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## Sins Against Our Soles: The Morality and Hygiene of Nineteenth-Century Women's Shoes

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Sins Against Our Soles: The Morality and Hygiene of  
Nineteenth-Century Women's Shoes

By

Nicole Rudolph

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
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Sins Against Our Soles: The Morality and Hygiene of  
Nineteenth-Century Women's Shoes

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University of Nebraska, 2019

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Our understanding of the Victorian woman has long centered around the idea of the “Angel in the House,” made famous by Coventry Patmore’s 1854 poem. This mythical ideal to which a middle-class woman should endeavor can be found in endless numbers of nineteenth-century texts and has become an oft-referenced concept in modern historiography. Representations of the attributes of the ideal woman circulated widely in society, pictured in etiquette books, medical journals, and especially advertisements. They were an ever-present reminder to women of the social norms governing their roles and life trajectories. As consumers, women were responsible for the presentation of themselves and their family, and the purchases they made reflected their adherence to these societal rules. In following fashion they walked a thin line between expectations and excess. While existing scholarship addresses discourse and representations of the ideal woman trope, explorations of how actual nineteenth-century women navigated these norms are lacking. Women’s writings and thoughts are often left unpublished and lost to history. However, that does not mean that they had no voice or power. This thesis addresses the issues of stereotyping and submission that often surround our understanding of women in the nineteenth century by examining the material and documentary evidence they left behind. In addition to the published prescriptive

literature, research into the extensive personal documents of Sarah Bradlee Codman provides an opportunity to see how the social framework that surrounding one woman manifested in everyday life. Additionally, artifact analysis and reconstruction of a surviving pair of Codman's boots will critically examine how an object can inform our understanding of historical discourse. This project illuminates the experience of women in the nineteenth century and foregrounds their voices in relation to fashionable objects.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

On May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1864 Sarah Bradlee Fletcher Codman wrote a small note in her diary stating “Ogden Augusta & I shopping.” A simple notation, though it was not an ordinary day of shopping for Sarah and her husband Ogden. They were completing a seven-month tour of Europe with three weeks in Paris and clearly intended to acquire a large assortment of fashionable goods before traveling home the following month. There are surviving receipts for ten shops that day alone, amounting to 2332.50 francs.<sup>1</sup> Along with parasols, jewelry, pipes, and baby clothes, the couple made two separate stops for shoes. In J.A. Petit’s shop at 334 Rue Saint-Honoré, Sarah purchased a pair of satin shoes, gold half-boots, and another pair of half-boots in *baptiste* with buttons (Appendix A, Fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> The most remarkable fact about this buttoned pair of boots is that they still exist in the collections of Historic New England, along with a number of Sarah’s other garments (Appendix A, Fig. 2). Made from a now yellowed cotton plain weave cloth, they are trimmed in bright blue silk piping, with matching blue silk cord and tassels delicately curling around the top edge, fastened with tiny buttons wrapped in tarnished gold thread. Gracefully curving in the popular Louis XV style, the heel is built of stacked

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<sup>1</sup> A calculation at the end of Ogden Codman’s monthly records converts 1428.98 francs to 57.10 pounds. This 25.2 rate converts the day to 92.56 pounds. By the price of gold, it would be 912 dollars in 1864.

<sup>2</sup> The first pair of boots is listed as *moutantes d’ore*, which is an old word for half-boots. The second pair is listed as ditto *baptiste noeuds*. *Baptiste* is variation on *batiste*, or what is also called *cambric*. Defined as a plain weave bleached linen or cotton, it was not necessarily as thin as our modern *batiste* textiles. *Noeuds* refers to node-like *passementerie* buttons.

leather, and the sole broadens to an ever so slightly curved square toe from a narrow waist. Inside, pasted to the insole, the paper label from J.A. Petit still rests, pristine.

Sarah's life was not remarkable in any particular way. Born in 1842 to James Bowdoin Bradlee, she grew up in a wealthy Boston family, married Ogden Codman in 1861, had six children, and passed away in 1922. Her oldest son, Ogden Jr., went on to be a famous architect.<sup>3</sup> What makes Sarah unique today is the massive quantity of documentation that survives from her and her family. Hundreds of receipts, travel records, diaries, letters, and even a list of the books she read in 1860 can be found in the Historic New England Library and Archives. The Codman family home still remains in Lincoln, Massachusetts as a museum, donated along with all of the objects and paperwork from the family. Sarah painstakingly remodeled the grounds and brought the home up to fashionable standards after Ogden repossessed the property in 1861; more than half a century after it was sold from the family. The remnants she left there show us a picture of a young woman who, like many others, clearly had an interest in fashionable goods. Sarah was far from obsessed with fashion; she only occasionally wrote about it to her older sister living in France or in her other family letters. But the surviving garments, photographs, and receipts reveal her investment. A shopping spree in Paris would have been the dream of many American women, and Sarah clearly took advantage of that opportunity.

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<sup>3</sup> Ogden Jr. co-wrote *The Decoration of Houses* (1897) with Edith Wharton and built homes for John D. Rockefeller Jr. and Cornelius Vanderbilt II.

### The Influence of Boots

French shoes in particular garnered a reputation for quality and style that carried across the Atlantic. As one shoemaking journal proclaimed in 1858, “The French are generally acknowledged to understand the art of boot and shoe making better than those of any other nation.”<sup>4</sup> American shoemakers were even rumored to use false French labels in order to sell their products.<sup>5</sup> Sarah’s Parisian boots would have been highly desirable for their lineage alone. Back in Boston, when Sarah had turned 18, she started to keep track of her own expenses. She recorded purchasing five pairs of boots ranging in price from four to eight dollars in the year leading up to her 1861 marriage. Her Parisian pair cost 45 francs, around 18 dollars in 1864.<sup>6</sup> It may seem a great deal more expensive, but the cost of shoes in America had doubled between 1860 and 1862 due to the war, and doubtless had become even more costly by 1864.<sup>7</sup> But it wasn’t just the cost, or even the quality of French shoes, which defined them as desirable. “French,” as a descriptor, was used for everything from kid leather, to heels, to even implying a fashionable style. And with these shoe trends came a litany of theoretical dangers to any young woman willing to wear them. Printed literature from doctors, religious figures, and reformists fervently warned against high-heels, tight shoes, excessive fashions, and self-indulgence. It wasn’t

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<sup>4</sup> W.H. Richardson, *The Boot and Shoe Manufacturers Assistant and Guide*. (Boston: Higgins, Bradley & Dayton, 1858), 12.

<sup>5</sup> Richardson, *The Boot and Shoe Manufacturers Assistant and Guide*, xviii.

<sup>6</sup> Calculated based on the value of gold. This would have been affected by war time inflation and the same conversion done in 1861 would have been closer to 8 dollars.

<sup>7</sup> “Winter Fashions,” *Saturday Evening Post* (Dec 20, 1862): 6.

just the body that was in danger from fashion, but morality as well, and women from the “fashionable” upper and middle classes were considered particularly at risk.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that we know so much about the woman who chose to purchase these boots provides an unusual opportunity to not only explore the world of a nineteenth-century American woman, but to understand how her relationship with fashion and beauty manifested itself in a surviving good. Bringing a material culture examination of the Codman collection into dialogue with analysis of both modern historiography and primary literature surrounding Victorian women’s health and fashion, this thesis considers the following questions: Where did the fashions for high heels, tight shoes, and thin soles originate and why did they persist? To what extent did women adopt these styles in order to fit the social values of the “ideal woman”? How did medical and social discourses represent these styles and their relationship to morality? Why was there so much concern over women’s bodies and health in the first place? How can the material record provide insight into how upper and middle class women negotiated these contradictory discourses through consumption practices?

Together, this set of questions probes the expectations of women as both (social) bodies and consumers in the mid-nineteenth century through their relationship with shoes. Through artifact analysis of Sarah’s boots and historical research, this study illuminates the particulars of how issues of health, fashion, and morality were interconnected. This specific pair was chosen because it is representative of the

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<sup>8</sup> “Physical Decline of American Women,” *Water-Cure Journal* 29, no. 3 (Mar 1860): 34.

fashionable styles of the period and due to their unique provenance. While other shoes of this period were also examined, the purpose of this study is not to create an overview of styles, but to focus on a singular example of microhistory as an opportunity for deep, rather than comparative, research. Text from etiquette books, medical journals, advertisements, fashion journals, and newspapers provide a basis for understanding the expectations and framework set forth for women in the mid-nineteenth century. These varying types of advertisements and prescriptive literature were widely published throughout all forms of literature, and would have been accessible by Sarah, as well as the vast majority of American women. Additionally, research into Sarah Codman and her family's documentation allows for analysis of how her role as a woman, and a consumer, manifested itself in a surviving good. The study focuses on the years between 1830 and 1885, when the concerns over shoe styles and health were at their peak, and is centered on Sarah's experience as a young woman operating within this framework.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

American women in the mid-nineteenth century navigated a careful path between individualism and conformity to communal norms. In the decades since, historians have returned repeatedly to the topic of social expectations for Victorian women, especially in relation to social stratification and the rise of consumer culture. These societal rules stretched far beyond simple etiquette. With regard to women, their morality and health were deeply public issues. In their roles as consumers and bodies, women held the responsibility of the family and thus, the future. These were important issues during the nineteenth century, and continue to generate new historical inquiry today. In what follows, I sketch three conversations within this broad scholarship on nineteenth-century women and social norms, as well as the way this thesis intervenes in these discussions.

### Historiography and the Agency of the “Ideal Woman”

While the image of the “ideal woman” was articulated ad nauseam in nineteenth-century texts, historians have recently begun to dismantle the verity of this concept for everyday women. Early historical research focused on the extensive literature and media that presented the ideal image of the Victorian woman. Louis W. Banner’s *American Beauty* and Barbara Welter’s *The Cult of True Womanhood* are of particular note.<sup>9</sup> According to Welter’s exploration of ideal womanhood, the nineteenth-century woman

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<sup>9</sup> Louis W Banner, *American Beauty* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983); Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* Vol. 18, No. 2 (1966): 151-174

was expected to endeavor towards the virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. The literature of the nineteenth century, which Welter's article cites heavily, proclaimed that through the enactment of these virtues, women would become the perfect wife and mother, guiding the family through example. These tropes were projected throughout discourse aimed at women, in the form of magazines, newspapers, novels, sermons, and etiquette books. Though she acknowledges the limitations of this discourse based analysis, Welter's article fails to explore how real women actually adhered to these standards. In *American Beauty*, Lois W. Banner delves even deeper, with entire chapters devoted to the various styles of different eras, but still the intention is to flesh out the perfect woman rather than to examine every-day womanhood.

Other scholars have attempted to dismantle the validity of this image and explore the gap between discourse and actual practice. Peterson's *No Angels in the House* and Nancy F. Cott's *Passionlessness* instead present alternate, and personal, views of how nineteenth-century women functioned.<sup>10</sup> Peterson in particular rejects this idealized notion in her article. She argues that historians have stereotyped the middle-class woman of the nineteenth century, and pushes scholars to deconstruct the perceived reality of these "angels." Instead, Peterson examines the women of the Paget family, showing how these women chose their own path which often did not follow the ideal standards set before them. This micro-historical methodology is imperative to uncovering how

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<sup>10</sup> M. Jeanne Peterson, "No Angels in the House: Victorian Myth and the Paget Woman," *The American Historical Review* Vol. 89, No. 3 (1984): 677-708; Nancy F. Cott, "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850," *Major Problems in the History of American Sexuality* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2002): 131-141.

Victorian women actually interacted with the world around them. Nancy F. Cott follows a similar method in her essay on the myth of passionlessness, exploring the stereotype of the sterile and frigid Victorian woman. She examines both public and private texts to expose the source, intent, and veracity of the concept of passionless women. While it seems that women would suffer the most from such a stereotype, Cott finds that by exploiting this concept they were able to claim moral superiority, and therefore improve their status. This example shows why it is essential to understand not only what the social expectations of women were, but how women negotiated them.

It may be easy to assume that women are powerless when they follow social expectations, but the reality is far more complex. While the “ideal woman” that appears in prescriptive literature is submissive, a shift in historical methodology has revealed new sources and theories that challenge that image. In the case of American women in the nineteenth century, a fair amount is known about what is said about them and what they are told to do. Etiquette manuals, magazines, and newspaper articles giving advice on every part of life are in no short supply. What has been missing is an understanding of how women navigated this social framework in practice. If research is limited to the published documentation that survives, it is easy to assume that women were constantly controlled and berated for their choices. A focus on discourse alone creates a picture of a very strict environment where women had little or no power over their own bodies, purchases, or activities. However, even if we understand the framework in which these women lived, it does not explain how these conditions were experienced.



This is the issue that Georg Iggers presents as part of the push towards a micro-historical approach towards research.<sup>11</sup> Instead of settling for broad generalizations and abstractions developed from sources such as widely circulating books and newspapers, a focus on individual experience grounds reality and reveals the inconsistencies. In both *Passion and Power* as well as *Major Problems in the History of American Sexuality*, Kathy Peiss assembles numerous articles and readings that aim to tease out these lesser-known histories through focused research on singular documents.<sup>12</sup> Often these texts are personal letters, diaries, or memories, which open up a window onto the various experiences of everyday people. Her books give us a view of a range of tactics and efforts utilized by subjugated or “invisible” groups, some operating within their cultural restrictions and others not. By going beyond the prescriptive literature, the actions of these groups can be better understood.

By the same token, in order to find evidence of the lives of ordinary women, rather than just the ideal, we need to look for what is not there, as well as what is present. The voluminous publication of advice on morality alone suggests that perhaps women were not universally following the social rules and needed constant reminders. Even for those who did respect these conventions, there is more to inhabiting norms than a simple label of “submission” would imply. Evidence shows that women were not necessarily ineffectual and docile in the nineteenth century, and their agency should therefore not be

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<sup>11</sup> Georg Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Kathy Peiss, *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); Kathy Peiss, *Major Problems in the History of American Sexuality*, (Boston: Wadsworth, 2002).

ignored in research today. Indeed, articles and books of the period which attempted to understand the nature of women proclaim that they that were the most powerful influencers. Their choices in the household, including how they raised their children or provided culture within the home, did more to shape society than masculine arenas. It is this forgotten agency that this thesis explores, drawing on literature that acknowledges individual women's capacity for action, even that directed toward normative role fulfillment. Sarah Codman's individual experience, as well as the choices women made in self-fashioning, provide insight into how the concept of the ideal woman operated in practice, beyond stereotypes.

Theorists who have looked at practice and power, such as Michel de Certeau, emphasize the importance and power of the body in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, though his focus is on the way the physical self is adapted for the situation.<sup>13</sup> De Certeau's theory allows for a person to have agency and influence in their circumstances through what he defines as "tactics," even if they are the subjugated body. Tactics are everyday actions and choices that are made which allow someone to navigate and operate within a given framework. This is not the same as "resistance," as the dominant framework is not necessarily challenged. A similar argument figures in Saba Mahmood's, work on women's roles and dress in the Egyptian Islamic piety movement.<sup>14</sup> Mahmood theorizes that agency is not always an act of resistance to dominant powers. Instead she

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<sup>13</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>14</sup> Saba Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival," *Cultural Anthropology* vol. 16, no. 2 (May, 2001): 202-236.

emphasizes that women striving to develop and maintain a virtuous life are in fact exercising their agency. Whereas Mahmood is looking at contemporary women, specifically looking for evidence of this type of action within a historical context can be difficult, as written records often focus on the normative framework and ideals, rather than the reality of how women enacted their agency.

### Gender, Consumer Culture, and Self-fashioning

According to Kay Boardman, Mary Louise Roberts, and Victoria de Grazia, conspicuous leisure and consumption had become a visible definer of the middle-class in the nineteenth century, and this responsibility was left to the woman.<sup>15</sup> She was given the task of filling the home with goods that encouraged culture and education, dressing herself and her family, and managing household costs. It was a narrow path to tread, however. Though women were seen as important consumers, they were also potentially prone to excesses. Just like women may have exercised power by fulfilling the expectations for ideal women, the relationship of women to consumer culture can be both construed as potentially powerful and subjugating. Roberts looks at both sides of this issue in “Gender, Consumption, and Commodity Culture,” emphasizing that though consumerism in the nineteenth century came with connotations of excess and weakness,

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<sup>15</sup> Kay Boardman, “‘A Material Girl in a Material World’: The Fashionable Female Body in Victorian Women’s Magazines,” *Journal of Victorian Culture* Vol. 3 (1982): 93-110; Mary Louise Roberts, “Gender, Consumption, and Commodity Culture,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 103, No. 3 (June, 1998): 817-844; Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough, *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1996).

women held control over their house and family through their given role. They had power over the appearance and identity of the house as well as the pocket book, and companies did not ignore this.

Boardman, as well as Lori Anne Loeb, seek to understand the life of nineteenth-century women through their engagement with advertisements.<sup>16</sup> These sources are particularly important, because they would have been prominently displayed in everyday printed media for many upper and middle-class women. Barbara Korte takes a similar approach, looking at women's magazines of the mid-nineteenth century to better understand both readers and editors.<sup>17</sup> Much like the concept of the ideal woman, however, the aforementioned literature draws attention to the display of women as consumers, rather than the enactment of consumption in individual lives. While thorough financial records like Sarah Codman's are rare, more can be understood about the everyday interactions between women and goods by looking not only at the opinionated discourse that surrounds them, but at the goods themselves.

How material objects are utilized informs our understanding about both the item and its user. Modern analysis of consumption has emphasized that it is not a passive act, but instead choices are made that connect directly to the development of the "self." As Goffman points out in his dramaturgical model of social interaction, we perform our "self," whether sincere or contrived, projecting an idealized version.<sup>18</sup> There is

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<sup>16</sup> Lori Anne Loeb, *Consuming Angels* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> Barbara Korte, "Between Fashion and Feminism: History in Mid-Century Victorian Women's Magazines," *English Studies* Vol. 96, No. 4 (2015): 424-443.

<sup>18</sup> Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959).

motivation to create a positive impression, which encourages a specific type of presentation depending on the desired communication. Essentially, we form a “self” to present to others, though it may vary according to the audience and situation. Furthermore, it is not just through our actions and words that we develop this presentation. Eicher and Roach-Higgins define this concept of “self” as a combination of dress, bodily appearance, and discourse.<sup>19</sup> Since we typically encounter and situate individuals first based on their dress and appearance, these serve as precursors to verbal communication. With this understanding, consumption as it relates to physical appearance plays a major role in all of our interactions and is often considered incredibly important in daily life. As Daniel Miller argues in *Stuff*, our choices of clothing are not superficial or idly made.<sup>20</sup> They are an extension of the body and the person that is specifically chosen to communicate our personal concept of “self.” While clothing itself can be seen as a form of communication, the relationship between body, dress, and identity is deeply entangled.<sup>21</sup>

This is a point addressed at length in Joanne Entwistle’s seminal work, *Fashioned Bodies*.<sup>22</sup> Entwistle demonstrates how fashion is tied to sex, class, income, and tradition. She also emphasizes that our experience of our body is lived through and embodied by dress. It can bring us comfort, or discomfort, and is in constant interaction and

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<sup>19</sup> Joanne B. Eicher and Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, “Dress and Identity,” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, Vol. 10, Iss. 3 (1992): 1-8.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Susan B. Kaiser, *The Social Psychology of Clothing: Symbolic Appearances in Context* (New York: Fairchild, 1997).

<sup>22</sup> Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress, & Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015).

negotiation with our movements. Even the act of getting dressed takes on meaning, as we prepare the body for social interactions. Similarly, in an ethnographic study looking at women's modern wardrobes in the UK, Sophie Woodward articulates an extensive view of how women navigate this important interaction with their clothing in *Why Women Wear What They Wear*.<sup>23</sup> The act of choosing what to wear each day is ordinary enough that we easily forget how influential it can be. Though we are unable to reach back and discuss the real time fashion choices made by women in the nineteenth century with the women themselves (as Woodward did), this universal concept of the importance of fashion consumption and use in everyday lives is impossible to ignore.

