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"I Have Thought Proper to Inform the World": Reading Unconventional Testaments of 18th- Century New England Women

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For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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“I HAVE THOUGHT PROPER TO INFORM THE WORLD”: READING
UNCONVENTIONAL TESTAMENTS OF 18TH-CENTURY NEW ENGLAND
WOMEN

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

of

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by

Elyssa A. Tardif

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For Stefan

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During a period of my childhood when I fancied myself something of a reincarnated Emily Dickinson, I also decided that I was destined to become a “Professor of English Literature.” If this journey has taught me anything, it is that getting a Ph.D. is by no means a foregone conclusion but earned through a dogged persistence you may not realize you possess and a network of supporters, cheerleaders, mentors, coaches, loving friends and family and even those well-meaning folks who ask, “So, are you done yet?” For all of these people, I am grateful, and I owe them all a lifetime of freshly baked goods for believing in me.

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ABSTRACT

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Early New England women chose to pass down what they owned and valued: clothing, cupboards, pewter dishes, commonplace books, etc. But some women passed down something more: a written testament, which sought to shape public opinion in colonial New England. A "testament" usefully suggests a text that both serves as a witness to lived experience as well as the means by which the individual herself can frame the narrative for those who come after. This project aims to examine not only written records but also their audience: who were the heirs to these testaments and how were the records preserved through centuries of movement through archives? What happens when we look to unconventional genres for evidence of women's self-fashioning?

Through an examination of four testaments – the petition of Abigail Faulkner, a white woman in Salem, MA, convicted of witchcraft (1711); the execution narrative of Katherine Garret, a Pequot woman in Connecticut, executed for infanticide (1738); the will of Naomai Ommaush, a Wampanoag woman on Martha's Vineyard (1749); and the

recorded testimony of Dinah Sisson, a free Black woman in Newport, RI (1794), I demonstrate how some 18th-century women seized certain genres in order to register their personal experience publicly. Each of these women insisted on access to this discourse during a moment when women's voices were subject to institutions that threatened to overwrite them.

Though scholars have already explored the notion of women as makers of public opinion in post-Revolutionary War and antebellum America, I hold that women during the colonial period sought participation in the same publics and counterpublics that would ultimately form "civil society." American women after 1790 were responsible for studying and then seizing the rights and obligations of citizenship, while colonial women, like those discussed in this chapter, engaged with public opinion on a local level, without nationalistic aims. Their interventions, recorded as written testaments and made public, allowed their message to be conveyed through generations.

In each chapter, I frame the central text as a testament, demonstrating how each woman attempted to shape public opinion to achieve her own particular end. Women's testaments, like other archival records, hold meaning in later periods and contexts—meanings that sometimes do not reflect the goals of their creators. Accordingly, I also explore the genealogy of each record and discuss how the record's meaning(s) has been shaped by the archives in which it has been placed. In each chapter, by positioning the record within a series of other records, I offer an alternative reading of the record that runs counter to its generic conventions.

INTRODUCTION

"Betsey Chase age ten years. Now in the bloom of youth prepare for death."
- sampler, Rhode Island Historical Society Collections, 1972.18.2

When ten-year-old Betsey Chase embroidered these words in her carefully rendered sampler, she would not have known that she would have ample time to prepare for death, as Betsey would live into her nineties. From conventional archival sources, we know scant details about her life: census data tells us that Betsey Chase never married, living in different cities throughout Massachusetts in the homes of other family members. The 1860 census in which she appears tells us that she was born in 1779. The sampler similarly inscribes her age by providing us with the year that Betsey was ten. But the sampler tells us what the census record cannot: something of the tenor of Betsey's life. Through the sampler, Betsey declares that she is a young girl, committed to developing mastery with the needle, and appropriately cognizant of her mortality. At age ten, she realizes that she must properly "prepare for death"; or, at the very least, she understands that such preparation was expected of a girl at her age. By rendering a sampler, Betsey creates a record of her burgeoning talent with a needle as well as the importance she places on piety, a testament to her values and developing skills that others will witness and by which they will remember her.

In 1869, at the age of ninety, Betsey Chase moved into her niece's home in Attleboro, MA, and presented the sampler as a gift to her 8-year-old great-niece, Fannie Read. Later in life, Fannie wrote a note to accompany the sampler that chronicles that childhood moment: "This sampler was made by Betsey Chase when ten years of age . . . When she presented me with the sampler she called my attention to the statement 'When in the bloom of youth, prepare for death' and said 'was not that a good selection for a little girl to make?'" Perhaps Betsey found the dictum to have been rather ill-suited for someone so young, and her remark to her great-niece reflects a moment of shared bemusement. Or perhaps Betsey saw the dictum as a lesson, useful to her in her own life, and one that she wanted to bequeath to her great-niece. Dictating the lesson to Fannie, Betsey then gave her the sampler to underscore it: the sampler thus functions as the means by which the lesson continues to be taught and its initial expression. Fannie wanted to memorialize both the exchange with Betsey as well as the details of her great-aunt's life, so she created a record that would accompany the sampler as it is passed from one heir to the next.

Fannie's grandson, Read Tompson, inherited the sampler and, in 1972, donated it to the Rhode Island Historical Society along with nine other objects, including a child's arm chair, several china dolls, and "assorted doll accessories." Contained in such a collection, the sampler is framed as an artifact relating to childhood, a possession wrought by a child during the same period that she might have played with china dolls. Within the archives of the Rhode Island Historical Society, however, the sampler was ultimately positioned within the "Sampler Collection" and separated from the other artifacts with which it was donated. The system of organization at the Rhode Island

Historical Society thus differed from Read Tompson's: the advent of scholarly interest in early American samplers during the 1980s led to the creation of the Sampler Collection, populated solely by such needlework. Responding to the expressed needs of researchers, the RIHS chose to define the artifact by its genre rather than the context within which it would have been used. Moreover, while the institutional archive overwrites Read's understanding of his ancestor's artifact, both Read and the Rhode Island Historical Society have ignored Betsey's own original construction of the sampler as a personal testament. In Betsey's estimation, the sampler was important for what it preserved: as a tool for her own instruction in embroidery at a young age, it served as a testament to her skill and, later, as means by which to instruct her descendants about the value of piety.

A brief word about terminology: I have framed Betsey Chase's sampler – as well as the four key texts analyzed in this dissertation – as *testaments*, or texts that “bear witness or attest” to an individual's own story. In the texts examined later, four women offer testimony – some in a social context, others in a legal context – which responds to the narratives put forth by those with greater authority. In earlier conceptualizations of this project, I tried other terminology on for size: *legacies*, *memorials*, even a term coined for the occasion, *self-memorial*. Yet, what I began to see in these four central texts engaged notions of both legacy (from the Latin *legare*, something that binds or ties) and memorial (*memorialis*, the recording of memory). A “testament” usefully suggests a text that both serves as a witness to lived experience as well as the means by which the individual herself can frame the narrative for those who come after. This project aims to examine not only the written testaments but also their audience: who were the heirs to these records and how were they preserved through centuries of movement through

archives? What happens when we look to unconventional genres like petitions, wills, execution narratives, and meeting minutes for evidence of women's self-fashioning?

Though this project focuses on written texts, early New Englanders recorded and passed down their memories in diverse ways, using written, oral and other means. Some, like Betsey Chase, created a record with a needle and memorialized their own life, while others chiseled epitaphs in stone to memorialize the lives of their loved ones. Edward Winslow, a Puritan living in 17th-century Plymouth Colony, recorded a tradition of memorialization practiced by the Pokanokets of the Wampanoag nation:

Where any remarkable act is done, in memory of it, either in the place or by some pathway near adjoining, they make a round hole in the ground . . . which when others passing by behold, they inquire the cause and occasion of the same, which once being known, they are careful to acquaint all men, as occasion serveth, therewith; and lest such holes should be filled or grown up by any accident, as men pass by, they will oft renew the same; by which many things of great antiquity are fresh in mind.¹

Though oral history functioned as the vehicle, the survival of these significant stories was dependent upon the physical marking of the land, mnemonics carved into the ground.

The oral transmission of memories might be used in tandem with the act of writing, as described in a story told by John W. Quinney, a Stockbridge Mohican leader.

¹ See Edward Winslow, *Good Newes from New England*. London: Matthew Simmons, 1648. Ezra Stiles writes about a related practice by 18th-century Wampanoag in Plymouth whereby stones or pieces of wood are piled on a large rock. Asked the reason for this practice, the "Indians say they know nothing about it, only that their Fathers & their Grandfathers & Great Grdfathers [sic] did so; and that if they did not cast a Stone or piece of Wood on that Stone as often as they passed by it, they would not prosper, & particularly should not be lucky in hunting Deer." See William Simmons, *Spirit of the New England Tribes: Indian History and Folklore, 1620-1984*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1986. 251-2.

When Quinney's great-grandfather, Ben Kokhkewenaunaunt, was a sachem at Stockbridge: "A Grand Council was convened of the Mu-he-con-new tribe for the purpose of conveying from the old to the young men, a knowledge of the past" (Brooks 241). The tribal memories were discussed at length and corrections were made by the group, "the results committed to faithful breasts, to be transmitted again to succeeding posterity" (Brooks 241). After the last of these councils, the memories were "reduced to writing" by two young men who had been taught to read and write. Although the written texts were published by an unnamed "white man" and subsequently lost, Quinney notes that "the traditions of the tribe . . . have been mainly preserved" (Brooks 241). As Lisa Brooks points out, "the importance of relaying and remembering communal history is evident in the amount of time and the number of people required to relate this narrative in full, as well as in the meticulous process through which the written account was created. The telling of history was a collective, participatory activity in which writing was made to play a part" (Brooks 242). Thus, both oral performances and written records – and sometimes a combination of the two – function as the means by which histories were created and personal narratives preserved for posterity.

Creating records and then situating them in an archive "[is] meant to make memory durable, external, locatable -- a thing to be pointed at" (Parrish 262). Yet, despite an individual or community's best efforts, records can be lost: epitaphs in a burying ground are rendered nearly illegible by relentless New England winters, or an archivist, attempting to preserve the main text by rebinding it, disposes of the handwritten marginalia that he has cut from the pages of a 17th-century Bible. Sometimes, records are simply forgotten, sitting uncatalogued in the dead aisles of over-capacity

archives or in the basements of disinterested descendants. Many records do survive, of course, in both publicly accessible and private archives. These records persist because they have been handed down from one heir to the next (often along familial lines) and/or have been entrusted to an archival repository, which may in turn transfer it to other archives. This transfer of ownership, from heir to heir or from archive to archive, can serve to ensure survival: if one heir dies, another living heir becomes accountable for the preservation of the record or story and for passing it down to the next heir; or, a company closes its doors and gives its archive of institutional history records to a state repository. Each time a record passes into another archive, it is imbued with another meaning, which depends on where/how it is arranged, with what other records it is grouped, and how it is used.

In addition to stories spoken aloud and written down, colonial New Englanders passed down community traditions, family names, material possessions, and the like, establishing and perpetuating lineages of inheritance just as memories were bequeathed from one heir to the next. Patrilineal lineages are fairly easy to trace: a genealogist or historian can follow the path of a surname passed from father to son, or track down land deeds that show property bequeathed from one generation to the next. Archives have traditionally – and fairly well – collected and preserved evidence of these patrilineal legacies. Matrilineal connections, however, are decidedly more difficult to trace, particularly since women took their husband's name upon marriage. Because married women could not own and bequeath property to their heirs, they bequeathed personalty: household goods, such as utensils and dishware, and textiles, including linens and clothing. Single or widowed women could legally own and gift property as well as

personalty in white communities, while in Native communities married women often were not subject to the same coverture laws that restricted women subject to English law. Enslaved Black women – single and married – could not legally own personalty, but free Black women could and did. By tracing the provenance of material artifacts and property bequeathed by women, we can locate lineages alternative to those found in the genealogical record.

Early New England women chose to pass down what they owned and valued: clothing, cupboards, pewter dishes, commonplace books, etc., and recent scholarship has deftly explored material artifacts like these that filled the households of early America.² But some women passed down something more: a written testament, which sought to shape public opinion in colonial New England. Through an examination of four testaments – the petition of Abigail Faulkner (a white woman in Salem, MA), the execution narrative of Katherine Garret (a Native woman in Connecticut), the will of Naomai Ommaush (a Native woman on Martha’s Vineyard), and the recorded testimony of Dinah Sisson (a Black woman in Newport, RI), I demonstrate how some 18th-century women seized certain genres in order to register their personal experience publicly. Each of these women insisted on access to this discourse during a moment when women’s voices were subject to institutions that threatened to overwrite them.

² For examples of recent material-culture studies of early America, see James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life*. Norwell, MA: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1996; James Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers: The Cultural Origins of North American*. London: Oxford University Press, 2000; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Hometown: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth*. New York: Random House, 2001; Marla Miller, *The Needle’s Eye: Women and Work in the Age of the Revolution*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006; Ann Smart Martin et al., *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field*. Winterthur, DE: Winterthur Museum, 1997; Stephanie Fitzgerald, “The Cultural Work of a Mohegan Painted Basket” in Kristina Bross and Hilary Wyss, eds., *Early Native Literacies in New England*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008; and T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Though scholars have already explored the notion of women as makers of public opinion in post-Revolutionary War and antebellum America, I hold that women during the colonial period sought participation in the same publics and counterpublics that would ultimately form what Sarah Josepha Hale (and, later, historian Mary Kelley) terms “civil society.”³ American women after 1790 were responsible for studying and then seizing the rights and obligations of citizenship, while colonial women, like those discussed in this chapter, engaged with public opinion on a local level, without nationalistic aims. Their interventions, recorded as written testaments and made public, allowed their message to be conveyed through generations.⁴

As the fate of Betsey Chase’s sampler demonstrates, women’s testaments have meaning in later periods and contexts—meanings that sometimes do not reflect the goals of their creators. Accordingly, in each chapter, I explore the genealogy of each record and

³ Mary Kelley adopts the term “civil society” to include “any and all publics except those dedicated to the organized politics constituted in political parties and elections to local, state, and national office” and prefers this term over “conceptualizing the public sphere either as a public with counterpublics or as multiple publics.” (5).

⁴ The purported dichotomy of public and private has been a source of contention in many disciplines, including women’s history and 18th-century literary studies. For recent commentary on the ongoing debate and expanded notions of the “public sphere,” see Mary Beth Norton, *Separated by Their Sex: Women in Public and Private in the Colonial Atlantic World*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011; Joanna Brooks, “The Early American Public Sphere and the Emergence of a Black Print Counterpublic,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 62:1 (January 2005): 67–92; Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America’s Republic*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006; the roundtable of essays entitled “Women’s History in the New Millennium: Rethinking Public and Private,” *Journal of Women’s History* 15:1 (Spring 2003): 10–69; and the responses by Mary P. Ryan, “The Public and the Private Good: Across the Great Divide in Women’s History,” *Journal of Women’s History* 15:2 (Summer 2003): 10–27, and Joan B. Landes, “Further Thoughts on the Public/Private Distinction,” *Journal of Women’s History* 15:2 (Summer 2003): 28–39.

Scholars of women’s history, in particular, treat the public as “fluid and relational, revealing that rhetorical, conceptual, and performative spaces of early American discourses, bodies, and identities informed and mutually shaped one another. Publics and counterpublics, then, intersect with the multiple subjectivities of status, class, race, and sexuality. This space, at once a sphere of power, agency, and subjection, permits some very new interpretative choices with regard to women as subjects in early America. See Terri Snyder, *Refiguring Women in Early American History*. *William and Mary Quarterly* 69:3 (July 2012): 445.

discuss how the record's meaning(s) has been shaped by the archives, both physical and figurative, in which it has been placed. Then, I frame the central text as a testament, demonstrating how each woman attempted to shape public opinion to achieve her own particular end. I examine genres not typically used by New England women to demonstrate self-fashioning and locate the testimony of women within these genres. In each chapter, by positioning the record within a series of other records, I offer an alternative reading of the record that runs counter to its generic conventions.

When I look at the surviving records of 18th-century New England, I see lineages: in genealogical ties born out in family trees, in land deeds that bequeath ownership from one heir to the next, and even in provenance of these records which have moved from one archive to the next. The notion of a lineage is particularly appropriate in this 18th-century moment, as linear hierarchies abounded in early America. Husbands served as heads of household to whom wives, children and servants were subordinate, just as God functioned as the head of the church, and thus, of men. This familial hierarchy was important to the proper functioning of the early colonies as it ensured that order could be maintained in the community.⁵ Thus laws governing inheritance and what men and women could and could not pass down to their progeny came to serve a crucial role in maintaining the community's cohesion and wellbeing.

Women were concerned with establishing and sustaining lineages—official, traditional and otherwise –that connected them to biological descendants as well as

⁵ See Edmund Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion & Domestic Relations in 17th Century New England*. New York: Harper and Row, 1944; Deborah Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1998; Lauren Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750*. New York: Vintage, 1982; and Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society*. New York: Vintage, 1997.

current and future members of their community. Identifying and tracing these lineages encourages us to view these archives as constructed sites that imbue each record with a particular set of meanings. My understanding of archives is informed by Jacques Derrida's conception of the archives as *arkhe*. The *arkhe* was conceived by Derrida as at once a site of "commencement" and "commandment," containing a set of rules which serve to dictate a record's meaning."⁶ Derrida explains that records transition from the private realm to a public one – the *arkhe* – although public access to these records is ultimately determined by archivists themselves. Betsey Chase's sampler, for example, is a private record that entered public archives after decades of private transmission from one heir to the next. Unlike Chase's sampler, the four texts in the chapters that follow were inserted into public archives by the women who produced them.

It is worth noting how archivists and academics distinguish between the "archives" and an "archive." The term "archives" denotes physical sites which house collections of records, what Antoinette Burton calls "traces of the past collected either intentionally or haphazardly as 'evidence'" (Burton, *Archive Stories*, 3). An "archive" denotes a set of records that share some common thread but do not necessarily share actual physical proximity. Records in an archive are contained within an imagined space, constructed for the purposes of meaning-making. A researcher assigns a meaning or meanings to a record based on his/her own lens, of course, but an archivist's arrangement of a record within an archive encourages a particular set of meanings. Though complicated power dynamics are certainly still at play within archival institutions, most archivists are now well aware that they do not passively participate in the archival

⁶ See Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

process. Rather, archivists recognize that they wield authority over the acquisition of records and their subsequent organization as well as users' access to these records. Some archivists argue that records only possess meaning once an archivist has accorded it such during the process of acquisition and appraisal (Booms 101). Documents are "imbued with meaning when they are cultivated – developed in some way by 'care, inquiry, or suffering'" (Furner 240). A record requires an "activation" of some kind, i.e., "every interaction, intervention, interrogation, and interpretation by creator, user, and archivist" allows the record to survive, be remembered, and, thus, hold meaning" (Ketelaar 25). Additionally, records in the archives can be said to possess multiple meanings, some of which can be understood from the intertextuality that connects that record to others (Prescott 40).

Constructing meaning out of an archival record, then, is a multi-step process in which the creator and user(s) play significant roles. The archivist, rather a middleman in this process—albeit a powerful one—serves as a "mediator and interpreter . . . an important shaper of the documentary record of the past that will be passed to the future" (Cook and Schwartz 183). Thus the archivist herself, in activating the record and imbuing it with meaning(s), perpetuates a lineage not unlike those created by the four women under study in this dissertation. The archivist, like the four women, bequeaths something of value to subsequent generations of users through her manipulation of the archives.

But are the scholars who make use of public archives as cognizant of the meaning-making process at work in these spaces as archivists seem to be? Collections of essays like *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions and the Writing of History* and *Contesting*

Archives: Finding Women in the Sources claim that, traditionally, historians and other scholars have not written about their subjective experiences in the archives and the ways in which these experiences have shaped their work. Both *Archive Stories* and *Contesting Archives* seek to remedy the problem “by telling stories about [an archive’s] provenance, its histories, its effect on its users, and above all, its power to shape all the narratives which are to be ‘found’ there” (Burton, *Archive Stories*, 6). These archive stories “are not merely histories or genealogies of archives or ‘the archive,’ but, rather, self-conscious ethnographies of one of the chief investigative foundations of History as a discipline” (Burton, *Archive Stories*, 6).

In each chapter of this dissertation, I offer my own “archive story” in order to remain transparent about my methods for mining the archives. I also attempt to delineate clearly the various meanings that I attribute to the records engaged in this dissertation, itself an imagined archive. In the interest of transparency, then, it seems appropriate to preface a discussion of my methodology with the process by which this project took shape.

Susan Scott Parrish argues that “if you go to the past with a list of what you are looking for, you will never get out of the present.” The solution? “The archive worker has to wallow in sloughs of boredom and thickets of patternlessness. The archive worker must reach the realm of disorientation . . . and dwell there.”⁷ This project indeed emerged

⁷ My methodology is also informed by the process of “hanging out” in the archives, as espoused by Jean Pfaelzer. Pfaelzer researched the lives of the first Chinese Americans by combing “national archives, local county historical societies, medical records, ships’ logs, government documents, and clipping files—the usual places.” She ultimately found, however, that “it was by hanging out—talking, sharing resources, telling and retelling this history—that I stumbled upon their stories and found their images.” Jean Pfaelzer, “Hanging Out: A Research Methodology.” *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers* 27:1 (2010): 140-159.

out of a thicket of what felt like profound patternlessness. That thicket was an archive of Native writings in the Massachusett language contained within a two-volume set compiled by Kathleen Bradgon and Ives Goddard. Turning the pages of the second volume, I found myself stopping at the will of a woman named Naomai Ommaush. I was struck by the careful attention that Naomai paid not only to naming the recipient of each gift but also to explaining each decision. It occurred to me that the will provided a glimpse of Naomai's own values – piety and generosity, among others – as well as the connections she had worked to establish in life and sought to memorialize as she approached death.

Months later, enmeshed in an entirely different archive – documents relating to the Salem witchcraft trials – I noticed a set of records that had received little play in the historiography of the trials. These records, a set of petitions, outlined the financial and emotional losses sustained by residents of Essex County. A petition by Abigail Faulkner stopped me in my tracks, as one line in particular seemed to jump from the page. Claiming that her conviction of witchcraft “will Remaine as a perpetuall brand of Infamy upon my family,” Abigail Faulkner calls for the “defacing of ye record against me.” A pattern began to emerge from my “realm of disorientation”: two women, separated by decades and miles, construct testaments that demonstrate marked attention to shaping public opinion about their own reputation and that of their posterity.

I kept an eye out for other examples of this pattern, finding one in an execution narrative and a fourth within the proceedings of a benevolent society in Rhode Island.

I have since encountered other examples, but, to emphasize a particular lens rather than expansive content, I have maintained an intentionally narrow scope in this project: four 18th-century public records that are authored by women in southeastern New England.

Similar in scope to Joan Gunderson's archive in *To Be Useful to the World: Women in Revolutionary America, 1740-1790*, my project highlights a small group of eighteenth-century women who "serve as points of entry for topics that affected many women" (xv). Of course, the texts which I have selected cannot speak to the experience of all 18th-century New England women. Indeed, race, class, and access to literacy, among other factors, obviously made a difference in the kinds of testaments women were able to create and how they did so. Nevertheless, my sample sheds light on a shared experience: the preservation of a testament in written form, whether it be to demonstrate gratitude toward a kindly neighbor or restore a damaged reputation. The four women discussed here were likely not taught to write and had to rely on mediators to record their words. However, women from all social and economic classes had access to the public record in some form, whether it be through a petition, execution narrative, or other genre. Thus, pulling sources from public, particularly legal, archives provides the opportunity to circumvent some of the limits that prevented many women from making their lives legible or visible to posterity through conventional authorship.

Rather than searching for examples in which women state explicitly how they want to be remembered, this project's primary exercise is to identify and close read records which demonstrate an attempt to shape public opinion. Two texts serve as my primary models for an effective close reading: Wendy Warren's "The Cause of Her Grief: The Rape of a Slave in Early New England" and Mary Elizabeth Perry's "Finding

Fatima, A Slave Woman in Early Modern Spain.”⁸ Both essays take as a point of departure a brief mention in the historical record of a disenfranchised woman. Drawing on primary sources contemporary to the original record, the historians construct a narrative that they argue is enriched by the inclusion of this newly considered evidence. As Warren and Perry demonstrate, and as I have found in this project, when women appeal in some written form to an institution of greater authority, they leave written evidence of what was important to them. The four women under study here speak back to the archives, demonstrating that they understand how public archives function and how they might wrest some measure of narrative control away from those with greater authority.

