

MARTHA WASHINGTON GOES SHOPPING:  
MASS CULTURE'S GENDERING OF HISTORY, 1910-1950

by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation expands the definition of women's social activism to include the innovative work of activists, intellectuals, and corporations creating popular historical narratives. As twentieth century American women assumed new social, political, and economic roles, popular media sentimentalized historical figures like Martha Washington as models for present-day domesticity, constructing colonial and antebellum womanhood as historical precedents for contemporary gendered and racialized divisions of labor. Magazines, advertisements, radio programs, films, and product packaging idealized the middle-class female consumer's domestic role as a timeless contribution to American democracy, encouraging contemporary women to continue privileging familial over political roles.

At the same time, women advertisers, magazine editors, department store executives, radio writers, and popular historians responded, constructing more dynamic narratives of progress in women's status, both in their own work and in their collective efforts on behalf of women's professional rights. Recent scholarship identifies amateur writing and historical preservation as alternative careers forged by twentieth century

women excluded from the academic profession. This dissertation reveals that popular media also narrated the history of women as key players in political and economic change. In the late 1930s, the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women, a prominent professional group, produced a series of local radio programs dramatizing the lives of transgressive female historical figures. Simultaneously, historian Mary Ritter Beard and journalist Eva vom Baur Hansl collaborated with the U. S. Office of Education to produce national radio programs dramatizing women's roles as "co-makers" of history and promoting Beard's development of the World Center for Women's Archives.

These constructions of the past made claims for women's professional capabilities and historical significance, but they also drew on the dominant culture's pre-existing cultural scripts for gender, racial, and national differences. Celebrations of business women's histories often assumed white middle-class cultural superiority. As second wave feminists in the 1960s and 1970s strove to reclaim women's history as a route to feminist consciousness, reception of their efforts was shaped by these complex constructions of women's history that had become central to mass media. This dissertation thus reveals the integral role of popular culture in defining "women's history" for public audiences.

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## Introduction

During the twentieth century, magazines, advertisements, film, and musical theater regularly deployed sentimentalized visions of the American past. Indeed they often constructed history as an ideal for contemporary consumers to emulate. By asserting continuity between the past and the present, writers, advertisers, and filmmakers strove to naturalize contemporary conceptions of gender, racial, ethnic, and national differences. As historian Jackson Lears has argued, celebration of a diminishing rural, preindustrial life offered reassurance during the economic and social disruptions of the 1930s.<sup>1</sup> Advertisements linked modern products with historical imagery, but in doing so, they promoted an ahistorical “pseudotraditionalism” that divorced objects from their specific contexts and that distorted the past in service of contemporary stereotypes.<sup>2</sup> Advertisements presented the Aunt Jemima character, for example, a fictional antebellum slave originally inspired by minstrel performance, as an actual slave who had worked on a southern plantation and who continued, in the present, to serve happily.<sup>3</sup> In a climate of racial violence and hostility towards immigrants, popular entertainments like the 1936 bestseller and 1939 film *Gone With the Wind* created a mythic past where white superiority was readily and happily accepted.<sup>4</sup> Dramatizing differences in mores and ability between white American women and their “others,” popular culture stereotyped non-white, and non-Western, women, ultimately suggesting that such women exhibited difference in both the past and in the present.

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<sup>1</sup> T. J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 382-3.

<sup>2</sup> Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 385-86.

<sup>3</sup> M. M. Manring, *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 74-78. First used in 1889 to promote pancake flour products, “Aunt Jemima” became a prominent mass-marketed brand when acquired by the Quaker Oats Company in 1925. Manring, 61-62.

<sup>4</sup> Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 164-65, 258-68.

Simultaneously, popular media relied on iconic moments and figures, typically the “founding fathers” of colonial history, to define the trajectory of progress. Women played subordinate, supportive roles in these narratives as natural, patriotic nurturers. Yet popular culture’s emphasis on continuities of American character across time made women essential to the democratic process. Female scholars had begun to explore women’s history, using print and radio to promote the possibility for change in the roles and status of contemporary women. Twentieth-century consumers thus encountered images of both continuity and change in women’s roles. Although corporations mythologized women’s domestic histories to promote products, contemporary media’s juxtaposition of historical interpretations ultimately called the authority of gender expectations into question.

A scrapbook of personal greetings sent to the Estes family of Iron Gate, Virginia, between 1929 and 1934 compiled historically themed advertisements, articles, and illustrations that elevated colonial American leaders as models for Depression-era citizenship. The book juxtaposed contemporary ephemera, including train schedules and reports on such current events as the Lindbergh baby kidnapping, with newspaper clippings referencing the iconic colonial founding fathers.<sup>5</sup> This collection combined commercial and editorial clippings, their diversity reflecting extended reader attention to popular culture’s historical themes. Even the Estes’ documents of contemporary life reveal the centrality of the past in the twentieth-century media’s construction of American identity. Coverage of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s presidential

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<sup>5</sup> Estes scrapbook, Box 34, Archives Center Scrapbooks Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. This collection includes scrapbooks of Emma Estes and Mr. and Mrs. William Estes. I am grateful to archivist Susan Strange for her suggestions on scrapbooks in the Archives Center’s collections.

appointments detailed the hobbies of Cabinet members' wives, including Daughters of the American Revolution activities and the "passion" of "Mrs. William Woodin...for anything colonial." An advertisement for the First National Bank in Clifton Forge, Virginia, included a George Washington portrait and presented the first President as a model for contemporary Americans. As an encouragement to Depression-era readers to "Start Saving Regularly NOW," the advertisement explained, "By banking money regularly [Washington] learned the value of money and self discipline which prepared him for the high office of President." Another First National Bank advertisement urged readers to be honest with themselves about the need for saving, retelling the mythic story that "every school boy knows" of the young George Washington's admission to cutting down a cherry tree. Indicating the resonance of this patriotism, the scrapbook embellishes the ad with a colorful illustration of cherries and with the image of a George Washington bicentennial teaspoon offered through a mail-in coupon. Incorporation of historically-themed advertisements into such patriotic celebration demonstrates that individual consumers applied mass media to their own narratives of the nation's history.<sup>6</sup>

Reflecting popular culture's emphasis on "great men" as the makers of historical progress, the included clippings simultaneously define women's roles by detailing the supportive acts of historical icons like Betsy Ross, and applauding the DAR women who provided guardianship over the nation's heritage. A serialized, illustrated strip by James W. Brooks traced "GEORGE WASHINGTON'S TRAVELS" through his military ventures and influence on iconic moments of American history. Simultaneously, the series' George Washington facts celebrated colonial women's contributions to the

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<sup>6</sup> Undated clippings: "Cabinet Wives Differ in Choice of Pursuits," "George Washington's Travels," First National Bank advertisements, Estes scrapbook, Box 34, Archives Center Scrapbooks Collection, Archives Center, NMAH.

American Revolution. As one episode explained, Washington served on the Flag Committee in 1776 that selected “Betsy Ross, an expert needlewoman,” who sewed the new nation’s flag in her home. Another installment illustrated the contribution of Mary Murray, “a loyal American [who] entertained British officers with a sumptuous dinner at her home while Washington got his colonial troops beyond British reach.” Such narratives presented domestic roles, as applied to patriotic activism, as women’s sphere of historical influence.<sup>7</sup>

Between 1910 and 1950, popular media frequently promoted earlier eras’ ideals of femininity and domesticity, even as American women assumed new social, political, and economic roles. Magazines, advertisements, radio, and film proposed sentimentalized historical figures like Martha Washington as models for women. The prescription of the idealized woman’s domestic role as a timeless contribution to American democracy asserted continuity in the face of technological change, the nation’s economic challenges, and World Wars I and II. At the same time, advertisers, magazine editors, department store executives, radio writers, and popular historians dramatized women’s dynamic influence on public life. This dissertation analyzes the creation and consumption of historical images of women in advertising and print media, radio, popular film, department store exhibits, and the design and packaging of products themselves. In each of these fields, prescriptions for gendered behavior shaped historical narratives and definitions of “history” itself. Ultimately, gendered depictions of the past became central to such diverse formats as the dramatic Broadway musical and the mass produced greeting card. Depictions of the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries pervaded

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<sup>7</sup> Undated clippings, James W. Brooks, “George Washington’s Travels,” Estes scrapbook, Box 34, Archives Center Scrapbooks Collection, Archives Center, NMAH.

twentieth-century American media, both prescribing domestic roles for women and encouraging women's public participation.

At the same time, female professionals and women's organizations melded popular themes with their activist and scholarly efforts to raise awareness of women's history. Recent scholarship has broadened definitions of the twentieth-century "historian" beyond the strict confines of the university. Bonnie G. Smith's *The Gender of History* identified amateur writing and historical preservation as alternative careers forged by women excluded from the academic historical profession. When the definition of the ideal historian as male restricted women's participation in university life, women marginalized by the professionalization of historical study built careers as teachers, a vocation deemed more suitable to their abilities, or wrote in the devalued genre of amateur history.<sup>8</sup> In the careers they forged, women historians produced innovative work that anticipated later trends in the historical profession, including the use of cultural sources, material culture, and everyday life to study the past.

The gendered construction of "history" that Smith describes shaped public and scholarly responses to women historians' work. In *Women & the Historical Enterprise in America*, Julie Des Jardins argues that the transformation of the historical field has helped obscure the influence of the amateur scholars she calls "domestic women." Innovative turn-of-the century writers including Alice Morse Earle and Anne Hollingsworth Wharton popularized historical studies of women and their everyday lives, thereby narrating women's contributions to the nation.<sup>9</sup> Des Jardins proposes that these writers,

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<sup>8</sup> Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 7-9, 157-60.

<sup>9</sup> Julie Des Jardins, *Women & the Historical Enterprise in America: Gender, Race, and the Politics of Memory, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 17.

as well as female preservationists, archivists, and pageant organizers, “may have unwittingly paved the way” for the Progressive female historians who undertook research as feminists and activists.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, the dominant cultural discourse popularized by anti-modernist groups like the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Society of Colonial Dames limited the popular impact of such progressive history. These patriotic groups invoked a mythic colonial past to ease anxiety about the social and cultural changes of modernization, industrialization, commercialization, and urbanization. In doing so, they elevated a version of American history that omitted nearly everyone but genteel white women and men.<sup>11</sup>

Along with the women Smith and Des Jardins identified, copywriters, magazine editors, screenwriters, and corporate executives also acted as historians.<sup>12</sup> Early-twentieth-century professional groups, including women’s advertising societies, identified historical precedents for women’s involvement in business and politics. Within the advertising industry, trade journals, professional organizations, and agencies invoked American history, depicting key moments in the evolution of American government as milestones in the evolution of media. Similarly, women working in popular media adapted these themes to support their professional and artistic goals. Even before the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 4, 67-8.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 67-8.

<sup>12</sup> Artists also responded to popular culture’s treatment of the past. Collection and assemblage of ephemeral objects provided an avenue for artist Joseph Cornell to transcend the pre-defined meanings of commodities. Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 398-403. As Jackson Lears argues in *No Place of Grace*, the eclectic urban architectural style in turn-of-the-twentieth-century bourgeois aesthetics disrupted the connection between objects and their historical contexts. In response, antimodernists embraced medievalism and the artisanal tradition as an alternative to consumption. T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

emergence of second wave feminism and scholarly efforts to reclaim “women’s history,” women workers invoked the past to prescribe and challenge gender norms.

Moreover, the portrayals of women’s history in popular media intersected with the work of activists and scholars. Just as historical consultants to Depression era radio dramas often held political beliefs divergent from those of the shows’ corporate sponsors, multiple perspectives collided in the assembly of a women’s magazine or a cosmetics product line invoking the past.<sup>13</sup> Popular media fuelled the public’s fascination with the past, strengthening interest in amateur and professional women’s work; activist and scholarly women writers even contributed to mass culture. Nevertheless, these popular versions of history typically ignored African-American, Native American, and working-class women, subjects that many amateur and professional historians did acknowledge. Simultaneously, while some portrayals celebrated women transgressing traditional norms, others sentimentalized domesticity as American women’s only valid contribution. These competing narratives shaped women’s everyday lives and their activism.

The chapters in this dissertation cover the creation and consumption of these various media. Because of the difficulty historians face in determining intention or reception for many popular artifacts, ubiquitous icons like Martha Washington or the idealized “Colonial Dame” provide crucial examples. The personalities used to promote different products and their circulation across various media provide a unique window on the function of historical images of women. Chapter one analyzes print culture,

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<sup>13</sup> While popular culture thus molded the past to naturalize contemporary ideals, scholarly perspectives also shaped popular depictions of the past. The historian William L. Bird has revealed corporations’ collaboration with scholarly historians to create a new narrative format, the historical radio drama, to challenge New Deal policy. Academic historians and serious playwrights collaborated with advertising agency BBDO and corporate sponsor DuPont, invoking tradition to make the *Cavalcade of America* radio program’s political critique palatable to the American public. William L. Bird, Jr., “*Better Living*”: *Advertising, Media, and the New Vocabulary of Business Leadership, 1935-1955* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 72-85.



emphasizing women's magazines and advertisements during the 1910s and 1920s. As women's suffrage and new household technologies altered women's roles, popular media frequently promoted earlier ideals of femininity and domesticity. Furthermore, during a period marked by change in women's roles, magazines and advertisements celebrated consumption as a constant in women's lives and an important contribution to history. Notably, this use of material objects to conceptualize women's past occurred just as academic and amateur female historians turned to material culture as historical evidence. Such analyses allowed for the possibility for change in women's roles over time and, in some cases, reached mass audiences.

Chapter two analyzes the activist work of advertisers from the 1910s through the 1930s. Professional associations used historical themes to assert women's significance to the advertising industry, and by extension, to public life as a whole. Groups including the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women and the Advertising Women of New York produced radio programs, charity events, and career seminars. This work promoted new facets of such familiar icons as the patriotic Colonial Dame and the Quaker Maid.

Chapter three focuses on national radio broadcasts from 1930 through 1945, which frequently relied on American history to interpret contemporary life. Corporate-sponsored series (*Cavalcade of America*, *A Woman of America*) emphasized the pull between the "traditional" and the "modern" in the progression of individual women's lives. Many of these radio programs identified enterprise and patriotism as characteristics that linked Americans, male and female, past and present. While commercial series like *Cavalcade of America* used the past to make a corporate critique of the New Deal more palatable to American audiences, historian Mary Ritter Beard and

journalist Eva vom Baur Hansl collaborated with the Works Progress Administration and the U. S. Office of Education to produce national radio programs dramatizing female contributions to democracy. These 1939 and 1940 broadcasts adapted the activist goal of publicizing women's history to New Deal educational objectives.

Continuing the analysis of popular media as a forum for activist and scholarly interventions in the study of women's history, chapter four considers cross-media collaborations that produced historical narratives in 1940s film, magazines, and comic books. For example, each issue of the quarterly *Wonder Woman* comic, which debuted in 1943, featured a brief historical biography of "Wonder Women of History" including social reformers, celebrated nurses, and even suffragists.<sup>14</sup> Women's rights activist Rose Arnold Powell shaped this content by lobbying for a Susan B. Anthony entry. Nevertheless, entertainment genres adhered to romantic narratives and other conventions which reflected contemporary assumptions about gender roles, even when depicting atypical figures like Anthony. Simultaneously, women's professional networks across different segments of consumer culture made the past a common language not only to promote individual products but also to celebrate women's increasing visibility in business. With the rise of "public relations" as an advertising strategy, multiple media frequently worked together to promote individual products or industries. Celebrations of women's history played central roles in these marketing campaigns.

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<sup>14</sup> *Wonder Woman*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (June-July 1943). In 1972 the first issue of second wave feminist publication *Ms.* reintroduced the 1940s "Wonder Woman" to symbolize women's self-sufficiency, an image which resonated with contemporary feminists who, like founding editor Gloria Steinem, had read the comic in their youth. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 58-61. In spite of this revival, activists and scholars have not emphasized the explicit construction of women's histories that early *Wonder Woman* readers encountered.

Chapter five analyzes consumer products, including the design and packaging of cosmetics, food items, and domestic objects like china. Greeting cards and cookbooks are also included among items whose constructions of the past played significant roles in consumers' everyday lives. References to the past in the names and packaging of products served as shorthand for the idealization of domesticity. In the mass-produced greeting card, multiple corporations repeated similar iconic scenes of colonial and nineteenth-century family life.<sup>15</sup> Simultaneously, serious consideration of objects as markers of change in women's lives also appeared in popular culture. This chapter provides a case study of Avon Products, Inc., which invoked the past both to appeal to consumers and to celebrate the company's history of promoting women in business. The company's products, as well as consumers' and employees' uses of these objects, offer unique evidence of how women conceptualized their roles in history. During the 1940s, Avon frequently used historical themes in designing and packaging cosmetics; for example, the company introduced a "Betsy Ross Red" lipstick shade in 1941.<sup>16</sup> Countless cosmetic packages and advertisements repeated idealized scenes like a turn-of-the-twentieth-century family greeting Christmas visitors. In 1943, a series of advertisements in mass market women's magazines celebrated historical "American Heroines."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Barry Shank argues that twentieth-century greeting cards manipulated the nostalgia for personalized human interactions that was inspired by the type of modern, efficient corporations that produced greeting cards and reshaped industrial workplaces. Mass market cards incorporated anxiety about social change in images celebrating the innocence of childhood or of previous eras. Provoking desire for self-contained domestic realms of childhood and femininity, greeting cards defined emotional nurture as a familial and feminine responsibility separate from the public space of business. Barry Shank, *A Token of My Affection: Greeting Cards and American Business Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 9, 205-6.

<sup>16</sup> "Announcing Betsy Ross Red," *Avon Outlook* (April 29-May 14, 1941), Imprints Division, Hagley.Museum and Library.

<sup>17</sup> "American Heroines" advertisements, Avon Records, RG I, Series 7, Box OS-16, Hagley.

Simultaneously, Avon encouraged its sales representatives to take pride in the company's innovative history of female entrepreneurship. In 1945, Avon asked sales representatives to donate vintage cosmetic packaging from their own collections and those of their clients to a new corporate museum. In their enthusiastic responses, members of the sales force expressed pride in the company's history and in their contributions to its museum, writing appreciative letters that recounted the history of the products they had retained for decades. These letters reveal that the use of objects to connect with history was not merely imposed from the top by corporations and advertisers. Women had retained products, associating them with their memories of service on Avon's sales force. Through the circulation of objects used by saleswomen and ultimately returned to the corporate museum, the corporation and individual women collaborated. Avon created advertisements and products to narrate the company's history and to construct women's roles in business, while Avon employees and consumers used company promotions to construct their own places in history.<sup>18</sup>

The circulation of these complex historical constructions in popular culture merits scholarly attention. As second wave feminists in the 1960s and 1970s strove to reclaim women's history as a route to feminist consciousness, reception of their efforts were shaped by the complex constructions of gender that saturated early and mid-twentieth-century media. Betty Friedan's 1963 work *The Feminine Mystique* proposed rediscovery of women's history, and especially of the suffrage movement, as an effective route to feminist consciousness. Friedan blamed the popularity of Freudian thought in the 1940s and 1950s for fuelling the perception that the women's suffrage movement "came from man-hating, embittered, sex-starved spinsters, from castrating, unsexed non-women who

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<sup>18</sup> Avon Records, RG II, Series 10, Box 130, Avon museum correspondence file, Hagley.

burned with such envy for the male organ that they wanted to take it away from all men, or destroy them. . . .”<sup>19</sup> The resulting popularity of vicious jokes about suffragists prevented contemporary women from identifying with nineteenth-century feminist causes.<sup>20</sup> A chapter of *The Feminine Mystique* recounts the history of American women, refuting negative stereotypes and drawing parallels between women’s relegation to the private sphere in the past and the present.<sup>21</sup> However, mass culture’s gendering of history in the early twentieth century was often more uneven and more complex than Friedan’s criticism suggests.

Friedan drew a sharp contrast between her narrative of women’s history and that presented in women’s magazines. Yet women’s magazines, advertisements, radio, musical theatre, and film provided forums for a variety of interpretations of women’s pasts. Indeed, the magazines Friedan used as evidence celebrated many pioneering women including suffragists, offering a dynamic construction of women’s roles. While Friedan and her cohort attended college in the late 1930s and early 1940s, radio stations broadcast historian Mary Ritter Beard’s claims for women as influential “co-makers” of American history. Corporate-sponsored programs even profiled women’s rights activists and other female historical figures. While many 1940s depictions of the past emphasized anonymous housewives and women notable for their attachments to great men, some media depicted more dynamic heroines. Issues of *Wonder Woman* published in the 1940s included episodes celebrating historical figures like Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth,

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<sup>19</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed. (Laurel: New York, 1984), 102. Quote on page 82.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 80-102.

and Carrie Chapman Catt. These historical biographies parallel the work of later activists and historians to identify notable female historical figures.

During the 1960s and 1970s, feminists frequently invoked history to acknowledge women's contributions and to demonstrate their absence from scholarly and public historical narratives. Efforts to recover women's historical experiences appeared frequently in publications like the *Ms.* magazine "Lost Women" column during the 1970s, when, historian Judith Bennett writes, "the link between feminism and history was simultaneously broadened and deepened."<sup>22</sup> But as historians of women and gender gained increasing influence in the academy, approaches to women's history shifted. Bennett observes that women's historians' use of feminist ideology declined in the 1980s and 1990s as scholarship that de-emphasized feminism gained acceptance in the academy.<sup>23</sup> Simultaneously, feminist scholarship produced in the 1990s focused increasingly on the recent, post-1945 past, minimizing the histories of women who transgressed gender roles prior to 1945.<sup>24</sup>

"Third wave" feminism also emphasized the recent past, and many young women denied a link with earlier generations of women's rights activists.<sup>25</sup> However, mass mediated feminisms often incorporated nostalgia for the idealized femininity of the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1990s, independently-produced 'zines and publications like *Bust* magazine became public examples of a "girl culture" feminism that was frequently contrasted with second wave politics. As feminist journalists Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards wrote, "Girlies are girls in their twenties or thirties who are reacting to an

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<sup>22</sup> Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2006), 4. Quote on page 6.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

antifeminine, antijoy emphasis that they perceive as the legacy of Second Wave seriousness. Girlies have reclaimed girl culture, which is made up of such formerly disparaged girl things as knitting, the color pink, nail polish, and fun.”<sup>26</sup> Young feminists emphasized the pleasure in knitting and other crafts traditionally prescribed to women, and many appropriated retro aesthetics. Baumgardner and Richards quote a young feminist activist who finds herself “buying pictures of these very coquettish pinup women at antique shows, and putting them up on the wall,” observing, “I feel like I am trying to reconnect with this part of myself.”<sup>27</sup> Such women enjoyed the “feminine” artifacts of previous decades, interpreting this aesthetic choice as free expression, symbolic of individuals’ ability to create their own identities and to enjoy social equality. On one level, reappropriation of outmoded ideals dramatized other changes in women’s behavior; now women who dressed in lipstick, stockings, and vintage clothing set out to conquer a variety of careers previously limited to men. Simultaneously, “girl culture” championed an inherent femininity that made knitting and make-up appealing to women across decades.

Through references to the popular culture of the past, late-twentieth-century feminists thus debated nature’s and society’s influences on gender. In exploring history as an aesthetic, feminists echoed the work of women earlier in the twentieth century who combined historical costumes with activism for suffrage or who emphasized their adherence to “traditional” femininity in order to make their transgressions into public life more acceptable. Simultaneously, in using popular culture as a forum for exploring the relationship between women’s lives in the past and the present, third wave feminists

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<sup>26</sup> Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 80.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

adopted media and imagery that had been used by corporations to construct ideals for gendered behavior. Indeed, gendered historical narratives have long been embedded into common advertising images and into everyday objects like lipstick. When second and third wave activists ignored the centrality of gendered history to popular culture, they minimized the power of mass media's constructions, as well as the difficulties feminists faced in transgressing the gendered histories ingrained in everyday life.



## Chapter 1

### Martha Washington (Would Have) Shopped Here: Print Culture, 1910-1930

During the 1910s and 1920s, women's magazines and advertisements invoked the past to normalize contemporary gender ideals. As the suffrage movement and new household technologies altered women's roles, popular print culture frequently promoted earlier eras' ideals of femininity and domesticity. During a period marked by change in women's behavior, periodicals and advertisements celebrated consumption as a constant in women's lives and as women's timeless contribution to the nation. A February 1924 *Good Housekeeping* magazine advertisement for Liquid Veneer furniture polish offered to prove the product's value "to the modern hostess" with a free sample bottle and a portrait of Martha Washington "suitable for framing" (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> The advertisement touted Liquid Veneer as an innovative product reflecting the "labor-saving helps of modern homekeeping" that Washington "would have welcomed." This was not, however, because it would have freed time for activities outside of the home, but because it would have increased the beauty of the physical furnishings that made Mount Vernon the "democratic" and welcoming "hub of political and social life of the day."<sup>2</sup> Such elevation of Martha Washington as an inspirational model denied that the white, middle-class *Good Housekeeping* readership, newly enfranchised by the Nineteenth Amendment,

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<sup>1</sup> Liquid Veneer Advertisement, "American Housewives Today Enjoy What Martha Washington Could Not!" *Good Housekeeping* (Feb. 1924), 121.

<sup>2</sup> On changes in household technology in the early twentieth century, see Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work For Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983), 89-101. Time saved by appliances became time spent on other household and childrearing tasks, as new technologies increased homemaking standards. Studies conducted in 1924-25 and 1930-31 indicated that total time spent on domestic labor had not decreased from the previous generation (Cowan, 178-79). See also Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 162-63.

occupied a different position in politics and society than Martha Washington and her contemporaries.<sup>3</sup>

Other advertisements highlighted the innovative time- and effort-saving properties of new products, narrating businesses' technological progress through comparison of familial generations. This narrative of consumption as liberating obscured the status and community influence that colonial women had gained through their roles as household producers.<sup>4</sup> An advertisement produced by the N. W. Ayer advertising agency for the Simplex Ironer dramatized previous eras' household tools as "Fetters from which every woman can be freed."<sup>5</sup> The advertisement's text emphasized the drudgery of ironing, a job requiring a day's strenuous labor, which women had faced "for generations" but which could now be replaced with "a single hour."<sup>6</sup> A striking black and white illustration showed a contemporary woman, metal chains anchoring her ankle to an oversized metal iron, straining towards the light emanating from an open doorway. The large iron, drawn so that it occupies as much space as the woman herself, embodies unnecessary restriction of women's freedom. Although the text does not explain how a Simplex Ironer will alter women's lives beyond lessening the hours of labor, the imagery suggests that improved household technology could free the modern woman, allowing her to move through the home's open doorway into the outside world.

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<sup>3</sup> Other notable developments in the 1920s included increase in married women's paid labor and in young women's premarital sexual activity (Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 147-50).

<sup>4</sup> For analysis of women's work and status see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 8-9, 51-67. For an assessment of the economic value placed on women's preindustrial household production, see Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Advertisement, n.d., Box 517, N. W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Such cases demonstrate that the historical (or ahistorical) interpretations performed by consumer culture can not be dismissed as monolithically oppressive. While this Simplex advertisement highlighted change in domestic work over time, popular ideals of the female homemaker remained relatively constant. New products could save time, but they simultaneously allowed heightened standards. According to dominant ideals, women influenced public life through their maintenance of domestic stability across generations, thus providing a nurturing environment for children learning their place in America's democratic project and for men whose economic roles supported family and country. Nevertheless, while advertisements typically assumed domesticity as the center of women's lives, print culture also introduced more complex historical narratives that combined public life with women's more traditional roles.

The use of domestic consumer products to conceptualize women's history occurred just as academic and amateur female historians turned to material culture as historical evidence. Historical writing allowed the possibility for change in women's roles over time and, in some key cases, gained popular currency through inclusion in mass culture. Publication of women historians' work in mass market magazines subverted these same publications' portrayals of women's roles as consistently domestic and subordinate across time. Organizations for women working in the advertising industry invoked history to claim professional status in a predominantly male field. While asserting women's roles in the evolution of American business, these groups nevertheless echoed the popular assumption of an inherent feminine nature. By adapting popular fascination with the past to their activist aims, scholars and professionals encouraged alternative readings of mass culture; simultaneously, references to continuity

in women's nature across time both assuaged concern about their public activities and limited the extent to which gendered expectations for behavior could bend.

Between 1890 and 1930, consumer culture took hold in the United States as corporations created and promoted a vision of American life with consumption at its center.<sup>7</sup> When industrialization and the development of national brands resulted in a surplus of products, popular discourse responded to this imbalance by promoting consumption. Fuelled by the expansion of leisure time and prosperity among the middle class, advertisers, women's magazines, department stores, and mail-order businesses developed a discourse of desire to sell products. As the historian William Leach explains in his history of the American department store, businesses provoked new and latent desires in the American public and then attempted to position their products as solutions.<sup>8</sup> Maintaining the flow of commerce required the steady production of desires; cultural discourse thus fetishized the "new" and stressed stylistic differences between products.<sup>9</sup>

Promoting brands as crucial domestic tools, national periodicals increasingly defined consumption as a female role. Comparing issues of the *Ladies' Home Journal* from 1914 and 1924, historian Jennifer Scanlon reveals the increasing prescription of the home as the center of women's consumption.<sup>10</sup> Although the *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1924 made greater reference to women's activities outside the home, from women's

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<sup>7</sup> On the development of American consumer culture, see William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), xiii-xiv; and T. J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> *Counter Currents*, an in-house publication for the Newark department store L. Bamberger & Co. expressed pride in its ability to serve as a respite and entertainment for "the tired housewife," just as the Broadway show revived the "t.b.m.," the tired business-man. *Counter Currents* (July 1919), 15-16, Special Collections, Alexander Library, Rutgers University, New Brunswick.

<sup>9</sup> Leach, 162, 276-77.

<sup>10</sup> Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies' Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 16.

clubs to political organizations of newly-enfranchised citizens, the magazine characterized these public activities as extensions of women's domestic, maternal roles.<sup>11</sup> Simultaneously, advertisements for national brands became increasingly dominant in the magazine, providing information that was offered in articles and editorials a decade earlier.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, marketers expanded some boundaries of the ideal woman's realm to secure consumers' interest; as Scanlon observes, "The successful department store and the successful women's magazine had to indulge customers and manipulate them at the same time."<sup>13</sup> Print culture defined women's spheres as domestic but elevated household consumption as personally fulfilling, socially important work. Advertisements and prescriptive literature likened consumption to democratic participation. Corporations touted their national brands as patriotic community builders.<sup>14</sup> Drawing parallels between contemporary women's domesticity and an idealized colonial era, print culture presented consumption as an historically significant act, and even as a way to study the American past.

By emphasizing continuity across time, magazines and retailers defined consumption as both a pleasurable leisure activity and as work ideally suited to women's universal nature. In 1928, the advertising trade journal *Printers' Ink Monthly* celebrated women's instinctual affinity for shopping, proclaiming: "With the female, buying is a passion, a religion; all of her faculties and emotions are bound up in it."<sup>15</sup> Home

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 43-44.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>14</sup> Margaret Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture and Votes for Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> Tom Masson, "Advertising as a Buyer Views It," *Printers' Ink Monthly* (Jan. 1928), 36-7.

Simultaneously, however, women's magazines like the *Ladies' Home Journal* increasingly envisioned consumption as the means through which women could apply the era's ethos of managerial hegemony to

economists celebrated technology for removing unnecessary drudgery from household labor, but popular discourse assumed that, although the performance of tasks might change, women would remain as devoted to the home as previous generations had.<sup>16</sup> Constructions of this gendered history retained women's subordinate social status while alleviating anxiety during the reconfiguration of American economic patterns.<sup>17</sup>

In mass market publications, the ideal female consumer embodied by the "Colonial Dame," the antebellum Southern belle, and the contemporary homemaker was both white and middle-class. Adherence to the accepted ideals of domestic womanhood required economic advantages and familial lineages that were defined by race.<sup>18</sup> Mainstream magazines and advertisements seldom portrayed African-American women as active contributors to American history and progress. Nevertheless, this national culture was not monolithic; groups excluded from full status as citizen-consumers

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the home. Editorial content and advertising offered home-making advice that stressed the importance of educated consumption and product-selection as part of the home-maker's task. See Scanlon, 61-76.

<sup>16</sup> Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America 1889-1963: The Intellectual as a Social Type* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965), 49-50. Indeed, the availability of new products and homemaking methods heightened standards and kept the modern homemaker as busy as her pre-industrial counterpart. As the historian Ruth Schwartz Cowan has explained, more sophisticated cooking equipment led to expectations of more complicated meals. Although cloth-making became obsolete, the widespread use of easily-laundered mass-produced clothing increased the time and effort women spent washing the family clothes. Cowan, 62-65.

<sup>17</sup> Other historians offer examples of cultural discourse's references to history in support of their claims about the development of a consumption ideology (Lasch, 50). In *George Washington Slept Here: Colonial Revivals and American Culture 1876-1986* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), art historian Karal Ann Marling explores how mass culture, through everything from high art to tea parties, invoked George Washington to alleviate anxieties about social change.

<sup>18</sup> Scholars have identified the emergence of national media as a key factor in the nationalization of Jim Crow exclusionary policies and in the definition of American privilege along racially exclusionary lines. As the historian Matthew Frye Jacobson argues, popular culture naturalized legal and political conceptions of immigration and citizenship. Popular constructions of women's history drew from such scripts for defining difference. Hale, *Making Whiteness*. Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

contested and reconfigured mass media's themes.<sup>19</sup> Everyday use of commodities became subversive as marginalized consumers aligned themselves with mass ideals.

Advertisements, magazine illustrations, and commodities incorporated colonial revivalism, depicting human figures in monochromatic silhouettes that echoed portraiture of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century elite. The simplicity of these anonymous figures, ubiquitous in twentieth-century Christmas greeting cards, proved more inclusive than explicit reference to Martha Washington or Dolly Madison. Most greeting cards either presented white middle-class ideals or mocked African-American, Asian, and Native American figures as primitive. By contrast, simplified outline drawings placed racially ambiguous figures in idyllic settings. Among the consumers who incorporated such scenes of nineteenth-century Christmas decoration and gift-giving into their own everyday lives were African Americans.<sup>20</sup> The African-American writer Bernice Dutrieulle, who became a journalist and society columnist for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, *The Afro-American*, and the *Philadelphia Tribune* in the late 1920s, received numerous Christmas cards featuring domestic historical scenes, many showing silhouetted figures in black.<sup>21</sup> Dutrieulle received a Western Union telegram envelope that promoted

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<sup>19</sup> For analysis of the citizen-consumer model, see Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> African-American-operated greeting card companies did not flourish until after World War II, at which point mainstream card manufacturers began including more realistic depictions of African Americans in addition to the racist caricatures featured on many of their products. Prior to this product diversification, companies marketed their "blackface"-inspired images, typically showing young children, to African-American audiences. Shank, 193-97.

<sup>21</sup> Correspondence Dec. 9, 1929-Dec. 26, 1929, Bernice Dutrieulle Shelton Papers, Box 3, Folder 5, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Christmas Cards 1932, Box 8, Folder 2, Shelton Papers. Christmas Cards 1935, Box 11, Folder 8, Shelton Papers. In addition to the ubiquitous gift-giving scenes, silhouettes also featured in illustrations of the nativity. See, for example, card from Mamie E. Davis to Bernice Dutrieulle Shelton, Dec. 18, 1935. A "Scrapbook of Competitors' Cards" compiled by the Rust Craft greeting card company in the 1930s demonstrates the ubiquity of historical themes and scenes of colonial and nineteenth-century fashion in silhouette. Competitors' close copies of Rust Craft designs further established the familiar scenes of domesticity and courtship as iconic. Series 3F, Box 14, Norcross Greeting Card Collection, Archives Center, NMAH.

“Western Union Gift Orders” through the illustration in solid black on a solid red background of a colonial man in ponytail with bow offering a full-skirted woman a piece of paper. This simple sheet with a black bar at its heading echoes the look of a contemporary telegram. A framed oval silhouette on the wall behind the pair further underscores the association of the silhouette style with colonial gentility.<sup>22</sup> Consumers’ selections gained new meaning from the subject of correspondences, which in Dutrieuille’s case included her efforts to overcome media bias against African Americans, as well as the effects of discrimination on her own career as an African-American woman.

At the same time, African-American entrepreneurs reconfigured the popular themes of classical beauty ideals, brand longevity, and American patriotism to advertise their products. Political and historical writing to support civil rights also applied the iconographic silhouette portraiture, a visual symbol asserting African-American men’s and women’s place alongside colonial statesmen.<sup>23</sup> The universality of figures drawn in contour and the link between these portraits and respectability also shaped the choices of individual greeting card consumers, who redefined mass produced images with their personal correspondence.

Combining editorial material, advertising, and consumer contribution, print culture juxtaposed multiple takes on women’s political roles.<sup>24</sup> What these diverse

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<sup>22</sup> Telegram from Geo Busey to Bernice Dutrieuille, Jan. 5, 1933, Bernice Dutrieuille Shelton Papers, Box 8, Folder 3, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>23</sup> Hallie Q. Brown’s *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction* included a silhouette portrait of Martha Payne as the book’s opening illustration. (Xenia, OH: Aldine Press, 1926; reprint ed., Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971). See further discussion of *Homespun Heroines* later in this chapter.

<sup>24</sup> Gendered constructions of history juxtaposed multiple, sometimes competing, themes that circulated across media for decades. While Matthew Frye Jacobson describes the “glacial, nonlinear cultural movements” which constructed whiteness “into three great epochs,” political events did not enact such dramatic shifts in popular media’s gendered constructions of the past. Jacobson, 7.



gendered constructions of the past shared were naturalizations of “woman” as a unifying category and the assumption that inherent character traits defined this category. In the 1910s and 1920s, national print culture reworked gendered histories that organizations and activist movements had deployed in particular political contexts.<sup>25</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, women’s grassroots historical preservation efforts celebrated colonial homes and domestic artifacts as democratic symbols.<sup>26</sup> Organizations like the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), and the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) sought to protect the homes of prominent male leaders, presenting women’s reverence for the past as proof of their centrality to nationalism and patriotism. For instance, the NACW leadership funded preservation of Frederick Douglass’s home in the 1910s, hoping this contribution would inspire recognition of African-American women’s organizations.<sup>27</sup> In this model, celebrating history became a socially significant contribution.<sup>28</sup>

Women’s organizations also utilized consumer culture, staging local pageants and collaborating with retailers to promote the democratic significance of historical memory and to command respect for women’s work as historians. These efforts assumed that history held prescriptive relevance for the present and that consumer culture provided an efficient venue for promoting these connections. Local DAR chapters of the 1930s

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<sup>25</sup> In 1898, influenced by the Spanish-American War, the DAR emphasized women’s moral influence in civilizing an empire. World War I, the Red Scare, and the specter of women’s peace activism forged a new conservatism and alliance between the DAR and the government for national defense and anticommunism. Francesca Morgan, *Women and Patriotism in Jim Crow America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 63, 127, 139-42. Historical figures Annie Oakley and Joan of Arc, who departed from the domestic, maternal ideal prescribed in contemporary culture, became models for women’s medical and military service during World War I. Kimberly Jensen, *Mobilizing Minerva: American Women in the First World War* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 55-56, 66-67.

<sup>26</sup> Des Jardins, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>28</sup> Morgan, 1-2.

collaborated with retailers to produce historically-themed window decorations celebrating such colonial icons as George Washington and Betsy Ross.<sup>29</sup> While the organization's conservative activists opposed communal laundries and kitchens as socialist disruptions of women's work, DAR retail displays ignored the transformative effect of large retailers on household labor. Replicating familiar tropes from grassroots preservation efforts, these windows celebrated consumption's compatibility with familiar gender ideals.<sup>30</sup>

Manufacturers also adopted colonial imagery to combat consumers' hesitance to trust modern products sold on a national scale. Twentieth-century brand advertisements' direct appeals to consumers disrupted the relationships between consumers and local shopkeepers, but their references to the past obscured these shifts. Traditional and patriotic motifs proclaimed the quality of national brands, displacing the local retailer's role as authority on product quality.<sup>31</sup> By asserting colonial roots, the rhetoric of contemporary advertisers countered popular suspicion that mass-produced luxury goods disrupted the accepted Jeffersonian ideal of economic independence.<sup>32</sup> Simultaneously, advertisers placed their own industry in the narrative of America's historical progress, with professional organizations like Philadelphia's Poor Richard Club celebrating Benjamin Franklin as a forefather of modern advertising. In cultural discourses of the 1910s and the 1920s, invocations of the past, especially of the formative years of the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Mass-marketed products faced resistance from local retailers who preferred to serve as their customers' authorities on product quality. From October 1911 through October 1912, the Curtis Publishing Company, whose national publications included *The Ladies' Home Journal* and *The Saturday Evening Post*, conducted over 1100 interviews of store clerks, local merchants, and retail managers at chain stores to determine the treatment of national textile brands at transaction sites. Participants protested national brands' intervention in the relationship between consumer and retailer, complaining about female consumers who, influenced by advertisements, entered the store with a particular brand already chosen. Charles Coolidge Parlin, "Department Store Lines, Vol. A," 21-23, Series V, Box 20, Curtis Publishing Company Records, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

<sup>32</sup> Finnegan, 10.

republic, offered reassurance that American cultural values and gendered norms would remain intact in spite of the disrupting forces of industrialization, commercialization, and urbanization.

Women's magazines encouraged the continual accumulation of new goods, thus establishing a narrative of progress through technological innovation. Yet sentimentalization of the American past simultaneously assured that women would remain devoted to domesticity in spite of modern products that altered the standards and conditions of household labor. In spite of shifts in women's political, social, and economic roles, advertisements urged women to identify with figures from the past who devoted themselves wholly to family and home. Logos for national, mass-produced brands often included isolated historical imagery that gained context from printed advertisements. The logo for Baker's Cocoa featured the text "Established 1780" and a line drawing of a woman in simple colonial dress carrying a serving tray. By stressing the founding date, Baker's advertisements established quality as a trans-historical tenet of domesticity, assuring that even mass-produced goods could meet high standards. Repetition of this logo, identified as the "Belle Chocolatière," in advertisements and product packaging, strove to establish the brand's prestige.

In their 1928 manual on package design, New York University instructor Richard B. Franken and *Printers' Ink* editor Carroll B. Larrabee praised the Baker's Belle Chocolatière as an exemplar of "timelessness," the "first great factor to consider in the design of a package."<sup>33</sup> Contrasting effective timelessness with outmoded "old-fashioned" imagery, Franken and Larrabee explained:

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<sup>33</sup> Richard B. Franken and Carroll B. Larrabee, *Packages That Sell* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1928), 91.

There are today on the market many packages which have long outlived their usefulness because they picture a pretty girl of ten or fifteen years ago dressed in the clothes fashionable at that period....If the manufacture [sic] does desire to use a human figure he should choose a figure that is dressed in clothing so far out of date as to have become classical. La Belle Chocolatière of the Baker Chocolate package is effective because she is dressed in the quaint dress of many decades ago....<sup>34</sup>

Such aesthetically pleasing logos, according to Franken and Larrabee, reminded consumers of a brand's proven history. "Timeless" brand images that did not need constant updating to reflect current aesthetics would ultimately become part of consumers' individual memories.

Inserting the "timeless" Belle Chocolatière logo into contemporary scenes, Baker's advertisements asserted continuity in women's service roles. In 1924, for instance, one illustrated advertisement depicted the Chocolatière carrying her serving tray towards a table of three smiling women in contemporary dress.<sup>35</sup> A 1918 Baker's Cocoa ad featured a man and woman in colonial garb raising their cocoa glasses in toast towards the reader.<sup>36</sup> The product thus ostensibly enabled contemporary families to share a domestic tradition with their colonial ancestors by consuming a mass-produced drink. Such visual analogies between the contemporary and the colonial eras persisted in 1929-1930 Baker's ads appearing in *McCall's* and other national magazines. This later campaign emphasized nutrition in an appeal to mothers, with illustrations of colonial women serving children cocoa alongside parallel illustrations of women and children in contemporary dress. The colonial scenes established a tie with the Belle Chocolatière tins' packaging, featured in the margins of each advertisement. Simultaneously, the contemporary scenes dramatized the copy's claims that Baker's offers a healthy choice

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Advertisement. *Good Housekeeping* (Jan. 1924), 75.

<sup>36</sup> Advertisement. *Good Housekeeping* (Jan. 1918), 83.

for consumers, as endorsed by contemporary home economists.<sup>37</sup> One advertisement explained, “Times and customs change...but the nutritive needs of children do not change. Nor does their enthusiastic welcome of a cup of Baker’s Cocoa.”<sup>38</sup> Sentimental appeals to consumers’ personal histories further emphasized the product’s value across time: “When you say ‘...and a tin of Baker’s Cocoa, please,’ generations of American mothers confirm your judgment. For probably your grandmother was just as fond of it as are your children.”<sup>39</sup> According to these advertisements, longevity justified women’s faith in brands by demonstrating generations of loyalty.

Such invocations of the past appeared frequently in promotional materials for food products, reconciling new technologies with the familial ideal by likening mass production to the work of colonial women, antebellum slaves, or the idealized Grandmother. These motifs asserted that labor-saving devices would not disrupt women’s devotion to domesticity. Symbolized by the modern-day consumption of “Colonial” bread or “plantation pancakes,” even advertisements which emphasized the technological sophistication of products denied that modern foodways would alter hierarchies of gender and race. In the late 1910s and early 1920s, the Dolly Madison Baking Corporation marketed its “Colonial” and “Puritan” bread loaves to customers in Massachusetts and Connecticut.<sup>40</sup> The Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company chain, expanding its number of stores nationwide in the 1910s, invited customers to sentimentalize their own personal histories by promoting “Grandmother’s” store brand

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<sup>37</sup> Advertisement, *McCall’s* (Oct. 1929), 44.

<sup>38</sup> Ellipses appear in the original advertisement. *McCall’s* (Nov. 1929), 73.

<sup>39</sup> Advertisement, *McCall’s* (Oct. 1929), 44. Another advertisement praises the “quality which causes you to reach for the Baker’s Cocoa tin with the comforting conviction that here is the best possible cocoa that you can buy for your children—exactly as your mother and your grandmother did before you!” Advertisement, *McCall’s* (Dec. 1929), 55

<sup>40</sup> Account Histories: Dolly Madison Baking Corporation, January 30, 1926, Box 5, J. Walter Thompson Company Account Files, Hartman Center, Duke University.

bread.<sup>41</sup> National print advertisements for Aunt Jemima pancake flour depicted breakfast table settings with the product's featured logo, the smiling face of an antebellum slave. Alongside the modern ease of preparation, the advertisements' texts stressed the brand's link to a mythologized past, describing "those plantation pancakes that your family enjoys so much" and "Buckwheats with the old-time taste men talk about!"<sup>42</sup> This celebration of antebellum plantation domesticity asserted a national unity that bridged regional and class difference, positioning brand consumption as a marker of social status and constructing race as an exclusionary category.

Invocation of the past became such a ubiquitous advertising strategy that it also promoted products whose packaging and branding did not directly invoke earlier periods. Quoted in an advertisement for Heinz brand canned baked beans, company home economist Josephine Gibson praised "delightful kitchens of the past," but assured consumers that "I don't think we need sigh for the baked beans of past days. You'll find all their goodness in those made by Heinz."<sup>43</sup> According to such logic, women who took advantage of modern household technologies could nurture their families as well as previous generations had. Indeed, advertisements proposed that contemporary technologies would have fit easily into colonial women's lifestyles. In a promotion for Crisco frying fat, corporate home economist Winifred Carter described her research visit to an eighteenth-century residence in Massachusetts. Carter invited the home's seventy-

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<sup>41</sup> In 1916, A & P stores numbered over 2,000 in twenty-nine states. One thousand more stores opened the next year. Avis H. Anderson, *A & P: The Story of the Great Atlantic and Pacific Company* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2002), 20. Undated packaging, Grandmother's A & P Bread, Box OS 82, Folder 1, Warshaw Collection of Business Americana, Bakers and Baking, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>42</sup> Advertisement, *McCall's* (Jan. 1930), 57. Advertisement, *McCall's* (Dec. 1929), 50. One advertisement explained that the brand's formula and the Aunt Jemima legend "are based on documents found in the files of the earliest owners of the recipe," nevertheless acknowledging, "To what extent they are a mixture of truth, fiction and tradition, we do not know." Advertisement, *McCall's* (Jan. 1930), 57.

<sup>43</sup> Advertisement, *McCall's* (March 1930), 137.

five year old resident to test Crisco against another brand.<sup>44</sup> Emphasizing the home's "story-book kitchen," the advertisement featured an illustrated description of "the 200-year-old kitchen where generations of good cooks have concocted marvelous things to eat."<sup>45</sup> The facility was "[l]ike a museum room—low ceilinged, pine floored, with ladder back chairs and a huge fireplace which had a Dutch oven at one side, and a secret compartment on the other where the family stored their pewter during the Revolution."<sup>46</sup> Carter applauded the compatibility of Crisco with genuine antiques, revealing that the home's resident preferred Crisco in a blind test and had long relied on the Crisco brand for cooking. The insertion of contemporary products into popular culture's ideal of the colonial past asserted a direct continuity from the hard-working colonial "good wife" to the contemporary consumer.

Promotions of fashion and cosmetics also invoked the past to emphasize continuity in women's roles. Advertisements claimed that women remained consistently devoted to cultivating feminine beauty even as they changed their appearances in response to fashion trends. Beginning in 1916, the packaging for Armand brand cosmetics, mimicking a hatbox, featured a silhouette of "the belle of the time of Louis XVI of France" over a pink and white background.<sup>47</sup> This European reference established the visible identity that advertising scholars Franken and Larrabee identified as "timeless" rather than "old-fashioned." Print advertisements included illustrations of a woman and man in elaborate Louis XVI dress, the man often bowing in appreciation of

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<sup>44</sup> Advertisement, *McCall's* (Jan. 1930), 93.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Undated advertisement, Box 206, Book 386, Folder 2; advertising proof, 57 G, 1924, Box 205, Book 383; advertising proof, *Holland's Magazine*, Box 204, Folder 2. N. W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, NMAH.

the woman's beauty. The woman's full, formal skirt echoed the pink and white checkered pattern of Armand's cosmetic packaging.<sup>48</sup>

Such imagery placed modern women's use of cosmetics as part of an elite European tradition and simultaneously invoked the early-twentieth-century Colonial Revival, which resurrected imagery of eighteenth-century full skirts. One advertisement pictured the elaborately dressed woman looking in a hand-held mirror, served by a dark-skinned male who stands by with a box of cosmetics.<sup>49</sup> Rather than narrating this hierarchical relationship, however, the text described Armand Cold Cream Powder's hygienic, long-lasting ingredients as essential for "the active, modern housewife, the sportswoman or the smart young business executive."<sup>50</sup> Another advertisement illustrated with an ornately-dressed man and woman asserted that Armand-treated skin complemented contemporary "organdy and picture-hats...the cool fashions and soft colors of summer."<sup>51</sup> Other advertisements in the series produced visual analogies for the presence of the past in everyday life. One showed a stylish, contemporary woman in slim, knee-length skirt and cloche hat, holding a cosmetics jar. In the background, a full-skirted figure with a contrasting eighteenth-century silhouette mimics this pose, suggesting a shadow cast on a wall.<sup>52</sup> Another illustration showed a contemporary woman looking at a large, almost life-sized framed portrait of the company's eighteenth-century ideal woman.<sup>53</sup> This drawing dramatized contemporary reverence for previous eras' femininity while the advertisement's copy stressed the product's suitability for the

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<sup>48</sup> Advertising proofs, Box 205, Book 384, N. W. Ayer Records.

<sup>49</sup> Advertising proof, *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 7, 1927, Box 205, Book 384, N. W. Ayer Records.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Advertising proof, 44 A L 1927, Box 205, Book 384, N. W. Ayer Records.

<sup>52</sup> Advertising proof, *Ladies' Home Journal*, May 1928, Box 205, Book 384, N. W. Ayer Records.

<sup>53</sup> Advertising proof, *Holland's Magazine*, April, Box 204, Folder 2, N. W. Ayer Records.



contemporary “era of woman’s freedom and activity.”<sup>54</sup> Assuring the reader that Armand products will suit “modern” activity, careful cultivation of feminine beauty remains an expectation. These advertisements assumed that white middle-class consumers would emulate ornate femininity, whether they were housewives or professional women. Establishing the past as a mirror for the present, these promotions naturalized women’s consumption as an assertion of social status and implied racial hierarchy.

Relying on consumption to narrate the history of women in the cosmetics industry, this conception of the past ignored the independent female entrepreneurs who had become a part of the industry’s history: as historian Kathy Peiss notes, female entrepreneurs made unique strides in cosmetics and direct sales. Innovative women forged prominent careers in the industry. Elizabeth Arden emerged from an impoverished background as an executive and celebrity symbol for the beauty industry’s glamour in the 1920s and 1930s. Madam C. J. Walker (1867-1919), an African-American woman, developed a prominent beauty product business in the early twentieth century.<sup>55</sup> During the 1920s, advertisements in *The Crisis*, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s publication, emphasized Walker’s entrepreneurial leadership by featuring her portrait and narrating her business’s history of success.<sup>56</sup> Promotions also emphasized the significance of women sales agents to the company, including a representative photograph of “A Madam C. J. Walker Booster” and trumpeting the “Independent Livings Made” by such sales agents.<sup>57</sup> In its *Crisis* sales campaigns, “Poro” brand cosmetics placed similar emphasis on the innovation of its

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 61-96.

<sup>56</sup> Advertisement, *The Crisis* (July 1925), back cover.

<sup>57</sup> Advertisement, *The Crisis* (May 1925), back cover. Advertisement, *The Crisis* (July 1925), back cover.

female entrepreneur, proclaiming, “Mrs. A. M. Turnbo-Malone, Founder of this great business, has put into PORO her character, personality and ability.”<sup>58</sup> Such sales pitches celebrated women’s independent business agency, interpreting their efforts not only as transformative influences on women’s everyday lives but also as uplift efforts which reflected positively on the African-American race by “Glorifying Our Womanhood.”<sup>59</sup> In their business practices, Walker and Malone had constructed beauty ideals that could support this aim, excluding skin bleaching and hair straightening products from their lines, recognizing the beauty, and by extension the humanity, that white Americans generally denied in African-American women.<sup>60</sup>

By contrast, other brands’ advertisements in national, mass market publications celebrated female beauty as an historical influence but portrayed women themselves as passive. Armand isolated physical beauty as the link between women past and present. A 1918 advertisement for Sempre Giovine cosmetics encouraged contemporary women to emulate Cleopatra, whose beauty shaped history by influencing men. If Cleopatra had been less beautiful, the ad explained, “Caesar would not have attempted a war in her behalf and the history of the world might have been changed.”<sup>61</sup> Maintaining physical beauty, the advertisement suggested, allows women to shape the world, but only through their influence on men. A 1924 series of newspaper and periodical advertisements for Nadine “Southern Flowers” face powder obscured women’s significance as historical actors by likening contemporary women’s beauty to the archetypal look of antebellum plantation belles. An advertisement under the title “Why Do Southern Women Fascinate

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<sup>58</sup> Advertisement, *The Crisis* (July 1925), 154.

<sup>59</sup> Advertisement, *The Crisis* (May 1925), back cover.

<sup>60</sup> Peiss, 89-90.

<sup>61</sup> Advertising Proof, 30 M 1918, Box 206, Book 386, Folder 2, N. W. Ayer Records.

