

STRANGE BUSINESS FOR A LADY:
SINGLE WOMEN'S WORK IN MECKLENBURG COUNTY, NC, 1774-1860

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in
History

Charlotte

2016

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ABSTRACT

KATE HILLARY MOORE. Strange business for a lady:
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(Under the direction of DR. CHERYL HICKS)

An anonymous author in 1837 lamented that “if the world were just” the term Old Maid, instead of a pejorative, would “be a synonyme(sp) of *useful virtue*.” While scholars have examined the domestic and beneficent contributions of single women, this paper looks at the economic involvement of single women in their local economies through two professions. Widows were often left in charge of taverns after the deaths of their husbands, suddenly making their labor in these spaces visible. Taverns were important social spaces in the relatively isolated backcountry and, therefore, the women running them could be quite powerful within the local community. Examining several widows in this position reveals how women negotiated space for themselves within the local economy. A second group of single women are located in female schools during the latter half of the period under consideration. As educating young women became more popular among the middle and upper classes, a growing demand for female schooling created an economic opportunity for educated single women. Whether for only a short period of time before marriage, during widowhood, or throughout their lifetime, female teachers tapped into an evolving image of Southern gentility as a route to independence. An examination of both female publicans and teachers presents the chance to explore how women could simultaneously employ the gender ideals of the period while ensuring their own survival. Understanding these particular women's lives helps expand our understanding of Southern womanhood as a whole.

DEDICATION

For Mom

and

In Memory of Billy Moore

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the support, encouragement, and assistance of many people this thesis would be a shell of its current form. For the past four years Dr. Cheryl Hicks has provided advice, moral support, and a wealth of knowledge that has helped me in innumerable ways. I am forever grateful for her positive example throughout my undergraduate and graduate work. I would also like to thank Dr. Dan Dupre for his incredibly useful secondary source suggestions and insightful comments, as well as Dr. Amanda Pipkin for her insights on gender theory and her infectiously positive spirit.

I would also like to thank the countless local history buffs, genealogists, and digitization projects that have assisted me in innumerable ways. In particular, without Herman Ferguson's transcriptions of Mecklenburg's public documents this research would have taken additional years of painstaking work.

Without the unending support of friends and family, I would never have made it to this point. From an early age my family instilled in me a love of learning and of history for which I am eternally grateful. Special thanks to Mom, Aunt Georgia, Uncle Bill, Aunt Patsy, and June for being there to cheer me on at every turn. To Rivera without whose support I would not have been able to embark on this journey and for helping me maintain a level of fun and enjoyment while working that kept sane. In the same vein, thanks to Brad, Shane, and Adele for providing welcome distractions and being inspirational models of what hard work and determination can accomplish.

A final thanks and congratulations to my grad school peers. Your feedback and companionship were invaluable throughout this process.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In 1837 an anonymous author known only as “B” penned an opinion piece for the *Southern Literary Messenger* titled simply “Old Maids.” The author bemoaned the lingering tendency to view unmarried women with ridicule. The term Old Maid, this author argued, would “be a synonyme(sp) of *useful virtue*” if “the world were just.”¹ The best specimens of this “class” of women were, said B, humble doers of good who performed their many acts of charity and kindness without ostentation.

According to B, many members of the community owed a debt to the good works of Old Maids. While B’s Old Maids were mostly older, never-married women, widows and yet-to-be-married women often fit a similar mold. They were white, predominantly from the middling and elite class, and often fervently religious. These groups of single women supported charitable causes throughout their communities but favored preachers in particular. B asked his readers who made these men preachers in the first place, who paid for their instruction, who raised money, and who knit their stockings?² “Why, the answer must be, “OLD MAIDS!” he proclaimed. The works of these busy single women did not end with their local religious leaders either; students of local Sunday schools, missionaries, the sick, and the poor were all recipients of the virtuous single woman’s attention. While single women often physically attended to the needs of the community,

¹ B, “The Lyceum - No. II -Old Maids,” *Southern Literary Messenger* 3, no. 8 (August 1837): 473–74.

² B presents as male in this piece. I have made the decision to refer to the anonymous author with male pronouns for this reason.

according to B, they also used male surrogates to disperse substantial sums of their wealth discretely.

Of course, as B himself admitted, not every “Old Maid” was as virtuous and humble as his own maiden aunt and the others he discussed and clearly revered. However, creating a more realistic portrait of the average single woman’s life in the half-century before the Civil War is problematic because much of these busy and generous women’s lives has been lost to the passage of time. No statues were erected in their names, no streets named in recognition of their daily tasks of beneficence, and few written records of their lives have been preserved. Still, these uniquely positioned women offer a fascinating glimpse into the structure of the South’s conceptions of community, the economy, and its unique societal structure.

Just as B presented his readers with an alternative perception of single womanhood, the following thesis will shine a new light on female independence. While B focused on single women’s religious and charitable works, which were without doubt an important part of many women’s lives, widows, spinsters, and young women were also economic actors. Contemporary authors like B, unsurprisingly, often overlooked the economic involvement of single women in their local community beyond simple donations to needy persons or causes. In reality, all Southern women were involved in their economies as consumers, producers and or entrepreneurs. It appears this was especially the case for the region’s single women.

As this work’s title suggests, single women’s involvement in business was viewed as far strange than their knitting of socks or charitable fundraising. However, Southern women played critical, if usually invisible, roles in their local economies. While the

traditional colonial role of production of textiles and other sellable goods gradually gave way to larger industry, traditional role economic roles remained for women and other, new, roles presented themselves. This thesis will examine two specific positions that women held in the rural backcountry economy of Mecklenburg County from the time of the American Revolution through the Civil War. This period is one of critical importance to the region as it gradually became less isolated and more connected to the wider economy and society.

Popular opinion portrayed the world of business as part of the male-dominated public sphere, but Charlotte's records reveal that single women's work was available in a variety of arenas of public life. Of course, all women worked in their homes or in the homes of those who claimed ownership of them, but the particular women under consideration here were different. Their work had a more visible economic impact on their households; they ran businesses and promoted themselves publically or through word of mouth in the community. Their lives present the chance to understand how women could simultaneously employ the gender ideals of the time while ensuring their own survival.

Following a discussion of previous works on related topics, I will provide a brief introduction to the region. The second chapter will examine female publicans, or tavern owners. Through the colonial period and into the first decades of the new Republic, women operated taverns in rural and urban areas alike. Though wives and daughters undoubtedly played an important role in all taverns, single women stand out in the historic record. These female publican's lives reveal not only the potential for women to

hold critical positions within the region's economy, but also offers the chance to examine how the local economy functioned more broadly.

During the earlier half of the period under consideration, county court records reveal women's work in taverns. These brief appearances in the historic record allude to a far greater involvement for women in family-run hospitality businesses throughout their lives, not only during periods of singleness. The ability of widows to operate taverns for years or even decades after the deaths of their husbands indicates that some women, elite white women in particular, were prepared to handle the family's finances and negotiate a role for themselves in the local economy.

The third chapter focuses on a second group of workingwomen, teachers. As demand grew for female education, so too did the demand for teachers. As female publicans faded out of the record, largely because of the rise of more professional establishments, teaching emerged as a potential occupation for educated and ambitious women and girls. Mecklenburg's teachers left a lasting impression on their community that endured into the twentieth century. Studying institutions of female education and the women who staffed them illuminates not only attitudes towards education but also some of the ways that religion and social connections impacted a woman's ability to remain economically stable.

Female education gained increasing popularity throughout the antebellum period in the South. Academies offered the chance for local girls to get an education, of course, but they also proved to be an ideal space for respectable middling and elite female employment. Both local women and those recruited from the North utilized the developing association of teaching with feminine qualities to provide for themselves and

their extended families. The monetization of the maternal role of instructor and motivator within the family represents an important step towards female independence, though Southerners certainly would not have perceived it as such at the time.

This work will explore single women's roles in these two professions to demonstrate that even in a period of clear male dominance of virtually every aspect of Southern society, women managed to carve out spaces in which to survive and even thrive. Again, documentation of single women is often sparse, if not completely non-existent. However, combining snippets from court minutes, estate records, private writings, and newspapers creates a starting point from which we can begin to understand these fascinating women and their experiences. The main characters in this work are exclusively middling or upper class white women. These women were the only ones able to engage the credit networks of the area effectively and, more importantly, they are the only ones who left behind records of any detail.

Historiography and Theoretical Background

Before introducing the local women of Mecklenburg County it is necessary to address and define some of the larger trends within the political and social systems of Revolutionary and Post-Revolutionary America. Significant shifts in American society impacted women's abilities to remain single and contributed to the softening opinion of women who had been previously spoken of with derision as "Old Maids."

Family structure and gender roles in the United States, especially during the earlier period of this study, were fundamentally rooted in European norms. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, European family structure and gender relations were

based on the patriarchal system that mirrored the political order imposed by reigning monarchs. Within this system every person fell somewhere within a hierarchy; married women, however, were classified only as submissive to the position of their husband.³

These societal gender roles were reflected in the legal system of coverture.

Under British Common Law, an unmarried or widowed woman was known as a *feme sole* while a married woman was referred to as a *feme covert*. When a woman married and transitioned from the more independent status of *feme sole* to the restricted *feme covert* status she lost her legal independence; in the eyes of the law, a woman's identity was subsumed by her husband's.⁴ A married woman could not own property, if she worked her wages were the property of her husband, she could not sign any contracts, and she could not visibly participate as an "economic agent" in anyway.⁵ This meant that marriage was, in effect, a loss of liberty, identity, and independence.

Conversely the status of *feme sole* offered a position of independence within the community. A *feme sole* possessed all the same legal abilities as her male peers.⁶ There were two ways for women to make use of this system: the first was simply to never marry. Some women may have chosen this route intentionally, while others remained single due to circumstances beyond their control. Secondly, if a woman's husband died, she reverted from a *feme covert* to a *feme sole*. While these laws were rooted in British legal tradition, they outlasted British rule and were incorporated into the state and federal laws of the new nation. . Often complex laws regarding the rights of widows evolved in

³ Kathleen M Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁵ Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: Norton, 1984), 22–24.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

each state, but the general intent was to ensure the economic stability of the widowed woman.⁷ While some restrictions remained, widows returned to the legally more independent position that they generally only briefly occupied prior to their marriage.

A study of *feme soles* provides a glimpse into one unique cross-section of Southern society. Single women existed in every strata of antebellum society, they lived in both the village and the countryside; and they often occupied a liminal space between the already blurry public and private realms. The term “single,” in the context of this work, refers to several different types of women. Single here includes women who never-married, widows, and some women who had simply not married yet.

Women often moved through these categories of singleness throughout their lives. Some women lived as semi-independent agents before marriage; others were widowed and became economically independent; and a few never married at all. In their groundbreaking book, Judith Bennet and Amy Froide utilize singleness as an explicit category of analysis. They use the term “life-cycle” singleness to refer to women who had not yet married and “lifelong” singleness to refer to women who never married.⁸ Widowhood was another form of life-cycle singleness because many widows, especially those under thirty, often remarried.⁹ All of these types of singleness are present in antebellum Mecklenburg and provided women with different employment challenges and opportunities.

⁷ The chapter on taverns will detail more info on the legal and social status of widows. For more information refer to Marylynn Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).

⁸ Judith Bennett and Amy Froide, *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

⁹ Lebsack, *The Free Women of Petersburg*, 26–27.

The increasing acceptance of single women throughout antebellum society can be partially attributed to their perceived usefulness. Family members and neighbors began to appreciate the value of single women that B so deftly pointed to. These women filled niches that their married peers were unable or reluctant to fill. This is particularly true of elite and middling single women who played active roles in the lives of their families, the local economy, in various religious and charitable organizations, and in the classroom. Because of their relative economic independence, elite widows kept their deceased husbands' businesses running smoothly and kept income flowing for their extended families. Never-married and yet-to-be-married women also contributed to their families, both economically and socially. They helped care for younger members of the extended family and helped educate the community's youth, both wealthy and poor.

Though it may seem counter-intuitive, single women represented a hyper-ideal of femininity during the period. Over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, new conceptions of femininity and masculinity gradually evolved; this included a shifting perception of singleness. By the nineteenth century literary journals began describing single women as "unselfish ministers to the sick, teachers of the young, or moral preceptors with their pens, beloved of the entire village."¹⁰ Such a description fits neatly with the proposed "cult of true womanhood." Following Barbara Welter's coining of the phrase, historians have debated the validity and broad acceptance of this version of "true" womanhood. Suzanne Lebsack described Welter's hypothesis as focusing on the male need ensure that someone would be keeping an eye on the country's morality at home

¹⁰ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966): 196.

while men increasingly “gave themselves over to the relentless pursuit of wealth.”¹¹ According to Welter, true womanhood was built upon four virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.¹² Elite white single women, especially those who never married, were the epitome of these virtues. Their purity was complete because they fully and completely resisted the advances of the opposite gender.¹³ Their devotion was not to a husband but to the Christian God, thereby solidifying their piety. Even though they did not have a husband, most single women, whether widowed or unmarried, were still submissive to the males in their lives in many ways. Finally, even their roles in public life connected back to the ideals of domesticity that associated them with nurturing and moral encouragement within the household.

Most associated with the North in historiography, the cults of true womanhood and domesticity were also present in the South, though with adaptations.¹⁴ Historian of the emerging Southern middle class, Jonathan Daniel Wells, noted that Southerners were exposed to all of the gendered rhetoric presented in Northern publications. In fact, he found that Northern publications dominated Southerner’s subscription records, especially when it came to literary journals.¹⁵ But these images of idealized feminine virtue were firmly rooted within the upper class. Cynthia Kierner noted that the emerging valorization of domesticity as early as the Colonial period was obscuring the value of women’s labor. She argued that “(b)y praising attributes accessible to only the most privileged women, however, (the focus on domesticity) accentuated distinctions between

¹¹ Lebsack, *The Free Women of Petersburg*, 233.

¹² Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 152.

¹³ Or so their public image implied.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 64.

¹⁵ Jonathan Daniel Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class, 1800-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 47.

class and race.”¹⁶ Indeed, Wells found evidence of antebellum backlash against these elite ideals from the middling classes.¹⁷

In reality, there were many women who did not fit the idealized vision of womanhood. Yeoman women, in particular, did not have the luxuries of leisure time or education. Mecklenburg County was full of single women with children born out of wedlock, spinsters who dominated the textile trade of the region, and single women within farming households whose lives likely revolved predominantly around survival.¹⁸ These women have, unfortunately, left behind few records that allow the interested historian to reconstruct their lives.¹⁹ Because they did not leave estate records that detailed their business transactions, like female publicans, and did not advertise the many aspects of labor they performed in the newspaper, like teachers did, they are less visible.²⁰ Popular writings and the evolving gender ideals they reflected and inspired often obscured the reality of daily life for women across all classes.²¹

While the ideology of domesticity often hid the everyday labor of women from all classes, elite women were privileged enough to twist this ideology to suit their wants and

¹⁶ Cynthia A Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 26.

¹⁷ Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class, 1800-1861*, 78–80.

¹⁸ Johanna Miller Lewis teased out some of the experiences of nearby Rowan County's female textile workers in her 1995 book. She notes the tendency of historians not to include these women in artisanal histories because they often did not have formal training, but she argues this does not negate their importance to the local economy. Johanna Miller Lewis, *Artisans in the North Carolina Backcountry* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1995).

¹⁹ My earlier research focused a good deal on single women and their bastardy cases in Mecklenburg County. While I had hoped to include their stories, I found it to be beyond the scope of this work. Victoria Bynum's work is the best example of a creative examination of lower class and minority women's lives during this period in North Carolina. Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

²⁰ Delfino and Gillespie's collection of essays provides a critical example of the labor of average women in the South that existed in opposition to the gendered stereotypes of the South. Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie, *Neither Lady nor Slave Working Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=99929>.

²¹ Kierner, *Beyond the Household*, 181.

needs. As Kierner pointed out, elite white women were able to obscure “the potential radicalism of their public activities” and, therefore, “most men either ignored those activities or accepted them as the natural and even desirable consequences of women’s innate compassion and piety.”²² Teaching was perhaps the most common foray into the public realm that was clearly rooted in maternal ideals. Tavern labor was, however, also a venue for this form of domesticated labor.²³

Women were undoubtedly behind much of the work in taverns and inns throughout the history of the United States. Much of the historiography of taverns focuses on the Colonial period, but taverns remained important in many areas of the South well past the Revolution. The general domestic work, such as cooking, hosting, and cleaning, involved in taverns clearly fit with conceptions of femininity. But men and women of the upper class also emphasized the importance of women’s managerial skills of women within the household, another task that meshed well with the requirements of the business role of female publicans.²⁴ Educated women, married or single, were often expected to manage their household in many aspects, financial as well as domestic, and were able to turn these skills to business when required.

