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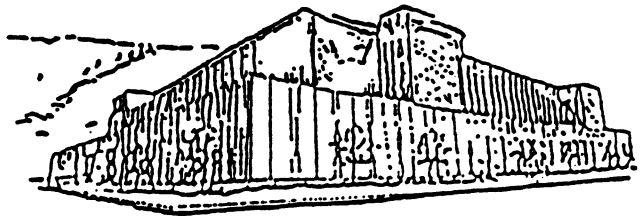
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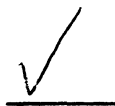
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**Lives Through the Looking Glass:
The Diaries of Three Nineteenth-Century American Women**

By

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B.A. 1993

Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, New York

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts
University of Montana
1999

Approved by:



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Abstract

Erin Kennedy Pelger

Lives Through the Looking Glass: The Diaries of Three Nineteenth-Century American Women

Advisor - Dr. Anya Jabour



This thesis focuses on three different but equally intriguing nineteenth-century American women - Madaline Selima Edwards (1816-1854), a "fallen woman" in Antebellum New Orleans; Charlotte Forten (1837-1914), a prominent free black abolitionist women from Philadelphia; and Angeline Mitchell (1854-1909), a schoolteacher on the Arizona frontier. Although these women came from very different family backgrounds, lived in different regions, and wrote in different eras, each crafted their life-stories through autobiographical writings. These writings not only capture their personal lives, but also reflect the social and historical circumstances that shaped their experiences. While these diarists use their writings to reflect, remember, and record, I use their writings as public documents that offer new vantage points for viewing major historical trends and events.

Madaline Edwards's private writings underscore the rigid gender roles that defined and confined middle and upper-class women in the Antebellum South. Her position as a woman outside the boundaries of acceptability, as a result of two failed marriages and an illicit affair with a married man, make Edwards's observations on gender particularly telling.

Charlotte Forten, a highly educated African American woman, used the power of literacy as a tool for social action both as a writer and a teacher. Her journals, particularly the ones she kept during the time she spent as a member of the Port Royal Experiment on the South Carolina Sea Islands during the Civil War, indicate her single-minded commitment to the liberation and improvement of her race.

Angie Mitchell's diary chronicles the changing face of the western frontier and the role that women played in that transformation. Beginning during her years as a college student in Kansas, Angie's dairy focuses mainly on her adventures as a schoolteacher on the Arizona mining and ranching frontier.

These chapters highlight the impact of education and literacy on the lives of nineteenth-century American women. Education extended women's concerns, expanded opportunities for financial independence, and dramatically altered the way they recorded their experiences. Integrating literary analysis with historical research, this thesis contributes to the growing literature on women's autobiographical writing.

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Finally, I want to thank my parents, Ellen Conroy Kennedy and Padraic Kennedy, and my husband, Jim Pelger, for their unwavering support, encouragement, and uncanny ability to listen. Thank you, Jim for bringing me to the mountains of Montana and leading me on a never ending series of great adventures.

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Introduction

Over the past two years I often have felt like a voyeur sneakily reading private writings. Spending countless hours deciphering and decoding handwriting, I have struggled to piece together stories and meanings from the diaries of three remarkable American women. This thesis focuses on very different but equally intriguing nineteenth-century women - a "fallen woman" in Antebellum New Orleans, a prominent free black abolitionist from Philadelphia, and a schoolteacher on the Arizona frontier. Although each of these women came from different family backgrounds, lived in different regions, and wrote in different eras, each crafted their life-stories through autobiographical writings. While these diarists used their writings to reflect, remember, and record, I use their writings as public documents. Reading between the lines of these private books not only offered me new vantage points for viewing major historical trends and events, it also gave me "the sense of being involved in actual lives in progress."¹ As I read daily entries, I was transported from the library or my living room to different settings in the Nineteenth century. I variously found myself in a cottage home in New Orleans in the 1840s, in a

¹ Harriet Blodgett, *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 156.

makeshift schoolhouse on the South Carolina Sea Islands during the Civil War, or in a frontier mining camp in the Arizona Territory in the late 1870s.

The essence of the historian's task is to "reconstruct the character and structure of ordinary life."² As a historian of women, the ultimate goal is to understand what women's lives were like in a past time, to get a sense of the attitudes, opinions, and beliefs that motivated individuals in different periods. What better way to accomplish this than by examining women's lives through their diaries? In many ways, women's diaries and journals chart unmapped territory. Written day by day, diaries provide "commentary on life as it is lived."³ This sense of immediacy pulls the reader in, fuels curiosity, and helps to reveal past times in a direct, unfiltered way.

It was not until recent years that historians began to use women's diaries at all. Dismissed as unimportant or trivial, women's diaries often remained hidden in manuscript collections under their husband's names. Since most women's writings ignored the "public" world of politics, focusing instead on daily routines and personal reflections, many historians deemed their stories peripheral to the main narrative of American history. Yet, with the rise of social history and the related emergence of women's history, fields of historical inquiry began to change. As new generations of researchers entered archives, they uncovered dusty documents to reveal new perspectives, new materials, and new ideas.

² Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), 148.

³ Suzanne L. Bunkers, "Midwestern Diaries and Journals: What Women Were (Not) Saying in the Late 1800s," in *Studies in Autobiography*, James Olney, ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 190-191.

An increasing number of scholars have begun to examine the role of autobiographical writing in nineteenth-century women's lives.⁴ Crossing disciplinary boundaries, these scholars integrate literary analysis with historical research in an effort to understand the impact of literacy on women's public and private lives. To these scholars, literacy means more than the ability to read and write. As Catherine Hobbs puts it, "literacy in its broadest sense denotes not only the technical skills of reading and writing but the tactical - or rhetorical knowledge of how to employ those skills." Ultimately, Hobbs asserts, literacy can provide the power to act in society.⁵

This project grew out of curiosity about the impact of early women's education in the United States. In the 1970s, influential scholars such as Nancy Cott, Mary Beth Norton, and Linda Kerber began to chart the rise of women's education in the post-Revolutionary period, linking the growth of women's activism to increases in education and literacy.⁶ In the colonial and early national periods, there was a wide gap between women's and men's literacy. With the rise of republican ideology in the revolutionary era, however, an educated public began to be seen as an essential cornerstone of a strong republic. While in the early 1800s the education of girls was considered unnecessary and even dangerous, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the fundamental skills of reading and writing were commonplace. Following a trend set by

⁴ On women's autobiographical writings see Shari Benstock, ed., *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); James Olney, ed., *Studies in Autobiography*; Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, *Inscribing the Daily*; Catherine Hobbs, ed., *Nineteenth-Century Women Learn to Write* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995); Margo Culley, ed., *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1764 to the Present* (New York: Feminist Press, 1985).

⁵ Catherine Hobbs, ed., *Nineteenth-Century Women Learn to Write*, 1.

⁶ Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980); Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

educational reformers in the Northeast, female academies opened throughout the country during the first half of the century and the common school movement increasingly brought the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic to the masses. During the second half of the nineteenth century, opportunities for higher education for young women also increased markedly. Access to education profoundly influenced women's lives in the nineteenth century. It changed their possibilities; it changed their views of the world; and it dramatically altered the way they recorded their experiences.

The dramatic increase in the literate population was followed by a "reading revolution." Innovations in producing and distributing books and periodicals made books a familiar commodity.⁷ Historians estimate that between 1820 and 1850, the publishing industry expanded tenfold in response to increasing national levels of literacy.⁸ Among the most avid consumers of books and periodicals were women, young and old. The centrality of reading in the lives of middle and upper-class women is evident in their diaries and letters. Reading became a daily activity, both as a private and as a shared experience. Though adamant critics warned of the dangers of novel reading, middle-class women throughout the country were caught up in the "craze" of reading. Fiction reading, vocal critics argued, would seduce women to the evils of passion and emotion. Romance novels, in particular, were targeted as "vehicles for wider mischief, " which would lure women away from both responsibilities and reality.⁹

⁷ Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett: The Life and Death of a Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 166.

⁸ Susan Coultrap-McQuin, *Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 30.

⁹ Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 241; Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

Perhaps the critics of novel reading were right about the subversive power of literature.¹⁰ Reading did offer women an escape from reality. Reading did lead women, at least temporarily, away from the concerns of daily life. The process of reading provided women entry points into new worlds, new possibilities, and new visions of themselves. Reading fiction played an important role in the private lives and imaginations of many nineteenth-century women.¹¹ More than just a frivolous recreational activity, reading created a space for women to "explore the dilemmas of a rapidly changing American social world and the new complexities of female identity."¹² As historian Drew Gilpin Faust explains, "books served as a focus for searching self-examination and definition. Generic narratives of female trials and triumphs enabled women to imagine challenges beyond their own, customarily limited experience."¹³

The act of reading served as the springboard for the development of the reader's own narrative voice. Characters in sentimental or domestic novels "became real people with real names who lead lives much like those of their readers."¹⁴ Suddenly, a woman's own life could become a story. In short, reading inspired many women to become authors of their own experiences.

The three women considered in this thesis - Madaline Edwards, Charlotte Forten, and Angie Mitchell - defined and described themselves through the introspective act of writing.

¹⁰ Cathy Davidson, "The Novel as a Subversive Activity: Women Reading, Women Writing," in *Beyond The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism*, Alfred Young, ed. (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993), 283-316.

¹¹ Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 236.

¹² Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 154

¹³ Ibid..

¹⁴ Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 236.

Reading provided models for the crafting of their own identities; writing gave them the tools of self-invention and self-representation.

In the process of understanding the worlds that these women inhabited it was important not only to let them speak to me in their own voice through their writings, but also to consider their writings in the context of their times. As historian Laurel Ulrich explains, "taken alone, such stories tell us too much and not enough."¹⁵ Without the context of their lives and times these autobiographical tales make little sense. Each diarist takes us on a journey. Madaline Edwards escorts us into her world in the antebellum South; Charlotte Forten pulls us into the sub-culture of the abolitionist movement; Angie Mitchell transports us to the far western frontier.

Not surprisingly, all three women considered in this study came from privileged backgrounds where education was provided and encouraged. Madaline Edwards was born in Tennessee in 1816 to a solidly middle-class family. Like other girls of her class, she attended a female academy where she was given the rudiments of an English education. Charlotte Forten, born in Philadelphia in 1837, represented the fourth generation of Fortens born into freedom. Her grandfather, James Forten, owned a successful sailmaking business and was one of a handful of northern free blacks to achieve economic success in the early 1800s. Recognizing the importance of education, Charlotte's father provided her with private tutors and eventually sent her to Salem, Massachusetts, where she continued her studies at an integrated public school. After completing her secondary schooling, Charlotte went on to earn a degree from the Salem Normal School. Angie Mitchell, the daughter of an early graduate of Mount Holyoke Seminary,

¹⁵ Laurel Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard Based on her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 25.

was born in Massachusetts in 1854. Although she attended common schools in Junction City, Kansas, the majority of her early education came from her mother, a writer and educator. At the age of fifteen, Angie was sent to Kansas State Agricultural College, a newly established co-educational Land Grant college, and she later went on to attend the University of Kansas. Each of the characters in this study enjoyed the highest educational opportunities of their day.

All of these women were avid readers. Like other women in the antebellum period, Madaline Edwards engaged in the delights of novel reading. Romantic novels and seduction tales filled her mind with the sagas of tragic heroines. She adored Byron's poetry and cherished domestic novels by British women authors such as Fredrika Bremmer and Sarah Stickney Ellis. Her literary tastes extended beyond popular poetry and fiction to include political tracts and newspapers as well as books on religion and astronomy.¹⁶

Charlotte Forten also was an active reader. Her written commentary in her journals indicate that abolitionist literature constituted the majority of her reading material. Inspirational poetry and prose in leading anti-slavery periodicals such as *The Liberator* and *The National Anti-Slavery Standard* fueled Charlotte's commitment to the abolitionist crusade. Always seeking to improve herself, she also read books on history and spent a great deal of time studying French.

In contrast to her earlier counterparts, Angie Mitchell rarely mentioned what she was reading. It is clear, however, that reading was a regular activity in her life. Perhaps because she grew up in a household filled with books and with two parents who were dedicated readers, direct commentary on the books she read did not seem necessary or even remarkable. Yet, in her

¹⁶ Dell Upton, *Madaline: Love and Survival in Antebellum New Orleans* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 39.

reflections on life as a college student, Angie compiled a list of the broad array of books she brought with her from Junction City, which ranged from domestic novels by nineteenth-century American women writers such as Louisa May Alcott and Susan Warner to early realistic novels by Dickens and Charlotte Bronte. Angie's library also included numerous works on history, a *History of Rebellion for Young People*, and a book entitled *Famous Women*.¹⁷ In addition, she read stories written by her mother, who, after moving to the Arizona Territory, wrote adventure tales with southwestern settings.¹⁸

These diarists adopted narrative styles and literary devices from the books they read. Textual features of all three diaries highlight the influence of fictional models. Though each writer had a distinctive voice, they all recorded their experiences in a narrative style drawing on contemporary literature. Noting this connection between fiction and autobiographical writing, scholars have recognized that diaries written by readers have a "latent tendency to become narrative." In writing a "book of the self," diarists, consciously or unconsciously, lean toward acknowledged literary forms.¹⁹

Madaline Edwards modeled her life story after the seduction tales she adored. As a result, her own failed marriages, the deaths of her children, her periodic destitution, and her illicit affair with a married man became part of a larger plot. Incorporating all of the ingredients of a tragic morality tale, Madaline was able to fashion her own sad story in a more sympathetic light. In her journals, poems, and stories, she portrayed herself as an innocent young woman led astray by a

¹⁷ Angie Mitchell, "The Books I Took from Mine at Home," College Diary, page 89, Mitchell/Brown Family Papers, Series I: Box 37A, Sharlot Hall Archives, Prescott, Arizona.

¹⁸ Mrs. Angeline Brigham Mitchell, Manuscripts, Mitchell/Brown Family Papers, Series II: Box 37C, SHA.

¹⁹ Steven E. Kagle and Lorenza Gramegna, "Rewriting Her Life: Fictionalization and the Use of Fictional Models in Early American Women's Diaries," in *Inscribing The Daily*, 38-55.

series of poor choices and bad men. In this way, she highlighted her struggle for salvation and redemption rather than her culpability for her troubled circumstance. This creative manipulation of reality allowed Madaline to gain a degree of control over her own life.²⁰ The process of writing eased Madaline's suffering. It also gave her the means to "imagine and narrate a changed life course, to escape the constraints of her situation, and to begin to imagine a transformation of self-consciousness."²¹

Although in a less obvious and direct way, Charlotte Forten also patterned her life story after the literature that she read. Abolitionist tracts inspired the vocabulary, content, and style of her own writings. Themes of self-sacrifice, dedication, and unwavering commitment to the abolitionist crusade formed the foundation of her private narrative. Her personal reflections indicate that the liberation and improvement of her race were the main concerns of her life. Reading and writing became tools that she used in the battle against oppression. From her days as a student in Salem, Massachusetts to her experiences as a teacher of freed slaves in the South Carolina Sea Islands, Charlotte's diaries chart her development as a social reformer.

Less constrained by specific literary genres than either Madaline or Charlotte, Angie Mitchell portrayed the life and times of a frontier schoolteacher in her diaries. Angie's diary mirrors women's western adventure. These narratives portray women as active and adventurous, riding horses, roaming alone in nature, swimming in rivers, walking over prairies and through forests, and traveling unaccompanied on long stagecoach rides.²² Echoing many of these themes,

²⁰ Ibid., 42.

²¹ Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 156.

²² In her dissertation, "No True Woman': Conflicted Female Subjectivities in Women's Popular Nineteenth-Century Western Adventure Tales," June Johnson Bube argues that as the Nineteenth century progressed, women's "border tales" increasingly showed women "openly adventuring out and sensationally appropriating the personal, sexual, social, and economic power that the Nineteenth century designated masculine." Ph.D. diss., (University of

Angie's diary focused on hair-raising episodes full of physical challenges and danger. In her daily entries, Angie characterized herself as resourceful, spirited, and brave. She deliberately fashioned even minor aspects of her daily routine to present her life as a series of precarious adventure stories in which she assumed the starring role. Like a born story-teller, Angie selected events and details that brought her story alive for her readers. She filled her diary with an interesting and diverse cast of characters, but, she always assumed the role of heroine in her adventure narrative.

As they wrote these supposedly private texts, each of these writers was profoundly aware of an audience. Lynne Bloom, a scholar of women's autobiographical writing, asserts, "contrary to popular perception, not all women's diaries are written - ultimately or exclusively - for private consumption." Even if women's self-writings are personal records of private thoughts and activities, rather than reflections on public events, women often had a sense of "audience hovering at the edge of the page."²³ Authors of diaries and journals in the nineteenth century often displayed a consciousness that their documents might eventually become public.²⁴ Madaline wrote with her lover in mind; Charlotte felt the gaze of the abolitionist community over her shoulder; Angie crafted her diary as a series of adventure tales to share with her friends and family. This sense of audience shaped the selection and arrangement of detail within these women's journals and determined the kind of self-construction they chose to present.²⁵

Washington, 1995), 12.

²³ Lynne Z. Bloom, "'I Write for Myself and Strangers:' Private Diaries as Public Documents," in *Inscribing the Daily*, Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, eds., 23.

²⁴ Nancy Walker considers this issue of audience in her excellent essay, "Wider Than the Sky: Public Presence and Private Self in Dickenson, James, and Woolf," in *The Private Self*, 274.

²⁵ Margo Culley, ed., *A Day at a Time*, 12.

Keeping a diary always begins with a sense of self-worth, a conviction that one's individual story is somehow important or remarkable.²⁶ By engaging in such a process of daily authorship, the three women considered in this thesis asserted that their lives were worth recording. They turned inward and expressed who they were and who they wanted to become. As Margo Culley explains, "the pages of a diary might be thought of as a kind of mirror before which the diarist stands assuming this posture or that."²⁷ One may think of the following chapters as attempts to study the looking glasses of three women and the times in which they lived.

²⁶ Ibid., 8.

²⁷ Ibid., 12.

Chapter 1

"Pollution's Stain": Madaline Selima Edwards's Quest for Self-Definition and Redemption in Antebellum New Orleans

It has been said that the true southern lady of the nineteenth century was "submissive, physically weak, timid, modest, beautiful, graceful, innocent, compassionate, and self-denying."¹ But what about women who were not paragons of virtue in the Old South? Madaline Selima Edwards, one such fallen woman, was a resident of New Orleans in the 1840s. A look at her private writings offers a unique perspective on the ideals of womanhood in the Old South. Madaline Edwards's writings during the years that she was the mistress of Charles Bradbury, a married business man, shed new light on the rigid gender roles and notions of sexuality that defined, and perhaps confined, middle and upper-class women in the antebellum South. Her position as a woman outside the boundaries of acceptability, as a result of two failed marriages and her relationship with Bradbury, makes her observations on gender particularly intriguing and telling.

During her tumultuous relationship with Bradbury from the autumn of 1843 until the summer of 1847, Madaline, who was twenty-six at the start of their liaison, wrote extensively in her diaries and writing books. These essays, poems, and stories reveal a fallen woman's desperate struggle to shape a life and sense of identity outside of marriage. They also reveal a time-period and culture that offered extremely narrow options, both economically and socially, for women beyond the control of fathers, husbands, or brothers. Rather than overtly rejecting the nineteenth-century feminine ideal, however, Madaline Edwards attempted to stretch and remold this convention to allow for her own personal redemption.

¹ Kent Anderson Leslie, "The Myth of The Southern Lady: Antebellum Proslavery Rhetoric and the Proper Place of Woman," *Sociological Spectrum*, VI (1986), 31-49.

Piecing together her life from her diaries, letters, and writing books will show the importance of the introspective acts of reading and writing in the southern woman's quest for self-definition. Reading helped Madaline Edwards forge a new identity. Writing gave her the tools to reinvent herself. As she put it, "I must seek wisdom and improvement from books... I am convinced that I am ruined here and that I must seek a home in another country far from this and there is no surer mode of reaching it than by knowledge."²

Historians of the South can not help but notice the prevalence of the mythic ideal of the southern lady. From the "rape-lynch complex" to the "moonlight and magnolias" image of the South, the southern white woman on a pedestal appears again and again. In his seminal work, *The Mind of The South*, published in 1941, historian W.J. Cash explains that the southern woman was the "South's Palladium." The ideal southern woman, in the eyes of men, was a sacred object that had the power to preserve the integrity and social institutions of the South, namely slavery. The true southern woman was adored and revered, and as Cash dramatically puts it, was seen as "a shield-bearing Athena gleaming whitely in the clouds." As if this imagery were not enough, Cash goes on to comment that "merely to mention her was to send strong men into tears - or shouts." To sum up the influence of this pervasive ideal, Cash points to a toast which brought twenty great cheers from the audience at the celebration of Georgia's one hundredth anniversary in the 1830's. The impassioned southern orator cried, "Woman!!!! The Center and circumference, diameter and periphery, sine, tangent and secant of all our affections!"³

² Madaline Selima Edwards, "Man," Writing Books, May 18, 1844, The Charles Bradbury Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Series II (hereafter MSE Writing Books), microfilm edition, Anne Firor Scott and William Chafe, eds., *Southern Women and Their Families in the Nineteenth Century: Papers and Diaries*, Louisiana and Mississippi Collections, Series A: Part 3.

³ W. J. Cash, *The Mind of The South* (New York, 1941), 86-87.