Men?” asserted, “One treasured beauty secret of theirs is Nadine Face Powder, used for years by Southern belles to make them still more lovely.”<sup>62</sup> Dramatizing the continued relevance of Nadine Powder and of carefully maintained beauty across centuries, the advertisement features a close-up portrait of a contemporary woman clutching a bouquet of flowers against her face. On the left of this oval portrait, a man bows as he clutches the hand of a light-skinned nineteenth-century woman, formally dressed in a full-skirted and bare-shouldered gown. On the right side, the twentieth-century equivalent appears: a contemporary, short-haired woman in glamorous dress with a tuxedoed man grasping her hand and gazing longingly at her. A similar advertisement dramatized the power of the brand’s “old Southern formula—for years the favorite powder in the South” in keeping women “always cool, serene, and dainty!”<sup>63</sup> The central oval portrait reappears in this advertisement, flanked with an illustration of a nineteenth-century woman on the left and two twentieth-century women in drop-waist dresses and cloche hats on the right. Although fashions may change, these advertisements assert, the Nadine brand remains ever-useful in helping women emulate consistently feminine, romantic roles.

Embodying the white privilege “Southern Flowers” promised, a 1926 color display for retailers depicted an idyllic, white-columned antebellum mansion.<sup>64</sup> As a full-skirted woman looks on from the building’s second-story balcony, a well-dressed man standing on the lawn clutches a gift and tips his hat to her. One African-American man attends the horse-drawn carriage parked outside, while another stands invitingly at the

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<sup>62</sup> McJunkin Advertising Company proof, Job No. 3810, *Holland’s Magazine* (Apr. 1924), Package 1, Dorothy Dignam Papers, Wisconsin State Historical Society. Kathy Peiss analyzes these Dignam advertisements in *Hope in a Jar*, pp. 149-50.

<sup>63</sup> McJunkin Advertising Company proof, Job No. 2014, *Pictorial Review* (Sept. 1924), Package 1, Dorothy Dignam Papers, WSHS.

<sup>64</sup> “Nadine Advertising for 1926” booklet, Package 1, Dorothy Dignam Papers, WSHS.

front door. The scene, presented as “the romance of an old-time Southern garden which the [Southern Flowers product] name suggests,” romanticizes the racial hierarchies of the antebellum South as relevant to the contemporary white consumer. Indeed, by presenting visual references to the antebellum South, the makers of the Nadinola Bleaching Cream products (initially targeted to African-American consumers) sought to establish a white clientele for a new “Southern Flowers” face powder line. Campaign copywriter Dorothy Dignam annotated the Nadine advertisements in her archives, explaining, “This line made in the South was largely sold to the Negro market. The advertising was a planned attempt to capture the white market also. (I was never told!)”<sup>65</sup> Analyzing Dignam’s retrospective observation, Kathy Peiss concludes that the advertisements “erased any hint of Nadinola’s black clientele.”<sup>66</sup> Further, the campaign’s exclusionary definition of womanhood demonstrates the rhetorical power of the nineteenth-century imagery as well as the default assumption of consumers’ white, middle-class identity. When depicting nineteenth-century plantation scenes, “Southern Flowers” advertisements did not need copy composed specifically to create a white market. By the 1920s, popular culture’s constructions of history linked whiteness with consumer privilege, stressing racial hierarchy in order to minimize regional differences. These meanings had become so entrenched in the historical references central to advertising imagery that Dignam, a copywriter with control over advertisements’ texts as well as visual composition, could

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<sup>65</sup> McJunkin Advertising Company proof, Job No. 6231, Newspapers (1924), Package 1, Dorothy Dignam Papers, WSHS. For analysis of Dignam’s annotation see Peiss, 150.

<sup>66</sup> Peiss, 150.

produce advertisements marginalizing black consumers without explicit direction to do so.<sup>67</sup>

In such advertising campaigns, objects like a cup of Baker's cocoa or a jar of cosmetics, symbolic of brands' unchanging integrity, dramatized the continuity of women's domestic work and good taste across time. Although styles shifted, women's relationships to products remained the same. Unlike many amateur and professional women historians writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who considered domestic objects as historical artifacts, advertisers typically denied the need or the possibility for change in women's subordinate status. Rather than reflecting the constructed social norms of specific time periods, product promotions asserted the continuity of women's lives across generations. Women's domestic roles ostensibly made them appreciate the strong quality and timeless design that advertising campaigns touted as brand hallmarks. Moreover, print culture encouraged women to use consumption as a way to incorporate history into their everyday domestic activities.

Institutions like department stores applied historic references to their sales pitches, using the past to promote the centrality of consumption to American life. The "Wanamaker Diary," a hardcover calendar published annually by the Philadelphia department store, presented historical facts along with promotions for Wanamaker's and other local businesses, thus constructing consumption as part of individuals' contributions to the nation. Providing space for recording daily entries, these yearly publications encouraged consumers to associate their daily activities with patriotic and

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<sup>67</sup> In explanatory material compiled at the time of Dignam's archival gift to the Wisconsin State Historical Society, Dignam revealed that her papers' examples of 1920s cosmetics advertisements reflected her work on "(1) copy appeal (2) subject and form of picture (3) text and (4) carry-through trade and retail copy when it was called for." "Contribution of Miss Dorothy Dignam, Writer," August 1960, Box 1, Folder 2, Dorothy Dignam Papers, WSHS.

domestic traditions while keeping the Wanamaker store in mind as a proven, progressive marketplace for modern conveniences. The 1912 diary offered insight on “how [William] Penn’s meat was roasted” and cited Harvard professor George A. Reisner’s study of the “first pure food labels,” found on ancient jars identified in Palestine.<sup>68</sup> Such anecdotes encouraged contemporary homemakers to identify with women from previous eras, even applying their recipes and strategies. This link between contemporary domestic tasks and the past thus emphasized the continuity of women’s domestic labor across time.

Simultaneously, the Wanamaker Diary invoked archetypes of American patriotism to construct an imagined community. The 1912 diary celebrated Abraham Lincoln, identifying books he read for pleasure and claiming that he “LIKED DIXIE” before clarifying that the reference was to the song “Dixie” rather than the Confederate states.<sup>69</sup> While this humanizing anecdote jokingly reconciled the Civil War-era North and South, sentimentalized racist stereotypes were also deployed to validate contemporary racial hierarchies and thus minimize differences within the white population. Although the 1912 calendar celebrated Lincoln’s birthday by describing him as “The Great Emancipator,” the previous page featured a story about “The Old Time Southern Devotion” of a black maid reduced to hysterical grief by her white mistress’s death, and by a nurse’s refusal to let her prepare the slaveholder a final meal.<sup>70</sup> The assumption that African Americans held emotional attachments to the hierarchical social structure of slavery implied that they would continue to serve whites even after emancipation.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> *Wanamaker Diary* (1912), 306, 59, Library Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

<sup>69</sup> *Wanamaker Diary* (1912), 49, 118, Library Company.

<sup>70</sup> *Wanamaker Diary*, (1912), 176-177. Library Company.

<sup>71</sup> Hale, 98-114.

The Wanamaker Diary encouraged readers to imagine themselves as the inheritors of Europe's prestigious legacy. The 1912 edition identified Christopher Columbus as the first to record a diary about America and trumpeted the diary of Mrs. Thrale, a Welsh woman whose commonplace book kept from 1775 to 1809 gained twentieth-century praise and auction bids.<sup>72</sup> Emphasizing daily observation and record-keeping as an act of historical preservation, Wanamaker's placed contemporary consumers in the historical trajectory of progress embodied by the modern department store. Wanamaker's customers used these diaries to document American achievements and glorify commerce's role in everyday life.

Consumers used the journals to record notable events and to contemplate their individual significance to history. In her 1914 diary, seventeen year old Margaret Moffat noted a May 27 suffrage parade in which "2,000 marched," reported on a lunch trip to Wanamaker's with a friend, and documented her success on a geometry test as the "Only girl [who] got A."<sup>73</sup> While these calendars validated the recording of such minutiae, individual consumers' daily activities did not illicit the same reverence as the progressive historical trajectory of Wanamaker's itself. Characterizing the Wanamaker Store's function, the 1909 diary explained: "Here are gathered constantly the finest creations of human skill from all over the earth./ Here Art gathers her treasures, as in a chosen temple./ And here the people, old and young, gather day after day, generation after generation, to read the story of the human race as told in its creations and achievements."<sup>74</sup> This presentation of the department store as a museum demonstrating

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<sup>72</sup> *Wanamaker Diary* (1912), 102. 48.

<sup>73</sup> Diary of Margaret Moffat, *Wanamaker Diary* (1914), 191, 246, 359, Box 83, Wanamaker Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>74</sup> *Wanamaker Diary* (1909), 392, Box 83, Wanamaker Papers, HSP.

corporate progress contrasted with popular culture's dominant portrayals of women's work. Wanamaker's glorified the capitalist system for bringing the world's highest standards to consumer products, placing the department store at the height of a triumphant progress narrative. The store's conceptions of women's labor, by contrast, constructed colonial history to mirror twentieth-century consumer culture. This static conception of women's roles minimized women's agency by presenting consumption as their greatest contribution to American life. Advertisements elevated domestic consumption, rather than household production or public activity, as the patriotic legacy contemporary women inherited from the past.<sup>75</sup>

Such constructions of the past applauded women's maintenance of the domestic sphere as a crucial support for America's unique democracy. Ultimately, this narrative minimized the productive agency of women in the colonial economy. While the homemaking tips, advertisements, and historical anecdotes in the Wanamaker diary acknowledged the value of recording everyday experiences, the publication's concept of historical change assumed that women's experiences would remain circumscribed in a subordinate domestic sphere. This sphere provided necessary support for progressive change in public life, and the domestic realm itself benefited from corporate innovations which could advance homemaking standards. Nevertheless, the static character of women's prescribed roles contrasted with the creativity attributed to male historical actors. The young diarist Margaret Moffat considered her particular place in the

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<sup>75</sup> For analysis of the preindustrial domestic labor that twentieth-century histories obscured, see Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Knopf, 2001)



historical record, writing “A True Poem” in the “Engagements” section at the back of the volume that reflected boredom with her own experiences:

My diary looks well enough,  
And I write reams  
But now composed of what trite stuff  
The recorded seems.

Each page doth disappointment bring  
And makes me frown,  
I never seem to do a thing  
Worth putting down.

My thoughts, as I record the same  
Seem a dull crop,  
I’m weary of this diary game  
And think I’ll stop.<sup>76</sup>

In devoting effort to this verse, Moffat applied creativity, dramatically lamenting life and thoughts as mundane. This simultaneous attention to and dismissal of her activities echoed dominant culture’s approach to the study of history. Women’s historical contributions to home and family were essential, popular culture maintained, but true dramatic glory was limited to notable men identified as transformative agents in social progress.

Combining celebrations of women with prescriptions for gender norms, advertisers assigned the idealized colonial woman the anachronistic role of brand consumer, a role crucial to the nation’s capitalist democracy but lacking individuality or innovation. A 1909 Wanamaker Diary ad for Ye Olde Colonials Rugs, a mark available in Philadelphia department stores, depicted Martha Washington as a shopper to dramatize continuity in women’s domesticity.<sup>77</sup> The ad’s copy asserted that Ye Olde Colonial Rugs

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<sup>76</sup> Diary of Margaret Moffat, *Wanamaker Diary* (1914), Box 83, Wanamaker Papers, HSP.

<sup>77</sup> *Wanamaker Diary* (1909), 272, Box 83, Wanamaker Papers, HSP.

combined innovation with old-fashioned quality: “They are hand-woven, as should be the case with all floor coverings of the Good Old Colonial Days. They are made of carefully selected new materials, and dyed in tints that are as rich in harmonies as in historic associations.”<sup>78</sup> Not only would a contemporary consumer interact with the past by purchasing new “floor coverings of the Good Old Colonial Days,” but “A Colonial Dame, visiting the Carpet Section of Wanamaker’s not long ago exclaimed: ‘If Martha Washington could revisit Philadelphia, how these rugs would brighten her eyes and call up wonderful old memories!’ You’ll Say So, Too, if You See Them.”<sup>79</sup> Ignoring the domestic production of colonial textiles and food, the modern model of women’s labor defined consumption as the crucial task which not only provided for material needs but also incorporated memories and patriotism into everyday life.

In popular culture’s constructions of public life, the contemporary Colonial Dame continued to populate idealized homes and department store floors, even as the New Woman and modern “flapper” figures gained prominence. Asserting that feminine domesticity from the colonial era continued in the present, advertisements assured that historical shifts like the movement for women’s suffrage or the proliferation of electric household technologies would not alter women’s status as helpmeets. To support this claim, popular depictions of previous eras denied that the gendered division of labor was constructed. This model ignored shifts in women’s work and status between colonial settlement and the industrialized twentieth century. However, mass culture itself had played crucial roles in the redefinition of housework with the onset of industrialization in

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

the nineteenth century.<sup>80</sup> In the early decades of the twentieth century, advertisements and the popular press emphasized consumption as central to women's roles. Promotion of this ideal through a continuity model of women's history required distortion of both the past and the present.

Twentieth-century advertisements depicted a sharp division between the male public domain and women's domestic work, bridged only by women's roles as consumers. Not only did this ideal ignore the complexities of contemporary women's political, social, and professional work, but it also reworked the preindustrial past to fit a separate spheres model in which women maintained the ideal home. The historian Ruth Schwartz Cowan complicates the assumption that industrialization transformed the American household from a site of production to a site of consumption. In fact, one form of production substituted for another as the stove and industrialized flour replaced cooking over an open hearth. Notably, such innovations altered the performance of household labor largely by eliminating the tasks which had been relegated to men in colonial America (chopping wood, hand grinding corn and wheat).<sup>81</sup> However, these shifts did not lessen the household labor required of women. Indeed, Cowan explains that new products often increased women's labor. The preindustrial husband's co-operative role contrasts with expectations that the twentieth-century housewife apply industrialized products and tools to produce all the meals and launder all the clothing.<sup>82</sup>

A "doctrine of separate spheres" both emerged from and encouraged the further development of industrialization.<sup>83</sup> The male public sphere developed as new tools

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<sup>80</sup> Cowan, 41.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 48, 63.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 19.

eliminated the household chores traditionally performed by men, thus creating free time for men to pursue paid labor.<sup>84</sup> Calling this process the “first phase of industrialization,” Cowan argues that the twentieth century saw a “second phase” in which “inventors and entrepreneurs and advertising copywriters and consumers themselves” accepted separate spheres as natural, supporting a gendering of labor which would sustain this division.<sup>85</sup> Advertisers’ reconstruction of the past to fit with the contemporary separate spheres ideal played an integral part in this process. Popular culture’s insistence on continuity in women’s roles across historical periods promoted separate gendered spheres as natural, constructing feminine domesticity as unchanging and innate.

Naturalization of the separate sphere model relied on revisionist histories which reimagined colonial women’s labor as consumption performed by upstanding women of all social classes. The 1924 Liquid Veneer advertisement in *Good Housekeeping* applied contemporary 1920s middle-class norms to the elite Martha Washington, an anachronism which emphasized the role of consumption in women’s labor. In the early twentieth century, with domestic servants in middle-class homes declining, white, middle-class women were increasingly likely to perform their own household labor. Simultaneously, the twentieth century’s mass-produced housekeeping aids differentiated 1920s housework from that performed by colonial women.<sup>86</sup> The advertisement linked Martha Washington and the 1920s woman by ignoring the reality of colonial slave labor and asserting that

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<sup>84</sup> Simultaneously, families embraced new household technologies in response to sociological changes such as urbanization and decreased land ownership. Ibid., 63, 42.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 69. It is during the shift to this second phase that Cowan identifies an increase in the amount of household labor women performed. In diaries and letters, women increasingly referred to tedium and fatigue in association with activities like sewing after the introduction of new industrialized fabrics like manufactured cloth. Ibid., 64.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 122. As domestic servants became less common, they were also removed from advertisements. Ads increasingly depicted housewives themselves performing domestic labor after World War I. Simultaneously, women’s magazines increasingly defined household labor as a notable familial contribution rather than menial labor Ibid., 175-78.

Washington polished her own furniture; the only significant difference between this idealized First Lady and the average twentieth-century consumer is the technological progress which makes the “Liquid Veneer” product available. This promotion glorified the selection of household products as a woman’s ideal contribution to her nation in the past as well as in the present. Use of a continuity model to compare the colonial era to the present defined women’s domestic roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers as unchanging, stemming from innate feminine tendencies. While Liquid Veneer celebrated Martha Washington’s role as domestic hostess, viewing it as a vital contribution to American democracy, the ad nevertheless limited women’s political role to the performance of traditionally “feminine” work.

Prescriptive literature encouraging women to integrate period styles into their homes with historical objects, like a “Liquid Veneer” Martha Washington portrait or Colonial Revival décor, used the past to normalize contemporary constructions of gender and race.<sup>87</sup> Although twentieth-century African-American clubwomen and writers were producing histories of African-American women, popular depictions of colonial domesticity in mass market magazines and advertisements remained strikingly white.<sup>88</sup> Invocations of the past in magazines and advertisements either ignored the role of race in American history, as in the Liquid Veneer promotion, or portrayed slavery as an unproblematic aspect of colonial American domesticity. An advertisement for Vitraline Floor Varnish in the September 1916 issue of *Good Housekeeping* depicted the elaborate entrance to a colonial home.<sup>89</sup> Two white men in colonial dress look on as a black man

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<sup>87</sup> Popular fascination with the colonial constituted part of the “Colonial Revival.” Marling, *George Washington Slept Here*, 12.

<sup>88</sup> Des Jardins, 120-121.

<sup>89</sup> Advertisement. *Good Housekeeping* (Sept. 1916), 173.

stands at the doorway, bowing deferentially. The ad's text explains that the image is available as a "handsome art print" upon request by mail. The use of such imagery as interior decoration reflected the Colonial Revival aesthetic that began to flourish with the centennial celebrations of 1876 and built to a peak in the 1920s and 1930s. But such décor extended beyond the realm of style, asserting the acceptability of the colonial era's racial hierarchy in the present day. Advertisers made engagement with the distorted past through home decoration and product selection part of the domestic labor expected of the idealized homemaker. This use of the past obscured domestic objects' value as historical artifacts that recorded unique moments in history.

Depictions of continuity in women's and minorities' subordinate status contrasted with dynamic narrative histories of "great men" as transformative figures. Even when invoking a specific figure like Martha Washington, advertisements privileged continuity over change as a model for understanding women's history, establishing Martha Washington as a parallel figure to the contemporary married consumer. By contrast, companies deployed narratives of historical progress as metaphors for their own success; the growth of a corporation, driven by strong male leadership, paralleled the nation's expansion through the vision of its Founding Fathers. Department stores' advertisements in particular often produced "institutional or prestige-building messages," defined by the Amos Parrish & Co. advertising firm as appeals "with no direct selling appeal, but calculated to build good will for a department or for the store."<sup>90</sup> Advertisements invoking a corporation's history employed tropes of change rather than ahistorical iconography; department stores often linked their own progress as corporations with the

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<sup>90</sup> Amos Parrish & Co., *Review and Analysis* (1930), 265, 286, Box 1, Folder 33, William B. Thalheimer Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

progress of the nation as a whole. Department stores' anniversaries and patriotic national holidays provided the occasion for re-enactments, pageants, and exhibits celebrating iconic events in American history. Advertisements promoting these celebrations contained historical facts rather than details on available products.

An advertisement for Wanamaker's Philadelphia department store running on George Washington's birthday explained that the store would be closed in observation of the holiday, but contained an informative biography of Washington and proclaimed itself "worth keeping for frequent reading."<sup>91</sup> When women appeared in such advertisements, they were celebrated for their domestic and maternal contributions, which made notable events in (male) American history possible. For example, one Washington's Birthday ad explained "This is What Madam Washington Told Her Eldest Son, George."<sup>92</sup> The ad reproduced such mother-to-son advice as "Labour to keep alive in your heart that little spark of celestial fire called conscience," and "Let your conversation be without malice or envy."<sup>93</sup> The ad continued:

Young George transcribed his mother's words into a set of "Resolutions," which he put together for his own use, to govern his behavior in company, at table and in business. No wonder that the first President of the United States said, "All I am I owe to my mother." Life is a terribly earnest matter. Would that every boy or girl of thirteen and every man and woman we know would specifically adopt these "Resolutions" and read them over, if possible, every day.<sup>94</sup>

Casting the maternal advice of the colonial era as useful even in the twentieth century, this ad portrays good mothering as a timeless influence on American society.

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<sup>91</sup> Advertisement, (Feb. 22, 1921), Box 247, Wanamaker Papers.

<sup>92</sup> Advertisement, (Feb. 21, 1921), Box 247, Wanamaker Papers.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

Such institutional ads often invoked past triumphs in American history to celebrate contemporary milestones, both in the department stores' own histories and in American political life. They may have celebrated the roles of women, such as Martha Washington and Betsy Ross, but they did not isolate women's lives as markers of great change, worthy of celebration.<sup>95</sup> However, popular invocations of the colonial sometimes depicted a more complex stance on the possibility for shifts in gender roles. A 1914 *Good Housekeeping* article featuring recipes and decorating instructions for a "Suffrage Luncheon" highlighted the movement for women's suffrage as a unique historical development with its opening line: "Possibly there is 'nothing new under the sun,' but it is yet to be proved that those marvelous people the early Egyptians ever gave a suffrage luncheon."<sup>96</sup> However, the historic referent offered to symbolize this new political development was not an icon of political change, but rather, the familiar idealized colonial woman. The article encouraged readers to make paper cut-out "suffrage figures" to stand by each place-setting. The model is dressed in yellow, the "suffrage color," and in colonial garb, as well as a "Votes for Women" sash. The article describes this "little figure" as "truly suffrage yet with a tiny touch of the Colonial." This reference to the past both asserted that political activity was a valid extension of the colonial legacy, and reassured readers that, even with suffrage, women would maintain the familiar feminine ideals of homemaker, hostess, and consumer.<sup>97</sup>

Advertisements asserted continuity in domestic roles across American history by emphasizing the enduring desires for comfortable and beautiful homes. The popularity of

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<sup>95</sup> For Betsy Ross Wanamaker's ads, see Oct. 11, 1913, Aug 26, 1914, and June 19, 1916, Box 247, Wanamaker Papers.

<sup>96</sup> Bertha E. Shapleigh. "A Suffrage Luncheon," *Good Housekeeping* (Jan. 1914), 136.

<sup>97</sup> On suffragist influence in magazines and advertisements, see Scanlon, 126-36, 183-88 and Finnegan, 45-75, 111-38.



Colonial Revival styles symbolized this inherent desire, both in advertisements and in the idealized consumer's home. Interest in colonial furnishings extended beyond the antique market, fuelling a variety of mass-marketed reproductions. In the late 1920s, the Simmons Company promoted metal reproductions of historic bed styles alongside its popular mattresses. In national publications, photographs of Simmons products in a variety of homes, accompanied with endorsements by famous women, demonstrated their compatibility with diverse historical styles.

Eleanor Roosevelt, pursued by the J. Walter Thompson ad agency for her prestigious name and visibility as a politician's wife, provided one of these endorsements. A promotional publication issued by Simmons featured an article "by Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt" advising consumers on "HOOKED RUGS! Their History and Use Today."<sup>98</sup> Roosevelt, identified as "a connoisseur of Early American antiques" described the recent fashion for "early American furniture" and praised early nineteenth-century hooked rugs that "are interesting to us as an expression of the craving for beauty in their homes which was as prevalent among our pioneer ancestors as it is today."<sup>99</sup> She presented these rugs as invitations to "conjure up before us pictures of old fire-lit kitchens of Colonial days."<sup>100</sup> Here, consumption of Colonial Revival style inspires a reverie on past American eras; according to Simmons' promotions, consumption provides an effective means to relate with national history.

In their selections of historical themes, corporations, advertisers, and publications not only modeled female consumers' roles in the industrialized twentieth-century

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<sup>98</sup> Promotional newspaper (1929), Box 117, Folder 1, Simmons Company Records, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

economy but also defined social, economic, and racial boundaries for the American elite. In many promotions, the European-American history of elite social families symbolized the prestige and quality of a product's brand. While such advertisements glorified the upper classes as the most influential in shaping civilization, this sales strategy presented products as an entry for white middle-class families to the taste of the elite. After documenting Simmons mattresses in elite homes of America and Europe, advertisements positioned Simmons as a prestigious but bargain brand name, explaining, "It is surprising how reasonably Simmons beds are priced."<sup>101</sup> The price and quality of Simmons beds allowed middle-class consumers to emulate iconic families in American and European history. While the application of elite Euro-American style to middle-class consumption eroded class boundaries, the absence of non-white consumers and non-white endorsers in Simmons advertisements constructed racial boundaries.

At the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency in the late 1920s, Lucile Turnbach Platt organized the series of advertisements featuring Simmons bedding in such noteworthy homes as the "ancient Roman palace" of the Duchess of Sermoneta. Platt accentuated the New York bedroom of Miss Mabel Choate with an "Early American model" Simmons metal bed.<sup>102</sup> Printed in *McCall's*, *The Delineator*, *Woman's Home Companion*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *Pictorial Review*, this promotional campaign further defined consumption as a role shared by women across history. Here, rather than imagining Martha Washington's reaction to the modern department store, the advertisements identified elite socialites and notable female figures as the inheritors of

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<sup>101</sup> Typed copy, "Mrs. J. Borden Harriman...Mrs. Charles Tiffany...Mrs. Charles Dana Gibson" (Jan. 27, 1927), 2, Box 2, Gibson Folder, Lucile Turnbach Platt Papers, Hartman Center, Duke.

<sup>102</sup> Simmons advertisement, *McCall's* (May 1930), 147. Letter enclosure to Mabel Choate (Feb. 24, 1928), Box 1, Choate Folder, Platt Papers, Duke.

historical legacy, presiding over stately homes and incorporating the modern healthfulness of a Simmons mattress into heirloom décor. The caption for Mabel Choate's home explained: "Miss Choate inherits the distinction and charm of her famous father, the late Joseph Choate, who was so long Ambassador at the Court of St. James," before citing Mabel Choate's own philanthropic work, social collections, and good taste as "a discriminating collector of old books and modern art."<sup>103</sup> Advertisements likened the cache of social standing to the quality of the Simmons brand name, with copy for 1927 magazine advertisements proclaiming Mrs. J. Borden Harriman, Mrs. Charles Tiffany, and Mrs. Charles Dana Gibson as "American women whose names proclaim their high social standing, and whose beautiful homes are eloquent evidence of their good taste."<sup>104</sup> Reliance on elite society to demonstrate this legacy excluded many segments of the nation's population. Nevertheless, the Simmons endorsement campaign assumed identification with the elite as a universal ideal.

Emphasis on familial names shaped the campaign from the early planning stages, reflecting the J. Walter Thompson agency's assessment of women's public roles. Aminta Casseres, a leader in the J.W.T. Women's Editorial Department, proclaimed that endorsements from "society names" would better promote Simmons than endorsements from women notable for activities in public life including careers or women's organization leadership.<sup>105</sup> Acknowledging that women's public activities may indeed

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<sup>103</sup> Letter enclosure to Mabel Choate (Feb. 24, 1928), Box 1, Choate Folder, Platt Papers, Duke.

<sup>104</sup> Typed copy, "Mrs. J. Borden Harriman...Mrs. Charles Tiffany...Mrs. Charles Dana Gibson" (Jan. 27, 1927), 2, Box 2, Gibson Folder, Platt Papers, Duke.

<sup>105</sup> Scanlon, 191-92. Notably, Jennifer Scanlon identifies a split between Casseres' advocacy for advertising women's professional status and her essentialist judgments of female consumers as driven by "snobbery."

interest consumers, Casseres stressed that advertisements should associate Simmons with high standards of home décor. In an internal J. Walter Thompson memo, she wrote:

I don't see how we can doubt that society names (Vanderbilt, etc.) and names of people in official life (Roosevelt, etc.) are the best for this purpose.

People like Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt or any club president may or may not have homes in which is taken for granted that the furnishings are of the best.<sup>106</sup>

The reliance on name and family to signal prestige reflected goals for this specific campaign. Indeed, many members of the Women's Editorial Department supported feminist causes, even striving to include progressive perspectives in their advertising work.<sup>107</sup> The department hired feminist Alva Belmont to endorse Pond's Cold Cream in 1924.<sup>108</sup> By contrast, in the Simmons campaigns, elite society women, rather than suffragists like Carrie Chapman Catt, served as guardians of the past.

The compatibility of Simmons products with antiques and heirlooms signaled the brand's status value to consumers. The J. Walter Thompson agency devoted significant thought to the objects included, compiling lists of items found in endorsers' homes, relocating interesting pieces from different rooms, and influencing the endorsers' "choice" of Simmons bedding. Although participants were paid and given a choice of Simmons merchandise for their homes, the agency sometimes selected alternative merchandise for the promotional photographs, based on its interpretation of a residence's unique historical appeal. Notes for photographs to be taken at the Oyster Bay home of Mrs. Charles Tiffany reveal this process. First, the agency placed Simmons products in the home, remarking: "At present it has a large 4-poster which can easily be removed and

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<sup>106</sup> A. G. Casseres, "Simmons: Concerning public interest in names" (May 10, 1927), Box 1, Women Endorsers-General, 1926-1927, Sept. file, Platt Papers, Duke.

<sup>107</sup> Scanlon, 187-89.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 192-94.

give place to twin beds.”<sup>109</sup> To highlight the product’s compatibility with antique décor, candle sticks, jars, “an old witch’s broom and old brass bellows,” “two old silhouettes [sic],” and hooked rugs were then relocated from other areas of the house.<sup>110</sup> Copywriters collected information on the background and hobbies of endorsers and then produced the quotes attributed to them. Revealing the control advertisers exerted in composing the advertisements, agency correspondence observed that “Mrs. Fairbank did not see the beds which she is quoted as advocating and as using in her guest room.”<sup>111</sup> Nevertheless, the advertisements’ copy emphasized endorsers’ interest in history (and in Simmons) as informed consumers. Mrs. Frederic Cameron Church Jr., “the former Miss Muriel Vanderbilt,” is credited with heightening the “historic charm” of her Revolutionary-era home, “artistically preserv[ing] the beautiful historic atmosphere of the old house” by combining antiques with contemporary decorating trends like “modern colorings.”<sup>112</sup> Such design ideals expanded the promotional relevance of history to products that did not mimic antiques, but could be combined aesthetically with historical styles.

The Simmons promotions associated wealth and prestige with history, defining women primarily through their roles as wives, daughters, and consumers. The J. Walter Thompson agency approached Eleanor Roosevelt because of her status as “Mrs. Roosevelt.” During early planning stages, the Simmons Company made lists of

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<sup>109</sup> Typed document (Jan. 24, 1927), Box 2, Mrs. Charles Tiffany file, Platt Papers.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> A. P. Haake to George S. Fowler (March 23, 1927), Box 2, Fairbanks file, Platt Papers, Duke. Aminta Casseres reported on J. Walter Thompson’s efforts to ensure that women featured in Simmons testimonial advertisements did in fact use Simmons products. However, in her April 9, 1928, meeting report, Casseres was only sure that fourteen of the seventeen women already featured were using the Simmons products. Typed minutes, Special Production and Representatives’ Meeting (April 9, 1928), Box 1, J. Walter Thompson Company Archives, Staff Meeting Minutes Collection, Hartman Center, Duke.

<sup>112</sup> Advertisements, “In the Delightfully Contrasting Homes of Mrs. Frederic Cameron Church Jr. and Mrs. Joseph Leiter,” and “Exceedingly Comfortable,” Series 2D1, Box 117, Folder 1, Simmons Company Records, Archives Center, NMAH.

recognizable family names and reported that “the Roosevelt name” inspired the greatest interest in “those who have come to the New York Simmons salesroom.”<sup>113</sup> However, Roosevelt’s independent public activities expanded women’s engagement with the past beyond domestic consumption. The popular press covered her achievement as the co-founder and vice president of Val-Kill Industries, which ran a factory where local workers produced Colonial Revival furniture reproductions.<sup>114</sup> Val-Kill’s copies of furniture from the Metropolitan Museum’s collection strove to reach a wider public than rare antiques themselves.<sup>115</sup> A *New York Sun* article on this “new business idea” identified change over time in women’s roles, observing that the “glamour of novelty that once surrounded the venture of a noted woman into the business world has been dimmed by frequent repetition, but when such a woman finds a new field for the development of her individuality and acumen, her venture stands out.”<sup>116</sup> In 1930 the *New York Times* praised Val-Kill Industries as an example of progress in female business leadership, explaining, “Today women are adventuring in practically all trades monopolized, until recently, by the sterner sex.”<sup>117</sup>

Roosevelt herself also emphasized contemporary women’s business achievements, presenting Val-Kill Industries as an example of female career success.

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<sup>113</sup> George S. Fowler to Miss Eaton (Apr. 14, 1927), Box 1, Women Endorsers-General, 1926-1927, Sept. file, Platt Papers.

<sup>114</sup> The Val-Kill Industries furniture factory began operating in 1927 continued expanding its production even after the 1929 stock market crash. Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt, Vol. 1: 1884-1933* (New York: Viking, 1992), 323-25, 332, 419-20. Roosevelt expressed relief after the 1936 decision that the resources of Val-Kill industries would be sold to its workers in 1936, citing her new interests and personal tensions with collaborators Nancy Cook, who had managed most of the factory operations, and Marion Dickerman. Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt, Vol. 2: The Defining Years, 1933-1938* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 360-62.

<sup>115</sup> “Mrs. F. D. Roosevelt Becomes Partner in Novel Business,” *The New York Sun* (May 16, 1927), Box 2, Roosevelt, Mrs. Franklin D. file, Platt Papers, Duke.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Diana Rice, “Mrs. Roosevelt Tells of Woman-Run Factory,” *New York Times* (Nov. 16, 1930), ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times, X13.

Exhibiting Colonial Revival furniture at the Exposition of Women's Arts and Industries in New York City, Roosevelt spoke on employment prospects for middle-aged women.<sup>118</sup> She advised women to be entrepreneurs, predicting that their success would disprove popular gender prejudice and enable further social progress.<sup>119</sup> Such publicity not only increased the visibility of Val-Kill Industries, but it also publicized Roosevelt's own skills. Her endorsement of Simmons through an essay on colonial hooked rugs simultaneously promoted the Val-Kill rugs that joined the company's furniture line in 1929-1930.<sup>120</sup> Because Roosevelt had objected to capitalizing on her husband's political office, Simmons advertisements were forced to identify her through her own activities.<sup>121</sup> This endorsement deal thus promoted the competing furniture manufacturer that operated from Roosevelt's personal Hyde Park residence. In such cases, popular culture and consumer roles expanded the accepted boundaries for women's behavior, paving the way for opportunities in business.

Eleanor Roosevelt's work with Val-Kill Industries emphasized historical shifts as contemporary women demonstrated their professional capabilities; yet simultaneously, Roosevelt participated in the Simmons advertising campaign which emphasized consumption and domesticity as the center of women's lives. During the 1910s and 1920s, women activists and writers contested mass culture yet benefited from an interest

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<sup>118</sup> "Women's Exposition Opens Tomorrow," *New York Times* (Oct. 5, 1930), ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times, N3.

<sup>119</sup> Diana Rice, "Mrs. Roosevelt Tells of Woman-Run Factory," *New York Times* (Nov. 16, 1930), ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times, X13.

<sup>120</sup> Louis Torres, "Historic Resource Study: Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site (Val-Kill), Hyde Park, New York" (Denver: Denver Service Center, National Park Service, August 1980), 116-21.

<sup>121</sup> Roosevelt rejected copy identifying her as "first lady of the Empire State," explaining, "I am sorry but I cannot advertise my husband's position." Lucile T. Platt to Miss Lampe, (June 25, 1929), Box 2, Roosevelt, Mrs. Franklin D. file, Platt Papers, Duke.

in the past inspired by and reflected in mass culture. Because invocation of the past provides a key consciousness-raising method in women's rights activism, attention to mass culture's gendered depictions of history is crucial to an understanding of women's activism and scholarship. Ubiquitous depictions of domestic roles as static and innate complicated feminist efforts to prove that progress in women's professional recognition was possible.

Representations of women's roles as constant contrasted with historians' efforts to consider objects as artifacts reflective of a particular historical context. Mass culture constructed women's status as continuous, attributing progress chiefly to male technological innovation that eased household labor. Advertisements and women's magazines acknowledged stylistic change in clothing and domestic objects but often did not link such changes to the possibility for change in women's status. In spite of technological progress, women's inherent domesticity would ostensibly ensure continuity in their social roles. Nevertheless, mass culture's uses of the past did not always exist in strict opposition to feminist and scholarly projects. Professional women and activists often cited continuity in women's character as justification for contemporary women's public roles. Advertisements and magazines acknowledged that women had taken individual actions which fostered nation and democracy. The limited transgression celebrated in such examples makes differentiation between mass culture and activist or scholarly depictions of the past more complex.

Recent scholarship has considered the innovative work performed by women historians, even as the definition of the ideal historian as male restricted their participation in the historical profession. Women like Lucy Maynard Salmon,



marginalized by the professionalization of historical study at the end of the nineteenth century, built careers around teaching, a scholarly activity deemed more suitable to women, or wrote in the devalued genre of amateur history.<sup>122</sup> The historical profession minimized the historical work of Progressive women writers.<sup>123</sup> Previous analysis has nevertheless neglected the consumer culture of the 1910s and 1920s as a site for serious women's or feminist history.

Feminists and women historians formulated their arguments in tune with mass culture's depictions of women in history, thus striving to create alternative narratives but still benefiting from a popular fascination for the past fuelled by mass culture. Progressive female historians adopted the multimedia publicity strategies that middle-class preservationists and writers used to address the public.<sup>124</sup> The "Colonial Revival" which encompassed groups like the Daughters of the American Revolution and Society of Colonial Dames sometimes eclipsed the work of Progressive women historians, so it makes sense that Progressive historians would have deployed some of the DAR and SCD's proven, popular strategies.<sup>125</sup>

By providing forums for activist and scholarly historical analysis, mass media juxtaposed multiple perspectives on continuity and change in women's roles. Historians like Lucy Maynard Salmon studied American culture, often by studying household objects. Their analyses thus held some common points of interest with women's magazines which analyzed objects and décor. Such commonalities complicate differentiation between activist women historians and nostalgic, patriotic women's

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<sup>122</sup> Smith, *The Gender of History*, 7-9, 157-60.

<sup>123</sup> Des Jardins, 4, 17, 67-8.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>125</sup> Simultaneously, the work of Progressive women historians may have informed the work of organizations like the DAR.

organizations. For example, *Good Housekeeping*, a homemaking magazine targeted to white middle-class readers, published several Salmon articles which analyzed contemporary consumer products like mattresses.<sup>126</sup>

In her scholarly work, Salmon used material culture to uncover shifts in women's roles across time, a perspective which disrupted the popular continuity model of domestic history. An instructor at Vassar College beginning in 1887 and an active participant in academic history, Salmon examined everyday objects as vessels for cultural meaning. Prefiguring the rise of cultural history, she used such artifacts as the cook book or the city's main street to narrate history.<sup>127</sup> For example, one essay examined Salmon's own backyard, describing the abandoned posts for laundry lines as a record of change in women's household labor. Salmon no longer laundered her clothes at home, but there were still laundry lines at the two-family houses neighboring her larger home.<sup>128</sup> This analysis revealed her belief that industrial innovation could in fact alter home-making tasks and her hope that technology would be applied to improve women's lives. Salmon interpreted the material as evidence of women's socially and economically specific conditions at a certain historical moment.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Lucy M. Salmon, "On Beds and Bedding," *Good Housekeeping*, Volume 52 (1911), 781. Notably, although an image of a colonial woman holding a quilt accompanies this article by historian Lucy Maynard Salmon, Salmon does not perform an historical analysis in this call for sanitary bedding materials.

<sup>127</sup> Nicholas Adams and Bonnie G. Smith, "Introduction: Lucy Maynard Salmon and the Texture of Modern Life," in Adams and Smith, eds., *History and the Texture of Modern Life: Selected Essays by Lucy Maynard Salmon* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 1-5.

<sup>128</sup> Lucy Maynard Salmon, "History in a Back Yard," in Adams and Smith, eds., 82. This piece was printed privately in 1912. (Adams and Smith, 76).

<sup>129</sup> Salmon interpreted the material as evidence of women's socially and economically specific conditions at a certain historical moment. By contrast, in her 1898 publication *Home Life in Colonial Days*, popular amateur writer Alice Morse Earle analyzed domestic objects as evidence of women's experiences, but ultimately reaffirmed ahistorical myths of preindustrial economic bliss in colonial home life. This analysis contrasted with late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century advertisements' celebrations of technological innovation as a marker of progress in women's work. Alice Morse Earle offered the past as evidence supporting white, middle-class superiority throughout time. Susan Reynolds Williams, "In the Garden of

*Good Housekeeping* exposed mainstream audiences to Lucy Maynard Salmon's work, but the publication applied its own lens of celebratory domestic history. Illustrations of women in colonial dress performing household chores decorated the margins of Salmon's articles. Such use of period illustrations, even with articles describing present-day consumer products, suggested continuity in women's domestic activity.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, a 1910 article on "domestic order" minimized the intellectual activity embedded in Salmon's housekeeping and writing. The author, one of Salmon's former students, proclaimed that Salmon "has, I think, the greatest intellectual force of any woman with whom it has ever been my good fortune to come in contact."<sup>131</sup> The article then illustrated these intellectual abilities with a detailed description of Salmon's household: "Her keen, well-ordered mind, as well as the great charm of her personality, were reflected in every corner of [her] house. I think her kitchen was her pride."<sup>132</sup> Notably, the piece failed to detail Salmon's intellectual leadership or her awareness of domesticity's historical significance. For readers familiar with Salmon's scholarship, the depiction of housekeeping as her greatest achievement would suggest that domesticity was more important than her professional success. Thus, attention to popular media, and to the possible co-optation of women historians' work, is crucial to assessing the impact of, and the difficulties faced by, women historians. Women's histories benefited from an interest in the past inspired by and reflected in mass culture. Women historians actively

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New England: Alice Morse Earle and the History of Domestic Life" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1992), 223-35.

<sup>130</sup> Lucy M. Salmon, "On Beds and Bedding," *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (June 1911), 781.

<sup>131</sup> Mary P. Hamlin, "The Beauty of the House Is Order: A Plea for Just a Little More Dirt and Much More Order and Happiness," *Good Housekeeping* (December 1910), 692-6, as quoted in Louise Fargo Brown, *Apostle of Democracy: The Life of Lucy Maynard Salmon* (New York: Harper, 1943), 196.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

engaged with popular depictions of history surrounding them, even as they sought to complicate continuity models of women's past.

When influenced by the work of historians and activists, print culture did not present women's roles as monolithically static, even in depictions of colonial domesticity. Activists applied the vogue for colonial style to causes like the movement for women's suffrage, and this shaped their reception in popular culture. A May 6, 1911, suffrage parade in New York City, for example, deployed the recognizable imagery of colonial domesticity in its agitation for progressive change in women's rights. Notably, Women's Political Union suffragists organized this particular parade to strengthen the relationship between women suffragists and women's labor advocates. The parade's opening floats narrated the history of women's work, including the domestic labor of previous generations and the industrial paid labor of contemporary women.<sup>133</sup> Suffragists' linking of their cause with both women's private and public labor assured that, in spite of changes in public behaviors, familiar gendered traditions would remain. The parade thus acknowledged the domestic work that consumer culture more readily identified as contemporary women's historical legacy. A float depicting eighteenth-century domestic labors such as spinning and cooking received praise from bystanders interviewed by the *Chicago Daily Tribune*. Nevertheless, coverage of this display explored the artifice required of contemporary public women celebrating colonial traditions of domesticity:

The Misses Rose Guylienbrook and Ella De Neergard gave the most earnest demonstrations on the float of the work of women 200 or so years ago. Miss Guylienbrook early in the afternoon placed her pocketbook in the caldron before

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<sup>133</sup> Ellen Carol DuBois, *Harriot Stanton Blatch and the Winning of Woman Suffrage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 136.

which she sat in costume. She steadily stirred the pocketbook around as the float moved southward. Miss De Neergard sat before a loom and wove things.<sup>134</sup>

While the utility of the “things” produced in colonial household production remained unaddressed, the pocketbook suggested contemporary women’s consumer, and even earning, power, providing a reminder of the female economic influence that underpinned contemporary society. The *Chicago Daily Tribune*’s emphasis on Rose Guylienkrook’s hidden pocketbook symbolized the consumer role that had altered women’s behavior and reminded readers that emulation of eighteenth-century housework required performance. Simultaneously, the use of “Quaker maids” in costume to represent notable figures in the nineteenth-century suffrage movement, along with the parade’s narration of industrial technological progress as a benefit to working women’s lives, emphasized the possibility for change in women’s roles.<sup>135</sup>

In such cases, activist women’s history melded models of continuity with celebrations of change. This approach also marked African-American women’s activism in the 1910s and 1920s. Books and periodicals emphasized African-American women’s roles in advancing civil rights and improving civilization. Recognition of women’s contributions supported the “uplift” strategy embodied by the National Association of Colored Women, formed in 1896 as an umbrella organization unifying pre-existing local clubs. According to the uplift ideal, the public morality and middle-class style exhibited by clubwomen disproved white supremacist claims. African-American clubwomen’s social mobility would improve the status of African-American women as well as men.

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<sup>134</sup> “New York Women in Huge Parade Demand Ballot,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (May 7, 1911), ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Tribune, 1.

<sup>135</sup> The *Chicago Daily Tribune*’s report explained, “Back of the eighteenth century float came a group that suggested to one how much the general use of steam power had to do with opening new fields of action for women. It was the industrial women.” Ibid.

African Americans would then fulfill capabilities that had been demonstrated by the race's history prior to the destructive imposition of American slavery. Like many of the local groups which preceded it, the NACW cited female historical figures including Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Phyllis Wheatley as models for modern women.<sup>136</sup>

This approach subsided during the 1920s, as the African-American women's club movement increasingly emphasized women's nurturing and maternal nature. By exemplifying this ideal femininity, clubwomen sought to repudiate the sexualized, modern woman embodied by consumer culture's African-American blues singers. Simultaneously, these activists responded to the increasingly male focus of civil rights activism and black nationalism. After World War I, an increase in male leaders' responses to racist violence displaced clubwomen's uplift efforts.<sup>137</sup> The NACW's responding turn to local, home-centered activism accompanied a reimagining of the link between women activists of the present and the past. The association's icons of African-American motherhood echoed popular advertisements' maternal ideals.

Print culture combined the "great women" approach with celebrations of maternity, introducing new figures into the narrative of American progress. The 1926 book *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction*, compiled by activist Hallie Q. Brown, collected biographies of African-American women to support the uplift strategy of the NACW. Brown, whose work included leadership in the National Association, dedicated the book to this organization "in memory of the many mothers

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<sup>136</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1999), 21-23, 29-31.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 123-32.

who were loyal in tense and trying times.”<sup>138</sup> Figures profiled included notable educators, wives and mothers of civil rights and religious leaders, and women whose public achievements attracted national attention. Josephine Turpin Washington’s foreword emphasized innate female qualities connecting women across time, thus making historical study valuable inspiration for contemporary youth; women’s “spirit” sustained previous generations and inspired contemporary youth facing different obstacles. “[C]onditions change,” Washington explained, “[b]ut the spirit of the noble dead may be enkindled in the hearts of those who live after.”<sup>139</sup> Following its introduction, the book opens with a poetic “Ode to Woman” as “the mother of man” and a biographical sketch and silhouette portrait of Martha Payne, mother of Wilberforce University founder Daniel A. Payne. This approach reflects the NACW strategy shift described by Deborah Gray White: “In short, where NACW leaders had once combined their race and gender ideology so that race work and feminism did not conflict, now they defined race work within the context of femininity.”<sup>140</sup>

Alongside its celebrations of maternal history, however, *Homespun Heroines* presented biographies in which activism was inspired both by race and by gender discrimination. A biography of Sojourner Truth celebrated her significance both as an abolitionist and as “a zealous advocate for the enfranchisement of women.”<sup>141</sup> The essay asserted that women’s lives were shaped by their unique historical contexts, opening with a quote celebrating Truth’s unique influence on society and closing with memories of

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<sup>138</sup> Hallie Q. Brown, *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction*, (Xenia, OH: Aldine Press, 1926; reprint ed., Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), iii.

<sup>139</sup> Josephine Turpin Washington, “Foreword,” *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction*, v.

<sup>140</sup> White, 130-31.

<sup>141</sup> Brown, 16.

Truth “recount[ing] many thrilling events of her long and remarkable life.”<sup>142</sup> The biography characterized her as influencing President Lincoln’s decision to admit African-American soldiers to Union forces.<sup>143</sup> With the publication praised by *The Crisis* for including “a good deal of information. . . concerning the work of colored women in the United States which hitherto has been difficult to find,” its conceptions of women’s dynamic roles could reach wide audiences, even as these conceptions lost favor in the contemporary civil rights movement.<sup>144</sup>

As a compilation of biographies by multiple authors, *Homespun Heroines* presented diverse examples of women’s historic roles. Readers who also encountered *The Crisis*’ advertisements promoting Madam C. J. Walker and Poro products could find evidence in Hallie Brown’s book to support this interpretation of women as dynamic historical actors. Simultaneously, they would find models of women’s domesticity that reflected NACW’s current strategy and that echoed mass market women’s magazines’ celebration of the home. The book also recalled the gendered historical tropes that had been popular in previous phases of the African-American women’s club movement. The image of Sojourner Truth and Abraham Lincoln included in the book had appeared as the cover image in *The Crisis*’ August 1915 issue advocating “Votes for Women.” This capacity of print culture to incorporate multiple perspectives, even within single works, provided challenges to dominant culture’s prescription of women’s history as static.

The juxtaposition (or even coexistence, in cases like the biographical compilation *Homespun Heroines*) of multiple models for women’s lives revealed inconsistencies in prescriptions for women’s behavior. Readers exposed to competing models for

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>144</sup> W. E. B. DuBois, “The Browsing Reader,” *The Crisis* (June 1927), 129.




understanding women's history could use serious depictions of women as historical actors to question the assumption of women's roles as innate and continuous. As Mary Louise Roberts theorizes in *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France*, "cultural illegibility," or the juxtaposition of contrasting viewpoints in the modernist French newspaper *La Fronde*, challenged culture's more limited prescriptions for women's behavior.<sup>145</sup> Confounding expectations that a women's publication be either "feminine" or "feminist," *La Fronde* asserted that women could maintain interests in politics as well as in style.<sup>146</sup> Because mass market women's magazines in the twentieth-century U.S. frequently deployed iconic, fragmented visuals to invoke the past, this decontextualized imagery could accompany a variety of assertions about women's roles. In the 1910s and 1920s, women working in the advertising industry applied this transgressive potential to activist work. They adopted historical imagery from advertisements to make activist claims, providing new contexts for images that typically promoted domesticity.

The threat of co-optation by a mass culture which reduced women's historical experiences to fragmented corporate symbols posed a consistent dilemma to feminists striving to assert the significance of women and gender in the past. Simultaneously, mass culture's fascination with the past remained constant, providing feminist writers, advertisers, and filmmakers opportunities to subvert and critique the construction of gender through invocation of the past. Advertisements juxtaposed celebrations of women's roles as innately domestic with encouragements for contemporary women to assume new roles.

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<sup>145</sup> Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin de Siècle France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 76.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.



MARTHA WASHINGTON  
One of a series of rare prints given you—see offer below

*American Housewives Today  
Enjoy What Martha  
Washington Could Not!*

NO American home ever offered a more democratic yet distinguished hospitality to its guests—native and foreign—than Mount Vernon when Dame Washington was its mistress.


GREAT men and great ladies, aristocrats and commoners, were everyday visitors; grand balls and other affairs were very frequent events. For the Washington mansion was the hub of the political and social life of the day.

WITH the many demands for her attention, how Martha Washington would have welcomed the labor-saving helps of modern homekeeping! For one thing, they would have saved her concern over the increasing dullness of her prized mahogany and other furniture—a dullness which grew in spite of a tedious rubbing, rubbing, rubbing with the beeswax of her time.

TO the modern hostess, Liquid Veneer Polish means a simple and easy way to care for piano, furniture and woodwork—restoring to or preserving in them the original beauties of finish, grain and coloring. As proof of its merit, we offer a free trial bottle; and with it we give a rare print (7 in. x 10 in., suitable for framing) of Martha Washington for 10c to pay postage and packing.

**BUFFALO SPECIALTY COMPANY**  
374 Ellicott St. Buffalo, N. Y.  
Reliable hardware, drug, grocery, paint and house furnishing stores recommend

**LIQUID VENEER**



One of a family of ten quality  
**POLISHING PRODUCTS**

Figure 1: Liquid Veneer Advertisement, “American Housewives Today Enjoy What Martha Washington Could Not!” *Good Housekeeping* (Feb. 1924), 121.

## Chapter 2

### “The Quaker Girl Turns Modern”: Advertising Women’s Activism

From the 1910s through the 1930s, ad agency employees frequently invoked the past, not only to promote products but also to define their profession’s role in contemporary society. Because of the unique opportunities it provided for female professionals, the advertising industry served as a visible metonymy for women’s increasing presence in public roles. Economic shifts that produced the twentieth-century advertising industry simultaneously produced other new employment opportunities for women. The ascendance of corporations in the American economy created new clerical jobs, pushing the number of women in clerical work from 400,000 in 1900 to two million in 1920.<sup>1</sup> The expansion of chain stores and department stores in the 1910s and 1920s also provided employment to women.<sup>2</sup> In this context, female advertisers’ efforts to gain recognition for women in business were relevant beyond the advertising industry itself. Their references to history challenged assumptions that women’s roles remained private and subordinate across time.

Advertising women invoked the past both as activists and as professionals.<sup>3</sup> After emerging in the 1910s, urban associations of women working in advertising flourished during the 1920s and 1930s. Although these groups did not seek legal or policy reform, they agitated for women’s employment and equitable treatment in the workplace. Their efforts challenge the division of American feminism into discrete “waves” delineated by

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<sup>1</sup> Scanlon, 80.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Women advertisers emphasized different themes as they moved between paid work and civic/professional activity. Their strategic choices produced coexisting identities, resembling the multiple activist identities that Nancy Hewitt identifies in Anglo, Cuban, and Afro-Cuban groups in Florida from 1880 to 1920. Combining such causes as suffrage and labor activism, these women responded to specific events. Nancy Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort: Women’s Activism in Tampa, Florida, 1880s-1920s* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

a period of stagnation following the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.<sup>4</sup> Across this milestone, women working in popular media organized and initiated civic activities to demonstrate women's historical significance. Exposing consumers to their transgressive public claims for professional status, advertisers inspired re-imaginings of the corporate-sponsored work which equated women's history more closely with domesticity but which nevertheless asserted women's historical significance. As historical imagery appeared both in advertising targeted to women and in advertising women's professional activism, anonymous, stylized colonial logos gained new significance as markers of women's influence on public life.

