

GROWING UP PIONEER:
NANNIE JEANNETTE WILLIAMS, A SECOND GENERATION PIONEER
WOMAN, OKLAHOMA TERRITORY, 1895-1907

By
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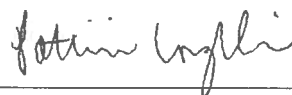
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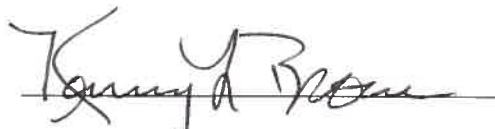
THESIS APPROVAL

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Introduction

By looking at the unpublished diary of a second generation pioneer woman from 1895-1907 in Enid, Oklahoma, I assert that the men and women who traveled the American West created new flexible gender identities that were viewed and learned by their children. The harsh conditions often forced women to work harder than they had previously, and while they strived to maintain the established gender roles, the West created new opportunities and freedoms for their daughters. Born in a rural and relatively undeveloped portion of Texas in 1883, Nannie Jeannette Williams travelled extensively in her first eleven years with her family, living or staying in at least five different places. She was likely not raised under strict gender roles, with the survival of the family as the primary importance.

My original research involved four different women in Oklahoma at four different times in their lives as can be seen in Chapter 4. Nannie being the youngest, the others ranged from 18 to 63, between 1894 and 1900. The other three women moved to Oklahoma Territory as adolescents and adults making them first generation pioneer women. I designate Nannie Williams as a second generation pioneer defined for this study as a child born in the Western frontier with two pioneer parents. The rarity and extensiveness of her collection coupled with the possibility for further study made her a great research subject. Her diaries allow for a continuous account of a young girl moving into adulthood in the American West. She began her writings as a child after the move to Enid, Oklahoma, and wrote daily until 1902 when her entries became sporadic until 1907. Her diaries described some of the major moments in her life as well as the activities of

her family and society in Enid, Oklahoma. The opportunities she took to improve herself led her to graduate from high school two years early, earn a teacher's certificate from Northwestern State Normal School in Alva, Oklahoma, and earn both a bachelors and masters degrees from the University of Oklahoma.

Her diaries remained unnoticed within an archive under the name of the Arms Collection. Similarly, unpublished documents by women continue to be anonymous in archives and family attics across the nation, some disguised in boxes while others remain concealed under the names of men. When I began research to uncover these documents I relied heavily upon the staff of museums and research libraries, hoping something revealed itself during their daily exploration of the collections. Fortunately for me, Mr. Larry Arms chose to donate the diaries, and the archivist at the Oklahoma Historical Society had recently finished inventorying the collection.¹

Mr. Arms's relation to the subject remains unclear, and how he came to possess the collection has not been determined. The assortment of documents includes ten boxes with two containing the diaries of Nannie Williams, spanning 1895 to 1907. Several folders contained letters between Nannie and her sister Eula and between Nannie, and their mother, Mary Williams. The majority of the collection encompassed school records, and notebooks, as well as financial and personal information of John Sherman Gifford, Nannie's future husband. Both John Gifford and his wife appeared to be avid keepers of paper. Mr. Gifford kept class curricula of his time at four universities, his lesson plans during his extensive career as a teacher, and school superintendent and family letter correspondences.

¹ Attempts were made to contact Larry Arms with the address located in the collection. The mailed letter was returned. An internet search revealed a second address; this second mailed letter has not been returned nor answered.

A plethora of information could be obtained from the documents kept by Nannie which aided in the construction of a 192 person family tree created during research of this project.² When I consulted the museum registrar to find out more information I was notified of a group of images with the same accession number, which contained photo copies from Drumright High School's 1916 yearbook, "The Gusher." The registrar also told me that a large part of the collection not dealing with Oklahoma was sent to other institutions that they believed better suited for the material. They had not maintained a list of places, and tracking down this portion of the missing collection would have been extremely time-consuming. I assume, since the Oklahoma History Center focuses on the history of Oklahoma and Nannie began her diaries in Oklahoma, archivists failed to keep the papers of John Gifford before he moved to Oklahoma.

Since this study is limited to a few individuals and Nannie and her family are middle class, white Americans, the scholarship does not delve into women of different ethnicities in Enid, Oklahoma. Based on the family tree, both sides of Nannie's family, the Williamses and Dicksons, were present during the Revolutionary War, owning property in Virginia and South Carolina respectively. We do occasionally see white minority groups mentioned in Nannie's diary entries. She talked of learning Bohemian and German words from neighbors as well as the potential for a Jewish neighbor. Gypsy women were often mentioned coming to the door to tell fortunes or sell goods. Nannie also spoke of seeing black servant girls at the homes of wealthier individuals and attending "the negro church" in town for celebrations and meetings. At times the descriptions appear as though the townspeople saw this minority group as entertainment, attending their private functions, funerals and Christmas celebrations with awe. She

² Williams Family Tree, Ancestry.com.

mentioned least often Native Americans. Based on names of individuals in her diaries, the family appeared to do business with at least one Native American man, and Nannie learned several “Indian words,” though she does not distinguish which language.

Choosing a methodology to study the journals involved an extensive reading on the development of women’s personal writings as well as looking at how historians have used those documents to substantiate their research. The original exploration by historians into women in the West primarily used documents created and written by men, such as newspapers and magazines. These sources created stereotypes of women as maintainers of home, family and society that were then perpetuated throughout time in literature, art and later movies of the Wild West.³ These primary documents also revealed how women saw their position in the social order and the standards they found themselves under, “social construction of gender impinge on the individual they are themselves shaped by human agency.”⁴ To gain further insight into how females viewed themselves in this relationship with society, the historian must turn to the writings of women, both public and private.

Personal writings can be categorized into two groups: those intended for an obvious audience often public documents and those with a hidden audience, personal records. Public works whether letters to a newspaper, a biography, poems, or a record meant to be a family history; the authors skewed the writings, particularly at the turn of the century when women were restricted in their personal declarations. The audience determined the content of the writing and the depth of self-expression. While these

³ Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 8, 10.

⁴ Joy Webster Barbre, *Interpreting Women’s Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 5.

documents contribute to the plethora of women's authorship they typically left out the mundane, ordinary details that give a sense of women's experiences on the western frontier.⁵

Women kept private writings for a number of different audiences, themselves, a future unknown or a trusted, personal correspondence with a friend. These documents allowed the writer some freedom of expression. Authors will at times be completely uncensored in their feelings and emotions, thereby giving the audience an intimate understanding of them. These females maintained daily records, no matter how mundane, offering historians a glimpse into the lives of pioneer women.⁶ Nannie Williams penned her diaries for no particular audience, sometimes addressing a future unknown, while other times her diary seemed written for a personal friend who could respond. She was aware of the exposure the book offered if it fell into the wrong hands therefore often censored herself. When she reread her own diary, she often regretted the limitations she put on the subject, wishing she had elaborated. Nannie wrote at times to an "unborn reader," and far into this project while considering my part and contribution, I realized I am the "unborn reader."

Since Nannie wrote entries daily, I was determined to read them in their entirety. People live in a perpetual motion forward; consequently their associations with places and individuals revolve around past experiences. By reading the entire set of books that spanned ten years and was almost daily, I recognized nuances and personality traits that I

⁵ For further research on women's public writings consult, Margo Culley, *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women in 1764 to the Present* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1985); Thomas Mallon, *A Book of One's Own, People and Their Diaries* (New York: Ticknor, 1984); L.L. Lee and Merrill Lewis, eds., *Women, Women Writers, and the West* (Troy, New York: The Whitston Publishing Company, 1979); Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988).

⁶ Mallon, *A Book of One's Own*, xv, 1; Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), chap. 1.

otherwise would have missed. As Thomas Mallon stated in his book on diaries, “one cannot read a diary and feel unacquainted with its writer.”⁷ Since I have developed this relationship, though one sided, I will be using first name familiarity when referring to Nannie and her family. I have also kept all quotes as they appear in her diary, including grammatical errors.

The relationship that develops between the reader, the writer, and the text can be problematic. There exists a fine line between representing the writer for who they are and the unconscious desire by the reader to make extraordinary, the ordinary woman. The historian can also have difficulty with the meaning of words which can change over time.⁸ These confines need to be recognized with attempts made to overcome them. A distinction also needs to be made between the objective truth of facts and the subjective truth of the individual. While factual information can be substantiated with newspapers, government documents, and magazines, the interpretations of Nannie’s feelings are educated assumptions. I accept full responsibility for my interpretations of the text, as well as my limitations. The missing portion of the collection and further research could lead to new information and interpretations. History is not a stagnant field with the written word being final. If it were, women’s and children’s contributions would still be marginalized in the history of the American West.

⁷ Mallon, *A Book of One’s Own*, xii.

⁸ Suzanne Bunker, “Faithful Friend’: Nineteenth Century Midwestern American Women’s Unpublished Diaries,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 10.1 (1987): 7-17.

Chapter One

Review of Literature: Western Women's History

The diaries of Nannie Williams, 1895-1907, reveal a second generation pioneer growing into adulthood in the American West. She modified the traditional gender roles of the previous generation taking the new opportunities offered her. The diaries serve as the gateway into the societal expectations placed upon Nannie and how she adapted to the environment. The first two years and the last five are sporadic with 1897-1902 having daily entries. Nannie's father traveled to the American frontier as an adult and her mother a child of nine. They met and married in Texas, starting a family. Nannie was born in this western frontier in the budding county of Wichita, Texas. She traveled with her parents as a small child to various parts of Texas, before settling in Enid, Oklahoma Territory. As a second generation pioneer and a child, she helped with both inside and outside work alongside her brothers. Her mother encouraged her to pursue her education, and she did, taking great pride in her studies. Nannie experienced opportunities the West and her mother's hard work afforded her, giving her the ability to transcend the public and private spheres.

Women were leading actors in the American West, shaping their environment and creating the history we understand today. These women experienced new situations, and while attempting to maintain established gender roles in this different environment, the harsh conditions led to an adaptation of a new role. The daughters of second generation pioneer women had new definitions and understandings and saw themselves with new opportunities. Sandra Myres, Glenda Riley, Julie Roy Jeffrey and Elizabeth Jameson

explained that the new environment of the West created new opportunities as well as new challenges for the brave pioneers who ventured into its grasp. Similar to these authors, I argue that women experienced both an oppression and freedom in the new frontier that was conveyed to their daughters, who consequently saw their roles differently. No scholarship exists on unmarried adolescent girls growing into womanhood in Oklahoma during this time period; their experiences are lumped together with either children or single, grown women. Comparing the happenings of a few Oklahoma women with the scholarly works of Elliott West and Paula Petrik and their study of children from 1850-1950 and the generational work of Cynthia Culver Prescott, revealed many similarities of developmental occurrences across geographical boundaries.¹ An analysis of Nannie's diaries unveiled a young girl emulating and evolving her mother's actions and role in both the public and private spheres.

The use of women's personal narratives allowed these female pioneers to tell the story of their trials and triumphs. Utilizing the methodology closely associated with the works of Elizabeth Hampsten and Margo Culley, I will identify Nannie's audience in order to understand what may have been left out of the entries. Culley particularly emphasized the importance of women developing self and self-centeredness during the turn of the twentieth century, resulting in the keeping of these personal narratives. In order to fully comprehend the diary as an artifact, other disciplines must be incorporated, such as the grief theory of psychologist Paul Rosenblatt. He offered a practical approach

¹ Sandra Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800-1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1982); Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988); Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979); Elizabeth Jameson, "Women as Workers, Women as Civilizers: True Womanhood in the American West," *Frontiers* 7.3 (1984): 1-8; Elliott West and Paula Petrik, eds., *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850-1950* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1992); Cynthia Culver Prescott, *Gender and Generation on the Far Western Frontier* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007).

to analyzing sometimes short and what appear to be sporadic entries, looking more at what the author failed to say. Thomas Mallon and Gayle Davis allowed evolution in the personal narratives recognizing that as an individual changed over time so too did the reasons for writing.²

Early works of history fixated on the major players, usually the ‘great men,’ who made the largest and most notable impact on society. These were the famous leaders of politics, the military professionals and contributors to the economy, names still recognizable today. The first incorporation of women into history followed a similar pattern, often focusing on the wives of these men. In the 1960s, a push toward social history developed, emphasizing the ordinary woman, which included their domestic, social and community lives. The 1970s, brought the second wave of the women’s movement, influencing how women historians began to perceive the field. The authorship of the topic significantly increased during this time, resulting in growing pains. Opinions differed as to whether females were victims of an oppressive system or active agents molding their own gender roles. Historians began to explore questions of how women identified themselves within the constraints of their situation and the new frontier.

History follows the trends of society and often emulates the cultural perceptions of the people within that society. Early in the development of the field of women’s history, Paula Treckel explored four of the first works concentrated on women, all of which were written by men. She stated the first as John Frost authoring *Heroic Women*

² Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Margo Culley, *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women in 1764 to the Present* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1985); Paul C. Rosenblatt, *Bitter, Bitter Tears: Nineteenth Century Diarists and Twentieth Century Grief Theories* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1983); Thomas Mallon, *A Book of One’s Own, People and Their Diaries* (New York: Ticknor, 1984); Gayle Davis, “Women’s Frontier Diaries: Writing for Good Reason,” *Women’s Studies* 14.1 (1987): 5-14.

of the West in 1854, which focused on early western exploration in the region of New England, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. William Fowler wrote in 1879 *Women on the American Frontier*; William Forrest Sprague *Women and the West: A Short Social History* in 1940 and finally Page Smith *Daughters of the Promised Land: Women in American History* in 1970. She found that these authors painted a picture of women in the West from assumptions that were based on cultural biases. Newspapers of the 1800s, depicted women as helpers of men and civilizers of society; individuals that survived the harshness of the frontier were cast up as heroines.³

Historians would continue for many years under a pedestal complex, giving ordinary women an importance they neither demanded nor deserved. The diarist's simplexes gave voice to the women that continue to toil day after day with no intention of national recognition. As the field of women in the West continues to develop and change, historians must recognize the personal limitations and biases they place on these regular individuals. History should be an interwoven story, incorporating all places and all people, despite age, gender, race, and class. I believe this to be where the study of women in the West will proceed, and my scholarship, which expands on ordinary Oklahoma women and the marginalized children of settlers, will hopefully contribute to that ultimate goal.

Women in the American West

The early attempts to incorporate women into the history of the American West met with stereotypes, such as the refined lady, sun-bonneted helpmate, hell-raiser, and

³ Paula Treckel, "An Histiographical Essay: Women on the American Frontier," *The Old Northwest* 1.4 (1975): 391-403; Isadore Rogers, "A Woman's Life in the Western Wilds," *Arthurs Home Magazine*, February 1886, 109.

bad woman. Dee Brown published a book titled *The Gentle Tamers: Women of the Old Wild West* in 1958 in which he looked at the roles of women in the American West.

Popularly known as a fiction writer, Brown wrote typical narratives of the West, with the savage Indian and heroic cowboy. With training as a history teacher and librarian, Brown successfully made the transition into non-fiction, becoming known for challenging conventional ideas. In this book on women in the American West, Brown used published memoirs of women's experiences, which he used to present an image of females civilizing the social frontier, but from a Victorian standard, as an ultimately passive process.⁴ This first substantial study on the role of women in the West led to many articles re-evaluating and contradicting this book. Shortly after and along the same premise the new social historians, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Gerda Lerner, and others, emerged, offering a chance to look at the role of women in a different way. They concentrated on community and public history and used local archives and manuscripts to form its base. The importance was on the human experiences and the individuals formerly marginalized in history.⁵

Beverly Stoeltje re-examined the perceived gender roles outlined by Brown but at the same time maintained them. Receiving her M.A. and Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Texas, her early scholarship focused on the American West and rodeos while most of her later works concerned women in Africa. In 1975, in an article on the image of frontier women, she identified the refined lady, the helpmate, and the bad woman in terms of their sexual position with men and society. The idea of the refined

⁴ Dee Brown, *The Gentle Tamers: Women of the Old Wild West* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1958), bk.

⁵ Clarke A. Chambers, "The 'New' Social History, Local History and Community Empowerment," *Minnesota History* 49.1 (Spring 1984): 14-18.

lady placed women on a sexual pedestal, constraining them by the “Cult of True Womanhood,” a comforting image for frontier men. The helpmate was the platonic partner, taking on the aspects of masculinity, therefore losing their sexual identities. The bad woman lived outside the constraints of society, encompassing the role of an erotic fantasy. Stoeltje insisted that society on the frontier was less rigid and women had opportunities for new means of expression, though she still confined them to the image of civilizers of society.⁶ She attempted to incorporate different elements into their images, though limited the female’s mobility and defined the women’s frontier experience based upon the male perspective.

In the 1970s, new attention was brought to the role of women in the American West with the second wave feminist movement and the emergence of women’s studies programs at universities. Some feminists believed that the West forced women to become working, laboring slaves with no recognition for their contributions. They said that females were oppressed by men and that dictated their experience in the frontier. One such historian was June Sochen writing “Frontier Women: A Model for All Women,” in 1976. She emphasized the unchanging biological role of women as the common thread that runs throughout history. Frontier women like their Eastern counterparts were mothers and helpmates. While both men and women experienced the hostility of the natural world, it affected them in very different ways. The environment restricted a woman’s life to arduous domestic endeavors that limited her physical landscape while a male existed in an ever changing and open sphere. The harsh conditions of the frontier forced women to work far harder involving more difficult tasks, while men controlled trade allowing them

⁶ Beverly Stoeltje, “A Helpmate for Man Indeed: The Image of the Frontier Woman,” *Journal of American Folklore* 88.347 (1975): 25-41.

leisure and socialization. The objective was to keep women in their place.⁷ My research with the diaries of Nannie Williams shows women working hard but not being forced to be drudges. The Williams men also labored strenuously to support his family, enduring both the heat and rain. While the two gender roles were different neither one seemed to be easier.