An excerpt from the execution narrative of Rebekah Chamblit can serve to illustrate my approach. Chamblit, a 27-year-old white woman living in Boston, was executed for infanticide in 1733. Chamblit writes: “I am sorry for any rash Expressions I have at any time uttered since my Condemnation; and I am verily perswaded there is no Place In the World, where there is a more strict regard to Justice than in this Province.” If we read this moment straight, we can understand that Chamblit experienced real regret for having made “rash Expressions” and that she ultimately believed herself to have been justly convicted of infanticide. However, her pairing of these two points suggests that the content of those “rash expressions” may have been the belief that she was unjustly convicted or perhaps that the punishment itself was too harsh – although she implies that her time in prison has changed her mind. But, if we read this moment as one where

⁸ See Wendy Anne Warren, ““The Cause of Her Grief”: The Rape of a Slave in Early New England.” *The Journal of American History* 93:4 (March 2007): 1031-1049; and Mary Elizabeth Perry, “Finding Fatima, A Slave Woman in Early Modern Spain.” *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources*. Eds. Nupur Chaudhuri and Sherry J. Katz. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010.

individuals with greater narrative control – i.e. her publishers, Kneeland and Green -- intervene in the text, we might see this as an attempt to undergird the authority and purported fairness of the Court. Chamblit, then, becomes a mouthpiece for those who possess a vested interest in proving that the proceedings were just. Given that isolating Rebekah Chamblit's actual voice in the text is a difficult if not impossible endeavor, this moment is a crucial one: whether such a thought was indeed conveyed by Chamblit hours before her execution or whether Kneeland and Green ventriloquized Chamblit to further their own agenda, we are still left with the likelihood that Chamblit did, in fact, make "rash Expressions" of some kind after her conviction. We cannot know for sure whether she would lament these expressions after the fact, or even the exact content of these expressions, but we can be fairly certain that she spoke out on her own behalf. Chamblit, like the four women at the heart of this dissertation project, expressed a desire to be heard.

My secondary exercise in this project is to explore how the meaning of a record is shaped by the real and imagined archives through which it passes. In the same way that possessions are passed down from one heir to the next, records are transferred from one archival site to the next. Sometimes the transfer is literal, as when a record is acquired by a different institution, and other times figurative, as when a record is situated in an imagined archive. When a scholar makes use of a record in his research, he places it within an imagined archive, situating it among other texts tied together by a common thread. A record can mean something very different depending on the archive within which it is contained: its meaning is shaped by its description in a finding aid as well as the other records in the same collection. With one foot in academia and the other in

public history, I find myself intrigued by the way an archivist's decision to situate a document in a certain place and describe it in a certain way affects how the document can be interpreted by readers. By making visible the construction of imagined archives, I hope to encourage both scholars and archivists to attend to the complex processes of interpretation and meaning-making.

The example of one 19th-century local history can help to illustrate what happens when records are repositioned in imaginary archives. A search that I conducted in the Sabin Americana database for histories of Martha's Vineyard to provide context for Chapter 4 yielded over 1,300 results. Among the documents are sermons, many of which were written by the Mayhews, a missionary family, as well as various reports from organizations like the Society for Propagating the Gospel Among the Indians and Others in North America. One particular text, Franklin B. Hough's *Papers Relating to the Island of Nantucket, with Documents relating to the Original Settlement of that Island, Martha's Vineyard, and other Islands adjacent, known as Dukes County, While under the Colony of New York, Compiled from Official Records in the Office of the Secretary of State at Albany, New York* looked to have been published in the 17th century, given the particular font employed and the use of the terminal "s." The document, however, was published in Albany, NY, in 1856. Hough's text is an edited collection of 17th-century documents relating to European settlement of Martha's Vineyard. Mostly comprised of land deeds, Hough's collection allows the reader to trace the ownership of certain townships on the Island throughout the 17th century.

The records in *Papers Relating to the Island of Nantucket* do not themselves have any bearing on this dissertation project, but Hough's framing of the collection does. He

essentially creates an imagined archive, transcribing the 17th-century documents and placing them together in one “site,” in an attempt to control and frame the early history of the Martha’s Vineyard and its surrounding islands. Hough’s reasoning for the creation of this imagined archive is of particular interest to my project in that, as I have tried to do, he attempts to be transparent both about his intentions in compiling the history (which differ from 17th- and 18th-century historians’ in one important way) and the process by which he does so.

Franklin Benjamin Hough, a 19th-century scientist and historian, published *Papers Relating to the Island of Nantucket, etc.* during a period when Americans were invested in preserving the nation’s history, not simply through the writing of historical accounts, as occurred during the 17th and 18th century, but through the founding of public repositories that would maintain important records for posterity. Repositories of records had existed earlier, of course, but they were held in private libraries of public officials like Thomas Hutchinson’s, for example, as we will see in Chapter 3. The new public repositories included the Massachusetts Historical Society, established in 1791, which was followed by the New-York Historical Society in 1804, the American Antiquarian Society in 1812, and the Maine and Rhode Island Historical Societies in 1822. As Hough explains:

The Emulation which has of late Years been evinced by several of the States, and by numerous Societies and Individuals in every Section of the Country, in the Preservation of the Records and Documents illustrating our History, affords a pleasing Evidence of the Prevalance of an active Spirit of Inquiry in this useful Department of Knowledge, and forms a

marked Era in our Literature. Next after the Obligation of leaving a full and lucid Record of the present Age, for the Benefit of those who are to come after us, is that of rescuing from Oblivion and placing beyond the contingency of Loss, the Memorials of former Times, so impressive in Lessons of Experience, and so useful in tracing the Origin of Development of our Civilization. (vi)

For Hough, then, the importance of history lies in its didactic quality, its ability to offer models to guide and instruct our own behavior. Not only should “full and lucid” records be kept to properly document the present moment, but records from earlier times – presumably the 17th and 18th centuries – should be “[rescued] from Oblivion” and placed in archives fitted to preserve them. Hough is cognizant of the cycles of remembering and forgetting, understanding that the current moment will soon be known only by the records left behind. Just as those in 1856 could learn from the examples set and recorded in the 17th century, so would individuals in later times learn from the records left by Hough’s generation.

Although Hough’s *Papers Relating to the Island of Nantucket* ostensibly concerns the history of one very specific site, it serves a secondary purpose: Hough attempts to provide a model for how historical inquiry and preservation can be effectively conducted. While earlier writers had provided some historical perspective to “elucidate our early History,” Hough finds that “much more still remains to be investigated.” He writes:

The Records which from conflicting Claims and frequent Changes of Boundary and Jurisdiction are found scattered through the Archives of different States, if brought together would afford an ample and satisfactory

solution of important Events in our History, hitherto but imperfectly understood. The Papers of Citizens who have held public Stations, if sought out and placed in public Libraries, would add immensely to our Knowledge of historical Events, and an extended System of Classification, Interchange, and Comparison, remains to be carried out, before our duty to Posterity is fully performed. (5)

Early historians, according to Hough, have “imperfectly understood” crucial events in the early American timeline, the remedy for which, he proposes, is the compilation and study of land claims which will serve as a corrective to the older histories. For Hough, legal texts are what count as the evidence by which one writes “real” history. These documents and others, held by individuals in “public Stations,” are the stuff of a perfectly understood history. For Hough, achieving such a lucid history of early America means that citizens will not only be able to learn from the examples of their predecessors but that their duty to “Posterity” – leaving a clear, organized record of “important” events – will be satisfied.

In certain ways, Hough’s project is similar to my own. His approximation of the field of history might well apply in the 21st century when “[t]he field of historical research is truly great, and . . . still, from the Extent and Variety of Subjects relating to our early Annals, much will yet remain to be accomplished by individual Enterprise.” Hough suggests that an “Association of Subscribers” be gathered who would promote and, more importantly, fund the project of bringing to light previously understudied projects, or “obscure but interesting Periods of our Annals.” Hough’s proposed project, then, is one of recovery, but he is also interested in what it would mean to organize

documents in a particular way and in a particular archive. Granting the public access to these documents is crucial – he does not suggest that these documents be made available to academic libraries for scholarly use. Instead, he believes that they belong in public libraries for broader access.

Hough sees *Papers Relating to the Island of Nantucket* as an exemplary text. He tells his benefactor John V. L. Pruyn that the book may “serve as an Example of the Materials in our publick Offices and Libraries, from which many similar and more ample historical Collections might be formed.” Hough hopes that the “[r]eadiness with which [Pruyn] responded to [his] Suggestion by assuming the Expenses attending the Publication of this Volume, affords Ground for Hope that sufficient Liberality will be found to sustain such an Enterprise.” Hough’s text is worthwhile on its own merit, he claims, but it also is meant to encourage others to embark on similar pursuits. What riches await the curious reader in the archives of “publick Offices and Libraries,” if only the historian-*cum*-archivist pulls the apt texts together into a compilation (viii). As I hope to show in this dissertation, Hough’s *Papers Relating to the Island of Nantucket* demonstrates that records can hold different meanings depending upon the imagined or physical archive in which they are gathered.

This project focuses on southeastern New England, what Jean O’Brien calls “arguably the most overstudied area of the United States for matters ranging from history to literature to national identity and beyond” (viii). For my justification in doing so, I am indebted to Karin Wulf’s recent work on 18th-century genealogical practices. Wulf contends that the “widespread practice of keeping family records and of tracing ancestry among 18th- century New Englanders provided the material and intellectual foundations

for the vogue in local history and genealogical publications that seemed to sweep the nation in the early republic” (viii). She finds that 18th-century New Englanders engaged in a distinctly social process of situating themselves as subjects in a line of ancestors and descendants by recording family details and events. These records were maintained by town clerks and clergymen in the 18th century, who provided the details upon request to those seeking to create and record their own family histories. Many of these genealogists were also early historians of the region, and thus two genealogical practices become closely aligned in New England: “the collective familial” (families who were tracing their lineages and recording them for posterity) and “the communal historical” (“communities of individuals highly invested in positioning family as a critical explanatory historical context”). While my project does not engage genealogical practices, per se, it employs the trope of a lineage, which, in 18th-century New England was inextricably tied to notions of history-making and memory-recording through the transference of records from one generation to the next.

This project is also indebted to Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s instructive, beautifully written narratives. Ulrich gathers slender evidence about the lives of ordinary individuals, which she deftly crafts into compelling stories that encompass whole communities.⁹ Though much of Ulrich’s oeuvre has influenced this dissertation in some way, two works have proven particularly important: the essay “Creating Lineages” in *The Art of Family: Genealogical Artifacts in New England*, ed. Peter Benes and D. Brenton Simons and DoHistory.org, an interactive website based on Martha Ballard’s diary. In

⁹ See Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750*. New York: Vintage, 1980; *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*. New York: Vintage, 1991; and *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth*. New York: Vintage, 2002.

“Creating Lineages,” Ulrich argues that an attention to the paths of inheritance initiated and sustained by women allows alternative lineages to emerge. Ulrich’s most compelling example concerns a certain painted cupboard: built around 1715 in Hadley, MA, the cupboard was given to Hannah Barnard, who, in her will, bequeathed the cupboard to her daughter, Abigail Marsh. Marsh then gave it to her daughter, Hannah Barnard Hastings, ultimately creating a matrilineal lineage that connected several generations. Ulrich points out that Hannah Barnard Hastings was named both for her grandmother and for her grandmother’s cupboard. Thus, this alternative lineage functioned as another form of inheritance, “[h]idden by the patrilineal mechanisms of the law,” which was not often recorded in probate court (Ulrich 7). The example of Hannah Barnard’s cupboard and the resulting matrilineal path encouraged me to look for other kinds of alternative lineages. Besides property and material objects, what else might have been passed down through generations? How else were connections to one’s heirs established?

Born out of 18th-century midwife Martha Ballard’s diary and Ulrich’s exploration of that text is DoHistory.org, “a site that shows you how to piece together the past from the fragments that have survived.” The site allows the user to read Martha Ballard’s diary in its entirety (digital images of the handwritten pages are accompanied by typed transcriptions) and also offers tools for examining and interpreting primary documents. The user is invited to “follow in the footsteps of a Pulitzer-Prize winning historian,” and the “footsteps” of a historian are purposefully rendered explicitly and transparently.

This attempt at transparency in the historical process has significantly influenced both this project and my work at the Rhode Island Historical Society. Indeed, a shift toward transparency and shared authority has occurred not only in academia but in the

public history sector, which includes archival sites, museums, historical sites, and historical societies. One salient example is that of the National Archives in the United Kingdom, which launched a revolutionary initiative entitled “Your Archives” in 2007. Functioning as a wiki, “Your Archives” allows registered users to play the part of archivists: they can add their own content tags to records in the collections, thereby expanding and enriching the archival descriptions to include community stories and knowledge (Prescott 49). In this way, “Your Archives,” where a record’s meaning is continually shaped by each user’s manipulation and contribution, demonstrates the fluidity of meaning production.¹⁰

Chapter 2 takes as its point of departure a 1704 petition submitted by Abigail Faulkner, one of many women deeply affected by the events that transpired in Salem in 1692. Faulkner had been convicted during the witchcraft trials but a reprieve from the governor released her. Despite her freedom having been assured, Abigail Faulkner recognizes that the community will not forget her conviction and may persecute her undeservedly. Even more damaging, she claims, is the fact that this record “will Remaine as a perpetuall brand of Infamy upon my family.” The aftermath of the trials for Faulkner, then, is clear: she and her family will forever bear the “brand” of having been accused of witchcraft. She desires the court to make amends and so petitions the court to “order the Defacing of the record” and thus rewrite the history of the events. She amends the archive of trial records by writing a petition (which then becomes part of the archive) in order to right her reputation and leave a revised version of the events of 1692

¹⁰ Alexis Ramsey’s Ph.D dissertation addresses the theory behind what “Your Archives” puts into practice. More than mere repositories, archives are “agentive” spaces and their potential for meaning-making.

to protect her against those who might yet persecute her or, later, her descendants. My reading of Abigail Faulkner's petitions demonstrates how one participant in the trials attempted to reclaim her rightful legal status, rewrite history, and assume narrative control of the archive by leaving a testament to her innocence for the sake of her posterity.

Naomai Ommaush, a Wampanoag woman on Martha's Vineyard, leaves a testament through the legal system, as well. To ensure her words are remembered, she submits a remarkably detailed will and testament in 1749. Chapter 3 examines Naomai's will, which she dictates to her minister in the Massachusetts language. The document not only outlines the objects which Naomai wishes to bequeath but also why she has chosen to give a particular item to a particular person. The record is a will, a spiritual narrative and an unorthodox colonial history that chronicles the dynamics of reciprocity at play within her community.

The importance of public declarations, crucial for shaping public opinion to Abigail Faulkner and other Salem petitioners in Chapter 2, comes to bear again in Chapter 4, which examines the construction of a testament in the form of an execution narrative. Execution narratives were written by convicted criminals sentenced to death and read aloud by a minister at their execution. The conventions of the genre dictate that these narratives reveal a last-minute repentance and an enumeration of the mounting mistakes made on the road to the crime for which these men and women were receiving the ultimate punishment. After her conversion to Christianity, the convicted criminal Katherine Garret takes pleasure in hearing her story offered as an instructive example: she was "*Exceedingly Affected*; Especially when her Case was more particularly touch'd

upon whither in *Prayers or Sermons*.” Garret desires that the account of her sins and subsequent punishment serve as a warning to others walking along the same path, and, for that reason, writes an execution narrative in 1738. Having received kindness from her community, she attempts to reciprocate, framing herself as a repentant, newly converted Christian woman whose life story and hard-won piety might encourage others to avoid a similar fate. Her execution narrative, coupled with her public declarations on the day of her execution, are perhaps the only means by which Garret could convey for posterity her story as penitent sinner.

Abigail Faulkner, Katherine Garret, and Naomai Ommaush all demonstrate a marked attention to public opinion and its effect on posterity – how would they be remembered after their death? How would others be affected by their reputation? Dinah Sisson, a free Black woman living in 18th-century Newport, RI, and the subject of Chapter 5, is keenly aware of the significance of reputation, and she uses this knowledge to further her own ends when she enters public discourse in 1784. Dinah’s husband, Neptune, belonged to the Free African Union Society (the first Black benevolent association in RI), and after his death in 1794, Dinah accused the Society of withholding funds owed to her. She approached the Society to demand a refund of the money, announcing her intentions to members who then brought her request to the attention of the Society, at which time her complaint was recorded. She then underscored her determination by disparaging the names of Society members throughout Newport. Her smear campaign elicited such an uproar within the community that the Free African Union Society was ultimately forced to disband entirely and return dues to its members, only reforming after Sisson’s death in 1795. Unlike the testaments of Abigail Faulkner,

Naomai Ommaush, and Katherine Garret, Dinah Sisson's intervention in the records of Free African Union Society does not explicitly show a consideration of posterity. Yet, Dinah's decision to ruin the reputation of the most prominent African American men in her community indicates that she, like the other women, possessed the wherewithal to shape public opinion to serve her needs. Her testament succeeds in speaking back to an institution that denied her membership and, thus, the ability to argue on her own behalf before its members. Though the Free African Union Society's resurrection depended on Sisson's death, it ultimately provided the means – that is, the archive – by which Sisson's testament would survive.

Although in this project I have been critical of the power that archives can wield over the texts they contain, I realize that in placing these texts in conversation with one another, I have myself positioned them in a new archive. It is my hope, however, that by remaining as transparent as possible in my methods and recognizing from the outset the constraints and limitations which my project necessarily places on these texts, I can unlock stories that have not yet been told. I can no more speak for Abigail Faulkner, Naomai Ommaush, Katherine Garret, and Dinah Sisson than could their male contemporaries, but it is not my intention to do so. Rather, this project aims to look beyond the lineages traditionally attributed to early New England women and uncover alternative lineages – the provenance of their testaments, recorded and preserved – which four women forged through dogged persistence and a strong sense of self.

CHAPTER 2: “THE ODIUM CAST UPON MY POSTERRITY”: READING ABIGAIL FAULKNER’S PETITIONS

The method that I undertake in this chapter (and in this project as a whole), involves the creation of a counterfactual archive that opens up new ways of uncovering, understanding, and speculating on the experiences of women like Abigail Faulkner, Naomai Ommaush, Katherine Garret, and Dinah Sisson. Additionally, taking into account the existing framework of the archive within which the record is contained provides additional insight into the interpretive possibilities. Thus, I begin with an archive story, a genealogy of the petitions of Abigail Faulkner.

Approximately 950 records pertaining to the Salem witchcraft trials are extant, consisting of Abigail Faulkner’s case files and 139 other individual cases. Given the large volume of documents, it is perhaps not surprising that they are not contained in a single archival site. Rather, the records are housed in judicial archives and manuscript repositories including the Boston Public Library, the Maine Historical Society, the Massachusetts State Archives, the Massachusetts Historical Society and the Philips Library at the Peabody Essex Museum. These records include complaints, warrants and returns, mittimuses, depositions, preliminary examinations, indictments, summonses, recognizances, petitions, letters, and confessions (Trask 44). All of these records were

re-transcribed and published in 2011 in a nearly 1,000-page edited collection by Bernard Rosenthal et al. Additionally, most records are also published digitally as part of the University of Virginia Electronic Text Center's "Salem Witch Trials Documentary Archive," thus increasing access to these records.

It is not entirely clear how the witchcraft records made their way into the various archives which contain them in 2013. It is likely, though, that after the trials, Stephen Sewall, Register of Probate for Essex County and Clerk of the Court of Pleas, of Peace and of the General Quarter Sessions, gave the original court records that he had written to the court house in Salem as part of the official repository of judicial documents of Essex County. Such repositories came into being in 1639 after the Massachusetts General Court, responding to complaints that cases were not being properly documented, ordered that "thenceforward every judgement, with all the evidence, bee recorded in a booke, to be kept to posterity" (*Massachusetts Records* 66). In the years that followed the trials, other people accessed – and sometimes removed – the records that Sewall had deposited, and eventually many of the documents came to be part of individual citizens' collections of personal papers. The examination of George Burroughs, for example, was discovered in the personal papers of John Hathorne and later given to the Massachusetts Historical Society where it still resides.

Collections like Bernard Rosenthal's *Records of Salem Witch Crisis* and the University of Virginia's "Salem Witch Trials Documentary Archive" on-line are important in that they provide a comprehensive look at all records (or nearly all, in the case of the latter) that pertain to the crisis. Before such collections existed, if one looked to study Abigail Faulkner's role in the trial aftermath, one could find both her individual

and group petition (Francis Faulkner et al.) in the Massachusetts Archives, though one would have to travel to the New York Public Library to access the 1692 petition that she submitted from jail. In 2013, in the “Salem Witch Trials Documentary Archive,” organized alphabetically by the defendant’s name, a researcher can examine Abigail Faulkner’s “case file” which includes her examination in August 1692, her indictment, the depositions against her, the verdict and death sentence, as well as the petition that she submitted while imprisoned in December 1692. While such an archive usefully allows the researcher to construct a narrative of the trials as they pertained to one individual, the digital case file excludes Faulkner’s 1703 individual petition and thus ignores the period during which Faulkner attempted, both individually and as part of a group, to reverse her conviction. Furthermore, an archive of records limited to 1692-1693 excludes the expression of Faulkner’s desire that her case be expunged from the record; in a rather cruel twist of fate, the only record eliminated from that archive is the one in which Faulkner insists that her name be “defaced” from the trial history. The Massachusetts General Court failed to grant her request in 1703 and the UVA Documentary Archive’s elision rubs salt in the wound.

If we remove Faulkner’s petition from its previous archives and place it in the imagined archive fashioned by this dissertation, we can position this moment not at the end of a timeline of trial-related events but rather at the commencement of a process of recuperation and the seeking of retribution. Without a reversal of attainder, the “brand” of conviction could prove as dangerous to descendants as for those directly involved in the trials. Like the other women highlighted in this dissertation, Abigail Faulkner sought to shape public opinion – in this case, to clear her name to protect her posterity– by

calling for something to be “publicly done.” This important action is lost in an archive that underscores the trials rather than their aftermath.

Despite Abigail Faulkner’s desire to remove her involvement in the trials from the historical record, the crisis has been described and critiqued in numerous narratives since its conclusion (and even before its conclusion, in the case of Cotton Mather’s *Wonders of the Invisible World*, written in 1692). Thomas Brattle – Boston merchant and a vocal critic of the trials – witnessed the execution of John Procter and John Willard and, in a letter to a clerical correspondent, reflected on the legacy of the trials as a whole: “What will be the issue of these troubles, God only knows; I am afraid that ages will not wear off that reproach and those stains which these things will leave behind them upon our land.” Faulkner, then, was not alone in her worry over the staying power of the trials, though Brattle seems to be concerned both with the “reproach” which the survivors might face as well as the “stains” of the accusers’ and magistrates’ wrongdoing. Abigail Faulkner writes about the trials in order that the memory of them be expunged and her involvement forgotten, but Brattle and others write so that the crisis will be remembered.

Thomas Brattle’s firsthand accounts of the trials, along with other primary documents, were used by later historians like Thomas Hutchinson to construct narratives of the crisis. Hutchinson mentions Abigail Faulkner only briefly in his account, though he describes one instance in which the “stains” of the guilty were shown to have persisted (58). Sarah Good, executed a month before Abigail Faulkner faced her examination, when asked by the minister Nicholas Noyes to confess in the final moments before death, replied: “I am no more a witch than you are a wizard, and if you take away my life God will give you blood to drink.” Good’s words resonated so powerfully that, sixty years

later, Salem residents informed Hutchinson that Sarah Good's prediction had come to pass: Nicholas Noyes had died of a hemorrhage, having been "choaked with blood."¹¹

The petitions of Abigail Faulkner as well as the last words of those executed for witchcraft demonstrate an attempt to assert one's innocence, even though the convictions were already recorded for posterity. Faulkner's 1703 petition does something more: it functions as a testament intended to reshape public opinion in her favor. Through this testament, she attempted to revise the historical record in order to destroy evidence that she had been a convicted witch, thereby blotting it from the public's memory, too. With no other recourse at her disposal, Abigail Faulkner attempted to circumvent the "odium cast upon [her] posterity" and, in the process, secured some measure of emotional and financial redress for herself and her peers.

In October of 1711 – nearly twenty years after the witchcraft trials in Salem, Massachusetts came to an end – the General Court in Boston reversed the attainder placed on the men and women who had been convicted of witchcraft between 1692-1693. For Abigail Faulkner, who had petitioned the court on her own behalf over a period of eighteen years, the news must have been bittersweet. The Reversal of Attainder acknowledged that the court in 1692-93 had mistakenly convicted Faulkner, as well as twenty-one others, thereby clearing their names. The ruling was a long time coming, however, and of course could hardly make amends for those families in which parents or spouses had been executed for their alleged crime. With the luxury of hindsight, we

¹¹ Robert Calef reports Sarah Good's last words in *More Wonders of the Invisible World*. Boston: Green, 1700). 358, which was a response to Cotton Mather's *Wonders of the Invisible World*. Thomas Hutchinson describes the circumstances surrounding Noyes' death (55).

know that the survivors and the victims' families would ultimately receive financial compensation. Yet for those who lived through the crisis, the end of the trials undoubtedly felt like both a conclusion and the beginning of a journey toward individual and communal healing, as they fought to recuperate their estates and their reputations.