Despite this, fashion remains largely absent from the traditional historical narrative. This is partly an artifact of disciplinary gender bias, where dress was often grouped together with "women's work" or other topics considered to be feminine, and therefore less worthy of attention. Until the advent of a new social history in the 1960s, historians had largely ignored activities and individuals operating outside (or below) the long-standing categories of political and economic history. Joan Scott in particular raises this issue in *Gender and the Politics of History*, arguing that instead of just trying to find exemplary women who navigated their way into male-dominated areas, value should be given to the other categories as well.<sup>24</sup> Recognizing the importance and validity of traditionally feminine research areas, such as fashion, is essential in understanding the role that women played within society. Through research on consumer goods and

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<sup>23</sup> Sophie Woodward, *Why Women Wear What They Wear* (New York: Berg, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

women's history this topic is beginning to expand into other areas, though arguments for the validity of fashion research are still being made.<sup>25</sup>

### Hygiene and the Female Body (and Body Parts)

Modern looks at the female body, such as Barbara Brook's *Feminist Perspectives on the Body*, acknowledge the complex nature of this seemingly singular entity.<sup>26</sup> A woman's body has been viewed as an object, a display, a fetish, a source of health concerns, and even a source of moral concerns. Through most of these lenses, the female body (and particular body parts) emerge as objects, rather than subjects. How this process of objectification occurs is part of Thomas J. Csordas' examination in *Embodiment and Experience*.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, Csordas also encourages us to see the body as a subject of culture, rather than an object in relation to culture. Though experts and social institutions of the nineteenth century may have objectified women's bodies, it is imperative to avoid the same viewpoint when trying to understand them. Instead, we must historicize the particularities of how women's bodies were understood and represented in the nineteenth century, and the changes occurring to the concept of the body itself. The notion of the physical body, its development, and its care, was shifting drastically due to medical advancements and new scientific fields such as anthropology and phrenology. Along with

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<sup>25</sup> Yuniya Kawamura, *Doing Research in Fashion and Dress: an Introduction to Qualitative Methods* (Oxford: Berg, 2011); Beverly Lemire, *The Force of Fashion in Politics and Society* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Barbara Brook, *Feminist Perspectives on the Body* (London: Longman, 1999).

<sup>27</sup> Thomas J. Csordas, *Embodiment and experience: The existential ground of culture and self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

new ways of knowing the body came new concerns for its moral and physical health, especially in relation to women's bodies.

Science became one method of reinforcing cultural and moral beliefs about women and their bodies. Cynthia Eagle Russett tracks the process of how and why these scientific "facts" developed in order to understand some of the reasoning behind gender roles in the nineteenth century in *Sexual Science*.<sup>28</sup> The medical field itself was distinctly gendered, and those roles spilled over into their interactions with patients and diagnoses. Men, through the eyes of mostly male physicians, were seen as the neutral standard, while women required scrutiny in order to be understood. Alison Bashford establishes how this mindset affected women's experiences with medicine and their bodies in *Purity and Pollution*.<sup>29</sup> It created an acute anxiety over women's bodies, particularly in reference to reproduction and sexuality, which extended beyond medical practices into all aspects of their physical appearance and behavior.

This concern spilled over into a society grappling with the shift in industry, social order, and medicine that took place over the nineteenth century. Specifically looking at the hands, Peter Capuano's *Changing Hands* explores how this distinct part of the body plays a role in this shift.<sup>30</sup> They can be viewed as independent entities and objects of their own right throughout their characterization in various literature, symbolizing society's growing anxieties. The concern with body parts during this time period was not unique to

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<sup>28</sup> Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>29</sup> Alison Bashford, *Purity and Pollution: Gender, Embodiment and Victorian Medicine* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1998).

<sup>30</sup> Peter J. Capuano, *Changing Hands: Industry, Evolution and the Reconfiguration of the Victorian Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).



hands, however. Hermann Meyer first published his influential book on feet, *Why the Shoe Pinches*, in 1857, causing an upheaval in the world of shoemaking. He believed that what affected the feet went far beyond the appendage and threatened the health of the entire body. In *Le Corps Redressé*, Georges Vigarello discusses the emergence of hygiene, exercise, and diet during this time as a way to control and format the body, avoiding the potential pitfalls of poor health.<sup>31</sup> Emphasis was placed on posture, movement, and body language alongside the larger concepts of hygiene. Though his text does not focus on clothing, it was one of the many ways mentioned wherein the body could be reshaped and adjusted in response to societal cues.

This constant interaction between body and social structure is what Bourdieu terms as *habitus*.<sup>32</sup> By responding to these external circumstances through reshaping appearance via dress and movement, both the individual and society are reproduced. The concept of habitus originated with Marcel Mauss, who saw it as a sort of collective societal memory whose techniques and traditions were transmitted between people (rather than being innate traits).<sup>33</sup> As an example, Mauss mentions the differences between generations in movements like swimming or marching, pointing out how they have shifted to meet new expectations and needs of a changing society.

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<sup>31</sup> Georges Vigarello, *Le Corps Redressé: Histoire d'un Pouvoir Pédagogique* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004).

<sup>32</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984).

<sup>33</sup> Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the body," *Economy and Society* vol. 2, iss. 1 (1973): 70-88.

Women in the nineteenth century were also responding to shifting body ideals, dress, and movement through their own methods of adjustment and transmission of techniques. Their bodies were considered part of their social role and required constant adjustment to maintain societal standards. However, as Susan Bordo argues in “Feminism, Foucault and the Politics of the Body,” this response to societal cues does not mean that women were entirely shaped by dominant outside forces.<sup>34</sup> She draws in part on Foucault’s understanding of power as generative, or “subjectivizing,” rather than merely coercive. In both *The History of Sexuality* and his later work on technologies of the self, Foucault emphasizes that our selfhood is not disciplined only by external constraints, but also through our own attempts at self-correction in conformity to normative frameworks.<sup>35</sup> With regard to nineteenth-century women, these insights are useful in our understanding of women’s bodies not only as terrains of control or struggle, but also as sites for self-fashioning.

Though the control exerted over the bodies of women may seem exhaustive, women responded with their own methods of self-adjustment. In *Women and Health in America*, Judith Leavitt outlines some of the ways women reclaimed control over their own bodies through a range of responses.<sup>36</sup> Even with laws on abortion and birth control emerging in the mid-nineteenth century, women still sought autonomy as both individuals

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<sup>34</sup> Susan Bordo, “Feminism, Foucault and the Politics of the Body,” in *Up against Foucault: explorations of some tensions between Foucault and feminism* (London: Routledge, 1993): 179-201.

<sup>35</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984).

<sup>36</sup> Judith Leavitt, *Women and Health in America* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999).

and groups. That's not to say that women as a whole entirely resisted or accepted, or even encouraged, these new medical and social regulations. Instead, it was their decisions in how they navigated these frameworks that gave them agency. Women were able to shape their body and image to reflect their beliefs and adherence to societal norms.

### Clothing, Bodies, and Patriarchy

In the discourse about women and nineteenth-century fashion, the corset is ever present as the example of controversy when it comes to the body and control. Possibly even more contentious today than when it was commonly worn, modern historians still have difficulty coming to an understanding of this garment. Some see it as a source of patriarchal control, a way of constraining and sexualizing women's bodies.<sup>37</sup> Mel Davies even argued for a connection between tight lacing of corsets and a decline in birth rates during the nineteenth century.<sup>38</sup> For others, it was a way for women to have control over their own bodies and images.<sup>39</sup> Much of the nineteenth-century literature on corsets tends to be generalized and male dominated, particularly coming from the medical establishment, so it can be difficult to think of women as forming their own individual opinions on the topic. In reality, most of the opinions voiced about corsets by women

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<sup>37</sup> Leigh Summers, *Bound to Please: A History of the Victorian Corset* (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2001).

<sup>38</sup> Mel Davies, "Corsets and Conception: Fashion and Demographic Trends in the Nineteenth Century." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (1982): 611-641.

<sup>39</sup> Valerie Steele, *The Corset* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001); David Kunzle, *Fashion & Fetishism* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2004).

were expressed by their decision to continue wearing the garment. Today, it is universally understood to be an incredibly complex piece of clothing worthy of numerous books and articles. Though high heels, tight shoes, and thin soles were often mentioned alongside tight-lacing as dangerous fashion in nineteenth-century sources, they have not yet been afforded the same scrutiny.

Indeed, most books on the topic of shoes today are presented as overviews of style, rather than exploring their connections to historical context or the body. Giorgio Riello's *Shoes* is considered one of the standard texts on this topic.<sup>40</sup> It covers the wide range of shoe history, but limits the content to what is essentially a timeline of styles. Nancy E. Rexford goes further in her text *Women's Shoes in America*, including an entire section on the social significance of women's shoes in the nineteenth century.<sup>41</sup> It is clear from Rexford's exploration of shoes and social context that this topic area deserves far more extensive development than her book allows for. She only begins to posit why stereotypes and class-distinctions of women's shoes during this time began to appear, and far more intensive research would be necessary to unpack those ideas. The compiled chapters in *Footnotes on Shoes*, edited by Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferriss, also acknowledge the many roles that shoes play within society, though not specific to the nineteenth century.<sup>42</sup> Kimberly Alexander's *Treasures Afoot* also focuses on this connection between footwear and society, through a series of micro-historical studies

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<sup>40</sup> Giorgio Riello, *Shoes: a history from sandals to sneakers* (Oxford: Berg, 2006).

<sup>41</sup> Nancy E. Rexford, *Women's Shoes in America, 1795-1930* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2000).

<sup>42</sup> Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferriss. *Footnotes on Shoes* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

based in the eighteenth century.<sup>43</sup> This particular examination of material culture illuminates the deep entanglements between people and shoes. No such research has been directed into the nineteenth century. My study will fill this gap, connecting shoes back to the broader narrative of women's experiences and empowerment through fashion. These are not isolated objects meant to be observed from a purely aesthetic viewpoint, but are indicative of the society in which they existed.

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<sup>43</sup> Kimberly Alexander, *Treasures Afoot: Shoe Stories from the Georgian Era* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press: 2018).

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This thesis adopts standard social/cultural history and material culture research methods, including document analysis of contemporaneous print media and literature, archival research, artifact analysis, and lastly, a reproduction of the boots was constructed and worn to better understand the choices made in their design and the dynamic physical experiences that result from their relationship with the body.

#### Document Analysis: Prescriptive Literature

I specifically look at prescriptive literature from fashion journals like *Godey's Lady's Book*, *The Art Journal*, and *The English Domestic Woman's Magazine*, books on morality and etiquette including *Golden Steps for Youth*, *Good Health*, *Dress Reform*, and *Sesame and Lilies*, medical advice from conferences, *Popular Science Monthly*, and other journals, as well as newspaper advice columns from 1830 to 1885. There is a focus on advice which references fashion and consumerism for women, particularly on the subject of shoes. Terminology relating to commonly controversial elements of shoes, such as “high heels,” “thin soles,” and “tight slippers” were examined, in addition to broader topics of “shoe health” and “shoemaking,” through online databases of historical periodicals, books, and newspapers.<sup>44</sup> The majority of sources originated in America, though some articles were re-printed from British documents. It was common for articles to be re-printed throughout various regions, often without original citations or context.

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<sup>44</sup> ProQuest, the Internet Archive, and Accessible Archives were primary search engines.

The wide variety of sources publishing similar, if not identical, articles on the topic reveals how widely circulated this type of prescriptive literature was. These sources serve to develop a basic picture of discourse on normative feminine identity for the nineteenth-century woman.

### Micro-History and Sarah Codman's Archive

I next look at how these standards applied to an individual woman. A focus on one individual story, jumping off from one pair of boots, follows the historiographic tradition of microhistory, coupled with what Pennell refers to as material microhistory.<sup>45</sup> While situating Sarah's story, and the story of her shoes, within the broader context of history is essential, her personal experience resists the trap of stereotyping and generalizing that can easily occur with approaches that only focus on the *longue durée* which Braudel argued for.<sup>46</sup> While these approaches may give us a more standardized or scientific view of history, they have a tendency to leave out groups that are not considered influential in the broader topics of politics, economy, and the like. If women of the nineteenth century are viewed only through a hegemonic lens which deems them without major influence, then we ignore the value of half of the population. In order to be of interest to that sort of traditional history, women must operate within the male arena

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<sup>45</sup> Sara Pennell, "'Pots and Pans History': the Material Culture of the Kitchen in Early Modern England," *Journal of Design History* vol. 11, no. 3 (1998): 201-216.

<sup>46</sup> Fernand Braudel, "History and the Social Sciences: The Long Duration," *American Behavioral Scientist* vol. 3, iss. 6 (1960): 3-13.

and the historical framework that so often attempts to exclude them, most often in a revolutionary sense. Those that continued to operate within societal bounds are forgotten.

When we only look to these traditionally masculine domains, women as individuals and their history, their documents and material evidence, do not show up nearly as often. The objects they left behind, the diaries and receipts, the possessions, thoughts, and memories, were not included in museum collections. They weren't considered important enough to take into the official History of the world, so when looking for them, it was easy to assume women did not produce these things on the same scale that men did. Instead of looking only within the traditional framework of momentous occasions and famous figures throughout time, a different approach must be taken to understand the importance and impact of women. As Iggers mentions, microhistory is a history of people who are often left out of other methods.<sup>47</sup> It provides a way to understand those groups that are treated as hegemonic, or even stereotyped. In the case of the nineteenth-century woman, the stereotype insists that they were disconnected and private, unaware of the world outside of their home.

Sarah is an example that resists this stereotype and brings the theory of separate spheres into scrutiny. She operates within her societal norms and expectations, but is far from disconnected or totally determined by them. The experiences she writes about shows an understanding and involvement with politics, the economy, foreign affairs, and other elements of the public sphere. By observing her narrative, the theories and

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<sup>47</sup> Georg Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1997).



constructs that perpetuate those stereotypes are tested. Personal diaries, letters, and receipts survive from Sally and her family at the New England Historic Society, which provides an individual context and direct records about the extant boots. These personal narratives will also illuminate the culture of everyday life and, as Henretta explains, “underscore the importance of human agency.”<sup>48</sup>

Sarah Codman’s family records survive at the New England Historical Society Library and Archives in Boston. The family’s papers and objects were donated along with the family home in the twentieth century. Originally, the purpose of the research done at the archives was to potentially find a written record or receipt for the boots which allowed them to be dated properly. However, it became clear that there was an extensive number of personal documents that were also in the collection, which allows for a rare micro-historical examination of a woman’s nineteenth-century records. The constructs of the ideal woman and her experiences with morality, health, and fashion can be accessed through these unique narratives. I spent several days pulling files from the archives which potentially had a connection to Sarah and her immediate family. These documents were then photographed and later transcribed in full, as the hand-writing was difficult to examine for general topics of interest, and many of the receipts were in French and required translation. Sarah’s diaries were of particular note, although it seems that she copied them over into uniform journals later in life, possibly altering or omitting entries. Though daily activities are well recorded, very little is said about personal thoughts.

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<sup>48</sup> James Henretta, “Social History as Lived and Written,” *The American Historical Review* vol. 84, no. 5 (Dec 1979): 1318.

However, these journals do corroborate the dates on other records, such as receipts or her husband's account book. In order to gain a greater insight into Sarah's opinions and concerns, letters she wrote to her sister Mary and husband Ogden were examined and transcribed (Appendix A, Fig. 3). Most are dated between 1860 and 1867 as she was writing to her sister Mary living in Europe. Because even important topics could only be discussed through discourse in letters at that time, there is an extensive amount of information about both daily life and major events.

While Sarah's documentation cannot provide us with her opinions on every topic area, there is a wide array of commentary that can be situated within the broader historical context. Since she was not writing to record these thoughts for posterity, there is an honest quality to them which does not ignore even the seemingly mundane events of daily life which are so rarely recorded. How fashion, consumption, health, appearance, and morals all interacted with her life on a daily basis is apparent through a variety of moments that she describes.

### Material Microhistory

The documents that Sarah left behind bolster the evidence provided by her surviving material objects as well. Indeed, the family's written records document the purchase history of the extant boots under examination. While her boots can stand on their own as an object of fashion, their life as an object of desire, consumption, use, and possession is more difficult to understand. In the same way that Sarah's written records can be taken apart and analyzed for details which enrich the broader strokes of history,

her boots can also be theoretically dismantled for information. Their design and construction was a series of conscious decisions made to produce an object that is both fashionable and functional. They are meant to be experienced and worn, creating a dynamic relationship between person and object. An investigation of the boots, their construction, and their design was made through both an examination of the original pair as well as a reconstruction project. In addition to this, contemporary literature from the period on shoe manufacturing and design, such as *The Boot and Shoe Manufacturers Assistant and Guide* and *Why the Shoe Pinches*, help to inform an analysis of the boots as a product, both desired and admonished.

Drawing from material culture methodology, this thesis takes shoes to be complex objects: objects with a lifespan understood beyond their present physical state. Several material culture scholars serve as exemplars of this approach towards objects. Karin Dannehl, in *Object Biographies*, defines the concept of this type of biography as “a tightly defined, finite time frame, the focus on a subject against a context, and the express purpose of highlighting exceptional or unusual features.”<sup>49</sup> It is by understanding how an object is both typical and unique that we can comprehend its lifecycle and connection to society. Giorgio Riello is another supporter of this theory, both in *The Global Lives of Things* as well as “Things that Shape History.”<sup>50</sup> Defining various types of relationships

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<sup>49</sup> Karin Dannehl, “Object Biographies: from production to consumption,” *History and Material Culture: A student’s guide to approaching alternative sources* (New York: Routledge, 2009): 124.

<sup>50</sup> Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, *The Global Lives of Things: The Material Culture of Connections in the Early Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2016); Giorgio Riello, “Things that shape history: material culture and historical narratives,” *History and*

as history *from* things, history *of* things, and history *and* things, Riello emphasizes the various ways that objects and historical narratives can interact. While exploring the changes in shoe design would give us a history *of* things, this thesis will push further into pulling history *from* things and understanding how an object can help to shape and change our view of history.

The process of studying an object and its life can take many different approaches. Fleming, Hodder, Zimmerman, and Kopytoff provide possible methodologies for the object or thing-based analysis.<sup>51</sup> Fleming sets it up as a series of operations and object properties to be filled in. He creates a very systematic approach which centers around the artifact. Zimmerman also focuses on the artifact, choosing to focus on a very specific method of classification and object purpose by looking at the concept of workmanship. Hodder, an archaeologist, widens the scope to emphasize the relationship between humans and material things through his concept of entanglement, an intense and multi-faceted thing-human relationship that can be viewed longitudinally and from numerous angles. Kopytoff's "cultural biography of things" also discusses objects and their lifespan in reference to their relationships to people and cultural contexts. He argues that objects and their values (symbolic, economic, and cultural) are unstable, subject to moves along

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*Material Culture: A student's guide to approaching alternative sources* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>51</sup> E. McClung Fleming, "Artifact Study: A Proposed Model," *Winterthur Portfolio* 9 (1974): 153-173; Ian Hodder, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships Between Humans and Things* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); Philip D. Zimmerman "Workmanship as Evidence: A Model for Object Study." *Winterthur Portfolio* 16, No. 4 (Winter 1981): 283-307; Igor Kopytoff, "The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process," *The Social Life of Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

the spectrum of commoditization and singularization. Crucially, their status at any given point in time reveals much about moral and ethical systems.

Another method for exploring artifacts comes in the form of reconstruction, which provides a window onto an understanding of the society and maker that brought it into existence. Tim Ingold is a fervent supporter of this method, extolling the benefits of this in-depth process.<sup>52</sup> He states that reproduction or reconstruction provides insight into *how* to find an answer, rather than the answer itself. Other researchers emphasize the methodology of reconstruction as a way to gain insight into the lives of those less present in the historical record, such as women.<sup>53</sup>

Connecting these methods of reconstruction, entanglement, and object biography allows for a deeper understanding of how women and their objects of fashion would have intertwined. Because these boots were not meant to be static objects, but to interact with the body, that area of research is crucial to understanding that relationship. Daniel Miller states that “a study of clothing should not be cold; it has to invoke the tactile, emotional, intimate world of feelings.”<sup>54</sup> The tactile connection is essential when we are discussing an object and how it interacted with the body. The reconstruction allows for handling and manipulation of the object that would otherwise be impractical. The methodology of

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<sup>52</sup> Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>53</sup> Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750-1950* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009); Mary C. Beaudry, *Findings: The Material Culture of Needlework and Sewing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives* (New York: Knopf, 1982); Elizabeth Wayland Barber, *Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1994).

<sup>54</sup> Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010): 41.

reconstruction has also been employed as a form of object analysis, looking at how a detailed technical exploration of a garment can provide information not otherwise available.<sup>55</sup> Both Sarah Woodyard and Carolyn Dowdell have published theses on the benefits of historic reconstruction that go beyond what simple observation can achieve.<sup>56</sup> In particular, this thesis will explore how reconstruction can support and clarify written literature, as well as provide details that cannot be examined through traditional methods of artifact analysis.

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<sup>55</sup> Janet Arnold, *Patterns of Fashion 2: Englishwomen's Dresses and Their Construction c. 1860-1940* (Hollywood: Quite Specific Media Group Ltd., 1972); Linda Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2002); Nancy Bradfield, *Costume in Detail: 1730-1930* (New York: Quite Specific Media Group Ltd., 1997); Susan North and Jenny Tiramani, *Seventeenth-Century Women's Dress Patterns* (London: V&A, 2011); Norah Waugh, *The Cut of Women's Clothes: 1600-1930* (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 1968).