During the 1910s and 1920s, women's magazines and advertisements developed a visual language linking contemporary femininity to the past. Brand icons obscured women's agency and its historical contexts. Using colonial imagery alongside housekeeping advice for contemporary women, periodicals suggested that woman's domestic role had not changed, even if the style of her clothing or housekeeping tools had. In 1911, *Good Housekeeping* magazine frequently featured small illustrations of a colonial man and woman bowing to one another and of women in colonial dress performing household chores such as dish-washing or quilt-making. These images, which filled the pages' margins, did not accompany articles about the colonial era, but rather, advice columns which described the latest housekeeping techniques and products.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For pioneering arguments against the feminist "wave" model, see Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Susan Ware, *Beyond Suffrage: Women in the New Deal* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981); and Lois Scharf and Joan M. Jensen, *Decades of Discontent: the Women's Movement, 1920-1940* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> For examples of colonial romantic couple imagery, see cover illustration, *Good Housekeeping*, August 1911, and *Good Housekeeping*, Vol. 52. (1911), 776. For images of colonial women performing household tasks, see Irene Nash Scott, "Housekeeping Gone Mad," *Good Housekeeping*, Vol. 52 (1911), 777 and Lucy M. Salmon, "On Beds and Bedding," *Good Housekeeping*, Vol. 52 (1911), 781. Notably, although an

Such use of anachronistic visual cues persisted, coming to define the twentieth-century women's magazine. In 1930, *McCall's* magazine featured silhouetted figures or illustrations of figures in period dress on pages that did not include editorial references to the past, as well as on pages that did.<sup>6</sup> These visual cues, in the absence of explicit textual references, implied links between romance, domesticity, and an idyllic American heritage. Such visual iconography suggested a continuity in domestic ideals and in idealized female behavior across time. The clothing in such illustrations suggested the possibility of stylistic, but not ideological change.

Many advertisements deployed visuals to invoke domestic tradition, even as they peddled products which drastically altered the performance of domestic labor. This promotional angle often emphasized women's domestic nature across time, in spite of shifts in household tools. Just as the Baker's "Belle Chocoatière" icon carried her tray of pre-industrial cocoa into the company's contemporary advertisements, illustrations of a spinning-wheel in the logo for mass-produced "wash and wear" cloth invoked the previous, more labor-intensive methods of cloth production.<sup>7</sup> Such images did not address the change in domestic work over time, reconciling progress in household technology and continuity in women's domestic roles. Advertisements and product packaging thus offered corporate products as links to sentimentalized, ahistorical ideals of previous eras' domesticity.

The continuity assigned to women's history contrasted sharply with the advertising industry's celebration of its own history as the embodiment of American

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image of a colonial woman holding a quilt accompanies this article by historian Lucy Maynard Salmon, Salmon does not perform an historical analysis in this call for sanitary bedding materials.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, *McCall's* (Oct. 1930), 28 and *McCall's* (May 1930), 69.

<sup>7</sup> Advertisement, *Wanamaker Diary* (1909), 240, Box 83, Wanamaker Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

progress. In their efforts to claim recognition for their contributions to a predominantly male field, advertising women drew on the profession's frequent invocation of the past to assert its own significance. In *Printers' Ink*, periodicals and publishing firms presented themselves to ad executives and to businesses as good ways to reach consumers. A 1916 advertisement for the Knickerbocker Press featured a town crier in colonial garb, thus suggesting the Press's status as an established commercial venture.<sup>8</sup> In the late 1920s, a series of advertisements for Westvaco paper mills in *Printers' Ink Monthly* celebrated the advertising profession by tracing the historical "pageant of advertising" through such milestones as the development of the railroad, which created railway stations as a place to post advertisements.<sup>9</sup>

As advertisers conducted their everyday work, they also conceptualized their place in history. Staff meeting minutes compiled by the J. Walter Thompson agency in the late 1920s reveal a preoccupation with contemporary advertising's heritage and legacy. Prepared talks assessed such topics as the history of typography in advertising from the invention of printing to the present.<sup>10</sup> A staff meeting talk on the "Importance of Strategy in Copy" used Joan of Arc, Napoleon, Julius Caesar, and Alexander the Great as illustrative examples.<sup>11</sup> Asserting that advertisements performed a necessary function in the economy, even preventing civilization from collapsing, William Day used military analogies to claim that skillful advertising strategy remained eternally effective, but that collective work could bring improvements even upon the great work of advertisers from

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<sup>8</sup> Advertisement. *Printers' Ink* (March 16, 1916), 107.

<sup>9</sup> Advertisement. *Printers' Ink Monthly* (Jan. 1928), 79-80.

<sup>10</sup> Talk by Janet Cunningham, "Type in Advertising" (March 24, 1931), Box 3, Folder 5, J. Walter Thompson Company Archives Staff Meeting Minutes Collection, Hartman Center, Duke.

<sup>11</sup> Talk by William Day, "Importance of Strategy in Copy" (June 4, 1930), Box 2, Folder 4, J. Walter Thompson Company Archives Staff Meeting Minutes Collection, Duke.

the past.<sup>12</sup> Such rhetoric portrayed the advertising profession as a dynamic part of Western civilization's progress.

As the historian Roland Marchand noted, advertising agencies in the late 1920s employed far more men than women, by a ten-to-one ratio.<sup>13</sup> Although the field offered comparatively more opportunities for women than other industries at the time, advertising executives admitted that they employed them almost exclusively to gain access to the "woman's viewpoint." Female advertisers were hired for their expertise on women and were seldom given the opportunity to do much else. Their exclusion from professional advertising societies reflected and further entrenched this division.<sup>14</sup> In response, women formed their own societies, beginning with the League of Advertising Women (later the Advertising Women of New York), established in 1912 "to enable women doing constructive advertising to co-operate for the purpose of mutual advancement; to further the study of advertising in its various branches; and to emphasize the work that woman is doing and is specially qualified to do in the field of sales promotion and in the many-sided business of advertising."<sup>15</sup> Established by noted home economist Christine Frederick and her advertiser husband Justus George Frederick, the League of Advertising Women grew from fewer than three dozen members in 1912 to one hundred and sixteen members in 1920.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 33-35. Simone Weil Davis, *Living Up to the Ads: Gender Fictions of the 1920s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 80-104.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> League of Advertising Women By-Laws, quoted in 1917-1918 Program, Advertising Women of New York Scrapbook 2, Wisconsin State Historical Society.

<sup>16</sup> Scanlon, 62. Dorothy Dignam, "Club Growth," Carton 2, "Digests from 1912" folder, Advertising Women of New York Collection 86-M216, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies.

The League of Advertising Women combined public educational efforts, including vocational courses for women, with social and professional events, frequently juxtaposing traditional and modern motifs to assert advertising women's prestige. For example, the program announcing the club's 1917-1918 schedule included a drawing of a (male) colonial town crier, similar to the imagery invoked by the trade journal *Printers' Ink* to establish a prestigious American history for the industry. Simultaneously, the League used "old-fashioned" imagery as a source of aesthetic amusement.<sup>17</sup> The League threw a lavish "Old Fashioned Ball" in 1930, promising to "revive memories of the Mauve Decade."<sup>18</sup>

Advertising women reconciled these historical costumes with their "modern" identity. Indeed, an announcement for the 1928 annual dinner dance juxtaposed a Godey's Lady's Book-style illustration of a woman in fashionable nineteenth-century dress with the 1920s fashion for lower-case typography and the statement, "it is to be a modern affair."<sup>19</sup> A skit presented by the League in 1926, "Gentlemen Prefer Advertising Women," featured fashion and beauty experts who presumably updated "Ye Hapless Advertising Man" and "The Antique."<sup>20</sup> Such events asserted that women's skills contributed to the industry and implied modernization as a goal. Simultaneously, organized advertising women defined improvement in women's societal status as part of modernization. They linked the movement for women's political rights with their professional networks, for example, proposing women's suffrage as a plank for male and

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<sup>17</sup> League of Advertising Women By-Laws, quoted in 1917-1918 Program, Advertising Women of New York Scrapbook 2, WSHS.

<sup>18</sup> Old Fashioned Ball invitation (March 18, 1930), Advertising Women of New York Scrapbook 19, WSHS.

<sup>19</sup> Dinner-dance invitation, Postmarked Feb. 28, 1928, Advertising Women of New York Scrapbook 7, WSHS.

<sup>20</sup> "Gentlemen Prefer Advertising Women" Program (June 23, 1926), Advertising Women of New York Scrapbook 18, WSHS.



female participants at the Associated Advertising Clubs of the World convention.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, League of Advertising Women members were not allowed to construct professional identities free from society's gendered assumptions, and even successful advertising women voiced doubts about women's abilities.<sup>22</sup> League leader Jane J. Martin lamented her female colleagues' identification with socially prescribed roles in a 1917 *New York Herald* interview. Martin criticized contemporary business women who "are still not working to their full capabilities" because "so many of them still cling hard to old fashioned, nineteenth century ideas," declining to attend League events without male escorts and leaving League meetings early, presumably to honor social norms.<sup>23</sup>

Organizations representing advertising women developed across the country, most often in major urban areas. Like the New York group, many of these associations became affiliated with the Advertising Federation of America, through which they collaborated with one another and with male advertising societies. By 1930, advertising women's clubs in Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Chicago, Cleveland, Buffalo, Baltimore, Milwaukee, Providence, Toledo, Detroit, and Grand Rapids had received A.F.A. charters.<sup>24</sup> Active women's advertising clubs also appeared in Boston and Cincinnati.<sup>25</sup> Yet despite their modern origins, invocations of the past defined these groups' social events and professional activities.

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<sup>21</sup> Clipping, Rose D. Westion, "Suffragist Ad Women Want Publicity Men to Adopt Their Plank," *North American* (June 29, 1916), Advertising Women of New York Scrapbook 2, WSHS.

<sup>22</sup> Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 209.

<sup>23</sup> Clipping, n.d., "Miss Jane J. Martin and her \$10,000 salary," *New York Herald*, Advertising Women of New York Scrapbook 2, WSHS.

<sup>24</sup> Dorothy Dignam, "Date of A. F. A. Affiliation of Women's Clubs," Carton 2, "Women's Clubs in A.F.A." folder, Advertising Women of New York Collection 86-M216, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe.

<sup>25</sup> Clipping, J. J. Martin, "Plans of Advertising Women," *Associated Advertising* (Sept. 1916), Advertising Women of New York Scrapbook 2, WSHS.

The Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women (PCAW), an association of local women in creative and executive positions in the industry, was founded in 1916.<sup>26</sup> In conjunction with a national advertising convention held in Philadelphia that year, a handful of local women planned social events for female advertisers and “advertising wives.”<sup>27</sup> The PCAW emerged from these meetings, recruiting as its members women who worked in the city’s nationally influential advertising agencies as well as those who served as publicists for local businesses. The group grew to a membership of about 80 in 1921 and 114 in 1928.<sup>28</sup> Approximately ten percent of the active members in 1928 were business owners.<sup>29</sup> The PCAW played active roles in community service and collaborated with local women’s clubs, and it also developed joint programs with the city’s exclusively male society of advertisers, the Poor Richard Club.

The Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women invoked the past in hopes of attaining the prestige of the Poor Richard Club, which celebrated printer, inventor, and “Founding Father” Benjamin Franklin as the embodiment of its ideals. Founded in 1906, the Poor Richard Club held lectures on historical topics, particularly relating to Ben Franklin and his era or to the history of advertising; social events, often featuring colonial costume or re-enactment; and public events to commemorate Franklin.<sup>30</sup> PCAW members, although denied Poor Richard Club membership, participated in many of these

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<sup>26</sup> Minute Book 1. Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women Records (Unprocessed Collection), Bryn Mawr Special Collections, Bryn Mawr, Penn. Jack Lutz. *The Poor Richard Club: Its Birth, Growth, and Activities; and its Influence on Advertising, the City, State and Nation*. (Philadelphia: Poor Richard Club, 1953), 37.

<sup>27</sup> Clipping, “Advertising Women Confer for National Organization,” *Advertising & Selling*, (July 1916), 49, Advertising Women of New York Scrapbook 2, WSHS.

<sup>28</sup> Club Meeting Minutes (March 10, 1936), Minute Book Vol. 3, Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women Records. Program, “Federation of Women’s Advertising Clubs of the World,” Twelfth Annual Meeting, (July 8-12, 1928), 26, Scrapbook (1928-1929), PCAW Records.

<sup>29</sup> Program, “Federation of Women’s Advertising Clubs of the World,” Twelfth Annual Meeting, (July 8-12, 1928), 26, Scrapbook (1928-1929), PCAW Records.

<sup>30</sup> Minute Book Vol. 1, p. 46, PCAW Records. *Adland News* (Dec. 1928), 2, PCAW Records, *Adland News* (Feb. 1931), 8, PCAW Records.

events. Celebrating Franklin's publishing career as the antecedent of the twentieth-century advertising profession, the Poor Richard Club constructed itself through a narrative of national progress. Franklin's bust adorned the entrance to the club house, and his image served as an icon for the club, providing the cover imagery for its publication, *The Almanack*.<sup>31</sup> Equating advertising with historic narratives of American progress, Philadelphia's flourishing industry invoked U.S. history to assert the status of advertisers and their profession as a whole. Wearing pins featuring Franklin's bust at professional meetings, Poor Richard Club members simultaneously asserted their roles as local civic leaders.

By responding to male advertisers' use of historical imagery, women advertisers made activist claims for their expanding presence in the profession. Like the Poor Richard Club, the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women positioned itself as part of advertising's historical development. In the 1920s, the Club heard lectures on topics such as Revolutionary War newspaper publication and the imagined state of twentieth-century advertising "If Ben Franklin Wrote Copy Today."<sup>32</sup> PCAW members taught an advertising course for women at the local Y.W.C.A., in which they stressed the history of the advertising profession.<sup>33</sup> The group's Colonial Dinner-Dance featured a period fashion show and a toast celebrating George Washington's truthfulness as a tenet of modern advertising:

Have you ever realized that we of the advertising profession have a special claim on the immortal George? Undoubtedly, he was the first President—not only of his country—but of the Associated Advertising Clubs of the World!

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<sup>31</sup> *Poor Richard's Almanack* (Nov. 1925), Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>32</sup> Minute Book 1, p. 138, p. 189, PCAW Records.

<sup>33</sup> Syllabus, review sheet (May 17, 1928), and exam (May 21, 1928). Scrapbook, 1928-1929, PCAW Records.

He gave the association its motto: Truth in Advertising—The actual words of his speech on a certain historic occasion were undoubtedly “Father, I cannot tell a lie; the Better Business Bureau will not permit it.”<sup>34</sup>

This tribute unites advertising women with men as heirs to America’s Revolutionary legacy, “the unchangeable ideals of the past...our heritage of true Americanism.”<sup>35</sup> By inserting themselves into the advertising profession’s self-congratulatory discourse, Philadelphia’s female advertising professionals asserted their significance and demonstrated the creativity they used in their jobs as copywriters, advertising managers, and marketing professionals.

Notably, however, to portray their status and aspirations, advertising women established a new historic ideology, reconstructing the historical frameworks asserted by the male Poor Richard Club. PCAW members collaborated with their male colleagues in some social and civic events but nevertheless challenged the marginalization reflected by women’s exclusion from Poor Richard membership. Thus, in creating its own club mythology, the PCAW co-opted the dominant advertising profession’s association of the colonial era with institutional prestige. The local and popular significance of colonial Quaker history influenced this strategy. Throughout Pennsylvania, local businesses and organizations reinforced the region’s significance by celebrating Philadelphia’s colonial legacy. In popular narratives, Quakers frequently symbolized the city’s unique history and its national significance. As Wanamaker department stores’ 1926 publication *A Friendly Guide Book to Philadelphia and the Wanamaker Store* explained, Philadelphia itself reflected the “temperament” of its Quaker founders, and “[t]he story of the Quaker

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<sup>34</sup> Program (1921), Colonial Dinner-Dance Folder, Box 1, PCAW Records. Toast handwritten on inside back cover.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

City during the Revolution is almost the same as a history of the Revolution itself.”<sup>36</sup>

Responding to Philadelphia’s identification as a “Quaker City” and to the prevalence of Quaker characters in twentieth-century consumer culture, the PCAW created a “Quaker Maid” symbol it hoped would become just as recognizable in professional circles as the pin featuring Franklin’s bust that Poor Richard Club members wore.

Although officially adopted in 1929, the “Quaker Maid” appeared in earlier club promotions. The 1918 PCAW dinner dance program highlighted the colonial character in printed lyrics of the popular song, “There’s a Quaker down in Quaker Town,” changing the song’s title to “Quaker Maid in Quakertown.”<sup>37</sup> The 1919 dinner dance program cover featured a female figure clad in a bonnet and simple blue-gray dress, holding a feathered quill pen suggestive of bygone eras. This bonnet would later come to identify the “Quaker Maid” icon created by the club, and it appeared frequently in popular depictions of “Quaker Maids.”<sup>38</sup>

During the 1910s, women embraced “Quaker” style fashions nationwide, accepting the “Quaker Girl” and “Quaker Maid” as archetypes of modest yet alluring, and sometimes provocative, femininity. The “Quaker Maid” in particular symbolized the tension of modernity and tradition, but it did not reflect serious interest in Quaker history or religion. Quaker women’s pacifist activism went unacknowledged. Instead, this trend extended a popular fascination with Quaker aesthetics which began after the Civil War.

As clothing and speech styles that once differentiated Quakers from the rest of the

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<sup>36</sup> *A Friendly Guide Book to Philadelphia and the Wanamaker Store* (Philadelphia: John Wanamaker, 1926), Box 2, Folder 9, Warshaw Collection of Business Americana, Pennsylvania, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>37</sup> Program, Second Annual Dinner Dance (Feb. 12, 1918), Box 1, PCAW Records. David Berg and Alfred Solman, “There’s a Quaker down in Quaker Town” (New York: Joe Morris Music Co. 1916), Series 10.19 A, the Sam DeVincent Illustrated Sheet Music Collection, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>38</sup> Program, Dinner Dance of the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women (Feb. 14, 1919), PCAW Records.

country declined, postbellum popular culture idealized these practices as symbolic of the American character and experience. In her analysis of popular depictions of Quakers in American culture, religion scholar Jennifer Connerly explains, “Rapidly eroding Quaker speech and Quaker dress were preserved and converted, in depictions, into attractive anachronisms that by association linked all Americans directly back to a simpler colonial past.”<sup>39</sup> Throughout the late nineteenth century, attributions of honesty, modesty, and morality to Quakers enabled their use for product endorsements; introduced in 1877, the “Quaker Oats man” became one of the nation’s most compelling images, symbolizing a diminishing lifestyle of simplicity and health.<sup>40</sup> In constructing the iconic Quaker as simple, thrifty, and rural, corporate brands obscured the significance of religion and commerce in the lives of actual Quakers, many of whom were both urban and affluent.<sup>41</sup>

Simultaneously, popular interest in Quaker women’s dress soared as popular fascination with their personal and political independence waned. Nineteenth-century Quaker abolitionists and women suffragists, including Lucretia Mott, were portrayed by contemporaries as transformative social figures who nevertheless devoted themselves to familial domesticity.<sup>42</sup> Yet as interest in this activism declined, the general population associated Quaker women chiefly with the simple dress and bonnet.<sup>43</sup> During the 1910s

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<sup>39</sup> Jennifer Connerly, “Friendly Americans: Representing Quakers in the United States, 1850-1920” (Ph.D. diss, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2006), 4.

<sup>40</sup> Connerly, “Friendly Americans,” 27, 206-208. Subsequently, a variety of commercial products adopted “Quaker” imagery. In response to the use of Quaker motifs to promote alcohol, the 1910s saw unsuccessful legal efforts by Quakers to restrict the commercial use of Quaker identity. Connerly, “Friendly Americans,” 227-28.

<sup>41</sup> Connerly, “Friendly Americans,” 6, 147. Quaker adoption of the bonnet was not linked to scripture or to ideas about women’s subordinate roles. The bonnet symbolized Quaker women’s separation from the fashion and ideals of larger society, but the bonnet itself was adapted from, and later influenced, popular nineteenth-century fashion. Connerly, “Friendly Americans,” 153-54. Jennifer L. Connerly, “Quaker Bonnets and the Erotic Feminine in American Popular Culture,” *Material Religion* 2.2 (July 2006), 174-203.

<sup>42</sup> Connerly, “Friendly Americans,” 86.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

and 1920s, popular interest in these Quaker fashions spiked. The stereotypical Quaker maid and her bonnet dramatized the influences of technology, mass production, and contemporary sexuality on women's behavior.

Through the Quaker maid figure, early twentieth-century popular culture weighed the influences of inherent feminine modesty with the possibility that women's behaviors could change dramatically with shifting times. The 1910 musical *The Quaker Girl*, first produced in London, became a significant influence on popular "Quaker" imagery. The play made its U.S. debut in Philadelphia in 1911 with a Broadway run and national tour soon following.<sup>44</sup> Media coverage of the show elevated the Quaker girl as a stylish and sexual ideal. Title character Prudence, an unmarried Quaker woman in England, longs for a romantic life beyond her "proper and sedate" existence.<sup>45</sup> When she participates in champagne toasts celebrating a local wedding, the village Quaker community disowns her, and a Parisian dressmaker adopts her as a muse. Prudence inspires a Parisian fad for "Quaker" fashion, characterized as simultaneously "modest" and attractive to men. The play ends with her happy engagement to a (non-Quaker) American man.<sup>46</sup> Popular coverage of the play reproduced the plot's construction of the "Quaker Girl" as romantic object. Reports on the national tour conflated performers with the "Quaker Girl" archetype, explaining that the attractive touring actresses declined male invitations

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<sup>44</sup> "'A Quaker Girl' is Fascinating," *New York Times* (Nov. 6, 1910), ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times, 13. "Musical Comedy in English Great Attraction in Paris," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Jun 25, 1911), ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Tribune, A1. "Scotch Comedy Delights New York; Miss Burke in New Play," *Christian Science Monitor* (Oct. 14, 1911), ProQuest Historical Newspapers Christian Science Monitor, 16. "'The Quaker Girl' a Hit; 'The Million' Also Pleases," *The Washington Post* (Oct. 29, 1911), ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post, A2. "'Quaker Girls' Bar Johnnies," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Oct. 7, 1912), ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Constitution, 2.

<sup>45</sup> James T. Tanner, Adrian Ross, and Percy Greenbank, *The Quaker Girl* (London: Chappell & Co., Ltd., 1910), 10, Performing Arts Reading Room, Library of Congress.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

(“for—they’re not that kind of girls!”) while dwelling on their physical beauty.<sup>47</sup> In American popular culture, the “Quaker Girl” thus dramatized the pulls of both modest and brazen femininity.

Popular culture used the “Quaker Girl” to prescribe a return to female modesty in response to changing social customs, but this feminine ideal constantly risked disruption through the appeal of modern style. As *The Washington Post* explained, “It’s a natural law of the swinging of the pendulum that the tango-mad, cocktail-drinking girl of recent times shall sway back to the type of the generations when the Puritan maid and the Quaker girl were the cynosure of all admiring eyes.”<sup>48</sup> During the U.S. tour of *The Quaker Girl* play, the female performers’ propriety in the face of desirous males’ impulses supported such predictions.<sup>49</sup> And yet, the “Quaker Girl” of the 1920s increasingly embodied the moment when modesty gave way to brazen indulgence. The fashionable Quaker Maid could become provocatively flirtatious. A 1927 *Life* magazine poem dedicated “To a Quaker Maid in Fashion” admitted:

Quaker Maid I long to kiss,  
With thy merry, wanton quips  
And thy quirking, lip-sticked lips--.<sup>50</sup>

When such Quaker girls slipped from fashionable consumers to sexual transgressors, men’s lives were dangerously disrupted.

In 1923, an unidentified “Quaker Girl” focused national media attention on the unsolved murder of married California aviator and engineer Earle Remington. Friends

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<sup>47</sup> “‘Quaker Girls’ Bar Johnnies,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Oct. 7, 1912), ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Constitution, 2.

<sup>48</sup> “Tango-Mad, Man-Aping Maid of Easy Codes Is Giving Way to New Girl Of Puritan Type, Miss Ermel Says,” *The Washington Post* (Sept. 26, 1915), ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post, ES13.

<sup>49</sup> “‘Quaker Girls’ Bar Johnnies,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Oct. 7, 1912), ProQuest Historical Newspapers Atlanta Constitution, 2. Grace Kingsley, “No Chance for Johnnies,” *Los Angeles Times* (Nov. 21, 1912), ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times, III4.

<sup>50</sup> L. M., “To a Quaker Maid in Fashion,” *Life* (Apr. 28, 1927), American Periodicals Series Online, 20.



interviewed after Remington was shot in his Los Angeles driveway described his fascination with a woman he identified only as the “Quaker girl,” recalling that “he repeatedly tried to get this ‘Quaker girl’ on the phone” in the days leading up to his death. The media reported that “He admired her, he told his friends, because she was old fashioned.”<sup>51</sup> Newspapers publicized police interest in this mysterious companion’s identity as investigators examined Remington’s extra-marital affairs and speculated that he ran a bootlegging ring for a wealthy clientele.<sup>52</sup> While this anonymous Quaker girl exemplified the extreme disjuncture between a demure façade and worldly experience, Quaker-inspired fashion provided an everyday reminder that women’s beauty could mask undesirable traits.

Indeed, *McClure’s* criticized women who used fashion to construct deceptive personae, identifying the feigning “Demure Young Thing” through her Quaker attire:

She has seen Isadore Duncan in a soft gray cape and toque, or Ina Claire as the Quaker Girl in organdy fichu and turn-back cuffs—oh, yes, other things of course. So she searches the shops for just the softest, bluest, silveriest-gray, and puts a mere touch of dark blue grease paint on her eyelashes, apple blossom rouge on her face, and the fichu, when no one else is wearing fichus, over her flat bust, and a droopy hat with scraps of lace and blue velvet ribbons and pale pink flowers,

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<sup>51</sup> Edward Doherty, “Trail to Flyer’s Slayer Haunted by ‘Quaker Girl,’” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Feb. 21, 1923), ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Tribune, 11. This “Quaker Girl” also appeared in *The Los Angeles Times*’ coverage of the case. “Widow Gives Police Clews,” *The Los Angeles Times* (Feb. 21, 1923), ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times, II, 1. Fifteen years later, stories of fallen “Quaker Maids” continued to symbolize the disruption of female morality. In 1938 *The Hartford Courant* reported on the divorce proceedings of Joseph H Roberts and Edna May Pearl Roberts, who married in Waterbury, Connecticut, on September 16, 1922. Joseph Roberts reported that his wife “was a regular little Quaker maid when I married her, never smoked, drank or told off color stories but after her mother died she threw caution to the winds.” His accusations of intolerable cruelty against Edna Roberts included excessive drinking, public extramarital affairs, and a secret sterilization that she allegedly confessed to on Mother’s Day. “Wife’s Revelation on Mother’s Day Leads to Divorce,” *The Hartford Courant* (Feb. 2, 1938), ProQuest Historical Newspapers Hartford Courant, 20.

<sup>52</sup> “Remington Clues Lead to 3 Women,” *New York Times* (Feb. 18, 1923), ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times, 7. “Liquor Clue in Killing,” *New York Times* (Feb. 22, 1923), ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times, 4. “Say Remington Was ‘Society’ Bootlegger,” *New York Times* (Feb. 23, 1923), ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times, 3.

and she really thinks that she is fooling the world into believing that she knows naught of evil and all of the good and the true!<sup>53</sup>

The *McClure's* editors suggested the deception that might lurk behind the fashionable “Quaker Girl’s” seeming lack of interest in glamour. Popular culture had idealized the colonial domestic woman as the embodiment of her sex’s nurturing patriotism; the disjuncture between the quaint “Quaker Girl’s” appearance and her true character threatened these gender paradigms.

Nevertheless, Quaker motifs remained prominent in consumer culture throughout the 1910s and 1920s, typically symbolizing women’s unchanging subordinate, domestic status. “Quaker Maid”-inspired fashions, marketed as quaint, demure, or alluring, constructed a modest femininity. In the wake of *The Quaker Girl*’s success on stage, stores marketed “the new QUAKER GIRL dress,” “Quaker Girl” hats, and even a “‘Quaker girl’ Silk negligee (with cap).”<sup>54</sup> The Quaker Maid also inspired brand imagery, particularly for food and domestic products. Most visibly, the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company chain of grocery stores marketed its “Quaker Maid” store in local newspapers.<sup>55</sup> The idealized feminine Quaker asserted a product’s thrift, domesticity, or modesty, ignoring the social, religious, and intellectual activities of the women they depicted.

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<sup>53</sup> Grace Margaret Gould, “Why Clothes?” *McClure’s Magazine* (Nov. 1917), American Periodicals Series Online, 12.

<sup>54</sup> R. H. White Co. advertisement, *Boston Daily Globe* (Jan. 21, 1912), ProQuest Historical Newspapers Boston Globe, 12. The G. A. Simon Co. advertisement, *The Hartford Courant* (Mar. 14, 1912), ProQuest Historical Newspapers Hartford Courant, 6. Butler’s advertisement, *Boston Daily Globe* (Mar. 29, 1912), ProQuest Historical Newspapers Boston Globe, 4. Mandel Brothers’ advertisement, *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Feb. 11, 1912), ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Tribune, F8.

<sup>55</sup> A & P advertisement, *The Pittsburgh Courier* (Nov. 10, 1928), ProQuest Historical Newspapers Pittsburgh Courier, 3. A & P advertisement, *The Pittsburgh Courier* (Jan. 5, 1929), ProQuest Historical Newspapers Pittsburgh Courier, 3. A & P advertisement, *The Pittsburgh Courier* (July 20, 1929), ProQuest Historical Newspapers Pittsburgh Courier, 3. A & P advertisement, *The Pittsburgh Courier* (Aug. 24, 1929), ProQuest Historical Newspapers Pittsburgh Courier, 3. A & P advertisement, *The New York Amsterdam News* (May 8, 1929), ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Amsterdam News, 3.

Simultaneously, although popular histories of Quaker women as activists had declined, activists did continue to invoke the Quaker woman as a symbol for social change. In the 1910s, women's suffragists utilized Quaker femininity's association with domesticity to render their cause more popularly acceptable. Suffrage parades incorporated Quaker costumes, reintroducing Quaker women's centrality to the history of women's rights. The May 6, 1911, suffrage march on Fifth Avenue in New York City, covered by *The New York Times* as "[t]he biggest thing in the way of a procession which the woman suffragists have ever had in the United States," included a dramatic Quaker-themed float produced by Pennsylvania suffragists. *The Chicago Daily Tribune* described its success in drawing public interest:

The Pennsylvania group had one of the two floats in the procession. This was the liberty bell float, a floral bell hanging high, and beneath it a group of eight Quaker girls from Philadelphia in costume representing historic women, Hannah Callowhill Penn, Lucretia Mott, Deborah Logan, Lydia Darrach, and Rebecca Biddle. They earned the loudest applause down the line.<sup>56</sup>

Such appropriation of the Quaker Maid icon reintroduced the history of Quaker women as dynamic public figures who agitated for improvement in women's status and who played crucial roles in antislavery, peace, and temperance movements. Nevertheless, popular associations of Quaker women with domesticity shaped reactions to this public display. Reconciling suffragists' public activity with the domesticity attributed to Quaker women, *The New York Times* explained that the float "will represent the earliest woman suffragists of the State of William Penn, Quaker women who from time immemorial have

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<sup>56</sup> "New York Women in Huge Parade Demand Ballot," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (May 7, 1911), ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Tribune, 1.

been noted as homekeepers and housekeepers.”<sup>57</sup> Clearly, the prevalence of Quaker maids in consumer culture shaped reactions to activists’ work.

The familiarity of the Quaker maid image made it adaptable to multiple goals. In its report on the 1929 adoption of the official Quaker Maid emblem, the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women’s “Emblem Committee” explained the difficulty it faced in finding a representative female historical figure who would represent “women, advertising and Philadelphia.”<sup>58</sup> The PCAW did not identify with popular depictions of women’s history that emphasized continuity shared by anonymous housewives, mothers, and consumers. Yet advertisements and women’s magazines rarely portrayed female historical figures as agents of historical change in the vein of a Ben Franklin. Betsy Ross was dismissed because she was more closely associated with myth than with history. The committee also eliminated Letitia Penn and Deborah Franklin because they were known only through their husbands. The realm of business had not yet produced a readily identifiable figure, leading the Emblem Committee to conclude, “Women in advertising, or any business for that matter, are not old enough to have a well known leader, therefore the best we could suggest was the use of the Quaker Maid.”

Although a seemingly forced choice, the “Quaker Maid” figure contained activist potential. The Emblem Committee’s report explained, “The word Quaker always suggests Philadelphia, and Quaker women have always been known as progressive and independent thinkers, sharing equally with the men in their Church, home, and business life.”<sup>59</sup> This rationale suggested that the committee viewed its anonymous logo, not as a

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<sup>57</sup> “Suffragists March in Procession To-Day,” *New York Times* (May 6, 1911), ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times, 13.

<sup>58</sup> Report of the Club Emblem Committee, June 17, 1929, Scrapbook (1928-1929), PCAW Records.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

static icon, but rather as a symbol for progressive change in women's roles. Rather than supporting women's relegation to the domestic sphere, the Quaker woman was celebrated as having "always been" progressive and independent in her thinking, a trait which aids her in business, home, and community. Thus, the past provided a precedent for contemporary women seeking equality. Not only would the Quaker Maid bolster the public image of advertising women, but association with successful business women would also redefine the "demure" young woman in a traditional bonnet (Figure 2.1). Further underscoring this link between the idealized past and the present, the chosen theme for the annual dinner dance at which the club unveiled its new logo was "La Danse Moderne," or the modern dance. In placing its Quaker Maid in contemporary consumer culture, the PCAW dramatized women's natural suitability to public business roles.

The activism of PCAW members assumed an inherent female nature relevant to women of the past as well as of the present. New styles and aesthetics signified the passing of time, but contemporary life did not threaten to disrupt this Quaker Maid's character as it did the provocatively stylish, immoral Quaker Maids presented in the popular media. The 1930 dance's commemorative newsletter explained, "Tonight the Quaker Girl turns modern" and referred to PCAW members as "Modern Quaker Maids."<sup>60</sup> On the program's cover, the colonial Quaker Maid, seen in silhouette, sits behind a stylish contemporary woman's hand, lighting an art deco style cigarette lighter (Figure 2.2).<sup>61</sup> Selecting modernist imagery to accompany its newly installed Quaker

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<sup>60</sup> "La Danse Moderne" Program (1930) and *Adland News* (February 1930), Danse Moderne Folder, Box 1, PCAW Records.

<sup>61</sup> In addition to its popular association with the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European-American elite, silhouette portraiture was linked with American Quaker history. Colonial era Quakers who followed plain dress criticized portrait-sitting as vain, but some late-eighteenth-century Quakers came to accept simple silhouette-style portraiture. Dianne C. Johnson, "Living in the Light: Quakerism and Colonial Portraiture," in Emma Jones Lapsansky and Anne A. Verplanck, eds., *Quaker Aesthetics: Reflections of a*

Maid emblem, the PCAW stressed that its turn to the past held relevance for the present; although the club emblem committee acknowledged that women's presence in business was new, the Quaker Maid ostensibly possessed the same qualities which made the contemporary advertising woman successful. This conceptual model stressed continuity in women's character across time while arguing that female nature was ever-ready to embrace innovation. Style became the chief marker of different eras in women's history, and engagement with the past assumed the fun of costumed play and a glamorous night spent smoking and dancing with Poor Richard Club guests.

Updating the colonial Quaker Maid with her art deco cigarette lighter and modern dance, the PCAW emblem echoed the anachronistic sensibilities of "camp." Media scholar Pamela Robertson argues that, by setting several of her 1930s films in the 1890s, Mae West dramatized the cultural construction of gender.<sup>62</sup> In spite of her films' period settings, West used contemporary slang and humor. Her characters' brazen and modern behavior towards men stood out as anachronistic against a "Mauve Decade" backdrop, thus allowing West to lampoon nineteenth-century gender ideals as prescribed. As Susan Sontag argues, the passage of time can create camp by making objects and sensibilities outmoded, explaining: "Time may enhance what seems simply dogged or lacking in fantasy now because we are too close to it, because it resembles too closely our own everyday fantasies, the fantastic nature of which we don't perceive."<sup>63</sup> Contemporary

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*Quaker Ethic in American Design* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 122. Some Quaker consumers commissioned silhouette portraits that captured elements of their individual hair and clothing styles. Emma Jones Lapsansky, "Past Plainness to Present Simplicity: A Search for Quaker Identity," in Emma Jones Lapsansky and Anne A. Verplanck, eds., *Quaker Aesthetics: Reflections of a Quaker Ethic in American Design* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 12.

<sup>62</sup> Pamela Robertson, *Guilty Pleasures: Feminist Camp From Mae West to Madonna* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 25-53.

<sup>63</sup> Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Delta, 1966), 285.

advertising women seeking professional acceptance, by contrast, held a goal that was perceived as “fantastic” by segments of their profession and society. Creating mythic historical precedents for its goals, the PCAW deployed anachronistic style as a performance of gender. Although the group’s emphasis on continuity in women’s character minimized the role of style in prescribing gender constructs, the Club nevertheless challenged twentieth-century consumer culture’s prescription of domesticity. In the hands of the PCAW, the anonymous female historical ideal became a screen onto which hopes for the present and the future could be mapped rather than an effort to rewrite history to reinforce the cultural ideals of the present.

Through public educational and activist efforts, the Philadelphia Club redefined the Quaker Maid as a symbol for women’s public, professional roles. In creating this iconography, the PCAW had responded to the advertising industry’s frequent association of American identity with the idealized history of the colonial era. From the group’s inception, pageantry and period style dramatized members’ presence in the advertising profession and in the Philadelphia community. From the club’s earliest years, period clothing appeared in program illustrations, and references to the “Quaker Maid” which would later become the club’s official icon occurred as early as 1918. That year, attendees of the annual dinner sang a “Quaker Maid in Quaker Town,” alongside popular World War I songs “Over There,” “Goodbye Broadway, Hello France,” “Keep the Home Fires Burning,” “Joan of Arc,” and the “Star Spangled Banner.”<sup>64</sup> Singing the lyrics

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<sup>64</sup> Program, Colonial Dinner-Dance, Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women, February 22, 1921, Box 1, PCAW Records. Program, Second Annual Dinner Dance, Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women, February 12, 1918, Box 1, PCAW Records. In the 1918 program, the “Quaker Maid” appears in song lyrics. The 1919 dinner dance program cover features a female figure clad in a bonnet and simple blue dress, holding a feathered quill pin suggestive of previous eras. A bonnet would later come to identify the “Quaker Maid” icon created by the club. Program, Dinner Dance of the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women, February 14, 1919, Box 1, PCAW Records.

from *The Quaker Girl* play, PCAW members presented their icon as a character present in contemporary life. They selected a verse from the popular song a "Quaker Down in Quaker Town" that describes a male's romantic perception of the contemporary "Quaker girl": "...Like the waters still, she's very deep. She knows a heap I've found. She has that 'Meet me Later' look, /And Oh, she knows her book."<sup>65</sup> These lyrics embodied popular culture's presentation of the contradictory Quaker girl: flirtatious yet demure, modern yet traditional.

Although the Quaker Maid's attire invoked the colonial aesthetic so popular as a twentieth-century cultural reference, the PCAW did not present its "Quaker Maid" as a woman constructed by one particular historical era. Rather, she symbolized women's inherent capacity for intellectual and professional contributions to public life. This identity diverged from the colonial brand logos peering from magazine pages and food packages which dramatized women's static roles as mothers and homemakers. Nevertheless, both of these historical models emphasized continuity over change; women's labor, either domestic or professional, reflected the sex's unchanging, inherent nature. The Quaker Maid emblem appeared on Club newsletters and letterhead in the decades that followed, either in silhouette or in a simple profile line drawing with "PHILADELPHIA CLUB OF ADVERTISING WOMEN" lettering visible on her bonnet. Her anonymity contrasted with the Poor Richard Club's detailed recreations of Benjamin Franklin's visage and symbolized her perceived relevance to all professional advertising women.

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<sup>65</sup> Program, Second Annual Dinner Dance, Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women, February 12, 1918, Box 1, PCAW Records.



While the Quaker Maid asserted continuity in women's abilities, the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women did imagine change in one aspect of women's lives: style. Although rooted in the past, the PCAW's "Quaker Maid" proved malleable; when the Club selected other historical eras as themes for its dinner dance, the shift in time was symbolized by stylistic adjustments to the colonial maid. This annual event frequently incorporated historical costumes to dramatize such themes as the 1921 Colonial Dance, the 1929 Dance Orientale, the 1930 Night in Old Egypt, the 1931 Night in the Nineties, and the 1940 Southern Serenade.<sup>66</sup> "A Night in the Nineties" provided décor and entertainments inspired by the 1890s, resulting in a modification of the familiar Quaker Maid's look. As the program explained, club members could be identified by "A tiny golden Quaker Maid head—worn with a coquettish black velvet ribbon on the left wrist, in the mood of the Gay Nineties...."<sup>67</sup> The PCAW depicted these stylistic adjustments as superficial; changes of costume or accessories did not alter the Quaker Maid's function but privileged amusement and style over historical accuracy. Rather than historicizing women's prescribed roles in a particular era, this approach to the past underlined the perceived continuity from the colonial Quaker Maid to the contemporary advertising women who created her.

An answer to Philadelphia's male advertising society and its idolization of Benjamin Franklin, this malleable Quaker maid served community-building and public relations functions for the PCAW. The Club worked to bolster women's public and

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<sup>66</sup> Other annual dance themes celebrated holidays, exoticized tropical locales, stressed patriotic themes, or dramatized famous advertising trademarks. These occasions also provided opportunities for historically-themed decorations, costumes, and promotional materials. See dinner dance programs, Box 1, PCAW Records.

<sup>67</sup> Program, A Night in the Nineties, Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women, February 20, 1931, Box 10, PCAW Records.

professional recognition but did not provide a direct, radical challenge to gender inequality as a social problem embedded in the advertising profession. Indeed, the PCAW often collaborated and socialized with the Poor Richard Club, the professional society whose exclusion of women members made the PCAW necessary. Although they sought greater opportunities for advancement within their profession, Philadelphia's organized advertising women did not promote the concept that women, as a unified class, faced oppression that required significant social reform. Nevertheless, the Club deployed history to expand contemporary ideals for women's behavior, for both professional and public audiences.

During the 1920s through the 1940s, a period supposedly marked by a decline in women's rights activism, professional organizations of women advertisers, alongside women working in commercial radio, magazine publication, and department store leadership, deployed mass media to assert women's professionalism and to redefine ideals for contemporary women's behavior. Embracing the strategies of public relations to stage dramatic events, advertising women of the 1930s adapted their organizational aims to the industry's cutting-edge strategies.<sup>68</sup> In their use of broadcast radio and public performances to define American women as historical actors, the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women extended the dramatic redefinition of gender ideals that historian Susan Glenn locates during the height of American vaudeville and theater. Glenn identified the professional culture and creative work produced by American women in the theater of the 1880s and 1890s as a precursor to the more explicitly political activism that

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<sup>68</sup> As Roland Marchand argues, corporations gendered their public relations efforts as "feminine" and emotional, in contrast with the innovation of male corporate leaders. Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 44-47.

emerged in the 1910s. Although female performers did not conceptualize an explicitly feminist project, Glenn concludes, the personae they created in the era's dominant entertainment medium constituted a "feminist moment" that prefigured the development of more explicitly political organizations. As Glenn writes: "Theater women [between 1880 and 1910] articulated—through their performances and their professional careers—some of the themes that later became central to the projects of off-stage women who called themselves feminists."<sup>69</sup> Similarly, the PCAW publicized its members' abilities and professional success as proof of adwomen's vitality to public life.

History was central to this PCAW identity. In her anonymity, the "Quaker Maid" could be adjusted to include a variety of historical roles and functions. Both the Poor Richard Club and the PCAW dramatized the past through costumed entertainments at formal social events. As an anonymous figure often divorced from specific historical contexts, however, the Quaker Maid functioned more as a stylistic emblem and a reflection of contemporary women's achievements. The male advertising establishment, by contrast, linked Benjamin Franklin firmly to his era and to the foundation of the United States. Poor Richard Club members conducted annual memorial services at Benjamin Franklin's gravesite, drawing participation from the PCAW, other local groups, and international dignitaries.<sup>70</sup> To commemorate milestones, including the Poor Richard clubhouse's relocation, members wore elaborate, realistic colonial costumes and paraded in Philadelphia's streets.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Susan A. Glenn, *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 4.

<sup>70</sup> Program, Poor Richard Club, *The Twenty-Eighth Annual Dinner*, January 17, 1933, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Room. The January 1933 birthday service at Franklin's grave featured a "wreath sent by President Herbert Hoover."

<sup>71</sup> The Photo-Illustrators, "Procession of Poor Richard Club members down Locust Street, Philadelphia" ca. 1925, Library Company Prints Department

Rather than alternating themes like the PCAW, each of the Poor Richard Club's annual formal dinners celebrated Benjamin Franklin's birthday and achievements. In 1927, the annual dinner observed the "one hundred and twenty-first anniversary of Benjamin Franklin's arrival on this earth" with a toast "To Poor Richard—for you culled the ages for its wisdom, pruned from it the parasites of tradition and custom, realized that life could be simple, full and joyous—and so lived it."<sup>72</sup> Participants honored Franklin as an embodiment of progress in his resistance to the constraints of tradition. The PCAW's 1929 "Quaker Maid Turns Modern" provided a similar precedent for forward thinking.

In spite of its opposition to unquestioned "tradition and custom," the Poor Richard Club found perennial inspiration in the story of Ben Franklin and his work. Focus remained on Franklin's historically-specific roles in the American colonies and the early American Republic. Having identified *Poor Richard's Almanack* as America's first modern advertising medium, Philadelphia's male advertising professionals characterized Franklin as an underappreciated figure. In its 1927 proposal for a Franklin monument, the club determined "rather conclusively that America has been very tardy in acknowledging the greatness of this greatest of all Americans."<sup>73</sup> Members selected influential Philadelphia *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Saturday Evening Post* publisher Cyrus Curtis as "Honorary Chairman" of a proposed three million dollar fundraising effort, citing his status as "the best posted citizen of Philadelphia and perhaps of the country on the very broad subject of Frankliniana."<sup>74</sup> Remarking that the American public robbed Franklin of recognition merely because he had not served as President of

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<sup>72</sup> Poor Richard Club, *The Book of the Twenty-Second Annual Banquet of the Poor Richard Club*, January 17, 1927, p. 9, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Room.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 39.

the United States, the Poor Richard Club's dinner presented a series of historical tableaux dramatizing George Washington and "Colonial Soldiers," Abraham Lincoln and "Slaves," Theodore Roosevelt and "Rough Riders," and then Benjamin Franklin.<sup>75</sup>

Through such narratives, the club sought greater emphasis on Franklin's historical significance to technology, diplomacy, and advertising, without challenging prevailing models for conceptualizing American history as the story of dramatic male leaders.

In its interactions with the PCAW the Poor Richard Club playfully emphasized another aspect of Franklin's persona: his relationships with women. Although the two groups collaborated on such projects as a local advertising school, the men often defined advertising women as potential mates rather than as colleagues. Poor Richard members dramatized Benjamin Franklin's romantic interest in and appeal to women as a direct parallel for contemporary relationships between men and women. In a 1927 annual dinner toast to "the Ladies," Franklin embodied men's romantic gentility to women: "With us, Ben would say, 'God bless 'em!'" PCAW members and other female guests observed these festivities from the distance of the balcony, a location which symbolized their subordinate place in the gender hierarchy, past and present. Through a prize drawing, Poor Richard Club members won the "Benjamin Franklin Dolls" decorating each table, followed by the instruction that each "winner must go at once to the Balcony and give the Doll to the lady of his choice."<sup>76</sup> Warning that these men must return immediately to their seats for the rest of the show, the program noted, "Anyhow, the woman's interest in you ceases when she gets the Doll."<sup>77</sup> This remark underscored the perceived adaptability of Franklin to the roles of contemporary advertisers, a Ben

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 9, 13.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 13

Franklin Doll providing a literal stand-in for a woman's date. Female guests' interest in Franklin went unquestioned. In fact, it was the Poor Richard Club's consistent emphasis of Benjamin Franklin as the ideal citizen, leader, advertiser, and man that obscured other interests.

In its adaptability to various historical eras, the Quaker Maid emblem departed from the men's focus on Benjamin Franklin as a unique historical actor and celebrated icon. Both groups, nevertheless, narrated history as an indicator of contemporary advertisers' professional and social status. While the Poor Richard Club applauded Franklin for his own indifference to tradition, the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women emphasized American women's pasts as precedents for their present-day modernity. Experimentation with historical styles marked joint activities sponsored by the PCAW and attended by the Poor Richard Club, including joint meetings of the two societies as well as dinner dances. At a May, 1936, meeting described by the PCAW's newsletter as a celebration of the previous year's "most enjoyable and friendly relations with our Big Brothers," two advertising women portrayed "Quaker Maidens," greeting attendees in costume and "parading as Quakers."<sup>78</sup> The meeting's entertainment included a "Fashion Show of Yesterday" in which PCAW members modeled historical costumes that lampooned previous eras' comparative constriction of women's activities. The PCAW newsletter described the parade of fashions without indicating precise eras but nevertheless emphasizing the separation of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century past from the present. Description of an elaborate "Gay Nineties"-inspired costume sarcastically characterized the outfit as "a simple little street dress--voluminous lace skirts almost, but not quite touching the ground...a cute little bonnet, and of course a

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<sup>78</sup> "Elections and Fashions," *Adland News*, Mid-Summer 1936, Box 10, PCAW Records.

parasol.”<sup>79</sup> In “the bathing costume of yesteryear,” a modest suit with long pants, long sleeves, a full skirt, and a bonnet, PCAW member Mathilde Hayes became “dashing...daring...wickedly revealing.”<sup>80</sup> These accounts asserted a disjuncture between unnatural historical restrictions and present-day norms, identifying contemporary practices as more reasonable.

Such satiric historical pageantry also shaped the social gatherings of the Women’s Advertising Club of St. Louis, Missouri. Like the PCAW, this group had formed in 1916 as a counterpart to its city’s organization of male advertisers.<sup>81</sup> The St. Louis women also applied historical themes to professional imagery and social events, thus responding to the male Advertising Club’s interest in the past. In its weekly news publication, the male Advertising Club of St. Louis accompanied its meeting minutes feature, “The Actual Facts by the Minute Man,” with an illustration of a colonial soldier in tricorner hat, echoing the iconography of Philadelphia’s Poor Richard Club and of the professional advertising community.<sup>82</sup> In its iconography and pageantry, the Women’s Advertising Club of St. Louis acknowledged the stylistic appeal of the past while applauding contemporary women’s professional status. Club member Lillian Thoele’s 1934 newsletter cover logo featured a woman in ornate formal dress, wearing gloves and a gown with bustle, daintily pointing her foot as she fans herself. Behind this figure is an

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid. Ellipses are in the original.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. Ellipses are in the original. For Harry S. Hood photograph of costume see Photographs Folder, Box 12, PCAW Records.

<sup>81</sup> “Panoramic Review as Presented at W.A.C. Silver Anniversary Party,” Oct. 27, 1941, Reel 1, Vol. 3, Advertising Women of St. Louis, Missouri, Scrapbooks and Newsletters, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri, St. Louis.

<sup>82</sup> “The Actual Facts by the Minute Man,” *The Advertising Club Weekly*, March 15, 1926, microfilm reel 1, vol 1, Advertising Women of St. Louis, Missouri, Scrapbooks and Newsletters.

image enclosed in a rectangular frame, as if it is a portrait hung on the wall.<sup>83</sup> This framed image depicts a woman in contemporary 1930s dress and hat, inverting the model found in Armand cosmetics advertisements of the 1920s, where a contemporary woman admired an historical feminine portrait.<sup>84</sup> Thus, St. Louis women advertisers inverted advertisements' frequent reverence for the femininity of the past, dramatizing the contemporary advertising woman as an ideal that earlier eras would admire.

According to the publication's editorial, the image "depicts advertising of long ago, gazing in wonderment at advertising of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, who has all the charm and grace and poise and color of the modern day."<sup>85</sup> Elevating the contemporary professional woman as an ideal, the image also naturalized the modern woman by satirizing the past, rather than the present, as shocking. Although the newsletter attests to its modern cover girl's "grace and poise and color," the image dramatizes the contemporary woman's disorientation at the sight of the ornate figure of the past. With automobiles behind her establishing the activity of modern life, the woman's arms are outstretched and her feet turned in as if she has stopped in her tracks. Her eyes and mouth are open in shock, and three books are falling from her hands to the ground. The image dramatizes a contemporary woman's shock at the type of feminine history commonly sentimentalized. Simultaneously, it places the modern working woman in the position of honor typically allotted to feminine ideals of beauty, reversing the more common scene of the contemporary woman admiring the femininity of the past. The assignment of historical

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<sup>83</sup> Cover illustration, *Adventure: Women's Advertising Club News of St. Louis*, October 1934. Cover illustration, *Adventure: Women's Advertising Club News of St. Louis*, May 1934, microfilm reel 1, vol. 2, Advertising Women of St. Louis, Missouri, Scrapbooks and Newsletters.

<sup>84</sup> Advertising proof, *Holland's Magazine*, April, Box 204, Folder 2, N. W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>85</sup> "Greetings!," *Adventure: Women's Advertising Club News of St. Louis*, May 1934, microfilm reel 1, vol. 2, Advertising Women of St. Louis, Missouri, Scrapbooks and Newsletters.



significance to the contemporary woman marked a common language for the national network of female advertisers as they collaborated with one another, sharing news and invitations and asserting their presence in the local and national advertising societies dominated by male professionals.<sup>86</sup>

Like the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women, the Women's Advertising Club of St. Louis also incorporated historical pageantry in its presentations to professional and local communities. In its annual "Gridiron Dinner," an event initiated in 1935 and closed to male guests until 1940, club members dressed in costume and performed skits to lampoon contemporary life as well as iconic historical images. Held on the same night as the male Advertising Club's members-only event, the Gridiron Dinner included women advertisers and male advertisers' wives.<sup>87</sup> Covered prominently in the local St. Louis press, the Gridiron Dinner's sketches parodied the artificiality of feminine fashions and mores. The 1940 event, opened to the attendance of two men, the mayor and a Washington University football coach, featured a fashion parade that satirized contemporary fashion's "new 'dumb-bell silhouette,'" complete with tin boxes as shoes sarcastically described as useful "for graceful strides." The club criticized the sentimentalization of previous eras as well, with presentation of "the demure model of the romantic old south in a hoop skirt, until a gust of wind whipped up by two fans blew her skirt off... 'It's Gone With the Wind.'"<sup>88</sup> This fashion parade mocked fashion itself as artificial, past and present.

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<sup>86</sup> The records of women's advertising clubs in New York, Philadelphia, and St. Louis contain invitations and correspondence from other local societies. Women's advertising clubs also reported on the achievements of women's advertising clubs in other cities.

<sup>87</sup> Mary Kimbrough, "Headaches and Laughs Dot History of Gridiron," *St. Louis Star-Times*, March 4, 1949, microfilm reel 2, volume 7, Advertising Women of St. Louis, Missouri, Scrapbooks and Newsletters.

<sup>88</sup> "Women Finally Let Men See Gridiron Skit," *St. Louis Star-Times*, April 4, 1940, microfilm reel 1, volume 2, Advertising Women of St. Louis, Missouri, Scrapbooks and Newsletters.