This chapter expands the study of the Salem witchcraft crisis to include the subsequent – and oft-neglected – two decades during which survivors and victims' families sought legal and financial redress. Despite the popularity of the Salem witchcraft crisis as a topic of study, relatively short shrift has been given to any discussion of the aftermath of the trials. Most scholars attempt to make sense of the events through the recorded testimony of those involved, both the accusers and the accused, and yet very little attention has been paid to events immediately following the trials and the nearly two decades of subsequent litigation, beyond pointing to the fact that retribution for the emotional and financial costs was slow in coming.¹² I explore the petitions of one survivor, Abigail Faulker, which reveal her attempt to rectify a damaged reputation for the sake of her posterity. By examining petitions issued during the latter part of the trials as well as during the legal aftermath which lasted until 1711, I demonstrate how Abigail Faulkner attempted to reclaim her rightful legal status and rewrite the history of the trials on her own terms. Abigail Faulkner's petitions stand out not only for their frequency – she petitioned the court four times – but also for their content. Although her initial petition shows an attempt to remain humble, her later

¹² For the most recent studies on the witchcraft crisis, see Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692*. New York: Vintage, 2003; Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974; Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England*. W.W. Norton and Co., 1998; and Peter Charles Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: A Legal History*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1997.

petitions adopt a sharper, more demanding tone, suggesting that she became increasingly frustrated with the court and the slow process of receiving redress. I analyze Faulkner's records as conventional petitions that demonstrate her demand for retribution and compensation. But more significantly for my project, her petitions function as testaments, texts in which we can see her attempt to clear her name and her efforts to rewrite the historical record.

Despite the unique nature of Faulkner's case, though, I am interested in moving beyond an argument that would frame Faulkner and her mark in the historical record as subversive or unusual. I look to Faulkner's case because she is one of the most visible women in the post-trials aftermath, and in highlighting her story, I hope to demonstrate an early example of a woman seeking to shape public opinion to suit her own needs. In order to clear her name for the sake of her descendants, Faulkner calls for something to be "publicly done" to restore her reputation. By turning from an exclusive look at the witchcraft trial transcripts to a consideration of the important aftermath during which the survivors fought for compensation, we can better understand how individuals like Faulkner, thrown into disrepute because of the trials, gained some measure of control in the decades that followed.

As the extant documents from the trials and the subsequent twenty-year period can attest, the possession of a particular reputation marked individuals and left them particularly vulnerable to suspicion. Even a person's non-blood relations were linked to him or her if their behavior drew concern, or, worse, formal accusation. In addition to serving as a source for allegations, rumor and reputation fulfilled numerous functions during the trials, including facilitating the judges' and juries' decisions to convict, and

functioning as ineffective tools by which the accused defended themselves. And as Mary Beth Norton points out, “By corroborating accusations that originated elsewhere, the Village afflicted simultaneously validated the opinions of their fellow Essex County residents and reconfirmed their own position at the vortex of the crisis. Their affirmation of others’ charges encouraged the expression of even more accusations, thereby renewing and repeating what become seemingly endless cycles of suspicion, gossip, and complaints, leading to more suspicion, more gossip, and additional complaints” (113). As the trial of Rebecca Nurse demonstrates, a good reputation – while highly regarded – was not sufficient to protect a person from conviction in 1692 Salem, although a bad reputation virtually assured it. After the trials were over, a person’s reputation and the taint of a witchcraft allegation or conviction became an obstacle to both financial and emotional recuperation for those who survived. As Carol Karlsen argues about witchcraft defamation cases, “the damage from which people . . . sought relief could range from simple enmity of one’s neighbors to the loss of property, of freedom of movement, and of life itself” (Karlsen 63).

Many of those accused of witchcraft had previously been accused of the same crime, and others, like Abigail Faulkner, saw family members accused as well.¹³ A court in late 17th-century Connecticut offered these grounds for identifying a witch: ‘If the party suspected be the son or daughter, the servant or familiar friend, neer Neighbor or old Companion of a Knowne or Convicted witch, this alsoe [is] a presumton, for witchcraft is an art that may be learned and Convayd from man to man and oft it falleth

¹³ The list of those previously accused of witchcraft includes Sarah Good, Bridget Bishop, Sarah Wilds, Lydia Dustin, Dorcas Hoar, Susannah Martin, and Elizabeth Howe and others.

out that a witch dying leaveth som of the aforesaid heirs of her witchcraft.”¹⁴ The art of witchcraft was viewed as a form of personalty, a body of inheritable knowledge that constituted a particularly dangerous kind of legacy. Witchcraft presented a serious threat to the colony, not the least of which was a perversion of acceptable gifts passed down to one’s descendants.

Abigail Faulkner, deeply affected by the events that transpired in 1692, herself demonstrated a marked attention to what she passes down to posterity. Convicted of witchcraft, she received a reprieve from the governor – and a stay of execution – because she had confessed to the crime. Faulkner petitioned the court several times to request that the account of her trial and conviction be erased from public record and that she receive compensation for monetary losses. Her 1703 petition’s retelling of the events reveals what Faulkner imagines the official record to indicate as opposed to how she wants the trials and her involvement in them to be remembered.

As the witchcraft trials have been covered extensively by scholars for over two centuries, I will describe only briefly the context in which Abigail Faulkner issues her petitions. Late 17th-century Salem Village was fraught with litigation, with conflicts over land distribution and debt settlement commonplace. The powerful families of Salem –the Porters and the Putnams – were particularly frequent participants in legal disputes. The Porters and Putnams led a hierarchical network of families who frequently vied for political and social power in the newly formed Salem Village. Having gradually separated itself from the larger, older Salem Town, Salem Village lacked its own

¹⁴ This list from a deposition in a Connecticut witchcraft trial closely resembles a list in *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* by William Perkins (Karlsen 3).

governing force and thus fell prey to what Peter Charles Hoffer terms rampant “village factionalism.” Complicating matters further, the overthrow of King James II left the Massachusetts Bay colony without a charter, and Salem Village faced political uncertainty on one hand and the ever increasing threat of Indian war on the other. As Boyer and Nissenbaum point out, the “two hundred or so adult residents of Salem Village [did not have] any local means of resolving their quarrels. Deprived of formal decision-making bodies controlled by Villagers, they always had to appeal to outside authorities – to Salem Town, to the General Court, to synods of ministers, to arbitrators or mediators – to achieve solutions to their conflicts” (Norton 17).

In the midst of this unrest, two young girls in the minister Samuel Parris’s household – his daughter, Elizabeth and his niece Abigail Williams – began to behave strangely. It became clear that the girls were afflicted with some kind of sickness, and their physician cited witchcraft as its cause. The girls’ behavior, although unsettling, was not unheard of in Massachusetts at that time: four years earlier, a Boston woman named Ann Glover had apparently inflicted the same sickness on Martha Goodwin, the daughter of Glover’s employer. Glover, convicted of the crime of witchcraft, was hanged in 1688. The Massachusetts courts at this time followed a statute established in 1642 that offered the following solution for the crime of witchcraft: “If any man or woman be a witch (that is hath or consulted with a familiar spirit) they shall be put to death.” The authorities in Salem would follow the same statute as their Boston counterparts four years later.

Confessing to the practice of witchcraft, precisely the path taken by Tituba, the first woman accused in February, 1692, was the most effective way to avoid a death sentence. Many other accusations followed in the next several months, and over 200

people were ultimately arrested on charges of witchcraft. Twenty were executed, and many others died while imprisoned. Some women, like Abigail Faulkner, escaped their death sentence because they were pregnant at the time of their indictment. As I discuss below, Faulkner attributed her reprieve to her pregnancy, though the fact that she had confessed would have safeguarded her from execution (Rosenthal 22). The trials came to an end in the spring of 1693 when Governor Phipps released all the remaining prisoners, and the Salem community began to take stock of what had transpired.

The most immediate consequence of the trials was Governor Phipps' interdiction against the admission of spectral evidence as condemnable proof in court.

Understandably, the end of the trials marked a period of pervasive discord and distrust among many community members, whose families had all been affected in some way by the accusations and executions. Several apologies from public figures followed, including that of Samuel Sewall who had served as one of the appointed judges. Sewall publicly apologized for his participation in the trials, and he seems to have been the only judge to do so. The minister, Samuel Parris, issued an apology as well, although his admission of guilt did little to assuage the fear and anger in the fractured community. Joseph Green replaced Parris in 1696, and Green – with no earlier ties to Salem Village and offering a much needed outsider's perspective – attempted to bring the divided community together, urging the Nurses and Putnams to sit together in church, constructing a new meeting house, and enacting policies of social welfare to benefit the community.

These welfare policies were particularly timely, as many individuals struggled to overcome debt they had incurred as a result of the cost of their own imprisonment or that

of their family members'. The fees associated with imprisonment were hefty, and the incarcerated individual's family also bore the cost of providing necessities for the prisoner as well as the expense of travelling back and forth to the prison. Additionally, those individuals who had been condemned but not executed found that they had lost their estates as a result of the trials. Their lives had been spared, but they were saddled with debt and, in some cases, denied access to their estates and property.

Abigail Faulkner was a survivor who found herself in such a situation. Abigail, the head of her household by virtue of her husband's illness, could not lay claim to any of the family property as a convicted felon. She sought reparations by petitioning the courts and explaining the financial and emotional losses they incurred as a result of the trials. Abigail petitioned the court a total of four times, including a group petition submitted with other members of the community. She and the other petitioners would have to wait until 1711 – eighteen years after the trials ended – before they received monetary compensation for their losses.

Abigail Faulkner's decision to seek compensation through the system of petitions was not unusual in the 17th and early 18th centuries. Although women in early New England were able (and often did) participate in legal disputes in court, the process of submitting a petition provided them with an often more effective way to seek redress. As Deborah Rosen points out,

before the nineteenth century . . . women actually had less need to fight for access to the formal legal system and for the rights that would make such access meaningful because an alternative path to justice was available to them. The alternative was not rights-based, but rested on official

discretion . . . This alternative did not actually grant women rights or entitlements, but under certain circumstances it helped mitigate the negative aspects of their limited personal freedom. (Rosen 313-14)

The petition, then, offered women a chance for direct communication with a source of authority in power. Yet, as Rosen argues, the very form of the petition (a supplicant seeking assistance from an authority figure) necessarily limited an individual's possibility for wielding power. Rosen writes:

it was considered more appropriate for women to seek redress not as litigants invoking rights but as petitioners asking for male protection. One can easily understand why women in the colonial period would be more likely to get what they wanted if they took an approach that was consistent with their assigned roles and with their presumed characteristics as women, and if that approach was not threatening to the basic social order (because it implicitly acknowledged the established gender hierarchy). (Rosen 323)

The petition as a form of legal redress for women, then, did not subvert the hegemonic structure of colonial New England. Although Rosen deals with examples of petitions specifically in early New York, other studies including Cornelia Dayton Hughes' survey of early Connecticut and Sharon Harris's examination of an 18th-century woman in Massachusetts reflect a similar conclusion: working within the system, rather than

working to subvert it, would have been the most advantageous way for women to achieve their goals.¹⁵

In fact, Puritan jurisprudence – with its prohibition against lawyers and simplified procedures – actually facilitated women’s expression in the 17th-century courtroom (Hughes 10). The Puritan system, “by encouraging lay pleading and by insisting on godly rules, created unusual opportunities for women’s voices to be heard in court” and “the magistrates’ confidence that God would help them discern the truth behind a dispute or criminal charge meant that women’s testimony was invited and encouraged in ways that clashed with English legal traditions” (Hughes 10). Sharon Harris strikes a different tone than Rosen in her approximation of women’s participation in the legal system: “Early women’s lives [. . .] were controlled by a legal system in which they were expected to have little or no control. Yet a few notable women challenged such exclusions” (Harris 70). Early women may not have been intended to participate in the legal system – and as women “covered” by their male counterpart, it seems fair to conclude they were not – but participate they did. Women of color had different stakes, of course, as they faced not only discrimination based on gender but on race and the intersection of the two. Harris points out that for nonwhite women, “the use of the petition as a means of entering into the rhetoric of rights and freedom from tyranny began with individual cases not meant to impact an entire group.” The woman Belinda, to whom Harris points in a case study, “represents an early figure in that process of challenge and change.”

¹⁵ See Cornelia Dayton Hughes, *Women Before the Bar: Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut, 1639-1789* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1995) and Sharon Harris, *Executing Race: Early American Women's Narratives of Race, Society, and the Law*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005, particularly Chapter 2, “Belinda: The Politics of Petitions.” For other studies of women’s use of petitions in early New England, see also George Billias, *Law and Authority in Colonial America*; and David Konig, *Law and Society in Puritan Massachusetts: Essex County, 1629-1692*.

As I argue here, Abigail Faulkner did not pave the way for other women to voice discontent in a legal forum, since this tradition had already been established. Yet, her petitions do shed light on the different ways that the genre could be used not only to seek a recuperation of financial losses suffered but also the reinstatement of an individual's reputation. Faulkner, concerned that her remaining days and those of her descendants would be marred or even cut short because of her unjustly acquired reputation as a convicted witch, used the petition in an attempt to alter her mark in the public record. Even if she did not achieve that goal, the very fact of submitting a petition, which would then become part of that same archive, would assure that she had some say in how her involvement in the witchcraft trials would be remembered.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, women made use of the petition for many different purposes, the most common of which was to settle disputes over inheritance and the bequeathing of property. Petitions were also used to ask for financial assistance, particularly by widows who were not able to support themselves with what they inherited after the passing of their husband. Widows with children, not surprisingly, were even more likely to request aid via the petition process (Rosen 324). In the aftermath of the trials in Salem, supplicants of all kinds sought compensation: those convicted individuals who had survived the ordeal, the family members (progeny, parents, and surviving spouses) of the convicted, as well as others who had been financially inconvenienced by the numerous arrests and imprisonments.

Petitions submitted by both women and men constitute a significant portion of the archive of trial and post-trial records. During the trials, petitions were written to serve as testimonies for the defendant, to secure aid for those imprisoned, and to beg for a

reprieve. Writing petitions after the trials might be intended to accomplish one of several goals: a person could try to recuperate funds lost to the jailer, to the sheriff (who had confiscated property from those convicted) or for various expenses incurred in feeding, caring for the jailed individual, travelling back and forth to see him/her, etc. Petitions were also submitted in hope of securing a reversal of attainder such that the names of the convicted would be cleared from any wrongdoing. Most of the petitions submitted after 1692 attempt to recuperate funds lost during or as a result of the trials, and these financial losses are figured to the shilling. Only a handful, however, like those of Abigail Faulkner, outline emotional damages whose effects cannot be so easily enumerated.

Tracing the process by which Abigail Faulkner and others succeeded in settling their legal struggles with the Massachusetts courts reveals what was no doubt a frustratingly slow process for the survivors and families who sought legal redress. The chronology of events which follows the official end to the witchcraft trials is not easy to track, as multiple petitioners made claims to the governor and to the general courts, and as there are only a few records of the responses which these petitions received. I provide below a general chronology of the major legal events involving petitions, beginning with Abigail Faulkner's first petition in 1692 and ending with the financial compensation of the affected families in 1711:

December 5, 1692 – Abigail Faulkner submits her first petition in which she solicits a pardon from the governor for her release from prison.

March 2, 1703 – The court hears an individual petition from Abigail Faulkner in which she demands that the trial records be defaced, which would thereby protect herself and her posterity from wrongful defamation;

The court also hears a petition signed by 21 people, Abigail Faulkner and her husband among them, which requests that rightful estates be reinstated to those who were condemned. The petitioners also request that “Something may be Publicly done to take off Infamy from the Names and memory of those who have Suffered.”

May 26, 1703 – An “Act for the Reversing the Attainder of Abigail Faulkner Sr. et al.” is introduced, by which the courts “*Declared & Enacted . . .* That the said Several convictions, Judgments and Attainders of the said Abigail Faulkner, Sarah Wardel, Elizabeth Procter and every of them be, and are repealed, reversed, made and declared null and void to all intents, constructions, and purposes whatsoever; as if no such convictions, Judgments or Attainders had ever been had or given. And that no corruption of blood, pains, penalties, or Forfeitures of Goods or Chattels be by the said convictions and Attainders or any of them incurred, But that the said persons and every of them and hereby are reinstated in their just Credit and reputation.”

July 20, 1703 – The court orders a bill of attainder for Abigail Faulkner et al. by which spectral evidence is outlawed and “the Infamy, and Reproach, cast on the names of the said accused, and Condemned Persons may in Some measure be Rolled away.”

Sept. 1710 -- 46 petitions were heard which sought redress for financial losses incurred from the trials; included in these is a petition from Abigail Faulkner (Clearly the act for reversal of attainder in 1703 was ineffective since it was still being requested seven years later).

October 17, 1711 –The courts pass an official act to reverse the attainders of George Burroughs et al.

Dec. 17 1711- Official Restitution: families are promised the funds they sought to reclaim for losses incurred: the Faulkners will receive 20 pounds.

Abigail Faulkner, in the throes of the frigid 1692 New England winter, petitioned the governor for a reprieve. She writes: “Your poor and humble Petitioner, having been this four monthes in Salem Prison . . . doe humbly begge and Implore of your Excellencye . . . that some speedy Course may be taken with me for my releasement that I and my children perish not.” Faulkner’s situation, like the scores of other women and men accused of witchcraft, was dire. Four months after her trial, she remained imprisoned, convicted of witchcraft and six months pregnant with her seventh child. She requested help from the Governor not only for her own predicament but for her family’s plight as well: with a husband subject to “fits” which virtually incapacitated him, the onus fell on Abigail to manage a household of six children, an impossible task if she were to remain imprisoned.

Unable to count on the typical head of the household -- her husband -- for support, Abigail Faulkner sought assistance from the head of state, Governor William Phipps. She asks the governor for a pardon, given that the witnesses who accused her had since confessed to her that they had lied. She writes:

having had no other evidences against me but the Spectre Evidences and the Confessors w'ch Confessors have lately since I was condemned owned to my selfe and others and doe still own that they wronged me and what

they had said against me was false: and that they would not that I should have been put to death for a thousand worldes for they never should have enjoyed themselves againe in this world; w'ch undoubtedly I should have been put to death had it not pleased the Lord I had been with child.

Faulkner believes that had she not been pregnant at the time of her conviction, she would have been subject to execution. As a mother pregnant with another child— the very posterity that she hopes to protect -- her desire to clear her name takes on even greater significance; she believes if it were not for the fact of her pregnancy that she might not have lived to write a petition in the first place.

Abigail Faulkner's name does not appear in court records before 1692, and thus the very documents she wished to be destroyed would come to serve as the means by which she is remembered today. Faulkner's interaction with the Salem courts began in August of 1692 when she underwent her first examination under Judge John Hathorn, who delivered the allegation of witchcraft. Her response, according to the recorder Simon Willard, is followed by what appears to be a surreptitious glance: the clerk notes that she claims to "know nothing of it with: the cast of her eye." Her very presence in the courtroom sends her accusers into fits, and, pressed on this point, she admits that it is the Devil who takes her form and afflicts the girls. According to the court record, she is questioned later that month and at this point confesses to the crime of witchcraft: "afterward: she owned: that: she was Angry at what folks said: when her Couz Eliz Jonson was taken up: & folk laught & said her sister Jonson would come out next: & she did look with an evil eye on the afflicted persons: & did consent that they should be afflicted: becaus they were the caus of bringing her kindred out: and she did wish them

ill. & her spirit being raised she did: pinch her hands together: & she knew not but that the devil might take that advantage” (Rosenthal 543). Faulkner confesses that when her niece Elizabeth Johnson, Jr. was arrested from witchcraft, she bristled under the taunts of neighbors who said her sister Elizabeth Johnson, Sr. would be next. Johnson Sr. had already brought calumny to the family when she was arrested years before for the crime of fornication; Abigail may have smarted at the reminder of this shameful moment in her family’s history. From the very beginning of Abigail’s involvement in the trials, she demonstrates the utmost concern for her kin and the reputation of her family within the community. Even more so, she clearly recognizes and, in her testimony, traces out for us an alternative lineage: these women (Elizabeth Johnson Jr., Elizabeth Johnson Sr. and Faulkner) are connected by blood but also by the poor reputation that they share as members of the same family.

Several other members of Faulkner’s family became entwined in the events of 1692-93. On September 16, 1692, her daughters, Dorothy and Abigail Jr. confessed that their mother turned them into witches and the next day Faulkner was indicted for afflicting Sarah Phelps and Martha Sprague.¹⁶ Found guilty on both charges, she was sentenced to death. Imprisoned and awaiting the execution which was expected to occur after the birth of her child, Abigail petitioned Governor Phipps on December 5 of 1692, in an impassioned plea to release her from prison. In the record, she explains that her husband’s ill health makes him incapable of presiding over the household and caring for their six children. She writes:

¹⁶ Abigail’s daughters apparently spent a month in jail following their confession, and on October 6, 1692 were released on £500 bail to their uncle Nathaniel Dane and John Osgood Sr. The girls were officially released on January 13, 1693.

[m]y husband about five yeares a goe was taken w'th fitts w'ch did very much impaire his memory and understanding but w'th the blessing of the Lord upon my Endeavors did recover of them againe but now through greife and sorrow they are returned to him againe as bad as Ever they were: I having six children and having little or nothing to subsist on being in a manner without a head to doe any thinge for my selfe or them and being closely con-fined can see no otherwayes but we shall all perish.

From this petition, we learn that Abigail serves myriad roles in her family. She is both wife and mother, and serves as the head of household during her husband's frequent illness. In fact, she indicates that she is even the one who can cure him of his "fitts" (it is "upon [her] Endeavors" that Francis convalesces the first time he falls ill). Deborah Rosen's claim that female petitioners are essentially seeking male protection is complicated in this instance. Certainly, Abigail needs the assistance of the court to remedy her family's troubles, and she seeks to be released so that she can continue to act as head of household. It is not my intention to refute Rosen's claims but rather to demonstrate the often complex dynamics between supplicant and authority figure and the rather fluid categories of protector and protected. As William Scheik explains, "[i]n societal structures involving both genders, power relations tend to be so subtly dispersed that the exertion of authority by one gender in a specific communal sector does not necessarily translate into a similar role in every sector" (Scheik 5). I would argue that in this instance, we cannot easily make claims about the fixed position of authority in petitions submitted during and after the trials.

In Abigail Faulkner's 1692 petition, we see an example of what Laurel Thatcher Ulrich terms the "deputy husband." Abigail must serve in the capacity of husband, which was not an unusual or unacceptable modification to her status as wife and mother. In fact, "[u]nder the right conditions any wife not only *could* double as a husband, she had the responsibility to do so" (Ulrich 38). While a modern eye might see Abigail's expanding role as wife, mother, and deputy husband as evidence of her achieving unusual or remarkable agency for a woman in her community at that time, it would be erroneous to do so since the role of deputy husband was completely appropriate (and, as Ulrich indicates) expected. Instead, Abigail's 1692 petition offers a cogent illustration of how seventeenth-century New England women consistently resist strict categorization: they are at once powerful and powerless, submissive and forceful. It is worth noting, too, that in these petitions, wives signed along with their husbands. A woman took on the role of deputy husband in her husband's absence, but in this instance we see that women are visible, viable participants in the legal system.

The result of Abigail Faulkner's first petition in 1692 is not extant, and it is not clear how long she remains in prison after sending this petition (Rosenthal 705). However, in her final petition to the court in 1710, she claims she was imprisoned a total of four months, and her two daughters for one month. Given this information, we can gather that she was released in December or January of 1692. Faulkner petitioned the General Court three more times in the next two decades, as she and other survivors attempted to recuperate emotionally and financially from the ordeal.

Many members of the Salem community and the surrounding towns were involved in shaping the aftermath of the trials through supplications to the governor and

later the General Court. Thus, when Abigail Faulkner submitted a petition during that summer of 1703, she was not engaging in a particularly remarkable practice. Yet, the content of her petition and the fact that she submitted one on her own mere months after she signed one with her husband and others makes this particular legal interjection worth examining more closely. Why did she feel the need to petition the governor so soon after the first attempt? The answer to my query probably is not recoverable, but it does suggest that Faulkner felt that her individual expression could achieve better results or would underscore the earlier petition. In the spring of 1703, a group of community members sought to “restore the reputations to the posterity of the sufferers and renumerate them as to what they have been damnified in their estates.” A group of twenty-one people (some were the accused who had survived the trials and others were their family members and families of the deceased) including Abigail and Francis Faulkner sent a petition to the governor in 1703 asking for a public renouncement of the supposed crimes of the accused.

Your Petitioners being dissatisfyed and grieved, that (besides what the aforesaid condemned persons have suffered in their persons and Estates) their Names are Exposed to Infamy and reproach, while their Tryall & condemnation stands upon Publick Record: We therefore humbly Pray this Honored Court, that something may be Publickly done to take off Infamy from the Names, and memory of those who have suffered as aforesaid, that none of their surviving Relations, nor their Posterity may suffer reproach upon that account.

This petition reveals that the loss of reputation was as significant as a loss of financial capital to the Salem community. This petition was signed by both men and women, although, as Mary Beth Norton argues, the stakes of a tainted reputation for each gender were quite different. With a good reputation, a man could submit testimony in court (an exceedingly useful privilege to possess if one was caught up in litigation of some kind) and was considered trustworthy among his peers; a man who had lost his “credit” (signifying, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “the reputation of being worthy of belief or trust”) threatened the very structure of a community built upon confidence in men’s oaths. For women, on the other hand, maintaining an unblemished reputation depended upon conforming to acceptable modes of sexual behavior; if they did not, women risked a summons to court when the indiscretion had been made public through one of many networks of gossip (Norton, *Founding Mothers*, 232).