<sup>56</sup> Sarah Woodyard, "Martha's Mob Cap? A Milliner's Hand-Sewn Inquiry into Eighteenth-Century Caps." Master's thesis, University of Alberta, 2017; Carolyn Dowdell, "The Fruits of Nimble Finger: Garment Construction and the Working Lives of Eighteenth-Century English Needlewomen." Master's thesis, University of Alberta, 2010.

## CHAPTER 4: SALLY

Sarah Fletcher Bradlee was born on July 19, 1842 in Boston to James Bowdoin Bradlee and Mary Perrin May Bradlee. Her father, James, was a partner in his father's international trade firm and was from a well-established Boston family. Sarah, or "Sally" as everyone called her, was one of seven children, though both of her brothers died at a young age. Marrying Ogden Codman at age nineteen, the two moved out to his family home in Lincoln, Massachusetts in 1862. During the first twenty-two years of marriage they had six children, two of which were born in France after the family was forced to move to re-coop financial losses from the Boston fire of 1872. Sally eventually passed away on June 23, 1922. It would be easy to simply mark Sally's life in these standard moments; birth, marriage, children, and death. For many women of her epoch that is all that survives. But these milestones tell us almost nothing about Sally as a person and individual, nor do they give us a sense of the texture of her everyday experience. Fortunately, extensive records from her family archive allow us to piece together some insights into her life.

### Marriage

Sally's personal account records begin in 1860, when she kept a small book recording her personal purchases (Appendix A, Fig. 4). Among items such as gloves, tea, books, and housekeeping, she regularly gave small amounts to "a little girl" or "a little boy," implying donations to those begging on the streets. Though the book only keeps

track of purchases for less than a year, the time between finishing school and marrying, Sally also purchased five pairs of boots and two pairs of kid slippers during that time ranging from four to eight dollars. Her diaries also survive, though they have been re-written into uniform books at a later date and were likely altered by Sally in her later years. Most keep to brief facts and events, with only occasional mentions of her thoughts or opinions. One small page in her 1860 diary lists the books that she read throughout the year, including topics of philosophy, Christianity, geology, travel, and a few fictional memoirs. Of particular note are *Portrait of a Christian, Drawn from Life*, discourses by Dr. Channing, and *Propria Quae Maribus*. The first two readings are strongly religious and moralistic. Dr. Channing is a physician and a pastor who wrote often on the topics of sin, morality, mental health, and homeopathy. *Portrait of a Christian, Drawn from Life* was published in 1858 and follows the progress of a woman's "Christian life" through her journals and correspondence, compiled by her pastor.<sup>57</sup> She passes away at age 36 after working herself into illness through extensive charitable efforts. *Propria Quae Maribus*, on the other hand, is a novel about the social difficulties a young American woman encounters when adopting bloomers.<sup>58</sup> While most of the characters are morally opposed to the attire, in the end the young woman seems to have won the argument and is happily married. Sally makes no notes as to her thoughts on these books, but they show that she was clearly aware of the on-going discussions of morals, health, and fashion.

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<sup>57</sup> Chandler Robbins, *Portrait of a Christian, Drawn from Life* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1867).

<sup>58</sup> Charles Reade, *Propria Quae Maribus: A Jeu D'Esprit* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1857).



Much of what is knowable about Sally's personality in the early years of her adult life comes from letters she wrote to her sister Mary. The sisters were separated for long periods, mostly due to Mary moving to France, and they constantly wrote letters back and forth discussing both the mundane and major events. A flurry of writing occurred between 1867 and 1868 as Mary fought to have her engagement approved by their father. He had four daughters, having lost both sons when they were young, and Mary was the oldest. Traveling to France at age 27, she met and fell in love with a Commandant in the French army who was older, with children from his previous marriage. It's not shocking that her father was hesitant. However, Sally's thoughts on the matter were very different. Regardless of his nationality, religion, or children a "gentleman is a gentleman all the world over." She urged Mary not to back down and stuck by her opinions.

Don't be bothered into giving him up and don't sacrifice yourself, this once for in marrying I think the persons own feelings are the only feelings to be consulted, it is not father that has to marry him and what difference except in a selfish point of view can it make to him, about the C- age, or any of the other points he objects to. You have all my sympathy and all the small help I can give on from side. In fact in your place I am afraid I should away with him if he would and there would be married.<sup>59</sup>

Clearly Sally had strong opinions on marriage and a woman's say in the matter. She, too, had a difficult engagement. Though she had romantic connections to Odgen for years prior to their marriage in 1861, their engagement wasn't announced until 1860. It wasn't her indecision that was the issue, in fact she wrote to Mary that she chose Ogden when she was fifteen and never regretted it. Instead, she waited for years to broach the subject of engagement with her father, sending Ogden off to Europe more than once to slow the

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<sup>59</sup> From a letter dated October 20, 1867.

advancement of their relationship. "I shall probably start tomorrow on a voyage of about 10 months duration & at the end of that time you have promised to tell your father how happy you have made me," Ogden wrote in June of 1858.

By his second trip in 1860, Sally's father knew of the engagement and apparently did not agree to it as yet. Returning home early due to illness in June, Ogden explained that "I have told him that I shall not try to see you without his permission. I hope he will not hold me to this and I rely a great deal upon your persuasion to make him consent to my coming to you at once." Though she had to leave the final agreement of terms to her father and future husband, Sally was clearly controlling the situation from the beginning and calculated how to be successful in getting what she wanted. Eventually, Mary too managed to receive their father's approval and married Louis Gaillard in 1868. In the end, it took numerous recommendations of the Commandant from family friends and a trip to France from their parents, including legal paperwork that kept any inheritance out of Louis' hands. The sisters had not sat idly by and simply wished for their marriages, leaving the decision up to their father. Instead, they actively fought for their right to choose their husbands.

### Family

In their other letters, Sally often discusses the day-to-day life of friends visiting, family illnesses, travel, children's education, and general gossip. She laments being trapped in Lincoln, too far away from Boston for most of the major social events. The family would often take the train into town to visit her parents or for the children to

attend classes, but this wasn't always a convenient option. A rainy November in 1872, Sally was casually bemoaning the lack of travel options as many of the horses in Boston were ill with equine flu. She continues on that the previous evening she happened to look out the window and notice a large fire in the direction of Boston. Though news of the Great Boston Fire spread quickly the next day, she was hesitant to believe that what she had witnessed was such a devastating event. They traveled into town a few days later to take stock of the damage. Though the homes of her family members all survived, the properties which Ogden leased out had not been so lucky. These properties were their main source of income, and the resulting devastation left them in a precarious financial position. "We are feeling very miserable just now not knowing what to do at all." Sally writes, "I was just feeling so comfortably settled with these servants & they will all go as soon as they are told. We mean to wait until the end of the week before telling them, but I feel sure that that will be the end for what I have is about all we shall have to live on now." Sally references the income she received annually from her father's estate earlier in 1872, guessing it will be three or four thousand a year. This was clearly not enough to live on at their current location, as by 1874 Sally and her family had closed up the house in Lincoln, moving to Dinard, France in an attempt to save money. It would be nine years before they returned.

Much of Sally's life was spent at great distance from members of her family. Even when she did live in Massachusetts, her parents and other sisters regular traveled around, spending weeks or months at a time where weather or social life was improved. The letters that they wrote back and forth were the only means of communication and

connection. In the case of her sister Mary, who moved around Europe for much of her married life, even massive events of turmoil and grief had to be written on a sheet of paper. The sisters had to be well aware of major world events and politics which impacted them on both sides of the ocean. When the French government went through upheaval at the beginning of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870, Sally wrote of following the events in the newspapers closely. Mary's husband, Louis, went off to fight and was subsequently injured and taken as a prisoner of war. Mary herself fled Paris in the fall. In October Sally wrote "I don't want Metz to surrender for I want the French to get the better of those dreadful Prussians. And I do want it to surrender for then why can we feel sure of Louis' safety, for as a Parisian he could do nothing & those sorties of which we continually hear would be at an end."<sup>60</sup> Her oldest child, too, was well educated in the political events taking place, "Little Ogden is so much interested in the war tried to read the war news in the newspaper..."<sup>61</sup> Eventually Louis was released and the family moved to Russia in 1873 after years of unrest where he worked as a diplomat.

Their letters sway between raw and personal moments to the global events taking place oceans away. Though Mary and Louis survived the war, tragedy still came in 1874 when Mary's only child passed away. Sally wrote emotionally, promising to keep on her mourning wear for the child as the "only token of love and respect that I can show to the memory of the poor little darling whom I have never met."<sup>62</sup> She could not be there to

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<sup>60</sup> The Siege of Metz lasted over two months, ending in late October, and was a major Prussian victory.

<sup>61</sup> October 16, 1870.

<sup>62</sup> May 14, 1874.

comfort her sister, or share in the grief, so clothing became the closest connection that they had. This was not the only mention of mourning wear throughout their letters. In fact, as Sally noted, she was keeping on her blacks from their last loss. Their father had passed away in January of 1871, and Sally was still in mourning attire over three years later. In the long and emotional letter that was sent to Mary after his death, Sally writes a short section near the end on the family's plans for mourning.

Mother sent for Becky to come here and she came yesterday and we each are to have two dresses one of cashmere with a little trimming of the same, for the morning & a dress of Henrietta cloth & outside jacket trimmed a good deal with crape. We are to wear white collars & sleeves... Kitty, Fanny, & I will be just alike & mother deeper.<sup>63</sup>

Since Mary could not come home for the funeral, this was how she was able to connect to the family and still take part in the rituals. Even as of March, it was still a topic of discussion as Sally wrote that she approved of Mary's clothing choices for mourning and included a swatch of Henrietta cloth from her own wardrobe pinned to the letter. In fact, the family decided to keep on their blacks until May of 1874. Sally wrote in March that she was having a new dress made for when they would leave off their blacks, because she "literally had nothing to wear," though snidely remarks that fashion doesn't really matter with living in Lincoln.

### Fashion

Despite her disappointment in Lincoln's social scene, references to clothing and purchases are sprinkled throughout the letters, some even written on extra notes or

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<sup>63</sup> Crape, cashmere, and Henrietta cloth were all regularly used for mourning fabrics as they had no shine.

sideways in the margins. Sally mentions purchasing “Moreno” wool to have a new common dress made in November of 1872, as hers “has got so shabby now that I am ashamed of it except for in here.” This concern over appearance arises a number of times throughout the letters. Sally mentions not attending a friend’s wedding, another friend’s party, and even her own sister’s party, all because she didn’t have a dress that was appropriate. That’s not to say that she wasn’t regularly purchasing fashion. Another undated note lists the desired items that Sally, Ogden, her mother, and sister Alice would like for Mary to purchase in exchange for the 1250 francs they are sending. It includes multiple bonnets, a black velvet coat, four or five dozen gloves, eighteen shirts, and a few cravats. Sally even apologetically asked her sister to bring back some items when the engagement situation looked dire and Mary was likely to be traveling home.

Sally’s own trip to Europe resulted in a massive spending spree in Paris. Receipts survive for items such as a sable gown, paletot, corsets, yardage of lace, a grey taffeta gown, hats, bonnets, and a small fortune of baby clothes and layette items. In all, over 6000 francs in bills survive from the short time they stayed in Paris. One of their final purchases was for a number of trunks; presumably they had overgrown their current storage. It was clearly not a typical shopping trip for Sally, and she took advantage of the opportunity. Though, these purchases were not hers alone. Ogden, too, made large purchases of suits, shirts, clothing, cravats, pipes, jewelry, boots, and more. The number of receipts is almost equally split between charges to Madam Codman and Monsieur Codman. In addition to all of the new ornaments, both Ogden and Sally spent the day at a photographer’s studio in Paris to capture the moment (Appendix A, Fig. 5&6). She chose

to wear a gown trimmed in a geometric pattern of lace, draped in a large lace mantle. Considering there were quite a few receipts for lace items in the days prior, it seems likely that Sally is showing off some of her latest Parisian fashions. Ogden even holds an umbrella in some of the photographs, having purchased one at Gravel's a few days earlier. They had at least four different photographs taken that day in various poses and copies can be found scattered throughout the family albums. Even if Sally would be stuck in the distant town of Lincoln, tending to her family and their home, she would have evidence of just how fashionable she could be.

Looking at the key points of her life, Sally was a fairly ideal nineteenth-century woman. She married relatively young, had a large number of children, took great care of her family, participated in social events, and even took particular pride in renovating the Codman family estate. She was interested in fashion, but recognized there were times to be frugal. Her time was spent raising and educating her children, as well as running the household. But, even within these boundaries, Sally found ways to be independent, educated, and express strong opinions of her own. The evidence that she left behind offers a glimpse into the everyday existence of a nineteenth-century American woman, a woman who didn't operate within the traditionally masculine sphere that makes it into records. Her voice cannot speak for all her peers, but Sally's story at the very least illuminates the variety and nuances that can be forgotten if such a diverse group is homogenized on the basis of gender alone. The world she navigated was complex and ever changing, and Sally, just like every woman, made conscious decisions each day on

how to approach these issues. Fashion, health, morality, and womanhood were a constant presence in Sally's life, just as they were for every woman.



## CHAPTER 5: A FASHION EPIDEMIC: HYGIENE AND THIN SOLES

“There was no apparent cause for the disease excepting that as the doctor said he had but considered her a strong well woman for some time, she had had some hiding trouble... She did not catch the disease at all it came to her & she had not strength to rally under it. I think I told you how her mind wandered & for the last few days she (knew) nothing at all. I saw her last on Monday & she died the following Friday.” Sally writing her sister Mary. June 15, 1871.

Sally wrote often about illness of the family or friends. Most commonly it was a mention of a sister or friend’s confinement, referencing them as being “sick” for an expected period of time, including her own concern about being “ill” and “shut up” in Lincoln over the winter since their Boston houses burned down in the 1872 fire. Illness was by no means a new topic of discussion during this period, but the way in which it was dealt with was shifting rapidly. As Vigarello mentioned, it was a time in which medicine sought to reshape the body through the means of diet, exercise, and hygiene.<sup>64</sup> Sally’s father, for example, was prescribed daily fresh air and a diet of meat and brandy to help strengthen his heart and prevent further spells of weakness after what was likely a heart attack.<sup>65</sup> The further the disease progressed, the less that could be done to treat the

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<sup>64</sup> Georges Vigarello, *Le Corps Redressé: Histoire d’un Pouvoir Pédagogique* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004).

<sup>65</sup> From letter to Mary dated January 25, 1871: “However Dr Oliver had said if possible he must not be allowed to stay in bed, but must be got down stairs and out in a close carriage for half an hour if possible. They had changed his food entirely & gave meat & brandy every two or three hours, but poor father had completely lost his desire for food so that he could hardly swallow any.”

problem. To mitigate this, the medical community began looking towards the prevention of diseases before they could arise.

Two concepts arose from this concern, that of public health and that of hygiene. Public health dealt with matters of food adulterations, statistics, the general prevention of contagious diseases, and public nuisances. Discourse related to public health transcended the medical establishment: In 1875, Harper's Bazaar proclaimed "Prevention Better than Cure," the saying "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" was taken up by the *National Era* in 1856.<sup>66</sup> The British Parliament even passed the Nuisances Removal and Diseases Prevention Acts in 1855.<sup>67</sup> The related concept of hygiene was considered the physical, mental, and even moral care of a person.<sup>68</sup> Hygiene involved far more than just the health of the body, however. If a person, or group of people, failed in maintaining their personal hygiene, whether through illness or moral shortcomings, it became an issue of public health. These concerns peaked when it came to the tuberculosis epidemic, encompassing not just women's bodies, but their mental state, disposition, and even their fashion tastes.

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<sup>66</sup>"Prevention Better than Cure," *Harper's Bazaar* vol. 8, iss. 32 (Aug 7, 1875): 506; "The Ounce of Prevention and Pound of Cure," *National Era* vol. X, no. 489 (May 15, 1856): 77.

<sup>67</sup>"The New Nuisances Removal and Diseases Prevention Acts," *The Observer* (Aug 19 1855): 6.

<sup>68</sup>"Hygiene and Public Health," *New York Times* (Oct 12, 1879): 10.

Ignorance and Specious Vanity: Public Health of Women's Bodies

Women, in particular, were considered an important and risky group when it came to the topic of hygiene. To begin with, the female sex was considered of great moral anxiety in the nineteenth century due to the inherent traits that the emerging biomedical and human sciences assigned them. It was during this time that new scientific and medical fields, such as anthropology and phrenology, expanded beyond the academic circle and were becoming influential in everyday life. Their views offered a way to categorize and support cultural beliefs on race, class, and gender. Book after book was published on the medical care of women, and though some were specific to prenatal care and female-specific illnesses, many were aimed at generally understanding their disposition and weaknesses. James McGrigor Allan, an anthropologist, stated in 1869 that:

The human female arrives sooner than the male at maturity, and furnishes one of the strongest arguments against the alleged equality of the sexes. The quicker appreciation of girls is the instinct... while the slower boy is an example of the latent reasoning power not yet developed.<sup>69</sup>

The belief was that girls developed aspects of maturity too quickly, and were therefore unable to fully develop higher abilities and reasoning. This meant they were prone to simplistic and childish behaviors as adults, such as vanity, rather than the masculine weakness of pride. The *American Phrenological Journal* proclaimed “The phrenology of woman, also, coincides with this view. She has much larger Approbativeness, and much

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<sup>69</sup> James McGrigor Allan, “On the Real Differences in the Minds of Men and Women,” *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London*, vol. 7 (London: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 1869): cxcvii.

smaller Self-Esteem than man.”<sup>70</sup> This phrenological view inexorably connected the physical body and the psychological mind. By this theory, women could not escape their natural state. On top of this, other research asserted that most of women’s energy was directed to their reproductive capabilities, leaving their body and brain weaker than men’s.<sup>71</sup> It was considered easier, therefore, for women to fall prey to their natural state of childish behaviors. How the body was formed, and subsequently treated, was seen to have a direct effect on a person’s mental and moral position.

However, not everyone saw women’s “instinct” or “vanity” as a negative trait. Proclaiming himself a supporter of women, and accusing other men of oppressing them, Alexander Walker published *Woman Physiologically Considered* in 1840. In this text he writes an extensive list of “original” thoughts on women, generally defending his concept that “the natural inferiority of intellect in woman is compensated by a vast superiority in instinct.”<sup>72</sup> Women’s strengths, he believed, lie not in reason, but in deep-seated instincts that men could never achieve. For that reason, she was considered best suited in the center of the domestic circle, and if “true to herself, she may wield a degree of moral and social power, far more extensive and all-controlling, than the grandest conceptions of man ever reached...”<sup>73</sup> This is the same concept of moral superiority which Nancy F. Cott viewed as a way for women to improve their position, both in the household and in society.<sup>74</sup> Dr. Gall wrote in the *American Phrenological Journal*, “I like the naïve vanity

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<sup>70</sup> “Woman,” *American Phrenological Journal* vol. 10, iss. 7 (Jul 1, 1848): 218.

<sup>71</sup> Russett, *Sexual Science*: 116.

<sup>72</sup> Alexander Walker, *Woman Physiologically Considered* (New York: Langley, 1840), 5.

<sup>73</sup> Walker, *Woman Physiologically Considered*, 11.

<sup>74</sup> Cott, “Passionlessness”: 131-141.

of that young girl; and I predict that, some day, she will be ambitious of being an excellent wife and mother.”<sup>75</sup> It was a way of creating a concept of womanhood that exalted their strengths, but left them vulnerable enough to still require the protection and guidance of men. Instinct served them well in the home, but was considered only a small step away from emotion over reason. This paternalistic logic the medical field and new human science disciplines such as anthropology and phrenology legitimated advice-giving to women on all aspects of their daily lives.

On top of this, concern in medical and scientific fields with women’s supposed childishness and emotional volatility converged with similar fears espoused in religious discourse of the time. These concerns centered on women of the middle and upper classes, the “classes of women who suffer most,” since the poorer classes were “not exposed to fashionable follies” like dancing, staying out late, and choosing fashion over practicality.<sup>76</sup> The concern about the public health of women in this case was not of communicable diseases, but of what was often termed “self-abuse.” Alongside the rise of concerns over public health came moral hygiene; the body, mind, and soul were all considered intrinsically linked. Women supposedly chose to put themselves in danger through anything from a lack of exercise, marrying too early, living too secluded, not having enough servants, wearing heavy skirts, or even by being bored.<sup>77</sup> Though these may not seem to be extreme problems, pertinent health issues of the nineteenth century

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<sup>75</sup> “Approbativeness,” *American Phrenological Journal* vol. 30, iss. 2 (Aug 1859): 19.