Though individuals may break from the cultural standards, women faced the most barriers. Sochen identified the limitations of the growing field and the complications in recreating a woman's story from a lack of sources, "When you live in a culture that depreciates the value of woman's thoughts and hopes, you do not preserve her diary or letters."⁸ The flaw in her study was that she failed to address women living outside the standards of society; the prostitutes and other such enterprising business women. Sochen used mining towns to show how women wove families into a community continuing its existence. This example has many flaws. First the essence of a mining town were the resources being extracted, when those were gone the town ceased to exist regardless of the families living there—a boom-bust settlement. Second, "bad" women existed in many towns where "refined" ladies did not and these towns thrived as well as failed.⁹

One of the first studies of its kind, Julie Roy Jeffrey's *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880* (1979), looked at women in the West from an evolving feminist stance. Considered a pioneer in the field of women in the West, Jeffrey started her research emphasizing male's oppression of females, but by the end of her

⁷ June Sochen, "Frontier Women: A Model for All Women?" *South Dakota History* 7.1 (Winter 1976): 36-56.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

book she had evolved feminist theory from men's limitations of women to female's limitations upon themselves. She stated at the end of her introduction, "My original perspective was feminist; I hoped to find that pioneer women used the frontier as a means of liberating themselves from stereotypes and behaviors which I found constricting and sexist. I discovered that they did not."¹⁰ Using the personal writings of middle class white women who had migrated between 1840 and 1880, Jeffrey discovered that oppression by men did not inhibit women but instead frontier women rejected the new freedoms. She argued that women sought to reinstate the old domestic world and roles and that the frontier did not offer a chance to break out of old stereotypes but strengthened women's commitment to the "Cult of Domesticity," in order to deal with the harsh environment. While this did not make women into mere servants, it did set limits on the extent of women's activities keeping them within the realm of family and the home.¹¹ This study focused only on the motivations and actions of first generation pioneer women who did seek to reinstate what was familiar; it failed to address the second generation pioneer woman, the daughter who was not exposed to the strict restrictions of the Cult of Domesticity.

Also studying the first generation pioneer women through their writings, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, feminist path breaker and professor of history, American culture, and women's studies, evaluated the Cult of Womanhood created by men in the 1820-40s. She sought to understand women as agents of their own history. In her book *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*, she used primary sources to look at the

¹⁰ Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), xvi.

¹¹ Ibid. 10.

language used by women in their writings, the historic presumptions placed on females, and the women's preconceived thoughts and notions about their own gender roles, ultimately exploring how these individuals broke the Victorian Era's rigid guidelines. She believed the West expanded the opportunities of women into the public sphere through activism, creating a deeper understanding of self.¹² The importance of self in comprehending women's writings would again resurface later in the field.

Presenting a slightly different perspective, *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (1989) a collection of essays gathered by Joy Webster Barbre presented a ground breaking multicultural perspective. The scholarship resulted from the conference on "Autobiographies, Biographies, and Life Histories of Women: Interdisciplinary Perspectives." In the book's introduction, Barbre explored the influence of women's personal narratives in the creation of feminist theory. Feminist thought has changed like other disciplines; the value of these theories is that they have pushed against the assumption that all women's experiences were the same. In this compilation of essays, the emphasis was placed on the plurality and diversity of women's experiences with an understanding of the extremes of male oppression and the varied reactions which created different experiences. The book deals largely with multicultural women. Its relation to my research is limited; however, it offers an example of more recent trends of feminist thought and the acceptance of women as a diverse group which is explored in my Chapter 4.¹³ The author made the assumption that all women felt oppression or the

¹² Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1985).

¹³ Joy Webster Barbre, *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

need to rebel against their gender constraints; however, the women in this study failed to mention their gender and any oppression they may have felt.

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg contradicted fellow feminist June Sochen, denying accepted gender and biological roles as a natural part of existence. Joy Webster Barbre analyzed how history had shaped current feminist theories resulting in a focus on the plurality and diversity of women's experiences.¹⁴ These writers were products of their times, raised and educated with the history written about men for men. These women were venturing into a new realm. While some heavy debates ensued, the objective remained the same; western history needed to be rewritten adding ordinary women to the pages of history. Western women's historians such as Elizabeth Jameson, Glenda Riley, Sandra Myres, Joan Jensen and Darlis Miller attempted to offer new approaches to the study as well as new interpretations. They also viewed women's personal writings as the foundation of the new social history incorporating race, class and gender.¹⁵

New Social Historians

In 1980, Joan Jensen and Darlis Miller in "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West," emphasized historians' marginalization of women by ignoring them from the history of the West and

¹⁴ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1985); June Sochen, "Frontier Women: A Model for All Women?" *South Dakota History* 7.1 (Winter 1976): 36-56; Joy Webster Barbre, *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

¹⁵ Sandra Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800-1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1982); Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988); Elizabeth Jameson, "Women as Workers, Women as Civilizers: True Womanhood in the American West," *Frontiers* 7.3 (1984): 1-8; Joan Jensen and Darlis Miller, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West," *Pacific Historical Review* 49.2 (1980): 173-213.

significantly reducing their numbers. Jensen and Miller hoped to offer new avenues for analysis of women in the West. They saw a rewriting of history necessary, one that accounted for females of all ethnic backgrounds with the hopes of “incorporating women’s history into western history.”¹⁶ Looking at school textbooks, Jensen and Miller noted the scarcity of women mentioned and the small numbers quoted. Women of the West and Southwest appeared invisible and inconsequential to the process of civilization, leaving out demographic statistics to the contrary. Women were seen as a mass group with any individualism lost; slowly a new trend emerged with studies focused on individual women’s lives from personal accounts, giving women an individual voice.¹⁷ Jensen and Miller’s groundbreaking article helped establish a new field beginning with a professional conference centered completely on western women’s history. Known as the Women’s West Conference, it was organized in 1983 along with the Coalition for Western Women’s History. Members of this group include some of the most influential individuals in the field of western women’s history.¹⁸

In *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800-1915* (1982) Sandra Myres, future president of the Western History Association offered the first substantial study on women’s unpublished personal diaries. Using journals and letters, she argued that the frontier opened up opportunities for women and elevated their position in society. She explained that the frontier offered new challenges, forcing both sexes to find different ways of adapting consequently creating new gender roles. Male family members

¹⁶ Joan Jensen and Darlis Miller, “The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West,” *Pacific Historical Review* 49.2 (1980): 174.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 173-213.

¹⁸ Coalition for Western Women’s History, <http://www.westernwomenshistory.org/index.html>.

to assist with men's work were too far away, and neighbors had their own duties to attend to, so women served as a reserve work force. Women worked alongside the men, clearing fields, building shelters and planting and harvesting. The two spheres often interlaced, with women learning hard labor and traditional men's work, while the men offered assistance in maintaining the home.¹⁹ Myres opposed the mode of thought that the frontier made women subservient drudges. She looked at the frontier experience from both the male and female standpoint and was one of the first to stress this as a gender study instead of a women's history.²⁰

Elizabeth Jameson similarly opposed the idea of women's subjugation on the western frontier. Two years after Sandra Myres' work, Elizabeth Jameson published "Women as Workers, Women as Civilizers: True Womanhood in the American West" in *Frontiers*. Focused on rural communities and the women who lived there, Jameson described the importance of using firsthand accounts intended as private and public documents to create a rounded picture. By looking into both the public and private language used to describe their experiences, a more complete image of their life could be revealed. Jameson used her research in mining towns to see that the public image painted by male written newspapers was starkly different from the image women drew themselves. The historian's image of western women correlated to the sources they used. She talked against creating a one dimensional image of women and using a top down approach focused on the oppression of women; which can stereotype women's experiences. Women were not one or the other, a worker or a civilizer, but often

¹⁹ Sandra Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800-1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1982), 160.

²⁰ *Ibid*, bk.

participated in public spheres for private, family interests.²¹ She substantiated the image of a diverse woman, with control of her life.

Making use of manuscripts and published documents, letters and diaries, Glenda Riley in *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains* (1988) used a comparative study of women in two different regions to show that they “displayed fairly consistent patterns.”²² Riley insisted that the experience of women on the plains and prairie was shaped by their gender constraints and less by their region, time period, or authoritative male’s occupation. She insisted that there existed very little regional variation in the lives of women. Men were influenced by the region since it often determined the occupational work available; while Riley argued the elements of a home, where a woman spent her day, were universal. She called this the female frontier. Many debate whether this is a valid argument, if the home environment was the same for women across geographical regions, then the eastern women’s experiences would be the same as western women; therefore, a female frontier would not exist.²³

Women were generally accepted as the civilizers bringing culture and institutions to the Wild West; however, whether this role was a construct of Victorian standards or a result of biology remained a topic of debate. A common thread among all the arguments was Leopold von Ranke's principle of letting the documents “speak for themselves.”²⁴ The study of these documents and interpreting them in new ways made the study of

²¹ Elizabeth Jameson, “Women as Workers, Women as Civilizers: True Womanhood in the American West,” *Frontiers* 7.3 (1984): 1-8.

²² Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 2.

²³ *Ibid*, 10.

²⁴ Karen Sayer, *Modern Women’s History: A Historiography* (Malta: Malta Historical Society, 2005), 10.

women inherently interdisciplinary, incorporating language and words, length of entries, frequency, style, and dictation. In my research I use critical methodologies modeled after Elizabeth Hampsten, Margo Culley and Gayle Davis to analyze how a diary as text, self-expression, and a historical document allow questioning of assumed epistemology. I view the diary itself as an artifact conveying important elements about the writer.

Whether a feminist, gender, or women's historian, the difficulty remains how to tell the story and what sources to use. Early on historians used the published manuscripts, magazine and newspaper columns to study women's experiences. These had their own set of limitations, particularly the perceived audience, which out of propriety would leave certain topics untouched and issues unaddressed. As the value placed on women's personal narratives grew, archives started to take note of these documents which were often filed among the papers of men. My unpublished documents give a raw and honest account of the activities of a woman and her family in Oklahoma; however, to truly understand the documents in a new way, the language and words, the length of entries, the frequency, the style and diction need to be analyzed. By understanding the human psychology through the work of Paul Rosenblatt and the study of diaries by Thomas Mallon, a complete picture of a second generation's life can be formed.²⁵

²⁵ Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Margo Culley, *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women in 1764 to the Present* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1985); Paul C. Rosenblatt, *Bitter, Bitter Tears: Nineteenth Century Diarists and Twentieth Century Grief Theories* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1983); Thomas Mallon, *A Book of One's Own, People and Their Diaries* (New York: Ticknor, 1984); Gayle Davis, "Women's Frontier Diaries: Writing for Good Reason," *Women's Studies* 14.1 (1987): 5-14.

Study of Diaries

Elizabeth Hampsten's *Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910* (1982) offered one of the first studies to analyze unpublished diaries. She discussed the importance of knowing whether the writer had an intended audience; whether the journals were being edited to include or exclude things for the benefit of an audience. Most personal narratives written by women were from upper middle class women who were literate and had spare time. Hampsten ascertained that writing was one of the only activities a woman could call her own, and we see this validated with Nannie, not her brothers, to keeping this sort of documentation. With women typically seeing nothing remarkable or important about themselves, they often downplayed their roles and contributions, "disguising the amount of room women take up," making the man central to the private and public spheres.²⁶ This formative research set the basis for the methodology used in this research. Understanding how individuals decided what should be included involved the psychology of the person and reading between the lines.

Psychologist Paul Rosenblatt reviewed fifty-six diaries by both males and females on the occurrence of loss in what seems to be an attempt to draw a connection between all people who experience grief regardless of timeframe and gender. *Bitter, Bitter Tears: Nineteenth Century Diarists and Twentieth Century Grief Theories* (1983) made some very good points about the limitations of using diaries, specifically the lack of reasoning on the part of the diarist as to why they included or not include information, social

²⁶ Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 3.

propriety, and the unimportance in the mind of the writer.²⁷ While the book focuses mostly on grief in diaries, I think the understanding of psychological theories can enhance the perception of any event in the journal. These concepts are key to understanding and grasping entries which can often be short and seemingly sporadic by offering a methodological approach which are used in the understanding of Nannie's emotions, mentioned or not mentioned.

Similarly, novelist and professor of English Thomas Mallon wrote on the nature of the diaries themselves including both males and females; however he included published diaries in his sources. A novelist and a critic, Mallon looked at how these personal accounts reveal not just the daily activities and lives of individuals but about the person, their emotional stability and their motivations. Mallon categorized journal-keepers into seven groups: the chronicler, the travelers, pilgrims, creators, apologists, confessors and prisoners. Each of these groups has an intended purpose and some more than others a perceived audience, and Mallon noted that these are not exclusive categories. A writer could fall into different groups during stages of their lives and based upon outside influences. He also delved into the different motives: to preserve the past, save one's soul, gain immortality and speak to posterity.²⁸ This study is important to understanding the diary as an artifact and lends itself to the interdisciplinary approach to history. This book created a framework for understanding Nannie's motives to write, and helped in the comprehension of these documents objectively.

²⁷ Paul C. Rosenblatt, *Bitter, Bitter Tears: Nineteenth Century Diarists and Twentieth Century Grief Theories* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1983), chap. 1.

²⁸ Thomas Mallon, *A Book of One's Own, People and Their Diaries* (New York: Ticknor, 1984).

A former English and Women's Studies professor at Amherst University, Margo Culley specialized in women's literature with an emphasis on their autobiographies and diaries. In 1985, she expanded on the ideas of Elizabeth Hampsten and on the concept of the diary as an artifact. Culley mentioned the importance of the diary itself, including the handwriting and any inserted clippings. "All diarists operate within the limits of their own self-knowledge, limits the reader may be able to transcend."²⁹ She began by looking at the transition from men to women diary writers. Men fastidiously kept journals up until the middle of the nineteenth century when suddenly women became the predominant writers. She concluded that diaries should be viewed as the writers saw them at that time. Prior to the nineteenth century, rather than a place to keep private inner thoughts, journals often served as semi-public documents to be read out loud in a public forum. Inside the men and women authors defined gender lines; men commenting on public life while the women wrote on the activities of the home. "Changes in the ideas of self-influenced by romanticism, the industrialization, and the discovery of the unconscious contributed to changes in content," wrote Culley.³⁰ Personal reflection developed as an aspect of the private sphere, one which women were consequently encouraged to express; it became acceptable to be self-centered. Culley argued that because men were unused to expressing these emotions the diaries came to represent refined feminine gentility, and men ceased journal keeping. She was trying to show how the ideology of refinement shaped the writings in class and race as well as gender. Culley, like many other authors, mentioned the importance of audience, whether real or implied, this has a huge influence over what

²⁹ Margo Culley, *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women in 1764 to the Present* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1985), 22.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

is said and how it is said. She overall sees the sense of self as the driving force behind journals.³¹

Two years later, Suzanne Bunker and Gayle Davis published articles on women's diaries, both emphasizing the importance of audience. Suzanne Bunker called into question the historian and the importance of understanding personal biases they may transfer to these women's narratives. She also emphasized the importance of not making these ordinary individuals into heroes; they are significant because of their existence in these documents.³² Gayle Davis took Thomas Mallon's journal-keeping categories and expanded on them. She focused solely on the reasons women kept diaries, and adjusted the seven categories into five. She first argued the concept of commemorating personal experiences, which included one of the few personal possessions a woman would have. The diary also acted as connection to the ideals of a refined lady, allowing the woman to stay civilized in the "uncivilized" environment. Next the journals served as a companion to loneliness and a way to keep mental equilibrium. As a place to vent, women could outwardly appear jovial and serene when internally they felt turmoil. Last, Davis mentioned that whether the individual was conscious of it, they were lending themselves to something bigger. By recording their lives, women were recognizing their existence as important in a larger picture. These concepts were flexible allowing one individual to fall under different categories at certain stages in her life.³³

³¹ Margo Culley, *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women in 1764 to the Present* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1985), 7.

³² Suzanne Bunker, "'Faithful Friend': Nineteenth Century Midwestern American Women's Unpublished Diaries," *Women's Studies International Forum* 10.1 (1987): 7-17.

³³ Gayle Davis, "Women's Frontier Diaries: Writing for Good Reason," *Women's Studies* 14.1 (1987): 5-14.

This concept of importance and influence in the world was carried over by Carolyn G. Heilbrun in 1988. A renowned feminist critic and fiction author, Heilbrun lived a controversial life, fighting against patriarchy and playing a part in the development of the field of feminist biography. She evaluated the writings of women from three perspectives, all focused around the issue of how women write biographies or autobiographies about women. Female biographers chose nonthreatening topics, which often included women who were thrust into power situations not by their own choice; the inadvertent invasion of a man's sphere from a feminine position. Even autobiographies lacked emphasis on the writer's personal accomplishments with the men often becoming the center of a woman's world. Women who wrote of their successes were considered exceptions whose fate was chosen by destiny or chance. They never chose their fate or success, which was either thrust upon them or chosen for them. Heilbrun looked at biographies and autobiographies over time, analyzing their construction, what content was included and what was left out. Women wrote as though their accomplishments were unimportant and the daily activities of the men in their lives were far more important, that females must maintain an ideal image of womanhood.³⁴ This constant focus and attention toward males can be found often in journals and many historians that use personal narratives touch upon the constant mentioning of men.

Children and Adolescents in the American West

As the study of diaries expanded historians looked to incorporate the individuals almost exclusively connected to woman; children. Very little literature has been written

³⁴ Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 14.

on the children of settlers; however, Elizabeth Hampsten in 1991, attempted to delve into this relationship. Correlating the experiences of children to their mothers, Hampsten explained why these two topics relate so closely. She asserted that the history of women and children are interrelated and co-dependent with both relegated to the sidelines. She explored the effects on children of these rough, unsettled areas, where people struggled for food and shelter at a time when the idea of children as laborers began to be questioned. Their somewhat new roles on these new frontiers invariably affected how the children viewed themselves in their community and along gender lines. Particularly interesting, the fathers and husbands decided for the family an often extremely dangerous fate and with children only haphazardly considered. The grief at the loss of a child was often very severe and real to mothers. With her case studies of these children, who wrote as adults reminiscing on their experiences, she found that while times were extremely tough for them, they often received better education than their parents.³⁵

Elliott West and Paula Petrik compiled a book of essays looking at the neglect of children to the history pages and argued that children and adolescents were influential actors in history. In *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850-1950*, (1992) West and Petrik argued that historians paid little attention to these young characters of history in part due to the scarcity of diaries and letters written by children. In West's personal chapter, he explored the children of the Plains Frontier. He asserted that children played an important role in the family as a reserve labor force. With the development of rudimentary machines, manual labor could be performed by children. They drove simple cultivators and scared cows and animals from the harvest. They were

³⁵ Elizabeth Hampsten, *Settlers' Children: Growing up on the Great Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

also responsible for secondary food sources such as tending gardens and chickens, as well as fishing and hunting. West also contended that because children were born and raised on the American frontier, they felt a unique bond with the environment and the entire West was their home. This connection gave this generation a confidence and independence, causing a gap between children and their parents.³⁶

This generational gap became the subject of Cynthia Culver Prescott's book *Gender and Generation on the Far Western Frontier* (2007). Using the terms first and second generation pioneers, Prescott asserted that while the first generation women sought to re-establish familiar gender roles from the East, second generation women changed these ideals with new educational, social, and occupational opportunities.³⁷ Like Elliott West, she saw children as a labor force with boys and girls working in both the private and public spheres. As the labor force transitioned into the middle class, values changed. Families wanted to raise refined daughters exemplifying these middle class values, not depicting them as "domestic drudges or frontier tomboys."³⁸ Daughters received a lot of pressure from their mothers to perform in a feminine way; however, the new values also offered women new economic and consumer opportunities and independence.³⁹ My research will continue this line of scholarship by examining a young woman coming of age on the frontier, the pressures placed on her, and the development of gender roles for children of pioneer parents in Oklahoma.