Despite the connections between the norms of domesticity and the work within taverns, little has yet been written on Southern female publicans. One historian of taverns, Sharon V. Salinger, noted that Southern tavern owners in the Charleston were more likely than their urban Northern counterparts to be married. While interesting, this observation applies only to a large urban area like Charleston, which was far outside the

²² Ibid., 198.

²³ Ibid., 19.

²⁴ Ibid., 181.

norm for the South during both the Colonial and post-Revolutionary eras. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese calculated that the urban population of North Carolina from 1800 through 1860 hovered around only two percent.²⁵ Other historians have examined rural taverns, but have not found, or have overlooked, the participation of women in this profession.²⁶ Clearly, the field is ripe for a deeper investigation of this essentially domestic profession in the rural South.

While female tavern labor has been largely unstudied by historians of Southern women, teaching has drawn far more attention from scholars. Perhaps this academic discrepancy is rooted in the availability of sources; teachers and the institutions they worked in left behind far more visible records than tavern women. Religious publications hailed the work of women in the Sunday School movement in the early nineteenth century. In rural areas especially, these informal educational groups were founded and run by women who strove to promote both religious growth and the basics of education.²⁷ By the 1820s, as Suzanne Lebsack pointed out in her study of Petersburg, the demand for female teachers had “mushroomed.” Elites across the South were increasingly placing value on the genteel education of their daughters.²⁸ In particular, Kim Tolley has produced valuable work on the educational landscape of North Carolina during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.²⁹ Many people may associate the growth of women in the

²⁵ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 72–73.

²⁶ Daniel B Thorp, “Taverns and Tavern Culture on the Southern Colonial Frontier: Rowan County, North Carolina, 1753...,” *Journal of Southern History* 62, no. 4 (1996).

²⁷ Kierner, *Beyond the Household*, 185–86.

²⁸ Lebsack, *The Free Women of Petersburg*, 172.

²⁹ Kim Tolley, “Music Teachers in the North Carolina Education Market, 1800-1840.,” *Social Science History* 32, no. 1 (2008); Kimberley Tolley and Nash, Margaret A., “Leaving Home to Teach: The Diary of Susan Nye Hutchison, 1815-1841,” in *Chartered Schools: Two Hundred Years of Independent Academies in the United States, 1727-1925*, ed. Nancy Beadie and Kimberley Tolley (Routledge, 2014); Kim Tolley, *The Science Education of American Girls: A Historical Perspective: A Historical Perspective* (Routledge,

teaching to the period after the Civil War, and for good reason; post-1865 many Southern elite women turned to the time honored tradition of teaching as a space for acceptable female employment.³⁰ However, few studies have delved into the individual experiences of women teaching in particular Southern communities. This work attempts to do just that by exploring both the local venues for female education and illuminating the lives of the women who taught in these schools.

In both their roles as teachers and publicans, single Southern women employed an additional ideology that was key to acceptance within their communities. Usefulness is another category of analysis most specifically and deftly employed by Christine Jacobs Carter in her study of single women in Charleston and Savannah.³¹ Through predominately letters and diaries Carter described how elite single white women prided themselves on being useful to both their families and their communities. Joan R. Gunderson also focused her study of women's work on this strategy of employing the language and concept of usefulness to legitimate their public activity in business.³² Religious commentators also employed the language of usefulness when they spoke of female Sunday School teachers.³³ While never-married women used the concept of usefulness to justify their marital status, widowed women and women who had not yet married were in a different situation.

2014); Kim Tolley, "A Chartered School in a Free Market: The Case of Raleigh Academy, 1801-1828," *Teachers College Record* 107, no. 1 (2005).

³⁰ Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 111.

³¹ Christine Jacobson Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness: Unmarried Women in the Urban South, 1800-1865* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

³² Joan R Gunderson, *To Be Useful to the World: Women in Revolutionary America, 1740-1790* (New York; London: Twayne Publishers ; Prentice Hall International, 1996).

³³ Kierner, *Beyond the Household*, 186.

Widows, of course, had generally already fulfilled their social duties by marrying and, usually, having children. In their widowhood these women remained socially and politically demure while supporting their families through active participation in the local economy. Young women who had yet to be married were in a particularly interesting moment of power. In her history of North Carolina's antebellum planter class, Jane Turner Censer pointed out that women of courting age held the power to accept or reject their suitors, with or without parental approval.³⁴ No study of early/antebellum Southern womanhood has focused on the single experience in a rural setting and none have examined these different stages of singleness in a comprehensive way. Further still, female publicans have been largely neglected and much remains to be teased out to fully understand the position of female teachers in local communities.

By bringing together these two groups of single women to examine their experiences in a rural Southern economy, we can learn a number of new things. While only a few female publicans appear in Mecklenburg records, these women's lives speak to far larger truths. The ability of women to take over their deceased husbands' businesses alludes to their previously developed domestic and managerial skills and knowledge of the enterprise. This refined skill-set implies that women, even when not visible in the public records, were a crucial part of the daily operation of taverns and other business ventures. As the community evolved over the first few decades of the nineteenth century, new opportunities for women's employment gradually opened. The predominance of single female teachers in the county's early history demonstrates another niche where this particular subset of women became visible to the public eye and

³⁴ Jane Turner Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 74-76.

the historian's retrospective gaze. Single women's prevalence in the teaching profession reveals that female education in the South was not purely of ornamental use, but could also be utilized to help support the household.

Investigating the part women played, both visible and invisible, in the functioning of the local marketplace more broadly restores them to their critical role in the volatile economy of the Colonial and antebellum backcountry economy. This study combines the social history methods of a community study with a gendered theoretical framework to demonstrate that singleness offered women the opportunity to legally control the businesses that they had always helped operate and to participate both formally and informally in professions of vital importance to the local community. These women's willingness and ability to step-up and operate these socially and economically important institutions is an as yet unexplored aspect of backcountry life that deserves illumination. Understanding the involvement of women in the emerging capitalist marketplace in areas like Mecklenburg opens up an entirely new view of the South in the years prior to the Civil War.

Community Background

A brief sketch of the history and people of Mecklenburg is necessary to understand the position of women within this rural community. This thesis will necessarily focus on both the town of Charlotte and the surrounding county of Mecklenburg. The majority of the region's population lived and worked on the farms surrounding the growing town, but this scattered population came together in Charlotte. As the county seat, many residents traveled to town on court days to deal with legal matters from lawsuits to real estate deals. Farming households brought crops to town to

trade or sell and came to purchase essentials from local merchants. Church services drew congregants to town each Sunday. Charlotte was the space where many of the varied citizens came into contact with one another; whether at the courthouse, in the shops, or in the pews of the weekly church services. It is important then to understand both the character of the county and of the town and their symbiotic relationship.

This thesis often makes reference to the “backcountry” and so it is necessary to address the meaning of this potentially imprecise term. Historians, geographers, and anthropologists have provided a variety of criteria that delineate the region from both more northern and more eastern areas of the early United States. In a 1998 collection of interdisciplinary essays on the Colonial backcountry, geographer Robert D. Mitchell outlined the progression of these definitions.³⁵ According to Mitchell, scholars have used geography, material culture, agricultural products, and religion as measures of similarity that help shape the physical boundaries of the backcountry.

Most simply perhaps, one early definition of the region describes it as “a distinctive, interior, upland area with no direct access to coastal navigation.”³⁶ Rather than focusing on major cash crops grown on expansive plantations, as was more typical in the low country of the coastal South, early backcountry agriculturalists grew primarily grains, vegetables, and raised livestock.³⁷ Ethnically, the backcountry was predominately settled by a combination of Scotch Scots-Irish, and German migrants. These groups brought distinctive architectural styles and social norms with them.³⁸ Backcountry settlers

³⁵ Robert D. Mitchell, “The Southern Backcountry: A Geographical House Divided,” in *The Southern Colonial Backcountry: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Frontier Communities*, ed. David Colin Crass et al. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 5–8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

were also largely adherents of various protestant sects and their religion informed their way of life and their conceptions of both community and individuality. Small courthouse towns surrounded by agricultural land and smaller neighborhoods were the norm for the backcountry until the Civil War.

Historian Lisa Tolbert uses the small towns of middle Tennessee to develop a “cultural definition of small-town experience” in the backcountry.³⁹ While there was a certain amount of variation between towns, Tolbert argues that these social centers share many traits in common. Small towns are often seen as simply the beginning of a successful trajectory of growth into a bigger city or the failed attempt thereof. Tolbert, however, presses the point that these small towns were often small not because of some defect, but because the small town structure best suited the agrarian social structure surrounding them.⁴⁰ Rather than sleepy hamlets, Tolbert argues that small Southern towns were dynamic spaces that responded to the needs and expectations of the communities they were nestled within. After all, there is no need for a large urban center in an area that is predominantly agricultural. A small town with the necessary political, economic, religious, and educational spaces was all that was required in a county like Mecklenburg during this period.

Indeed, when comparing the formation and growth of Charlotte, there are a number of similarities to the small-town patterns found in backcountry Tennessee. For one, the demand for new towns was generally the motivation for the formation of new counties, rather than the reverse. The increasing agricultural settlement of the

³⁹ Lisa C Tolbert, *Constructing Townscapes: Space and Society in Antebellum Tennessee* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 6.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

backcountry's rolling hills, verdant woods, and misty valleys created demand for more convenient locations to sell crops, buy supplies, and address grievances. More residents also meant a greater need for social control, a task mainly carried out by the local judiciary. The nearly ubiquitous grid design of backcountry small towns reflects this desire to impose order on the landscape and its residents.

Mecklenburg and its corresponding county seat, "Charlottetown," followed this same pattern. As was also common, Mecklenburg was formed from a portion of existing Anson County. Thomas Polk, the great uncle of future President James K. Polk, led the charge to promote the future Charlotte area as the ideal spot for a new economic, legal, and social hub. Just as the new county was named for her homeland, Polk's proposed town was named after England's Queen Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz.

After successful political positioning, and the somewhat preemptive construction of a courthouse, Polk's bid was successful. The royal governor ordered the new town's surveyor to lay out one hundred acres for the town, divided into half-acre lots, in 1768.⁴¹ Two popular trade routes lay at the heart of the newly plotted town. One trail originated in the east, at the coastal trading hub of Charleston, and continued on northwest to the Blue Ridge Mountains. The other route connected to the Great Wagon Road, a path leading from Pennsylvania down through the Piedmont.⁴² By the time of the American Revolution the few blocks surrounding the intersection of these two trade routes were dotted with taverns. Taverns were vital for the scattered population of the new county and

⁴¹ Thomas W Hanchett, "The Growth of Charlotte: A History," *Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission*, 14, accessed November 15, 2015, <http://www.cmhpf.org/educhargrowth.htm>.

⁴² Hanchett, "The Growth of Charlotte: A History."

for the travellers who passed through. Their presence represented the first vestiges of growth in a region.

Many Scots Irish settlers arrived in Mecklenburg after leaving Pennsylvania and travelling down the length of the Great Wagon Road. With them these settlers brought a number of distinct cultural traditions. Considering the Pennsylvanian origin of many of the region's settlers, it is no surprise that the new town followed the grid style popularized by William Penn in his design for Philadelphia.⁴³ The new courthouse was situated in a small square at the crossroads of the region's two trade routes, renamed Tryon Street and Trade Street. The city's 1768 plan demonstrated an urban influence that predates the Philadelphia-inspired layouts of both Pittsboro, in 1785, and Raleigh, in 1792, making it one of the early examples of the backcountry grid style plan.⁴⁴

The town, at the time of its founding, had little use for the large grid laid out by the founding fathers. The introduction of railroads in the 1850s spurred renewed growth in the city, but it was not until after the Civil War that Charlotte began filling out the full boundaries of the initial layout.⁴⁵ By 1860, Charlotte had over 1000 residents, making it a typical sized courthouse town for the backcountry of North Carolina.⁴⁶ During the years of the Early Republic, Charlotte followed the process of slow urbanization characteristic of North Carolina as a whole.⁴⁷ In 1802, the discovery of gold in neighboring Cabarrus

⁴³ Tolbert, *Constructing Townscapes*.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁵ Carolyn Frances Hoffman, "The Development of Town and Country: Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, 1850-1880" 1988, 3; Thomas W Hanchett, *Sorting out the New South City Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=41320>.

⁴⁶ According to early twentieth-century historian Guion Griffis Johnson, anything area with less than 1000 people "scarcely deserv(ed) the 'appellation of village.'" Guion Griffis Johnson, "Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History: Electronic Edition," 114–15, accessed November 12, 2015, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/johnson/chapter5.html>.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 115.

County sparked the young nation's first gold rush. From the census of 1790 till the population's pre-war peak in 1830, the county nearly doubled in size (see Figure 2.) As the city grew, demand for a wider variety of services grew as well. It was during this later period of growth that more citizens became interested in schools that would provide a well-rounded education for their children. The group of citizens that primarily drove this increased demand was the upper class of the county.

Much of the social, political, and economic life of Mecklenburg was dominated by a relatively small group of elites. In Carolyn Frances Hoffman's *The Development of Town and Country*, she found that the majority of these elites owned property and engaged in business in both the wider rural landscape, as well as within the city's boundaries.⁴⁸ These elite families fell somewhere between the oft-studied plantation elite and the recently considered emerging middle class. At the top of the social hierarchy laid out by Guion Griffis Johnson were elite planters and socially prominent families.

Men of the upper class dominated both the agricultural landscape of the countryside and the legal, medical, and entrepreneurial roles in town, contributing to a dualistic identity among many. Elite women also made their presence felt in both the town and country; they oversaw the domestic work on plantations and spurred religious and educational activity in town. While scholars of the emerging Southern middle class have described a group of educated city- or town-dwelling middling people interacting with and being shaped by rural culture, in Charlotte the two groups were largely one in the same.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Hoffman, "The Development of Town and Country."

⁴⁹ Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class, 1800-1861*.

While few, if any, planters in the area operated farms on the scale of their elite peers in the Tidewater or Deep South farming was still an important aspect of life in the backcountry. By 1850, three percent of the wealthiest households owned thirty three percent of the county's real estate and twenty three percent of the county's enslaved population.⁵⁰ Local elite's life of dual identities, working a moderately sized farm while holding other jobs or volunteer positions in town, was possible for elites, especially, because they relied on the labor of enslaved men and women. As the number of white residents decreased in Mecklenburg, the percentage of slaves and free people of color rose (See Table 1). One historian has described the ownership of slaves in antebellum Mecklenburg as "more a manifestation of conspicuous consumption" than economic necessity.⁵¹ While this may be true in comparison to the far larger plantations in other areas of the country, enslaved people in Mecklenburg played a critical role in the backcountry economy.

Elite women had the time to participate in economic, religious, and social activities largely because enslaved women performed many of the daily household tasks.⁵² Slaves and white laborers were critical for maintaining the genteel image of a lady who did not "work."⁵³ More broadly, both male and female slave owners relied on the labor of enslaved men and women in the fields, mines, taverns, stores and their work as skilled artisans. However, only 30 percent of the white population had slaves by the

⁵⁰ Hoffman, "The Development of Town and Country," 9–10.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵² The reliance on slave labor is especially true of single elite women. Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness*.

⁵³ Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World*, 80.

1850s.⁵⁴ Consequently, slaveholding in the county represents an important indicator of wealth and status.

Nearly all of the women in this study were a part of the slaveholding class of Mecklenburg. Through their influential male kin they obtained control over enslaved men, women, and children. Though the tasks and lives of these enslaved inhabitants of Mecklenburg are even more obscured than the lives of its white women, their presence undoubtedly aided the success of the women whose stories follow. With the support of enslaved labor and the elite connections of their well-placed social connections, elite female publicans became significant actors within the local economy of Mecklenburg County. Similarly, elite girls taught in the region by instructors from the North went on to become educators before marriage or throughout their singlehood. The chapters that follow will detail the strange, or perhaps not so much, businesses of Mecklenburg's single women.

⁵⁴ Hoffman, "The Development of Town and Country," 7.

CHAPTER TWO: FEMALE PUBLICANS IN MECKLENBURG'S HOUSES OF ENTERTAINMENT, 1774-1850

On court and market days the small town of Charlotte filled with visitors from the surrounding countryside. These visitors required a place to hold meetings, refresh their horses, enjoy libations, and bed down for the night. Just before George Washington visited in 1791, a traveler described the Mason's public house in Charlotte as a "good tavern," if a bit expensive.⁵⁵ The Masons and several other local publicans were located just blocks from the center of town life, Charlotte's courthouse. The small town's taverns were clustered around this sturdy symbol of backcountry justice. In 1778, for instance, visitors to Charlotte could choose from six establishments within only two blocks of the courthouse. (See Figure 2.1)

These taverns were operated by some of Charlotte's most prominent citizens. Along with Richard Mason, James Jack was one of the six licensed publicans in Charlotte during 1778. Captain Jack was locally famous for his 1775 ride to Pennsylvania to declare Charlotte's support for the American Revolution. Among these prominent local publicans were several noteworthy women, including Richard Mason's wife Elizabeth. Because of their owners' high standing in the local community, many of the licensed taverns in Charlotte were likely of the highest caliber. By the 1840s "hotels," marketed as more respectable and professional businesses, were appearing in ads of local newspapers.