<sup>76</sup> “Physical Decline of American Women,” *Water-Cure Journal* 29, no. 3 (Mar 1860): 34.

<sup>77</sup> “Poor Health of American Women,” *The Ladies’ Repository* 25 (Mar 1, 1865): 155.

meant that falling prey to these types of self-abuse could have dire ramifications. It was not just the physical body of a woman which was considered at risk when not properly cared for. Dr. Francis Emily White went so far as to claim that “hygiene is the *basis of morals*” and that disease will “undermine morality.”<sup>78</sup>

The idea that poor health would lead to an unpleasant and morally bereft person was not singular to Dr. White; “a healthy body is favorable to the attainment of a well balanced mind and a good heart,” an 1857 periodical argued.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, it was a person’s “chief moral duty” to actively preserve their health, something both religion and the medical establishment agreed upon.<sup>80</sup> This concept wasn’t just in reference to individuals, but was a direct influence on the overall public as well. If the poor health of one could corrupt, then wide spread issues of public health were particularly concerning, which also meant that public health was as much a religious issue as a medical one. The *Christian Watchman and Christian Reflector* wrote in 1850 that “Public morals depend upon public health essentially. Desolating epidemics always bear in their train increased vice and crime.”<sup>81</sup> While disease seems the obvious culprit, any damaging nuisance could be viewed as an epidemic as well. Many found the link between the two problems exemplified in alcohol or drugs, while some even claimed a diet of too much meat or

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<sup>78</sup> “Hygiene and Morals,” *Christian Union* 35, no. 24 (Jun 16, 1887): 17.

<sup>79</sup> “Health, Morals, Patriotism,” *Plough, the Loom and the Anvil* 10, no. 1 (July 1857): 56.

<sup>80</sup> “The Gospel of Hygiene,” *The Catholic World* vol. 30, iss. 176 (Nov 1879): 232.

<sup>81</sup> “The Public Health and Morals,” *Christian Watchman and Christian Reflector* 31, no. 12 (Mar 21, 1850): 46.

white bread would lead to nutritional issues and on to a lack of morality.<sup>82</sup> Corruption of society could come in numerous forms.

In the case of women, the failure to maintain their moral health was a particular grievance. As a wife and mother, women were responsible for not only themselves, but their family as well. The *American Phrenological Journal* stated that “The *physical* condition of the mother has a powerful influence on the bodily and mental constitution of the children...”<sup>83</sup> Women were to care for the health and morality of themselves and their families, and thus society. And when it came to pregnancy, anything that might be medically dangerous to women’s potential motherhood was an issue of public health. The act of producing children was a role singular to women, and one of essential importance to the continuation of society. One major developing problem in America during the second half the century was that of sterility and a dropping birth rate. Edwin Moses Hale, a prolifically published doctor, compared the current birth rate to that of the previous century by way of census records and found that the average number of children per family fell from eight to ten in 1765 to only three around 1878. He blamed this decrease in the birth rate on “the increase in the number of sterile women.”<sup>84</sup> Hale’s explanation for sterility in women included syphilis, change of climate, mineral waters, and most importantly “improper diet, clothing, and exercise.”<sup>85</sup> It was a woman’s responsibility to

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<sup>82</sup> “The Relation of Food to Morals,” *The Phrenological Journal and Science of Health* vol. 71, iss. 3 (Sep 1880): 151.

<sup>83</sup> “Woman in Her Social and Domestic Character,” *American Phrenological Journal* vol. 1, iss. 9 (Jun 1, 1839): 316.

<sup>84</sup> Edwin Moses Hale, *The Medical, Surgical and Hygienic Treatment of Diseases of Women* (New York: Boericke & Tafel, 1878), 47.

<sup>85</sup> Hale. *The Medical, Surgical and Hygienic Treatment of Diseases of Women*, 43.

uphold the family and society through a healthy (and reproductive) body, and she was meant to take great care to not jeopardize her capacity to follow through with that role.

Along with the concerns of falling birth rates and moral care of the body came the first efforts towards making abortion illegal. In 1857, the American Medical Association began a crusade to not only criminalize abortion, but to force midwives out of the medical field.<sup>86</sup> It was a way to take women's control of their bodies out of their hands from both angles. Pregnancy and childbirth would be under the sole discretion of almost entirely male physicians. Medical and moral advice on how to care for the body only had so much control over the actions women took, but the laws that were enacted throughout America in the 1860s and 1870s could do far more to control the issue of reproduction. It emphasizes just how important the role of motherhood was in society during this time.

Sally enacted this role of a nineteenth-century woman, having six children over the course of her life, her last at age 41. Her third died in infancy, but the other five went on to adulthood, though Sally had no surviving grandchildren. Her older sister, Mary, had a far more difficult motherhood. Mary's first son lived only a short time, while her second son died at age three. The two sisters wrote constantly about their children, particularly about their health, begging each other for photographs as they lived separated by the Atlantic Ocean. When Mary's son passed Sally wrote that she too was suffering through her children's ill-health. "My baby has been so delicate from his birth & I have thought so many times that he could not live, that I can possibly understand a little of

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<sup>86</sup> Leslie J. Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).



what you feel,” Mary wrote.<sup>87</sup> Her son, Bow, would only live another year. Motherhood was an important part of these women’s lives, and it all balanced delicately on the continuing health of themselves and their family. Healthy women became healthy mothers, who in turn had healthy children. John King, a prominent American physician and medical professor, wrote in 1867:

The female who neglects the hygienic rules, or who enfeebles the powers of her system, by a course of thoughtlessness and misgovernment, or by pursuing fashionable routine of dissipation, will make only an invalid, sterile wife, or, should she unfortunately give birth to offspring, they will be of delicate, sickly constitutions, seldom attaining adult age. There is no doubt but the decay of once great nations was a much owing to the condition of their women as to any other case...<sup>88</sup>

In a single comment, King connects thoughtless women to invalidism, sick children, and the fall of an entire nation. Women were responsible for taking care of their bodies, because they weren’t considered simply their own. The health of society relied on their health and reproductive capabilities. If they could not perform the role which society demanded of them, particularly if due to self-inflicted actions, then women had done damage to more than just their individual physical form.

In the case of American women, their supposedly prolific health issues were so well known that it became part of the female stereotype of frailty. Numerous articles titled similarly to “Poor Health of American Women” or “Observations on the Ill Health of American Women” can be found throughout the nineteenth century, comparing them to their supposedly heartier English or European counterparts. Some attributed this frailty

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<sup>87</sup> May 14, 1874.

<sup>88</sup> John King, *Woman: Her Diseases and Their Treatment* (Cincinnati: J.M. Scudder, 1867), 8.

to the lack of exercise and fresh air, others to their fashion choices. Still, the consensus was clear that it was not nature, but lifestyle that produced these issues. This wasn't altogether a terrible thing, however, as American women were considered by some to be more beautiful because of their frailty. *Christian Parlor Magazine* admitted that they were "more fine, more delicate- yes, generally with more of a certain graceful beauty, than in England or Germany," even if they suffered for it.<sup>89</sup> Women were asked to walk a careful line between delicacy and robustness, grace and strength. One of the dozens of articles titled "Health of American Women," published in 1859, actually attempted to understand not just how American women lost their health, but *why*. "There is so much fear that women will not be sufficiently lady-like, retiring and modest, that they will become coarse..." the author bemoans, "It is a mistaken notion that women do not need strength, and that they must look to man for protection and support."<sup>90</sup> A delicate woman was someone who required assistance, and specifically allowed for men to feel needed. It may not have been a desirable attribute to all, but for some illness, and frailty, was the way to achieve beauty and play the role of the ideal woman. Not only did it signify submissiveness, but as illness caused suffering, it tied into the purity of spiritual cleansing and the piety of atonement.

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<sup>89</sup> "Health of Women," *Christian Parlor Magazine* (May 1, 1852): 315.

<sup>90</sup> "Health of American Women," *Michigan Farmer* vol. 1, iss. 6 (Feb 5, 1859): 46.

### Red Harbinger of Death: Consumption and the Female Disposition

By the point Sally and Mary were writing back and forth around 1870, tuberculosis, one of the most concerning causes of this frailty, was just beginning to fade away. More often referred to as consumption, it was a widespread issue in the first half of the nineteenth century and was strongly associated with the female sex. There was no known cure for the disease and the understanding of its causes was little more than speculation. It seemed to randomly inflict some people, while leaving their close family members completely alone. Desperate to find some cause that the public could cling to, doctors formulated a wide variety of hypotheses which often fell into the categories of “predisposing” and “exciting.”<sup>91</sup> A predisposition meant that some people were naturally weaker than others, leaving them more vulnerable to illnesses, which helped to explain why the disease did not affect everyone exposed. Age was certainly a factor, as was the family history, but consumption was also believed to “operate more powerfully on the delicate female constitution.”<sup>92</sup> This idea was developing simultaneously with scientific fields like phrenology and anthropology, which also supported the concepts of predisposition. Factors like gender supposedly had a marked effect on a person’s mental state, intelligence, and temperament, therefore it follows that health and illness would also be dependent on those factors.

However, this reasoning offered little in terms of prevention, and as consumption was an illness with no cure and a high mortality rate, prevention was paramount. Since

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<sup>91</sup> “Consumption,” *The Knickerbocker; or New York Monthly Magazine* vol. 8, iss. 1 (Jul 1836): 4.

<sup>92</sup> “Medical,” *The Medical and Agricultural Register* vol. 1, iss. 9 (Sept 1, 1806): 129.

they could not extinguish the disease itself, they instead encouraged the public to find ways of keeping themselves from being susceptible, particularly if they were considered to be predisposed. This fell to strengthening the body and avoiding all of the seemingly infinite risks to “exciting” consumption. Dr. Marshall Hall, who was a well-published physician of the early nineteenth century, listed eight causes for tuberculosis: hereditary disposition; old and damp soil or air; insufficient clothing; insufficient exercise, air or light; the depressing passions; attacks of fever, inflammation, dyspepsia, &c.; and the abuse of remedies.<sup>93</sup> Most of these can be avoided by way of proper diet, exercise, fresh air, and keeping the body warm and dry according to Hall. Healthy living and healthy dressing were the two main recommendations for all that had a predisposition to illness.

This second recommendation is what led to the condemnation of many fashionable items of dress by the medical community. Corsets and tight clothing were blamed for restricting the lungs, bare shoulders for exposing the skin, thin shoes for letting in the dampness, and a lack of flannel for failing to repel the cold weather. The irony of fashion being blamed for consumption was that consumption itself was considered a fashionable disease. Unlike many other illnesses which left the afflicted with sores, sallow skin, or violent deaths, consumption gave the person an almost ethereal appearance. Their skin became translucent and glowing, their cheeks and lips flushed, pupils dilated, and victims were calm and composed near the end. The descriptions of the disease were entirely poetic, even when supposedly written by a physician. “The bright

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<sup>93</sup> Charles W. Wilder, “Pulmonary Consumption: Its Causes, Symptoms and Treatment,” *Massachusetts Medical Society* vol. 7 (Jan 1, 1848)

crimson spot which burnt in each cheek, and the vivid fire of her eye when roused up by fever or excitement, gave her fair and beautiful face an expression of almost angelic loveliness.”<sup>94</sup> It was not only her physical beauty, but her “angelic” appearance, which skewed societal views on this deadly disease. Victims were strongly associated with ethereal concepts and heaven. In *Consumptive Chic*, Carolyn A. Day explains that in a way, the suffering she endured before death gave a sense of atonement and purity in a moralistic Christian society.<sup>95</sup> Combined with the aesthetics of the disease, this created a romantic and fashionable version of consumption which endured for the first half of the nineteenth century. As consumption exemplifies, not all diseases were seen as a corruption of the body and soul. However, the hygiene of the female body was considered of utmost importance to society and its maintenance was paramount. Disease and deformation were a threat to public health, even on an individual level. Women’s bodies were not entirely their own. Caring for their hygiene affected all of society, and therefore it could be seen as the responsibility of all.

#### Paper-Soled Shoes: Exposure and Dress

Consumption was by no means the only concerning illness in the nineteenth century. Sally in particular mentioned fevers, colds, dysentery, cholera, tumors, and other vague maladies over the years. Sally wrote to her sister Mary on August 11, 1867 “When I last wrote Alice was here, she was quite sick here the day after my letter to you went &

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<sup>94</sup> “Love and Consumption,” *The Magnolia* 1, no. 1 (Jul 1842): 37.

<sup>95</sup> Carolyn A. Day, *Consumptive Chic* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 57.

I had the doctor come & see her. She was afraid she had fever & ague caught at Kittys as that is one of the drawbacks of the place.” Her mention of the fever and ague that her younger sister Alice might have caught is interesting as she posits where the illness might have originated. Kitty was born in between Sally and Alice, marrying into Boston elite. In 1870, she moved into a new home her husband, Benjamin W. Crowninshield, had commissioned from H.H. Richardson.<sup>96</sup> However, in 1867 their Boston home may not have been so well updated. Drafty houses were commonly cited as a culprit of catching colds and physicians cautioned patients to dress properly for the weather, both in and out of the home. It was more than just a matter of catching a minor chill, however, as colds were the beginning of far more serious diseases. As discussed earlier, consumption was a grave concern, and prevention through proper dress was a frequent subject of advice. Shoes in particular found themselves a major point of scrutiny.

One of the more commonly mentioned dangers to health in the first half of the nineteenth century was that of the fashion for thin soles. An 1825 circular wrote: “Another error in the conduct of many of our young ladies is, the wearing paper-soaled prunello shoes, in damp weather, & thus they frequently take colds, which terminate in consumptions- & over which death draws his final curtain.”<sup>97</sup> This blunt connection between thin soled shoes, consumption, and death was not limited to this example. Cold feet were considered a sign of “imperfect circulation” which affected the blood flow of

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<sup>96</sup> H.H. Richardson was a prominent American architect, credited as the father of the Romanesque Revival.

<sup>97</sup> “Ladies Department: Evils of Tight Lacing?” *Circular* (Feb 18, 1825): 168.

the entire body and would eventually lead to illness.<sup>98</sup> Newspapers and magazines regaled readers with dramatic warnings about the dangers of cold or wet feet in hopes of preventing tragedies. Those that were considered most at risk were the young, rich, and fair since they were not accustomed to being out in inclement weather. It would be a swift and deadly choice they made when they ignored advice. “The child which had been playing about in the morning, in all its infantile loveliness and vivacity, is seized at night with croup from wet feet, and in a day or two is a corpse.”<sup>99</sup> Since the contraction of many rapid diseases and infections was not fully understood, concerns over methods of how someone accidentally “excited” various illnesses were a common topic beyond just consumption.

Women were blamed for their illnesses by exposing themselves, wearing their light satin house slippers out of doors and onto the damp streets.<sup>100</sup> In fact, thin slippers and improper clothing were of such concern that one New York journal claimed those issues were most likely at fault for the 31 deaths due to consumption that week in 1834, since nearly all were women.<sup>101</sup> The wording in many of these articles draws a specific connection between fashion epidemics, such as thin shoes, and the spread of diseases like tuberculosis. The thin, flat slipper which was so concerning had only just developed in the early part of the nineteenth century. Constructed in a method labeling them as *turn shoes*, a thin leather sole was required in order to turn the shoe right-side out after the

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<sup>98</sup> “A Few Seasonable Words about Dress,” *Ohio Cultivator* vol. 12, iss. 2 (Jan 15, 1856): 28.

<sup>99</sup> “Wet Feet,” *The Ariel* 3, no. 20 (Jan 23, 1830): 154.

<sup>100</sup> “Consumption,” *Liberator* vol. 3, iss. 51 (Dec 21, 1833): 204.

<sup>101</sup> “Admonition to Ladies,” *The Free Enquirer* 1, no. 13 (Jan 19, 1834): 103.

upper fabric was stitched to the outer sole. Some heavier construction methods existed as well, but even in the case of shoes meant for wear outdoors, turn shoes were still very common. As the fashion for walking became a popular leisure activity, women's footwear continued to resist thick soles, and instead turned to boots. Though sometimes inspired by military attire, these boots were still a far cry from the heavy leather options for men. With uppers often of nankeen cotton, corded silk, or colorful calf-skin leather they were hardly suitable for rough work or inclement weather. Boots continued as popular women's footwear throughout the century, whether laced up, buttoned, or even elasticated. Joseph Sparkes Hall presented the first pair of elastic-sided boots to Queen Victoria in 1837.<sup>102</sup> Only ten years later these Congress Boots were widely sold in America and so popular that production couldn't keep up with demand.<sup>103</sup>

Even with the fashion for boots continuing through the century, women were still considered dangerously prone to wearing inappropriately light footwear, especially American women. "It has been customary, in some of our cities and towns, for young ladies to walk in thin shoes, and delicate stockings in mid-winter," wrote the *Boston Observer* in 1840.<sup>104</sup> Such footwear may seem impractical given the season, but there were admissions from even the most averse that these fashions had certain benefits. While noting the connection between thin soles and consumption, the *Poughkeepsie Casket* admitted, "A thin pair of shoes undoubtedly sets off and displays to advantage a

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<sup>102</sup> Sally Levitt, *Victorians Unbuttoned: Registered Designs for Clothing, their Makers and Wearers, 1839-1900* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1986): 156.

<sup>103</sup> "Fashions", *Godey's Ladies Book*, August 1848: 120.

<sup>104</sup> "Health (Miss Sedgwick)," *Christian Register and Boston Observer* vol. 19, iss. 47 (Nov 21, 1840): 188.



pretty foot.”<sup>105</sup> It would be this idea of a pretty foot that inspired many shoe fashions over the decades, with strong ties to concepts of ideal beauty and femininity. Thin soles had found their way into American fashion and women seemed settled on continuing to support their use, if the amount of discourse denouncing their wear is any evidence. As *The Family Magazine* articulated, fashion was a “despotick destroyer of comfort” and a “foe to health,” but was none the less the fashion.<sup>106</sup> The style, however, had to manifest in a physical form beyond just ideals. Someone originally designed the implement which destroyed women’s comfort and health.

#### Implements and Engineer of Destruction: The Shoemaking Trade

In reality, it was not just women who were found to be at fault for these dangerous fashions; the shoemakers took their share of the blame as well. One magazine decried that “Our countrywomen have long endured great and cruel hardships in this particular, compelled to wear so flimsy an article as if all the shoemakers were in league with consumption and death.”<sup>107</sup> Rather than change the desired style, the shoemaking industry responded to concerns about health with various technical solutions over the years. However, the constant repetition in print of these problems meant that the solutions were clearly not adopted by all. To begin with, a variety of recommended changes were made in shoe construction, such as the insertion of additional sole layers, or the testing of

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<sup>105</sup> “Thin Shoes,” *The Poughkeepsie Casket* vol. 3, iss. 21 (Jan 25, 1840): 166.

<sup>106</sup> “Wet Feet” *The Family Magazine* vol. 5 (May 1, 1838): 251.

<sup>107</sup> “The Education of English Girls,” *The Happy Home and Parlor Magazine* vol. 9 (Jan 1, 1859): 28.

new construction techniques. Early recommendations for extra sole layers focused on a thin layer of cork or felt.<sup>108</sup> This was not a new idea, as both had been commonly used as mid soles in shoemaking in centuries prior.<sup>109</sup> In 1860 the women's journal *Peterson's Magazine* recommended a brown paper or knitted wool insole as well as course felt added to the bottom of the shoe by the wearer.<sup>110</sup> It also made note of a more recent invention that could render these other options obsolete: gutta percha (from the tree of the same name).

While related to the India rubber that could be found in congress boots, which is elastic and soft once processed, gutta percha hardened and produced a very fibrous and tenacious bond which happened to be water-proof.<sup>111</sup> Entire "rain-proof" boots were made from the substance, sold as way to temporarily cover up those fashionable shoes and prevent the dangers of wet feet.<sup>112</sup> However, these overshoes could be removed and cast aside, forgotten or ignored when they were needed.<sup>113</sup> Once again, women were believed to be too fickle for their own good when presented with the choice of fashion or health. So, shoemakers found a more permanent use for gutta-percha as a way to both waterproof and assemble shoes. However, anything that was truly waterproof, rather than just water resistant, meant that moisture was also retained inside of the shoe. So long as

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<sup>108</sup> "The New-York Mirror," *New York* vol. 13, iss. 18 (Oct 31, 1835): 138.

<sup>109</sup> They filled the space left by the allowances of the upper, prevented squeaking between leather layers, and did provide some degree of water resistance and warmth.