³⁶ Elliott West and Paula Petrik, *Small World: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850-1950* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), Introduction, 28-39.

³⁷ Cynthia Culver Prescott, *Gender and Generation on the Far Western Frontier* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007), 2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 73.

Historiography of Women in Oklahoma

Nannie's diary remains the primary source documentation of her life as a child. As an adult she mentioned writing two fictional stories that were published in local newspapers on the work of women, but these documents have not been found.⁴⁰ Though she did not intend her diary to be read or analyzed by a future audience, Nannie's journal lends itself to a bigger picture, recording the life and development of a second generation pioneer woman. It also gives us insight into a period in Oklahoma history. Oklahoma and Indian Territories did not become one until statehood in 1907, after the completion of the journals. The 1880-90s were a tumultuous time, the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 brought allotment to Indian lands, and the first land run of Oklahoma occurred in 1889. The largest land run, into the Cherokee Outlet, brought Nannie's family to the area in 1893.

Some have argued that performing large geographical studies can limit the uniqueness of certain areas' situation. Linda Reese and Joan Smith disagreed with Glenda Riley, arguing instead that the land runs in Oklahoma offered large tracts of free land created a unique situation for women coming to the area, whether married or alone. Linda Reese, retired associate professor at East Central University in US, Women, and Oklahoma History, earned her Ph.D. at the University of Oklahoma. Her scholarship looked primarily at women of color and Cherokee Freedwomen in Oklahoma. In 1997, she published *Women of Oklahoma*, which examined the limited work that have been performed on women in the state. Reese throughout the book argued that Oklahoma

⁴⁰ Nannie mentioned these publications in her 1907 diary without giving the year published. She had sent them into the newspaper anonymously; however she was married during publication. A search of the Enid newspapers for 1902 to 1907 resulted in no definitive leads.

offered a unique experience for women, especially a multicultural perspective. She took diaries, letters and accounts of women, comparing them against each other and pointing out their unique experiences. Often instead of using the primary source documents, she used passages taken from journal articles reviewing the diaries. This method could lead to misinterpretations of documents, something that was stressed in both the Suzanne Bunker and Gayle Davis articles.⁴¹ Using primarily the accounts of famous women, Reese failed to take into account the ordinary woman. While it does use Oklahoma women in its discussion, the study was limited; contributing more to a multicultural experience and less to the Anglo-American pioneers in Oklahoma.⁴²

Joan Smith in 2010 again added to the limited scholarship on Oklahoma women. A professor at the University of Oklahoma in the Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education, of which she is a former dean, Smith received her undergraduate degree in History, Philosophy and Comparative Education. Her article published in the *American Educational History Journal* served as a short historiography using the primary works of Glenda Riley and Sandra Myres. Smith largely agreed with Myres and stated that Riley was too short-sighted in her work.⁴³ Riley's *Female Frontier* looked at women in the plains and prairies, and stressed the consistent patterns that transcend geography. Joan Smith concluded that women in Oklahoma received a unique experience, allowing them to participate in the land runs and enabling them to grow through informal educational

⁴¹ Linda Reese, *Women of Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); Suzanne Bunker, "'Faithful Friend': Nineteenth Century Midwestern American Women's Unpublished Diaries," *Women's Studies International Forum* 10.1 (1987): 7-17; Gayle Davis, "Women's Frontier Diaries: Writing for Good Reason," *Women's Studies* 14.1 (1987): 5-14.

⁴² Linda Reese, *Women of Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997).

⁴³ Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800-1915*; Riley, *The Female Frontier*.

experiences. Smith mentioned the blurring of gender roles due to the harsh conditions. Men often helped maintain the soddy or dugout, and women participated in trade and subsisted while the men were away. Smith believed that Riley marginalized the harsh conditions as a significant force in the development of women. In general the author stressed Riley's limited lens in an attempt to find commonalities between the plains and prairie women, and often marginalized the informal education and survival characteristics learned due to harsh conditions in Oklahoma.⁴⁴

The primary sources documenting women exists, but are often difficult to find. Fortunately, family members who have found the journals and writings of various authors have generously donated them to archives. In the 1930s, the University of Oklahoma teamed up with the Works Progressive Administration and interviewed eleven thousand individuals both male and female on the pioneer experience. In 2007, Terri Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw, scoured the collection and gather interviews by women of women for a book, *Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma*.⁴⁵ An invaluable source, the interviews have their limitations, specifically they recall the past to a very specific audience; the interviewer.

Newer Scholarship

Renee Laegreid and Sandra Mathews published *Women on the North American Plains* in 2011, a compilation of essays by historians to show a range of experiences and commonalities. They took regional accounts of women, refusing to limit the study to a

⁴⁴ Joan Smith, "Learning to be Homesteaders: Frontier Women in Oklahoma," *American Educational History Journal* 37.1 (2010): 169-186.

⁴⁵ Terrie Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw, eds., *Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma, Stories from the WPA Narratives* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007).

specific state or era, resulting in a complete image of experiences on the North American Plains. This collection covers different areas and people to show the range of experiences of the women who moved to, lived in, and traveled through the plains. By not limiting the study, the book presents a multicultural perspective. A common denominator, the environment of the plains created difficulties for all women regardless of race, or class, and this book was the first to attempt to show a comprehensive view of women of the Great Plains. While the region was the commonality, the environmental sub-regions presented differing experiences and obstacles, including whether an individual lived within a rural or urban community.⁴⁶ Either way, this work contributed to the mission of placing women into the fabric of history in all aspects and dimensions and showed the recent scholarship.

Newer scholarship asks the question, how are we limiting the study. Margaret Jacobs looked at the problem in several articles she published in 2010, and 2011. Margaret Jacobs earned her undergraduate degree at Stanford University before receiving her M.A. and Ph.D. in History at the University of California, Davis. She currently works in the history department of the University of Nebraska. Her interests include gender, Native Americans, colonization and decolonization, and the North American West. “Getting Out of a Rut: Decolonizing Western Women’s History,” published in the *Pacific Historical Review*, expanded on the work of Joan Jensen and Darlis Miller, attempting to include a multicultural perspective.⁴⁷ Jacobs argued that as Western history goes through

⁴⁶ Renee M Laegreid and Sandra K. Mathews, eds., *Women on the North American Plains* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2011).

⁴⁷ Joan Jensen and Darlis Miller, “The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West,” *Pacific Historical Review* 49.2 (1980): 173-213.

a decolonizing process so too does Women's Studies. The author acknowledged that women's history is repeating the path of men's history. We are confining others to the sidelines, and Jacobs argued that the field should move to eliminate the colonial from American history. This article explored the idea that history was meant to be an interweaving of different perspectives and people, leading us into a more holistic approach with the intent of explaining our present circumstances.⁴⁸

Historians must recognize the limitations they place upon women in the West. Women, like men, did not stand alone on the new frontier. As historians continue to write the history of the American West the focus should be on developing one history that includes different genders, races, classes and the way they interact with one another. Like the varied writings and theories on women in the West, these pioneers had as equally unique and varied experience on the frontier. Many different factors need to be taken into consideration, no one will fit a perfect mold or image. As it continues to change, historians must be conscious of the limitations of the field and the need to include other marginalized groups, the fabric of history is interwoven including the stories of all people and places. My research will add to the history of women in Oklahoma by looking at the diary of Nannie Williams from twelve to twenty-four years old. She represents a second generation pioneer, and I intend to weave her experience into the historical fabric of the American West.

⁴⁸ Margaret Jacobs, "Getting Out of a Rut: Decolonizing Western Women's History," *Pacific Historical Review* 79.4 (2010): 585-604.

Chapter Two
The Early Years,
Learning to be a Child on the Frontier, 1895-1898

“The is way that I came to do it a long time ago I heard Papa telling about a man that keep a diary of the weather and by this he saved a man’s life by proving that the weather had been different at a certain time, from what it had been sworn to be.”

-Nannie Williams, November 20, 1899¹

As parents moved their families for greater economic and social advantages, the adults left behind family and lifelong friendships, experienced separation, a sense of loss and dislocation. As children grew to understand themselves, they developed a comprehension of their surroundings. Children were far more comfortable with the environment of the West than their parents.² Those born in the American frontier were never far from home, for the West was their home.³ These nomadic children were better suited to deal with the harshness of life on the frontier, rarely showing emotion when moving frequently. Nannie rarely mentioned sorrow at leaving behind family, they still wrote letters and she existed within a state of mind that they would be bound to meet again. This familiarity with their environment would create a far more independent group of women who were not afraid of stepping outside the domestic sphere.

¹ Diary of Nannie Williams, November 20, 1899, Folder 5, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

² Elliott West, “Children of the Plains Frontier,” in *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850-1950*, eds. Elliott West and Paula Petrik (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1992), 36.

³ *Ibid.*, 32-3.

Though we can trace the family lineage for Nannie Williams back to her great-great grandfathers, Nathaniel Wray born in 1750 and Hugh Dodd born in 1780, the focus will be on the journey of her immediate family. Both her mother and father came from old American families; participants of the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. John A. Williams, born June 10, 1848, to Nathaniel Williams and Susan Wray, was the fourth child, second boy in a large family of twelve. John grew up in Saint Andrew's Parish, Brunswick, Virginia. Sometime after 1860, he left home for he was not listed with the family in the 1870 US Census Records.⁴ Some sources hint that he may have participated at some point in the Civil War on the Confederate side.⁵ He does not resurface in the US Census until 1900. Due to his commonplace name, his whereabouts were difficult to determine.

Nannie's mother was much harder to trace with all initial facts coming from Nannie's diaries. The most difficult information to find was her maiden name which was needed to trace her path before marriage. Fortunately in one passage, Nannie mentioned Mary's father as Grandpa Dickson, and with this crucial piece of information, we could trace her roots back to South Carolina.⁶ Born July 9, 1861, to Walter C. Dickson, Jr. and Rebecca Cox, Mary Matilda was the fourth child, third girl in a family of eight. Her mother died four years after Mary's birth, and her father remarried Leacy Hardin in 1866. Due to births, deaths and census records, we know the family moved between the end of

⁴ US Bureau of Census, Department of Commerce, "Tenth Census of the United States: 1870-Population," Saint Andrew's Parish, Brunswick County, Virginia, Ancestry.com [accessed March 2013].

⁵ "Williams Family Tree," Ancestry.com [accessed May 2013]; "John A. Williams," Enid Cemetery, Findagrave.com [accessed May 2013].

⁶ Diary of Nannie Williams, Page 116, Folder 3, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

August 1870, and December of the same year.⁷ Four short months after Leacy had her youngest son in South Carolina, she died in Cass, Texas, cause of her death unknown. At the age of nine, Mary would be living in the newly readmitted Lone Star state without a mother. Cass, Texas, located on the border near Arkansas, would be officially established with its first post office in March 1894.⁸ We do not know whether this was a stop on the way or the final destination for the large family.

No records were located on the pioneer journey of Mary Dickson; her father never remarried, and she likely shared domestic responsibilities with her fifteen and eleven year old sisters. Mary's eleven-year-old sister would marry a year later and leave to set up a home of her own.⁹ Not being able to emulate her mother in domestic tasks, the girls likely adjusted their roles to meet the needs of the family, raising an infant, twin two year olds and a six year old child. The family would remain close throughout the years with letters and promises of visits. It was difficult to trace both John Williams and Mary Dickson in the 1880 US Census, luckily Nannie recorded the anniversary of her parents' marriage,

⁷ US Bureau of Census, Department of Commerce, "Tenth Census of the United States: 1870- Population," Center, Oconee County, South Carolina, Ancestry.com [accessed March 2013]. The youngest son of Walter Dickson, Jr. and Leacy Hardin, John "Lute" was born August 21, 1870 in South Carolina. Leacy Hardin died December 18, 1870 in Cass, Texas.

⁸ *The Texas Almanac for 1870, and Emigrant's Guide to Texas*, Book, January 1870; digital images, (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth123775/>: accessed April 15, 2013), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Texas State Historical Association, Denton, Texas.

⁹ US Bureau of Census, Department of Commerce, "Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900- Population," Justice Precinct 1, Panola, Texas, Ancestry.com [accessed March 2013].

“It is seventeen years ago since Mamma was married,” as December 9, 1880, and this information was collaborated with later census records.¹⁰

They had their first son, Guy Yandall on September 7, 1881, in Wichita County, Texas, followed by Nannie Jeannette on October 9, 1883, and Dot on August 14, 1886. According to an autograph book and Nannie’s diary, the family lived in Amarillo, Texas, in January 1893, White Mound, Texas, in October, Tom Bean, Texas, in November, and Luella, Texas, in December 1893, all near family.¹¹ Since extended families were usually scattered for quite a distance, second generation pioneers born in a restless environment, saw every place as home. Census records show that Mary Williams had five children with four surviving.¹² Nannie only twice mentioned her sister Bernice, once to remember her birth July 2, 1892, and once to remember her passing on March 11, 1893.¹³ She did not mention where Bernice was born, why she died, or where she was buried.

As a first generation pioneer, Mary Williams nee Dickson traveled under her father’s care when she was nine to the relatively “wild” Texas frontier, where her step-mother died. Later, after her marriage to John Williams, Mary would again travel this time under her husband’s guidance to different parts of Texas, totting her growing brood until settling in Enid, Oklahoma Territory. Mary Williams likely was well accustomed to

¹⁰ Diary of Nannie Williams, December 9, 1897, Page 82, Folder 2, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City; US Bureau of Census, Department of Commerce, “Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900-Population,” Enid, Garfield County, Oklahoma, Ancestry.com [accessed March 2013].

¹¹ Misc-Cards, Invitations, Programs, Folder 13, Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

¹² US Bureau of Census, Department of Commerce, “Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900-Population,” Enid, Garfield County, Oklahoma, Ancestry.com [accessed March 2013].

¹³ Diary of Nannie Williams, July 2, 1899, Folder 7, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City; Diary of Nannie Williams, March 11, 1899, Folder 3, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

difficulties and change on the frontier and would serve as an example to her children of an enduring spirit, making the best of the situation. Mary Williams made these places a home and established her domestic workplace, evident in Nannie's diary. We are unsure what drew the family to the area, but based on activities noted in the diary, John Williams, a carpenter by trade, constantly looked for opportunities to earn money to support his family, and likely came to the area because of the land runs.

In 1828, the area referred to as the Cherokee Outlet was provided to the Cherokee Indians, as an extended hunting area to the core nation in current in Oklahoma. After the Civil War, parts of the land were reallocated to other nations: the Osage, Poncas, Pawnees, and other tribes. Also a syndicate of cattlemen leased the remainder for grazing of cattle. During the 1890s, growing distrust of cattle barons and a push for agriculture and farmers, along with the financial depression of the nation, pushed these lands toward Anglo-American settlement.¹⁴ In March 1893, the Indian Appropriation Bill was approved by Congress, allowing the sale of the Cherokee Outlet to the federal government. The date was then set for the land run¹⁵ The Cherokee Outlet often referred to as the Cherokee Strip, or "Strip" in Oklahoma Territory opened on September 16, 1893. The largest land run in Oklahoma, it saw over 100,000 people vie for 42,000 parcels of land.¹⁶ Many registered for the run; however, claiming a tract of land was difficult and many went home empty handed.¹⁷

¹⁴ Jay M. Price, *Images of America: Cherokee Strip Land Rush* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2006), 7, 9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7; Robert N. Gray, *The Cherokee Strip of Oklahoma* (Enid: The Sons and Daughters of the Cherokee Strip Pioneers, Museum of the Cherokee Strip, 1992).

¹⁷ Price, *Images of America*, 8.

In 1889, several years prior to the opening of the territory, a small town was established with a rail station, originally called Skeleton Station and later renamed Enid, for the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railway. Shortly before the opening of the land run, the US Land Office discovered that four Cherokee Indians had taken large pieces of land as their allotments at or near the town site, upsetting many would be settlers. In an attempt to avoid complications and risks of raising racial tensions, the Department of the Interior relocated the town three miles south. The two sides of the same town became known as North Enid and South Enid, though the railroad only recognized the original, northern location, refusing to stop in the southern town site.¹⁸ This spurn created tension between the townspeople and the railroad company. In an effort to get the conductor to stop, certain parties from the southern settlement sawed through the railroad ties of a bridge, causing the train to crash into a riverbed.¹⁹ In August 1893, South Enid received its post office under the name “Enid,” becoming what is currently known as the town today. North Enid, refusing to give up established its post office in January 1894, as “North Enid.” The Rock Island Railway legally forced to recognize the former South Enid, established a rail station there in 1894.²⁰

After the land run, the Cherokee Outlet was divided into seven counties, each designated by a letter. Enid became the county seat of ‘O’ County, later renamed Garfield

¹⁸ Jim Fullbright, “Hell on Rails: Oklahoma Towns at War with the Rock Island Railroad,” *Wild West Magazine*, December 2007.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Gary L. Brown, “Enid,” *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History & Culture*, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/Chronicles/index.html>; George Shirk, *Oklahoma Place Names*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1987; Bobby D. Weaver, “North Enid,” *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History & Culture*, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/N/NO010.html>.

County. One of four US Land Offices was located in this new town that flourished overnight with the assistance of the railroad depot and the land run.²¹ In the *Daily Enterprise*, the local Enid newspaper, John Williams was noted to have filed for land in November 1893. A land patent record in 1895, granted him 84 acres of land, suggesting the family came to the area for the land opportunities.²² Through a compilation of government documents and accounts given by Nannie in her diary, the Williams family arrived in Enid between 1893-4. Her journal entry for December 5, 1897, stated, “Four years ago since we came to this country.”²³ This date would place the family moving to Enid on December 5, 1893, after the land run. Further evidence of the Williams family in the area was recorded by government records that give the birth of the youngest daughter Eula “Sister,” as April 26, 1894.²⁴ Based on this evidence, Mary Williams was pregnant when the family moved around Texas before making the long journey to Oklahoma, where she again worked to establish a household. Her pregnancy was not seen as a limitation to the family’s travel and special consideration to her situation was not a high priority. Both of Nannie’s parents, John and Mary were first generation pioneers who forged ahead, moving to create a better life for their family and give their children more opportunities.²⁵

²¹ Price, *Images of America*, 8.

²² “U.S. Land Office Filings,” *Daily Enterprise* (Enid, Oklahoma Territory), November 25, 1893, 4.

²³ Diary of Nannie Williams, December 5, 1897, Page 82, Folder 2, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

²⁴ US Bureau of Census, Department of Commerce, “Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900-Population,” Enid, Garfield County, Oklahoma, Ancestry.com [accessed March 2013].

²⁵ Riley, *Female Frontier*, 79.