⁵⁵ LeGette Blythe and Charles Raven Brockmann, *Hornets' Nest; the Story of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County* (Charlotte [N.C.: Published for Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County by McNally, 1961).

Before the hotel, the genteel “house of entertainment” stood out as somewhat distinct from the “tavern.” In 1802 the Mecklenburg Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions “(o)rdered that Mrs. Elizabeth Mason have leave to keep a house of entertainment at her Dwelling house in the Town of Charlotte,” an indication that the Mason’s business was something more than a rough and rowdy grog house.⁵⁶ According to Julia Cherry Spruill, the colonial “hostess of a genteel house of entertainment needed to be trained in the social amenities as well as in housewifery arts, for much was expected of her.”⁵⁷ Whether known by the more genteel title of “house of entertainment” or the ubiquitous “tavern,” these businesses were family affairs in which wives played a major role during and after their husbands’ lives.

Even when court was not in session and a room for the night was not required, Mecklenburgers frequented the local public houses for a variety of reasons. Of course, the tavern was practically useful as a place to get a meal, before dedicated restaurants existed in the area, and as a place to quench one’s thirst for any variety of alcohol-laden beverages. Some taverns also served as general stores of sorts; customers might trade various homemade or homegrown goods to pay off their tabs and then the publican could turn around and sell those items to other community members. Taverns were interstitial spaces where male community members met to discuss politics, business, and local gossip while women often tended to the customers.

⁵⁷ Julia Cherry Spruill, *Women’s Life and Work in the Southern Colonies*. (New York: Norton, 1972), 301–2.

As men and women interacted across the tavern's bar, at the public tables, or in the private dining rooms of fancier establishments, the line between the supposed public and private spheres could blur in taverns. The act of hosting customers, lodging them, and feeding them mirrored the norms of hospitality in the domestic private sphere. The presence of women, as wives of the proprietor or as licensed publicans themselves, further reinforced the domestic atmosphere of taverns. At the same time, male political groups and fraternal organizations gathered under the tavern roof to discuss and debate the stuff of the distinctly public sphere. Because of this unique blend of public and private interactions, the tavern makes for a fascinating snapshot of backcountry life.

Looking specifically at women in taverns offers a lens on not only the economic and social life of Charlotte, but also the position of elite women within these structures. The women who ran taverns in Charlotte followed similar trends as their peers in larger urban areas like Charleston. They took on the family business to help provide for their children, engaged in local networks of reciprocal credit, and generally operated their businesses in much the same way their male counterparts did. Though the number of female publicans in Mecklenburg was low, examining their position in the local economy creates an opportunity to understand the little researched region as a whole.

This portion of the study focuses primarily on the period between the 1774 and 1830. No female tavern owners appeared in the records after the 1840s and the majority were active from the Revolutionary period through the first few decades of the nineteenth century. At the later end of this period the hotel business model began to prevail and some establishment went alcohol-free. Another development was the increased licensing of liquor retailers, essentially liquor stores of sorts, which likely impacted the role of

these types of establishments in the community. The population of Mecklenburg during this period waxed and waned, and as the population changed so too did the area's public houses.

Despite a decline in population, due in part to the exodus of gold speculators during the 1830s and the annexation of a portion of the county to create Union County, the number of taverns in Mecklenburg continued to grow through the 1840s before declining in the 1850s.⁵⁸ (See Figure 2.2) Local inhabitants visited taverns not only for a glass of hot India rum, but also to engage in everything from politics to trade. As consumers of imported goods, like Indian rum, tavern owners were important components in the increasingly capitalist marketplace.⁵⁹ Lisa Tolbert describes the combination of taverns and dry goods stores as the “commercial backbone” of developing towns.⁶⁰ In her history of taverns in colonial America, Sharon V. Salinger states that most colonial towns only had two public establishments, a tavern and a religious gathering place.⁶¹ Because of their importance, the men and women who ran taverns often held significant social sway. Charlotte followed this same pattern; some of its earliest inhabitants were innkeepers.⁶²

⁵⁸ Part of the cause for this seeming decline in public drinking venues may be an increasing number of liquor retailers who were not limited to the “small measure.” More detailed tax lists appear in the court records during the 1850s. These records show that licenses were distributed to tavern owners and retailers of small amounts of alcohol, grog shops and the like, but the long list of general retailers of liquor were seemingly not subject to the same licensing restrictions. North Carolina, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions, trans. Herman W Ferguson (Rocky Mount: H.W. Ferguson, 1995), books 10-11.

⁵⁹ Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor, *The Ties That Buy: Women and Commerce in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 50.

⁶⁰ Tolbert, *Constructing Townscapes*.

⁶¹ Sharon V Salinger, *Taverns and Drinking in Early America* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

⁶² Charles Mason, for instance, was recorded as an innkeeper in his 1774 will. Brent Holcomb, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Abstracts of Early Wills, 1763-1790 (1749-1790)* (Greenville, S.C.: A Press, 1980), 46.

Taverns were of incredible practical and social use in every area of settlement, but especially in the backcountry. Their importance was such that taverns were regulated by first British Common Law and, later, by American state laws. The simplest motivation for these laws was to control prices. For instance, in January of 1784 North Carolina's legislature published their latest rates for tavern keepers, which was to be read aloud in open court. Any one in search of a drink in 1784 could be assured that they could get a half pint of whiskey for £0.0.8, a bottle of Madeira for £0.5.0, a half pint of West India Rum for £0.1.4, a quart of "Strong Beer" produced in the state for £0.0.8, or even a "well made" quart of "Limb Juice Punch(sp)" for £0.2.6. A traveler could get a "Nights Lodging in a Well Furnished Bed" for only six pennies, breakfast or lunch for a shilling, dinner for one shilling and six pennies, and could stable their horse for a shilling.⁶³

Courts used regulation and licensing as tool to maintain social control over taverns spaces because they were sites of potentially transgressive behavior, such as fighting, swearing, and prostitution. In 1715 the North Carolina General Assembly issued an "Act concerning Ordinary Keepers and Tippling houses." Part of the act was concerned with using the appropriate measures and controlling quality, but the third section sought to prevent "Riots and disorders in Ordinarys and other places where drink is retailed" by requiring all Retailor's obtain a license and pay a bond to ensure the "due Observance of this Law." Anyone caught serving alcohol without a license was subject to a forty-shilling fine.⁶⁴

⁶³ North Carolina, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions*.

⁶⁴ North Carolina and North Carolina, *The Earliest Printed Laws of North Carolina, 1669-1751*. (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1977), 79–80.

Because the government used licensing to exert social control, courts were more reluctant to license women who were seen as less capable of preventing “disorderly” behavior. While taverns were associated with all sorts of illicit activity, there were specific connections with prostitution that made officials especially wary of licensing women.⁶⁵ Therefore, it was even more important that a woman seeking a tavern license have an upstanding image in the local community. This reluctance to license women extended to widows, but widows with the right reputation and skills were the exception. In Charlotte it is clear that wives of tavern owners who had an established reputation in the community, stable wealth, and labor and capital resources were able to operate independently during their widowhood. Through their long-term involvement in taverns and their social connections, these widows proved their low liability to the courts. In the isolated backcountry where nearly everyone was connected in one way or another, a solid reputation was even more important. Indeed, reputation was of paramount importance for Charlotte’s female publicans and they built their social, economic, and even legal successes on their good name.

Jane Davidson McComb Emerson obtained her first license to sell liquor by the small measure in Mecklenburg in 1809.⁶⁶ In many ways, Jane’s life is indicative of the life of Charlotte’s elite female publicans in general. Like the majority of women operating taverns in the area, Jane was a widow with partial control of her deceased husband’s estate. Her second husband ran a successful tavern business and Jane took over after his

⁶⁵ Kirsten Fischer, *Suspect Relations: Sex, Race, and Resistance in Colonial North Carolina* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 119–21.

⁶⁶ North Carolina, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions.*, Vol. 2, 5-35.

death, a pattern common in the area and across the country.⁶⁷ Also like the majority of her peers, Jane was a member of the slave-holding elite in Charlotte. In other ways, however, Jane was exceptional. She was active in the local economy for nearly three decades and she legally operated a tavern for far longer than any of her female peers.⁶⁸ In addition to Jane, five other female publicans appear in the county's court records (see Table 2.2).⁶⁹

The popular image of a Southern "belle" generally does not include book keeping or other business matters and certainly did not include involvement in the sometimes-raucous environs of the tavern. However, there was an historical precedent for women working in and owning taverns in both Britain and the colonial United States. Whether working alongside their husbands to provide the needed feminine domestic touch or operating the business on their own, women occupied an important role in the local community as they helmed these centers of social and political life. Traveler's accounts and community records all point to the presence of female publicans in both rural and urban settings throughout the South.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ In her study of Colonial America, however, Salinger found that widows were less common as tavern owners in the urban South, cities like Charleston. This is largely explained by the ability of women in South Carolina to obtain status as a sole trader. Salinger, *Taverns and Drinking in Early America*, 170–73.

⁶⁸ Two other female tavern owners were licensed for five years and one for three. North Carolina, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions*.

⁶⁹ This paper primarily focuses on three women in particular, Jane Emerson, Elizabeth Mason, and Esther Kennedy, whose lives left the largest stamp on the available primary record. The two later female publicans, Mary Nolan and Mary Rossick, are far less visible in the records, while Sarah McDonald is a complete mystery. Part of the reason for Mary Nolan and Mary Rossick's invisibility in the record, especially in regards to licensing, appears to be due to male involvement in their legal affairs. More on this later.

⁷⁰ Salinger, *Taverns and Drinking in Early America*; Bill Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in Antebellum North Carolina* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1992); Kierner, *Beyond the Household*; Spruill, *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies*.; Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World*; Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property in Early America*.

Traditionally, widows were the most likely women to be licensed to sell alcohol in both England and colonial America and the same held true in Mecklenburg.⁷¹ More than just tradition made widows suitable publicans; they had specific legal, economic, and social advantages that made them more suited to running taverns in comparison to both their married and never-married female peers.⁷² First, elite widows utilized the social reputation of their husbands and families, along with their experience and skills, to run family taverns. Secondly, as widows were freed from the laws of coverture and became *feme soles*, they regained legal rights that they lost during marriage. This legal status allowed women to act on their own in legal and property matters.⁷³ As *feme soles*, wealthy widows served as executrixes of their husbands' estates and participated in the lengthy settling process. Because of their independent status, elite widows were also directly involved in the local economy. This included lending and borrowing money on credit. As far as investors were concerned, a widow with strong character and access to capital was as good a creditor or lender as a similarly situated man.⁷⁴ Finally, widowed women had the support of their kin, especially sons, and of other elite community members who formed social and economic networks. Through these networks they both received and provided assistance.

⁷¹ Four of the six women in this study were widowed at the time of their licensing. The marital status of the other two women, Mary Rossick and Sarah McDonald, is unclear. Salinger, *Taverns and Drinking in Early America*, 161–62; Spruill, *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies.*, 293; Thorp, "Taverns and Tavern Culture on the Southern Colonial Frontier," 680–81.

⁷² One historian described widows as being "freed from coverture by the death of their husbands." Lisa Wilson Waciega, "A 'Man of Business': The Widow of Means in Southeastern Pennsylvania, 1750-1850," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (1987): 41, doi:10.2307/1939718.

⁷³ Women in South Carolina had an especially advantageous legal position. Married women could be designated sole traders and operate as freely as *femme soles*. Spruill, *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies.*; Salinger, *Taverns and Drinking in Early America*; Kierner, *Beyond the Household*.

⁷⁴ Hartigan-O'Connor uses the term "person of credit" to discuss the lack of concern about gender when it came to lending. Reputation and risk were far more important. Hartigan-O'Connor, *The Ties That Buy*, 81.

A full accounting of local taverns is difficult to obtain because of the often-lax enforcement of licensing laws in the backcountry. A study of neighboring Rowan County in the colonial period estimated that during the average year ten licensed taverns were in operation, while another thirty were operating without a license. Some publicans only got licenses intermittently, while others never received one at all.⁷⁵ The same pattern held in Mecklenburg where, for instance, Esther Kennedy renewed her license in 1782, 1784, 1787, and 1788.⁷⁶ Jane Emerson went even longer periods between licenses, first obtaining one in 1809, then again in 1818, 1819, 1823, and 1824 (see Table 2.2).⁷⁷ Intermittent licensing makes it hard to trace the business life of both male and female publicans.

There is some evidence to suggest that women were operating more illegal taverns than formally licensed ones. In antebellum Petersburg, women composed thirty percent of the people brought before the court for illegally operating a tavern, but held less than twenty percent of licenses.⁷⁸ Similar to colonial Rowan County, however, illegal publicans in Mecklenburg were rarely called before the courts.⁷⁹ The lax enforcement of licensing laws makes it yet more difficult to even estimate how many women may have been operating on the more informal side of “spirituous liquor” sales. Since licenses required bonds and taxes be paid and a reputable security obtained, the women who were

⁷⁵ Thorp, “Taverns and Tavern Culture on the Southern Colonial Frontier,” 668.

⁷⁶ North Carolina, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions*. 1-346, 1-457, 1-116, 1-210.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 5-35, 5-71, 6-423, 7-1, 7-62.

⁷⁸ Lebsack, *The Free Women of Petersburg*, 178.

⁷⁹ In fact, during this period only one man appeared in court accused of selling liquor. Archibald Hall was found guilty of retailing liquor in 1824. North Carolina, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions*, trans. Herman W Ferguson (Rocky Mount: H.W. Ferguson, 1995), 7-48.

licensed, even if somewhat irregularly, likely represent the most established and reputable of those who were operating in the community.

Because they came into direct ownership as operators of established businesses, most widows had the advantage of years of prior experience. Three of the most prominent female publicans in Mecklenburg were widows of male tavern owners. Widows who came from families with established reputations were less risky as formal licensed publicans. Their years of experience and the high standing of their male relatives reassured the courts that they could maintain order in their establishments. In addition, the credit worthiness of the deceased husband was extended to his widow after his death; a fact that made continued operation of the family business possible.⁸⁰ The concept of credit worthiness included not only the financial history of a man or woman, but also their general social standing because, as Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor aptly states, "credit and debt were fundamentally social."⁸¹ Esther Kennedy, Elizabeth Mason, and Jane Emerson all benefitted as independent businesswomen from the high social standing of their husbands.

Jane, Elizabeth, and Esther, in particular, came from some of the most well established families in the local community. Dr. Joseph Kennedy, Esther's husband, was Charlotte's first permanent doctor. In 1775 Joseph, along with Thomas Polk, procured 300 pounds of gunpowder, 600 pounds of lead, and 1000 flints in preparation for revolutionary action.⁸² At the time of his death Joseph owned land all over Mecklenburg and the surrounding counties, including a plantation on Twelve Mile Creek, "1000 acres

⁸⁰ Hartigan-O'Connor, *The Ties That Buy*, 83–84.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁸² Daniel Augustus Tompkins, *History of Mecklenburg County and the City of Charlotte: From 1740 to 1903* (Charlotte, N.C.: Observer Print. House, 1903), 40.

upon waters of Catawba including the mountain(sic) Island,” and at least three lots in Charlotte.⁸³ In addition to being a doctor with agricultural interests, Joseph also ran a tavern in town. In 1775 Joseph received a tavern license from the court; based on the number of accounts recorded in Joseph’s estate, it is likely that the family’s tavern operated for longer than a single year.⁸⁴ With such scattered responsibilities, Joseph undoubtedly relied on Esther to assist with maintaining the tavern.

Elizabeth Mason entered a multi-generation tavern operation when, around 1776, she married Richard Mason. In his 1774 will, Richard’s father Charles Mason was listed as an “Innkeeper.” By 1783 Richard was licensed to operate a “public House in Charlotte.”⁸⁵ Richard served the community as a juror, a representative at the Salisbury Supreme Court, as the overseer of the Charleston Road from Charlotte, and as a tax assessor. He received deeds for town lots from other elites, like Thomas Polk and Sheriff Joseph Graham.⁸⁶ By the time Elizabeth took over the tavern after Richard’s death, in 1802, the reputation of the business and of the family was firmly cemented within the community.

Elizabeth likely played a large role in maintaining the reputation of the business as well. Not only did Elizabeth labor in the Mason tavern for over twenty years before assuming control, she also likely worked alongside her first husband in his tavern.

