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# Dolley Madison and Anecdotes in Early Twentieth Century Textbooks

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DOLLEY MADISON AND ANECDOTES IN EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY  
TEXTBOOKS

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
History

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by  
Ryann Finley Warlick  
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Accepted by:  
Dr. Paul Anderson, Committee Chair  
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## ABSTRACT

On August 24, 1814, during the War of 1812, British troops were quickly advancing upon the American capital, Washington City. Inside of the Executive Mansion, First Lady, Dolley Madison, was gathering items to be rescued in the event that the British troops should advance into the capital. Following the American defeat at the Battle of Bladensburg, American General John Armstrong ordered a retreat of his troops, resulting in the final exodus of Washington City. As she was leaving the Executive Mansion, Dolley Madison decided the Gilbert Stuart portrait of General George Washington also needed to be saved, and according to letters she wrote, ordered it removed and passed to two New Yorkers who had stopped to offer their assistance. This removal of the portrait resulted in an anecdote, a short story portraying idealistic behavior, that has been published in numerous forms throughout the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. It was a narrative spread by Dolley in the months following the burning of Washington, a narrative corrected by Paul Jennings, one of the slaves present in the Executive Mansion at the time the portrait was removed, and a narrative published in textbooks. Each of these narratives will be analyzed comparing and contrasting their similarities and differences, as well as the motives of each publication.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my parents for supporting me in my pursuit of a Masters degree for five years. I would like to thank my husband for constantly encouraging me through the craziness of completing a degree while planning a wedding. I would like to thank Dr. Anderson for assisting me despite numerous problems. I would finally like to thank an unnamed professor for not believing I could complete a Masters in History, while still feeding my love of history, thus making me determined to do it.

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## INTRODUCTION

The War of 1812 was declared in June 1812 and ended with the Treaty of Ghent in February 1815, costing 15,000 American lives. As explained by Donald Hickey in his study of the War of 1812, the purpose and outcomes of the war are often debated by modern day historians, the war's purposes and causes range from ending the British impressment of American sailors to a political move by Republicans to silence Federalists, although the Treaty of Ghent, which ended the war only stated that the "status quo ante bellum" would be returned. While the war is largely forgotten, in favor of other wars that resulted in outright American victories, its national memory remains through three anecdotes: that of Francis Scott Key, who wrote the poem the Star Spangled Banner during the British bombardment at Fort McHenry; General Andrew Jackson and the victorious Battle of New Orleans after the Treaty of Ghent had been signed in England; and lastly, the centerpiece of this chapter, Dolley Madison and her efforts in rescuing the Gilbert Stuart portrait of General George Washington during the British invasion and burning of Washington City in 1814.<sup>1</sup>

In August 1814, British troops advanced toward Washington City, the undeveloped capital of a fledgling nation. As the month wore on, the British, who began their bombardment in the Chesapeake Bay, continued to grow closer to the capital, a city

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 660-700. Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict: Bicentennial Edition* (Chicago: the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois, 2012) 1-3.

which was sorely undefended due to the general dissatisfaction of the development of the city held by its inhabitants. By the end of the month, President James Madison felt the need to leave his wife, Dolley Madison, in the Executive Mansion with instructions to secure the sensitive Cabinet documents stored in the house. He left on August 22, and Dolley spent the next three days packing these documents and sending them away, moving on to items belonging to the Executive Mansion, as well as a few of her personal belongings. On August 24, American and British troops collided near Bladensburg, Maryland, resulting in a catastrophic loss for America, placing the British troops six undefended miles outside of Washington City. American General John Armstrong ordered a retreat of the troops at Bladensburg, resulting in a final mass exodus of the remaining inhabitants of Washington City. Roughly five hours later British troops entered the largely abandoned city with orders to burn all government buildings, subsequently destroying, nearly irreparably, the American capital. Fortunately for America, a large storm, purported by some to have been a hurricane, swept in on August 25, chasing out the last of the British troops still pilfering the city and extinguishing the fires still burning.

The subject of this thesis is these final moments Dolley Madison experienced in the Executive Mansion before her own flight from the city after hearing word of General Armstrong's ordered retreat. In these moments, Dolley, who had been impatiently awaiting the return of her husband from battle, finally decided to abandon the Executive Mansion with her friend, Mr. Carroll, but not before securing one final item in the

Executive Mansion: the Gilbert Stuart portrait of General George Washington. These moments were first recorded in letters authored by Dolley Madison, the developing narrative later corrected in the memoir of a Madison slave, Paul Jennings, and has continued to be passed down through American generations in anecdotal form in grammar school textbooks.

In the first chapter, I will analyze the letters Dolley Madison wrote to her sister in August 1814 as she packed the Executive Mansion, and later to Mary Latrobe in December 1814, comparing and contrasting the differing narratives each letter provides. Through these letters, I will explore the role Dolley played in nineteenth century society, at which time was divided by gender to maintain the purity of women by protecting them from the tumultuous nature the outside world. Men and women operated in two separate realms, men managing that which was tumultuous and sinful, namely politics, business, and religion, while women were charged with the responsibilities of the home and family, as well as managing society. This division of politics from society was also out of fear that the tumultuous nature of politics would taint the innocence of society. President Thomas Jefferson's concern over the society's separation from politics resulted in him only hosting two large social events per year in the Executive Mansion, one at New Years and a second on the Fourth of July.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Rosemary Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, 2007) 63, 132-35, 181. Catherine Allgor, *A Perfect Union: Dolley Madison and the Creation of the American Nation* (Henry Holt and Company: New York, 2006) 67. Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (University of Virginia Press, 2000) 23, 27-28.



Providing a reprieve from the tumultuous nature of politics through social events was one way women assisted men in completing their political duties, but it also allowed for clandestine political discourse. A large social gathering with a jovial environment hosted by a woman assisted in easing tensions throughout the capital and allowed men of opposing political parties the opportunity to socialize in a more enjoyable environment than the floor of Congress. At these social events, a temporary truce was called between opposing political parties, allowing men to discuss politics under the guise of a generic social conversation, and later bring compromises to the floor of Congress. Women also used these social gatherings to discuss politics once again under the guise of a generic social conversation. But women, unlike men, were able to call upon families of opposing political party to share their own opinions, further their husband's agenda, and gather political gossip to be later shared with their husbands.

The second chapter will explore the separation of society by race through the lens of Paul Jennings, a slave in the Madison household from his birth in 1799 until he purchased his freedom in 1846. Jennings was one of the innumerable slaves omnipresent in the Madison household and the Executive Mansion, always at hand but also ignored, rarely recorded in historical documents. Across slaveholding America, as historian Eugene Genovese explains, slaveholders “acted as if their house servants had neither eyes nor ears—as if they hardly existed at all.” This provided slaves such as Paul Jennings the ability to witness political events, and even at times take action, under the guise of slave duties. These actions were rarely recorded by slaveholders, and have been largely ignored

by historians, but through the efforts of historians such as Eugene Genovese and Jennings biographer Elizabeth Dowling Taylor, the impacts of slaves have come to light in recent decades.<sup>3</sup>

In the first and second chapter, I will also explore the methods Dolley Madison and Paul Jennings used the narrative of the removal of the portrait to rebel against their respective societal expectations. Dolley Madison, like many wives of politicians who braved the journey to Washington City, was interested in politics, and as will be explained, she used the narrative to control the atmosphere in Washington City and across the United States following the burning of Washington. Through the publication of his memoir in 1856, Paul Jennings was able to gain autonomy as a freedman and former slave, taking control of his experiences on August 24, 1814 by correcting the falsely developing narrative.<sup>4</sup>

The third chapter will explore the changes of these societal divisions in the early twentieth century by analyzing textbooks anecdotes of Dolley Madison securing the portrait of General George Washington. Anecdotes have been used in the classroom at least since ancient Greek and Roman times, as will be discussed in the third chapter, reflecting contemporary society values. By the early twentieth century, anecdotes were used in the classroom to promote patriotic and morally righteous behavior. Anecdotes

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Dowling Taylor, *A Slave in the White House: Paul Jennings and the Madisons* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2012) 4, 131. Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 341.

featuring political and military heroes are those most often used, historical characters who portray characteristics such as bravery and honesty. Examples of President George Washington throughout his life are featured heavily in textbooks, from his childhood, in admitting to cutting down his father's cherry tree, to being the first Commander in Chief and bravely leading troops across the Delaware River during the American Revolution, and later as President, modestly declining to be called such titles as "his majesty."

By using the anecdote as it was published in early twentieth century textbooks, I am able to explore the changes, or lack there of, in the long societally mandated divisions of race and gender. The inclusion of the anecdote, as well as the historical characters mentioned and adjectives associated with them, portrays the changes in societal values regarding race and gender. Despite history textbooks oft published inaccuracies, the anecdote is still useful in exemplifying contemporary societal values. The changes in the anecdote also reflect the changes in the field of history, specifically the professionalization of the field, as well as the introduction of the professional historian into the publication process of grammar school textbooks.

It is important to note the verbiage I will use to reference Dolley Madison and Paul Jennings. In the first chapter especially, Dolley and James Madison, as well as other married couples, will be referenced most often by their first name. Dolley Madison biographer, Catherine Allgor, referenced the Madisons in the same way stating "To refer James Madison as 'Madison' replicated outdated biographical forms in which men are

given the respect of last names and women are relegated to informal designations.”

Dolley and James Madison are each deserving of a great deal of respect, but to avoid confusion, they will each most often be referenced by their first name. In the second chapter, I will follow the social norms by referring to James Madison by his last name, as Dolley Madison is not often referenced.

I also reference Dolley Madison as “First Lady” and the Madisons, during James Madison’s presidency, as the “First Family,” however these terms did not come into use until late into the nineteenth century. While Martha Washington was referenced as “First Lady” in a profile by Mrs. C. H. Sigourney in 1838, the term did not come into general use until 1860 when Frank Leslie’s *Illustrated Monthly* referenced President James Buchanan’s niece, Harriet Lance, as “The Lady of the White House, and by courtesy, the First Lady of the Land.” I will also reference the house in which the President resides as the Executive Mansion. While there was reference to this house being called the White House in the nineteenth century, as it was made of sandstone and painted white after it was burned, it was not officially called the “White House,” until 1902 under President Theodore Roosevelt.

The primary sources used in this thesis predominantly come in three forms: letters, a published memoir, and textbooks. The textbooks I viewed are all housed in Gutman Library in the education department of Harvard University, one of several textbook archives across the country. These textbooks were mostly from New England, but there are examples of textbooks published and used from across the country. Dolley’s

letters are currently housed at the University of Virginia archives. Unfortunately, I was unable to make a trip to Charlottesville, but the University of Virginia has created an online archive of her letters. These are typed facsimiles, providing what is written in the letter, but without seeing the letter, her feelings at the moment they were written exemplified through her penmanship are missed. Paul Jennings' memoir was viewed on the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's website. Once again, I was unable to venture to the university to view an original copy, but a scanned copy of the original publication was viewed at [archives.com](http://archives.com).

## CHAPTER 1: DOLLEY MADISON AND HER NARRATIVE

Dolley and James Madison first entered Washington City in 1801 following James' appointment as Secretary of State under the newly-elected President, Thomas Jefferson. The physical development of the capital had been plagued with problems since its inception. From frequent revisions by architect and civil engineer Pierre Charles L'Enfant to a lack of property investors, the city had barely developed beyond its swampy origins in 1800 when Congress was scheduled to assemble in the city limits for the first time. Potholes and tree stumps in the road and scattered street lights made travel within the city hazardous. Aside from the Executive Mansion, only 109 habitable brick houses and 263 habitable wooden houses had been erected. The few single family homes were expensive, and Congressmen on a budget often found it necessary to share rooms in boarding houses. Few conveniences, such as speciality shops, tailors, or even a basic market, had been established in the fledging capital. Georgetown and Alexandria were the closest established towns, but neither was suitable for the grandeur imagined for the capital city of the new nation.<sup>5</sup>

Abigail Adams, who had presided as First Lady in the new capital the year before Madison's appointment, wrote to her sister upon settling into the Executive Mansion describing her first impression. A grand entrance was provided to President John Adams

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<sup>5</sup> Constance McLaughlin Green, *Washington: Village and Capital, 1800-1878* (Princeton University Press, 1962), 4, 14, 38. Catherine Allgor, *A Perfect Union: Dolley Madison and the Creation of the American Nation* (Henry Holt and Company: New York, 2006) 41-42.

upon his solo arrival on June 3, 1800, but he returned to Massachusetts after only ten days. He then returned to the capital the following October for the opening of the Congressional session, but Abigail had to remain in Massachusetts to tend to an illness in the family. Abigail's own entrance following that of her husband was so disorganized that her party got lost just outside of the city for two hours before coming across a "black fellow with a horse and cart" who led them the two miles back to their path. In the letter to her sister, her single compliment of the city was that the Executive Mansion being in a "beautiful situation" surrounded by wilderness. She assured her sister that the mansion was large and "built for ages to come," but she preferred the Executive Mansion in Philadelphia for undisclosed reasons, likely because it was already completed and in an established city. Abigail noted that in the new Executive Mansion, "not one room or chamber is finished," and thirteen fires had to be maintained at all times in order to keep out the "wet and damp places." The East Room, an events and reception room in the modern era, was used by Abigail to hang her laundry. Abigail was not the only resident who found the new capital wanting. Pointing out Washington's shortcomings became a pastime for residents and visitors alike. It was often chaffed that a European could be found, waste deep in mud, inquiring into his location of the city, only to be informed that he was, in fact, already inside the city limits. Identifying with such jokes was one of the few ways Washingtonians were able to bond.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Charles W. Akers, *Abigail Adams: A Revolutionary American Woman* (Pearson Longman: New York, 2007) 194-95. Green, *Washington*, 17. Steward Mitchell, *New Letters of Abigail Adams: 1788-1801* (Read Books, 2008) 256-60.