In recent years, as a result of growing interest in the experiences of American women, historians have begun to explore the lives of southern women, both black and white, during the antebellum period. Catherine Clinton's *The Plantation Mistress* (1982) and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's *Within the Plantation Household* (1988), consider the impact of gender conventions of rural slaveholding women. Suzanne Leacock, on the other hand, focuses on the experiences of urban women in Virginia in her book *The Free Women of Petersburg* (1984). More recently, Victoria Bynum has extended this discussion to an exploration of the politics of social and sexual control in the Old South with her book, *Unruly Women* (1992). These books, and numerous others, have established a solid framework for further research into the lives of women in the antebellum South.⁴

One thing that all of these historians agree on is the widespread influence of gender stereotypes in the Old South and the consequent subordination of women to men. The gendered images of the day characterized the southern gentlemen as a chivalrous cavalier, and the southern lady as weak, pure, and graceful. The southern lady, confined to the dominion of her home, required the protection of her worldly, benevolent patriarch.⁵ As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese puts it, "southern gender conventions simultaneously derived from and influenced social relations and operated like a language or discourse that helped individuals to make sense of their place in their world."⁶ This language permeated the words of ministers, teachers, parents,

⁴ Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill and London, 1992).

Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South*; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within The Plantation Household: Black and White Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill and London, 1988); Suzanne Leacock, *The Free Women Of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town 1784-1860* (New York and London, 1984).

⁵ Taylor, William R., *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and the American National Character*, (New York, 1961), 169-172.

⁶ Fox-Genovese, *Within The Plantation Household*, 195.

periodicals, and novels. Purity, piety, submissiveness, and domesticity were the defining attributes of this prescribed role for middle and upper-class women in the nineteenth century.⁷

This construction was particularly powerful and rigid in the South, where white women were considered the guardians of virtue, and their purity was an integral part of the proslavery defense.

The weakness and frailty of southern women, justified the assertion of brute force by chivalrous white men who were charged with protecting them from the advances of savage black men.⁸

Sermons, literature, and art were saturated with metaphorical images of female innocence.

Southern ladies, Catherine Clinton summarizes, were supposed to be "delicate as lilies, spotless as doves, polished as alabaster, fragile as porcelain, but above all, pure as the driven snow (with its inherent connotation of coldness)."⁹

Conventions of gender were also an important factor in the formation of the nation's legal structure. In the South, as in the rest of the nation, married women were crippled under English common law by their status as *femes covertas*. A woman's legal identity was merged with her husband's; a woman's legal existence was suspended during marriage.¹⁰ This legal disability had wide-ranging implications in terms of women's rights to property, or maintaining custody of children. But perhaps most significantly for this study, the law limited woman's ability to obtain a divorce. In fact, until the 1830s, divorces in most southern states were granted only by petition through the state legislature.¹¹ Divorce remained both difficult to obtain and uncommon throughout the antebellum period. This meant that "acceptance of a man's proposal of marriage

⁷ Welter, Barbara, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," in *The American Family in Social Historical Perspective*, Gordon, ed., (New York, 1973), 313-333.

⁸ Leslie, "Myth of The Southern Lady".

⁹ Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 87.

¹⁰ Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 61-62.

¹¹ Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 79.

constituted the most important decision most free women would ever make."¹² Southern white women were expected to stoically accept their choices in life without complaint. Catherine Clinton explains, "a wife's inability to coexist peacefully with her husband was no legal ground for divorce; rather, Southerners censured women for acting on such an inability."¹³

The institutions of marriage and motherhood were valorized in the Old South and portrayed as the essence of true womanhood. "Marriage," Victoria Bynum explains, "gained a white woman entry into the mainstream of society by linking her with the central actor of society - man."¹⁴ Single women and options for them were very rare in the South. As Suzanne Lesock puts it, "occupational choices were few, earnings were pitiful, and economic independence was very difficult to achieve."¹⁵ Generally, single white women of the middle and upper-class would take on the role of the maiden aunt, living a celibate, dependent life in the homes of married relatives. An unmarried woman of the middle or upper-class might find work as a teacher or governess, or perhaps she could make a bit of money sewing or writing, but on the whole it was very rare for a single woman to live independently. Bynum points out that a single woman of the middle or upper-class risked ruining her reputation or that of her family if she stepped beyond the strict bounds set by social convention. She explains,

Besides marital status and family background the final proof of a southern woman's breeding and personal quality lay in her behavior.... So inculcated were the values of purity and chastity among upper and middle-class Southern white women that few understood women who were forced or tempted by circumstances to defy the norms of social behavior.¹⁶

¹² Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 61.

¹³ Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 80; Sally G. McMillen, *Southern Women: Black and White in the Old South* (Arlington Heights, 1992), 37.

¹⁴ Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 44.

¹⁵ Genovese, *Within The Plantation Household*, 256; Upton, ed., *Madaline*, 9; Lesock, *The Free Women of Petersburg*, 164.

¹⁶ Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 45.

Strict standards of behavior set the boundaries of southern women's lives. If codes of social behavior limited southern women's legal, economic, and marital options, they certainly defined the limits of women's sexuality. As passive creatures, women were thought to have no sexual desire. The boundaries between the lady and the wench were firmly set, regardless of a woman's social class, one false move could plunge her into the irredeemable status of a fallen woman. Catherine Clinton comments that "actual impropriety of any sort was inexcusable, but even a hint of sexual suspicion would ruin a woman forever."¹⁷ Once a woman fell prey to the lure of the seducer, "only death could release her from a life-sentence of shame."¹⁸

Of course, the model of the southern lady represented what women ought to be, not necessarily what they were. For most women this ideal was at odds with reality, both unattainable and inapplicable to their particular situation. As Dell Upton, editor of Edwards's writings, points out, Madaline Selima Edwards was, "caught between the 'should' and is, between the demands of society and the exigencies of personal circumstances."¹⁹ It is precisely this liminal condition, the position of being betwixt and between, that makes Madaline Edwards an interesting case study.

Born into a prominent Tennessee family in 1816, Madaline had a difficult childhood. The product of a broken marriage, she spent most of her youth with the family of her uncle, William Cage, Jr., a local merchant and land speculator.²⁰ One advantage that her upbringing in the early national period did offer her was access to a decent education. This era saw a dramatic increase in the education of girls as female academies were founded throughout the nation.

¹⁷ Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 110, 120-121.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 120-121.

¹⁹ Upton, ed., *Madaline*, 2.

²⁰ All biographical background comes from Upton, ed., *Madaline*, 1-47.

Educational reformers in revolutionary and early national America argued that education for women was valuable and necessary because it prepared them for their vital duties as virtuous wives and "republican mothers."²¹ Following the trend set for well-to-do girls in the South, the young Selima Cage attended a female academy in a nearby town and developed a love of reading and painting at a young age. She was, as she put it, given "the rudiments of an English education," which probably consisted of the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic, and perhaps an introduction to philosophy, history, French, Latin, and geography.²² Penmanship, epistolary composition, and Bible study probably were the cornerstones of Madaline Edwards's early education.²³ Despite her love of learning, her uncle took her out of school at the age of fourteen, when she had, presumably, received enough education to heighten her prospects for a good marriage.²⁴

Shortly after leaving school, on January 2, 1831, Madaline was married to Dempsey Elliott. She later deemed her wedding day "the most unfortunate day of my life."²⁵ In Madaline's mind, Dempsey Elliott fell short of the romantic ideal on many fronts. Madaline's main complaints were her husband's limited intellectual capacity and his inability to fulfill the role of provider and protector. Contemporary advice books on marriage stressed the importance of romantic love, friendship, and bonds of affection between husband and wife.²⁶ But as Suzanne

²¹ On education and republican motherhood see, Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, Chap. 7.; Anya Jabour, "'Grown Girls, Highly Cultivated': Female Education in an Antebellum Southern Family," *Journal of Southern History* 64, no.1 (1998): 23-64.; Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women 1750-1800* (Boston and Toronto, 1980), Chap. 9.

²² Upton, ed., *Madaline*, 5

²³ Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 123-138.

²⁴ Upton, ed., *Madaline*, 5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁶ Nancy Woloch, *Women and The American Experience: A Concise History*, (New York, 1996), 54-56.

Lebsock explains, "companionate marriage only described the general direction in which marriages were moving; it was an ideal that influenced behavior, but as with all ideals, it was often difficult for real people to achieve."²⁷ In Madaline's case, it seems that the disparity between the couple's education and intellect played a major part in the dissolution of their marriage. Reflecting on this matter in an autobiographical story entitled "A Tale of Real Life," Madaline explained, "My husband was kind and devoted to me, but I had felt from the first week that he was my inferior in terms of education and natural intellect, and I was sadly disappointed when I appealed to him for information to receive the answer 'don't know' and soon saw that he was compelled to call upon me for the most ordinary assistance in book-keeping or any other subject."²⁸ Unfortunately, she did not recognize Elliott's shortcomings until it was too late. The marriage was rushed, and the bride was only a few days past her fourteenth birthday.²⁹

After they wed the couple moved to Clinton, Mississippi where Edwards bore - and later buried - three children. One presumably died in childbirth, and the other two probably died during an epidemic of scarlet fever, a disease that was common throughout the region at this time.³⁰ Epidemics such as scarlet fever, cholera, and yellow fever, were widespread in the South due to the warm climate. Catherine Clinton points out that "infant mortality was so common that many plantation couples referred to their 'living children,' the assumption being that some were always lost in infancy."³¹ After these tragic losses, the Elliotts moved to New Orleans Madaline

²⁷ Lebsock, *Free Women*, 17. On the companionate ideal see Anya Jabour's *Marriage in the Early Republic: Elizabeth and William Wirt and the Companionate Ideal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

²⁸ Madaline Selima Edwards, "A Tale of Real Life," September 12, 1844, MSE Writing Books.

²⁹ Upton, *Madaline*, 6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*...

³¹ Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 156-157.

gave birth to a fourth child. Soon after the couple arrived in New Orleans, however, their marriage ended.³² The true cause of this failed marriage remains uncertain. Was it the result of infidelity on his part? Was he unable to provide for his young wife and child? or was the tragedy of their years in Clinton simply too much for the ill-suited couple to bear? Whatever the case, it is clear that Madaline Edwards did not do what a good southern woman was supposed to do -- stoically accept her fate and make the best of a bad situation.

Reduced in circumstances, Madaline struggled to support herself and her sickly child, Isabella, selling her paintings and teaching at the New Orleans Female Orphan Asylum. After Isabella died when she was about nineteen months old, Madaline moved back to her uncle's home in Tennessee. It was not long, however, before she became involved with another man, a Mr. Edwards, whom she would eventually marry. Madaline briefly described her ill-fated second marriage in her semi-fictional "Tale of Real Life." The Edwardses lived a somewhat unsettled life, first living in New Orleans, and later traveling up the Red River to Alabama. In time, however, Madaline discovered that her second husband had deceived her; he was still married to another woman. Mr. Edwards apparently deserted Madaline after she discovered the truth about his situation. Once again, Madaline's circumstances were reduced and her status irrevocably stained by not one, but two broken marriages, as well as the depressing reality of losing four young children. After being forced to turn to various members of her family for support, she eventually returned to New Orleans in year 1842 or 1843 at the age of twenty-six.³³ It was at this point that Edwards met the most prominent actor in the ongoing drama of her life, a young, married insurance broker from New York named Charles Bradbury.³⁴

³² Upton, ed., *Madaline*, 6.

³³ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

Madaline met and fell deeply in love with Charles Bradbury in the late summer of 1843 with, as she put it, "the fervor of one who has lost all she ever had to love." Although she was fully aware that Charles Bradbury was a married man, she envisioned her relationship with Bradbury as a charitable one based on his desire to help a wounded soul. Edwards also asserted that her love for Charles Bradbury was deeper than his wife's. The intensity of her feelings for Bradbury is evident throughout her writings, particularly the letters that she sent him at the start of their illicit relationship. She opened a letter dated September 1843 exclaiming, "With feelings of burning gratitude and a heart gushing with the purest affection I have seated myself to give vent to a portion on paper." Edwards went on to describe the miserable, degraded state of her heart before she had the good fortune to meet her "beloved Charley." In a tone and language that is characteristic of her reflections on Bradbury, Edwards wrote of his "exalted benevolence," "purity of motive," and "nobleness of heart." She proclaimed that "the purity of [his] character will be a subject of study and contrast between the many I have met and may still meet."³⁵ To Madaline Edwards, Charles Bradbury must have indeed appeared to be the angel of good fortune. He purchased a house for her and supplied her with all manner of books, writing and painting materials, as well as money. Freed from the struggle of providing for herself, Edwards was able to devote her time to self-improvement.

Although Edwards lived a life beyond the boundaries of southern social convention, she created a domestic haven for herself and engaged in many of the sort of activities that were expected of a good southern lady. Her diaries reveal that her days were spent gardening, sewing, knitting, and painting. Her writing books are evidence that she also spent a great deal of time

³⁵ MSE to Charles Bradbury, September 1843, Bradbury Papers, Series I (hereafter MSE Papers).

reading and writing. Like other educated women in the antebellum period, she engaged in the delights of reading novels.³⁶ But Madaline Edwards's literary tastes extended far beyond the romantic or sentimental novels of her day. She absolutely relished the gift of a newspaper or other periodicals, and she prided herself on being informed on important topical issues, such as the annexation of Texas or the presidential campaign of Henry Clay. Although women were officially excluded from politics and public life, historian Eugene Genovese has discovered that "southern women followed political events closely, debated them hotly, and often battered their men on the issues."³⁷ Madaline Edwards's writings attest to her interest in and awareness of the world of politics. Her diaries frequently note important historical and political events, and she recorded her debates with male friends on political issues. Beyond reading novels, poetry, and periodicals, Edwards also spent a good deal of time reading books on religion and astronomy. She was deeply inspired by these readings and she devoted a great deal of time and energy to recording her thoughts on them in her writing books and diaries.

Madaline Edwards's regimen of reading and writing, though not unusual to a woman of the upper echelons of southern society, was probably unusual for a woman in her circumstances. In her study of plantation mistresses, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese finds that upper class southern women were urged to be able to converse intelligently on a broad range of topics. Reading was seen as a means of improvement and was closely linked with restrictive notions of race and class. Historian Isabelle Lehuu points out that despite the feminization and democratization of reading that occurred the early decades of the nineteenth century, "book reading continued to be

³⁶ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 259.

³⁷ Genovese, Eugene, "Toward a Kinder and Gentler America: The Southern Lady in the Greening of the Politics of the Old South," in *In Joy and Sorrow*

a sign of social status and gentility among southerners."³⁸ Madaline Edwards embraced the introspective life of reading and writing not only because she hoped to improve herself, but also because literacy represented the last vestige of her former social position.

An integral part of Madaline's quest for self-improvement was the rekindling of her religious faith. Although she was a deeply religious woman, her fallen status had prevented her from attending services. Ironically, Bradbury, an adulterer, introduced her to Reverend Theodore Clapp's First Congregational Church, and encouraged her to practice her neglected faith.³⁹ Edwards entered into this new life with the zeal of a person with a mission -- a mission of personal redemption. She began to attend services regularly and concluded her Sabbath routine by writing reflective essays on the sermons. Clapp's optimistic theology and engaging personality appealed to Edwards. More importantly, his religious teachings emphasized free will and the possibility of salvation. Like other ministers during the period following the Second Great Awakening, Clapp questioned the doctrines of original sin and eternal damnation and maintained that good could be found in even the most degraded of people.⁴⁰ It is not surprising that Madaline Edwards, a fallen woman entwined in an illicit love affair, would find solace in Clapp's church.

Despite the progressive aspects of Theodore Clapp's religious philosophy, his radicalism was constrained by nineteenth-century gender conventions. In this respect, Theodore Clapp was not unlike other Protestant ministers in the early Antebellum period. Evangelical religion conveyed a two-fold message and possibility to women. Clerical guides needed both to elevate

³⁸ Elizabeth Lehuu, "'Knit Some and Read Some': Women and the Uses of Print in the Old South," (paper presented at the Third Carleton Conference on the History of the Family, May 1997), 5-6.

³⁹ Upton, ed., *Madaline*, 28-36.

⁴⁰ Upton, ed., *Madaline*, 33.

women as religion's supporters in order to expand their congregations and yet, to preserve social stability, they continued to reaffirm women's subordination to men.⁴¹ On the one hand, Reverend Clapp's sermons appealed to Madaline. They gave her hope that her condition was not irrevocable, that redemption was attainable. On the other hand, his judgmental conclusions deeply troubled her as a fallen woman.

There is no better illustration of Madaline's personal dilemma than her written reactions to two related sermons, one on the duties and privileges of woman, and the other on the duties of man toward woman. These essay-style reflections are among the most striking passages in her writing books. Although the theme of gender reappears again and again throughout Edwards's works, these two pieces, read together, highlight the complexity of her situation as a fallen woman in a world that offered little room for women outside the boundaries of convention.

Reverend Clapp gave the first of his two-pronged exhortation on gender on April 28, 1844. In her diary on that afternoon, Madaline Edwards wrote: "Went to church today and heard Mr. C. preach upon the duties and privileges of woman in which he not only lauded her above price but above the fixed stars." Later, she composed a long, analytical essay in response to Clapp's sermon. "Woman," the deliberate title of her five-page handwritten essay, was written at the top, center of the first page. Her ambivalent emotions on Clapp's sermon were apparent at the outset. She reported, "Although the sermon was beautiful to the extreme, sublime in the highest degree, thrilling and touching, yet to me it had one barb that pierced my inmost soul, and hath a sting that will reach the grave if not beyond. He said 'unless a woman was pure and immaculate she was a curse to all who knew her.'"⁴²

⁴¹ Cott, Nancy, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*, (New Haven, 1977), 159.

⁴² Edwards, "Woman," April 28, 1844, MSE Writing Books.

Madaline could not help but feel singled out by such rebukes. Rather than breaking down, however, Edwards consoled herself, pointing out that few women would be able to achieve such a high standard. She went on to lament that the mistakes of her past alienated her from a community of women "whose sympathies would be the sweetest cordial, whose approbation would be the noblest incentive to excite [her] to be in part at least the angelic wife or mother he so beautifully painted today." Though she acknowledged that her relationship with Charles was not "based on [her] virtue and moral goodness," she described him as "one of the noblest of spirits on the earth" who "saved her from the lowest degradation."⁴³

Instead of accepting eternal damnation, Edwards envisioned a sort of redemption for herself. She adopted the cliched language of the day, imagining that Charles could recreate her in the image of the angelic southern lady. "I would," she reasoned, "in his society, in his instruction, in his admonitions and in a congenial soul find all the enjoyment that a mind so organized as mine could desire." She continued: "Could he look on me as Pygmalion on his own creation and feel proud or even glad that such was I of his, how great a charm would hallow the balance of my days. It would be a magic that would obscure the past and I should count the past as a blessing that it had secured me such a friend. But these are phantasies and only add torture."⁴⁴

Throughout her writings, Edwards ruminates on this theme of instruction. She repeatedly referred to Charles Bradbury as her "guide" or "teacher" in her conscientious program of self-improvement. In her love letters to Bradbury, Edwards expressed her desire to be molded into a cheerful, better woman. She hoped to learn from the example of "one so congenial in soul

⁴³ Ibid..

⁴⁴ Ibid..

and sentiment." Edwards fantasized about the perfect scene of domestic bliss with Charles Bradbury returning home after a long day at the office to settle down by a cheerful fireside to "read some work to [her] that would teach [her] to lift [her] thoughts and mind above the dying things of this life."⁴⁵ Edwards gladly accepted the conventional idea of the man of the household being the guide in a program of instruction and improvement.

In the next part of his sermon, Clapp apparently asserted that women create their own sorrows. Madaline Edwards strongly disagreed with this judgment. Rather than placing guilt on her own shoulders, Edwards implicated her seducers, portraying herself as the victim of bad men, poor choices, and ill fortune. If Reverend Clapp could see "the disgrace that looms over the path I am destined to tread through life," she wrote, "he would think others had dug the grave in which hope and happiness lie buried and had created for me those sorrows that must end only in the grave that receives the ill-fated victim."⁴⁶ Edwards did not include Bradbury in this list of seducers. In fact, Edwards continually claimed that she owed a debt of gratitude to God and Charles Bradbury for pulling her out of the depths of despair. In order to justify her own actions and her illicit relationship with Bradbury, she convinced herself of his purity of motive and benevolence. She painted Charles Bradbury in a such a shining, positive light as her savior, instructor, and caring friend that it seems she might have been attempting to help him justify his adulterous actions as well. In Edwards's mind, men not only were responsible for her fall, they also were responsible for her rescue. In this line of reasoning she clearly subscribed to the nineteenth-century notion of the frailty and dependence of women.

⁴⁵ Madaline Edwards to Charles Bradbury, Fall, n.d., 1843, MSE Papers.

⁴⁶ Madaline Edwards, "Woman," April 28, 1844, MSE Writing Books.