⁸³ Joseph also owned land with a plantation in Pennsylvania that he purchased from a local man who inherited it. Holcomb, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Abstracts of Early Wills, 1763-1790 (1749-1790)*, 47; Mecklenburg County (N.C.) and Court, *Mecklenburg County Court Minutes: Book I, 1774-1780* (Charlotte, N.C.: Doris Futch Briscoe, 1966), 55.

⁸⁴ Mecklenburg County (N.C.) and Court, *Mecklenburg County Court Minutes*, 28.

⁸⁵ By 1776 Elizabeth is referred to as Elizabeth Mason (formerly Little). *Ibid.*, 44.

⁸⁶ In fact, Joseph Graham deeded a whopping fifteen town lots to Mason in 1790. North Carolina, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions*.

William Little obtained a tavern license in 1774, a year before his death.⁸⁷ When William died, Elizabeth was left with a young son to care for and a particular set of skills to help her support them both. It made perfect economic sense then for Elizabeth to marry another, more prominent, tavern owner within a year of William's death. Elizabeth then employed her hospitality skills as she worked alongside her second husband, Richard Mason, in the family tavern until his death.

Samuel McComb operated a tavern for over two decades, through the years of the Revolution and nearly in to the new century. In addition to the tavern, Samuel owned a plantation on Sugar Creek. Samuel also owned one of Mecklenburg's first gold mines.⁸⁸ Between this mixture of rural and town business Samuel amassed a sizeable estate valued, ten years after his death, at \$5,570.38.⁸⁹ Just like Richard Mason and Joseph Kennedy, Samuel participated in community life as a jurist, constable, and veniri court representative.

The long careers of male tavern owners visible in the legal record obscured the labor of their female kin, slaves, and hired labor. The invisible labor of women in taverns has been pointed out by a number of historians and the same pattern likely held true in Mecklenburg. In fact, precisely because Mecklenburg's elite men were involved in a wide variety of economic ventures (taverns, medicine, agriculture, and speculation) they needed their wives' labor to ensure the success of the family businesses. Wives often served as "silent partners" in one or more of these ventures and were, therefore,

⁸⁷ Mecklenburg County (N.C.) and Court, *Mecklenburg County Court Minutes*, 133.

⁸⁸ Tompkins, *History of Mecklenburg County and the City of Charlotte*, 129.

⁸⁹ North Carolina, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions*, 5–88.

adequately prepared to continue the business after the death of their husband.⁹⁰

Throughout the colonies and early America it was typical for widows to continue operating businesses where they had labored alongside their husbands for many years.⁹¹

While the social standing of their husbands certainly helped Charlotte's female publicans, their legal standing as widows was even more important. Jane Emerson's position as executrix of her deceased husband's estate gave her the power to control all of Samuel's property, including both their plantation and the tavern. After Samuel died in 1798, Jane and a local man named Robert Irwin were named as the executors.⁹² In Petersburg, Virginia widows were named as an executor of their deceased husbands' estate over fifty percent of the time. However, elite men, whose estate required a bond of over \$2,000, were less likely to name their widows as executors and never left the responsibility to them alone.⁹³

Jane, Elizabeth, and Esther were all members of the local elite and they were all named as one of the executors of their husbands' estate. Esther Kennedy was the sole executor to sign was the valuation of Joseph's estate at over £1000 in 1778.⁹⁴ Elizabeth Mason served as one of the executors who settled Richard's £4,461.01.11 estate in 1810.⁹⁵ Jane's second husband, Samuel McComb, left an estate valued at \$5,370.38 in 1810 and

⁹⁰ Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World*, 83–85.

⁹¹ Kierner, *Beyond the Household*, 20.

⁹² North Carolina, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions*, Vol. 1, 4-127.

⁹³ Lebsock notes that from 1784-1830 only a third of wealthy widows were named as executors of their husbands' estates. Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg*, 37–38.

⁹⁴ Family Search, "North Carolina Estate Files, 1663-1979," *Joseph Kennedy, 1778*, accessed December 12, 2015, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:KFSW-4B8>.

⁹⁵ North Carolina, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions*, trans. Herman W Ferguson (Rocky Mount: H.W. Ferguson, 1995), 5-74.

Jane's final husband, Henry Emerson, had an estate that required a \$4000 bond in 1812.⁹⁶ The settling of an estate could be a long and complicated process and widows who operated family businesses required the legal rights of executor to act as needed in economic and legal matters.

As executrixes, widows became direct economic participants. This direct participation in the local economy meant that widows transcended the legally invisible role of wife to more powerful roles as independent and key economic actors. Esther Kennedy, in her role as executrix, was responsible for dealing with the complexities of her husband's accounting system. Tavern owners, as key resources for credit, used two major forms of securing debts. Joseph Kennedy, like most tavern owners, used a mixture of two available credit tools that were vital in the rural economy of the backcountry: book debt and promissory notes. These two credit tools were vital in the rural economy of the backcountry. Physical currency was hard to come by during the final decades of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth, so Charlotte's citizens dealt primarily with credit.

Likely because of the earlier date, Joseph's probate file explicitly recorded "book debt" owed to the estate. Book debt, or the written log of purchases and payments in an account book of varying reliability, was utilized as a step up from verbal agreements. These records were often imprecise and could be challenged in court, which meant they were best suited for small amounts that would be quickly paid off in cash or goods. Tavern owners, for instance, kept accounts that tallied drink and service tabs and made

⁹⁶North Carolina, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions*.

purchases for daily operations on book debt with local merchants.⁹⁷ Joseph Kennedy's estate recorded a total of £211.2.2 in, mostly, small book debts. Jane Emerson also kept a record of "accounts" that were presented to the court at the time of her death.

Her account books recorded that, in 1833, thirty-one local men owed a total of \$251.14 to Jane's estate.⁹⁸ Like Joseph, the majority of the book debts owed to Jane were relatively small amounts. Darling Belk, grandfather of the Belk department store founder William Henry Belk, Sr., had an average sized account with Jane that totaled \$19.68 plus \$1.46 interest. At the higher end of the spectrum, William Thompson had an account valued at \$70.15 plus \$20.50 in interest. Jane's accounts represent a bit of a hybrid between book debt and notes because her customers' accounts accrued interest.⁹⁹

The second credit tool used during this period was paper currency in the form of promissory notes and bonds. A far larger portion of Jane's estate value was tied to promissory notes she held on local men. Promissory notes were generally used for smaller and more temporary debts. Bonds, in contrast, were commonly used to secure large amounts that could then be used to make investments, improvements, and otherwise pursue economic goals. Both of these forms of credit were more advantageous because they were secured by a signature and could be transferred to other people and used as currency. This form of credit was for those who had enough funds to make longer-term

⁹⁷ Hartigan-O'Connor, *The Ties That Buy*, 74–76.

⁹⁸ "North Carolina Estate Files, 1663-1979," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:KDGJ-C4Q>), Jane Emerson, 1833; citing Mecklenburg, North Carolina, United States, State Archives, Raleigh; FHL microfilm 1,994,115.

⁹⁹ Jane Emerson, "North Carolina Estate Files, 1663-1979," 1833, North Carolina Estate Files, 1663-1979, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:KDGJ-C4Q>.

investments.¹⁰⁰ At the time of her death Jane held a total of sixty-one notes that amounted to \$1,938.¹⁰¹

None of the loans recorded in Jane's estate records were identified as bonds, possibly indicating the predominance of promissory notes in the 1830s backcountry or the interchangeable use of the terms "note" and "bond." The majority of the notes Jane held were fairly recent, common for promissory notes, but some of them were over twenty years old, more similar to colonial bonds. Older notes, and older accounts in this case, could be used as informal annuities for widows who collected the interest on the debt.¹⁰²

The credit network that developed between elites, as seen through bonds, deeds, and legal interactions, was fundamentally one of reciprocity. In particular, a strong network developed between tavern owners and their families. The Kennedys, McCombs, and Masons, and several other families all operated taverns during the same period. In December of 1785 Richard Mason, Samuel McComb, and Joseph and Mary Lafevre were all issued a tavern license at the same court session. All parties share one security, local lawyer Samuel Martin.¹⁰³ Again in 1787 Richard, Samuel and Esther were all issued tavern licenses.¹⁰⁴ Esther, her sons James and Samuel, Joseph Lafevre, Richard Mason,

¹⁰⁰ Hartigan-O'Connor, *The Ties That Buy*, 78–80.

¹⁰¹ Emerson, "North Carolina Estate Files, 1663-1979."

¹⁰² Hartigan-O'Connor, *The Ties That Buy*, 80.

¹⁰³ North Carolina, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions*.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

and Samuel McComb all appear almost in sequence in the 1790 census, indicating that their businesses/residences were all close together.¹⁰⁵

In addition to geographic and occupational commonalities, tavern families shared membership in reciprocal credit network. These families appear in each other's wills, book debts, and in court records together. The first account in Joseph Kennedy's probate records was Joseph Lafevre and Richard Mason purchased some items from the estate. Samuel McComb's estate held a note on Richard Mason. Joseph Kennedy purchased land from Richard's parents. Richard proved a bill of sale in court for Esther Kennedy. This strong network of credit between tavern owners ensured both economic and social stability.

Property was, perhaps, even more important than strong credit networks. Some historical research has suggested that widows, especially those from wealthier families, rarely controlled either real or personal property. A paternalistic desire to keep control within the hands of male heirs prevented widows from accessing capital.¹⁰⁶ In contrast, elite tavern keeping widows in Mecklenburg had access to capital and credit, as we have seen, and they also controlled portions of both real and personal property. Much of these widows' ability to control a portion of the estates' property likely stemmed from their power as executrixes.

Property, more so even than credit, was the mark of an elite family. Land, slaves, livestock, tools, and furniture all signaled the wealth and status of Mecklenburg's elites.

¹⁰⁵ Only one other name, William Luckey, breaks the sequence of names as they are listed. United States and Bureau of the Census, *Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1790: North Carolina*. (Baltimore: Genealogical Pub. Co., 1973), 4.

¹⁰⁶ Carol Shammas, "Early American Women and Control over Capital," in *Women in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1989).

In the 1808 tax lists Elizabeth Mason held 401 acres of land, eight slaves, two improved town lots, and twenty-five unimproved lots in the town. In comparison, the year of his death her husband Richard was taxed on 469 acres, ten slaves, fifteen improved lots, and two unimproved lots.¹⁰⁷ After Richard's death it appears that Elizabeth retained control over the majority of the enslaved persons within the household. From just an acreage perspective it appears that Elizabeth sold or deeded over around 70 acres but, interestingly, the real estate breakdown indicates she may have been involved in a degree of land speculation. While Richard held title on fifteen improved lots and two unimproved, Elizabeth reduced the number of improved lots she held to two while increasing her holding of unimproved lots to twenty five. Perhaps she sold the additional improved lots and used the capital she acquired to purchase additional unimproved lots as the town slowly grew.

Esther Kennedy also retained key pieces of property after her husband Joseph's death in 1778. Until her sons reached twenty-one years old, Esther controlled all of the property and enslaved persons on the scattered tracts of land that Joseph accrued during his lifetime. Esther was specifically willed the 242 acre plantation "on the waters of four mile creek" and temporary control of three slaves, Phillis, Nero, and Hannah. A total of 1,600 acres of land in Mecklenburg were to be sold by Esther, as Joseph's executrix, and she and her sons were to divide up a plantation in Pennsylvania that none had ever set foot on.¹⁰⁸ At the public auction of items in Joseph's estate Esther bought back a number

¹⁰⁷ Herman W Ferguson and Ralph B Ferguson, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, Will Abstracts, 1791-1868; Tax Lists, 1797-1807* (Rocky Mount, North Carolina: H.W. Ferguson, 1993), 283.

¹⁰⁸ Holcomb, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Abstracts of Early Wills, 1763-1790 (1749-1790)*, 34.

of household items like blankets, pots, furniture, and bottles in addition to a sign.¹⁰⁹

Perhaps this sign was one Esther continued to put to use advertising the family tavern.

The same year that Esther lost her husband, 1778, her mother Mary Curran also died. Mary left the majority of her property to her son and his children with some cash and a heifer going to Esther's sons.¹¹⁰ Having drawn up her will shortly before her death, perhaps Mary knew that Esther was financially secure enough not to need specific gifts from her estate. Other local widows, however, paid particular attention to ensuring their daughters received a substantial portion of the final estate.

When Jane Davidson McComb Emerson died in 1833 she had accumulated quite a sizeable estate including the debts previously discussed as well as land and property. Her personal property was sold over the course of three days in November and netted the estate a total of \$5,235 and the lands sold by the executors totaled \$5,202. After all was said and done Jane's son's and grandson's received the following amounts: James McComb- \$107; William Davidson- \$1,345; Benjamin F. Davidson- \$107; James Davidson- \$1,345; Samuel McComb- \$1,345. In contrast, Jane left all of her slaves and a large portion of her real estate to her granddaughters Harriet, Laura, and Jane. The granddaughters' total portion of the estate was valued at over \$6,000.¹¹¹ Jane was clearly concerned with providing for these particular female relatives, likely this concern stems from the fact that Jane's daughter and the girls' mother, Mary Williams, was a widow by 1830. Without the income of their father, Jane ensured that her daughter and her granddaughters would enjoy a similarly strong financial foothold.

¹⁰⁹ Family Search, "North Carolina Estate Files, 1663-1979."

¹¹⁰ Holcomb, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Abstracts of Early Wills, 1763-1790 (1749-1790)*, 18.

¹¹¹ Emerson, "North Carolina Estate Files, 1663-1979."

Jane's concern for her female relatives hints at the reliance women still had on male family members. While widowhood gave women a far greater amount of independence, legally they were still restricted, especially if their spouses left no will. Legal preference was given to preserving the value of land and property for the benefit of any heirs; this meant that some widows were little more than lifetime tenants on their land.¹¹² Even executrices were often tasked with dealing with the estate in cooperation with a male relative or friend of the family. This meant that these male figures became important liaisons for widows in both legal and business matters. Just as credit networks were of vital consequence, the importance of kinship networks in the colonial and antebellum South cannot be underestimated. The involvement of male sons, relatives, and friends in legal matters was common. Indeed, male normality in the legal record likely obscured further involvement of women in the local economy.¹¹³ Widows without kin in the area were in a riskier position than their peers with strong local support.¹¹⁴

Part of Jane's success may be attributed to her extensive, and elite, kin network within Mecklenburg and the surrounding region. Jane and Samuel McComb had four children, Samuel B., Mary, Robert, and James, all of who were under the age of ten when their father died. Luckily, Jane had the assistance of her four older sons from her marriage to James Davidson. William, James, John, and Andrew Davidson were all in their teens and twenties when their mother's second husband passed away and, therefore, were old enough to assist Jane on the plantation, with the business, and in the courts.

¹¹² Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property in Early America*, 143.

¹¹³ Hartigan-O'Connor points out that accounts at taverns and stores were often litigated under a male family member's name, no matter who actually accrued the debt on the account. Hartigan-O'Connor, *The Ties That Buy*, 87–88.

¹¹⁴ For instance, Kierner discusses the position of Revolutionary War widows who petitioned the government for assistance after the losing their husbands. Kierner, *Beyond the Household*, 90.

The economic relationship between Jane and her male kin was not, however, a one-way street. At the time of her death, several of Jane's family members had outstanding accounts or loans with her. Son, William Davidson, owed Jane's estate \$7.20 on an account and \$632.50 on a note with interest. John, Jane's son who lived in Cabarrus County, owed the estate \$987.50 on a note with interest.¹¹⁵ Rather than a widow who relied on her sons for assistance, Jane provided capital for their business ventures and helped settle their debts. Jane's powerful position within the family was further illustrated when she served as one of the securities for a \$15,000 loan that William owed to the Bank of Newbern in 1832.¹¹⁶

Remarriage complicated economic matters and obscured women in the legal record. At a later than average age Jane remarried for the third and final time.¹¹⁷ Henry Emerson, Jane's third husband, was another prominent member of the local community.¹¹⁸ Upon her marriage to Henry, Jane gave up her right as executrix of Samuel's estate and each of the McComb children were appointed a guardian.¹¹⁹ The remarriage also prompted a new valuation of the estate and the firm division of land. Henry then represented Jane's interests in court and prompted the division of Samuel's estate. Jane's

¹¹⁵ Emerson, "North Carolina Estate Files, 1663-1979."

¹¹⁶ William had to deed over 486 acres of land and twenty-two slaves to his creditors to protect the interests of Jane and his other securities. North Carolina, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions*, 7.

¹¹⁷ Jane's age is not clear from the surviving records. Genealogists have estimated she was born in 1750. This would make her 39 at her marriage to Samuel McComb and 59 at her marriage to Henry Emerson. However, it is unclear if these ages are accurate. Lebsack found that only 9% of Petersburg widows remarried if they were widowed by their forties. Lebsack, *The Free Women of Petersburg*, 26-27.