The capital quickly developed into a physically and politically divided city, as the republican ideal of “separation of powers” was reflected in the city’s layout. Washington lacked a central locality, and the buildings that housed each branch of government were equidistant and far apart. The men who worked for each branch of the government resided in houses surrounding their respective buildings. This separation combined with the treacherous travel conditions made it difficult for individuals from different branches of government to socialize. In addition, the boarding houses, the few drinking and dining establishments, and even the streets, were quickly segregated by political party, further solidifying political camaraderie while preventing a sense of American factionalism from developing.<sup>7</sup>

Not only were people separated by political party and branch of government, but a division based on gender also developed early in the city’s establishment. As explained in the introduction, the nineteenth century established separate spheres based on gender in order to maintain the purity of white women and society. But this division only worked to deepen the tumultuous nature of politics and further prevent its proper operation. By 1801, when Jefferson took office, two opposing political parties had emerged, the Democratic-Republicans (most often referenced simply as Republicans) and the Federalists. Each party believed that only they promoted the beliefs and intentions of the Founding Fathers, and that the opposing party was not only wrong, but traitorous to the

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<sup>7</sup>Allgor, *A Perfect Union*, 47, 48, 56. Washington Village 38. Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (University of Virginia Press, 2000) 4.



country. This belief that the opposing political party was traitorous ran so deep that to be seen conversing with a member of the opposing party was viewed itself as a traitorous act. On the floor of Congress, tempers ran high, and these hot tempers spilled out into the city. Socialization across party lines was nearly impossible, which only further solidified political differences within the capital.<sup>8</sup>

As dictated by the division of genders, females were necessary to establish a social scene which might temper moods, but the lack of suitable housing and the few luxuries found in the capital, combined with the obstreperous nature of politics, prevented many females from joining their husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers in the early years of Washington City. Fortunately for the future of the government and the country, a few women braved the difficult journey to reside in the fledgling capital despite its disorderly environment and few luxuries. These were predominantly the wives of politicians from the planter class who had the capital necessary to purchase or rent one of the few single family homes as opposed to residing in a small room in a boarding house. The Madisons were invited by President Thomas Jefferson to reside in the Executive Mansion when they first entered Washington City, but to avoid the perception of favoritism they quickly found residence in one of the “six buildings,” which were named so because they were a series of six buildings located near the capital that were ready for residency. But the Madisons returned to Montpelier after only two months in the capital when James

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<sup>8</sup> Rosemary Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, 2007) 6, 63, 84, 116-22, 132-35, 181. Allgor, *Parlor Politics* 23, 25 27-28.

suffered an attack of his chronic bilious fever. When they returned the following October, they took up residence in a large home on F Street, which Dolley immediately began remodeling to create a comfortable living environment, but also as a welcoming social environment for the large social gatherings with which her name would become synonymous.<sup>9</sup>

Dolley Madison quickly became the spirit of Washington City, as her ability to balance social situations and politics was incomparable, thus providing the capital with a jovial and reconciliatory environment, one which made for an enjoyable and productive Congressional season. John Quincy Adams, United States Senator from 1803 to 1808 and in 1825 elected the sixth President of the United States, described the Madison's home as "one of the social centers of the city." Dolley was often described as cordial and gracious and was famous for never forgetting a name or pedigree. She took a number of Washingtonians under her wing, claiming them as distant relations, which further enlarged her circle of influence. One such "relation" was South Carolinian William Campbell Preston, the son of a successful lawyer and United States Congressman, whose mother Dolley knew. During one of Dolley's social gatherings, Preston was having a discussion with James Madison when he was spotted by Dolley. Likely harnessing her familiarity with his mother, she claimed him as her cousin, reintroduced him to her husband, who obliged Dolley by greeting him as though they had not yet met, and subsequently paraded him around the party, introducing him to everyone as her cousin.

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<sup>9</sup> Allgor, *A Perfect Union*, 43-45.

He would remain in Dolley Madison's close circle of friends throughout his long career in Washington City.<sup>10</sup>

Beginning with Thomas Jefferson, Presidents of the Early Republic developed a precedent in which the position of Secretary of State served as a preparation for the office of the presidency. James Madison was appointed Jefferson's Secretary of State, which set him up to become the fourth President of the United States. Two years before Jefferson's second term was officially over, he even virtually retired to his own home in Virginia, and Madison effectively became President. But this natural pattern of succession was not a guarantee and citizens still voted, making campaigning a necessity. Unfortunately, in the early nineteenth century, it was considered inappropriate for candidates to actively pursue political office by such necessary campaigning, as candidates were expected to remain "disinterested" in serving political office. To maintain this seeming "disinterestedness," it fell to Dolley Madison to campaign on her husband's behalf, by hosting social events and inviting congressmen to gatherings at which their attendance signaled their allegiance and allowed her the opportunity to dip into the men's political realm. As she was the official hostess, James could still appear "disinterested" while congregating with Congressmen. She fulfilled the position of wife of a Presidential candidate flawlessly and her husband was elected to the office of the President in 1808 as the fourth President of the United States.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Allgor, *A Perfect Union*, 50-51, 240.

<sup>11</sup> Allgor, *A Perfect Union*, 126-29, 136-37.

Dolley Madison's success as First Lady was foretold by the *National Intelligencer* in its inaugural edition by referring to Dolley as "presidentess." Her political and social acumen made her a gracious hostess for official residents, local families, and foreign and domestic visitors to the capital. These attributes also became useful for her first task as First Lady: completing the design of the long neglected interior of the Executive Mansion. In the early nineteenth century, the design of both the interior and exterior of one's home fell within the men's realm, the physical nature of the home being viewed as a physical representation of the male owner. President Thomas Jefferson had appointed his own architect, Henry Benjamin Latrobe, as surveyor of the capital city, entrusting him with the design and construction of numerous government buildings. During his presidency, Jefferson focused on creating a grandiose facade for the Executive Mansion, but largely ignored the interior details, the result of which was that he left behind a grand and elaborate, but empty and uncomfortable, house.<sup>12</sup>

James Madison immediately continued the contract with Latrobe to complete the interior design of the Executive Mansion, but instead of working with the architect himself, he entrusted his wife with the task. As soon as James was elected, Dolley Madison called upon Latrobe to begin the arduous task of decorating the three main public rooms of the Executive Mansion, the large drawing room, the small parlor, and the dining room, in order that she might begin entertaining as soon as possible. Dolley Madison and Henry Latrobe sought to create an atmosphere that balanced "Republican

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<sup>12</sup> Allgor, *A Perfect Union*, 73-74, 155-56. Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 58-63

simplicity with Federalist high style,” as was later described by Dolley Madison biographer, Catherine Allgor. The importance of this project was further exemplified by Congress in passing the first financial appropriations bill for the development of the capital since 1800. In fact, while James Madison was still President-elect, Henry Latrobe was already in Philadelphia, the center of American fashion, corresponding with Dolley and making purchases on her behalf, and on behalf of the country, to furnish the interior of the Executive Mansion.<sup>13</sup>

On May 31, 1809, the smaller drawing room was completed, and Dolley Madison was able to continue the precedent of holding weekly social gatherings set by her two predecessors, Martha Washington and Abigail Adams. The room boasted yellow silk damask draperies, high backed sofas and chairs, and even a guitar and a pianoforte. The “Federalist high style” came in the form of luxuries found in few American homes, such as the more expensive spermaceti wax candles that Dolley insisted on as opposed to the tallow candles used by most Americans which sputtered and smelled. Henry Latrobe also installed carpeting when most Americans had dirt or wood floors. But the home also included “Republican simplicity” in the form of ancient Greek and Roman motifs in the furniture as a political statement. Together, this balance satisfied members of the Federalist and Republican parties alike. Favorable descriptions of Dolley Madison and the Executive Mansion abounded. Visitors were dazzled by the “perfect palace” with the

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<sup>13</sup> Allgor, *A Perfect Union*, 156-60. Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 63. Green, *Washington*, 38-39.

Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington which hung “as large as life,” as described by the son of Vice President Eldridge Gerry.<sup>14</sup>

The weekly gatherings held by her predecessors, known as levees, had been extremely formal occasions, with visitors standing in a line or a circle while the respective First Lady worked her way to each guest and exchanged at most a few words. Instead of these stale events, Dolley Madison hosted large parties so highly attended that the doors and windows often had to be opened to allow the cool air to enter and Washingtonians to spill out. While these social gatherings were advertised in the newspaper, there were requirements for entry to maintain the quality of the attendees, namely having been introduced to Dolley or producing a letter of introduction from a respected member of society. Everyone in the gentry class in and around Washington City could be found at Dolley’s “Wednesday Evenings” as they were officially called; Federalists and Republicans, dignitaries foreign and domestic, and the local gentry families were all in attendance. Dolley Madison was thus able to create a jovial atmosphere that promoted good humor while in purposely also provided a reconciliatory environment for “unofficial” political discussions. Even John Randolph, the Representative from Virginia famed for his caustic, violent outbursts and his extreme republicanism, knew that it was necessary to maintain a civil demeanor while attending Dolley’s “Wednesday Evenings.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Allgor, *A Perfect Union*, 161-65, 167. Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 60-65.

<sup>15</sup> Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 73-76, 114. Allgor, *A Perfect Union*, 143, 161-65, 189-95, 250.

As tensions rose between America and England and France in the beginning of James Madison's administration, the relationships Dolley Madison had developed with the wives of other political and military officials grew in value. The growing number of women in the capital in the first decade of the nineteenth century resulted in their developing a close bond, sharing their mutual political interest while balancing their necessary social obligations. Hannah Gallatin developed an especially close bond with Dolley, as both had loved ones working towards peace in London. Hannah's husband, Albert Gallatin, was appointed as a peace negotiator to Britain during the War of 1812, while Dolley's son was appointed to his personal secretary. This bond proved to be only one example of how a wife's social alliances could benefit a political husband in the nineteenth century. Hannah and Albert Gallatin would correspond as often as possible from across the Atlantic Ocean, and Dolley and Hannah would pour over letters received from Albert in search of minute details absent from letters between Albert and James Madison. Dolley also corresponded with Albert, providing even more letters for the ladies to analyze. Any information gleaned from letters written between these women of Washington and the peace negotiators in England would be passed to James Madison as the war continued.<sup>16</sup>

By 1814, with the help of Dolley Madison, Washington had become an established city with businesses, seasonal and permanent residents, and a social

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<sup>16</sup> Allgor, *A Perfect Union*, 152, 267-71, 300-04. Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash*, 57.

atmosphere. The population had nearly tripled since the city's inception. Visitors from across the country and across the world flocked to the city to see the grand government buildings, the Executive Mansion, and even to see Dolley Madison, herself. Letters abounded describing her gentility. But after the events of August 24, 1814, it would be upon this gentility and her quick thinking that the future of the city would rely.<sup>17</sup>

The events leading up Dolley Madison's flight from the Executive Mansion begin with the British attack in the Chesapeake Bay between April and August 1814. After a smaller but similar British offensive in 1813, Commodore Joshua Barney, an American Revolutionary War hero and privateer, ordered a series of barges and galleys built and armed to ward off any future British attack. The flotilla was begun in the winter of 1813, completed the following spring, and faced a British barrage almost immediately. After several months of skirmishes, on August 22, 1814, Barney ordered the flotilla destroyed to keep it from falling into enemy hands. Unfortunately, the flotilla was also the last physical barrier that lay between British troops and their objective: the sorely undefended capital of the United States.<sup>18</sup>

Just before the flotilla was destroyed, American officials in the capital realized the precarious situation of the city. According to Allgor, "the long-standing inferiority complex" among Washingtonians due to the capital's under-developed nature resulted in

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<sup>17</sup> Allgor, *A Perfect Union*, 188, 290.

<sup>18</sup> Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 203-204.



Washington officials not believing the capital a likely target and causing them to not thoroughly fortify the city. Additional troops were called too late and would not arrive in time. On August 22, 1814 James Madison fulfilled his duties as Commander in Chief and joined the American troops gathering just north of the capital in a desperate attempt to stop the quickly advancing British troops. Unfortunately, only as many as 6,000 American troops could be organized, most of these being untrained militia. The 4,500 well-trained British marines who disembarked in the Chesapeake advanced toward the capital, meeting the American troops in Bladensburg, Maryland, quickly defeating the American troops. The battle began around 1:00pm on August 24, and by 4:00pm that afternoon, the British controlled the battlefield. This victory placed the British roughly six undefended miles outside of the capital.<sup>19</sup>

Despite General John Armstrong's continued assurances otherwise, James Madison realized that the British were quickly advancing toward the capital, and that the city was unprepared for such an attack. When he left Dolley in the Executive Mansion on August 22, he requested that she pack the sensitive Cabinet documents located in the Executive Mansion to be carted away from the capital to keep them from falling into the hands of the British. She completed this task while writing a letter to her sister, recording her actions and feelings as she prepared for the possibility of a British attack. After packing the Cabinet documents, she packed as many items belonging to the Executive Mansion into as many carriages and wagons as she could find, while still trying to rescue

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<sup>19</sup> Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 205-206. Allgor, *A Perfect Union*, 309.

a few of her personal items. A mass exodus of Washington only made her task more difficult—there were few carriages and conveyances remaining in the city. She was forced as a result to sacrifice a number of personal and public items before fleeing on the afternoon of August 24.<sup>20</sup>

On the evening of August 24, 1814, British troops entered Washington City under strict instruction to destroy only government buildings. The British swept through the largely abandoned city, encountering only a few citizens who had remained to protect their homes and workplaces. The British quickly built fires in the Capitol building, Executive Mansion, the Treasury, and the building housing the War and State departments. Fortunately for the preservation of the city, a strong storm, possibly even a hurricane, swept in the following day, chasing out the last of the British troops and putting out fires before they were able to spread. But the Capitol and Executive Mansion were burned, leaving behind only scorched sandstone carcasses that had previously held a developing government.<sup>21</sup>

The anecdote that describes Dolley Madison's actions in rescuing the Gilbert Stuart portrait of General George Washington can be traced to the aforementioned letter to her sister, as well as a second letter she wrote to Mary Latrobe in December 1814. In

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<sup>20</sup> Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Lucy Payne Washington Todd, 23, August, 1814. The oldest copies of each of these letters written by Dolley Madison are contained in the University of Virginia archives. While there is no scanned copy available, there are typed facsimiles available online in The Dolley Madison Digital Edition. In order to view the facsimiles, one must enter one's email, but one only gets access for 24 hours. <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/dmde/default.xqy>

<sup>21</sup> Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 207-08.

the eighteenth century, letter writing was the only way for individuals to communicate when distance prevailed. Samuel F. B. Morse would not send the first commercial telegraph until 1844, and Alexander Graham Bell would not make the first telephone call to his assistant, Thomas Watson, until 1876. Without these more instantaneous means of communication, family and friends, colleagues and government officials, were forced to write letters to one another. Letters provided people with a method to share both personal and official information, but they also served as a way to communicate with a loved one during a difficult time. As Dolley packed Cabinet documents, she would use a letter to communicate with her sister, who resided in Kentucky with her husband.<sup>22</sup>

It is through personal letters such as this one to her sister that historians are able to gain a candid glimpse into Dolley Madison, wife and citizen. Dolley's public persona, that of wife of the successful politician James Madison, is well documented. As previously established, many residents of and visitors to Washington City and Montpelier wrote letters to friends and family and in personal journals recounting her congenial demeanor and even temper. Dolley understood the importance of maintaining this positive attitude to the public, but to family and close friends she often expressed her more intimate concerns and anxieties. Specifically, in the letter she wrote to her sister, the reader can sense her distress during the tumultuous events of August 23 and 24, 1814, as

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<sup>22</sup> Deirdre M. Mahoney, "'More Than an Accomplishment': Advice on Letter Writing for Nineteenth-Century American Women" *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 66. 3 Studies of Cultural History of Letter Writing (2003), 411-423.

she awaited her husband's safe return from Maryland and ultimate flight without seeing her husband safe.<sup>23</sup>

This letter to her sister describes her personal and material priorities as she packed the Executive Mansion for her flight from the capital. Her primary concern was for her husband, as she looked out of her "spy glass" on the morning of August 24, in hopes that she would see his safe return to the city. That morning, the *National Intelligencer* published a rumor that five to six thousand British troops were joining those already in Maryland to attack Washington City, resulting in a mass exodus of those remaining in the capital. The letter to her sister reveals that Dolley Madison was reasonably concerned and preparing to flee as well, but she refused to leave without her husband. The letter also reveals her concerns for her country, as she made efforts to rescue as many items "belonging to the house" as she could. She writes that she filled a wagon with plate and "valuable portable articles," including red velvet curtains from the drawing room, to be taken to the Bank of Maryland. She also packed some of her personal items, such as a few of her dresses for which she had become known.<sup>24</sup>

She concluded her letter with an account of the last few minutes she spent in the Executive Mansion, during which time she ordered the portrait of General George Washington removed and protected. She wrote:

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<sup>23</sup> Allgor, *A Perfect Union*, 214-16. Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Lucy Payne Washington Todd, 23, August, 1814.