Through comedic sketches and social events, St. Louis advertising women dramatized feminine stereotypes. Local newspaper coverage of the 1939 Gridiron Dinner reported on the event's caricature of women "going to cooking schools, marrying off their daughters, using all the room on a bus, asking gossipy personal questions, and looking for a man."<sup>89</sup> Simultaneously, the group accused men of rivaling feminine stereotypes in their devotion to outlandish fashion. A skit titled "Gender on a Bender" reimagined *Romeo and Juliet*, the St. Louis press reported, with "Romeo dressed in scarlet satin shorts, socks and garters, and a floppy hat. Romeo talked with a lisp." Capitalizing on cultural stereotypes of femininity as frivolous, the Women's Advertising Club dramatized iconic male figures as equally foolish. A club announcement promoting a fund-raising luncheon of card games during the 1932 bi-centennial of George Washington's birth reduced even the iconic founding father to the frivolity of style. Comparing the luncheon's fund-raising goals to Washington's Revolutionary War military efforts, the announcement proclaimed:

Today George would not risk his life, his tri-corner and his platinum blonde marcel by standing on the deck as he crossed the Delaware. He would simply reach down into the pocket of his knee-panties, extract a dollar and pay his bridge toll. Stand on the deck? Nay! He would deal the deck and perchance help himself to the prize that will adorn each and every one of the tables.<sup>90</sup>

The vision of George Washington in "platinum blonde marcel" and "knee-panties" deciding to participate in a fundraising game of "bridge" rather than crossing the Delaware mockingly equated the Women's Advertising Club's activities with historical

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<sup>89</sup> The 1939 dinner was attended by 550 women. Unidentified photo caption clipping and "Gridiron Dinner Skits by Women's Ad Club" clipping, microfilm reel 1, vol. 2, Advertising Women of St. Louis, Missouri, Scrapbooks and Newsletters.

<sup>90</sup> Marie Capp and Bea Adams, Women's Advertising Club, "Washington Bi-Centennial Luncheon Bridge," microfilm reel 1, volume 1. Advertising Women of St. Louis, Missouri, Scrapbooks and Newsletters.

milestones. While the Club acknowledged feminine frivolity, it stressed both male and female style as artificial. Simultaneously, advertising women suggested that social events like the bridge luncheon could serve serious functions. If men and women shared equally in the follies of style, then women as well as men could transcend fashion and influence society.<sup>91</sup>

The Philadelphia Club's historically themed "Fashion Show of Yesteryear" also emphasized the professional status of contemporary women, taking the alternative approach of celebrating women advertisers' professional contributions as significant in the male-dominated profession. Prominent club member and N. W. Ayer copywriter Dorothy Dignam's costume, a long turn-of-the-century driver's coat, complete with goggles and hat, established a link with her current professional work. At N. W. Ayer, Dignam wrote promotional materials and radio programs promoting Ford Motors Company to female consumers. In this work, she emphasized the suitability of driving to women, asserting a long history of female drivers who challenged prejudice against their abilities by embracing new automotive technology.

Dignam's scripts for *Motor Matters*, a series of fifteen-minute local, daytime programs encouraging women to drive, dramatized this history by featuring women drivers as guests.<sup>92</sup> While adopting gendered homemaker and consumer archetypes,

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<sup>91</sup> The Women's Advertising Club of St. Louis also deployed historical pageantry in events shared with male advertisers and community members. On December 11, 1941, the club held a "Gay Nineties" roller skating party to raise funds for establishing the home of fur trader Robert Campbell as an historical landmark. This event featured a prize contest for best costume judged by a "men's auxiliary committee" of "bustle judges" and presented by the local chapter of the Colonial Dames. The event was also attended by Red Cross members, one in an "authentic uniform of the gay nineties period." Undated clipping, "Roller Skating Party to Recall Gay Nineties Period. Undated clipping, "W. A. C. Plans 'Gay Nineties' Skaing Party. "Gay Nineties Skating Party," *St. Louis Daily Globe-Democrat*, December 14, 1941. Microfilm reel 1, vol. 3, Advertising Women of St. Louis, Missouri, Scrapbooks and Letters.

<sup>92</sup> Dorothy Dignam, annotated *Motor Matters* script, August 27, 1937, Dorothy Dignam Papers, Box 1, Folder 3, WSHS.

*Motor Matters* simultaneously refuted the assumption that women were “wild,” inadequate drivers, an accusation placed in the mouth of the male announcer and dismissed by Dignam.<sup>93</sup> In the first script for the 1937 Philadelphia series, Dignam bantered with a male announcer about the abilities of female drivers, citing the 1907 formation of the Quaker City Ladies Motor Club. She then enacted the drive to a Bryn Mawr tea room with guest “Mrs. Hayes Agnew Clement, who lives at 1615 Walnut Street, and was given her first automobile by Dr. Clement when she was little more than a bride.”<sup>94</sup> Identified as one of the city’s earliest female drivers, Clement emphasized both the novelty of a woman driver in 1904 and the influence she enjoyed as an automobile consumer. In Clement’s scripted remarks she recalled her driving attire, which included an “auto bonnet from Paris, the first one in Philadelphia.” She stressed the individualism of her role as a female automobile consumer: “Dr. Clement bought me a big Studebaker and I went out to Ohio, to the factory, to have them take my measurements for the placement of the various levers. It was so unusual for a woman to drive a car that we often traveled a long distance to the factory to make these arrangements. And then, of course, I had to pick my color-scheme!”<sup>95</sup> The script characterized women’s interest in fashion and style as a pathway to innovation. Meanwhile, linking the turn-of-the-century driver with the contemporary consumer, Dorothy ended the program discussing contemporary automobile cleaning products.

In another script, women’s maternal roles demonstrated the generational continuity of women drivers through the participation of guest “Mrs. Al Harris of Drexel Park who has driven a car since she was seventeen and now has a daughter almost old

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Dorothy Dignam, *Motor Matters* script, n.d., Dorothy Dignam Papers, Box 1, Folder 3, WSHS.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

enough to apply for a license!”<sup>96</sup> Throughout the series, references to early women drivers naturalized the idea of female automobile culture. Past and present overlapped through the participation of guests whose driving history dated to the early 1900s. Simultaneously, scripted dialogue voiced contemporary objections to female drivers that women had faced in the 1900s, suggesting a direct parallel between past and present.

Derision of women’s driving skills was presented as outmoded. In *Motor Matters* scripts, as well as in her work for national Ford Motor Company, Dignam legitimized women’s status in automobile culture by citing a history of courageous women drivers and by asserting that female consumers had influenced the industry’s history. In a “Women’s Driver Manual” to promote 1937 Ford models, Dignam countered narrow definitions of women’s abilities by placing opposition to female drivers in the past:

Women have been driving cars for about forty years. And while it as first feared that their ‘natural hysteria’ would get them into trouble, and that ‘youths under 18 and all women’ should be refused motor licenses for the public good, men began to reason that if women continued to take ‘motor management’ seriously, they might eventually influence the design of the cars.

And, sure enough, they did!<sup>97</sup>

Dignam’s text cites historical evidence to disprove women’s “natural hysteria.”

As in her *Motor Matters* scripts, Dignam’s Ford campaigns foregrounded style as an area in which women could influence business, citing female consumer demand as the reason cars were modified to include windshields and closed tops that would not require goggles or disturb women’s hats. Viewed in this context, the PCAW “Fashion Show of Yesteryear” description of Dignam’s modest, retrograde driving costume as “the latest

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<sup>96</sup> Dorothy Dignam, *Motor Matters* script, August 27, 1937, Dorothy Dignam Papers, Box 1, Folder 3, WSHS.

<sup>97</sup> Dorothy Dignam, typed transcript of copy, “Women’s Driver Manual,” n.d. Box 2, Folder 2, Dorothy Dignam Papers, WSHS. The text attributes the manual to “a woman driver for Ford Motor Company.”

thing for motoring” located historical progress in the female consumers who became historical actors by influencing automotive design. Simultaneously, this fashion show transcended style and entertainment by publicizing Dignam’s professional work in a joint meeting of Philadelphia’s male advertising elite and the women they marginalized. Celebration of the American past was a familiar theme to the Poor Richard Club members; by invoking pasts which connected with the advertising work performed by Dignam and other women, the PCAW event asserted women’s status within the profession.

The Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women and members like Dorothy Dignam simultaneously used the medium of radio to promote public awareness of female advertisers. The automobile advertising that Dignam completed for N. W. Ayer underlined her status as a female professional. In the August 27, 1937, *Motor Matters* script, the male announcer observed Dignam’s “arrival” to the show by car, prompting a response which highlighted the professional capacity in which she participated in the program: “Well, I’m an automobile broadcaster. You don’t expect me to arrive in a row-boat, do you! This car is part of my act, just like trained seals.”<sup>98</sup> Although her work identified style and homemaking as indisputable women’s interests, the depiction of herself as performer of an “act” suggested the skill and work involved in an adwoman’s career.

In the 1930s, the PCAW produced local radio programs that further emphasized women’s roles in advertising to the Philadelphia public. Extending the message of the “Quaker Maid” emblem, these broadcasts asserted the progressive nature of women’s

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<sup>98</sup> Dorothy Dignam, *Motor Matters* script, August 27, 1937, Dorothy Dignam Papers, Box 1, Folder 3, WSHS.

roles in consumer culture. The radio dramatizations explored the influence of history on the present and on the future, arguing that historical awareness allowed modern women to strengthen their public roles. As its initial foray into serialized radio drama, the Club's radio committee began a regular feature on local airwaves in 1930: weekly, fifteen-minute discussions between the characters of "Aunty Antique" and "Mary Modern."<sup>99</sup> Visiting her aunt, Mary explained how advertising can enrich women's everyday lives by enabling informed product selection. This series championed the informed, enthusiastic consumption embodied in the "modern" young woman. According to a report from the radio committee, "In the end you won't be able to tell Auntie from the most up-to-date of city matrons, all because of advertising."<sup>100</sup>

While the "antique" perspective required updating, the series did not abandon historical awareness. In one script, Aunty Antique, Mary Modern, and Mary's beau discuss the power of advertising slogans. Mary Modern demonstrates her knowledge of the past by explaining to her aunt that the origin of advertising slogans was "the war cry of the old Scottish clans. Each clan had its own cry for urging their men forward in battle, and these cries were called slogans!" The discussion then turned to the longevity of successful slogans, many, the script notes, created by women. The best ad slogans are "time-proof," according to Mary Modern, preventing the costs associated with overhauling an advertising campaign.<sup>101</sup> Notably, for the women advertisers of the Philadelphia Club, change and continuity, modernity and awareness of the past, went hand in hand. The discussions of Aunty Antique and Mary Modern asserted the

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<sup>99</sup> Report of Radio Committee for Club Season of 1930, 1928-1929 Scrapbook, PCAW Records.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Dorothy Dignam, "Aunty Antique and Mary Modern Discuss Slogans," Box 1, Folder 3, Dorothy Dignam Papers, WSHS.

relevance of the past, making even Mary Modern an expert on advertising history. Her advocacy of “time-proof” campaigns echoed the philosophy that contemporary trade publications celebrated in the marketing strategies of brands like Baker’s Cocoa.<sup>102</sup> While the Poor Richard Club’s public activities recast industry leaders like publisher Cyrus Curtis as Benjamin Franklin experts, the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women’s public depictions of the past emphasized members’ proficiency in their chosen advertising profession.

Simultaneously, the club’s use of radio reflected its efforts to create a dynamic, progressive image for contemporary advertising women. Noting the positive response from listeners, the radio committee “chairman” explained, “We trust that we have interested the public in our cause—but if we have done nothing else, we have brought the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women before the Public Eye thru Advertising’s Lusty infant—radio—again proving that we are a progressive and up-to-the-minute organization.”<sup>103</sup> Indeed, in its emphasis on radio as a forum for advertising, the PCAW responded to the industry’s ongoing, uncertain experimentation in the medium. The suitability of radio to sponsors’ needs had caused controversy in advertising agencies like J. Walter Thompson, which did not feature a radio department until the late 1920s.<sup>104</sup> Only in 1929 did major corporations begin to sponsor series.<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, the percentage of U.S. households with radios continued to increase throughout the Great

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<sup>102</sup> Richard B. Franken and Carroll B. Larrabee, *Packages That Sell* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1928), 91. See discussion of this text in Chapter 1.

<sup>103</sup> Report of Radio Committee for Club Season of 1930, 1928-1929 Scrapbook, PCAW Records.

<sup>104</sup> Michelle Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 115-116.

<sup>105</sup> Michelle Hilmes cites the sponsorship of *The Rise of the Goldbergs* by Pepsodent after its 1929 debut as a significant moment in the transformation of radio. Hilmes, 3-4. In its use of radio, the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women also operated in the context of commercial radio’s interest in idealized pasts. In 1929 the Aunt Jemima logo inspired a daytime sponsored program by the J. Walter Thompson agency on the NBC network. Hilmes, 80.



Depression.<sup>106</sup> Thus when the PCAW used radio to promote the advertising industry to the public, it stressed the vitality of women to the industry's progress.

As Dignam and the PCAW asserted, their use of radio placed them in the vanguard of the advertising and entertainment fields. In the late 1930s and the early 1940s, corporate-sponsored dramatic histories became a trademark of national radio and a lens for interpreting the Great Depression and the New Deal. Print culture's use of women's histories to prescribe domesticity and to promote products extended to the new medium. Simultaneously, the Philadelphia Club's radio programming evolved, producing a series of local radio programs dramatizing the lives of notable female figures. Promoted with the Club's Quaker Maid emblem, these celebratory biographies humanized the iconography ubiquitous in advertisements and women's magazines. Life stories demonstrated individual women's unique achievements, as Club members impersonated female historical figures with dynamic roles in public life. Reconfiguring popular culture's assumption of a universal female nature, the broadcasts conceptualized history as proof of women's inherent capacity for progress. Publicizing alternative constructions of women's history, Philadelphia's advertising women prefigured radio projects of women historians and challenged the dominance of the national media elite.

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<sup>106</sup> Ronald C. Tobey, *Technology as Freedom: The New Deal and the Electrical Modernization of the American Home*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 7, 18, 23, 37.



Figure 2.1: Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women emblem, no date, Box 12, Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women Records, Bryn Mawr Special Collections.



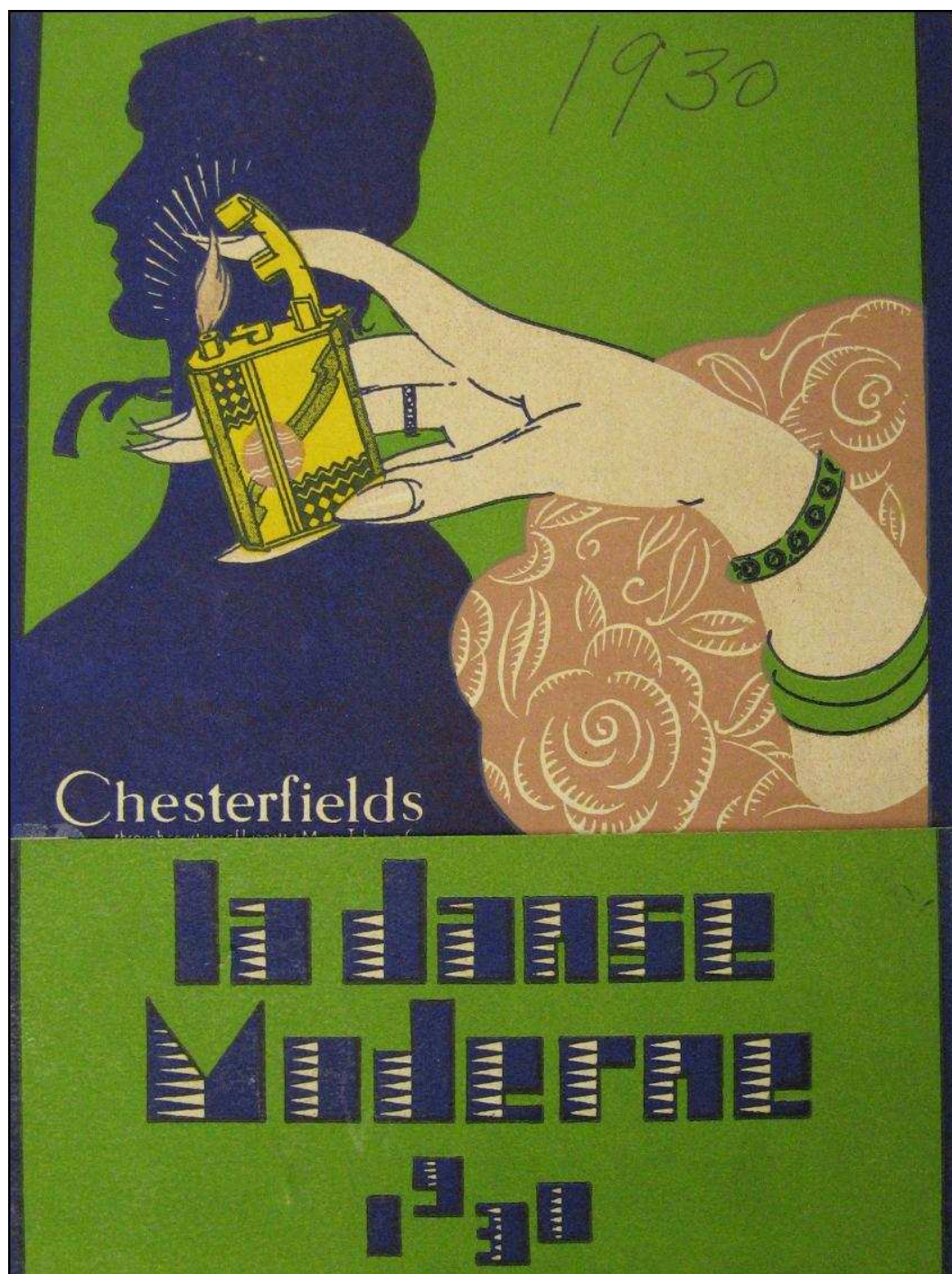


Figure 2.2: “La Danse Moderne” Program (1930), Danse Moderne Folder, Box 1, Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women Records, Bryn Mawr Special Collections

### **Chapter 3: Gallant American Women on the Airwaves, 1930s-1940s**

As advertisers and serial writers invoked the past to define contemporary women's public roles, historical drama became a convention of the radio medium. Sales pitches celebrating women's domestic responsibilities reinforced the gendered histories that had been firmly established in print culture. Even the serialized soap opera, a genre that emphasized contemporary daily life, relied heavily on tradition and generational legacy to define women's roles. But the airwaves also became a space for women's historians and activists, whose programs deployed history as an educational tool.<sup>1</sup> Creating more detailed identities for the stock historical characters that populated advertisements and periodicals, radio plays portrayed women as dynamic forces in American history. Together, activist and corporate portrayals of women's history reflected the tensions between modernity and tradition, and between domesticity and public life, in defining women's roles.

As the medium of radio gained prominence in the 1930s, it adopted the fascination with an idyllic American past exhibited in print culture and historical pageantry. Patriotic themes provided a familiar narrative framework for the new medium's listeners. Both local and national radio dramatized iconic moments in American history, drawing explicit links between the accomplishments of the past's great men and modern crises of economic depression and world conflict. By invoking patriotic colonial themes, radio plays likened the biographies of "Founding Fathers" to the

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<sup>1</sup> Radio increased the reach of large, urban media outlets into consumers' everyday lives and homogenized American leisure. Bruce Lenthall, *Radio's America: The Great Depression and the Rise of Modern Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 1-16. Nevertheless, experimental development of programming genres in the 1930s, along with the coexistence of local and national programming, brought diverse perspectives on women's history to the airwaves.

democratic potential of contemporary citizens. The programs' idealization of historic American individualism sought to naturalize modern political and corporate messages, and historical biography became a trademark of national, corporate-backed network dramas.

Many academic historians incorporated this mainstream platform into their own educational efforts. Individual scholars served as consultants on prominent corporate programs; Dixon Ryan Fox of Union College and Arthur M. Schlesinger of Harvard University advised and promoted the DuPont-sponsored *Cavalcade of America* broadcasts from 1935 to 1938.<sup>2</sup> Beginning in 1930 the American Historical Association contributed to the National Advisory Council on Radio in Education, and it presented the national series *History behind the Headlines*, later known as *The Story behind the Headlines*, on network radio from 1937 through 1947.<sup>3</sup> Emphasizing political historical contexts for contemporary events, this programming encouraged citizens to imagine history as a nation-building enterprise.

Simultaneously, local programming, including foreign-language broadcasts targeted to immigrant communities, as well as educational programs produced by local civic organizations, inserted the home, women, and ethnic diversity into the history of American democracy. Academic historians contributed to radio plays, and the U.S. government collaborated with historian Mary Ritter Beard on a national series celebrating women's roles as "co-makers" of the nation's history.

Through collaborations and independent local programs, activists and scholars used the airwaves to publicize women's historical contributions. From 1936 through

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<sup>2</sup> Bird, 72-3.

<sup>3</sup> Ian Tyrrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890-1970*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 93-103.

1939, the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women produced a series of local radio plays dramatizing the lives of notable, transgressive female historical figures.<sup>4</sup> These broadcasts also reflected an awareness of the latest professional developments, and an effort to convey the vitality of advertising women's work to local audiences. Communicating its message of women's contributions to public life, the Club focused in 1936 on "Famous Philadelphia Women of Yesteryear," in 1937 on "Famous Pennsylvania Women of Yesteryear," in 1938 on "Famous American Women of Yesteryear," and in 1939 on "World-Famous Women of Yesteryear."<sup>5</sup> After a shorter series in 1936, each year featured over twenty separate programs on a notable historical figure, broadcast during a weekly fifteen-minute evening slot. These radio plays often established historical precedents for women's participation in public activities, from Revolutionary warfare (the legendary Molly Pitcher) to the editorship of women's magazines (*Godey's Lady's Book* editor Sarah Hale). Paralleling the Poor Richard Club's promotion of Benjamin Franklin, these programs positioned Philadelphia's advertising women as authoritative guardians of local and patriotic history.

Also, like the Poor Richard Club's commemoration of Franklin, the PCAW radio programs simultaneously promoted club unity and sought recognition from the larger Philadelphia business community and citizenry. Club members researched, wrote, and acted these radio programs, even dressing in full historical costume for some of the broadcast performances.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the broadcasts provided information that could

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<sup>4</sup> The club selected female historical figures as its radio programming focus after eliminating such possibilities as "Philadelphia Institutions," "Philadelphia Industries," "Doctors," and an orchestral program. Ruth E. Clair, "PCAW Radio Programs" Memo, November 2, 1934, PCAW Radio Programs and Fan Mail, 1927-38 Folder, Box 1, PCAW Records.

<sup>5</sup> Folder, PCAW Radio Programs and Fan Mail, 1927-38, Box 1, PCAW Records. Unfortunately, scripts for only a few of these radio programs are available.

<sup>6</sup> Box 12, Photographs Folder, PCAW Records.

influence readings of the Club's anonymous "Quaker Maid." The visual icon of the colonial maid's silhouetted head marked the programs' publicity brochures and schedules. In language that later promotions echoed, the brochure announcing the first series explained its aims: "We want you to listen; we want you to be interested in these programs. Our aim is to remind men, as well as women, that Women—as Women, today, and yesterday, are and were important in the scheme of things....Back in the Colonial days women were making history; women were working and accomplishing outstanding results."<sup>7</sup>

This deployment of the past both affirmed and challenged pre-existing conventions in popular representations of women's history. The Club depicted ideals for women's behavior as changeable, proposing the potentially subversive alternative that women could assume non-domestic roles. Nevertheless, some aspects of the Club's imagery converged with the static colonial figure familiar to popular audiences as a symbol of idealized femininity. Both the Philadelphia Club and popular culture as a whole typically focused on the colonial era and on white middle-class and elite history. This limited focus differentiated their conceptions of the past from the more inclusive work pioneered by amateur and professional women historians. In its use of the Quaker Maid logo and its textual characterization of the series' aims, the PCAW identified the colonial era as the embodiment of women's social contributions. Colonial and early Republic figures, particularly with local connections, appeared prominently, as did Quaker women of Philadelphia and iconic wives of prominent men. The initial 1936 series featured biographies of Betsy Ross, Lydia Darragh, Dolly Madison, Deborah

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<sup>7</sup> Flier, "The Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women Present 'Famous Philadelphia Women of Yesteryear, '" PCAW Radio Programs and Fan Mail, 1927-38 Folder, Box 1, PCAW Records.

Franklin, and Sally Wister. It also featured a biography of Rebecca Gratz (1781-1869), who remained single throughout her life and was a leader in founding a number of local charitable organizations and Jewish institutions.

Nevertheless, from the first series, the “Women of Yesteryear” programs transcended the Revolutionary War era. Nineteenth-century editor Sarah Hale, for example provided the subject for the second broadcast. The subsequent yearly series, as they expanded their scope from Philadelphia to the World, included such figures as Pocahontas, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Susan B. Anthony, Jane Addams, Cleopatra, Rosa Bonheur, George Sand, Madame Curie, and Amelia Earhart.<sup>8</sup> The 1938 promotional brochure emphasized the series’ historical accuracy in its sweep of “famous American women...from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>9</sup> While expanding its temporal scope, the program also devoted prominent attention to performers, with biographies devoted to Marie Dressler, Isadora Duncan, and Sarah Bernhardt.<sup>10</sup> Recognizing twentieth-century writers, artists, and performers as historical actors shifted the focus well beyond colonial era mythology.

Through these programs, the Club emphasized its message of women’s potential for business success, combining the modern, burgeoning medium of radio with an awareness of the *longue durée* of American women’s history. The program’s scripts asserted women’s contributions to public life in various times and places. The 1936 show on *Godey’s Lady’s Book* editor Sarah Hale stated that her significant, varied

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<sup>8</sup>Brochure, “The Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women is On the Air!” PCAW Radio Programs and Fan Mail, 1927-38 Folder, Box 1, PCAW Records. Brochure, “World-Famous Women of Yesteryear,” PCAW Radio Programs and Fan Mail, 1927-38 Folder, Box 1, PCAW Records.

<sup>9</sup> Brochure, “The Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women is On the Air!” PCAW Radio Programs and Fan Mail, 1927-38 Folder, Box 1, PCAW Records.

<sup>10</sup> Brochure, “The Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women is On the Air!” PCAW Radio Programs and Fan Mail, 1927-38 Folder, Box 1, PCAW Records. Brochure, “World-Famous Women of Yesteryear,” PCAW Radio Programs and Fan Mail, 1927-38 Folder, Box 1, PCAW Records.



accomplishments “rival” those of Benjamin Franklin.<sup>11</sup> In addition to her work as *Godey’s* editor beginning in 1837, the script cites a variety of accomplishments, including advocacy for women’s education and women’s employment as teachers, influence on the creation of the home sewing and washing machines, encouragement of women’s exercise, and the campaign for Thanksgiving as a holiday.

As two female visitors ask Hale about her career, the script celebrates the editor as a capable professional woman and underscores her conformity to the ideals of femininity and domesticity. While one of Hale’s visitors seeks her advice on an editing career, the other asks for “secrets of charm” to help her “get a good husband.”<sup>12</sup> With Hale gamely offering each woman advice, the script seems to validate both choices. Nevertheless, the emphasis on Hale’s family and beauty recalls many more static popular conceptions of women’s contributions and suggests that success might require adherence to these values. Although Hale is a grandmother, “She’s perfectly beautiful!” one visitor exclaims, continuing to marvel that her “hands are exquisite...so white and dainty.”<sup>13</sup>

Simultaneously, the script suggests that the Philadelphia Club intended its listeners to look beyond the prescriptive power of popular media, acknowledging that a forum like a women’s magazine could challenge gender ideals. While advising her husband-hunting visitor that charm requires femininity, Hale nevertheless stresses that women should not wear clothing just because it is fashionable. Hale’s career-oriented visitor quotes a poem the editor wrote criticizing hoop skirt fashions which restricted women’s movement. This anecdote dramatizes the simultaneously repressive and

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<sup>11</sup> Dorothy Dignam, “Sarah Hale: ‘The Lady of Godey’s’” Box 1, Folder 3, Dorothy Dignam Papers, WSHS.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

transgressive possibilities of popular culture that the PCAW navigated. Like the Sarah Hale figure that the radio script celebrates, Dignam created a complex body of work. Assigned to address the female consumer's perspective, her most celebrated ads, as in her 1940s campaigns for De Beers diamond engagement rings, often focused women's ambitions on romantic goals.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, work on accounts like Ford Motors celebrated the possibility for change, heralding women's increasing freedom with their emergence as drivers earlier in the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup>

In a script for the program's third (1938) series, Dignam contributed a program on Susanna Wright, "The Silk Lady of the Susquehanna," which asserted a colonial "Quakeress" precedent for American women's business agency. Like the Hale script, the Wright biography legitimized Wright's contributions by establishing a link with Benjamin Franklin. While Wright's biography emphasized her reverence for style and family ties, Wright also played a unique, active role in the development of business and fashion. She planted mulberry trees and raised silkworms, earning recognition for "establish[ing] the culture of silk" and making Pennsylvania's Susquehanna Valley "the cradle of the silk industry in this state!"<sup>16</sup> In the script, Wright gives a humble speech after receiving honors from the English monarchy, asking, "When so great a leader as Benjamin Franklin foresees our success, how can we fail?"<sup>17</sup> Narration reveals that Wright later collaborated with Franklin, who had financed silk cultivation, to supply clothing for Washington's army during the Revolutionary War.

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<sup>14</sup> Dorothy Dignam Personnel File, Series 19, Box 6, File 11, N. W. Ayer Advertising Agency Records, Archives Center, NMAH. For examples of De Beers ads, see Box 148, Folder 1, N. W. Ayer Records. On De Beers ads' presentation of a diamond engagement ring, and the traditional feminine roles it embodied, as a life goal for young women in the 1940s, see Vicki Howard, *Brides, Inc.: American Weddings and the Business of Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 55-65.

<sup>15</sup> Dorothy Dignam, "Motor Matters," n.d., Box 1, Folder 3, Dorothy Dignam Papers, WSHS.

<sup>16</sup> Underlining appears in the script.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

The dramatization emphasized the inspirational relevance of historical women in the present, creating a supernatural conversation between Wright and a 1938 relative. Notably it is domesticity that enables this connection as a great, great, grand-niece polishes the silver cup that the Queen of England and King George presented Susanna Wright in appreciation “for her achievements with silk culture in his colony,” and which had been passed down in the family as wedding silver.<sup>18</sup> Style and feminine beauty also provided a connection between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. A narrator responds to the eighteenth-century English folk song used to open the program by exclaiming, “The Lass with the delicate air! What a picture that phrase calls up of a young Susanna Wright. Can you see her in her slim, high-waisted dress and little brimmed bonnet!”<sup>19</sup> At the program’s close, Wright and her grand-niece converse about the silk stockings fashionable in 1938, and Wright’s grand-niece asks why she never married, prompting the response, “Well! Well! Girls are just the same today! Here I’ve been gone a century and a half, and the only thing you want to know is why I didn’t marry a widower!”<sup>20</sup> Yet Wright’s justification--that she was too busy caring for her father and his children and then with “start[ing] this silk industry”--emphasized traditionally acceptable feminine characteristics.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the script emphasized Wright’s role in promoting industrial progress, aligning her with contemporary professional women. The grand-niece explained that, in 1938, she would be called “a career woman” rather than the pejorative “blue stocking.”

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<sup>18</sup> Dorothy Dignam, “The Silk Lady of the Susquehanna,” Box 1, Folder 3, Dorothy Dignam Papers, WSHS.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Responses to the Philadelphia Club's historical broadcasts, solicited by a contest asking listeners to identify their favorite dramatized figure, indicate that the program's educational goals did translate to listeners. Addressing her letter to the "gentlemen" responsible for the program, one listener wrote, "Something historical and worth knowing is always enjoyed."<sup>22</sup> Another listener, conceding "I don't expect to win a prize with my grammatical and orthographical shortcomings," nevertheless applauded the insight a Molly Pitcher broadcast provided on his stamp collection, remarking: "It really seems a shame that an ordinary two cent stamp with her name on it was all the recognition given to Miss Molly by our Government. After hearing your program on her life, I feel an injustice was committed...."<sup>23</sup>

While these responses indicated an increased awareness of women's historical contributions, the PCAW's radio programs, like many popular depictions of the past, also appealed to individuals' interest in luxury and style. Although series were transmitted by radio, responses highlighted stylistic engagement with the past. Responding to a dramatization of Harriet Lane, who assumed the duties of "First Lady" during the Presidency of her uncle James Buchanan, one listener described a treasured photograph of Lane in her private collection. Her description, rather than using objects and imagery from the past to understand a historically-specific moment or to celebrate the possibility for change, highlighted the ahistorical appeal that objects could hold as objects. She described the floral decoration on Lane's "period gown" and hair, likening it to a Hawaiian lei. She explained:

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<sup>22</sup> Mrs. E. M. Govan, January 7, 1937, PCAW Radio Programs and Fan Mail, 1927-38 Folder, Box 1, PCAW Records.

<sup>23</sup> Simon Nathan, n.d., PCAW Radio Programs and Fan Mail, 1927-38 Folder, Box 1, PCAW Records.

Hawaii—so far away so alive—Harriet Lane—so far along the years, she seems lost in the mists of time.

Yet, the twain meet on a decorative note just for a moment in my mind—as I close the old Album—clasping within its mellowed gilt-edged leaves the glamorous picture of Harriet Lane—a famous Pennsylvania woman of Yesteryear.<sup>24</sup>

This response, like many of the era's advertisements, fashions, and films, cultivated a superficial, stylistic engagement with the past; historic objects became part of the present because of their glamorous appeal. Simultaneously, as evidenced by the colonial "Quaker Maid" logo and the radio scripts of the PCAW, historic anecdotes sought to model progress for contemporary women. Close readings reveal that myths of the past could simultaneously replicate static visions of femininity and suggest that women's proven capabilities suited them for new public prominence.

Women employed in popular media like advertising also acted as historians, shaping popular perceptions of American women's history. The Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women claimed women's past achievements as evidence of their intellectual and professional abilities. Notably, this conception of the past asserted continuity in women's personalities across time rather than historicizing the construction of gender roles. The PCAW's emblem, letterhead, and promotional imagery recorded changes in style as markers of passing time but did not interpret these shifts as indicators that culture was constructing ideals for female behavior through fashion. Through references to the past, the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women adopted some dominant cultural stereotypes, reworking them to support the claim that women like the PCAW members were valuable contributors to American life. By responding to male advertisers' use of

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<sup>24</sup> Carolyn Fox, January 7, [1937], PCAW Radio Programs and Fan Mail, 1927-38 Folder, Box 1, PCAW Records.

historical imagery, women advertisers made activist claims for their expanding presence in the profession. In creating its iconography, the group responded to the advertising industry's frequent association of American identity with the idealized history of the colonial era. Simultaneously, historically-themed brand icons, from a colonial woman serving Baker's Cocoa to Aunt Jemima, the antebellum slave character promoting pancake mix, sold potentially time-saving products by celebrating gendered and racialized divisions of labor as natural and timeless, unaltered by the emergence of new, potentially time-saving technologies. For professional and public audiences, these stereotypes would shape reception of the PCAW's historical dramas.

When the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women turned its attention to the imagined pasts of non-white or non-Western women, parody differentiated the perceived mores of these "others" and contemporary advertising women. Dramatizing differences in ability between white American women and "others," visual imagery highlighted stereotypes and ultimately suggested that such women exhibited difference both in the past and in the present. In some cases, temporal and geographical othering converged, as the Club sponsored annual dances inspired by the antebellum South or ancient Egypt.<sup>25</sup> The comic distance asserted between contemporary women and their Egyptian counterparts implied a level of ridicule not present in the celebratory turns to previous American eras. A club report characterized the "Egyptian Holiday" event as "colorful,

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<sup>25</sup> Notably, the analogy between geographic and temporal distance appeared frequently in the work of the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women. The use of travel metaphors to describe "turn[ing] the page of history back" paralleled the frequent use geographic themes for such annual dinner dances as the "Dance Orientale" (1929), the "Florida Frolic" (1936) and the "Hawaiian Holiday" (1939). For example, the 1931 Gay Nineties dance program playfully likened the progression from the previous year's "Danse Moderne" theme to a trip "flown by airplane speed." *Adland News*, Feb. 1931 Special Gay Nineties Number, Box 10, PCAW Records.

Oriental, bizarre, with its never-ending sources of amusement.”<sup>26</sup> Promotional material featured illustrations of scantily-clad women in abbreviated tops and diaphanous skirts (Figure 3.1).<sup>27</sup> Internal club memos sought Egyptian or Turkish costumes for members to wear at the event, assuring that “the figure illustrated is not wearing the costume we’ll have so don’t be alarmed!”<sup>28</sup> Notably, this correspondence presents ancient Egypt as interchangeable with other cultures; one member volunteers a Chinese costume as a backup.<sup>29</sup>

Clearly advertising women’s perceptions of history had been shaped by the era’s cigarette marketing. Frequent references to “Fatima,” an American brand of cigarettes advertised as “Turkish Tobacco” with an image of a veiled woman occur in the group’s event planning discussions. Because Turkish tobacco was frequently processed into cigarettes in Egypt and because the era’s most popular cigarette shape had first flourished in Egypt, advertisers combined references to Egypt and Turkey, using ancient Egyptian imagery, for example, to promote “Turkish” tobacco cigarettes.<sup>30</sup> Many brands emphasized male Egyptian figures, linking history to quality and prestige.<sup>31</sup> Fatima

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<sup>26</sup> This report provided a retrospective of events over the previous year. *Adland News*, Feb. 1931 Special Gay Nineties Number, Box 10, PCAW Records.

<sup>27</sup> Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women card invitation, “An Egyptian Holiday,” Sept. 14, 1930, Box 1, PCAW Records.

<sup>28</sup> Unsigned letter carbon, 14 Sept. 1930, to Mrs. Quennel, Box 1, PCAW Records.

<sup>29</sup> Henrietta Harrison, undated note on undated letter from Edith Ellsworth to “Girls,” Box 1, PCAW Records.

<sup>30</sup> William Wesley Young, *The Story of the Cigarette* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1916) 56-58. The conflation of Egypt and Turkey by advertisers and the PCAW was also shaped by ongoing changes in Turkey and Egypt. Egypt became a British protectorate in 1914, ending the Turkish Ottoman Empire’s control there; in 1922 Egypt gained independence from this British influence. In the 1920s, leaders in both Egypt and the newly-defined Turkey deployed history to establish unique nationalist identities and to emphasize Western influences. Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 23, 44-46, 54, 82-84

<sup>31</sup> Helmar Turkish Cigarettes packaging featured a male Egyptian bust. Print advertisements reproduced this colorful packaging against the backdrop of contemporary sociability. In one advertisement, a man in close-up gazes at the reader, and in another a group of fashionably dressed women stood behind an oversized cigarette package. Box 411, Folder 1, Series 2, N. W. Ayer Records, Archives Center, NMAH.

packaging featured the text “TURKISH CIGARETTES” prominently, alongside an illustration of a woman’s face, entirely veiled beneath her eyes.<sup>32</sup> As early as the 1910s, advertisements in national periodicals and papers like *The New York Times* featured more detailed illustrations of the product icon, veiled in white, holding a package of the Fatima brand.<sup>33</sup> Even without textual references to history, this character and the society she symbolized were interpreted as outdated. At New York city’s League of Advertising Women ball in 1921, members seeking to “leave the busy world behind...in costume of another time” chose “Egyptian woman,” “Turkish woman,” “Spanish bride,” “Spanish girl,” “gypsy,” “American Indian,” and “Indian Princess” as historical identities. Participants who chose elite European or American subjects, by contrast, used specifically historical or biographical material, emulating a “Colonial Dame,” “Dolly Madison,” “Marie Queen of Scots,” “Marie Antoinette,” and “Queen Anne Neville.”<sup>34</sup> These performances reflected the assumption that Egyptian, Turkish, Spanish, and Native American women were out of step with modern progress, only relevant as relics of the past.

The PCAW’s familiarity with such imagery inspired its conflation of ancient Egypt with the “Fatima” figure. In brainstorming costume and event plans to correspond with their Egyptian theme, one member remarked, “I’ll help in a tent if there’s a sheik in

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Other brands invoking Egyptian themes included Egyptian Deities, Box 429, Folder 1, Series 2, N. W. Ayer Records, Archives Center, NMAH. “Old Egypt” cigarette ads included the slogan “Not old--but new!” and Rameses cigarettes claimed to be the “Aristocrat of Cigarettes.” Box 419, Folder 1, Series 2, N. W. Ayer Records.

<sup>32</sup> Fatima packaging, Box 16, Virgil Johnson Collection of Cigarette Packages, Archives Center, NMAH. The brand’s print advertising featured this package design prominently. See, for example, Box 414, Folder 1, Series 2, N. W. Ayer Records, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>33</sup> Advertisement, Oct. 4, 1914, *The New York Times*. Box 420, Folder 1, Series 2, N. W. Ayer Records, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>34</sup> League of Advertising Women, Costume ball invitation, n.d.; unidentified clipping, “Pictures of Ad Women’s Costume Appear in Rotogravure,” n.d.; “Ad Women at Costume Ball,” *The American Printer*, Dec. 20, 1921; “Centuries Fashions Shown at Fancy Ball,” *Morning Telegraph*, Dec. 11, 1921. Advertising Women of New York Scrapbook vol. 4, WSHS.



it!! But I donno about the costume, the only thing I can think of is Fatima and I'm funny enough looking as it is."<sup>35</sup> Members thus defined impersonation of a "Fatima" or Egyptian character as a dramatic departure from their true personalities. One comment assured, "just think how Fatima-ish you will look in a costume; but with a little more to it than the lady on the card!"<sup>36</sup> Other comments emphasized the racialized definition of "Fatima's" appearance as a deviation from typical ideals, suggested in a member's hesitancy to dress in such costumes. One member highlighted the club's racial preoccupation with the personalized request, "It is not a costume party, nor will it be formal, but you're dark enough to make a good 'Fatima' so wouldn't you like to join the ranks of the girls who are coming in costume, and help out at one of the booths. . . .or in the Slave market!"<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, the difference between these other cultures and the PCAW members' everyday lives remains distinct. As one member wrote in response to the Egyptian costumes, "Whoever heard of one of those with red hair?"<sup>38</sup>

Although radio publicity for the event described a trip to contemporary Egypt, the evening exoticized Egyptian history by staging a "slave market" for bids on female dance partners.<sup>39</sup> Such slippage between the past and the present suggested that Egyptian culture was static, asserting Western culture's assumed superiority over a more backwards "other." This imagery contrasts with the more respectful tone assumed when the PCAW sponsored serious lectures by experts or members who had visited other

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<sup>35</sup> Edith Ellsworth to Ann, Sept. 16, 1930. Box 1, PCAW Records.

<sup>36</sup> Unsigned, "Dear Marie," Sept. 16, 1930. Box 1, PCAW Records.

<sup>37</sup> Unsigned to Alice Roche, Sept. 13, 1930. Box 1, PCAW Records.

<sup>38</sup> Unsigned, undated note on undated letter from Edith Ellsworth to "Girls," Box 1, PCAW Records.

<sup>39</sup> Mrs. John G. Fleck, "Radio Play Over WFI," Scrapbook, Box 10, PCAW Records.

nations.<sup>40</sup> The association of Egyptian history with female sexuality contrasted with corporations' association of Egyptian achievements with technological progress. For example, at the Chicago Century of Progress exposition, Ford Motors cast itself as the inheritor of Egyptian civilization with an exhibit of "The Ford Drama of Progress: The Story of Transportation Through the Ages," beginning with "the earliest Egyptian chariot."<sup>41</sup> Instead of locating a parallel legacy of Egyptian women's progress, the PCAW used racial caricatures that put their own assumed superiority on display.

Similar parody appeared in local newspaper coverage of the Club's 1940 dinner dance, the "Southern Serenade." A *Philadelphia Record* photograph reporting on the event shows a "tableau" of club members in antebellum Southern costume standing with a stereotypical African-American mammy character (Figure 3.2). She carries a serving tray of drinks, and the caption supplies her with dialogue of wonderment: "IS YOU-ALL REALLY ADVERTISIN' WOMEN?"<sup>42</sup> With the mammy caricature portrayed in dark make-up by club member Edith Hawk, this joke reproduces the PCAW's complex construction of historical change.<sup>43</sup> While the Poor Richard Club had created historical tableaux to emphasize the underestimation of Benjamin Franklin, the PCAW's fictionalized 1940 performance strove to legitimize advertising women's contemporary careers by inserting them anachronistically in cultural idealizations of the antebellum

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<sup>40</sup> These events, such as an April 13, 1943, musical and education program on China, whose promotions exclaimed "We salute you! For your Bravery/ For your Valor," became more prevalent during World War II and its aftermath. Flyer for April 13, 1943, Program Meetings, 1940-44, Folder, Box 1, PCAW Records. In 1942, the Club sponsored an educational event to promote "Pan-Americanism," or "good fellowship between the Americas." Presentation of the PCAW to the Committee for Club Achievement Award of Advertising Fed. Of America, 1941-2, Box 2, PCAW Records.

<sup>41</sup> Advertisement proof, Series 3, Box 205, Folder 2, May 27, 1934, N. W. Ayer Records, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>42</sup> The caption's text affirms, "Yes, Mammy, that's what they are." Photograph and Clipping (Feb. 27, 1940), *Philadelphia Record* Photograph Collection, V7:3062, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>43</sup> 1938-1939 PCAW Roster, Box 12, PCAW Records.

South. This portrayal of continuity between past and present relied on racial categories of difference. White antebellum ladies and contemporary professional advertising women are presented as parallel. The erroneous perception that women's professional activity was shocking is relegated to a marginalized, racialized "other" whose imagined ignorance is cast as humorous.<sup>44</sup> Through these constructions of the past, the Philadelphia Club made an activist claim for professional women's capabilities, drawing both on the advertising industry's obsession with historical legitimacy and on pre-existing cultural scripts for gender, racial, and national difference.

In its use of history to define women's status, the PCAW existed in dialogue not only with the advertising industry and print culture, but also with the historical drama as an emerging radio genre. During the late 1930s, serialized commercial dramas explored contemporary women's relationship to the past. By centering the experiences of women, the Philadelphia Club reworked conventions of radio's emerging historical genre, which acknowledged women's contributions but emphasized the enterprise and individualism of male leaders as the driving forces in American society, past and present.

The historical drama became a trademark of national corporate-sponsored radio, exemplified by DuPont's *Cavalcade of America*, first broadcast on the national CBS

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<sup>44</sup> The PCAW's 1940 antebellum tableau uses the "Mammy" character to define white women's superiority through their business success. Recalling the popular 1939 film *Gone With the Wind*, this dramatization aligns PCAW members with the "Scarlett O'Hara" archetype. As Tara McPherson argues, author Margaret Mitchell's Scarlett participated in public life as a lumber industry entrepreneur who deployed her beauty as a business strategy. This construction of the antebellum South contrasted the physical labor of the asexual, maternal Mammy character with the genteel femininity of Scarlett O'Hara. Nevertheless, although Scarlett relied on her Mammy's support, just as the Southern economy relied on African-American women's labor, the story obscured the social and historical conditions that assigned privilege through the mutual construction of race, class, and gender. Tara McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 23-27, 55-65. Similarly, the PCAW ignores class distinctions and assumes racial distinctions as natural and unproblematic to illustrate the ideal advertising woman.

network from 1935 through 1939 and then on NBC from 1940 through 1953.<sup>45</sup> A collaboration of advertising agency BBDO, the corporate sponsor, and academic historians, the series invoked tradition to celebrate self-sufficiency as an ideal of American character.<sup>46</sup> This influential program dramatized the lives of notable American figures, typically by emphasizing the individualism of political leaders and male entrepreneurs, but with episodes devoted to key women, including anti-slavery and women's suffrage activists. As explained by historian William L. Bird, *Cavalcade of America* invoked tradition to make the corporate critique of New Deal economic policy palatable to the American public.<sup>47</sup>

Like the PCAW radio programs, *Cavalcade of America* presented itself as an instructional effort. Announcers described letters received from listeners praising the program's educational functions.<sup>48</sup> A letter from Miss Mabel Thatcher Washburn, identified as President of the National Historical Society, prefaced one broadcast by proclaiming that "the DuPont Company is rendering a real service" through its presentation of stories "so full of drama, of thrill and romance, yet so little known to a great proportion of the people."<sup>49</sup> Key to the program's utility was the idea that inherent characteristics made past Americans great and would help contemporary ones meet the challenges of the present. To bolster the DuPont Corporation's promotion of "Better things for better living through chemistry," enterprise and the power of the individual emerged as key programming themes. Traditional patriotic icons like George

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<sup>45</sup> William L. Bird, Jr., *"Better Living": Advertising, Media, and the New Vocabulary of Business Leadership, 1935-1955* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 66.

<sup>46</sup> Bird, *"Better Living."*

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> "Enterprise," *Cavalcade of America*, January 29, 1936. I am grateful to William L. Bird for use of his *Cavalcade of America* broadcast recordings.

<sup>49</sup> "Women in Public Service," *Cavalcade of America*, January 6, 1936.

Washington appeared prominently for their selfless leadership.<sup>50</sup> In a novel approach to Franklin's achievements, the statesman narrated his various inventions to convince his granddaughter that he is "the laziest man in the world" because he always sought to make life easier. The bifocal, for example, allowed him to look out the window while working.<sup>51</sup>

The Du Pont Corporation's own founding father, Eleuthere Irénée du Pont, provided the focus of multiple episodes, gaining historical weight as "a true American pioneer" through his proximity to the nation's founding fathers. A 1939 biography of du Pont characterized the corporation's 1802 founding as inspired by "the suggestion of Thomas Jefferson."<sup>52</sup> Other episodes characterized the past as inspiration for modern-day entrepreneurship and citizenship, detailing inventor Eliphalet Remington's innovation and gun-making, alongside the romance which supported him.<sup>53</sup> An early episode devoted to "Enterprise" celebrated Frederick Tudor's early nineteenth-century ice exportation business as a precedent for current refrigeration technology. Identifying "the national trait of enterprise" as a current in U.S. society, *Cavalcade* assured that "The optimism and energy that spur men to enterprise have always been notable in American character" and have "often led to astonishing progress."<sup>54</sup> This definition of American character as ahistorical and continuous, and yet influential in individual achievement and progress, corresponded with the conceptions of history championed by the Poor Richard Club and the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women.

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<sup>50</sup> "George Washington Refuses a Crown," *Cavalcade of America*, May 1, 1939.

<sup>51</sup> "The Laziest Man in the World," *Cavalcade of America*, November 13, 1944.

<sup>52</sup> "Eleuthere Irénée du Pont," *Cavalcade of America*, May 29, 1939.

<sup>53</sup> "The Forge," *Cavalcade of America*, October 13, 1947.

<sup>54</sup> "Enterprise," *Cavalcade of America*, January 29, 1936.

*Cavalcade of America* also devoted biographical episodes to women.

Contributions to iconic moments in American history and to American enterprise typically marked these figures' significance; simultaneously, family, domesticity, and beauty embodied women's roles. A biography of Mehitabel Wing dramatized her journey to secure the New York governor's intervention in her husband's trial. Convicted for inciting a renters' protest, William Prendergast's trial and ultimate pardon symbolized "the struggle of the people to own the land on which they live."<sup>55</sup> Introducing Mehitabel Wing's dramatic efforts to prevent her husband's execution, *Cavalcade of America* program advisor and Yale history professor Frank Monaghan proclaimed "her ride is as notable as the midnight ride of Paul Revere"<sup>56</sup> The episode's portrayal of Wing as the dutiful wife, beside her husband "in gray Quaker dress" at his trial, resonated with popular depictions of women's contributions as essential but linked strongly to their prescribed roles as wives and mothers.

Each *Cavalcade* episode linked female figures to feminine ideals, even when stressing milestones of change in women's social status. A 1940 biography of "Jane Addams of Hull House" portrayed Addams as a transgressive figure who challenged limitations placed on women. The program dramatized her childhood determination to improve life for the impoverished, a goal which prompted her father's concern. Responding to Jane's citation of Abraham Lincoln as an example of an individual's power in social change, her father warned that "Abraham Lincoln was a man," and that social concerns were outside the domain of women.<sup>57</sup> Following Addams' life story

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<sup>55</sup> "Mehitabel Wing," *Cavalcade of America*, January 16, 1940.

<sup>56</sup> Bird, 97, 106. "Mehitabel Wing," *Cavalcade of America*, January 16, 1940.

<sup>57</sup> Recent scholarship has challenged such readings of John Huy Addams' relationship with his daughter, citing his encouragement of her intellectual pursuits. Victoria Bissell Brown, *The Education of Jane*

through her foundation of Hull House and the opposition she faced in this effort, *Cavalcade of America* again stressed her transgression in claiming a place alongside male leaders. In a dialogue with President Wilson at the White House, the Hull House founder argues that voting should be a “human right” for women as well as men, leading Wilson to admit, “Of course you are one of the best arguments [for women’s suffrage] yourself.” Nevertheless, the episode characterized Addams as traditionally feminine. The drama opens during her youth, as she walks with a male companion and later tells her father that she would like to marry him. An episode devoted to Emily Dickinson similarly emphasized courtship and romance as central to women’s lives, tracing the poet’s life story through her romance with George Gould, which ended due to her father’s insistence.<sup>58</sup>

The themes of romance and family devotion that pervaded *Cavalcade of America*’s portrayals of women were also prominent throughout the radio medium during the 1930s and 1940s. In the mid-1930s, emergence of separate daytime and nighttime programming schedules redefined the medium’s approach to female audiences.<sup>59</sup> Commercially-sponsored daytime serial soap operas targeted women and defined feminine roles largely through family, romance, and such traditionally-accepted forums for female service as nursing. Soap operas’ nearly exclusive focus on contemporary life differed dramatically from nighttime network broadcasts, where history and anthology drama provided frequent subject matter. Nevertheless, the family dramas of daytime

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Addams (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 13-15. Louise Knight, *Citizen: Jane Addams and the Struggle for Democracy* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2005), 57-67. Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 45-6. Addams began her 1910 autobiography by describing her father’s influence, and she attributed her interest in history to his encouragement. Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House with Autobiographical Notes*, ed. James Hurt (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 29.

<sup>58</sup> “Wait for the Morning,” *Cavalcade of America*, January 22, 1941.

<sup>59</sup> Hilmes, 108.

serials explored tensions between modernity and tradition as markers of women's roles. Soap operas thus constructed frameworks for assessing the possibility of change in women's status over time.

Historians have characterized the serialized daytime program *Painted Dreams*, which appeared on Chicago station WGN in 1930, as the first soap opera.<sup>60</sup> The drama centered around a mother's and daughter's competing ideas about the daughter's best interest. Describing the value of this plot to commercial sponsors, writer Irna Phillips characterized the trajectory of a woman's life as a story of progress towards marriage:

..."Painted Dreams" lends itself to a very unusual range of change, and moreover, to a change of natural sequence. Already Irene Moynahan, the young daughter, has several suitors who are desirous of marrying her, but Irene portrays the aspiring modern girl, with ambitions toward a career. Hence, the one aspect of "Painted Dreams". Mother Moynahan, on the other hand, is solicitous, as only mothers are, for the future of her daughter, and naturally her "painted dreams" see Irene happily married, with children.<sup>61</sup>

Mother Moynahan's model for understanding change in women's lives characterized marriage as a "natural" outcome of a woman's growth.

While the PCAW's programs proposed historical precedents to legitimize women's public careers in the 1930s, the soap opera characterized change as an individual process that occurred within each woman's lifetime. Careers might interest modern, young women, and the serial program capitalized on this excitement by including characters at multiple stages in their lives and by creating dramatic devices which threatened relationships. Nevertheless, marriage remained the desired, assumed outcome. The career-minded Irene has nevertheless pursued this traditional path by following courtship rituals. Pointing out the commercial value of this progression

<sup>60</sup> Robert Clyde Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1985), 110. Hilmes, 155.