For many families the choice to relocate involved a lot of planning. While women did not always have a voice in the decision, it affected the whole family. Both Mary and John Williams were aware of the difficulties and risk involved in travel and the subsequent work involved in re-establishing a household. Often the chance of improving a family's circumstances helped make the harshness of the environment bearable to early pioneers with the well-being of the family as the main concern.²⁶ Rather than leave behind aspects of traditional gender roles in the new areas, women transplanted their behaviors and habits, offering them security through tradition.²⁷ When arriving in a new area, women quickly established relationships with other women and families. Reminiscent of eastern networks of female kinship, this dynamic distributed responsibilities more evenly, making the work load for each less.²⁸ For the children, while the journey may be difficult, their work responsibilities remained the same. They were expected to assist their parents in adult work regardless of the defined gender roles with both male and female children performing both indoor and outdoor chores.²⁹ So while their parents tried to transplant traditional values in their adult lives, second generation pioneers were living the opposite in their childhood.

Prior to the nineteenth century, journals were not a place to keep private inner thoughts but often meant to be semi-public documents that were read out loud in a public

²⁶ Riley, *Female Frontier*, 79-80; Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: "Civilizing" the West? 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 5.

²⁷ Riley, *Female Frontier*, 54; Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: "Civilizing" the West? 1840-1880*, 5.

²⁸ Elliott West, "Family Life on the Trail West," *History Today* 42.12 (December 1992): 33-9.

²⁹ Elliott West, "Children of the Plains Frontier," in *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850-1950*, eds. Elliott West and Paula Petrik (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1992), 27-9; Elizabeth Hampsten, *Settlers' Children: Growing up on the Great Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 14-6.

forum.³⁰ Men dominated journal keeping, meticulously recording their thoughts, political opinions and life happenings. Toward the end of the century, women took up the habit in great numbers.³¹ While men wrote on a number of activities that expand a broad range of topics, but mostly included public life; women focused on home, families and personal reflections.³² As the perception of journals as public documents changed into private writings, diaries began to represent feminine gentility. They became synonymous with “civilized,” representing the refined lady, who through continuous writing could improve her skills. When women moved to the American West, many kept diaries to hold on to the civilized activities of their eastern sisters and to connect themselves with the life they were leaving behind. As women traveled the Overland Trail, they wrote so they could recall and read the story to family in the East.³³ In this role, women served as the family historian and accountant, writing about friendships, housekeeping, relationships with men, death, illness, children, and money.³⁴ Whether these entries exuded positivity or tragedy often depended upon women’s previous status in society and prior exposure to rural life.³⁵

³⁰ Margo Culley, *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women in 1764 to the Present* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1985), 4.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

³² Riley, *Female Frontier*, 75.

³³ Elliott West, “Family Life on the Trail West,” *History Today* 42.12 (December 1992): 33-4; Lillian Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982).

³⁴ Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 129.

³⁵ Gayle R. Davis, “Women’s Frontier Diaries: Writing for good reason,” *Women’s Studies* 14.1 (1987): 5-14.

Women were material writers, describing their surroundings not through detailed descriptions of inanimate objects, but by the life within the community. People appear in entries far more often than anything else.³⁶ Surroundings were described through the people who live in them, “Our next door neighbors are Welches. Talmadges live on the west side of the block.”³⁷ At school, her friends have a specific place they like to go, “She, Alice, Maude and I went down to ‘our corner’,” the exact spot of this location she never described: closeness to the school, and whether wooded or by a creek, are not addressed.³⁸ Trying to find or visualize the setting is nearly impossible, but the image of four teenage girls huddled together chatting is relatable to the reader. Nannie described her Enid through the people who lived there.

Diarists will often re-read their diary and note how the entries brought them back to the place and time of writing functioning as a personal history.³⁹ Families lived in close quarters with one another, and having personal belongings could be an important escape for adolescent girls. Journals served as an outlet for emotions and a place for self-indulgence. Nannie wrote poems, pasted newspapers and drew horses, her notebook existed as a place of her choosing. Due to the precarious financial situation of the family after moving to Enid, Nannie chose the content though she had no choice in the actual book. Nannie’s early journals were often recycled record material; her 1899 diary being

³⁶ Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself*, 45.

³⁷ Diary of Nannie Williams, Introduction, 1900, Folder 4, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

³⁸ Diary of Nannie Williams, November 10, 1899, Page 1, Folder 7, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

³⁹ Suzanne Bunker, “‘Faithful Friend’: Nineteenth Century Midwestern American Women’s Unpublished Diaries,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 10.1 (1987): 7-17.

an ‘O’ County Jail Record book with pages written by the jailer listing the men arrested and payment of bail or recording boarders of the ‘O’ County Hotel.⁴⁰ Other materials include account volumes, a County Treasurer’s School Account Register from Texas, and school notebooks.⁴¹

After the family moved to Enid, Oklahoma, they established a residence accessible to both North and South Enid. Nannie’s first diary in 1894, at the age of eleven, began with poems and observations on the weather, before delving into more detailed accounts of her life, the activities of her family and the absence of her father. Her 1894 entries read as follows:

Nov 20 it is a warm still day to day

Nov 21 it is a warm pleasant day a little windy

Nov 22 it is a cold + clody day

Nov 23 it is a cold and snowing a little⁴²

These early details are almost lists of things Nannie didn’t wish to forget. The diary was more of a notebook keeping track of books read, friends’ names and birthdays, and new German and Native American words learned.⁴³

The earliest book contained disjointed entries with 1897, coming before 1895, and poems and essays dated to 1894 scattered throughout the book, beginning to end. The opening of the diary contained the family financial accounts, with hay and livestock sold

⁴⁰ Diary of Nannie Williams, Folder 1, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁴¹ Diary of Nannie Williams, Folder 6, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁴² Diary of Nannie Williams, November 20-23, 1894, Page 26, Folder 2, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁴³ Thomas Mallon, *A Book of One’s Own: People and Their Diaries* (Saint Paul, MN: Hungry Mind Press, 1995), 120.

and items bought. Side by side with the monetary records would be Nannie's personal expenses: a pencil, valentines, a notebook, a ribbon.⁴⁴ By 1895, though Nannie kept her entries to one or two lines, she packed a lot of information in a short space, ignoring grammar and proper punctuation. While she noted attending school, her lack of education in 1895 was obvious with school misspelled as "chool," and examination as "examating."⁴⁵ At this time school does not appear to play a major role as it would later when the family's financial situation would be more certain.

Nannie chose to start the 1895 diary with her fourteenth birthday, October 9. Diary analysts argue that people begin to keep journals during times of change in their lives, and while adolescence could be argued as a momentous time of change, Nannie gives another reason for her writings.⁴⁶ Her diary keeping related to a story she heard her "Papa" tell about a man's journal saving another man's life because he could prove the weather was a certain way when an event happened.⁴⁷ When studying diaries as artifacts, historians need to read between the lines. Omissions are important and can give clues to the family, societal norms, class, education, and morale of the community. The opening excerpt tells many things besides the reason Nannie started her journal. It suggested the father had involvement in public life, and the importance of the law and justice system to him. The entry tells us Nannie's educational level through sentence structure and verb usage. It also hints at the motivations of Nannie herself, based on the reason she began

⁴⁴ Diary of Nannie Williams, Folder 2, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁴⁵ Diary of Nannie Williams, Folder 2, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁴⁶ Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself*, 25; Mallon, *A Book of One's Own*, 75.

⁴⁷ Diary of Nannie Williams, Folder 5, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

her diary she saw her impact on the world as possibly lifesaving. Though the original motivation, her writings were not consistent until she again picked up the pen in 1895, choosing a momentous day—the day of her birth and the day her father left for Colorado.

While men pursued additional work that carried them away from the home, women were tied to the domestic sphere requiring that they stay behind.⁴⁸ Throughout 1895-7, Nannie's father remained absent from the family, starting with the very first entry. "Papa is going to Colorado," Nannie noted from October 9-26 and after he returned he left again five days later reemerging April 4, 1896.⁴⁹ In the short entries, a visit to the post office was always noted and money sent back to the family recorded. The mention of these letters in her diary indicated that the absence of her father was an important event in her life and important to the family finances. In December 1895, her Papa sent back nine dollars and in January five dollars. During the time her father was present, Nannie only mentions him briefly in entries, "papa went to town twice today."⁵⁰ John Williams again left his family on May 7, 1896, and does not return until January 24, 1898, nearly two years later. During this twenty month long absence Nannie infrequently mentioned her father, only when it had been an extremely long time since hearing from her father did she make a remark. She did not express frustration or anger from her father's absence but the longer the absence the less she seemed to think of him and note him in her diary.

While the money sent back likely helped the family, the possibility of going weeks without income meant other alternatives would be needed. Nannie's two brothers,

⁴⁸ Riley, *Female Frontier*, 197.

⁴⁹ Diary of Nannie Williams, October 31, 1895, Page 109, Folder 2, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁵⁰ Diary of Nannie Williams, April 26, 1896, Folder 2, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

Guy, sixteen, and Dot, eleven, sometimes with her assistance, would hunt and fish for food to sustain the family. Nannie, with the help of her friend, started a plot of vegetables and herbs and was in charge of its maintenance, “Blossom and I are making a garden” and “We planted some seed in our garden Blossom and I and finished spading it.”⁵¹ This produce would supplement the family’s diet as well as be traded for vegetables grown by neighbors. Nannie’s mother existed during this time as a “woman in waiting,” taking the role of men while Papa was gone, and in essence creating a matriarch.⁵²

The boys plowed and harvested for neighbors, with the money received from these activities being used for the survival of the family. The diary described Nannie and Mamma washing and ironing three times a week large quantities of clothing, and though Nannie never stated outright, entries indicate that the daily washing of close to a dozen loads was Mamma taking in extra washing for money; October 16, 1895 “Mamma washed three quilts and a blanket” and October 17, 1895 “we washed three pairs of blankets,” and date unknown “We had an awful big washing more than six dozen.”⁵³ Jobs were determined by gender expectations, and women could earn extra income for the family as long as it was gender acceptable. In other words, work that mimicked domestic labor done by women did not threaten the gender status quo.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Diary of Nannie Williams, March 7, 1898, Page 89, Folder 2, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁵² Riley, *Female Frontier*, 22-3.

⁵³ Diary of Nannie Williams, October 16-17, 1895, Page 108, Folder 2, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City; Diary of Nannie Williams, date unknown, Folder 7, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁵⁴ Riley, *Female Frontier*, 121.

In addition to these already time-consuming tasks, Mamma and the children would make soap, clothing, and butter that would then be sold in town to neighbors. Gender lines blurred due to the harsh conditions, with women participating in trade and subsistence activities designated male while the men were away. Second generation women learned through an apprentice style education, often emphasizing trial and error.⁵⁵ The daughters of these ‘women in waiting’ did not see their mothers recoil at the absence of the men, but rise up and succeed. These homemade goods would likely have brought in the additional income necessary for the family especially in the winter months when the family frequently ran out of coal. John Williams left his wife and children, believing that Mary could survive despite the assumed limitations of her gender. These modified genteel expectations affected how Nannie saw her role and her mother’s role in the family and community.⁵⁶

While the view of children in the East was changing away from laborers, the harsh conditions of the American West made it necessary for children to continue working. Networks set up in the East had allowed families to rely on the adult assistance of family and friend. With those ties left behind the family unit leaned heavily upon all members despite age.⁵⁷ In addition, new technology allowed for children to perform what

⁵⁵ Joan Smith, “Learning to be Homesteaders: Frontier Women in Oklahoma,” *American Educational History Journal* 37.1 (2010): 169-186.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Jameson, “Women as Workers, Women as Civilizers: True Womanhood in the American West,” *Frontiers* 7.3 (1984): 1-8.

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Hampsten, *Settlers’ Children: Growing up on the Great Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 13; Elliott West, “Children of the Plains Frontier,” in *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850-1950*, eds. Elliott West and Paula Petrik (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1992), 32.

once were strictly adult responsibilities, specifically the advances made in plows.⁵⁸ Both boys and girls would help with housework and existed as a reserve labor force.⁵⁹ Mary Williams likely did not raise Nannie under strict gender definitions; survival of the family was of primary importance. Nannie's early journal indicates she did wash and iron with her mother; however, she attended school regularly, fished, sold items in town and spent a lot of time doing the activities of her brothers. Children were particularly important in caring for crops and animals as well as hunting, the two primary food sources for the family.⁶⁰ Mamma, Sister, and Nannie would frequently go to the corn fields, here they could scare away birds, and pull weeds. While neighbors would often purchase coal for the family or give them a chick or a piglet, the children were responsible for the care of the animals. Dot Williams, seemed in charge of the chickens, often trading roosters for hens, or selling chicks. Guy and Dot Williams and some of their friends would hunt frequently, even when their father was in town. Men had little time for hunting, so the job would be left to the youngsters. Even Nannie hunted and learned to shoot a gun, "Guy Dot and I shot at a post I missed it."⁶¹ Parents relied heavily on children to help which in turn created a generation of confident and independent individuals.⁶²

⁵⁸ Ibid., 28.

⁵⁹ Riley, *Female Frontier*, 52-3; Priscilla Brewer, "The Little Children" Images of Children in Early Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of American Culture* 7.4 (Winter 1984): 49.

⁶⁰ Elliott West, "Children of the Plains Frontier," in *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850-1950*, eds. Elliott West and Paula Petrik (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1992), 29.

⁶¹ Diary of Nannie Williams, July 20, 1898, Folder 1, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁶² Elliott West, "Children of the Plains Frontier," in *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850-1950*, eds. Elliott West and Paula Petrik (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1992), 37.

After John came back from prospecting, family life seemed to go back to normal; Nannie took examinations in school and visited friends. On April 2, 1898, Mary told her daughter that the family was going to move, “Mamma told me about having traded our house for some horses and things and thought we would move to Jonesville I cried.”⁶³ Whether or not this decision was made together between the parents, the children had no input. Nannie was told the family plan and not consulted. Travel could often be the hardest on children, with sometimes long journeys and harsh conditions.⁶⁴ Reestablishing a sense of community and civilization could be trying on both mothers and children. On April 27, 1898, the family sold their house in anticipation of moving to Jonesville, New Mexico, but unexplained circumstances stopped them. When they “couldnt get off and could not find a house to rent,” they purchased a tent and moved onto John Cannon’s claim, “the first claim east of Enid.”⁶⁵ Nannie’s apprehension about relocating was apparent in her journal and after the decision to move into the tent was made, she understood the trials that would come with it. The day they moved she wrote, “We are going to move in a tent I think it will be the end of playing out and going to school and other things.”⁶⁶

During this time, John Williams would continue to stay in Oklahoma working odd jobs in the town. He was at one time a jail warden, a state fair marshal, a carpenter on

⁶³ Diary of Nannie Williams, Page 23, Folder 2, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Hampsten, *Settlers’ Children: Growing up on the Great Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 13.

⁶⁵ Diary of Nannie Williams, Page 28, Folder 1, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁶⁶ Diary of Nannie Williams, Page 21, Folder 3, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

houses and on bridges, hauled bricks, as well as harvested and plowed. The two boys in the family were seen spending a great deal of time working outside the home, entering a strictly public sphere with their father, while the women seemed to continue their coexistence in the public and private parts of life. Nannie mentioned the coming and goings of her father and brothers outside the home with little detail and rarely revealed their private activities, especially in the case of her father. She does note the help offered by neighbors.

The family relied heavily on their neighbors throughout their time in the tent and even afterwards. Throughout the summer, Mamma continued to do washing, but this time the water needed for washing, bathing, drinking, and cooking had to be fetched from John Cannon's well up the hill. Nannie worked even harder cooking meals outside with her mother and trying to keep the tent in order. Mary Williams set the tent up like home and continued to keep the regular schedule of the family. She cooked bread though the process involved more steps, "Mamma made some bread and found a spider in it and we threw it away. Mamma had some more bread to bake and it looked as if it were going to storm and we had a time getting it baked."⁶⁷ Uncertain how long their stay would be in the tent and in an attempt to refine their living space a wood floor was laid and "We put down the carpet and fixed things around."⁶⁸ Storms were a large cause for concern not only for the baking of breads. Large rain and hail storms threatened to blow the tent down

⁶⁷ Diary of Nannie Williams, August 6, 1898, Page 1, Folder 1, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁶⁸ Diary of Nannie Williams, April 28, 1898, Page 1, Folder 1, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City; Andrea G. Radke, "Refining Rural Spaces, Women and Vernacular Gentility in the Great Plains, 1880-1920," *Great Plains Quarterly* 24.4 (Fall 2004): 227-48.

and water leaked onto their things. Cyclone season threatened to decimate the family, who sought shelter at neighbors and in John Cannon's dugout.

In this microcosm, Nannie experienced a different pioneer life with all focus on the keeping of the family, ignoring preconceived gender roles. During Nannie's time in the tent, she really expressed her loneliness in the diaries, with everyone out performing a job and function for the family. With her friends' visits infrequent, her diaries took on the role of companion and her entries became longer stating openly her loneliness. Journals were often the only activity a woman could consider her own; a way for individuals to keep their self-identity in cramped quarters. For Nannie in a tent with little privacy this was possibly a way to control her environment and develop her personal identity.

Anyone living in Oklahoma would know that the summers can be brutally hot and dusty and the fall and winter brings the strong, bitter wind. The 1890s were no different, and enduring weather conditions in a tent made it only more difficult. In one entry Nannie described the conditions with some dread:

This has been another day of wind and dirt everything is covered with dust and then the wind is blowing. The tent flopping and the worst is that perhaps we will have to stay here through all the wind of Sept. and might have to stay through all the cold weather. We cant find a house to rent.⁶⁹

As the summer ended and the potential for cold weather increased, the search for a more permanent structure intensified. By September 5, they had found a place to rent and the family moved out of their tent. At this point Nannie looked back romantically about her experience, stating "I look back and it look so still and quite the tent gone....I will save this and all ways remember the summer in the tent on John Cannons claim." The heat

⁶⁹ Diary of Nannie Williams, September 2, 1898, Page 22, Folder 1, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

was in fact dreadful, the wind blew strong, and there were several dangerous storms in reality making the experience probably less than ideal.

Pioneer women experienced new situations and adjusted their roles. The daughters of these women saw the American West as their home, while following the examples of their mothers, the second generation pioneer women explored new definitions and understandings of the roles they played in society. Adequate homes were essential to the survival of the family, women worked incredibly hard to make these places function.⁷⁰ While men were mentioned in diaries by their simple comings and goings, whether they were present for supper or not, or what work they were doing outside the home, the bulk of the writings revolved around the women's daily actions and visitors. Domestic chores such as washing, ironing, baking and tidying house were recorded in the diaries, and in the case of Nannie; these undertakings were regularly the only thing mentioned for particular days. Diaries were coping mechanisms allowing unfamiliar and familiar to co-exist; the soothing effect of privately expressing oneself without judgment.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Riley, *Female Frontier*, 56.