<sup>24</sup> Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Lucy Payne Washington Todd, 23 August, 1814. James Madison to Dolley Payne Todd Madison, 23 August, 1814.

Our kind friend, Mr. Carroll, has come to hasten my departure, and is in a very bad humor with me because I insist on waiting until the large picture of Gen. Washington is secured, and it requires to be unscrewed from the wall. This process was found too tedious for these perilous moments; I have ordered the frame to be broken and the canvass taken out it is done, and the precious portrait placed in the hands of two gentlemen of New York, for safe keeping. And now, dear sister, I must leave this house, or the retreating army will make me a prisoner in it, by filling up the road I am directed to take. When I shall again write you, or where I shall be tomorrow, I cannot tell!!<sup>25</sup>

This letter portrays Dolley Madison as a fallible human being, subject to the fears and concerns virtually anyone would experience at such a moment. It is a candid account of her thoughts and feelings as she waited for her husband and attempted to save valuable items in the Executive Mansion, before finally being forced to flee in the face of impending danger. It portrays the real Dolley Madison, wife and citizen, as opposed to the congenial facade portrayed while acting as First Lady. This letter provides the historian with the opportunity to have a more thorough understanding of what she experienced on August 24, 1814 and the actions she took in rescuing various items, as well as of her personal concerns for her husband as she prepared to flee.

Dolley Madison wrote a second letter in 1814 that also records the events of August 24, 1814. This letter was written to Mary Elizabeth Hazlehurst Latrobe, wife of Henry Latrobe, with whom Dolley had worked in decorating the interior of the Executive Mansion. As two of the few women in Washington City from 1801, Dolley and Mary developed a close relationship. The Latrobes spent the duration of the war in Pittsburgh,

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<sup>25</sup> Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Lucy Payne Washington Todd, 23, August, 1814.

Pennsylvania, and without knowing the details of the destruction of the capital, the Latrobes must have been frantic following the news of the burning of Washington. Newspapers published general information on the destruction of the city and military movements, but they did not include the extent of the damage to the buildings nor what items had possibly been rescued. The Latrobes would have instead relied on the scattered gossip that spread through the country, gossip that was unreliable and often exaggerated. Possibly at the request of Mary, Dolley listed a few of the items she was able to save, which likely provided the Latrobes with some relief.<sup>26</sup>

This second letter exemplifies the patriotic and courageous Dolley Madison as she described her actions before fleeing the Executive Mansion, excluding her fears and concerns for her husband the days and hours preceding. Dolley wrote to Mary that she was able to send “out the silver (nearly all) and velvet curtains and General Washington’s picture...” among other items. But she tragically had to sacrifice nearly everything else, both items belonging to the public and her own personal items. “In short, it would fatigue you to read the list of *my* losses, or an account of the general *dismay* or particular distresses of your acquaintance.”<sup>27</sup>

The letter continues with a description of the measures she wished she had taken to protect the Executive Mansion, and exudes a masculine level of bravery in these desires. She specified that she “was so unfeminine as to be free from fear, and willing to

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<sup>26</sup> Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Mary Elizabeth Hazlehurst Latrobe, 3 December 1814.

<sup>27</sup> Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Mary Elizabeth Hazlehurst Latrobe, 3 December 1814.

remain in the *Castle!* if I could have had a cannon through every window...” but that the men who could have assisted her with such a task had already fled the capital. The letter was concluded with a description of her return to the city three days later, and the sorrow she felt over the destruction of the city. This second half of the letter further solidifies the narrative of a heroic First Lady, prepared to sacrifice herself for her country, but also grieving for the loss her country experienced.<sup>28</sup>

This letter to Mary Latrobe, an American citizen, portrays the public persona of Dolley Madison, acting as First Lady, the persona with which the general public was more acquainted. She mentioned the items she was able to save but stressed over the many sacrifices she had to make. She focused on her desire to fight the British, even being “so unfeminine as to be free from fear.” The emotions she portrayed in this letter, written several months after the events it described, are drastically different from those she shared in the letter written to her sister as the events occurred. The first, private Dolley was more encumbered with the feminine emotions of fear and concern for her husband and country. This second letter portrays a masculine Dolley, a Dolley still concerned for her country, but also interested in taking physical actions to assist in the protection of the Executive Mansion.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Mary Elizabeth Hazlehurst Latrobe, 3 December 1814.

<sup>29</sup> Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Mary Elizabeth Hazlehurst Latrobe, 3 December 1814. Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Lucy Payne Washington Todd, 23, August, 1814.

The two letters served two distinctly different purposes for Dolley Madison. The first letter allowed Dolley to express her unencumbered fears and concerns regarding her husband and country as the British troops advanced upon the capital. She had been given the arduous task of protecting sensitive Cabinet documents by packing them and sending them away, as well as choosing which items in the Executive Mansion would be saved, and which would lay in the path of the British. She packed the Executive Mansion as she looked out her “spy glass” for her husband’s safe return while listening to the bomb blasts of the Battle of Bladensburg that she knew were close to the city she still inhabited, but were likely landing even closer to her husband. Through this turmoil, she needed an avenue through which to express her true anxieties while maintaining the congenial demeanor necessary for a First Lady. It was through the letter to her sister that she chose to express her true feelings.

Dolley understood the importance of maintaining this public demeanor, and was very temperamental with whom she shared her emotions. She most often turned to her sister, Anna, who also resided in Washington City as her husband was a United States Representative, but a frantic note from Anna to Dolley on August 24, reveals that Anna was in the midst of her own preparations to flee the city. While Dolley could still have written a letter to Anna to be read at a later time, Dolley instead wrote to her other sister, Lucy, who resided in Kentucky on her husband’s plantation in August 1814. Regardless of her reasons for confiding in Lucy, this was not the first time Dolley turned to an absent loved one during a moment of anguish. Twenty years earlier, on the day she married



James Madison, Dolley though surrounded by family and friends, felt the need to steal “from the family to commune [by letter] with” Eliza Collins Lee, who, according to family tradition, was a bridesmaid at Dolley’s first wedding to John Todd. In the Executive Mansion in 1814, instead of being surrounded by family and friends, she was surrounded by Washington officials offering assistance, as well as servants and slaves, individuals with whom she may not have experienced such a close bond. This was likely the reason Dolley sought comfort elsewhere in the form of a letter to her sister.<sup>30</sup>

While the letter to her sister was of a personal nature, the letter to Mary Latrobe was likely written with a more public purpose, that is to spread her own narrative across the country and inspire a sense of camaraderie in support of the war effort. Dolley Madison understood the social aspects of politics, specifically the role of gossip. As Patricia Spacks describes in her study of gossip, for the governing class, gossip served as a method of control and Dolley Madison understood that the country’s fears and that these concerns needed to be controlled. By spreading her own narrative to Pittsburgh, Dolley Madison was able to control the narrative being spread. Dolley’s heroic narrative developed into an anecdote behind which the country thus could rally.<sup>31</sup>

Washingtonians were in desperate need of a narrative they could rally behind to support the capital and the country. By September 1814, some Washingtonians were already discussing the validity of keeping the capital in Washington versus temporarily

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<sup>30</sup> Allgor, *A Perfect Union*, 22, 32, 111, 210, 350, 312.

<sup>31</sup> Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1985) 172.

moving it to a more established and better defended city. The origin of the idea to move the capital is unknown, but on September 3, the *National Intelligencer* published an editorial outlining its support for keeping the capital in Washington. By October 1814, the debate had grown to the point that President James Madison called an emergency session of Congress in order to decide whether the capital should be moved to a more established, better protected city. The Madisons had spent more than ten Congressional sessions in the capital, deeply investing themselves and their finances in the success of Washington. They supported Washington remaining the capital, fearing that even a temporary move would become permanent and would ruin the American citizens who had invested in the city. But as the President of the United States, Madison had a sworn duty to uphold the new and fragile republican values of the fledgling nation, requiring him to allow Congress to debate the idea.<sup>32</sup>

Aside from the debate over whether to keep the capital in Washington City, the country as a whole was deeply divided over the continuation of the war itself. In November 1814, the General Assembly of Georgia composed a letter to James Madison that outlined its support for the continuation of the war. Rumors of the slowly advancing peace negotiations were spreading, the terms of which Republicans in Georgia opposed, claiming they were “incompatible with the essential rights of the American Republic.” Conversely, in December 1814, as defense costs continued to rise, Federalist New Englanders gathered at the Hartford Convention to discuss secession from the union and

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<sup>32</sup> Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 241-248. “A Very Few Words on an Interesting Subject” *National Intelligencer* September 3, 1814.

declare their own peace with England. The faction of New Englanders who supported secession was actually small, and ultimately the Hartford Convention resulted only in a series of suggested amendments to the United States Constitution. Still the sentiment against the war remained.<sup>33</sup>

As Washingtonians began returning to the capital in the fall of 1814, Dolley Madison likely began orally spreading her version of the events of August 24 in which she inserted herself into the narrative. What developed was a practiced and refined story that would serve to help unite the city following the destruction of the capital. The citizens returning to the city allowed Dolley to spread her narrative orally, and many Washingtonians likely wrote the developing narrative to friends and family. As her oral narrative became more practiced, Dolley wanted to ensure that it continued to spread. This desire may well have been what prompted her letter to Mary Latrobe.

The final catalyst that likely sparked the composition of this second letter may have been a set of articles published in the *National Intelligencer* on December 3 from European newspapers describing a narrative quite different from what virtually any American experienced. The Washington newspaper described the articles as being “very long, bombastic and lying official accounts of the Expeditions against Washington...” After reading these articles, Dolley Madison may have been concerned that Americans would be influenced by this “bombastic” narrative in the London newspapers, prompting

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<sup>33</sup> Governor Peter Early to President James Madison, 2 December 1814. Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 261-283.

her to write Mary Latrobe in an effort to ensure the spread of her own narrative. By writing to Mary in Pittsburgh, she was able to portray herself as a heroine, who was willing to sacrifice her own belongings to save items belonging to the public and was even willing to fight the British if she had been able to “put a cannon through every window.” Dolley had of course personally experienced the flight from the Executive Mansion, but she needed to ensure the appropriate narrative was spread.<sup>34</sup>

While both of the letters Dolley wrote are dated to 1814, the oldest copies of each letter are actually excerpts that were written decades later. The first letter, dated August 1814, was produced by Dolley Madison at the request of Margaret Bayard Smith for the creation of a mini-biography published by the National Gallery in 1834. Across the top of the excerpt of the letter to her sister, which is currently in the archives at the University of Virginia, there is a note identifying it as an “Extract from a letter to my Sister published in the sketch of my life written for the ‘National Portrait Gallery.’” The second letter, written to Mary Latrobe in December 1814, was first published in a book by Allen C. Clark in 1914. Clark appears to have had a fascination with Dolley Madison, having given a talk on the former First Lady at the “Dolly Madison Chapter” of the Daughters of the American Revolution in May 1911. He decided to share his research with the public,

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<sup>34</sup> *National Intelligencer*, December 3, 1814.

as “the unfading fame of Mrs. Madison has its foundation more on fact or more on fancy, the reader, it is believed, has within these pages, sufficient evidence to pass judgement.”<sup>35</sup>

Given this publishing history, there are reasons, then, to doubt the authenticity of both of these letters. Written decades after they were dated, it is possible that the letters were complete fabrications by Dolley Madison or even written by a third party. But that the letters were written at the time they were dated is also not unlikely. In a time of such distress as having to pack valuable items in the Executive Mansion as British troops advanced toward her home, it is understandable that Dolley might seek solace in writing to a beloved sister. In a private letter to her sister, she would have been more likely to reveal her personal fears and concerns for her husband and country, saving expressions of bravery for the letter she wrote to Mary Latrobe. She understood the importance of maintaining a strong and congenial demeanor in public, and yet in the letter to Margaret Bayard Smith she revealed a fearful and concerned wife and citizen. If she were to have written the letter in 1834 specifically to be published in a biographical excerpt, it is unlikely she would have portrayed herself as fearful, but rather as brave, as she had done in her letter to Mary Latrobe.<sup>36</sup>

The second letter was written to the public, dated at a decisive time in the creation of the memory of the war. As previously stated, the *National Intelligencer* had begun republishing stories from European newspapers, potentially tarnishing the memory of the

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<sup>35</sup> Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Lucy Payne Washington Todd, 23, August, 1814. Allen C. Clark, *Life and Letters of Dolly Madison* (Press of W. F. Roberts Company: Washington, D.C., 1914).

<sup>36</sup> Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Lucy Payne Washington Todd, 23, August, 1814.

burning of Washington City. By writing to Mary in Pittsburgh, Dolley was able to control the narrative being created, portraying herself as a forthright, even brazen First Lady, willing to sacrifice her personal belongings for those belonging to the public. This desire to control the story would have assisted in rallying support for the war effort.<sup>37</sup>

Corroboration, or at least correlation, of the narratives in these letters is possible through another source, James Madison's valet, Paul Jennings, who published his memoirs in 1865, which include his recollection of the events of August 24, 1814. As a long time house slave for the Madisons, Jennings served in a variety of positions in the Madison home, beginning as a playmate to Dolley's son, then being "promoted" to footman when he was brought to the Executive Mansion, and later serving as Madison's valet after Madison retired to Montpelier. But while Jennings did corroborate the removal of the portrait, he did so to correct a false narrative that was being published at the time: that Dolley had removed the portrait with her own bare hands. He explained that he witnessed John "Susé," the first Master of Ceremonies, and Magraw, the gardener, physically remove the portrait while Dolley Madison was collecting silver in her reticule, a personal drawstring bag. Jennings' memoir will be analyzed further in the second chapter, but it must be noted that Dolley never claimed she physically removed the portrait herself in either letter, but simply that she ordered the portrait removed. It must

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<sup>37</sup> Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Mary Elizabeth Hazlehurst Latrobe, 3 December 1814.

also be noted that there is no evidence she tried to correct the developing narrative that may have begun being published in her lifetime.<sup>38</sup>

Towards the end of her life, Dolley Madison wrote a third, less well-known letter that includes the narrative, the original of which is in the UVA archives. In 1848, she wrote to Robert G. L. De Peyster who, along with a Mr. Barker, appear to be two New Yorkers identified in the letter to her sister, who ultimately carried the portrait away from the mansion. This letter appears to have been written in response to a letter from De Peyster who wrote to Dolley Madison to combat the narrative being spread by Mr. Carroll claiming he removed the portrait from the Executive Mansion. This is likely the same Mr. Carroll who Dolley indicated ultimately persuaded her to flee from the Executive Mansion in his carriage. In this 1848 letter, Dolley replied to DePeyster's request and verified that her recollection and his were the same, that together DePeyster and Barker removed the portrait from the Executive Mansion. But in verifying DePeyster's recollection of the removal of the portrait from the Executive Mansion, in a letter of which the original still exists, Dolley Madison corroborates at the very least that there was some involvement on her part in the removal of the portrait in 1814, as had been published in her previous letters.<sup>39</sup>

The differences between these accounts, the three letters written by Dolley Madison and Paul Jennings' memoir, are slight and not of great consequence. As

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<sup>38</sup> Paul Jennings, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*. (Brooklyn, NY: George C. Beadle, 1865).