In the next section of "Woman," Edwards pledged to "aim at high and noble ends," although she recognized that she inhabited an "ill-judging" world and that her days "can not ever be encircled with the halo of purity." Her "little cottage home" was a sacred place where she was able to escape the harsh judgments of the world to "think, reflect, study, and adore, here sentiments, hopes and opinions present themselves that could have never been felt in the public walks of life." Edwards put an interesting twist on the domestic ideal, commenting that while her home was not place of "domestic social joy shared by parent, brother or sister... it is one of happy seclusion."⁴⁷

Throughout her response to Reverend Clapp's sermon Madaline attempted to come to terms with and redefine attributes of southern womanhood. In the act of writing, she stretched and remolded each of the tenets of this ideal - purity, piety, submissiveness, and domesticity - to suit her own circumstances. She recognized that she could never be pure, but she saw herself as a victim rather than a sinner. Throughout her writings she portrays herself as a helpless woman betrayed by men. She claims that as a young, innocent girl of fourteen, she was unprepared to judge the character and suitability of Dempsey Elliott, her first husband. In her diary on January 2, 1844, Edwards noted, "The Anniversary of the most unfortunate day of my life, my marriage." Depicting herself as a victim of misfortune, she wrote, "I launched my bark upon the waters of expectation and it has been sadly wrecked, the cargo lost the wreck till late all abandoned."⁴⁸ In this way she presented herself as a passive victim of circumstance, unable to control her own destiny.

⁴⁷ Ibid..

⁴⁸ Madaline Edwards, Diary [hereafter MSE Diary], January 2, 1844.

Madaline saw herself as pious, but she rejected the concept of eternal damnation. She embraced Reverend Clapp's theological beliefs and was comforted by his preachings that emphasized the possibility of redemption in the afterlife. In her writing book on Christmas Eve in the year 1843, Edwards reflected that Reverend Clapp "teaches me though I have greatly erred yet even at some future day I may be as other say saved... [he] teaches us that the day *will come* (not may) that I too will be received into my Saviors love and the happy home of the blest."⁴⁹ Despite her fallen position, Madaline Edwards presented herself as a deeply religious woman who attended services regularly and read religious tracts with the hope of improving herself.

Throughout her writings, Madaline Edwards highlighted her frailty and attributed the cause of her fall to this feminine weakness. She also adhered to the notions of dependence and submission, willingly placing herself in the hands of her benevolent savior, Charles Bradbury. Bradbury provided both emotional and financial support for Edwards, who gratefully accepted her position as his moral and intellectual inferior. As her instructor and provider, Charles assumed the role of patriarch in their extra-marital relationship. Madaline embraced these ideals with the hope of lending a sense of convention to an unconventional relationship.

Madaline Edwards extolled the virtues of domesticity. Engaging in typical domestic tasks of a southern lady, Madaline found a sense of calm. Her home was a consoling place of refuge from the sneers of the outside world. "My own home," she wrote, "is one little spot [where] I can indulge in reflection and study without the comments of the world, and from the doors of which I cannot be turned when detraction fastens on my name and actions."⁵⁰ Edwards's domestic sphere was perhaps the only place where she could let down her guard and develop a

⁴⁹ MSE Diary, December 24, 1843

⁵⁰ Edwards, "Woman," April 28, 1844, Writing Book.

sense of self. Within the walls of her home, she penned many lines in her determined attempt to develop a sense of identity and self-worth. Madaline Edwards, in sum, embraced the values of true womanhood - purity, piety, frailty, submissiveness, and domesticity - with the knowledge that she could never be a true woman in the eyes of New Orleans society. She could, however, strive to become a true woman on her own terms.

For Madaline Edwards, the key to personal salvation lay in the introspective life of reading, writing, and attending church. She made linked her pursuit of knowledge with her feelings of self-worth. Her intellectual ability was, most importantly, the last vestige of her former social position - the one thing that set her above most women. Her reflective essay, "Woman," concludes with a commentary on the prosperous women of Clapp's congregation who, she believed, did not take advantage of "the glorious opportunities" of improving their minds. She speculated that a great portion of these women, when thinking back on Clapp's sermon "a week hence will not know two sentences in it." She reflected that "those whose privileges are the greatest, have the least taste for research and study and are content to while away their time with no book for a companion loftier than a romance." Edwards distinguished herself from these vacuous women, who, she claimed, were "blest with all the acquisitions for improving their minds [but]... act as though they were animals living by instinct and felt no wish to rise higher."⁵¹ Edwards, in contrast, proclaimed that she relished the opportunity to improve her mind, even if her ultimate aim was to please her mentor, Charles Bradbury.

To Madaline, education was both a way of setting herself above other women and an integral part of her quest to remodel herself so that she could better serve the man in her life. Her goals reflected the message presented to women in antebellum novels and periodicals, which

⁵¹ Ibid..

emphasized that the purpose of women's education was to make them useful and attractive to men. In her study of early republican periodicals, historian Lucia McMahon has noted that "improvements in women's education were designed to serve men and society better, and were not intended necessarily as tools for self-empowerment. Of course," she continues, "women were able to use their education and knowledge as tools for self-fashioning -- reclaiming their subjectivity from a practice that was designed..... to objectify them."⁵² Madaline Edwards's writings certainly support this theory. Education, under the guidance and encouragement of her kind instructor, Charles Bradbury, served a dual purpose --pleasing him and improving herself.

Theodore Clapp's sermon on "the duties and privileges of woman" made a deep impression on Madaline Edwards. Although it "had one barb that pierced [her] inmost soul," in the end, her interpretation and revision of the sermon's message served to bolster her desire for self-improvement. A sermon he gave a few weeks later on "the duty of man towards woman" was not so easily reconciled with her philosophy. Clapp's message inspired a great wave of distress, as well as another thoughtful essay.

The three weeks that passed between these sermons were eventful for Madaline Edwards. On May 2, just four days after Clapp's sermon on the duties and privileges of woman, Madaline Edwards found for certain what she had suspected in an earlier diary entry on April 25, which simply noted: "Felt a sensation that I think will unfold a new destiny."⁵³ She was pregnant with Bradbury's baby. On May 2 she wrote: "learned of a certainty that I am in a certain situation." She divulged her situation to Bradbury and commented, "do not believe he likes it much."⁵⁴ He

⁵² Lucia McMahon, "Between *Cupid* and *Minerva*: Gender and the Construction of Knowledge in Early Republican Periodicals", (paper presented at the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic, University Park, Pennsylvania, July 1997), 10.

⁵³ MSE Diary, April 25, 1844.

⁵⁴ Ibid., May 2, 1844.

did, however, continue to visit her on an almost daily basis, bringing her little gifts of strawberries and a bottle of cologne. He also arranged for a doctor to examine her, and on May 8, Edwards noted that the doctor "confirmed my hopes concerning my situation."⁵⁵

On Sunday May, 12, Madaline Edwards set out to attend church. Much to her dismay, when she got onto the street car she realized that Charles Bradbury and his wife also were passengers on their way to First Congregational Church. Later that day, Edwards described this uncomfortable meeting in her diary. "Rode down and up with them, " she wrote, " O if she could have read my heart jealousy would almost have given way to pity for me, but is this even thus my life..... I have had a long cry to night called up by one who meant not to wound me. O my poor heart."⁵⁶ This episode deeply affected Edwards, and a melancholy mood plagued her during the next week. This harsh reminder that Charles Bradbury was not truly hers - that he lived a double life - was more than Madaline Edwards could bear, especially since she was carrying his child. On top of this, Edwards was aware that Bradbury was planning to leave on an extended trip to the North. Her depression deepened as his departure date grew nearer and the tensions between Edwards and Bradbury increased. On Saturday evening May 18, the lovers had a fight, and Madaline "wept until [her] heart [was] nearly broken." She explained, "He did not mean to wound me but an unguarded word did it all."⁵⁷ The next morning she awoke and commented in her diary: "Feel wretched this morning after my agony of mind, indeed it preys upon me so that I feel but little able to go to church to day." But she pulled herself together and went to hear Reverend Clapp preach, an experience she later came to regret.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ibid., May 8, 1844.

⁵⁶ Ibid., May 12, 1844.

⁵⁷ Ibid., May 18, 1844.

⁵⁸ Ibid., May 13-19, 1844.

In her diary later that afternoon, Edwards wrote: "Heard Mr. Clapp preach today upon the duty of man towards woman. He spoke beautifully and feelingly and when he portrayed the character of the seducer and his victim the tears unbidden fell from my eyes and I would have given much to have been alone to give them vent for my heart felt as if it would burst."⁵⁹ Later that same day, an emotionally distraught Edwards sat down and composed an essay in her writing book entitled "Man." When compared with "Woman," written three weeks earlier, it is clear that Edwards was almost crushed by the weight of Clapp's words. In this shorter essay, which filled three pages of her writing book, Edwards had a great deal of trouble coming to terms with the implications of the sermon. After discussing the main points of Clapp's sermon, Edwards described her inner turmoil as she sat in the church looking across at her lover seated next to his unsuspecting wife.

The main subject of Clapp's sermon was the duplicitous, evil nature of the male seducer. Madaline wrote that he "spoke forcibly of the early and pure offering of love from man to woman," proclaiming that "when that love became desecrated that man was no longer worthy of the name man."⁶⁰ Clapp's comments on the sinner reaching the point of no return echoed the theme of his earlier sermon on women, when he commented, "unless a woman was pure and immaculate she was a curse to all who knew her."⁶¹ Clapp almost seemed to be targeting Charles Bradbury when he went on to trace the ruin of young men who "came to this metropolis" and "were drawn into the vortex of dissipation and licentiousness and ended in ruin by the illicit connection with woman." The strategy of the immoral seducer, Clapp went onto explain, was to gain the confidence of his victim by proclaiming his good intentions and undying love. Once the

⁵⁹ Ibid., May 19, 1844.

⁶⁰ Edwards, "Man," MSE Writing Book, May 18, 1844.

⁶¹ Ibid..

unsuspecting and innocent woman proclaimed her love in return, "his mark was carried [and] She was cast upon the world heart broken and deserted by all who once knew and loved her."⁶²

The message of the sermon was simply too much for Edwards to bear. Suddenly, she recognized that she was such a victim and that she had been fooling herself into believing that Charles Bradbury was her benevolent savior. She broke into tears, feeling as if her "heart would burst." As she sat on the church pew with tears welling up in her eyes, she "felt as if the finger of the whole world was pointed at" her. She went on to declare, "I felt as one who is doomed to stand on a bleak and lonely island surrounded by the Ocean of degradation and witness at a distance happiness, innocence and purity that I dare not approach, while the natural essence of those qualities were as warm in my breast as others, but one step has lost all the bliss attendant on them. I felt if the vile seducer feels half as much as his victim he is well punished."⁶³ Yet, instead of painting Charles Bradbury as such a villain, in the rest of her essay she falls back on the image of him as her savior, seeing herself as the cause of his ruin. "I am debarred," she wrote, "of the society almost entirely of the only one on earth who does not think his time misspent in trying to improve my mind, from him I could learn, and learn to forget my bitter grief."⁶⁴ In her mind, Bradbury was still the kindhearted man who was dedicated to improving her lot.

Madaline's greatest fear was that Clapp's powerful sermon would inspire Charles Bradbury to cut off their secret relationship. "I fear from his soul," she lamented, "[that] he wishes to place me in another position to him than the one in which I stand, that he thinks I am the cause of all he can reproach himself for as a husband or moralist, that he feels I am bound to

⁶² Ibid..

⁶³ Edwards, "Man," *Writing Books*, May 19, 1844.

⁶⁴ Ibid..

be a source of self condemnation to him and that he can not be happy under these reflections." The insecure ethical and moral basis she had created to justify her relationship with Bradbury was destroyed.⁶⁵

Madaline's heartfelt reaction to Clapp's sermons indicates that within the restrictive world of the South it would be impossible for her to forget her troubled past. Edwards recognized that in order to be pleasing to Bradbury, and conform to the ideal of the southern lady, she had to struggle constantly to suppress her emotions - to rise above her feelings of degradation and despair. But as hard as she tried, she could not mask her depressive nature. A poem that Edwards wrote on August 13, 1844, "On Being Reproved for Weeping, and Asked the Cause," considered this theme. In this poem, Madaline Edwards also ruminated on the concept of fallen womanhood and her ongoing effort to come to terms with her precarious position in society.

Writing essays and poems provided an emotional release and helped her to analyze her situation. "On Being Reproved for Weeping, and Asked the Cause" was Edwards's effort to explain the deep roots of her sadness. The first five stanzas of this fourteen-stanza poem describe various hardships in Madaline Edwards's life that she had learned to accept: her children's death, the loss of childhood friends, her lack of wealth and beauty, or her poor choice in her first marriage. The remainder of the poem focuses on the one burden that she could never come to terms with - her status as fallen woman.

The image of an indelible stain or mark is repeated throughout the poem. First, Madaline lamented that her opportunity for pure marital love when she was young and "no stain was on [her] brow" was lost. A few lines later, with her relationship with Charles Bradbury in mind, the image of the stain appears again:

⁶⁵ Ibid..

I weep that love so deep and true
 Should be deemed pollutions stain
 Of all the woes I must endure,
 This brings the wildest pain.⁶⁶

She went on to explain her grief over the fact that even in "God's house" she felt like an outcast who was "Shunned, betrayed, condemned." She explained:

I weep to stand on this waste isle
 And cast my eyes oer all the world
 With none to share this just exile
 From all but memory hurled.
 But even this were better far
 That dwell *among*, and still apart.
 Then might heal the deep, deep scar
 That freshly wounds my heart.

Only in death, she concluded, would this stain be removed. She proclaimed that God's love would extend to her and she would be forgiven "For every guilty shame."⁶⁷

Madaline's sins weighed heavily on her mind. Even during the best of times, she was constantly aware of and insecure about the way she was perceived by others. In an epilogue to the poem, she concluded, "were moral laws so constructed that a fallen female might reinstate herself by any penance that life could endure however severely how gladly would I embrace it. Were it even to terminate my life directly [when] it was accomplished, it would be worth my toil if in my last moments I could be clasped to the breast of my earthly friend as pure and

⁶⁶ MSE, "On Being Reproved for Weeping and Asked the Cause," August 12, 1844, MSE Writing Books.

⁶⁷ Ibid..

spotless."⁶⁸ Pollution's stain marked Madaline Edwards; no matter how hard she tried, she could never accept this as her fate.

Although Madaline recognized that the prescribed ideal of the southern lady was unattainable, her self-perceptions were profoundly influenced by this standard. Her position as a social outcast who dwelled among, and still apart made her keenly aware of the ideal and her inability to achieve it. Edwards used the introspective life of reading and writing as an avenue of escape. But, as her writings reveal, prevailing gender roles set the boundaries of her imaginative life as well. She understood her world and experience through nineteenth-century feminine literary conventions, alternately portraying herself as the victim in a tale of seduction, and the heroine of the domestic novel who overcomes misfortune by developing her inner strengths.⁶⁹ Rather than rejecting the nineteenth-century feminine ideal, Edwards struggled to piece together her own version, picking and choosing among the parts that suited her circumstances.

Madaline Edwards's troubled and intense relationship with Charles Bradbury continued on for several years until the tension between them became too much for either of them to bear. Her pregnancy never came to term. With Bradbury's assistance, Edwards secured a job as a teacher at a public school in the city in October of 1846. James Breedlove, who had been Charles Bradbury's employer in his earlier years in New Orleans, sat on the school board that hired Edwards. Unfortunately, Breedlove began to make improper advances toward Madaline

⁶⁸ MSE, Epilogue to "On Being Reproved for Weeping and Asked the Cause," August 12, 1844, MSE Writing Books.

⁶⁹ Upton, ed., *Madaline*, 44-46.

Edwards. After a brief investigation into the affair, the school board fired Edwards in January 1847.⁷⁰

Strained for years by her desperation and his fear of discovery, Madaline's relationship with Bradbury lingered on for several months in the form of heartfelt letters. But a letter from him on March 25, 1847, made it clear that their relationship was nearing its end. "It is a very difficult matter for me to make up my mind," he wrote, "that you are *not* what I had once believed, truly and sincerely believed you were, namely, an exemplary woman at least in heart, if not always so in action." He went on to write, "you have, I freely admit Mad, had a great deal to contend with, probably more than you can well bear, still with assistance of a proper exercise of our mental facilities, (usually called good common sense,) we overcome immense obstacles."⁷¹

Desperate circumstances finally prompted Madaline Edwards to use her good common sense. She recognized that there was nothing left for her in New Orleans. Her dismissal from her teaching position destroyed her last vestiges of hope. She could never be redeemed in New Orleans. In a letter to Bradbury on April 25, 1844, Edwards wrote: "Charley, I always told you when we parted I could not willingly live near you..... our separation leaves me no wish to remain here." Edwards awaited news from a cousin in San Antonio, Texas, who was attempting to secure her a teaching position at a new school there. "In case of his death or non action in my favor, " she resolved, "I leave forthwith for California upon the determination I have lately formed."⁷²

In the end, Madaline Edwards was able to imagine and narrate a changed life course and take bold action. Reading and writing not only helped to ease Madaline's suffering, they also

⁷⁰ Ibid., 23.

⁷¹ Charles Bradbury to Madaline Edwards, March 25, 1847.

⁷² MSE to Charles Bradbury, May 16, 1847.

gave her the means to reinvent herself. Escaping to the pages of her writing books allowed her to examine herself, her relationships, and the restrictive ideals of southern womanhood. Upon her departure for California, Madaline left her writing books with Charles. In her final letter she explained, "I wrote [these books] with the sole hope and belief that they would be yours.... Little did I think when penning the most of those pages, a day was so close at hand when you would spurn them and me. Your name appears so oft in them that I cannot well leave them to another."⁷³ Leaving Bradbury with her writing books symbolized her desire to start afresh, to begin a new chapter in her quest for self-definition and salvation. In the West, Madaline Edwards hoped to forge a new identity.

⁷³ MSE to Charles Bradbury, April 25, 1847.

Chapter 2

"Laboring in a Holy Cause": The Journals of Charlotte Forten



Charlotte Forten, no date, (1837-1914)

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On Tuesday the thirtieth of May, 1854, Charlotte Forten, a sixteen- year- old free black student in Salem, Massachusetts, recorded recent events and her thoughts in her diary.

Rose early and was busy until nine o'clock; then, at Mrs. Putnam's request, went to keep store for her while she went to Boston to attend the Anti-Slavery Convention. I was very anxious to go, and will certainly do so tomorrow; the arrest of the alleged fugitive [Anthony Burns] will give additional interest to the meetings, I should think. His trial is going on and I can scarcely think of anything else; read again today as most suitable to my feelings and to the times, "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point," by Elizabeth B. Browning; how powerfully it is written! how earnestly and touchingly does the writer portray the bitter anguish of the poor fugitive as she thinks over all the wrongs and sufferings that she has endured, and of the sin to which tyrants have driven her but which they alone must answer for! It seems that no one would read this poem without having his sympathies roused to the utmost on behalf of the oppressed. After a long conversation with my friends on their return, on this all-absorbing subject, we separated for the night, and went to bed, weary and sad.¹

The following day Charlotte Forten and a friend set out for Boston to attend the Anti-Slavery Convention where they heard several "excellent speeches" on the "exalted sentiments of Truth and Liberty." As she had predicted, the mood at the Convention, and throughout the city, was one of "indignation and excitement" inspired by the trial of Anthony Burns, an escaped slave from Virginia. Burns, who had learned to read and write in slavery, had been captured on May 24. In keeping with the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, he was denied a trial by jury or the right to testify on his own behalf. Charlotte's great interest in the trial reflected the mood among abolitionists during this period, who often gathered around courthouses in protest. The Fugitive Slave Law and the commotion created by the capture of alleged runaways such as Burns served to inject the reality of slavery forcefully into the everyday lives of those in the

¹ Charlotte Forten Grimke, *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimke*, ed. Brenda Stevenson (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 63 .

North.² Later that same day, Charlotte dined at the home of abolitionist leader and family friend William Lloyd Garrison. "At the table, I watched earnestly the expression of that noble face as he spoke beautifully in support of the non-resistant principles to which he has kept firm; his is indeed the very highest Christian spirit, to which I cannot hope to reach, however, for I believe in resistance to tyrants, and would fight for liberty until death."³

Charlotte returned to Salem that evening and spent the next day in great suspense awaiting the decision of the trial. She expressed her feelings on the Fugitive Slave Law and the trial in her diary. "Alas! that any one should have the power to decide the right of a fellow being to himself! It is thought by many that he will be acquitted of the *great crime* of leaving a life in bondage, as the legal evidence is not thought sufficient to convict him. But it is only too probable that they will sacrifice him to propitiate the South, since so many at the North dared oppose the passage of the infamous Nebraska Bill."⁴

On Friday, June 2, Charlotte's "worst fears" were realized; Anthony Burns was convicted and sent back to bondage. "Today," she wrote, "Massachusetts has again been disgraced; again has she showed her submissions to the Slave Power.... With what scorn must the government be regarded which cowardly assembles thousands of soldiers to satisfy the demands of slaveholders; to deprive of his freedom a man, created in God's own image, whose sole offense is the color of his skin!... I can write no more, " she concluded, " A cloud seems hanging over me, over all our persecuted race, which nothing can dispel."⁵

² Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 207-209, 233.

³ Grimke, *The Journals*, 64. For more information on the trial of Anthony Burns see Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*.