⁷¹ Gayle R. Davis, "Women's Frontier Diaries: Writing for good reason," *Women's Studies* 14.1 (1987): 5-14.

Chapter Three

Adolescence, Growing to be a Woman, 1899-1902

“Leo and Floy are getting to dress like young ladies and I am only a little girl.”

-Nannie Williams, aged 15, July 5, 1899¹

Traditional gender roles defined women as existing and functioning within the home and private spheres. As families began to migrate to the West in the 1800s, the once very specific gender lines became blurred and the focus shifted to the survival of the family.² First generation pioneers were raised with a certain value system that placed women in the domestic sphere and men within the public. This generation always worked to re-establish this old system, however the unforgiving frontier made transition between the spheres necessary. The daughters of these women or second generation pioneers saw a new role for themselves, one that while it remained rooted inside the home, expanded into public works, school and social activities. The opening of the year 1900 found Nannie at sixteen years old, and that October she would turn seventeen. Diaries served to help in the transition into adolescence by allowing the author to openly express herself without judgment and fear. The long absence of her father, coupled with her mother's matriarchal position, presented Nannie with new flexible gender roles changing how she saw her role as a second generation pioneer.

¹ Diary of Nannie Williams, July 15, 1899, Folder 7, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

² Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: "Civilizing" the West? 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 26.

Women's domestic importance and position in the family fluctuated in the nineteenth century. In the East during the nineteenth century women's role and influence in the household changed. As industrialization mass produced the items once made by females in the home, the financial contribution and value of women declined in the domestic sphere.³ Settlement in the West made production of goods, such as soap, butter, and catsup, again the women's job reinforcing her importance in the family unit. Ladies magazines and pamphlets in the East emphasized female submission as a mark of moral leadership; their value existed as the nation's moral compass raising children and keeping men on the path of righteousness.⁴ When it came time to move to the West, guide books failed to consider the role of women. Unsure what to expect in the new land, many women quickly tried to transplant accustomed roles but found the gender lines blurred and thus adapted their ideals. Women's contribution lay in a co-relationship—husband and wife, mother to child—focused on the survival of the family.⁵

Understanding the specific historical, geographical, and socio-economic context diaries were written in helps understand the writer's motivations, expectations, and actions. Based on clippings found within the diaries, Nannie was exposed to domestic propagandist articles relating the role of women.⁶ Another Oklahoma diary by eighteen year old Lizzie Gertrude Sproat, showed a similar exposure to such material. An article,

³ Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: "Civilizing" the West? 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 26; Elizabeth Jameson, "Women as Workers, Women as Civilizers: True Womanhood in the American West," *Frontiers* 7.3 (1984): 1-8.

⁶ Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: "Civilizing" the West? 1840-1880*, 9; Suzanne Bunker, "'Faithful Friend': Nineteenth Century Midwestern American Women's Unpublished Diaries," *Women's Studies International Forum* 10.1 (1987): 7-17.

pasted to a page titled “Wives Should Remember,” emphasized the role of women to their husbands; “That Adam was made first,” “That there should be no place like home,” and “That a man likes neatness in your attire at all times.” Printed by the *Boston Globe*, the list included thirty items a wife should remember, placing her in a submissive role, vulnerable to a husband’s whim.⁷ Both women were influenced by published materials and their mothers who wanted a refined young woman. This pressure would influence what the women saw as suitable material for their journals and the reasons for writing. Nannie and Gertrude both left out details about love and sexuality, topics inappropriate for a proper future wife.

The family moved out of the tent and into a home located in Enid proper in September 1898. They shared the residence with another family and though all felt cramped inside the house, they were grateful because the winter was starting off harsh. Life shifted into its normal rhythm and Nannie began to attend school regularly, taking examinations and enjoying the company of friends once again. As young girls developed into adolescence they were often told to move from outdoor activities to more domesticated work. This transition could be difficult for the starkly independent children the American West was creating. Girls saw themselves helping with “men’s” work only to be told they also had to help with “women’s” work.⁸ Females more routinely assisted

⁷ L. Gertrude Sproat Diary, 1893-1894, Box 1, L. Gertrude Sproat Diary, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁸ Elliott West, “Children of the Plains Frontier,” in *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850-1950*, eds. Elliott West and Paula Petrik (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1992), 38.

men in their duties and not the other way around.⁹ It was a rare occurrence to see in an entry that John Williams was helping with domestic work.

As Nannie matured through her teens, her entries grew and developed. She expanded her description to give details of school, and activities with friends and neighbors. In her early journals Nannie clearly saw herself and the world through a child's eyes developing an understanding of self and environment, at the same time refusing to give opinions and deviate from a pattern.¹⁰ Her early diary was intended to serve a purpose, to keep the weather in the hope of performing a greater good. By 1899, Nannie began to keep a new pattern; she wished to write first about home then about school, the two important aspects of her life. Many times school ended up being the entirety of the day's entry and showed the significance in her life.

Patterns are an important part of frontier diarists' arsenal, when things out of the ordinary happen, the authors could place the event into their set pattern ensuring control of the chaotic frontier. A successful home was also measured by the consistency of habitude; women prided themselves in their routines.¹¹ The ideals of women's sphere were to keep a tranquil home of consistency where the family took shelter from the

⁹ Glenda Riley, *Female Frontier, A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1988), 62.

¹⁰ Elliott West, "Children of the Plains Frontier," in *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850-1950*, eds. Elliott West and Paula Petrik (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1992).

¹¹ Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 68.

competitive public world.¹² Women wrote not to record extraordinary events but what their day consisted of—regularity.¹³

During the time without her husband, who left for extended periods of time between 1895 and 1898, Mary Williams, Nannie’s mother relied heavily on the assistance of neighbors and the relationships between women in the community. Daily visits with other females in Enid helped establish a circle or network of women who took comfort in each other. These friendships focused around activities in the domestic sphere offering security in traditional roles.¹⁴ Mary Williams maintained her social obligations by joining the literary club and the Needle and Thimble society, which additionally forged bonds with other women.¹⁵ These organizations were likely started and structured by women who despite their busy schedule entered the public sphere to create and establish these groups focused on civilized endeavors. At the same time, these were accepted groups based on feminine gentility and did not put into question masculinity. Likely, Mary would never have mentioned these clubs had she kept a journal because women marginalized their contributions often placing the activities of men at the center of their lives, “disguising the amount of room women take up.”¹⁶ Nannie, however, found it important enough to note in her journal and she fashioned her involvement with other girls after her mother’s example, even starting school literary clubs.

¹² Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: “Civilizing” the West? 1840-1880*, 6.

¹³ Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself*, 69.

¹⁴ Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: “Civilizing” the West? 1840-1880*, 10.

¹⁵ Diary of Nannie Williams, January 16, 1898, Page 86, Folder 2, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

¹⁶ Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself*, 3.

In late 1899 and early 1900, Nannie started to express herself in new ways, voicing her opinion though she was always careful to cut herself off before she stated improper thoughts or spoke badly of others. She began in her late teens to feel a sense of secrecy with attempts to X out and erase portions of her entries. She made mention of reading her old journals and finding “many mistakes and funny things,” and it was not clear whether during these rereads she would dispose of errors in correctitude.¹⁷ The X-ed out portions often had to do with John Cannon thirty one year old, close, family friend who frequently visited and showed an interest in Nannie. In one disguised portion John Cannon’s brother, Wylie “went on teasing me about him [John Cannon] then said that he talked about me in his sleep.”¹⁸ Nannie mentioning this teasing was typically rare, a topic seen as higher risk and possibly taboo. Including the incident in the journal gave it and the characters significance, these were important people in her life and she likely enjoyed the attention with a school girl crush. These details were also high risk topics because of the chance of discovery by prying eyes.

A sense of propriety and a fear of others reading developed as Nannie entered her late teens. In an early journal, she mentioned that John Cannon and her mother would likely read the diary and consequently the writings are short and uneventful. Later, she expressed fear her classmates might find and read her diary since she wrote in a school composition book. The privacy of her diary sparked the curiosity of her classmates who would beg to see them, while she allowed a few friends to see the old ones, she refused

¹⁷ Diary of Nannie Williams, August 15, 1899, Page 2, Folder 4 Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

¹⁸ Diary of Nannie Williams, January 15, 1899, Page 65, Folder 3, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

the new ones, showing the evolution of what the diaries came to mean to her.¹⁹ People who desire to read other's diaries feel a sense of jealousy; no one wishes to be talked about without a chance of rebuttal. Diaries also enabled girls to learn about themselves faster than individuals who do not keep one; they learned when to hold back emotions and how to enact revenge by literally talking it out with themselves through their journals.²⁰

The development of self emerges over time in Nannie's diaries, specifically as she questioned her motives to write showing a development of thought and consciousness to a bigger picture. Nannie placed herself within her environment which included social dynamics of class, community influence as well as gender, she noted that her family was not wealthy but at one time had been. Deciphering the family's past circumstances from Nannie's entries can be difficult. In one instance a fortune teller came "She told her [Mamma] a great many thing that were true. She said that we had been with money but had been wronged out of it. That Mamma got the man that suited her but not her first love."²¹ These glimpses into her mother's past and upbringing can shed light on the values and circumstances of the family. It appeared that Mamma did not have the opportunity to marry for love but married because of circumstance. First generation pioneers saw marriage very differently than their daughters. They viewed it as a

¹⁹ Diary of Nannie Williams, January 26, 1900, Page 76, Folder 5, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

²⁰ Thomas Mallon, *A Book of One's Own, People and Their Diaries* (New York: Ticknor, 1984), 210.

²¹ Diary of Nannie Williams, September 11, 1899, Page 31, Folder 4, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

partnership based on survival, with two sets of hands better than one. The companionship and love came later.²²

Class was an important way for people to distinguish themselves from others. After attending a public event, Nannie noted several class distinctions, “I was glad we wasent the only decent white people there but there were some low white people there.”²³ The distinction made by Nannie indicated that she no longer viewed the family in the laboring class but as middle class. Emigrants were mostly middle class families; they typically had enough money to move.²⁴ Based on her assessment, she would have fallen into the middle class which was important to the way she viewed herself in relation to the people she included in her journals.²⁵ Even though the family lacked money, they came from good stock and could hold their heads up next to the families in town with more money than them. Looks seemed to be an even greater concern for Nannie, she mentioned the advantages of being pretty and often inter-relates beauty and class as being “worth a little something.”²⁶ These elements were how Nannie related to her surroundings and defined her sense of self.

Historians have contemplated why individuals begin journals or continue to keep them. Suzanne Bunker asserted that for the author to define self and understand their

²² Cynthia Culver Prescott, *Gender and Generation on the Far Western Frontier* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007), 61.

²³ Diary of Nannie Williams, December 26, 1898, Page 55, Folder 3, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

²⁴ Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), xiv.

²⁵ Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself*, 72.

²⁶ Diary of Nannie Williams, January 11, 1900, Page 60, Folder 5, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

existence they needed to materialize their interactions with others.²⁷ Thomas Mallon attempted to answer the question through observations of Virginia Woolf's diaries. She saw the activity "so queer, so ad hoc, and supposedly so private," that it forced the diarist to stop and contemplate what they were doing.²⁸ Again, this sense of self prevailed, by solidifying who they are or who they perceive themselves to be, the authors maintain their sense of individuality, while also placing themselves in the large context of society.²⁹ Nannie wondered several times about herself, always placing it within the accepted norms of society:

I wonder if other people are anything like me. It seem as though I am in a dream most of the time. Then when any thing that troubles come up some thing seem to say. It will come out well and you will still be going on through life any way. But every one knows I am strange I cant hardly understand my self. I have an odd face to go with my ways (Different colored hair, eyes and eye brows) But one good thing I am not like any one else.³⁰

Going hand in hand with a sense of identity was improvement of one's self.

Keeping a journal improved writing skills and offered the writer a place to express their faults and offer solutions for improvement. Nannie would often mention the importance of improving to be a proper girl, being kind to her sister and family. Nannie did improve her writing. The differences in Nannie's grammar, spelling, and punctuation from 1898 to 1899 were dramatic. She would purposely ask her mother how to spell a word, and often attempt a sentence one way crossing it out to state it clearer.

²⁷ Suzanne Bunker, "'Faithful Friend': Nineteenth Century Midwestern American Women's Unpublished Diaries," *Women's Studies International Forum* 10.1 (1987): 7-17.

²⁸ Mallon, *A Book of One's Own*, 31.

²⁹ Gayle Davis, "Women's Frontier Diaries: Writing for Good Reason," *Women's Studies* 14.1 (1987): 5-14.

³⁰ Diary of Nannie Williams, September 22, 1899, Page 45, Folder 4, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

While keeping a journal improved writing skills, reading and borrowing books improved the mind and spirit. Books were a large part of life, whether owning or borrowing, and it was common to send books to loved ones far away. They also served as an important occupation and distraction for women. Literary clubs were regularly organized by the youth in Enid; holding meetings at a female school teacher's house. They would read excerpts or short stories, and be required to recite them from memory at the next meeting or offer a reading of their own. These activities were regularly followed by music and ice cream or popcorn. Nannie frequently read to her mother while she scrubbed the floor or washed the clothes, she read to Sister, keeping her occupied and happy. When individuals had nothing else to do, and time seemed to drag along, books were a common pastime. Novels were another way for neighbors to network; sometimes the reasons for a visit included the loaning or borrowing of a good read.

Victorian standards allowed women limited outward emotion. Society saw a lady openly expressing herself, especially selfish emotions; pity for oneself, jealousy, and sadness as improper. For the second generation pioneer, raised to be independent and self-reliant, this polarity of thought could be confusing. Nannie was expected to work hard in the home and be self-sufficient, control her temper, and not cry over loss. Journals would be an outlet for her to express unacceptable emotions.³¹ In one instance, she was scolded for crying over the death of a pet chicken that became injured, "I took it to Papa and told him that it would have to be killed. Then while he did it I just had to cry. They reproved me for this—they knew that I was sorry but should be able to control my self."³²

³¹ Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880*, 9.

³² Diary of Nannie Williams, May 26, 1900, Folder 1, Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

This passage showed Nannie being reprimanded for crying publicly over something as trivial as the death of a chicken. Her parents were holding her to eastern standards of a refined woman, someone who has self-restraint and self-control.

Closely related to self in diaries is the sense of audience. Thomas Mallon contended that all diarists have an audience in mind, whether they know who, depends upon the reason for writing.³³ He argued that the purpose of a future reader makes the diarist exist.³⁴ The writer's awareness of the intended audience effects how he or she writes. For individuals penning a diary for future use as a memoir such as politicians, they may interpret their actions in a more favorable light knowing that the public will judge their deeds. For the ordinary diarist, in order to fully explore a sense of self, there needs to be present a private, faceless future reader.³⁵ Nannie originally wrote for her family and friends who she allowed to read entries. These excerpts are also short and have no feelings or emotions that may be found embarrassing. As her writing developed she becomes more guarded about her property and fears someone reading her thoughts. Though the immediate audience changed, the larger picture remained the same, of a future nameless individual.

Nannie addressed her future audience several times the first coming in May 1899.

She lent explanations, summaries and details:

I, Nannie Williams, author of this book, wish to give an introduction before I begin my daily writings. I have three other books full and intend to fill this one. If any one should read this, years from now I would like to have it so they could read it and have an idea of my surroundings even

³³ Mallon, *A Book of One's Own*, xvi; Gayle Davis, "Women's Frontier Diaries: Writing for Good Reason," *Women's Studies* 14.1 (1987): 5-14.

³⁴ Mallon, *A Book of One's Own*, xvii.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

though they did not have the other books. This is what there is total. I am the eldest daughter and next to the eldest child in the family of J.A. Williams. There is my father, a gentleman of nearly 50 years, my good kind mother nearly 38 years of age. My eldest brother is "Guy" he is 17 years old and my smaller brother (Dot) is 12. My sister is 5. Her name is Eula but we call her "Sister" I attend the Public School and am in the 7A class- (writing is my poorest study) Here is the most important points and if any one wishes to know any thing further they can by referring to books 1.2.3.³⁶

This passage tells the important people in Nannie's life, as well as a possible motive for writing. She mentioned writing as her poorest subject and keeping a diary would improve that skill. It also gives a hint at the intended audience. Though she would here after mention repeatedly that no one would ever desire to read the simple musings of a school girl, early on she thought there might be a chance that her life would make a difference. She confirmed this in her last diary when she wrote, "I felt then that when I was a woman I was to be great and people would want to know of my early life."³⁷ Her unconscious audience was the world. Knowing she recognized a future audience, explained her omissions of details concerning boys, courting, and arguments with schoolmates.

School has always been synonymous with childhood. It could be translated to an understanding of time and development of identity for children of settlers.³⁸ The frequency of entries mentioning classes, teachers and school activities implied that school held an important position in their lives. Once John Williams returned from prospecting to his family, Nannie was very fortunate to be able to attend almost regularly. While all

³⁶ Diary of Nannie Williams, Introduction, Folder 7, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

³⁷ Diary of Nannie Williams, January 15, 1907, Folder 8, Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

³⁸ Elizabeth Hampsten, *Settlers' Children: Growing up on the Great Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 17.

the children's attendance at school waned during 1895-7, the brothers Guy and Dot continued to fluctuate in and out of school. Enid at this time relied mainly upon agricultural subsistence becoming known as the Wheat Capital. Most male children likely would be required to work, while girls could attend school and receive an education.³⁹ Guy continually assisted in harvesting and held other occupations, working alongside his father. Being a female benefitted Nannie, not being confined to season harvest times like her brothers she was able to continue her education. Guy did graduate from the eighth grade and continue his education; however, he struggled, having to take private lessons. An uncle who worked in Texas as a pharmacist wanted Guy to live with him and work for him. The family at first refused stating, "But I think we cant let him go."⁴⁰ After a year of considering the offer the family about decided to let him go, "Uncle Joe will give him every thing that he needs and besige this he will learn the drug trade while if he stays here it will be hard, hard work."⁴¹ John Williams opposed the decision the most, "Papa will not hardly listen to his going."⁴² Guy's financial value to the family prevented him from these opportunities.

Nannie excelled at school, receiving high marks and always in the top five of her class. She received perfect attendance with her name even mentioned in the local

³⁹ Riley, *The Female Frontier*, 54.

⁴⁰ Diary of Nannie Williams, June 24, 1899, Folder 7, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁴¹ Diary of Nannie Williams, June 5, 1900, Folder 1, Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁴² Diary of Nannie Williams, June 5, 1900, Folder 1, Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

newspaper.⁴³ School served as an escape for children from difficult work required of them. A family needed to exist within relative luxury and secure financial position to allow their children to go to school rather than work alongside the family.⁴⁴ When the family's financial situation was less stable in 1895-7, Nannie infrequently attended school, but with her father home and the family working together as a team, she was able to pursue her education. This marked a distinct change in the status of women, by receiving an education, more opportunities would be available.