<sup>39</sup> Dolley Payne Madison to Robert G. L. De Peyster, 11 February 1848.

previously mentioned, Dolley Madison never claimed to have physically removed the portrait herself, but rather that she ordered it removed while she gathered a few more items from the Executive Mansion. The origin of the narrative that Dolley Madison physically removed the portrait from the wall herself are unknown but were being published by the 1860s according to Paul Jennings' memoir. While Jennings is adamant that she did not physically remove the portrait herself, it is possible that she ordered it removed before he entered the parlor room, as he was at that time likely assisting in the task of removing portable valuables from the mansion. The De Peyster letter supports her narrative that she instigated the removal of the portrait even if she did not herself undertake the task. The ability for Dolley Madison's letters and Paul Jennings' memoir to both contain the truth will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.<sup>40</sup>

James Madison was succeeded in the presidency by his protégé and Secretary of State, James Monroe in 1817. The Madisons remained in Washington for a month following Monroe's inauguration, during which time they attended a series of balls and celebrations in honor of the newly elected President and many that honored the Madisons. Permanent and seasonal residents were aware of the great accomplishments of both Madisons—James Madison's accomplishments in leading the country successfully through a difficult war were obvious and easily celebrated, but Dolley's more nuanced

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<sup>40</sup> Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Lucy Payne Washington Todd, 23, August, 1814. Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Mary Elizabeth Hazlehurst Latrobe, 3 December 1814. Dolley Payne Madison to Robert G. L. De Peyster, 11 February 1848. Jennings, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*.



but important accomplishments as a hostess and caretaker of the Executive Mansion were also celebrated. Dolley was recognized by Washingtonians for her accomplishments in transforming the capital from its swampy origins into the more cosmopolitan city it was quickly becoming. She had developed the social environment of the capital that provided Washingtonians with entertainment and culture, making Washington City a popular place to visit for the wealthy and bringing in a variety of business. Seasonal residents and government officials were grateful for a cosmopolitan, congenial environment during the Congressional season, while permanent residents were grateful that the city would remain the capital, and that their investments would not be lost.<sup>41</sup>

The Madisons set out for their three-day journey from Washington City to Montpelier in April 1817. As James boarded the boat that took the party out of Washington City, he was described by his biographer, James K. Paulding, as being “playful as a child; talked and jested with every body on board.” The relief he must have felt at the end of such a tumultuous presidency must have been profound. Only thirteen of our forty-five American Presidents have been in office during an active war, and James Madison was the first. From the beginning, the War of 1812 was deeply divisive, only growing more so as it became more financially draining for some Americans, and more financially beneficial for others. In addition, the burning of Washington destroyed, nearly irreparably, the capital and arguably the country by default. And yet, all of this was

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<sup>41</sup> Allgor, *A Perfect Union*, 339-40.

ignored as James Madison was widely celebrated for bringing the war to a successful end.<sup>42</sup>

Aside from the winter of 1829, during which time the Madisons resided in Richmond for the Virginia Constitutional Convention, the couple remained at Montpelier for the remainder of James Madison's life. As the First Family, the Madisons had accrued enormous debt, as they were held personally responsible for such expenses as the household staff and for entertaining in both an official and unofficial capacity. Some American Presidents became incredibly frugal during their time in office, such as Thomas Jefferson who barely even furnished the Executive Mansion, but Dolley understood the political necessity of such extravagances, including large parties and a well decorated home. These expenses, coupled with the extravagant lifestyle of Dolley's son, had virtually drained the Madisons financially. James Madison as a result spent much of the rest of his life unsuccessfully managing Montpelier in an effort to restore his wealth so as to provide for his wife after he passed away.<sup>43</sup>

Despite regular visitors at Montpelier, Dolley missed the vivacious social atmosphere of Washington City and her role as hostess at large social events. During James' life, she refused to leave his side, and spent the nearly twenty years following his retirement at Montpelier assisting him in organizing his personal and professional

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<sup>42</sup> Allgor, *A Perfect Union*, 348. Ralph L. Ketcham, ed., "An Unpublished Sketch of James Madison by James K. Paulding," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 67 (1959): 432–37.

<sup>43</sup> Allgor, *A Perfect Union*, 349-50.

documents for the purpose of posterity. But upon his death in 1836, Dolley Madison returned to Washington City in search of her former glory and lifestyle. In November 1837, she remodeled and took possession of her brother-in-law's house in Lafayette Square, and upon settling in Washington City, she was inundated with visitors, so many that she had to purchase a congressional directory to record her visiting debts, debts that she always repaid. She was also highly sought after throughout Washington the social season, as the number of balls and celebrations, which she had begun had only grown in number. No event it seemed could take place in the capital without Dolley Madison in attendance.<sup>44</sup>

Despite James' best efforts in life, he was unable to procure the fortune he sought, and upon her return to the capital, Dolley Madison found herself unable to afford new clothes and was forced to adapt her costumes from her time as First Lady. But instead of seeming outdated, her recycled outfits served as a reminiscence of a bygone era. She became increasingly more destitute in later life, so much so that at times she became reliant on others for even her most basic needs. One of the last possessions she sold was James Madison's former valet, Paul Jennings, to her neighbor, Senator Daniel Webster. But Webster continually sent Jennings to Dolley with baskets of food and other necessities. Jennings remained one of Dolley's regular visitors, even after he had worked off his purchase price from Webster and began working for the pension office.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Allgor, *A Perfect Union*, 380.

<sup>45</sup> Jennings, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*.

When Dolley Madison returned to the capital in 1837, the management of Montpelier was left in the incapable hands of her son, Payne. In 1839 she was forced to return to the plantation due to his mismanagement and to raise funds by renting the house in Lafayette Square. Even after returning to Washington City again, she continued to try to save the plantation, obtaining a second mortgage and selling small parcels of the property. But in 1844 she was forced to sell the remainder of the property, the house, and the remaining slaves to the Virginia merchant Henry Moncure. By doing this, she was able to spend the remainder of her life in Washington City without the financial constraints of Montpelier.<sup>46</sup>

During her life in Washington City, Dolley was awarded numerous accolades. Immediately following Monroe's inauguration, the Madisons were celebrated in prose and paintings, which were taken back to Montpelier as souvenirs. Upon James' death, Dolley struggled to keep up with the vast number of condolence letters, and was subsequently awarded franking privileges, which had previously only been given to active Congressmen and former Presidents. She was also known for her regular attendance in Congress, but as a female was, of course, relegated to the gallery. In 1844 she was provided with her own seat on the floor of the House of Representatives and was assigned an escort to her seat through the often disorderly floor of Congress.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Allgor, *A Perfect Union*, 384.

<sup>47</sup> Allgor, *A Perfect Union*, 5, 340.

In 1849, despite reports that her recent health issues were improving, Dolley Madison passed away in her home on Lafayette Square in Washington City. She was given a state funeral, the largest at that time, and was buried at the Congressional Cemetery, and later interred alongside her husband at Montpelier. Her obituary further exemplifies her importance to the city. The *Daily National Intelligencer*, formerly the *National Intelligencer*, wrote that she was “beloved by all who personally knew her,” and that she spent “her long and well-spent life with the calm resignation which goodness of heart combined with piety only can impart.” The Mayor of Washington City also passed a series of resolutions in “Respect to the Memory of the late Mrs. D. P. Madison.” In resolving to attend the funeral and subsequently closing the government offices, the resolutions spoke of the “deep impression upon this community, in the midst of which she has passed so large a portion of her life, and who will always hold in respectful remembrance of her memory.”<sup>48</sup>

Dolley Madison has mostly been remembered for her often conflated actions in rescuing the portrait of General George Washington, but she in fact did a great deal more than this for the city of Washington and, subsequently, for the country. In an era before female suffrage, she created an acceptable role for women to serve in politics in the fledging country by marrying society and politics in the capital. She set an example by organizing social events, and even spoke with politicians directly. She also encouraged

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<sup>48</sup> *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, District Of Columbia), Saturday, July 14, 1849; Issue 11,355. *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, District Of Columbia), Saturday, July 14, 1849; Issue 11,355. *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, District Of Columbia), Monday, July 16, 1849; Issue 11,356.

female attendance at Congressional sessions, thus developing an informed female citizenry.

When the capital burned, she had saved Washington both literally and figuratively by ordering Washington's portrait be removed from the Executive Mansion. She literally saved General George Washington in the form of this Gilbert Stuart portrait, ordering two of her servants remove the portrait to be placed in the capable hands of two New Yorkers. But she also figuratively saved Washington City by creating a narrative regarding her actions in saving the portrait of the man for whom the capital was named. When its capital was burned, America was just a budding nation, and in the face of defeat and near decimation of its capital, the country needed a political figure upon whom to rely. As George Washington had passed away more than a decade previous, his portrait served as an important symbol for the American people. She immediately understood the significance of this portrait as exemplified by her insistence in rescuing the portrait. That portrait remains in the East Room of the White House today, and the anecdotes regarding its rescue and Dolley's part in it, are reprinted in textbooks every year.

## CHAPTER 2: PAUL JENNINGS AND HIS NARRATIVE

Paul Jennings was born in 1799 into unfortunate circumstances that nevertheless would result in his name forever being associated with the War of 1812. He was born at Montpelier, James Madison's plantation, the son of an unknown female slave and a white merchant named Benjamin, or William, Jennings. As Jennings' mother was enslaved, by nineteenth century Virginian law, so would be Jennings. Jennings worked in the house as a young child, pointing to the probability that his mother was also a house slave, and would remain a constant presence in the Madison household even after he acquired his freedom in the late 1840s. But Jennings' value was in his intimate access to American history and his memories as a house slave in the Madison household. He was a house slave—a "servant"—in Montpelier and at the Executive Mansion as part of President Madison's household, and Madison's personal valet from 1817 until Madison's death in 1836. Jennings thus played witness to numerous historical events and became acquainted with many important nineteenth century historical figures, including Senator Daniel Webster, who would assist Jennings in gaining his freedom.<sup>49</sup>

In 1863, Jennings' memoir, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*, appeared in a historical magazine and was republished in book form two years later. His memoir provides insight into his intimate relationship with President James Madison, and

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<sup>49</sup> Elizabeth Dowling Taylor, *A Slave in the White House: Paul Jennings and the Madisons* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2013) 3, 7, 38, 106-07.

his wife, Dolley Madison, focusing particularly on the War of 1812. Jennings' memoir begins with anecdotal information on Madison's relationship with some of his fellow statesmen and neighbors, including Presidents Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe. But very quickly the memoir turns to the War of 1812, describing the stances of political supporters of the war and its ultimate declaration. After a brief mention of General Hull's disastrous surrender at Fort Detroit on August 16, 1812, Jennings jumps ahead two years to the events of August 1814. He describes the concern Washingtonians had regarding the advancing British troops, but also General Armstrong's constant and misguided reassurances that there was no cause for concern. The memoir concludes with a favorable character description of Dolley and James Madison, before concluding with James' last words before he dropped his head and passed away in 1836.<sup>50</sup>

Paul Jennings' intimate acquaintance with James Madison began as a young child when he served as playmate and slave to Dolley Madison's son from her first marriage, John Payne Todd, who went by his middle name. Due to Dolley's inability to decline any of his requests, Payne would grow to become a spoiled and insolent man. But despite his insolence, it appears that James embraced his stepson, sharing his paternal warmth and using his connections to enroll young Payne in St. Mary's College in Baltimore. During school breaks, Payne was educated by a tutor at Montpelier, as Madison had high aspirations for what became his only descendant. Being Payne's constant companion,

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<sup>50</sup> Paul Jennings, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*. (Brooklyn, NY: George C. Beadle, 1865).



Jennings likely attended some of these tutoring sessions, acquiring such skills as literacy and mathematics, rare and valuable skills for a slave.<sup>51</sup>

In 1808 James Madison was elected as the fourth president of the United States, and as Presidents at this time were financially responsible for staffing the Executive Mansion, slaveholding Presidents, encompassing five of the first seven Presidents, brought with them numerous house slaves to fill the positions of caring for the house, the President, and his family and guests. The young Paul Jennings was among the unknown number of slaves chosen to join the Madisons in Washington City, which provided him with new opportunities but also untold danger. Before Jennings was born, Madison was selected to attend the Continental Congress in Philadelphia to assist intellectually in the war against Britain, and then to assist in the establishment of the United States. A young slave named William Gardner joined Madison to serve as his personal attendant, exposing him to ideas such as liberty, ideas slaveholders believed too radical for a slave to hear. According to a letter James wrote to his father while still in Philadelphia, James had determined that Gardner's mind had become "tainted" by the ideas of liberty that were spreading in Philadelphia, and decided to sell Gardner before returning to Virginia to avoid such radical ideas being spread amongst slaves at Montpelier. Gardner was ultimately sold to a Pennsylvania slaveholder, possibly with the Pennsylvania Emancipation Act in mind, under which Gardner was freed after seven more years of enslavement, then becoming a merchant's agent in Philadelphia and ultimately handling

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<sup>51</sup> Taylor, *A Slave in the White House*, 24-25.

business for James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and other prominent men. But Gardner was unable to ever return to Montpelier nor see his relatives again.<sup>52</sup>

With the fate of William Gardner in mind, Jennings' family must have experienced great sorrow at the possibility of her son's mind also being deemed too "tainted" to return to Montpelier. But as a slave, Paul lacked the autonomy to choose his residence and followed the First Family to Washington City. While working in the Executive Mansion, he served as footman, performing a variety of duties including messenger and dining room attendant. But he also served as an assistant to others who worked in the Executive Mansion. One of these, John Sioussat, was a French immigrant who was hired by Dolley to perform the duties of what would become known as the Master of Ceremonies. Sioussat assisted Dolley in making her guests more accustomed to the ways of the European court as Dolley had never traveled abroad. McGraw, a gardener, was an Irish immigrant who Dolley also hired to assist in running the Executive Mansion. Together, Sioussat and McGraw would remove the Gilbert Stuart portrait of General George Washington from the wall of the Executive Mansion according to Jennings' memoir. But whereas hired staff may have gone to the comforts of their own homes in the evenings, the unknown number of slaves in the Executive Mansion slept in the cellar, which also contained the kitchen and various storage areas for liquors, coal, and wood, as well as the privies. In managing the home, Dolley also likely rented a number of local slaves at times to assist with social gatherings and the maintenance of the

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<sup>52</sup> Taylor, *A Slave in the White House*, 26-27.