¹¹⁸ Henry ran a ferry, another important position in the relatively isolated backcountry economy. North Carolina, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions*.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5-51, 5-71, 5-72.

portion included four enslaved people, some livestock, plus the mansion and all outbuildings on 170 acres of land along Sugar Creek.¹²⁰

Other female publicans had more direct business ties with male community members. Mary Nolan was licensed to retail spirituous liquors in her home from 1833 through 1836.¹²¹ Nolan's husband, Michael, died in 1830 with an odd will. While the court named Mary to administer the estate, she was not mentioned in the will.¹²² Regardless, Mary was entitled to her widows' third and quickly petitioned the court for a year's allowance from the estate.¹²³ A year later, in 1831, Mary Nolan was appointed guardian of John O'Farrell.¹²⁴ Mary then began her visible career as a female publican in 1833 and may have taught her charge the business. Six years after Nolan's last recorded licensing, John O'Farrell first received a liquor license of his own.¹²⁵ While John's brother, Thomas, was apprenticed to a bricklayer, John was perhaps informally apprenticed to Mary to learn the tavern business.¹²⁶ Once O'Farrell was old enough to take over operations, Mary Nolan faded from view in the record.

Another female publican only briefly came into view in the records before again disappearing behind the reputation of a male business partner. Mary Rossick's husband Paul died in 1840 after running a tavern in Charlotte for nearly a decade. The following

¹²⁰ Ibid., 5-88, 5-98.

¹²¹ Ibid., 8-29, 8-126, 8-181, 8-241.

¹²² Suggesting that the couple may have been recently married. Ferguson and Ferguson, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, Will Abstracts, 1791-1868; Tax Lists, 1797-1807*, 1299; North Carolina, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions*, 7.

¹²³ Widows were legally entitled to one third of their husband's estate if no will was left. Even if a will was present, it often took years to settle an estate so a widow could petition the court to at least obtain her third to provide cash flow until the estate was fully settled.

¹²⁴ John's mother was alive when his father died, in the late 1820s, and it is not clear why Mary was named his guardian. His mother, Elizabeth, may have either died or remarried around this time. North Carolina, *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions*, 7-400.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 9-10.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 7-323.

year Mary received a license with a Robert H. Brawley. In 1842 Mrs. Mary Rossick again received a license, this time on her own.¹²⁷ This was Rossick's final license; however, Robert Brawley was licensed through the 1840s. It seems possible that Rossick continued working in the tavern with Brawley, but the records reveal nothing further about her life.

Whether as recipients of male assistance or as financiers of male entrepreneurs, female publicans ultimately held an important place in the local economy. Their experience as business owners in the fluid and evolving economy of the first decades of the New Republic shows the possibilities available to Southern women of means and skill. In contrast, female publicans' disappearance from the record as mid-century approached hints at the hardening of new gender norms that increasingly excluded women from the public business realm. In a more broad sense, the life of these female publicans reveals a slice of experience that was similar to many male business owners at this time. They dealt with buying and selling on credit, made land and property deals, relied on crucial social networks to keep their business and families running, and ensured the stability of their children and grandchildren through prudent economic decisions.

The daily lives of women such as Jane Emerson and Elizabeth Mason are equally as important and fascinating as those of the male founders of the county that are remembered today. Female publicans and their "houses of entertainment" in Mecklenburg and throughout the South revealed themselves in the historic record for brief glimpses of time to provide the historian a better understanding of how women fit in to Southern life in the rural backcountry. It seems, however, that the role of independent publican was less and less available to women as the hospitality industry became more professionalized

¹²⁷ Ibid., 8–50.

as the nineteenth century progressed. Middling and elite women turned their attention to other, equally acceptable and even more respectable, roles in the community that could provide financial support: teaching. One of Jane's granddaughters, in fact, followed this path. Where female publicans had once exerted their subtle domestic influence on their male tavern patrons, they increasingly turned to informing the morality and intellect of Mecklenburg's children.

CHAPTER THREE: INSTRUCTRESSES IN MECKLENBURG'S HOMES AND ACADEMIES, 1827-1860

In 1852 a Mecklenburg editorialist boldly proclaimed, “No longer can it be maintained that it is entirely unnecessary to bestow as much care and means in training daughters as on the education of sons. Those days of ignorance and prejudice have passed away.”¹²⁸ The anonymous author, who employed the pen name “Sigourney” in the editorial that appeared in the *North Carolina Whig*, highlighted the work of one particular school for girls in the area but also expounded on the subject of female education generally.¹²⁹

Sigourney perfectly summed up much of the attitude towards female education in the South as it had evolved in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. She began her piece by stating that she felt sure the readers of the paper were “not merely willing but quite solicitous to hear of the advancement of the cause of female education.”¹³⁰ Indeed, by the 1850s Mecklenburg’s elite had largely embraced the “cause of female education.” A decade before Sigourney’s report, on July 4, 1842, the local Washingtonian Temperance Society held a large Independence Day celebration that concluded with a meal and a series of toasts. One of these toasts paid tribute to the Charlotte Female Academy. Colonel B.S. Gaither described the Charlotte Female Academy

¹²⁸ Sigourney, “For the North Carolina Whig: The School of Miss Brandon and Mr. Lee,” *The North Carolina Whig*, December 29, 1852.

¹²⁹ The choice of the name Sigourney is likely a reference to one of the time’s most famous authors, Lydia H. Sigourney.

¹³⁰ Sigourney, “For the North Carolina Whig: The School of Miss Brandon and Mr. Lee.”

as being “(h)ighly distinguished at present, in having a learned and accomplished Tutoress and an unusual number of pupils.”¹³¹

To a large degree female education in the antebellum South remains misunderstood and mischaracterized. Many people, both academics and the public at large, assume that girls and young women in the paternalist South did not have access to education or were discouraged from pursuing higher learning when it was available. It is true that the rural settlement patterns of the South kept literacy lower than in the more urban North and also that Southern female literacy continued to lag behind male literacy through the start of the Civil War.¹³²

Among the middling and upper class, however, the education of daughters became an important aspect of Southern gentility and religious belief. Consequently, Southern female education gained increasing popularity throughout the second quarter of the nineteenth century.¹³³ The North Carolina superintendent of education reported in 1854 that there was double the number of female to male students in the “college” system.¹³⁴ The increasing demand for female education led to more opportunities for female teachers. Just as female publicans likely employed images of domesticity and respectability to lend credence to their business operations, female teachers drew on the ideals of Republican Motherhood, religious devotion, and usefulness. By the antebellum period, young well-educated women were filling an increasing number of positions in the private institutions of North Carolina.

¹³¹ *Mecklenburg Jeffersonian*, July 12, 1842.

¹³² Christie Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York; London: New York University Press, 1994).

¹³³ Tolley, “Music Teachers in the North Carolina Education Market, 1800-1840.,” 89; Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle*, 94,11-32.

¹³⁴ Tolley, “Music Teachers in the North Carolina Education Market, 1800-1840.,” 87.

The average daughter of North Carolina's planter class began her schooling away from home between the ages of ten to fourteen years old.¹³⁵ At ten years old, Sarah Davidson was among the youngest students at Salem Female Academy when she started her formal education. In 1816 Sarah and her sisters transferred to Raleigh Academy, where they made the acquaintance of a life-long influence, Susan Nye Hutchison.¹³⁶

Sarah and Susan later worked together teaching at the Charlotte Female Academy and they are representative of some of the most common experiences for women teaching in the South. Sarah attended a Southern boarding school, never married, and wound up teaching in a variety of venues throughout her community, for both economic and moral reasons. Susan taught at, operated, and founded female academies throughout the South from her days as a single woman, during marriage, and through her widowhood. While Sarah turned to teaching by chance and circumstance, Susan was a driven professional who focused much more on the financial and social success of the institutions she helmed. The cultural and religious ideology of the early national and antebellum period allowed for teaching not only as an acceptable way of supplementing the family income, but also as a suitable position of leadership for women like Sarah and Susan.

Evolving gender ideology imbued nineteenth-century women with a particular set of "natural" traits that made them well suited to teaching. These "natural" traits were enhanced through the types of education that girls received in female schools and former pupils could then go on to teach these skills to the next generation. Socially, young ladies were expected to be artistically and intellectually refined enough to converse with their

¹³⁵ Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children, 1800-1860*, 56.

¹³⁶ Hutchison later encouraged Sarah to keep the journal that provides insight into her life as a single woman. Sarah F Davidson, *A Life in Antebellum Charlotte: The Private Journal of Sarah F. Davidson, 1837*, ed. Janet S Dyer, Karen M McConnell, and Ann Williams (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2005), 19–20.

peers, especially potential suitors. While middle and upper class women rarely continued producing their own cloth and sewing their own clothes, they still needed the skills to beautifully embellish their accessories through intricate embroidery and other needlework. Learning to paint proved to be a popular way of declaring one's refinement. Best of all was a musical skill that could be used to entertain family and guests.

Politically, educating daughters became very important after the American Revolution, because young girls would, in turn, be responsible for the intellectual and moral education of coming generations. A Republican Woman needed to be properly educated so that she might raise her sons and daughters to be active and well-informed citizens of the country.

Spiritually, renewed religious fervor began placing more moral authority in the hands of women. During the Second Great Awakening, a religious revival that swept the nation but particularly the Southern states, a large religious base was created as middle class and elite women attended large tent meetings and then brought their religious fervor back to their local communities.

Married and single women alike were able to find a place within nineteenth century society as moral agents. Within this context, a good education became not only vital for the formation of future generations of well-informed citizens, but also for the spreading of religion through tracts, beneficent organizations, and Sabbath schools. Even before the renewal of religious fervor, Presbyterians, the predominant local religious group, placed special importance on literacy because of their belief in a personal faith that required being able to read the bible. Women taught both their male and female relatives in the home before their official schooling began, but as teachers in more public institutions

women parlayed notions of respectability that encouraged their presence in supervising young female students.

According to Southern gender ideals, women during the first half of the nineteenth century were most concerned with the well being of her family and community. With the combination of political and spiritual goals in mind, however, some women were able to parlay these ideals into economic benefits as well. As it goes with most ideals, the reality of women's daily lives generally differed from the norms of femininity. Namely, there was often a need for even genteel ladies to contribute to the household income. Where women in the Colonial period occupied themselves with production of all manner of goods for sale or trade, women across the country increasingly turned to other options. Women could pursue teaching because it was seen as essentially maternal and was, therefore, an acceptably feminine occupation.¹³⁷

Despite the acceptance of female teachers, men still, more often than not, held the purse strings. Male trustees operated the financial side of schools and male principals often oversaw a small group of female teachers. As the Civil War approached male clergy increasingly helmed the Piedmont's female schools. Just like taverns, however, women continued to play an important, if less visible, role in female schools.

Attitudes toward female education differed in the North and South because of varied expectations and norms for women. While male onlookers in the North accepted the basic education of girls, they were wary of higher education. Well-educated Northern women were beginning to move into a variety of new professions and establishing self-sustaining households and enclaves. Historian Christie Anne Farnham pointed out that

¹³⁷ Tolley, "Music Teachers in the North Carolina Education Market, 1800-1840.," 77-81.

Southern males, in contrast, saw higher education purely as a mark of gentility for Southern “ladies.”¹³⁸

As Southerners embraced and interpreted the concept of Separate Spheres to suite their own cultural values, it was increasingly understood that women simply did not work outside the home. Therefore there was no risk that education would push them towards this eventuality. The women who were exceptions to this rule, like female tavern owners, were generally employed in a family business where they learned the trade over time and which they operated on a semi-temporary basis. Female teachers also operated within families, their own or others, and often left the profession after marriage. For these reasons, female colleges blossomed in the South far more than similar institutions in the North.¹³⁹

During the nineteenth century women came to dominate the teaching profession in both the North and South. While taverns were primarily the domains of widowed women already established in the business through their families, teaching was increasingly an option for women across different phases of life cycle singleness. Female teachers entered the profession for a variety of reasons. Widows, like Susan Nye Hutchison, ran schools throughout the South in an effort to support their children and extended families. Single women, either yet-to-be married or never married, could also supplement their own or their families’ income through teaching. While economics drove many into teaching, some women were motivated by the potential for social and religious uplift through education. Unlike tavern work, which placed women more firmly in the

¹³⁸ Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle*.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*.

public realm, teaching allowed women to remain in a semi-private social space.¹⁴⁰ Since female teachers worked in the seclusion of their home or schoolroom, even genteel Southern ladies could respectably engage in this growing occupation.

While female tavern owners rarely advertised in local papers, Mecklenburg's weekly journals are full of ads for male and female academies. In fact, local female schools and their corresponding teachers were primarily located through newspaper ads for this study. Regional schools for both boys and girls often advertised in the paper and sent out brochures or catalogues. School trustees and headmasters or -mistresses could not rely simply on word of mouth; they used advertisements to inform their potential patrons about their establishments. Examining these advertisements reveals critical details about the type of education on offer and about who the instructors were at local female academies. Ads generally listed the courses offered, the tuition rates, and teachers' names, as well as providing a brief description of the location, lodging details, and other glowing descriptions of the efficaciousness and moral respectability of the academy in question.

This study includes not only the schools within the county, but also those in the region that advertised to the Mecklenburg population. While many families likely preferred to keep their daughters close to home, it was not unusual to send them to schools some distance away. To properly gauge the attitudes toward female education in Mecklenburg, therefore, it is important to include the wide array of institutions of interest to the local community. However, analysis of specific teachers has been predominately limited to Mecklenburg County. This limitation is necessary to understand the role that

¹⁴⁰ Kierner, *Beyond the Household*, 19.

teachers held within this particular community; namely, who they were, what class of the community they were from, and what their prior- and post-teaching trajectories were.

For the most part, advertisements retained the same general format from the 1820s through 1860. A full ad generally included the name of the individual in charge of the institution, sometimes the names of particular teachers, a brief mention of the location or building, the cost and arrangements for boarding, and a list of courses offered with their corresponding cost. (See Figure 3.1) While some institutions offered a flat rate, the cost of tuition was most often broken down into “classes,” what we might think of as “grades” today in the United States.

The first and second classes consisted of primary and secondary education: reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, geography, and the like. The third class was focused on what was often referred to as the “higher branches,” this included more advanced composition, math, philosophy, rhetoric, and sciences. In addition to these fundamental courses, most schools offered a variety of “ornamental” courses that were generally artistic: examples include music on the guitar and piano, embroidery, painting, and a number of other fashionable crafts.

Full ads like these were most important at the founding of a school or when the ads were placed in areas outside of the school’s location. After a school became well known in an area, ads were often much more brief, including only a mention that tuition remained the same as it was previously and giving the dates of new sessions. In addition to direct advertisements, this study includes reports on school activities. Public examinations of students took place at the end of each session, once a year, or even monthly in some cases. The date and content of the examinations was advertised and a

report of the event from a citizen often followed in the next edition of the paper. Updates on construction, illness, and management were other reasons for schools, or their representatives, to post in papers.

From 1830 through the end of 1860 eighty-one distinct school ads appeared in Mecklenburg's newspapers. This total was reached by including only one ad from each institution per year. In this manner, a generally accurate portrait of how many schools were actively advertising in the area can be derived. (See Figure 3.3) From 1830 until 1850, each year saw ads for only one to three institutions. From 1850 onward, however, an increasing number of female schools were founded in the region and began advertising to the growing population of Charlotte. These numbers will be further analyzed below.

Sources similar to those used to learn more about female publicans have also been utilized to locate details about teachers who were employed in Mecklenburg. Because this period is generally later than when female tavern owners were operating, more detailed census data is available for women. Prior to 1850, census workers were only required to list the name of the head of household. Basic information on how many people of what gender, race, and age was provided in earlier censuses, but from 1850 onward the detailed information was provided. Censuses from 1860 and after also include the occupation of women, whereas only the occupation of males had been previously recorded. Estate records have also been used to better understand the class status of female teachers and their families. Some of these records are from a period later than the one under study; because many teachers were quite young at the time of their employment, records that follow these women to later stages in their lives have been utilized. In rarer cases, like those of Sarah Davidson and Susan Nye Hutchison, words of

the women themselves have been utilized to better grasp their opinions of teaching and how they perceived their role within the community.

Using this combination of public advertisements, public records, and private writings creates a well-rounded picture of the lives of female teachers in antebellum Mecklenburg. A broader understanding of female education in the Piedmont also emerges from this analysis. This analysis does not, however, have strong cross-class implications. The majority of both female teachers and students included here are from the middle or upper class. Girls and women from the yeoman or working class had less access to education; these women had less leisure time to pursue education and did not have the money to attend a female school like the ones considered, though they may have obtained some education through Sabbath Schools and other public schooling institutions that became more common as the nineteenth century wore on.

