedom from the patriarchal society which dictated their lives. The impossibility of full female autonomy left women in positions where they resorted to crimes like abortion, concealment, and infanticide. None of these actions happened in isolation, however, and subversion of patriarchal control came to be defined by the complex networks of female connection and communication that would later prove vital to its successes. Any grasp for agency indeed threatened the patriarchal social order that ruled their lives; "after all, male domination of women was deemed essential to preserve the ideal family structure and avoid the disruption of the natural order of things."⁷⁷ The multifaceted and complex networks of connection among women from this period demonstrate both the lengths women went to and their many objective successes in their fight for autonomy.

This research investigates the experiences of women prosecuted for offenses against the person—what compelled them to action, how they were treated socially and legally, and how their community shaped their experiences—through readings of assize court documents of prosecutions against women for infanticide between 1860 and 1870. In summary,

female relationships undermined the male-dominated power structures of Victorian society, as well as the regulation of their bodies and reproduction. The proliferation of methods of female connection like baby farming and wet-nursing, their roles in the courtroom as witnesses and jury members, and their communal involvement in crimes like infanticide and concealment all contributed to successful evasion of the patriarchy's full control over women and their bodily autonomy despite the strict legal policy of the time. In other instances, like when women embraced patriarchal standards by pleading insanity or displaying shame for illegitimate motherhood, women successfully escaped the full wrath of the law and undermined the patriarchy's grasp on society and womanhood. Women's varied and complex roles in the legal system demonstrate how they successfully banded together and weaponized their femininity to secure their agency and autonomy.

This research makes a new contribution to reproductive and gender history studies. Incorporating existing scholarship exploring reproductive trends, the criminal justice system, and gender roles in Victorian era England, this paper provides original archival research to craft a more holistic, rich, and personal analysis of women's reproductive experiences during a period of severe legal and medical disempowerment. This paper holds immense relevance to today's political and legal environment. As recently as the summer of 2023, the world witnessed a prosecution under the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act in England, sparking uproar from both sides of the abortion debate. Despite the nature of reproductive health access having greatly evolved in the time since the Victorian era, the ever-personal nature of the issue and the root of the debate have remained the same: women's bodily integrity and ability to act as autonomous agents. As the world grapples with debates over abortion and contraception, even the definition of personhood and its implications for in vitro fertilization services, we can look to historical studies to trace the origins of this discourse and gain a more nuanced understanding of reproductive and gender history. This paper seeks to contribute to the scholarship available to the politicians, lawyers, historians, and individuals charged with creating statutes, establishing case law, continuing scholarship, and making informed decisions about reproductive health access and rights

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Purple Hazing

Witchcraft Accusations and the War of the Roses

Jaden Miller

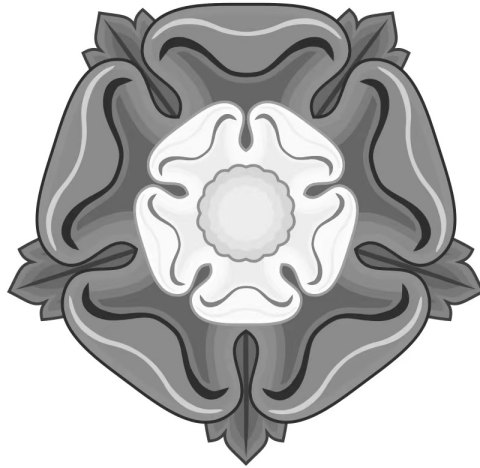


Image: *Tudor Rose*. Photo courtesy of Wikipedia Commons.

Jaden Miller is currently a Junior History major with a Medieval and Renaissance studies correlate at Vassar College. His main interests are 19th-century American history, with a research focus on American identity, culture and wealth. He also has a great interest in religion and government in medieval Europe. After graduating, Jaden hopes to pursue a doctoral degree in 19th century American History.

At their core, the Wars of the Roses was a dynastic war, fought in largely sporadic eruptions of violence between the Houses of Lancaster, York, and their respective noble allies, from the 22nd of May 1455 until the 16th of June 1487.¹ These houses were both a part of the ruling Plantagenet dynasty, with each having been founded by one of King Edward III's sons. The war, fought to secure the throne for one house or the other, has fascinated the public imagination for centuries. These thirty-two years of violence contain enough action, mystery, drama, romance, intrigue, and twists to make even the most imaginative writer recount the maxim that truth is stranger than fiction. Even works as varied as *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *the White Queen* have sought inspiration from the war.² But another dimension to this conflict that is too often overlooked by modern media is the role witchcraft accusations played in the trajectory and outcome of this civil war. No accounting of the war is complete without an examination of the various social and political realities that both facilitated and legitimized the practice of accusing people, generally women, of practicing witchcraft, a crime that could be punished with death.³ It was this practice that was deliberately utilized, on several occasions, to change the war's historical path. It begs the question of why were witchcraft trials particularly conducive to the targeted exertion of political power during the War of the Roses? Further, how did witchcraft trials even develop as a vehicle of power politics, a tool one could use against political rivals? So, while the cases of so-called witchcraft, here, were almost uniformly politically motivated, the fact that these accusations succeeded in bringing some of the mightiest women of the realm, duchesses, and Queens, to the brink of execution and disgrace, is indicative of the unique, turbulent, and often paranoid political and social climate of the time that illuminates the way English gender dynamics and religiosity could be exploited to alter the course of a civil war.

The witch hunts did not simply materialize; rather the accusations made during the Wars of the Roses were a culmination of centuries of build-up. It was a potent cocktail of witchcraft-fueled paranoia. The social and political opportunities afforded to those who could successfully make accusations synergized to create the witch hunts during the Wars of the Roses. Attempts to enforce such an edict increased throughout the Middle Ages and into the early modern period,

but witch hunts, at least as people think of them today, took quite a while to develop.⁴ It is important to recognize that while fear of witches and magic had been intensifying steadily across Europe for decades, witchcraft accusations also had political utility. These politicized witchcraft trials, which may be understood as accusations made with overtly pragmatic and political rationales, regardless of whether or not the accuser really believed in the guilt of the individual in question, had a relatively long history in Europe.

As early as 1324, during the first recorded witchcraft trial in the British Isles in Ireland, there may have been multiple purposes and ulterior motives for the charges.⁵ John Shinnars wrote that “the charges against Alice [Kyteler] and her company seem born as much out of social malice as fear of witchcraft. Alice, who came from a wellborn Kilkenny family, married a wealthy banker...[and] Legal records reveal that a number of local knights and gentry were bound to Alice and her eldest son, William Outlaw, Jr., for large loans., “These financial grudges...lay at the heart of the charges of sorcery against them.”⁶ Clearly, even at this early stage, witchcraft accusations were motivated by hidden agendas. This trial does offer valuable insight into the way a witchcraft accusation worked. In most cases, one would be accused by those in their own community and tried either by mob justice, as outlined in such books as *Malleus Maleficarum* by Heinrich Kramer, an Inquisitor whose book became highly influential after its publication in 1487. This is not to say that more official trials did not happen, however, it is indisputable that the number of victims dragged before an Inquisition tribunal for witchcraft charges was always far lower than the number persecuted at the local or individual level. Though this trial was just a stepping stone for what was to come, it does offer a template for these accusations. Extrapolating from these events, it seems clear that these witchcraft accusations could be used as a weapon against persons, especially women, inconvenient to those with power and influence. Alice Kyteler was inconvenient to her local nobility, who used trumped-up witchcraft charges to deal with her. During the Wars of the Roses, the same model would play out but on a much grander scale.

It is useful to define witchcraft and label what being a witch actually meant. Witchcraft in the Middle Ages was a spectrum, with so-called “white magic” on one end and, in England at

least, “treasonable necromancy,” which directly subverted or controlled the mind, on the other.⁷ As with almost everything in the Middle Ages, there was a huge amount of variation in the way witches were treated and tried. Outside factors, like community paranoia about witches and the ability to prosecute alleged ones, had a tremendous impact on every step of these proceedings. This is not to say attempts were not made by the Catholic Church, and individual monarchs, to offer a standard code of conduct for how to deal with witches. For example, in 1326, Pope John XXII issued the papal bull *Super Illius Specula*. In it, he laid out a description of those who engaged in witchcraft and stated that anyone who did not heed his warning would be excommunicated and could be tried under the Inquisition.⁸ Yet, there are numerous issues with this bull. Here again, John seemingly had ulterior, political, motives for the way he formulated his Bull, in addition to genuine fear of sorcery. Michael Bailey, author of John’s entry in the *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition* wrote that “in using accusations of heresy, sorcery, and demonic invocation for clear political purposes, Pope John was hardly alone in the early fourteenth century. Many individuals during this period found they could use such charges to eliminate or at least discredit rivals at court or to augment or secure their own positions.”⁹

This idea of using witchcraft accusations for political gain seems to be corroborated in Keith Thomas’ book *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. In it, he performs a deep exploration of both the profile of those accused of being witches and their accusers. Some parts of his findings related to English notions of witchcraft are worth quoting in full.

In England...The tensions which such accusations usually reflected arose from the position of the poor and dependent members of the community. The charges of witchcraft were a means of expressing deep-felt animosities in acceptable guise. Before a witchcraft accusation could be plausibly made, the suspect had to be in a socially or economically inferior position to her supposed victim...had she been the stronger party, more direct methods of revenge would have been at her disposal. This is why there are hardly any cases in which the witch was socially more elevated than the victim; and why witches tended to be poor. It may be that it was easier to pin an accusation on a poor man because he

was less able to defend himself. But the essential reason was that the poor man was the one most likely to find himself in the social situation from which witchcraft accusations sprang.¹⁰

Here Thomas highlights that witchcraft accusations were often just as much about social positions and politics as actually perceived witchcraft. The political utility of witchcraft accusations that not only explains the reason such a disproportionate number of women were accused of witchcraft but also helps explain why the accusations were made specifically during the Wars of the Roses.¹¹ Witchcraft paranoia and persecutions had risen steadily in the 14th century. By the 15th century, the political usefulness of such accusations was readily apparent and could be capitalized on with little evidence due to the nature of witchcraft and the broad fear it invoked. What the onset of the Wars of the Roses did was exacerbate tensions and fears. In his article “Political Uses of Sorcery in Medieval Europe,” William R. Jones describes how “the English ““witch-plots”” of the fifteenth century were promoted by the...conditions [of] fierce partisanship on the highest levels of society, dynastic uncertainty, and a politics of crime and scandal.”¹² Obviously, heightened states of political and social anxiety all helped to spur witchcraft accusations. The Wars of the Roses would provide ample kindling to both enflame and polarize English society, and allow witchcraft accusations to have a devastating effect. Further, this idea of witchcraft accusations being targeted specifically at those of social disadvantage corresponds well to the fact that most witches were women, and in the witchcraft cases most important to the course of the Wars of the Roses, were women with a social vulnerability that left them open to attack, as shall be explored.