Three months after Francis Faulkner et al. petitioned the court, in June 1703, eleven ministers from Salem and the surrounding communities, including Joseph Green (who had replaced Samuel Parris as minister to the Salem congregation) demonstrated their views on how the aftermath of the trials should unfold:

We would therefore humbly propose to the consideration of this Honored Court, whether something may not, and ought not, to be publickly done to clear the good name and reputation of some who have suffered as aforesaid, against whom there was not as is supposed sufficient evidence to prove the guilt of such a crime and for whom there are good grounds of charity. Some of the condemned persons aforesaid, and others in behalf of their Relations who have suffered, have lately Petitioned this Honoured

Court upon this Account. We pray that their case may be duely considered.

The language of this petition echoes that of Francis Faulkner et al. Clearly something must be done to restore the “good name and reputation of accused,” according to both petitions. Faulkner et al. and the group of ministers call for a particular kind of response from the court: the ministers write: “We . . . propose . . . whether something may not, or ought not, to be *publicly done*” and Faulkner et al. write: “We . . . pray that something may be *publicly done*” (my emphasis). Significantly, Faulkner indicates that there ought to be a spectacle of apology in order to clear the reputations of the accused. These petitioners – laity and clergy alike – clearly recognize the crucial role that public opinion has played in the proceedings. They recognize that public opinion must be shaped yet again, but this time in favor of those who had been accused.

The ministers make it clear that they are purposefully supplementing the earlier petition, which might explain the similarity in the kind of language employed. The difference in the verb used, however, is quite telling: the ministers “propose” this action, while the laypeople “pray” that it might be done. This difference, while minute, indicates the significant power vested in the ministers’ position. Their authority was clearly thought to be beneficial to the cause of the accused. Additionally, there must have been some question of whether the earlier petition would have been effective, which prompted the subsequent petition. Finally, it is well documented that the clergy of the surrounding communities were for the most part silent during the worst parts of the witchcraft trials. We might read this interjection as an attempt to rectify their silent acquiescence of the events.

Abigail Faulkner's petition of 1703, written three months after the collective petition was submitted to the governor, demonstrates a distinct desire to restore her reputation as a result of the witchcraft trials. As she recorded the petition, Faulkner had yet to receive anything in the way of compensation for what she suffered during the trials and continued to face the threat of residual persecution by those who did not accept her innocence. Her conviction, she argues, "besides its utter Ruining and Defacing my Reputation, will Certainly Expose my selfe to Iminent Danger by New accusations, which will thereby be the more redily believed." Despite her innocence having been assured, Abigail Faulkner understands that the community may not be able to erase their memory of the crime she supposedly committed and thus would persecute her undeservedly. Even more damaging, she claims, is the fact that this record "will Remaine as a perpetuall brand of Infamy upon my family."

The aftermath of the trials for Abigail, then, is clear: she and her family will forever bear the "brand" of having been accused of witchcraft, and she desires the court to make amends. This language echoes the wording of the petition she signed along with her husband and several others ("Francis Faulkner et al.) as well as that signed by the ministers, although Abigail highlights both the damage done to her reputation as well as the significant physical threat that her conviction poses. Her "selfe" is exposed to "Iminent Danger by New accusations": the chance of continued persecution is both probable and immediate, and Abigail calls for a drastic solution.

She petitions to have the court “order the Defacing of the record against me Soe that I and mine may be freed from the Evill Consequents Thereof.”¹⁷ A “defacing of the record,” will destroy the evidence of her participation and, in essence, rewrite the history of the events. Abigail calls for a “defacing” of the public record, just as her reputation has been “defaced” by a wrongful conviction. The *OED* defines “deface” as follows: “to blot out of existence, memory, thought, etc.; to extinguish; to destroy the reputation or credit of; to discredit, defame. *Obs.*” In calling for a defacing of the public record, Abigail seems to invoke the Biblical adage requiring “an eye for an eye”: the identity that she had constructed and perpetuated for herself in her community was destroyed and so the public record must be in return both damaged and, most important, blotted out of memory.

Abigail Faulkner surely recognizes that a change to the public record will not erase what the community still remembers about the trials: that she was convicted and sentenced to death for witchcraft. Yet it is her inability to blot out this memory (and the gossip networks which perpetuate it) in the present that forces her to wield the only weapon available to her; if the written records of her involvement in the trials no longer existed, eventually those who remembered the trials would all have died; without a written record, the possibility of Faulkner’s family bearing further persecution would die along with them.

¹⁷ The official defacing of 17th-century public records occurred in Hampton, NH, in 1938. At the tercentenary of the execution of Eunice “Goodie” Cole for witchcraft, authorities Cole and “ordered the selectmen to burn certified copies of all official documents relating to the false accusations.” See <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2006/rpt/2006-R-0718.htm>.

The form of Abigail's petition reveals that Abigail herself attempts to take matters into her own hands and rewrite the events of the past. She describes those who accused her as "the afflicted who pretended to See me by their Spectrall Sight (not with their bodily Eyes)." The note in parentheses indicates her own interpretation of these events and her own interjection into their retelling. She follows this pattern later when she describes how she was arrested due to the accusations "(and theirs only)" of the afflicted girls. Additionally, she points out about the jury that it was "(upon only their Testimony)" that she was found guilty. I would argue that these interjections offer a model of refashioning the record in the way that she hopes the court will follow concerning her involvement in the entire affair. Abigail makes it very clear that she disagrees with the way that the trials were conducted (not only the use of spectral evidence but the reliance on such scant testimony); additionally, she begins to amend the public record by writing a petition (which will thus become part of the public record) which rights her reputation. Her ultimate goal, of course, is for the records to be destroyed entirely, but if she is not successful, her revisions have at least been recorded.

Abigail Faulkner and the group of ministers who petition the court in 1703 called for some kind of public reckoning which would attempt to remedy the harm suffered by the victims and survivors of the witchcraft crisis. But what might something "publicly done" have looked like in 1690s Massachusetts? We can see one possibility in Samuel Sewall's public apology for his involvement in the trials. Sewall believed that God, displeased over the executions, had begun to direct his wrath toward Sewall's family and the colony in general. His written apology, which Rev. Samuel Willard read to the entire congregation at South Church in Boston, indicated that he "Desire[d] to take the Blame

and Shame of it.” His wording is significant, as many petitioners, Faulkner included, desired the courts to do something in order to remove the “blame” from their shoulders. Sewall, in leaving himself vulnerable to the response of his peers and fellow congregants (and most importantly to God), attempts to do just that.

Despite numerous petitions over the span of a decade, the courts were slow to act on behalf of those individuals who had suffered as a result of the witchcraft trials. On July 20, 1703, the courts made the first move toward righting the tragic wrongs that had been committed against members of the community. They declared that:

In Answer to the Petitions of Abigail faulkner, and Sundry of the Inhabitants of Andover, in the behalfe of sundry persons in and late of s'd Town, & Elsewhere, who in the Year 1692 were Indicted, accused and Condemned, & many of them Executed for the crime of Felony by witchcraft. And whereas it is Conceived by many worthy and pious Persons that the Evidence given against many of the s'd condemned Persons was weak and insufficient as to Taking away the lives of sundry so condemned &ca Wherefore it is thought meet and it is hereby Ordered That a bill be drawn up for Preventing the like Procedure for the future, and that no Spectre Evidence may hereafter be accounted valid, or Sufficient to take away the life, or good name, of any Person or Persons within this Province, and that the Infamy, and Reproach, cast on the names and Posterity of the s'd accused and Condemned Persons may in some measure be Roll'd away.

The fact that Abigail Faulkner's name is specified here while others are grouped under the category "sundry inhabitants" indicates the effectiveness of her persistence. Clearly she made herself and her plight visible to the authorities, prompting them to set apart her name from the other petitioners. This document reflects some of the language used in earlier petitions, in particular the "Infamy" and "Reproach" which have plagued the accused since the trials. Significantly, the courts express the desire that this "Infamy, and Reproach" placed on the accused "may in some measure be Roll'd away." According to the *OED*, the phrase "rolled away" has referred to the passage of time since at least the 16th century, as in "The donk nycht is al maist rolyt away" (from a 1522 translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*). It is acknowledged that the injuries done to these individuals can never wholly be undone, which must have been a bittersweet victory for those whom this missive addresses. Yet the court's statement is paradoxical, for while they hope that their official response serves to lessen the survivors' pain, their use of the phrase "roll'd away" implies that it is only the passage of time that can effectively ameliorate the situation. The confusion at the heart of this response reveals the very delicate political situation in which the General Court found itself: the Court, unlike Samuel Sewall, was not prepared to take any blame for the executions of innocent people. Even in the Reversal of Attainder, which would follow in 1711, the Court is careful to point to the "principal Accusers and Witnesses," not the magistrates, as those inherently responsible, thereby deflecting blame from themselves.

The Reversal of Attainder, enacted on October 11, 1711, stated that the twenty-two convicted individuals – including Abigail Faulkner – were pardoned and their reputations restored (at least as far as the public record was concerned; of course, Abigail

Faulkner would have argued that this was not quite far enough.) A cash payment of 578 pounds, 12 shillings was granted and divided among heirs of the accused. The 1711 attainder read :

Be it Declared and Enacted by his Excellency the Governor Council and Representatives in General Court assembled and by the authority of the same That the several convictions Judgments and Attainders against the said George Burroughs, John Procter, George Jacob, [et al.] and every of them Be and hereby are reversed made and d[eclared] to be null and void to all Intents, Constructions and purposes wh[atso] ever, as if no such convictions, Judgments or Attainders had ever [been] had or given. And that no penalties or forfeitures of Goods or Chattels be by the said Judgments and attainders or either of them had or Incurrd”

Faulkner and others would have to be satisfied with the public proclamation that the sentences are reversed “as if no such convictions, Judgments or Attainders had ever [been] given.” From Faulkner’s perspective, only physically changing the record would turn a hypothetical situation – one that exists only “as if” – into fact. Thus the courts demonstrate that they have the power not only to decide how these events will be resolved but also to shape how the history of these events will be recorded.

Ultimately, Abigail Faulkner’s petition goes unheeded, as the courts did not go as far as to grant Abigail Faulkner’s wish of having the records “defaced.” Some survivors and families of the accused may have accomplished outside of the legal arena what Abigail Faulkner failed to do within it. Mary Beth Norton argues that “participants or

their descendants decided individually, at different times and places, to remove traces of involvement in the trials from the written record” (13).¹⁸

Though Faulkner was unable to reshape the historical record as she wished, she did maintain a measure of control over how her family would remember the crisis. When Faulkner gave birth to her seventh child in March of 1693 – the one with whom she was pregnant during the trials – she named him Ammiruhama, which in Hebrew means “My people have received mercy.”¹⁹ Faulkner’s last child, whose existence was thought to have preserved his mother’s life, would bear the mark of his family’s survival. Both responsible for the preservation of the family line and destined to carry the memory of the ordeal in his very name, Ammiruhama was a testament to his mother’s small triumph over a legal system that had failed her.

Perhaps following conventional naming practices or perhaps to honor his mother’s choice in naming him as such, when Ammiruhama’s first son was born in 1734, he was named Ammi, “my people.” Four years after her death, Abigail’s wish had been partly realized in her grandson: unlike his father’s name, Ammi’s name no longer referenced the time of crisis when, as Abigail believed, God had granted her family mercy. Leaving behind “Ruhamah,” the reminder of the injustices Abigail had suffered, Abigail’s grandson’s name preserved “Ammi,” “my people,” who Abigail had held most

¹⁸ Richard B. Trask is less suspicious than Norton of the cause of missing records: “At least 58 named cases remain where no examination is extant, though other documentation indicates examinations were, in fact, held. Documents in other categories, including complaints, warrants, depositions, and indictments, are also known to be missing, as references to them in other documentation point to their original existence. Some of these documents may still be awaiting discovery, either in private, unknowing hands or buried away in institutions and not yet uncovered” (47).

¹⁹ Although Ammiruhamah’s name and its meaning is known by scholars— even Wikipedia notes its meaning in Hebrew – to my knowledge, no scholars have connected this naming practice with Faulkner’s desire to manipulate the record of the trials.

dear. Though Abigail Faulner's involvement in the trials was not expunged from the official record, as she had desired, her son ensured that the memory of that period would not persist in their lineage.

CHAPTER 3: “BECAUSE OF HOW KIND HE HAS BEEN TO ME”: READING
NAOMAI OMMAUSH’S WILL AS ORTHODOX COLONIAL HISTORY

Over 800 miles from the site where it originated, the will of a Wampanoag woman of Martha’s Vineyard, Naomai Ommaush, is housed in the Native American History Collection in the Clements Library at the University of Michigan. The will is catalogued chronologically between two letters that originated nearly as far from Michigan as Naomai Ommaush’s will: the letters, written by interpreter Conrad Weiser and Virginia politician Thomas Lee, pertain to conflicts with Indians and English settlers in Pennsylvania.²⁰ In such a geographically diverse archival collection, the will is framed as a record that is generically “Native American,” and we lose much of its nuance.

But how did the will come to be in the Clements Library, separated from other Wampanoag records created on Martha’s Vineyard? Correspondence with the Library reveals very little to explain how or why the will left the island, only that it was purchased in the 1980s from a manuscript dealer and subsequently placed in this particular collection. Members of Naomai Ommaush’s congregation, the Gay Head Community Baptist Church, still active in the 21st century, continue to maintain some of

²⁰ Conrad Weiser (1696 – 1760) was a German immigrant to Pennsylvania who served an Indian affairs agent and lieutenant colonel for the British forces in the French and Indian War. Weiser negotiated land ownership treaties between the Iroquois and the Pennsylvania colony. Thomas Lee (c. 1690-1750), a politician from Virginia and later governor, founded the Ohio Company which, with the help of men like Weiser, organized land settlement in the Ohio Valley.

the Church's early records. Other Gay Head records have survived because they are housed in archival repositories or reproduced in written histories. Countless other Native records were destroyed by fire (Leibman 39).

Naomai Ommaush's will has been reproduced and translated in Kathleen Bragdon and Ives Goddard's *Native Writings in Massachusetts*, a linguistic study of Massachusetts texts written during the 17th and 18th centuries in Martha's Vineyard. Containing land deeds, wills and other legal documents, *Native Writings in Massachusetts* is essentially a more expansive version of Franklin B. Hough's *Papers Relating to the Island of Nantucket, etc.*, discussed in Chapter 1, though it uses a linguistic rather than a historical lens. When the text of the will is placed in the context of Goddard and Bragdon's linguistic study, a sense of place is restored to the context of the document, yet the brief biographies of Naomai's community members go unremarked.

By paying attention to the various archives which have physically or theoretically contained Naomai Ommaush's will, we can piece together a more robust understanding of its author, appreciating her traditional Wampanoag identity, her language, and her sense of posterity. And, by placing Naomai Ommaush's within an imagined archive of women's testaments rather than amidst other generic "Native American" or strictly Massachusetts texts, we see how Naomai uses the genre of the will to accomplish more than its conventions intended. Like the other testaments explored in this dissertation, Naomai's will attempts to shape public opinion in order to recognize and honor the kinship ties that she acknowledged and wanted to perpetuate. Her will bears witness to her religious conviction as well her desire to commemorate the bonds she and others forged with one another.

More than simply a will that enumerates objects to be bequeathed, Naomai Ommauh's written record can also be seen as unorthodox colonial history. Native records, like Naomai's will, have been seen as sources of history, but not themselves as historical narrative.²¹ Rather, it is the narratives of men like Thomas Hutchinson, Experience Mayhew, Increase and Cotton Mather, Nathaniel Morton, William Hubbard, and Thomas Prince that make up the historiography of early New England. These religious and political leaders had access both to the records that served as historical evidence and the means to publish their narratives. Given the limited scope of these conventional histories which frequently overwrite or disregard the perspective of women of color, we can look to other kinds of texts to recover their voices. This chapter examines one such unconventional history: the will of a Wampanoag woman named Naomai Ommaush, recorded by her minister in 1749, that documents the relationships that Ommaush sustained with her kin and the commonplace objects familiar and valuable to them all. Lacking the access to publication enjoyed by her male counterparts, Naomai Ommaush produced a collection of brief biographies, similar to many early colonial histories, that together tell a story of the Gay Head community in 1749. As much as we learn about Naomai Ommaush and her work by placing it in a new archive among other women's testaments, this chapter argues that we can learn something more about even well-known and established chroniclers of New England history if we similarly put them into a new archive—in this case, an archive of "New England historians" in which Naoami is collected.

²¹ See Kathleen Bragdon, "Probate Records as a Source of Algonquian Ethnohistory." In William Cowan, ed. *Papers of the Tenth Annual Algonquian Conference*, 136-141. Ottawa, Ontario: Carleton University.

Reading Naomai's will as colonial history counters the contention held by historians even into the 20th century that most Native people were not only illiterate and thus "unable to record the events of their lives" but also lacking historical awareness. As Jill Lepore counters, those Native people who did learn to read and write "occupied an extraordinarily complicated and tenuous cultural position as a mediator between two very different cultures" (Lepore 49). I would add to Lepore's formulation those who otherwise manipulated or used print literacy, as we do not know definitively whether Naomai Ommaush could read or write anything beyond the mark that she records in her will. As a Native woman, Naomai was able to occupy the role of "historian" in her community, engaging in the English custom of relying on print literacy yet using her the language of Massachusetts. The example of Naomai's will thus gives us a method of approaching women's attempts to construct history by documenting themselves and their past in a form that is neither wholly Native nor wholly English.

Naomai Ommaush was not the first to document the community of Wampanoags at Gay Head. Her contemporary, the white missionary Experience Mayhew (1673-1758), collected short biographies of Native men, women, and children in *Indian Converts, or Some account of the lives and dying speeches of a considerable number of the Christianized Indians of Martha's Vineyard, in New-England* (1727). While Naomai's will and other Wampanoag documents contained in Kathleen Bragdon and Ives Goddard's compilation *Native Writings in Massachusetts* have thus far garnered little scholarly interest, more attention has been paid to Mayhew's *Indian Converts*.²²

²² See Kathleen Bragdon, "The Interstices of Literacy: Books and Writings and Their Use in Native American Southern New England." *Anthropology, History, and American Indians: Essays in Honor of William Curtis Sturtevant*. Ed. William L. Merrill and Ives Goddard. Washington DC: Smithsonian

Mayhew's text has proven both invaluable and problematic to scholars in Native studies. On the one hand, his efforts make possible a rare opportunity to examine the fabric of a whole community, and a Native community, at that. On the other hand, the account is very visibly framed by the missionary's agenda. In *Indian Converts*, Mayhew makes use of sermons by Wampanoag ministers, deathbed confessions and speeches, and various other oral histories by both "good," i.e. repentant, converted Native people, as well as those whose paths were less admirable, to offer 128 detailed biographies. As Hilary Wyss notes, Mayhew interpreted the behavior, customs and speech of the Native men and women he documented, yet he did not have access to the appropriate cultural knowledge necessary to do so accurately (Wyss, "Things," 46). As a Native woman, Naomai Ommaush possessed the cultural knowledge that Experience Mayhew did not, and thus may have better suited to create a history that chronicled the Native community on Martha's Vineyard.

Two examples from conventional colonial histories – one from Thomas Hutchinson's *The History of the Colony of Massachusetts-Bay* (1694) and the other from Mayhew's *Indian Converts* – underscore the need to look to unconventional histories like Naomai Ommaush's will to locate the perspectives of Native women. Thomas Hutchinson dedicated a section of *The History of Massachusetts* to the Salem witchcraft crisis of 1692-93, and his transcription of several trial records – the originals of which are no longer extant – have proven incredibly valuable to scholars. Yet Hutchinson, for all

Institute Press, 2002; Hilary J. Wyss, "'Things That Do Accompany Salvation': Colonialism, Conversion, and Cultural Exchange in Experience Mayhew's *Indian Converts*." *Early American Literature* 33 (1998): 39-61; David J. Silverman, *Faith and Boundaries: Colonists, Christianity, and Community among the Wampanoag. Indians of Martha's Vineyard, 1600-1871*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005; and Laura Arnold Liebman, *Experience Mayhew's Indian Converts: A Cultural Edition*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008.

his attention to collecting and preserving records of the past, was not as thorough as he might have been. In copying into his manuscript the examination of Mary Lacey Jr., he abridged the original record, noting that “the examination contains many pages more of the same sort of proceedings which I am tired of transcribing.”

Thomas Hutchinson’s nonchalant omission -- and, ultimately, erasure – of Mary Lacey Jr.’s testimony is not unusual in the historiography of early New England. Indeed, the voices of marginalized people, including white women and people of color, have historically been overwritten or ignored by institutions or individuals who wielded greater authority over the historical record. Another example that illustrates this pattern is the biography of a woman named Pahkehtau, or Hannah Ahhunutt, in Experience Mayhew’s *Indian Converts*. Mayhew writes of Pahkehtau: “She was a Person of good Knowledge in the things of God, was able and willing to read the *Scriptures*, and other good Books translated into the *Indian* Tongue. And I have heard her discourse very understandingly and seriously in matters of Religion, and about the State of her own Soul; tho I cannot now particularly remember what she said.” With the dismissal of details of her speech, Pahkehtau’s voice, like Mary Lacey Jr.’s, is silenced by a historian who wields control over the narrative.

Both Hutchinson and Mayhew confess that they neglect the complete testimony of the women because of their own failings – Hutchinson is “tired,” while Mayhew “cannot remember” – not necessarily the irrelevance of those testimonies that they elide. Yet the fact that Hutchinson does not return to Lacey’s testimony on a day when he felt more rested suggests that he did not deem her words significant enough to transcribe in full. Mayhew, on the other hand, does his best to document Pahkehtau’s testimony; he

recalls the general content of her discourse if not her exact words. By including the admission of forgetfulness, Mayhew indicates that he recognizes that her words would have held import for his text – or even that readers might question his vague approximation of her speech. In both cases, however, the historians fail to document speech that would have allowed us greater access to the lives of these two women, providing us, as all archives do, with only tantalizing remnants. The remnants of speech were sufficient, however, to satisfy the agenda of these early historians; we can only speculate as to what would have been included in *The History of Massachusetts* if it had been written by Mary Lacey, Jr., or *Indian Converts* if Pahketau herself had taken up the quill. We can, however, look to a 1749 will, written in Massachusetts, for a history of Gay Head, Martha's Vineyard, from the perspective of a Wampanoag woman.

Something happened during that summer of 1749 in Gay Head, to remind Naomai Ommaush that her earthly life might soon be at an end. Perhaps she had recently taken ill and feared she would not last the year, or perhaps she simply recognized her advancing age and desired to make the final arrangements for her property. Whatever her reason, that summer she contacted her minister, Zachary Hossueit, and arranged for her will and testament to be recorded. On July 8, 1749, Naomai Ommaush dictated the will to Hossueit in her native language of Massachusetts.²³ The first third of the will describes Naomai's concern for the condition of her soul, revealing her devotion to Christianity:

²³ An Eastern Algonquian language, Massachusetts was spoken by Native peoples throughout southeastern New England, including the Wampanoag of Martha's Vineyard.

Know ye this all Christian people of God. I Naomai Ommaush of Gay Head know that very soon I go the way of all the earth, whence I shall not be able to return again. And now I hope, if I should die this year, I would have my sins be forgiven by the blood of my Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And again I know that although my body dies and has rotted, it shall rise again on the last day, and also my soul shall also enter where he is, on the great day of resurrection, to go to meet the Lord in heaven. And then we shall dwell with the lord forever.

The second section outlines the objects which Naomai wishes to bequeath to her minister, Zachary Hossueit, and his wife Butthia. She writes:

And I Naomai Omaush say this before God: I willingly bequeath this property of mine to my kin. Each one shall take, after I die, what I have not yet used.

To Zachary Hossueit, the minister, I bequeath one ohquoh – it is straight-looking (and) large – and also six pewter dishes, and also seventeen pewter spoons. [[And this]] And also to his wife Butthiah Hossueit I bequeath one of my dresses – whichever one she pleases she shall choose when I have died. And I say at this time, no one shall have the authority to defraud them out of the things I bequeath to them. And, witnesses, see [[m(y m)ark (and) m(y sea)]] my mark and also my seal.

Finally, she continues the list of beneficiaries, though this section appears to have been something of an afterthought. Though it is dated the same day as the earlier portion of the will, the third section comes after Naomai and her witnesses have already made their marks and put their seals on the document. Perhaps Naomai had not planned to give away all of her possessions initially but changed her mind, returning to her minister later that day to have the addendum recorded. Or, perhaps she had planned for the separate addendum, using a visual demarcation to make clear that her most valuable pieces were bequeathed to the minister and his wife. Whatever the reason may be, the third section describes Naomai's intention to bequeath gifts to five more individuals:

On July 8, 1749, on that date I also say I bequeath to [[my broth]] my kinsman (nuttauwatueonk) Calab Elisha one blanket.

On July 8, 1749, on that date I say that I bequeath to my kinswoman (nuttawatueonk) Jeanohumun one ohquohkoomme kaskepessue and also one of my dresses. On July 8, 1749, on that date also I bequeath to my kinsman (nuttauwam) Henry Amos (some of) that cloth of mine that I may then have; of the red he shall have one penchens because of how kind he has been to me.