<sup>61</sup> Irna Phillips, Plan Presentation: Montgomery Ward, n.d., Box 4, Proposed Programs: Painted Dreams Folder, Irna Phillips Collection, WSHS.



towards marriage, Phillips revealed, “It is my plan to have an engagement, the wedding, (in June) the trousseau, the furnishing of a home, actually occur via the air.”<sup>62</sup> The role of the young consumer-bride reflected the corporate sponsor’s ultimate goal, an opportunity for direct product promotion; by extension, the program portrayed marriage and domesticity as the desired outcome of a contemporary woman’s youth.

In her subsequent work, Irna Phillips continued this emphasis on home and family as the timeless purpose for women’s lives. The program *Today’s Children*, an adaptation of the *Painted Dreams* format, gained popularity under Pillsbury sponsorship on the national NBC network in the mid-1930s.<sup>63</sup> Material prepared for the “Today’s Children Family Album,” a 1935 Pillsbury advertising booklet, emphasized home and family as the values connecting generations of women. The booklet summarized a disagreement between character Mother Moran and her daughter Frances, suggesting that the continuities in attachment to family outweighed changes in women’s career interests. Describing her unwillingness to let marriage prevent her ambition of becoming a painter, Frances told her mother: “You are old fashioned. You’re like the women of yesterday who made her home her whole life. But women are different today. I’m not going to be foolish and center all my interest in a home and raising a family. I have a right to grow and develop. I am not going to give up my career just because I’m going to be married.”<sup>64</sup> Mother Moran cited the stability of family across time in her response:

Frances, you are paintin’ your dreams, yes. And you hold the brush and must be choosin’ the colors to use. But when you’re paintin’ your dreams, be

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<sup>62</sup> Irna Phillips, Plan Presentation: Montgomery Ward, n.d., Box 4, Proposed Programs: Painted Dreams Folder, Irna Phillips Collection, WSHS.

<sup>63</sup> Allen, 114.

<sup>64</sup> Walter C. Wicker to K. K. Paitner, May 29, 1935, attachment, Box 7, Pillsbury Advertising Folder, Irna Phillips Collection, WSHS.

careful of the colors you're goin' to be usin'. 'cause sometimes you make a mistake, and the colors that you think are goin' to look good, don't look so good in the finished picture. Now Frances, darlin', let me be sayin' just one more thing to ya. There are three colors that have stood the test of all time. They are the colors that are the foundation of all dreams of all the men and women in the world--the colors of love--family--home.<sup>65</sup>

Such emphasis on traditional values as timeless and inescapable contrasted with *Cavalcade of America's* approach to public figures like Jane Addams. In the DuPont series, uncommon public roles became possible for women. If women adhered to key aspects of traditional femininity, they could center their lives around public service and gain significant acclaim. In daytime serials, women's plans and desires faced many disruptions, but home, tradition, and family were portrayed as necessary goals whose absence prevented a woman's fulfillment. This model emphasized the continuity of women's familial roles across history by showing that individual women's lives would always return to the home.

Soap operas presented consumer products as a shortcut to domestic happiness. Their commercial messages emphasized brands' longevity, praising housewives past and present for their wise consumer choices. Such promotional approaches extended brands' definition of history through packaging and print advertisements. As sponsor of *When a Girl Marries*, an early 1940s serial of young married life, General Foods emphasized its Baker's chocolate product's endurance across generations, continuing the longstanding print strategy of linking past and present through the service of the "Belle Chocolatière" logo. Tying in with the serial's dramatic depiction of a young wife's efforts to establish her marriage and home, announcers characterized consumption of Baker's Chocolate as a valuable tradition, identifying the products as "favorites with American housewives for

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

nearly ten generations.”<sup>66</sup> Promotions for General Foods brand Calumet baking powder similarly emphasized product longevity, proclaiming Calumet “the best kitchen friend of family bakers for more than half a century.”<sup>67</sup>

Serials’ invocation American history icons furthered the association of domestic roles with their contributions to family life. One episode of *When a Girl Marries* opened with a commercial announcement proclaiming that “ever since Martha Washington’s time women all over America have preferred Baker’s Chocolate for their chocolate cookery!”<sup>68</sup> It was Martha Washington’s connection to domestic labor through Baker’s chocolate that apparently justified her inclusion in America’s historical narrative. The advertisement dramatized a classroom exchange between a teacher and a young student who interjected an anecdote about the First Lady’s cooking into the lesson on George Washington. Young student Nancy exclaimed:

I know something about Martha Washington, too! She used to bake one of George Washington’s favorite cakes herself! It was a bee-u-ti-ful Devil’s Food cake! [*When a Girl Marries* announcer] Mr. Stark says he bets she used Baker’s Unsweetened Chocolate for it...’cause even then, American women were using Baker’s. My mother makes her cakes with Baker’s Chocolate too...and gee, do they taste good!<sup>69</sup>

This dialogue presented Martha Washington’s homemaking and consumer choices as justification for her inclusion in the patriotic study of American history. Notably,

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<sup>66</sup> Elaine Carrington, Episode 57 script, *When a Girl Marries*, December 16, 1941, Box 7, General Foods Corporation Radio Script Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>67</sup> Elaine Carrington, Episode 45 script, *When a Girl Marries*, November 28, 1941, Box 7, General Foods Corporation Radio Script Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>68</sup> Underlining appears in the script. Benton & Bowles, Inc., advertisement, *When a Girl Marries*, January 21, 1942, Box 7, General Foods Corporation Radio Script Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>69</sup> Benton & Bowles, Inc., advertisement, *When a Girl Marries*, January 21, 1942, Box 7, General Foods Corporation Radio Script Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. Ellipses and underlining are present in the original. The script’s printed text reads: “’cause even during Revolutionary War days, American women were using Baker’s in everything they made with chocolate!” and is hand-edited to read “’cause even then, American women were using Baker’s.”

Nancy's enthusiastic attribution of her historical Martha Washington knowledge to *When a Girl Marries* credits the soap opera and its General Foods sponsor with fostering young women's personal connection to the American legacy of female domesticity. The episode's closing further linked the Baker's product to individual memories of domesticity, characterizing the Baker's Chocolate logo as the source for warm childhood memories. Announcer "Mr. Stark" recalled "begging for a cup of the 'Chocolate Girl's' cocoa!" during childhood and speculated that listeners would also recall "that famous symbol of quality in everything chocolate. . .among the happiest of your childhood memories."<sup>70</sup> Through such messages, contemporary radio dramas adapted advertisers' visual invocations of the past to the medium of radio, drawing on the domestic themes and colonial icons that pervaded print culture.

Soap opera narrative focused closely on the contemporary family, using the process of generational succession to dramatize the pulls of home and career. In rare cases when daytime serials deployed historical settings, they produced similar models for female roles, highlighting women's contributions to American society through their functions as mothers, daughters, wives, and homemakers. Influential writer Irna Phillips produced multiple proposals for serials with historical characters and settings. While these proposals did not reach the airwaves, they nevertheless demonstrate the genre's focus on the pull between tradition and modernity. *Pioneers*, a proposed serial drama to be sponsored by Ford Motors, followed a "typical American family" from 1783 to the present. Phillips argued that audiences' interest in the past could be maintained only through serialized family stories because "the narration of purely historical events,

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<sup>70</sup> Benton & Bowles, Inc., closing advertisement, *When a Girl Marries*, January 21, 1942, Box 7, General Foods Corporation Radio Script Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

whether they be economic, political or social, are in themselves insufficient, in my opinion, to hold the interest of a radio audience.”<sup>71</sup> In response to Ford’s interest in a historical narrative, Phillips proposed a program that fit information about the past within the framework of familiar daily activities. With the nineteenth-century Western frontier as her setting, Phillips outlined discussions of grandmothers, mothers, and daughters on homemaking skills, focusing “more on the intimate, family life than on the historical side of Colonial times.”<sup>72</sup> While women’s devotion to home transcended generations, technology embodied progress, with “the development of land transportation” in the form of horse-drawn coaches that ads would link to “the manufacture of the Ford.”<sup>73</sup> Like women’s magazine advertisements celebrating the efficiency of modern products, this conception of the past embraced technological advances in consumer products while denying corresponding changes in women’s domestic roles. Ina Phillips claimed, “In tracing the growth of our various commodities” through the transition from spinning wheel to modern factory and through the transition from boat and covered wagon to Ford car, “we might make a humorous and striking comparison between our times and the early days.”<sup>74</sup>

While products from the past would be outmoded in the present, radio serials conceptualized women’s nature as constant across time. The shows relied on

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<sup>71</sup> Ina Phillips, undated typed proposal, Box 4, Proposed Programs: Patriotic Programs Folder, Ina Phillips Collection, WSHS. Phillips’ Ford proposals are undated, but she likely produced them in the early 1940s. Ford became a J. Walter Thompson account in 1943, and in 1944 Ina Phillips returned the book *Henry Ford and Greenfield Village* to J. Walter Thompson executive Henry T. Stanton. Philip T. Dougherty, *New York Times*, July 2, 1987, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times. H. T. Stanton to Ina Phillips, May 26, 1944, Box 62, J. Walter Thompson Company Correspondence Folder, Ina Phillips Collection, WSHS.

<sup>72</sup> Ina Phillips, “Frontier Manners and Morals,” n.d., Box 4, Proposed Programs: Patriotic Programs Folder, Ina Phillips Collection, WSHS.

<sup>73</sup> Ina Phillips, undated typed proposal, Box 4, Proposed Programs: Patriotic Programs Folder, Ina Phillips Collection, WSHS.

<sup>74</sup> Ina Phillips, undated proposal, “America’s Industrial Progress,” Box 4, Proposed Programs: Patriotic Programs Folder, Ina Phillips Collection, WSHS.

contemporary courtship and marriage customs for drama but characterized interest in being “modern” as a trait shared by women throughout history. In a script proposing a new Irna Phillips serial, *Reflections*, an heirloom mirror brought to America on the Mayflower leads a contemporary bachelor to reflect on his family’s history.<sup>75</sup> Phillips likens Elizabeth Richmond, the English court maiden who originally owned this luxurious, “gold-framed mirror,” to the contemporary woman. Observing that “the young moderns of all generations are pretty much alike,” the narrator recounted his ancestor Richmond’s sacrifice of fashionable European court life to journey to New England with the husband she loved and become a “pioneer mother.”<sup>76</sup> While these explicitly historical settings remained largely absent from the radio soap opera, they nevertheless embodied the conventions of the genre. As in *Painted Dreams* and *Today’s Children*, the disruption of traditional feminine domesticity appeared as a temporary life stage in each individual woman’s saga, past or present. The “modern” desires for independence and career were not attributed to historical shifts; rather they linked the present to the past because marriage and family remained the ultimate goal.

During World War II, invocation of the past to construct U.S. character became newly focused on mobilizing patriotic unity. Radio portrayed continuity in familial values across time to obscure differences in nationality and ethnicity. In the 1930s, dramas of immigrant assimilation into American family life, including *The Rise of the Goldbergs* and *I Remember Mama*, contrasted with the exaggerated black caricatures

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<sup>75</sup> Irna Phillips, “Reflections,” n.d., Box 4, Proposed Programs, Reflections, Folder, Irna Phillips Collection, WSHS.

<sup>76</sup> Further demonstrating her assessment of modern and historical women as fundamentally similar, Phillips also wrote scripts for a proposed series, *Famous Women Men Have Loved*, in which iconic figures like Salome are presented as contemporary women interviewed by a female reporter. Irna Phillips, “Salome,” n.d., Box 4, Proposed Programs: Famous Women Men Have Loved Folder, Irna Phillips Collection, WSHS.

presented in such influential programs as *Amos 'n' Andy*.<sup>77</sup> During the war, anxieties emerged about the status of Italian and German immigrant groups. A variety of radio formats cited immigrants' familial and patriotic loyalty as proof of their Americanism. Fiorani Radio Productions, producer of Italian-language programming for the Scranton, Pennsylvania, area, characterized American patriotism as central to the history of the area's Italian-American immigrants. The keystone *Sunday Serenade* variety program presented Italian and American musical selections popular in previous years as an "album of familiar melodies."<sup>78</sup> During World War II, *Sunday Serenade* featured patriotic American favorites, stressing songs popular during the World War I era as evidence of American civilians' gratitude, then and now, for soldiers' service. Italian recordings sentimentalizing the home, family, and motherhood, a mainstay of the format, gained new context. Dedication requests poured in from local Italian-American men serving in the U.S. military who wished to honor their families back home.<sup>79</sup> Rather than conveying nostalgia for Italy, these songs became celebrations of American family life.

The assumption of inherent national character traits shaped wartime radio soap operas' treatment of ethnicity. For its sponsorship of *Today's Children*, General Mills received a July 1945 complaint about the continued presence of the program's German-American characters as exemplars of the American family. In closing her letter, listener Nan Bolsius explained, "In gratitude to those who suffer, to those who died, no German, but a typical American can dispense neighborly kindness and wisdom for my money, my cereal, and my baking. And I can not remember when [General Mills brand] Gold Medal

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<sup>77</sup> Hilmes, 94-95, 1-4.

<sup>78</sup> Musical Continuity, *Fioranis' Sunday Serenade*, November 19, 1944, Box 15, Folder 7, Fiorani Radio Productions Records, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>79</sup> Musical Continuity, *Fioranis' Sunday Serenade*, October 22, 1944, Box 15, Folder 7, Fiorani Radio Productions Records, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Flour was not my mother's and my choice."<sup>80</sup> Her assertion of brand loyalty replicated advertisers' construction of consumption as a woman's inter-generational legacy, yet Bolsius tied her loyalty to the *Today's Children* program, assuming that every character should reflect the inherent characteristics of an entire group. Simultaneously, Bolsius's fear of positive portrayals of German-Americans after Germany's surrender to the Allied Powers reflects the assumption that the characteristics exhibited by Germans during World War II would be similarly present in future generations. Finally, Bolsius notes a neighbor's sentiment that the "love-the-Germans propaganda" on the *Today's Children* program was dangerous for her five children to hear.

General Mills' personalized response to this complaint also assumed continuity in character across generations. However, General Mills attributed Germany's role in World War II to an historically-specific context, stating that "training in imperialism, militarism, and Hitlerism rather than heredity...made the German people criminals."<sup>81</sup> These specific events were interpreted as a departure from the true German (and German-American) character. Acknowledging that recent German actions had "justifiably horrified" American citizens, General Mills praised Ina Phillips' program for showing that "many German-American families are especially loyal to the ideals of democracy because their forbears fled Germany to escape the oppressions, injustices, and poisonous doctrines of their mother country."<sup>82</sup> Immigrant family histories in the United States became evidence of German-Americans' contributions to the national character.

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<sup>80</sup> Nan Bolsius to "Gentlemen, General Mills, Inc.," July 5, 1945, Box 62, Knox Reeves Folder, Ina Phillips Collection, WSHS.

<sup>81</sup> Marcelle LaMonte to Nan Bolsius, July 11, 1945, Box 62, Knox Reeves Folder, Ina Phillips Collection, WSHS.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.



A rare soap opera set in an historical era, writer Mona Kent's *A Woman of America* likened contemporary women's industrial and domestic contributions during World War II to the nurturing femininity of women on an Oregon Trail wagon train immediately after the Civil War.<sup>83</sup> At the beginning of each daily fifteen-minute broadcast, sponsor Ivory Snow introduced the historically-themed *Woman of America* as "the story of Prudence Dane, a woman of America whose courage and faith are the glorious heritage of all women of America today."<sup>84</sup> Further emphasizing the connection between pioneer women and their great granddaughters on the World War II homefront, the drama shifted its focus after Prudence Dane successfully settled the frontier, introducing the 1940s life story of her descendant.

Tied directly to the current conflict with reminders that the program would be interrupted for war news, and with military men and women presented as guests at the beginning of many episodes, the historical drama of *A Woman of America* emphasized individuals' roles in building family and community for "the common good."<sup>85</sup>

Addressing listeners directly, Prudence prefaced one episode by saying:

I speak to you, the future generations of America, who will in some far distant day, fight to hold the land that we have won, I bid you remember, as we remember, these words that were written in our first great time of battle, in our war of Revolution by Tom Paine, and read to our soldiers by order of George Washington: These are the times that try men's souls....<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Script #174, *A Woman of America*, Series 3, Box 58, Folder 11, Mona Kent Papers, Library of American Broadcasting, University of Maryland, College Park.

<sup>84</sup> *A Woman of America* broadcast recording, June 7, 1944, NBC Radio Collection, Recorded Sound Reference Room, Library of Congress.

<sup>85</sup> *A Woman of America* broadcast recording, June 7, 1944, NBC Radio Collection, Recorded Sound Reference Room, Library of Congress. *A Woman of America* was briefly interrupted for example, to announce Allied victory in Europe. *A Woman of America* broadcast recording, May 7, 1945, NBC Radio Collection, Recorded Sound Reference Room, Library of Congress.

<sup>86</sup> *A Woman of America* broadcast recording, June 21, 1944, NBC Radio Collection, Recorded Sound Reference Room, Library of Congress.

Another episode remarked that the “unrelenting force of the free American spirit which today is spelling the doom of the Axis on the far flung battlefields of the world is no new thing. It had its roots in the character of those men and women of yesterday who carved America out of a wilderness, men and women like those in the covered wagon caravan of Prudence Dane, a woman of America.”<sup>87</sup> A unifying national spirit, inherited from the American Revolution and the nation’s expansion, shaped the United States’ strength on the contemporary world stage.

Such linkage of past and present reinforced the program’s messages to contemporary women, encompassing advice on wartime service, family philosophy, and the wise consumer’s selection of Ivory Snow. Announcers placed women’s daily work in the show’s grand vision of American triumph, voicing regular reminders from Ivory Snow soap that “When you waste soap, you waste vital war materials” and that “sav[ing] every drop of your used kitchen fat...can save a soldier’s life as ammunition or military medicines.”<sup>88</sup> The serial’s romantic plotlines also promoted women’s self-sacrifice for their men. Single woman “Prue” Dane, traveling on a wagon train to Oregon with her sister and married aunt, makes selfless decisions about her fiancé Wade, a leader of the caravan unknowingly facing the threat of paralysis. Prue wants to marry Wade to give him a period of happy family life before the onset of his paralysis and to ensure that she will care for him afterwards. She argues that a materially comfortable “home means a lot to a woman, but being with the man she loves means more,” a sentiment not shared by

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<sup>87</sup> *A Woman of America* broadcast recording, July 3, 1944, NBC Radio Collection, Recorded Sound Reference Room, Library of Congress.

<sup>88</sup> *A Woman of America* broadcast recording, August 14, 1945, NBC Radio Collection, Recorded Sound Reference Room, Library of Congress. *A Woman of America* broadcast recording, June 7, 1944, NBC Radio Collection, Recorded Sound Reference Room, Library of Congress.

her selfish, promiscuous romantic rival Fanny Carlisle, who is traveling West with ambitions of wealth as proprietor of a dance hall.<sup>89</sup>

While romance provided the story's emotional center, Prudence Dane nevertheless claimed women's primary allegiance to community service, concluding after a romantic setback that "There's so much more in this world for a woman than being in love... Work that means something. That amounts to something.... Oh, I can see that now.... There are clothes to be made, people to be taken care of. So much to do."<sup>90</sup> Prue's sacrifices help Wade and the wagon train counter Native American attacks and thwart an unethical caravan member's scheme to lend supplies at high interest rates.<sup>91</sup> After the drama's relocation to post-World War II contemporary life, protagonist Prudence Dane Barker, "whose great grandmother Prudence Dane crossed the continent in a caravan four generations ago," further demonstrates women's dual allegiance to family and society as a widowed mother and newspaper editor whose "words serve and inspire her community."<sup>92</sup>

As a serialized daytime drama set in the distant past, and as a narrative of the nineteenth-century West through the lens of women's contributions, NBC's *A Woman of America* was unique. By promoting women's domestic contributions to the war effort, including soap conservation, the program glorified the Ivory Snow dishwashing product. Citing continuity in women's contributions as an influence on their consumer choices,

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<sup>89</sup> *A Woman of America* broadcast recording, June 20, 1944, NBC Radio Collection, Recorded Sound Reference Room, Library of Congress.

<sup>90</sup> *A Woman of America* broadcast recording, January 5, 1944, NBC Radio Collection, Recorded Sound Reference Room, Library of Congress.

<sup>91</sup> *A Woman of America* broadcast recording, July 10, 1944, NBC Radio Collection, Recorded Sound Reference Room, Library of Congress.

<sup>92</sup> *A Woman of America* broadcast recording, April 18, 1946, NBC Radio Collection, Recorded Sound Reference Room, Library of Congress. *A Woman of America* broadcast recording, May 17, 1946, NBC Radio Collection, Recorded Sound Reference Room, Library of Congress.

one episode's opening announcement proclaimed, "Today as in the pioneer days of Ivory Snow's story of a woman of America, American women have always been glad to find a better way of doing things.....So lend an ear to the story of a modern pioneer: a lady who searched for and found a better way to do dishes [by using Ivory Snow]."<sup>93</sup> Other announcements indicated that pioneer female characters would have eagerly embraced Ivory Snow as a tool for higher standards and greater efficiency in homekeeping, for they had to produce their own dishwashing soap.<sup>94</sup> This pitch emphasized the centrality of women's domestic support to American success, nevertheless differentiating corporate technological progress from the continuity in women's character across generations.

Although Prudence Dane was a nineteenth-century pioneer, she exhibited the characteristics that popular culture had attributed to the iconic colonial woman. Happily performing domestic chores in the difficult, disruptive conditions of a pioneer caravan, she emphasized familial love as the means through which she would support her community and nation. Reinforcing Dane's identification of the Revolutionary War and World War II with her own era, visual promotions for the program reworked familiar tropes associated with the colonial ideal. Newspaper advertisements promoting the series' January 1943 debut showed a woman in a simple full skirt, a simple bonnet obscuring her face except for the shadowed hint of a profile. Although by 1944 the protagonist was portrayed as an unmarried, childless woman, 1943 advertisements featured Dane's protective hand on the shoulder of a male child, accompanied by text identifying her as "a great-hearted woman—one of those Western pioneer mothers whose

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<sup>93</sup> *A Woman of America* broadcast recording, June 27, 1944, NBC Radio Collection, Recorded Sound Reference Room, Library of Congress.

<sup>94</sup> *A Woman of America* broadcast recording, July 4, 1944, NBC Radio Collection, Recorded Sound Reference Room, Library of Congress. *A Woman of America* broadcast recording, August 1, 1944, NBC Radio Collection, Recorded Sound Reference Room, Library of Congress.

faith, devotion, and courage set the pattern for our American Way.”<sup>95</sup> Other advertisements featured Dane’s bonnet and silhouetted face only, an image that echoed both the PCAW’s Quaker Maid emblem and the modest, bonneted woman that products commonly associated with women’s domestic contributions to past eras. Touting “A stirring story of America-in-the-making, from which all who are answering America’s call today may derive strength and inspiration,” these portraits emphasized women’s role in the nation’s development while citing familiar feminine imagery including the “Belle Chocolatière.”<sup>96</sup>

The significance of Prudence Dane’s attire is suggested by caricatures sketched on series creator Mona Kent’s personal script copies. These drawings exaggerate character traits present in the program’s scripts. A romantic rivalry is caricatured by two women tugging on a man’s arm. The brazen Fanny Carlisle wears only her stockings with Wade sleeping in her bed, an event that is not depicted so directly in the scripts themselves. An African-American servant character is sketched as inept and lazy, watching events unfold without taking action. In a sketch where Prudence implores Dr. Hargrave to take leadership over the caravan and to help her romantic pursuit of Wade, she is defined entirely by her clothing (Figure 3.3). She wears a simple dress, apron, and bonnet, the bonnet’s size greatly exaggerated so that it obscures her face entirely and suggests a modest downcast glance. By obscuring Prue’s face and unique identity, this visual parody highlights Prue’s selflessness as her dominant character trait. This

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<sup>95</sup> Advertisement, “Beginning Mon., Jan. 25, ‘A Woman of America’ The Story of Prudence Dane,” *New York Times*, Jan. 24, 1943, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times. Advertisement, “Inspiration for these Times! ‘A Woman of America’ The Story of Prudence Dane,” *New York Times*, May 16, 1943, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times.

<sup>96</sup> Advertisement, “‘A Woman of America’ The Story of Prudence Dane,” *The New York Times*, May 17, 1943, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times. Advertisement, “‘A Woman of America’ The Story of Prudence Dane,” *The New York Times*, May 24, 1943, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times.

contrasted sharply with the unnamed Quaker Maid figure, who the PCAW presented as an active participant in progress.<sup>97</sup>

On national airwaves, invocation of the past to assert women's active, historical contributions to public life appeared most prominently in *Women in the Making of America* and *Gallant American Women*, collaborations of historian Mary Ritter Beard, journalist Eva vom Baur Hansl, and scriptwriter Jane Ashman with the U.S. Office of Education, the Federal Security Agency, Works Progress Administration, and NBC's Women's Activities Division. Broadcast in 1939 and 1940, with script copies offered for sale, these programs provided publicity for Beard's efforts to establish the World Center for Women's Archives in New York, founded in 1935 to promote the study of women's history.<sup>98</sup> Promoted as "Documentary Radio," these programs portrayed "women's contribution to the building of American Democracy" through "the story of women pioneers in every field of endeavor" and demonstrations of "how their work is being carried on today."<sup>99</sup> Each episode presented a theme, such as women's roles in democracy or in journalism, dramatizing anecdotes from the lives of several relevant women spanning the colonial era through the present. In contrast with commercial radio's emphasis on domesticity, *Women in the Making of America* and *Gallant American Women* focused largely on political activities, organizations, and contributions to public life, including mobilization for the rights of women and immigrants. Asserting

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<sup>97</sup> Undated, unsigned pencil sketches on script pages, *A Woman of America*, Series 3, Box 58, Folder 11, Mona Kent Papers, Library of American Broadcasting, University of Maryland, College Park.

<sup>98</sup> Hungarian feminist Rosika Schwimmer had collected archival materials to document European feminism and pacifism. After seeking support from American feminists to establish a women's history repository, Schwimmer collaborated with Mary Ritter Beard on the initial plans for the World Center for Women's Archives. Des Jardins, 225-240.

<sup>99</sup> Flier, "Listen!!! 'Gallant American Women'" Mary R. Beard's Correspondence and Commentaries" folder, Unprocessed Box 1, Eva vom Baur Hansl Papers, MS 72, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts.

women's roles as "co-makers" of American history, Hansl and Beard approached radio as an activist tool for educating the public.

Beard and Hansl's work adapted the feminist goal of publicizing women's history to New Deal educational objectives. Nevertheless, these programs were not produced in opposition with business culture. In its episodes on business and industry, *Gallant American Women* and *Women in the Making of America* echoed the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women's emphasis on women's professionalism. After the series ended its run as an NBC/ U.S. Office of Education program, writers Eva Hansl and Jane Ashman proposed a corporate-sponsored version of *Gallant American Women*.<sup>100</sup> The women's organizations that had listened to and promoted the program, they argued, represented the vast "buying power" of both mass and elite audiences.<sup>101</sup>

By identifying female "co-makers of history," *Gallant American Women* and *Women in the Making of America* expanded their subjects' sphere of influence beyond domesticity.<sup>102</sup> Employment provided a significant opportunity for increasing women's status. In a June 17, 1940, episode devoted to commerce and trade, *Gallant American Women* asserted that contemporary female entrepreneurs contributed to American business by using the unique skills of their sex: "tact, intuition, [and] the art of handling people."<sup>103</sup> In a sentiment similar to the PCAW's description of its Quaker Maid emblem, an opening narration explained, "Little as moderns realize it—women have

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<sup>100</sup> Eva Hansl and Jane Ashman, n.d. [after May 1941], "Gallant American Women," Box 1, Proposals Folder, Eva vom Baur Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Each episode's introduction referred to women's status as "Daughters of destiny—mothers of might—co-makers of history."

<sup>103</sup> Eva vom Baur Hansl, "Women in Commerce and Trade," *Gallant American Women*, June 17, 1940, p. 2, Box 1, Eva vom Baur Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

always been in business—along with the men—ever since business began.”<sup>104</sup> The program highlighted widows and deputy husbands who ran businesses in colonial America, women who developed promotional strategies for nineteenth-century department stores, and post-Civil War female office workers empowered by the introduction of the typewriter. Throughout this survey, dialogue dramatized the initial opposition to each shift in women’s roles.

The series simultaneously defined female consumption as an opportunity for collective action and for business success. Detailing Florence Kelley’s work with the National Consumers’ League to improve conditions for workers in factories and department stores, the “Women in Commerce and Trade” episode presented female employment and consumption as sites of activist cooperation. The story of Lillian Sholes’ participation in her father’s invention of the typewriter further demonstrated the link between consumer technology and the expansion of women’s employment.<sup>105</sup> The episode closed with the story of the Knox Gelatine corporation, a business built on the partnership of Charles Knox and his wife, Rose Markward Knox. The program celebrated Rose Knox’s success in running the business after her husband’s 1908 death, emphasizing the widowed mother’s use of a feminine perspective to target consumers and to foster community for factory employees.

Although this biography celebrated women’s capacity for corporate leadership, it nevertheless assumed a patriarchal model. The script identifies Rose Knox only as “Mrs. Charles B. Knox,” now age eighty-two, and praises her interest in factory workers’

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 10.



family lives rather than detailing her business strategies.<sup>106</sup> In order to heighten the drama of her husband's death as a transformative moment, the plot minimizes Rose's earlier innovative work, including the creation of promotional recipe books during the Knox gelatine brand's first decade.<sup>107</sup> In reality, Rose Markward Knox first published *Dainty Desserts for Dainty People* in 1896, promoting the Knox brand by likening its production to traditional preparation of calves foot jelly.<sup>108</sup> A pioneer in the field of corporate cookbooks, reprints of *Dainty Desserts*, featuring illustrations of colonial men and women along with recipes stressing health and hygiene, played central roles in the Knox Corporation's promotions for decades.<sup>109</sup> Rather than narrating this work, *Gallant American Women* emphasized Knox's wedding and the efforts her husband made to make sure she would be prepared to support herself "if anything ever happens" to him.<sup>110</sup>

Simultaneously, *Gallant American Women* incorporated some of the advertising industry's racial tropes of domestic consumption. A program on "Women the Providers" illustrated feminine efforts "to solve one of America's most fundamental problems—that of feeding the Nation" through dialogue between Martha Washington and a young slave, Belinda.<sup>111</sup> Identifying Martha as one of the women who "presided over great plantations, with servants to wait on them hand and foot," the play nevertheless

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 18, 21.

<sup>107</sup> Juliann Sivulka, *Ad Women: How They Impact What We Need, Want, and Buy* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2009), 71-4.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. Wendy Woloson, *Refined Tastes: Sugar, Confectionery, and Consumers in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 218.

<sup>109</sup> *Dainty Desserts for Dainty People* (Longtown, N.Y.: Charles B. Knox Gelatine Co., 1915), *Dainty Desserts for Dainty People* (Longtown, N.Y.: Charles B. Knox Gelatine Co., 1924), *Dainty Desserts for Dainty People* (Charles B. Knox Gelatine Co., 1930), Box 1, Folder 41, Frances S. Baker Product Cookbooks, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>110</sup> "Women in Commerce and Trade," p. 19.

<sup>111</sup> "Women the Providers," *Gallant American Women*, November 21, 1939, p. 1, Box 1, Eva vom Baur Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection. *Gallant American Women* broadcast recording, November 21, 1939, NBC Radio Collection, Recorded Sound Reference Room, Library of Congress.

celebrates her work rather than the enslaved labor at her command.<sup>112</sup> Belinda complains about fatigue, although she admits that Martha has retrieved molasses from the storeroom and inspected meat in the smokehouse, taking assistance only in the carrying of building keys. Martha declares herself the busiest worker at Mount Vernon and bakes a cake in preparation for her mother-in-law's visit, because she "wouldn't trust anyone else to mix it."<sup>113</sup> As the narrative continues, it aligns antebellum women, faced with the challenge of "feeding hundreds of relatives and slaves," with the modern era's new problem: "New mouths to feed—millions of them—coming from hunger to the land of plenty. Germans, Irish, Hungarians, Swedes."<sup>114</sup>

Like many 1930s radio dramas, this story celebrates American culture as an assimilating force. It covers the work of domestic scientist Ellen Richards to instruct late-nineteenth-century Boston immigrants in proper nutrition. In the show's closing anecdote, Mrs. Puccini, a twentieth-century immigrant, introduces broccoli to Lucy, a government tenement worker who concludes, "I guess I can learn something from you."<sup>115</sup> Although creators Mary Ritter Beard and Eva Hansl promoted religious and ethnic acceptance, such narratives emphasized the leadership of white, Anglo-Saxon women.

In the 1930s and 1940s, the emerging genres of scripted radio programming adopted print culture's gendered definition of history. Activist efforts to promote contemporary women's status, including the programs by the PCAW and Mary Ritter

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>115</sup> This dialogue in the broadcast is more restrained than the script version, which read: "I came here to teach, but I made a mistake. I guess I can learn something from you." *Gallant American Women* broadcast recording, November 21, 1939. "Women the Providers," 20.

Beard, also assumed continuity in women's nature across time. Nevertheless, commercial programs like Dorothy Dignam's *Motor Matters*, the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women's portrayals of *Famous Women of Yesteryear*, and Beard's *Gallant American Women*, all emphasized the professional creativity of female advertisers and writers, either as historical subjects or as performers of historical analysis. These programs applied the popular model of continuity in women's roles to the assertion of historical precedence for their active, progressive contribution to public life.

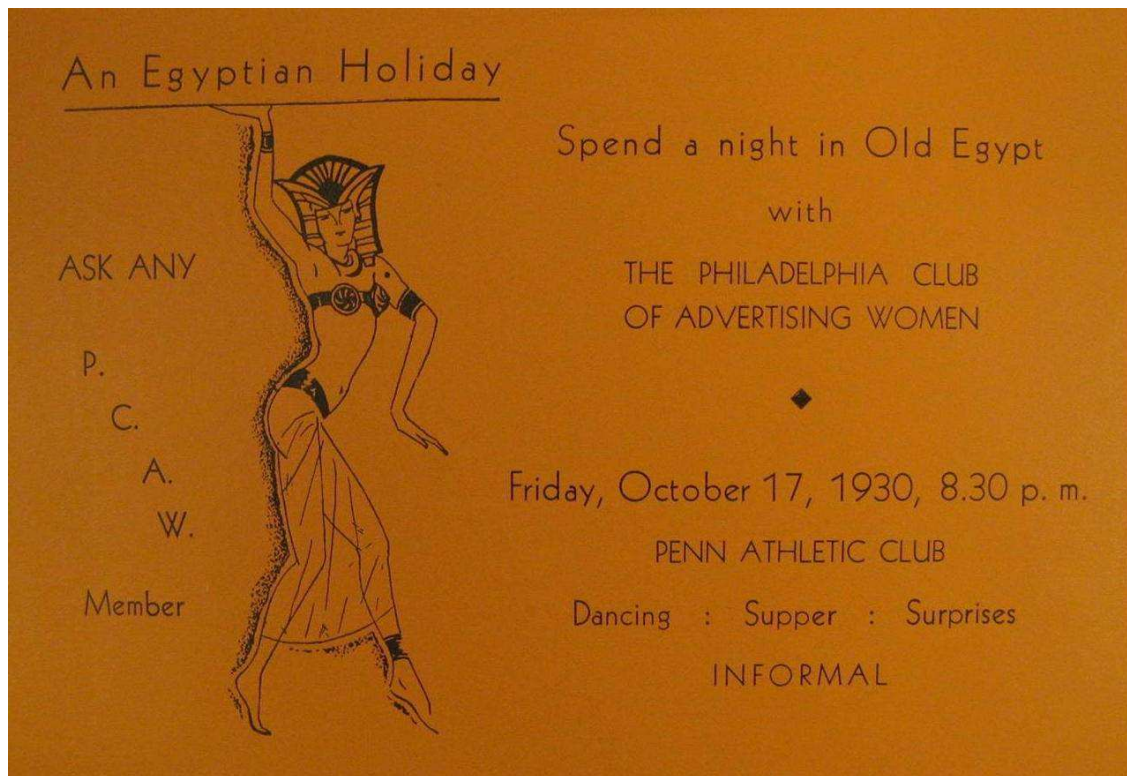


Figure 3.1: Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women card invitation, “An Egyptian Holiday,” Sept. 14, 1930, Box 1, PCAW Records, Bryn Mawr Special Collections



Figure 3.2: Photograph and Clipping (Feb. 27, 1940), *Philadelphia Record* Photograph Collection, V7:3062, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



Figure 3.3: Undated, unsigned pencil sketches on script pages, *A Woman of America*, Series 3, Box 58, Folder 11, Mona Kent Papers, Library of American Broadcasting, University of Maryland, College Park.

## Chapter 4

### “Wonder Women” of History: Popular and Academic Narratives

By demonstrating women’s historical influences on public life, radio programs, women’s magazines, and advertising societies simultaneously promoted the status of “women’s history” as a worthy subject. Through *Gallant American Women* and *Women in the Making of America*, Mary Ritter Beard, Eva Hansl, and Jane Ashman claimed the airwaves as a site for serious examination of women’s roles in politics and democracy. Simultaneously, women activists and historians shaped the content of popular culture’s gendered histories by lobbying corporations and periodicals for inclusion of feminist pioneers. As female professional societies grew, they increasingly promoted women’s place not just in public life, but also in the historical record. By archiving their organizational development, advertising societies claimed their own transformative influence on American business. Through professional women’s networks, department store executives collaborated with advertisers and magazine editors. Their shared interest in documenting twentieth-century women’s economic progress became a platform for the female media elite to influence industries and individual careers and to challenge the idea that women’s roles were static.

Nevertheless, twentieth-century women’s histories sparked controversies. Beard and Hansl fought government agents over program content. The living subjects included in *Gallant American Women* and *Women in the Making of America* objected to what they perceived as inaccuracy, sentimentality, or immodesty. Women’s magazines and comic books also contained competing perspectives, shaped by the intervention of historians and activists. When collaborating with the popular press, activists weighed the threat that their messages would be diluted against the opportunity to reach wide audiences.



Although they questioned the efficacy of mass media in recording women's history, the power of popular culture as a public historian made it impossible to ignore.

While many 1940s depictions of the past emphasized anonymous housewives and mothers or women notable for their attachments to great men, some media depicted more dynamic heroines. Each issue of the *Wonder Woman* comic, which debuted in 1942, featured a brief biographical narrative on "Wonder Women of History." These installments celebrated social reformers, nurses, and even women's rights' activists to reinforce the ideal modeled by Wonder Woman herself.<sup>1</sup> Psychologist and lie-detector inventor William Moulton Marston developed the character to instruct male and female children on the "universal truth" that social progress required "women taming men so they like peace and love better than fighting."<sup>2</sup> Marston drew inspiration from ancient mythology but proclaimed his heroine's relevance to contemporary shifts in women's status. In Wonder Woman's adventures, men relied on women's political and diplomatic abilities, and heroic women pledged themselves to the public good. Both males and females willingly yielded to benevolent leaders, based on Marston's belief that reverence for "wise authority" would enable world peace.<sup>3</sup> "Only when the control of self by others is more pleasant than the unbound assertion of self in human relationships," he argued, "can we hope for a stable, peaceful human society."<sup>4</sup> During planning stages, Marston warned All-American Comics, Inc. editor Sheldon Mayer that empowerment of women would be central to this message: "I fully believe that I am hitting a great movement now

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<sup>1</sup> Lillia S. Robinson, *Wonder Women: Feminisms and Superheroes* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 58-60.

<sup>2</sup> William Moulton Marston to Sheldon Mayer, April 12, 1942, *Wonder Woman* letters collection, 1941-1945, Dibner Library, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

<sup>3</sup> William Moulton Marston to M. C. Gaines, February 20, 1943, *Wonder Woman* letters collection, 1941-1945, Dibner Library, NMAH.

<sup>4</sup> William Moulton Marston to W. W. D. Sones, March 20, 1943, *Wonder Woman* letters collection, 1941-1945, Dibner Library, NMAH.



under way—the growth in power of women and I want you to let that theme alone—or drop the project.”<sup>5</sup>

Training young boys to respect women’s strength was central to Marston’s vision. Press releases announcing the inaugural *Wonder Woman* issue boasted that eighty percent of children responding to the character’s test runs in established comic books had favored her over male heroes.<sup>6</sup> Publishers estimated that most *Wonder Woman* readers were male.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the stories also encouraged female readers to fulfill their own abilities proudly. Promotional material predicted that Marston’s creation would influence society profoundly, leading young readers to “model themselves on the self-reliant, strong, comradely woman who can be honest and fearless because she is not dependent upon a man for her living.”<sup>8</sup> The Wonder Woman ideal would further the expansion of women’s public labor during World War II, a prediction supported by arguments that World War I employment improved women’s status.<sup>9</sup>

Both in the comic itself and in his descriptions of its goals, Marston relied on the past to justify his contemporary worldview. In the Wonder Woman character’s origin story, women escaped men’s subjugation by creating an ancient utopian female society on “Paradise Island.” There, the female capacities for intellect and physical strength

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<sup>5</sup> William Moulton Marston to Sheldon Mayer, February 23, 1941, *Wonder Woman* letters collection, 1941-1945, Dibner Library, NMAH.

<sup>6</sup> Undated article transcript, [1943], “Noted Psychologist Revealed as Author of Best-Selling ‘Wonder Woman’, Children’s Comic,” *Wonder Woman* letters collection, 1941-1945, Dibner Library, NMAH.

<sup>7</sup> Les Daniels, *Wonder Woman: The Complete History* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2004), 33. Robinson, 42-3.

<sup>8</sup> Undated article transcript, [1943], “Noted Psychologist Revealed as Author of Best-Selling ‘Wonder Woman’, Children’s Comic,” *Wonder Woman* letters collection, 1941-1945, Dibner Library, NMAH.

<sup>9</sup> Unsigned article, “A Wife for Superman,” *The Hartford Courant* (Sept. 28, 1942), *Wonder Woman* letters collection, 1941-1945, Dibner Library, NMAH. This article on the introduction of the Wonder Woman character asserts that World War I “accustomed women to thinking and doing for themselves. Taboos on women at the machines, on women in public places, on women in comfortable, mannish attire were broken. The clinging-vine type of woman was definitely dated. Not only was the Godey model eliminated from the fashion plates, her stays were let out or discarded, her voice sank a pitch and, reborn in a realistic world, she began to swagger.”

developed fully. These “new women” held power that they “have to use...for other people’s benefit or they go back to chains, and weakness.”<sup>10</sup> The first stand-alone edition of *Wonder Woman* underscored the protagonist’s link to this history. When she travels to America to return a fallen pilot and to aid the Allied cause in World War II, she drops “an old parchment manuscript” in ancient Greek, identified by “Dr. Hellas at the Smithsonian Institute” as “an ancient document sought for centuries—the history of the unconquerable Amazons!”<sup>11</sup> Secluded from modern nations, Paradise Island preserved its feminist mission untouched by twentieth-century encroachments on women’s and individuals’ rights.

To defend his comic against criticism that it sexualized violence, Marston claimed that history supported his psychological theories, and that contemporary conflicts proved the necessity for his work: “Hitler, Mussolini, Napoleon, business tyrants, [and] criminals” were driven by selfish love of power.<sup>12</sup> Marston simultaneously framed his project as part of the historical progress in American women’s rights. Challenging opposition to Wonder Woman’s revealing clothing, he cited the authority of the New England Women’s Club, which his mother had directed. “Hundreds” of the “old conservative New England teachers” affiliated with the club had praised Wonder Woman’s costume, and this group deserved respect as “probably the most conservative and cultured body of women in the United States and the first pioneer in the Women’s

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<sup>10</sup> William Moulton Marston to Sheldon Mayer, February 23, 1941, *Wonder Woman* letters collection, 1941-1945, Dibner Library, NMAH.

<sup>11</sup> *Wonder Woman*, Vol. 1, No. 1(Summer 1942).

<sup>12</sup> William Moulton Marston to W. W. D. Sones, March 20, 1943, *Wonder Woman* letters collection, 1941-1945, Dibner Library, NMAH. A professor at the University of Pittsburgh, Sones maintained that “the social purpose which [Marston] claims is open to very serious objection. It is just such submission that he claims he wants to develop that makes dictator dominance possible. From the standpoint of social ideals, what we want in America and in the world is cooperation and submission.” W. W. D. Sones to M. C. Gaines, March 15, 1943, *Wonder Woman* letters collection, 1941-1945, Dibner Library, NMAH.

Club movement, back in the days of Harriet Beecher Stowe.”<sup>13</sup> The world of *Wonder Woman* deferred to such women’s judgment, applauding historical figures who gained professional or political recognition by seeking to influence society.

The “Wonder Women of History” installments were attributed to Alice Marble, the tennis star and an associate editor of *Wonder Woman*. These biographies reinforced Marston’s feminine ideal by projecting it onto successful historical figures. Demonstrating the message of female service to others, the first four entries covered famous nurses, emphasizing their contributions during wartime: Florence Nightingale, Clara Barton, Edith Cavell, and Lillian Wald.<sup>14</sup> Nightingale garnered praise for her “superhuman strength of will and purpose” in nursing British soldiers during the Crimean War, service inspired by “an ancient statue of an Amazon maiden which she saw in Rome” and which convinced her that “strong women only....can save suffering mankind.”<sup>15</sup> These stories linked the nursing profession to the capacity for motherhood, praising women’s ability to nurture all people as they would their own children. To demonstrate why “gentle Lillian Wald, brought up within a Jewish family of comfortable circumstances [chose] the arduous, often thankless profession of nursing,” the comic traces her career to an 1889 scene that left her feeling helpless at the bedside of a sick friend.<sup>16</sup> In her subsequent charitable work as “The mother of New York’s East side,” Wald “had no favorites. Her boundless sympathy and care went out to all. . . Regardless

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<sup>13</sup> William Moulton Marston to M. C. Gaines, February 20, 1943, *Wonder Woman* letters collection, 1941-1945, Dibner Library, NMAH.

<sup>14</sup> *Wonder Woman*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Summer 1942); *Wonder Woman*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Fall 1942); *Wonder Woman*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Feb.-March 1943); *Wonder Woman*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (April-May, 1943).

<sup>15</sup> *Wonder Woman*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (Summer 1942).

<sup>16</sup> *Wonder Woman*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (April-May, 1943).

of race, color, or religion.”<sup>17</sup> Like Wonder Woman herself, these historical characters gained respect by devoting themselves to the public good.

The series’ fifth issue expanded this model by celebrating nineteenth-century suffragist Susan B. Anthony as a “wonder woman” who challenged unjust gender biases.<sup>18</sup> Rose Arnold Powell, a civil service employee and activist seeking greater public recognition for Susan B. Anthony, successfully lobbied for her inclusion after noting the first two “Wonder Women of History” installments on Florence Nightingale and Clara Barton.<sup>19</sup> Significantly, the language of the piece, as it celebrates Anthony as an “emancipator” to equal Lincoln and Washington, clearly echoes Powell’s own rhetoric that George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Susan B. Anthony should be held equal as the three “great emancipators” of American history.<sup>20</sup>

Simultaneously, All-American Comics imposed the genre’s narrative conventions on Anthony’s story. Service to family and attractiveness to the opposite sex were consistently celebrated in *Wonder Woman*, and the S.B.A. biography assured that powerful women would still remain romantic beings. The comic portrayed Susan B. Anthony as extremely attractive, receiving romantic proposals but opting instead to focus on her activism to improve the legal rights of married women. As a collaboration between Powell and All-American Comics, this narrative subverted popular assumptions

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> *Wonder Woman*, Volume 1, No. 5 (June-July 1943).

<sup>19</sup> I am grateful for Ellen Shea’s suggestion that I investigate the papers of Rose Arnold Powell at Schlesinger Library. Powell was corresponding with All-American Comics President M. C. Gaines about completed Susan B. Anthony drafts in January 1943, indicating that she approached the comic soon after its inaugural Summer 1942 issue. Rose Arnold Powell to M. C. Gaines, Jan. 28, 1943, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Box 2, Folder 18, Schlesinger. Powell identified her midlife exposure to Ida Husted Harper’s Susan B. Anthony biography as the inspiration for her activism. John Taliaferro, *Great White Fathers: The True Story of Gutzon Borglum and His Obsessive Quest to Create the Mount Rushmore National Monument* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 312-13.

<sup>20</sup> Various correspondence, Rose Arnold Powell to Charl Williams, Box 4, Folder 60, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

about women's significance to history while deploying other pre-existing cultural scripts about gender.

Wonder Woman's adventures consistently emphasized women's roles as agents of change in historical progress. The character appeared not only in her own comic book but also in the monthly *Sensation Comics* publication, which introduced her in 1942; in the quarterly collections *Comics Cavalcade* and *All Star Comics*; and, beginning in 1944, in syndicated newspaper strips throughout the U.S., Canada, and South America.<sup>21</sup> Through her super-human strength and a magic lasso which compels others to speak the truth, she saves the world from Nazi threats and, later, from the menace of atomic power. The significance of these contemporary issues is highlighted when Wonder Woman travels across time and encounters notable historical figures. In the fifth edition of the *Wonder Woman* comic, Dr. Psycho, a dangerous Nazi scientist whose violence stems from romantic rejection and a pathological hatred of women, produces an ectoplasmic "George Washington" apparition. This illusion warns the American public that women's increasing involvement in public life is a threat to the nation:

WOMEN WILL LOSE THE WAR FOR AMERICA! WOMEN SHOULD NOT BE PERMITTED TO HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITIES THEY NOW HAVE! WOMEN MUST NOT MAKE SHELLS, TORPEDOES, AIRPLANE PARTS—THEY MUST NOT BE TRUSTED WITH WAR SECRETS OR SERVE IN THE ARMED FORCES. **WOMEN WILL BETRAY THEIR COUNTRY THROUGH WEAKNESS IF NOT TREACHERY!**<sup>22</sup>

Only Wonder Woman ascertains that this realistic-looking "George Washington" figure is not genuine, ultimately saving the world from Dr. Psycho. She reveals that Psycho's

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<sup>21</sup> William Moulton Marston to Mr. Waugh, March 5, 1945, *Wonder Woman* letters collection, 1941-1945, Dibner Library, NMAH.

<sup>22</sup> *Wonder Woman*, Volume 1, No. 5 (June-July 1943). Emphasis appears in the original.

sabotage efforts on behalf of the Axis Powers were the reason for his hysteric accusations that women workers threatened the U.S.

While this episode casts the heroic contributions of Wonder Woman and, by extension, women involved in the homefront war effort, as historically significant, the issue's biography of Susan B. Anthony also celebrated the possibility for women to intervene and improve the status of women as a group. The installment's hyperbolic opening text proclaimed Anthony's relevance: "THIS INDOMITABLE FIGHTER FOR FREEDOM AND JUSTICE STARTED THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT WITH RESULTS MORE FAR-REACHING **THAN ANY WAR OR REVOLUTION SINCE HISTORY BEGAN.**"<sup>23</sup> Comparisons with accepted historic icons justified this assertion:

AMERICA HAS THREE GREAT EMANCIPATORS. GEORGE WASHINGTON WELDED FOUR MILLION COLONISTS INTO A UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, ABRAHAM LINCOLN FREED FOUR MILLION NEGROES FROM SLAVERY. AND SUSAN B. ANTHONY STRUCK THE SHACKLES OF LEGAL, SOCIAL, AND ECONOMIC BONDAGE FROM MILLIONS OF AMERICAN WOMEN. BRAVE, DARING, GENEROUS, SINCERE, THIS **WONDER WOMAN** LED HER SEX TO VICTORY AND BECAME "THE LIBERATOR OF WOMANKIND."<sup>24</sup>

The accompanying visuals further linked Anthony's achievements with Wonder Woman's other diverse exploits (Figure 4). The opening panels of S.B.A.'s autobiography show her unlocking the literal chains that bind a female's hands.<sup>25</sup> This

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

image linked Anthony with the comic book's protagonist, whose storylines featured chains heavily.<sup>26</sup>

Reinforcing Marston's efforts to make children respect women's authority, the narrative emphasized Anthony's experience as an educator. In response to an unruly male student who proclaims "WE WON'T MIND NO **WOMAN** TEACHER," Anthony pulls him by the hair while brandishing a stick.<sup>27</sup> By the next panel, the male students respectfully bring Anthony bouquets of flowers, and editorial commentary reveals that "THE BOYS SOON LEARN TO ADORE SUSAN AS DID LATER SUCH NOTABLES AS PRESIDENTS MCKINLEY, GROVER CLEAVELAND AND THEODORE ROOSEVELT."<sup>28</sup> To explain Anthony's efforts for married women's property rights, the illustrations relied again on stylized violence, showing an alcoholic Senator who punches his wife and places her in an insane asylum. Anthony comes to her aid, the significance of these actions again demonstrated by comparisons with other celebrated histories: "SUSAN HELPS THE TORTURED WIFE TO ESCAPE HER CRUEL MASTER AS MANY PEOPLE HELPED FUGITIVE SLAVES."<sup>29</sup> Later installments in the "Wonder Women of History" series likewise drew comparisons with Wonder Woman herself. Couplings of femininity and strength allowed "BRAVE, BRILLIANT, LOVELY JANE ADDAMS" to stand up against "THE MOST POWERFUL POLITICIANS AND BUSINESS MEN IN THE COUNTRY" and defend

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<sup>26</sup> William Moulton Marston to Sheldon Mayer, Feb. 23, 1941; William Moulton Marston to M. C. Gaines, Feb. 20, 1943; M. C. Gaines to William Moulton Marston, Sept. 14, 1943. *Wonder Woman* letters collection, 1941-1945, Dibner Library, NMAH.

<sup>27</sup> *Wonder Woman*, Volume 1, No. 5 (June-July 1943).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

the rights of children.<sup>30</sup> An entry devoted to Abigail Adams celebrated the social influence of her skill as “wife and mother.”<sup>31</sup>

Through the variety of stories included in the “Wonder Women of History” series, the comic did introduce heroines who departed from dominant ideals of womanhood. An entry devoted to “**GALLANT WONDER WOMAN**” Sojourner Truth made a rare case for African-American women’s roles as agents of change, arguing that her efforts on behalf of African-American rights “**OPEN[ED] THE GATES OF INDUSTRY TO ALL MEN AND WOMEN, REGARDLESS OF RACE.**”<sup>32</sup> The same issue included episodes in Wonder Woman’s rescue of the female residents of the “lost garden of Eden,” an undersea utopia known as Eveland until brutal “Seal Men” capture the maidens as their “garden slaves.”<sup>33</sup> The book closes as Wonder Woman negotiates a treaty promising that the Seal Men will not attack Eveland, prompting the freed women to proclaim: “**YOU’VE SHOWN US, PRINCESS, THAT CLEVER WOMEN CAN CONQUER THE STRONGEST MEN!**”<sup>34</sup> Underscoring this lesson’s relevance to contemporary youth, Wonder Woman’s achievement prompts a marriage proposal from her love interest Steve, which she refuses by suggesting that engagement would become a form of slavery: “**IF I MARRIED YOU, STEVE, I’D HAVE TO PRETEND I’M WEAKER THAN YOU ARE TO MAKE YOU HAPPY—AND THAT, NO WOMAN SHOULD DO!**”<sup>35</sup> The comic encouraged readers to link Wonder Woman with the portrayal of Sojourner Truth, defined by her “rebellion” and “independent airs” under slavery and by her heroic legal

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<sup>30</sup> *Wonder Woman*, Vol. 1, No. 9 (Summer 1944).