At this point, it is worth discussing the fascinating nature of, and background of, the Wars themselves. The Wars of the Roses were, at their core, an internecine dynastic struggle, fought by different houses of the Plantagenet dynasty after a litany of historical misfortunes befell the English succession. Allison Weir, author of *The Wars of the Roses* remarked, “in order to understand the causes of the Wars of the Roses and the dynastic heritage of the chief protagonists, we need to go back even further, to the founding of a race of magnates of royal blood by that most prolific of Plantagenet kings, Edward III.”¹³ The Plantagenet Dynasty was England’s royal dynasty, and

it had grown to unprecedented size after King Edward III of England, who reigned for 50 years from 1327 to 1377, and his wife, Philippa of Hainault, had eight sons and five daughters. Of the sons, five survived their childhood and all had children.¹⁴ Hence, even in Edward's own lifetime, royal blood began to course through many powerful English nobles and there was, by nearly any metric, an overabundance of powerful claimants to the English throne. Yet, crisis may still have been averted had there been a clear successor to Edward. For almost his entire reign, Edward's eldest son, Prince Edward, known as "The Black Prince," had seemed destined to succeed his father as Edward IV. A great warrior and hero of the Hundred Years War, Weir stated how he was renowned as "the finest knight in Christendom. The nickname given him may have been inspired by the colour of his armour or, more probably, the ferocity of his temper."¹⁵ Edward was popular, trained to rule, favored by his father, and most importantly, was likely the only claimant who had both the political power and inbuilt legitimacy to ensure a strong succession. He predeceased his father by one year, dying of a vicious wasting disease in 1376, and immediately the question of succession, which had been settled for over forty years, threatened to tear England apart.¹⁶

In a stroke, England had lost its obvious next king, and now King Edward had to select a candidate from among the ever growing pool. He decided, perhaps out of mourning for his eldest son, to follow primogeniture and declare the Black Prince's only surviving son Richard as his heir. Richard was nine at the time, and to say his uncles, King Edward's other sons, were displeased about this situation would be an understatement.¹⁷ Richard, who became Richard II, did not last long as king, and he ended up losing the throne to his uncle, John of Gaunt who was the wealthy, powerful, and ambitious Duke of Lancaster. From the moment his brother had died and Richard had been named Prince of Wales in his place, rumors circulated that John was conspiring to seize the crown from the boy king.¹⁸ When he finally did, the House of Lancaster quickly established itself as the new ruling house of England and eventually produced the infamous King Henry VI who lived 6 December 1421 – 21 May 1471.

Henry VI was, for almost his entire adult life, plagued by severe mental health issues that sometimes left him unresponsive for months at a time. Weir remarked that at the

center of the war was “the pathetic figure of the mentally unstable Henry VI, whose ineptitude in government and mental incapacity gave rise to political instability, public discontent, and dissensions between the great landed magnates that in turn led ultimately to war and a bitter battle over the throne itself.”¹⁹ Even when he was aware and astute enough to attempt to rule, he was often found to be weak, easily manipulated, and naively trusting of his French wife, Margaret of Anjou, whose loyalty was in constant question by his noble advisors. A series of unpopular moves made in Henry VI’s name, by his wife and the regent she selected for her husband, eventually became intolerable to the Ducal House of York, who were descended from Edward III’s 5th son Edmund, and who were claimants to the throne through him. In essence, the war began as an attempt by the Yorks to first counteract and later replace the ill Henry VI and his wife along with their Lancastrian faction, who they believed were taking advantage of the King’s illness to enrich themselves without regard to the realm.²⁰

This background sets the stage for the ensuing accusations made during the Wars of the Roses. The first and most straightforward of these accusations were leveled against Lady Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester, and wife to Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, a younger brother of Henry V, the previous king, and one of the leading nobles of England. Her story is actually relatively simple, and to a modern reader, perhaps politically transparent. Eleanor had been Gloucester’s mistress before she was his wife, something that already made her position socially precarious, and thus more vulnerable to witchcraft accusations which are most effective against those with less social cache or political authority. Her position as a perceived social climber reached its zenith after the death of Humphrey’s brother John, Duke of Bedford. This meant that her husband was next in line to the throne if Henry VI, were to die, making her husband the heir and herself a very possible future queen. It was these circumstances that led Jones to remark that “the political motivation of the trial of the Duchess of Gloucester is fairly obvious.”²¹ Her husband’s enemies wanted to take him down and would be perfectly willing to target his wife to do so, and they would soon have the opportunity they had been waiting for.

Eleanor, seemingly taken with the idea of being queen, was soon to find out the price of dabbling with witchcraft, a crime

to which she would later confess. She is said to have, in the words of Susan Higginbotham, author of *The Woodvilles: The Wars of the Roses and England's Most Infamous Family* "been unable to resist employing astrologers to find whether a crown might be in her husband's future."²² In 1441 her activity was discovered and her co-conspirators, if they could be called such for employing astrologers, Roger Bolingbroke, Thomas Southwell, and possibly even the infamous witch Margery Jourdemayne, known as 'the witch of Eye,' were all accused of using astrology to predict the king's death, and possibly even cause it. Eleanor attempted to flee, but it was futile. Not only had she performed some magic ritual involving the King, a high crime on its own of "treasonable necromancy," but her husband's political opponents saw an opening to ruin Gloucester's political career by linking them together. Higginbotham described the outcome of the trial, and wrote that Eleanor was "forced to stand trial in an ecclesiastical court for heresy and witchcraft...Southwell died in prison, perhaps [by] a suicide, Bolingbroke was hanged, drawn, and quartered, and Margery was burned alive at the stake."²³

Found guilty of the charges against her, Eleanor was made to do public penance, forcibly divorced from Gloucester, and imprisoned for the rest of her life on the Isle of Man.²⁴ As if this was not enough, Jones described in his own article how the condemnation of Eleanor, happened before an "ecclesiastical court, in which her husband's enemies predominated" and how the ordeal "enabled the Beauforts and his other enemies to diminish his influence within the government."²⁵ This culminated in Humphrey himself being arrested for treason in 1447, and dying shortly after in captivity. Allison Weir remarked that "Gloucester's wife had tried to bring him to the throne by witchcraft, and although he had not been implicated, it is clear that Henry VI had never again trusted him and was all too ready to believe the lies of his detractors."²⁶ Thus, in a stroke, a brother of Henry V was removed early from the chessboard of nobility in the years before the outbreak of the Wars of the Roses.

The tale of Eleanor Cobham gives some fascinating insight into how witchcraft and witchcraft accusations worked during this period. Cobham's case was tried before an ecclesiastical court run by her and her husband's enemies. Separation of church and state, while obviously a modern

idea, is so ingrained in many today that it makes it difficult to understand this situation as it might have been understood by its participants. The clerics who tried Cobham were politically active and aware enough to not only have strong opinions on court politics and successions but to be actively involved in their own right shows a clergy dominated by people very much involved in the governance of England as whole, and who might very well have been born to nobility themselves . The religious nature of witchcraft charges, combined with the fact that Cobham had attempted to seek sanctuary in Westminster Abbey, speaks very much to a church with a dual role that seems to be at odds with itself. The church was both a place Cobham felt she could flee to for safety, and yet it ended up being the insulation which not only prosecuted her, but which espoused and supposedly upheld the religious doctrine that labeled her actions criminal in the first place .

This pseudo betrayal seemingly corroborates Thomas' early findings that "before a witchcraft accusation could be plausibly made, the suspect had to be in a socially or economically inferior position to her supposed victim," and that "accusations usually reflected arose from the position of the poor and dependent members of the community."²⁷ A witch had to be socially inferior to the victim, Cobham, was as a dutchess inferior to relatively few in England, but since her supposed victim was the King himself, the point seems to hold. Further, Cobham was, despite her highly privileged position as a duchess, a relatively easy target. Notwithstanding the she did possibly a magical ritual, she still would have been vulnerable. She was originally a mistress before becoming Gloucester's wife, which always made her an outsider to the high nobility and made her totally dependent on his protection. This offers some insight into the tenuous political tightrope noblewomen, especially ambitious noblewomen, had to walk. Cobham's actions contributed to her downfall, but it was her position, both at court and as a woman, that made such charges against her both possible and useful.

By far the most important witchcraft accusation made during the Wars of the Roses was made against the Queen Mother Jacquetta of Luxembourg, the widow of the aforementioned John, Duke of Bedford, and her daughter the Queen, Elizabeth Woodville.²⁸ Together, these are two of the most powerful women in English history to ever be accused of witchcraft.

In no small way, the accusations leveled against them shaped not only the outcome of the Wars of the Roses but altered the course of English history going forward.

It all originated, as many great tales do, with a love story. The man was a king, though his reign was far from unchallenged. He was King Edward IV of England, of the House of York, inheritor to the claims and royal ambitions of his late father Richard, Duke of York, and the man who, on two separate occasions, had seemingly won the Wars of the Roses.²⁹ He was also perhaps the most eligible bachelor in Christendom. Edward was invariably described by contemporaries as brave, just, intelligent, and generous, and was renowned for his supposedly incredibly good looks and tall form.³⁰ The woman was Elizabeth Woodville. She was the widow of a staunch Lancastrian, the mortal enemy of his House, who was five years his senior and already had two sons from her previous marriage.³¹

Even on the surface level, the match was highly unlikely, and yet it gets even odder. While Woodville's mother was of the high nobility, having previously been married to the Duke of Bedford, her current husband, and Elizabeth's father, was not. Further, if there was ever a King not in a position to marry for love, it was Edward IV. His rule was constantly under grave threat from the Lancastrians, and he was often facing rebellions, some of which even succeeded temporarily during his reign. He was a man in need of a foreign alliance to help end the war, as all his advisors, including his most influential and powerful supporter, Richard Neville, 16th Earl of Warwick, also known as the "Kingmaker," were well aware.³²

This helps to explain why, when it was revealed that Edward and Elizabeth had secretly eloped in earlier 1464, the realm shook with the news. Weir described the nobility's reception to the announcement as "stunned and horrified to learn the identity of their new queen, [and they] did not attempt to hide their disapproval, telling the King candidly 'that she was not his match, however good and fair she might be, and he must know well that she was no wife for a prince such as himself,'"³³ But Edward was enamored with his new bride, who had seemingly charmed the man with her intellect and witty personality, and House Woodville was transformed into one of the most powerful in England. Elizabeth's sons by her first marriage, her siblings, and family members were all given titles

and royal favor in spades.³⁴

This terrified Edward's existing advisors who were afraid of losing their power, and it especially incensed the powerful Warwick who felt betrayed that Edward had not consulted him on the marriage. Within a few years of the announcement, the Wars of the Roses had broken out again, with Warwick renouncing his loyalty to Edward and supporting the claim of his disaffected younger brother George, Duke of Clarence.³⁵ Together, they captured Edward by 1469 and held him captive for several months before Edward managed to regain his freedom after Warwick proved unable to maintain control without him.³⁶ It was during this period that Warwick began to move rapidly against the Woodvilles. Perhaps not coincidentally, it was also when the witchcraft accusations against the family surfaced.

Warwick seized the opportunity of Edward's captivity to execute Jacquetta's husband in 1469, and very shortly after Thomas Wake, a follower of Warwick's, accused her of witchcraft.³⁷ In Higginbotham's words, Thomas Wake brought two charges against the Queen Mother. The first was he "brought to Warwick Casle, where Edward IV was still being held prisoner, [he presented] 'an image of lead made like a man of arms of the length of a man's finger broken in the middle and made fast with a wire, saying that it was made by Jacquetta] to use with witchcraft and sorcery.'" ³⁸ For the second charge, "Wake also enlisted the aid of John Daunger, the parish clerk of Stoke Brewerne, to say that Jacquetta had made two other images, 'one for the king and one for the queen?'" ³⁹

Every aspect of what was found seemed to indicate that Jacquetta of Luxembourg had employed, or attempted to employ, "love magic."⁴⁰ Take, for instance, the striking similarity between what was supposedly found and the ingredients for a "Necromancer's love spell" from a 15th-century spell book. The 15th-century manual was roughly contemporary to the Wars and could potentially have been very similar to one Jacquetta would have had access to. It instructs the spellcasting hopeful to use "wax [to] make an image over burning coals placed in a pot... [acquire] some of the hairs of the woman for whom he wishes to act, and three bristles of red hair, and [then to use]...a knife with a white handle... [to make] an image of the woman for whom you perform it."⁴¹ So, with this spell in mind, the evidence did indicate guilt. After

all, what other purpose would the Queen Mother have had for miniature figurines supposedly depicting the King and Queen, which had evidently been broken to allow, perhaps hair, to be placed inside and then closed with a wire?