<sup>110</sup> "Health Department," *Peterson's Magazine* XXXVIII, no. 4 (Oct 1860): 319.

<sup>111</sup> India rubber require vulcanization in order to harden, which produced a strong smell and was still not fully water-proof.

<sup>112</sup> "Gum Elastic and its Varieties," *The North American Review* 101, no. 208 (Jul 1865): 65.

<sup>113</sup> "A Chapter on Ladies' Shoes," *Maine Farmer* vol. 20, iss. 16 (Apr 15, 1852): 2.

the substance was used sparingly on just the sole or around the edges, this would not be too much of a problem. It did, however, raise concern that entirely waterproof shoes could cause as much damage due to dampness and sweat as they solve. No matter what new inventions or ideas were put forward, they came with their own list of grievances. The style of dangerously dainty shoes persisted, despite the efforts of the shoemakers to find a solution which allowed for both fashion and health.

### Cemetery of Fashion: Vanity Leads to Death

This push was far from a light touch, however. In women's journals as well as local newspapers of the mid-nineteenth century, the quantity of articles concentrated on the topic of thin soles proliferated. But they were clearly not enough to solve the problem. Authors resorted to attempts to shock and horrify women into changing their ways through dramatic stories and hyperbolic threats of death. One article on the topic begins "Epitaph on the grave-stone of a young lady. 'Died of thin shoes; January 1839'."<sup>114</sup> A few years later another proclaims "Corsets, light shoes, and Self-Murder," asking "How many who, in yielding to the requirements of barbarous fashion, are committing self-murder! How many mothers are there who look on quietly and see their daughters dedicate themselves to an early grave!"<sup>115</sup> The wearing of thin shoes in the cold or damp even made it on to an actual list of the best way to commit suicide in 1851, demonstrating persistent attempts by the press to drive home the drastic connection

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<sup>114</sup> "Thin Shoes," *The Poughkeepsie Casket* vol. 3, iss. 21 (Jan 25, 1840): 166.

<sup>115</sup> "Corsets, Light Shoes, and Self-Murder," *Christian Secretary* vol. 4, iss. 44 (Jan 14, 1842): 4.

between fashion choices and death.<sup>116</sup> Thus victims were considered doubly responsible for their own death, or even that of their children: by way of neglect and by way of fashion. The accusations were far from subtle, raising the question of just how believable many women found such over-dramatic descriptions.

A perfect example of the almost theatrical advice about women's shoes and health comes in the form of a story about poor Agnes Waltham. Written by Ellen Ashton and published in 1842, this short story is the perfect example of the romantic, but moralistic, path from fashion to consumption. The downward spiral to death could commence with something as seemingly innocuous as a pair of light shoes, choosing fashion over health. The story begins with Agnes refusing her mother's insistence on wearing her thick shoes out on a walk. She returns, flushed, to find her betrothed waiting at home. He scolds her harshly for risking consumption, so much so that she bursts into tears. But it was too late; Agnes develops a small cough the next day. No one thinks anything of her light cold as she runs off to late night parties and dances for the next two months before she finally wakes up violently ill one morning. She is whisked off to warmer weather in Cuba by her parents, but to no avail. Upon returning home, her fiancé Edward rushes over.

Oh! the sight that met his eyes. Pale, and worn to a skeleton, yet with the lustrous eye and crimson cheek of the consumption, Agnes Waltham met the eye of her lover, who had parted with her, when she wore at least the appearance of health. The change was too much for him, he staggered to a chair, and for some minutes could not speak. Her parents wept aloud.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> "Favorite Means of Committing Suicide," *Water-Cure Journal* vol. 12, iss. 3 (Sep 1851): 67.

<sup>117</sup> Ellen Ashton, "Agnes Waltham," *Lady's World of Fashion* vol. II, iss. 6 (Dec 1842): 181.

Agnes asks to be forgiven her sin of vanity and the fatal pride of dress, then smiles “an angel’s smile” and passes away. Agnes’ tragic story is an example of not only how health and fashion were viewed, but an insight into why women chose to wear such seemingly impractical shoes. Or, at the very least, why they were *believed* to have worn light shoes. Agnes’ particular excuse was that she was meeting a fashionable friend and would be embarrassed to wear heavy boots. So, in her case it was merely following the caprices of fashion and beauty. However, the negative reaction of her fiancé implies that it was not beauty intended merely for male observation. In this particular case, fashion was a purely female driven activity and desire.

It was also a fashion that would change as the century progressed. In 1858 the Princess Royal, Victoria, was married and among her trousseau were “Twelve dozen pairs of boots of useful and solid make; some of them intended for rough walking, being provided with treble soles, and small but projecting nails.”<sup>118</sup> The article jested to just “think of some of our ‘paper soled’ delicate-footed damsels sporting, by way of novelty, hob-nailed triple soled shoes!” However, this may have been the last hob-nail in the coffin of thin soles, so to speak. By 1859 thin shoes were declared out of fashion, except for dancing, as Balmoral boots with half an inch-thick soles and military heels usurped them.<sup>119</sup> After this point, the articles concerning cold and damp feet focus more on how to prevent them through extra layers of insoles or thick, woolen stockings.

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<sup>118</sup> “Female Dress and Health,” *Friends’ Intelligencer* vol. 15, iss. 39 (Dec 11, 1858): 623.

<sup>119</sup> “The Girls of the Past and Present,” *Michigan Farmer* vol. 1, iss. 13 (Mar 26, 1859): 102.

The epidemic of thin soles had begun to fade away by the time Sally purchased her boots in 1864. That's not to say that her boots would be considered heavy or clunky. In fact, the edges of her outsole are barely more than 1/8" thick, but looking at the profile we can see a deep curve in the sole as it returns to a sturdier thickness under the foot (Appendix A, Fig. 7). Had practicality won out, or did fashions simply change? Perhaps it was a little of both. As an 1841 magazine put it,

But you say they are not fashionable here. What of that? You can render them fashionable- you can render any thing fashionable by general use. If it were fashionable to be sick, would you desire to be a follower of the fashion? If so, then by wearing thin walking shoes in November, you are in a fair way to render not only sickness but death fashionable- at least prevalent.<sup>120</sup>

But what drove this fashion in the first place? Why was a dainty foot so desirable, particularly when set off by a thin pair of shoes? If women were willing to risk their health to complete the illusion of a beautiful foot, the idealism must have deeper roots than just a few decades of thin slippers. In order to understand the allure of a well-shod foot, we must turn to another concern within shoe fashions- the tight slipper.

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<sup>120</sup> "Thick Shoes," *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine* vol. 13, iss. 32 (Jan 30, 1841): 128.

## CHAPTER 6: PAINS AND PENALTIES: TIGHT SHOES AND HIGH HEELS

“Have you heard from Ben or Kitty lately I wonder? They have given two parties this Spring. Musical parties about 75 people were at the first & over 100 at the last. Ogden was there at the last one & said the house looked very pretty. Several people have spoken to me at the dancing class where I take the children, of Kitty, her charming manners etc, etc, her parties were very successful. I was very sorry not to be at at least one of them, but for one reason it seemed folly to have a dress arranged just for one & then I could not have gone without spending the night & then the children would have been obliged to pass the night in town too, & it was altogether too much of an execution. I have made up my mind that all going anywhere must be abandoned as long as we remain here.” Sally writing her sister Mary. March 22, 1874.

By the time she wrote the above passage, Sally and Ogden had established themselves at their house in Lincoln, Massachusetts. Her sister Kitty lived in a fashionable new house in Boston with an active social life, something Sally often lamented missing out on by living so far away. Sally still regularly took the train into Boston to see her family, as well as to take the children to their weekly dance class. Even if she did not have the opportunity to be out dancing, she would be sure that her children were prepared for their future social expectations. It was not unusual for events such as Kitty’s parties to last well into the night, with hours of music and dancing. They were fashionable events, and a way to show off. Which included displaying their dancing feet and slippers.

Dear creature! You’d swear  
When her delicate feet in the dance twinkle round,  
That her steps are of light, that her home is in the air,  
And she only, “par complaisance,” touched the ground.

*Moore’s Fudge Family*<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> George H. Seymour, “Poetical Quotations,” *Flag of Our Union* 21, no. 47 (Nov 24, 1866): 745.

### Feet Admiration: The Cinderella Effect

Looking at poems and stories that were scattered throughout journals of the nineteenth century, the terminology used to describe women's feet is universal. Often labeled as delicate, dainty, or tiny, they were listed alongside features that made for the ideal woman. Published in the *Michigan Farmer*, a poem about the incomparably perfect farm girl, Jenny, describes her "dainty foot that presses lightly as the leaves that fall on the grass from boughs above her."<sup>122</sup> The beauty ideals for feet were not just for women of the highest classes; it permeated all levels of society. So, it's no surprise that some women were resistant to those thicker soles they were recommended, as they might "destroy the beauty of the form of the foot."<sup>123</sup> In reality, this foot sentiment went far deeper than just thick soles. The idea of a perfectly formed, tiny foot was somehow romantic and almost obsessive.

Jane Swisshelm, a publisher and suffragist, blamed Cinderella for "this human vanity about shoes," frustrated that "children, from the earliest dawn of reason, are taught to regard small shoes as the external manifestation of all the inward graces. By it, every baby-boy is taught that the standard of female perfection is small feet, or, rather, the ability to put on a small shoe."<sup>124</sup> A dainty shoe meant a dainty foot, and subsequently said the same about the wearer. One of the most famous comments upon a woman's feet came from John Suckling, who though writing in the seventeenth century, was still often

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<sup>122</sup> Mrs. L.B. Adams, "Jenny," *Michigan Farmer* vol. 15, iss. 8 (Aug 1, 1857): 247.

<sup>123</sup> "Letter from A Mother," *Morris's National Press* vol. 1, iss. 14 (May 16, 1846): 3.

<sup>124</sup> Jane Gray Swisshelm, "Cinderella Largely Responsible for Female Immorality," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Dec 6, 1874): 10.



quoted two centuries later: “Her feet beneath her petticoat, like little mice stole in and out.”<sup>125</sup> While Swisshelm condemned this particular poetry, others viewed it as an indication of society’s unusual interest in women’s feet. When J. Sparkes Hall wrote *The Book of the Feet* in 1847, covering the history and methods of the shoemaking trade, he included an entire chapter to the poetry of the feet where Homer, Chaucer, and Shakespeare all make an appearance.<sup>126</sup> Even when *The United States Magazine* published an article arguing against the beauty of small feet they described the perfect foot as having “a delicate spring to it, as if it did not quite belong to the earth, and touched it daintily if not disdainfully.”<sup>127</sup> Regardless of their size, women’s feet were considered an object of beauty and grace, expected to be delicate and dainty.

It wasn’t just the story of Cinderella which took responsibility for the dedication to small feet. In case nineteenth-century readers found that classic tale too dated for their liking, *The Ladies Companion* published a story called “The Lady’s Slipper” in 1842 which had a very familiar plot.<sup>128</sup> Young Charles Percy comes across a stray slipper, so tiny and perfect that he becomes obsessed with finding its owner. His search leads him to the home of Miss Floyd, an old and ugly woman, much to his severe disappointment. His sister later invites him to an event where he meets Grace Floyd whose hem “rested on the instep of the smallest and most beautiful foot in the world.” Realizing that this was the niece of the old woman, and the true owner of the perfect slipper, he rejoices. It’s hard to

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<sup>125</sup> Sir John Suckling, “A Ballad upon a Wedding”.

<sup>126</sup> J. Sparkes Hall, *The Book of the Feet: A history of boots and shoes* (New York; William H. Graham, 1847).

<sup>127</sup> “Small Feet,” *The United States Magazine* vol. III, iss. 7 (Jul 1856): 80.

<sup>128</sup> Caroline Orne, “The Lady’s Slipper,” *The Ladies Companion* 17 (Aug 1842): 190.

say whether Charles first loved the shoe, the foot, or the young woman it belonged to. However, his betrayal when he believed the perfect slipper to belong to such an imperfect woman mirrors Swisshelm's issues with the connection between ideal feet and the ideal woman. In the same way that health and morals had been connected through the concept of hygiene, the physical appearance of a person was also expected to directly connect to their inner self. Properly dainty feet were supposed to speak to the physical, and moral, qualities of their owner.

This perfect tiny foot was expected to be naturally so, however. Their shortness was "not to be made by dint of shoes."<sup>129</sup> Nor was it, for that matter, to be forced upon the foot itself through external shaping. Deforming the body to achieve beauty went against concepts of hygiene and fell within the bounds of vanity. Throughout the articles that mention the fashionable desire for small feet, women are repeatedly warned away from the practice of Chinese foot binding. As Western women took to wearing tight shoes in an effort to elicit, or at least fake, small feet, the comparisons swiftly arose. The Chinese custom involved breaking, bandaging, and essentially reshaping a young girl's feet to achieve the ideal shape and size. It may seem far-fetched to compare tight shoes to such extreme measures, but some saw the practices as equally pernicious. "How frequently do we smile at the Chinese," a New York newspaper wrote in 1811,

who, from a tyrannical custom, squeeze and compress their feet, that they may remain small and crippled. Yet these feeble Orientals proceed more rationally in this practice, than their European rivals. *They* begin with it gradually, and from the earliest infancy. *We* do not think

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<sup>129</sup> "Criticism on Female Beauty," *Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction* vol. 10, iss. 56 (Jan 2, 1825): 140.

of contracting the feet of our children till they have almost attained the natural size, and thus endeavor to counteract the progress of nature...”<sup>130</sup>

Though American women weren't intentionally breaking their feet, the damage they wrought was apparently dramatic enough to warrant such a comparison. Books on shoemaking in the nineteenth century reference such problems as corns, blisters, bunions, callouses, and other various deformities. It wasn't just the variety of problems that existed, but their frequency which was alarming. *The Journal of Health* estimated in 1830 that nine out of ten women would have deformed and suffering feet by age twenty-four due to tight shoes.<sup>131</sup> If a woman's dainty feet were meant to speak to her physical and moral state, then this voluntary deformation and damage would as well.

The choice of vanity over logic resulted in both physical and moral suffering according to the popular press of the time. Additionally, this foolishness wasn't just found among the elite, as articles about tight shoes even permeated smaller, local papers. “There is no little thing in which a woman can show how deficient she is in the article of good common sense as to foolishly persist in wearing shoes that are too small for her feet,” wrote the *Ohio Farmer*.<sup>132</sup> Nor was it found solely among the female sex. Although women in general were thought to be more prone to succumbing to fashionable follies, and had more at stake when it comes to the appearance of small feet, men were caught up in this sort of vanity as well. “Both men and women are so foolish as to case their feet first with tight stockings, and then with tighter boots or shoes...” wrote the *Circular* in

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<sup>130</sup> “Shoes,” *The Observer* 27 (Apr 14, 1811): 149.

<sup>131</sup> “Tight Shoes,” *Journal of Health* vol. 1, iss. 14 (Mar 24 1830): 217.

<sup>132</sup> “Small Shoes” *Ohio Farmer* vol. 20, iss. 22 (Jun 3, 1871): 346.

1860.<sup>133</sup> The vanity of small feet was apparently not nearly as gendered as it may initially seem. Another wrote in 1842, “The nice young man must wear a boot so small, as to cramp and maim the very necessary portion of the human frame, denominated the *understanding*, merely because some imagine, that a small foot is much the prettiest; and so it is with other articles of dress.”<sup>134</sup> It wasn’t just for the sake of smaller feet, however. According to the *Phrenological Journal*, a foolish young gentleman requires that his boots “be made so small, so narrow, and fit so snugly as to be without a wrinkle.”<sup>135</sup> He limps home and curses his shoemaker for his pains. This means that when it came to feet, vanity was not solely a fault of the female sex. Men, too, fell victim to the desire for perfectly shaped feet. Yet, the literature is rarely aimed at men. An 1851 article on the differences in dress between men and women posits that while male dandies do exist, that “such specimens are rare.”<sup>136</sup> Men are instead labeled as dressing with “great regularity,” in comparison to women who are so often termed fickle and easily swayed.

The problem of tight shoes, evidenced in the numerous articles complaining of this scourge, was apparently universal and wide-spread. In fact, entire industries arose to deal with the issues of ill-fitting shoes. Corn-doctors would travel the country to offer their services to those in need, though their skill and knowledge were questionable at best. It was an opportunistic field that relied on the continuation of poor choices in footwear. J. Sparkes Hall, the author of *The Book of Feet*, dismissed them in more

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<sup>133</sup> “Head, Neck, and Feet,” *Circular* (17 May 1860): 63.

<sup>134</sup> “Slavery of Fashion,” *Literary Messenger* vol. 2, iss. 10 (Mar 1842): 77.

<sup>135</sup> “New Boots,” *The Phrenological Journal and Science of Health* 56, no. 1 (Jan 1873): 45.

<sup>136</sup> “A Few Words on Clothing,” *Water-Cure Journal* 11, no. 2 (Feb 1851): 25.

elaborate terms, calling them “the sharks that follow the misguided craft of shoemakerdom, and prey upon its victims.”<sup>137</sup> Elaborate words for a very un-poetic profession, but it sets up the positions of three different players. In Hall’s opinion, it was the wearer who was the victim, while shoemakers took only the blame of ignorance.

### Misguided Craft of Shoe-makerdom: Shaping the Foot

When it comes to the fit of shoes, the shoemaker was only occasionally blamed for encouraging the damaging practice. Victor Crum wrote of his experience in 1871 with a bootmaker who made him boots that were excruciatingly small, insisting they would stretch with time.<sup>138</sup> However, “Old ‘Leather-brains’ in Satan’s livery” was wrong, and Victor ended up giving the boots to the office-boy. Though there are other stories of this nature, shoemakers still had little control over the decisions consumers made regarding their shoe size. Most of the fault was still laid at the feet of those who knowingly chose a size or more smaller than they should be wearing. However, shoemakers were encouraged to do what they could in terms of design to better accommodate the foot. Hall argued in 1847 for a better shaped last, comparing the shoe shapes to that of natural feet.<sup>139</sup> Interestingly enough, he believed that it was better to have a straight last than one with right and left, provided that the current trend for crooked, unnatural lasts endured.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> “Died of Thin Soles- The Corn-Doctor Dismissed,” *Christian Advocate* 54, no. 38 (Sep 18, 1879): 606.

<sup>138</sup> “Hygiene of Boots,” *Herald of Health* vol. 17, iss. 4 (Apr 1871): 147.

<sup>139</sup> J. Sparkes Hall, *The Book of the Feet*.

<sup>140</sup> As “straight last” implies, these lasts were symmetrical and formed to right/left on the foot instead.

In 1857 Hermann Meyer published his pamphlet on the anatomy of the foot and how it relates to shoes, which heralded a noticeable shift in shoemaking.<sup>141</sup> He wrote in great detail about the structure of the foot, shoe designs, and injuries caused by a variety of issues. Instead of the straight last which had been used for centuries, and Hall had supported, he diagramed out how right and left lasts could be beneficial. All of this aligned with the concern over excessively tight shoes that forced the toes and foot into unnatural positions. Though Meyer's book was not singular in its arguments, this particular pamphlet was exceedingly popular and was quickly translated from its original German. *Scientific American* noted that,

A favorable change has lately taken place in the shape of the lasts that are employed to give form to boots and shoes. They are not only made broader at the toe than formerly, but also nearly straight on the inner side, with a right line passing through the center of the heel and the arch to the extremity of the great toe. Such lasts correspond more nearly in form to the anatomic structure of the foot. For this reform the public are indebted to Herman Meyer, Professor of Anatomy in the University of Zurich, who published a pamphlet on the Anatomy of the Foot, in relation to the Form of Boots and Shoes...<sup>142</sup>

Even with the transformation in shoemaking brought about by Meyer's research, the allure of a tiny foot didn't disappear. The shape of the shoe was better suited to the natural foot, the toe began to widen, thicker soles and even rounded toes began to appear in fashion magazines by the end of the 1860s.<sup>143</sup>

Sally's boots are a perfect example of the fashion forward shape brought about by these concepts. They have a distinct right and left, following the natural curve of the foot

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<sup>141</sup> Herman Meyer, *Why the Shoe Pinches* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1860).

<sup>142</sup> "Shape of Lasts, Boots, and Shoes," *Scientific American* IX, no. 22 (Nov 28, 1863): 345.

<sup>143</sup> "New York Fashions," *Harper's Bazaar* 1, no. 6. (Dec 7, 1867): 83.

that Meyer was so fervently supporting. The toe is still fairly flat, but the box shape has widened significantly from the 1840s. It's impossible to say if Sally was a victim of tightly fitted shoes, as we don't know the size of her feet, but the practical designs called for decades earlier had filtered their way into even the most fashionable shoes of the 1860s. However, alongside fashion shifts toward a wider and more natural shape of the shoes were new ways of deceiving the eye. A small chapter in Meyer's pamphlet gives us insight into the next developing issue of footwear and deformation- that of the high heel.