Executive Mansion, a common practice that provided extra income for the local slaveholders when their slaves proved seasonally superfluous. It was through the careful selection of slaves and local workers that Dolley was able to maintain the smooth running house for which she would become known.<sup>53</sup>

As had become the custom in American slave society, slaves had Sundays off; Paul was thus able to venture into Washington City, free to explore and socialize as the local black codes allowed. But even with these restrictions, Paul Jennings likely experienced an unprecedented amount of freedom, at least compared to that which he had experienced in rural Virginia. He likely spent many Sundays exploring the city and developing friendships with other slaves and freedman. In his role as footman, he was also likely sent on errands across the city granting him even more access to the same ideas that had “tainted” William Gardner’s mind. Washington City was populated with 28% blacks, roughly one-third of whom were free, but also many early abolitionists from across the country who were working toward immediate emancipation. Jennings friendships and exact actions during his free time are unknown, but there is evidence that he was exposed to and influenced by the ideas of personal freedom he overheard. In January 1817, James Madison’s nephew, Robert L. Madison, wrote to James Madison from Montpelier about the discovery of a plan for three Montpelier slaves working in the Executive Mansion, including Paul Jennings, to run away. According to Abraham Eddins,

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<sup>53</sup> John H. McCormick “The First Masters of Ceremonies of the White House” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C.*, 7 (1904) 170-194. Taylor, *A Slave in the White House*, 28, 36,-38, 45.

an overseer on the Madison plantation, the three slaves intended to become cooks on a local ship and sail away from Virginia. Madison's reaction was not recorded, but his custom, according to Jennings' memoir and the diary of John Finch, an Englishman who traveled around North America, was to speak to misbehaving slaves as opposed to resorting to physical punishment. What is known is that Jennings was not sold off, but instead returned to Montpelier with the Madisons the following April.<sup>54</sup>

Through his intimate relationship with the First Family and his role as footman in the Executive Mansion, Paul Jennings was able to witness, and later record, one of the most tumultuous days in the history of America's capital. In August 1814, British troops slowly advanced up the Chesapeake Bay, up the Patuxent River, disembarked in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, and finally battled American troops at Bladensburg on the afternoon of August 24, 1814, just six miles northeast of Washington City. This last effort by American troops to protect the capital failed miserably and by the evening the British troops had advanced into Washington City with a mission to destroy all government buildings.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Taylor, *A Slave in the White House*, 21, 41, 60-61. Jennings, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences*. I. Finch, Esq., *Travels in the United States of America and Canada, Containing Some Account of Their Scientific Institutions and a Few Notices of the Geology and Mineralogy of Those Countries to Which is Added an Essay on the Natural Boundaries of Empires* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1833) 240, 255.

<sup>55</sup> Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict: Bicentennial Edition* (Chicago: the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois, 2012) 205-08.

As described in the previous chapter, the burning of Washington City nearly led to the abandonment of Washington City as the capital, but instead, this event resulted in an anecdote that has remained in the hearts and minds of Americans for generations: that of Dolley Madison's removal and rescue of the Gilbert Stuart portrait of General George Washington moments before she fled the Executive Mansion. By the mid-nineteenth century, Paul Jennings appears to have read the developing narrative and became incensed with its falsities. His memoir reflects his feelings regarding what he read when he wrote:

It has often been stated in print, that when Mrs. Madison escaped from the White House, she cut out from the frame the large portrait of Washington (now in one of the parlors there), and carried it off. This is totally false. She had no time of doing it. It would have required a ladder to get it down. All she carried off was the silver in her reticule, as the British were thought to be but a few squares off, and were expected every moment. John Susé (a Frenchman, then door-keeper, and still living) and McGraw, the President's gardener, took it down and sent it off on a wagon, with some large silver urns and such other valuables as could be hastily got hold of. When the British did arrive, they ate up the very dinner, and drank the wine, &c., that I had prepared for the President's party.<sup>56</sup>

This recollection of August 24, 1814, was published nearly fifty years after the event, and his forceful language in stating “This is totally false,” referring to Dolley's involvement in the episode, points to the probability that he had relived this event in his head repeatedly over the years. Aside from Dolley's own letters, this memoir is the only other known first-hand account of the events inside of the Executive Mansion this fateful day, which encompass four of the fourteen pages of Jennings' memoir in book form.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Jennings, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*.

<sup>57</sup> Jennings, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*.

According to Jennings' memoir, August 24, 1814 began and proceeded just like any other day. Dolley Madison had organized a formal dinner for the prominent residents who remained in Washington City in an effort to lift their spirits as British troops advanced upon the city. As footman, Paul was often tasked with preparing for the numerous dinners Dolley hosted, including setting the dinner table, bringing up various libations, and setting up entertainment, as well as a myriad of other last minute preparations. Invitees for that day included "all the Cabinet and several military gentlemen and strangers," according to Jennings, as well as the Secretary of Navy, William Jones, and his family. Jones' wife, Eleanor, however, wrote a note to Dolley apologetically stating she was going to be unable to attend the dinner as she and her daughter had chosen to flee the city.<sup>58</sup>

Despite impending doom and Dolley Madison's efforts to pack the Executive Mansion, as well as at least one cancellation for dinner, preparations for the dinner continued throughout the day. Dinner was scheduled to be served at 3:00pm, and evidence suggests that preparations were completed. Unfortunately for the hungry Washingtonians, James Smith, a freedman who had attended James Madison to Bladensburg, came galloping on horseback at about 3:00pm crying "Clear out, clear out! General Armstrong has ordered a retreat!" This declaration appears to have prompted Dolley Madison hastily to depart from the Executive Mansion before the return of her

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<sup>58</sup> Eleanor Jones Young to Dolley Payne Madison, 23 August 1814. Jennings, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*.

husband. According to Jennings, Dolley gathered up a few pieces of silver before fleeing with Mr. Daniel Carroll; this was presumably the same Mr. Carroll who Dolley claims to have convinced her to flee the mansion according to the letter she wrote her sister. According to Paul Jennings' memoir, the British officials ultimately consumed the likely now cold, but well-prepared dinner. This is a meal corroborated by British General Robert Ross's personal papers which describe the meal they encountered in the Executive Mansion, and consumed, before setting fire to the building.<sup>59</sup>

After Dolley left, Jennings was sent to fetch Dolley's brother-in-law's carriage while John Freeman, "the colored butler," fled with his family in a "coachee" with a feather bed strapped to the back. The city was in chaos and it can be imaged that all the roads out of Washington, south away from Maryland, were obstructed by this mass exodus. But Paul Jennings chose to stay in the capital, perhaps because he did not have a family to protect and enjoy the few extra hours of freedom he thereby gained. Despite later making plans to run away, he spent the hours between the mass exodus and the British approach walking around the capital instead of taking the opportunity to acquire his own freedom. According to his memoir, he ran into President Madison, rode in the boat with him across the Potomac, and then played some "pranks" with some other young black men he ran into. He spent the night with a Methodist minister, where he heard a "tremendous explosion, and, rushing out, saw that the public buildings, navy yard,

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<sup>59</sup> Jennings, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*. John McCavitt and Christopher T. George, *The Man Who Capture Washington: Major General Robert Ross and the War of 1812* (Norman, Ok: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016) 155. Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Lucy Payne Washington Todd August 23-24, 1814.

ropewalks, &c. were on fire,” which were likely the actions of the few remaining American troops who they set fire to the Navy Yard to prevent the British from obtaining the remaining weapons and ammunition.<sup>60</sup>

Paul Jennings’ memoir was first published in 1863 in the *Historical Magazine and Notes on Queries Concerning the Antiquities, History and Biography of America*, and later published in 1865 in book form. As a book, it consists of fourteen pages on the life of Paul Jennings as the slave of President James Madison, focusing on the War of 1812 and, as previously mentioned, specifically on the afternoon and evening of August 24, 1814. But there is an interesting statement and testimonial on the title page of the book:

Among the laborers at the Department of the Interior is an intelligent colored man, Paul Jennings, who was born a slave on President Madison's estate, in Montpelier, Va., in 1799. His reputed father was Benj. Jennings, an English trader there; his mother, a slave of Mr. Madison, and the grand-daughter of an Indian. Paul was a "body servant" of Mr. Madison, till his death, and afterwards of Daniel Webster, having purchased his freedom of Mrs. Madison. His character for sobriety, truth, and fidelity, is unquestioned; and as he was a daily witness of interesting events, I have thought some of his recollections were worth writing down in almost his own language.<sup>61</sup>

This is signed “J. B. R.” and through incredible detective work, Elizabeth Dowling Taylor has discovered the owner of these three initials to be John Brooks Russell, a clerk in the Department of Interior and himself an amateur historian. A voracious reader from Massachusetts, as a teenager Russell moved to Boston to learn the printer’s trade. Russell

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<sup>60</sup> Jennings, *A Colored Man’s Reminiscences of James Madison*. Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 136.

<sup>61</sup> “A Colored Man’s Reminiscens of James Madison,” *Historical Magazine and Notes on Queries Concerning the Antiquities, History and Biography of America* v. vii (1863): 17-20.



published works on agriculture and domestic economy, successfully ran a seed store, and helped found the Massachusetts Horticultural Society of which he became the librarian. After several moves around the country, he and his family settled in Washington City where he began working for the Department of Interior. He maintained his interest in history as is indicated by the fact that he was a regular contributor to the aforementioned historical journal.<sup>62</sup>

As Russell was moving across the country, Paul Jennings was working to gain his freedom. By the mid-1840s, the widowed Dolley Madison had grown desperately impoverished and was selling most of her possessions. She sold parts of Montpelier in the early 1840s, but in 1844 was finally forced to sell the house at Montpelier and its remaining land. In 1845, she offered Paul Jennings his freedom in exchange for \$200, a sum he was unable to immediately acquire. In 1846, he approached Daniel Webster, to whom he likely served at dinners held at Dolley's house and where he had overheard Webster's abolitionist convictions. The two men appear to have developed a plan for Jennings to acquire the funds necessary to buy his freedom. In September 1847, Jennings was sold to Pollard Webb for \$200, and six months later, when the transaction was recorded in a local newspaper, Jennings was sold to Daniel Webster for \$120, having already apparently worked off \$80 of his original purchase price. But despite this series of transactions, Paul Jennings and Mary Cutts, Dolley Madison's niece, both maintain that Jennings had purchased his own freedom from Dolley. Senator Daniel Webster

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<sup>62</sup> Taylor, *A Slave in the White House*, 204.

appears to have served as a way to advance Jennings the money rather than as the man who actually provided him with his freedom.<sup>63</sup>

Jennings worked for Daniel Webster for five years, serving as a dining room servant in the Webster household, a similar role as that which he had served as an enslaved man in the Madisons' household. In 1851, Daniel Webster wrote Jennings a letter of recommendation, which was passed on to Alfred Chapman, who worked in the Department of Interior and, not coincidentally, was the son of James Madison's niece. The letter, which survives in the Alfred Chapman Papers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, states that Jennings was "very honest, faithful and sober" and was once a "body servant to Mr. Madison." In 1851, Jennings began working in the pension office for the Department of Interior. His exact duties are unknown, but he was listed as a "laborer" by the pension office, a generic term for all black employees who usually performed duties such as message runner or doorkeeper as opposed to the physical labor the title implies. He began his employ with an annual salary of \$400 and retired in 1866 with an annual salary of \$720. In 1854, he purchased his first home for \$1,000 on L Street with a down payment of \$400, and two years later purchased the adjoining property for the same price. He had five children with his first wife while still enslaved, four of whom survived to be manumitted between 1853 and 1856. By

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<sup>63</sup> Taylor, *A Slave in the White House*, 155-57, 159.

purchasing two homes, he was able to provide all of his children and grandchildren with a roof over their heads.<sup>64</sup>

It was likely that through Paul Jennings' job at the Department of Interior that John Brooks Russell, who was already employed there, met Jennings, Russell perhaps being familiar with Paul Jennings by name through his hobby in historical research. The exact nature of their friendship is unknown, but the intimate details in Paul Jennings' memoir point to the likelihood that Jennings grew to trust Russell and that the two talked at great length. The result of this relationship is the memoir, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*, with intimate details of James Madison and his household.<sup>65</sup>

The publication contains Paul Jennings' recollections of serving, albeit without choice, the Madison family at Montpelier and in the Executive Mansion. These are Jennings' personal memories regarding Madison, whom he describes as a great man, as well as his recollections of his service at the Executive Mansion. As these are Paul Jennings personal recollections, this book may be labeled, and is often referenced by modern historians as a memoir. The Oxford American Dictionary defines a memoir as "autobiographical observations," which is a good description of what *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison* contains. The book is his recollections of events, seen

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<sup>64</sup> Taylor, *A Slave in the White House*, 176 183-84, 191-94, 195, 215. Alfred Chapman papers, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*.

<sup>65</sup> Taylor, *A Slave in the White House*, 204-05, 213.

from his perspective and most importantly of his observations on the afternoon of August 24, 1814. But overall, the memoir itself focuses on Jennings' personal observations of his master, James Madison, ranging from jokes Madison shared with his neighbors and fellow statesmen, Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe, to his final words as he passed away in 1836.<sup>66</sup>

But since these memories were recorded “in almost [Jennings'] own language,” by a third person, amateur historian John Brooks Russell, this puts into question the publications label as a memoir. While these are Paul Jennings' intimate memories, Russell was likely the individual who chose to focus *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison* on the fourth President of the United States. The publication then becomes in many ways a biography, which is defined by the Oxford American Dictionary as “an account of someone's life, written by someone else,” a point routinely overlooked by historians in consulting this work. The publication provides the general public with intimate tales of an American hero, as interpreted by a nineteenth century amateur historian.<sup>67</sup>

The differing genres in which this publication can be categorized means that it serves two different purposes for Paul Jennings and John Brooks Russell. As a memoir, the book provided Jennings with the opportunity to publish his own memories of James

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<sup>66</sup> Jennings, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*. Oxford American Dictionary, 3rd ed., s.v. “memoir.”

<sup>67</sup> Jennings, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*. Oxford American Dictionary, 3rd ed., s.v. “biography.”