As Jones points out in his article, there is ample room to doubt the legitimacy of the evidence and its raconteurs. He wrote that “the cynical political motivation of the attack on the Duchess of Bedford and her daughter is visible through these events. Wake was a partisan of Warwick and had lost a son at the battle of Edgecot in July 1469, which had marked Edward IV’s defeat by Warwick’s party.”⁴² To Jones it was evident that “Warwick’s party, of which Wake was an adherent, doubtlessly recognized the value of accusations which impugned the legitimacy of the king’s marriage and which could be used to eliminate the Wydevilles as a source of opposition.”⁴³ Weir corroborated this view and wrote that the “two men had been paid by Warwick to give evidence that she had... practiced her black...to bring about her daughter’s marriage to the King... [and that] further investigation proved that the evidence against her was deeply suspect. Witnesses had been bribed to make them testify against her, but... would not take the oath in court, the prosecution’s case collapsed and the Duchess was freed.”⁴⁴ Ultimately, Jacquetta was only exonerated after Edward IV was freed and restored to power in February 1470. She had been granted a stay of execution, but only so long as Edward was there to enforce it, and uphold her status.

This gets at critical issues of legitimacy, as well as the intermediary role of a witchcraft trial in targeted political character assassination. These trials and their charges, by their very nature, were capable of connecting accusations against the politically vulnerable Jacquetta, to her daughter Elizabeth Woodville’s and her own personal life. These also tie into the accusations against the legitimacy of Edward IV and even his children. It gives a glimpse into the way gender dynamics, marriage, and political legitimacy influenced each other. In a political system where dynasty, legitimacy, and lineage were all inextricably linked, any dispute about one’s ancestry was a direct threat to power. Hence, witchcraft accusations could be almost uniquely potent, as they connect they offer a way to target a powerful individual through another’s actions, such as when Eleanor Cobham was targeted to discredit her husband and his claim to the throne.

Further, witchcraft accusations made these attacks less overtly political to outsiders and gave accusations an immediate religious dimension. Part of the reason the allegations against Edward IV and Elizabeth Wydeville had so much staying power and potency was because so many were already inclined to believe that they had been the victims of love magic. The idea appealed to many in England, who had been shocked when the King was first married.⁴⁵ After all, their marriage had always been controversial and unexpected. The Wars of the Roses continued to rage, until 1471, when Edward managed to retake the throne after having briefly lost it, again, to the Lancastrians. At last, England stabilized and Edward ruled unchallenged until his death on April 9th, 1483, he was only 40. His eldest son, also named Edward, who was to be King next, was only 12.⁴⁶ In the words of Allison Weir, author of *The Wars of the Roses*, “Edward IV ruled England firmly and well, unchallenged by any. In 1473... the House of York seem[ed] almost invincible. But when Edward died suddenly, in 1483, and his twelve-year-old son Edward V succeeded him, a power struggle erupted between the Duke of Gloucester, whom Edward had designated Protector of England, and the Wydeville faction.”⁴⁷

Edward had not even been dead a year before his younger brother, the now infamous Richard III made his move. Edward died young, only age 40, and while he had made great strides towards ending the Wars of the Roses and cementing York as the new ruling house, he did not live long enough to quell the cycle of violence and tame the dynastic web that fueled the Wars in the first place. England, even after years of war and numerous deaths, still had too many potential royal claimants. Under these circumstances, Richard utilized legitimacy destroying witchcraft accusations to cull alternate claims to the throne. Richard remembered the 1469 claims made against the Woodvilles and saw in these witchcraft accusations a rare and tempting opportunity. His plan was to seize power long enough to reopen the case and find the Woodvilles guilty, which would mean that all of Edward’s children, as well as Edward’s marriage in its entirety, would be de-legitimized since Edward had been controlled by magic. Such a move would make Richard heir apparent since Edward had executed their middle brother George some years earlier.

Whether or not Richard truly murdered his nephews has long

been debated, and it is impossible to ever be certain. But Weir believed that he did, she wrote that Richard emerged as the victor of the struggle for the English throne and “imprisoned the boy king, deposed him, and had himself crowned Richard III, all within three months. He then almost certainly arranged for young Edward and his brother to be murdered in the Tower of London.”⁴⁸

That witchcraft accusations that were aimed at his wife and her family could be used to discredit Edward’s children demonstrates once more both the potency these accusations carried and the role gender dynamics and dynastic politics contributed to the effect these accusations engendered. All Richard had to do was target a single individual, who was of course a woman in a less socially powerful position than him after the death of her husband, and the nature of legitimacy in England allowed the effects to cascade like fire along a tangled web.

These wide-ranging effects can be seen readily. Richard articulated the justification for his actions in the very act of Parliament of his reign, the same that made Richard the king. The 1484 act was called *Titulus Regius* and leaves no room for debate. According to it:

The seid pretended Mariage bitwixt the above named King Edward and Elizabeth Grey, was made of grete presumption, without the knowyng and assent of the Lords of this Lond, and also by Sorcerie and Wichecrafte, committed by the said Elizabeth, and her Moder Jaquett Duchesse of Bedford, as the common opinion of the people, and the publique voice and same is thorough all this Land; and hereafter, if and as the caas shall require, shall bee proved... which premisses being true, as in veray trouth they been true, it appearreth and foloweth evidently, that the said King Edward duryng his lif, and the seid Elizabeth, lived together sinfully and dampnably in adultery... evidently and followeth, that all th’Issue and Children of the seid King Edward, been Bastards, and unable to inherite or to clayme any thing by Inheritance, by the Lawe and Custome of Englonde.⁴⁹

This act is an incredibly rich document that speaks volumes on such topics as the framing of magic in 15th-century England, popular perception of royal figures, as well as expected normative practices for royalty. Particularly of note here is the act’s assertion that the sorcerous nature of Edward

IV's marriage was the "common opinion of the people... thorough all this Land."⁵⁰ This statement helps to illuminate the popular nature of these accusations, which both appealed to and frightened the average Englishman of the day, as well as display how the perceived strangeness of Elizabeth and Edward's marriage had bothered both nobility and peasantry alike. The fact that Parliament sought to invoke a rumor from fifteen years earlier as their main pretext to disinherit Edward's sons shows how effective these accusations were as political tools.

And so it was that a witchcraft accusation enabled Richard III to claim the throne and arguably ended the mighty House of York. Richard was not to reign long. Henry Tudor, one of the last living Lancastrian claimants to the throne saw the chaos in England and seized the opportunity to invade. By 1485, he defeated and killed Richard during the Battle of Bosworth Field, ushering in the House of Tudor and finally ending the Wars of the Roses. He revoked the *Titulus Regius* as one of his first acts, making Richard legally a usurper once more, and restored Elizabeth Woodville's rights and honors which had been stripped from her during Richard's short reign. He then married Edward IV's eldest daughter, also named Elizabeth, officially uniting the two houses.⁵¹ I believe that this turn of events supports Thomas' argument that victims of witchcraft accusations had to be of a lower social rank than the accuser. With Richard's death and the Tudor victory, his posthumous social standing obviously plummeted, making Elizabeth and her children the stronger party once more. Just as *Titulus Regius* had proclaimed her a witch, the act was struck and the charges dismissed, demonstrating their ethereality as well as their overt politicization. With Richard's death, Henry Tudor was, at last, presiding over an England with an overabundance of competitors to his claim, in no small part due to the targeted use of witchcraft accusations that had for decades removed whole branches of viable contenders for the throne from the line of succession.

After all of this, it seems apparent that underneath the paranoia, and even the popular belief in witchcraft, lies a deeper message about the meaning, of dynasty, legitimacy, family. In a time and place where lineage, legitimacy, and family were so critical to power politics, anything that could alter these seemingly inalterable variables offered a uniquely

potent weapon. The fact that witches were usually women and that even the most powerful women in England could fall prey to them proves that witchcraft accusations were viewed, in the highest level of English society, as a political weapon that could be exploited to attack not just the target, but those connected to them. The examples listed here are particularly interesting cases because they were so overtly political. The fact that attacking the wives of England's leading men could end even the most powerful nobleman's hope for the throne, or aid in a nationwide seizure of power, speaks to the prominence and power these noblewomen held, which was not abstract, but very real and something which could be counteracted with witchcraft accusations. The part that stands out most however was how successful these accusations really were at removing the power of the women accused and those associated with them. Earlier in this paper, the case of Alice Kyteler was discussed and it was explained how the local gentry and nobility used a witchcraft accusation against her to avoid paying their debts to her family. The case against Queen Elizabeth feels very similar in the abstract, with the only material differences perhaps lying in scale and impact. What does it say about the place and role of women at the time that across the boundaries of space, time, and social class, two women 100 years and hundreds of miles apart could be brought down in the same way for much the same purposes? This shows that as legitimate power is tied to lineage and hereditary succession, and laws structured not on universal application and equality but on prescribed privileges, any means of removing legitimacy were almost the ultimate weapon. Witchcraft accusations offered this almost to a tee; the means to attack an individual with a charge almost impossible to disprove and yet that carried the religious and political power behind it to remove legitimacy from numerous individuals in a stroke.

The Wars of the Roses are remembered for their sheer complexity and depth, and while this makes them a joy to learn about, it makes them a curse to write about. The fact that Eleanor Cobham was accused of witchcraft seems to have played a major role in stopping her husband from being considered for the throne, making it easier for claimants to rise up during the war. These kinds of unseen, unconscious, aspects of English culture at the time have far-reaching effects

that cascade out to the present. Who knows what kind of king Edward V may have been, had the witchcraft accusations against his mother's family not provided Richard an excuse to depose and possibly kill him? It does not behoove an academic paper to speculate too much. However, it offers an intriguing insight into how witchcraft accusations shaped the course of history. Beyond even this speculation, however, one must understand that these stories are important and deserve the attention of a 21st-century individual removed from the Wars of the Roses by virtue of time's unstoppable onslaught.

Endnotes

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“One Star in the Celestial Firmament of Workers:”

The Life and Career of Astronomer
Harriet McWilliams Parsons, 1892–1986

Arianne Nguyen



Image: *Harriet Parsons* (right). University of Chicago
Photographic Archive, Hanna Holborn Gray Special

Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Arianne Nguyen is a graduating fourth-year undergraduate student at the University of Chicago in History and Chicago Studies. Her interests in local, scientific, and public history have led to producing programs at a Chicago art museum, interviewing oral history narrators, researching community co-curation in the Calumet region, and working on an exhibit about women in astrophysics at UChicago (the last of which introduced her to Harriet Parsons). Outside the archive, you can find her leading gallery tours, teaching writing, captaining a competitive scavenger hunt team, or taking public transit in Chicago.