⁴ Grimke, *The Journals*, 65.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

The following morning, Charlotte awoke to a beautiful day. The sky was cloudless, the sun was warm and bright, and a "delicious breeze" fanned her cheeks as she sat by the widow writing. After this brief description of the weather, Charlotte commented, "How strange it is that in a world so beautiful, there can be so much wickedness, on this delightful day, while many are enjoying themselves in their happy homes, not poor Burns only, but millions beside are suffering in chains." Charlotte went on to reflect that during the past week she had been on vacation from school. She had "expected to enjoy [the holiday] very much, but it was, of course, impossible for [her] to do so." Higginson Grammar School, the integrated public school that Charlotte attended in Salem, would commence again the following morning. The young Charlotte Forten knew that she would bring the experiences of the Anti-Slavery Convention in Boston and her feelings on the trial of Anthony Burns with her to the classroom. Ruminating on this idea, Charlotte wrote:

Tomorrow school commences, and although the pleasure I shall feel in again seeing my beloved teacher, and in resuming my studies will be much saddened by recent events, yet they shall be a fresh incentive to more earnest study, to aid me in fitting myself for laboring in a holy cause, for enabling me to do much towards changing the condition of my oppressed and suffering people. Would that those with whom I shall recite to-morrow could sympathize with me in this; would that they could look upon all God's creatures without respect to color, feeling that it is character alone which makes the true man or woman! I earnestly hope that the time will come when they will feel thus.⁶

These passages from a five day period in Charlotte Forten's diary reveal the experiences of a young, free, African-American woman coming of age in the North in the decade before the Civil War. They introduce an expressive, thoughtful young woman aware of, interested in, and directly involved with the anti-slavery crusade. Forten's daily entries portray a person with the luxury of time to read, write, and reflect on the world around her. The passages also present an individual who was part of a community of activists, who was alive with concern for her race,

⁶ Ibid., 66-67.

and who was committed to "earnest study" to aid in her efforts to change the condition of her "oppressed and suffering people."

Like many young, intellectual women in the Victorian period, Charlotte Forten was an avid diarist; unlike most intellectual women in this period, she was black. Her race directly influenced the uses of her literacy. For Charlotte Forten, the pursuit of knowledge was more than a quest for personal empowerment; knowledge provided an avenue for empowering her people. Despite her privileged position, she felt a strong sense of duty to her race. Charlotte recognized that she served a dual role in the struggle for abolishing slavery; she was both a role model for other blacks and a representative of her race in the eyes of white society. Her intellectual achievement was important both as a woman, and as a black woman. As "the other within the other" she had to surmount the considerable obstacles presented by her gender as well as those presented by her race. Her determination to excel as a student, teacher, and writer challenged prevailing stereotypes of black female intellectual inferiority.⁷ Using literacy as a tool for social action, both as a writer and as a teacher, Charlotte dedicated her life to the improvement of her race. The highlight of this lifelong effort was the time she spent as a teacher of former slaves as part of the historic Port Royal Experiment on the South Carolina Sea Islands during the Civil War.

During a ten year period, from 1854 until 1864, Charlotte Forten kept an almost daily account of her experiences and ideas. She used her journals to, as she put it on the opening page of her first diary, "record the passing events of my life." She went on to explain: " keeping a diary will be a pleasant and profitable employment of my leisure hours.... Besides this it will

⁷ Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 119.

doubtless enable me to judge correctly the growth and improvement of my mind from year to year."⁸ Forten's journal charts her evolution from student to teacher in Salem, Massachusetts, her periodic returns to her family home in Philadelphia, and finally, her experiences as a teacher on the Sea Islands during the Civil War. While exploring her anomalous position as an elite black woman in a white world, her journals trace her education and her development as a social reformer. Her private writings also served as a tool for the development of both her political and artistic consciousness.⁹

It is not surprising that Charlotte Forten grew to become a committed social activist. She was the product of a family, community, and age that fostered a sense of firm ideological commitment to reform movements, particularly abolitionism. Charlotte, who was born to Robert and Mary Forten in Philadelphia in 1837, represented the fourth generation of Fortens born into freedom. Her paternal grandfather, James Forten, owner of a successful sailmaking business, was one of a handful of northern free blacks to achieve economic success despite racial barriers.¹⁰ As the patriarch of the Forten clan, James provided his family with all of the material comforts of the day, from a stately home, to fine educations, to access to cultural and social activities. Most importantly, he steeped his children and grandchildren in the world of social reform. A prominent abolitionist, James Forten established close relationships with leading reformers of his day, including William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and Lydia Maria Child, to name just a few. By all accounts, the Forten home on Lombard Street was a hub of reform activity,

⁸ Ibid., 58.

⁹ Joanne Braxton, "Charlotte Forten Grimke and the Search for a Public Voice" in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Shari Benstock (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 256.

¹⁰ Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists*, 5.

alive with conversation and a sense of social consciousness. "Humanitarianism," one historian of the Forten family noted, "became a family affair."¹¹

Charlotte's mother, Mary Woods Forten, died when Charlotte, her only child, was just three years old. As a result, the influence of the extended family was even stronger in Charlotte's life. Surrounded by her "forward looking" aunts, Harriet, Sarah, and Margaretta, young Charlotte had no shortage of strong female role-models in her life. Each of these women nurtured aspects of Charlotte's artistic and political consciousness. Sarah was a renowned abolitionist poet; Margaretta was an active feminist and educator; and Harriet made her mark as a leader in Philadelphia's anti-slavery societies. The comfortable environment in which Charlotte grew up, marked by rich educational opportunities and time for leisure and reform activity, was unique for African-Americans at this time. Historian Emma Jones Lapansky points out, "such a setting contrasted sharply with the life possibilities of most nineteenth-century black women - indeed, of most nineteenth century women.... Pampered and protected from the harsh realities of fending for themselves, [these women] drank greedily from the Forten wells of privilege, always assuaging their thirst with a clear sense of noblesse oblige."¹² Despite their advantaged social position -- or perhaps because of it -- the Fortens emphasized scholarship, morality, achievement,

¹¹ Janice Sumler-Lewis, "The Forten-Purvis Women of Philadelphia and The American Anti-Slavery Crusade," *Journal of Negro History* 66, no. 4 (1981-82), 282.. For biographical background on the Forten family see, Charlotte Forten Grimke, *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimke*, ed. Brenda Stevenson, 3-55.; Charlotte Forten Grimke, *A Free Negro in The Slave Era: The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimke*, ed. Ray Allen Billington (New York: Collier Books, 1961), 7-41.; Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists.*; Emma Jones Lapansky, "Feminism, Freedom, and Community: Charlotte Forten and Women Activists in Nineteenth- Century Philadelphia," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 62, no. 1 (January 1989), 3-19.;

¹² Lapansky, "Feminism, Freedom, and Community," 9.

and selfless dedication with the ultimate aim of improving the political and economic condition of all black people.¹³

The Fortens' unswerving commitment to helping their race was not uncommon in northern free black communities, nor was the active role that black women took in this social cause. The struggle to build and maintain viable African-American communities through self-help organization, schools, and churches politicized the northern free black community. Engaging in the abolitionist movement was a logical extension of this concern for improving their race. For free blacks, the movement meant more than ending slavery; it meant actively addressing the social, economic, and political inequality that was a cause and product of the peculiar institution.¹⁴

From the outset, black women played an important part in the struggle for liberty and social justice. Recently, historians have begun to reconsider the role that black women played in nineteenth-century reform movements. It is clear that, far from being passive victims of oppression, free black women were active participants in efforts to help their families and communities secure racial equality. Like the Forten women, many northern black women developed strong working relationships with each other as members of kinship groups, churches, and social organizations. These relationships often crossed racial boundaries, as black and white urban reformers joined together in abolitionist organizations. Black men supported female reform activity in the name of racial uplift. In a study of gender conventions among antebellum free blacks, James Oliver Horton concludes that "black women were encouraged to take on reform activities that departed from the gender expectations in the wider society. Black men

¹³ Stevenson, ed., *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimke*, 8.

¹⁴ Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists*, 2-3.

were generally supportive of these reform efforts."¹⁵ As a result, black women - even middle-class ones - were expected to be active in the public sphere.¹⁶

The values of the elite community of which Charlotte Forten was a product directly influenced the person she was becoming in the ten years chronicled in her journals. Her private writings, therefore, not only provide insight into the urban free black world, but also shed light on the ideal of womanhood she struggled to achieve. Perhaps the formative years in this process of development was the time she spent as a student, and eventually a teacher, in Salem, Massachusetts. It is no coincidence that she began keeping a journal shortly after arriving in Salem. Charlotte, an introspective, thoughtful girl, was intensely committed to her educational life. For Charlotte and many other adolescent girls in the nineteenth-century, self-conscious reflection in a journal provided an emotional outlet, as well as a means of examining, monitoring, and chronicling personal and intellectual growth. In her journals, Charlotte developed a personal, literary voice and created a self-portrait. Writing in her journal allowed her to reflect on where she had come from, where she was, and where she hoped to go. Charlotte placed great emphasis on the power of the written word.

Before Charlotte was sent to Massachusetts at the age of sixteen to complete her studies at an integrated public school, she was educated at home by private tutors. Her father refused to send her to the ill-equipped, segregated schools for blacks in Philadelphia. Like many other black abolitionists, Robert Forten felt that racially segregated schools were "relics of slavery, fostering prejudice and discrimination."¹⁷ Massachusetts, the hub of abolitionist activity, was the

¹⁵ James Oliver Horton, "Freedom's Yoke: gender Conventions Among Antebellum Free Blacks," *Feminist Studies* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1986), 62.

¹⁶ Lapansky, "Feminism, Freedom, and Community," 13.

¹⁷ Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 111.

nation's most progressive state in terms of public education and reform activity. Throughout the 1840s, the movement for school desegregation flourished in the state's free black community, with black women leading successful petition drives in the campaign for educational equality.¹⁸ So when Charles Lenox Redmond, a prominent black abolitionist from Salem, Massachusetts, recommended the all-female Higginson Grammar School and offered to serve as Charlotte's host family, Robert Forten decided it would be best for his daughter to take advantage of the educational opportunity. He hoped that Charlotte would continue to improve her mind with the goal of attending the Salem Normal School, where she could to prepare for a career as an educator. Charlotte's father recognized that the teaching profession would offer her a suitable means of assisting her race in addition to providing her with a degree of financial independence.

The emphasis that Robert Forten placed on his daughter's education and future vocation was in keeping with the values of the elite free black community. Education, in the eyes of free black reformers, was central to the improvement of their race. In the nineteenth century, blacks throughout the nation sought knowledge in a culture that valorized the written word, yet systematically denied blacks access to education. Black reformers "recognized that literacy was at the center of liberation and that its denial was a primary means of subordination and oppression."¹⁹ In their campaign to improve the education of black children, reformers emphasized the importance of educating black women. The education of black girls was essential for the welfare and improvement of the black community, for, as one contemporary advocate put it, "Every measure for the thorough and proper education of [black] females is a

¹⁸ On the desegregation of public schools in Massachusetts see Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 106-112; and Yee, *Black Women*, 132-133.

¹⁹ Shirley Logan Wilson, "Literacy as a Tool for Social Action among Nineteenth-Century African-American Women," in *Nineteenth-Century Women Learn to Write*, Catherine Hobbs, ed., (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 180.

blow aimed directly at slavery."²⁰ Advocates asserted that as wives and mothers, educated black women would help to advance their families and their race. Beyond enabling them to serve as the moral leaders of their families, education also would provide black women with practical training for employment.²¹

That Charlotte Forten would be encouraged and expected to pursue a career in education is not surprising. The most revered form of employment for a black woman was teaching. Teachers served as role models for young people while working directly for the improvement of the race as a whole. Holding a position of great respect within her community, the ideal black schoolteacher had to live up to a high standard, displaying intellect and morality as well as a pleasing personality and physical grace. Pure and pious, the black schoolteacher also was supposed to be intelligent, selfless, and self-assured. While the notions of submission and passivity were characteristics of "true womanhood" for middle-class white women, these qualities held less meaning for black women, who were encouraged to participate actively in racial uplift activities such as teaching.²² In short, the ideal black schoolteacher exemplified the interplay between the feminine ideals of the white and the black worlds; she needed to live up to certain aspects of "true womanhood" espoused by middle-class white society while, at the same time, demonstrating the strong, active commitment to racial uplift embraced by the middle-class black community.²³ This demanding role was particularly well-suited to a woman like Charlotte

²⁰ Yee, *Black Women*, 49.

²¹ Yee, *Black Women*, 49-51.

²² *Ibid.*, 41.

²³ Shirley J. Carlson, "Black Ideals of Womanhood in the Late Victorian Era," in *The Journal of Negro History* 77, no. 2 (Spring 1992), 61. Shirley Yee also explores the interplay between the cult of true womanhood and black gender ideals in *Black Women Abolitionists*, pp. 40-59.

Forten, whose privileged upbringing cultivated the social graces of the dominant culture while honing her skills as a social reformer.

In contrast to the experience of many white women teachers, for whom teaching was seen as a temporary occupation before marriage, for most black women, teaching was a profession that was supported by the community and praised as a noble cause. While the social pressures and expectations in most young middle-class white women's lives pushed them towards the duties of domesticity -- marriage and motherhood -- in Charlotte Forten's case, social pressures and expectations emphasized a sense of duty to her race and the call to service.²⁴ As a result, teaching was a natural course of action rather than a temporary aberration from the normal female pattern of marriage and motherhood.²⁵ Her journals, which were written between the ages of sixteen and twenty-six, are remarkably free from references to domestic concerns or worries about marriage and motherhood. Clearly, the main concern for Charlotte, her family, and her social circle was the question of social justice.

As her father had hoped, Salem proved to be the perfect place for Charlotte's intellectual and personal development. Although it took some time for Charlotte to settle into her new life in Salem, she soon grew to love the scholarly environment and the climate of political activism in the town. The Redmond household was very much like her own, comfortable and continuously busy with a stream of influential visitors. With her days focused on self-improvement, Charlotte enjoyed a lifestyle typical of a young, unmarried, middle-class woman. In addition to attending school and visiting with friends, a typical day for Charlotte involved practicing the piano,

²⁴ Lee Chambers-Schiller explores the conflicting social pressures faced by single, white women teachers in the North during the antebellum period in *Liberty, A Better Husband* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

²⁵ Sally Schwager, "Educating Women in America," in *Signs* 12 (1987), 349-350.

sewing, reading and reciting poetry, and taking long walks. She also frequented antislavery lectures and kept abreast of happenings in the abolitionist movement by reading newspapers such as the *Liberator* and the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. Constantly busy and inquisitive, Charlotte had no shortage of things to write about in her beloved journal. She capped off almost every day with an entry, recording and commenting on the books she read, the places she walked, and the people with whom she spent her time. Her writings echoed the vocabulary, style, and content of the abolitionist rhetoric that surrounded her. During this period she also began to write poetry and essays, which invariably had an antislavery stance. Themes of self-sacrifice and idealistic commitment to the abolitionist crusade appear again and again in her writings.

Apart from the ideological education she received as a member of the town's abolitionist community, Charlotte gained a tremendous amount from her formal schooling. Her academic horizons constantly expanded as she studied French, German, and Latin and read great works of literature and history.²⁶ A dedicated student, Charlotte rose at dawn to begin her studies before school. Yet, although she excelled in her studies, made a few friends, and developed a close relationship with her teacher, Mary Shepard, Charlotte often wrote of her difficult, marginalized position as the only black student at the school. A particularly heartfelt entry on Wednesday, September 12, 1855, indicates her experiences in a subtly racist environment:

To-day school commenced. Most happy to return to the companionship of my studies, ever my most valued friends. It is pleasant to meet the scholars again; most of them greeted me cordially, and were it not for the thought that will intrude, of the want or entire sympathy even of those I know and like best, I should greatly enjoy their society. There is one young girl and only one - Miss Sarah Brown, who I believe thoroughly and heartily appreciates anti-slavery, radical anti-slavery and has no prejudice against color. I wonder that every colored person is not a misanthrope. Surely, we have everything to make us hate mankind. I have met girls in the schoolroom - they have been thoroughly kind and cordial to me - perhaps the next day meet them in the street - they feared to

²⁶ Brenda Stevenson, ed., *The Journals*, 24.

recognize me; these I can but regard with scorn and contempt, once I liked them, believing them incapable of such measures.²⁷

In this passage Charlotte gave vent to feelings of isolation, distrust, and frustration that accompanied her situation as a token black girl in a white school. Yet, she also expressed the joy she found in retreating to the companionship of her studies. This theme of finding solace in the quest for literacy is repeated throughout Charlotte's writings. As she explained in a later entry, "books [are] a treasure and a blessing unspeakable and they are doubly this when one is shut out of society as I am."²⁸ More than simply a means of escape, reading and writing allowed Charlotte to expand her mental landscape. Through reading and writing, Charlotte created space which allowed her to, at least temporarily, overcome her anomalous position as the only black student in a white school.²⁹

Rather than allowing herself to succumb to self-pity, Charlotte concluded her entry on September 12, with a reminder of far greater suffering of blacks in bondage:

These are but trifles, certainly to the great, public wrongs which we as a people are obliged to endure. But to those who experience them, these apparent trifles are most wearing and discouraging; even to the child's mind they reveal volumes of deceit and heartlessness, and early teach a lesson of suspicion and distrust.... In the bitter, passionate feeling of my soul again and again there rises the question "When, oh! when shall this cease?".... Consciousness answers it is wrong and ignoble to despair; let us labor earnestly and faithfully acquire knowledge to break down the barriers of prejudice and oppression. Let us take courage, never ceasing to work, - hoping and believing that if not for us, for another generation there is a better, brighter day in store, when slavery and prejudice shall vanish before the glorious light of Liberty and Truth.³⁰

²⁷ Charlotte Forten Grimke, *The Journals*, Stevenson, ed., 139-140.

²⁸ Charlotte Forten Grimke as quoted in Joanne Braxton, "Charlotte Forten Grimke and The Search for A public Voice," 258.

²⁹ Barbara Sicherman, "Sense and Sensibility: a Case Study of Women's Reading in Late-Victorian America," in *Reading in America: Literature and Social History*, ed. Cathy Davidson, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 201-225.

³⁰ Charlotte Forten Grimke, *The Journals*, Stevenson, ed., 140.

This deep concern for the welfare of others inspired Charlotte to engage in earnest study. It also inspired her to find productive, useful outlets for her activist spirit. Following the footsteps of her aunts, the two courses of action that Charlotte would chose to pursue were writing and teaching.

After graduating from the Higginson School, Charlotte entered the Salem Normal School and began her course of study in the field of education. Since the scholarly lifestyle appealed to her, Charlotte was somewhat disappointed when she neared the completion her program of study. She also began to feel the pinch of financial pressures, as her father was having difficulty meeting her expenses in Salem. "All of my day dreams of independence and usefulness," she wrote, "seems to have been dissipated one by one."³¹ Nearing her graduation, Charlotte wrote: "I desire nothing so much as some employment which shall enable me to pay my debts. I hope I shall be fortunate enough to obtain some situation as a teacher."³² Fortunately, upon graduation in June of 1856, Forten obtained a teaching position at the all-white Epes Grammar School in Salem for an annual salary of \$200. In her journal she noted with enthusiasm, "amazing, wonderful news I have heard to-day! I cannot realize it.... I have received the offer of a situation as a teacher in one of the public schools of this city, of this conservative, aristocratic old city of Salem!!! Wonderful indeed it is! Again and again I ask myself - 'Can it be true?' " It seems impossible. I shall commence to-morrow."³³ The eyes of the community were on Forten, as she was the first black woman to hold a teaching position in the Salem public schools.³⁴ She was as

³¹ Ibid., 150-151.

³² Ibid., 154.

³³ Grimke, *The Journals*, Stevenson, ed., 157.

³⁴ Stevenson, ed., *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimke*, 28.

pleased at the opportunity of having a degree of financial independence as she was at the chance to prove her abilities as a black woman teacher.

Not long into her employment, however, this note of excitement began to dwindle. She found the children "boisterous and unmanageable" and commented that the "teacher's life not nearly as pleasant as a scholar's."³⁵ Her ambivalent feelings about teaching were clear; so were the pressures she felt as a pioneering young black woman. After long, trying hours in the classroom, Charlotte would return home to delve into her own studies, yet she often was plagued by a gnawing sense of dissatisfaction. On one such evening she wrote: "So utterly dispirited and weary have I been for these few days past that I have not felt like writing in thee my Journal. I have been troubled at school very much; and have felt most hopeless."³⁶ As time went on, Charlotte felt increasingly frustrated with her growing sense of depression and exhaustion. She used her journal to vent these emotions. "To thee, my journal, however sad and weary I may be, I will always say a word - My faithful friend, comforter!... I wish I were not so selfish, - This loneliness, this despondency, it is all selfishness. Would that I could banish it forever!"³⁷ The high standard Forten set for herself inevitably led to wave of stress-related disorders, which forced her to take several leaves of absence from teaching in the following years.³⁸

Forten's overwhelming sense of frustration and guilt was not uncommon for ambitious, educated, single young women in the antebellum period. Historians have noted a pattern of illness and psychological distress among women who struggled to develop a sense of independence and purpose outside of the ordinary arenas of marriage and motherhood.³⁹ The

³⁵ Grimke, *The Journals*, Stevenson, ed., 158.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 165.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 214.

³⁸ Stevenson, ed., *The Journals*, 35.