On July 8, 1749, on that date I bequeath to my kinswoman (buttauwaeh) Ezther Henry one dress of mine of blue calico; I bought it from her late mother, and she shall have it. On July 8, 1749, on that date I bequeath to my kinswoman (nuttauwam) Marcy Noah one petticoat. And those other things more that I have of household goods, those I shall use as long as I

live. And then if I do not use them all, you shall divide them up when I have died.

My bequeathing of all this to my kin (nuttawamoog) was done; I willingly do it on this date before my G[o]d, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[Se]e my mark and also my seal. Naomai Omaush, her (x) mark and seal (S).

[Wi]tnesses:

[Jude] Hossueit, his mark (X).

[Buth]i[a]h Accomus, her mark (X).

The fact that Naomi left a will at all is significant and speaks to the larger trend of Indians adopting and modifying English ways as a mode of survival. Leaving a will permitted Indians to dispense of their property however they saw fit. Since Indian women were not subject to the status of *feme covert*s as English women were, Indian land could be passed down to anyone, and indeed it was: women left land to their daughters, and men left land to their wives and daughters alike. Naomai Ommaush did not own land, but she did possess material property. For Naomai, these material possessions – clothing and household goods – are treated in the same way that land is: it is property of value in need of being passed down to one's heirs. By describing her reasons for bequeathing her possessions to these heirs, she creates brief biographies of them, showing their kindnesses to her and their attention to maintaining kinship ties. In bequeathing gifts to her kin and preserving the act in the written record, Naomai demonstrates her own participation in and appreciation for those ties of kinship.

These ties of kinship carried great importance for the members of Naomai's community whom Laura Leibman refers to as the Wampanoag "traditionalists." These traditionalists "believed themselves bound to the sacred, the earth, and the natural world by ties of kinship." Their morality was informed by a belief in a "harmony with the nature beings and natural forms" and "reciprocity [was] the recognized mode of interaction" (Leibman 36). The importance of maintaining kinship ties appears in other Native communities as well, including the Narragansett. Of the Narragansett, Roger Williams writes: "Whoever commeth in when they are eating, they offer them to eat of that which they have, though but little enough prepared for themselves. If any provision of fish or flesh come in, they make their neighbors partakers with them." Lisa Brooks explains that "inherent in the concept of the common pot is the idea that whatever was given from the larger network of inhabitants had to be shared within the human community. This ethic was not an altruistic ideal but a practice that was necessary to human survival" (Brooks 5). By contrast, Puritans "believed they were bound to a community of saved people through their kinship to Christ. Indeed, the underlying principle of congregationalism 'is that each local congregation has as its head Jesus alone and that the relations of the various congregations are those of fellow members in one common family of God" (Leibman 36). It is not surprising, then, that Naomai would emphasize the ways by which she and members of her community attended to the ties that bound them together.

A close reading of Naomai's will indicates the different ways that she and her beneficiaries marked and sustained these kinship ties. She begins with her gift to Zachary Hossueit, the minister and scribe of the will. In naming Hossueit as her first

beneficiary, Naomai indicates a respect for his position as religious leader and his elevated status in the Gay Head community. Hossueit was lauded as a local hero by the Martha's Vineyard Indians, and Naomai's gift to him – the monetary value of which exceeds that of any of the other gifts – further confirms his standing within the community. That Hossueit was a Native minister, as opposed to a white Puritan minister, like Experience Mayhew, probably also contributed to his popularity among his congregation. As Laura Leibman points out, “being self-led was a crucial selling point for Natives, [who] had repeatedly emphasized their preference for Native preachers” (37). Naomai's “biography” of Hossueit complements and enriches what we already know about the minister from his own correspondence and from Mayhew's *Indian Converts*.

The detail with which Naomai describes her gift to Hossueit is telling: in addition to 6 pewter dishes and 17 pewter spoons, Hossueit also receives one *ohquoh* which is “straight-looking and large.” Is an *ohquoh* an Indian artifact? Or is it perhaps an English artifact which has been given a Massachusetts name? (The *ohquoh* is unidentified by translators Goddard and Bragdon.) In either case, the fact that Naomai chooses to describe its condition in detail– “straight-looking and large”-- suggests that she takes pride in her belongings and the way that she has properly maintained them. In describing the object as large, Naomai implies that the size of the *ohquoh* is notable – and perhaps more valuable than other smaller *ohquoh* that would have been familiar to her audience. Laura Leibman finds that “[n]otably, the goods bequeathed by Ommaush are all English in nature, although the average household probably would have contained a mixture of Wampanoag and English goods.” Wampanoag goods might include mats for sitting, clay

pots, baskets, fishing gear, farming tools, bark containers, pipes, and foodstuffs, while common European goods included kettles, hatchets and axes, utensils, knives, cloth, clothing, beads, ceramics, firearms, scissors, and other metal objects (Nanpashamet). Thus the will evokes a picture of a community using and adapting many different kinds of tools and materials.

An alternative explanation for Ommaush's generosity toward Zachary Hossueit lies in the saga over land sales that affected much of the island. Hossueit apparently prevented fellow Wampanoag Israel Amos from buying up Native lands in order to sell them to the English. David Silverman notes that the town of Gay Head presented Hossueit in 1765 with one hundred sheep-rights because Hossueit had, decades earlier, "stood by us and bore the big[g]est part of the Charge' in fending off Israel Amos" (170). The town wished to reciprocate Hossueit's gesture, an act that served to protect their land, by offering a significant gift of sheep-rights.

While Zachary Hossueit receives the important gift of pewter, his wife Butthiah is honored, too, with the promise of her choice of Naomai's dresses ("whichever one she pleases she shall choose when I have died"). The dresses from which Butthiah could choose likely more closely resembled what English women were wearing on the mainland colonies, rather than traditional Wampanoag apparel. By the 18th century, it was considered "unfashionable and unchristian for Indians to dress in skins, reed-woven clothes, or just shirts with leggings" (Silverman 191). While some Native men and women purchased spinning wheels and wheel to produce their own homespun, the majority frequented local merchants to purchase fabric or finished garments (Silverman 191).

Though the fact that Naomai chooses to present a large gift to the minister and his wife may not have needed an explanation, Naomai's gift to Henry Amos, brother to Amos, seems to have warranted one.²⁴ Amos receives "(some of) that cloth of mine that I may then have; of the red he shall have one *penchens* because of how kind he has been to me." The fact that the giving of a gift requires justification suggests that Amos may have been surprised to receive something from her. Or, perhaps Naomai wanted to distinguish Henry from his notorious brother Israel by explicitly identifying his virtue. This moment tells us something of Naomai's relationship to Amos, a neighbor and perhaps also a friend, but it also memorializes Amos as a man who performed kind deeds for members of his community. This gift shows, too, that items were bequeathed not out of adherence to an established colonial legal system but out of a personal desire for and community expectation of repayment and reciprocity.

Further signs of this reciprocity appear in the description of Naomai's gift to Ezther Henry. Ezther is to receive: "1 dress of mine of blue calico; I bought it from her late mother, and she shall have it." Even though the person to whom she owes something has died, Naomai feels obligated to demonstrate gratitude to the woman's family, thus reaffirming the very specific ties of kinship which bind the community. Additionally, knowing that the cloth destined for Ezther Henry was blue suggests another reason why Naomai felt she needed to repay the Henry family: the process of dyeing cloth blue was both time-consuming and noisome, as it involved soaking the cloth for a time in fermented urine. The results, though, were well worth the trouble: cloth dyed blue did

²⁴ In Document 12, Zachary Hossueit, minister, records a marriage between Henry Amos and Jude Gashim, 1/1/1756 (Bragdon 31).

not “fade in sunlight, [was not] destroyed by boiling, and [did not] react with other substances in the air to produce unexpected hues” (Ulrich, *Age of Homespun*, 222). And, importantly, the smell went away after it was washed with soap and water. The tediousness of the dyeing process as well as the steadfastness of the indigo dye are both very reasonable incentives for Naomai to find a new owner for the blue dress.

The detailed list of objects in Naomai’s will conforms to conventions of the genre, but also demonstrates the importance of the objects themselves, and particularly of their use. Naomai bequeaths the objects to her kin not only because she wishes to participate in the tradition of reciprocity but also for the very practical reason that these objects are still useful. Without knowing more about Naomai, it is difficult to speculate as to how she was able to accumulate so many belongings, particularly what is clearly an extensive collection of costly pewter.²⁵ What is clear, however, is the active market of exchange in which Naomai participated. The will reveals that she purchased either a dress (or the fabric to make the dress) from one woman, wore it, and then wished to continue the process of exchange by bequeathing it to the deceased woman’s daughter. Even from such slender evidence in the brief history that Naomai produces, we can better understand Gay Head as a place where the exchange of goods was significant enough to be reciprocated and recorded.

Naomai Ommaush’s will, like conventional colonial histories, frames its subjects with a particular lens. Naomai underscores the kindness of her kin and preserves their acts of generosity and her reciprocal giving for the sake of posterity. Historians like

²⁵ Laura Leibman speculates that she was the widow of Nehemiah Ommaush, a preacher at Tucker’s Island. *Indian Converts* (49).

Cotton Mather were also interested in showcasing the positive qualities of their subjects, though Mather's definition of events worthy of the written record differs considerably from Naomai's. For Mather, events like the Salem witch crisis and the captivity and escape of Hannah Dustan – rather than local acts of kindness among neighbors – deserved commemoration.²⁶

Cotton Mather's goal in penning *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702) is “write the Wonders of the Christian Religion, flying from the deprivations of Europe, to the American Strand; and . . . report the wonderful displays of His infinite Power, Wisdom, Goodness, and Faithfulness, wherewith His Divine Providence hath irradiated an Indian Wilderness” (C). Mather offers biographies of many illustrious men of the early colony, though he hopes not to have celebrated nor condemned the figures he describes:

‘Tis true, I am not of the opinion that one cannot merit the name of an impartial historian, except he write bare matters of fact without all reflection; for I can tell where to find this given as the definition of History, *Historia est rerum gestarum, cum laude aut vituperatione, narratio*²⁷. . . I have not commended any person, but when I have really judged, not only that he deserved it, but also that it would be a benefit unto posterity to know wherein he deserved it: and my judgment of desert, hath not been biassed [sic] by personas being of my own particular judgment, in matters of disputation, among the Churches of God.

²⁶ Hannah Dustan (1657-1736) was captured by a group of Abenaki Indians in 1697. Her subsequent escape, made possible by scalping a group of ten Abenaki men, women and children, was heralded by Cotton Mather.

²⁷ Translation: History is the narration of great events with praise or censure.

While 21st-century readers might consider an “impartial historian” to be one who refrains from offering his own perspective, Mather argues that his judgment actually serves to “benefit . . . posterity.” What he purports to offer in *Magnalia Christi Americana*, then, is fact combined with “reflection,” a history that is framed not by personal bias but by a judicious lens that offers the necessary context by which descendants might properly learn about God’s presence in the early years of the colony. Naomai Ommaush does not offer an introductory text to her history like Mather, but her choice to bear witness to the good deeds of kin indicates that she, too, may have intended her biographies to “benefit . . . posterity.”

While historians like Cotton Mather purported to produce public histories, the source materials for their histories were maintained privately, hidden away in home libraries. Naomai Ommaush’s energies are expended not in keeping records or artifacts private but in rendering them public. In her will, she collects information about members of her community – including their personality and their standing within the community – and records this information in a public document. She records the kind acts of her kin and her commitment to reciprocate, thereby documenting an early New England that features Native people at the center.

In addition to preserving stories, Naomai Ommaush’s will indicates that she intends for her collection of valuable material objects to be disassembled after her death. She also makes certain that this process of disassembly, and the motivations behind it, are recorded and find their way into an official archive. We cannot know for sure that Naomai chose to dictate her will to Hossueit because of a belief that a document contained within his archive (that is, the collection of the documents Hossueit gathered

from other members of the community) would guarantee the record's survival. But, we know that she chose to dictate the will instead of relying solely, if she did at all, on the oral transmission of her wishes regarding the dissemination of her belongings. We also know that during the 17th century, Indian magistrates who had "learned to write fairly" were required to maintain "Records . . . of all Actions, and Acts passed in their several Courts." David Silverman argues that this requirement "challenged the Native custom of having collective memory serve as the people's archive," for "under the new system, charges, testimony, and verdicts became official only after they were put down in ink" (Silverman 91). As Kathleen Bragdon and Ives Goddard observe in *Native Writings in Massachusetts*, traditional Wampanoag oral agreements were often supplemented by written records. Thus Naomai's decision to dictate a will to her minister indicates that her testament – like other legal records – was considered more likely to be preserved when recorded within the archives of a figure like Hossueit as well as communicated through oral transmission. This decision underscores the power that she and other Wampanoags bestowed on the written document itself and the archive in which it was positioned. The will is an act of colonial archiving, or an act made necessary by colonial practices. We therefore can read the decision to "write" a will as perhaps a way to retain Native traditions like demonstrating reciprocity or as a way to overwrite those same traditions.

By gathering stories and recording them, Naomai Ommaush disseminates her private history publicly through her will. By contrast, conventional historians gathered primary sources that had been public and contained them within private, personal archives. Their intention, of course, was ultimately to distill these sources into a written

history for public view, and in doing so, to preserve the records for posterity. But the histories they wrote were always already subject to the historians' own agendas – and as we will see in the case of Thomas Hutchinson, private archives were no more safe than public from destruction and loss.

As Thomas Hutchinson was at work on *The History of Massachusetts*, a mob of Boston citizens, angered over the recent Stamp Acts, attacked his house on August 26, 1765. The manuscript was damaged during the mob violence, and it was this very fear of losing records that had compelled him to undertake the project in the first place. He writes: “The repeated destruction of ancient records and papers, by fire in the town of Boston, first inclined me to endeavour the preservation of such materials as remained proper for an history of the Massachusetts colony. Many such came to me from my ancestors, who, for four successive generations, had been principal actors in public affairs” (Hutchinson i). Hutchinson gathered correspondence from family members as well as other prominent families in Massachusetts for decades. Though he was compelled to do so out of fear for their imminent loss, he found the process of gathering these materials quite enjoyable: “We are fond of prolonging our lives to the utmost length. Going back to so familiar an acquaintance with those who have lived before us, approaches the nearest to it of any thing we are capable of, and is, in some sort, living with them. I was so pleased with their company, that the further employment of the same kind of pleasure was inducement enough to collect and peruse materials for the History of the Province of Massachusetts from the year 1692, when we concluded the History of the Colony” (Hutchinson i-ii). Establishing an archive of early colonial materials provided Hutchinson with a living history experience. Hutchinson finds himself enchanted with the

“company” of the imaginary figures brought to “life” by the records he has collected. But, he is surrounded by the company of the records themselves, too. Without their presence, he would not have access to his predecessors’ lives, and so this archive that he has established functions as a gathering of physical records as much as a collection of ghosts. Naomai Ommaush’s will, as it gathers details of various members of community, functions in a similar way, once its subjects have died. The people whom she mentions – and Naomai herself – will not survive, but her record of their kindnesses will.

During that August evening in 1765, Hutchinson’s archive – his “company,” as it were – was threatened by the angry demonstrations of Bostonians. Alerted to the coming mob, Hutchinson determined to stand his ground until his eldest daughter, Sarah, refused to leave without her father. Hutchinson accompanied his family to a neighbor’s house where he received continuous reports of the rampant destruction of his home. Though a letter he writes four days later to Richard Jackson, a British lawyer and politician, reveals his anger over the incidence, he adopts a more tragic tone when he describes the event in the preface to *The History of the Colony*. He explains that he had reached the year 1730 in his writing

when a misfortune befell me which had like to have rendered my past labour of no effect, and to have prevented me from proceeding any farther. The stamp-act had disturbed the minds of the people of America. In such a state of affairs, the vicious, the abandoned, have a peculiar opportunity of gratifying their corrupt affections of envy, malice and revenge. I had in public and private, in every way and manner which appeared to me the most prudent, endeavoured to shew the inexpediency of an act of

parliament of this nature; but an unaccountable jealousy of the contrary had been infused into the minds of the populace, and, being thus misguided, they expressed their resentment and rage by breaking into my house, destroying and scattering all my furniture, books, papers, etc. The sober, virtuous part of the Province expressed the greatest detestation of this act of violence, and few or none ventured to justify or approve it. The loss which I sustained, as far as it was repairable, by his majesty's most gracious recommendation to the Province and their generous grant in consequence of it, both which in this public manner I most gratefully acknowledge, has been repaired or compensated; but the loss of many papers and books, in print as well as manuscript, besides my family memorials, never can be repaired.

The morning after the attack, it seemed to Hutchinson that the greatest portion of his manuscript and print archive had been lost irrevocably. He writes that "by the great care and pains of my good friend and neighbour, the reverend Mr. Eliot, who received into his house all my books and papers which were saved, the whole manuscript, except eight or ten sheets, were collected together, and although it had lain in the street scattered abroad several hours in the rain, yet so much of it was legible as that I was able to supply the rest and transcribe it." Just as Hutchinson imagines "living with" the 17th-century figures described in the records he held so dear, we can imagine living with Hutchinson and Eliot at the scene on Garden Court Street in the North End on August 27, 1765. It had rained the night before, happily so, perhaps, as the rain would have extinguished some of the fire that threatened to consume the papers "scattered abroad" throughout the

neighborhood. Splintered chair legs, satin sofas ripped and split in two, family portraits that had been slashed and then thrown from windows littered the street. Some draperies and fine clothing had been stolen, but much of it had simply been destroyed and tossed away. Hutchinson and Eliot, feathers from the family's beds likely sticking to their shoes, must have stepped over heaps of burned mahogany settees and corner chairs as they picked up, piece by piece, the manuscript material so valuable and so ephemeral.

Naomai's will lists objects of value to her that will soon be given to others, a contrast to the list of damaged or stolen goods that Thomas Hutchinson prepares in order to reclaim their monetary value after the house-breaking in 1765. In comparing one list to the other, one is immediately struck by Hutchinson's incredible wealth. Aside from the lengthy catalog of furniture, he lists a camlet surtout, breeches, robes, Holland shirts, two suits, various cloth coats and waistcoats of velvet and crimson, numerous hats, a wig, kid gloves and his "black silk King's Council gown." Hutchinson's daughters lost apparel, too, of course: lustring silk robes, petticoats, satin shoes with silver laces, ribbons, gold and ruby earrings, lace and muslin handkerchiefs, riding hoods, aprons, stockings, muffs and tippetts. Unlike the items in Naomai's will, these items are enumerated for their monetary value, making visible the means of exchange in a monetary-based economic network. Yet these articles of clothing speak to who these people were: the gown that Hutchinson dons as member of the King's Council, the cloaks that Sarah and Peggy Hutchinson wear for their rides across the family's estate in Milton. These articles of clothing suggest something of the tenor of their lives, as the will recorded by Naomai chronicles the actions of her kin.

Even with all the clothing, furniture and other objects – as well as nearly 1,000 pounds sterling – that had been lost, both Hutchinson and Francis Bernard, then Governor of Massachusetts, agreed that “the most valuable materials” lost were his manuscript collection. Governor Bernard reports that “everything Moveable was destroyed in the most minute manner, except such Things of Value as were worth carrying off . . . But the loss to be most lamented is that there was in one Room kept for that purpose a large & valuable Collection of Manuscripts & Original Papers which he had been gathering all his Lifetime, & to which all Persons who had been in Possession of Valuable Papers of a Publick Kind, had been contributing as to a Publick Museum. As those related to the History & policy of the Country from the Time of its settlement to the present & was the only Collection, the loss to the publick is great & irretrievable, as it is to himself the Loss of the Papers of a family, which had made a figure in this Province for 130 years.”²⁸

Bernard’s distinction between the “publick[‘s]” loss and Hutchinson’s loss is an interesting one: records that impart knowledge of the colony’s history are crucial for the public, but the contents of family papers are integral to the individual. Hutchinson’s archive, of course, contained both kinds of records. Bernard refers to the records as “of a Publick Kind,” explaining that donors had given these documents to Hutchinson, as to a Publick Musuem.” Yet Hutchinson’s archive was not a public repository at all. Contained within his private home, in a room dedicated to the purpose of housing these records, Hutchinson’s archive was intended to reach the public’s purview only when and how he saw fit. The rioters would wrench this archival control from Hutchinson, however, and in response, he prayed that God would “forgive the actors in and advisers

²⁸ Bernard to Halifax. Letter. August 31, 1765.

to this most savage and inhuman injury,” hoping that “their posterity will read with pleasure and profit what has so narrowly escaped the outrage of their ancestors.”

Attacking a neighbor’s house, though illegal in Massachusetts, was not an uncommon tactic for expressing anger toward one’s perceived enemy. Due to its prevalence in the colony, housebreaking became a crime in Massachusetts in 1648, punishable by a brand of “B” on the forehead for a first offense, branding and whipping for a second offense, and death for a third offense. The punishment for the crime “was symmetrical: for defacing or fragmenting the bodies of houses, offenders had their own bodies similarly defaced and broken” (St. George 282).²⁹ Thus when the mob attacked Hutchinson’s house, it was “more than a mere lashing out at the material property of the rich and powerful.” The act was intended to “destroy symbolically the body of its owner by tearing out its eyes and its tongue, opening its head, and exposing its brain . . . , and by tearing down interior partitions and throwing broken furniture and mangled household possessions out into the streets, to publicly disembowel his corpse” (St. George 284). If Hutchinson’s home and its material contents functioned as a stand-in for Hutchinson as political figure, and their destruction meant a correlated destruction of the figure himself, we might also understand the damage done to Hutchinson’s archive and to the individual records themselves as an attack on the historical figures contained within those records – the company so cherished by Hutchinson. These figures are thus attacked, too, ripped to pieces as the documents that tell their story are reduced to shreds.

²⁹ There are echoes in this passage of Abigail Faulkner’s 1703 petition in which she demands that the historical record be defaced as retribution for the defacement of her reputation.

A Providence report from the day after the attack indicates that those involved may very well have known what they were destroying – and consciously intended to eliminate the possibility that “their posterity” would discover Hutchinson’s history. The newspaper account says “outright that Hutchinson’s house had been attacked because people did not like *his* version of *their* history.”³⁰ On that fateful evening in August, the mob of Bostonians ensured that the archive would be made public at the very instant that it was destroyed. These individuals either did not see the merit in preserving the documents that Hutchinson had so painstakingly gathered and did not lament their destruction, or, if the Providence account is to be believed, the attackers were willing to pay the price in order to seek their revenge. The attack on Hutchinson’s house is an attack on the archive and the *arkhan*, the site of commandment presided over by Hutchinson, the gate-keeper. Boston residents launched themselves on Hutchinson’s home that night, determined to open the doors to a “Publick Museum” that had been in the private hands of an authority figure for whom they held little respect – and they destroyed everything they found.

Physical and imagined archives, like many of the records they contain, are fragile repositories, their existence at risk of destruction by fire and by forgetting. Early historians like Thomas Hutchinson worked to save these records from destruction by gathering materials that to them appeared valuable; they collected these materials in a physical archive when possible as well as in the imagined archives that they created when

³⁰ I have not been able to locate the primary source summarized in this excerpt. St. George cites this newspaper account, but the *Providence Bulletin*, the only Providence newspaper printed at the time, was not published in August 1765.

writing histories. As we have seen, however, despite Hutchinson's best efforts, records and the archives that contain them can be disassembled and destroyed.

Naomai Ommaush recognized the possibility that, despite her best efforts, her beneficiaries ultimately might not be able to keep the gifts that she promised to them. She writes: "And I say at this time, no one shall have the authority to defraud them out of the things I bequeath to them." Her authority to give away her possessions could be tested or ignored in the same way that Hutchinson's control of his archive was disregarded by the Stamp Act rioters. Unlike Hutchinson, who closely guards his materials and then, when they are wrenched from him, gathers them up again, Naomai Ommaush disperses both her belongings and the will that documents this choice.

Naomai's inclination to make her words public and to disseminate rather than gather, contrary to that of conventional historians, may be related to or inspired by the Wampanoag tradition of the give-away ceremony. Described by Mary Rowlandson in her captivity narrative, the ceremony consists of a female leader (in this case, Weetamoo), who begins the dance with "girdles of wampum from the loins upward; her arms from her elbows to her hands covered in bracelets." The leader also wears "handfuls of necklaces about her neck and several sorts of jewels on her ears," all of which are given away to members of the group in order to redistribute wealth.³¹ Daniel Gookin describes a similar ceremony at harvest time during which "men danced singly and in the course of their turn gave away all of their possessions, 'according to [their]

³¹ Quoted in Alice Nash, "Antic Deportments and Indian Postures." in *Centre of Wonders: The Body in Early America*. Ed. Janet Moore Lindman and Michele Tarter. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001. 164.

fancy and affection.”³² Naomai’s will might be seen, then, as a print version of the giveaway ceremony, intended to redistribute her possessions among the group and to disseminate their stories to a public archive accessible to posterity.

Naomai Ommaush disassembles her own archive of artifacts, and by creating a will, she records the purposeful scattering of possessions that she deems valuable. In writing a will, Naomai tells her own story and that of her community, providing us with a perspective of a Native woman that is absent from the conventional histories of men like Cotton Mather and Thomas Hutchinson. Mather and Hutchinson gathered source materials for their own archives, intended for a “Publick Museum” that would be framed by their own agenda. In writing a will – and, thus, creating a brief history of the Gay Head community – and placing it in the minister’s archive, Naomai Ommaush gives away parts of herself for others to keep.