The Williams family spent three months of 1898 living with the McClane family before moving into a home built by John and Guy Williams. Before the cold weather set in, they laid down the carpet and put up the stove, even before the ceiling was completed. Frequent visits from the neighbors and to others in the community became the second most mentioned item in the diaries. Nannie would often note her mother at the home of a lady neighbor after the birth of a child or during sicknesses. When a woman's husband was away from home, Nannie would be called to stay at their home for company and Sister, the youngest Williams, would be left in the custody of friends. Women created the social fabric of a community helping them cope with difficulties. The relationships forged by Mary likely contributed to her own strength and determination as well as the sustaining of her family during hard times.

A smallpox scare occurred in the winter of 1899-1900. Children were removed from school, and the newspaper called for everyone to be vaccinated. While other children in town went to the doctor to be immunized, John Williams personally

⁴³ "Roll of Honor," *The Enid Weekly Wave*. (Enid, Oklahoma Territory), Thursday, February 11, 1897, 3.

⁴⁴ Hampsten, *Settlers' Children*, 35.

vaccinated Nannie, Guy, Dot and Sister. Homes in the neighborhood wore yellow ribbons of contamination. Nannie's entries during this time contain fear of becoming ill and fear of losing the youngest, Sister. The death of her sister, Bernice surely effected how she viewed loss, it would be natural for her to fear her other sister dying, "Evry since she was a wee babe I've had a feeling that we could not keep her long."⁴⁵

Her early journals lack emotion or sympathy when mentioning individuals dying, the entries seemed almost callous with no elaboration of the story. Illnesses and death of friends and neighbors were sometimes mentioned with diligence, and other times squeezed into margins. Diaries served as confidants to emotions and views the writer felt uncomfortable to confide in friends. They also helped to work through grief and understand loss.⁴⁶ Nannie began to open up about her feelings on death around the time she first mentioned the birthday and death of her sister, Bernice. Nannie, a chronicler, meticulously kept dates, noting everyone's birthday, and even mentioned yearly the anniversary of her parent's marriage.⁴⁷ It appeared odd that such an important event as the loss of a family member would not be remembered. Nannie recognized the fact she never mentioned it before but does not give an explanation, instead she gets somewhat poetic, "I have never said anything about it in my diary books It is almost sunset. She died just as the sun was sinking."⁴⁸ Some women used avoidant behavior, if the emotion

⁴⁵ Diary of Nannie Williams, September 5, 1899, Folder 4, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁴⁶ Paul C. Rosenblatt, *Bitter, Bitter Tears: Nineteenth Century Diarists and Twentieth Century Grief Theories* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1983), 35.

⁴⁷ Mallon, *A Book of One's Own*, 27.

⁴⁸ Diary of Nannie Williams, March 11, 1899, Folder 3, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

and loss was never materialized on paper than it could be forgotten and erased from history.⁴⁹

As Nannie mentioned death more frequently in her journals the descriptions became more detailed and evoked emotion. The most descriptive and beautiful account comes from the death of a baby, a close neighbor:

They saw that the baby was getting worse and growing cold. They went to bathing it. Mrs. Reed went for the Dr. Then Dot was sent again. Mrs. Webb came and went to work too. It was not long until Mr. Rainy, Mrs. Reed and the Dr. were there. Then Dot and Ed went for Dr. Kelso. Every one was at work. We got hot water ready and water bags. Mrs. Webb burnt her hands real bad. After they had bathed Roy and put him in his little bed. I came home. It was not long until Mrs. Webb called me and said that he was dying. Mamma came in soon. I went to Roy and staid there until all was over. At first he was moaning, it grew fainter and fainter (some one said he is nearly home) until it could not be heard just see his breathing. The clock struck ten at every stroke he got breath. Afterward it grew fainter until the little life had flown into eternal glory. Mrs. Rainy was in another room crying. It was nearly killing her. I shall never forget Mr. Rainys look as he said Our little boy is gone. Then he could not keep back the tears any longer. I will not tell any more of this day. sadness.⁵⁰

The entry ends that abruptly but offered an abundance of information. The women of the community came together for the family, offered solace, cleaning the home, holding the child in its last minutes. The doctors served as supporting actors only briefly mentioned and their actions overshadowed by that of the females. Men in general are secondary, being used to fetch doctors and other neighbors, the only adult males mentioned are Mr. Rainy and the physicians. After the baby's final breath, Mr. Rainy would have to find comfort on the shoulder of women.

⁴⁹ Gayle Davis, "Women's Frontier Diaries: Writing for Good Reason," *Women's Studies* 14.1 (1987): 5-14.

⁵⁰ Diary of Nannie Williams, July 11, 1900, Folder 1, Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

The only time men seem to make a strong appearance during death involved violence or gruesome accidents outside of the domestic sphere. In one instance a Mr. Crump was hit by a speeding train, and as the women were walking home they noticed a large crowd of men surrounding the tracks, when they heard someone had been hit, they quickly went home and let John Williams know. He hurriedly left to town.⁵¹ But females tended to deal with illness and death, supporting neighbors and friends, being an emotional crutch for other women. The community served in large part as an extended family. These ties between women produced strong bonds that assisted in hard times, existing as an outlet for feelings and emotions, resulting in companionship.⁵²

Mary Williams was frequently called to neighbors' homes, to lend remedies for illness and tidy up the home during the final hours. In the case with the Rainy child, there were five women listed at the home assisting during that final day, and three visiting in the days before and after. The women often acted in the place of male doctors.⁵³ It was actually the women who found out that the doctor had in fact given the child the wrong medicine, an opiate that had burned its mouth, "We tasted of the medicine that the Dr. left and thought it strong to give a baby...and they have found out that it was the wrong kind of medicine."⁵⁴ All these women had likely lost a child or family member and the

⁵¹ Diary of Nannie Williams, July 25, 1900, Folder 1, Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁵² Elliott West, "Family Life on the Trail West," *History Today* 42.12 (December 1992): 33-39.

⁵³ Riley, *The Female Frontier*, 74.

⁵⁴ Diary of Nannie Williams, July 10, 1900, Folder 1, Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

comradely helped them cope with these losses.⁵⁵ In all the cases, the community becomes a large kinship network, held together by the women and mirroring what they left behind.

When women left a home to move with their family, they were breaking with the past and traditional gender roles. The networks set up by women to assist in the daily chores were shattered and women found the work load far larger than they remembered.⁵⁶ Though the cult of domesticity dictated that a woman should be devoted to their husband, the separation of spheres coupled with the shared experiences of women made female companionship very important.⁵⁷ Too often the sphere of women as just the home, lead to an assumption by scholars that women were discontented and disillusioned, however the many happy times shared in Nannie's diaries prove otherwise.⁵⁸ Socializing and hospitality created a sense of community and offered relief from chores and long days in the home.⁵⁹ Women recorded the happy occurrences of town; graduations, plays, circuses, and celebrations.⁶⁰ These events added to the comradely furthering the bonds of companionship and the community.

Diaries, also served as a companion when one could not be found.⁶¹ Nannie became quite fond of her journal referring to it as "Little Journal," and affectionately told it goodnight. Diary keeping was a time consuming task and the endeavor meant a

⁵⁵ Riley, *The Female Frontier*, 73.

⁵⁶ Elliott West, "Family Life on the Trail West," *History Today* 42.12 (December 1992): 35.

⁵⁷ Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880*, 10.

⁵⁸ Riley, *The Female Frontier*, 71.

⁵⁹ Joanna L. Stratton, *Pioneer Women, Voices from the Kansas Frontier* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), 130.

⁶⁰ Riley, *The Female Frontier*, 75.

⁶¹ Gayle Davis, "Women's Frontier Diaries: Writing for Good Reason," *Women's Studies* 14.1 (1987): 5-14.

sacrifice of time someplace else. Nannie kept writing even when she was tired of it or too busy. In 1900, between acquiring books there was a lapse of ten days, during that time she kept outlines of the day's happenings and when she finally bought the new book, she spent time recalling and writing the missing days. Her journal was important to her even if she was not aware of why. As Nannie got older the diary took on a new role and she started to explore her sense of self. This also meant understanding one's faults and making an effort to better herself. Nannie's sixteenth birthday was a turning point for her. She reflexed on past actions and used her diary as a companion to hold herself to a higher standard.

This is my sixteenth birthday I wonder if the average girl of sixteen has as much trouble to endure as I have. But I suppose I am a little to blame for my troubles....I am from this time since, going to try to be kind to every one and not speak unkindly of any one and never repeat what I hear unless very nessacary never talk about any one or praise their good qualities. Best of all never mention any one only, as I have before said, when nessary. Then I want to do about my self as Washing did himself never speak of my self or actions only when doing so would to good to someone. And a rules of my own make. 1. never get too intimate or trust any one too much. 2. Treat my friends and acquaintences as near alike as possible. Be cheerful and happy but stop short of silliness and coldness. But be kind, gentle, patient, polite and friendly all these and evry things that it takes to make a good, steady girl. Then to them that are "near my heart" all these and more too—a king obiedient daughter. And a gentle, loving sister.⁶²

Birthdays were not the only time for insightful ponderings, new years and holidays made Nannie reflect on what she had done or accomplished in that year. Every new book was a new era or beginning, she would be different or circumstances would change.

The way Nannie Williams viewed herself as a girl and later as a woman was shaped by magazines and newspapers promoting the Eastern standards of women, but

⁶² Diary of Nannie Williams, October 9, 1899, Folder 4, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

also by the expectations of her mother. The second generation pioneer woman while maintaining that there existed a difference between the sexes, challenged the traditional lines drawn opting instead for a re-interpretation of gender roles.⁶³ Nannie's family expected her to behave in a certain manner becoming a refined lady; she was not to seem eager to receive the attention of men and she was not to place herself in a circumstance that could bring shame to the family. Her older brother Guy would often scold Nannie on her behavior in front of John Cannon and her mother would often not allow her to take walks with or accept rides from men. Diaries are not just the record of past events but an intimate expression of self. While they offer a glimpse into the individual they also display the historical time period and associated expectations placed on women.⁶⁴

One instance of the changing expectations placed on women, involved some gossip Nannie included in her journal. The entry showed how Nannie and her family saw courtship and marriage and how different the expectations were for second generation pioneer women. The family of Etta Tindle found themselves in a predicament. Etta, a fourteen year old girl, had without her parent's consideration, was in a serious courtship with a twenty one year old man who she was in love with and the family feared elopement. Nannie had strong feelings on what the right steps were for Etta:

They are terrible worried about Etta She is so young and ought to take a greater interest in her education and they say that the boy seems so worthless. But he seems determined to marry Etta. I needn't not write about it for every one knows about marrying under such condition. But one fear is that they might, by interfering the match, make her future life unhappy. It is my opinion that if she does love him that she should stop going with him awhile any way and make him wait untill she gets her

⁶³Prescott, *Gender and Generation*, 119.

⁶⁴ Gayle Davis, "Women's Frontier Diaries: Writing for Good Reason," *Women's Studies* 14.1 (1987): 5-14.

education then if she see that she still loves him, and he has a home fixed for her. Just marry him.⁶⁵

This passage highlights the new role of parents who by choosing not to say anything to their daughter were allowing her the freedom to make her own choices. They were also not being consulted in the decision. First generation pioneers sought a co-relationship based upon survival, second generation pioneers were seeking relationships based on love and equality, though women still wanted financial stability.⁶⁶ That this boy could furnish a house remained an important point in the choosing of a life partner.

Nannie appeared to have several beaux. The first seemed to be Bert, who emerged in her early diaries described more as a friend of her brothers. She does not inform the reader of this romantic liaison until much later in her diary when she was teased by another about him and his absence,

Rosie and I played “truths” again. One question she asked me was “Which do you like the best Bert or John” That question led to talk about Bert and from what Rosie said Bert was real fond of me. (and I was fond of him) in my other books I never told as much as I have in this one and any one reading them would never catch on that we were almost lovers.⁶⁷

Rereading the first journals with the new information brings to light small tidbits of this relationship which would have been quite juvenile. There were also several schoolboys that showed an interest in Nannie, including Roy Allen, but these seemed to be one sided endeavors. No seriousness came from them, and Nannie clearly saw herself as too young for marriage.

⁶⁵ Diary of Nannie Williams, August 25, 1899, Folder 4, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁶⁶ Prescott, *Gender and Generation*, 73.

⁶⁷ Diary of Nannie Williams, June 21, 1899, Folder 7, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

The second and more prominent man in her life was John Cannon, who appeared early and often in her entries. He was twelve years older than Nannie and began as a family friend. He allowed them to pitch their tent on his claim in 1898 and gave gifts to Mary Williams and the family. Nannie took great care to point out his importance in an introduction to the reader, "But I suppose one of most important character will be John Cannon. For his name is on almost every page of my other books. He and his brother Wylie are two of our friends."⁶⁸ When John tried to pursue Nannie's friend Floy a sense of jealousy could be felt in her writings. Fear of improper behavior can be detected in the entries concerning Cannon, "I saw John pass and I ran to the window to see him. Mrs. McLane teased me saying that I tried to get him to come under the wish bone," and she would often try to X-out the more romantic incidents between them.

John Cannon's attention came to a head on May 30, 1901, when he made his intentions clear. Spurred on by the budding relationship of Nannie and Mr. Gifford, Cannon told Nannie his feelings and asked hers in return. The entry for this incident was interesting and started with "I have something to write to day that I know not how to write."⁶⁹ This a rare instance when she openly and unabashedly discussed her feelings over an event that would be improper to discuss with friends. Her diary served as a confidant. After Cannon asked her feelings, she responded that she saw him as nothing more than a friend and admitted only to her diary that "It is true that at one time I thought

⁶⁸ Diary of Nannie Williams, Introduction, Folder 7, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁶⁹ Diary of Nannie Williams, May 30, 1901, Folder 4, Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

more of him than I do now.”⁷⁰ When asked if she could ever love him, her response was no, never, “do not love him because it does not seem to be in my nature.”⁷¹ She made sure to mention twice in her entry that she had not encouraged him. This was a marked difference from the definitions of marriage her parents, first generation pioneers, had when they wed. The harsh conditions and the need for two labor sources led many first generation pioneers to wed not for love but survival, affections would hopefully develop later. As families transition from labor class workers to middle class, the values changed. The middle class saw it better not to wed then marry the wrong person.⁷²

After John Cannon left, Nannie finally confided in her Mamma and brother Guy. Second generation pioneer women typically did not seek out parental approval or guidance but consulted them after the fact.⁷³ Nannie’s father was not consulted or mentioned in reference to this episode indicating that he had little to no say in the choice of his daughter’s future husband. Love was mentioned repeatedly; does she love someone else, and could she learn to love him. The emphasis on love exemplified the change in opinions, the second generation pioneer sought relationships based on love, which ultimately challenged male authority.⁷⁴ Men had to actively seek women’s affection giving females more power in the relationship.

⁷⁰ Diary of Nannie Williams, May 30, 1901, Folder 4, Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁷¹ Diary of Nannie Williams, May 30, 1901, Folder 4, Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁷² Prescott, *Gender and Generation*, 74.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

The last man to enter Nannie's life in a romantic sense was her future husband, John Sherman Gifford. Nannie met Mr. Gifford, as she referred to him, in high school; he was the teacher of history and physical geography. Born in Carlisle, Indiana in 1868, Mr. Gifford has an extensive resume and quite a history before meeting Nannie. Graduating from the Orleans High School, he went on to study at Central Normal College in Danville, Indiana. He later earned a bachelor's degree from Indiana University, from 1889-1891. Sometime in the 1890s, he married Anna Cowles and they had their daughter Ruth Gifford January 21, 1894. Shortly after accepting a position as principal in Philipsburg, Montana, and moving his family, his wife passed suddenly. He took his daughter to the care of her parents in Indiana. He went on to receive a doctorate degree from Chicago, College of Science in 1896. According to his resume, he is "a high school graduate, a normal school graduate, a collegiate graduate and a collegiate post graduate-four diplomas."⁷⁵ In 1901, he became superintendent of the Enid High School and there met Nannie who was a freshman student.

Their innocent acquaintance quickly turned into office visits, trips to church together, and accidental happenings. The winter of 1901, Mr. Gifford returned home to visit his family for the holidays and it becomes clear to the reader that the relationship had escalated beyond teacher and student. They wrote letters to one another during that time and Nannie worried that her words would be misinterpreted and he would not want to see her again. During this time, she also does a lot of self-reflection, wondering what the future would hold and describing her life as a mystery. She mentioned the first tears shed and the first squabble with no details, "Mr. Gifford came this evening. We had a

⁷⁵ Transcripts of Testimonials-J.S. Gifford, Folder 17, Box 1, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

little split and shed our first tears but, of course we made peace.” We cannot be certain whether she saw the details as relatively unimportant or whether she felt it was improper to mention such things. On January 1, 1902, Mr. Gifford proposed. Nannie made very little to do in her journal over her proposal simply stating, “What will this year bring to me! Will I be happy wherever I am? To-night will be remembered by two for this reason—I have answered yes to a question asked by one to which another longed to receive the answer “yes.”⁷⁶

The twentieth century contained big years for Nannie. In 1900, she graduated from the eighth grade, after attending the first year of high school she decided that summer to take the examinations to skip to the fourth year of high school. She passed and entered her senior year alongside her brother Guy. Her entries are full of descriptions of school and studying at night. After doing very well, she got set to graduate in May 1902. She described in more detail preparations for graduation from high school, getting her dress, photos taken, picking out school colors, flowers and motto, than her courtship with Mr. Gifford. The whole community took pride in her accomplishments; old neighbors that had moved away came back to town. The day after graduation, she described her happiness in three full pages, “Everything ‘went off’ nicely last night...Oh! how strangely we felt when they said the curtain was going to go up, another minute—and we were before those “two thousand eyes”... now all was over and we were left to say good bye to our teachers.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Diary of Nannie Williams, January 1, 1902, Folder 3, Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁷⁷ Diary of Nannie Williams, May 3, 1902, Folder 3, Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

Her graduation from school seemed to be not only from education but into adulthood. Shortly, after the ceremony she began to make an effort to be more self-sufficient, "Mamma and I cut a dress for me. I must begin to think about making my own clothes."⁷⁸ After her proposal there appeared hints of preparations being made, "Mamma has been busy making towels. She said I might need them some time. Dear Mamma."⁷⁹ Mr. Gifford built a home in town and the two visited it with the progress noted in her diary. Her journal for 1902 ends abruptly on August 8, the entry for the next day only includes the date.⁸⁰ Two days later Nannie and Mr. Gifford would wed at the house of her parents.⁸¹ Shortly, afterwards the couple departed on the train for Carlisle, Indiana, to visit his home before traveling on to Fairfax, Virginia, to see her uncle. They were to return in September and establish their home.