Madison and the opportunity to correct the false narrative regarding Dolley Madison's efforts to rescue the portrait of General George Washington. By recording his memories and then having them published, Jennings was able to take back his experience as a slave, inserting himself into a narrative where he could previously have been invisible. In this way, Jennings was given the opportunity to insert himself into the narrative. This provided him with a historical agency previously denied him as a slave.<sup>68</sup>

But Jennings' historical agency only went as far as John Brooks Russell would allow as in the nineteenth century, in order for a black man's narrative to hold significance, its value must be recognized by a white man. This is seen in the way Russell inserts himself into Paul Jennings' life by recognizing the significance of Jennings' memories, and publishing them for the future historian. This recognition by another individual allows Paul Jennings' narrative to be published and spread. But Russell does more than merely validate Jennings' narrative: Russell takes the narrative and alters it to be a biography of President James Madison. Russell has an obsession with bringing to light previously unknown historical characters and events. At the time of Jennings' memoir's publication, Russell was also perusing the former mayor of Washington, Peter Force's, personal papers and publishing the parts he considered of historical interest. But in altering Paul Jennings' narrative as he does, even if he still used "[Jennings'] own

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<sup>68</sup> Jennings, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*. Oxford American Dictionary, 3rd ed., s.v. "memoir." Margo Minardi, *Making Slavery History: Abolitionism and the Politics of Memory in Massachusetts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 9

language,” John Brooks Russell was in a way taking some of Jennings’ agency from him.<sup>69</sup>

John Brooks Russell validating Paul Jennings’ memories by publishing them gave Jennings an opportunity that cannot be ignored. In 1863, Jennings was still considered a second class citizen, even though he had gained his freedom roughly a decade before, and even if he had published his memoir on his own, he still needed a white man to validate them. Russell was able to publish Jennings’ memories in a historical journal, and then in booklet form, allowing them to be read by historians in the modern era. None of this would probably have been possible for Jennings himself. Russell further validated Jennings by introducing him as “an intelligent colored man” whose “character for sobriety, truth, and fidelity, is unquestioned.” Russell’s final validation of Jennings’ memories specifically was in stating “as a daily witness to interesting events, I have thought some of his recollections were worth writing down in almost his own language.” These validations served the historical record.<sup>70</sup>

Still, in writing Paul Jennings’ memoir merely “almost in his own words,” John Brooks Russell took autonomy away from Jennings. Russell took the memories Jennings shared with him and chose what he viewed to be most important, namely President James Madison. The memoir was no longer Jennings’ own memories, but rather a selection of

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<sup>69</sup> Jennings, *A Colored Man’s Reminiscences of James Madison*. Minardi, *Making Slavery History*, 9. John Brooks Russell, “School Lands,” *Historical Magazine and Notes on Queries Concerning the Antiquities, History and Biography of America* v. 9 (1865): 126-127.

<sup>70</sup> Jennings, *A Colored Man’s Reminiscences of James Madison*. Minardi, *Making Slavery History*, 9, 118.

Jennings' most important memories. Russell further disparaged Jennings by using the term "colored," repeatedly, a common characteristic of nineteenth century slave narratives written by whites to create a separation between themselves and those for whom they were writing. By labeling Paul Jennings as a "colored man" and altering his memories, John Brooks Russell was in effect laying claim to Jennings' memories. It was a continuation of the white man's control over black men even after individual manumission and general emancipation.<sup>71</sup>

By altering Jennings' narrative to suit his own purpose, Russell was able to become an actor of history, a likely aspiration as evidenced by his plethora of articles in the historical journal. But when Russell published Jennings' recollection of the events of August 24, 1814 "in almost his own language," including the forceful language Jennings likely used, Jennings was also able to be an actor on history. Paul Jennings witnessed an important moment in history, the removal of the portrait of General George Washington before the Executive Mansion was burned, a moment that has been repeated, albeit often inaccurately, in many textbooks and history books. It is an anecdote that most Americans know today. Paul Jennings had power in having a narrative alternative to that which was being published in his lifetime; he held the power to change the narrative, and was likely attempting to do so by sharing it with family and friends. While John Brooks Russell took

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<sup>71</sup> Jennings, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*. Minardi, *Making Slavery History*, 62, 97-100.

It must be noted that while the term "colored" is a derogatory term in the twenty-first century, it was a descriptive word in the nineteenth, but still used as a way to separate whites from blacks.

away a level of autonomy by likely altering Jennings' memories, Jennings maintained some of that autonomy when his memories of the removal of the portrait were included.<sup>72</sup>

As historian Jennifer Wallach explains, memoirs are first person accounts of history, inherently subjective and biased, but able to provide the reader with the ability to understand the contemporary significance, or insignificance, of historical events as viewed by those who experienced them. They provide key insights into the actual impact of historical events on society as they occurred and seen by contemporaries as opposed to only the longterm affects of these events based on later historical judgements. Despite the benefit of understanding the contemporary significance of various events, the weight of the biases inherent in the memoir have prevented their use. The author of a memoir is writing from the mental and physical perspective he or she experienced, and what is remembered and recorded is subject to the biases of these perspectives. Mentally, personal beliefs developed through political socialization and varying life experiences influence an individuals political and ideological outlook on the world. These ideological beliefs can alter how one interprets an event, interpreting it in a positive or negative way. Events that occurred in the time between the original event and the event being recorded can also alter an individual's interpretation. A scientific study completed in 2012 showed that when an individual remembers an event, he or she does not remember the event, but rather the last time he or she remembered the event. The recollection of each memory

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<sup>72</sup> Jennings, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*. Minardi, *Making Slavery History*, 20.



may then be triggered by a later event, eliciting feelings not initially associated with the original event, and even associating later interpretations with the initial event.<sup>73</sup>

Paul Jennings' memoir was published roughly fifty years after Washington City had been burned and his memory of the rescuing of the portrait seems to have been impacted by the publication of an alternative narrative. According to Jennings, the narrative that Dolley Madison physically removed the portrait with her own bare hands had been published multiple times in the fifty year interim between the event and the publication of the memoir. Each time Jennings came across the narrative of Dolley Madison rescuing the portrait of General George Washington, he likely felt angry over this alternative narrative, and his memory focused on his recollection of the physical removal of the portrait completed by John Soissat and McGraw. Repeatedly reliving the afternoon of August 24 likely developed and maintained the narrative that it was John "Susé" and "Magraw" who physically removed the portrait while Dolley gathered her silver in her reticule. What became solidified in his mind was the event in the moment he physically witnessed it, as opposed to the popular account.<sup>74</sup>

In this way, Jennings' physical perspective also appears to have played a role in his narrative of the removal of the portrait. Paul Jennings was a footman in the Executive Mansion, serving a variety of roles throughout the house. On the afternoon of August 24,

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<sup>73</sup> Jennifer Jensen Wallach, *Closer to the Truth Than Any Fact: Memoir, Memory, and Jim Crow* (Athens, Ga: The University of Georgia Press, 2008) 13-38. Donna J. Bridge and Ken A. Paller, "Neural Correlates of Reactivation and Retrieval-Induced Distortion," *Journal of Neuroscience* 32: 35 (Aug 2012) 12144-12151.

<sup>74</sup> Jennings, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*.

Jennings was tasked with the duty of setting the table for the dinner planned at 3:00pm. In order to keep these food items fresh and warm for guests, it may be assumed that he was working up until dinner was scheduled to be served. But it was at about 3:00pm that James Smith came galloping into the city exclaiming “Clear out, clear out!” which appears to have prompted Dolley to finally flee before the long awaited return of her husband. It may be assumed that Jennings’s task changed from setting the table for dinner to assisting in collecting items in the Executive Mansion to be rescued, sending him hurrying throughout the mansion. While completing this presumed task Jennings most probably witnessed the removal of the portrait. As he was passing through the parlor where the portrait had been hung, he may well have briefly seen John Souissait and McGraw removing the portrait from the wall. According to her letter to her sister, upon the discovery that the frame was screwed to the wall, Dolley Madison ordered the frame to be broken and the portrait removed from its frame. This must have been the moment Paul Jennings witnessed. This brief glimpse of this event appears to have stuck in Jennings’ mind, but with his own tasks to complete, he likely did not witness the entirety of the removal of the portrait, as John Souissait and McGraw’s struggled in its removal and Dolley instructed them to break the frame.<sup>75</sup>

Nonetheless, his memory of these events appear to be solidly imprinted in his mind. He appears to be positive that John Souissait and McGraw removed the portrait,

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<sup>75</sup> Jennings, *A Colored Man’s Reminiscences of James Madison*. Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Lucy Payne Washington Todd, 23 August 1814.

and this narrative is corroborated by other accounts that don't name Souissat or McGraw, or state that Dolley removed the portrait either. This does not mean that Jennings' account contains the entirety of the truth. His memory may itself have been tainted by time. While repeatedly reading accounts counter to his own memory, Jennings may have solidified his own counter-narrative. His memory of the event may have also begun incomplete, as he only witnessed a few moments of the portrait's removal, namely its physical removal by Souissat and McGraw as he is unlikely to have been allowed to stand idly as the Executive Mansion was being evacuated.<sup>76</sup>

The marginalization of Paul Jennings as a slave and black man in the nineteenth century can still be seen in history books today by the use of his memoir by historians. Jennings biographer, Elizabeth Dowling Taylor, writes that *A Colored Man's Reminiscence* contains the most often quoted statement regarding the removal and rescue of the portrait of General George Washington, namely of James Smith's exclamation of "Clear out, Clear out!" But it was not until the late twentieth century that this statement began appearing in a large number of history books. It portrays the urgency in Dolley Madison's departure, adding to the anecdote of Dolley trying to save an important part of history in removing the portrait of General George Washington before the British invasion. Jennings' affirmation that Dolley Madison was not involved in the removal of the portrait is largely ignored by historians, who at best do not attribute the physical

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<sup>76</sup> Jennings, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*.

removal of the portrait to anyone, at worst still attribute the removal to Dolley. Paul Jennings full account of events are often reserved for historians of African American history, such as his biography by Taylor.<sup>77</sup>

But regardless of its misuse, Paul Jennings was able to publish his memory of the events of August 24, 1814, sharing his own narrative with the public, inserting himself into the narrative of the War of 1812 in general, and the removal of the portrait of General George Washington specifically. Paul Jennings was able to take his identity into his own hands by publishing his memoir, albeit through the lens of an amateur historian, and insert himself into history. Jennings had become successful in his freedom relative to other freedmen. He owned two pieces of property, worked a successful career in the Department of Interior, and even had a photo taken of himself that has been passed down through his family. But he still needed to insert himself into this more public narrative. As a slave, most of Jennings' life was invisible. He was described as gracious and kind, but was rarely mentioned outside of his congenial greetings at the door of Montpelier. But he was still present and a constant witness to history. By publishing his memories, he was able to make his presence known, and by correcting the narrative of the afternoon of August 14, 1814, Jennings was able to attempt to correct that narrative, inserting himself not just into the narrative as a witness, but as an active participant into the development of the narrative.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Taylor, *A Slave in the White House*, 47.

<sup>78</sup> Jennings, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*. Taylor, *A Slave in the White House*, 191-194,

### CHAPTER 3: TEXTBOOKS AND THEIR NARRATIVE

Anecdotes have been used to tell stories and bolster arguments for virtually all of human history, but their varying uses have made it difficult for social scientists to develop an overarching definition. Historian Arnaldo Momigliano defines their use in ancient Rome briefly as “entertaining stories” that were often used in biographies and autobiographies. Fellow classical historian Richard Saller widens this definition by stating types of anecdotes he has seen used in ancient eras, including oral or written anecdotes, those used as a moral lesson or a joke, or those that support that which is common knowledge, or could also be used to question that which is unknown. Lionel Gossman, through his study of anecdotes and their use in the modern era, suggests a structure in that they generally contain three acts “consisting of a situation or exposition, encounter or crisis, and resolution...” But according to Gossman, they also usually encompass a level of brevity that often launches into a longer narrative or lesson.<sup>79</sup>

According to Saller, anecdotes are believed to have begun as oral histories, passed down through generations altered by the narrator with each retelling. Any aspect of the anecdote may have been altered, including the time, place, and even subject of the original narrative, exaggerating aspects as suited the narrator. Anecdotes may have been altered for the purpose of entertainment, changing the time or location to allow the

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<sup>79</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography: Four Lectures of Arnaldo Momigliano* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971) 37-38. Lionel Gossman, “Anecdote and History,” *History and Theory*, 42. 2 (May, 2003) 143-168. Richard Saller, “Anecdotes as Historical Evidence for the Principate,” *Greece and Rome*, 27. 1 (Apr., 1980) 69-83.

entertained to better relate to the anecdote. Educators of the classical era would even encourage students of politics and law to exaggerate established anecdotes, or even make up new anecdotes, to support an argument. But as the original anecdote, namely its characters and author, was not passed along with each retelling, what would often be passed from narrator to listener and from generation to generation was an inevitably false narrative often taken as truth.<sup>80</sup>

Anecdotes are still used in classroom, but their use has changed from bolstering a law students' argument, to sharing contemporary values of national identity and moralistic behavior with a new generation of students. Military heroes who fought bravely throughout our country's history are featured in textbooks, including General George Washington, who acted as Commander in Chief for the Continental Army, General Andrew Jackson, whose leadership led to a final and definitive victory against the British during the War of 1812, and General Ulysses S. Grant whose leadership led to the surrender of General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox. Anecdotes also feature morally righteous politicians such as the Founding Fathers, who created a country independent from England, and Abraham Lincoln, who is credited with the abolition of slavery. But anecdotes in textbooks predominantly feature elite men of western European descent, often ignoring the accomplishments of women, African Americans, and Indians. Until

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<sup>80</sup> Saller, "Anecdotes as Historical Evidence for the Principate."

recent decades, these individuals were often placed in roles that portray them as inferior, such as the lazy African American or the savage Indian.<sup>81</sup>

One anecdote featuring an elite white male often published in textbooks is that of young and ethical George Washington, who finds himself in a situation many adolescents experience: confronted with their delinquent actions by a parent. In this anecdote, George's father accuses him of chopping down his beloved cherry tree, and young George is faced with a conundrum: to admit the truth, that he cut down the tree, or lie and hope to avoid punishment. In an effort to teach the benefits of telling the truth, the anecdote continues with young George's response to his father: "I cannot tell a lie," and he admits to having chopped down the cherry tree. The anecdote then describes George's father's reaction to the confession: he embraces his son, the future President of the United States, for telling the truth as opposed to punishing his son for chopping down the tree. This anecdote has been published and republished in history textbooks throughout the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries to portray the benefits of always telling the truth, despite having little historical benefit or validity.<sup>82</sup>

In the early twentieth century, women were only beginning to make appearances in textbooks, primarily in anecdotes in which white women exemplified the ideal balance

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<sup>81</sup> Saller, "Anecdotes as Historical Evidence for the Principate." Stuart J Foster, "The Struggle for American Identity: Treatment of Ethnic Groups in United States History Textbooks," *History of Education*, 28. 3 (Nov 2010) 251-278.