³² Ibid.

CHAPTER 4: “THAT SHE MIGHT BE THE FARTHER HEARD”: READING
KATHERINE GARRET’S DYING WARNING

A sermon preached on the occasion of the execution of Katherine Garret etc., published in pamphlet form in 1738, contains several documents: a record of a dying woman’s testimony as told to her minister, Eliphalet Adams, an account of Adams’s impressions of Garret’s experience in prison, as well as the sermon Adams preached before he and the rest of the congregation climbed Town Hill to watch Garret’s execution for the crime of infanticide. The extant copy of the imprint currently resides at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, MA within the Dated Pamphlets Collection. This collection began in 1813 when Isaiah Thomas outlined the kinds of records that should be included in the newly founded library: primus inter pares books, magazines, and pamphlets relating to the history of North and South America. The AAS reproduced the imprint on microfilm as part of the Early American Series: Evans, 1639-1800 and, as a result, physical access to the original record is extremely limited. While the microfilm series is only accessible to patrons of a few major research libraries, the collection has been digitized, thereby increasing access to this digital copy.

As in the case of Abigail Faulkner’s petition and Naomai Ommaush’s will, a reading of Katherine Garret’s dying warning is shaped by its archival context. The

infrastructure of the Early American Series website dictates how a user can locate a particular record. Katherine Garret's dying warning, as it follows both Adams's account and his lengthy sermon, can be found by browsing "sermons," works by Eliphalet Adams, printed by Timothy Green, published in New London, or published in 1738. Katherine Garret's name is tied to the record only as one of seven subject keywords, including: "Murder – Connecticut," "Infanticide – Connecticut," "Indians of North America – Crime," "Executions and executioners – Connecticut," "Criminals – Connecticut," and "Execution sermons – 1738." The record is thus framed by its particular genre, Katherine Garret's Native identity, the crime she committed and the colony where it took place. The browsing functionality of the Early American Series overly emphasizes Garret's crime, such that her attempt to display penitence and to serve as an instructive example to others is overshadowed.

Despite Garret's best efforts to be remembered as an exemplar, she is remembered for her punishment rather than her penitence, hard-won and cherished to the last. The only extant original imprint of the record that documents this penitence, housed at the American Antiquarian Society, belonged originally to Dr. Isaac Grant (1760-1841) of Litchfield, CT. We know this because Grant had the foresight to inscribe his name in the top right corner of the title page. Grant, known primarily for his pioneering work as an early administer of vaccinations, served in the Revolutionary War at the age of sixteen. He may have had little in common with the woman whose dying words filled part of his library, but he, like Katherine Garret, understood the experience of imprisonment. Captured by the British twice, Grant was held captive in a prison-ship until he was able to escape. When he reflected on time spent as a captive, did he

consider Katherine Garret's words? Did her plight shape how he understood his own experience? We cannot be sure, but what we do know is that Katherine Garret's desire to be remembered by others was realized at least insofar as her account survived in a published pamphlet. By delivering a testament that could be transmitted to others, she established a line connecting her to each person – each heir – who would read it. By considering this pamphlet alongside contemporary journal entries and later local histories, we gain a better sense of the audience Garret attempted to reach.

The execution of twenty-seven-year-old Katherine Garret on May 3, 1738 was a spectacle not to be missed. A “Vast Circle of people, more Numerous, perhaps, than Ever was gathered together before, On any occasion, in this Colony” came to witness the hanging of the young Pequot woman convicted of infanticide (Adams 42). Standing before the large crowd, the Reverend Eliphalet Adams offered a lengthy sermon. Then, a warning that Katherine Garret had written for the occasion was “publicly read” (42). An indentured servant, Katherine had spent her life in the Saybrook, CT, household of the Reverend William Worthington, who attended her execution and, “Full of Concern and Affection for her, Spread her Case before God” to the onlookers (42). For her own part, Katherine Garret supplemented the reading of her warning with additional counsels to her audience. She appeared to pray throughout much of the proceedings, and even in the moment of death, “with her hands lifted up, as she cou'd, she passed out of life, *in the posture of one praying*” (42).

The onlookers at Katherine Garret's execution on that cloudless day in May were farmers, merchants, ship captains and their families. These citizens, according to 19th-

century town historian Frances Manwaring Caulkins, “had peculiar characteristics” (180). They were a “floating, wavering, self-confident populace, inured to the hardships of the sea, to artisan labor, and the tillage of a stubborn soil, but easily drawn aside to recreation, and we infer from the complaints against them, noisy and litigious” (180). One of these “self-confident” witnesses was Joshua Hempstead, a descendant of one of the area’s earliest white settlers. Hempstead later recorded the event in his diary: “Wednsd 3d fair. In the foren I was at a Lecture to hear a funeral Sermon pr by mr adams. aftern at Townhill to See Kate ye Indian Woman Hanged for murdering her Bastard Infant at Saybrook last year & thn home” (Hempstead 334). Hempstead mentions the execution sermon given by Eliphalet Adams but not the narrative, authored by Katherine Garret and read to the crowd. What appears important to Hempstead and what he wishes posterity to remember – that is, what he records in his diary – are Garret’s racial and gender designations, the illegitimate status of her infant, and the crime that prompted her execution. What does not appear in Hempstead’s account is Garret’s perspective on the final day of her life, or even the fact that during the ritual of her execution she spoke out on her own behalf.

If Hempstead ignores or forgets what Garret said at her execution, we can locate her words in the testament that she produces: a record of her *Dying Warning and Exhortation* offered for the benefit of others, read to the gathered crowd at her execution. Her execution narrative reached yet a wider audience with its publication in 1738 as part of a pamphlet that included Adams’s sermon and a brief account of Garret’s life (presumably written by Adams). Garret further shaped her testament for posterity by offering additional warnings and words to the crowd after her account had been read.

Some of these additional counsels are recorded by her minister, Eliphalet Adams, in his published account, but the entirety of her commentary travels only as far as the ears of individuals like Joshua Hempstead who gathered to witness her execution.

Hempstead's omission underscores the importance of looking to various sources in order to recover Katherine Garret's words and also exemplifies the limits of archives, which offer only fragments of individual lives. Garret speaks in and out of archives: some of her words were recorded and made accessible posthumously, while others were likely heard and then forgotten, as the example of Joshua Hempstead suggests. Writing an account that she may have hoped would be published, Garret also supplemented the reading of this account on the day of her execution with additional commentary in order that her testament be conveyed to posterity by any means possible – and on her own terms.³³

This chapter explores Garret's narrative and motivation to be heard, framed by a recovery of the audience of her various speeches, in order to demonstrate that Garret worked to shape a particular testament about her life that was communicated to the world. I examine the impact of Garret's narrative and oral performance before and after her execution by looking at the diary of Joshua Hempstead and two 19th-century local histories, Frances Manwaring Caulkins's *History of New London, CT* (1852) and the *Genealogy of the Worthington Family* (1894). Taken together, these varied sources flesh out and contextualize the fraught legacy of Garret's oral performance, revealing how the 18th-century Pequot community, and Katherine Garret in particular, were memorialized.

³³ It is not made explicitly clear whether Katherine Garret knew that her narrative would be published, though, given the popularity of published execution narratives, it is likely that she was aware of other such publications.

Garret's narrative and the record of her speech act outlive her, serving as an example for others against which they might measure their own behavior as well as a figurative monitor of that behavior. While we cannot know whether Garret truly believed her story could successfully serve as an example for others, or even whether she agreed with Eliphalet Adams that her story *should* function as such, her moments of elocution underscore a desire to be heard and remembered.

Garret's *Dying Warning* fits within a larger trend of execution narratives published and read voraciously in the 18th century.³⁴ These narratives were written by convicted criminals sentenced to death and read aloud by a minister on the day of execution. The conventions of the genre dictate that these narratives reveal a last-minute repentance and an enumeration of the mounting mistakes made on the road to the crime for which these men and women were receiving the ultimate punishment. Some prisoners were encouraged by their ministers to write these narratives in order to "stir

³⁴ For more on incarceration and the experience of imprisoned people in early America, see *Buried Lives: Incarcerated in Early America*. Eds. Michele Lise Tarter and Richard Bell. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2012. For more on early American execution narratives, see Daniel Cohen, *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace: New England Crime Literature And the Origins of American Popular Culture, 1674-1860*. Amherst, MA: University of MA Press, 2006 and Daniel E. Williams, *Pillars of Salt: An Anthology of Early American Criminal Narratives*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1994; and Tamara Harvey, "'Taken from Her Mouth': Narrative Authority and the Conversion of Patience Boston." *Narrative* 16:3 (1998): 256-270. For an exploration of the intersection of race and gender in the early American legal system, see Sharon Harris, *Early American Women's Narratives of Race, Society, and the Law*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2005. For the only scholarly treatment of Katherine Garret's execution narrative, see Jodi Schorb, "Reading Prisoners on the Scaffold: Literacy in an Era of Disciplinary Spectacle." *Buried Lives: Incarcerated in Early America*. Eds. Michele Lise Tarter and Richard Bell. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2012; "Hard-Hearted Women: Sentiment and the Scaffold." *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers*. 28.2 (2011): 290-311; "Seeing Other-Wise: Reading a Pequot Indian Execution Narrative." *Early Native Literacies in New England: A Documentary and Critical Anthology*. Eds. Kristina Bross & Hilary Wyss. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008. 142-61; "Uncleanliness is Next to Godliness: Sexuality, Salvation, and the Early American Woman's Execution Narrative." *Puritan Origins of American Sex: Religion, Sexuality, and National Identity in American Culture*. Eds. Nicholas Radcliff, Tracy Fessenden, and Magdalena Zaborowsky. Routledge, 2000. 72-92.

spiritual awakening, prompt reform, and testify to the direct ‘imprint’ of God on the heart,” which, once published, would ideally impress the same on the readership (Schorb, “Reading Prisoners,” 156). Reading and hearing, practices undertaken by prisoners and by both those who witness the prisoners’ execution and those who later read the execution narrative, “became spiritual exercises that abetted the ever-necessary, ever-continuing process of self-examination.” Writing, on the other hand, “was not necessary for salvation . . . and did not have the social cachet it would acquire later” (Hall 123). Writing may not have been mandatory for achieving salvation, but it served a different purpose for a prisoner like Katherine Garret: it provided her with an opportunity to inscribe her story for posterity.

Even when prisoners did not themselves produce narratives as Katherine Garret did, ministers and others often documented their crimes and punishment for public consumption. In fact, several scholars have pointed to the connection between literacy practices of all sorts and the early American legal system.³⁵ As Jodi Schorb notes, “the elaborate performances of public justice were inscribed, explained, transfigured, and disseminated by texts intimately shaped by the literacy performances of prisoners” (“Reading Prisoners” 150-51). Additionally, prisoners like Katherine Garret were given “good Books” to provide further religious instruction and spiritual comfort during their imprisonment.

But why might a prisoner seek to produce a written record of her own? Katherine Garret may have been persuaded to record her spiritual transformation by her minister, Eliphalet Adams, or by friends concerned for her welfare. Another possibility is that she

³⁵ See Cohen, Williams, Seeman, Schorb, and Harvey.

believed it would afford her “both comfort and strength during their last days on earth” (Cohen 79). While she may have hoped to atone for her mistakes and prepare for the afterlife, she also, through her narrative, sought to live on in the memories of others after her execution. Producing a narrative and supplementing this narrative with public exhortations on the day of her execution not only provided Katherine Garret with comfort in the remaining days of her earthly life, but it also gave her the chance to bear witness to a spiritual transformation during which she sought to offer her life as an example for others, encouraging them to choose a path different than hers. If Garret could succeed in persuading an audience to view her case sympathetically, they might also be persuaded to make different choices than she; additionally, the narrative would serve as a monitor of their behavior, even after Garret, the example, was no longer living (and speaking).

Social behavior in the 18th-century was monitored in several ways: by the legal system, certainly, as we see in Garret’s case, but also by parents and guardians, who were required to provide religious instruction and were tasked with judging and redirecting the behavior of those in their care. Though women like Katherine Garret admitted to having disregarded the counsels and warnings of parents and masters who monitored their behavior, they were forced to face the consequences of their actions when the colonial authorities became involved. These women, of course, were judged by the courts and the clergy for their criminal behavior, but even the act of writing, typically undergone privately, was a scene supervised by others in the case of an execution narrative. Rebekah Chamblit’s narrative is “Sign’d and Acknowleg’d in the Presence of divers Witnesses with a desire that it may be publish’d to the World, and read at the Place of Execution.” Perhaps Katherine Garret partook in a similar scene, her words recognized

as authentic by a group of “divers Witnesses.” Chamblit, and perhaps other criminals in her position, were judged first by a court and then by the group that gathered to sign off on the validity of the narrative.

Yet a criminal like Garret possessed some measure of agency, granted to her as an exemplary figure. The execution narrative reversed the established power dynamics whereupon the sinner could direct the behavior of those would judge her. The narrative, by offering an example of penitence, measured others’ behavior against the author’s, providing the author with an opportunity in the afterlife to serve figuratively as a monitor of the actions of her peers and, later, those who read the written record. This issue of monitoring and surveillance is tied to 18th-century philosopher Adam Smith’s notion of establishing sympathy or “fellow-feeling” with another person. “Fellow-feeling,” a term used by Smith in his tract *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), denotes that which is achieved when a person theoretically places himself in another’s circumstances and determines how he might feel in that case. If the person’s feelings would match those exhibited by the other – that is, if the person judges the other’s feelings to be justified – fellow-feeling between the two is established.³⁶ Similarly, testaments – dying warnings written for one’s children as well as those meant for a wider audience – were intended to function as judges of the audience’s behavior after the author was no longer living.

Katherine Garret, then, is tasked with framing herself as a justifiably penitent individual so that her New London audience will sympathize with her plight and, consequently, modify their own behavior. She begins her narrative in a conventional

³⁶ An excerpt from Laurence Sterne’s 1760 novel *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, *Gentleman* serves as one of the *OED*’s examples of usage of the word “monitor”: “Conscience, this once able monitor,— placed on high as a judge within us.”

way, assuring her audience of the justice of her impending execution. She writes: “I Katherine Garret, being Condemned to Die for the Crying Sin of Murder, Do Own the Justice of GOD in suffering me to die this Violent Death; and also Acknowledge the Justice of the Court who has Sentenced me to die this Death” (43). According to the narrative, both God and the Court are thus in agreement: for the crime of “destroying the fruit of [her] own Body,” Garret must die (43). She expresses thanks to those who have provided her with the comfort of “good Books,” and offers warnings to four distinct audiences: “all young people,” “Little Children,” “Servants, Either Whites or Blacks,” and “Parents and Masters.” Much of the narrative conforms to generic standards, but her call to the fourth group, “Parents and Masters” does not. She writes: “I would also Intreat Parents and masters to set a good Example before their Children and Servants, for You also must give an Account to God how you carry it to them” (44).³⁷ It is unclear here whether she means this statement as a criticism of her own parents or her master, William Worthington, but she does seem to draw attention to the fluid terms of master/servant that her Biblical studies have prompted. For example, she warns “Servants” to “Fear God . . . [for] He is our Great Master” (44). And, in the text that accompanies Garret’s published narrative, Adams notes that William Worthington travels to New London from Saybrook to visit his former servant on the night before her execution and that when he leaves, Garret is “Overheard in her Prayers . . . to bless God who had sent his Servants that Day to Pray for, to Instruct, and Comfort her a poor Dying Creature” (41). Garret points out that there is a higher authority to which servants and even earthly masters must submit.

³⁷ Jodi Schorb notes that this type of entreaty became more common later in the 18th century but was “atypical” in 1738 (“Seeing Other Wise” 143).

The execution narrative is the only document purportedly “left under her own hand,” but we hear more of Garret’s voice in Adams’s account of her imprisonment and execution that precedes the narrative in the published pamphlet. Adams notes certain observations that Garret made in the weeks and then days leading up to her execution. He writes that “[m]any of her Expressions from time to time were Valuable and worth the Preserving,” though he hesitates to transcribe for posterity her every word (41). As a way of explanation, he writes: “I forbear gathering up any more of her Expressions, That I be not too tedious” (41). While Adams only records those statements that he deems “valuable,” he ultimately preserves several other moments of oral performance from which we can glean additional pieces of Garret’s testament. Observing the events on May 3, Adams writes that Garret

was more strengthened and enabled to attend at the Sermon that was preach’d on that Melancholy Occasion, altho’ with some faintings; Upon her retiring to the Prison, when it was Over, she made apt and pertinent remarks, upon the sight of her Coffin, the taking off of her fetters, the putting the rope about her Neck & other such Occurrences. Then she took Leave of her friends thanking them for the good Offices which they had done her (as she Ever Expressed a grateful Spirit to every one, that at any time, had shewn her any Kindness) She passed on foot in the sad procession, for about a Mile, to the place of Execution & still *went On praying.*” (41)

Despite Adams conclusion that Garret is “more strengthened,” we learn that she is yet quite weak, as she faints several times during the course of Adams sermon. It is worth remembering that it is Adams himself who delivers the sermon. One wonders: does he notice her fainting or does he only hear that it has taken place after the sermon has ended? If he notices, does he pause his oration or perhaps even call attention to it as evidence that Garret is moved by his words? Does he rely on her demonstration of overwhelming emotion to underscore his attempt to garner sympathy for her plight and set her up as an example to others? Adams does not say, nor does he reveal the content of the “apt and pertinent remarks” that she makes upon her return to prison. His description of the scene touches on many senses: Garret sees the coffin, feels the release of the fetters from her wrists and audibly notes the sensation of the noose sliding over her head and onto her neck. Adams cannot know what Garret feels, but he does approve of the way that she reacts. Perhaps her “apt and pertinent remarks” consist of the quotation of another proverb by which Garret frames herself as appropriately cognizant of how her situation is analogous to other Biblical examples.

By the time the crowd climbs Town Hill and arrives at the gallows, Garret is yet even more emotional. She adopts a “set and fervent prayer,” her expressions “more broken and incoherent.” William Worthington, there until the very end, addresses the crowd and “spread her case before God.” Then, Garret’s narrative is “publicly read.” Hearing her narrative read out loud, Garret realizes that it is insufficient in some way, and thus she “added many Other Warnings and Counsels by word of mouth, Lifting up her Voice as she could that she might be the farther heard” (42).

It seems unlikely that we will ever know for certain whether Garret's narrative accurately reflects her true feelings. When we consider her narrative alongside Adams's observations at her execution, however, it becomes clear that in those moments before death, Garret wanted more of her words to be heard by the crowd. Perhaps the narrative was actually written by Adams or another minister, or perhaps Garret authored it under duress or strong suggestion by others; if so, hearing it read to the crowd on her execution day prompted Garret to offer a counter to the narrative, so that her own words would make an impression. Or maybe Garret authored the narrative of her own volition, and, hearing it recited, wished to supplement it with thoughts she had had in prison during her final days. In any case, Garret raised her voice, speaking as loudly as she could muster with the rope around her neck, to ensure that that "Vast" crowd heard what she had to say.

One audience member in the crowd that day whom Garret strove to influence was Joshua Hempstead (1678-1758), farmer, judge, shipwright, gravestone carver, and diarist. Garret appears only a few times in the diary that Hempstead kept from 1711-1758, but these references, though brief, provide rich information about Garret's effect on the New London community and have heretofore been unmentioned in scholarship relating to Garret. Hempstead first mentions Garret when she is baptized in the New London congregation. He writes: "Sund 29 fair. Mr Adams pr all Day. Samll Tinker & his wife took into ye Church. Titus Hurlbutt an Infant Babtized George Butolph & Kathrene Jarrett Indian Woman (brot up by Mr Worthington of Saybrook a) Prisoner Condemned to Dye for Murdering her own Bastard Infant when Born. Made an open Confession of her crimes &c and was Babtized." (January 29, 1738). This event is presumably the first

time that the New London congregation has been introduced to Garret, who would have attended the Saybrook congregation. Hempstead provides racial and gender signifiers (Garret is described as an “Indian Woman”), and he reveals that she “made an open confession of her crimes.” While the community may have already been made aware of her crimes, they are able to hear them described by Garret as she frames herself as a penitent sinner from the outset of her relationship with the New London community.

By April of 1738, three months after her baptism and confession in church, news of Katherine’s impending execution had spread throughout New London and garnered enough attention that Hempstead noticed a swell in church attendance. He writes: “Sund 30 fair. Mr Adams pr. All Day. a grt Congregation on accot of the Sermon Suited to the occasion of the Indian woman tht is to be Executed Wednesday next” (April 30, 1738). Since Garret did not reside in New London, it is reasonable to assume that the congregants had heard of her case through word of mouth and did not know her personally. Hempstead’s journal bears out this reading: in January, he records her baptism in the church and refers to her as “Kathrene Jarrett Indian Woman.” In March, when she is “taken into the Church,” she is “Kate the prisoner.”³⁸ On the day of her execution, Hempstead refers to her as “Kate ye Indian woman.” Whether or not Hempstead has actually become personally familiar with Katherine is unclear, but at the least her case has become a familiar one and thus he refers to her by a nickname.

The entries in Joshua Hempstead’s journal suggest that while New Londoners may have become familiar with Katherine Garret during her four months in the town,

³⁸ “mr Adams pr. al Day. Kate the prisoner taken into the Church.” (March 12, 1738)

they may not have held as strong connections to her as her own Saybrook community. But, another contemporary source, Eliphalet Adams's execution sermon, reveals that the audience at her execution was made up of both individuals who cared little for her and those who cared very deeply. Looking to both sources thus provides a more nuanced understanding of the diverse audience of Katherine Garret's oral performance and indicates the difficulty that both she and Adams would have encountered in reaching them all.

We can learn something of the individuals who made up the "vast" crowd that heard Adams's sermon and witnessed Garret's execution from Garret herself when she identifies the "masters," "servants," and "young people" and "little children." Eliphalet Adams's sermon reveals yet more about this audience, and thus I turn now to Adams and the sermon that he read to the New London congregation directly preceding Garret's execution.

Though Eliphalet Adams does not allude to his own background in his sermon, his experience in ministering to Native communities in Rhode Island before coming to Connecticut may have shaped his relationship with Katherine Garret and his feelings about her case. Born in Dedham in 1677, Eliphalet was named "from the Lord's special preservation and deliverance of him of his mother from the danger they were both in at his birth," according to his father's diary entry on March 27 of that year.³⁹ William Adams, like his son Eliphalet, was a minister. He noted in his diary the births of his children and the death of his wife, as well as the hanging of an Indian in Boston on Oct.

³⁹ The memoirs of Rev. William Adams as well as those of his son, Eliphalet, were compiled by New London historian Frances Manwaring Caulkins and published in 1849. Eliphalet is a son of David (2 Samuel 5:16), and the name means "God, his deliverance" in Hebrew.

20, 1670. Like his son, Rev. William Adams witnessed and memorialized the oral performance of a Native person on the scaffold: “I saw a thief and an Indian hanged: the Indian turned off singing.” The experience of hearing someone singing as he or she died struck William Adams as remarkable. Yet, for both William and Eliphalet, it is the oral performance itself that merits recording, not the actual words spoken or sung by the Native person.

Eliphalet, like his father, also kept a diary, though it consists of only one page. Despite its brevity, the entries contained therein provide a glimpse of how Eliphalet wanted to be remembered:

Eliphalet Adams

His Book Anno 1699

Anno 1677. March 26. I was born a sinner into an evil world.

1679. June 24. My Mother died.

1685. Aug. 17. My father left this evil world and left me an orphan to God's Providence and a wide world.

1696. Nov. 29th. I came first to Little Compton to preach among them.

1698 July 12. I was put in to be an Indian preacher by the Gentlemen who have the oversight of the work.

1699 May. I preached my first sermon to the Indians in their own language, with fears lest I should be a Barbarian to them but they told me they understood it well and accepted it thankfully.

Eliphalet's entries underscore the loss of his parents, which leave him "an orphan," whose fate lies in the hands of two possibly opposing forces: "God's Providence" and the "wide world." His own guides gone, he embarks on a life devoted to guiding the paths of others, first the Narragansetts in Little Compton, RI, and later the congregants of New London, CT. Eliphalet displays concern that he will be viewed by the Native population in Little Compton as a "Barbarian" and thus modifies his sermon to fit their needs by offering it in their language. He would come to rely on this skill of adapting to his audience's needs when he addresses the congregation in New London on May 3, 1738.

Adams takes great pains – and forty-three pages of printed text – to persuade that New London congregation that Katherine Garret deserves sympathy. Adams attempts to persuade an audience mainly interested in the spectacle of execution to feel compassion; however, Adams is careful to avoid allowing her plight to resonate so strongly with the audience that they seek to prevent her execution and thwart what he deems to be the course of justice.

Convincing the audience of the worthiness of her case does not concern only Adams, however. Katherine Garret, desiring others to look to her case as a guiding example, would rely on their "fellow-feeling" to ensure that they would see her case as universal, not exceptional. Jodi Schorb aptly argues that ministers used execution sermons to engender sympathy for the accused by highlighting similarities between the accused and members of the congregation who hear or, later, read the sermon. Ideally, once a person sympathizes with the criminal, he understands that a similar fate would befall him if he makes similar decisions; this realization ultimately should serve to prevent the person from making such decisions.