Introduction and Historiography¹

In 1921, Albert Einstein visited the Yerkes Observatory in Wisconsin, home of the University of Chicago's (UChicago) astronomy department. Along with observatory staff and faculty, Einstein posed in front of the observatory's flagship telescope, a 40-inch refractor in the observatory's central dome.² When a university group working on the historic preservation of the observatory rediscovered the photo more than a century later, their first reaction wasn't to the celebrated physicist. Instead, they were interested in the observatory staff. Half the astronomy staff pictured were women.³



Figure 1. This group photo, taken upon Albert Einstein's 1921 visit to Yerkes Observatory, features eight women astronomers among the group of Yerkes staff, faculty, and visitors in front of the observatory's 40-inch refractor telescope. Harriet McWilliams Parsons, at center in white, stands next to her mentor and observatory director Edwin B. Frost as well as visitor Albert Einstein. Image courtesy of University of Chicago Photographic Archive, apf6-00415, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Historians of science have tended to emphasize the historically subordinate position of women in science. This is what made the sight of the eight women standing next to Einstein and male Yerkes staff a surprise and a new research question for the UChicago research group. Far from being constitutionally unfit for the rigor of the scientific method, women faced structural and interpersonal barriers that systematically excluded and marginalized them from both scientific education and further scientific careers. Historian Margaret Rossiter and others have argued that scientific women have to prove themselves exceptional—and meet a higher bar than men—to overcome these barriers.⁴ Women scientists must be extraordinary, requiring unrealistic levels of brilliance and perseverance to “overcome” their gender and prove themselves equal.⁵ The model of a woman scientist, then, has been characterized as the “Marie Curie complex”: an exceptionalism narrative that required women to “do it all” both in the domestic and the scientific sphere.⁶

It is absolutely true that astronomy had its exceptional women, such as Maria Mitchell, who became America’s first woman astronomer when she discovered a new comet in 1847 using her and her father’s home telescope in Nantucket. Mitchell won a gold medal that the king of Denmark had promised to the comet’s discoverer and later became one of the most prominent faculty members at Vassar College.⁷ In 1899, an early history of women in astronomy from the Renaissance suggested that “the glory of the heavens spoke to the soul of women.”⁸

However, an exclusive focus on these types of figures risks obscuring the role of women in the ordinary workings of astronomy. American women increasingly pursued undergraduate science degrees through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially at the newly opened women’s colleges. In astronomy, field-wide intellectual shifts played a far more material role in the field’s welcoming stance towards women scientists than earlier romantic conceptions about the “glory of the heavens.” At the turn of the century, as astronomy shifted away from individual observation towards analyzing photographs of the sky and understanding the physical relationships between measured properties of stars—the origins of astrophysics—it required increasingly more

observatory staff. The spectroscope and the photometer became ever-present companions to the telescope, and they generated libraries of glass plates that required calculation, cataloging, and analysis.⁹ These changing needs—in terms of both science and labor—created a new kind of astronomy institution: the “factory observatory.” These observatories were named this way because they employed a large semi-skilled labor force to do calculations, supervised by more highly educated astronomers who led observations. They became a large-scale, low-cost way to meet astronomy’s new scientific needs and also created a niche for increasing “women’s work” in astronomy.¹⁰ Per historian John Lankford, “Men observed at the telescope. Women measured, classified, and reduced the data men collected... the data were then presented to male astronomers to interpret and prepare for publication.”¹¹ Women computers often worked for cheaper than men, making them attractive hires for cash-strapped observatory directors.

In this paper, I focus on women astronomers as a narrower subset of women in science at a point of transition in the discipline—in intellectual, technological, and labor terms as well as gender—during the early 20th century. What it meant to “do astronomy” changed dramatically, as did the unique opportunities and challenges for women in the discipline. Historians have generally seen this period as expanding women’s foothold in astronomy. The “factory observatory” model has dominated explanations of why women began to play a greater role in this scientific field. While other histories of science have more narrowly defined the astronomy community as including only academics who published a certain number of papers, historian John Lankford argues that up to 43 percent of the population was composed of women (during 1900–1940). He arrived at this number by expanding the community to include observatory staff, part-time workers, fellows, and other forms of access to the field that were increasingly roles for women. This coincided, too, with the growth of women’s colleges, which hosted observatories of their own and sent their graduates to become support staff at larger institutions.

Along with the work done by the primarily undergraduate observatories at women’s institutions like Mount Holyoke, Vassar, and Smith Colleges, Harvard College Observatory’s astronomy has emerged as a key example of the opportunities

available to women in the field. Funded primarily by two women patrons, Anna Palmer Draper and Catherine Wolfe Bruce, Harvard College Observatory systematically photographed the night sky for decades to create the Henry Draper Memorial Catalog, generating long-term work for a large staff of women.¹² Some would make major contributions as part of their work as “female computers,” such as Mina Fleming and Annie Jump Cannon. They worked on Harvard’s spectral classification system, a detailed way to photographically analyze and categorize stars by each one’s spectrum as seen through prisms, a measure of the star’s temperature. A version of their Harvard system is still used today.¹³ The observatory also authored many publications on variable stars, which were often identified for the first time by Harvard’s women astronomy staff, like Fleming, or affiliated amateur volunteers.¹⁴ However, Harvard and these women were still exceptions to the rule, and they were hailed as such by both skeptical and supportive contemporaries.

Even women who succeeded in the “women’s work” of the factory observatories remained in a marginalized role with limited opportunities available—similar to the “glass ceiling” still often experienced by women in STEM.¹⁵ Many of the women at Harvard and other observatories were research assistants or staff, without formal academic positions. While increasing numbers had undergraduate degrees in astronomy from women’s colleges, their roles functionally let women use only half of their education—just computation, not observation—and severely limited their upward mobility within academia.¹⁶ At the department level, women’s college astronomy departments suggested their role was “to supply factory observatories with women who had baccalaureates or master’s degrees, to serve as computers; or to send a few of their graduates on to take the doctorate and, quite frequently, see them return to teach” at their alma maters, a post-Ph.D. role that focused more on administration than on research due to the limited resources of the colleges.¹⁷ Even if scientific women achieved advanced positions in industry or academia, they were all but required to resign upon marriage as a matter of course.¹⁸ As such, the same directors who had preferred to hire women because they drew lower salaries also hesitated to devote resources to their advancement or further education, since they were assumed to leave the field and take those investments with

them.¹⁹

However, beyond their sheer number, the women of Yerkes offer a more complex refutation to these conventional narratives. While not a women's college, the explicitly co-ed University of Chicago was nicknamed the "Western Wellesley" for its comparatively welcoming environment for women.²⁰ Between 1900 and 1930, Yerkes hosted an increasing number of women astronomers, over 100 of whom have been identified across several different academic generations.²¹

Powered by a much larger university and a greater focus on the growing field of astrophysics than the East Coast women's colleges, Yerkes provided a unique opportunity for women to directly observe on its large refracting telescope and to achieve advanced training in astronomy. Rather than computing staff, women at Yerkes were frequently masters and Ph.D. students in their own right, conducting their own research towards a degree—in other words, rather than following the labor model previously thought to be the norm for astronomy in the early twentieth century, women observed at the telescope. Women were not confined to computation, and computation was not confined to women—multiple men accepted roles as calculators at Yerkes.²²

Historians of astronomy have struggled to make sense of the women of Yerkes Observatory. Historian John Lankford characterized it as a "factory observatory" based on the large number of women, especially Vassar graduates, that passed through the observatory. However, that labor model neglects the fact that those same women often did not just pass through the University of Chicago's observatory outpost in Wisconsin but also took classes and earned advanced degrees from the institution's main campus in Chicago. A formalized system by the early 1910s enabled someone working as a calculator to simultaneously earn credits towards an advanced degree at half time.²³ The women of Yerkes seem to fit into half of the "factory" model—benefitting from pipelines from women's colleges, institutional backing at university observatories, and sheer numbers—and half of the "exceptionalism" narrative fueled by their research and observations. After Yerkes, their paths diverged—positions in astronomy research were extremely limited, especially for women, and while some went on to teach at their alma maters, most eventually left the field for marriage or other better-paying careers. The range of

women astronomers' activity at Yerkes complicates narratives of women in science and higher education at the time, especially the kind of scientific work available to them and their relationships to their academic institutions.

This essay narrates the biography of one Yerkes woman astronomer as a case study in "exceptionalism," scientific careers, and their complications. Harriet McWilliams Parsons (1892–1986) stands out in the landscape of Yerkes for more than just her all-white outfit in the 1921 photograph. In some ways, Parsons reads as a textbook example of a woman astronomer in this period. She earned her undergraduate degree at Vassar College (1915), leveraging important advances and networks by women scientists before her. After her graduate degrees from UChicago (M.S. 1916, Ph.D. 1921), she would return to her alma mater's sister school, Smith, to teach. However, Parsons could be read as exceptional even among them for her brilliant quality of work, including a master's thesis on the color of stars in the Pleiades, exploring concepts later demonstrated in the Hertzsprung-Russell diagram. Former Yerkes director and astrophysicist Rich Kron has noted, "Edwin Hubble was at Yerkes doing research too and his Ph.D. thesis was published the same year. If I had to compare them I would say that Parsons' is far superior work, and yet Hubble is the one that went on to become highly decorated."²⁴ At the same time, even this exceptional astronomer had to cobble together research funding from teaching and often unguaranteed short-term fellowships, and like many other women scientists, she left the position and the field upon her marriage to lawyer Henry Twitchell Hall, at age 31.

How, then, did Parsons's opportunities for graduate research at UChicago fit into her career path to and beyond Yerkes? I analyze bureaucratic documents from the Yerkes director's office and UChicago registrar along with astronomy sources that have not been previously read through the lens of the gendered history of science. They allow a new understanding of the ways that one woman strategically navigated mentorship, access to advanced study, and modes of engagement with science including but not limited to formal research. I argue that examining Parsons' careful navigation of her path between institutions complicates our view of women astronomers' opportunities, expanding how historians of science have conceptualized what makes an astronomical career. Tracing

Parsons' career from undergraduate study to her death, her biography resists being a straightforward, exceptional story of overcoming structural barriers in science—even as it suggests how one woman used her agency and advantages to contribute to the field in unconventional ways.

“Wonderful developments”: Early Life and Undergraduate Work at Vassar (1892–1915)

Parsons was born on December 17, 1892, in Troy, Pennsylvania.²⁵ Her family's background was professional and academic: her father Eli Burton Parsons was a lawyer, and her four brothers attended Yale, as would one of her nephews.²⁶ It is unlikely that familial or financial barriers prevented her from education. When she arrived in Poughkeepsie, Parsons was active in the astronomy department at Vassar, which was then under the leadership of associate professor Caroline Furness. Vassar College's Observatory, established in 1865, had made it one of the leading women's colleges in astronomy and a frequent source of baccalaureate-bearing computers for the larger factory observatories at institutions like Harvard. Parsons took sixteen courses in the astronomy, physics, and mathematics departments there, only missing two of the college's total offerings in those areas.²⁷ She also reviewed popular astronomy books in the college's magazine.²⁸ Parsons was successful at Vassar, and she graduated with honors, plus, one of four non-resident fellowships, in 1915.²⁹

For a woman graduating in astronomy in 1915, women's colleges provided not just a diploma but an important network of ongoing support. Parsons was part of a generation of women scientists who could benefit from earlier efforts by the “entering wedge,” as the first generation of baccalaureate-holding women were known. Those earlier graduates in turn supported their alma maters via advocacy and funding to encourage the next generations to push further. As early as 1870, Vassar had created specially-funded graduate fellowships, and in 1912 they were expanded to non-resident study.³⁰ These were far from guaranteed—Parsons's Sutro Fellowship in 1915 was one of fewer than ten funded by Vassar that year—but were part of a “creative philanthropy” strategy pioneered by the Association of Collegiate Alumnae in the 1880s and 1890s, which emphasized funding to support the first women in graduate programs.³¹

Vassar did this institutionally, reaching out to many

benefactors and women's organizations to fund fellowships. The fact that these fellowships were non-residential, enabling Vassar alums to move beyond their gender-segregated undergraduate institutions, was crucial. Vassar was an under-funded institution that could not always even afford to subscribe to leading journals. Vassar professor Margaret Washburn argued that advanced women should benefit from increased interaction with more peers in their field. She avowed, "I wouldn't have a graduate student under any circumstances" due to the college's lack of resources at the graduate level.³² Where the school could not fund fellows independently nor support its graduates and teachers as much as it wished, fellowships like the ones Parsons received fulfilled the need.