#### Extraordinary Form of Contortion: The Rise of High Heels

On the evening of November 10, 1872, Sally wrote to her sister complaining of the weather, "The childrens dancing school began last week, but there was such a pouring rain that I did not take them in. You can't think how dismal it has been without any husears<sup>144</sup>, it is such a tiresome walk from the station." Sally wrote in the same letter that it had been a particularly rainy month, consistently causing her issues with travel. The difficulty she experienced with this inclement weather came at the same time as an epidemic decimated Boston's horse population, which nearly shut down the transport system.<sup>145</sup> Rather than be forced to walk through the streets in heavy rain, Sally opted to just remain home. The concerns over damp and cold feet that had been prevalent in the first half of the nineteenth century hadn't entirely disappeared. However, there was one

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<sup>144</sup> An alternate spelling of Hussars, who were originally cavalry in the Polish army. In this instance it refers to the carriage services that were transportation around Boston.

<sup>145</sup> This illness is part of what exacerbated the Great Fire in Boston on November 9. Sally also goes into great detail about her experience with this in her letter, first observing it from their home in Lincoln that night.

major adjustment to the construction of shoes which potentially offered assistance. High heels began to reappear in the early 1850s and, at least at first, some saw this as the healthy choice. As the *Home Journal* explained in 1854, “The high heels which ladies are beginning to wear, are one round, at least, in the ladder to health. On merely damp ground- as on the grass of a lawn or a garden walk at evening- there is a difference between the application of the whole foot or only the least sensitive portion of it.”<sup>146</sup> Heels elevated the foot off the ground and out of the damp grass or puddled streets. Early discourse on the style emphasized practicality over fashion. Even the *Prairie Farmer* argued that prairie school girls should wear high heeled boots in winter and that “any lady that turns up her nose at this idea is just half a century behind the times.”<sup>147</sup> It would not take long, however, before the praise of healthful high heels turned to scorn and fear.

This wavering love for high heels was nothing new, as the fashion for them had waxed and waned in previous centuries. The first heeled shoes in Europe, appearing at the end of the sixteenth century, were likely inspired by Persian footwear.<sup>148</sup> Originally, they were used by Western men for stability when horse riding, but soon became fashionable for both sexes as it showcased the foot and calf, as well as added to the overall height of the wearer. The high, fabric covered timber heel continued in popularity throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, constantly changing in shape and height. However, in the 1780s, the then fashionably narrow heel began to shorten,

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<sup>146</sup> “The High Heels,” *Home Journal* vol. 19, iss. 430 (May 6, 1854): 2.

<sup>147</sup> “Boots for Prairie School Girls,” *Prairie Farmer* vol. 2, iss. 6 (Oct 14, 1858): 245.

<sup>148</sup> Elizabeth Semmelhack, *Heights of Fashion: A History of the Elevated Shoe* (Toronto: The Bata Shoe Museum, 2008): 14.



reducing to less than an inch in the 1790s. Inspired by the Classical era and its laced “Roman” sandals, flat soles took over and heels of any height had generally disappeared as of the 1820s. It seems though, that by the middle of the nineteenth century, heels were making a rapid comeback. Some of the earliest evidence for the return of high heels came at *The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations*, held in London in 1851. It showcased both industrial design and culture, including the trade of the shoemaker.

The Victoria & Albert Museum holds an elegant white kidskin boot, daintily topstitched in thin, black lines, which was part of the Great Exhibition. It highlights not only the elastic gussets, the height of fashion for the time, but a heel of about one and a half inches. It had been nearly fifty years before the 1851 exhibition that heels had shrunk away to flat soles, and this return to the fashions of the past was by no means heralded by all, even if it did offer some supposed health benefits. An 1853 article in the *Art Journal* referenced the fashions found at the Great Exhibition. It stated,

We have known an instance, where the lady’s heels were never less than an inch and a half high. We were sorry to observe some of these high-heeled shoes in the Great Exhibition; and still more so, to see that shoes with heels an inch high, are likely to be fashionable this season. Could we look forward to this height as the limit of the fashion, we might reconcile ourselves to it for a time; but, judging from past experience, there is reason to fear that the heel will become continually higher, until it attains the elevation of former years.<sup>149</sup> Articles, like the preceding one in the *Art Journal*, seemed less concerned about the concept of heels, and more concerned with their potential to reach extreme heights. Perhaps if heels had retained a lower height upon their return, they might have

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<sup>149</sup> Mrs. Merrifield, “Dress- As a Fine Art,” *The Art Journal* (June 1858): 158.

maintained the early association with dry feet and good health. Instead they grew in height and became a target for critiques of the dangers of fashion.

### Follies of Fashion: Achieving the Grecian Bend

Unlike thin soles or tight shoes, high heels were a fashion trend that was distinct enough, and pervasive enough, that the reason for their return became a topic of discussion for a range of popular newspapers and journals. The style was examined thoroughly in medical, moral, and fashion industry contexts. Almost universally it was agreed upon that the concept of heels had the capability of being both healthy and fashionable if they stayed low and stable. Whereas one might expect that a certain height qualified a heel as both “high” and dangerous, instead the discourse focused frequently on the technical concerns of heel shape and its effect on body mechanics. A few critics mentioned the height of the heel, but many that broke down the exact issues claimed that it was not just the height, but the narrowness and poor placement of the heel itself that did the major damage.<sup>150</sup> The medical reasoning was that nature “has made the heel broad, so as to afford a firm basis of support, but the present style demands a small heel, which gives but an insecure foundation, and throws a great strain on the ankle joint when the foot is placed on an irregular surface.”<sup>151</sup> Concern here focused on the possibility of twisted or otherwise strained ankles due to narrowness, rather than height.

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<sup>150</sup> “High Heels,” *Circular* (Jul 18, 1870): 141.

<sup>151</sup> “The Sanitary Aspect of Fashion,” *The Albion* vol. 45, iss. 28 (Jul 13, 1867): 334.

Yet others claimed that it was the placement of some heels, too far under the arch rather than under the heel of the foot, that caused ill health. A pair of black silk boots from the V&A Museum (Appendix A, Fig. 8) shows the fashionable Louis XV heel of the late 1860s which curves under far enough to place the support of the heel further forward, almost under the arch of the foot. *Harper's Bazaar* posited that this heel position was moved to give “an artificial appearance of shortness” or to increase the arch of the foot, another aspect of the ideal foot.<sup>152</sup> The same article also notes that this adjustment takes away the strength of the foot and is likely to distort it. Even if this heel position did cause discomfort, it did not disappear quickly. The *Chicago Tribune* published an article in 1881 in which a physician discussed the case of a young girl suffering from pain and even nausea due to her heel placement.<sup>153</sup> The concern went far beyond the issues of the foot and ankle; heels were seen as having the potential to disrupt the health of the entire body.

This was clearly a risk many women were willing to take. Even if high heels had returned under a more practical pretense of dry feet, they also helped women achieve longstanding normative beauty ideals. Indeed, the desire for small feet had not disappeared since the preceding decades and heels were considered one element in achieving that illusion. They also created a notable change in the posture and movement of the wearer, along with added height and lengthening of the silhouette. The fashionable effects of high heels, both on and off the feet, swayed women and men alike. In response

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<sup>152</sup> “The Foot,” *Harper's Bazaar* 1, no. 17 (Feb 22, 1868): 258.

<sup>153</sup> “Ill-Health from High Heels,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Jan 8, 1881): 15.

to a medical lecture against high heels in 1882, Dr. Barker mentioned that he noticed that “the most graceful gait and movements which I have ever seen have been those who have worn high-heeled shoes.”<sup>154</sup> Despite his experience and knowledge of the dangers of high heels, their effect was undeniable. When wearing high heels, the body tends to shift posture to accentuate the hips and chest, as well as shortening the gait.<sup>155</sup> This posture, however, was less than ideal in the straight mid nineteenth-century corsets and cage crinolines. Without visible bottom halves and rigid torsos, a woman in too high of heels “instead of becoming like a graceful pillar, resembles rather a leaning tower,” according to *Godey’s Lady’s Book*.<sup>156</sup> To accommodate this stiff lean forward, *Godey’s* claimed, a new walking process was adopted that was less of a graceful glide and instead gave “the walk a tottering motion, which is exceedingly ungraceful.”<sup>157</sup>

In fact, the fashionable shape of garments began to shift along with this new posture in the late 1860s and developed a particular appearance that was coined the “Grecian Bend” (Appendix A, Fig. 9). According to *Scientific American*, this posture was “an S-like curvature of the upper figure, caused by thrusting out the chest, bending forward the head, contracting the stomach, and elevating the hips, the latter effect being aided by wearing very high-heeled shoes, and an arrangement upon the hips called a

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<sup>154</sup> Samuel C. Busey, *Transactions of the American Gynecological Society*, Vol. 7 (Philadelphia: Henry C. Lea’s Son & Co., 1883): 262.

<sup>155</sup> Morris et al. (2013) studied point-light displays of women in high heels to find an increase in hip rotation, tilt, and shortened gait. Correct sex identification and ratings of attractiveness also increased.

<sup>156</sup> “Dress Taste,” *Godey’s Ladies Book* (Sept 1857): 216.

<sup>157</sup> “The Science of Dress,” *Godey’s Ladies Book* (Mar 1858): 235.

*panier*, which is, most unsophisticated reader, in plain English, a bustle.”<sup>158</sup> This trend quickly became a target for both ridicule and judgement, with caricatures in the *Saturday Evening Post* and satirical articles published widely. Even *Harper’s Bazaar* sarcastically published that if a young lady wants to assure a proper bend, one should eat “one pint of green chestnuts, two large, hard, green apples, one stale watermelon, half a pound of raw cabbage, and a quarter of a pound of honey. A little milk and vinegar will add to the effect.”<sup>159</sup> Clearly, as the position was associated with less desirable digestive problems and their ill effects, not everyone found it to be an attractive posture for women.

While the quote above is meant sarcastically, it does draw attention to another central critique of the exaggerated silhouette and the shoes that went with it. The medical and popular press considered the high heels and tight clothing necessary to achieve the look deleterious to women’s health. One journal author complained of women’s figures being “marred, spoiled, and obliterated” by the style.<sup>160</sup> And it wasn’t just the physical ramifications that were troubling, but as the term “spoiled” might imply, there were moral implications as well. Damaging the body in the name of fickle fashion was cast as a moral issue for women, as was the fact that they were making a hobbled and bent back somehow fashionable. In a poem titled “The True Grecian Bend,” Larry Leigh accused young women of taking the hunched back, which was so often a source of pain and colic

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<sup>158</sup> “High Heels, Narrow Toes, and Other Absurdities of Fashion,” *Scientific American* XIX, no. 10 (Sep 2, 1868): 148.

<sup>159</sup> “Facetiae,” *Harper’s Bazaar* 1, no. 59 (Dec 12, 1868): 944.

<sup>160</sup> “High-Heeled Boots,” *Appletons’ Journal of Literature, Science and Art* IV, no. 89 (Dec 10, 1870): 710.

for poor and laboring women, and turning it into a desirable aesthetic.<sup>161</sup> Leigh adds yet another layer of moral problems for women who were seen to purposely hobble themselves in the name of fashion. The mostly young and wealthy female consumers were accused of ignoring those who suffered from health defects out of their control (due in part to their class status) and willingly inflicting those defects upon themselves. It was the self-deformation that was the largest concern, however, as women purposely damaging their own bodies fell under the realm of public health concerns and morality.

#### Prerogative of Self-Torture: Slavery to Fashion

Medical groups quickly began attacking the fashion of high heels as they rose in popularity, warning women of the dangers to their health in hopes of promoting reform. John Harvey Kellogg, a physician who gained notoriety for the cereal served at his holistic sanitarium, published in his *Good Health* journal that the making of shoes with such high and tiny heels is an “abominable practice.” Writing in 1879, he notes that “four or five years ago either the ladies or the shoemakers took a notion to the laws of hygiene in this particular; and for a year or two shoes for ladies had low and broad heels...”<sup>162</sup> Others took a more technical approach. At a meeting of the *American Gynecologic Society* in 1882, alongside such medical topics as extra-uterine pregnancy, Dr. Samuel C. Busey presented entirely on the subject of high-heeled French shoes and their dangerous relation to the pelvic organs. He delivered a lengthy discussion of how the position of the

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<sup>161</sup> Larry Leigh, *The True Grecian Bend: A Story in Verse* (New York: J.S. Redfield, 1868).

<sup>162</sup> “A New Abomination,” *Good Health* vol. 14, no.2 (1879): 59.

feet, and therefore the rest of the body, changes when wearing high heels. As a result, Busey argued, a woman's equilibrium is displaced, so the body must compensate by over-exaggerating their posture and spinal curve. While this repositioning of the body is supported by modern science, Dr. Busey also went a step further and applied it to the most concerning part of a Victorian woman's body: the uterus.

It was Dr. Busey's belief, as was common among the medical establishment of this era, that a woman's uterus was tentatively held in place by fine, elastic structures that could easily be disturbed. It was meant to move about freely to promote healthy circulation, but even a slight alteration in the pelvic tilt could cause issues. Other organs, when displaced and improperly supported, could push upon the uterus and prevent it from functioning properly. This would lead to "uterine displacement," which Dr. Busey even went so far as to suggest could result in sterility.<sup>163</sup> A discussion between the attending physicians followed, who were largely supportive of his theories. Women were summed up as vain creatures "influenced by the caprices of fashion" and the instinct to make themselves attractive for the other sex. Thus, Dr. T.G. Thomas responded that it was essential for this work to not only be published in medical journals, but in journals "which will reach the masses of the people, because it so fully and so clearly lays before them the evils attending upon the fashion mentioned."<sup>164</sup>

This idea of raising public awareness was by no means new. The medical establishment produced copious books, treatises, and journal articles on the subject of

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<sup>163</sup> Busey, *Transactions of the American Gynecological Society*, vol. 7: 259.

<sup>164</sup> Busey, *Transactions of the American Gynecological Society*, vol. 7: 264.

high heels, often even turning to local and regional newspapers in an effort to reach women more directly. The *Ohio Farmer* published such an article from the London *Medical Examiner*, noting that even with such a “high authority” giving caution to ladies, high heels won’t be abandoned until “fashion gives the word.”<sup>165</sup> As for the advice, they urged women to call for reform and resist purchasing the shoes in question. Women were the ones with the power to change fashion, they claimed, exercised by their pocketbooks. If women weren’t willing to demand change in this area, according to the *Medical Examiner*, then no woman “who is willing to follow so absurd a fashion as this, fully cognizant of its evils, ought ever to ask the right of suffrage, or to complain that she has no part in the making of laws by which she is governed.” Women who were asking for more power were being accused of squandering what they already had. And this was not a singular article. The *New York Times* repeated the accusations in 1871 stating “Suffrage! Right to hold office! Show us first the woman who has independence and sense and taste enough to dress attractively and yet to walk down Fifth-avenue wearing an unfashionable bonnet, or in a shoe which does not destroy both her comfort and her gait.”<sup>166</sup> Women’s slavery to fashion was being used as a reason to continue their subservience in society.

Despite concerns of morality and health, the high heel managed to keep its relevancy. Its end was prematurely heralded by the *Chicago Daily Tribune* in 1873, proclaiming “Louis Quinze is not only dead, but so is his heel.”<sup>167</sup> Yet, high French heels

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<sup>165</sup> “High Heeled Shoes,” *Ohio Farmer* vol. 19, iss. 13 (Apr 9, 1870): 236.

<sup>166</sup> “Make-Believe Shoes,” *New York Times* (Sep 2, 1871): 4.

<sup>167</sup> “Boots and Shoes,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (May 18, 1873): 7.



and Louis XV heels were consistently mentioned in fashion reports throughout the 1870s. It took until the mid-1880s for the heel to lower for any distinct amount of time, which may have had more to do with the fashionable long and pointed toe that was appearing. An article published on the Grecian Bend in 1868 puts the eternal allure of the high heel in perspective, arguing that when the skirt hem was low a lady's feet "might be as crooked, flat, and ugly as she pleased," but that once the feet were exposed under a shorter skirt they need the remedy of the "boot-maker's art."<sup>168</sup> As for why women chose to adopt such an extreme fashion as the solution, the article notes that women must have some weakness, "just to prevent us from becoming altogether angelic, spreading our wings and flying away." This slavery to fashion was nothing new, so far as prescriptive literature was concerned, and women had been finding some "weakness" to ground them for a long time. On the other side, criticism was nothing new to these women either and, as an 1864 article notes, "if the bonnets are not in fault, the shoes are objectionable; the feather is too long, or the heels are too high; and intermediate to the foot is millinery, which never fails to offend."<sup>169</sup> If everything that women wore brought some sort of complaint, it becomes easier to ignore all of it.

In the end, the fashion for high heels and small feet never went entirely away. The presence of these issues in modern society speaks to how pervasive these ideals truly are. Even in the nineteenth century, they recognized how constant the desire for dainty feet was throughout history and how difficult it would be to discourage centuries of societal

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<sup>168</sup> "The Grecian Bend," *Arthur's Home Magazine* (Nov 1868): 308.

<sup>169</sup> "The Circumference of Ladies' Dresses", *Freeman's Journal*, 14 September 1864.

ideals. Even in the case of the newly re-emerging high heels, opponents failed to dissuade the public, even if the arguments made against them were prolific and nearly immediate after their return. The quest for the ideal foot has certainly led some to extremes, though it leaves open the question of just how far most women did venture. Even the prescriptive literature often acknowledges that a little effort and artifice is not the same as torture and deformation. Rarely do the women who chose to wear these styles have a presence in this literature, however. Those that do speak tend to be either unaware of how their health is affected by their choices, or unrepentant of their insistence on extreme fashion. They aren't necessarily the voice of real women, but serve as stereotypes of the ignorant or vain woman who must be protected from herself. Even in the case of Sally's plethora of private documents there is nothing said specifically about her experience with wearing these shoes. However, we are fortunate enough to have her surviving boots, which can provide us with insights into how these shoes were constructed and adapted to keep up with both fashion and function.

## CHAPTER 7: RECONSTRUCTION

The goal of this reproduction was to not only better understand this pair of extant boots and their construction, but how they functioned as living objects. It can be easy to look past many details when studying an object that are impossible to ignore during the process of reconstruction. Though relatively small, shoes of any type are incredibly complex. Sally's boots in particular were considered fragile due to their age and amount of trim. A thorough examination of the exterior could be made, but the interior could not easily be accessed. Measurements, photographs, and scale drawings are all utilized together to take note of the visible construction methods and details. In the case of reproductions, something as minute as the number of stitches per inch becomes essential. The boots are examined with each step in the shoemaking process in mind, rather than as a static object. This allows for an inspection of exterior evidence of construction that would otherwise be nearly invisible and easily missed. Shoes were sent through a series of skilled hands in nineteenth-century production, and even something as simple as order of operations can speak to the process and decisions that were intentionally made.

The goal of this reproduction was to better understand the three aforementioned major issues that were repeated throughout the nineteenth century; thin soles, tight shoes, and high heels. All three had strong connections to the concept of small feet, which is also related to the modern view that antique shoes often appear very tiny, and therefore women must have had smaller feet, or suffered for the appearance of it. Being able to compare the shape and measures of a reproduction 1864 shoe last to a modern last that

fits the same foot, as well as looking at the final appearance of the shoe on the foot provided some surprising results. Unlike the surviving pair, the reproduction boots can be put on and walked in, resulting in a dynamic experience that cannot otherwise be examined. Additionally, the reconstruction helped to shed light on how shoemakers dealt with potential issues of discomfort in fashionable shoes, the new construction methods of heels, and changing ideas of healthy shoe shapes.

Here it should first be mentioned that I have a background in women's historical shoemaking, working with both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While the exact process of reproducing Sally's boots did require additional research in certain construction methods, the process was not wholly unfamiliar. This is important to understand, because shoemaking was, and still is, considered a lengthy trade to undertake an education in. To produce a wearable pair of shoes that fits properly is the result of many years of trial and error, and this task of reproduction was not taken on without that acknowledgement. This also means that the process can at times be complex and requires a range of specific terminology. A diagram has been provided to help clarify (Appendix A, Fig. 11). Understanding how shoes were constructed changes how extant objects are viewed. For example, while something as minute as stitching patterns may seem merely ornamental, they can help to date or classify the quality of construction. It is through this lens that Sally's boots will be scrutinized.