Though ministers like Eliphalet Adams could not rely on the public to be fully persuaded to sympathize with a prisoner, their ability to determine which prisoners' stories were told afforded a certain measure of control. Prisoners whose agenda did not coincide with those of their minister, or those who disobeyed the minister's wishes were not used as exemplary figures. According to Schorb, "the perceived insensibility of such condemned persons to their crimes and ensuing deaths affected the ability of spectators – and print audiences – to feel on their behalf and to embrace the prisoners' imminent dramas as their own. Recalcitrant prisoners interrupted the necessary emotional transaction between spectator and spectacle" ("Hard-Hearted" 294). According to the requirements for proper fellow-feeling as outlined in Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, a spectator must feel that a particular emotion is justifiably expressed; otherwise, sympathy for the person cannot be produced. Yet, recalcitrant audience members were similarly problematic.

In Adams's attempt to garner sympathy for Katherine Garret, he addresses and works to persuade multiple audiences: those who already exhibit sympathy for Katherine, those who do not, and Katherine herself. Adams outlines the important, though sometimes nearly imperceptible distinctions between deserving and undeserving prisoners as well as the appropriate and inappropriate treatment of these prisoners. Addressing those who do not yet sympathize with Garret, Adams writes:

It is no fault to have Compassion upon such malefactors and minister to their Necessities and Comfort, during the Time they are permitted to Live.

Common humanity will bind us, notwithstanding the Just Indignation rising in our breasts, against the Odious crime that hath been committed,

to see that nothing be wanting for the tolerable support of Life during their Confinement. If they should prove stubborn & hard hearted, these good Offices will indeed be done with so much less good-will. But when they appear truly sensible of their faults & humble under them, we may minister to them with readiness and Delight, we must feed them when they are Hungry, cloth them when they are Naked, see that they be not Exposed to the cold and not suffer to want any thing that is for their Convenience; It is true, they are not shut up in Prison there to be pampered and feasted, but Neither should they be unnecessarily pinch'd and exposed" (6-7)

Although all prisoners deserve decent treatment during their confinement, prisoners like Katherine Garret, who are "sensible of their faults & humble under them," merit treatment that is administered happily and without delay. That an onlooker must judge a prisoner to "*appear* truly sensible" (my emphasis) underscores the importance of physical manifestations of feeling. It is not enough for Garret to profess her conversion; she must also look the part of a penitent sinner. This moment also underscores two competing notions: the scene as physical and real – onlookers standing together to witness a person's hanging – and the scene as symbolic – the individual prisoner's experience is flattened to function as a stand-in for all other sinners.⁴⁰ In other words, on the one hand, execution narratives play close attention to a specific prisoner's body, engendering an intimacy between prisoner and observer: the prisoner must "appear sensible," and typically the narrative is said to be "taken from the mouth" of the prisoner; onlookers are encouraged to be moved by the individual's plight and to see something of themselves in the prisoner.

⁴⁰ For more on the prisoner as symbolic figure, see Cohen, Williams and Schorb.

On the other hand, the prisoner is painted as a symbolic figure whose individuality is muted in the interest of casting him or her as representative of all penitent sinners.

If the individuals in the audience see nothing of themselves in Garret, they may not deem her worthy of humane treatment nor will they understand that her plight might be their own. Adams works to remind his congregation that they are not so very different from a criminal like Garret: “It may be you have not actually done Violence to the blood of any person in the world, But let persons take a view of their thoughts and their wishes: These may have been bloody Enough” (17). Adams encourages his audience to reflect on their own thoughts, and, assuming that they will find these thoughts to be sinful, to place themselves in Katherine Garret’s situation. This process should encourage them to feel sympathy toward her, and it should serve to prevent them from making her mistakes. Discussing Katherine Garret’s case as typical of many others, Adams writes: “When the Day of Execution comes, then, *Multitudes, Multitudes* flock together; And Oh! that it might be to learn Wisdom, that they might *hear & Fear* & none of them ever Venture any more to do so *wickedly, so Presumptuously*” (25).⁴¹ Adams describes the three-part process of preventing criminal behavior: hearing, fearing, and taking a different path. In order to achieve the third step, however, it is crucial that the onlooker believe that he is similar enough to the criminal that he might one day be faced with similar choices. Adams and other ministers believed that this understanding was reached through a sympathetic relationship.

Just as an individual must find a way to avoid both “pampering” and “pinching” a prisoner, there were other pitfalls to establishing appropriate sympathy. In addressing

⁴¹ See Deut. Xvii.13

those who already sympathize with Garret, Adams allows that one's natural affections might compel one to try to prevent her execution, but that the temptation should be resisted:

Tho' the poor Malefactors may beg and plead hard and promise ever so good behaviour for the time to come. What moving Expressions do sometimes come out of the mouths of poor people on such Occasions! With what affecting Language will they plead! With what Earnestness will they cry! They faint,⁴² They swoon away under their Dismal apprehensions; The Spectators are struck with concern; The Judges are melted into tears, Yet they must not be so mollified thereby as to neglect Justice; With tears in their Eyes they must pronounce the righteous Sentence. (14)

The spectators, of course, should feel concern for one who is about to die. If they do not, they are "hard-hearted," ignoring what Adams calls the bond of "common humanity" that ties us to one another. Yet, despite the bonds of sympathy that can be established with the criminal, the course of justice should not be impeded. Katherine Garret has been judged and sentenced to death, even if these judges are "melted to tears." For Adams, then, sympathy must be monitored closely: too little and one risks losing one's humanity, too much and one is "so mollified" as to "neglect Justice" (14-15).

Adams's attempt to convince the audience to sympathize with Garret and consequently follow a different path is one tactic in a larger strategy undertaken by

⁴² It is possible that this mention of fainting was prompted by Garret's fainting that Adams notes in the account accompanying his sermon.

ministers during this period. Not only could exemplary prisoners instruct potential sinners, but ministers, parents, and masters could – and were expected to – offer similar monitoring and guidance. Adams, and other ministers authoring execution sermons, posit that being raised in an environment where one receives religious instruction is crucial to avoid taking the same path as criminals like Katherine Garret. He writes: “Oh! that Parents and Masters would be Intreated to look well to the Education of Children & Servants, *to train them up in the way wherein they should go*, For altho’ sometimes it happens that they who have had a *good Education & been kept under a strict Discipline*, do yet *break loose* and fall into Scandalous & Even Capital Crimes, through their not taking heed to the Instructions that have been given them, Yet little better can be Expected, if Superiors are altogether Negligent” (28-29). Even though there is a chance that religious instruction is not an effective preventative measure, Adams argues that no religious instruction proves to be a far worse influence.

According to Adams, Garret did receive such religious instruction as a child; he writes that she “was put into the Family of the Reverend Mr. WILLIAM WORTHINGTON, where she was taught to read well and to write & Instructed in the principles of religion, always speaking honourably of her Master, who was frequent in giving her good Instruction and Advice.” Garret, too, points to the fact that she was raised in a religious household and received instruction through religious texts; yet, this environment did not preclude her from committing a capital crime. The texts that she read would have offered her own set of examples – some models to follow, others models to avoid.

Another woman executed for infanticide, Patience Boston, indicates in her narrative that she was familiar with the cases of other penitent sinners. Boston, a Native woman living at the time of her execution in York, Maine, was executed in 1735 for having drowned her master's 8-year-old child. She writes: "I thought of many Malefactors that I had read or heard of, and many Examples that were read to me, out of Dr. Cotton Mather's *Church History*; but I saw my self worse than any of them. So I hoped God was humbling me yet more, and killing Sin in my Heart." These other examples do not prevent Boston from committing a crime, but they do strengthen her hope that God would "humble [her] yet more." Despite the insistence of ministers like Eliphalet Adams, religious texts and execution narratives do not seem to prevent crimes, but they do serve a purpose after the fact: they appear to facilitate the spiritual conversion and repentance of the sinner.

If Adams did not question the efficacy of the execution narrative example in preventing others from following similar paths, Patience Boston and Rebekah Chamblit certainly did. In her execution narrative, Boston remembers that in her youth, she "had seasonable and frequent Warnings against sinful Courses, and was put on secret Prayer." Boston, however, "was very Wicked, and took little notice of what was said to me." Like Boston and Garret, Rebekah Chamblit, a young Boston woman convicted of infanticide in 1733, assures her readers in an execution narrative that she was raised in a religious household. The religious instruction that she received, however, did not prevent her from becoming pregnant out of wedlock. "I had the advantage of living in several religious Families; but alas, I disregarded the Instructions and Warnings I there had, which is now a bitterness to me; and so it will be to those of you who are thus favoured, but go on

unmindful of God, and deaf to all the Reproofs and Admonitions that are given you for the good of your Souls.”

Given the examples of Boston and Chamblit, Eliphalet Adams’s mission to encourage audience members to follow a different path than Garret did seems a fruitless one. Despite his consistent message throughout the sermon, one particular moment hits a false note. He addresses Garret directly, advising: “Had any persons really wronged you in being Instrumental to bring on this Day of Suffering upon you, Yet it would be your Interest to let your resentment die, before you passed into the Other world” (33). Adams does not specify who these individuals might be; does he mean to implicate the father of Garret’s child who participated in fornication but suffered no legal consequences for it? Whomever he meant, Adams is clear on one point: Garret must divest herself of these feelings to prepare for death. As for those Garret leaves behind, Adams counsels that Garret should “[pray] that all manner of Blessings, Temporal & Spiritual may remain upon them and their Posterity for Ever; Thus, Die, I do not say, forgiving (for what of this sort have *you* to forgive) but bearing an Universal goodwill to all the World” (33). Adams’s aside is provocative: by asking the question “what . . . have *you* to forgive?” it appears that he is trying to persuade someone -- himself, Garret, or the audience -- that she does not, in fact, have a need to forgive anyone, for, of course, she is the one who has erred. In praising Katherine Garret as penitent sinner to whom an audience can relate, Adams must take pains that she should be perceived as having done wrong, not having been wronged. That Adams makes such an observation at all, however, begs the question: did he feel that she had, even in small part, been wronged? Did he recognize

that she was not wholly to blame for her crimes? Did he harbor doubts as to whether holding her up as exemplary would serve its intended purpose?

We cannot know for sure, nor can we know exactly the impact of Adams's sermon on his congregation that day. Even the eye-witness account, Joshua Hempstead's journal, does not describe what he thought or felt while listening to the sermon, while watching Garret's execution or while listening to her testament. But, we know that her words did reach others, like Dr. Isaac Grant, who purchased Timothy Green, Sr.'s publication. We know, too, from local histories and genealogies, that her story persisted in the 19th century, as evidenced by *The History of New-London* written by Frances Manwaring Caulkins, the town's preeminent historian. By 1858, 120 years after Garret's sentence was carried out, Caulkins recalls the story as a legend, to which the physical landscape itself bears witness:

There is a spot upon Town Hill, overlooking the harbor of New London, which seems fairly to have earned the reputation of being either haunted or memorable, without having as yet been honored with its due portion of renown. In fact lofty hills open to free wind and sunshine are not favorable to the growth of twilight superstitions. These will not bear exposure, but need fostering care, and display the greatest vitality in situations where the light is obscure and the air stagnant. But the spot in question is upon a highland ridge, airy and healthful, inspiring only cheerful thoughts and pleasing frames of mind. It looks out upon the Sound and commands a noble variety of prospect. Here too, as in Gallows Lane, there is an historic blight upon the place. It was the scene of the first

public execution that is known to have taken place in New London. Indian Kate, a Pequot woman, was here made a fearful spectacle of punishment, in accordance with the divine law “life for life,” on the 3d of May, 1738, -- 90 years after the settlement of the town. (*Legends of New London*)

According to Frances Caulkins, Katherine Garret’s execution has made a “historic blight” upon the site where Garret “was made a fearful spectacle of punishment.” In this account, Garret’s agency from that scene is removed entirely. The passive voice emphasizes the role that others played in producing the “fearful spectacle.” Even her crime is glossed over with a reference to the justification for her punishment not with an explanation of the crime itself. The agency that is glimpsed in Katherine Garret’s narrative is thus thrown into sharp relief when we consider Caulkins’s account.

Caulkins memorializes other New London women, as well, in her description of Ye Antientist Burial Ground (already old when Caulkins writes about it), a cemetery adjacent to Town Hill where Garret was hanged. Caulkins reminds the reader that amidst the gravestones of Revolutionary War soldiers, one can find illustrious women like Sarah Kemble Knight. Caulkins writes: “Madam Knight was a remarkable woman in her day. She entered largely, for those times, into trade and speculation. She wrote poetry, and her journal, kept during an excursion on horseback from Boston to New York, through Norwich, New London, and New Haven, near the commencement of the eighteenth century, has been published” (24). Also of note was Dr. Giles Goddard, famous (at least in Caulkins’ eyes) because of his wife Sarah and daughter, Mary Katherine, the first female newspaper editors and publishers in the colonies.

We can see that Caulkins chooses to commemorate colonial women who excelled in unconventional roles: a published travel writer, a printer and an executed criminal. Caulkins herself was extraordinary: she became the first and only female member of the Massachusetts Historical Society and held that title for over a century. A pupil of the poet and seminary instructor Lydia Sigourney, Caulkins also taught young women at a school in Connecticut. Caulkins was no longer a student under Sigourney when the latter published her poem “Indian Names,” but Caulkins evokes a similar spirit in her treatment of Katherine Garret’s legacy. Sigourney writes:

Ye say their cone-like cabins,
That clustered o’er the vale,
Have fled away like withered leaves
Before the autumn gale,
But their memory liveth on your hills,
Their baptism on your shore,
Your everlasting rivers speak
Their dialect of yore.

For Caulkins, the memory of “Indian Kate” can be said to “liveth” on the Town Hill, as the Indians in Sigourney’s poem persist in the names of shores and rivers. Though the hill on which she died does not carry Garret’s name, it bears a “blight” on its imagined landscape as the site of her execution.

Town Hill is not the only site in the New London landscape described in 19th-century local histories as indelibly “marked” by a spectacle made by its Pequot inhabitants. The wedding of Rev. William Worthington, Katherine Garret’s master, in

nearby Stonington, CT, illustrates another such example. Worthington (1695-1756), ordained at Saybrook in 1726, was descended on both his maternal and paternal side from men who fought in the Pequot War. According to the Worthington Family genealogy, a great-grandfather, Thomas Bull, of Hartford CT, “[a]fter the taking of the fort, May 14, 1637, had a narrow escape, thanks to a piece of hard cheese in his pocket, which arrested the flight of an arrow” (Worthington 14). Another great-grandfather, James Mason, “commanded [a] successful expedition against the Pequots, near New London, for which he was called ‘Conqueror of the Pequots’” (Worthington 26). According to the genealogy, later encounters between Pequots and the white Worthingtons were of a more peaceful nature, yet the tolls of war on the Pequots (and the remaining fears of the white settlers) were still present.

After Worthington’s first wife, Elizabeth Mason, died in 1725, he married Temperance Gallup on what the *Providence Journal* would later call a “golden day in the town’s history,” on the authority of a “proudly cherished . . . family tradition” : “As a measure of affluence had sprung from the virgin soil of the valley, and colonial life was blooming into a degree of luxury and taste befitting the inherited qualities of the Puritan planters, the wedding was made to comport with the dignity of the large plantation and the blood of the families to be united.” William Worthington’s father-in-law invited all of the settlers in Stonington, but they were not the only people to arrive on the “golden autumn day” of September 20, 1726. Arriving with the white settlers was the “friendly remnant of the Pequot Indians, then occupying reserved lands in the northern portion of the town . . . The Pequots were his friends and admirers, and had an inherent

relish for large and abundant feasts.” Gallup could not accommodate such a large group, however, and he

was compelled to explain to his aboriginal friends, and asked them to visit him the next day, when they should receive his attention and find full proof of his hospitality. As they wound their way back to their wigwams, in open Indian file after their native manner, the line extended from the Gallup mansion well on to the head of the river, near a mile. On the following day the Pequots returned, plumed and mantled in their best, and closed the festive scenes by having all that had been promised them. None went away hungry or thirsty. (Worthington 24-25)

This passage underscores the beneficence of Temperance’s father, William, in his treatment of the Pequot guests, yet the “spectacular” role demanded of the Pequots in an English colony emerges when we consider this account alongside Garret’s narrative. Their great number is measured on the landscape, their line extending as it did “from the Gallup mansion well on to the head of the river.” Also remarkable was the attire of the Pequot guests who were “plumed and mantled in their best.” Yet, the Pequots at the Worthington/Gallup wedding were, like Katherine Garret, stepping out of their expected roles. Unintended guests at the wedding, the Stonington Pequots’ arrival, subsequent dismissal, and eventual welcome were framed as a spectacle witnessed by white settlers. In the account recorded by Frances Manwaring Caulkins, Katherine Garret is a spectacular anomaly and in Joshua Hempstead’s diary, she is simply a Native woman who paid for her crimes.

Despite Hempstead's omission of Garret's words in his diary and Adams's narrative control over her written testament, each piece of text proves vital to even a limited understanding of Garret's intention for her afterlife. Neither Adams's sermon, nor Caulkins's account, nor Hempstead's journal entry, nor Garret's narrative, even, can be taken alone, but when positioned side by side in this chapter, a richer picture emerges of a woman who took pains to record what she envisioned as the purpose of her life and of the members of her community who responded to and shaped her story.

Joshua Hempstead does not record what Katherine Garret says at her execution, yet he records the fact that she made a confession in front of the congregation; once again, he records her speech act but not the content of that speech. One detail from his account proved startling to me. Hempstead spells her last name "Jarrett"; as spelling was not standardized and can indicate speech patterns, it is possible that Garret's name was pronounced with a soft "g," which is why Hempstead, who at the time did not know Garret, spelled it with a "J." After having studied Garret's text for several years, I realized that I may have been pronouncing her name incorrectly! The possibility was disconcerting; it suddenly seemed very important that I should know how to pronounce her name. When so many of her words have been forgotten, try as she might to "Lift her voice [to be] farther heard," it seemed to be another slight to call her by a name that was not truly hers.

CHAPTER 5: “[THEY] GETS A BAD NAME BY THE WIDOW:” READING THE
MINUTES OF THE FREE AFRICAN UNION SOCIETY AS DINAH SISSON’S
EXTRALEGAL TESTIMONY

The Rhode Island Historical Society, founded in 1822, boasted a Northern cabinet in Providence and a Southern cabinet in Newport until 1854 when the Society split into two distinct institutions. The Southern cabinet had housed many of the collections pertaining specifically to the history of Newport, and these archives were overseen by the newly chartered Newport Historical Society. Some records and objects pertaining to Newport history, however, were kept – and are still maintained – by the Rhode Island Historical Society in Providence. While most of the meeting minutes of the Free African Union Society, an early benevolent society founded by free Africans in Newport, reside at the Newport Historical Society, the Rhode Island Historical Society owns some of the papers and minutes of the Free African Union Society and its members.

The Rhode Island Historical Society also owns other materials related to free African Americans in Newport, including the diary and account books of Caesar Lyndon, erstwhile secretary for the Free African Union Society. Though it is possible to locate these materials by searching by the keyword “Free African Union Society” in the card catalog, a researcher is more likely to come across them in the more widely accessible “Guide to RIHS Manuscripts Relating to People of Color,” a finding aid available

digitally and in hard copy. Rhode Island Historical Society archivists compiled this finding aid from 1988 to 2004, by taking “note of anything relating to people of color that they noticed in the course of their work, and [collecting] these notes in a single document.” During the same time period, RIHS archivists also compiled a finding aid to the 18th-, 19th- and 20th-century women’s diaries contained within the RIHS collections. Both the “Guide to RIHS Manuscripts Relating to People of Color” and the “Guide to Women’s Diaries in the RIHS Collections” reflect a response by RIHS archivists to the growing interest by humanities scholars in issues of race and gender.

The “People of Color” finding aid offers many advantages to researchers interested in the lives of African Americans in Rhode Island during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. Brief mentions of individuals, many unnamed, are collected in a single archive, found haphazardly by a group of RIHS archivists over a sixteen-year period; such an endeavor may have taken a single researcher even longer. Additionally, a perusal of the finding aid reveals the wide scope of experiences – some tragic, others mundane – of African American Rhode Islanders. From this “People of Color” finding aid, we learn that a woman named Dinah, owned by William Arnold of Smithfield, RI, was not charged in the death of her infant son who had died, the courts ruled, “by accident” in 1761; Toby, an enslaved man owned by Richard Arnold, was bequeathed to Arnold’s son until the age of 25, at which time Toby was to be emancipated; and Joseph Bucklin of Rehoboth, MA, paid a “colored man” \$1.75 in 1860 for washing the streets for seven weeks. These details are as tantalizing as they are incomplete, but a collection of such details is crucial to a more expansive understanding of the different roles played by early Black Rhode Islanders.

Despite its many advantages, the “People of Color” finding aid, in gathering materials tied together by only two shared characteristics (i.e. relating to people of color and relating to individuals living in or near Rhode Island) erases the nuances of these materials. The materials relating to the Free African Union Society, for example, are listed between a letter written by Joseph Melancton Addeman, a white captain of the 14th R.I. Heavy Artillery (Colored) during the Civil War and letters from Alexander Aldrich to his father Winthrop Aldrich, U.S. Ambassador to England, detailing his participation in Civil Rights marches in 1965 during which he befriended Martin Luther King Jr.⁴³

The experience of Dinah Sisson (1720-1795), an African American woman in Newport, RI who caused the disbanding the Free African Union Society, is necessarily quite different from the experience of the 19th-century African American soldiers described in Addeman’s letter as well as the 20th-century African Americans who marched with Alexander Aldrich on Selma. Indeed, by considering these varied experiences together, we risk adopting the view that there exists a single, monolithic African American experience. These materials tell very different stories of individuals who might have shared experiences of oppression but perhaps little else.

An example from a recent dissertation on free African Americans in Colonial Newport highlights another way by which individual voices can be elided, even inadvertently. Akeia Benard’s compelling dissertation, “The Free African American Cultural Landscape: Newport, RI, 1774-1826” (2008), provides an extremely useful database of Free Africans known to live in Newport during the time period under study.

⁴³ The manuscript collections are organized alphabetically in the People of Color Finding Aid, and the Free African Union Society records are organized under “A” for “African” rather than “F” for “Free.”

Benard writes that “by utilizing the documents of the Free African Union Society to explore community interaction within the African American community, [she] cannot account for the perspective of women” (Benard 177). Benard claims that the meeting minutes do not shed light on women’s perspectives, though she notes elsewhere that it was a woman, Dinah Sisson, who succeeded in disbanding the FAUS.⁴⁴ While it is true that women could not be members of the Free African Union Society (and Benard makes the point that they formed auxiliary groups), women do appear in the meeting minutes and, in the case of Dinah Sisson, to important effect. By overlooking Dinah Sisson’s controversial intervention into the Society’s proceedings, Benard misses an opportunity to access the way by which one woman interacted with male members of her community.

A focus on Dinah Sisson’s testament found within the proceedings of the Free African Union Society minutes allows us to read these records in a new way. Although they were not intended to do so, the Society minutes preserve a testament of self-fashioning by a woman whose gender precluded her inclusion in the group. Yet, she affected the course of the Society’s history as much as any official member, and perhaps more so, through the smear campaign that she waged throughout Newport against the men who she felt owed her money.

Issues of reputation, memorialization, and agency emerge when we consider Dinah Sisson’s testament alongside a broadside published by another Newport woman, Ann Maylem, and a manuscript written by the Society’s secretary, Caesar Lyndon. By placing the archival traces of Sisson’s experiences, actions, and speech in an imagined archival series that includes works by and about women manipulating public forums and

⁴⁴ Benard includes this information as a biographical note under Sisson’s name in the appendix.

genres to their own ends, this chapter uncovers the testament of a woman whose limited resources left her few options to make her voice heard. This imagined series is subject to the same limitations of the “people of color” series shaped by its finding aid —both are “artificial collections,” in archivists’ terms. By creating an imagined series in this chapter, I aim not to lambast the “real” artificial collection, but to note its limitations and use archival methods to analyze the past rather than remain subject to the archival methods imposed by others.

Dinah Sisson (1720-1795), whose words wreaked havoc for many respected members of her community, was not the first woman to make her dissatisfaction known throughout the streets of Newport. “I have thought proper to inform the World how cruelly I have been dealt with,” declares Ann Maylem in a broadside published in 1742. After an indictment for selling “rum spirits and orange water” illegally in Boston, John Maylem came to Newport with his wife Ann and entered into the business of rum distillery. After his death in March of 1741, Ann took over the operations of the distillery. Finding herself cheated out of several hundred pounds by George Gardner, the man from whom her husband had purchased the distillery, she sought recourse by taking the issue public.⁴⁵ In the broadside, Maylem describes the “Fraudulent manner” in which she was treated: she charges that Gardner asked to borrow the written record of

⁴⁵ No birth date exists for Maylem, but her parents second child was born in 1701. Maylem, as administrator of her deceased husband’s heavily indebted estate, used several methods to manage the debts and seek redress from Gardner, including multiple petitions, several litigation cases and notices in the *Boston Post-Boy* (the *Newport Mercury* would not come into existence until 1758). For more on Maylem’s ultimately unsuccessful campaign against Gardner, see Sarah T. Damiano, ““To Well and Truly Administer”: Female Administrators and Estate Settlement in Newport, Rhode Island, 1730–1776.” *New England Quarterly*. 86:1 (March 2013): 89-124.