Parsons also benefited from Caroline Furness's personal mentorship. Furness had inherited Vassar's observatory from her mentors Maria Mitchell, of comet fame, and Mary Whitney. Her work at Yerkes in 1900 made her a friend of the observatory's directors, who would both reach out to her and heed her recommendations to employ Vassar students.³³ In the absence of broad structural support for women scientists, mentorship was especially crucial to help with both formal and informal socialization into the field—a single influential woman professor might guide a student protegee into becoming her successor, or recommend her for further opportunities.³⁴ A strong sponsor could both emotionally and materially lower barriers to a protégée's participation in science by becoming a source of shared experience and creating a "protégée chain" that linked the rare women who did hold scientific careers to each other and the few opportunities available to them. While the sciences were growing more hierarchical and professionalized during the early 20th century, patterns of mentorship, patronage, and sponsorship were still enormously influential even for male astronomers to navigate and manage their careers.³⁵

Parsons came to Yerkes via Furness's recommendation.

Upon Parsons' receipt of her first Vassar fellowship, Furness wrote to Yerkes director Edwin B. Frost,

I am greatly pleased to announce to you that one of my students has won a graduate fellowship for next year, and wishes to study at the University of Chicago and the Yerkes Observatory... [She] is ready to do some good work. We have

selected the place of study without asking you if it will be possible for you to take her, but I have rather taken that for granted.³⁶

Furness's forthrightness stands out, demonstrating both the grit required to become a woman astronomer at her level—the highest generally considered possible for women—and her extension of that directness on her mentee's behalf. Her assumption was correct, and Frost responded warmly, "You are quite right in taking it for granted that we shall be able and glad to give her an opportunity for work here."³⁷ He had accepted Parsons, sight unseen on the strength of Furness's sponsorship.³⁸

Parsons introduced herself to her future director as follows: "Miss Furness...wrote you recently concerning one of her students...In reply to the letter you showed a willingness to take me into the Observatory."³⁹ With Furness smoothing her way, Parsons accepted an offer to bring her fellowship money from Vassar to Yerkes and the University of Chicago just months after her graduation, in September 1915. Through both mentorship and her ability to bring her own funding to her observatory of choice, Parsons enjoyed a uniquely privileged position when it came to acquiring a position in an observatory to begin research in astronomy. While her scientific opportunities were still circumscribed by the limited resources of the gender-segregated women's college, Parsons exemplifies the advantages these institutions worked to give their graduates both structurally and interpersonally. Building on this intellectual foundation, she would begin her work at Yerkes.

Variable Stars and Variable Work: Between Vassar and Yerkes (1915–1921)

At Yerkes and UChicago, Parsons worked primarily under Professor John A. Parkhurst on photometry. She spent September and autumn quarter at Yerkes before finishing her master's degree through winter coursework at UChicago and spring research back at Yerkes.⁴⁰ Parsons made efficient use of her time and funding, and she graduated with a master's thesis, "The Photo-Visual Magnitudes of the Stars in the Pleiades," in June 1916.⁴¹ It drew upon visual magnitude data from Müller and Kempf and photographic magnitudes taken by Hertzsprung, plus color-filtered plates taken under Parkhurst at Yerkes, to pioneer a relationship between relative magnitude/luminosity and color index.⁴²

Parsons remained connected to Vassar, linking her teaching there to her graduate education at Yerkes. This would continue from 1918 through 1921, during her Ph.D. work at Yerkes and UChicago. In the middle of her master's year at UChicago, in February 1916, Parsons was appointed an assistant in astronomy at Vassar.⁴³ Her new teaching position would have entailed teaching and researching under Furness. It's unclear how and where Parsons spent her time that winter, but she held the Vassar position through the year she obtained her M.S.⁴⁴ Parsons herself linked the two institutions: when asking Frost to spend summer 1918 at Yerkes, she wrote, "I wish, if possible, to get a start toward my doctor's degree and incidentally to gain some astronomical knowledge useful in my work at Vassar."⁴⁵ Her research was important to Parsons not just for her academic ambition, but also to reinvest in Vassar and the next generation of women astronomers there.

But the connection was also material—Parsons wrote that she would come to Yerkes "unless, as I have explained...the trustees of Vassar feel that they cannot grant me the salary I have asked for next year."⁴⁶ Parsons could not afford to research at Yerkes without her ongoing Vassar work, unlike other women astronomers at the observatory who received their funding entirely through Yerkes/UChicago. For example, the first woman to undertake Ph.D. research at Yerkes, Jessie Short, received \$120 in fellowship funding from UChicago in 1914. Later, Evelyn Wornham Wickham, another recommendation by Furness, would earn \$30 per month for spending half her time working as a computer and half toward graduate work. This represented a pay cut from the \$50 per month paid to full-time computers but was attractive enough, especially combined with the prospect of finishing a UChicago masters' in a year, that Wickham rejected other job offers while waiting for Frost to confirm her half-time appointment.⁴⁷ Both were more attractive than the low-pay or even volunteer positions often available at institutions like Harvard College Observatory, all without the promise of an advanced degree.⁴⁸

Parsons professionally and physically moved frequently between the two institutions throughout this time: She was an assistant in astronomy at Vassar from 1916–1918, likely physically at UChicago/Yerkes through May 1916 to complete her master's, then at Vassar afterward. After she began Ph.D. work in the summer of 1918 at Yerkes, she taught as

an instructor at Vassar during the 1918–1919 year⁴⁹ before receiving Vassar’s Sutro Fellowship for the next year,⁵⁰ which enabled her to be in residence at UChicago/Yerkes for the next two years to complete her Ph.D.⁵¹ Thus, Parsons’s intent to make her Ph.D. research useful to her Vassar work can be seen not only as dedication to her students but also as a realistic, not truly “incidental,” evaluation of the possibilities available to her: women astronomers had to teach at and appeal to the fellowship funding boards of their women’s college alma maters to support themselves.

The details of how Parsons funded her Ph.D. by cobbling together funding from fellowships and teaching may be bureaucratic, but they are crucial to her story. While the understudied role of women in science has sometimes been explained away by a lack of archival information, Parsons’ encounters with the financial and bureaucratic systems of the academy generated a large archive, preserved in the institutional files of observatory director Edwin B. Frost. Further research would be required to ascertain to what extent Parsons’ patchwork approach to supporting her advanced study was an exception to a norm in which most women would not have had access to institutional-level support or higher-level teaching positions like her Vassar appointment. What is more widely known is that many women astronomers supported themselves through secondary education teaching in related subjects rather than astronomy. Nonetheless, Parsons’ case study can provide historians of science with at least an example of a strategic path through an astronomy career.

Parsons negotiated for her funding and positions throughout this time, exemplifying the attempts at containment of women in science during this period as well as strategies to circumvent those attempts. It may seem counterintuitive that the “exceptional” Parsons needed to negotiate just to remain a student. She was relatively well-resourced—she consistently had mentorship support, and she was always either employed as a teacher or holding a Vassar graduate fellowship. She never actually faced unemployment during this time, nor did she have to take a “research assistant” position at Yerkes of the kind that provided the cheap labor of the “factory observatory” models.⁵² A letter from Frost to Vassar president Henry MacCracken in support of one of her annual fellowship applications calls her “a hard worker, and...an exceptionally bright young woman...

we have high anticipations of her future work.”⁵³ To UChicago graduate dean R. D. Salisbury, Frost wrote, “Her work is of permanent importance to the [Yerkes] Observatory.”⁵⁴

However, her correspondence still shows the effort required to negotiate for funding, even for a scholar who had been consistently receiving it and who was considered exceptional. Her traveling fellowships were so unusual that it took considerable correspondence between Frost and Salisbury to obtain her tuition waivers. “We have no rule covering such cases,” Salisbury wrote, regarding attempts to gain tuition waivers for Parsons.⁵⁵ His language echoed the refrain of “no precedent” that had been used to bar the first women from any advanced study.⁵⁶ Administrative burdens like the difficulty in obtaining waivers were a known systemic constraint on the careers of women scientists at the time. Historians of women in science have made it clear that professional barriers such as tenure, requiring approval by mostly male committees, and anti-nepotism policies, making it harder for women who married fellow professors or graduate students to continue their own scientific careers, placed indirect but increasing pressure on women, requiring them to be “exceptional” or otherwise make exceptional sacrifices to continue pursuing science.⁵⁷ While the growing professionalization and bureaucratization of science academia has sometimes been seen as a gender-neutral response to the growing complexity of the field, it functioned as a way to disproportionately eject women under the guise of meritocracy.⁵⁸

While Parsons was still obtaining her Ph.D. at this time and did not face these particular barriers, her residency and tuition waiver requirements had a similarly chilling effect, slowing but not stopping her. However, overloading the administration with paperwork was a tactic that Parsons could and did turn to her advantage. When Parsons applied for her final fellowship from Vassar in 1919, she requested an avalanche of recommendations from Furness, Parkhurst, Frost, and several other UChicago professors: “This seems to be a case where ‘all contributions are gratefully accepted,’ and a note from you [Frost] would have a strong influence with the settlers of my fate.”⁵⁹ This contrasted with the way that mentorship often worked for men in astronomy, who might have many mentors across a scientific career but who needed much less aid at the predoctoral level. An 1897 campaign in which

astronomer Aaron N. Skinner mobilized a similar number of recommendation letters, seven, had the aim of not a one-year fellowship to finish a dissertation, but instead a prestigious position as director of the University of Virginia's McCormick Observatory.⁶⁰ Parsons needed as much documentation simply to get her Ph.D. as Skinner did to achieve the highest position available, to men, in the same field. This overwhelming documentation testifies to how difficult Parsons thought it would be to overcome the roadblocks to her career—to her credit, they succeeded in winning her the fellowship. She took no chances, and it worked.

Though some have suggested that women astronomers primarily stuck to the mentorships they formed in undergraduate women's colleges rather than depending on their graduate supervisors, Parsons demonstrated unusual professional networking and strategy even among women.⁶¹ Frost, though not generally known for his commitment to women's role in astronomy, to the degree that, for example, Harvard Observatory director Pickering was, nevertheless went out of his way to advocate for her within UChicago bureaucracy. Amid Parsons' frequent changes in both Vassar teaching job title and UChicago residence status during her Ph.D. years, Frost may have strategically exaggerated Parsons' position in statements to Salisbury to support her application for additional UChicago funding. For example, he wrote to Salisbury that she was the head of her department, Astronomy, at Vassar, which is unattested elsewhere, and Furness remained active there throughout.⁶²

Living up to her many mentors' recommendations, Parsons' graduate work was extremely successful within the field. She was elected to the American Astronomical Society at its 1916 conference, after the publication of her master's thesis.⁶³ In the year after her thesis was published by Yerkes in the *Astrophysical Journal*, it was cited twice.⁶⁴ Along with Parkhurst, she used Yerkes's 40-inch telescope to contribute numerous observations to the American Association of Variable Star Observers, denoted by her contributor code (Pr.) in *Popular Astronomy*.⁶⁵ She also reviewed New York museum exhibitions related to astronomy for *Popular Astronomy*.⁶⁶ Finally, she played her own role in the mentorship networks between women's colleges and Yerkes—as early as 1916, Frost asked her for recommendations about younger Vassar student Evelyn

Wornham Wickham, who would go on to work at Yerkes half-time. “Mr. [Frank] Schlesinger, having seen her lately, has recommended her highly, but you, knowing the situation and probably knowing her pretty well, can give me a very useful opinion in the matter,” Frost wrote, requesting Parsons’ input even over a National Academy of Sciences member who was a male astronomer.⁶⁷ Parsons continued recommending students throughout her time at Yerkes. In one case, Parsons reached out to Frost to recommend younger Vassar instructor Helen Davis without prompting by either Frost or Davis: “This is her first year at Vassar and she has already shown herself to be extremely capable and agreeable. I am saying these few words about her without her knowledge, thinking you might wish to have another opinion about her work and personality.”⁶⁸ Parsons seems to have borrowed Furness’s methods when it came to direct, confident sponsorship. She was thus very connected to the broader astronomical field in both formal and informal ways.