The project begins with constructing a wood last that forms the shape of the shoe, which was carefully worked to match the silhouette and sole shape of the original boot. Only minor adjustments were made to the size, adding 1/3" in length and 1/4" in width.

Both the shape of the original boots and the measurements of my modern feet were used to create the last. What surprised me most about the final format of the last was how large the circumference was compared to the foot print. Most of the room for the foot was done vertically, and the sole kept as narrow as possible. By keeping the sole as narrow as the foot can comfortably be condensed, it reduces the apparent size of the foot greatly. I did not expect to be able to cut the sole so narrow originally. In reality, there was extra width carved away that I thought would be necessary, in order to reach the circumference measurements needed for my foot. Sally's boots looked incredibly small to my eye while I was examining them, but there is no feasible way to measure the interior circumference of a surviving shoe. Only once the last was carved based on the height and width could a comparison of that measure be made. By keeping the height the same as the original boots, I found that I could only add 1/4" to the width and still keep to my measures. When it came to length, I found that there was only a slight difference between her size and mine as well. Based on the standardized women's shoe sizes discussed in *The Art of Boot and Shoemaking* from 1889, that would place me as a size 3 and Sally's boot as a size 2.<sup>170</sup> For reference, I am a modern size 7 (US). It should be noted that the women's 1889 sizes range from 1-7, which would be comparable in measurements to a modern range of 5-11.5 (US).<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Leno, *The Art of Boot and Shoemaking*: 32.

<sup>171</sup> Exact comparisons are difficult since we have moved to a system with half sizes.

1858 <sup>172</sup>	1889 <sup>173</sup>	2018 <sup>174</sup>	Length of Foot	Length of Last
	1	5	8 2/3"	9 1/3"
2	2		9"	9 2/3"
3	3	7	9 1/3"	10"
4	4		9 2/3"	10 1/3"
5	5	9.5	10"	10 2/3"
6	6	10.5	10 1/3"	11"
7	7		10 2/3"	11 1/3"
8		12	11"	11 2/3"

This illusion of small feet continued in the construction of the boots soles. Shoes of this era often have a very strong bow to the bottom of them, which is also visible in surviving lasts. By curving the sole upwards along the side of the feet, it follows the natural shape of the foot, allowing for a closer fit. If made completely flat, the upper would need to be lengthened to reach the ground, or the shoe would initially fit too tightly until broken in. This visual curve also allows for that hidden thickness in the middle of the sole. While the external, visible edge of the sole was a scant 2mm, the central portion of the sole was much thicker at 11mm. Not only is the outsole only thinned towards the edges, but the insole, which is not visible along the outer edges, adds to the overall thickness. The cork or wool inserts that were recommended in numerous dialogues would also have been hidden inside. I chose to place mine between the out and insoles in a gap left by the seam allowances of the uppers. It only places bulk under the joints of the foot, which would be visible only as that slight curve to the sole.

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<sup>172</sup> Richardson, *The Boot and Shoe Manufacturers' Assistant and Guide*: 91.

<sup>173</sup> Leno, *The Art of Boot and Shoemaking*: 32.

<sup>174</sup> From <https://www.bloomingdales.com/b/about-us/shopping/sizecharts/mens-womens-kids-shoes/> and supported by numerous other websites charts.

Once the boots were constructed, and before trim was applied to both, I tried them on to check fit and appearance (Appendix A, Fig. 12). The illusion of a small foot was surprising. When wearing a cage crinoline, as would have been common in 1864, the skirts extend far enough to hide the foot when standing. The shoe would only be visible once the foot was fully extended forward when climbing up steps or seated. This meant that at no point would the foot be visible when spreading out to bear the weight of the body. Whenever I moved forward to place weight on my foot, the center of mass moved far enough forward to cover it with the skirt. Any constriction in the width of the shoe would be maintained when weight was lifted, so even if the foot has a tendency to spread and widen at the joints when standing, it would never be seen.

The trimmings add another layer of illusion by masking and creating new proportions on the foot (Appendix A, Fig. 13). For example, the bow sits over the joint of the foot, essentially obscuring the widest part. Only a few inches of narrow toes are visible forward of the bow. Above it, the instep is visible up to the tassels. This is the narrowest part of the foot, though the tallest. The tassels in turn bring attention to the narrow front of the ankle. While I had observed some of these elements on the extant pair, the effect on a foot was almost shocking. The boots looked small to the eye for a number of reasons. So much so that I did not expect to be able to reproduce their proportions for my own foot. In reality, once made to the measurements I expected to fit me, I found that I could have made the boots slightly shorter and tighter around the joint of the foot, which would have placed them at exactly original size.

Other areas of the boots had deceptive construction techniques as well. The heel, for example, appears higher than it actually is. Because of the aforementioned curve in the sole, the heel is also carved out to make a basin for the heel of the foot and the sole edges are hammered up to fit tightly to the uppers. This allows the foot to be cradled, which not only adds a few deceptive millimeters to the height, but helps to prevent the heel of the foot from sliding around in the shoe. The heels themselves tell their own story. Having worked on women's eighteenth century shoes prior to this, the construction technique for stitching in heels is very tedious and exacting compared to the rest of the process. Since the methods of shoemaking were changing dramatically in the nineteenth century, moving away from hand-stitching towards faster mass-production, the old methods of heel attachment were not going to be feasible on that scale. Instead, the knock-on heel was created, which allowed for the heels to be fully covered or constructed from layers of leather prior to attaching to the shoe. Gutta percha and other cementing options meant that stitching was no longer necessary for that part of the production as well. The heels on Sally's boots were made from layers of leather soling cemented together, and likely pegged, and then carved.<sup>175</sup> Even in the case of high quality, and fashionable, shoes, this knock-on heel was still standard.

Heels, however, were still considered a subsection of the shoemaking trade due to the difficulty in their production. Even as of 1885, the process still required "considerable

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<sup>175</sup> "Pegging" refers to a process where an awl is used to make a hole through multiple layers into which a small wooden peg is driven. This prevents movement between two or more layers.



skill” to produce even heels and had yet to be properly copied by machine.<sup>176</sup> Regardless, the time it took to make and attach a heel would have been greatly reduced and would have been compatible with changing production methods. Some shoes in the late nineteenth century still maintained stitching around the fabric covering of the heel, but the stitches were rarely functional. A pair of 1880s embroidered satin boots from F. Pinet, a luxury French shoemaking brand, are part of the collections at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Appendix A, Fig. 10). I was able to examine these boots as part of the research process into understanding shoemaking methods of the nineteenth century. While the soles are stitched on by hand, as the shadows of the stitches are visible, the heels are cemented together with only decorative, fake stitches visible. If boots of this quality are no longer using older methods, than very few would be. Knowing how long the true eighteenth century heel methods take in comparison to both styles of knock on heel, having now tried all three methods, it’s no surprise that shoemakers were imitating this high level of skill. It shows how highly held the old techniques were, which makes the reappearance of high heels at the Great Exhibition of 1851 less surprising. If a shoemaker of women’s styles was looking for the best way to show off skill, then heels seem like a very logical choice.

Even if high heels owe some of their return to flaunting of shoemakers, their comfort and practicality are still in question. Sally’s boots have a deceptive heel height of 1 ¼”. The heel itself is placed far back, directly under the weight of the heel of the foot,

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<sup>176</sup> “Factory Shoemaking in Massachusetts,” *Scientific American* LII, no. 7 (Feb 14, 1885): 106.

unlike some of the fashionable heel styles that were of concern. In wearing the reproduction boots I found that this made modern heel-to-toe style walking very difficult. As I placed my foot down with the weight at the back of the heel, it made contact with the floor in the wrong place. Instead of the contact of the shoe heel being centered under my heel, it put pressure just behind my foot and felt unstable. I switched to a less aggressive gait, still placing the heel down first, but with the foot almost parallel to the floor, and the adaptation more readily fit the gliding motion that was mentioned in dialogues.

In fact, this particular method of walking was well described by *Scientific American* in 1882. They claimed that the standard heel-toe walk should not be attempted in French heels, and that this was what caused injury. The proper method could be achieved by taking flat shoes and “fastening to each, at the point where the heel should be, a small rubber ball with a whistle in it that makes a noise when it is squeezed.”<sup>177</sup> The wearer should practice until there is no noise. Supposedly, this would strengthen the calf muscles and avoid throwing the weight of the body too far forward, as high heels were often accused of doing. So, it might not be just the placement of the heel which caused foot problems, but perhaps the method of walking itself added to the complaints. As Marcel Mauss discussed with the theory of habitus, traditional techniques of the body are passed down, but often altered with time.<sup>178</sup> Since heels had been absent from

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<sup>177</sup> “Origin and Evolution of French Heels,” *Scientific American* XLVII, no. 2 (Jul 8, 1882): 21.

<sup>178</sup> Mauss, “Techniques of the body” (1973).

women's shoes for around fifty years, walking in them would require the techniques to be re-learned by society, not just individuals.

The original boots also have a straight heel breast, which means the heel does not extend to support the arch of the foot. Unlike modern shoes, these were also made with no shank, meaning that the sole and insole alone support the arch of the foot as it slants down towards the ground.<sup>179</sup> By the 1910s heel heights had increased and the shape of the last had changed enough that they began producing women's shoes with layered cardboard shanks for support. Since surviving nineteenth-century shoes in museum collections cannot be worn or heavily manipulated, it's impossible to tell from them how rigid or supporting this lack of structure may be. With this reproduction we are able to bend and test the support of the waist. While there is some slight flexibility, the leather is heavy enough to resist, and the construction methods of cementing create a fairly rigid center line. This means that the curved heel breast was not necessary for holding up the arch of the foot, and that shoes of this era were capable of being stable and supportive.

All of these areas of interest could not be feasibly studied with the extant boots alone. While detailed observation of the objects can illuminate these decisions, in the end, these boots were made to be worn. That dynamic relationship between body and shoe, which is of such concern to medical and moral society, cannot be fully understood with a static object. This reproduction is not meant to provide answers as to the individual experience that Sally, or any other woman of the nineteenth century, had while wearing

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<sup>179</sup> Modern shoes often have a shank- a narrow strip, made of metal or fiberglass, that runs from the heel to just before the joint of the foot to create a stiff and permanent arch.

them. Instead, this exploration is meant to force a minute level of research that unveils questions that would otherwise go unasked. It places doubts on the claims that were made and even possibly explains some of the artifice that may have tricked the eye. The reality is that the prescriptive literature is a one-sided dialogue. When studied in detail, artifacts can illuminate assumptions and misconceptions which the discourses do not.

## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS

“Don’t sacrifice yourself.”

When Sally wrote those words to her sister in 1867, she was encouraging Mary to remember that ultimately it was her life and her decision in who she married. She was fighting for the ability to make that choice, to have a say in her future, and to stand up for what she wanted. This voice, so strongly worded, is rarely heard in the historical records. Instead, the overpowering and constant drone of prescriptive literature and concepts of the ideal woman permeate the discourse. Looking at the surface by examining published literature shows a wealth of ways that efforts to control women in the nineteenth century, and police their bodies, were undertaken. Even the sheer quantity of dialogue on just the topic of women’s shoes is overwhelming. In the end, the concern over their bodies, minds, actions, and desires led to stereotypes of womanhood that still persist today. Women were assigned inherent traits and ideals that gave them a narrow framework to exist within. Despite this, women were able to exercise their own form of power and individualism, but we need to look further than the stereotypes in order to understand them. As Mahmood suggested, it isn’t just resistance to domination that defines agency, but it can be found in the everyday actions of women.

Even within the dialogue of the nineteenth century, women were recognized to have both weaknesses and strengths. While naivety and vanity might seem problematic, these attributes were also held up as reasoning for why women would excel in the household. It was believed that their emotional state, their “instinct,” was what allowed

them to guide the family. They became the bastions of morality not just in each household, but for society as a whole. In turn, this role came with both power and responsibility which subsequently led to the concerns over women's bodies and health. The concept of the ideal woman was created alongside other stereotypes of vanity, weakness, and childish behaviors as a warning. Despite issues with these negative feminine traits, the focus was not on how to amend these aspects, but how to control them. The prescriptive literature on shoes not only adds to the long list of women's weaknesses, but exposes the fact that women weren't expected to make good decisions on their own accord. If the literature is to be believed, women were either coerced into a narrow view of perfect womanhood or fell prey to moral vices for which they were condemned. However, these theories of vanity and weakness served a purpose in society and gave women a reason to exist within the role that they were considered best suited for. Medical research fed back into these concepts as well, further supporting the need for patriarchal guidance from physicians. By not only claiming that women had attributes which required external involvement, but by listing off a litany of examples in which women endangered themselves, the male-dominated medical field was establishing their own necessity.

With so much effort exerted towards telling women what to do and how to dress, it can imply that women had very little say in their own lives. This developing narrative is why looking at prescriptive literature through an isolated lens can be problematic. Assuming that that nineteenth-century women willingly submitted to all of these rules in an effort to fit the social values of the ideal woman, a stereotype of women as submissive

and docile develops. In fact, the freedom and power of women was in debate in the nineteenth century and many recognized that women did have self-determination, even if it wasn't within the traditional male arenas. Foucault argues that selfhood is not maintained through restraint, but through our own self-correction to norms. Even by following societies rules, women chose how to present their "self" to the world every day. In presenting that ideal image with how they dressed and acted, regardless of where the standards originated, women were creating the "self" that Goffman defined. When men were accused of patriarchal control over women's lives, they often refuted their ability to do so. "Look at the dress of woman," the Knickerbocker wrote, "Were man to so direct the fashion of woman's dress, in order to enable him by physical force to overcome her and tyrannize over her, he could not more completely fetter her than she shackles herself."<sup>180</sup> It was fashion that was charged with holding dominance over women; a choice these women supposedly readily made. Regardless of whether they chose fashion because of popularity, beauty, joy, or even practicality, they expressed themselves through what they wore.

By looking at Sally's surviving boots, we can see how this relationship between fashion and identity affected their construction. Shoemaking is as much an art form as it is a technical job. By reproducing these boots, and examining every decision made, the complex illusion that they created is revealed. The lines, trim, shape, and style all contributed towards the ideal dainty foot. Even something as simple as the placement of a

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<sup>180</sup> Physical Decline of American Women. The Knickerbocker. New York Vol 55 Iss 1 (Jan 1860) 37.

bow, or as discreet as the curve of a sole, played a part in achieving the ideal. Sally purchased these boots herself and cherished them long enough to be handed down and donated to a collection in nearly pristine condition. She chose a pair of shoes that epitomized the fashionable high heel and small foot, regardless of what was said about them. And Sally was not alone in that choice. Every object of fashion saved in a collection is amalgamation of conscious decisions, and shoes such as Sally's can encourage a reexamination of the impact that prescriptive literature had. Women created a version of "self" and identity through their fashion choices, which clearly reached far beyond their clothing. The dialogue would not have focused so heavily on morality and health if they didn't believe that clothing could have a marked effect on a person, or that it was an expression of identity and social role.

Women's roles were doubly important, because they represented not only the individual, but the reproduction of society as well. Through their health and morality, they propagated the next generation. Damage to either aspect was considered a public concern. When it came to shoes and their potential dangers, women were not only considered high risk, but their protection carried those high stakes as well. Their public role of reproduction could only be performed if their body remained safe and healthy. Not only were they medically in danger if they damaged their body, but were morally at risk as well. If something as simple as the appearance of a tiny foot reflected heavily on inner beauty, then the deformation of the feet translated to a deformed morality. In the case of the Grecian bend, the entire body was considered altered and damaged. The ideal woman was meant to be pure, but they had polluted themselves. Women were



subsequently accused of neglect, endangerment, and even self-murder, based on their fashion choices. Originally I questioned whether women would even have believed such dramatic warnings of death and disfigurement. Clearly, they had failed to alter styles. However, these warnings did serve a larger purpose of continuing to support theories of women's weaknesses and the actions taken to control them. These discussions were published widely, far beyond just women's magazines, and potentially had a diverse audience. It was not just young and fashionable women who needed to be warned, but those around her who could claim control over her actions.

The supposed consequences of pain, disfigurement, and even death shadowed fashionable shoes throughout the century. In order for these fashions to have persisted, women had to keep buying and wearing them in resistance to those warnings. Some may have done so in acknowledgement of their ability to control and shape their own bodies through such resistance. For others, it was a way of keeping to the norms of beauty that society presented through fashion. Regardless of their individual reasons, women's agency is apparent within the continued presence of these supposedly dangerous fashions. Employing the theories of material culture in this research, the surviving boots from the Codman collection highlight the disparity between literature and material evidence. We may not always know who made it, or who wore it, but the existence of fashionable shoes in general challenges the narrative written in nineteenth-century documents. Though women may not have responded to the litany of prescriptive literature with articles of their own very often, they still exercised their power in how they shaped and presented their bodies.

Women's voices in general are largely absent from the traditional historical narrative. They didn't publish at the same rate that men did, they weren't the majority of writers for newspapers or magazines. Instead, many women were just like Sally; filling their day with family, the home, and seemingly mundane responsibilities. Rarely are their letters, diaries, and personal thoughts able to survive through time. And even less often are those pieces that do survive given the treatment and study that the published media or private correspondence of great figures receive. But if a woman's role was so important and vital to society in the nineteenth century that it required article after article, book after book to be written to help guide them, then they should be considered just as important to historiographical studies. Their opinions and actions were influential, even if they were not rebels and activists. Sally raised her children to be well-educated and aware of broader issues of politics, as she was not isolated from the world and knew the importance of that knowledge. Her account book shows that she had experiences in finances at a young age and the books she read reveal a broadly educated woman. Even if she didn't make a notable impact on history, Sally was hardly segregated from it. She had an active part of guiding the household and society.

Women who kept to societal expectations, such as Sally, have been previously homogenized and placed within a boxed-in framework that was assumed to be universal and consistent. They weren't always viewed as impactful individuals by historical study. As a whole group, they at least had some sway on the approved historical framework that was so often male. However, there are difficulties with assuming women need to operate within the male arena in order to be of interest to history. It creates a past where one

group had all the power and influence, while others were simply subjugated and controlled. Those women who did follow social norms, who worked within the system, are seen as unlike us, as a sort of “other” because they supposedly submitted in a manner we are unaccustomed to today. Todorov mentions that when we other someone they often fall into the categories of an ideal or a foil.<sup>181</sup> This represents the nineteenth-century woman perfectly. She is seen as either a meticulous, virtuous stereotype or a supporting role in a masculine world. In order to dismantle this imagery, the individual lives and experiences of women need to not only be recognized, but respected. It can’t be done simply by looking at the broader groups of the nineteenth century because as they are generalized, they fall into those stereotypes and those roles we have relegated to others.

Neither can stereotypes be dismantled simply by looking to the standard forms of historical research. Historiography on the ideal woman found in prescriptive literature shows her as disconnected and private, unaware of the world outside of her bubble. But our museums and collections are filled with their lives and everyday choices. The clothing that they made, bought, and wore still exists in massive quantities. And just like written literature, it does have a voice if we look at it through a detailed lens. The aim of this viewpoint of microhistory, according to Iggers, is to provide evidence for those who are left out of history. Sally’s life, and the physical object she left behind, are their own form of evidence, through which the stereotypes of the nineteenth-century woman are challenged.

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<sup>181</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *The Morals of History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

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APPENDIX A

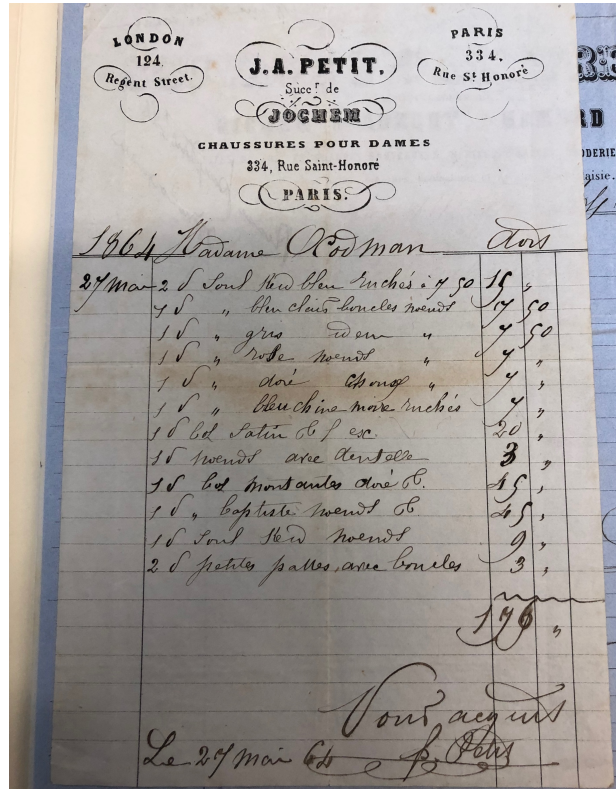


Figure 1: Receipt for boots purchased from J.A. Petit on May 27, 1864. Codman family papers, MS001.15. Historic New England, Library and Archives.