<sup>31</sup> *Wonder Woman*, Vol. 2, No. 14 (Fall 1945).

<sup>32</sup> *Wonder Woman*, Vol. 2, No. 13 (Summer 1945).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*



efforts to claim custody of her enslaved son, appearing in court despite the dismissal of judicial officials.<sup>36</sup> Truth also receives praise for her support of the women's rights movement, with illustrations showing her persuasive power over white audiences.

By exposing readers both to this biography and to Wonder Woman's intervention in Eveland, All-American Comics cast activism for gender and racial equality as part of ideal womanhood. Nevertheless, regular readers of *Wonder Woman* would also encounter more restrictive definitions of women's place in society. A historical biography devoted to Juliette (Gordon) Low, founder of the Girl Scouts, reproduced popular culture's familiar "Mammy" stereotype. The narrative opens during Low's Civil War-era youth, identifying her as the child of a Southern plantation owner and Confederate general. An African-American woman in kerchief and apron awakens the Gordon family with the warning that Yankee troops approach. Cradling young Juliette, the enslaved woman laments the effect of the war on young white Southerners. She foreshadows the instructive play Low would promote through the Girl Scouts by proclaiming that Southern children would sing happily once the war was over.<sup>37</sup> This character's devotion for the patriarchal institution of slavery above her own interests reproduced familiar advertising industry stereotypes.

By turning to *Wonder Woman*, Rose Arnold Powell deployed mass media to raise consciousness of women's history, making compromises in order to reach a wide audience. For years, Powell had devoted herself to securing greater public recognition for Susan B. Anthony. Reading Ida Husted Harper's Susan B. Anthony biography was Powell's own consciousness-raising moment, but she deployed a vast array of media in

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> *Wonder Woman*, No. 10 (Fall 1944).

her publicity efforts.<sup>38</sup> Transradio's "Women in the News" story service interviewed Powell and noted Anthony's relevance to contemporary women. Arguing that most women "know of Miss Anthony only for the part she played in the woman suffrage movement," Powell explained that Anthony improved women's legal rights, as well as their status in business and education. In an interview feature for the syndicated radio service "Women in the News," Powell's narrative of growth in women's public presence elevated not only Anthony but also the variety of women represented in contemporary America, "[n]ot merely the feminist, but business women, educators and other women in many walks of life."<sup>39</sup> While this rhetoric echoed that of twentieth-century women's advertising clubs, Powell deployed mass culture differently. Her activism was not linked to her professional career, and she used women's magazines, radio, and comic books to publicize her legislative reform efforts.

Developing relationships with women's club leaders and with women's movement notables including Carrie Chapman Catt, Powell made public memory a political project.<sup>40</sup> She founded the Susan B. Anthony Forum, which petitioned the U.S. Congress to memorialize Anthony and to mandate the suffragist's inclusion on sculptor Gutzon Borglum's Mount Rushmore.<sup>41</sup> Advising female citizens to use their power as voters, she urged them to pressure officials "on the eve of [the 1936] Presidential

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<sup>38</sup> Powell identified her midlife exposure to Ida Husted Harper's Susan B. Anthony biography as the inspiration for her activism. Taliaferro, 312-13.

<sup>39</sup> Transradio transcript, June 17, 1936, Box 5, Folder 81, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>40</sup> Rose Arnold Powell, Jan. 3, 1933, Journal Vol. 1, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Box 1, Schlesinger. After Catt's death, Powell noted that she had been "deeply disappointed" in Catt's participation in the "Rushmore struggle." March 5-10, 1947, Journal Vol. 5, Box 1, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>41</sup> Transradio distributed its recordings by subscription. Transcript, June 17, 1936, Box 5, Folder 81, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger. On Rose Arnold Powell's efforts to add Anthony to Mount Rushmore, see Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 385-411 and Taliaferro, 312-26.

campaign.”<sup>42</sup> Powell conducted much of her work through letter writing campaigns to public figures, including Borghum, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, and Winston Churchill. Collaborations with women’s business and political organizations helped her exert further political pressure.

Simultaneously, she worked to harness mass media. In doing so, she acknowledged the power of magazines, comic books, and radio programs to reflect and to shape public opinion. Citing print culture as a measure of ingrained biases, Powell collected selections from newspaper and elementary textbooks that reflected “the strangle hold masculinity has on the public consciousness.”<sup>43</sup> Asking the National Woman’s Party to distribute her Susan B. Anthony bibliography at its 1933 Chicago Exposition display, Powell blamed public ignorance for Anthony’s fifth-place performance in a *Ladies’ Home Journal* ranking of public figures.<sup>44</sup> In response, she sought to shape popular depictions of the past, convincing commercial calendar publishers to acknowledge Susan B. Anthony’s February 15 birthday, and asking writers to incorporate suffrage history into popular entertainments.<sup>45</sup> Powell made personal appeals to influence *Good Housekeeping* magazine’s coverage of women’s history, as she advised writer James Truslow Adams on his list of influential historical figures for the magazine.<sup>46</sup>

Willing to embrace stereotypes in order to reach large audiences, she also wrote to NBC’s national radio program *Amos ‘n’ Andy*, which derived humor through its

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<sup>42</sup> Transradio transcript, June 17, 1936, Box 5, Folder 81, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>43</sup> Rose Arnold Powell to Florence Bayard Hilles, June 15, 1933, Box 4, Folder 56, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Rose Arnold Powell to Mrs. Adamson, April 4, 1945, Box 2, Folder 19, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>46</sup> James Truslow Adams to Rose Arnold Powell, Nov. 1, 1940; James Truslow Adams to Rose Arnold Powell, Nov. 18, 1940; Rose Arnold Powell to James Truslow Adams, Nov. 7, 1940; James Truslow Adams, “The Six Most Important American Women,” *Good Housekeeping* (Feb. 1941), 30. Box 3, Folder 38, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

portrayals of African Americans as ignorant.<sup>47</sup> Reminding program executives that its broadcasts had included the biography of Abraham Lincoln, Powell proposed that African-American characters Amos and Andy debate the value of Susan B. Anthony's women's rights achievements as a way to memorialize Anthony and to group her with Washington and Lincoln, as the "third great emancipator" celebrated for a February birthday.<sup>48</sup> Adapting her approach for each individual request, Powell wrote within the same week to the network's *Southern Airs* program, which had narrated the achievements of Frederick Douglass and played recordings of "negro spirituals."<sup>49</sup> She identified Douglass as a friend of Anthony "for years" and as a friend of the women's rights movement, and she detailed Anthony's petitioning for the abolition of slavery, criticizing the omission of this work from "history text-books."<sup>50</sup>

After hearing that the new *Wonder Woman* comic was profiling a notable woman in each issue, she lobbied to secure a place for Anthony. Although she found comic book artwork unattractive, she valued the reach of a medium so popular with young people.<sup>51</sup> In her assessment of the Anthony panels drafted by All-American Comics, Powell makes strategic concessions and demonstrates her criteria for consciousness-raising history. Most essential is the grouping of Anthony, Washington, and Lincoln that she carried throughout her work. Her explanation to a supporter that the comic "link[s] the three names together" goes without further elaboration, demonstrating the centrality of this trio

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<sup>47</sup> On the construction of race in *Amos 'n' Andy*, see Hilmes, 81-93.

<sup>48</sup> Rose Arnold Powell to Amos and Andy, NBC, Jan. 6, 1935, Box 2, Folder 14, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>49</sup> Rose Arnold Powell to "Southern Airs," NBC, Jan. 10, 1935, Box 2, Folder 14, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Rose Arnold Powell to Mrs. MacGee, May 16, 1943, Box 2, Folder 18; Rose Arnold Powell to Miss Boyles, June 3, 1943, Box 2, Folder 18, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

to her activist approach.<sup>52</sup> In her correspondence with All-American Comics about the final product, Powell likewise stresses her gratitude for the placement of Anthony alongside male pioneers:

For years I have labored to weld her name with those of Washington and Lincoln as ‘a third great emancipator,’ and I can not express how grateful I am that you have linked their names together in this story. We have had no commanding feminine figure uplifted beside the masculine to express the BALANCE of national greatness. Seeing this necessity, you too have had a great vision and have given it birth in SUPER MAN AND WONDER WOMAN.”<sup>53</sup>

Such elevation of women as equals to men superseded factual accuracy. Aware of incorrect statements in the comic draft, Powell provided biographical and bibliographical information for review but did not demand specific revisions. The final published version erroneously places Anthony as a co-organizer with Elizabeth Cady Stanton of the 1848 women’s rights convention at Seneca Falls, New York, an event which she did not attend.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, Powell acknowledged to supporters that “[n]ot everything is entirely accurate,” but that the biography did convey “the long struggle [Anthony] waged.”<sup>55</sup>

Rather than expecting accurate historical details, Powell sought to demonstrate Anthony’s broad influence on public life. Proposing that the subject’s desires should influence the way she is portrayed, Powell’s correspondence to All-American Comics suggests inclusion of Anthony’s “alleged illegal voting in 1872 and her dramatic trial in

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<sup>52</sup> Rose Arnold Powell to Miss Boyles, June 3, 1943, Box 2, Folder 18, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>53</sup> Rose Arnold Powell to M. C. Gaines, May 4, 1943, Box 2, Folder 18, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger. Superman preceded Wonder Woman as an All-American Comics character.

<sup>54</sup> *Wonder Woman*, Volume 1, No. 5 (June-July 1943).

<sup>55</sup> Rose Arnold Powell to Miss Boyles, June 3, 1943, Box 2, Folder 18, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

1873 [which] she considered the highlight of her life.”<sup>56</sup> Although she frames this request as an effort to honor Anthony’s own perspective, Powell remained willing to distort Anthony’s views in the service of public acclaim. In her appeals to national calendar publishers, which she prioritized based on their size, Powell approved linking of Anthony with commercial causes, even when Anthony, “an old temperance pioneer,” was featured on a “brewing company” calendar.<sup>57</sup> She willingly shaped her narratives about Anthony to maximize their public appeal, recording in her journal that she excised references to Abraham Lincoln in the material she sent to southern state presidents of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs. In the “seceded states’ where Civil War animosities still exist,” Powell did not want to jeopardize her request that the G.F.W.C. recognize Anthony’s birthday and pressure the U.S. Congress to do the same.<sup>58</sup> She strategized to capture the attention of contemporary audiences, and she requested that Alice Marble broaden the “Wonder Women of History” narrative’s appeal through connection of Anthony with “the present participation of women in war activities.”<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, she praised *Wonder Woman* for looking beyond suffrage to “broaden” Anthony’s public persona, acknowledging married women’s property rights and women’s access to education as “other wrongs” she combated.

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<sup>56</sup> Rose Arnold Powell to M. C. Gaines, Jan. 28, 1943, Box 2, Folder 18, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>57</sup> Rose Arnold Powell to Mrs. MacGee, May 16, 1943, Box 2, Folder 18, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>58</sup> Rose Arnold Powell, Sept. 18-19, 1942, Journal Vol. 3, Box 1, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger. Powell added that she “Put Anthony suffrage stamp on these letters” to G.F.W.C. leaders.

<sup>59</sup> Rose Arnold Powell to M. C. Gaines, Jan. 28, 1943, Box 2, Folder 18, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger. All-American Comics does not seem to have used Powell’s suggestions, mentioning suffrage only briefly and omitting the comparisons to the current war that shaped its entries on famous nurses. Powell nevertheless expressed enthusiastic approval for the finished product in her correspondence to All-American President M. C. Gaines. Rose Arnold Powell to M. C. Gaines, May 4, 1943, Box 2, Folder 18, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

After publication of the *Wonder Woman* issue, Powell used it as a platform to further promote her work. Through the publisher, she arranged that copies be sent to fellow Anthony enthusiasts, as well as to relatives and historians of other noted women's rights leaders.<sup>60</sup> She sent the comic to writer Margaret Louise Wallace, using the occasion to address Wallace on her book in progress about Lillie Devereux Blake, a collaboration with the suffragist's daughter Katherine Devereux Blake.<sup>61</sup> Stressing her own connections to the family of suffragist Matilda Joselyn Gage, Powell endorsed the only "authentic sources of information on the background of the woman movement." She praised Ida Husted Harper's biographies on *The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony*; the *History of Woman Suffrage* volumes compiled by Anthony, Gage, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton; and finally "the valuable set of scrap books, thirty-three in number, presented to the Library of Congress by Miss Anthony," filled with information that "can be found nowhere else."<sup>62</sup>

To Powell's dismay, Wallace and Blake's 1943 publication *Champion of Women: The Life of Lillie Devereux Blake* did not follow the spirit of Anthony as "wonder woman" or of Powell's recommended sources. Criticizing the book in her personal journal, Powell wrote that she "struggle[d] to keep from letting condemnation hold sway, as there seems to be a deep-seated hatred of Miss Anthony and the determination of the daughter to vindicate her Mother and 'show up' Miss Anthony."<sup>63</sup> Powell argued that the book's personal "digs" reflected "petty" resentment and failed to recognize that, even if

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<sup>60</sup> Rose Arnold Powell to Miss Boyles, June 3, 1943, Box 2, Folder 18, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>61</sup> Rose Arnold Powell to Margaret Louise Wallace, April 7, 1943, Box 2, Folder 18, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>62</sup> Rose Arnold Powell to Margaret Louise Wallace, April 7, 1943, Box 2, Folder 18, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>63</sup> Rose Arnold Powell, October 19, 1943, Journal Vol. 4, Box 1, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

she had made mistakes, Anthony's "lifetime of experience had given her a wisdom and vision beyond the younger woman."<sup>64</sup> Powell felt that reverence for Anthony's long career, and the desire to promote public awareness of Anthony, should shape the writing of women's history. She feared that the Blake biography "will have a bad influence, because women are inclined to believe what they read without challenging it. They know very little of Miss Anthony's life-long sacrifice for them. Not their fault. There ought to be many biographies of her. (Lincoln has a hundred.)"<sup>65</sup> Powell defined history as a means to fulfill obligations to historical pioneers, but she nevertheless marshaled evidence to support her claims. She used her self-identified definitive sources to refute the Blake book, remarking "No one can read the three-volume Harper biography as I have done and. . .not be convinced that what Katherine Blake charges is largely malicious, deliberately intended to discredit Miss Anthony and rob her of the long deserved credit she is now getting."<sup>66</sup>

Powell's conception of public history as a political project shaped not only her historical interpretations but also her definition of feminist activism. In her devotion to securing public prominence for Susan B. Anthony, Powell approached surviving figures of the suffrage movement. Throughout her Congressional activism, she sought the support of suffragist Carrie Chapman Catt, who replaced the retiring Anthony as president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association in 1900. This fact made Catt a logical link to Anthony's life, as did content of Ida Husted Harper's Anthony

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<sup>64</sup> Rose Arnold Powell to Margaret Louise Wallace, April 7, 1943, Box 2, Folder 18, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger. Tensions between Susan B. Anthony and Lillie Devereux Blake emerged over plans for Susan B. Anthony's successor as National American Woman Suffrage Association president. Alma Lutz, *Susan B. Anthony: Rebel, Crusader, Humanitarian* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), 289-91. Grace Farrell, *Lillie Devereux Blake: Retracing a Life Erased* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 162-89.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Rose Arnold Powell, October 19, 1943, Journal Vol. 4, Box 1, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.



biography. In her letters to Catt asking support for Congressional recognition of Anthony's birthday, Powell used Harper's text to link Anthony, Catt, and the problem of public history. In a 1934 letter, Powell opens by lamenting: "Your prediction many years ago, as recorded in the Harper biography of Miss Anthony, that in another quarter of a century every boy and girl would know the name of Susan B. Anthony, is far from realization."<sup>67</sup> Continuing, Powell quoted a 1900 *Washington Star* report portraying Anthony's emotional presentation of Catt as the new president over the NAWSA annual meeting. "Just this morning I was reading on p. 1171 of the biography the following report," Powell noted to preface her selected passage.<sup>68</sup> In such requests, Powell emphasized the importance of public recognition both as an activist strategy and as a goal. In 1935 Powell again appealed to Catt to lend her own fame to the cause, arguing that the 1933 *Ladies' Home Journal* ranking of influential female figures had devalued Anthony because of public ignorance about "the facts."<sup>69</sup> In 1939, Powell returned to the same *LHJ* survey, defining Catt's importance as one of the twelve ranking women: "I consider you the most influential woman in the country in the leadership of women. Aside from Helen Keller, who is a friend of the [Mount Rushmore] sculptor [Gutzon Borglum] and would remain loyal to him, you and Dr. Mary E. Woolley are the only living women among the twelve voted as the nation's greatest."<sup>70</sup>

Initially offering brief statements of public support, Catt was unwilling to devote significant effort to memorializing Anthony, arguing that the drive to include her on

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<sup>67</sup> Rose Arnold Powell to Carrie Chapman Catt, Jan. 18, 1934, Box 2, Folder 32, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Rose Arnold Powell to Carrie Chapman Catt, Jan. 24, 1935, Box 2, Folder 32, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>70</sup> Rose Arnold Powell to Carrie Chapman Catt, Aug. 9, 1939, Box 2, Folder 32, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

Mount Rushmore would be futile. Resigned to the fact that “men dote on glorifying themselves,” Catt argued that monuments and renown were irrelevant.<sup>71</sup> “I am inclined to think that women are never going to get their full share of monuments in this world, but I do not think that that is important,” Catt remarked, explaining that her current work focused on the National Committee on the Cause and Cure of War.<sup>72</sup> Rejecting Powell’s request that this Committee join the Susan B. Anthony Forum, Catt explained: “The women who compose the National Committee on the Cause and Cure of the War are not, necessarily, interested in Susan B. Anthony. We put no business of that nature before the Conference. We only bring before it the affairs that concern the group” and its pacifist goals.<sup>73</sup>

Catt continued to play a visible role in politics, focusing on anti-war philosophy, economic inequalities, and the plight of refugees from Europe. As her own activism evolved, popular efforts to record the history of the women’s rights movement sought to define her. Soon after her 1947 death, Catt herself became the subject of “Wonder Women of History.” Identifying her as a “feminist,” the comic praised her hard work to earn money as a college student, to agitate for women’s suffrage, and to establish the League of Women Voters; her efforts to “stop wars and the suffering they cause”; and her support for the United Nations.<sup>74</sup>

In their radio series *Women in the Making of America* and *Gallant American Women*, journalist Eva Hansl, historian Mary Ritter Beard, and writer Jane Ashman also

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<sup>71</sup> Carrie Chapman Catt to Rose Arnold Powell, June 21, 1938, Box 2, Folder 32, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>72</sup> Carrie Chapman Catt to Rose Arnold Powell, Feb. 2, 1935, Box 2, Folder 32, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> *Wonder Woman*, No. 26 (Nov.-Dec. 1947).

combined efforts to record women's history, to secure participation from notable female figures, and to attract audiences. Like Rose Arnold Powell, these women saw public education as crucial to promoting the study of women's history and to elevating contemporary women's status. Each of the three brought different techniques to the project. Eva Hansl, a writer and editor with experience at *The New York Tribune*, *The New York Times*, and *Parents' Magazine*, originally developed the idea and managed the program's diverse participants. She had worked for the past three years to collect and cross reference 12,000 articles on women's "interests and activities."<sup>75</sup> As a noted historian, Mary Ritter Beard brought publicity to the project and assessed scripts for historical accuracy. A 1939 publication with husband Charles Beard had criticized the radio medium for "canned rumbles, thumps, and rattles" that prevented serious thought.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, sound effects-filled radio dramas became a vehicle for promoting her World Center for Women's Archives and its efforts to collect "new source material from private diaries, letters and public records."<sup>77</sup> Jane Ashman, who drafted most scripts, was an experienced radio writer with the U.S. Office of Education.<sup>78</sup> Their 1939-1940 collaborations with the New Deal's Federal Theatre Project demonstrate the permeable lines between the scholarly and the popular, with many women simultaneously contributing to public, professional, and more traditionally "academic" histories.

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<sup>75</sup> Eva Hansl biography, n.d., Box 1, *Gallant American Women* Proposals Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

<sup>76</sup> Charles Beard and Mary Ritter Beard, *America in Midpassage*, vol. 2 (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1939), 647-49. Quoted in Bruce Lenthall, *Radio's America: The Great Depression and the Rise of Modern Mass Culture* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 26.

<sup>77</sup> Mary Ritter Beard biography, n.d., Box 1, *Gallant American Women* Proposals Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection

<sup>78</sup> Jane Ashman biography, n.d., Box 1, *Gallant American Women* Proposals Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection

In producing the broadcasts, Beard, Hansl, and Ashman consulted with contemporary public figures, as well as with historians. By framing each episode with guest speakers and references to contemporary life, Mary Ritter Beard sought to demonstrate the wide influence of women's historical actions. In notes on a "Women in Politics and Government" script draft, she encouraged using "historic background [that] would make the contemporary story a fine continuum. Otherwise we may seem like Don Quixotes or Sancho Panzas? Here just for a day or so?"<sup>79</sup> By contrast, Beard argued, women played crucial roles in diplomacy, from historic European queens to contemporary European and American ambassadors.

If this evolution of women in the democracy of America seems quixotic, the truth is that it is a natural evolution. Running far back in time, far beyond the founding of our republic, is a tradition of women in politics and government. . . . We cannot go into long history in this connection for this radio program but we can point out that even the idea and practice of women as foreign ministers is not original with America.<sup>80</sup>

Drawing parallels between the present and the past, Beard envisioned an alternative to the continuity model championed by many advertisers. Her radio programs presented women's history as a narrative of progress, but one that ran throughout the history of Western civilization.

Nevertheless, listeners of the forty-six *Gallant American Women* and *Women in the Making of America* broadcasts encountered a variety of gender ideals. Celebrations of motherhood or white gentility echoed contemporary advertisements. The script celebrating historical preservationists sentimentalized the class and racial hierarchies of the antebellum South. Depictions of May Field Lanier, who worked to preserve Robert

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<sup>79</sup> Mary Ritter Beard to Eva Hansl, n.d., Box 5, "Politics and Government" Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>80</sup> Mary Ritter Beard, "Women in Politics and Government" notes, June 30<sup>th</sup> [1939] Broadcast, Box 5, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

E. Lee's birthplace, celebrated the fact that "life is going on in the old plantation just as it did 200 years ago."<sup>81</sup> As NBC's "women's programming" coordinator Margaret Cuthbert had advised, "That 'before-Gettysburg' feeling could be brought up to date in the re-establishing of life in these old houses that are preserved in the style of their famous owners."<sup>82</sup> These celebrations of plantation life accepted the race, gender, and class boundaries that limited nineteenth-century women.

Inclusion of famous guests, by contrast, often demonstrated the visible public achievement of contemporary women and the progress from women's suffrage to women's contemporary political power. Broadcast on June 23, 1939, the program on "Freedom of Citizenship" concluded with comments read by Carrie Chapman Catt herself, who had been portrayed by an actor in the preceding historical scenes of the women's rights movement. Introductory announcements advertised Catt's participation, identifying her as "one of the truly great women in the making of America."<sup>83</sup> Not only did Catt appear on the program, but she also shaped the format of early installments, advocating that episodes include the variety of female pioneers on each topic, rather than isolating individual figures. Eva Hansl later claimed that "[t]he plan for the first five programs in the initial series 'Women in the Making of America' was definitely hers."<sup>84</sup>

Suggesting Catt's influence on the program's historical content, its narrative of women's suffrage begins with Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792, the same year Catt identified

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<sup>81</sup> Eva Hansl to May Field Lanier, Feb. 13, 1940, Box 4, "The Bronze Tablet" Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>82</sup> Margaret Cuthbert to William D. Boutwell, Feb. 7, 1940, Box 4, "The Bronze Tablet" Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>83</sup> Jane Ashman, "Freedom of Citizenship" script, June 23, 1939, Box 1, Folder 8, Eva Hansl Papers, Schlesinger. Broadcast recording, "Freedom of Citizenship," *Women in the Making of America*, June 23, 1939, NBC Radio Collection, Recorded Sound Reference Room, Library of Congress.

<sup>84</sup> Eva Hansl memo, "RE: GALLANT AMERICAN WOMEN-Its Educational Value," Apr. 15, 1940, Box 1, Correspondence folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

as “the real beginning” of the women’s rights movement in her correspondence with Rose Arnold Powell.<sup>85</sup> The story then covers Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s life and activism, with her childhood and anti-slavery movement experiences leading to the 1848 convention at Seneca Falls. The dramatized biography of Susan B. Anthony includes dialogue with William Lloyd Garrison and other abolitionist leaders, as Anthony protested women’s exclusion from the Fifteenth Amendment. Actors then performed Anthony’s arrest and trial for voting in 1872, with Anthony voicing her justification that women gained suffrage under the Fourteenth Amendment. Legislative and activist highlights showed younger generations joining the movement and ultimately securing passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. After this performance, Eva Hansl introduced Catt’s speech, which promoted her current pacifist work. She argued that both male and female voters were failing in their duties: “Every civilized citizen should make the riddance of war his primary aim.”<sup>86</sup>

In addition to the influence of Carrie Chapman Catt, this radio broadcast also reflected the historiographical work of her philosophical antagonist Rose Arnold Powell. The script’s brief notation of state campaigns led into Susan B. Anthony’s retirement from NAWSA and her introduction of Carrie Chapman Catt at the annual meeting: “You, yourself, have chosen my successor. I present her to you--my ideal leader—Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt.”<sup>87</sup> This dialogue paraphrased the *Washington Star*’s record of Anthony’s comments at that 1900 meeting: “In Mrs. Catt you have my ideal leader. I present to you

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<sup>85</sup> Ashman, “Freedom of Citizenship,” p. 3. Carrie Chapman Catt to Rose Arnold Powell, Nov. 9, 1938, Box 2, Folder 32, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>86</sup> Jane Ashman, “Freedom of Citizenship” script, June 23, 1939, p. 35, Box 1, Folder 8, Eva Hansl Papers, Schlesinger. Broadcast recording, “Freedom of Citizenship,” *Women in the Making of America*, June 23, 1939, NBC Radio Collection, Recorded Sound Reference Room, Library of Congress.

<sup>87</sup> Jane Ashman, “Freedom of Citizenship” script, June 23, 1939, Box 1, Folder 8, Eva Hansl Papers, Schlesinger. Broadcast recording, “Freedom of Citizenship,” *Women in the Making of America*, June 23, 1939, NBC Radio Collection, Recorded Sound Reference Room, Library of Congress.

my successor.” It was this same clipping Rose Arnold Powell quoted in her efforts to inspire Catt.<sup>88</sup>

The passage’s inclusion in *Women in the Making of America* reflects Powell’s outreach years earlier to Mary Ritter Beard for support on the Mount Rushmore project. In an introductory 1935 letter, Powell praised Beard’s work and recommended that she read Harper’s biography, “if you have not already done so, and use your influence to get proper recognition for this phase of [Susan B. Anthony’s] life.”<sup>89</sup> Lamenting that these volumes were out of print, Powell observed that they had perhaps “[i]nadvertently, I am sure” been omitted from a bibliography Beard compiled for the American Association of University Women.<sup>90</sup> In her supportive response, Beard offered to approach publishers about reissuing the volumes. She admitted that she was “ashamed” to be unfamiliar with the Harper biography.<sup>91</sup> Observing that it would help if she had copies in hand, she arranged to buy one of Powell’s two personal sets.<sup>92</sup> As Beard read the Harper texts, the pair continued to correspond, conferring on publicity strategies. At Beard’s request, Powell helped her purchase copies of the *History of Woman Suffrage* volumes produced by Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Matilda Joslyn Gage, and Ida Husted

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<sup>88</sup> Ida Husted Harper, *The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony, Including Public Addresses, Her Own Letters and Many from Her Contemporaries During Fifty Years*, Vol. 3 (Indianapolis and Kansas City: Bowen-Merrill Company, 1908), 1127. Newspaper transcripts of suffrage movement speeches were often themselves paraphrases of speakers’ actual comments. Although Powell was in contact with Mary Ritter Beard in the 1930s, the women’s archival collections do not contain correspondence with Powell on the *Women in the Making of America* or the *Gallant American Women* programs. Rose Arnold Powell, June 30-July 6, 1934 and April 28-30, 1935, Journal Vol. 1, Box 1, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger. Correspondence, Box 2, Folder 27, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>89</sup> Rose Arnold Powell to Mary Ritter Beard, March 22, 1935, Box 2, Folder 27, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Mary Ritter Beard to Rose Arnold Powell, April 16, 1935, Box 2, Folder 27, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>92</sup> Rose Arnold Powell, April 30, 1935, Journal Vol. 1, Box 1, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger. Rose Arnold Powell to Mary Ritter Beard, April 9, 1935; Mary Ritter Beard to Rose Arnold Powell, April 28, 1935, Box 2, Folder 27, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

Harper.<sup>93</sup> Although correspondence between Powell and Beard slowed significantly during the late 1930s and early 1940s, a period during which Powell faced health problems, these historiographical suggestions shaped Beard's radio work.<sup>94</sup>

As collaborative efforts, *Gallant American Women* and *Women in the Making of America* combined the input of public figures, historians, and governmental agencies. Activists and relatives contacted Beard or Hansl to point out biased omissions. After the inaugural 1939 episode, Alice Stone Blackwell objected that her mother Lucy Stone was not mentioned alongside the women's rights accomplishments of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony.<sup>95</sup> One listener who "was brought up in a suffrage atmosphere in Boston, and had a small part in the activities of the Amer. Suffrage Assn., the College Equal Suffrage League, and the Natl. Woman's Party" expressed her gratitude for the series, but argued that the National Woman's Party "never let up its work for a moment" and should have received more credit in the story of women's suffrage.<sup>96</sup> Suffrage historian and future Susan B. Anthony biographer Alma Lutz argued that program collaborator "Mrs. Catt was given too much credit for the suffrage victory" and offered to share her own "Feminist Collection" of books as program preparation materials.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Mary Ritter Beard to Rose Arnold Powell, July 10, 1935; Rose Arnold Powell to Mary Ritter Beard, July 13, 1935, Box 2, Folder 27, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>94</sup> Rose Arnold Powell to Mary Ritter Beard, June 10, 1939; Rose Arnold Powell to Mary Ritter Beard, June 23, 1948, Box 2, Folder 27, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger. In her 1947 advice on Eva Hansl's efforts to include women's history in the corporate-sponsored traveling Freedom Train exhibit of patriotic documents and artifacts, she stressed the importance of Ida Husted Harper's work. Mary Ritter Beard to Eva Hansl, July 9, 1947, unprocessed box 1, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection. For history of the Freedom Train, see Wendy Wall, *Inventing the "American Way": The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 201-40 and Bird, 162-68.

<sup>95</sup> Alice Stone Blackwell to Eva Hansl, May 21, 1939, Box 4, "Women in Medicine" Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>96</sup> Henriette M. Heinzen to Eva Hansl, June 23, 1939, Box 1, Correspondence folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>97</sup> Alma Lutz to "Dear Sirs," May 19, 1939; Alma Lutz to Eva Hansl, July 1, 1939, Box 1, Correspondence folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection. Alma Lutz, *Created Equal: A Biography of Elizabeth*



According to NBC policy, broadcasts and script publications necessitated approval from living subjects, and the resulting negotiations reflect competing notions of what constitutes women's history. Dramatic license in formulating dialogue troubled many of the women depicted. Script protests criticized inaccurate dialogue as simplified, unintelligent, or overly sentimental. Female doctors consulted by network executives for a script on "Women in Medicine" revised dialogue to make it scientifically and professionally accurate, portraying female doctors past and present with "more dignity and less sentimentality."<sup>98</sup> *Woman's Medical Journal* editor Dr. Esperance felt the program draft downplayed men's resistance to female medical professionals and criticized it for showing "women doctors' sympathy, understanding and humanizing of medicine at the expense of her intellectual equipment, her knowledge, ability and training in the science of medicine."<sup>99</sup> Episode writer Jane Ashman, by contrast, deemed such detail irrelevant and refused to meet with the medical professionals.<sup>100</sup> She made moderate revisions but protested that "the barrage of pennies thrown its way by all the people who are authorized (or not) to stick in their two cents...ruins the script."<sup>101</sup> Ashman favored dramatic unity over the clinical accuracy expected by her subjects.

In the most controversial cases, scenes downplayed female figures' foresight while exaggerating the influence of male advisors. *Gone With the Wind* author Margaret Mitchell, featured in a brief vignette in the script for the January 23, 1940, "Women of

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*Cady Stanton* (New York: The John Day Company, 1940). Alma Lutz, *Susan B. Anthony: Rebel, Crusader, Humanitarian* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959).

<sup>98</sup> Eva Hansl to William Boutwell Jones, Feb. 29, 1940, Box 4, "Women in Medicine" Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>99</sup> Eva Hansl to J. Morris Jones, Feb. 28, 1940, Box 4, "Women in Medicine" Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection..

<sup>100</sup> Eva Hansl to William Boutwell Jones, Feb. 29, 1940, Box 4, "Women in Medicine" Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>101</sup> Jane Ashman to Mr. Jones, Feb. 28, 1940, Box 4, "Women in Medicine" Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

the Letters” broadcast, objected to dialogue in which a male publisher hears about her manuscript, seeks her out, and encourages her to submit the novel that she claims to have written merely for her own amusement. After Mitchell’s objections to a “radio actor pretending to be her,” NBC cut this scene before the broadcast.<sup>102</sup> However, U.S. Office of Education administrators failed to remove the offending passage from scripts published by Columbia University Press and distributed through the network. After the *Nyack-Journal News* reported that a Suffern, New York, women’s club performed “Women of Letters” with Margaret Mitchell among the cast of characters, the famed author threatened legal action.<sup>103</sup> Mitchell’s husband John R. Marsh demanded acknowledgment that this depiction was “inaccurate and misleading and. . . badly distorted from what really happened”:

This situation is an important one to Mrs. Marsh. Her greatest single burden since her novel was published has been the circulation of strange rumors and fantastic stories about her. Your script not only circulates errors about her and makes her say things in direct quotes which she never said, but does it as copyrighted matter with the prestige behind it of the National Broadcasting Company, the U.S. Office of Education and the Columbia University Press. Those who received the script, therefore, have every reason to believe that the material is authentic and accurate.<sup>104</sup>

Anticipating that audiences would accept information presented by a national network, the U.S. government, and the academy as historical fact, Mitchell protested her lack of control over this history. A letter from Hansl to script holders explained Mitchell’s

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<sup>102</sup> John Marsh to Eva Hansl, June 29, 1940, Box 4, “Women of Letters” Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>103</sup> Eva Hansl to L. H. Titterton, July 8, 1940, Box 4, “Women of Letters” Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>104</sup> John Marsh to Eva Hansl, Aug. 6, 1940, Box 4, “Women of Letters” Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

objection, asking that the consumers physically remove the Mitchell dramatization from pages seventeen and eighteen and return the clippings in an enclosed envelope.<sup>105</sup>

Similar problems occurred when *Gallant American Women* sought noted writer Ida Tarbell's assistance. Hansl asked permission to adapt Tarbell's autobiography and to include her 1902-1904 *McClure's* magazine coverage of the Standard Oil Company as one of the historical episodes of "Women in Journalism."<sup>106</sup> Simultaneously, she sought Tarbell's insight as an Abraham Lincoln biographer for a separate episode "on the mothers of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln."<sup>107</sup> After the latter installment's broadcast, Hansl identified Tarbell as an authority to deflect listener criticism, explaining that "Miss Ida Tarbell, one of the foremost Lincoln enthusiasts loaned us her own books and passed on the authenticity of that part of the script."<sup>108</sup>

When Tarbell herself became the subject of the "Ladies of the Press" episode on journalism, the authority of source material again came under question. Tarbell objected to dialogue that showed her receiving, and resisting, orders from publisher S. S. McClure to investigate Standard Oil.<sup>109</sup> Using Tarbell's memoir *All in the Day's Work* as a revision guide, Jane Ashman apologized to the journalist for errors made in haste to meet weekly deadlines for scripts on diverse topics.<sup>110</sup> Explaining that her interpretation was

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<sup>105</sup> Eva Hansl, August 1940, Box 4, "Women of Letters" Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>106</sup> Eva Hansl to Ida Tarbell, Jan. 15, 1940, Box 4, "Mothers of Great Americans" Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Eva Hansl to Parke C. Bolling, Feb. 9, 1940, Box 4, "The Bronze Tablet" Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>109</sup> Biographer Kathleen Brady identifies Tarbell's resistance to the Abraham Lincoln writing assignment. In contrast, Tarbell developed ideas for the Standard Oil project and brought them to McClure. Kathleen Brady, *Ida Tarbell: Portrait of a Muckraker* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), 95, 121-22.

<sup>110</sup> Typed memo, Ladies of the Press: Changes suggested by Eva Hansl, Margaret Cuthbert, Ishbel Ross, Jan. 19, 1940, Box 4, "Ladies of the Press" Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

inspired by a newspaper clipping, Ashman noted that Mary Ritter Beard had rightfully questioned this portrayal of a passive Tarbell:

When I sent my script to Mary Beard for her historical check-up, she phoned to ask if I was sure that Mr. McClure asked you to undertake that [Standard Oil story]. I replied that I was. She said she knew you had a personal interest in the subject, having lived in the Oil Region—she didn't have her copy of your book here in New York—but if I had looked at it and was sure—<sup>111</sup>

Ashman's apology concluded with a statement of shame and an observation that, "All I can say in self defense is that if you had tried to do your history of the Standard Oil Company in a week..."<sup>112</sup>

Meanwhile, Eva Hansl sought script approval from S. S. McClure, the other participant in the dialogue under question. Objecting to lines that he called "invented" and "utterly out of character + inaccurate," McClure refused to sign release documents.<sup>113</sup> "My recollection differs from Miss Tarbell's," he offered, "She, however, has notes."<sup>114</sup> Respecting this source material, McClure advised Hansl to keep the script intact, promising he would not challenge its publication. Because he could not corroborate Tarbell's account, however, he refused to provide his own written approval.<sup>115</sup>

Like McClure, Tarbell, and Mitchell, subjects most often objected to dramatizations that they felt misrepresented their character. Hansl and Ashman's invitations that their critics contribute to subsequent episodes often worked to smooth such disagreements. In her response to Tarbell's criticism, Ashman asked for Tarbell's

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<sup>111</sup> Jane Ashman to Ida Tarbell, Jan. 19, 1940, Box 4, "Ladies of the Press" Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. Ellipses appear in the original

<sup>113</sup> S. S. McClure to Eva Hansl, Jan. 28, 1940, Box 4, "Ladies of the Press" Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>114</sup> S. S. McClure to Eva Hansl, Jan. 29, 1940, Box 4, "Ladies of the Press" Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>115</sup> S. S. McClure to Eva Hansl, Jan. 28, 1940; S. S. McClure to Eva Hansl, Jan. 29, 1940, Box 4, "Ladies of the Press" Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

input on the “Mothers of Great Americans” script underway. “This is a fine way to apologize for an erratical script—to ask you to do my research for the next one,” she noted sarcastically.<sup>116</sup> But the opportunity to provide input did win the program new allies. Hansl approached Parke C. Bolling, the President of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, as a potential program contributor.<sup>117</sup> In her initial judgments about the project, Bolling criticized the dialect spoken by an enslaved woman in Mary Ball Washington’s life story. She wished greater emphasis had been placed on Mary Ball Washington and Nancy Hanks Lincoln “with an impressive account of their influence upon their famous sons,” rather than the program’s re-enactments of “crying infants. . . lisping children...deathbed scenes etc.”<sup>118</sup> By the next month, the tone of Bolling’s correspondence changed significantly. She thanked Hansl for incorporating her suggestions into a script devoted to the nineteenth-century preservationist efforts of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, judging it a “marked improvement over the Mary Ball W. + Nancy Hanks L. program.”<sup>119</sup> Praising the “Ladies of the Press” episode, Bolling appreciated inclusion of the *Virginia Gazette* as a Virginia resident.<sup>120</sup>

Perhaps reflecting their growing awareness that participation in the research process produced audience loyalty, Eva Hansl and Jane Ashman incorporated listener participation into a later proposal. Pitching a new series of *Gallant American Women* to potential corporate sponsors after their collaboration with NBC ended, Hansl and

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<sup>116</sup> Jane Ashman to Ida Tarbell, Jan. 19, 1940, Box 4, “Ladies of the Press” Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>117</sup> Parke C. Bolling to Eva Hansl, Jan. 11, 1940, Box 4, “Bronze Tablet” Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>118</sup> Parke C. Bolling to Eva Hansl, Feb. 8, 1940, Box 4, “Mothers of Great Americans” Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>119</sup> Parke C. Bolling to Eva Hansl, Feb. 28, 1940, Box 4, “The Bronze Tablet” Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

Ashman suggested that consumers “be encouraged to send in stories of women they know....women whose stories match those found in the annals of the past—the Unsung Women to whom honor is long past due.”<sup>121</sup>

In their efforts to honor their subjects’ wishes, Beard, Hansl, and Ashman often faced opposition from NBC and federal executives. Women wanted their profiles to demonstrate calmness and competence even in male professions. By contrast, Office of Education staffer William Boutwell consistently requested more emotional displays in the scripts. An April 1940 broadcast, “From Tavern to Tearoom,” celebrated women’s culinary achievements, including restaurant entrepreneurship and nutritional science.<sup>122</sup> Boutwell praised a “sobbing scene” in which an early twentieth-century housewife followed home economist Ellen Richards’ suggestions and became distraught when her husband praised food that she did not feel she had created independently.<sup>123</sup> According to Boutwell, this irrational emotional outburst was “one of the best episodes we have had in a long time.”<sup>124</sup> In his reactions to a script on “Women as Nurses,” he praised the “sensitive writing” and requested more “tearjerker or comedy scenes.”<sup>125</sup> These stylistic preferences clashed with the wishes of many of the program’s living subjects.

Disagreements over the program’s prescriptive functions also emerged. Beard approached mass media as a way to inspire average women’s investment with history and

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<sup>121</sup> Eva Hansl and Jane Ashman, n.d. [after May 1941], “Gallant American Women,” Box 1, Proposals Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>122</sup> Eva Hansl script, “From Tavern to Tearoom,” *Gallant American Women*, Apr. 9, 1940, Box 2, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>123</sup> William D. Boutwell memo, Apr. 11, 1940, Record Group 12: Records of the Office of Education, Entry 174, Box 3, “Gallant American Women” Folder, Archives II, National Archives, College Park, Maryland. “From Tavern to Tearoom,” p. 13.

<sup>124</sup> William D. Boutwell memo, Apr. 11, 1940, Record Group 12: Records of the Office of Education, Entry 174, Box 3, “Gallant American Women” Folder, Archives II.

<sup>125</sup> William D. Boutwell memo, Apr. 5, 1940, Record Group 12: Records of the Office of Education, Entry 174, Box 3, “Gallant American Women” Folder, Archives II.

democracy. Writing to Rose Arnold Powell in the mid 1930s, Beard explained that her public histories did not elevate Susan B. Anthony to the status of an icon because she did not want to make her achievements an “exception”:

Susan B., if I had given her all the space allotted [in history textbooks] to women, would have seemed to be unique among women. She was in many ways but what I mean is that she would have figured as too great an exception with respect to our sex when, as a matter of fact, women have always been at the center where history has been made.<sup>126</sup>

Beard argued that women’s active roles in politics were the historical norm, and she wanted radio listeners to identify with the diverse women profiled as gallant American women.

Some NBC and government officials, by contrast, sought to refocus program content on the domestic roles they defined as the average woman’s responsibility. An Office of Education employee responsible for compiling the program transcripts argued that the program should depict more mothers. In October 1939 he complained that the list of proposed subjects did not refer to women’s familial roles:

I personally never heard of a man having a baby and doubt that women are more important as peace makers, fighters for freedom, etc., than as home makers and mothers. I believe if I were an impressionable high school girl listening to this program I would get the idea our Government is saying that they should become Carry Nations (vile maniac that she was) rather than wives. After all, our birth rate is falling fast enough as it is, + the only prolific species seem to be the Semetic [sic] and the Ethiopian.<sup>127</sup>

The finalized series did include programs devoted to women’s domesticity, with episodes on “Mothers of Great Americans” (February 6, 1940) and “Wives of Great Americans”

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<sup>126</sup> Mary Ritter Beard to Rose Arnold Powell, March 27, 1935, Box 2, Folder 27, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.

<sup>127</sup> Richard Philip Herget to William Boutwell, Oct. 23, 1939, Record Group 12: Records of the Office of Education, Entry 174, Box 3, “Gallant American Women” Folder, Archives II. Herget added “vile maniac that she was” to his typed letter by hand.

(June 3, 1940), along with a celebration of women's charitable activities titled "Children First" (April 30, 1940).<sup>128</sup> Young listeners could read these histories as encouragement that they follow the examples of famous mothers and wives.

Nevertheless, the Office of Education simultaneously approached women's history as an empirical subject. Circulated on Federal Security Administration/ Office of Education letterhead, scholarly consultant surveys requested attention to the contrast of "attitudes 'then and now'" and to historical "turning points."<sup>129</sup> The program outline for "Women in Business" argued that "civilization can progress only through increasing participation of women in commerce, trade, and manufacturing."<sup>130</sup> Moving beyond a simple linear model, the sketch observes shifts in women's status: "Women do everything in [the] colonial period," but by the nineteenth century they were "put back into the homes."<sup>131</sup>

*Gallant American Women* experimented in presenting such historical interpretations, and the program made contributions to women's history scholarship through the bibliographies published with episode scripts. Serious historians, including Eleanor Flexner, contributed to and populated these book lists.<sup>132</sup> Promoted to women's organizations and to academics, the show gained recognition as a serious scholarly endeavor. During the 1939 period when the fifteenth through twentieth installments

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<sup>128</sup> Eva Hansl, broadcast record and script corrections, n.d., Box 1, "Corrections on Scripts #27-#47," Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>129</sup> "Program on 'Women in Aviation'" questionnaire, n.d., Record Group 12: Records of the Office of Education, Entry 174, Box 3, "Gallant American Women" Folder, Archives II.

<sup>130</sup> Outline for "Women in Business," n.d., Record Group 12: Records of the Office of Education, Entry 174, Box 3, "Gallant American Women" Folder, Archives II.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Eva Hansl to Margaret Cuthbert, May 19, 1940, Box 1, *Gallant American Women* Proposals Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.



aired, there were formal listening groups in ten women's colleges.<sup>133</sup> Hood College in Maryland arranged for its entire student body to listen to the afternoon broadcast. A Duke University dean of women reportedly changed her class meeting times so she could tune in at 2:00 PM.<sup>134</sup> A University of Maine House Director requested advertisements to post in women's dorms and in "each building where women's classes are held."<sup>135</sup> Beard's mass entertainments thus claimed a space in academia.

Nevertheless, Federal Radio Project records of audience correspondence and script requests showed *Gallant American Women* lagging behind the Office's other programs, including an educational series produced in cooperation with the Smithsonian Institution.<sup>136</sup> After its July 1940 conclusion on NBC, the program failed to find other sponsors and did not return to the airwaves. Mary Ritter Beard's World Center for Women's Archives likewise dissolved, hurt by the wartime economy.<sup>137</sup> Political alliances dating to the suffrage movement limited archival donations, as Carrie Chapman Catt and Alice Stone Blackwell found the Archives biased towards the National Woman's Party.<sup>138</sup> Some activists felt that women had made progress in business and politics that would be minimized by the segregation of their papers from established repositories.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> These were the second through seventh broadcasts under the *Gallant American Women* title.

<sup>134</sup> Brodinsky and Waldron, "Report of Audience Preparation and Station Relations, Nov. 1 to Dec. 15, 1939. Record Group 12: Records of Special Projects and Programs, Radio Education Project Office of the Director Progress Reports, Entry 177, Box 2, Archives II.

<sup>135</sup> Julia D. H. Whittlesey to William Boutwell, April 18, 1940, Box 1, Correspondence Folder, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>136</sup> Federal Security Agency, weekly reports of incoming mail, 1939, Record Group 12: Records of Special Projects and Programs, Radio Education Project Office of the Director Progress Reports, Entry 177, Box 2, Archives II.

<sup>137</sup> Des Jardins, 236-41. Nancy F. Cott, ed. *Mary Ritter Beard Through Her Letters*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991, 48-50.

<sup>138</sup> Des Jardins, 237.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

However, other women maintained the *Gallant American Women* framework, tracing the evolution of their own lives by considering previous generations' influence. Working women recorded their professional histories and created archives that they hoped to benefit younger women. Now based in New York, copywriter Dorothy Dignam served as the historian of that city's professional advertising society. Like Dignam, many business women who worked in the 1920s and 1930s to promote colonial icons devoted the late 1940s and the early 1950s to documenting their own histories.

Dignam's "club biography" of the Advertising Women of New York privileged archival materials. Describing her efforts for the group's newsletter, she explained:

Our first publicity chairman, Allyne V. Scheerer, who married her boss and dropped from sight all too soon, did this club a priceless service. She sent releases about our meetings to newspapers and trade journals, beginning in advance of the second session. These notices, still to be found in old scrapbooks and at the library, give an accurate story of "our youth." The bits that dear old ladies sit down and write off from memory are not always accurate. I'll be the same some day!<sup>140</sup>

Further demonstrating Dignam's studious approach, she annotated the club's archival materials for "future historians," suggesting newsletters for research on the group's activities.<sup>141</sup>

Organizational history simultaneously became a service to contemporary students. In a 1945 lecture, Dignam cited the evolution of women in business while assessing the current climate for young women in advertising.<sup>142</sup> Through a slideshow of ads from previous decades, she invited debate over the best career strategy for women as men

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<sup>140</sup> Dorothy Dignam, article draft for *AdLibber*, n.d., Advertising Women of New York, Collection 86-M216, Carton 2, Schlesinger.

<sup>141</sup> Dorothy Dignam, "Biographer's Statement," n.d., Advertising Women of New York, Collection 86-M216, Carton 2, Schlesinger.

<sup>142</sup> Dorothy Dignam, "Report on Jobs for Women in Advertising: Final Session of 1944-45 Advertising Class sponsored by Advertising Women of New York, Inc.," March 26, 1945, Advertising Women of New York, Collection 86-M216, Carton 2, Schlesinger.

returned from war. As Dignam knew from personal experience, the industry had long provided women opportunities marketing household and beauty products. Nevertheless, by demonstrating female innovations in the profession, she raised the possibility that postwar adwomen could claim new career paths.

Her 1962 decision to donate part of the Advertising Women of New York records to the growing communications archive at the University of Wisconsin further reflects this acknowledgment that her colleagues had created history.<sup>143</sup> The awareness that their work would be of interest to later scholars provides an indication of the social significance women advertisers saw in their work.

Individual women also documented their own careers in archival form. After the failure of the World Center for Women's Archives project, many participants contributed manuscripts to the New York Public Library and the Library of Congress, as well as to academic special collections.<sup>144</sup> During the mid 1940s, Mary Ritter Beard and Eva Hansl advised Smith College, Radcliffe College, and Syracuse University on their own efforts to build women's history collections.<sup>145</sup> Beard's and Hansl's personal papers, including material on their *Gallant American Women* and *Women in the Making of America* radio programs, became part of the growing resources at Radcliffe and Smith through multiple donations from the 1940s through the 1960s.<sup>146</sup> Eva Hansl's post-World War II work included a "Womanpower" radio program devoted to female employment, and she

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<sup>143</sup> Dorothy Dignam to Dariel Steer, July 2, 1962, Advertising Women of New York, Collection 86-M216, Carton 2, Schlesinger.

<sup>144</sup> Des Jardins, 241-242.

<sup>145</sup> Mary Ritter Beard correspondence, 1944-1945, Box 2, Folder 30, Mary Ritter Beard Papers, 1935-1958, Collection A-9, Schlesinger.

<sup>146</sup> Finding aid, Mary Ritter Beard Papers, 1915-1958, MS 13 and finding aid, Eva Hansl Papers, MS 72, 1930-1975, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College. Finding aid, Mary Ritter Beard Papers, 1935-1958 and finding aid, Eva vom Baur Hansl Papers, 1939-1954, Schlesinger Library.

donated her radio research and scripts, along with her bank of news clippings, to Smith College and to Syracuse University, home of a flourishing journalism program.<sup>147</sup>

Women corporate and media employees simultaneously compiled archives to document their work, imagining these collections as part of the scholarly historical record. Contributors to such mass market women's magazines as *Mademoiselle* donated their business papers to Radcliffe's Schlesinger Library.<sup>148</sup> Simultaneously, that publication's employees deployed history to communicate their own professional identities. Editor-in-chief Betsy Talbot Blackwell decorated her office with antique magazine images.<sup>149</sup> Longtime collaborators Blackwell and beauty editor Bernice Peck used the decorative artifacts in their offices to define their own personal roles in the historical evolution of women's employment. Peck chose a "funny little jug" in the "End of Day" pattern for Blackwell's birthday flowers because "its name and origin remind me more than somewhat of a working woman's life....in those times the glass workers could have all that was left over at day's end, to make whatever they could of it."<sup>150</sup> Rather than invoking the past to justify women's presence in public life, post-World War II professionals increasingly cited history to glorify their own achievements.

As a supporter of Schlesinger Library, Mary Ritter Beard strategized to channel such professional pride into archival collection. Noting newspaper reports that cosmetics magnate Elizabeth Arden was adding clothing to her merchandise lines, Beard hypothesized that she would welcome additional press attention and encouraged

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<sup>147</sup> Eva Hansl, Foreword to the Eva v B. Hansl collection, n.d., Unprocessed box 1, Eva Hansl Papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>148</sup> Ginny to Betsy Talbot Blackwell, n.d., Box 17, Personal Correspondence, 1948-67, Betsy Talbot Blackwell Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

<sup>149</sup> Ormond to Betsy Talbot Blackwell, n.d., Box 16, Personal Correspondence, 1943-70; Clipping, "Mademoiselle Marches On," *Mademoiselle*, June 1944, Box 49, Betsy Talbot Blackwell Papers, American Heritage Center.

<sup>150</sup> Birthday card, n.d., Box 49, Betsy Talbot Blackwell Papers, American Heritage Center.

Radcliffe College president Wilbur K. Jordan to approach her for funding.<sup>151</sup> After consulting with fashion journalist and women's archive supporter Virginia Pope, Beard determined that Arden would be supportive of the Schlesinger Library's mission but would need encouragement to participate in the form of a detailed proposal and the promise of publicity about a monetary donation.<sup>152</sup> Noting Arden's professional rivalry with Helena Rubinstein, Beard impressed upon Schlesinger staff that they should not approach both entrepreneurs; if Rubinstein participated, Arden would not be willing.<sup>153</sup> Beard also encouraged Radcliffe College to ask Mary Pickford, Bette Davis, and Gertrude Lawrence, and Greer Garson for support of its collection efforts. Citing a literary agent's remark that such actors were disappointed with the quality of roles available for women, Beard anticipated that they would encourage filmmakers and playwrights to use women's archives as source material for "grander themes dealing with women."<sup>154</sup>

Although willing to support individual women's professional agendas in order to secure publicity and finances for women's archives, Beard drew the line at corporate or organizational influence on scholarship itself.<sup>155</sup> Plans for academic programs and scholarships to support student research in the Schlesinger Library's collections caused a sharp disagreement between Beard and her former collaborator Hansl, who wanted to

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<sup>151</sup> Mary Ritter Beard to Wilbur K. Jordan, Nov. 1, 1944, Mary Ritter Beard Papers, Collection A-9, Box 2, Folder 30, Schlesinger.