During the latter part of the antebellum period a more structured system of public education was established through the Common School system. Because they did not advertise in the same manner as private schools, less information is readily available regarding public schooling and these schools, therefore, have not been included in this study. However, there is much to be learned from even a limited study of only these elite institutions and their staff and students. The number of schools, their longevity, and their employment patterns all contribute to the still under-studied history of education in the South.

Prior to the establishment of more local schools, many daughters of the Mecklenburg elite boarded at schools throughout the wider region. A good number attended Salem Female Academy and, later, Raleigh Female Academy. As local schools

appeared they sometimes focused on the advantages of keeping daughters close to home. Despite their perceived advantages and disadvantages, both local and regional schools were often fairly short-lived. Even institutions that maintained a fairly consistent presence throughout the antebellum period went through lulls of inactivity and changes in management. It is also important to note that there are issues determining the true longevity of many institutions. Some academies may have advertised only once, but continued to operate on a small-scale basis that relied on word of mouth rather than ads; this may be especially applicable to the small schools, which were often held in people's homes throughout the countryside.

Female schools had a trickle-down effect; the girls who attended early academies generally went on to fill teaching positions in other schools, usually before marriage. Other female teachers ran founded and ran academies, while some women informally taught out of their home to a small number of private pupils. Through examining a small community like Mecklenburg, which was typical of communities throughout the Southern Piedmont, patterns for female teachers emerge. Mecklenburg's female teachers and female educational institutions provides a sample group that illuminates the structure of the schools themselves, of the relationship between teachers and the wider community, and the economic motivations for teaching.

Two particular schools had a lasting impact in antebellum Mecklenburg: the Charlotte Female Academy and Claremont Female Academy. The Charlotte Female Academy, in operation from 1825, was perhaps the most influential female school in the county. The institution changed names quite a few times, but the charter remained largely the same, and by 1912 it was known as Presbyterian College for Women. After moving

from the original location on College Street to the Dilworth neighborhood, the school changed its name to the more familiar Queen's College.¹⁴¹

The Charlotte Female Academy was not a static institution; its public presence grew and waned throughout its history. As different headmasters and mistresses came and went, the school experienced periods of robust community engagement and of quiet dormancy. In 1827 the first school for girls using the name Charlotte Female Academy advertised in the local newspaper. Mrs. Thomas Cottrell helmed this early iteration of the Charlotte Female Academy. Young ladies could study literature, the “ornamental branches,” or piano forte.¹⁴² In 1830 and 1831, the Charlotte Female Academy remained under the Cottrell family's care, but advertisements disappear after this date.¹⁴³ While it is unclear whether the Charlotte Female Academy continued tutoring the area's young women over the next few years, a renaissance of the institution was on the horizon at the end of the decade. In 1839 the able and driven Susan Nye Hutchison moved to Charlotte and took direction of the institution.

The Charlotte Female Academy was most active in the public records during Susan Nye Hutchison's tenure. From 1839 through 1845 Hutchison presided over the Charlotte Female Academy. The local community held Susan in high regard and locals and visitors alike praised her efforts at the academy. A visitor in 1841 reported to the editor of the *Mecklenburg Jeffersonian* that “(Charlotte) is now one of the handsomest villages with which we are acquainted; and is well furnished with schools, especially for

¹⁴¹ “Queens University of Charlotte | NCpedia,” accessed February 20, 2016, <http://ncpedia.org/queens-university-charlotte>; “History of Queens | Queens University of Charlotte,” accessed March 14, 2016, <http://www.queens.edu/About-Queens/Get-to-Know-Queens/History-of-Queens.html>.

¹⁴² *The Charlotte Journal*, December 4, 1827.

¹⁴³ *Miners' and Farmers' Journal*, September 27, 1830; *Miners' and Farmers' Journal*, July 20, 1831.

females. The Female Academy is a very neat building, and in a delightful location.”¹⁴⁴ At the 1842 Independence Day celebrations, Colonel Gaither praised the condition of the Charlotte Female Academy and its students, noting that the all of the pupils “beautifully reflect the learning and accomplishments of their Instructress.”¹⁴⁵ In 1845 Susan left to open her own school in nearby Concord, leaving the academy without a leader.

In the fall of 1845 the city had recruited Reverend Cyrus Johnson to take over supervision of the academy. Under his care, however, the institution became much less visible in the local papers. One reason for the seeming decline of the school might have been the fact that Susan Nye Hutchison’s school in Concord may have attracted a number of Mecklenburg’s elite daughters. Another issue was likely Reverend Johnson’s divided commitments. The following spring, in 1846, he accepted the pastorship of First Presbyterian Church.¹⁴⁶ The new responsibilities that came with the small but growing flock likely took up the majority of Reverend Johnson’s attentions.

By the summer of 1849, the Trustees of the Charlotte Female Academy were growing restless. The Board of Trustees was composed of male members of the local middling and elite classes. Ideally, the Board of Trustees was the economic safety net for a small private school. Gaining and retaining the approval of the both the Trustees and the wider community was one of the keys to the success or failure of an academy.¹⁴⁷ At

¹⁴⁴ *Mecklenburg Jeffersonian*, May 4, 1841.

¹⁴⁵ July 12, 1842.

¹⁴⁶ Robert A. Dunn, *History of the First Presbyterian Church of Charlotte, N.C.* ([Charlotte : s.n.], 1932), 18, <http://archive.org/details/historyoffirstprdunn>.

¹⁴⁷ Tolley and Nash, Margaret A., “Leaving Home to Teach: The Diary of Susan Nye Hutchison, 1815-1841,” 176.

the end of June, an anonymous trustee called for a meeting to decide whether the school should be revived or, if not, how the property should be disposed of.¹⁴⁸

Clearly, reviving the Charlotte Female Academy seemed advantageous to the Board. Whether they found it economically, morally, or intellectually advantageous is hard to say, but in September 1849 the public was assured that action to revive the Female Academy was indeed under way. Reverend Burwell was “making arrangements to procure one of the most accomplished, talented and well known instructresses in the South.”¹⁴⁹ By the latter half of the 1850s male clergy were in charge of almost all of the region’s female academies. In 1849, however, Charlotte’s Board of Trustees was still inclined to turn to an “instructress” to helm the institution.

A month later, in October 1849, the paper announced that a Miss Dayton would be installed as the “principal Instructress.” Miss Dayton, the announcement ensured, was preceded by an “excellent and highly flattering reputation.” While Miss Dayton was clearly an outsider, several local women were employed to assist the new instructress. Josephine Kerr and Sarah Frew Davidson would both join Miss Dayton. Josephine, teenage daughter of local tavern owner Jennings Kerr, apparently enjoyed “a reputation for accomplishments, eminently fitting her for the post.” Sarah, whose father served as one of the Trustees, was the academy’s “Instructress in Music.” The ad informed the public that Sarah’s services would “complete the high claims this School has upon the public for a liberal support.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ *The Charlotte Journal*, June 15, 1849.

¹⁴⁹ *The Hornets’ Nest*, September 1, 1849.

¹⁵⁰ *The Hornets’ Nest*, October 27, 1849.

Employing local women to assist outside instructors was both a convenient and strategic arrangement. Because the support of the public was essential for establishing a thriving institution, it was helpful to have women who were already integrated into the local social structure. These women already had an established reputation that could be leveraged in exchange for support of the school. Sarah Davidson was in charge of the music department under Susan Nye Hutchison and had been teaching piano from her home for many years prior to her formal employment.¹⁵¹ Practically, hiring local women was more economically advantageous than recruiting teachers from a distance. While males took over most of the principal positions at schools in the later period, the increasing demand for education created greater demand for female teachers.¹⁵² Teachers from the area, especially younger women like Josephine, would require smaller salaries and might not require board.

The Charlotte Female Academy also employed local women during Reverend Cyrus Johnson's tenure in 1846. In addition to Sarah Davidson, Reverend Johnson employed a tutoress named Miss E.J. Trotter who was in charge of the ornamental branches. Miss Trotter may have been Emily Trotter, daughter of local Coachmaker Joshua Trotter. If Emily was the tutoress, however, she was only twelve or thirteen years old in 1846 and would likely have served in a support role rather than a lead teaching position. Reverend Johnson also added in a newspaper ad, that his own young daughters assisted with the younger children.¹⁵³ It was typical for entire families to be involved in the business of education.

¹⁵¹ Davidson, *A Life in Antebellum Charlotte*, 55, 57.

¹⁵² Tolley, "Music Teachers in the North Carolina Education Market, 1800-1840.," 82.

¹⁵³ *Mecklenburg Jeffersonian*, September 18, 1846.

Claremont Female Academy, another lasting female institution in Mecklenburg, was founded and run by a local family. In 1846, Isaac and Annabella Alexander opened the doors of their home to young ladies seeking an education. The Alexanders lived on a plantation in the Sugar Creek section of Mecklenburg County called Claremont. The area, according to an ad from the fall of 1846, was “five miles north of Charlotte, distinguished for good health, and in a neighborhood remarkable for its religious and moral cultivations, and only one and a half miles from Sugar Creek Church.”¹⁵⁴ The Alexanders made arrangements to “board any number of pupils” near the home. A fair number of girls could be housed in the Alexander’s own two story brick home and other pupils could be boarded with surrounding families if necessary.¹⁵⁵

Just like Charlotte Female Academy, Claremont opened with the backing of six local men: four lawyers, a reverend, and a doctor. Miss Jane Chamberlain was the school’s first Instructress. Jane previously taught at the Harrisburg Female Academy and established a positive reputation among the local community during her time there.¹⁵⁶ Jane only helmed Claremont during the 1846 and 1847 sessions, however. In June 1848 she married one of the school’s trustees, Reverend R. H. Lafferty, and left her position at the academy.

Jane Chamberlain Lafferty’s teaching experience is typical of young women who taught prior to marriage and then “retired” to the home after their nuptials. Josephine Kerr only taught at the Charlotte Female Academy for one year before marrying the Reverend H.T. Sloan.¹⁵⁷ It is interesting, though not particularly surprising, that Josephine

¹⁵⁴ *Mecklenburg Jeffersonian*, October 16, 1846.

¹⁵⁵ *The Charlotte Democrat*, May 10, 1859.

¹⁵⁶ October 16, 1846.

¹⁵⁷ *The Hornets’ Nest*, January 4, 1851.

and Jane both married religious leaders. Both male and female teachers were often very religious; they approached teaching with a bit of missionary zeal. Their goal was to help nurture spiritual and intellectual skills that would aid in living a moral life.

Beyond the paid role of instructress in local schools, women were also involved in teaching through other venues. Much of this unpaid teaching was motivated by the evangelical desire to spread and support religious growth. Before public schools became wide spread, Sabbath schools offered a means for children of all class levels to gain an education. Sarah Davidson participated in founding the first successful Sabbath School in Charlotte.¹⁵⁸ The Sabbath School movement coincided with a renewed burst of spiritual fervor. Largely women, who were increasingly seen as the moral instructors of future generations, spearheaded the movement to spread education to the masses. These Sunday schools were not focused solely on religious education though; they also covered the foundations of education. The two facets, basic education and religious education, cannot be neatly separated though. For a person to become a good Christian, it was increasingly seen as vital that they be able to read the Bible and contemplate the meaning of the scriptures put before them by ministers and missionaries. Religiously motivated education impacted not only the education of the white populace in the South, but also the enslaved community.

Historian Christine Jacobson Carter studied the lives of two single Georgia women who were considered pillars of their communities and who focused on the education, not of future citizens, but rather of their slaves. Maria Hull Campbell and Anne Clay efforts to teach their slaves were described favorably by Mary Telfair, the

¹⁵⁸ Davidson, *A Life in Antebellum Charlotte*, 41–42, 93, 98.

primary focus of Carter's work. Clay instructed her slaves daily for sixteen years while Campbell made efforts to teach her slaves the Bible.¹⁵⁹ The same "benevolent" impulse is evidenced in Sarah Frew Davidson's journal.

In addition to instructing the town's girls in religious matters, Sarah Davidson also taught her slaves to read in an effort to better their chances of perceived spiritual prosperity.¹⁶⁰ In the second entry in her diary, Sarah described her decision to instruct the young slaves in religion. She found, however, that for her religious lessons to be "well communicated," her students needed to be able to read. In January of 1837, Sarah began teaching the sixteen youngest enslaved children on her father's plantation how to read. She recorded their progress in her journal, first noting who knew their letters, who had begun spelling, and who had progressed to spelling two syllable words by February 7.¹⁶¹ She variously referenced their instruction during storms, her attempts to teach them the differences between works of nature and works of art, and even had them attend her at the side of her bed to recite their scriptures when she was too tired to have class.¹⁶² Davidson hoped that the education she attempted to provide would be for their eternal (religious) good rather than for a "vain show of a little knowledge."¹⁶³

In North Carolina, as well as many other Southern states, the education of slaves was against the law, meaning that Davidson was breaking the law with impudence. In 1831 a North Carolina statute was passed forbidding anyone from teaching slaves to read or write; this included all white persons, male and female, as well as free black persons. There was a fine between one and two hundred dollars and possible jail-time in store for

¹⁵⁹ Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness*, 109, 111, 117.

¹⁶⁰ Davidson, *A Life in Antebellum Charlotte*, 99.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 41, 63, 70, 73, 79, 93, 98, NaN& 99.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 63.

any white person who taught, or attempted to teach, any slave to read or write, or who gave them any reading material.¹⁶⁴ This and other similar statutes were often a reaction to revolts, such as Nat Turner's 1831 Revolt in Virginia, which led to the deaths of fifty-five whites and struck fear in the hearts of slaveholders throughout the South.¹⁶⁵

Despite writing her diary only five years after the widely publicized revolts in Virginia, Davidson made no attempt to hide her work with the enslaved members of her father's household. Mary Telfair, from antebellum Georgia, also wrote without reserve about the efforts of her single friends who were engaged in educating their slaves.¹⁶⁶ Both Sarah and Mary Telfair were a part of the planter class and held high positions within their local communities. Their seeming freedom to educate the enslaved people around them indicates that either such laws were not vigorously enforced or, more importantly, elite single women occupied a moral high ground that allowed them to disregard these laws. Religious fervor and moral motivations insulated elite women from legal judgment, if not social judgment, about their choices to educate enslaved, poor, and female students.

Because of their dual commitment to piety and education, the types of women who became teachers often made ideal preacher's wives. During the latter 1850s male religious figures began to take over female schools and their wives often aided them. Beginning in 1857, Reverend Burwell "and lady" began a transformation of the Charlotte Female Academy. Robert and Margaret Anna Burwell were not new to the education field. In 1837 the Burwells began a female school in Hillsborough, North Carolina, where

¹⁶⁴ State of North Carolina, *AN ACT TO PREVENT ALL PERSONS FROM TEACHING SLAVES TO READ OR WRITE, THE USE OF FIGURES EXCEPTED*, 1831, <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/slaveprohibit.html>.

¹⁶⁵ John W. Cromwell, "The Aftermath of Nat Turner's Insurrection," *The Journal of Negro History* 5, no. 2 (1920): 208–34, doi:10.2307/2713592.

¹⁶⁶ Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness*, 109, 111, 117, 147.

Robert was the reverend at the local Presbyterian Church.¹⁶⁷ Margaret Anna, or Anna as she was more commonly known, was a teacher before she married Robert Burwell in 1831.¹⁶⁸ The Burwells moved from their native Virginia to Hillsborough, North Carolina just four years into their marriage. There the family was pinched for money; living on a minister's salary was not sufficient for the rapidly expanding family. Anna utilized her former experience as a teacher and her high social reputation to establish a female school in Hillsborough.

The school in the Burwell home quickly gained a strong reputation among the local community. Anna and Robert Burwell operated the "Burwell School for Young Ladies" from 1837 to 1857.¹⁶⁹ When the Burwells moved to Charlotte, the Reverend Burwell was portrayed as the driving force behind the educational duo. Anna was not mentioned by name in the early ads. This public image in Charlotte contrasts with the modern understanding of Anna's primary role in the management of the Hillsborough school.

In Hillsborough, Robert Burwell was most likely focused more on the church than he was the school. Surviving letters and diaries from the Burwell family indicate that as a part of the domestic sphere of the household, supervision of the school predominantly fell to Anna. In 1855 Anna described one of her days: she spent the early morning looking for late season pork, then she taught and observed class at the school before heading out back to trim the pork. After dealing with the meat, Anna cleaned up and paid a social call to

¹⁶⁷ Historic Hillsborough Commission and National Register of Historic Places, "Burwell School" (OR0004, 1969), <http://www.hpo.ncdcr.gov/nr/OR0004.pdf>.