<sup>82</sup> Mason Locke Weems, *Life of Washington* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967) 9-10. Philip Levy, *Where the Cherry Tree Grew: The story of Ferry Farm, George Washington's Boyhood Home* (St. Martin's Press: New York, 2013), 94, 217. Marcius Wilson, *Primary American History: For Primary Schools* (New York: Ivison, Phinney, Blakeman & Co., 1864) 119-20. Augusta Stevenson, *George Washington: Our First Leader* (New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1986).

of patriotism while maintaining the feminine expectations of their respective era. In American history textbooks, these anecdotes often include the fictional character Molly Pitcher, who assisted her husband's artillery unit when he was fatally wounded during the American Revolution, and the real life First Lady Dolley Madison who is attributed with the rescue of the Gilbert Stuart portrait of General George Washington during the War of 1812. But these periodic appearances in textbooks only provide a brief glimpse into the lives of women of the Revolutionary and Early Republic Eras as these anecdotes only portray the moments when it became necessary for these women to briefly portray masculine bravery and patriotism. These brief and heroic moments are usually during times of war when men are called upon to leave the home to bravely fight for their country, and women automatically fulfill their own patriotic duty by taking the places of their husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons, managing farms and plantations, or businesses and factories, working in the fields and at machines. But what is often left out of textbooks are the ways women worked within the women's realm to for a patriotic cause. During the American Revolution and War of 1812, women boycotted British goods, turning to homespun clothes and making various household goods at home. In times of peace, women in the Early Republic worked as "republic mothers," a role in which they taught the values of the Early Republic to their sons who would go on to be ideal republican citizens. Dolley Madison also worked to advance the social life of Washington



City, providing a congenial atmosphere through which politicians of opposing political parties were able to converse under the guise of a generic conversation.<sup>83</sup>

In grammar school textbooks, however, women are only featured in the brief moments in which they stepped into the men's realm. Until the turn of the twentieth century, American society was divided by gender, as previously described in the introduction. Women organized that which was virtuous, namely the family and society, while men managed that which was tumultuous, namely politics and business. The anecdotes featuring female protagonists portray women who took necessary liberties during war, when the two realms were blurred and it became a woman's patriotic duty to step into the masculine realm, to assist with the continuation of life while the men were away, but when war literally came to a woman's doorstep, she may have been forced to step even farther into the men's realm.<sup>84</sup>

According to a popular anecdote regularly published in grammar school textbooks, during the Battle of Monmouth during the American Revolution, Molly Pitcher began her day by caring for her husband and those who served alongside him in an artillery crew, in this way fulfilling her feminine responsibility. But when her husband

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<sup>83</sup> Carol Klaver, "An Introduction to the Legend of Molly Pitcher," *Pasadena* 7. 2 (June, 1994). Rosemarie Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007) 23. Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>84</sup> Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash*, 134-35. Waddy Thompson, *The First Book in United States History* (New York City: D. C. Heath & Co., 1921) 374-75. Charles F. Horne, *The Story of the American People: Volume Two: for use by Pupils in the Seventh and Eighth Grades* (New York: United States Pub. Co., 1925).

was mortally wounded, his artillery crew found themselves one man short the necessary number to operate the cannon. Instead of allowing the cannon to lay in disuse, or worse be seized by the British troops, Molly took the place of her dying husband and assisted in the operation of the cannon. In this anecdote, Molly began by adhering to her feminine virtues by caring for her husband and other soldiers but stepped into a masculine realm when circumstances necessitated it.<sup>85</sup>

The anecdote of Dolley Madison rescuing the portrait of General George Washington also exemplifies this blurring of the men's and women's realms during war. When discussing the War of 1812, some history textbooks include the Dolley Madison anecdote in which she reportedly rescued the portrait of General George Washington. As British troops rapidly advanced toward the capital in late August 1814, Dolley Madison stubbornly remained to await the return of her husband from the Battle of Bladensburg, the last effort by American troops to stop the British from advancing upon the capital. But the British quickly overcame the Americans in Bladensburg, and upon of the American retreat, it became imprudent for Dolley to remain in the city. According to a textbook published in 1925:

Our government fled from Washington amid wild confusion. President Madison took refuge in the Virginia woods. Mrs. Madison sent off as much of the bulk of national documents as she could handle, rescued the original Declaration of Independence, took Washington's picture out of its frame for safety, and fled in her carriage.

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<sup>85</sup> Klaver, "An Introduction to the Legend of Molly Pitcher." Thompson, *The First Book in United States History*. Lawton B. Evans, *First Lessons in American History: Revised Edition* (New York: Benj. H. Sanborn & Co., 1922) 166. Augusta Stevenson, *Molly Pitcher: Young Patriot* (New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1986).

In this anecdote, Dolley is portrayed as a caregiver of America by ensuring the survival of some “national documents,” while also operating within the men’s realm by physically removing the portrait from its frame.<sup>86</sup>

These three anecdotes, featuring George Washington, Molly Pitcher, and Dolley Madison, all feature white individuals, exemplifying ideal nationalistic and moralistic American values. Young George portrays his morality by admitting to his father that he cut down the cherry tree, while Dolley and Molly both exemplify an unfeminine bravery by fighting for the creation and continuation of America. In the anecdotes, all three are going against their basic human instincts, George to avoid punishment by lying to his father, and Dolley and Molly to maintain their feminine virtue and seek shelter away from the masculine war. But by not following their basic human instincts, these three individuals exemplify ideal American values for the next generation of Americans. These and other similar anecdotes have been used in the history classroom since the nineteenth century as this has proven to be the most prudent location to teach American values. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, teachers were often not educated beyond high or grammar school themselves, and became dependent on the rapidly developing textbook industry for information. The combination of teachers almost exclusively dependent on textbooks that portrayed ideal American values resulted in a generation of students who almost assuredly were taught ideal moralistic and nationalistic behavior as

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<sup>86</sup> Horne, *The Story of the American People*.

decided by textbook authors. Textbooks today still use anecdotal information to spread morals and exemplify appropriate behavior, as well as entertain the student.<sup>87</sup>

Unfortunately for students who read these anecdotes, and rely upon them for information, a less valuable characteristic was also passed down from ancient anecdotes: the tendency to be heavily exaggerated if not complete fabrications, many falsities having only been discovered by the general public in the last few decades with the publication of such books as *Lies My Teacher Told Me* by sociologist James W. Loewen. George Washington's moralistic anecdote in which he cut down his father's cherry tree originated from a fictitious biography of the first President published by Mason Locke Seems in 1808 in an effort to capitalize on the subject's death a decade before. The exact origins of the anecdote featuring Molly Pitcher are unknown as there is no known individual named Molly Pitcher to have existed, but several women are recorded to have assisted in artillery units after their respective husbands were wounded, including an individual named Mary Corbin. During the Battle of Fort Mifflin during the American Revolution, Mary is recorded to have stepped in to assist her husband's artillery crew when he was killed in action. The origin of Dolley Madison's anecdote in which she had a role in the rescue of the portrait of General George Washington was explored in the first chapter. It is likely that the anecdote began with her own efforts to spread her narrative in

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<sup>87</sup> Foster, "The Struggle for American Identity: Treatment of Ethnic Groups in United States History Textbooks."

the months after the city was burned, but when the anecdote transitioned from her own narrative to the exaggerations commonly known today is unknown.<sup>88</sup>

There were two changes in the field of social sciences in the late nineteenth century that appear to have impacted the publication of anecdotes in general, but especially anecdotes featuring female protagonists such as that of Dolley Madison rescuing the portrait of General George Washington. The first was the dissolution of the belief that separate spheres for men and women were necessary for an ideal society, namely the separate spheres which mandated Dolley Madison's life in the early nineteenth century. In the mid nineteenth century, several coeducational universities began accepting female students in the West, while in the East several women's universities opened after women had been advocating for such opportunities for at least a generation. In the decades following the Civil War, a Massachusetts woman named Emily Talbot advocated for educational opportunities for women after realizing that women could not longer depend upon their role as wives and mothers for stability following the high loss of able bodied men during the Civil War. In the 1870s Emily's daughter Marion repeated applied to Harvard University, but each time was denied acceptance. She would ultimately attend Boston University and later the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Upon the successful completion of her advanced degree, Marion formed the Association

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<sup>88</sup> Levy, *Where the Cherry Tree Grew*, 217. Klaver, "An Introduction to the Legend of Molly Pitcher." James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York: The New Press, 1995).

of Collegiate Alumnae (ACA), an organization to encourage young women who desired to attend university and support graduates in their quest for a career.<sup>89</sup>

The organization also conducted research to disprove misconceptions of the female body and mind that had prevented women from attending institutions of higher learning and continued to limit women's career opportunities. One such theory was published by Dr. Edward Clarke in 1873, a publication Marion Talbot likely read when exploring her own educational aspirations. Dr. Clarke published *Sex in Education; or a Fair Change for the Girls*, in which he expressed his concerns that exposure to the intellectual rigors of a university, such as Harvard, would likely jeopardize a woman's reproductive abilities. In response to this publication, in the 1880s the ACA composed a questionnaire completed by 705 female college graduates regarding their mental and physical health. This empirical study revealed few problems among women in general, with "constitutional weakness" being the chief concern, explained by inherited unhygienic habits, and "emotional strain," explained by the high expectations of women from the church. Ultimately, in combination with other studies of women's physical and mental health, as well as marriage and birth rates, it was proved that women were physically and mentally capable of the rigors of an advanced degree program, resulting in a gradual increase in female enrollment in advanced degrees. By 1900, a half dozen

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<sup>89</sup> Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1982) 2-4, 12-13, 18-19, 25.

universities boasted a fifty percent female enrollment among their students, a trend that would continue to increase throughout the twentieth century.<sup>90</sup>

A second change that affected the publication of textbooks in general and anecdotes specifically at the turn of the twentieth century was a development in the professional field of history. In the 1870s the field of history became professionalized. The patriarchal historians of the early and mid-nineteenth century were generally men of means who studied history as a hobby with the assistance of relatives and friends who experienced these events first hand or even their own experiences. But the development of the social sciences into a more scientific field created a new generation of historians from more meager backgrounds trained at universities. This professional training coupled with exposure to a variety of individuals while at university created a field that encompassed a wider range of interests beyond the elite white male. Historians such as Henry Adams and Frederick Jackson Turner were among these first professionally trained historians, who sought out an objective history through which a single American historical narrative would result. However, by 1910, the continuing increase in the variety of students accepted to institutions of higher learning, including middle class and women, resulted in a progressive historical movement which continued to widen the range of interests, introducing new historical actors including women and the working class.

Charles A. Beard and Vernon L. Parrington led the Progressive historians.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres* 5, 18-27.

<sup>91</sup> Gerald N. Grob and George Athan Billias, *Interpretations of American History: Patterns and Perspectives: Volume 1 to 1877*, (New York: The Free Press, 1967) 7-10.

Textbooks of the early twentieth century follow a similar trajectory as the field of history. Beginning in the 1890s, American history as published by textbooks became the all encompassing truth of the formation of our country. According to Frances Fitzgerald, who studies the changes in history textbooks over time, discovered that textbooks in the late nineteenth century sought out a similar objectivity as historians of the late nineteenth century by using “terse declarative statements.” In the 1910s, the authors of these textbooks were also professional historians of the Progressive Era, including Charles Beard and his wife Mary, a Columbia educated suffragist. While textbooks would not include the historical additions of women until the 1960s, their brief appearances in anecdotal form increased during the first three decades of the twentieth century.<sup>92</sup>

These changes in academia in general and textbooks specifically are exemplified in the anecdote featuring Dolley Madison rescuing the portrait of General George Washington. The more progressive nature of textbook authors increasingly in the first three decades of the twentieth century reflect the increasing publication of the anecdote, which was published in five textbooks in the first decade of the twentieth century, and nearly doubled in appearance every decade thereafter. The narrative of the anecdote also

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<sup>92</sup> Frances Fitzgerald, *America Revised: What History Textbooks have Taught our Children about their Country, and How and Why Those Textbooks have Changed in Different Decades* (New York: Vintage Books: A Division of Random House, 1980) 51-52, 93. Robert Lerner, Althea K. Nagai, and Stanley Rothman, *Molding the Good Citizen: The Politics of High School History Texts* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1995) 56.

The two books to identify a time in which women began appearing in textbooks specific this time to be during the New Left historical movement of the 1960s, and yet I found roughly a dozen women mentioned in textbooks in varying frequencies throughout my research of textbooks published between 1900 to 1930. The only way I can recollect this disparity is by assuming that these authors did not count anecdotes as mentioning women, and all of the references to women I found in the early twentieth century were in anecdotal form, what Robert Lerner, Althea K. Nagai, and Stanley Rothman call “Filler Feminism.”



follows the trend in history of a professionalization of the writing, albeit a few decades later. While the professionalization of the field of history resulted in professional writing in the 1870s, this change did not occur in history textbooks until the 1910s, at which time the anecdote developed a cohesiveness in each publication. But each of the five anecdotes published between 1900 and 1910 had a distinct style. One anecdote, published by Eva March Tappan, a professional educator, encompassed an entire chapter in a book designed to introduce American figures to young students while another by the same author is brief and references her good housekeeping skills in rescuing her silver spoons. Another textbook only briefly references Dolley Madison, while a fourth insinuates her bravery and states that she cut the portrait from the frame herself.<sup>93</sup>

A prolific textbook author and professional educator, and one of the few authors with much biographical information, Eva March Tappan published two versions of the anecdote in two different textbooks in the first decade of the twentieth century. The first was published in an encyclopedic biography entitled *American Heroes*, featuring men ranging from Christopher Columbus to Abraham Lincoln, and a single woman, Dolley Madison. In *American Heroes*, Tappan uses quotes from Dolley's letter to her sister, presenting the anecdote quite realistically, but then delves into conversations based on these quotes. According to the introduction of the book, Tappan's objective was to

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<sup>93</sup> Grob and George Athan Billias, *Interpretations of American History*, 6. Francis Newton Thorpe, *A History of the American People* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1901). Eva March Tappan, *Our Country's Story: An Elementary History of the United States* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1902). Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *History of the United States: from 986 to 1905* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1905). William A. Mowry, *Essentials of the United States History* (New York: Silver, Burdett and Co., 1906). Eva March Tappan, *American Hero Stories* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1906).

introduce students to historical figures, which she did by using entertaining, albeit exaggerated, stories.<sup>94</sup>

The second anecdote authored by Tappan followed the trend found in most anecdotes in the beginning of the twentieth century with its brevity coupled with slight embellishments. However, this anecdote differs from other anecdotes in that this anecdote seemingly places her within the women's realm where most of the others place her within the men's realm. The anecdote reads: "Dolley Madison, the President's wife, saved the Declaration of Independence and a valuable portrait of Washington. Tradition declares that, like a good housekeeper, she also carried away to safety her work-bag filled with silver spoons." In the twenty-first century, this description of Dolley Madison ensuring the safety of her personal silver spoons and the consequent reference to her good housekeeping skills would place her well within the women's realm. But this may not have been the intention of the author. Tappan was one of the early women to have gained an advanced degree and was head of Worcester English High School. She advocated for the right to an advanced education for women and spoke at a meeting of the ACA held on October 25-26, 1889, and may have been a member of the organization.<sup>95</sup>

Therefore, the early twentieth century definition of "housekeeping" should be referenced. According to the Oxford American Dictionary, the term "housekeeping" was

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<sup>94</sup> Tappan, *American Hero Stories*. Margaret Ferry, "Eva March Tappan (1854-1930): An English Teacher Who Made a Difference." *The English Journal* 75. 8 (Dec., 1986) 28-31.