<sup>152</sup> Mary Ritter Beard to Wilbur K. Jordan, Jan. 13, 1945, Mary Ritter Beard Papers, Collection A-9, Box 2, Folder 30, Schlesinger.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Mary Ritter Beard to Wilbur K. Jordan, Nov. 18, 1944, Mary Ritter Beard Papers, Collection A-9, Box 2, Folder 30, Schlesinger.

<sup>155</sup> Beard herself had deployed mass media to publicize her World Center for Women's Archives, not only through the *Gallant American Women* and *Women in the Making of America* radio programs, but also in a proposed series of articles for *McCall's*. Nancy Cott, editorial note, in Nancy F. Cott, ed. *A Woman Making History: Mary Ritter Beard Through Her Letters* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 207.

teach and fund the study of women's household and paid labor.<sup>156</sup> Arguing that it was inappropriate to direct academic research, Beard encouraged Radcliffe College not to give Hansl a formal position in the Schlesinger Library.<sup>157</sup> Simultaneously, Beard praised the Business and Professional Women's Clubs for interest in funding the study of women's history but argued that the proposal for a scholarship on the study of women in business was inappropriate:

I want to incite the B&PW to an interest in women's history as a possible education which may lead them to evaluate their own labors and careers more critically. It is well, certainly, for them to learn about earlier business and professional women in America but I remember how successful business and professional women, associated with the feminist movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were actually declaring on the public platform that they were in the same status, or fix, as Negro slaves!<sup>158</sup>

Criticizing such subjective approaches to feminist scholarship, Beard argued that students at Radcliffe must be free to select their own research topics on the history of American women. Although willing to use mass media to promote her own scholarly agenda, and to cater to the professional interests of archival contributors, Beard nevertheless drew a sharp distinction between popular culture and serious scholarship.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Mary Ritter Beard to Eva Hansl, Aug. 11, 1944, Mary Ritter Beard Papers, Collection A-9, Box 2, Folder 30, Schlesinger.

<sup>157</sup> Beard initially recommended Eva Hansl for an archivist position at Schlesinger Library, praising her abilities. She later wrote to the Radcliffe College President that "After learning that [Hansl] wishes to promote a survey of women's attitude toward domesticity vs. gainful employment or their desire for both, I lost interest in recommending her for a position at Radcliffe. I regard the archive collecting, the large historical approach to learning about women, and the broad educational enterprise as the prime concern of the college." Mary Ritter Beard to Wilbur K. Jordan, July 21, 1944, Mary Ritter Beard Papers, Collection A-9, Box 2, Folder 30, Schlesinger.

<sup>158</sup> Here Beard was quoting a passage from a letter she sent to Dr. Eduard Lindeman. Typed letter draft, Mary Ritter Beard, "The Daily Bulletin," Nov. 24, 1944, Mary Ritter Beard Papers, Collection A-9, Box 2, Folder 30, Schlesinger.

<sup>159</sup> Nancy Cott notes that, in spite of her encouragement of women's archives, Mary Ritter Beard resisted making her own personal letters available to other historians. Incoming correspondence archived in other individuals' collections is thus crucial to understanding many aspects of Beard's life. Nancy F. Cott, Preface, in Nancy F. Cott, ed. *A Woman Making History: Mary Ritter Beard Through Her Letters* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), ix-x.

From *Gallant American Women* to *Wonder Woman*, popular narratives of women's history combined multiple, often competing, perspectives. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, writers and activists turned their focus from colonial historical mythology to the complexities of the more recent past. The agendas of living historical subjects introduced new criteria for the definition of women's history. Personal animosities and conventions of mass media genres often limited the efforts to celebrate women as transgressive historical actors. Nevertheless, the presentation of twentieth-century workers, consumers, and activists as valid historical subjects enhanced the claims for women's significance to public life. According to *Gallant American Women* and *Wonder Woman*, not only did the history of "Quaker Maids" and patriotic workers justify contemporary women's inclusion in politics, but these modern heirs to historical women were transforming the nation and its culture. As Rose Arnold Powell wrote to All-Star Comics editors, paying tribute to Susan B. Anthony through the "Wonder Women of History" project made them "co-workers in the unfinished business of the blessed pioneers of the woman movement."<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Rose Arnold Powell to M. C. Gaines, May 4, 1943, Box 2, Folder 18, Rose Arnold Powell Papers, Schlesinger.



Figure 4: "Wonder Women of History": Susan B. Anthony, *Wonder Woman* (June-July 1943).



## Chapter 5

### Betsy Ross Red: 1940s Products and Definitions of Women's Work

During the 1940s, household and beauty products increasingly conflated the history of American enterprise, and of individual businesses, with the history of the nation itself. Marketing campaigns portrayed corporate labor as a patriotic tradition, placing nineteenth-century waitresses, office workers, and saleswomen alongside Martha Washington and Betsy Ross. Time-saving cooking tools and cosmetics invoked archetypes of domestic tradition while celebrating modern technology as an aid to women's expanding public roles, including consumption, patriotic volunteerism, and paid employment. The ubiquity of historical elements in products and packages reinforced the sales pitches found in print or radio. Simultaneously, corporations' insistence on business as a throughline in women's history shaped popular fiction, as well as employment practice.

National brands situated mass-produced objects as testaments to American historical tradition, emphasizing women's sentimental and professional connections to these objects. The cosmetics manufacturer Avon Products, Inc. involved its customers and female sales force in collecting artifacts for a corporate museum. The typewriter manufacturer Remington Rand publicized its current models through collaboration with Twentieth Century-Fox on *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*, a musical film about the 1873 introduction of typing machines and female "typewriters" to American offices. Such campaigns claimed consumption as women's historical legacy, celebrating the roles of corporate products in enabling both women's domestic and public work. In their acknowledgment of women's roles in business, 1940s advertisements, popular

entertainments, and corporate communications paralleled the activist claims of women's advertising societies. Nevertheless, narrations of women's history through consumer products typically assumed that feminine beauty and family nurturance remained constant goals. The sentimentalized histories that corporations applied to simple everyday objects played powerful roles in gendering popular definitions of labor.

Commercial invocations of the past during World War II and the postwar era manipulated tropes well-established in the first decades of the twentieth century. Product promotion during the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s emphasized domestic labor as the link between American women past and present, providing the rationale for hanging a Martha Washington portrait in a home filled with modern mass-produced products. Such sentimentalization of the past ignored the value of particular artifacts for recording unique moments in history. During World War II, government propaganda, corporate advertisements, and popular entertainment increasingly celebrated women's public activities as timely contributions that echoed the sacrifice of mythic colonial women. Radio and magazines, for instance, presented women's industrial employment, military service, and domestic rationing as essential responses to the current war and as echoes of their earlier sacrifices on behalf of the nation. While an emphasis on home front patriotism acknowledged the power of events to alter women's activities, corporate advertisers nonetheless highlighted familiar ideals of domesticity and feminine beauty. Wartime advertisements for fashion and beauty products romanticized women's public visibility by depicting their physical attractiveness as inspiration for male patriotism, and by identifying historical precedents for current developments. A beautiful, cosmetically-enhanced appearance ostensibly linked Rosie the Riveter with the ladies who inspired

Revolutionary War heroes. Further emphasizing continuity in women's roles, corporations cited their own histories and cast loyal brand consumption as an intergenerational legacy.

Such simplifications of the past diverged from scholarly work that analyzed social shifts in women's roles. During the 1930s and 1940s, women historians continued to emphasize the value of objects and artifacts to narrate the nation's history. While their approaches often diverged from the sentimentality of advertisements, they nevertheless received significant exposure. Historical preservation initiatives served as outlets for female professionals and clubwomen. Scholars sought to legitimize the study of women's history and heighten women historians' professional status through the development of such institutions as the World Center for Women's Archives. In promoting her vision for this archive as a scholarly record, Mary Ritter Beard initially differentiated the archive from a museum, emphasizing the power of written documents to lend legitimacy to women's history. However, the difficulty of representing all segments of the population with such documents eventually drove Beard to collect objects and visual texts to record the breadth of American women's histories.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast with the use of objects to develop serious analyses, consumer products typically obscured the historical contexts behind the styles they adopted. Historically-themed icons, including the Quaker Maid characters employed to brand A&P products and the Salem China Co.'s "Quaker China" dinnerware, were often developed no further than the product name and the image of a young woman in a bonnet.<sup>2</sup> Although the A&P supermarket chain developed *Woman's Day* magazine to promote its brands, the

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<sup>1</sup> Des Jardins, 233.

<sup>2</sup> Quaker Girl logotypes, 1943, Salem China Company Collection, Series 5, Box 18, Folder 1, Archives Center, NMAH.

publication's 1940s advertisements never elaborated on the "Quaker Maid" figure behind its line of canned products.<sup>3</sup> Such references to the past in the names and packaging of products served as shorthand, providing everyday reinforcement of the explicit gender histories that circulated through multiple media. Simultaneously, these abstractions of the past left consumers free to recall more venturesome concepts of women's roles in history. A twentieth-century female consumer exposed to "colonial" recipes or product packaging, for example, might recall the work of Lucy Maynard Salmon or Mary Ritter Beard, or of the Quaker Maid adapted by the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women.

Across the first half of the twentieth century, historical references pervaded the everyday commodities designed for women's homes and bodies. Mass-produced home décor had long incorporated history as an aesthetic element. In the early twentieth century, historical labels differentiated such abstract products as wall paint shades. Several companies included the popular shade "Colonial Yellow" in their house and wall paint product lines, with variations including "Colonial Ivory" and "Light Colonial Yellow." "Quaker Gray" and "Quaker Drab" shades were also widely advertised.<sup>4</sup> Introduced in sample pamphlets through paint swatches rather than historically-themed illustrations, these names co-opted the popular Colonial Revival. While "Quaker" and

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<sup>3</sup> *Woman's Day* first appeared in 1937 and was sold exclusively in A&P stores. Avis H. Anderson, *A&P: The Story of the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2002) 35, 89.

<sup>4</sup> Devoe House Paint brochure (featuring Colonial Yellow), n.d., Warshaw Collection, Paints, Box 151, Folder 2; F. W. Devoe Company Lead & Zinc Paint brochure (featuring Colonial Yellow), n.d., Warshaw Collection, Paints, Box 151, Folder 2; B.P.S. Patco paint chart mailing card (featuring "Quaker Gray" as an "original shade," 1919, Warshaw Collection, Paints, Box 151, Folder 3; Wadsworth Howland & Co., Inc. Bay State Paint chart (featuring Colonial Ivory), n.d., Warshaw Collection, Paints, Box 151, Folder 3; Gillespie's First Quality House Paint brochure (featuring Colonial Yellow), n.d., Warshaw Collection, Paints, Box 44, Folder 3; Sherwin Williams Housepaint brochure, 1927 (featuring "Quaker Drab" and "Colonial Yellow" shades, Warshaw Collection, Paints, Box 44, Folder 4; Wetherill's Atlas Ready-Mixed Paint brochure (featuring "Light Colonial Yellow"), n.d., Warshaw Collection, Paints, Box 44, Folder 4. Archives Center, NMAH. These paint promotions sometimes featured historically-themed logos that touted corporate longevity, or that depicted male colonial era settlers or Native Americans. However, they did not incorporate women's histories into this iconography.

“Colonial” décor trends spanned many products of the 1910s and the 1920s, by the 1940s manufacturers increasingly designed products and promotional campaigns that employed brand-specific historical themes to symbolize unique corporate identities.

During World War II, product names, packaging, and advertisements situated brands as necessary tools for women striving to honor familial tradition while working outside of the home. In 1942 and 1943, a series of Avon cosmetics ads cited U.S. history as the inspiration for contemporary patriotic fashion aesthetics. According to these ads, contemporary consumer product design embodied women’s social significance. A February 1943 installment that appeared in *McCall’s*, *Woman’s Home Companion*, and *Ladies’ Home Journal* attributed Avon products with “the Spirit of Early America” because they enabled women’s wartime work. The ad’s text likened a versatile tweed skirt suit, not part of the company’s own product line, to the convenient Avon cosmetics peddled by door-to-door sales representatives.<sup>5</sup> Mass-produced fashion, as embodied by the service of Avon, allowed “today’s war-minded women” to contribute on the home front, just like “our courageous ancestors who helped make America great” and whose “spirit still lives in the heart of every gallant American woman.”<sup>6</sup> The asserted link between past and present established contemporary women’s public and private labor as compatible with previous eras’ norms.

Similarly, a June 1942 Avon advertisement in *McCall’s* and *Woman’s Home Companion* constructed the company’s modern products as vehicles through which contemporary women could emulate timeless American ideals. The ad promoted Avon’s

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<sup>5</sup> Avon recorded a national sales staff of 35,000 in 1940 and 26,000 in the wartime economy of 1944. Katina Lee Manko, “‘Ding Dong! Avon Calling!’: Gender, Business, and Door-to-Door Selling, 1890-1955” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Delaware, 2001), 257.

<sup>6</sup> Monroe F. Dreher, Inc., advertising proof, “In the Spirit of Early America,” Avon Products, Inc., Records, Record Group I, Series 7A, Box OS-15B, Hagley.

exclusive “Paul Revere Red” as the latest fashionable shade for lipstick, rouge, and nail polish which “gives new patriotic vigor to your fingertips.” The cosmetics were paired with high fashion designer Omar Kiam’s “white sheer organdy evening gown highlighted with embroidery and sequins,” also “inspired” by Paul Revere’s ride.<sup>7</sup> Notably, this cosmetics shade and evening gown held no factual link to history beyond the claim of inspiration from an iconic event and the ad’s background illustration of Paul Revere. The advertisement series emphasized the aesthetic appeal of the clothing and models photographed in the ads rather than providing concrete facts about early America. However, by referencing history in multiple advertisements, products, and sales tools, Avon integrated the idealized colonial past into the brand’s identity in a way that the inclusion of “Colonial Yellow” in paint menus of the 1910s and 1920s had not.

While Avon cited historical inspiration and the company’s past success as proof of the brand’s quality, this sales appeal competed with many other popular sentimentalizations of the past. During the 1940s, promotions often associated the latest beauty products with tradition to assert that women could remain feminine while supporting the war effort and moving into positions typically held by men. These sales pitches contained contemporary shifts in women’s labor by claiming continuity with a narrative of American women’s earlier efforts to balance domestic and patriotic roles. Femininity and domesticity ostensibly spanned all eras of U.S. history; similarly, women’s subordinate status remained constant in spite of new employment opportunities available during wartime. As historian Kathy Peiss notes, 1943 and 1944 campaigns for Tangee brand lipstick targeted women workers as a consumer market by identifying

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<sup>7</sup> Monroe F. Dreher, Inc., advertising proof, “Old New England Inspires an Enchanting Gown by Omar Kiam, Paul Revere Red by Avon,” Avon Records, RG I, Series 7A, Box OS-16, Hagley.

feminine beauty as a historical source of inspiration: “Picturing the Venus de Milo with the Statue of Liberty, Tangee equated the protection of freedom and democracy with the protection of beauty.”<sup>8</sup> Cosmetics sales appeals echoed the rhetoric of employers, government agencies, and medical professionals who urged working women to take pride in their femininity, and of female consumers surveyed by the War Production Board who identified lipstick as a necessary item that should not be rationed.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, marketers’ historical claims did not go unquestioned. Noting the new centrality of patriotic defense to “nine-tenths” of wartime advertising campaigns, Long Island, New York, writer Dorothy Atkinson Robinson quipped, “The five and ten is pushing Courage lipstick -- too bad Molly Pitcher didn't have the advantage of it.”<sup>10</sup> Mocking the cosmetics industry’s strategic invocation of history to promote lipstick as a wartime defense tool, Robinson emphasized that the iconic Molly Pitcher made heroic contributions without the benefit of modern products.

While challenging the logic of aggressive patriotic sales pitches, Robinson’s diary, published in 1943 under the pseudonym Dorothy Blake, nevertheless celebrated Revolutionary-era women’s history. Although she was a women’s magazine contributor and daughter of a successful writer, Robinson cast her criticism from the perspective of the average consumer. The daughter of Eleanor Stackhouse Atkinson, a successful journalist, novelist, and children’s author who wrote under the pen name Nora Marks, “Dorothy Blake” had previously authored the 1936 William Morrow & Co. publication

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<sup>8</sup> Peiss, 239-40.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 240-45.

<sup>10</sup> Diary of Dorothy Atkinson Robinson, January 19, 1942, in *It's All in the Family: A Diary of an American Housewife*, Dec. 7, 1941-Dec. 1, 1942. New York, NY: William Morrow & Co., 1943, p. 279. North American Women’s Letters and Diaries Database, Alexander St. Press.

*Diary of a Suburban Housewife*, and she contributed to mass market magazines.<sup>11</sup>

Through her published diaries, Robinson provided an alternative analysis of the mass culture to which she contributed as a freelance writer.<sup>12</sup>

Robinson's sarcastic description of "Courage lipstick" implied that women had played historic roles even without the benefit of patriotic beauty products. Nevertheless, her conviction that women's domesticity supported the war effort echoed the narratives familiar to radio listeners and magazine readers, narratives that defined women's traditional roles as uniquely influential during wartime. Describing her pride in a friend's voluntary salvage drive efforts, she remarked, "Lottie Gibson stopped in for five split seconds this morning, and I finally persuaded her that a cup of coffee and my own special cinnamon buns with the raspberry jam in their middles were just what she needed to keep up her morale for National Defense."<sup>13</sup> Aware that advertisers "on the printed page" as well as on radio manipulated the concept of National Defense for corporate goals, Robinson still identified with the idea that women past and present could offer unique contributions in wartime by performing their domestic roles patriotically.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Francis L. Lederer II, "Nora Marks—Reinvestigated," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, Vol. 73, No. 1 (Spring 1980), 61-64. Illinois Historical State Digitization Projects, Northern Illinois University, <<http://dig.lib.niu.edu/ISHS/ishs-1980spring/ishs-1980spring.html>> Accessed Aug. 2009. John William Leonard, ed., "Eleanor Atkinson," *Woman's Who's Who of America* (New York: The American Commonwealth Company, 1914). Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, eds., "Eleanor Atkinson," *Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature* (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1942). Dorothy Atkinson Robinson, *Diary of a Suburban Housewife* (New York: W. Morrow & Co., 1936).

<sup>12</sup> Articles under the name Dorothy Blake appeared in *Woman's Home Companion*, *Parents' Magazine*, and *The PTA Magazine* during the late 1930s.

<sup>13</sup> Diary of Dorothy Atkinson Robinson, January 19, 1942, in *It's All in the Family: A Diary of an American Housewife*, North American Women's Letters and Diaries Database.

<sup>14</sup> Advertisers' and salesmen's deception of women received attention throughout Robinson's diary. She expressed her pride in refusing a door-to-door salesman who offered "the latest thing in rackets...a specialized service to prepare all types of heating equipment against air raids." Diary of Dorothy Atkinson Robinson, January 7, 1942, in *It's All in the Family: A Diary of an American Housewife*, North American Women's Letters and Diaries Database.



Invocations of the past to promote household products also highlighted women's domestic work as integral to democracy. Advertisements and consumer products often invoked the past to assure that women would remain devoted to home, in spite of the labor-saving potential of new household products and the wartime increase in women's wage labor. Food product marketing dramatized the continuity in women's lives by asserting the inter-generational power of domestic traditions. Corporations had long promoted mass-produced brands by proclaiming approval of "mothers" and "grandmothers."<sup>15</sup> This strategy flourished during World War II, as food corporations portrayed packaged mixes as compatible with the high culinary standards observed by earlier generations of women. A 1944 General Foods Corporation cookbook promoted Jell-O by explaining that the brand's mixes produce "Puddings like grandma's—only more so," since they incorporated modern health standards and compensated for wartime sugar rationing.<sup>16</sup> The book, published by the General Foods Consumer Service Department, speculated that "Great-grandma would have loved Jell-O Puddings. And her eyes would pop to see how easy they are to make—compared to the old-fashioned kind she knew." General Foods touted the modern "Jell-O plant and laboratory" for replicating "grandmother's long preparation of calves' foot jelly" with modern hygienic standards. In such promotions, corporations highlighted intergenerational continuity, even as they brought technological progress to consumers' homes.

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<sup>15</sup> In the early twentieth century, many mass-produced brands featured anonymous maternal figures. Packaging for "Mother's Brand" featured a woman in colonial-style cap. Package label proof, Oct. 20, 1915, Warshaw Collection, Food Box 22, Misc. Labels F-K, Archives Center, NMAH. A & P supermarkets produced a line of "Grandmother's Bread." Undated package, Warshaw Collection, Bakers and Baking, Box OS 82, Folder 1.

<sup>16</sup> "Dessert Magic" (New York: General Foods Corporation, 1944) 26. Archives Center Cookbooks Collection, Box 1, Folder 27, Archives Center, NMAH.

During World War II, the history of the American frontier often exemplified this domestic legacy. Corporate publicity identified nineteenth-century westward migration as a precedent for contemporary women's vigilant maintenance of domestic traditions under disruptive conditions. Selection of brand products became an expression of patriotic devotion to family and country.<sup>17</sup> A 1944 recipe book celebrating the Pillsbury Flour Mills Company's seventy-fifth anniversary, free to consumers with a magazine advertisement's mail-in coupon, likened the brand's nineteenth-century origins to the pioneering of America's western frontiers.<sup>18</sup> Applauding women's "courage" while "fighting off Indians" and harsh climates on the overland trail, the Pillsbury Company identified "the job of keeping the family fed" as American women's most persistently difficult task. Tracing the nation's and the company's growth through the experiences of "your pioneer grandmother and mine," *Pillsbury's Diamond Anniversary Recipes* foregrounded continuity and domestic heritage as the markers of women's history.<sup>19</sup>

Anecdotes of a pioneer woman's progression through history to grandmotherhood introduce each category of the book's recipes. Illustrations of a nineteenth-century family show a woman in modest brown dress, cradling an infant obscured by a colorful wrapped blanket. Behind her stands a man, hands on hips, as they both look into a nighttime sky, "stalwart pioneers," who "transform[ed] a vast wilderness into a great United States."<sup>20</sup> His greater height and pose, filling space with a wide stance, symbolizes the role of family protector, while the woman holds direct responsibility for

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<sup>17</sup> Corporate invocation of colonial legacies, to promote such brands as Chef Boy-Ar-Dee and Campbell's, also flourished in patriotic advertisements of the 1940s. Jane J. Parkin, *Food Is Love: Food Advertising and Gender Roles in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 93-7.

<sup>18</sup> Advertisement, *Northwest Life* (December 1944), 14. Advertisement, *Woman's Day* (September 1944) 20.

<sup>19</sup> *Pillsbury's Diamond Anniversary Recipes* (Minneapolis: Pillsbury Flour Mills Company, 1944. Minnesota Historical Society.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

their child.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, Pillsbury emphasized that the frontier placed new demands on women's familial responsibilities. The legend accompanying "Pillsbury's 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Cake" dramatizes Grandmother's endurance after "Indians swooped down and destroyed the whole village," as she "dragged her little iron stove from the smoldering ashes, set it up on its feet and fed it wood from the wreckage of her home." An illustration shows her using a cannonball to grind wheat. The recipe book's history of World War I celebrates the work of "farmers and millers...to keep the world supplied with bread," along with

Grandmother, already a veteran of another war...up at five to feed the family, off to the Fire Hall to make surgical dressings, dropping a letter to Jimmy—fighting in France—on the way. But her biggest job, these crowded days, is to help the younger women make use of the foods allowed them and get the most out of them. And nobody can sing 'Over There' with more gusto than Grandma!<sup>22</sup>

In Pillsbury's narrative of U.S. history, women's patriotism provided consistent support during war and peace, while technological innovation drove the national progress that Grandmother had long envisioned.

Placing the company itself in this story, the recipe book describes Western pioneers' delight at the establishment of Pillsbury mills. The narrative culminates with contemporary women's appreciation of Pillsbury products, as Grandmother trusts the Pillsbury Company's scientific experts with her family's health:

Grandmother is a little old lady now, and as she sits enjoying her afternoon coffee and sandwiches she remembers her little iron stove and the tiny hand mill. Seeing

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<sup>21</sup> Erving Goffman, *Gender Advertisements* (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1979), 28, 32, 39, 40, 57, 65. The male and female figures look together into the distance, but his authoritative body language suggests that he would be first to react to an event or threat. Although the disruptive conditions of the trail make them partners in travel, his positioning reflects the executive "helmsman" role. Michael L. Smith, "Selling the Moon: the U.S. Manned Space Program and the Triumph of Commodity Scientism" in Richard Wighman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears, eds. *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 184-85.

<sup>22</sup> Introduction to "Cookies" section. *Pillsbury's Diamond Anniversary Recipes*.

her bag of flour in the cupboard, with its familiar “XXXX” on the label—and now with the new word “enriched”—she thinks, “What a long way we pioneers have come together—and what an exciting future lies ahead.”<sup>23</sup>

The recipe book’s concluding section attributes pioneer families’ reliance on wheat to its availability and women’s “natural good sense.” Not until her exposure to data produced by the twentieth-century corporation did Grandmother understand its nutritional value. Yet, Pillsbury concludes, “Back in her pioneering days, when Grandmother was a young homemaker, how her eyes would have sparkled at the sight of Pillsbury’s boxed pancake flour, cake flour, corn meal, and vitamin-enriched flour.” Pillsbury’s narrative thus celebrated its products’ quality as evidence of American women’s natural good judgment.

Such promotions asserted that new technologies supported traditional values and that corporate brands had long shaped women’s work. However, the mid-1940s dry goods trade was undergoing marked changes. A. C. Nielsen Company statistics cited a 230 percent increase in sales of prepared baking mixes between 1942 and 1946.<sup>24</sup> A market research report produced by *McCall’s Magazine* argued that wartime rationing and women’s employment made female consumers more amenable to the type of mixes that had been marketed nationally since the 1920s. They were now able “to attract housewives who disliked the effort of baking cakes at home, but who did not care for ordinary cheap ‘store cakes’ or couldn’t afford specialty ready-baked cakes.”<sup>25</sup> Ad campaigns citing World War II time and ingredient shortages had broadened the market for prepared mixes by recasting them as a patriotic, prudent, and frugal choice.

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<sup>23</sup> Pillsbury’s *Diamond Anniversary Recipes*. Pillsbury’s trademark included the notation “XXXX.”

<sup>24</sup> Research Department, *McCall’s Magazine*, “Consumer Market for Baking Mixes,” p. 2. Box 3, Folder 17, Charlotte Cramer Sachs Papers, Archives Center, NMAH. Gift of Lilian Randall.

<sup>25</sup> Research Department, *McCall’s Magazine*, “Consumer Market for Baking Mixes,” p. 1, Box 3, Folder 17, Charlotte Cramer Sachs Papers, Archives Center, NMAH.

Both advertisers and consumers acknowledged that packaged mixes departed from tradition by altering women's labor and by eliminating some tasks. The inventor Charlotte Cramer Sachs referred specifically to women's paid labor when promoting her new 1942 "Joy" line of cake and muffin mixes, linking the need for time saving products to the wartime need for labor. Nevertheless, women could still continue a national tradition of domesticity: "There's nothing quite comparable to JOY MIXES in possessing THAT HOME-MADE TASTE and FLAVOR—just 'LIKE THE KIND that MOTHER BAKED'!"<sup>26</sup> Such language assured that the comforting rituals of domesticity would persist in spite of broader social changes that pulled increasing numbers of women outside the home. Simultaneously, Cramer Products Co.'s "Early American" muffin mix packages emphasized the key ingredient of "Early American Flour."<sup>27</sup> In a sales pitch to store owners, the use of colonial-era milling technology became a link to "nature," offsetting the artificiality of "fully prepared flours [that] save the housewife the worry of gathering all the different ingredients such as flour, sugar, milk, eggs and others."<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Cramer Products Co. claimed colonial legacies in Joy mixes' grain "milled by the old STONE GRINDING method in a century old mill, operated by water power as by our forefathers, so as to preserve and retain all the essential VITAMINS as nature gave them to us for our well being."<sup>29</sup> Like Pillsbury, Cramer promoted new technologies that eased women's domestic work by emphasizing the continuity between the careful selection of modern products and the care women's ancestors devoted to nurturing their families.

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<sup>26</sup> Cramer Products Co., "These New Joy Cake and Muffin Mixes are Hot Sellers," 1942, Box 3, Folder 17, Charlotte Cramer Sachs Papers, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Undated letter to store owners, Cramer Products Company to "Dear Sir," Box 3, Folder 15, Charlotte Cramer Sachs Papers, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

In its 1940s campaigns, Cramer Products explained that corporate research enabled mixes to “save time and work for the homemaker or business woman.”<sup>30</sup> One headline promised “OUR WORK, YOUR FAMILY’S DELIGHT,” and these products did attract consumers interested in reducing food preparation time and in pleasing family members. Consumer respondents in a 1947 Joy Prepared Mixes survey emphasized these concerns. One woman remarked, “The Joy cake mix is a wonderful time-saver,” while another confided, “My family enjoyed your prepared cake better than my own home made.”<sup>31</sup> Although Cramer promised “the best type of HOME MADE muffins or cake, which will assure the praise of all who taste them,” customers repeatedly differentiated between home made batter and packaged mixes.<sup>32</sup> Lucille Altman, another survey participant, wrote, “I always have to co[a]x my husband and two children to eat my cake, this they finished, the same day.”<sup>33</sup> Another consumer explained that the cake mix she tested produced a good cake quickly and would be useful “[e]specially for busy people.” Although she planned to keep a packaged mix on her shelf in case of emergency, this consumer remarked, “I am still old-fashioned enough to like to mix my own however.”<sup>34</sup> In such cases, brand consumption diminished women’s identification with productive labor. According to Cramer Products, Co., even if wartime women used a pre-made mix to bake muffins after their shift on the assembly line, their discerning consumer selection

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<sup>30</sup> Undated copy, “OUR WORK, YOUR FAMILY’S DELIGHT,” Box 3, Folder 14, Charlotte Cramer Sachs Papers, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>31</sup> Amy S. Babilot, response to August 28, 1947, form, Angelina Amiano, response to August 28, 1947 form, Box 3, Folder 17, Charlotte Cramer Sachs Papers, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>32</sup> Undated letter to store owners, Cramer Products Company to “Dear Sir,” Box 3, Folder 15. Charlotte Cramer Sachs Papers, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>33</sup> Lucille Altman response to August 28, 1947, form, Box 3, Folder 17, Charlotte Cramer Sachs Papers, Archives Center, NMAH. Other respondents emphasized the convenience of prepared mixes for working women and for households on budgets.

<sup>34</sup> Edna P. Farrington response to August 28, 1947, form. Box 3, Folder 17, Charlotte Cramer Sachs Papers, Archives Center, NMAH.

of “Early American” Flour lived up to previous generations’ work. By contrast, consumers’ differentiation of mixes from “home” baking focused on the changes in technology and in women’s work.

In the postwar era, national brands sought to sustain wartime developments. They encouraged women to take personal pride in cooking aided by modern labor-altering products. Packages, promotional events, and publications cast mass-produced brands as aids to creativity and as links to domestic tradition. In 1949, Pillsbury Baking Company held its first annual Bake-Off, a national contest that became a powerful promotional tool for Pillsbury Flour. Winning recipes appeared in Pillsbury cookbooks emphasizing the ease of baking with the company’s high-quality ingredients. Descriptions of the recipes, accompanied by photographs using classic, stately silver serving dishes to display the food items, made references to idealized American traditions. The prize-winning Mount Vernon Dessert recipe (1949) recalled “Grandmother’s old-fashioned upside-down cake turned modern!” while Mrs. Mason Parker’s “Log Cabin Chicken Pie” was a family heirloom recipe reportedly served to Abraham Lincoln.<sup>35</sup> Such references to the past limited women’s sphere of influence to the domestic, but nevertheless emphasized the importance of women’s domestic function during the Cold War. At Pillsbury’s inaugural baking competition, Eleanor Roosevelt praised baking as an American tradition that strengthened families and the nation. At the second annual Bake-Off awards ceremony, company President Phillip Pillsbury proclaimed the importance of the event as “war clouds [were] gathering” in Korea, citing the General Electric President’s assessment that, “....At this time of tense [sic] and trouble in this world, it was important to have

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<sup>35</sup> *100 Prize-Winning Recipes* (Minneapolis: Pillsbury Mills, Inc., 1950), 48-49, 61, Pillsbury Bake-Off Collection, 1949-1999, Series 2, Box 1, Folder 4, Archives Center, NMAH.

something natural.”<sup>36</sup> Such emphasis on women’s domestic roles as “natural” proposed continuity as the model across time, even if the *way* American women supported democracy through domesticity changed.

In contrast with promotional materials that subsumed technological innovation into the larger model of continuity in women’s devotion to home, invocations of the past used to characterize women’s professional careers more frequently emphasized the possibility for change. Popular culture of the 1940s placed new emphasis on material objects as markers of progress in women’s public, non-domestic labor. The May 1944 issue of *Woman’s Day* featured an article by the anthropologist Margaret Mead, asking “Will Women Be Able to Choose?: After the war will women themselves decide where they belong—at home or in industry.”<sup>37</sup> Concluding that the postwar economy would provide enough employment opportunities for all who chose to work, Mead argued that social definitions of femininity were the only barrier to women’s careers. Some like to “darn socks,” and some like to “tend machines,” she argued, as the article’s photographs asserted a visual parallel between a woman on an assembly line and a woman canning food at home. The ability to choose between these two forms of production, including the option of hiring someone to cook for one’s own family, would best serve society as a whole. To encourage this shift in gendered definitions of labor, Mead traced previous historical shifts in gender ideals, from the initial entry of women into the public sphere to their legally won right to vote.

In 1942, Dorothy Dignam, well-established as a successful N. W. Ayer advertising agency copywriter, analyzed the ramifications of the current war for women’s

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<sup>36</sup> Video recording, Pillsbury Bake-Off television broadcast, Dec. 11, 1950, Pillsbury Bake-Off Collection, Series 4, Box 6, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>37</sup> Margaret Mead, “Will Women Be Able to Choose?” *Woman’s Day* (May 1944), 20-21, 66-69.



careers by narrating the historical shifts in women's work from World War I through the present. Dignam lectured on this history to the Advertising Women of New York, contributing a companion article to the influential advertising trade publication *Printers' Ink*. She emphasized historical change in women's roles, arguing that "The last war brought a great shift in jobs for women, and history is beginning to repeat itself."<sup>38</sup> She noted, for instance, that women used earnings from World War I jobs to buy beauty products that would improve national morale and personal romance, leading advertising agencies to hire women to work on cosmetics accounts. Inspired by this history, Dignam's *Printers' Ink* article offered advice for women hoping to extend their careers beyond the current conflict; alert women could cultivate insights about packaging and design from assembly line work, and women should select wartime positions with their own postwar career plans in mind. By analyzing the past to develop strategies for women's professional advancement, Dignam acknowledged that changing social ideals could provide new opportunities for women.

Nevertheless, the editors' assessment of Dignam's own history revealed that professional women still faced gendered expectations. Photographs of Dignam in 1918 and in 1942 were used to represent the "Advertising Woman of 1918" and the "Advertising Woman of 1942." The editorial captions presented Dignam's 1918 slight smile as evidence that she was "not too self-assured." In 1942, by contrast, she exhibited "considerably more confidence in her bearing" and yet retained "her long hair still parted on the forehead." Dignam's own comments playfully stressed the feminine vanity that coexisted with her professional expertise, remarking: "I am glad to turn the calendar to

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<sup>38</sup> Dorothy Dignam, "More Women in Advertising Now than in World War I: a look backward and ahead through women's eyes," *Printers' Ink* (May 29, 1942), 16-17, 38. Dorothy Dignam Papers, Box 3, Folder 18, Schlesinger.

the wall—so you won't just sit there and check up on my age—and recall some of the history of women in advertising between the two wars.” Such reassurances that pleasing manners and feminine appearance were compatible with women's public and professional labor echoed the ubiquitous promotions of lipstick as the woman worker's tool during World War II.<sup>39</sup>

Depictions of American women's progress in business emphasized their continued interest in fashion and beauty, denying fears that they might become unfeminine. Although trend cycles and product shortages produced variations in fashion across time, cultural images stressed patriotic continuity in women's beauty. The July 1944 issue of *Mademoiselle*, a popular magazine targeted toward college-educated single women during their early years of employment, featured an article lauding women's contributions to the American Revolution, from fund-raising to the use of home-made cosmetics to boost soldiers' morale. Although many of these examples reinforced dominant ideals of feminine domesticity and beauty, the article also criticized history textbooks for denying women's significance. Encouraging a reassessment of “dusty diaries and faded copies” of newspapers and journals, the article championed a historical narrative that acknowledged women beyond “a few stray females like Betsy Ross and Martha Washington.”<sup>40</sup> Like the *Printers' Ink* presentation of Dorothy Dignam's advertising history, *Mademoiselle's* treatment of the past challenged conventional assumptions about women's contributions while nevertheless assuming a feminine physical ideal.

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<sup>39</sup> Simultaneously, Dignam's coy remark about age reflects the advertising industry's association of youth with professional innovation. The ramifications of aging for advertising men's careers had long been analyzed in the pages of *Printers' Ink*. Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 168-69.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Erdoes, “The American Woman—As an Ancestor” *Mademoiselle* (July 1944), 72-3, 116, 117.

Such association of historical significance with feminine beauty shaped the marketing and personnel management strategies of Avon Products, Incorporated, which provided unique opportunities for its exclusively female sales staff. During the 1930s and 1940s, Avon adapted its business strategies and rhetoric to the contemporary challenges of the Great Depression and World War II. Simultaneously, national advertisements and publications for employees emphasized the timelessness in women's quest for beauty, both as consumers and as sales representatives. Avon Products evolved from the California Perfume Company, a company which began selling toiletries and household products door-to-door in 1886. In 1929, the "Avon" line of products first appeared, and within a decade the company officially adopted the Avon name (inspired by Stratford-upon-Avon, England) and placed new emphasis on the sale of color cosmetics across the United States by its sales representatives.<sup>41</sup> During the Great Depression, California Perfume Company and Avon sales remained profitable, allowing the company to undertake a mid-1930s expansion in urban markets. Simultaneously, internal publications shifted their construction of the female employee's role to correspond with the demands of the time. As Katina Lee Manko explains in her history of Avon's business strategies, Depression-era sales literature emphasized the American consumer's and the Avon saleswoman's roles in alleviating the nation's economic difficulties.<sup>42</sup> Avon had initiated national magazine advertising in the late 1930s to raise awareness of their products in urban markets, where representatives could not rely simply on social connections with customers to drive sales.<sup>43</sup> During the 1940s, the characterization of the door-to-door Avon saleswoman as a player in national events

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<sup>41</sup> Manko, xii-xiii, 192, 213-14.

<sup>42</sup> Manko, 176.

<sup>43</sup> Manko, 176.

expanded. The advertisements promoting products as distillations of patriotism and the “Spirit of Early America” placed consumers and employees as participants in American progress.

Announcing its “American Heroines” national magazine advertising campaign in March 1943, Avon celebrated sales representatives’ importance to wartime morale by praising contemporary military women and female historical figures who made heroic contributions while maintaining their feminine beauty.<sup>44</sup> The American Heroines series ran through 1946 in prominent women’s magazines including *Good Housekeeping*, *Vogue*, *McCall’s*, and *Ladies’ Home Journal*; each advertisement celebrated a female historical figure whose sacrifices to family and to democracy paralleled the contributions of the idealized contemporary woman to America’s efforts in World War II.<sup>45</sup>

Dramatizing this connection between past and present, each ad’s unique color illustration depicted a woman in contemporary military or fashionable attire standing in front of an historical portrait. An abstract scalloped design provided a “picture frame” for the historical portraits and provided visual continuity across advertisements. The advertisements’ texts narrated the historical contributions of female historical figures, often emphasizing famous wives and mothers (Martha Washington, Dolly Madison, Nancy Hanks Lincoln) or women who made iconic contributions to patriotism (Betsy Ross’s creation of the American flag and Julia Ward Howe’s authorship of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic”). The Avon campaign also saluted contemporary contributions to the military by celebrating women who participated in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century military conflicts. The narrative of Molly Pitcher stressed the wifely devotion which led

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<sup>44</sup> *Avon Outlook* (Feb. 22-March 13, 1943), p. 18, Avon Records, RG I, Series 6C, Box 32, Hagley.

<sup>45</sup> “American Heroines” advertisements, Avon Records, RG I, Series 7, Box OS-16, Hagley.

her to the Revolutionary battlefield. The celebration of Lucy Brewer's bravery in dressing as a man to serve with Marines during the War of 1812 connected past and present by invoking "The Marines' Hymn": "She Brought Loveliness to the Halls of Montezuma."<sup>46</sup> The hymn's familiar opening lyric, a reference to the 1846-1848 war with Mexico, would resonate with consumers because of the song's current popularity as a 1942 Gene Krupa recording, but it did not apply to the Avon ad's 1812 setting.<sup>47</sup>

Each of the "American Heroines" advertisements likened these historical women's active contributions to the work of contemporary women in the military services, wartime production jobs, and Avon sales, which aided U.S. morale through the promotion of "loveliness." The ads thus emphasized the positive impact of Avon saleswomen on American society rather than promoting the company's products directly.<sup>48</sup> The Betsy Ross advertisement depicted a contemporary woman, busy knitting and gazing at a framed portrait of Betsy Ross at work on her flag. The text emphasized the power of objects like the flag as symbols for women's work across time:

It is fitting, indeed, that this Emblem made by a woman should rally a new generation of her countrywomen. The machines their deft fingers operate...the bandages they roll...the comforts, happiness and health they

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> John Bush Jones, *The Songs That Fought the War: Popular Music and the Home Front, 1939-1945* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2006), 162-63.

<sup>48</sup> Notably, many Avon products invoked the past in part through the products' physical appeal, particularly with packaging depicting a previous era's fashions; for example, gift sets often depicted ornately dressed colonial men and women engaged in courtship rituals. See "Gifts of Charm by Avon," Christmas catalogue 1945, Avon Records, RG I, Series 6B, Box 26, Hagley. However, the "American Heroines" ad series did not emphasize the company's explicitly nostalgic products, thus assigning material objects historical significance based on their symbolic value rather than their physical characteristics. Patriotic wartime advertisements for Simmons Beautyrest mattresses, by contrast, also lacked a direct sales pitch, but they nevertheless emphasized the quality of Simmons products. A series of ads presented photographs of sleeping women, explaining the crucial rest a Simmons Beautyrest mattress could provide. Because Simmons could not produce new Beautyrest mattresses until the end of the conflict, however, the ads could only urge consumers to look forward to the day when they would be available. Magazine Advertising Scrapbook, 1943-1946, Simmons Company Records, Series 2D1, Box 120, Archives Center, NMAH. Corporate advertising and public relations strategies during World War II celebrated individual sacrifice as a contribution to community and nation, see Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*, 312-63.

bring to their families...are creating a pattern of Victory for America as surely as the fingers of Betsy Ross created our Flag. All are America's modern heroines.<sup>49</sup>

Such descriptions cast the physical components of women's work, including tools used for grooming, as objects which inspired contemporary women to emulate the past.

Although an Avon lipstick tube would not appear in Betsy Ross's own home, Avon's promotional materials encouraged women to identify with such historical figures when applying "Betsy Ross Red" lipstick, which was introduced in 1941.<sup>50</sup>

Avon's "American Heroines" advertising campaign and the accompanying internal publications defined the individual saleswoman's role in her company and community. This approach extended the corporation's 1930s characterization of Avon as a company that nourished saleswomen so they could prosper through independent enterprise; female sales representatives worked independently to cover their local markets. Unlike corporate executives, sales staff's earnings were determined by sales rather than an hourly wage or salary.<sup>51</sup> This model endorsed a limited sphere of agency for the contemporary businesswoman. Women could make some decisions about when and where they would canvas, but the products, prices, and promotional themes were dictated by executives. There were minimal possibilities for women to advance in or to change the company. Avon celebrated women who contributed to the American Revolution or the current conflict by rallying morale or even by joining female military service ranks. Their patriotism paralleled sales representatives' devotion to the company line. The celebrated "American Heroines" were not women who centered their activism

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<sup>49</sup> Ellipses appear in the original. Advertisement, "Heroines of Yesterday and Today," 1943, Avon Records, RG I Series 7, Box OS-19A, Hagley.

<sup>50</sup> "Announcing Betsy Ross Red," *Avon Outlook* (April 29-May 14, 1941), Imprints Division, Hagley.

<sup>51</sup> Manko, 176, 207-8.

around the quest for women's rights or made distinct, independent innovations that transformed the course of history.

Avon's presentation of the anonymous saleswoman as the embodiment of female contributions across time contrasted with the corporation's elevation of individual "great men" in its own history. Sales campaigns often celebrated milestones in the lives of male executives.<sup>52</sup> Notably, like the corporate structure, in which upper management and executive personnel were exclusively male, Avon's constructions of the cosmetics industry's history placed women firmly in supportive roles.<sup>53</sup> This conception of the past ignored the independent female entrepreneurs who helped create the industry: as Kathy Peiss notes, female entrepreneurs forged prominent careers in cosmetics and direct sales. Madam C. J. Walker, an African-American woman, developed a prominent beauty product business in the early twentieth century; and Elizabeth Arden emerged from an impoverished background to become an executive and celebrity symbol for the beauty industry's glamour in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>54</sup> Avon's promotional materials, by contrast, emphasized the collective influence of women's everyday actions; even when highlighting individual figures, the "American Heroines" ads stressed these individuals' parallels with typical women, past and present. Post-World War II advertisements continued constructing Avon's past through the anonymous ranks of sales representatives; a 1947 advertisement illustrated a fashionable woman from 1886 making sales visits in the company's first year.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> See, for example, celebration of the company's "Founder" and of the anonymous 1886 saleswoman in Avon's sixty-first anniversary sales campaign, *Avon Outlook* (June 2-June 21, 1947), Imprints Division, Hagley.

<sup>53</sup> Manko, 241

<sup>54</sup> Peiss, 61-96.

<sup>55</sup> Advertising proof, "Since 1886 Service Through Friendly Calls," Jan. 1947, Avon Records, RG I, Series 7, Box OS-19A, Hagley.

This army of female sales representatives benefiting from the vision of male corporate leaders also pervaded popular entertainments of the 1940s.<sup>56</sup> Through collaborations between film studios and corporations, movies became advertising tools that reinforced campaigns circulating in other media. Historical musicals and comedies flourished, emphasizing women's domestic, romantic, and corporate experiences in a way that serious historical dramas did not.<sup>57</sup> When combined with corporate promotions, such films celebrated the compatibility of women's employment with traditional femininity. Reworking familiar tropes from serious dramatic films, such historical musicals as *The Harvey Girls* and *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* reconciled women's public roles with their family responsibilities, framing corporate employment as a safe route to romantic fulfillment.

Filmed during the first half of 1945 and released early in 1946, the profitable MGM musical *The Harvey Girls* emphasized the power of corporations to influence American society and to shape the historical record.<sup>58</sup> This portrayal of Fred Harvey Company waitresses as "civilizing forces" in 1890 Sandrock, New Mexico, opened with

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<sup>56</sup> Vaudeville acts, Broadway musicals, and films of the early twentieth century featured lines of uniform "chorus girls," their bodies regulated by male directors and choreographers. M. Alison Kibler, *Rank Ladies: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy in American Vaudeville* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 141-42.

<sup>57</sup> Indeed, historical themes were so integral to the Broadway and Hollywood musical that they came to define the genre. Often cited as a turning point in the development of musical theater, Rodgers and Hammerstein's 1943 musical *Oklahoma!* invoked a mythic Americana, while simultaneously calling to mind the economic difficulties faced by the West during the Great Depression, and offering patriotic encouragement for America's participation in World War II. The play provides a narrative of nation-building, set in Indian Territory at the turn of the twentieth century, Oklahoma Territory gained admission to the Union as a state. The plot offers a gendered model for its audiences by depicting women as integral to social organization, but only through their status as sweethearts or maternal figures. As domestic laborers and romantic partners, women facilitate community formation by influencing the alliance of the male "cowboy" and "farmer" factions. Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 122-4, 130-1. Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, II, *Oklahoma! A Musical Play* (London: Williamson Music Ltd., 1954).

<sup>58</sup> George Sidney DVD commentary, *The Harvey Girls*. Dir. George Sidney. Warner Home Video DVD, 2002.



printed text thanking the Fred Harvey Company for the information it provided during filming.<sup>59</sup> A lengthy legend superimposed on the screen celebrated the Harvey restaurant chain, still in operation at the time of the film's release, for making the innovations that enabled women to move West. Although the film's exposition first acknowledged the pioneering role of Fred Harvey and his company, it then applauded female employees for "conquer[ing] the West as surely as the Davy Crocketts and the Kit Carsons—not with powder horn and rifle, but with a beefsteak and a cup of coffee."<sup>60</sup> This narrative framework celebrated business for the opportunities it provided women to shape society and to bring material, domestic comforts to the frontier.

*The Harvey Girls* assumed that gender differences would prevail even on the frontier. Nevertheless, the film framed its celebration of women's work as a challenge to accepted criteria for historical significance. The final screen proclaimed: "To these unsung pioneers [the Harvey girls], whose successors today still carry on in the same tradition, we sincerely dedicate this motion picture." The formality of this dedication signaled the historical significance of women's work, past and present. Film scholar J. E. Smyth has argued that Hollywood produced a cycle of dramatic, historically-themed films between 1931 and 1942, deploying superimposed text to establish the screen as a legitimate medium for recording history. According to Smyth, these projects simultaneously legitimized studios as American institutions, celebrated dominant cultural norms of patriotism and individual achievement, and challenged the authority of pre-

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<sup>59</sup> The Harvey Girls promotional brochure, Decca Records, Inc., 1945, Harry Warren Papers, Box 33, Folder 11, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>60</sup> The text began: "When Fred Harvey pushed his chain of restaurants farther and farther West along the lengthening tracks of the Santa Fe, he brought with him one of the first civilizing forces this land had known—THE HARVEY GIRLS." *The Harvey Girls*. Dir. George Sidney. Warner Home Video DVD, 2002.

existing historical narratives.<sup>61</sup> *The Harvey Girls* reflects the ascendance of historically-themed stage and screen musicals in the 1940s, replacing the serious dramas that Smyth has identified as Hollywood's classical "historical cycle." Indeed, the studio originally developed the Samuel Hopkins Adams novel *The Harvey Girls* as a dramatic project for Clark Gable before sending it to the musical department and transforming the material into a starring vehicle for Judy Garland.<sup>62</sup> The resulting film reworked conventions of the historical drama, which typically celebrated male figures, by inserting women's handiwork into the narrative of national progress.

As in Avon's celebration of its sales force, *The Harvey Girls* portrayed female corporate employees' civic influence as a function of women's innate domesticity and morality. The plot focused on a Western town's resistance to the Harvey Company's latest outpost, as customers and workers at the local Alhambra saloon and gambling hall feared the Harvey girls' civilizing influence. At the film's resolution, the community's attendance at a formal, Harvey-sponsored ball prompted the local Reverend to proclaim a shift in the town: "On this night, the male population of Sandrocks... turned down a wild time in favor of a good time." In the film's closing scenes, the displaced Harvey restaurant (destroyed by arsonists but now accepted by the community) has taken over the Alhambra saloon, the decorative statues of nude women now clothed in gingham cloth. Decca Records' promotional material for the soundtrack album proclaimed this transition "a revolution."<sup>63</sup> Aware that Sandrocks can no longer support their type of work,

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<sup>61</sup> J. E. Smyth, *Reconstructing American Historical Cinema: From Cimarron to Citizen Kane* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006).

<sup>62</sup> George Sidney DVD commentary, *The Harvey Girls*. Dir. George Sidney. Warner Home Video DVD, 2002.

<sup>63</sup> The Harvey Girls promotional brochure, Decca Records, Inc., 1945, Harry Warren Papers, Box 33, Folder 11, Archives Center, NMAH.

the saloon's showgirls (and implied prostitutes), relocate to Flagstaff.<sup>64</sup> Saloon owner Ned Trent makes a last-minute decision to stay in Sandrock for Judy Garland's character, Susan Bradley, just as the lovestruck Susan boards the train for Flagstaff and resolves to become a showgirl if that's what Ned wants. Apologizing to "Em," her previous romantic rival for Ned's affection, Susan admits that she had been a "snob" about "what I thought girls like you were like," now concluding that "It's only a matter of style. I mean some people wear one kind of dress and other people wear another." Demonstrating that reverence for romantic love is common to both these "styles" of women, Em causes an emergency train stop so that Susan can reunite with, and marry, Ned.<sup>65</sup>

Nevertheless, *The Harvey Girls* does favor the "beefsteak" and "cup of coffee" introduced in the opening text over the economy of alcohol, gambling, and sex they replaced.<sup>66</sup> The introductory text's narrative framework of civility conquering the West, and the triumph of romantic love with the closing shot of Susan and Ned's wedding, elevated the moral "style" of the Harvey girls. Throughout, it is the Fred Harvey Company that makes these social and personal triumphs possible. Susan first traveled to

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<sup>64</sup> In his 1987 Directors Guild of America oral history interview with Irene Atkins and Brooks Jacobsen, *Harvey Girls* director George Sidney describes the film's central conflict as the male hero's decision between living a "good" life and enjoying the Alhambra prostitutes. Oral history interview transcript, pp. 87-95, George Sidney Collection, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>65</sup> Suggesting that some filmgoers also saw similarities in these two categories of women, a 1948 fan letter to *Harvey Girls* composer Harry Warren remembered its "depict[ion of] the wild activities of the Harvey Girls," even though the film emphasized the prim, regimented behavior of the waitresses, portraying Susan's gun-toting challenge to restaurant thieves as laughable for her timid and polite demeanor. Typed letter, Richard B. Matheson to Harry Warren, September 26, 1948, Harry Warren Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>66</sup> Similarly, the 1946 Broadway musical *Annie Get Your Gun* assumed that good women could possess skill and ambition along with their femininity, but that they would put their own desires behind those of the men they loved. In spite of her fame, romance becomes performer Annie Oakley's only route to happiness. She disguises her sharpshooting abilities in order to please love interest Frank Butler, but the show emphasizes that this is a knowing act and that Annie's ability surpassed Frank's. The scholar Andrea Most interprets composer Irving Berlin and playwright Dorothy Fields' narrative as a metaphor for women's sacrifice of their wartime employment for returning veterans. Andrea Most, *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 142-52.

Sandrocks to marry a man who had advertised for a wife. Realizing upon her arrival that he had misrepresented himself, she joined the team of Harvey employees who had arrived on the same train. In the musical number “It’s a Great Big World,” Susan and two other Harvey girls consider the personal deficiencies that left them single: Susan confesses that buying a “bonnet to suit [her] face” and wearing her “petticoat trimmed with lace” could not provide her enough confidence to meet the “cold, cold, cold” world. Harvey waitress Alma responds, “I learned to sew and I learned to bake. I even frosted an angel cake. I thought by learning each social grace, some likely chap might forget my face. I can’t understand it, I’ve knitted and purled...Alas and alack it’s a great big world.” In the song’s third verse, Harvey waitress Deborah admits her inability to cook, but wonders at the failure of her beautiful face and dancing skill to bring a “prince charming.”<sup>67</sup> These lyrics demonstrate the difficulty of meeting all the ideals for women’s behavior simultaneously: not only domestic skills and beauty, but also the courage to find one’s place in the world. Rather than redefining these expectations, however, the film proposes membership in the Harvey company as the solution. Each of these characters ends the film having gained the appreciation of the Sandrocks community for her work as a Harvey employee, and having gained a romantic partner in the process.