Parsons ended her graduate work at Yerkes with her Ph.D. dissertation, “Astrometric and Photometric Statistics of Certain of Hagen’s Fields Photographed with the 24-inch Reflector.”⁶⁹ However, her transition to life after Yerkes was still administratively fraught. Parsons returned home to Troy before the end of the summer, needing to rest her eyes from overwork.⁷⁰ She had taken her exams in July, and Frost petitioned for her to receive her degree in absentia in August, but UChicago abruptly declined.⁷¹ Parsons responded to the news unflinchingly, though grimly:

Your very explicit night letter...brought the bad news that the university faculty is a body of cold-hearted men. Of course, I’ve known that there was a possibility of their turning me down so it didn’t come as a serious shock. The idea of leaving a degree just unfinished does not appeal to me so I shall dig deep into my first month’s salary and be present at convocation.⁷²

Her letters throughout the summer are pointed and frustrated but also determined. The very possibility that an administrative technicality could have lost Parsons her degree after years of work demonstrates the tenuous position she was in. Only the good fortune that Parsons already had obtained the position of instructor in astronomy at Smith College—and specifically, its accompanying salary—enabled her to overcome this last major

administrative barrier to her UChicago education at September Convocation that year.

Tracking Parsons's work at Yerkes reveals both challenges and victories in her academic career. Because graduate-level research in astronomy has been so understudied in histories of women in science, uncovering her thesis and Ph.D. research alone contribute to our understanding of women scientists' achievements. At the same time, Parsons's story exemplifies the highly interconnected nature of mentorship, teaching, research, and funding that these graduate experiences reveal for women scientists. Instead of a one-way "pipeline" in which women's college undergraduates were "pushed" straight to factory observatories, Parsons instead moved frequently, leveraged resources, contributed both teaching and original research, and became an early mentor herself within a more complex relationship to both her undergraduate and graduate alma matres.

"The work is absorbing": Teaching at Smith (1921–1923)

With her job offer at Smith already in place by graduation, Parsons seemed ready not just to continue research in astronomy but also to give back to networks of women in higher education. Parsons began her teaching career at Smith College first as an instructor⁷³ before being promoted to assistant professor in 1922.⁷⁴ She replaced the late Yerkes patron Mary Murray Hopkins and joined a department including fellow Yerkes/UChicago M.S. Vera Gushee. In 1921, Parsons received her first entry in American Men of Science as a Smith instructor, resisting the trend that doctorates awarded did not correlate to actual employment in the field.⁷⁵

Teaching at the university level, though it could be seen as "women's work," was genuinely the most advanced career that could be achieved by a woman astronomer. Rossiter writes, "An associate professorship was the highest rank to which most women faculty could aspire realistically." At Smith, the position at the head of the department had only recently changed from being an associate professor to a full professor (during the transition between Mary Murray Hopkins, who had died in the position of associate professor in 1921, and Harriet Bigelow, who was head when Parsons was hired). Unlike Hopkins, Bigelow, and Gushee, Parsons had not been a student at Smith and was thus not considered as part of its

“protégée chain.” Thus, as an assistant professor, Parsons at Smith could be said to be at the peak of what was possible for her credentials and institution, though these limits were conditioned by gender.⁷⁶

But professorships did not necessarily mean prestige or research. Women’s colleges valued teaching over research and also did not have the equipment or time to allow faculty to pursue their own projects for publication.⁷⁷ It was out of the question to hope that a professorship at Smith might become a stepping stone to a senior or tenure track position at Harvard or UChicago, much less an observatory directorship, and women professors faced lower pay, less autonomy, and less job security than men, even as men were increasingly hired into senior positions at women’s colleges.⁷⁸

Parsons seemed to truly enjoy the work despite the busyness, corresponding with Frost about her opinions on beginner astronomy textbooks and wryly writing, “Smith is an interesting institution. The work is absorbing, though I never seem to accomplish anything”, the latter referring to her own research interests and lack of telescope time.⁷⁹ Her busy schedule matched other Yerkes women who had moved into teaching positions—Alice Farnsworth, who was an assistant professor at Mount Holyoke, wrote Frost, “Now if I could command clear skies and annihilate laboratory sections as well as alumnae guests, March plays, intercollegiate debate, etc. etc., I might get something done.” In this letter, Farnsworth also indicates that she had heard from Parsons recently and that she was “in good spirits, with plenty to keep her busy.”⁸⁰

Contrary to the “teaching over research” trend, though, Parsons did not leave behind astronomical research or her professional connections, which she found time to maintain while at Smith. She corresponded with Frost and with other Yerkes women like Alice Farnsworth. 1922, her second year at Smith, marked a high point of professional activity for Parsons. Without a formal appointment, she “spent some weeks at the [Yerkes] Observatory” and continued work alongside Farnsworth as well as Parsons’s coworker, Smith professor Harriet Bigelow, who was on sabbatical there.⁸¹ Later that year, she returned for the AAS conference held at Yerkes to celebrate the observatory’s 25th anniversary, accompanying Bigelow.⁸² She was also elected member of the American Association of Variable Star Observers in December 1922, which likely

originated from her Yerkes work—Parsons had contributed observations as early as 1919.⁸³ Her AAVSO membership especially fit well into both a tradition of women in variable star research but also into Parsons's professional networks—AAVSO's most active members feature Furness and Bigelow.⁸⁴

Rather than fitting a “pipeline” model in which women's colleges and mentors helped push their students to Yerkes graduate education, at which point the students either became research faculty, became long-term observatory employees, or “fell out” of the pipeline, Parsons is an example of a woman whose contributions to academic astronomy slowed but did not stop as she moved into undergraduate teaching. She retained close relationships with her mentors, and though she did not publish her research during her time at Smith, Parsons remained a professional astronomer through more than just her instruction. She engaged in both conventional teaching, conferences, and unconventional correspondence, travel, and amateur research ways of doing science. However, the high point of Parsons's astronomy in 1922 was also to mark an endpoint.

“After” Astronomy: Resignation and Later Life (1923–1986)

In 1923, at age 31, Parsons's formal employment in astronomy ended—she resigned her post at Smith upon marriage to New York lawyer Henry Twitchell Hall. In a heartfelt letter later archived with Frost's personal correspondence, he congratulated her on the announcement:

We do most certainly approve, however much we may regret the loss of one star in the celestial firmament of workers... We wish very much that you could take the young man on a trip to see the eclipse just the same... We should expect him to acquire the best astronomical knowledge from expert and intimate teaching, so that on the whole we shall expect that astronomy will gain a new recruit rather than losing one of its votaries.⁸⁵

The September 29 wedding was large, attended by over 200 people in Parsons's hometown of Troy and with much of her family participating.⁸⁶

As alluded to by Frost, marriage was a known tradeoff with Parsons's career. Academic women, even at women's colleges, were all but expected to resign upon marriage. The reasoning

was rarely made explicit, but the implicit assumption was that their household duties would interfere with teaching and research, and thus make resignation a forced choice.⁸⁷ Surveys of American Men in Science demonstrate that through the 1920s–40s, astronomy as a field shrank as the proportion of women astronomers and the frequency of marriage for women astronomers grew.⁸⁸ Parsons's exit from professional academic astronomy seemingly places her squarely back in line with conventional narratives of women's historical career paths.

However, Parsons resisted disappearing entirely from astronomy, proving Frost partly right that the field would not “lose one of its votaries.” She reappeared at Vassar for the 1925 eclipse “party” led by her longtime mentor Furness. The observatory engaged in a wide range of eclipse-related activities across campus, including taking glass plate exposures with the twelve-inch telescope and giving undergraduates time to observe contours.⁸⁹ Coordination and timing were crucial, and Furness engaged her former student Parsons in the key role of timekeeper: seated at a microphone connected to loudspeakers across campus and the long-distance telephone, she viewed the eclipse out a window through field glasses and was in charge of announcing the signal for totality (“Dash—Poughkeepsie says goodbye”) and calling out every fifth second during totality.⁹⁰ Furness found Parsons' help crucial, as technological and administrative issues prevented Furness from getting to her observations during totality.⁹¹ Though Parsons may not have been at the observatory's telescope, she facilitated both photometry and undergraduate learning during the eclipse, echoing her previous career. While Parsons's verbal timekeeping appeared, on its surface, less scientific than her previous work, she was maintaining long-lasting ties to Vassar, astronomy, and her mentors.

Even as Parsons raised her family, defining an “end” to her career remains difficult. She had three children, Harriet Amelia Hall in September 1925,⁹² Henry Parsons Hall in June 1928,⁹³ and Burton Harrington Hall in 1929.⁹⁴ In 1928, seven years after she had obtained the degree, her Ph.D. dissertation was published in the Publications of the Yerkes Observatory. It is difficult to say whether her dissertation would have been cited more often or earned her more recognition if it had been published while Parsons was actively employed as an astronomy professor. Frost often expressed regrets that Yerkes had not

published as much or as frequently as it had actually produced scholarship.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, as soon as her work was published, it was almost immediately favorably reviewed and seen as extremely significant, necessary work. Reviewer Francois Henroteau wrote, “This publication is extremely significant in that it furnishes positions and magnitudes of comparison stars with an accuracy which has rarely been attained. It is the only kind of photometry which will lead to important results, because it will permit the determination of the small fluctuations of light, so necessary when it comes to accepting or refuting modern theories of variable stars.”⁹⁶

Finally, when the AAS conference returned to New York, close to her residence in New Jersey, Parsons attended as a member as late as 1938.⁹⁷ She continued to teach—alumni notes from UChicago note that “Mrs. Hall lectures on astronomy before college clubs in the vicinity of New York” in 1926, and she even became a substitute teacher at Hunter College in the 1940s, before her daughter was married in 1947.⁹⁸ Perhaps the only definite end date that can be given to Parsons’s life as an astronomer is her death, on July 7, 1986, in Massachusetts.⁹⁹

Conclusion

How should historians of science make sense of Harriet McWilliams Parsons-Hall’s life in astronomy? Based on her extraordinary research, it may be tempting to valorize her as a success story despite the barriers to women’s participation in science; based on her later disappearance from the field, it is equally easy to read her as an example of acquiescence to those barriers. As a biographer, I want to defend the uniqueness of her life story, but as a historian of science, neither simple story is quite right.

Parsons’s biography encourages us to imaginatively and complexly understand “doing science” historically. While conditioned by constraints placed upon her by her gender and the trends of her chosen scientific field, her career became one of many “stars in the celestial firmament of workers”—part of larger institutions like Yerkes Observatory, astronomy departments at women’s colleges, and the field of astronomy writ large. The experience of discovering Parsons’s life in the observatory records is also an invitation for further research.