This essentially ended the inveterate keeping of diaries for Nannie. While there would be three books after this one, they are sporadic. The time after her proposal and prior to her wedding were focused more on her schooling than anything else. She took great pride in the achievements she had made. From the lack of details of her pending nuptials; we can concluded that she valued her education. Nannie was now to be a woman, nineteen years old and a high school graduate. Her mother worked hard in the American frontier to afford her daughter these opportunities, while the first generation

⁷⁸ Diary of Nannie Williams, May 12, 1902, Folder 3 Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁷⁹ Diary of Nannie Williams, July 30, 1902, Folder 5, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁸⁰ Diary of Nannie Williams, August 8, 1902, Folder 5, Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁸¹ Marriage Certificate, Personal Items, Folder 10, Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

pioneer woman tried to reinforce old gender stereotypes unto their daughters, the second generation were interpreting these roles in new ways. They were gaining freedom to transcend between the public and private spheres.

Chapter Four

Comparative Review of Four Oklahoma Women's Diaries

Women were not homogenous but had a variety of roles in their individual families and the community. This chapter explores those differences and similarities looking at four women and what their journals at the turn of the century tell us. Dee Brown presented the sun-bonneted helpmate, the bad woman, the refined lady, and the hell-raiser, but women were sometimes all things at once.¹ Diaries allow a window into the daily lives of ordinary women, where the reader sees women changing to adapt to their surroundings, creating extended networks of other females, and expressing themselves. Diaries hold extremely private writings, inner thoughts, and uncensored emotions and these incredibly personal belongings reveal a great deal of the writer. Women meticulously maintained diaries for practical purposes; to combat loneliness, act as a companion, to document happenings and the weather, and to deviate from the Victorian standards of a passive, emotionless female stereotype. The following journals vary in length but all are examples of the experiences of Oklahoma women.

Looking at the total experience of Nannie and bringing in these three women creates a bigger picture of the ordinary women of Oklahoma. The first woman L. Gertrude, or Lizzie Gertrude Sproat, also resided in Enid, Oklahoma. The youngest child of Sarah J. and Samuel Sproat, Gertrude, as she liked to be called, lived in the country outside Enid with her family during 1894. She would later move to the city with her father and mother and her mother would pass away June 10, 1902 and her father June 12,

¹ Dee Brown, *The Gentle Tamers: Women of the Old Wild West* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1958), bk.; Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 41.

1925.² In 1880, the family still resided in Jefferson County, Ohio, and her father was listed as an Inn Keeper on the 1880 U.S. Census. Her siblings included Joseph W., aged 29 and Samuel Grimes, aged 24.³ Gertrude and her brothers were born in Ohio and lived for a time in Kansas before moving to Oklahoma, she would be considered a first generation pioneer woman coming to the West instead of being born here. She noted living in Kansas in her journal; however, no census records can confirm the information. Like Nannie, Gertrude attended the Enid public school. The journal she kept from December 13, 1893 to November 27, 1894, when eighteen years old was the only one in the Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division. She recorded her days in an old Township Clerk's Record book.⁴

The next woman Katie Edwards Bemo Mitchell (1848-1933), lived a long and interesting life. Her diaries began in 1865 and ended September 19, 1911. Born and raised in Xenia, Ohio, she left behind her family and friends to move south coming to Oklahoma Territory in 1870. She took the train which at that time went as far as Girard, Kansas, making the remainder the approximately 140 mile trip overland. She moved to be a missionary teacher at the Tullahassee Manual Labor Boarding School and resided with the parents of Miss Alice Robertson. A short time later she "got independent," and began teaching in the government schools for Creek Indians in Muskogee, Oklahoma, a

² "Sarah J. Sproat," and "Pvt. Samuel Sproat," Enid Cemetery, Findagrave.com [accessed May 2013].

³ US Bureau of Census, Department of Commerce, "Ninth Census of the United States:1880-Population," Jefferson County, Ohio, Heritage Quest Online: <http://persi.heritagequestonline.com/hqoweb/library/do/census/search/basic> (accessed March 2012).

⁴ L. Gertrude Sproat Diary, 1893-1894, Box 1, L. Gertrude Sproat Diary, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

new railroad town established in 1872.⁵ She married John Douglas Bemo of the Creek Nation in 1873 and they acquired a farm north of the city of Muskogee. Katie would continue to teach even after her marriage. By 1885, Katie had a son Leon Bemo and had lost another child; in 1879 her husband began a public affair with Mrs. Lewellen.⁶ Katie's husband died in 1898 and she married W.S. Mitchell in 1904. She continued to live alone on the farm outside of Muskogee after the death of her second husband.⁷

In 1851, Presbyterian missionary Robert N. Loughridge opened a large boarding school, to teach Creek Indians. After a fire destroyed the building, the Creek Nation reopened the facility for the education of Creek freedman who established the Tullahassee Manual Labor School. The school housed both boy and girls students. Ten miles south lay Muskogee, Oklahoma, located in the Muskogee (Creek) Nation. The town served as a railroad station for the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railway, also known as the Katy. In the early years, the town known for being rough, had minimal law and order.⁸ Katie, a young woman, moved to the school and later the town alone. She needed to be self-reliant, strong willed and independent.

In 1901 and 1902, Louisa Rohrer Fair wrote a journal, she was sixty three years old and resided near Rocky, Oklahoma. A native of Pennsylvania, she met and married her husband Michael Fair of Titusville, Pennsylvania, in 1860, where he did well in oil.

⁵ "Pioneer Teacher Among Tribesmen Is Dead at 85," *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, 1933.

⁶ Ibid.; "Report of Necrology Committee of Oklahoma Press Association," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 11.2 (1933) 878; *Diary Origins (CF Letter) and Obituary for Mrs Mitchell, Box 1, Katie Edwards Bemo Mitchell Diaries*, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Center, Oklahoma City.

⁷ "Pioneer Teacher Among Tribesmen Is Dead at 85," *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, 1933.

⁸ Myra Starr, "Creek (Muskogee) Schools," *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History & Culture*, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/Chronicles/index.html>; George Shirk, *Oklahoma Place Names*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1987.

After their financial success the family moved to New Jersey. During the recession of 1880, the family experienced a decline and Mr. and Mrs. Fair along with six daughters; Alice, Leida, Kittie, Josephine, Georgia and Rena and one son; Harvey, moved to Clay County, Texas. The daughters subsequently married in Texas, while the son remained a bachelor for life. When the Cheyenne-Arapaho Territory opened in 1892, the whole family including the husbands of the daughters staked claims with the exception of two daughters; Georgia, who married a successful rancher and decided to stay in Texas, and Rena, not yet age eligible. Rena upon her twenty-first birthday in 1895 staked a claim near the family on Cheyenne Territory, her husband would later win a land lottery in Comanche County. All the claims were either adjacent or relatively close enabling daily visits. All members of the family made final proof, farming cotton and establishing a small orchard.⁹ At the time of the journal, Louisa had seven grandchildren with four born during the writing of the diary.¹⁰

The Fair family staked claims between Rocky and Sentinel, Oklahoma. Finding that the land run brought with it the need for businesses and towns, W.F. Shultz and John C. Riffie founded Rocky, Oklahoma Territory, in 1897. They established the Rocky Mercantile Store gathering rock from the Kiowa Reservation to build the store, which became a major trading hub. In 1898, Rocky received its post office.¹¹ Also growing in the wake of the Cheyenne-Arapaho land opening in 1892, Sentinel was created. R.B.

⁹ Folder 7, Box 1, Louisa Rohrer Fair Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division,, Oklahoma City.

¹⁰ Folder 7, Box 1, Louisa Rohrer Fair Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division,, Oklahoma City.

¹¹ Heidi Self-Hoyt, "Rocky," *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History & Culture*, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/Chronicles/index.html>; George Shirk, *Oklahoma Place Names*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1987.

Gore opened a general store and applied for a post office which in 1899 was approved establishing Sentinel, Oklahoma Territory.¹²

The Fairs were an excellent example of a family taking the chance to purchase land someplace they had not been to possibly improve the families circumstances. After the loss of financial security the family decided to relocate and even more impressive, almost the entire family again relocated from Texas to Oklahoma when the opportunity for land presented itself. Migration was a family affair, even including the husbands of the adult daughters.¹³ A woman's enthusiasm in their new homes depended upon her life cycle. Typically single or newly married women were more willing, however Louisa, at sixty three, does not complain in her journal. The nearness of her family seemed to make the experience more tolerable.¹⁴

The act of writing daily happenings on paper made the situation a memory or part of the individual's history giving the bound pages a material significance. Often the diary served as the writer's only personal possession, an important object in a full, crowded household where privacy remained at a minimum. Choosing the content of the book, also served as a creative and self-indulgent outlet for these women. Nannie Williams and Gertrude Sproat both drew and pasted newspaper clippings to the inside of their diaries. Nannie traced her hand and foot, drew horses, listed her school mates and practiced her name. She chose the content though she had no choice in the actual book, writing in

¹² Jolene Wolfenbarger, "Sentinel," *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History & Culture*, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/Chronicles/index.html>.

¹³ Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 5; Riley, *Female Frontier*, 80.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Jameson, "Women as Workers, Women as Civilizers: True Womanhood in the American West," *Frontiers* 7.3 (1984): 1-8; Gayle Davis, "Women's Frontier Diaries: Writing for Good Reason," *Women's Studies* 14.1 (1987): 5-14; Elliott West, "Family Life on the Trail West," *History Today* 42.12 (December 1992): 33-9.

school ledgers, old jail record books, and her siblings' school writing tablets. Gertrude's diary also consisted of an item not intended for use as a diary, a Township Clerk's Record book; she pasted favorite newspaper clippings, stories, anecdotes, and illustrations over previously used portions. By listing daily activities the women gave importance to their actions, making their contribution to society significant. These actions made the diaries personal belongings and represented the women's identities.

Journals persist as a way for individuals to keep their self-identity, for women in the West these writings take on a new importance. Women as the great social civilizers of the West as portrayed by Dee Brown in *Gentle Tamers* came with certain responsibilities; an expectation to be a lady and not let those values get lost in the wilderness. Maintaining a journal improved writing skills ensuring an individual stayed refined and gave women a sense of being civilized. These individuals stayed up late in order to write, losing valuable time and sleep, furthering the importance the diaries possessed.¹⁵ Nannie specifically stated that writing was her poorest subject in school and wrote to improve "Writing is my poorest subject."¹⁶ When in high school and very busy, Nannie would stay up until past 9 o'clock to write in her diary and on days she was too busy, she kept an outline to fill in later.¹⁷

Keeping a civilized self-identity seemed particularly accurate for Katie, who moved to the railroad boom town of Muskogee, where murders were recorded by the

¹⁵ Gayle Davis, "Women's Frontier Diaries: Writing for Good Reason," *Women's Studies* 14.1 (1987): 5-14; Suzanne Bunker, "'Faithful Friend': Nineteenth Century Midwestern American Women's Unpublished Diaries," *Women's Studies International Forum* 10.1 (1987): 7-17.

¹⁶ Diary of Nannie Williams, Introduction, Folder 7, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

¹⁷ Diary of Nannie Williams, Folder 7, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

handful and some lawlessness existed. Her diary maintained her identity as a refined, lady. Katie's earlier diaries recorded her life in Ohio and then her daily school routines in Oklahoma, listing the children, the activities and what she perceived were their skill sets. As a teacher it appeared natural for her to record her life, and subsequently improve her writing skills. Diaries appeared as an extension of these women, and the content remained important as a reflection of them. Diaries presented a way for women to sustain their identity from the east often continuing the activity they performed before moving to Oklahoma; this connected them to the bigger, civilized world.¹⁸

While men wrote on a broad range of activities and subjects, women focused on recording the activities of the home and the family within.¹⁹ Community was not excluded from their writings but it was viewed from the activities the family members performed in that community. Women recorded major and minor events in their diaries; making them important and the people involved significant. These individuals were often neighbors and friends showing a community connected by the women who cared for one another. While Louisa and Gertrude did not focus on improving their writing skills, they did record events in some detail, particularly the visits of family and friends. These two women had a different purpose in mind for their diaries. By recording the ordinary occurrences of the day, the diary served as a coping mechanism.²⁰

Events perceived in the twenty first century as being momentous occasions that would fill pages of people's diaries were mentioned as afterthoughts to a few of these

¹⁸ Gayle Davis, "Women's Frontier Diaries: Writing for Good Reason," *Women's Studies* 14.1 (1987): 5-14.

¹⁹ Riley, *Female Frontier*, 75.

²⁰ Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 97.

women. When entries consisted of both momentous and mundane, we see the women forcing the unfamiliar and familiar to co-exist, effectively soothing the situation and maintaining control.²¹ In particular, Gertrude mentioned the arrest of a neighbor she visited almost daily with indifference, “Brenner is arrested for shooting Crowder,” nothing more.²² On another entry she wrote, as an after note, squeezed in between lines, “today mama had a child.” Based on her entries these occurrences do not happen often enough to be mundane to her, yet she controls the circumstances by not allowing it to be a situation. Lacking outward emotion was a value of the Victorian era and we see here it carried over to the journal.

Diaries presented an outlet for emotions not acceptable to express in public or that some felt uncomfortable to confide in friends. Louisa and Gertrude wrote their diaries in an almost meticulous, repetitive manner. They expressed a lack of outward emotion, mentioning individuals dying in an almost callous way with no elaboration of the story. These two women used their diaries as a coping mechanism, maintaining a rigid, repetitive manner to their writings. The strange became normal and they asserted a “well regulated and successful life.”²³ While trying to control the uncontrollable by grasping at something that made her secure and gave her control—her diary—Gertrude would keep long entries when her parents traveled to “the Strip.” Even Nannie attempted to create patterns in her life, usually when school kept her busy and life seemed chaotic. She made a conscious effort in 1899-1900 to relate home items first then school news. In this way,

²¹ Gayle Davis, “Women’s Frontier Diaries: Writing for Good Reason,” *Women’s Studies* 14.1 (1987): 5-14.

²² L. Gertrude Sproat Diary, 1893-1894, Box 1, L. Gertrude Sproat Diary, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

²³ Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself*, 68.

these women maintained sanity, controlling their environment and creating orderliness where none existed.

On the other spectrum, Katie expressed emotions and self-evaluation, using her diary to cope with her situation and understand her limitations and frustrations, in the same way maintaining her sanity. Katie's husband had started a public affair with a married woman whose husband had abandoned her. He was often absent from their home, arriving drunk and likely with bad news. Her diary became a place to wrestle with her feelings of resentment and abandonment by her husband. She expressed so sorrowfully her options, "I stay here but how shall I go. How can I start out with a young baby in arms to battle with the stern cold world for a living, and for the present there is no alternative but to stay here & bear it with the best grace I can muster." She used her diary to say what would have been unthinkable, something that would take a mass amount of trust to confide to another.²⁴ In this same statement, it becomes apparent that she lived within the confines of Victorian standards, where leaving her husband and surviving on her own would not be a viable option.

Patterns also emerged when the women wrote about disease and death.²⁵ Seen as a socially acceptable topic to write about since death typically occurred in the home, women could express their emotions and feelings in their diaries.²⁶ Katie remembered diligently the death of her child, "The fourth anniversary of little Stella's death."²⁷ She

²⁴ Diary 10.04.1879-12.21.1880, Folder 4, Box 1, Katie Edwards Bemo Mitchell Diaries, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Center, Oklahoma City.

²⁵ Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself*, 144.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

²⁷ Diary 10.04.1879-12.21.1880, Folder 4, Box 1, Katie Edwards Bemo Mitchell Diaries, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Center, Oklahoma City.

wrote poetic entries, similarly to Nannie, who eloquently recalled her sister's death. Avoidant behavior could also be used to cope with bereavement. If the feelings are never materialized on paper the emotion can be forgotten and erased from the memory.²⁸ Both Louisa and Gertrude mentioned death in passing, with the weather and other information placed before as if it held more importance. Knowing that loss existed and people died frequently, these women indicate by not mentioning it or gliding over it that they may have had a very different reason for keeping their journals.²⁹ They were keeping records of events not an outlet for emotions. All the women mentioned the illnesses of family, friends and individuals in the community. Gertrude, Nannie's father, and Louisa all sat up nights with ill neighbors and family.

This feeling of community had roots in the East where women set up networks of female kinship, with friendships being lifelong connections. Eastern women had set up extensive emotional and physical networks in order to share the domestic responsibilities; when these women went west; their workload exceeded what they had formerly been used to.³⁰ The diaries mentioned the family and friends the women left behind, but it appeared that the move did not stop women from creating new networks and friendships. These bonds softened the harsh conditions especially during childbirth, illness, and death.³¹ This was especially true in more rural areas where doctors would not have been

²⁸ Gayle Davis, "Women's Frontier Diaries: Writing for Good Reason," *Women's Studies* 14.1 (1987): 5-14.

²⁹ Paul C. Rosenblatt, *Bitter, Bitter Tears: Nineteenth Century Diarists and Twentieth Century Grief Theories* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1983), 12.

³⁰ Elliott West, "Family Life on the Trail West," *History Today* 42.12 (December 1992): 33-9; Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880*, 25.

³¹ Riley, *Female Frontier*, 73; Cynthia Culver Prescott, *Gender and Generation on the Far Western Frontier* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007), 21.

easily accessible, and women needed to rely on the experience and knowledge of other women. Louisa made mention and appeared very excited when her daughter Josie had a baby "...us were surprised beyond measure to find that Josie had a boy born last Monday night-Oct 21st 1901." Had Louisa and her husband not traveled out of town and missed the event, she would have assisted her daughter.³²

Women would also set aside pressing household tasks to help one another.

Women worked together to complete tasks, delegating responsibilities and making the burdens less on all involved.³³ Almost daily, Gertrude visited married women's homes, assisting in the care of their children. When her parents traveled to "the Strip," these women came to her house spending "all after noon... all evening" with her.³⁴ Similarly, Nannie stayed the night with women in the community whose husbands were out in the country and needed company.³⁵ Katie relied heavily on female in-law family members and fellow teachers. Katie, when dealing with a land dispute visited an aunt, seen as a strong matriarch, knowing she would help.³⁶ Louisa served as a resilient matriarch for her family, instilling a solid family bond. Louisa spent every day with one of her daughters, sitting with them when they were sick and assisting them with their children.³⁷

³² Folder 7, Box 1, Louisa Rohrer Fair Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

³³ Elliott West, "Family Life on the Trail West," *History Today* 42.12 (December 1992): 33-39.

³⁴ L. Gertrude Sproat Diary, 1893-1894, Box 1, L. Gertrude Sproat Diary, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

³⁵ Diary of Nannie Williams, Folder 6, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

³⁶ Diary 10.04.1879-12.21.1880, Folder 4, Box 1, Katie Edwards Bemo Mitchell Diaries, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Center, Oklahoma City.

³⁷ L. Gertrude Sproat Diary, 1893-1894, Box 1, L. Gertrude Sproat Diary, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

The community became a large kinship network, held together by the women mirroring what they left behind.