Like *The Harvey Girls*, director George Seaton’s 1947 musical film *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* presented the corporation as a corrective to historical narratives and as a path to feminine personal fulfillment. Screenwriter Frederica Maas and her husband Ernest Maas developed the original screenplay in 1941, using the 1873 invention of the typewriter to narrate women’s entry into office work. When the heroine’s presence causes a violent romantic rivalry in the workplace, the resulting murder courtroom

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<sup>67</sup> Lyrics by Johnny Mercer.

becomes a referendum on women's rights, drawing the participation of movement leaders including Susan B. Anthony.<sup>68</sup> The film version omitted the murder story, but the title character's entry into women's rights activism drove the success of her career and her romance with her boss. Manufacturer Remington Rand, Inc., provided Seaton and Twentieth Century-Fox with historical materials and artifacts for the film, which portrays the typewriter as a historical milestone. Frames of text introducing the film explained:

On July 4, 1776, men became free. On January 1, 1863, slaves became free. On June 10, 1874, women became free, or at least independence winked at them for the first time. Not because Congress passed a law, but because of the newly invented typewriter which was called most impractical,--and a handful of daring young ladies who were called—any number of things.

This portrayal of technology as liberating simplified the experiences of women workers, whose entry into offices was regulated by new ranks of male management. As these new opportunities emerged for men, and as typewriter operation became the domain of women, secretarial work declined in status.<sup>69</sup> *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* nevertheless cast women's presence in the workplace as a sign of progress, mocking the nineteenth century controversy over female office workers.

To promote the film Twentieth Century-Fox collaborated with Remington Rand, aligning Betty Grable's title character with contemporary office workers. Remington Rand held approval rights over each component of the studio's publicity campaign.<sup>70</sup> The studio provided the company with posters and cardboard displays of Grable's character,

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<sup>68</sup> Frederica Sagor Maas, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim: A Writer in Early Hollywood* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 232-34.

<sup>69</sup> Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business: Men and Women in the Corporate Office, 1870-1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 1-14.

<sup>70</sup> Remington Rand typewriter division memo, "20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Publicity Tie-in with *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*," April 9, 1946, Sperry Rand Collection 1825, Box 2, Folder 8, Hagley.

seated at “the first typewriter,” along with parallel images of Grable dressed in modern clothing using the company’s current model.<sup>71</sup> Local Remington sales divisions distributed these materials to movie theaters and department stores, which featured elaborate displays, contests, and events to promote both typewriters and the film.<sup>72</sup>

Print and radio promotions placed by Remington Rand also used Betty Grable and the film to promote modern products. The company adapted pre-existing promotional strategies to this multimedia event, producing a new cover for its “How to Be a Super Secretary” educational pamphlet. Simultaneously, the film’s narrative of women’s entry into business echoed the company’s established promotional strategies. A 1933 booklet released to typing teachers and students featured an illustration of a nineteenth-century woman operating the first commercial typewriter, proclaiming that “women were freed” and given “their first real chance to enter business” with this invention.<sup>73</sup> *Shocking Miss Pilgrim* campaigns also identified the typewriter as a revolutionary force in women’s history. Twentieth Century-Fox submitted a newspaper column for syndicated writer Walter Winchell, proclaiming that the invention of the typewriter “brought women into the bizness [sic] world and started the suffragette movements in this country.”<sup>74</sup> Print advertisements for the 1947 KMC [Keyboard Margin Control] Remington model contrasted the resistance to Grable’s character in 1873 with “The Shocking Miss

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<sup>71</sup> Sales Promotion Department, Remington Rand Inc. to B. J. Shepherd, February 6, 1947, Sperry Rand Collection 1825, Box 2, Folder 6, Hagley. The modern product and fashions did not appear in the film itself.

<sup>72</sup> A. H. Barsh to George W. Fetus, February 6, 1947, Sperry Rand Collection 1825, Box 2 Folder 6, Hagley.

<sup>73</sup> Remington Typewriter, “The Invention of the Typewriter,” Sperry Rand Collection 1825, Box 1, Folder 10. Hagley

<sup>74</sup> Walter Winchell radio transcript, “Now is the Time for All Good Men....” Sperry Rand Collection 1825, Box 2, Folder 8, Hagley. The Remington Rand Typewriter Division’s April 9, 1946, memo explained that Winchell “occasionally uses material of this sort prepared for him by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox.” Remington Rand typewriter division memo, “20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Publicity Tie-in with *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*,” April 9, 1946, Sperry Rand Collection 1825, Box 2, Folder 8, Hagley.

Pilgrim's' granddaughters...the millions of typists of today...[who] have made the American office a warmer, more human place." Before describing the efficiency of Keyboard Margin Control technology, the advertisement celebrated women as a "vital part of the national economy....without the typist, the office as we know it today just couldn't exist."<sup>75</sup>

Remington publicity, like Twentieth Century-Fox's film, celebrated the first female typist as a shocking disruption that won women a place in public life. Nineteenth-century men's laughable closed-mindedness contrasted with secretaries' presence in the twentieth-century workplace. However, *Shocking Miss Pilgrim* promotions left radical change squarely in the past. On the cover of "How to be a Super Secretary," illustrations of nineteenth-century women provided the background to a contemporary photograph of Betty Grable.<sup>76</sup> These drawings replaced the women's suffrage placards featured in the film with a sign proclaiming "MY BOSS-RIGHT OR WRONG," carried by one woman and causing another to hold her hand to her mouth in an expression of shock. A Milwaukee movie theater lobby display created by local Remington offices featured placard-style signs "My BOSS RIGHT or WRONG" and "My BOSS THE WORLDS BEST," as live models sat at 1873 and contemporary typewriters.<sup>77</sup> Recasting secretarial employment and deference to male authority as the goal of women activists, these promotions portrayed contemporary business as the triumphant endpoint to women's evolving roles. Simultaneously, Twentieth Century-Fox and Remington Rand portrayed females' contributions to business as crucial, but as supportive rather than transformative.

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<sup>75</sup> Advertisement, "Shocking in 1873...Essential Today," Sperry Rand Collection 1825, Box 2, Folder 7, Hagley.

<sup>76</sup> Image proof, August 26, 1946, Sperry Rand Collection 1825, Box 2, Folder 7, Hagley.

<sup>77</sup> Photograph and memo, L. E. Perkins to George Fotis, March 26, 1947, Sperry Rand Collection 1825, Box 2, Folder 7, Hagley.

Evolution remained on the aesthetic level, as reflected by the film's winking portrayal of nineteenth-century propriety. Nodding to Betty Grable's fame for her legs, the camera lingered on them from the perspective of male co-workers secretly watching her operation of typewriter foot pedals. Emphasizing this perspective, the film provides the visual joke of a coworker turning the telescope he uses to view incoming ships so that he can better observe Pilgrim's ankles. Leaving work that day, coworkers who had craned their necks to view Pilgrim's desk complain of stiffness. In the next scene, the "boss" John Pritchard decides to make Miss Pilgrim a permanent employee, and to pursue her romantically, after secretly spying her legs when she lifts her skirt to inspect a run in her stocking.

*The Shocking Miss Pilgrim's* portrayal of women's office work as a titillating historical transformation reproduced a familiar cultural narrative. The history of the secretary appeared even in promotions for products without a direct connection to office work. A 1942 advertisement for Beech Nut Gum provided visual contrast of female office workers' attire in the past and in the present, proclaiming that "even in 1911 when secretaries wore dresses like this, they found Beech-Nut gum refreshing."<sup>78</sup> Office work also provided a familiar dramatic symbol. The opening sequence of RKO's popular 1940 adaptation of the novel *Kitty Foyle* prefaced the "story of a white collar girl" with a three and a half minute dramatization of this "comparative newcomer to the American scene. . . as she was in 1900." This series of vignettes featured the exaggerated acting style of silent films to emphasize the strict boundaries of the earlier era's gender roles. First, men offer their seats to a beautiful young woman on a streetcar. Set to the vintage lyrics "I want a girl just like the girl who married dear old Dad...a good old-fashioned girl," the

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<sup>78</sup> Advertisement, *Woman's Day* (September 1942), 57.



use of outmoded cinematic styles gently mocks these gestures as artificial.<sup>79</sup> In the next scene, the same young woman receives a proposal of marriage after resisting her suitor's kiss. In the scene representing married life, this man returns from a day at work and hands her his earnings. He realizes her pregnancy when he sees the "Baby" lettering she has stitched in needlepoint, causing her to hide her face shyly.

But while *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* celebrated the acceptance of women secretaries as a triumph over nineteenth-century prudery, *Kitty Foyle* criticized the gender norms of both 1900 and 1940. Following these vignettes, expository text, shown as if stitched on a sampler, interrupts the progression from courtship to motherhood with the explanation, "But this was not enough," followed by a depiction of women activists, including the previously seen young wife, in a suffrage parade demanding that "the hand that rocks the cradle guide the state." A scene demonstrating the effects of women's suffrage showed the young white collar girl struggling on the streetcar without men's assistance. Explanatory text on the screen explained that men became so accustomed to women's presence in the workplace that white collar girls of 1940 faced loneliness when their daily shifts ended. Juxtaposing humor with the somber cinematic convention of historical films' introductory text, director Sam Wood introduced Ginger Rogers' title character, circa 1940, as part of the evolution of gender roles.

Told in flashbacks as Kitty reflects on her past choices in order to guide her decision between two men, the film traces women's secretarial work as a byproduct of the Great Depression and as a cause of personal dysfunction. The melodramatic plot proposed that women's everyday lives could be just as crucial to understanding historical

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<sup>79</sup> "I Want a Girl Just Like the Girl Who Married Dear Old Dad," music by Harry Von Tilzer, lyrics by William Dillon, copyright 1911.

change as the achievements of leaders were. Describing her secretarial studies and employment in voiceover narrative, Foyle emphasizes the stock market's influence:

Then, boom, came the Depression. And you had to trade in a few of those dreams for a volume of Gregg's shorthand, remember? June 1932. Mr. Hoover said if Mr. Roosevelt was elected, grass would grow in the streets. Mr. Roosevelt said that if Mr. Hoover got back in, there wouldn't be any streets. All of a sudden, you were set, Oh boy. All you needed to get a peach of a job was this fancy document [a business school diploma] and a miracle.

In this narrative, transformations in women's fashions and in women's work invite precise contrasts, while the 1932 Presidential election becomes inconsequential and abstract.

Kitty's employment for a Philadelphia society magazine transformed her life in a way that politics did not. Election night provides the backdrop to the beginning of Foyle's affair with her boss: "the first time he took [her] to New York," her agreement to accompany him to society events, their first kiss, and the decision to leave a raucous election night speakeasy and go to a secluded cabin. The influence of these actions on Foyle's personal history demonstrates that women's biographies can not be narrated solely through traditional historical milestones. Although Kitty and her editor eventually marry, his elite family will not accept her working-class background, and Kitty stoically initiates a divorce. Soon learning that the brief marriage led to a pregnancy, Kitty plans to raise her child as a single mother and grieves when the baby is stillborn. At the film's conclusion, Kitty, now working in a department store, achieves happiness only by choosing to marry a young doctor rather than following her desire to begin an affair with her remarried ex-husband. This resolution identifies marriage as the pinnacle of a woman's life, suggesting that office work led Kitty Foyle to yield to the claims of passion, removing her from the realms of home and family that would make her happy.

*Kitty Foyle*'s narrative, subtitled "the natural history of a woman," assumed that feminine domesticity should persist across generations, even if the propriety demonstrated in the film's satire of 1900 had dissolved into something more diffuse.

*The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*'s narration of women's entry into office work provided a more optimistic view of the workplace's effect on female employees. Kitty Foyle's happy ending came only after she chose marriage over her love for her immoral boss. *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*, on the other hand, celebrates the title character's romance with her boss John Pritchard, presenting the workplace not only as the pathway to personal happiness but as a fulfilling pursuit for women. Indeed, Pilgrim's entrepreneurship precipitates her reunion with Pritchard after early obstacles.

The film's opening scene shows Cynthia Pilgrim's graduation at the top of her coed Packard Business College typewriting class. At the ceremony, the faculty speaker explains that female graduates face a particular responsibility in promoting "the future of this newly invented machine," for "until now, the business world has been a man's world." The next speaker, an agent of the Remington typewriter company, explains that his business depends on the success of the graduates to create demand for the low-selling typewriter. He then provides placement for each of the graduates, prompting Pilgrim's journey to Boston to join the Pritchard Shipping Company. John Pritchard, the young heir to the family business, initially objects, having assumed that "all expert typewriters were men," a policy that Pilgrim criticizes as "old-fashioned." However, Pritchard's Aunt Alice, the business' owner and a suffragist (her introductory scene identifies her as a friend of "Mrs. Stanton"), demands that the company hire Pilgrim. Her efforts to clean the workplace and her lunch hour shopping draw derision from the all-male staff, but she

wins them over first by joining in their laughter and then by demonstrating her proficient typing.

Through Alice Pritchard's influence, Pilgrim soon becomes a central figure in the local women's rights movement, which embraces her criticism of their style of activism: "You can't gain equality with brass bands and speeches. Women have got to earn equality. That's why I became a typewriter: to show men that women can do men's work....But equality in the offices alone is not enough. Women have to go into other fields of endeavor and gain equality there too. Then suffrage will be a natural conclusion." John Pritchard, attending a suffrage meeting at which Pilgrim speaks, uses her prescription of communication between management and female employees to initiate a date. During their courtship, Pritchard humors Pilgrim's activism by going along to meetings, and Pilgrim softens her personal rules against dating a boss or inviting public scorn by dining unaccompanied with a man.

After his marriage proposal, however, Pritchard no longer approves of Pilgrim's activism. While he argues that complete devotion to home is a female "duty" abandoned by "old maid" suffragists, she cites her commitment to women's rights: "But why is it always the woman who has to change her way of living and thinking?....Equal rights is not a habit like biting your nails. It's a principle, and you don't give up principles overnight. In the last three months I persuaded over four hundred women to get jobs and go out and work. I've convinced them that it's the only way to achieve equal rights." The engagement, and Pilgrim's post with the Pritchard Shipping Company, end over Pritchard's objection to married women's employment. As Pilgrim's replacement is introduced, the disappointed officeworkers stare not at Betty Grable's legs but at a

scrawny young man's red socks, exposed as he operates the machine's foot pedals.

Unhappy with a succession of male typewriters, John Pritchard concludes that men can not operate as efficiently as women, particularly on the typewriter, which is "just not a man's machine." In the film's final scene, Pritchard goes to the Boston Academy of Typewriting's placement agency, seeking a new secretary. His intake interview, which includes questions on the suitability of married women for employment, leads him to admit that women have a right to work and to express themselves freely, and to realize that Pilgrim was the manager behind these questions. Pritchard rushes into her office, prompting her to declare that she knew he would come to accept her way of thinking.

This approach criticized nineteenth-century men's resistance to women's office work but emphasized the timeless appeal of women's beauty. It is only after seeing Cynthia Pilgrim's legs and beginning his romantic overtures that John Pritchard starts to accept her presence in the workplace. While Pilgrim had chosen a plain wardrobe so that men would take her seriously, Pritchard instructs her to wear more feminine clothing. During the couple's separation, Pritchard expects physical beauty in candidates for Pilgrim's job. In the montage that precedes the conclusion's romantic reunion, Pritchard rejects a series of efficient female secretaries who are unattractive. Similarly, the promotional release prepared for Walter Winchell applauds women's aesthetic influence on nineteenth-century offices, asserting that their presence made workplaces "cleaner."<sup>80</sup> Associating women's office work with their personal beauty, the text rattles off a list of famous fashion models with typing experience.

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<sup>80</sup> Walter Winchell radio transcript, "Now is the Time for All Good Men..." Sperry Rand Collection 1825, Box 2, Folder 8, Hagley.

Understandably, *The Harvey Girls* and *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*, films with corporate ties, emphasized paid employment's compatibility with feminine ideals. Criticism of the Harvey Company's or Remington Rand's reliance on female workers would have diminished the films' promotional appeal. Films with product tie-ins contrasted sharply with those like *Kitty Foyle*, that deployed women's work solely as a dramatic element. This split further celebrated the power of national brands to protect individual women's interests.

Echoing the decade's marketing, *The Harvey Girls* and *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* celebrated corporations' ability to promote national progress while letting women continue their ostensibly natural civic and familial duties. The reality of corporate interactions with individual employees and consumers, however, better reflected these women's individuality and creativity. In their responses to corporate marketing, women used mass products to create alternative narratives that celebrated women's work itself as historically significant.

Avon Products, for instance, encouraged its sales representatives to take pride in the company's innovative history of female participation, using the appeal of the past both to promote products and to shape company loyalty. During World War II, executives began collecting artifacts for a corporate museum. In a prospectus for this project, the Monroe Dreher advertising agency noted that the current display of "Avon's contributions to victory" on "that little shelf in the conference room" could provide an initial foundation for the museum.<sup>81</sup> This display featured the toiletries kits Avon produced under contract with the U.S. military by slowing production of the company's

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<sup>81</sup> Manko, 246. Monroe F. Dreher, Inc., "Company Museum for Avon Products Inc.," 1945, Avon Records, RG II, Series 10, Box 130, Avon Museum prospectus folder, Hagley.

signature cosmetics. That Avon first began its historical documentation project by collecting such materials, rather than artifacts of its employees' work, reflects its preference for transformative moments as more compelling than stories of continuity. Tradition determined women's work and consumption, but corporate innovation shaped society. Nevertheless, rank and file employees would play a role in the museum's construction. Analyzing pre-existing corporate museums, Monroe Dreher advised Avon to involve its sales representatives in collection-building, noting that corporate museums promoted goodwill with consumers and with employees and could thrive only by drawing on diverse observations. This suggestion corresponded with Avon's overall strategy in managing its workforce; executive rhetoric sought to standardize sales representatives' professional strategies by making them feel that they were active autonomous participants in their adoption of corporate philosophy.<sup>82</sup>

In 1945, Avon asked sales representatives to donate vintage cosmetic packaging, especially materials pre-dating the 1930s, from their own collections and those of their clients to a new company museum. In their responses, many members of the sales force expressed pride in their place in the company's history and as contributors to its museum, writing appreciative letters that recounted the history of the products they had retained for decades. These letters reveal that using objects to connect with history was not merely imposed from the top by corporations and advertisers. Women had retained products, associating them with memories of service on Avon's sales force. Through the circulation of objects produced by Avon, embraced by saleswomen and consumers, and ultimately returned to the corporate museum, the corporation and individual women collaborated, employing material culture to narrate the history of Avon and its role in

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<sup>82</sup> Manko, 176-77, 198-206.

consumers' and workers' everyday lives. Objects require scholarly attention, not only because they shaped everyday behavior and experiences, but also because individuals used them to conceptualize their own place in history.<sup>83</sup>

Sales representatives' responses to the Avon museum emphasized the company's beneficial influence on their lives, exemplified by products' quality and by saleswomen's and consumers' sentimental attachment to the items. One sales representative volunteered a can of talc and her childhood memory of the can's place on her mother's dresser. The product's continued quality dramatized the sentimental attachment that made childhood memories continually influential in adult women's lives: "As you notice the talc is still nice," she explained. Further demonstrating such intergenerational ties, another employee revealed that many of her own customers had previously sold Avon products and that she planned to ask them for items that may "have been handed down from mother and grandmother." In other comments, employees testified that their personal experiences affirmed the corporation's narrative of its history as progress. Anticipating the museum display, district manager Roberta Lee Frost wrote, "it will be interesting to note the Avon progress, which has been wonderful. I have seen it progress for 16 years + can see it progress from month to month almost." Frost continued, "Incidentally when this was founded 1886--I was born July 5 1886--so I know just how long + how old Avon is."

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<sup>83</sup> The nature of the sources available for understanding consumers' and employees' engagement with objects demonstrates how constructions of "history" shaped the development of archives. Employees' written responses to Avon's request for museum contributions were well-preserved; the letters' references to unrelated business reveal employee/executive dynamics which did not receive such focused collection efforts. Simultaneously, women's engagement with Avon's products is not fully captured by the historical record; corporate publications advised employees on product demonstration strategies, but comprehensive records of consumers' and employees' engagement with Avon's products (of the type that might reflect their handling in the home) do not appear in the company-produced archives. Avon's historical records emphasized product innovation from the top of the corporation. Although Avon's promotional materials advanced the significance of material objects to women's lives, celebration of corporate identity superseded acknowledgment of women's contributions.



Frost explains that she has received many compliments about Avon's current national advertising campaign, making her proud of the company. Notably, Frost's reaction emphasized her role as an observer of Avon's progress, rather than imagining her own work as a dynamic contribution to the company's growth.<sup>84</sup>

Nevertheless, individuals associated Avon with the past independently of corporate prompting. One district manager wrote that many of the sales representatives she oversaw "delight[ed] in bringing [old CPC/ Avon products] out" even before the museum collection campaign began; these objects demonstrated employees' status as "old timers." Sales representatives reported long-time customers' interest in products' longevity, a topic frequently discussed in sales interactions. Avon representatives also used their products to mark personal histories and to pay tribute to the company. Years before Avon requested museum contributions, a 1943 *Avon Outlook* publication issued to sales representatives described individual collections of vintage cosmetics:

Quite often some Avon product made long ago is returned to us by a customer to show us how well it has held up through the years. More often than any other product, Sachet is sent in to us. Three or four years ago a Representative sent us the Sachet in the old-fashioned jar pictured here. She had used this Heliotrope Sachet to perfume the quilted padding of her baby daughter's crib before her birth. When the letter was written, the daughter was 26 years old, and about to marry. The Sachet was as fragrant and enchanting as ever. All these years it had been a symbol of Avon quality.<sup>85</sup>

Emphasizing the significance of familial milestones to Avon employees and, by extension, to the company itself, *Avon Outlook* also paid tribute to the sales force's central role in marking corporate history. The testimonial that Avon sachet persisted

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<sup>84</sup> Mrs. Fred A. Smith to Henry Bachler, Dec. 8, 1945; Mrs. F. W. Brady to Henry Bachler, May 31, 1945; Roberta Lee Frost to Henry Bachler, July 2, 1945, Avon Records, Box 130, Avon museum correspondence file, Hagley.

<sup>85</sup> "Attention Sachet Is Perfect 57<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gift: Sachet Was One of First Products Made by Our Company," *Avon Outlook* (May 17-June 5, 1943).

from infancy to marriage allowed a more precise timeline than the newsletter's description of the "old-fashioned jar" and the products "made long ago."<sup>86</sup>

Building on customers' and employees' demonstrated interest in such keepsakes, Avon promoted its place in personal memory. This approach strengthened employees' loyalty to a company they often dealt with indirectly, through mailed catalogues and sales instructions. The 1943 *Outlook* publication also tied this sentimental history directly to its prescriptions for contemporary sales, noting that the "Attention Sachet" product is a strong promotion during the company's fifty-seventh anniversary celebration. Avon deployed similar strategies in its 1945 invitation to employees and customers to collaborate on the corporate museum. This campaign stimulated women's personal investment in the company, and it adopted the collection and correspondence practices in which representatives and customers had demonstrated their interest.

During the museum campaign, sales representatives continued to personalize their own engagement with the company's history. One employee reflected on the promotional value of asking customers for contributions to the museum. Seeing the products a woman kept brought insight on her preferences, and the juxtaposition of old and new products gave saleswomen the opportunity to "explain improvements."<sup>87</sup> The company had not emphasized technological innovation as a sales pitch, so such responses demonstrate variability and creativity in individual women's deployment of the past to promote Avon.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Bertha F. Callan to Henry Bachler, June 28, 1945; Josephine P. Joneberg to Henry Bachler, June 4, 1945; Florence Kohli to Henry Bachler, July 19, 1945, Avon Records, Box 130, Avon museum correspondence, Hagley.

The information that sales representatives provided to annotate their museum contributions further demonstrates their investment in Avon's history. While the company had requested "the name of the person who bought [the product], the approximate date of the purchase and any remarks that would prove of interest from an historical standpoint," representatives made particular note of the personal and professional relationships behind an item's sale and use.<sup>88</sup> Because the vintage items they collected from their customers typically pre-dated their own Avon employment, correspondents traced the genealogy of the markets they inherited. Letters recorded full names of former sales representatives and described their familial and community ties. These details produced narratives of inter-generational collaborations between customers and sales representatives, and of individuals' transitions between Avon consumption and sales. Carrie Abbott wrote to Bachler explaining that "Mrs. N. E. Phillips, a friend of mine, also your agent in Norfolk, Virginia handed me your letter asking if I had any of the California Perfume Company Products [CPC] prior to 1929. She was a customer of mine when I was your agent several years ago." Abbott continued, describing her 1905 initiation as a CPC representative after health problems afflicted her mother "Mrs. Emily A. Rogers of South Norfolk, Virginia...the first agent here."<sup>89</sup> The donations of Mrs. Lucinda Shambarger, a "package containing powder, coloring set, and Spots out cream," accompanied letters from both Mrs. Shambarger's current sales agent and from Mrs. Shambarger's daughter-in-law, Cora Wallick Shambarger, a former CPC rep.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Henry L. Bachler to "Sales Associate," May 23, 1945, Avon Records, Box 130, Avon museum correspondence, Hagley.

<sup>89</sup> Carrie Abbott to Henry L. Bachler, June 4, 1945, Avon Records, Box 130, Avon museum correspondence, Hagley. Notably, Abbott emphasizes her mother's role, although she explains that she herself took over after her mother's first 1905 sale.

<sup>90</sup> Mrs. J. C. Gebbs, June 11, 1945. Cora Wallick Shambarger, June 6, 1945. Avon Records, Box 130, Avon museum correspondence, Hagley.

These testimonials documented the personal significance of Avon sales work.

Cora Wallick Shambarger explained her 1904 and 1905 success selling CPC products to Amish populations in rural Ohio, recalling that her profit of “four dollars + fifty cents” a day allowed her to attend the St. Louis World’s Fair. Shambarger also noted her reintroduction to the company in 1929 as a consumer after her “daughter bought a bottle of perfume from Mrs. Northway” with a fragrance reminiscent of “something of long ago.” She identified herself as a loyal customer to her current sales representative, Mrs. Gebbs. Gebbs’ cover letter to Avon identified Cora Wallick Shambarger as “The Mrs. Shambarger who sold Avon when she was a young lady-[and] who was most helpful to me in the beginning of my ‘Avon Career’ as it was all so new to me at that time and has been a customer ever since up to the present time.” Such remarks foreground the integrity of women’s collaborations to the persistence of the Avon brand. While the company’s request focused on the products themselves, responses deployed these objects as markers of customers’ and employees’ intertwined professional and personal histories.

At the same time, professional strategy could shape sales representatives’ celebrations of Avon history. Multiple women responding to Henry Bachler’s request praised the museum idea as a segue into their apparent motives for writing: explanation of health and family problems that had limited their sales.<sup>91</sup> The interests of customers, sales representatives, and executives all influenced the company’s historical mythology.

By urging saleswomen to involve customers in the museum project, Avon underscored its advertisements’ assertions that American women shared a tradition of actively maintained beauty. As one customer letter published in the employee newsletter

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<sup>91</sup> Maude B. Cash[ere?] to Henry L. Bachler, June 18, 1945. Hildur Flavelle to Henry L. Bachler, June 6, 1945. Avon Records, Box 130, Avon museum correspondence, Hagley.

explained, “In your [American Heroines] advertisements you tell us about the courage of the American pioneer women such as Molly Pitcher. Yes, today we are all Molly Pitchers whether in the kitchen, nursery, or on the production line.”<sup>92</sup> Another consumer attested that Avon’s promotion of ideals rather than of products instilled confidence in the company’s cosmetics: “I was so much impressed by your beautiful advertisements that I decided the products you manufacture must also produce beauty.”<sup>93</sup> Avon’s advertising campaigns presented beauty as a manifestation of women’s inherent femininity and their propensity for supporting family and nation. Across time, women shared the experience of making themselves beautiful, so advertising and mass culture celebrated cosmetics as the embodiment of women’s contributions to history. In their own models of Avon history, sales representatives emphasized the overlapping roles of customer, sales representative, family member, and professional mentor while celebrating cosmetics’ beautifying functions.

While Avon presented beauty as an integral part of women’s wartime defense work, from the mythic Molly Pitcher to the paid World War II employee, other brands incorporated historical references to signal that women using household products were also maintaining a patriotic legacy of high standards. Although national brands altered women’s domestic production, style became a crucial part of women’s work as consumers. Items that mechanized homemaking incorporated preindustrial handiwork as design elements. The illustrated logos on packages of Lux soap and Whitman’s

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<sup>92</sup> “Avon’s New American Heroine Advertising Touches Hearts of Millions of Readers,” *Avon Outlook* (Aug. 16-Sept. 4, 1943), 21, Imprints Division, Hagley.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

chocolate, brands marketed as luxurious, echoed embroidery.<sup>94</sup> Spinning, needlepoint, cross-stitch, and quilting became ornamental rather than functional when applied to products. General Mills advertised its Gold Medal flour line with a recipe for “Calico Quilt Cake.” In magazine ads, the Betty Crocker promotional character placed this dessert, iced to look like a floral quilt, in the context of the generational evolution of women’s work: “Your great-grandmother wore ‘sprigged’ calico in dresses—your grandmother pieced it into quilts—You may have a full-skirted evening dress in this pattern. . . . *Now you see it in a gay cake!*”<sup>95</sup> Offering recipes for the Calico Quilt cake and other “Creations” in each package, the Gold Medal Flour brand became a conduit to female tradition. Although the advertisement stressed the ease of preparation using scientifically developed flour, the cake’s quilted design manifested the devotion to domestic service shared by contemporary homemakers and their ancestors. The modern consumer may not adapt worn clothing into useful quilts, but she still devotes time to careful brand selection and to the aesthetic desires of her family.

Historical themes in home design likewise drew attention to the transition from production to consumption in women’s roles. Not only did interior design replicate antique pieces, but it also emphasized shifts in women’s work. Rather than copying historical artifacts, the Salem China Company used historically-themed decals to decorate its modern dinnerware lines. Among the company’s popular designs, introduced in the 1930s and selling throughout the 1940s, were “Colonial Fireside,” which featured illustrations of colonial American décor, including a hearth and spinning wheel; and

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<sup>94</sup> Soap collection binder, Virgil Whyte Collection, Box 6, Archives Center, NMAH. Whitman’s sampler chocolate boxes, Whitman’s Chocolate Collection, Division of Work and Industry, NMAH.

<sup>95</sup> Ellipses in original. Advertisement, *Woman’s Day* (September 1940), 10. This was also one of the recipes included in packages of Gold Medal Flour.

“Godey Prints,” which redefined the color “fashion plates” included in nineteenth-century editions of *Godey’s Lady’s Book* by applying the designs to dinner plates.<sup>96</sup> This china was advertised to middle-class audiences in national women’s magazines, such as the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, and sold to independent and chain grocery stores, as well as to movie theaters, hardware stores, and drugstores that used the china in giveaways.

Promotional materials stressed the relevance of early American decoration to modern, streamlined plate design.<sup>97</sup> Salem China’s “petit point” lines, featuring decals that mimicked floral needlepoint, proved particularly popular in such promotions (Figure 5).

Decal decoration allowed the precision needed to reproduce a historical scene or to simulate needlepoint; eighteenth- and nineteenth-century methods could not have produced this level of detail.<sup>98</sup> Simultaneously, the company’s use of European-produced decals lowered production costs, making decorative china available to a wider range of consumers. By reproducing historical images rather than copying antique china designs, Salem’s nostalgic dinnerware themes dramatized shifts in women’s household labor. Average American women no longer cooked daily meals over a hearth, but this outmoded technology adorned their Salem “Colonial Fireside” plates, cups, and serving dishes.<sup>99</sup>

Print advertisements praised the early American fireside as one of the “oldest and most

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<sup>96</sup> Advertisement mats, Series 3, Box 7, Folder 4; Color brochure, n.d., Godey Prints Dinnerware, Series 3, Box 6, Folder 9, Salem China Company Collection, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>97</sup> China give-away photographs, Series 4, Box 12, Folder 3; Undated flier, “Victory by Salem: A New Shape of Unparalleled Beauty,” Series 3, Box 7, Folder 3, Salem China Company Collection, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>98</sup> Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 86. On decorative saturation in post-World War II mass produced housewares, see Shelley Nickles, “More is Better: Mass Consumption, Gender, and Class Identity in Postwar America,” *American Quarterly* 54:4 (2002), 581-622.

<sup>99</sup> Promotional photograph, Series 3, Box 13, Folder 4. Salem China Company Collection, Archives Center, NMAH. The art department’s intermittently updated records indicated that Salem promoted the Colonial Firesides line throughout the 1940s. Advertisements produced for 1940 promoted the line’s success in the previous year. Usage records show access to Colonial Fireside halftones in 1948. Advertisement halftone, “Salem Leaders in 1939: A New Shape to Lead in 1940,” Series 5, Box 18, Folder 2; Form, Deco No. 11/UF/82, Series 5, Box 18, Folder 1, Salem China Company Collection, Archives Center, NMAH.

cherished traditions of American life” and illustrated modern homes that incorporated the china into colonial revival décor, including hooked rugs on the floor and candlesticks on the table.<sup>100</sup> This promotional campaign prescribed consumption as women’s familial labor, emphasizing home fashion rather than depicting meal preparation.

The “Petit Point” sampler-style decals likewise emphasized the aesthetics rather than the function of colonial labor. No longer an individualized educational tool or a practical method for identifying ownership of household linens, needlepoint imagery became uniform in mass production. Nevertheless, the clear representation of individual stitches, both on Salem’s Petit Point style decals and in its advertising imagery, emphasized the history of needlework as individual labor. Even the illustrations in small, black and white print advertisements rendered the Basket Petit Point design so that individual “stitches” were visible.<sup>101</sup> As one promotional brochure claimed, the “quaint old-fashioned” petit point flower basket design was “Just as fresh in color and dainty in detail as the work in Grandma’s sewing basket.”<sup>102</sup> Advertisements thus created nostalgia for fading domestic traditions, proposing that mass-produced brands could nurture nation and family, just as handiwork had in the past.

The synergy of advertisements, women’s magazines, and product packaging increasingly emphasized consumption as women’s household contribution, even presenting brand selection as a way to honor family traditions. However, productive household labor was not merely the realm of “grandma” in the 1940s, nor was it separate

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<sup>100</sup> Art department advertisement halftone Series 5, Box 18, Folder 2, Salem China Company Collection, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>101</sup> Art department advertisement proof, “We Want You to Have This Lovely Dinner Set,” Series 5, Box 18, Folder 5, Salem China Company Collection, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>102</sup> Promotional brochure, Series 5, Box 17, Folder 3, Salem China Company Collection, Archives Center, NMAH.



from consumption. During World War II, thrift became a patriotic duty, and advertisements advocated wise consumption as a productive contribution to the war effort. As sponsor of the Oregon trail radio drama *A Woman of America*, Ivory Snow promoted brand consumption, but not overconsumption. The program's announcer punctuated broadcasts by advocating salvage: "Patriotic American women save soap by using it wisely, because soap is made from vital war materials," or "Please save every drop of your used kitchen fat. It can save a soldier's life as ammunition or military medicines."<sup>103</sup>

As with contributions to Avon's museum collection, consumers also responded creatively to nostalgic commodities. During World War II, Nebraska wife, mother, and former teacher Grace Snyder adapted the flower basket petit point design from a Salem china plate, producing an elaborate, 85,789 piece quilt over a period of sixteen months.<sup>104</sup> While Salem used a single decal to represent multiple stitches, Snyder's application of the design in quilt form required a more complex process than needlework itself. Copying not only the floral design of the Salem "Basket Petit Point" dinnerware, she used small triangular pieces to represent the individual stitches in the plate's imagery. After beginning the quilt, Snyder wrote an inquiry to the Salem China Company about the design's origin, learning that the German artist Wendelin Grossman had created the decal. Unable to obtain an address for him until after the war, Snyder then sent

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<sup>103</sup> June 8, 1944, *A Woman of America*, Library of Congress Division of Recorded Sound, recording RBW 2551 B2. June 7, 1944, *A Woman of America*, Library of Congress Division of Recorded Sound, recording RBW 2496 B2.

<sup>104</sup> Virginia Soltow, "Childhood Hobby Wins National Acclaim for Mrs. A. B. Snyder," *Sunday World Herald* (Omaha, Neb.), July 6, 1947. Series 5, Box 16, Folder 11, Salem China Company Collection, Archives Center, NMAH. Grace Snyder as told to Nellie Irene Snyder Yost, *No Time on my Hands* (University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 528.

Grossman a photograph of the quilt, along with information about her success in exhibiting the piece.

Snyder's quilting, which also included original decorative designs and narrative quilts depicting American and Nebraskan history as well as work produced for wartime drives and charitable causes, garnered coverage in local newspapers and national publications. Snyder later criticized the distortion of her late-nineteenth-century frontier childhood in many of these articles, recalling that "One had me piecing my first doll quilt while on the way to Nebraska in a *covered wagon* at the age of *three*. Another had me carrying my little box of quilt pieces and herding cattle on the prairie, while still in danger of having to run for my life from the Indians."<sup>105</sup> Although such articles placed Snyder in the framework of family-centered gendered labor, the virtuosity of her elaborate quilts also brought her recognition as an artist. The "petit point" quilt received the most acclaim and was featured in *McCall's Needlework* magazine in 1947. The piece won multiple exhibition prizes in the late 1940s and became part of the University of Nebraska's permanent collection.<sup>106</sup>

Although she had copied the design from Grossman and the Salem China Company, press coverage provided Snyder a position of creative authorship. Before selling Salem a printing plate of the quilt photograph used in its article, the McCall Corporation required Snyder's permission.<sup>107</sup> Both Grossman and Salem responded positively to this stipulation. Salem sent Snyder petit point dinnerware and incorporated

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<sup>105</sup> Snyder and Yost, 530.

<sup>106</sup> Nebraska State Historical Society, "Nebraska Quilts: A Patchwork History," <<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/sites/mnh/quilts.htm>> Accessed May 2009

<sup>107</sup> Grace Snyder to F. W. McKee, July 20, 1947. Eleanor Spencer to F. W. McKee, July 28, 1947, Series 5, Box 16, Folder 11, Salem China Company Collection, Archives Center, NMAH.

the story into its promotional strategy.<sup>108</sup> Grossman likewise interpreted Snyder's quilt as an admirable creative effort, writing her a personal letter about the artistic work ethic that linked her quilting and his painting career:

I was astonished to hear that the design having been so much in favor of the Salem China Co., was even used for a quilt. The work must be wonderful and I only admire your patience and troubles and I understand quite well that you are proud of the great success in the exhibitions. This being a pleasure for me too, hearing that with my design so many nice things arose. It will encourage me to go on working and to create many good ideas..... It is astonishing that men, being so far off from each other, get acquainted by a chance and this time by our work.<sup>109</sup>

Addressing Snyder as a peer and repeatedly classifying her quilt as "work," Grossman's letter found art in domestic tradition and in consumption, minimizing the role of gender in determining individuals' abilities.

In the 1940s, commercial culture applied colonial and nineteenth-century archetypes to its prescription for female wartime sacrifice. Corporations cast consumption as a form of domestic work, asserting continuity in women's devotion to family. Yet consumer and employee responses to these themes also received national publicity, proposing alternative models of women's labor as creative, dynamic, and career-oriented. As product promotions reassured Americans that gender roles would remain constant, activists and female professionals applied cultural fascination with the past to calls for change in gender ideals. The gendered histories embedded in everyday objects and entertainment genres would shape the reception of these efforts in the post-World War II decades.

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<sup>108</sup> Grace Snyder to F. W. McKee, July 20, 1947. Salem China Co. memo, F. W. McKee to Jim, July 30, 1947. Series 5, Box 16, Folder 11. Salem China Company Collection, Archives Center, NMAH.

<sup>109</sup> Wendelin Grossman to Grace Snyder, transcribed in Snyder and Yost, *No Time on my Hands*, 529-30.



Figure 5: "Petit Point" Quaker Girl promotional photograph, n.d., Series 5, Box 14, Folder 24, Salem China Company Collection, Archives Center, NMAH

## Epilogue

In spite of their diversity, comic books, advertisements, radio programs, and consumer products did not fully establish figures such as Susan B. Anthony and the “Quaker Maid” as equals to male forefathers. Post 1950, the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women increasingly promoted Benjamin Franklin rather than his female counterpart, selecting Franklin themes for its shared social events with the Poor Richard Club.<sup>1</sup> After William Moulton Marston’s 1947 death, the Wonder Woman character evolved, demonstrating increased interest in romance and family. As the comic book’s focus on women’s strength decreased, the historical biography feature disappeared, replaced in 1950 by a “Marriage a la Mode” column illustrating global wedding customs.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, diverse women’s histories continued to populate mass media. Corporate marketing invoked the past to promote household products and Cold War era relegation of women to domesticity.

As the number of married women performing wage labor outside the home increased after World War II, women’s magazines and their invocations of the past continued to present devotion to family and home as the ideal.<sup>3</sup> Historical references also reassured that, in spite of the increasing availability of time-saving appliances and products like cake mixes and TV dinners, technological innovation did not pose the threat that women’s time would be freed for careers and pursuits outside of the home. In fact, a heightened vogue for emulation of historically-inspired styles of decorating and entertaining presented a new housekeeping task which could fill time freed by new

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<sup>1</sup> The Club’s 1956 annual dinner dance celebrated Franklin, “Kite & Key Capers” program, Box 1, PCAW Records.

<sup>2</sup> Robinson, 78-79. Daniels, 102.

<sup>3</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era, Revised and Updated Edition* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 16.

scientific advances. Cooking articles, for example, presented instructions for making the favorite meals of the “Founding Fathers” on the latest kitchen equipment. From 1955 through 1959, a *McCall’s* series entitled “Our Living Heritage” offered recipes prepared by the wives of former Presidents and Civil War heroes. Accompanied by photographs of actors in period dress in the homes of historical figures, these articles employed present tense verbs to describe the cooking and entertaining rituals in the homes of figures like Abraham Lincoln. The February 1957 piece “At Home with the Abraham Lincolns,” for example, encouraged readers to emulate these efforts by preparing one of the many “good recipes from Mary Lincoln’s day” included as part of the feature.<sup>4</sup> *McCall’s* stressed that the diverse decorative layers of creams, jams, and jellies differentiated these desserts from the standard “1957 version.”<sup>5</sup> By electing to produce these cakes, *McCall’s* suggested, contemporary women emulated the tradition of “endless hard work” that went into providing the “comfort and good food” valued by President Lincoln.<sup>6</sup>

Reproduction of historic homemaking was also a prominent theme in advertisements. Magazine ads promoting Dromedary cake mixes presented homemaking as a fulfilling way for women to engage with the national heritage. Encouraging housewives to “make history” with cake mixes inspired by “Treasured Historic Recipes,” typically attributed to former first ladies, the ads include photographs of reenactors,

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<sup>4</sup> Anne Colver, “At Home with the Abraham Lincolns,” *McCall’s* (February 1957), 54. Other articles in the “Our Living Heritage” series include Marie Kimball, “Feast Days at Monticello,” *McCall’s*, (November 1955), 42; Hermann Hagedorn, “Good Living at Teddy Roosevelt’s,” *McCall’s* (June 1956), 38; and Christine Sadler, “Arlington: Robert E. Lee’s House of Decision,” *McCall’s* (January 1959), 32.

<sup>5</sup> Anne Colver, “At Home with the Abraham Lincolns,” *McCall’s* (February 1957), 54.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

captioned to stress that they were taken in historic Presidential homes.<sup>7</sup> In a similar promotion, Duncan Hines offered an entire line of Early American Cake Mixes, promoted with a patriotic eagle logo and photographs of cakes on antique tableware, surrounded by candles in brass colonial candle holders.<sup>8</sup>

Use of the past as a visual motif increased in these publications in the late 1950s and early 1960s, to the point that nearly all photographs of food contained old-fashioned candlesticks or other antiques. Visual references to outmoded household objects celebrated technological innovation but asserted continuity in women's devotion to domesticity. A 1963 *McCall's* article, "Blend it 'Round the Clock," praised time-saving electric blenders for making it possible to prepare foods for any occasion and at any time of day.<sup>9</sup> In the photograph accompanying the article, a sleek modern blender sits in an antique grandfather clock's pendulum case. The presence of outmoded objects in fashion photography became customary as well. In the 1949 feature "Vogue Designs for Dressmaking," models pose in front of murals executed in the style of ancient Egypt.<sup>10</sup> A 1959 *McCall's* portfolio of dress patterns features models posing in and on early 1900s cars from the Long Island Automotive Museum.<sup>11</sup> Such invocation of outmoded technology is notable in an era when futuristic rockets had inspired the construction and

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<sup>7</sup> "Imagine! You Can Make Yellow Cake Inspired by a Favorite Recipe of Abraham Lincoln's Wife," *McCall's* (January 1956), 95; "Now you can bake White Cake inspired by a favorite recipe of Mrs. James Monroe," *McCall's* (April 1956), 117; and "Now! Bake Devil's Food Cake inspired by a favorite recipe used in the home of President Theodore Roosevelt," *McCall's* (March 1956), 74. Other advertisements in the series include *McCall's* (February 1957), 111; *McCall's* (March 1957), 122; *McCall's* (April 1957), 131; and *McCall's* (May 1957), 103.

<sup>8</sup> See for example, the Duncan Hines advertisements in *McCall's* (August 1961), 176 and *McCall's* (October 1961), 217.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Sweeney Herbert, et. l, "Blend it 'Round the Clock," *McCall's* (November 1963), 76. Similarly, in the June 1962 article "Step-by-Step to Old Fashioned Icebox Cookies," a decorative glass cookie jar sat in a large icebox. "Step-by-Step to Old-Fashioned Icebox Cookies," *McCall's* (June 1962), 125.

<sup>10</sup> "Vogue Designs for Dressmaking," *Vogue* (April 1, 1949), 169.

<sup>11</sup> Virginia Steele, "Cotton's in the Driver's Seat," *McCall's* (April 1959), 46.

marketing of automobiles.<sup>12</sup> This visual imagery portrays women as quaint and stable in a time of uncertainty.

Even the fascination with antique décor stripped objects from their historical context. Antiques signified “the past,” but not the specific historical moment in which they were created. Women’s magazines encouraged housewives to spend a great deal of time locating and placing antique objects, but did not require that they look beyond the objects’ physical or visceral emotional appeal. Home decorating advice in *McCall’s* encouraged women to create pastiches of “unsophisticated objects” from the past, including Franklin stoves, manual coffee grinders, Colonial era brass bed warmers, apothecary bottles, and building plans for outdated machinery, as mere decoration.<sup>13</sup> A 1961 article encouraged collecting several broken clocks from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and placing them together on one wall.<sup>14</sup>

*McCall’s*’ fictional pieces also advocated women’s integration of antique objects into their sleek, contemporary homes as a way to nurture their families. Female characters in these stories commonly possess the ability to gain a mystical association with the past, merely through proximity to antique domestic objects. This mystical association replaces the antiques’ function as markers of specific time periods. In “The Cradle,” protagonist Elinor performs her housework with “assembly-line efficiency,” aided by all the modern products.<sup>15</sup> Such unthinking acceptance also extends to Elinor’s home décor. To the annoyance of her husband, Elinor buys antiques, simply in order to

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<sup>12</sup> Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 133.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Davis Gillies, “Country Airs,” *McCall’s* (July 1961), 55; Mary Davis Gillies, “Perfect Accents,” *McCall’s* (October 1962), 118.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Davis Gillies, “More Than a Tick and a Tock,” *McCall’s* (October 1961), 100.

<sup>15</sup> Eileen Herbert Jordan, “The Cradle,” *McCall’s* (June 1960), 66.



fit in with “everybody else.” Her detached attitude towards these objects changes, however, when she finds an old cradle at a flea-market. The cradle transfixes Elinor, who purchases it, planning to use it as a plant holder. Soon after, she is pregnant and draws comfort from the cradle, which her husband helps her repair and refinish. The narrator explains: “She could see, through the years, babies who rested here: the future was linked to the present, and the present was chained to the past.” Contact with this object allows Elinor a new appreciation of the joys of pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>16</sup>

Such depictions of women as a mystical link between past and present dominated mass culture’s gendered construction of history from 1945 to 1965. However, female historical heroines did not disappear entirely. A 1961 *McCall’s* article, “Woman’s Suffrage,” presented a portfolio of paintings of key moments and leaders in the women’s rights movement. It narrated the woman’s rights movement from the Seneca Falls Convention to the Nineteenth Amendment, explaining: “If we remember what a little band of women achieved without the vote, we will find no room for apathy, but only inspiration to move ahead. . . .”<sup>17</sup> Mass market women’s magazines also produced dissenting voices that decried the use of nostalgia for physical objects as the predominant lens through which to interpret women’s pasts.

In her 1958 *Mademoiselle* article, “The feminine principle,” the poet Elizabeth Hardwick makes an argument similar to one Betty Friedan would make in *The Feminine Mystique*.<sup>18</sup> Hardwick suggests that contemporary women should turn to the past, where

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<sup>16</sup> In another supernatural story, the female protagonist gains new homemaking skills after moving into a nineteenth-century house. Jack Finney, “Where the Cluetts Are,” *McCall’s* (January 1962), 72.

<sup>17</sup> Leonard Slater, “Woman’s Suffrage,” *McCall’s* (September 1961), 93. Many other articles also celebrated women who went beyond the prescribed domestic sphere. Examples include “Eminent Women,” *McCall’s* (May 1959), 55; and John F. Kennedy, “Three Women of Courage,” *McCall’s* (January 1958), 37.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Hardwick, “The feminine principle,” *Mademoiselle* (February 1958), 133.

they would find that their nineteenth-century counterparts suffered the same discontent in their restricted roles. However, Hardwick explains, women do not analyze the past from this perspective of common experience. Rather, she writes, they dwell on the superficiality of style:

If we remember Mrs. [Julia Ward] Howe at all, we recall the photograph taken in her old age. She is a wrinkled old lady in a white cap and she sits in a great, hooded rattan chair on her veranda in Newport. At the moment, fashion having resurrected yet another group of corpses, our minds reach out greedily for the delicious rattan chair, an old object once more le dernier cri. And that is about all of Mrs. Howe we would seek to have about us.<sup>19</sup>

Hardwick suggests that the nostalgic view of the past symbolized by remembrance of Julia Ward Howe's furniture, but not of the activist and writer herself, is bad historical analysis which relegates women to domesticity. Her example replicates the thought process of the radio listener who praised the Philadelphia Club of Advertising Women for its 1937 Harriet Lane biography by describing a photograph in her personal collection:

Hawaii—so far away so alive—Harriet Lane—so far along the years, she seems lost in the mists of time.

Yet, the twain meet on a decorative note just for a moment in my mind—as I close the old Album—clasping within its mellowed gilt-edged leaves the glamorous picture of Harriet Lane—a famous Pennsylvania woman of Yesteryear.<sup>20</sup>

Hardwick criticizes such thought as dangerous “false simplicity” that makes women expect true fulfillment through feminine roles. She predicts “hysteria and breakdown” for the American woman rendered “as compliant as her dishwasher.”<sup>21</sup> This critique,

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<sup>19</sup> Hardwick, “The feminine principle,” 133.

<sup>20</sup> Carolyn Fox, January 7, [1937], PCAW Radio Programs and Fan Mail, 1927-38 Folder, Box 1, PCAW Records.

<sup>21</sup> Hardwick, “The feminine principle,” 180.

based on a lecture presented at Barnard College, challenges Betty Friedan's argument that mass culture had silenced critical challenges to domesticity and to gendered history.

Ignoring the suffragist biographies that had permeated the childhood of her contemporaries, Friedan argued that women needed to excavate their history. Her encouragement that women reclaim forgotten pasts emphasized the consciousness-raising process, rather than historical facts themselves, as the greatest inspiration for new activists. She told 1960s housewives, who could have read "Wonder Women of History" or watched *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* in their youth, that their intervention in public history was necessary. Friedan's invitation that housewives become investigative historians marked a canny call to action. The drive of Rose Arnold Powell, Mary Ritter Beard, and Eva Hansl to collect archives and agitate for public recognition, or the company loyalty promoted by Avon's inclusion of saleswomen in its business history, demonstrated the capacity for public history to build community.

And, although they went largely unacknowledged, the histories established by early twentieth-century media did influence feminism's second wave. Recalling *Wonder Woman* as an inspiring model of female action during her childhood, Gloria Steinem reinvented her on the inaugural 1972 cover of *Ms.* magazine, requesting a return from the character's current marriage-minded focus to the days when the book's cover touted "Wonder Woman for President."<sup>22</sup> This reclamation itself became a part of feminist historical iconography. The thirty-fifth anniversary issue of *Ms.* used previous *Ms.* cover images in a pixilated collage showing Wonder Woman's face.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ulrich, *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History*, 59-61. *Wonder Woman*, No. 7 (Winter 1943).

<sup>23</sup> *Ms.*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Fall 2007).

Simultaneously, corporate agendas continued to shape public perceptions of women's history. Whitman's Chocolates, promoted through its needlework-style box design, collected historical samplers.<sup>24</sup> Housed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, these artifacts have provided source material for academic historians. Advertisements continue to promote products by defining women's legacy in history. A 2009 Avon television advertisement, run during the Super Bowl, urged women that during economic recession "it makes sense to sell Avon. Avon is an American icon."<sup>25</sup> March 2009 catalogues for retailer Bed Bath & Beyond identified influential nineteenth-century female inventors behind the circular saw, the life raft, and the fire escape. This promotion urged consumers to enter a contest that would enable "[y]our invention" to be "sold in our stores": "Throughout history women have been responsible for some of the world's greatest innovations. Now we're looking for the next great generation of American Women of Invention."<sup>26</sup>

Mass culture's gendered constructions of history pose challenges to historians and activists. Advertisements, comic books, and films can be both liberating and repressive. Their complex authorship encompasses serious efforts to analyze the past, corporate promotion, and propaganda. Even the scholarly historian's tools have been shaped by corporate and patriarchal definitions of history. To be successful, feminist histories must address mass culture's gendering of the past.

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<sup>24</sup> Pet Incorporated, *The Story of Samplers* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1971).

<sup>25</sup> Avon advertisement, television advertisement, 2009, <[http://www.youravon.com/REPSuite/static/BAR/become\\_a\\_rep\\_sellavon.html](http://www.youravon.com/REPSuite/static/BAR/become_a_rep_sellavon.html)> Accessed June 2009.

<sup>26</sup> Bed Bath & Beyond catalogue, March 9-11, 2009. Author's collection.

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Williams, Susan Reynolds. "In the Garden of New England: Alice Morse Earle and the History of Domestic Life." Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1992.

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### Education:

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| October 2009 | Ph.D., History, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey |
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### Teaching and Research Positions:

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| 2009-2010   | Visiting Assistant Professor, History, Franklin & Marshall College                                      |
| 2008-2009   | Research Assistant, Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers History Center, New Brunswick, NJ |
| Fall 2008   | Instructor, Women in American History I, Rutgers University, NB   |
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| 2007-2008   | T. A. Associate, Writing Program, Rutgers University, NB  |
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### Publications:

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