Examining institutions like Yerkes, at a large scale, and the strategies used by women scientists, at an individual one, will contribute not only to our understanding of women’s

worldmaking but also to the way that astronomers worked at a crucial moment for the field. The observational astronomy of the factory observatories and the proto-astrophysics of Yerkes and Parsons's research respectively represent competing "old" and "new" branches of the field. By understanding scientific communities, and the work that comprises "doing science," as contingent and gendered, biographies of women like Parsons contextualize the ways that the intellectual history of science intersects with the lived experiences of the scientists who shaped and were shaped by their fields. Women of course continue to be astronomers and astrophysicists today, beyond the moment of the "factory observatory" to contemporary academic communities.

Parsons's life exemplifies some narratives: that of the brilliant woman astronomer whose women's college mentors provided key support through the graduate school "pipeline" into teaching. Her "exceptionalism" and her personality led her to fight for funding and continual involvement in major conferences and publications, helped her resist others, such as the "outstanding women [who] held lowly titles and were recognized only belatedly."¹⁰⁰ Her academic career is crucial to answering questions about how a woman might achieve and navigate the status of that mythical, Curie- and Mitchell-like well-resourced scholar—largely via negotiating hard for fellowships on her own behalf and with the help of a large mentor network. She is a testament to the systemic barriers that still rose against even the most outstanding women. Parsons's post-Yerkes career also, importantly, complicates what is thought of as the career trajectory of a woman in science in the 1920s. She constantly moved between Yerkes and the women's colleges at which she taught both before and after her graduate degrees; she became a node in wide-ranging mentorship networks; she married and resigned her position after one of the most professionally awarded and active years of her career. In these ways and more, the life and career of Harriet McWilliams Parsons-Hall help us complicate available narratives around the role of women in science in the early twentieth century, and develop a nuanced understanding of female agency in a world where women still fight for basic rights and recognition.

Endnotes

1 The original paper on which this article is based was written for “Capturing the Stars: Exhibiting the History of Women at Yerkes Observatory in early 20th Century America” with Dr. Kristine Palmieri at the University of Chicago in Winter 2023, in preparation for the exhibit Capturing the Stars: The Untold History of Women at Yerkes Observatory at the University of Chicago. The archival materials used in this paper were collected and digitized by members of the Capturing the Stars Research Group at the University of Chicago. My thanks go to Andrea Twiss-Brooks, Kristine Palmieri, and Richard G. Kron for making these digital materials available for my use. This exhibition project is ongoing; see “Capturing the Stars,” The Online Cultural and Historical Research Environment, <https://voices.uchicago.edu/ochre/project/capturing-the-stars/>.

2 “Einstein, Albert,” University of Chicago Photographic Archive, apf6-00415, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

“Einstein, Albert,” University of Chicago Photographic Archive, apf6-00415, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

3 Louise Lerner, “Records Reveal Hidden History of Female Astronomers at Yerkes Observatory,” *University of Chicago News*, November 8, 2023, <https://news.uchicago.edu/story/records-reveal-hidden-history-female-astronomers-yerkes-observatory>.

4 Margaret W. Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America: Struggles and Strategies to 1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 175.

5 Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America*, 1.

6 Julie Des Jardins, *The Madame Curie Complex: The Hidden History of Women in Science* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2010), 36.

7 Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America*, 12.

8 Dorothea Klumpke, “The Work of Women in Astronomy,” *The Observatory* 22 (August 1, 1899): 295–300.

9 John Lankford, *American Astronomy: Community, Careers, and Power, 1859-1940* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 59.

10 Borrowing from market and economic history approaches, this model has been characterized as “proletarianized.” See Lankford, *American Astronomy*, 184.

- 11 Lankford, *American Astronomy*, 290.
- 12 Dava Sobel, *The Glass Universe: How the Ladies of the Harvard Observatory Took the Measure of the Stars* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), xii.
- 13 Harvard's women astronomers analyzed photographs of the night sky that had been taken through prisms, splitting the light from distant stars into their spectra (plural of spectrum). Lines that appeared on the spectra indicated the abundance of specific chemical elements based on the temperature of the stars, allowing them to be classified. Stellar spectra became a vital tool of astronomy in part due to the systematic work of the women of Harvard. Along with Harvard's observatory director Edward C. Pickering, Annie Jump Cannon has been credited with creation of Harvard's classification scheme because of how instrumental her detailed cataloging expertise was.
- 14 Sobel, *The Glass Universe*, 276.
- 15 Evelyn Hammonds and Banu Subramaniam, "A Conversation on Feminist Science Studies," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 3 (March 2003): 939.
- 16 Lankford, *American Astronomy*, 323.
- 17 Lankford, *American Astronomy*, 310.
- 18 Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America*, 16.
- 19 Kristine Palmieri, "They Were Astronomers," *Physics Today* 76, no. 11 (November 1, 2023): 42–49.
- 20 Lynn Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), "The University of Chicago, 1892–1920: The Western Yale and the Western Wellesley," 85.
- 21 Lerner, "Records Reveal Hidden History of Female Astronomers at Yerkes Observatory."
- 22 Palmieri, "They Were Astronomers."
- 23 Palmieri, "They Were Astronomers."
- 24 Lerner, "Records Reveal Hidden History of Female Astronomers at Yerkes Observatory."
- 25 1990 United States Census, Troy, Bradford County, Pennsylvania, District 47, Sheet 13, Row 88, digital image s.v. "Harriet M. Parsons," Ancestry.com.
- 26 At least one of Parsons's brothers, Judson A. Parsons, also shared her future occupation, teaching. See 1910 United States Census, Troy, Bradford County, Pennsylvania, digital image s.v. "Judson A. Parsons," Ancestry.com; "Obituary Record of Graduates of Yale University Deceased During the

Year 1945–1946,” *Bulletin of Yale University*, 1948, 72.

27 Harriet M. Parsons to Edwin B. Frost, letter and enclosed catalog pages with annotations, 21 April 1915, Yerkes Observatory Office of the Director records, Box 64, Folder 2, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

28 Parsons’ early enthusiasm for the field is clear too in this review: “Practically the whole field of Astronomy is covered, not exhaustively in any sense, but in such a way as to give the reader an understanding of the wonderful developments in this important line of scientific work.” See Harriet M. Parsons, “Review: The Call of the Stars by John R. Kippax,” *Vassar Miscellany*, July 1914, 644, Vassar Newspaper and Magazine Archive.

29 “Honors Awarded to Thirty Four Seniors,” *Vassar Miscellany*, February 19, 1915, Volume XLIV, Number 4 edition, 3, Vassar Newspaper and Magazine Archive; “1915 Commencement Exercises,” *Vassar Miscellany*, June 15, 1915, 5.

30 Alma L. Molin, “Fellowships Are ‘Big Business,’” *Vassar Quarterly*, June 1967, 3, Vassar Newspaper and Magazine Archive.

31 Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America*, 38.

32 Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America*, 30.

33 Pamela E. Mack, “Straying from Their Orbits: Women in Astronomy in America,” in *Women of Science: Righting the Record*, ed. G. Kass-Simon, Patricia Farnes, and Deborah Nash (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 81.

34 Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America*, 299.

35 Lankford, *American Astronomy*, 152.

36 Caroline Furness to Edwin B. Frost, 12 March 1915, Yerkes Observatory Office of the Director records, Box 63, Folder 3.

37 Frost to Furness, 19 March 1915, Yerkes Observatory Office of the Director records, Box 63, Folder 3.

38 Frost’s letter, though warm, refers to Parsons only as “your Graduate Fellow”—Furness did not (and seemingly did not need to) even provide her mentee’s name in her initial letter, so confident was she that Frost would accept her students once funded and sponsored.

39 Parsons to Frost, letter and enclosed catalog pages with annotations, 21 April 1915, Yerkes Observatory Office of the

Director records, Box 64, Folder 2.

40 “Notes from the Yerkes Observatory,” *Popular Astronomy* 24 (1916): 131.

41 “The Ninety-Ninth Convocation,” 6 June 1916, University of Chicago, Campus Publications, Convocation Programs, University of Chicago Library, 14.

42 Harriet McWilliams Parsons, “Photovisual Magnitudes of the Stars in the Pleiades,” *The Astrophysical Journal* 47 (January 1, 1918): 38–45, <https://doi.org/10.1086/142378>.

43 The odd mid-year appointment may have been due to the fact that Parsons was replacing instructor Fuller at Vassar. It’s unclear how many assistants Vassar’s astronomy department could support at one time. See “Appointments and Promotions in the Faculty,” *Vassar Miscellany Weekly*, February 18, 1916, Volume 1, Number 19 edition, 4, Vassar Newspaper and Magazine Archive.

44 Yerkes Observatory Staff, Group photograph, apf6-00399, 1916 50:1533 (2008-003), Series VI: Yerkes Observatory, University of Chicago Photographic Archive.

45 Parsons to Frost, 9 March 1918, Yerkes Observatory Office of the Director records, Box 74, Folder 7.

46 Parsons to Frost, 16 April 1918, Yerkes Observatory Office of the Director records, Box 74, Folder 7.

47 Palmieri, “They Were Astronomers.”

48 In 1899, when Mina Fleming became Harvard’s first woman ever to hold a title at the observatory, college, or university (as “curator of astronomical photographs,”) she was at the head of the team of 12 women. Even so, her \$1500 per year salary had led her to express frustration in her private journals: “Sometimes I feel tempted to give up and let him [observatory director Edward Pickering] try some one else, or some of the men to do my work, in order to have him find out what he is getting for \$1500 a year from me, compared with \$2500 from some of the other [male] assistants. Does he ever think that I have a home to keep and a family to take care of as well as the men?” Fleming, who had been initially hired as the Pickering’s maid, never received an undergraduate or advanced degree. See Sobel, *The Glass Universe*, 89.

49 *American Men of Science* lists Parsons as an instructor in astronomy at Vassar from 1918–1919, so it’s likely that the “salary I have asked for” refers to Parsons requesting promotion to instructor in April 1918 for the 1918–1919

academic year. However, Frost describes Parsons as an instructor in a letter of 23 April (in which he seeks to get her scholarship funding for her summer 1918 work at Yerkes), while Parsons remains optimistic but uncertain about this funding in a letter to Frost on 14 May (indicating she did not receive what she was requesting, whether it was a promotion, raise, or other funding). It's possible that Parsons requested first a promotion to instructor, then other fellowship funding for the same academic year. Notwithstanding, the bureaucratic back-and-forth required for Parsons to receive positions and funding at both institutions testifies to some of the systemic roadblocks she faced as a woman in science, regardless of the exact time of her position changes. See *American Men of Science: A Biographical Directory* (Bowker, 1949), 1002; Parsons to Frost, 14 May 1918, Yerkes Observatory Office of the Director records, Box 74, Folder 7.

50 Vassar Miscellany News, "Fellowships," *Vassar Miscellany News*, March 8, 1919, Volume III, Number 37 edition, Vassar Newspaper and Magazine Archive.

51 Parsons's frequent geographical whiplash may also contextualize the large archive of correspondence between Frost and Salisbury's dean's office at the University of Chicago, much of which includes vaguely passive-aggressive confirmations of people's residence status at Yerkes. If Parsons's frequent travel between institutions can be taken as typical, confirmation of residence would have been a genuinely daunting bureaucratic task when it came to the Yerkes women.

52 Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America*, 55.