John Maylem's payments to him, claiming that "he just wanted to look at it and that he would send it back to [her] immediately." Gardner apparently had no intention of returning the receipt; he later charged Ann Maylem for the very debts that she claimed had already been paid to him.

Dinah Sisson chose to engage in public discourse with the aim of recuperating monies owed, as did her contemporary Ann Maylem. Maylem's path to securing funds owed to her – though ultimately unsuccessful – was a conventional one. Maylem's access to literacy allowed her to compose a written text, and her financial situation provided her with the funds to publish the broadside as well as to hire a lawyer to prosecute George Gardner.⁴⁶ Sisson was likely financially unable to hire a lawyer, but she nonetheless found the means to verbally petition the Free African Union Society to which her deceased husband had belonged. Sisson angrily denounced its members, seeking to damage their reputation either in order to secure her livelihood or as an act of retribution, or perhaps both. Although like Maylem, Sisson was ultimately unsuccessful in receiving any funds owed to her – rather than the Society owing money to Sisson, their records indicated that, in fact, Sisson seems to have been indebted to them – she managed to damage the reputation of Society members to such an extent that they felt compelled to disband the organization entirely.⁴⁷ By examining the complaint that Dinah Sisson registers in the proceedings of the Free African Union Society, we see how Sisson attempts to shape public opinion against the Society members by wielding rumor as a tool to damage their reputation. If we read the minutes with an eye to what they might say

⁴⁶ In fact, Maylem would be disappointed by the work of her first lawyer and ultimately hired three different attorneys to represent her.

⁴⁷ Eventually, the group would reform under the same name.

about women's perspectives, we see that by inserting her words into the Free African Union Society minutes, Sisson ultimately ensures that she will be remembered as the woman who brought about the Society's downfall, a difficult, independent woman who persisted in her own opinions.

A brief overview of the Black communities in early Rhode Island will help to establish the broader social context within which Dinah Sisson played a part. Free Blacks and enslaved individuals worked in a variety of professions as skilled artisans, plantation workers, domestic servants, etc. and lived in both rural and urban areas in Rhode Island.⁴⁸ Many free Blacks in Rhode Island had been enslaved but were manumitted as a result of the state's Gradual Emancipation Act of 1784. This act dictated that children born to an enslaved mother would not remain slaves for life but would be manumitted at the age of 18 (for boys) or 21 (for girls). Additionally, masters could manumit healthy slaves between 21 and 40 years of age without bearing financial responsibility for them. The issue of who should accept the financial burden of sheltering and administering to the needs of slaves had been contested throughout much of the 18th century, as white masters and city and town officials were generally unwilling to bear responsibility for old and/or infirm slaves. Before the Act of 1784, when a slave was manumitted, the responsibility for his well-being often fell to the town, and many free Blacks (as well as impoverished

⁴⁸ For two recent studies of African Americans in 17th- and 18th-century Rhode Island, see Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000; Anne Farrow et al., *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2006.

whites) who had made their way to Newport from elsewhere were “warned” out of town as a result.⁴⁹

The free Black community of Newport, in order to secure stability and security for its constituents, established the first benevolent society for Africans and African Americans.⁵⁰ Founded on November 10, 1780, at the home of Abraham Casey, a carpenter, the Free African Union Society was created to address the financial and social needs of free Blacks and to facilitate their transition from enslavement to freedom.⁵¹ The Society disbanded in 1794 (as a result of Dinah Sisson’s smear campaign), resumed activities in 1795 and then merged with the African Benevolent Society in 1808. Responsibilities of the Free African Union Society included issuing funds for burial and the purchase of cemetery plots, funding funeral services, providing insurance for members and their families in cases of accident, illness, or death, as well as providing a forum for community discussion, which could include issues of moral conduct within the Society’s membership as well as plans for migration to Liberia (Harris 614).⁵² The Free African Union Society functioned as a crucial means by which free Black families could help one another to survive in a town that, at best, offered limited assistance and goodwill.

⁴⁹ For a book-length analysis of the legal process of “warning out”, see Ruth Wallis Herndon, *Unwelcome Americans: Living on the Margin in Early New England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.

⁵⁰ I refer to the free Blacks in Newport as both African and African American, as at least 1/3 of the Black population at this time was foreign-born. See William D. Piersen, *Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth-Century New England*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988. 18.

⁵¹ The Society was the first of its kind in the American colonies and served as a model for similar institutions that were established in Boston, Philadelphia, in New York.

⁵² Several Newport families did eventually migrate to Liberia in 1826.

Eighteenth-century white Rhode Islanders considered organizations like the Free African Union Society as well as African American activities like Election Day festivities to be imitative and exaggerated forms of already established white traditions (and 20th-scholars would view them similarly). It seems more likely, however, that this type of self-help organization was influenced by “traditional African mutual aid associations” and grew alongside white organizations (Pierson 59). Black organizations, however, had to adopt a religious focus to be acceptable to the master class (Pierson 59). In addition to promoting the causes of Christianity and abolition, organizations like the Free African Union Society “legitimated the social order that African American community leaders established” (Benard 7). Ultimately, these organizations, “central to an African American sense of identity,” functioned as “the staging ground for reform and protest organizations and were the foundation of the social and economic structure of black society” (Dunbar 624).

Though African Americans living in Newport during the late 18th century likely shared experiences of oppression and disenfranchisement at the hands of white citizens, both the free and enslaved populations were differentiated by class structures. The Free African Union Society, with its dues requirement, limited its membership to African American men possessing at least modest means, thereby excluding many others from joining; all members were landowners, and enslaved men were not invited to join. Thus, the men (and, by extension, their families) who were a part of the Society represented the highest economic echelon of the Black population in Newport, and their experiences do not necessarily align with those of Black families of fewer means.

The Free African Union Society was in existence for fourteen years when Dinah Sisson disrupted its proceedings to such an extent that the Society voted to disband entirely. We know little else about the lives of Dinah and her husband Neptune beyond the controversy that is played out in the meeting minutes of the Free African Union Society. The epitaphs on their gravestones do provide some information, however: “In Memory of Neptune Sisson/Who died October 9, 1794/Age about 65 Years” and “In Memory of Dinah/wife of Neptune/an industrious virtuous/Black Woman/who deceased aged 75/[Year illegible].” Dinah’s husband, Neptune Sisson, was one of the Society’s founding members, and in 1794, he found cause to make use of its financial resources. Caesar Lyndon, the Society’s secretary, records on September 26, 1794, that a meeting of 9 members was called at Prince Amy’s house. “After the chairman seated and the members called, the clerke inform them that Mr. Nepturn Sisson had send for him, declaring to him that he is in need of some help. It is voted unanimously that three shillings be drawn out from the Treasury for Mr. Sisson relief, and that Mr. Roadman be appointed to take an order from the clerk of this committee upon the Treasurer for three shillings, and by him to be presented to Mr. Sisson” (Robinson 134). Neptune Sisson’s request apparently brings to light a greater need that the Society felt it ought to fill, and thus “it [was] voted and resolved that a [sic] especial meeting of the Union Society be called on Monday, the 29 instant, to consider and adopt a plan to persur (sic), with respect to our sick brethren” (134). It is unclear as to what ailment plagued Neptune Sisson, but fewer than two weeks later, he was dead at the age of 65.

Sometime within the next month, Dinah approached at least one member of the Free African Union Society and pleaded that her case be brought to a meeting. (Women,

though they formed their own auxiliary groups of the Free African Union Society, were denied membership in the main organization). On November 6, Prince Amy told the committee that Dinah Sisson “desire[d] to have her account made up and if any thing is due to her husband, she should be glad to have it.” The committee acquiesced, ordering that an account be drawn up and “presented to the widow” (135).

A week later, Caesar Lyndon reported on the Free African Union Society’s progress in fulfilling Sisson’s request. He writes: “Resolved that the secretary of the society be and he is hereby requested to send the copy of this our proceeding with respect to Mr. Nupturin [sic] Sisson, a member of this Society, now deceased to his widow, Dinah Sission [sic], for her information, containing all the monies he pay into the Treasury, the money paid to him while sick, and his past expenses be reduted [sic] out from it, and give her the remainder, if any left” (136). Lyndon writes that he has found a record stating that Sisson joined the Society on April 28, 1789, and throughout his tenure as a member, had paid and received the following:

one shilling, six pence or ... \$0.25

May 13 1790 Ditto . . . 12 ½

November 11 1790 Ditto

May 12 1791 Ditto

November 8 192 Ditto

August 8 1793 Ditto

November 14 1793 Ditto

February 13 1794 Ditto

87 ½

Paid Mr. Neptune Sisson
 August 14 1794 . . . 1.00
 Paid Ditto September 26 179450
 His past expenses . . . 1.00
 Due to the Society . . . 2.50
 All the money he ever pay87 ½
 The Society overpaid him 1.62 ½

Accompanying this itemized account, a copy of which the Free African Union Society sent to Dinah Sisson, was the following letter:

Newport. December 5 1794

Mrs. Dinah Sisson,

Dear friend, by order of the African Union Society, I transmit to you these proceedings with respect to Mr. Nepturn [sic] Sisson, your deceased husband, for your information I have the honor to be

Your very humble servant Newport Gardner

Though we cannot know for certain how Dinah Sisson reacted to the account stating that her family owed the Society money – not the other way around, as she presumed – we know that she was less than satisfied. Apparently believing that the members of the Free African Union Society were mistaken, she decided to take up the case with the other members of the Newport community. Sisson evidently cast aspersions throughout town on members of the Union Society. We find evidence of this smear campaign in the Society's minutes, in which we learn that "Mr. Amy moved for breaking up of the Society and begin it anew; the reason that because the members gets a

bad name by the widow.” Two other members – Lymas Kieth and Zingo Stevens – second Amy’s motion. Newport Gardner, however, opposes a disbanding of the Society, questioning: “but how be it, the question was put – Shall this Society be broke up?” Perhaps in an attempt to prevent further strife within the Society, Gardner questions how the Society will be “broke up,” that is, how and to whom they will disburse the funds contained in the Society’s treasure. Despite Gardner’s protestations, the motion “was passed almost unanimously.” Lymas Kieth “moves that all the account of whatsoever monies the members paid into the Treasury together with each past expenses be drawn up by the secretary, and reduct each expenses from their money and give everyone remainder of the their [sic] money. And it passed by unanimous vote.” (Robinson 137-138). The Free African Union Society disbanded, although it reformed under the same name in 1795 – likely the same year that Dinah Sisson died. Perhaps the Society members felt that it would be safe to reform the organization when Dinah Sisson could no longer interfere in their affairs.

Though it is not certain that Dinah Sisson died in 1795, that is the most likely possibility as indicated by her gravestone and makes sense given the Society’s decision to reform in the same year. Due to the effects of weather, Dinah Sisson’s gravestone is nearly illegible, but “Voices of Remembrance: African Slave Markers,” an online archive that features images of all the African American gravestones in God’s Little Acre in Newport, RI, states that Dinah Sisson died in 1775 at the age of 75. The records of the Free African Union Society show that she was alive at least as late as 1794. It is likely, then, that her gravestone actually reads 1795 rather than 1775. The 1775 date is certainly incorrect, given Sisson’s presence in the FAUS records, and it is possible, given the

damage done to the face of the stone, that the number that was understood to be a “7” is actually a “9.” Additionally, as the Free African Union Society disbanded in 1794 and re-organized in 1795 under the same name and with the same infrastructure, it is possible that they were only able to do so because Dinah Sisson had died that same year, 1795.

Dinah Sisson appears only briefly in the proceedings of the Union Society, yet her effect on the organization is profound. After fourteen years of existence, with 70 total members in its peak years, the damage done to members of the Society by Dinah Sisson forces the Society’s dissolution, underscoring the extraordinary import of a person’s reputation in that community. Prince Amy complained that Dinah Sisson gave the members “a bad name.” For men like Amy, Lymas Kieth, Caesar Lyndon, and others, to have a “bad name” was indeed a serious problem. With little cash currency available at the time, many financial transactions relied on credit and a “bad name” would discourage another party from engaging in such a transaction. Additionally, although Newport was quite heavily populated by colonial standards, the 1790 census enumerates only 6,700 people, and African Americans made up fewer than 10% of that number. Within such a relatively small group, a poor reputation might easily diminish an individual’s social capital among his peers.

Indeed, the very infrastructure of the Free African Union Society relied upon the approbation and approval of the membership base to function. When Conjo Jenkins declared in a Society meeting on October 6, 1791 that he wished for all of his contributions to the Society be given to John Greene, Esq., one person “objected against such a proposal” and thus “it was proposed that the Agreement or Order, by the whole Community should be read.” The issue was presented to the “Community,” that is, the

members of the Society, and it was decided that in the future, no member would be allowed to remove all of his contributions at one time.

It appears that the “Community” was made up of a large group of individuals, many of whom wanted their voices heard. During a meeting on September 6, 1792, the Society enacted the following:

it is requisite and necessary that whenever the abovementioned Committee, or the Members belonging thereto, in General or Quarterly Meetings to transact Business, that each Member, or others present in said Meetings, remain silence [sic] in Time of Business, Excepting the President or Vice President, and those transacting needful Business, that when & so often as any one be requested to be silent, that he or they be silent, and obey, and that, on the contrary, if he or they shall still persist in making noise or disturbance in time of Business, he or they shall be fined One Shilling & six pence, lawful Money, for each Person, for each & every offence committed. (Robinson 73)

The Society demonstrates a marked attention to maintaining order, and, in particular, in maintaining a chain of command which dictated whose voices could and should be heard. As this passage indicates, the President and Vice-President were allowed the liberty to speak at will during meetings and “[times] of Business.” Indeed, one’s membership in the Society was equated with one’s ability to speak. When Newport Gardner became a member, his new status was recorded as follows: “Voted, That Mr. Ocramar Mirycoo, or Newport Gardner be, and he is hereby admitted with the Privileges of having a Voice in the said Union Society” (Robinson 58).

Widows, although denied the privilege of membership, were in fact allowed the opportunity to speak, albeit not directly to the Society's "Community." After Genney Gardner's husband, Pompey Gardner, died in 1794, "Mr. Stevens moved that [sic] ought to be committee chosen to waite on the widow Gardner to know her cercumstances [sic] and agree to it and Mr. Tanner and Mr. Amy chosen to wait on her and make report to committee." Later, Mr. Tanner reported that "they have waited on the widow Gardner to know her circumstances and she having made known to the committee, they thought proper to allow her six shillings, to help her." After the Society agreed to the payment, it was "agreed that Mr. Stevens wait on the widow Gardner with six shillings for her, and explain to her the circumstances of the society." Zingo Stevens and his two associates visit Genney Gardner to "know her cercumstances," thus providing her the opportunity to present a case to the Free African Union Society. She evidently had asked for some kind of financial support; the three men requested six shillings to be paid to her, at which point the men explained to Genney Gardner the "circumstances of the society." Thus the relationship between Genney Gardner and the Society members, as reflected in the meeting minutes, is regarded as reciprocal: she explains her "circumstances" to the Society members, and the members explain the Society's "circumstances" to her.

This example of the process of determining Genney Gardner's "circumstances" provides us with a probable scenario of how Dinah Sisson interacted with the Society. She likely presented her request to a small group of the Society's members, who promised to convey her words to the Society during a monthly meeting. If, like in the case of Genney Gardner, the Society members conveyed the Society's "circumstances" to Dinah Sisson, she would have been made aware of the process by which issues were

presented to the “Community” during Society meetings. Given this knowledge, it is possible that Dinah expected her negative pronouncements about Society members in town to be carried back eventually to the men on whom those pronouncements would inflict shame.

The men whom Dinah Sisson shames were not unknown to her – perhaps they were the very men who waited upon her after the death of Neptune Sisson. In fact, it seems that they had been friends for decades. We see evidence of this friendship in a manuscript, contained within the materials relating to the Free African Union Society at the Rhode Island Historical Society.⁵³ The document pertains to a picnic that occurred in 1766, eighteen years before Dinah Sisson would launch her smear campaign and twelve years before the Society was founded. The manuscript consists of one sheet of paper and has been collected in a folder with other single-sheet accounts written by Caesar Lyndon that may at one time have been gathered in an account book. Those attending the picnic described in the manuscript would later prove important players in the controversy caused by Dinah Sisson following the death of her husband. Caesar Lyndon provides the details of the event in his account book: the Sissons, along with Caesar Lyndon, Sarah Searing, and three other friends, Zingo Stevens, Phillis Lyndon, and Boston Vose, embarked on a picnic to Portsmouth on August 12, 1766 with provisions that included a wine, rum, and a “pigg to roast.” Extant documents reveal that at least two men at the picnic would become members of the Free African Union Society, and the others may have become members as well. Shortly after the picnic, Caesar Lyndon would marry Sarah Searing and another couple who picnicked together, Zingo Stevens and Phillis

⁵³ August 12, 1766. Rhode Island Manuscripts. MS 9004. Rhode Island Historical Society Collections.

Lyndon, would also marry. According to Lyndon's records, he and Neptune Sisson had other dealings together: Sisson produced turnips that he arranged to be sold at the Newport market on Sundays, and was financially comfortable enough to be able to afford a silk handkerchief, which he purchased from Lyndon.⁵⁴ Though the record of only one social gathering is extant, we can speculate, given Sisson and Lyndon's other transactions, that members of the group were friends as well as business associates, picnicking in 1766 and becoming members of the same organization several years later.

It appears that occasions like the picnic in Portsmouth or others like it sometimes devolved into rowdy events, for one of the first tenets agreed upon by the Free African Union Society was to avoid exactly the kind of gathering that Caesar Lyndon records in 1766: "We the members of this society agree to void [sic] frolicking and amusement that lead to expense and idleness; they beget the habits of dissipation and vice and these expose you to deserved reproach amongst our white neighbours" (Franklin 10).

Historians of early Newport have indicated that certain African American rituals like Election Day festivals and burials were viewed by white individuals as boisterous and inappropriate, and according to members of the Free African Union Society, some of their social gatherings were viewed similarly, to the detriment of the men's reputation among "white neighbours."

Dinah Sisson seems to have understood the machinations of the social network in which she lived and the importance of maintaining an unblemished reputation, choosing to use her words to damage the men who she believed wronged her. If we accept the

⁵⁴ The following excerpts are from Caesar Lyndon's account books: "1 Linen blue and white handkerchief for Neptune \$3 8' 0'" (December 17, 1765); "Received 1 silk handkerchief for Neptune \$9 0' 0'" (January 3, 1766); "put five bunches turnups (sic) in the market house to sell for Neptune" (June 27, 1766). MSS 9004. Rhode Island Manuscripts. Rhode Island Historical Society.

evidence put forth in the Society's meeting minutes, it seems that Sisson had no basis for her argument against the Free African Union Society. Evidently believing otherwise, she wielded maligning speech as a weapon against the Society members.

Sisson's example stands in contrast to that of Susannah Wanton, also a widow, who similarly requests an account of funds owed to her family. In December of 1793, nearly a year before Dinah Sisson's case, the Free African Union Society resolves "that Newport Wanton is full payed and therefore he has no more rights to this society." The Free African Union Society sends a copy of this message and an itemized account to Susannah Wanton, and the meeting minutes show no further correspondence with the widow. Although Susannah Wanton does not receive the funds that she may be expecting, unless the record of her response is lost, it seems that she is either satisfied with the results or does not convey her dissatisfaction by the same means as Sisson.

Admittedly, we must sift through layers of mediation in order to access Dinah Sisson's voice: we know only that her displeasure eventually reaches the ears of members of the Union Society, one of whom (Prince Amy) broaches the issue at a Society meeting. We do not know how Amy came to hear the aspersions: was he a witness to them? Did he hear about them secondhand? Sisson's voice is further mediated by the fact that we do not even have access to Amy's words, which are recorded by another individual, Caesar Lyndon. Does Lyndon accurately record Amy's retelling of the event? We cannot know, but, as scholars like Wendy K. Warren have indicated, we must rely on evidence like this moment in the meeting minutes, slender as it is, to gain access to the voices of marginalized individuals like Sisson.

Whatever words Dinah Sisson may have used against the Society's members, her intention seems clear: she wanted to make certain that everyone knew how the Society had mishandled her husband's account. Her actions demonstrate both a marked persistence in the face of contrary evidence, and her knowledge of how to wield the weapon of disparaging speech. Dinah shapes public opinion against members of the Free African Union Society and ultimately leaves a record that creates a more complex portrait of that virtuous woman depicted in the epitaph in God's Little Acre. Although the Free African Union Society probably did not intend to offer a space in its meeting minutes for Dinah Sisson to create a testament, they did so nevertheless. Through an intervention in the Free African Union Society's records, Dinah Sisson underscores the extent to which she will fight to regain what she feels is owed to her and damage the Society that did not live up to its promise.

Despite the preponderance of male voices in the Free African Union Society minutes, we have access to Dinah Sisson's perspective and can glimpse how effectively she was able to navigate social networks of 18th-century Newport to settle a score. And, our understanding of her personality becomes more nuanced when we juxtapose the Free African Union Society controversy with the sterling qualities listed on her epitaph. The records of the Free African Union Society demonstrate that an "industrious virtuous Black woman" embodied other qualities, too: persistence, wherewithal, and perhaps something of stubbornness, too.

EPILOGUE

The histories that I have constructed here from slender, elusive evidence are the histories of an “unrecoverable past . . . written with and against the archive” (Hartman 12). The past is unrecoverable in part because of the damage done to records by the very archives that seek to preserve them. Placing a record within an archive can ensure its survival, but it necessarily categorizes the record in some way and thereby circumscribes its use or meaning. The organizational infrastructure of the archive, whether it be a finding aid or some other documentation, shapes the way that a record is read by a user who discovers it. Placing each record alongside the others in this dissertation, I have positioned the record in a new archive that I hope opens up and encourages new interpretations. My “imagined archive,” though, is subject to the same constraints as the bricks-and-mortar archives which house the records. By paying attention to the effects of the archive on a given record, one can more readily develop meanings that run counter to those shaped by the archival methods.

My interpretations of the records examined in this dissertation also run counter to generic conventions. Despite the usefulness of considering genre in the interpretation of texts, this method can, like a record’s inclusion in a particular archive, preclude certain alternative readings of the record. For example, if we read a will strictly as a document that enumerates which objects are bequeathed to a list of heirs, we miss the print version

of a giveaway ceremony or a brief history of the community. A finding aid allows us to locate a record, yet its very existence discourages the possibility of mining all possible meanings of that record. The categorization of a record as exhibiting the conventions of a certain genre can help us to contextualize the record, but this method also suggests one reading of a text over another.

I have tried to show in this project that we gain a clearer notion of the perspective of women like Abigail Faulkner, Naomai Ommaush, Katherine Garret, and Dinah Sisson when we attend to the effect of archival methods and conventions on the manuscripts that tell their story. In Chapter 2, we see that Abigail Faulkner lacks the authority to manipulate the official record of the archive and thus her involvement in the trials is preserved and made available to later generations. Though she is ultimately unsuccessful in her attempt to have the trial transcripts destroyed, she does manage to shape the official archive by submitting petition after petition, asserting her innocence of any wrongdoing. Classified as a “Native” record in the collections of the Clements Library and, more specifically, as a Massachusetts record in the figurative archive of Bragdon and Goddard, the will of Naomai Ommaush that I examine in Chapter 3 looks quite different when figuratively placed alongside orthodox colonial histories. As a will, the record fulfilled a particular, important function in 1738, as it determined who should receive Naomai’s possessions after her death. Yet this classification as “will” precludes an alternative reading of the record as unconventional colonial history. The published pamphlet of *The Confession and Dying Warning of Katherine Garret, etc.*, examined in Chapter 4, frames Garret as an exemplary figure, a repentant sinner; we gain access to her experience of imprisonment and execution only from the perspective of the

narrator/minister. Yet an archive that considers the confession alongside Adams's execution sermon, journal entries from another congregant, and a 19th-century local history paints a more nuanced picture of a frightened woman who tries and fails to shape how she will be remembered. Finally, in Chapter 5, the nuance of a woman's perspective is erased when the meeting minutes that contain it are positioned alongside other texts related only by the race and geographical location of their subject(s): African Americans who live in Rhode Island. In this collection of meeting minutes, we see that records meant to document the daily operations of the all-male Free African Union Society can reveal the testimony of a woman who was never intended to have a voice in the proceedings. Nevertheless, she wields the weapon of disparaging speech and thus shapes public opinion to suit her needs, taking down the Free African Union Society in the process.

Despite their differences, the four women whose voices animate this project are united by their desire to shape public opinion using the means at their disposal. By reading conventional genres in an unconventional way, we discover the testaments of women who were determined to speak out. By using the methods of close literary analysis, historical contextualization, and archival organization together, we can counter some of the damage done to records created by individuals whose racial, social, and economic position provided little control over public archives or the writing of history. The survival of these testaments of self-fashioning, entrusted as they were to the whims of individuals and institutions, hangs in the balance.

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VITA

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