¹⁶⁸ Mary Claire Engstrom and Historic Hillsborough Commission, *The Book of Burwell Students: Lives of Educated Women in the Antebellum South* (Hillsborough, NC: Historic Hillsborough Commission, 2007), 8.

¹⁶⁹ Mary Claire Engstrom, "The Legend of M.A. Burwell: Historic Hillsborough Restores a School and Remembers a Super-Woman," *The State*, September 1976, www.ncdnpe.org/documents/hhh143.pdf.

two friends before presiding over supper and ending the day by composing a letter.¹⁷⁰

This was probably not an unusual day for Anna who, according to family legend, was mistaken for a widow by a peddler “because she seemed to be responsible for everything about the household.”¹⁷¹

In Charlotte, Reverend Burwell had no flock per se; the school became his primary focus and he became its public face. From 1857, when the Burwells arrive in Charlotte, to 1871, when Anna died and the Reverend and his son John moved to take over Peace Institute in Raleigh, the family’s reputation steadily grew in the region. The family promoted the school through the creation of prints and broadsides that featured illustrations of the building and grounds. (See Figure 3.4 and Figure 3.5) By 1870, former governor Zebulon Vance served as one of the references for the Charlotte Female Institute.¹⁷² The Burwell’s changes to the school’s name (from the Charlotte Female Academy to the Charlotte Female College to the Charlotte Female Institute to the Charlotte Female Seminary) during their tenure reflected an expanding vision of the institution.

As the reputation of the Burwells grew and their institution’s name evolved, the public image of paternalist male leadership grew. From around 1866 on, the school was advertised as being under the care of “Reverend Burwell & son.”¹⁷³ Two male professors and three single women were added to the staff by the late 1860s. (See Figure 3.5) Mrs. M.A. Burwell still appeared on the staff, but clearly her public-facing role in the school continued to be downplayed now that the school was Reverend Burwell’s primary focus.

¹⁷⁰ Engstrom and Historic Hillsborough Commission, *The Book of Burwell Students*, 9–10.

¹⁷¹ According to historical researcher Mary Claire Engstrom, this story comes from Anna and Robert’s son, John Bott Burwell. *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁷² *The Carolina Watchman*, September 9, 1870.

¹⁷³ *The Raleigh Sentinel*, January 12, 1866.

Before the Charlotte female school recruited the Burwells, the trustees funded the construction of a beautiful new building. This structure was needed to replace the former Academy building, which was burned in a fire in 1851.¹⁷⁴ The new building reflected the increasingly professionalized direction of the institution. Previously, many academies were in private residences. Anna Burwell ran the family's school out of their home in Hillsborough, Claremont Female Academy operated out of the Alexander family plantation home, and Sarah Davidson operated a school out of her home in Charlotte from the mid-1850s on. Going even further back in the chronology of female education in Charlotte, private instruction in the home was often the norm. Indeed, the seed that started the Burwell's Hillsborough school was Anna's private instruction of two daughters of a local elite family. Music instruction from the confines of the instructress' home seems particularly common before it was as readily available in local academies.

In 1837 Sarah Frew Davidson lamented the recent fad for musical education. "It has become a fashion or custom for all who are able to bear the expense to learn Musick (sic) regardless of ear or taste for it," Sarah declared in her March 11 journal entry. Anyone who began teaching "promiscuously" would not only "be disgusted and lose their own relish for the divine art" but fail to even teach their students to play one piece.¹⁷⁵ Still, Sarah agreed to assist her "young friends whose desire is so great as to induce them to walk here a distance of two miles to obtain (her) poor assistance."¹⁷⁶ In only a few years, Sarah was indiscriminately accepting pupils with the money, if not the

¹⁷⁴ *The Charlotte Journal*, March 26, 1851.

¹⁷⁵ Davidson, *A Life in Antebellum Charlotte*, 58.

¹⁷⁶ Davidson, *A Life in Antebellum Charlotte*.

talent, to enroll in music instruction at the Charlotte Female Academy. Music was a staple of the institutions advertised to the Mecklenburg community.

Music education was stylish not only in Mecklenburg but across the South during the antebellum period. Musical talent was an especially desirable trait for the elite Southern lady. If female education's major purpose in the South was to reinforce a woman and her family's social status, then music became one of the most obvious vehicles for demonstrating this position in society. A girl skilled on the piano might entertain guests in her home with a sophisticated selection of songs. In elite families, the sheet music chosen for a night of performance might even be the latest compositions acquired on a trip to the North or to Europe.¹⁷⁷

Because it was in such high demand during the majority of this period, a woman's musical skills could be economically leveraged to her advantage. A select few women performed publically as musicians with their families or alongside other artists and travelled throughout the country. More common, however, was the option to tutor local children. This second option was especially viable if a woman had a piano in her home. Owning a piano was a symbol of economic wealth and it could in turn be leveraged to earn income.¹⁷⁸ While most visible musical tutoring occurred within the local academies, in addition to Sarah's home tutoring a Mrs. Hampton offered instruction from her home directly across from the female academy in 1841.¹⁷⁹ Though she only advertised for one year, it is possible that Mrs. Hampton continued offering classes in her home once her

¹⁷⁷ Unpublished Conference Paper, Candace Bailey, "Music in the Aiken-Rhett House: Transatlantic Exchanges in Antebellum Charleston" (The Southern Association for Women Historians' Tenth Southern Conference on Women's History, Charleston, SC, June 12, 2015).

¹⁷⁸ Tolley, "Music Teachers in the North Carolina Education Market, 1800-1840.," 85.

¹⁷⁹ *Mecklenburg Jeffersonian*, May 11, 1841.

reputation was established or, also like Sarah, she may have begun teaching at one of the local academies.

Though male music teachers dominated academies during the colonial period, female music teachers began taking their place in the academy during the antebellum period. Kim Tolley found that there was a steady increase of female music teachers in North Carolina academies from 1820 through the 1840s.¹⁸⁰ While her research on school advertisements in Raleigh newspapers suggested a declining interest in music education as more academic subjects gained popularity, there is little evidence of this trend in Charlotte. As evidenced by Sarah's 1837 diary entry, music education remained fashionable in Mecklenburg.¹⁸¹ Advertisements of local academies' public examinations also showed the continuing value placed on musical skill.

The prestige and demand for musical instruction also kept tuition at a higher level than even the upper levels of academic education for girls at local academies. The cost of tuition solidified music education as a genteel past time, but also served to ensure it as one of the most profitable forms of income for women with the skill to instruct aspiring musicians in their communities. From 1827 through 1860 the average advertised cost of tuition for musical instruction in Charlotte newspapers was nineteen dollars; during the same period the average cost for general tuition was eleven dollars and the cost for the "third class" at female academies was only fourteen dollars.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Tolley, "Music Teachers in the North Carolina Education Market, 1800-1840.," 87.

¹⁸¹ Davidson, *A Life in Antebellum Charlotte*, 58.

¹⁸² General tuition, in this case, refers to advertised school cost that was not differentiated by academic level. Conversely, the third class was advertised as the most advanced level of education advertised by female academies and was the most expensive option.

In addition to music, other artistic courses were on offer, dependent on the skills of the available teachers. The “ornamental branches,” as these artistically oriented courses were known, included activities such as embroidery, needlework, painting, and the like. The ornamental branches focused less on intellectual pursuits and more on traditionally feminine handicrafts. While some of the ornamental branches had no use other than being fashionable, others could be incorporated in to the adult woman’s repertoire of skills that might help provide for her family or charitable organizations.

While female music teachers outnumbered males by the 1820s, male teachers continued to dominate general teaching positions in North Carolina through the 1840s. However, in Mecklenburg women dominated the rank and file positions in female academies. From the early nineteenth century through 1860 nearly twenty different women advertised as teachers in Mecklenburg and the surrounding region. A number of these women appear only once in the record, while others appear for five or more years in a row. Some of this trend likely represents the relative transiency of teaching. Like Susan Nye Hutchison had done, many teachers would move from school to school as the fortunes of their institutions and their prospects changed. Some single teachers may have decided to marry and leave the teaching field temporarily or for good. Examining the contrasts between the individual women involved in female education offers some insight into these and other patterns of employment and commitment.

In addition to the propensity for leaving teaching after marriage, another significant pattern that emerges from examining the longevity of teachers in the area that speaks to regional connections. Throughout the ads in local papers, new teachers were often touted for their special skills and their distant origins. In 1850 Mrs. A.J. Alexander

assured the community that she intended to employ “none but superior teachers.”¹⁸³ Mrs. Alexander had operated the Claremont Female Academy since 1845, running the school out of her home a few miles south of Charlotte proper in the Sugar Creek district. As the academy’s fifth year commenced, Mrs. Alexander announced that “Miss M. M. Stewart, a graduate of Troy Female Seminary, N.Y.” would be in charge of the pupils education.¹⁸⁴ Despite, or perhaps because, of Miss Stewart’s excellent educational pedigree, she was apparently no longer employed at Claremont by 1851. Similarly, other teachers only show up once or twice, perhaps because they married or perhaps because they simply moved on to greener pastures at different institutions.

Like Miss Stewart, a number of teachers were recruited from the North to come and teach in the South. Susan Nye Hutchison began her career this way, moving from New York to North Carolina to teach in 1815.¹⁸⁵ However, it seems that teachers who had more established connections with the local community were more likely to stay for extended periods of time. Susan was connected with the Charlotte community through her previous work in both Raleigh and Salisbury, making her transition to the Charlotte Female Academy smoother than it might be for a complete outsider. It was especially true that local women, like Sarah Davidson, who were a part of the community prior to beginning a career in education tended to continue teaching for long periods of time. Between teaching at church, in her home, and at her school Sarah’s educational career stretched over at least three decades.

¹⁸³ *The Hornets’ Nest*, October 19, 1850.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Kimberley Tolley, *Heading South to Teach: The World of Susan Nye Hutchison, 1815-1845*, 2015, 1, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=978196>.

The loss of a headmistress or principal teacher, particularly a gifted one, could also mean a significant set back for an academy. The Charlotte Female Academy seemed to languish after Susan Nye Hutchison left to start her academy in Concord. The Reverend Cyrus Johnston took charge of the school in 1845, but by 1849 the trustees had publically announced a meeting designed to revive the institution.¹⁸⁶ Even after soliciting a new teaching staff by 1850, the Charlotte Female Academy continued to experience additional set backs in the form of an illness that spread through the student population and a fire that destroyed the academy building. It was almost a decade before a new building, along with a new principal, was reopened in 1857.

At the beginning of her illustrious career, Susan taught at the Raleigh Academy where she tutored a number of Mecklenburg's elite daughters. She moved to Raleigh from New York to teach and evangelize. After Raleigh, Susan moved on to teach in Augusta, Georgia. There she married and instantly became the mother to several stepchildren and soon gave birth to children of her own. After marriage, Susan returned to teaching. Her new husband was, regrettably, a disappointment and was unable to provide financially for the family. Thus, even after marriage Susan retained, out of necessity, much of the independence she initially displayed when moving to the South on her own as a young woman. Susan later separated from her husband and moved back North. A year after their separation, her husband died and the widowed Susan once again became a legally independent woman. Only this time, it was even more important for her to continue her work to help support her children and extended family.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ *The Charlotte Journal*, November 28, 1845; June 15, 1849.

¹⁸⁷ Hutchison's full biography and unique importance to education in the South is revealed in Kimberly Tolley's work. Tolley, *Heading South to Teach*.

As headmistress of the Charlotte Female Academy, Susan was keen to have her students participate in countywide holidays and public events. She followed a consistent pattern of public engagement that showcased the progress and skills of her students. Unlike in the North, where public female speaking was frowned upon, Southern female pupils put their intelligence and gentility on display for the community.¹⁸⁸ At the end of each academic session, or even more often, the Charlotte Female Academy held a public examination of students to display their academic and artistic progress.

While some scholars have noted that female education was seen as less of a threat in the South because moving into the profession of teaching could potentially bring shame on one's family, the rhetoric of usefulness proved to soften the threat to one's family honor.¹⁸⁹ Sarah Davidson's work teaching throughout the community earned her a "high place as a teacher...in the opinions of eminent people."¹⁹⁰ Sarah and other female teachers in Mecklenburg couched any potential threats to the gendered social order by emphasizing their service to the community. The community responded in kind by recognizing the importance of a number of the most beloved instructresses of the community.

Decades later Susan was still remembered fondly by her former friends and pupils in Charlotte. Her death was announced in the local papers with a touching tribute to her influence on the women of Charlotte.¹⁹¹ Indeed, both Sarah Davidson and Susan Nye Hutchison both enjoyed a status of great respect in the local community because of their work. The memory of both women lived on in local minds into the twentieth century.

¹⁸⁸ Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle*.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁹⁰ J. B. Alexander, *The History of Mecklenburg County: From 1740 to 1900* (Charlotte, N.C.: Observer Print. House, 1902), 97.

¹⁹¹ Tolley, *Heading South to Teach*, 194.

Local papers printed announcements of Susan's death and community members reminisced about Miss "Sallie" Davidson well past her death in the 1880s.

The enduring memory of these key local educators seems to counter the belief that teaching was seen in a negative light by Southern elites, at least in Mecklenburg. Quite the opposite was true, in fact; single women leveraged the desire for and perceived importance of education as a means of obtaining an income and establishing a respectable reputation among their communities. Of course, risks remained. As the newspaper ads show, schools often came and went in unpredictable cycles. Female teachers recruited from the North often contended with conflicting views on sensitive topics like abolition; as Susan found out, missteps in dealing with such issues could cause friction with the community that provided financial support for their institutions.

But these concerns were not unique to women teaching. The economy generally was volatile and unpredictable during this period. Sometimes women sought out economic opportunities like teaching because of the financial misfortunes of their male relatives. It seems logical that women would seek out opportunities, like teaching, to replace the in-home production that helped supplement income during the Colonial period. Gaining a better understanding of the role of women in teaching and other professions restores them to the historical picture of the Southern economy.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

On the first Thursday of April 1837 Sarah Davidson recorded in her diary that she had been occupied with some rather unusual tasks. That day Sarah “(e)ngaged in domestic duties cleansing the house.” Domestic duties were not out of the ordinary; indeed they likely occupied much of Sarah’s time. After all, Sarah was essentially the mistress of her widowed father’s plantation. When she completed these more typical duties, however, she turned to a new task: “mending and varnishing the furniture.” Sarah nodded to the gendered ideal of Southern femininity when she referred this foray into furniture maintenance as “strange business for a lady.”¹⁹²

Sarah’s practical side clearly held sway over concerns about what was lady-like, as the rest of her entry that day shows. Sarah “endeavor(ed) to obtain some knowledge” that was both interesting and “useful to others.”¹⁹³ By learning how to keep the furniture up Sarah would save her father from spending money to have the task done. Plus, when it needed to be done again, Sarah would be able to “do it better and with less labour(sic).”

This episode in Sarah Davidson’s life illustrates two things. First, it shows the importance that single women placed on establishing a status within the family and community that was based on the concept of “usefulness.” Second, it shows the practical motivations of single women. Widows, unmarried women, and those, like Sarah, who never married did not publicly engage in such masculine trades as cabinet making or

¹⁹² Davidson, *A Life in Antebellum Charlotte*, 71.

¹⁹³ Original emphasis. Ibid.

furniture repair. Instead, elite and middling white women took up occupations that were more aligned with their public reputation as respectable domestic figures.

In reality though, Sarah's activities were not so strange at all for a single woman. While there may not have been many "ladies" polishing the furniture in their plantation homes, single women strove to be useful within their families and communities. Whether that meant learning to care for the family's furniture, running a business, or providing services from the home single women attempted to solidify their position of usefulness through their domestic and financial contributions. These women expanded their private familial roles into the public sector in ways that were both beneficial to their household and acceptable to the wider public.

The combination of this desire to be useful and the stark necessity of assisting the household financially drove single women to seize economic opportunities where they were available. Much of single women's labor, along with that of their married and enslaved peers, has been obscured by the legal and social dominance of men. As we know from the past fifty years of evolving Southern historiography, this relative invisibility does not mean that women failed to contribute to the region's history. More research is necessary to continue to expand our understanding of the contributions of women throughout the rural South.

Both tavern owners and teachers reveal a different side of Southern womanhood. From the scant records that remain it is difficult to pin down their exact motivations. Perhaps ambition, a thirst for knowledge, or the drive for religious improvement motivated these women in addition to, or even instead of, pure financial necessity. It is clear, however, that these women possessed a level of agency often left un-credited by

modern observers.