³⁹ see Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty*, 157-173.

avenues open to young women seeking independence were limited to low paying "womanly" occupations such as social reform or teaching. In a culture which encouraged women to "find self-actualization in abnegation of self," women such as Charlotte often "found their energy, purpose, and direction interrupted and diffused."⁴⁰ Charlotte repeatedly expressed her angst over her constant struggle to overcome selfishness. This feeling must have been particularly troublesome for her given the community of activists in which she was raised. From a young age, Charlotte was taught that self-fulfillment was permissible only in service.⁴¹

Charlotte began to question whether teaching was the right vocation for her. But what else could she do? This emotional crisis was punctuated by profound guilt over a loss of direction and purpose. Reflecting on this issue, Charlotte confided in her journal:

I have been examining myself tonight, - trying to fathom my own thoughts and feelings; and I find, alas! too much, too much selfishness! And yet, I know that in this world of care and sorrow, however weary and sad the heart may be, true unselfishness must ever be a source of the purest and highest happiness. Every kindly word, every gentle and generous deed we bestow upon others, - every ray of sunshine which penetrates the darkness of another's life, through the openings which our hands have made, must give to us a truer, nobler pleasure than any self-indulgence can impart. Knowing this, feeling it with my whole heart, - I ask thee, Oh! Heavenly Father! to make me truly unselfish, to give me a heart-felt interest in the welfare of others; - a spirit willing to sacrifice my own; - to live ' for the good that I can do!⁴²

Charlotte's personal struggle began to take its toll both physically and emotionally, manifesting itself in depression, exhaustion, and respiratory ailments. Charlotte eventually became quite concerned for her health, given the fact that her mother and several other close relatives died from a similar respiratory conditions.⁴³ Forced to take a leave of absence from her teaching position, she returned to Philadelphia in June of 1857, where she was nursed back to

⁴⁰ Grimke, *The Journals*, Stevenson, ed., 158.

⁴¹ Lapansky, "Feminism, Freedom, and Community," 16.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 255.

⁴³ Stevenson, ed. *The Journals*, 34.

health by her aunts. She eventually returned to Salem and Eppes Grammar school, but her health was frail; she reluctantly chose to resign permanently in March, 1858, at which point she returned home to Philadelphia.

During this period, she began to concentrate her energies on writing. She published several poems and essays in antislavery publications.⁴⁴ Like other black women poets and essayists in the antebellum period, Charlotte was able to publish only with the aid of prominent abolitionists, who praised black women authors as "shining examples of black progress."⁴⁵ Despite her ill health, Charlotte was determined to remain dedicated to her cause, using the power of the written word as a tool for social reform. Writing, however, did not provide her with a means of financial independence, so, when she was well enough, Charlotte also taught at her aunt's school for black children in Philadelphia. Yet she never felt fully satisfied with this situation, feeling that her quest for a useful vocation and financial independence was thwarted by her frail health. She feared that all of her goals and ambitions would be stunted. As she put it herself, "If I loose my health entirely now of what use will my life be to me? None. I shall be dependent, miserably dependent on others. I would ten thousand times rather die than that."⁴⁶ Perhaps due to her illness and sense of frustration, Charlotte stopped writing in her journal for a two-year period, from January, 1860 until June, 1862.

When Charlotte resumed her journal-writing, she was at the brink of the most exciting and challenging periods in her life. In June 1862, Charlotte was well enough to return to Salem to teach summer classes at Higginson School. But although she was pleased to be back among her friends in Salem, Charlotte recognized that she would be unable to remain there through the

⁴⁴ Ibid., 34-35.

⁴⁵ Yee, *Black Women*, 121.

⁴⁶ Grimke, *The Journals*, Stevenson, ed., 289-290.

winter due to the potential dangers of New England's cold climate. Charlotte longed to find a sense of purpose and direction. On her twenty-fifth birthday, she reflected, "Tisn't a very pleasant thought that I have lived a quarter of a century, and I am so very, very ignorant. Ten years ago I hoped for a different fate at twenty-five.... The accomplishments, the society, the delights of travel which I have dreamed of and longed for all of my life, I am now convinced can never be mine."⁴⁷

The adventure and sense of accomplishment Charlotte wished for, however, would soon be hers. The Civil War was underway, and with it came new areas of opportunity for reform-minded women like Charlotte Forten. With escalation of the war, it became baldly apparent that the emancipation of slaves would be only the first step in the process of restructuring life for blacks in the South. As Union troops marched through Dixie, destroying plantations and dismantling the southern way of life, more and more slaves fled to Union camps seeking refuge and freedom. In the midst of this chaos, questions emerged about the fate of these former slaves, the purpose of the war, and the direction of the nation. How would land and labor be reorganized in the South? How would the southern economy be restructured? What would the place of blacks be in the political and social life of the South and the nation at large? What would the reconstructed South be like? No group was more eager to address these questions than the ardent abolitionists of the North. Extending their prewar campaigns for moral and institutional reform, northern reformers established freedmen's aid societies with the goals of assisting southern blacks in the transition from slavery to freedom and influencing the course of the nation. These organizations, which incorporated the ideologies of evangelical abolitionists, common-school reformers, and temperance workers, sought to remodel the South in the image

⁴⁷ Ibid., 376.

of the North.⁴⁸ Central to this process of reform was the female teacher from the North, who would provide former slave with both intellectual and moral instruction. Well-educated young women who were committed to the cause of elevating the down-trodden race, found a new avenue for action as volunteers in these neo-abolitionist organizations.⁴⁹

In August of 1862, Charlotte and her mentor, Mary Shepard, went to visit their friend John Greenleaf Whittier, the famed abolitionist poet. Aware of Charlotte's quest for meaningful employment, Whittier suggested that she put her talents to work as a teacher of contraband slaves in the South. He told her of an exciting experimental project that had been established to assist the newly freed slaves in the transition from slavery to freedom on the South Carolina Sea Islands.⁵⁰ Home to some of the most exclusive southern aristocracy and richest cotton fields, the isolated Sea Islands also boasted a deep water port. Port Royal caught the attention of Union naval strategists early in the war as they sought a coaling depot and suitable anchorage along the southern coast. In November 1861, just seven months after the fall of Fort Sumter, the U.S. Navy occupied Port Royal, South Carolina to find that all of the white inhabitants of the island, with the exception of one staggering drunk, had fled to the mainland, leaving their plantations and some ten thousand slaves behind.⁵¹ Union officials declared that all land, property, and slaves were to be defined as contraband of war, but it quickly became apparent that a clear policy and course of action needed to be developed to deal with the major social and economic changes that were taking place. How would order be established on the islands? What would happen to the

⁴⁸ Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865-1873*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 14-15.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁰ Grimke, *The Journals*, 374.

⁵¹ Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964). Chapter 1, 3-31.

rich cotton harvest that would soon need to be harvested? How would labor be organized? What would be the fate of these restless contraband slaves?⁵²

These sorts of questions sparked bitter debates and created intense excitement among northern reformers, who saw the islands as the perfect proving ground to advance the cause of freedom.⁵³ Abolitionists felt that slaves, given sufficient encouragement, education, and economic support, would be able to make the transition from slavery to citizenship with ease and rapidity. Beaufort, the main island, quickly became a mecca for newspapermen, government investigators, and others hoping to learn how the freedmen would adjust to the end of slavery. Shortly after the occupation of the islands, the Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon Chase, a man deeply influenced by the anti-slavery rhetoric of the day, launched the Port Royal experiment. He hired Edward Pierce, a young lawyer from Boston with abolitionist leanings and experience with contraband slaves in Virginia, to assess the situation and develop a comprehensive plan of action.⁵⁵

Pierce's bold plan called for a broad-based effort to reconstruct all aspects of life on the islands. He recommended a general program of relief and improvement for the newly released slaves, but his ultimate aim was to direct the transition from slave labor to free labor while firmly imbedding the cornerstones of republican society -- the church, the school-house, the militia, and the town meeting -- in the South.⁵⁶ Pierce also advised hiring a team of salaried superintendents to oversee the plantations and recruiting a contingent of teachers and

⁵² Ibid., 31

⁵³ C. Vann Woodward, introduction to *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, xv-xvii.

⁵⁴ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 52.

⁵⁵ Rose, *Rehearsal*, 21.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 229.

missionaries, sponsored by northern benevolence organizations, to establish schools and churches.

In March of 1862, a diverse cross-section of northerners, from missionaries and businessmen to military officials and schoolteachers, descended on the islands to begin the complicated job of wartime reconstruction. Various freedmen's aid societies from New England, New York, and Philadelphia recruited teachers to join the campaign to educate contraband slaves and to prepare them for life and work in a democratic society.⁵⁷ Well-educated women with teaching experience and a strong commitment to the abolitionist crusade were in demand, and Charlotte Forten certainly fit that description. Acting on Whittier's advice, she enthusiastically pursued the possibility of joining as a volunteer of the Port Royal experiment. A few months later, she secured a position as a teacher under the auspices of the Port Royal Relief Association, which was based in Philadelphia.⁵⁸

Full of optimism, idealism, and nervous energy, twenty-six year-old Charlotte Forten boarded a steamship in New York and set out for Port Royal in October of 1862.⁵⁹ If adventure and a challenging and useful outlet for social activism were what she longed for, she would find both in South Carolina. Charlotte, assuming her usual role as a pioneer, was among the first northern teachers in the South; she was the only black teacher on St. Helena's island, which would serve as her home for eighteen months.

After an exciting voyage, Forten arrived in Port Royal and got her assignment as a teacher at the Penn School on nearby St. Helena's island. "I cannot tell you how glad I am to be

⁵⁷ Robert C. Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction: The Education of Freedmen in The South, 1861-1870*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), 7.

⁵⁸ Rose, *Rehearsal*, 37.

⁵⁹ Grimke, *The Journals*, 382.

here," she wrote to William Lloyd Garrison.⁶⁰ Charlotte was warmly greeted by two enthusiastic white co-workers from the North, Laura Towne and Ellen Murray, who had established a school in a small Baptist church that was "beautifully situated in a grove of live oaks."⁶¹ Charlotte and a few others set up their home in a "pleasantly situated... but... somewhat dilapidated" house on Oaklands plantation, about a mile from the school.⁶² Amazed with her surroundings and the intriguing people she met, Charlotte could hardly believe that she was in South Carolina, the "very heart of Rebellom."⁶³ "It is all like a dream still, and will be for a long time, I suppose; a strange wild dream," she wrote in her diary during her first week there. "When we get settled into our own house and I have fairly entered into teaching, perhaps I shall begin to realize it all."⁶⁴

Like other teachers of contraband slaves, Charlotte not only taught children the basics of reading, writing, spelling, math, and history, but also instructed adults in moral and social behavior.⁶⁵ As "evangels of civilization," Yankee schoolmarms taught "everything which is proper for free men to know."⁶⁶ This prescription included cleanliness, industry, thrift, good manners, and Christian morals. Charlotte, however, also noted that she hoped to inspire her students with "courage and ambition (of a noble sort) and high purposes."⁶⁷ She and the other teachers at The Penn School imbued their lessons with abolitionist rhetoric. For instance, they taught the youngsters to sing a hymn about John Brown, the radical abolitionist martyr who led

⁶⁰ Grimke, "Letter from St. Helena's Island, Beaufort, S.C.," in *The Liberator*, December 12, 1862.

⁶¹ Grimke, *The Journals*, 391.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 390.

⁶³ Grimke, "Letter from St. Helena's Island," in *The Liberator*, December 12, 1862.

⁶⁴ Grimke, *The Journals*, 393.

⁶⁵ Stevenson, *The Journals*, 39.

⁶⁶ Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction*, 4; Rose, *Rehearsal*, 88.

⁶⁷ Grimke, *The Journals*, 397.

the raid of Harper's Ferry. Charlotte also taught the children about Toussaint L'Overture, the black slave who led the successful slave insurrection on Haiti. "They listened attentively," she reported. "It is well," she wrote, "that they sh'ld know what one of their own color c'ld do for his race."⁶⁸

From the start, Charlotte noticed "with pleasure how bright, how eager to learn" many of the students seemed.⁶⁹ Yet, like most other northern teachers in the South, she struggled with frustration over the difficult conditions in which she worked. The space was tight, the pupils were many, and supplies were few. Since the new pupils were unused to long-term intellectual concentration, teachers often found it extremely challenging to maintain their attention for extended periods of time.⁷⁰ "It is necessary to interest them at every moment, in order to keep their thoughts from wandering," Forten explained. "Teaching here is consequently far more fatiguing than at the North."⁷¹ Perhaps most difficult for Charlotte was the wide variety of ages in the classroom. Many of the children who came to school were very small, and consequently restless. These youngsters, often too young to learn the alphabet, were brought to school by older siblings who looked after them while their parents were at work in the fields. "Coming to school," Charlotte wrote, "is a constant delight and recreation to them. They come here as other children go to play."⁷²

The Penn School opened its doors in September of 1862, and throughout the fall, the number of students grew. Although the numbers constantly fluctuated with the weather and the

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Grimke, *The Journals*, 391.

⁷⁰ Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love*, 109-127.

⁷¹ Grimke, "Life on the Sea Islands: Part One," in *The Atlantic Monthly* 12 (May, 1864), 591.

⁷² Ibid., 592.

demands of work, on most days the school averaged between eighty and ninety pupils with just three teachers.⁷³ One day in December, Charlotte noted that she "had a perfectly immense school today. 147, of whom I had 58, at least two-thirds of whom were tiny A.B.C. people. Hardly knew what to do with them at first. But I like a large school. It is inspiring."⁷⁴ By the end of the year, as freedmen's education began to take shape on the Sea Islands, an estimated 1,727 children were attending classes on Port Royal, St. Helena, and Ladies islands alone. Before long, the number of schools increased to more than thirty. The schools employed teachers recruited by the American Missionary Association and freedmen's aid societies from Boston, New York, and Philadelphia.⁷⁵

Charlotte's role as a teacher did not end when she left the school-house, nor was it confined to educating young people. She was delighted to discover that a number of adult men expressed a keen interest in learning to read and write as well.⁷⁶ Interestingly, no women came to Charlotte for instruction. While Charlotte taught these men, they also taught her. They told her stories about life on the islands under slavery and their excitement on the day of the "gun shoot" when the Yankees came to free them. In her journal she noted, "This evening Harry, one of the men on the place, came in for a lesson. He is most eager to learn, and is really a scholar to be proud of. He learns rapidly. I gave him his first lesson in writing to-night, and his progress was wonderful. He held his pen almost perfectly right the first time. He will very soon learn to write, I think. I must inquire who w'd like to take lessons at night.... It will be a pleasure to teach

⁷³ Grimke, "An Interesting Letter from Miss Charlotte L. Forten," in *The Liberator*, December 19, 1862.

⁷⁴ Grimke, *The Journals*, December 15, 1862, p.419.

⁷⁵ Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction*, 7.

⁷⁶ Grimke, *The Journals*, 398, 400.

them."⁷⁷ Within a few days time, several other men came for lessons. Forten was continually impressed with former slaves' determination to learn to read.⁷⁸

Northern teachers like Charlotte were thrilled and amazed by freed slaves' passion for learning. Whether she wrote of adults or children, Charlotte repeatedly mentioned that in all her years of teaching she had never seen students so motivated and driven to learn.⁷⁹ In the minds of those born into slavery, literacy equaled power. Although most slaves did not know how to read or write, they had a profound reverence for the written word.⁸⁰ As Leon Litwack put it, "nothing could have been more calculated to impress upon slaves the value of education than the extraordinary measures adopted by their 'white folks' to keep them from it."⁸¹ South Carolina's 1740 Slave Code prohibited teaching writing to slaves, yet individual masters could teach their slaves to read at their own discretion. In 1834, however, reading also was proscribed. Increased fears of servile insurrections, prompted by Nat Turner's rebellion (1831), and the earlier revolts led by Denmark Vessey (1822) and Gabriel Prosser (1811), who were all literate blacks, inspired lawmakers to deny slaves access to literacy in order to keep them away from the dreaded influence of abolitionist literature.⁸² Consequently, slavery became a system of intellectual as well as physical bondage.⁸³ With the arrival of Yankee schoolmarmes during and after the Civil War, education suddenly became attainable. Southern blacks recognized that to remain in ignorance was to remain in bondage. Access to literacy for themselves and their children was

⁷⁷ Ibid., 398.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 400-401.

⁷⁹ for example see Grimke, "Life on the Sea Islands: Part One," 591, 593.

⁸⁰ Rose, *Rehearsal*, 86.

⁸¹ Leon Litwack, *Been in The Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 473.

⁸² Rose, *Rehearsal*, 86.

⁸³ Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love*, 49.

central to the meaning of freedom. As a result, teachers were joyfully accepted everywhere, and the schoolbook became a talisman of freedom.⁸⁴

What could be more exciting for a lifelong abolitionist, teacher, and social reformer than being in the heart of rebeldom during the Civil War, teaching newly released slaves how to read and write? It was the opportunity of a lifetime for Charlotte; the opportunity to prove that her race was capable of advancement and the opportunity to influence future policy on the education of freedmen. Her position as a teacher on the Sea Islands also gave her independence and a way to support herself. This transitional period between slavery and freedom opened up a new realm of possibility not only for the former slaves, but for Charlotte as well. After years of dreaming of a useful, challenging, and satisfying avenue of reform, she finally found what she was looking for. Transferring the power of literacy to the most degraded of her race was both rewarding and exciting. But of equal importance to her was gaining public support for the project among those in the North.

Using the power of the written word, Charlotte was determined to inform northerners about the tremendous progress she saw among people who were "so long crushed to the earth."⁸⁵ Charlotte's first course of action was to send letters to influential friends. William Lloyd Garrison published two of these letters in his widely read abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*.⁸⁶ Part travelogue, part report, these letters had a strong underlying message and purpose - to vindicate the intellectual capabilities and potential of the black race. The first letter that Garrison published was prefaced by a brief introduction, identifying Charlotte as "a young

⁸⁴ Rose, *Rehearsal*, 85-86; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 96.

⁸⁵ Grimke, "Life on the Sea Islands: Part 1," 591.

⁸⁶ Two of Charlotte Forten's letters appeared in *The Liberator*, December 12, 1862, and December 19, 1862.

colored lady of Philadelphia" who was a "graduate of the State Normal School in Salem, Mass., and a grand-daughter of the late venerable James Forten, or Philadelphia."⁸⁷ Presented in this way, Charlotte herself was proof of what blacks could accomplish with the advantages of education.

In her carefully crafted letters in *The Liberator*, Charlotte painted a portrait of the people and life on the Sea Islands. To humanize her subjects and to gain the support and sympathy of her northern, mostly white, middle-class audience, she portrayed the former slaves as God-fearing, Yankee-loving, polite, industrious people who were grateful to be freed from the evils of slavery:

As far as I have been able to observe - and although I have not been here long, I have seen and talked with many of the people - the Negroes here seem to be, for the most part, an honest industrious, and sensible people. They are eager to learn; they rejoice in their new-found freedom. It does one good to see how jubilant they are over the downfall of their 'secesh' masters, as they call them. I do not believe that there is a man, woman, or even a child that is old enough to be sensible, that would submit to being made a slave again. There is evidently a deep determination in their souls that never shall be. Their hearts are full of gratitude to the Government and the 'Yankees.'⁸⁸

She went on to describe her school in the Baptist church and her well-behaved, eager students. Emphasizing the rapid progress she saw, Charlotte commented, "I wish some of those persons at the North, who say the race is so hopelessly and naturally inferior, could see the readiness with which these children, so long oppressed and deprived of every privilege, learn and understand."⁸⁹ Charlotte assured her readers that, freed from the horrors of slavery and given the opportunities of education, former slaves would prove to be responsible and educated citizens.

⁸⁷ introduction to Charlotte Forten's "Letter from St. Helena's Island, Beaufort, S.C.," in *The Liberator*, December 12, 1862.

⁸⁸ Forten, "Letter from St. Helena's Island."

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Both of letters published in *The Liberator* evinced a contagious sense of exhilaration about the Port Royal Experiment. Charlotte obviously was thrilled to be part of such a historic project and moment. Her description of the Thanksgiving celebration on St. Helena's Island captures this mood. The celebration was held in the Baptist church, which doubled as the schoolhouse during the week. On Thanksgiving morning, a large number of superintendents, teachers, and freedpeople assembled at the church. Gathered together in the small space, the joyous spirit of those released from slavery was almost overwhelming.

The church was crowded, and there were many outside, at the doors and windows, who could not get in. It was a sight that I shall not soon forget - that crowd of eager, happy black faces, from which the shadow of slavery had passed forever. 'Forever Free! Forever Free!' All the time those magical words were singing themselves in my soul, and never in my life before have I felt so deeply and sincerely grateful to God. It was a moment of exaltation, such that comes but seldom in one's life, that in which I sat among the people assembled on this lovely day to thank God for the most blessed and glorious of all gifts.⁹⁰

Charlotte's writings brought her a degree of public recognition. Much to her delight and surprise, she received several letters from readers in the North. On one occasion, she noted in her journal that she received a letter with a Boston postmark and handwriting she did not recognize. "On opening it," she wrote, "I found it to be from a stranger - a lady in W. Gloucester, who says she has read my letter in the paper, and expresses her great interest in the work here. A very kind and pretty letter.... It touched me receiving such a letter from a stranger."⁹¹ Knowing that her message was reaching people in the North inspired Charlotte to continue to write about her experiences in South Carolina.

⁹⁰ Forten, "Interesting Letter from Miss Charlotte L. Forten," in *The Liberator*, December 19, 1864.

⁹¹ Grimke, *The Journals*, 427.

After spending eighteen of the most thrilling and challenging months of her life on St. Helena's Island, Charlotte returned to Philadelphia in May of 1864. The circumstances surrounding her decision to leave are unclear, but it seems as though failing health played a major role. More than likely, her father's untimely death in April of 1864 also contributed to her decision to leave South Carolina.⁹² Although rewarding, work on the Sea Islands was also demanding and taxing. A committed volunteer, Charlotte worked hard, but, as a characteristic overachiever, she always felt that there was more she could do. This drive for service, her single-minded commitment to helping her people, and the pressures she put on herself often led to physical ailments. In a revealing letter to a friend written in 1867, Charlotte indicated some of these tensions along with her desire to teach in the South again.