Figure 2: Sarah (Sally) Codman’s boots. Historic New England Collections, Massachusetts (1969.5479AB).



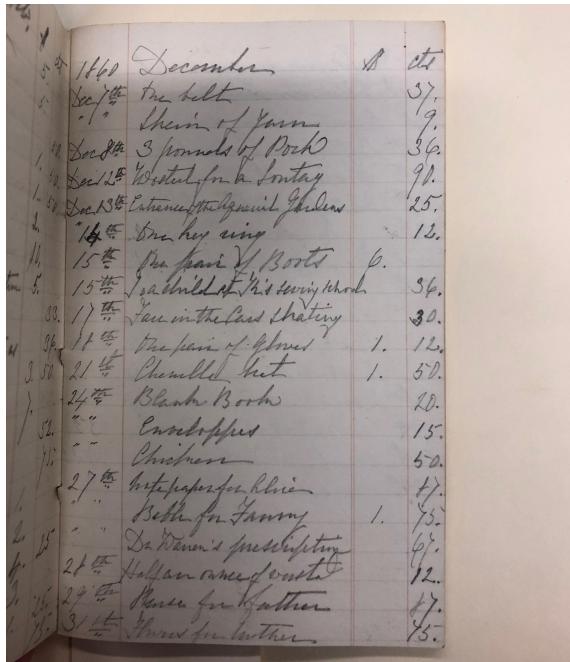


Figure 3: A page from Sarah (Sally) Codman's account book 1860-1861. Codman family papers, MS001.18. Historic New England, Library and Archives.

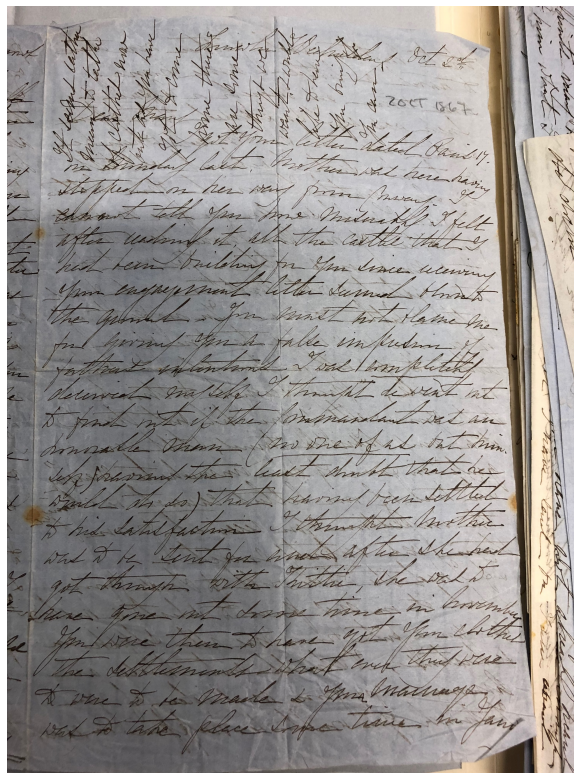


Figure 4: A letter from Sarah (Sally) Codman to her sister Mary dated October 20, 1867. Codman family papers, MS001.23. Historic New England, Library and Archives.



Figure 5: Sarah Bradlee Codman. Taken in Paris on May 24, 1864. Codman family photograph collection, MS001.PC. Historic New England, Library and Archives.





Figure 6: Ogden & Sarah Codman. Taken in Paris on May 24, 1864. Codman family photograph collection, MS001.PC. Historic New England, Library and Archives.



Figure 7: The curve of the outsole. Historic New England Collections, Boston, Massachusetts (1969.5479AB).



Figure 8: Satin Boots by Gartrell (1865-1870). Victoria & Albert Museum, London (T.127&A-1961).





Figure 9: Currier & Ives. *The Grecian Bend*. 1868, Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002695813/>



Figure 10: F. Pinet Boots (1880s). LACMA, Los Angeles (M.58.4a-b).

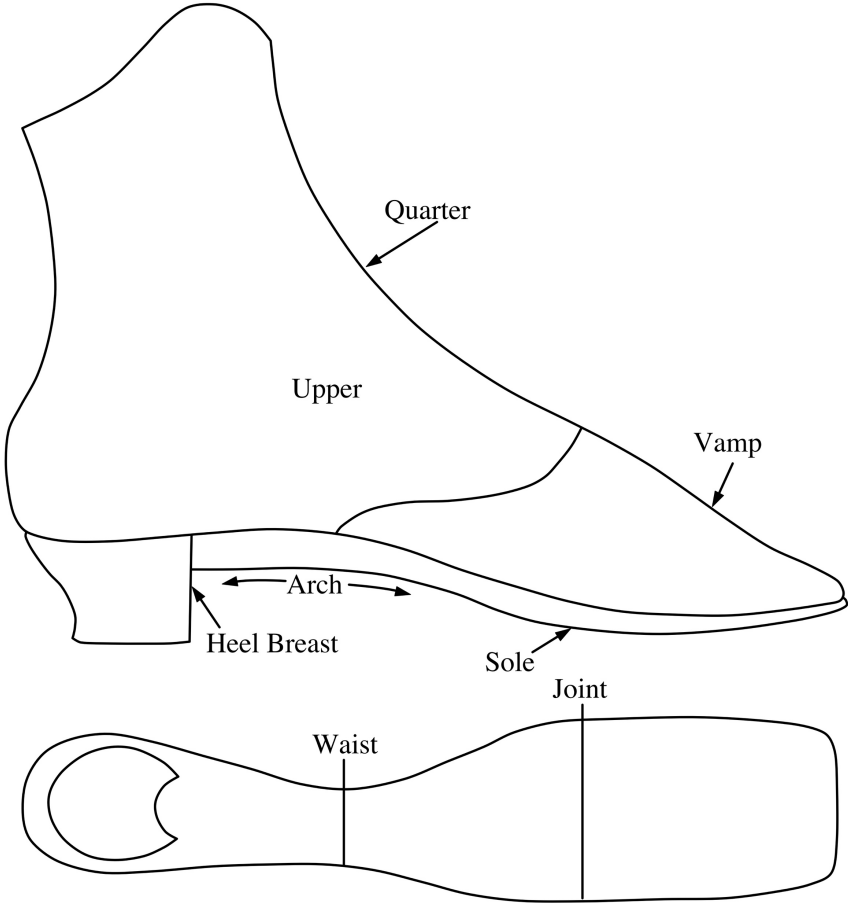


Figure 11: Diagram of shoemaking terms.



Figure 12: Reconstructed boot before trimming is applied.



Figure 13: Reconstructed boots with trimming.



APPENDIX B



Figure 1: French boots purchased by Sarah Codman in 1864. Historic New England Collection, Massachusetts (1969.5479AB).





Figure 2: Detail of stitching for leather reinforcement.



Figure 5: Bow made of two different silk ribbons.



Figure 3: Sole of left boot.



Figure 6: Interior photograph showing the stitching of the reinforcements and binding.



Figure 4: Matching silk braided cord and tassels.

### Construction Process

First, the extant boots are thoroughly documented and photographed for reference (Fig. 1-6). A drawing is made to scale, often tracing around the shoe, of both the sole shape and side profile (Fig. 7 & 8).

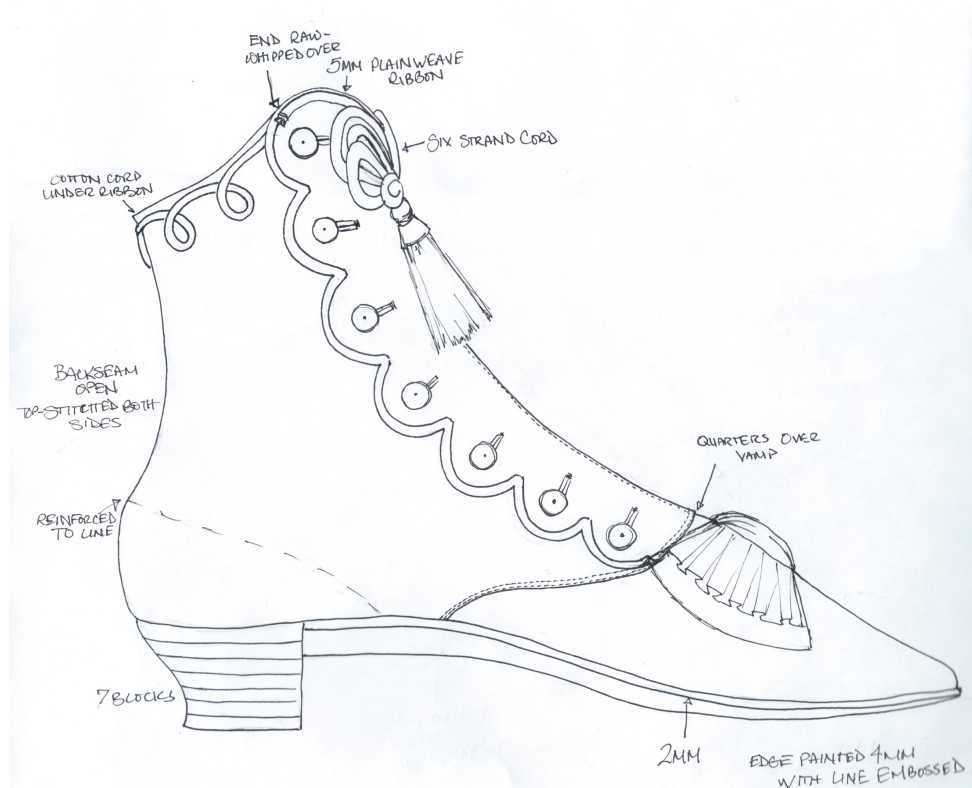


Figure 7: Notes and drawing taken from extant boots.

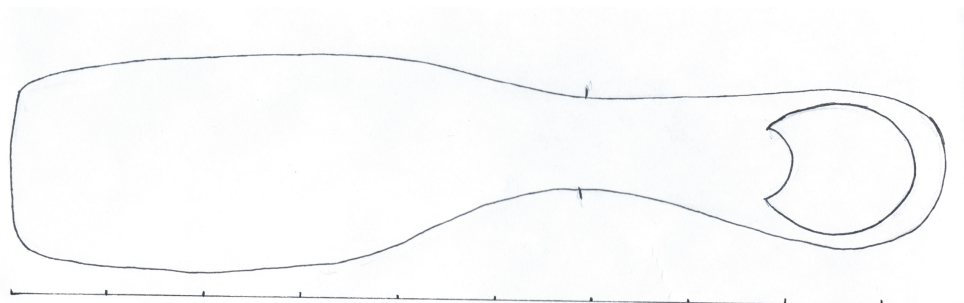


Figure 8: Tracing and measure of sole from extant boots.

Notes are made on the construction techniques and measurements of stitching, trim, buttonholes, reinforcements, etc. Since the boots were too fragile to unbutton, photographs were carefully taken of the interior to help understand the construction methods that are difficult to see inside (Fig. 9). Worn areas can be particularly useful, as they expose some of the structure and internals. In this case, only a small abrasion on the ribbon binding existed, which allowed us to view the edge treatments underneath.



Figure 9: Interior photograph of the insole, label, and lining.

The reconstruction of Sally's boots began with sourcing materials, which is always one of the most difficult steps of the process (Fig. 10). Most of the textiles and trims utilized are no longer produced, at least not at the same quality. This necessitates that if an antique or vintage supply cannot be found in a strong enough state to be worked on, the missing element must either be produced from scratch or compromised. The original exterior fabric was listed as "baptiste" on the receipt. The extant has a very tightly woven and light weight, though not sheer, cotton in a natural, slightly yellow tone. Aging has



yellowed the cotton further and given a few spots. Having searched for a source for cotton nankeen in the past, I know that this quality of weave and natural color of cotton is not available easily. Instead, I chose to use a fabric that has the appropriate weave, thread weight, and color variations, but is a mix of natural fibers. It was slightly too cool of tone, so it was dyed to be closer to the extant. The lining textile of the boots could be either plain weave cotton or linen, as both were common for shoe linings. I chose a linen since it was close in weight and weave. There are also reinforcements in whittaw leather behind the buttons and buttonholes.



Figure 10: Fabric and ribbons after being dyed to match thread.

Most of the upper was assembled with a dark blue silk thread, also used for the buttonholes. The edges were bound in a 1/2" china silk ribbon, which I dyed for the

reproduction. The bow was constructed from two different silk ribbons, with the wider 3” ribbon being antique and the pleated top ribbon dyed to match. While the original buttons have tarnished and lost their shine, I chose to reproduce them as they were originally. Small wooden beads were sanded down to the correct size, then gold wrapped thread was woven around the mould (Fig. 11). I was surprised at how well the gold thread matched the fabric once dyed, since that was not apparent in the boots due to aging. Braided cord and tassels could not be found in silk, so I chose to produce these as well. The color was matched to a heavy silk button twist thread and the cord done in a six-part braid. The tassels were worked over wooden moulds with the same thread (Fig. 12).



Figure 11: Gold thread covered button.



Figure 12: Six-strand silk braid and matching silk tassels made from covered wooden form.

Before the uppers could be patterned or constructed, wooden lasts needed to be carved to match the shape of the boots. I chose to make these to my foot size so that the boots could be worn and experienced. In the end, there was only around a 1/3" added in both length and width, so the reproductions are one size larger than the originals. The lasts were made from basswood, carved by hand (Fig. 13). I based the shape off of the measurements and profiles of the original boots, referencing an 1820s original last and a reproduction of it that I carved to fit my foot.



Figure 13: The process of carving a wooden last. Beginning with sawing to shape, carving, planning, then sanding.



Once both a right and left had been carved and matched to measure, a paper pattern was produced. I utilized a more modern method of covering the last in masking tape to obtain a shape, though wrapping in paper would have been done originally (Fig. 14). Once the shape was drawn out cleanly, the seam lines were added and a pattern created. Since I had not worked with this last or boot style before, I chose to make a test shoe. The uppers were made in muslin, lasted, and stitched to the sole which was a heavy piece of wool broadcloth (Fig. 15).



Figure 14: Masking tape pattern drawn onto last.



Figure 15: Patterns for uppers.

A few minor adjustments were made to the pattern from here to clean up the curve of the back seam and profile. In trying to understand how the seam allowances would be hidden and finished while making the test pair, I realized that the lining could not be cut from the same pattern. An examination of a photograph of the label inside the boots revealed that there was no interior seam between vamp and quarters- something that could not be seen by eye since the boots could not be unbuttoned to examine the interior. A separate pattern was made for the lining with two parts instead (Fig. 16).



Figure 16: Muslin and wool broadcloth mockup made to test fit.

Assembly then began with the fabric uppers being stitched and bound. The blue top-stitching was done by hand only through the outer layer, with the exception of the vamp/quarter seam to reinforce where the layers connect on the top of the instep. This was still left separate near the bottom to allow for the layers to be folded back during the lasting process later. A narrow cotton twill tape was whipped up the center back edge of the lining to help prevent stress. The edges around the top and button flap then had a



cotton cord whipped over them, joining the lining and outer fabric, to prevent fraying as well as stretching (Fig. 17). The ½” china silk ribbon was hand stitched to bind the raw edges in one action. The seven buttonholes on each boot were cut open and stitched with the same dark blue thread (Fig. 18). Whittaw leather reinforcements were whipped down to the interior behind the buttonhole flap and where the buttons would later be attached. I decided to wait on the buttons and other trim until after the boots had been assembled to reduce the risk of damaging or abrading them. The buttonholes and reinforcements were done prior because they were easier to do while manipulation and turning of the uppers was still possible.



Figure 17: Cotton cord whipped around edges for reinforcement.



Figure 18: Edges bound in blue silk ribbon. Buttonholes marked on right boot, cut and stitched on left.

The original boots were assembled using gutta percha in a process that was unique to the nineteenth century. While stitching was still being used for shoemaking at this time, there is visible evidence on the exterior of the sole that resembles narrow horizontal bumps. Sally's boots have no such marks, so the only other option for such a thin sole is that of gutta percha. It was first utilized as a cement for shoes in 1849, allowing the layers to be adhered without need of stitches or pegs.<sup>182</sup> While a shoemaking manual published in 1858 spent the majority of its pages discussing the usefulness of this rubber, another published in 1889 only mentioned it as a "special operation" which fell out of use because gutta percha quality had declined.<sup>183</sup> Stitched shoes were still regularly made during this time, but Sally's boots do not show the markings of stitches on the outsole, implying that gutta percha had been used as a cement. The process cannot be entirely replicated today, since gutta percha has fallen out of use with the exception of dental work and other minor areas. Aside from obtaining the rubber, special machinery was needed. The Jenkin's Press, patented in 1858, was even specifically invented to heat, hold, and cool down shoes that were cemented together.<sup>184</sup> However, this concept of cementing shoes together instead of stitching led to modern shoemaking techniques. For that reason, I chose to utilize a modern shoemaking cement as a replacement for gutta percha, which would allow me to construct the shoes with the same basic process.

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<sup>182</sup> Richardson, *The Boot and Shoe Manufacturers' Assistant and Guide*: 39.

<sup>183</sup> John Bedford Leno, *The Art of Boot and Shoemaking* (London: Crosby Lockwood and Son, 1889).

<sup>184</sup> Richardson, *The Boot and Shoe Manufacturers' Assistant and Guide*: 319.

Prior to assembly, all of the necessary pieces are cut and finished. The insole and outsole are cut to the same shape. The insole is then pared down to what is called a *feather edge* so it will be invisible around the outside edge, and is covered with a white leather liner. I chose a whittaw calf because it was readily available to me, though the original pair used tawed sheepskin. The outsole has a small amount of thickness removed near the edges to give the illusion of a thinner sole and lighter shoe. It was then finished by glassing and sanding until a suede finish was achieved, the edges had a thin line embossed near the edge, and the edges were dyed brown up to the embossed line (Fig. 19). I believe this was done to keep the leather which is visible in profile the same dark color, while leaving the main part of the sole raw, since any dye there would wear away quickly and unevenly.



Figure 19: The sole is finished with burnished edges and a suede finish.

A heel reinforcement was also pre-shaped to the last, made of whittaw since colored leather would show through and possibly bleed if wet (Fig. 20). The original boots have a clear line where this was inserted, with no reinforcement in the toe area. Finally, the heel was made from layers of sole leather cemented together, reinforced with wooden pegs to prevent the layers from slipping, and carved to shape (Fig. 21). After glassing and sanding to smooth the rough texture, the edges were dyed brown.



Figure 20: Whittaw heel re-enforcement cut and shaped before inserting.



Figure 21: Stacked leather heels cemented and pegged together (left) and carved to shape (right).



The actual assembly of the parts goes quickly once each piece is finished. The insole is tacked to the bottom of the last and the upper pulled down over it and tacked around the edges in a process called *lasting* (Fig. 22). I then pulled away sections of the tacks to apply cement to the insole edges and the interior edge of the lining. Working around the shoe, the entire lining is cemented to the insole first. The heel reinforcement is then inserted and cemented. Keeping the layers under even tension, the outer fabric is then cemented down.



Figure 22: Lasting the uppers over the insole and tacking to hold them in place before cementing.

A narrow piece of wool broadcloth was then applied to fill in the center sections where the fabric allowances did not meet, which also provides some warmth, water protection, and prevents the layers of leather from squeaking. The outsole is then cemented on and hammered down around the edges to give the proper curve of the sole which was

common in nineteenth-century women's shoes. Not only was the last made with a curve to its bottom, but the thickness of the insole, sole, and wool broadcloth towards the center of the shoe means the edges will appear much thinner than the center. The heel is the last piece cemented on. In order to bring the outsole to match the heel edge perfectly, I had to compress the outsole until it spread out slightly. This matches with the original boots, as the thickness of the outsole layer of the heel is more than the others. Some additional dye was applied to reduce variations that had appeared as the leather dried and the edges and heels were burnished by rubbing a wooden tool along them until they smoothed and became glossy. Once the finishing was completed (Fig. 23), the final steps are to apply the trimmings of buttons, cord, tassels, and ribbon bows (Fig. 24).



Figure 23: The boots after lasting, cementing, and finishing of the soles and heels. Lasts have not been pulled out yet.



Figure 24: The bow has been pleated, assembled, and tacked to the vamp.





Figure 25: Finished reproduction boots.