53 Frost also demonstrated a clear awareness of the stakes of Parsons' application, continuing, "She has already accomplished much in her graduate studies and we have high anticipations of her future work, if conditions are such that she can undertake it. If she should receive such a fellowship you may be sure that *Vassar will be worthily represented*" (emphasis mine). See Frost to MacCracken, 4 February 1919, Yerkes Observatory Office of the Director Records, Box 77, Folder 4.

54 Frost to Salisbury, 12 February 1920, Yerkes Observatory Office of the Director Records, Box 81, Folder 6.

55 R.D. Salisbury to Frost, 4 October 1915, Yerkes Observatory Office of the Director records, Box 64, Folder 9; Frost to Salisbury, 1 October 1915, Yerkes Observatory Office

of the Director records, Box 64, Folder 9.

56 Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America*, 30.

57 Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America*, 196.

58 Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America*, xvii.

59 Parsons to Frost, 30 January 1919, Yerkes Observatory Office of the Director records, Box 77, Folder 7.

60 Lankford, *American Astronomy*, 159.

61 Lankford, *American Astronomy*, 152.

62 Frost to Salisbury, 23 April 1918, Yerkes Observatory Office of the Director records, Box 75, Folder 4.

63 Parsons's election to the AAS is slightly conflicted, as she is listed as one of 27 new members at the 1916 meeting, but is listed as a "visitor" apart from the membership in 1917. She was certainly a member by 1918. At the very least, we can say she was active in major astronomical associations and conferences. See "Report of the Nineteenth Meeting of the American Astronomical Society," *Popular Astronomy* 24 (1916): 583; "American Astronomical Society: Twenty-First Meeting, Dudley Observatory, 1917" 3 (1918): 290.

64 "Council Note on Stellar Distribution and Motions," *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society* 79 (February 1919): 289, <https://doi.org/10.1093/mnras/79.4.289>; W. J. A. Schouten, "The Parallax of the Pleiades," *The Observatory* 42 (June 1919): 240–45.

65 "Variable Star Observations," *Popular Astronomy* 27 (1919): 538.

66 She also leveraged her location in New York to help track down some of Yerkes's photographic plates—in connection to her review of this exhibition, Frost wrote her asking her to make connections between him and the American Museum of Natural History's curators. See Harriet M. Parsons, "Exhibit of Eclipse Photographs," *Popular Astronomy* 27 (May 1919): 333; Frost to Parsons, 1 May 1919, Yerkes Observatory Office of the Director records, Box 77, Folder 7.

67 Frost to Parsons, 17 April 1916, Yerkes Observatory Office of the Director records, Box 67, Folder 4.

68 Parsons to Frost, 3 March 1919, Yerkes Observatory Office of the Director records, Box 77, Folder 7.

69 Harriet McWilliams Parsons, "Astrometric and Photometric Statistics of Certain of Hagen's Fields Photographed with the 24-Inch Reflector," *Publications of the Yerkes Observatory* 4 (January 1, 1928): iii–322.

70 It is worth considering the relationship between the way that women astronomers often defended their role in the field in terms of women's superior skill at patient, detailed work and the consequences this could have for women astronomers' vision. If Parsons had not had the funds or stubbornness to return for Convocation, overworking her eyes could well have cost her her Ph.D. in addition to her health and time. See quote from Maria Mitchell, "The eye that directs a needle in the delicate meshes of embroidery will equally well bisect a star with the spiderweb of a micrometer" in John Lankford and Rickey L. Slavings, "Gender and Science: Women in American Astronomy, 1859–1940," *Physics Today* 43, no. 3 (March 1990): 60.

71 Frost to Salisbury, 8 August 1921, Yerkes Observatory Office of the Director records, Box 84, Folder 8.

72 Parsons to Frost, 27 August 1921, Yerkes Observatory Office of the Director records, Box 84, Folder 2.

73 Edwin B. Frost, "Notes from the Yerkes Observatory," *Popular Astronomy* 29 (1921): 595.

74 Smith College, Bulletin of Smith College Catalogue 1922–1923 (Smith College, 1920), 54, <http://archive.org/details/smithannu2021smit>.

75 Rossiter uses AMS as a proxy for recognized employment in scientific fields, highlighting that the gap between doctorate and employment was a key "leak in the pipeline," especially in astronomy in the 1920s. See James McKeen Cattell, *American Men of Science: A Biographical Directory* (Bowker, 1921), 528; Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America*, 132.

76 Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America*, 188.

77 Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America*, 174.

78 Lankford, *American Astronomy*, 358.

79 Parsons to Frost, 25 October 1921, Yerkes Observatory Office of the Director records, Box 83, Folder 10.

80 Farnsworth to Frost, 16 March 1922, Yerkes Observatory Office of the Director records, Box 82, Folder 9.

81 "News from Yerkes Observatory," *Popular Astronomy* 30 (1922): 512.

82 Parsons did not attend all conferences, even ones to which Smith sent other members of its staff (Bigelow, Gushee, and Fairfield, comprising the rest of the department, attended the December AAS conference in Boston months later. Gushee

had not attended the Yerkes conference). It is unclear what the selection criteria were among the department, although likely financial limitations played a part. Parsons had spent more time at Yerkes than either Bigelow or Gushee, possibly motivating the choice of conference attendance. See “Publications of the American Astronomical Society: Twenty-Eighth Meeting” 4 (1922): 335; Alumnae Association of Smith College, “Faculty Notes,” *Smith Alumnae Quarterly*, November 1922, <http://archive.org/details/smithalumn2223alum>.

83 Howard O. Eaton, “Monthly Report of the American Association of Variable Star Observers, Dec. 20, 1922,–Jan. 20, 1923,” *Popular Astronomy* 31 (1923): 207.

84 Dorrit Hoffleit, *Women in the History of Variable Star Astronomy*, Cambridge (Cambridge, MA: American Association of Variable Star Observers, 1993), 44.

85 Frost to Parsons, 12 June 1923, Edwin B. Frost papers, Box 2, Folder 2.

86 “Troy,” *The Canton Independent-Sentinel*, October 4, 1923, Year 53, Number 23 edition, Newspapers.com.

87 Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America*, 15.

88 Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America*, 141.

89 These included coordinating via telephone with other observatories in the path of totality, hosting prominent astronomers, capturing other images using smaller cameras and artists with telescopes, and engaging many undergraduate students both in the astronomy department and out to time contact and observe shadow bands. See “Eclipse Notes,” *Vassar Miscellany News*, January 21, 1925, Vol. IX, No. 26 edition.

90 Caroline E. Furness, “Eclipse Observations at Vassar College,” *Popular Astronomy* 33 (April 1925): 221.

91 Caroline E. Furness, “An Astronomer Views the Eclipse,” *Vassar Miscellany News*, February 7, 1925, Vol. IX No. 27 edition.

92 Associate Alumnae of Vassar College, “Contemporary Notes: 1915,” *Vassar Quarterly*, September 1926, 378, Vassar Newspaper and Magazine Archive.

93 “Contemporary Notes: 1915,” *Vassar Quarterly*, February 1929, 71.

94 “Contemporary Notes: 1915,” *Vassar Quarterly*, May 1930, 126.

95 As early as 1921, Frost had accepted and expected

to publish Parsons' thesis within two years, a delay already required by cuts to Yerkes's Publication Fund. It was to take another five years. See Frost to Parsons, 29 October 1921, Yerkes Observatory Office of the Director records, Box 83, Folder 10.

96 "Review of Publications (Amateur Telescope Making, Ed. Ingalls; Astrometric and Photometric Statistics of Certain of Hagen's Fields, Parsons)," *Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada* 22 (December 1928): 438.

97 "Publications of the American Astronomical Society: Sixty-First Meeting, New York City, 1938" 9 (January 1, 1939): 213.

98 "Doctors of Philosophy Alumni Notes: Practical Astronomy and Astrophysics," *University of Chicago Magazine*, July 1926, University of Chicago Library; *American Men of Science: A Biographical Directory* (Bowker, 1949).

99 "Death Notices," *Boston Globe* (1960-), July 11, 1986.

100 Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America*, xvi.

Editors' Biographies

Thomas Harb is a junior majoring in linguistics and anthropology, with a certificate in folklore. Although he is not pursuing a degree in history, it remains one of his primary academic interests, especially its interface with other disciplines. His other interests include the languages and cultures of Northern Europe and Central Asia. He works on the editorial team at the UW Press, and as a documenter for the Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures. He enjoys cooking, watching TV, and playing contrabass balalaika in the UW Russian Folk Orchestra.

Zhengzai “Charles” Pei is a graduating senior at UW-Madison. His majors are history and political science. His primary area of interest is the history of crime in contemporary China. Charles is currently working on his senior thesis, which explores the origins and socioeconomic impacts of organized crime in China’s neoliberal era using a combination of oral history and local archives. More broadly, Charles is interested in histories of institutions, thoughts, gender, and labor in modern East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Americas. Beyond academics, Charles enjoys watching films, jogging, and reading.

Avery Beirne is a graduating senior majoring in history with certificates in medieval studies and classical studies. Her main area of interest is Medieval European History, with a specific focus on The Wars of the Roses and the Tudor Period. After graduation, Avery is planning on taking a gap year in order to get some work experience before pursuing a Masters degree. Outside of academics, Avery enjoys cooking new recipes, reading, crafting, and spending time with friends.

Grace Pietruszka is a graduating senior, majoring in art history and anthropology. Her interests include the captivating world of European Renaissance paintings, where the convergence of artistic brilliance and historical context has always fascinated her. Northern Renaissance artist, Hieronymus Bosch, fascinates her with his imaginative symbolism and human body depictions. Beyond academic endeavors, Grace finds joy in crafting, reading, and watching films. Looking ahead, Grace’s aspirations align with a future in art museums and/or galleries, where she hopes to contribute to the preservation and exhibition of artistic treasures, bridging the gap between academia and public appreciation.

Emmett Robison is a freshman majoring in political science and history with a certificate in classical studies. His interests include the Cold War and its ripple effects on contemporary politics, the politics of Rome's transition from a Republic to an Empire, and the correlation between the quality of history education in the United States and political ideology. He hopes to pursue a career in academia and continue studying the connections between history and politics. Outside of academics, Emmett can be found singing with Jewop A Capella, giving tours of the campus, and enjoying the nature of the Madison area.

Sophie Stein is a graduating senior majoring in art history and anthropology. Her primary area of interest is medieval European history, particularly with regards to Ireland and the United Kingdom. Sophie is currently working on her senior thesis, which explores the enigmatic marginal imagery of a Christian prayer book produced at the turn of the fourteenth century in England. This project combines her fascination with medieval manuscripts, monstrosity, imagination, and dreaming. Sophie is also a Curatorial Assistant at the Chazen Museum of Art. After graduation, she hopes to work at an art museum or gallery. Outside of academics, Sophie enjoys cheering for Badger sports teams, crafting, and cooking.

Rose Weithaus is a graduating senior at UW-Madison, majoring in political science and history with a certificate in public policy. Her primary areas of interest are Renaissance era Europe, the founding of the United States, and US foreign policy of the mid to late 1900s, including WWII and the Cold War. Rose also works as a Mosse Oral History Project Intern, where she contributes to the growing oral history library at UW-Madison, specifically those related to German social and cultural history. She recently had a piece published on the Mosse blog. After graduation, Rose hopes to work on a political campaign prior to attending law school. Outside of history, Rose enjoys attending Badger sporting events, trying new restaurants, and reading.

Tianchen Zhang is a junior studying history with a concentration in East Asian history and Cold War topics. This year, Tianchen engaged in research focused on Sino-American relations and worked as a journalist, covering global political news.

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