I long to enter into the work again. I feel that I ought to go South, if I am able to teach. But the last year of my experience there taught me that it would be folly for me to attempt teaching again, anywhere, until my head should be better. Often, I was haunted by the fear of insanity, and indeed, I think I should have become insane had I continued to teach. Oh, if one could only be well! I am disgusted with myself. I feel as if my life were a failure. Not one of my long cherished aspirations has yet to be fulfilled.⁹³

Echoing the kind of psychological distress and frustration that marked her years as a teacher in Salem, Charlotte failed to see the tremendous amount of good that she already had accomplished in her life. As a teacher, a writer, a representative of her race, and a role model for other blacks, Charlotte demonstrated her strong commitment to uplifting her race. Yet she also revealed the pressures of her anomalous position as a highly educated and privileged black woman. From a young age, Charlotte was constantly plagued by guilt. Always her own worst critic, she repeatedly chastised herself for giving in to feelings of despair or depression when so many

⁹² Stevenson, ed., *The Journals*, 49.

⁹³ Charlotte Forten, as quoted in *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*, Dorothy Sterling, ed., (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1984), 283.

blacks were forced to endure the pain and suffering of slavery and poverty. Like many women who dedicate their lives to helping others, Charlotte failed to take care of herself and her own needs. Crippled by exhaustion and mental strain, she was forced to retire to less physically and mentally taxing work.

Charlotte continued to remain active in the struggle for her people despite her inability to teach. After a brief period of recovery, she moved to Boston in October, 1865, where she obtained a position as Secretary of the Teachers Committee of the New England Branch of the Freedmen's Union Commission.⁹⁴ Although she left the Sea Islands, she did not end her efforts as a propagandist for the Port Royal Experiment. In the summer of 1864, the *Atlantic Monthly* published a two part series entitled "Life on The Sea Islands." This revised and expanded version of the letters that appeared earlier in *The Liberator* described the vast accomplishments and gains made by the Sea Island residents. Once again, Charlotte wrote of the progress made by her students. She firmly asserted her faith that knowledge would break down the barriers of prejudice and oppression. "It is wonderful to see," she wrote, "how a people who have been so long crushed to the earth, so imbruted as these have been, - and they are said to be among the most degraded Negroes of the South, - can have so great a desire for knowledge, and such a capacity for attaining it." In a more aggressive, biting tone she went on to comment:

One cannot believe that the haughty Anglo-Saxon race, after centuries of such an experience as these people have had, would be very much superior to them. And one's indignation increases against those who, North as well as South, taunt the colored race with inferiority while they themselves use every means in their power to crush and degrade them, denying them every right and privilege, closing against them every avenue of elevation and improvement. Were they, under such circumstances, intellectual and refined, they would certainly be vastly superior to any other race that ever existed.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Stevenson, ed., *The Journals*, xxxviii.

⁹⁵ Forten, "Life On the Sea Islands: Part One," in *The Atlantic Monthly* 12 (December), 1864.

In the conclusion to the second installment of "Life on the Sea Islands" Charlotte expressed a sense of optimism for the future of the residents. "Daily," she wrote, "the long-oppressed people... are demonstrating their capacity for improvement in learning and labor. What they have accomplished in one short year exceeds our utmost expectations. Still the sky is dark; but through the darkness we can discern a brighter future."⁹⁶ Unfortunately, what Charlotte Forten could not predict is that after the burst of brightness, the clouds would again return over the South, for as W.E.B. DuBois expressed it, Reconstruction was the period when "the slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back into slavery."⁹⁷

In many ways, the Port Royal Experiment was a "rehearsal for Reconstruction." The neatly defined stage of the Sea Islands served as both a proving ground for freedom and a training ground for reformers. Despite the great advances that were made, and the profound influence that the project had on the formation of post-war policy, it took place in a "social and political vacuum." Insulated from the presence of the former slaveholders, and involving a relatively small number of freedmen, the project failed to address a whole host of issues that would plague later efforts in Reconstruction.⁹⁸ Although emancipation and education were crucial ingredients of change, the more complex questions of how to restructure land and labor remained unanswered. The Experiment's goal of dismantling and rebuilding the entire southern social structure in the model of New England proved impossible. As the Experiment neared its end, the cross-purposes of the different factions involved became more pronounced. Willie Lee Rose, historian of the Port Royal experiment, concludes that "all the goals, motives, and ironies first seen at Port Royal would be written large in the history of the turbulent years between 1865

⁹⁶ Forten, "Life On the Sea Islands: Part Two," in *The Atlantic Monthly*, 13 (June) 1864.

⁹⁷ W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, (New York: 1935), 30.

⁹⁸ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 54.

and 1877."⁹⁹ Reconstruction was America's "unfinished revolution." While tremendous progress was made in the push for the political and civil equality, these advances proved transitory. Yet, the seeds of education were planted during these years by women such as Charlotte Forten could not be uprooted entirely.¹⁰⁰

For Charlotte Forten, the years she spent in "the very heart of Rebeldom" were among the most challenging and rewarding in her life. Faced with unprecedented responsibilities and experiences, her consciousness as a social activist and writer was greatly expanded. As a black woman whose life was broadened by the power of literacy, Charlotte used these skills to transfer such power to others. Through her actions as a writer and as a teacher, she challenged stereotypes of black intellectual inferiority while vindicating the capabilities of her race.

In later years, she continued to commit herself to a life of service. After returning to the South to teach freedmen in Charleston for a year in 1871, she taught at a black preparatory school in Washington, DC..¹⁰¹ At the age of forty, she married Reverend Francis Grimke, who was twelve years her junior. The perfect match for Charlotte, Grimke was intelligent, sensitive, and fiercely dedicated to his profession and race.¹⁰² The couple had one daughter who died in infancy, a loss that deeply affected Charlotte. Although she retired from public life after her marriage, Charlotte remained dedicated to writing poetry and essays.

Charlotte Forten's autobiographical writings leave an indelible record of one of the most important eras of American history. While chronicling the Great Age of Reform, Charlotte's writings also chart her personal struggles as she labored for the holy cause. Faced with the

⁹⁹ Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 377.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 602.

¹⁰¹ Stevenson, ed., *The Journals*, xxxviii.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 51.

demanding ideals of her family and social and intellectual circle, Charlotte turned to the pages of her journal as a means of solace and support. Although she privately battled feelings of despair, the needs of her community always came before her own. Like many other educated black women in the nineteenth century, Charlotte Forten lifted as she climbed.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ for examples of other black women who used the power of literacy for racial uplift see Shirley Wilson Logan, "Literacy as a Tool for Social Action Among Nineteenth-Century African American Women," in *Nineteenth-Century Women Learn to Write*, Catherine Hobbs, ed., 179-196.

CHAPTER 3

"She's Got Grit ": The Adventures of Angie Mitchell, Teacher on the Arizona Frontier



Angie Mitchell, 1873.

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Far from being the "gentle tamers" of Western lore, rural teachers on the far western frontier played active roles in building communities and displayed a bold sense of adventure while doing so. The experiences of Angie Mitchell, a young teacher in Central Arizona in the late 1870s, illustrate the ways that the teaching profession in the American West offered women financial autonomy and a way of making use of their education, in addition to opening avenues for adventure. Instead of feeling constrained by the restrictive ideals of womanhood that plagued many women in the nineteenth century, Angie Mitchell enjoyed a strong sense of self while demonstrating bravery and confidence. Unlike many nineteenth-century women's diaries, which dwell on emotional states and interior worlds, Angie's writings focus on the exterior world and her actions in it. The engaging narrative style of her diaries and the way she characterizes herself echo the freedom she experienced as a teacher in one-room schoolhouses on the mining and ranching frontier. Capturing the excitement of her life in these newly settled areas, Angie fashioned herself as a bold adventure heroine who deliberately chose to lead a life full of challenges.

Drawing on the work of historians of women in the American West, this chapter explores the way one woman embraced the respectable job of teaching in order to turn it into a means of adventure. In recent years, increasing interest in the history of women in the American West has generated waves of research. Early accounts of the West either excluded women all together or presented polarized images of the "gentle tamer" and the "sunbonneted helpmate" in contrast to the "hell raiser" and "bad woman."¹ Traditional studies of the West portray the West as a masculine environment where women are "invisible, few in number, and not important in the

¹ see, for example, Dee Brown, *The Gentle Tamers: Women of the Old Wild West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1958).

process of taming a wilderness."² Inspired by pioneering works in the field of women's history, scholars in the 1970s began a determined effort to correct this imbalance. This wave of scholarship raised questions about the impact of westward migration on Victorian ideals of womanhood. Was the West liberating for women? Was the West more egalitarian than the East? Mining archives and manuscript collections, historians found a wealth of information and a whole new vantage point from which to view the region.³

As the sub-field of western women's history grew, historians revised initial assumptions and called for new approaches. In an early overview of the works on western women, Joan Jensen and Darlis Miller recognize the value of case studies, but argued for a comparative, multi-cultural approach that would broaden the scope of the field.⁴ Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage both stress the need to reconsider the significance of true womanhood in the West. Jameson asserts, "we need to approach western women's history not through the filters of prescriptive literature or concepts of frontier liberation and oppression, but through the experiences of the people who lived the history."⁵ In a similar vein, Armitage proclaims that "ordinary lives are the story of the West."⁶ Answering their call for a focus on the women who lived the history, this chapter will investigate the life of one woman.

² Joan M. Jensen and Darlis A. Miller, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West," *Pacific Historical Review* XLIX, no.2 (May 1980): 176.

³ see, for example, John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).; Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: "Civilizing" The West? 1840-1880*, 2d ed., rev. (Hill and Wang, 1998).

⁴ Jensen and Miller, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited," 212-213.

⁵ Elizabeth Jameson, "Women as Workers, Women as Civilizers: True Womanhood in the American West," in *The Women's West*, Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, eds. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 161.

⁶ Susan Armitage, "Through Women's Eyes: a New View of the West," in *The Women's West*, 14.

Angeline Brigham Mitchell was born in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, in 1854. Her mother, also named Angeline, was an early graduate of Mount Holyoke Seminary, and like many of the women in her class, she went on to a career as an educator and writer. Angie's father, Daniel Mitchell, who was seventeen years older than her mother, made his living as a surveyor and civil engineer. Although Angie was the only child born to her mother, she had two much older step-brothers from her father's first marriage.

Both of Angie's parents were ardent abolitionists. Like many others committed to the cause of freedom, the Mitchells took their crusade to the West. Spurred on by the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, which provided that the inhabitants of both Kansas and Nebraska would be allowed to decide for themselves whether slavery or freedom was to rule the new territory, many northern abolitionists moved their battle to the West.⁷ Mr. Mitchell decided to join the Massachusetts Free State Immigrant Party, and in 1856 Angie's father and step-brothers set out for Kansas to "plant a free state."⁸

Like other wives of early pioneers to the Kansas territory, Mrs. Mitchell, with her young daughter, remained in New England while her husband and step-sons got settled in the west. While she shared something in common with other wives and young mothers, Mrs. Mitchell stood apart in one respect - she continued her work as an educator. While waiting for word from the West she served as the "preceptress" of the Brattleboro Academy's "female department" in

⁷ Joanna L. Stratton, *Pioneer Women: Voices from the Kansas Frontier* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), 234-239.

⁸ Most Biographical information on D.F. Mitchell is gleaned from various obituaries found in the Obituary Books at the Sharlot Hall Archives, Prescott, Arizona ; Information on the Free State movement can be found in "Kansas and Nebraska: Report of the Committee of the Massachusetts Emigrant Aid Company," Boston, 1854, Microfilm. New Haven, Research Publications, 1975 (Western Americana, Frontier History of the Trans-Mississippi West, 1550-1900; Reel #388; 3839-3840).

the "charming, rural village" of West Brattleboro, Vermont. Mrs. Mitchell was not new to such an administrative position. An advertisement for the school assured parents that as the former principal of the Young Ladies' Seminary in Bridgewater, Mrs. Mitchell's "recommendations and antecedents encourage the expectation that her department will be superior to that of any other seminary on this vicinity."⁹

Mrs. Mitchell and little Angie began their own journey to Kansas in May 1858. In a fictionalized account entitled "Westward Bound: A Reminiscence," Angie's mother described their adventure-filled trip to Kansas.¹⁰ Four days of railroad travel took them to St. Louis, where they caught a steamship on the "low," "muddy" waters of the Missouri. After a slow, week-long trip down the Missouri, the Mitchell women reached Leavenworth, where they set out on the last 100 miles of their overland journey in numerous vehicles, from a lumber wagon to a stagecoach to a "springless farm wagon."¹¹

Despite torrential rains, high streams, deep mud, and dilapidated vehicles, the two travelers maintained "excellent spirits." After describing the various trials and tribulations they faced, the ever-optimistic Mrs. Mitchell proclaimed, "We had come to settle in Kansas and were prepared to make the best of whatever happened." Eventually Angie and her mother reached Ogden, Kansas, where they "found their loved ones" and new home waiting for them.¹²

It did not take long for the Mitchells to make their mark in their new home. Daniel, known for his abilities as a surveyor, became involved with the Junction City Town Company and laid out the site of the new town. Town companies, which were founded by enterprising

⁹ Advertisement for Brattleboro Academy, 1857. Series III; box 37E.

¹⁰ Mrs. Angeline B. Mitchell, "Westward Bound: a Reminiscence," Mitchel/Brown Family Papers, Series II: box 37C, Sharlot Hall Archives, Prescott Arizona (hereafter SHA).

¹¹ Ibid..

¹² Ibid..

pioneers, set up new communities and drew the attention of settlers through advertising campaigns in eastern newspapers.¹³ As a crossroads of interstate commerce and communication, Junction City soon became the county seat. Daniel, who was widely considered "accurate and industrious, conscientiously honest and of good habits," was an active member of his new community.¹⁴ Throughout the 1860s he "was mixed into politics," holding numerous public offices, from mayor to county treasurer, to register of deeds and county clerk.¹⁵ Both Daniel and his wife also served as important leaders in establishing the town's educational and religious institutions.¹⁶

From her groundbreaking parents, Angie inherited both curiosity and a respect for the importance of education. Although she attended common schools in Junction City, the majority of her education as a young girl came from her accomplished mother, whom her step-brother William declared was "better than all the school-teachers."¹⁷ When she finished her secondary schooling at the age of fifteen, Angie and her best friend Anna went on to study at the newly established Kansas State Agricultural College in Manhattan. KSAC was a product of the Morrill Land Grant College Act of 1862, which provided federal funding for institutions of higher education. As Angie put it, the college "was agricultural in name only."¹⁸ Like other new land grant colleges, Kansas State began as a liberal arts college with the intention of eventually expanding the curriculum to include agricultural courses.¹⁹ The new college struggled to find

¹³ Joanna Stratton, *Pioneer Women*, 188.

¹⁴ Obituary of Daniel F. Mitchell in the Junction City Tribune, August 9, 1877, Obituary Books, SHA.

¹⁵ Angie Mitchell, "Notes on the Callen and Murphy Parties," page 173, Series I: box 37A, SHA.

¹⁶ Ibid..

¹⁷ William Mitchell to Angie B. Mitchell, 1864, Series I: box 37A, SHA.

¹⁸ AM College Diary 1869-1872, page 27, Series I: box 37A, SHA.

¹⁹ Patricia Alberg Graham, "Expansion and Exclusion: A History of Women in American

enough qualified male students as a result of heavy losses in the Civil War, and, like many other state universities in the West, KSAC needed to admit young women to keep afloat economically.²⁰ In order to attract female students and to serve the educational needs of the new state, the college provided "special instruction for those preparing to teach."²¹ Like her mother, Angie decided on a career in education and took advantage of the "classical course," which included Latin, German, English literature, geometry, philosophy, physical geography, instrumental music, geology, rhetoric, trigonometry, ancient history, and drawing.²²

During Angie's time in Manhattan from 1869 through 1872, she and several close female friends lived in both the college boarding house and private boarding houses, which cost between \$3.50 and \$4.00 a month.²³ The young women "took into partnership," combining their possessions to set up "a pleasant boarding place." Angie reported that one of her roommates even "brought her organ with her so there was always music galore."²⁴

While Angie enjoyed her studies, she was even more fond of her social life in Manhattan. In her college diary Angie explained that she and her schoolmates "studied hard but 'played' equally hard and broke the major portion of the twenty-eight college rules with surprising regularity - We sometimes got caught and were variously punished - but never were any of us suspended or expelled."²⁵ The girls were not supposed to socialize with the male students, but Angie confessed that they "often ran away to some dance out in the country nearby - or to some

Higher Education," *Signs* 3, no. 4 (1978), 762.

²⁰ Thomas Woody, *A History of Women's Education in the United States*, volume 2 (New York, Science Press, 1929), 252.

²¹ Homer Soclofsky, "MCMLXXXVIII: Celebrating Kansas State University's 125th Birthday," *Kansas Quarterly* 20 (1988), 15.

²² AM College Diary, p.29.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.27.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.28.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.29.

party there or to our nice picnic ground out up the Wild Cat Creek where we would have an 'impromptu' moonlight picnic and frequently a dozen or more of us would steal out on lovely evenings and go to walk - of course, the boys would attend these little parties."²⁶ While Angie was clearly independent and slightly mischievous, she assured her readers that though "guiltily of many a 'rule breaking escapade' and at all times a 'law unto myself'... I have never done anything that I have not told mother about as soon as I got home and no prank or act of mine has been so bad that I was ashamed to tell her of it."²⁷

Angie's written reflections on her life as a college student reveal a confident and independent young woman entering adulthood. Writing in a diary served as both a tool of recording her progress and a vehicle for defining the independent person she was in the process of becoming. Although diary-writing is usually considered a private genre, scholars of women's autobiographical writing are quick to point out that "the importance of the audience, real or implied, conscious or unconscious... cannot be overstated."²⁸ Like many other female diarists of her day, Angie probably shared her private writings with her mother or female friends, never envisioning her diary as a secret book. As a result, a sense of audience played a central role not only in what she said and how she said it, but also in the way she constructed herself. As the daughter of a highly educated, progressive woman writer, Angie was raised to carry on a tradition of female intellect and self-assurance. In her writings she took on that role, repeatedly emphasizing traits such as curiosity, vitality, and independence. Throughout her college diary

²⁶ Ibid..

²⁷ AM College Diary, page 31.

²⁸ Margo Culley and Rebecca Hogan, *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1764 to the Present* (New York: Feminist Press, 1985), 11.

she presents herself as sociable and fun-loving, yet she also made sure to highlight the development of her more mature and studious side.

After spending two and a half years as a student in Manhattan, Angie went on to study at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. As there was no boarding house attached to the university property, she boarded in a private home. Her new roommates, Jennie Drinkwater and Sadie Dryer, were both teachers in the Lawrence public schools. Angie was struck by the "curious sensation of being stranded on a 'foreign' shore" in her early days in Lawrence. Comparing the "much be-ruled, over-governed KSAC" with the University of Kansas, which was defined by the "total absence of all rules or apparent guardianship," Angie concluded that the University of Kansas put her on her "mettle to show how well [she] could behave herself." Unlike her "comrades" in Manhattan, her new, more mature roommates could not share her "slightly lost sensation as they were not students." Angie was clearly impressed and inspired by these "free and easy" young teachers, and before long, she became accustomed to the independence of life in Lawrence and "liked it very much."²⁹

In the end, Angie reported that she "learned a good deal during the terms," although the faculty "had about three times too much work to do." There were "too many students for so few teachers" and as a result the professors were "always hurried, usually nervous and, in Prof. Kellog's case always cross." Despite these shortcomings, she wrote: "I liked my class and schoolmates very much, and was sorry I could not return in September for the next year when I should have graduated but financial troubles overtook Father and of course I couldn't."³⁰

²⁹ AM College Diary, page 31.

³⁰ Ibid..

Following her departure from school, Angie taught in several towns surrounding Junction City for short periods of time, gaining the reputation as a "teacher of outstanding record."³¹ Like other young women teaching in the "prairie districts" of Kansas, Angie was faced with the challenge of teaching in a wide variety of settings.³³ She taught in sod schoolhouses and log schoolhouses and one "heavy stone block house, which was used as a safehouse during Sioux Indian raids."³⁴ Yet, her teaching career on the prairies of Kansas did not last long. In 1875 Angie joined her family on their next pioneering venture - the long trek to the Arizona Territory.

In February of 1875, Daniel Mitchell was approached by Anson "Grizzly" Callen, a Junction City lawyer, about potential mining riches to be had in the Arizona Territory. Callen, who had found many mining claims in an 1873 exploration of the area, returned to Kansas and formed the Arizona Mining Association, selling shares for \$500.00.³⁵ Promising riches and new opportunities in mining and other occupations, the company soon had twenty-nine members and employees.³⁶ Callen assured Daniel Mitchell that he would find profitable employment surveying both mining properties and new towns, and that his wife and daughter would be welcomed to the new public schools in the area. Daniel signed on as secretary of the new company.³⁷

³¹ The names of towns in Kansas where Angie Mitchell lived after college are found on a list she kept of various places she lived from her birth in 1854 until her marriage in 1881, Series I, box 37A, SHA.; "A School Teacher of Early Arizona," author unknown, Article Collection of Sharlot Hall Archives, Article Box 22: Folder 15, SHA.