<sup>95</sup> Ferry, "Eva March Tappan (1854-1930)." Eva March Tappan, *Our Country's Story. Publication of the Association of Collegiate Alumnae* 3. 7 (Feb. 1908) 125.

used more literally in the early twentieth century by referring to the general care of the home and the goods therein. While the home generally fell within the women's realm, certain tasks were reserved for men, including chopping wood, making the title "good housekeeper" non-gendered. A book published in 1911 entitled *Housekeeping*, a guide for children intended to assist children learn the skills necessary to maintain a home, has a picture of a girl and a boy on the front cover, the girl peeling an apple and the boy completing some woodwork. The book describes a wide range of tasks, from care of various rooms, the cooking and the washing, as well as a chapter on "The Cellar, Fires, Plumbing, etc." describing tasks reserved for both men and women. Therefore, by using the phrase "good housekeeper" to describe Dolley, the author may be accentuating Dolley's management of the household and the goods therein, not necessarily relegating Dolley Madison solely to the women's realm.<sup>96</sup>

Another anecdote published in the first decade of the twentieth century was brief but insinuated Dolley's bravery in physically removing the portrait from its frame herself, one of the few anecdotes to state her physical actions. The anecdote states that Dolley was "determined" to rescue the Gilbert Stuart portrait from the advancing British troops, and therefore "cut it from its frame, and escaped with it under her arm." References to and statements of her bravery would continue with increasing regularity with each passing decade, but no other anecdote would state that she removed the portrait with her

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<sup>96</sup> Ferry, "Eva March Tappan (1854-1930)." Eva March Tappan, *Our Country's Story*. Eva March Tappan, *An Elementary History of our Country*. Oxford American Dictionary, 3rd ed., s.v. "housekeeping." Elizabeth Hale Gilman, *Housekeeping* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1911).

own bare hands. The reason for the exclusion of this aspect of the anecdote is unknown, but the professional historians who wrote textbooks beginning in the 1910s may have referenced sources whereas professional educators who authored textbooks in the past sought simply to entertain unruly students.<sup>97</sup>

The juxtaposition of Dolley Madison's risk taking behavior with her husband's presumed cowardice in several textbooks also furthers her perception as a brave heroine. Modern access to archives and a myriad of historical studies have made it easily accessible knowledge today that President James Madison, along with other military officials, left Washington City on August 22, 1814 in an effort to organize the slowly gathering and poorly trained American troops against the quickly advancing and professionally trained British troops. The opposing forces met in combat on August 24 in a field near Bladensburg, Maryland, where the Americans were decimated in mere hours. It was not until the defeat of this weak American army that General Armstrong admitted the precarious nature of the city and ordered a retreat, ultimately prompting Dolley Madison's hasty departure. Shortly after the retreat President James Madison reentered the city to view it one last time before its now inevitable destruction.<sup>98</sup>

But instead of the brave actions taken by Madison in attempting to stop the British troops, several textbooks publish an alternative narrative in which Madison and other

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<sup>97</sup> Thorpe, *A History of the American People*.

<sup>98</sup> Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012) 203-208.

unnamed officials fled to the Maryland and Virginia woods in cowardice upon hearing the proximity of the British troops. The origin of this rumor likely dates back to the months immediately following the burning of Washington in an effort to defame the president. In the Early Republic, it was common for politicians and civilians to refer to members of the opposing political party using such derogatory terms as “a board, a liar, a rascal, and a scoundrel,” in newspapers. Such accusations were aimed at the opposition’s honor, a characteristic so personal to men that when one’s honor was challenged, one was expected to call a duel in an effort to regain one’s honor. Following the Battle of Bladensburg and the resulting burning of Washington, President James Madison found himself on the receiving end of a series of verbal attacks in an effort to dishonor his name. According to David O. Stewart, author of *Madison’s Gift*, a slew of mocking words were anonymously thrown at James Madison from Washingtonians who disapproved of the war and the destruction of their city. Such attacks included graffiti on the Capitol stating that “James Madison is a rascal, a coward, and a fool” and a tavern song appeared, that also proclaimed James Madison’s cowardice:

*Our capital you lost, Jim, much wealth with it likewise  
Your fame has fled your honor’s dead, your minions be despised,  
In wisdom you’re deficient, Jim, in energy also,  
Most manfully, you ran away, James Madison, my Jo.*

The timing of these attacks and their nature indicate a political motive likely originating from Federalists who were never Madison supporters. Madison’s reaction to this verbal abuse is unknown, but there is no known record of his involvement in a duel. Instead, it is

possible that James Madison ignored the abuse and focused his energy on rebuilding the capital and moral, and on bringing the war to a successful conclusion. The reason it was included in some textbooks, however, is unknown. While it does bolster Dolley Madison's portrayal as a courageous hero, it is a falsehood often set amongst mostly truths. It is possible that amateur and/or professional historians may have had limited access to publications of the event, and fell pray to these attacks on Madison's honor instead.<sup>99</sup>

What is conspicuously absent from the majority of the anecdotes published in early twentieth century textbooks is the presence and voice of anyone aside from Dolley Madison, namely of Paul Jennings who also recorded his own recollections of the event, and the two servants who physically removed the portrait according to Jennnigs' memoir, first Master of Ceremonies, the French immigrant John Souissait, and the gardener and Irish immigrant, McGraw. The origin of the exclusion of these three individuals likely resides in a lack of reference to Paul Jennings' memoir, either by accident or on purpose, but the status of immigrants and African Americans in the early twentieth century cannot be ignored either. At this time, despite equality guaranteed by a series of amendments passed in the nineteenth century, some men were still considered second class citizens in America, John Souissait, Paul Jennings, and McGraw, all representing men who lacked

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<sup>99</sup> James B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Rebpulic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) 173. David O. Stewart, *Madison's Gift: Five Partnerships that Built America* (Simon and Shuster: 2015) 261.

equal opportunities in America at the turn of the century, John Souissait and McGraw being an immigrant and Paul Jennings being of African descent. Between 1870 and 1920, an influx of immigrants resulted in the nationalistic focus of white individuals of western European descent in textbooks. While it was mostly the southern and eastern European as well as Asian, immigrants who were subjected to exclusion, Irish immigrants were also frowned upon, and John Souissait may have been overlooked as a general immigrant lacking an anglo-saxon. The portrayal of individuals of African descent throughout the nineteenth century as accepting of their position in society and as being culturally and intellectually inferior resulted in their second class status despite a long history of attempts at rebelling against slavery and later against laws that prevented them from living lives equal to whites. These ideas of cultural and intellectual inferiority, however, were published in history textbooks well into the twentieth century.<sup>100</sup>

As previously mentioned, textbooks became the primary place to educate children on American values and identity, which in the early twentieth century had become white, primarily of British descent, and Protestant. The classroom proved to be a method of assimilation of the roughly twenty-two million southern and eastern Europeans who immigrated to America between 1870 and 1920. The need to spread a sense of pride and patriotic loyalty to America amongst the new population of immigrants was of particular focus, resulting in history textbooks portraying nearly exclusively the accomplishments of Anglo-Saxon Americans. As a result of the focus on “traditional” American heroes, the

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<sup>100</sup> Foster, “The Struggle for American Identity.” Moreau, *Schoolbook Nation*, 163-174.

focus of this anecdote of the War of 1812 became Dolley Madison, and her personal efforts to rescue the portrait of General George Washington. Few of these accounts state that she physically removed the portrait herself, but only one even mentions who else may have completed the act, in this one instance only the term servants used, as opposed to names. The result of this focus on Dolley Madison has been to completely ignore the accomplishments of blacks and immigrants, excluding them from the historical narrative of American history.<sup>101</sup>

The more likely reason for completely ignoring the actions of John Soissait and McGraw, was the likelihood that Paul Jennings' memoir was not even referenced. Until the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, the primary sources of African Americans were not heavily referenced by leading white historians. These would have included memoirs published in the nineteenth century or passed down, as well as accounts recorded in the 1920s as part of the New Deal. Even in professional history books of the early twentieth century, Paul Jennings' memoir and the information therein was not often referenced. Textbooks of this era, however, had a focus on the accomplishments of white Americans which would have precluded the necessity to reference Paul Jennings memoir. As this memoir is the only known reference to John Soissait and McGraw, their names were naturally excluded from the anecdote.

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<sup>101</sup> Foster, "The Struggle for American Identity." Thorpe, *A History of the American People*. Tappan, *American Hero Stories*.



The anecdote served a specific purpose for American students in the early twentieth century: to provide a patriotic example for citizens on how they should behave as adults. They should exude bravery in the face of danger and be ready to sacrifice oneself for the greater cause. Even females were expected to shed their feminine demeanor for the greater cause if necessary, as in the case of Molly Pitcher and Dolley Madison. But the anecdote featuring Dolley Madison changes over time, pointing to varying priorities by Americans. In the first decade of the 1900s and the first half of the 1910s, the most descriptive anecdote references her good housekeeping skills for rescuing her silver spoons, possibly a reference to overall home management expected of men and women. But it did not describe her as brave or of risking her own life for rescuing the portrait of General George Washington and the Declaration of Independence (neither of which, of course, was true). In this version, as discussed in the previous two chapters, Dolley Madison at most instigated the removal of the portrait of General George Washington by instructing her servants John Soissait and McGraw to remove the portrait. When it was discovered that the painting was screwed to the wall, Dolley appears to have instructed them to break the frame to remove the portrait.<sup>102</sup>

But that, in this version, Dolley Madison was also credited with the removal of the original copy of the Declaration of Independence points to the strong desire for American textbooks to provide her as an example of feminine bravery. She rescued the country, not just through a portrait of the first President but also through rescuing the

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<sup>102</sup> Thorpe, *A History of the American People*. Tappan, *American Hero Stories*.

document that arguably had sparked the American Revolution. In a real sense, the Declaration was the country, just as George Washington was considered the country. But contrary to some versions of the anecdote, the Declaration of Independence was in fact not in the Executive Mansion, but framed and hanging on a wall in the Customs Office. According to a *New York Times* article published in 1905, one of the last men to leave the Customs Office saw the document and grabbed it off the wall as he himself fled.<sup>103</sup>

Regardless of the numerous inaccuracies and varying descriptions of the episode, these anecdotes show the changes in American society. In the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a focus on the home, and maintenance of the items therein, in the caring for items such as the silver spoons, and according to the children's book *Housekeeping*, on cooking, cleaning, and plumbing. As the century progressed, there was a greater focus in the anecdote on feminine involvement in the war effort. The anecdote changed to portray Dolley Madison as single handedly rescuing the portrait of General George Washington, among other items, as the British advanced upon Washington. The anecdote during and after World War I changed again to portray her bravery and her actions in saving important relics of America.

Today, the anecdote has continued to change, to be slightly more factual, but at least one textbook still does not include the "servants" as the ones who actually removed the portrait. A textbook published in 2008 states in a section titled "History *through* Art:"

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<sup>103</sup> Thorpe, *A History of the American People*. "The Saving of the Declaration of Independence." *The New York Times*, July 2, 1905.

As British troops closed in on Washington, D.C., in August 1814, most civilians fled the city. Even the 100 troops guarding the White House and First Lady Dolley Madison left. But Madison herself refused to leave until she had rescued one treasure: this full-length portrait of George Washington by renowned painter Gilbert Stuart. Madison was determined to save the painting or destroy it herself rather than let the British ruin it. When newly elected president James Monroe moved into the rebuilt White House in 1817, he restored this symbol of America to its rightful place.<sup>104</sup>

The anecdote as it is described in this textbook today changes the narrative in that it includes her desire to destroy the painting as opposed to allowing it to fall into the hands of the British.

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<sup>104</sup> Robert Dallek, Jesus Garcia, Donna M. Ogle, and C. Frederick Risinger, *American History: Teacher's Edition* (McDougal Littell, 2008) 357.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, the narrative of Dolley Madison rescuing the portrait of General George Washington has served a variety of purposes for numerous individuals. Dolley began by using the narrative to express her fears and concerns to her sister, and then to create a narrative centered on a brazen heroine behind which the country could rally following the burning of the capital. Paul Jennings used the narrative to insert himself into history in a time in which he was virtually invisible and often left out of historical accounts. Textbooks in the early twentieth century used the anecdote to portray idealistic behavior of a feminine hero as she risked her life to save an important piece of American history. Through analysis of each narrative, one can examine changing societal trends, or lack thereof, regarding women and blacks, and through textbooks specifically the changing values that were desirous among American citizens.

Dolley Madison used the letter to her sister, written as she prepared to flee the Executive Mansion, to express her fears and anxieties for her husband and country during the War of 1812. The British had advanced dangerously close to the capital. While awaiting the return of her husband from battle, Dolley packed various items in the Executive Mansion, but had to hide her various anxieties from her servants and slaves who worked in the Executive Mansion, as well as visitors who came to offer their assistance. But December, with hindsight available to her, Dolley was able to change the

narrative, describing herself as “so unfeminine as to be free from fear,” and wishing she had put a canon through every window to prevent the British capture of the Executive Mansion. She knew this narrative would reach beyond its recipient, Mary Latrobe, and likely intended this as the country needed a narrative behind which to rally in the months following the burning of its fledgling capital.<sup>105</sup>

For Paul Jennings, the narrative served as a method to insert himself into the narrative, but also to correct the narrative that was being published. As John Brooks Russell recorded Jennings’ memories to be shared with the general public, Jennings lost some of the agency he had retained from slavery, the ability to act on his memories. Paul Jennings had been able to share his own recollections, maintaining control of them, until Russell took them and published them with his own interpretations. But by using Jennings’ forceful language in his stating “this is totally false,” when referencing the developing narrative of Dolley Madison, Jennings was still able to insert himself into the narrative, stating that he was present even if he was not involved in the removal of the portrait.<sup>106</sup>

Textbooks have used this and other anecdotes to exemplify contemporary societal values for children in assisting them in becoming ideal citizens. The initially periodic presence of the anecdote in the first decade of the twentieth century, published only five times in the textbooks available in Gutman Library at Harvard University, shows the

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<sup>105</sup> Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Mary Elizabeth Hazlehurst Latrobe, December 3, 1814.

<sup>106</sup> Paul Jennings, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*

hesitancy of including women textbooks as their appearance outside of the feminine realm had only been recently accepted. At the end of the nineteenth century, a series of studies performed within the newly developing field of social sciences discovered that women were physically and mentally capable of the rigors academia, as well as life in general, where they had previously been viewed as weak. As the twentieth century progressed, the anecdote featuring Dolley Madison was increasingly published, showing her increasingly accepted role in assisting in the removal of the Gilbert Stuart portrait of General George Washington. Where she had described herself in 1814 as “so unfeminine as to be free from fear,” she was described a century later as being brave and risking her life to rescue the portrait.

It is through these three narratives, that historians can trace the changes in societal norms and values, despite the inaccuracies present in the anecdote. The general acceptance of Dolley’s role in rescuing the portrait as an example of an American hero changes as society slowly accepted a change in women’s values. Conversely, Paul Jennings’ narrative remains ignored and/or buried as the achievements of African Americans remained ignored until the mid and late twentieth century. Textbooks are a good platform through which to explore these changes, as textbooks authors use textbooks to exemplify idealistic behavior for a new generation of students. As seen in this thesis, through the analysis published anecdotes and comparing them to primary sources, changes in societal roles can be traced that can affect contemporary historical decisions. It may be speculated, that during World War I and World War II, women used

this anecdote as a motivation to enlist, and assist in the war effort in the ways available to them.

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