Socializing and hospitality were important reprieves from the tough chores and long days, as well as giving the women and children a chance to have fun.³⁸ Life was not boring on the western frontier. Women participated in and organized community activities; ice cream socials, box dinners, surprise and birthday parties. Gertrude, while her parents were away, went around to the neighbors and organized a fishing trip to the local creek. Almost a dozen people attended. On another afternoon, a neighbor, Mr. McMachael brought a bunch of bananas over and a plan was hatched to make ice cream and the following day have all the neighbors as guests.³⁹ Nannie attended several parties at friends' houses, no particular reason mentioned; they played guessing games, sang songs, and gave speeches. Nannie helped with birthday parties for younger children, spending most of her time keeping the little ones from fighting. In particular, Nannie and her friends enjoyed playing pranks on neighbors and strangers. One prank involved a sack of dirt and she expressed the fun they had, "After breakfast we tied some dirt up in a nice sack and put it in the road. We had fun watching. One man even jumped out of a buggy after he had passed and came away back and took it with him to the buggy. He untied it and threw it away."⁴⁰ Louisa, who lived farther out into the country, had daily dinners with her children and grandchildren, taking joy and pleasure in their presence.

³⁸ Joanna L. Stratton, *Pioneer Women, Voices from the Kansas Frontier* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), 130.

³⁹ L. Gertrude Sproat Diary, 1893-1894, Box 1, L. Gertrude Sproat Diary, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁴⁰ Diary of Nannie Williams, April 1, 1900, Folder 6, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

Women recorded the happy occurrences of town, with most of the activities hosted and organized by the women.⁴¹

In spite of this extended network, the women still expressed loneliness and feelings of being homesick. The diaries mentioned visits to post offices in anticipation of letters. These correspondences were an important and often mentioned topic in the journals, with the women noting meticulously the receiving and sending of correspondences. Diaries could serve as a companion between visits from neighbors and family and as a way to remember the events in life that one wanted to write in a letter.⁴² The only woman to mention the need for solitude was Katie. “It seems as if I never have a Sabbath to myself any more there is always something to break in upon it and I don’t much like it” she stated after two neighbors visited.⁴³ She, however, presented an interesting situation, in 1880 while she lived with her husband, he was often absent and there were no other family members in the household besides her young baby. She did not seem to have an extended network of women in the community, being staunchly independent at times. She housed boarders and often complained of the added work they made of her day, and she wished for solitude. Katie, however, was often homesick for her family in Ohio.

Weather was an important part of the pioneer woman’s day; it determined whether the children would be bothering their mothers indoors all day, if they could attend school or church functions, and could domestic chores be accomplished, such as

⁴¹ Riley, *Female Frontier*, 75.

⁴² Gayle Davis, “Women’s Frontier Diaries: Writing for Good Reason,” *Women’s Studies* 14.1 (1987): 5-14.

⁴³ Diary 10.04.1879-12.21.1880, Folder 4, Box 1, Katie Edwards Bemo Mitchell Diaries, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Center, Oklahoma City.

laundry. The women documented the weather daily; most were fairly detailed with the exception of Gertrude, who often stated it was “a nice day” with little more added. Louisa began with a mention of the weather even stating, “Today I begin my new journal but my diaries are not much account except as weather chronicles.”⁴⁴ The repetitive behavior was also control of their personal environment. While the women had no control in the weather, they could control the content of their diaries. These repetitive and almost mundane records paralleled the women’s journals from the Overland Trail, who meticulously documented the weather and burials they would encounter along the way.⁴⁵ These ritualistic behaviors supported a control of the chaotic.

Men were also systematically mentioned in the women’s diaries. While men are mentioned in all the diaries, they are relegated to the sidelines while women’s daily activities and visitors took center stage. Gertrude often mentioned her brothers being at the “Strip” and away from home. Louisa mentioned the activities of her husband, son and son-in-laws the least, but they likely stayed away from home with a household full of mothers, daughters, and granddaughters. Domestic chores such as washing, ironing, baking and tidying house were recorded frequently in the diaries, in the case of Katie, these activities were regularly the only thing mentioned for particular days. Gertrude took great pride in baking and helping her mother around the house. She stated “house keeping is fine work.”⁴⁶ Nannie mentioned the interests of each member of the

⁴⁴ L. Gertrude Sproat Diary, 1893-1894, Box 1, L. Gertrude Sproat Diary, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City; Folder 7, Box 1, Louisa Rohrer Fair Collection Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁴⁵ Adrienne Caughfield, “Westering with Death: Scribbling Women in the 19th-Century American West,” *Journal of the West* 41.2 (Spring 2002): 72-7.

⁴⁶ L. Gertrude Sproat Diary, 1893-1894, Box 1, L. Gertrude Sproat Diary, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

household and for her mother, “Mamma has her home work and lady friends and many things to interest her.”⁴⁷

While the Victorian American standard of the female sphere encompassed the home, all the women mentioned participating in outside work.⁴⁸ Women could hold jobs within certain gender expectations; the work needed to mirror domestic responsibilities.⁴⁹ One of the most popular occupations for females was as a teacher. Seen as an extension of the domestic duties of raising children, the job seemed suited for women, besides the wages were often too low to entice men. Women often gave up the work when they became married.⁵⁰ Katie worked as a teacher continuing her profession into her marriage. Nannie pursued a higher education, and worked throughout her adult life as a teacher, alongside her husband who often served as principal or superintendent.⁵¹ Nannie’s favorite teacher Mrs. Parks was also a married woman working outside the home. Louisa’s daughter Leida was noted in the journal riding her bike to teach at the local country school.

When reading Katie’s journal it became apparent that she subsisted most of the time without her husband, performing the majority of the outdoor and indoor work as well as managing business matters. Katie, having an absent husband, took care of land

⁴⁷ Diary of Nannie Williams, October 27, 1899, Folder 4, Box 5, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Jameson, “Women as Workers, Women as Civilizers: True Womanhood in the American West,” *Frontiers* 7.3 (1984): 1-8.

⁴⁹ Riley, *Female Frontier*, 53, 121.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁵¹ Diary of Nannie Williams, Box 5 and 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

disputes by visiting lawyers, butchered animals, and did most of the outside work.⁵² A 1900 US Census record had Gertrude listed as working in a store as a clerk.⁵³ In 1906, a local newspaper listed her as the party responsible in selling of family property.⁵⁴ Gertrude would choose to be active outside the home in a different way than the other women. She became vice-president of the local Epworth League prayer group in 1906, also an active member of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and was elected National Guard of the Texas Women's Auxiliary.⁵⁵ No record could be found of Gertrude marrying, she continued to live with her father and care for him until his death in June 1925. Louisa and her husband kept the farm in Clay County, Texas, and every year would travel to harvest the crops. She would assist in gathering with her husband, as well as the selling of bales and livestock, maintaining her husband's book keeping in the back of her journal.⁵⁶ These women's lives did not revolve only around the domestic sphere; they were not stagnant images of what women should behave like or be.

According to Thomas Mallon in *A Book of One's Own*, people kept diaries for a number of motives and he categorized them by these different reasons. But as we see people are not stagnant and can sometimes fall into a number of categories. All the women displayed traits of Chroniclers, who were date conscious noting anniversaries and

⁵² Diary 10.04.1879-12.21.1880, Folder 4, Box 1, Katie Edwards Bemo Mitchell Diaries, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Center, Oklahoma City.

⁵³ US Bureau of Census, Department of Commerce, "Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900-Population," Enid, Garfield County, Oklahoma, Ancestry.com [accessed March 2012].

⁵⁴ *The Enid Weekly Wave*, Thursday, November 8, 1906.

⁵⁵ *Garfield County Democrat*. (Enid, Oklahoma), Friday, September 28, 1906; *The Enid Daily Eagle*, Wednesday, December 15, 1909; "Spanish War Veterans Elect New Yorker," *Dallas Morning News*, August 24, 1911, 9.

⁵⁶ Folder 7, Box 1, Louisa Rohrer Fair Collection Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

birthdates with a certain preoccupation.⁵⁷ Louisa was probably the best example of this type of journalist. Nannie and Katie developed into Pilgrims, setting out to discover who they really were.⁵⁸ Creators kept a record of their readings and practiced their craft inside the pages of their diaries.⁵⁹ Both Nannie and Gertrude expressed themselves creatively on the leaves of their books, Nannie hoped to one day become a poet. Katie embodied the Confessor, admitting both defeat and victory, the diary served as a means of secrecy.⁶⁰ Nannie seemed to understand that keeping the diary would lend itself to a bigger picture, though she did not know what that meant. Several of her diaries had opening statements addressed to an unknown reader. She repeatedly mentioned the number of books and where in the series that particular book pertained. She noted the level of privacy and a fear of others reading it, and always questioned herself as to why she continued to keep a diary.

Diaries served as a coping mechanism and connection to what was familiar. If looking at the writings as simple logs of the daily comings and goings of an individual, the reader will miss the important, underlying messages about the women themselves. Nannie and Gertrude likely had little choice in the move to Oklahoma from their homes, Katie made the choice herself, choosing to make a life on her own wits, and Louisa did not mention who made the decision but where women outnumbered men, they may have had an influence. Their migration was done together, as a family. Whether the choice came from their husbands and fathers or whether the women chose for themselves, they

⁵⁷ Thomas Mallon, *A Book of One's Own, People and Their Diaries* (New York: Ticknor, 1984), 27.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 209.

worked hard and diligently to make these places homes, taking old traditions and adjusting them to their new environment. These women are not the stereotypes of women as portrayed in *The Gentle Tamers* but complex, strong individuals who created a community where none existed and shaped the families of the American West.

Conclusion

“And as I look at the white, unwritten pages left in this book it seems to say that the future is written there already but has not come so I can read it.”

Nannie Williams-

Women of the American West were a dynamic group, with not all situations identical. The environment offered a place of unfamiliarity for first generation pioneers who adapted their behaviors to fit the conditions they found. They envisioned a better life for their children; encouraging a generation of surprisingly independent children.¹ While these second generation pioneer women acknowledged a difference between males and females, they refused to accept the limitations placed upon them by traditional gender roles. They instead re-interpreted what their mothers had accepted. Consequently second generation daughters like Nannie Williams, had new opportunities for an extended education and greater freedoms. These advantages their mother's often did not have, allowed second generation pioneer women to transcend the public and private spheres.

Captivity narratives and popular literature painted helpless, civilized women in a savage environment.² This image was repeated throughout history, placing women into very distinctive roles as civilizer and mother. As the field of women's western history developed, historians found females were key actors in the settling of the West. As the men and women traveled to the American frontier in the nineteenth century, they

¹ Priscilla Brewer, ““The Little Children” Images of Children in Early Nineteenth-Century America,” *Journal of American Culture* 7.4 (Winter 1984): 46.

² Susan Armitage, “Women's Literature and the American Frontier: A New Perspective on the Frontier Myth,” in L.L. Lee and Merrill Lewis, eds., *Women, Women Writers, and the West* (Troy, New York: The Whitson Publishing Company, 1979), 6.

experienced harsh conditions that would test their accepted gender norms. Survival became the primary importance with all hands working to forge a new path for the family. These first generation pioneers blurred the gender lines creating flexible roles focused on the maintenance of the family. After becoming established the first generation pioneers attempted to reinstate the traditional gender roles, but the daughters or second generation pioneer women saw a new role for themselves. They took the opportunities the West offered and expanded their influence to include public works, school and social activities outside the domestic home. These second generation pioneer women grasped new social and educational opportunities extending their sphere to include participation in both the public and private domains. Nannie for approximately six years conformed to the traditional role of women, keeping the domestic sphere and caring for her family. As the family experienced financial security, Nannie began school again, earning several degrees before entering the workforce.

Diaries are the key to understanding women of the past and the expectations placed upon them. Nannie's diaries showed us the expectations placed upon her by society and how she viewed her role growing into adulthood. The last three journals encompassing her adult life are sporadic and cover the month of October 1903, five months in 1906, and January through March 1907. When Nannie tried to renew her diary writing efforts she began rather poetically starting October 5, 1903, a few days before a monumental birthday for her, the day she leaves her teens and enters her twenties. "I am going away to a new place never to return in body to this old one. By this I mean that tonight I leave my teens....I have used you well, I think and you will be a foundation for

the coming years.”³ The diary also gives us insight into her current situation since marrying Mr. Gifford. Her step-daughter, Ruth, now lives with the couple and she would be the same age as Sister Williams, nine. After living the first eight years of her life in the care of her grandparents in Carlisle, Indiana, the child followed her family to the West. The new family of three were living in Enid with Mr. Gifford still working as the high school superintendent. Nannie stayed at home during this time and the entries exude a bored feeling.

Oct. 13. Home all morning. After noon down home

Oct. 14 Doing little things at home

Oct. 15 Doing little things at home. Down home.

Oct. 16 Doing little things at home.⁴

She always feared writing uninteresting things, with the “little things” she did at home, not important enough to mention. Her mother visited frequently and sometimes brought her laundry so they could do the chore together. The bond between women was unbreakable with new brides seeking company and help from other married women. October 1903 ended with no March to follow. A few pages later, Nannie attempted to keep a journal again, though now the date was January 1, 1906.

She started the New Year praising her husband for being a good man, promising to write daily, and rejoicing at how well the family was doing. The Giffords had started 1905 with \$4,600 and 1906 with \$5,104; she was happy they would have to save a little less often. Her joy would come to a temporary end March 17, when Papa, Mamma, and Sister moved to Claremore, Indian Territory, where they had acquired a farm. She got

³ Diary of Nannie Williams, October 8, 1903, Folder 6, Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁴ Diary of Nannie Williams, October 13-16, 1903, Folder 6, Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

very lonely that her mother was “153 miles away.”⁵ Dot stayed and lived with Nannie, helping her with domestic chores and errands. This diary continued to skip around ending March 21, 1906, however in between the pages are loose outlines of day’s happenings. Using the methodology employed throughout this study of looking beyond the written word, but as an artifact of history, we find that the back of one of these sheets gives us a hint about future plans. The paper is a half written draft of a letter to a man in Silver City, New Mexico, sending a copy of credentials.⁶ Mr. Gifford was looking for a new job and planned to relocate the family.

The family did move but to Colorado. Starting a new book though the last was never completed, Nannie would use this diary more as a travel log. Beginning on August 10, 1906, the four year anniversary of her marriage, she began very vague, wondering where they will live and what they shall do this winter but not mentioning why they would have to leave. On August 28, the family secretly left town, saying goodbye to no one. She then included a wonderful description of their travels on the train to Colorado, stopping first in Denver before visiting Colorado Springs and Manitou Springs. They hiked the Ute Pass and Williams Canyon, generally enjoying nature. Nannie did not seem to feel like a stranger in this place. On September 3, 1906, the family took up residence in a large house in Aspen. The diary ended shortly after on the seventeenth. Nannie did not seem particularly upset by this move and upon arriving at their new house quickly worked to make it a home.

⁵ Diary of Nannie Williams, August 10, 1906, Folder 7, Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

⁶ Diary of Nannie Williams, Outline, May 27, 1906, Folder 6, Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

The last and final diary again began in a new year, on January 10, 1907. She gave a quick synopsis of the year and offered some insight into the family's journey after arriving in Aspen. On October 9, 1906, Mr. Gifford and Nannie were struck by a train and knocked into a river, no other details were given. That same month Mr. Gifford resigned his superintendent position and they started for Enid, Oklahoma Territory. In September, Mamma and Sister returned from Claremore and the Williams moved into a house in Enid. Life continued as it had with Nannie making frequent visits to her mother.

Early frontier marriages were needed to share workloads as time passed the second generation pioneer woman would not exchange their household labor for male dominance and field labor.⁷ While Nannie does perform the majority of household duties, the relationship between her and her husband seemed quite egalitarian. Mr. Gifford would help with domestic chores, one instance she came home from visiting a neighbor to find, "Mr Gifford had been to town—got a roast and had it on cooking. Good for him!"⁸ This exclamation on the end of this passage indicated that Nannie was happy that he could take care of himself while taking a duty off her list. He also brought in water for wash day and helped wring the clothes. Mr. Gifford's presence in the home with these domestic roles paralleled Nannie's participation in the public sphere. She often attended board meetings and visited schools with her husband. Their apparent financial security would later lead to Nannie having the ability to attend school. Though her last diary does

⁷ Cynthia Culver Prescott, *Gender and Generation on the Far Western Frontier* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007), 25.

⁸ Diary of Nannie Williams, February 1, 1907, Folder 8, Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

not mention it, she must have started school again.⁹ She does note learning German words and on the last entry she had learned three hundred and fifty.¹⁰

Diaries still serve as the best source of information on the role of ordinary women in the American frontier. Journals give insight into how a person reasons with themselves, their environment, and with others.¹¹ And in his book Thomas Mallon recognized, “Diaries from the past have been recognized as the principal historical record of the once disenfranchised.”¹² While March 13, 1907, marked the end of the diary for Nannie Gifford nee Williams, her path can still be traced through other primary source documents. In 1908, she graduated from Northwestern State Normal School.¹³ Afterwards, the family moved to Norman, Oklahoma where she studied Sociology with a minor in Spanish at the University of Oklahoma earning her Bachelors of Arts June 9, 1910. In between school, Nannie would have a daughter in 1913 she would name Dot Jeannette. Several years later, she went back to the University of Oklahoma for a Masters of Arts, graduating August 5, 1919.¹⁴

The family’s financial security coupled with women’s growing educational and occupational opportunities, enabled Nannie to pursue higher education and in 1921 she served as a professor at Sayre High School. The family would continue to move around

⁹ Diary of Nannie Williams, March 1, 1907, Folder 8, Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

¹⁰ Diary of Nannie Williams, March 13, 1907, Folder 8, Box 8, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

¹¹ Thomas Mallon, *A Book of One’s Own, People and Their Diaries* (New York: Ticknor, 1984), 163.

¹² *Ibid*, xv.

¹³ Personal Items, Folder 16, Box 7, Arms Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, Oklahoma City.

¹⁴ University of Oklahoma, Student Files, Email Correspondence, Kristen Gregg, Academic Transcript Clerk, April 9, 2013.

Oklahoma, living in Sayre, Norman, Oklahoma City, Nash, Alva, and Chickasha. Even more than Nannie was, both her daughters, Ruth and Dot grow to be independent, women. They worked as teachers, Ruth at Drumright, Oklahoma until she moved in the 1930s to Tulsa where she continued to teach. Ruth would never marry, choosing to live and work alone. Dot graduated from college and moved to Alva, Oklahoma, to teach. As a second generation pioneer woman, Nannie saw her family struggle and her mother work hard under the harsh conditions of the American West. While the frontier created flexible gender roles that enabled the family to survive, it gave second generation pioneer women new social and educational opportunities that promoted women entering into more public endeavors.

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