³³ On teachers in Kansas see Wayne E. Fuller, "Country Schoolteaching on the Sodhouse Frontier," *Arizona and The West* 17 (Summer, 1975): 121-140.; Stratton, *Pioneer Women*, 160-170.; Mary Hurlbert Cordier, *Schoolwomen of the Prairies and Plains: Personal Narratives from Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska, 1860-1920*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992).

³⁴ Dawn Dollard, "A Rose Garden of Memories," Territorial Rose Garden File Folder 32, Article Box 18, SHA.

³⁵ Angie Mitchell, "Notes on the Callen Party," page 170.

³⁶ Ibid..

³⁷ Ibid., page 173.

In June 1875 a great caravan of covered wagons filled with the household goods of more than one hundred people set out along the Santa Fe Trail toward Arizona.³⁸ The diverse group of families and single men hoped to find success in the growing town of Prescott. The Callen Party, as the group came to be known, was made up of people with a wide assortment of skills that would prove essential to the establishment of the young town. In her notes on the Callen Party, Angie carefully recorded biographical information on each of the members. The group included three carpenters, one mason, three blacksmiths, more than a dozen farmers, two lawyers, a shoemaker, a barber, several clerks, two surveyors, and two teachers (including herself).³⁹



Callen Party Wagon Train, Junction City, Kansas, 1875.
Reproduced with permission from Sharlot Hall Archives, Prescott, Arizona

³⁸ "A School Teacher in Arizona," SHA.

³⁹ AM, "Notes on the Callen Party."

The four-month-long overland journey across great prairies and over the Rocky Mountains went smoothly and was particularly fateful for Angie. Along the way she met her husband-to-be, George Brown, a former Union soldier from Iowa. Brown had moved to Kansas, where he served as a railroad engineer, after the Civil War.⁴⁰ He and four other single men set out for Prescott in a smaller group in order to cover more ground. Brown's party overtook the Callen's in October, staying with them for a couple of days before pressing on, since the caravan traveled "too slow to suit" the young men.⁴¹ Although neither George nor Angie mentioned their meeting, before too long the two became a steady item in Angie's new home of Prescott, Arizona.

Founded in 1864 as the Territorial capital, Prescott was the center of Arizona's gold rush. Surrounded by well-timbered country and the mineral-rich Bradshaw mountains, the growth of the remote town corresponded with the post-gold rush period in California. As one historian put it, "rumors of a new bonanza in the Arizona Territory spread like wildfire... Soon miners and ranchers were pouring into the area as though someone had let the cork out of California!"⁴² The wide streets of Prescott quickly filled with "prospectors, freighters, cowboys, tin horn gamblers, merchants,... and the rest of the wide gamut of frontier society."⁴³ In some ways Prescott was an anomaly in the Southwest. Since it was mainly settled by Republicans originally from the East, the growing town reflected its settlers' New England heritage. Unlike other towns in Arizona, which were marked by racial diversity and adobe style architecture, Prescott was distinguished by its town square and frame houses with glass windows.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ibid., page 196.

⁴¹ Transcription of George Brown's Diary, October 1, 1875, Series I: Box 37A, SHA.

⁴² Melissa Ruffner, *Prescott: A Pictorial History* (Prescott, Primrose Press, 1985), 19.

⁴³ Marshall Trimble, *Roadside History of Arizona* (Missoula: Mountain Press, 1986), 330.

⁴⁴ Frank C. Lockwood, *Pioneer Days in Arizona* (New York: The MacMillan Company,

As "Grizzly" Callen had promised, the Mitchells established themselves quickly in their new found home. Daniel found plenty of work surveying throughout the area and was eventually named Deputy Surveyor General of Arizona. He also remained active as a public servant, serving as a Justice of the Peace in Prescott before his untimely death of dysentery in July of 1877.⁴⁵ Angie's mother, widely considered "a woman of rare culture, refinements, and education," was named to the Territorial Board of Examiners, which was responsible for examining and certifying prospective teachers.⁴⁶ As Callen had predicted, Angie found work as a teacher in various new public schools in and around Prescott.

When the Mitchell family arrived in Prescott, the public school system was still in its formative stages. Just five years earlier, there were no public schools in the entire territory of Arizona. But by 1880, over one hundred schools had opened across the region, more than keeping up with the dramatic growth in population.⁴⁷ From the start, John Goodwin, the first Territorial Governor of Arizona, recognized the importance of public education in the formation of a democratic state. In his address to the first meeting of the Territorial Legislature in 1864, the governor emphasized that "the first duty of the legislators of a free state is to make as far as lies in their power, education as free to all citizens as the air they breathe."⁴⁸ Symbolizing the importance Arizona pioneers placed on free public education, \$15,000 of the \$16,137 appropriated for the civil expenses of the territory at the first session of the legislature was put aside for education.⁴⁹

1932), 336.

⁴⁵ Obituaries of Daniel F. Mitchell from Obituary Books, SHA.

⁴⁶ Obituaries of Angeline B. Mitchell from Obituary Books, SHA.

⁴⁷ Elliott West, *Growing Up With the Country* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 189.

⁴⁸ Frank C. Lockwood, *Pioneer Days*, 241.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*.

It was not until 1870, however, that the cause of public education was championed by another Territorial Governor. Governor A.P.K Safford brought his zeal for common school education with him from his native New England. Convinced that "an educated ballot was a safer guarantee for the prosperity and perpetuity of a government than scientifically trained standing armies," Safford doggedly pushed forward a plan for tax based funding for public schools.⁵⁰ Convincing the legislators, who were more concerned with quelling Apache uprisings, of the need for free schooling was no easy task. Safford went directly to the people and embarked on an "educational crusade," going from "town to town, from house to house," urging citizens to support the campaign for a publicly funded school system. His efforts were not in vain; the first public school in Arizona opened in 1871, and during the next decade, schools grew by leaps and bounds.⁵¹

As miners and ranchers settled into small communities surrounding the bustling hub of Prescott, schoolhouses soon followed. Seeking out a better life on the western frontier, pioneering parents often feared that they were "turning their backs on their cultural birthright."⁵² As a result, schools became important symbols of stability and community in an uncertain land, passing on the sacred values of patriotism and moral rectitude, not to mention the fundamental skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic.⁵³

The transient nature of frontier society, however, left these eager school organizers with an uncertain tax base and limited funds with which to work. In order to receive tax support, schools needed to maintain a minimum attendance of eight children.⁵⁴ Establishing a school on

⁵⁰ Ibid., 242.

⁵¹ Ibid., 244.

⁵² West, *Growing Up*, 209.

⁵³ Ibid., 188.

⁵⁴ Ronald E. Butchart, "The Frontier Teacher: Arizona 1875-1925," *Journal of the West* 16,

the frontier was an expensive proposition, since organizers "had to start from scratch, building and furnishing schoolhouses at a time when everything from lumber to books cost more than in the East."⁵⁵ This lack of funds meant that one-room country schools were hastily constructed and typically only open a few months a year.⁵⁶

Determined to educate their children, parents in sparsely settled areas frequently had to raise extra funds and contribute volunteer services to construct schools.⁵⁷ One student of an early Arizona school recalled the "indomitable spirit" of pioneers who scraped together money needed to establish schools. "If three or four children, or half a dozen, were found in a community a school followed somehow, more than once taught in some little out-building cleared of the chickens or calves that had been the original tenants."⁵⁸ In scattered ranching settlements, children frequently had to ride several miles on horseback get to school. Faced with the struggle of maintaining the eight-child minimum, parents who lived closer to the schoolhouse often took in extra children and boarded them for free or a small sum.⁵⁹ Despite the difficulties of education on the frontier, "both children and their parents showed a strong and persistent interest in public education."⁶⁰

The results of early efforts to build schools varied widely depending on the availability of materials and funds. In most cases, school houses were more primitive than the settlers' homes. While schools in the high desert might be constructed of brush, mud, and poles, a more forested

no. 3 (1977): 55.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 192.

⁵⁶ Ibid..

⁵⁷ "Some Early Arizona Schools," *The Arizona Journal of Education* 2, no.2 (June, 1911): 75.

⁵⁸ Ibid..

⁵⁹ Ibid., 77.

⁶⁰ West, *Growing Up*, 197.

area might have a crude log cabin for its schoolhouse. Furnishings in rural schools usually consisted of only the barest of essentials, and teachers had to make do with a few books and minimal supplies.⁶¹

As the outlying areas of Prescott grew, so did the demand for teachers. Mirroring a national trend toward the feminization of teaching, the vast majority of teachers in early Arizona schools were young single women. Not only were women cheaper to hire, but they also were seen as naturally suited to the profession of teaching. In a letter written in 1873 to Arizona's Commissioner of Education, Governor Safford commented on the benefits of women teachers: "I prefer them for several reasons: First, they usually have better faculty and more patience to teach children...; Second, they are not so liable to become dissatisfied with their occupation and change to other duties which they consider more profitable; Third, I desire their influence to give tone to the morals of the community."⁶²

In order to lure teachers to out-of-the way locations, monthly salaries were well above the national average.⁶³ Yet, while teachers in Arizona earned a higher monthly wage than most teachers in the East, the instability of the short terms, coupled with the high cost of frontier living meant that teachers actually earned little more than a bare living.⁶⁴ Single women also were paid less than men, since it was assumed they would not have families to support. Ronald Butchart points out that "salaries were paid only when school was in session, and many small schools held classes only a few months out of each year. A teacher might find herself with as little as four months salary on which to live."⁶⁵ These factors, combined with the fact that the

⁶¹ Butchart, "Frontier Teacher," 55.

⁶² as quoted in Lockhart, *Pioneer Days*, 246.

⁶³ Butchart, "Frontier Teacher," 55, 62.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 62; West, *Growing Up*, 194.

⁶⁵ Butchart, 55.

young single women often left teaching to get married, led to a high turnover rate among teachers. As a result, students in rural schools rarely saw the same face at the front of the classroom from term to term, since less than half of the teachers would return for a second year. At the end of their three-month stay, teachers often would jump at the opportunity to move on to a different schools as positions became available. This high mobility among teachers in rural schools created a host of problems for the local boards and superintendents as they struggled to find enough qualified teachers to meet the rising demand.

Angie Mitchell's experience as a teacher in Arizona certainly illustrates this trend of mobility. Between her arrival in Prescott in 1875 at the age of twenty and her marriage to George Brown six years later, Angie taught in at least six different public schools, in addition to periodically running a small private school of her own. As one of the best educated and most experienced teachers in the region, Angie Mitchell had no trouble finding work; the hard part was finding work that would last. Her teaching positions usually spanned a mere three months. During the interim between teaching posts, Angie returned to her mother's home in Prescott and found a variety of jobs, from sewing to teaching music lessons and taking on private students. She also worked in her step-brother's photography gallery and delivered eggs produced by her mother's prized hens, which sold for about \$2.50 a dozen.⁶⁶ On two different occasions she served as an engrossing clerk during sessions of the Territorial Legislature, which met in Prescott. 1879 was a busy year for Angie.⁶⁷ From January to March she worked as a legislative clerk, from May until August she taught at the Walnut Grove School; from there she moved directly to Tiger Mine, where she taught until November, at which point she returned for another

⁶⁶ AM scrapbook, Series I :Box 37B.; on average cost of eggs in Prescott see Ruffner, *Prescott*, 28.

⁶⁷ This information is gleaned from her diaries, scrapbooks, and other miscellaneous notes.

three-month position in Walnut Grove. As if to keep her own memory straight, Angie kept a running list of the names and dates of the various places where she lived.⁶⁸

If local newspapers are any indication of a community's impressions of a person, Angie was a very well-respected citizen. Soon after her arrival in Prescott, Angie Mitchell developed a reputation as one of Prescott's most "talented and accomplished young ladies." Distinguished by her abilities as a musician, Angie also was known for her competence as a teacher and "popularity in the school room."⁶⁹ Over the years, either Angie or her mother carefully pasted newspaper clippings about her activities and various teaching jobs in a scrapbook. An 1877 advertisement in the local paper read: "Miss Angie Mitchell, by request, proposes opening a school, and will be happy to receive scholars, either male or female. Will teach all the branches usually taught in schools, and if required, will also teach music." The paper also reported each of the many posts she filled over the years, always referring to her with the utmost respect. When Angie went to Miller Valley in February of 1878 to teach a "three month school" it was noted that "Miss Mitchell is an experienced teacher, and will, we have no doubt, maintain that popularity in the school room, for which she is so distinguished in Prescott society." Several months later, when she moved on to the Chino Valley school, the paper reported, "Miss M. is an excellent teacher and the scholars can hardly fail to succeed under her management." In a similar vein, an announcement of Angie's acceptance of a teaching post in Walnut Grove in 1879 proclaimed, "Miss Mitchell is one of our best teachers and will doubtless give... thorough satisfaction to the Trustees and people of her new field of labor."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ List of places Angie Mitchell Lived, Series I: Box 37A.

⁶⁹ Newspaper clippings from Prescott papers from 1877-1880, scrapbook, Series I :Box 37B.

⁷⁰ Ibid..

Teaching offered Angie a reputable means of financial autonomy and a way to make use of her education; it also opened up a degree of personal freedom without challenging middle-class notions of respectability. While fulfilling her womanly role as a civilizer and caregiver as a frontier schoolteacher, Angie also needed to possess less traditionally feminine traits such as independence, courage, resourcefulness, and above all else, a sense of adventure. The life of the rural school teacher was as demanding and taxing as it was exciting and unpredictable. In addition to dealing with the challenges of teaching a diverse group of children and a wide range of ages in a small, ill-equipped school room, young teachers like Angie had to become accustomed to a variety of living situations in rough frontier settlements. Sometimes with very little advance notice, Angie packed her trunk with necessities and set off along rugged roads to teach in newly-settled areas.

In Walnut Grove, Angie was fortunate enough to board with her aunt and uncle, who had recently established a ranch there. But when she moved to teach at a new school in Tiger, a mining camp with about 140 residents, she took up quarters in a busy boarding house. Luckily, Ephraim Bennitt, an old family friend from Junction City, who had also been a member of the Callen Party, lived in the boarding house as well. Ephraim, who was about Angie's age, operated a mercantile business in Tiger.⁷¹ While she lived in the boarding house she often helped the proprietor, Mrs. Groves, by "putting up lunches for the shift in the morning" or "waiting on tables, making beds, or sweeping rooms."⁷² From her diaries it appears that Angie enjoyed life in

⁷¹ Biographical information on Ephraim Bennitt from Angie's "Notes on the Callen Party," Series I; box 37A.

⁷² AM Diary, August 30, 1879.

the mining camp. When a visitor commented that Tiger was a "most 'amoosing' place she ever saw," Angie decided that she was "tempted to agree with her."⁷³

Angie spent her days teaching. In her estimation the "school ran smoothly with good attendance."⁷⁴ But aside from a few scattered comments on her experiences in the schoolhouse, the majority of her diary entries reflect the social life and freedom she enjoyed in the town. In this respect, Angie is not different from many other teachers in the rural West. In a study of women teachers in rural California, for example, Kathleen Weiler notes that the exclusion of details on the actual job of teaching is a common trend in several accounts left by teachers in the late nineteenth century. In these accounts, teachers focus on their adventures, dangers, and obstacles overcome.⁷⁵ This lack of focus on the schoolroom indicates that many women teachers in West, Angie included, might have had other motives for entering the profession. Kathleen Weiler found that some unmarried women entered into the teaching profession in order "to gain independence, power, or adventure."⁷⁶

In her diary, Angie presented herself as a free-spirited adventurer, not as a self-sacrificing "schoolmarm." While she enjoyed the challenge of teaching at frontier schools, she seemed to relish the adventurous lifestyle that went along with the jobs ever more. Angie clearly embraced teaching as an avenue for adventure and personal pleasure. Expanding the role that she scripted for herself during her college years, Angie focused her writings on action and exploration. Instead of using her diary as a private place to record the daily routines of domestic life or to reflect on her emotional state, Angie used her diary as a way of crafting a western adventure tale

⁷³ Ibid., August 20, 1879.

⁷⁴ Ibid., August 29, 1879.

⁷⁵ Kathleen Weiler, *Country Schoolwomen: Teaching in Rural California, 1850-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 132-149.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 126.

in which she played the heroine. Always exploring the dramatic possibilities of brief scenes, her engaging narrative style makes her diary read like notes for a future novel, rather than a record of daily events. In the act of writing, Angie composed a lively character for herself. This likable heroine took center stage allowing Angie to become the principal actor in the tale.⁷⁷

Far from timid, Angie reveled in the opportunities to explore her surroundings. When she returned to Mrs. Graves's boarding house in the late afternoon, she would read or write, or "go to ride or walk ('climb' would better express it)" by herself or with "some of the girls." During the three months she spent in the mining camp she enjoyed spending time with her friend Ephraim, riding horses or walking in the surrounding hills. On one occasion, she and Ephraim rode out in the hills for five hours, investigating abandoned mines.⁷⁸ She also spent time visiting neighbors. In the evenings there was "always cards music and chess or checkers.... and often a sort of 'family' dance." She concluded, "its a harmless innocent enough existence as far as I am concerned at least."⁷⁹

But life in a mining camp, no matter how amusing, had its share of disasters and hardships. Mining accidents were fairly common and quickly changed the mood of the camp. One such "dreadful accident... roused everyone in camp." Capturing this dramatic episode in a long diary entry, Angie explained that "the reel at the Hoisting Works had come 'unclutched' and dropped the whole big cable - the bucket and five men to the bottom of the shaft." Several men died and "130 persons - nearly everyone in camp excepting those with the injured, attended the

⁷⁷ Lynne Z. Bloom, "I Write for Myself and Strangers": Private Diaries as Public Documents," in *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays of Women's Diaries*, Suzanne Bunkers and Cynthia Huff, editors, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts), 32.

⁷⁸ AM Dairy, November 1, 1879.

⁷⁹ Ibid., August 20, 1879.

funeral." ⁸⁰ These sorts of grim realities shaped Angie's experiences, and they also shaped the story that she recorded each day. Yet, rather than dwelling on disasters, she took them in stride and continued to seek out more adventures and more scenes for her daily narrative.

When her teaching assignment in Tiger came to a close in November, Angie noted that she "cleaned out the schoolhouse, made out my reports and packed satchels and a box for Barron to take on his pack train."⁸¹ Two days later she and Ephraim chose to head out to Walnut Grove on horseback. She reported that they "had a hard trip for it snowed most of the way 'till we got out of the mountains and snowed so hard that we could scarcely see the trail."⁸² After spending a few weeks visiting with her aunt and uncle, Angie returned to Prescott through a blizzard to spend the holidays with her mother and her fiancée, George. But it was not long before she returned to teaching, this time for another three-month position in Walnut Grove.

At twenty-five, Angie was of the age to marry. Engaged to George for several years, she continued to put off their wedding date in order to enjoy the independence of teaching in rural schools. Angie knew that when she married and settled down as a rancher's wife she would be unable to continue teaching. Although not an official rule, it was generally understood that school boards did not hire married women.⁸³

Between Angie's busy teaching schedule and George's hard work sowing wheat and barley on his homestead in the lower Agua Fria valley south of Prescott, there was little time for the couple to spend together.⁸⁴ Their courtship was limited to occasional visits and written correspondence. George often took Angie to and from her various teaching positions, and he

⁸⁰ Ibid., August 23, 1879.

⁸¹ Ibid., November 7, 1879.

⁸² Ibid., November 9, 1879.

⁸³ Ruffner, *Prescott: A Pictorial History*, 36.

⁸⁴ AM Scrapbook, pg. 10, Series II: box 37D..

spent weekends in Prescott visiting with the Mitchells when she was in town. But in addition to his work on his ranch, George was busy as a deputy sheriff in Yavapai county and an active member of the Republican party. George took a deep interest in political affairs, and in 1878 he ran unsuccessfully for a position on the Territorial Legislature. Despite Angie's protestations, he considered running for office a second time in 1880.⁸⁵ Perhaps hoping for one last teaching adventure, Angie warned George that if he ran for a position on the ticket, she would go teach in "the most 'barbarous' country" she could find. Neither one of the independent duo was prepared to back down, and, sure enough, when George broke his share of the agreement, Angie applied for a position in Tonto Basin, an isolated mining and ranching area known for Apache unrest.⁸⁶ Angie reported that while George "said things about my craziness in wanting to go to such an out of the way place," he eventually agreed to take her there.⁸⁷ Capturing the tenor of their relationship, she explained, "he looked disgusted - but the whole thing is a little amusing and we both laughed... and that settled it."⁸⁸

Despite the protestations of Angie's friends, George and Angie set out for Tonto in a double spring wagon accompanied by her mother, whom Angie described as "resigned not jubilant" about her choice.⁸⁹ Getting to Tonto proved almost as exciting and unpredictable as Angie's daily life as a teacher there. It took five long, hard days to get to the remote settlement in Central Arizona. Along the way Angie and her mother camped under an improvised tent and

⁸⁵ Ibid..

⁸⁶ on Apache raids in Tonto Basin see Margaret Maxwell, "Cordelia Adams Crawford of the Tonto Basin," *Journal of Arizona History* 26 (1985), 418; Michael Tate, "John P. Clum and the Origins of an Apache Constabulary, 1874-1877," *American Indian Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1977), 99-120.

⁸⁷ AM Diary, September 5, 1880.

⁸⁸ Ibid..

⁸⁹ Ibid., September 6, 1880.

George slept under the wagon. As she put it, "the track led over country that was well nigh impassable." On one "horrid," uneven part of the road, the wagon came close to tumbling down a mountainside. George had to repack the wagon and piece together some halters and harness straps to tie around it. He then instructed Angie to hang onto the straps, lean uphill, and keep the line taught. To "encourage us," she wrote, "we could see far down in the canyon the total wreck of what had been at some time a loaded freight-wagon and the bones and hides of three or four horses."⁹⁰

Eventually, the party reached Tonto, which Angie described as "desolation itself," marked by "high frowning hills, long stretch of dusty road, no fields, no trees except for a few near what part of the year is a creek." After describing the house where she was left by her mother and George, Angie commented, "I am simply filled with amazement that people - sensible, nice people - can live in such a way!"⁹¹ What better setting for the next installment of her adventure tale?

Although Angie initially felt a bit out of place in Tonto Basin, she was impressed by the friendly reception she received from her hosts. When a "rough but kindly looking miner" rode up to the house one afternoon to find her wearing her white lawn dress with delicate pink flowers, ruffles, and lace, he exclaimed, "my little lady, where on earth did a dainty bit of humanity like you drop from to light in this dirty valley?" She told him that she would be teaching at the Tonto School and would go there tomorrow. "You, teach down there?" he cried. "That's like putting a hummingbird in a mud lark's nest!" Judge Blake, the head of the school board, replied, "She looks more like a living rosebud in that dress than anyone I ever saw, but she's got grit enough to

⁹⁰ Ibid., September 18, 1880.

⁹¹ Ibid., September 23, 1880.

teach any school around this country and she'll run it to please herself!" After recording this interchange in her diary, Angie concluded, "next time I go into 'barbarism' I'll wear nothing but dark calico and unbleached sheeting for underclothes!"⁹²

Josephine and David Harer, who were among the earliest white settlers in the Tonto Basin, arranged to repair an old dilapidated brush cabin and take in the "schoolmarm" as a boarder.⁹³ Although they lived in Greenback Valley, a good fifteen miles from Tonto, the Harers decided to bring their four youngest children to the Tonto so they could attend Angie's school. After fixing up the 14x18 foot house and helping build the schoolhouse, Mr. Harer returned to Greenback to tend to his cattle, leaving his wife and youngest children behind.⁹⁴

In addition to Mrs. Harer and her children, Angie shared the crude home with Janie Blake and her sickly newborn son. As Angie put it, "the house is primitive to the extreme and our furniture more so, but everything is clean and I guess we'll get along O.K..." In order to remember her curious living arrangements and set the stage for her readers, Angie wrote up a detailed description and even drew diagram of their "mansion." The hut, she reported, had a dirt floor and was framed with mesquite poles. The walls and roof were made of brush and yucca plant leaves and tule that were woven through the poles and held together on the outside with adobe clay. The rough chimney in their "parlor" was built with rocks secured with mud. Angie and her housemates slept on simple beds made of loose hay with canvas thrown over top, which were then covered with quilts. Angie noted that "Mrs. Harer is a good cook but has little to do with - we have, however, good, solid grub and lots of it... and I am perfectly satisfied with it."⁹⁵

⁹² Ibid., September 25, 1880.

⁹³ Ibid., October 7, 1880.

⁹⁴ see Marshall Trimble's *Roadside History of Arizona*, 211-213 for information on the Harer family and early settlement of the Tonto Basin.

⁹⁵ AM Diary, November, 8, 1880.

Using the same building materials as they had used on the house - mud, poles, and weeds - Mr. Harer and several men in the community constructed a 10x12 foot schoolhouse.⁹⁶ Angie had a small desk in one corner, and there were enough benches to seat twelve students, until late in the term when the men were able to pull together the lumber to make more.⁹⁷ When the Tonto school opened, Angie had just four students, but the numbers steadily increased; by November there were twenty-five students ranging in age from four to sixteen. Many of Angie's pupils rode to school on horseback from their homes miles away, and others boarded with families who lived closer to the school. Despite the assortment of ages and the primitive schoolhouse, Angie claimed that the Tonto school was "easiest school to manage I've ever seen" and that she had never seen "a quieter, more obedient lot."⁹⁸

There was nothing quiet or easy to manage about Angie's living arrangements. The rough little house she shared with as many as ten others was a hub of activity. In addition to the sheer number of people sharing such a small space, and the colicky baby who kept them up at night, Angie and her housemates had to deal with confrontations with an array of wildlife. From coyotes and stampeding cattle to pesky skunks, the women seemed to be constantly roused by furry invaders. One evening Angie was "wakened... by a tremendous purring noise.... Wondering what it could be I partly raised in bed and looked through a chink some three inches wide... and was terribly frightened by the.. the mouth and nose of some animal thrust just opposite my face in an attempt to reach me... I darted back with a scream to see a big, furry paw stick through the

⁹⁶ Ibid., October 13, 1880.

⁹⁷ Ibid., November 9, 1880.

⁹⁸ Ibid., November 1, 1880; October 16, 1880.

crack." She "roused the family with my shrieks which were echoed from outside by a long, peculiar wail.... Then I knew what it was - it was a cougar or mountain lion."⁹⁹

Continuing her adventure tale, Angie described another evening, when she was finally enjoying "uncommonly sound" sleep until she was awakened by "something warm and moist licking... my hand which hung down over the side of the bed. I drew it up with a jerk and... looked down on the floor and beheld a pretty little spotted skunk - nothing more or less than one of the dreaded 'hydrophobia cats' of Arizona." Her screams roused Mrs. Harer, and the two of them urged the little beast out of the room with a stick, "standing at a respectful distance.... Finally," Angie wrote, "we got him outside and we had the good luck to kill him.... No Arizonian attacks a 'hydrophobia cat' unless it is necessary, for their bite is almost certain death." The women's fears were not unwarranted; as Angie reported, not long before, "two men living up the creek, died in the terrible agonies of hydrophobia induced by the bite of one of these pretty looking little animals under circumstances similar to ours."¹⁰⁰

Even more unsettling, one morning, while the men in the camp were out mining for gold and herding cattle, the women were surprised by an armed band of Apache men. Conflicts between Native Americans and white settlers had not been uncommon in the Tonto Basin, which had served as the traditional refuge of the White Mountain Apache. Some of the fiercest battles between the U.S. army and the Apache were fought in the area, most notably during General Crook's military campaign in 1872 and 1873.¹⁰¹ While the military had forced most Apaches in the region onto reservations, a pass system at the San Carlos Reservation allowed Indians to

⁹⁹ Ibid., October 6, 1880.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., November 4, 1880.

¹⁰¹ Lockwood, *Pioneer Days in Arizona*, 154-190.

check out weapons and leave the reservation for hunting trips.¹⁰² Occasionally, these hunters would clash with the white inhabitants who had settled on their lands.

Capturing the dramatic episode in a lengthy narrative entry in her diary, Angie took her reader into the house when a group of thirteen Apache men, led by their chief, burst inside, wielding pistols and "big wicked looking knives." In a vivid description of the scene, Angie explained that she and the others "sat as if petrified thinking our time had come...." Mrs. Harer, who had years of experience with the Apache as she lived near the San Carlos Reservation, "arose, put on a brave face and stepping toward the chief held out her hand with the customary 'How.'" When this failed to elicit any response, Janie held up her baby, pulled back the shawl and showed him to the chief, a gesture normally seen as a sign of friendship. The tension in the room grew thick as it appeared that the women's attempts at frontier diplomacy had failed. Angie explained that the "Chief and his band surveyed us in ominous silence - three lone defenseless women, one old, small and gray; one a slender girl, and the third weak from recent confinement.... Grasping Mrs.H firmly, the Chief held her hands behind her back while one of the others tied them tightly with a buckskin thong." The group then proceeded to threaten Angie and Janie. During this performance, Angie sat motionless, "paralyzed with fright." She explained that one of the men grabbed her chin, jerking it back

with a force so hard that it nearly broke my neck. I looked at him then, straight and unflinchingly in his cruel gleaming eyes... Something in my expression seemed to please him - the fear I could not hide probably, and with a wild woop that made our nerves tingle... he grabbed that great knife and grabbing me by the hair, threw my head back.... He dropped my head and... then tore open my sleeves and pinched my arms and shoulders..., slapped my cheeks, pulled my ears... and then grabbed my bangs and pretended to scalp me.... At last as if tired he paused a minute.... I suddenly saw that one Indian had my trunk open and... I knew that he'd reach my bundle of photos... I sprang up from my chair so suddenly that the buck did not have time to stop me even if he wanted to, rushed to the Indian at my trunk who had just got a photo in his hand, grabbed it from

¹⁰² Tate, "John P. Clum," 104.

him and dealt him a blow in the face so unexpected that he fairly staggered and flung the picture into the trunk... I put the lid down turned the key, and snapped the catches and put the key down my neck. The Indian whom I struck made a move as if to spring upon me but the chief said a word or two and he slunk back scowling.... Instead of finding myself dead, I was grasped by [an] Indian... who came up to me and said, 'Heap brave squaw, mucho brave - mucho.'.... They patted us on the shoulder and kept calling us 'brave'.... After praising us for a while ..., they made a few rapid unmistakable gestures and exhibited a certain portion of themselves to us that decency usually keeps covered and while we grew fairly frozen with an awful terror - they adjusted their garments again... [got on their horses and rode off] towards the west.¹⁰³

Mrs. Harer, who had a great deal of experience with Indian raids in the area, concluded that the Apache men were impressed by Angie's bold action. Since Apache were great admirers of "courage in anyone, particularly white women," they decided to leave the women alone.¹⁰⁴

What is most remarkable in the aftermath of this unnerving episode is that Angie never wrote of it again. The combination of sleepless nights, confrontations with hungry cougars, and an Indian raid induced only this comment: "My goodness - but this is a lively place to live - only its a bit warring on one's nerves!"¹⁰⁵ Unfazed by these incidents, Angie proved herself fearless of her environment on several fronts. In each of these dramatic scenes, women successfully cope with the dangers of frontier life on their own. Far from weak or timid, the female characters that fill the pages of Angie's diary repeatedly step to the forefront and take charge. Angie's account supports historian Glenda Riley's claim that the notion of female fear of Western landscapes is a myth. Riley argues that while many women in the nineteenth-century West might have been constrained by gendered constructions that emphasized aggressive, fearless men and conservative, timorous women, there were many Western women who willingly ventured out to explore and enjoy the natural world. Angie was certainly one such Western woman.¹⁰⁶ Alone or

¹⁰³ AM Diary, October 18, 1880.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid..

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. October 25, 1880.

¹⁰⁶ see Glenda Riley's excellent article, "The Myth of Female fear of Western Landscapes," *Journal of the West* 37, no. 2 (April 1998) 33-41.

in the company of her female friends, she continued to enjoy her outdoor exploits, climbing "one mountain after another," sometimes finding herself several miles from home.¹⁰⁷

Angie's curiosity and resourcefulness made her an excellent teacher. Near the end of her three-month stay, her class had grown too large for the tiny schoolhouse. Ever inventive, Angie decided to take her students out in the nearby hills to study and explore the ancient Pueblo ruins. Her detailed descriptions of the cliff dwellings reads like a report by an archeologist. After investigating the ruins, Angie and her students built a fire and settled down to eat their supper. "It seemed strange," she reflected, "to be chatting and laughing so gaily in a house built, unknown centuries ago by people unlike us in appearance but who had known joy and grief, pleasure and pain same as our race of today knows them and who had laughed, cried, sung, danced, married, and died, mourned and rejoiced their lives away in this once populous town." Tellingly, her respect for native cultures was in no way tainted by the alarming confrontation with the Apache men a few weeks earlier. As the group relaxed by the fire, Angie explained, an "uncanny feeling came over us as we rested 'till moonrise and talked of this long dead people and told of the little we knew concerning them, but 'my' children are a courageous crowd and though they range in age from six to fourteen... they never dreamed of being afraid." The "tired but happy group" descended the mountain and began their long ride home.

On the rainy last day of the term, Angie's students and their parents crammed into the little schoolhouse to hear the children recite. Clearly impressed by Angie's abilities as a teacher, the Tonto school board members re-engaged her for the Spring term.¹⁰⁸ In spite of the torrential

¹⁰⁷ AM Diary, December 5, 1880.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., December 15, 1880.

rain, Angie began her long journey back to Prescott on a stagecoach from Phoenix through deep mud, across swollen streams, and over steep mountain passes.¹⁰⁹

While she had the adventure of her life in Tonto Basin, Angie chose not to return in the Spring. In January she finally ordered her wedding gown and set the wedding date for April 20, 1881. George served as a Republican member of the Territorial Legislature, where he distinguished himself by "his honest and upright course on all matters of public interest."¹¹⁰ Not surprisingly, Angie was not far from the action; she served as the enrolling and engrossing clerk for the Legislature.¹¹¹

After their wedding the couple settled into life on the ranch in Agua Fria. Angie and George never had children. Like her mother, Angie became a member of the teacher's examining board for the state and Yavapai County. Both women helped to set the standard of education in Arizona by selecting questions for teacher certification examinations.¹¹² Although Angie continued to cultivate her interest in archeology, exploring and writing about Indian ruins, the rhythms of her life changed with marriage.¹¹³ Her diaries began to reflect more domestic concerns and emphasized life on the ranch rather than independent adventures. In 1904 George was named chief agricultural officer on the Maricopa Indian Reservation where the Browns were both loved by the Indian peoples. Four years after the couple moved to the reservation, George died of spinal meningitis.¹¹⁴ Less than a year later, at the age of fifty-four, Angie joined her

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., December 17- 26.

¹¹⁰ Wedding Announcement, Scrapbook, Series I: box 37B.

¹¹¹ AM Diary, January 4, 1881.

¹¹² Author Unknown, "A School Teacher of Arizona," SHA Article Collection, Article Box 22: Folder 15, SHA.

¹¹³ Angie Mitchell Brown, "Descriptions of Indian Ruins," Series II: Box 37C, SHA.

¹¹⁴ Obituary of George Brown, Obituary Books, SHA.

husband in death after a "long and steady" decline.¹¹⁵ Just a few weeks before she died, Angie had passed the teachers' examination for US Indian Service, receiving a perfect score in every subject.¹¹⁶

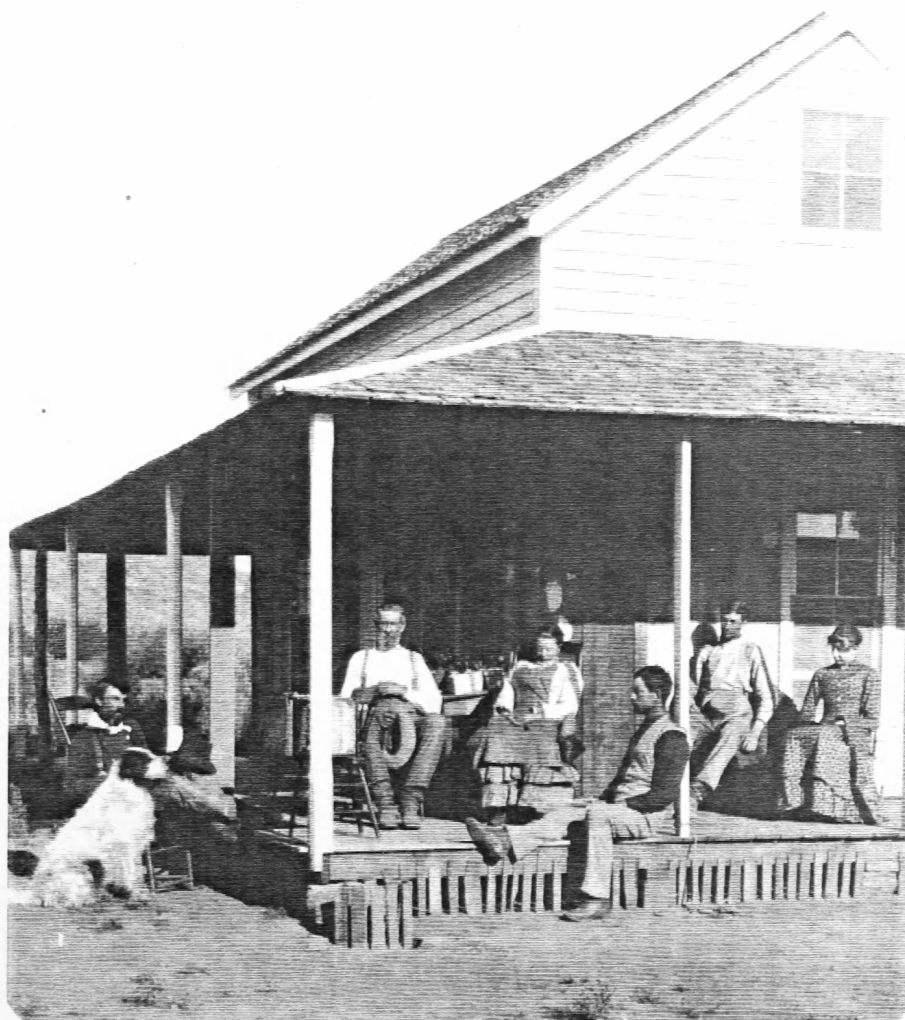
Angie Mitchell's diary not only chronicles the changing face of Arizona's frontier; it also indicates the central role that women like Angie played in that transformation. Far from being a gentle tamer, Angie Mitchell was a confident woman full of verve who embraced teaching as a means for adventure. As a rural teacher in the West, Angie Mitchell was freed from constraints that plagued many of her contemporaries. In contrast to many female diarists in the nineteenth century, whose writings focused on emotional states and interior worlds, Angie's writings focused on the exterior world and her actions in it. Far from submissive and domestic, Angie portrayed herself a strong-willed lover of the outdoors who successfully faced physical challenges and thrived on danger and adventure. Angie Mitchell proved time and again that she did in fact have "grit enough" to teach in any school on the Arizona frontier.

¹¹⁵ Obituary of Angie Mitchell, January 25, 1909, *Prescott Journal-Miner*, Obituary Books, SHA.

¹¹⁶ "A School Teacher of Early Arizona," 4.



George and Angie Brown on their wedding day, April 20, 1881
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George and Angie Brown with friends at their ranch in Lower Agua Fria, Arizona, June 9, 1896.
George is seated on the far left, Angie is seated with apron on in the center.
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Conclusion

The women considered in the preceding chapters used their diaries for distinct purposes. Madaline Edwards turned to her diary seeking comfort and a means of control; Charlotte Forten charted her development as a social reformer and the personal struggles that went along with that life; Angie Mitchell chronicled the changing frontier and her adventures in the Western landscape. Encouraged and inspired by the literature they read, these three women became authors of their own experiences. Their writings not only captured their personal lives, but also reflected the social and historical circumstances that shaped their experiences. Though separated by region, time period, and race, these three personal narratives offer insights into the impact of literacy on the lives of nineteenth-century women. Bridging the gap between the public and private world, diary writing helped many nineteenth-century women describe and define themselves. This power of expression profoundly changed the way many nineteenth-century women considered their lives, their place in the world, and the value of their experiences.

With the benefits of education, young women throughout the nineteenth century began to set their sights beyond marriage and motherhood, to consider options other than leading lives defined by domesticity. The prospect of securing a degree of financial independence and serving a broader social purpose inspired many women to break from conventional roles and seek out new ones. Delaying or rejecting marriage altogether, young women such as Charlotte Forten and Angie Mitchell became teachers and writers. Education extended women's concerns, expanded opportunities for financial independence, and dramatically altered the way they recorded their experiences.

Engaging in the life of the mind through reading and writing, nineteenth-century women began to envision new possibilities for themselves. Diary writing assumed an important role in this process of self-discovery. As vehicles for self-examination, diaries allowed women to reflect on their lives while fostering new female self-consciousness.¹ In the act of writing, the nineteenth-century diarist claimed time for herself and in the process gained deeper understanding of the female self in relation to the world around her. While constructing her story, the diarist often discovered the means to imagine and narrate a changed life course.² As Judy Simons explains, "authorship, however private, creates autonomous life."³

As each of these chapters indicates, reading offered women inspirational models for the crafting of their own stories. Novels written by women introduced an array of heroines who subtly challenged ideals of domesticity and female passivity. These fictive models allowed women to take action in their own lives, or at least in their imaginative lives. Inspired by these tales, nineteenth-century female diarists became the leading actors in their own personal narratives, even if they were relegated to supporting roles in a male dominated cast in real life.⁴

Reading and writing gave nineteenth-century women the means to explore the complexities of female identity. These skills also permitted women to envision new opportunities for their sex in general.⁵ While not simply leading to a seamless pattern of progress, literacy did empower many nineteenth-century women and helped them transform their

¹ Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 162.

² *Ibid.*, 156.

³ Judy Simons, "Invented Lives: Textuality and Power in Early Women's Diaries," in *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*, Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia Huff, eds. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 254.

⁴ Lynne Bloom, "'Write for Myself and Strangers': Private Diaries as Public Documents," in *Inscribing the Daily*, 32.

⁵ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 154.

lives.⁶ By the century's end, women entered into public life in unprecedented numbers, enjoying expanded professional and educational opportunities. In a larger sense, the power of literacy nurtured the women's suffrage movement. Advanced literacy served as a springboard for new visions and new possibilities for American women. Ultimately, literacy gave women the power to act in society.⁷

⁶ Catherine Hobbs, ed., *Nineteenth-Century Women Learn to Write* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

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