Jane Emerson took the opportunity to become tavern owner and was able to parlay that role into a position of relative power. Sarah Davidson used her education and talents as a means of providing for her own support as well as creating a useful role for herself within her community. Black feminist theorist, bell hooks, states that “sexist ideology teaches women to be female is to be a victim” but that “in their daily lives most women are not continually passive, helpless, or powerless ‘victims.’” It is my hope that examining this historical community will make visible some of the ways that Southern women were able to find agency in their daily lives within a society of domination and oppression.¹⁹⁴

Only through a wider examination of similar communities, and indeed a deeper look at the Mecklenburg community, can we understand how these female publicans and instructresses compare to other Southern women. Perhaps it is enough, for now, to reveal and remember the lives of the women contained herein as one step in the journey to reconstructing a fuller version of communal memory that moves beyond the signers of the mythical Mecklenburg Declaration, the founders of institutions like Davidson College, or the much studied industrialists that have come to dominate Charlotte’s New South story. I hope too that later scholars will be able to recover even more of Mecklenburg’s history and add the memory of the county’s yeomanry, enslaved people, and religious minorities. Simply by telling these stories, I believe, we create a better understanding of our collective history that informs that state of our region and country today.

¹⁹⁴ bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2010), 45.

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APPENDIX A: FIGURES AND TABLES

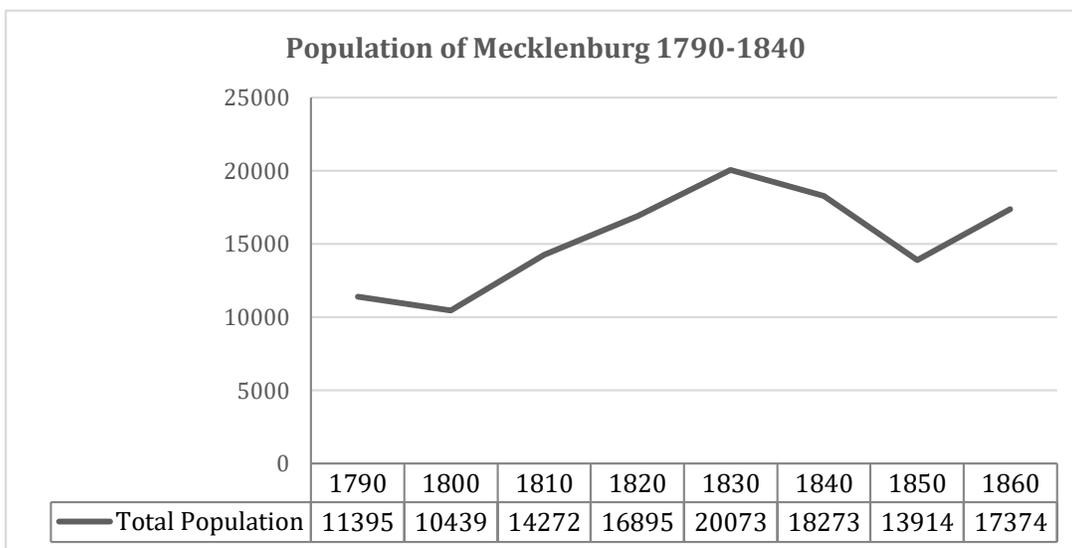


Figure 1.1: *Population of Mecklenburg County*. The region saw a marked increase in population through the first three decades of the nineteenth century. By 1840, however, the population decreased as miners left the area hunting the latest gold rush and western regions of the country opened up for agricultural settlement. Source: U.S. Census data.

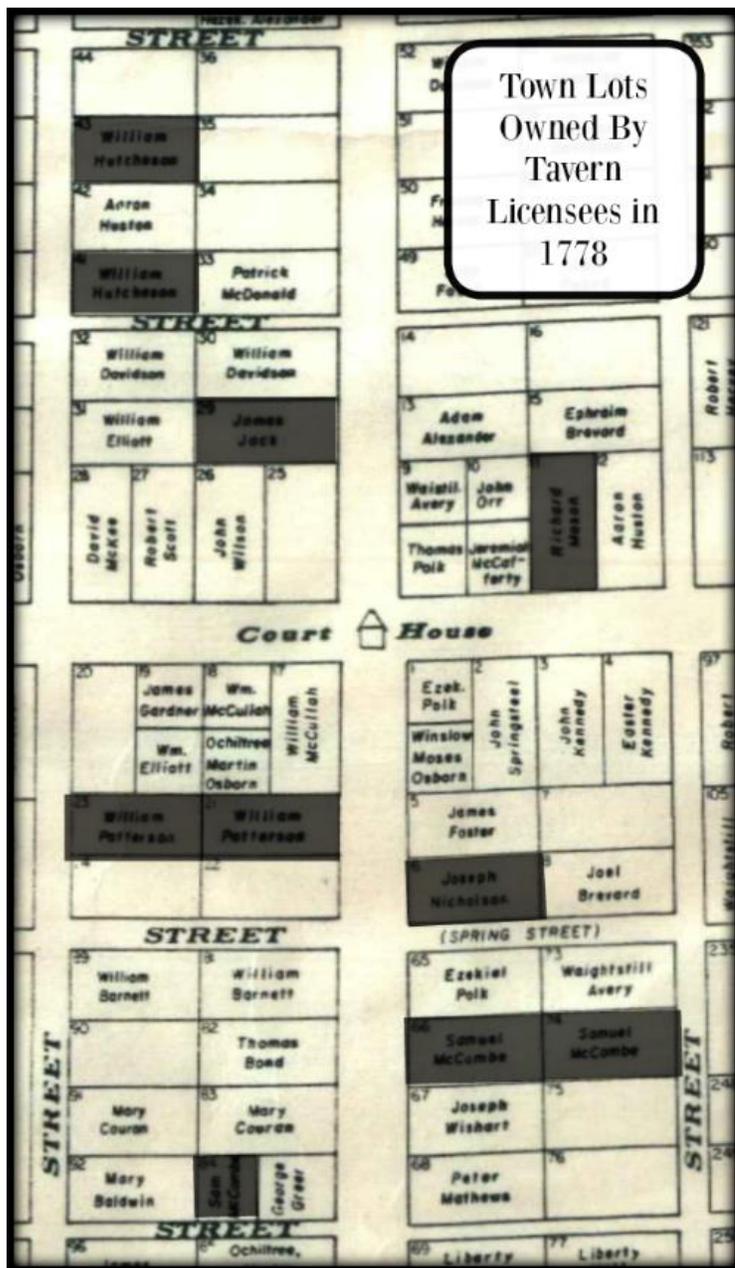


Figure 2.1: *Town Lots Owned by Tavern Licensees in 1778* Each shaded lot on this map denotes property owned by tavern licensees in 1778. The map itself shows original lots sold prior to 1781. Source: *Map of Charlotte Mecklenburg County, N.C.: Original 1/2 Acre Lots Sold Prior to 1781*. Charlotte, NC: Mint Museum of History, 1984.



Figure 2.2: *Small Measure Liquor Retailing Licenses, 1780-1859* This graph shows the number of tavern and liquor licenses during the period under consideration. The number of male licensees spiked significantly from 1810-1820, suggesting either town growth or stricter licensing regulations. It is clear from this graph that the number of female publicans generally paled in comparison to male tavern owners. However, many of the male licensees likely relied on females who performed much of the labor within the business. Source: Mecklenburg County (N.C.), and Court. *Mecklenburg County Court Minutes: Book I, 1774-1780*. Charlotte, N.C.: Doris Futch Briscoe, 1966; North Carolina. *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions*. Translated by Herman W Ferguson. Rocky Mount: H.W. Ferguson, 1995

Table 2.1: As the population dipped the percent of both free black and enslaved women among Mecklenburg's female population steadily rose. For comparison with other North Carolina counties, view Victoria Bynum's Table 1.2 in *Unruly Women*. Source: U.S. Census Data

Year	Total female population	Percent of white females	Percent of free black females	Percent of slave females
1820	8533	68.1	0.1	31.8
1840	9122	65	0.5	34.5
1860	8673	59.8	1.6	38.6

Table 2.2: Female Publicans. The irregular licensing of tavern owners, specifically female publicans, is clear from this table. Even the most established tavern owners did not receive licenses every year. Source: Mecklenburg County (N.C.), and Court. *Mecklenburg County Court Minutes: Book I, 1774-1780*. Charlotte, N.C.: Doris Futch Briscoe, 1966; North Carolina. *Mecklenburg County, North Carolina Minutes of the Court of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions*. Translated by Herman W Ferguson. Rocky Mount: H.W. Ferguson, 1995.

Licensed Women	License Years
Esther Kennedy	1782,1784,1787,1788
Elizabeth Mason	1801, 1802, 1804, 1806
Sarah McDonald	1805
Jane Emerson	1809,1816, 1818, 1819,1822, 1823,1824
Mary Nolan	1833, 1834, 1835, 1836
Mary Rossick	1841, 1842

Charlotte Female Academy.

THE Exercises of this Institution commenced on the 14 instant. Miss S. F. Davidson takes charge of the Institution both as principal and Superintendent. Competent assistants have been also engaged.

The buildings have been put in comfortable repair, and will be occupied by the Teachers, with whom Boarding can be had in the Academy if desired, at eight dollars per month.

The terms of tuition will be nearly the same as last session of twenty one weeks, viz :

1st Class.	Children,	\$6 00
2nd "	The first principals of arithmetic, English Grammar, Geography, &c.	10 00
3rd "	All the higher branches of a liberal education	15 00
4th	Fuel and Contingencies,	1 00
<i>Extra Charges.</i>		
Music on the Piano,		\$20 00
Use of instrument,		5 00
Guitar,		20 00
Drawing,		5 00
Monochromatic and Painting,		6 00

THE TRUSTEES.

Charlotte, October, 1850. 13-tf.

Figure 3.1: *Charlotte Female Academy Ad from 1850*. This ad is typical of school ads, for both female and male schools, during this period. It details the types of classes and the costs, while also providing a description of the respectability and positive reputation of the institution. Source: *The Hornets' Nest*. November 23, 1850.

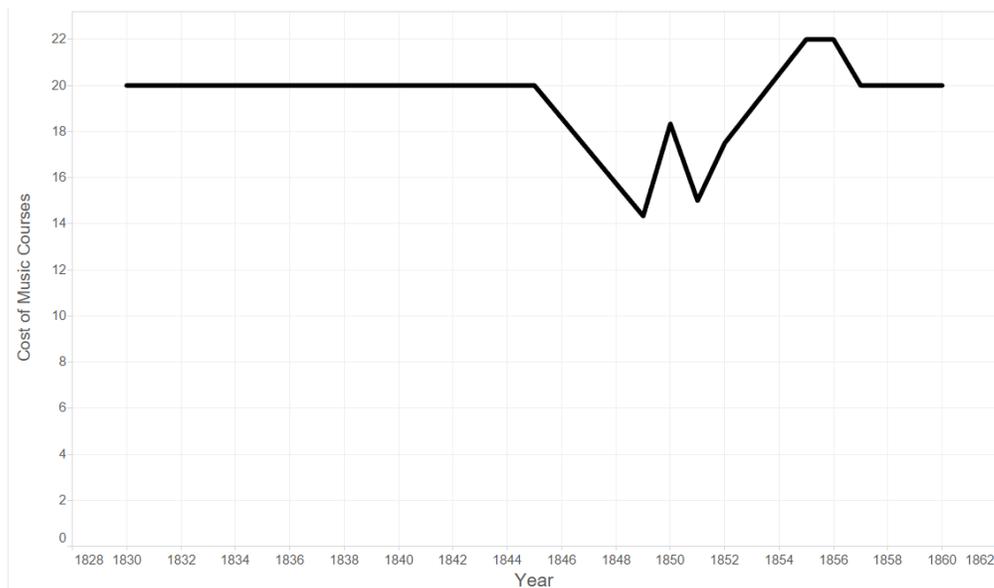


Figure 3.2: *Cost of Music Tuition*. This graph shows the cost of music tuition at female academies, as advertised in local papers, from the 1830s through 1860. Though this data has not been adjusted for changing monetary values, it is still notable that for much of the period under consideration, the tuition for music remains the same. It would seem that despite fluctuating currency values, the perceived value of musical education remained fixed at a certain amount until the late 1840s.

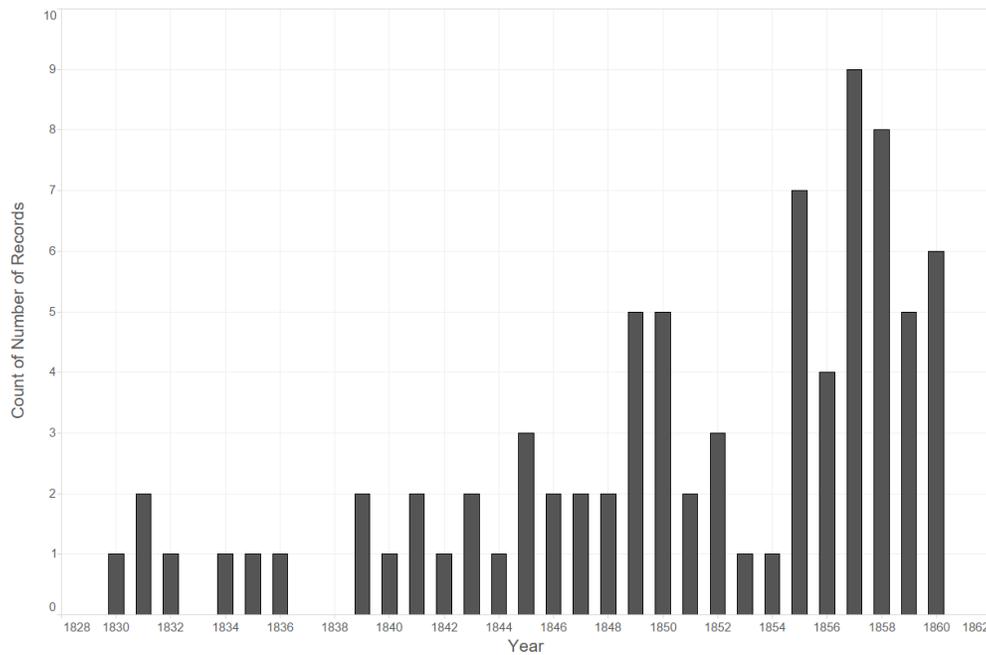


Figure 3.3: *Number of Female School References in Local Papers.* This figure shows the increased number of ads and articles related to female academies in Charlotte's area newspapers from the 1830s through 1860. The number of references remains relatively steady through the 1840s before seeing a marked increase in the late 1850s. Data compiled from regional newspapers.



Figure 3.4: *Charlotte Female Institute*. This print of the Charlotte Female Institute was created the year that the Burwells moved to Charlotte to helm the school. Clearly, the school was an architecturally impressive site. This image makes it clear why visitors to the city lavished such praise on the school. Source: "Charlotte Female Institute." Benson John Lossing and William Barritt, 1857. Queens University of Charlotte Digital Archive. <http://cdm16700.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p16700coll1/id/2>.

N.C. n.d. 25X21 3,50

CHARLOTTE FEMALE INSTITUTE.



A Boarding and Day School for Young Ladies,

Situated in a retired and pleasant portion of the City of Charlotte, N. C.

OFFICERS AND INSTRUCTORS.

<p>REV. R. BURWELL, Principal, and Instructor in MENTAL AND MORAL PHILOSOPHY AND MATHEMATICS.</p> <p>JOHN R. BURWELL, A. M., CHEMIST, NATURAL PHILOSOPHY, AND ANCIENT LANGUAGES.</p> <p>MRS. M. A. BURWELL, ENGLISH BRANCHES, and SUPERINTENDENT SOCIAL DEPTHS.</p> <p>MISS MARY RATTE, ENGLISH BRANCHES.</p>	<p>PROF. A. BAUMANN, VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC.</p> <p>PROF. WM. BENZIGER (Grad. of Harvard College, Netherlands), MODERN LANGUAGES, DRAWING AND PASTELING.</p> <p>MISS MARY E. PENICK, MUSIC ON PIANO AND GUITAR.</p> <p>MISS H. EMMONS, ENGLISH BRANCHES.</p>
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Expenses per term of twenty weeks, payable half in advance in Currency.

<p>Board, exclusive of Washing,..... \$100.00</p> <p>Tuition in Collegiate Department,..... 25.00</p> <p>Tuition in Primary Department,..... 20.00</p> <p style="text-align: center;">MUSIC ON PIANO, GUITAR, or MELODEON.</p> <p>Two Lessons per week,..... 30.00</p> <p>Three Lessons per week,..... 45.00</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SINGING LESSONS.</p> <p>Two Lessons per week,..... 30.00</p> <p>Three Lessons per week,..... 45.00</p>	<p>Use of Piano,..... \$7.50</p> <p>Modern Languages, each,..... 12.50</p> <p>Ancient Languages, each,..... 12.50</p> <p>Oil Painting,..... 30.00</p> <p>Pastel Painting,..... 30.00</p> <p>Pencil and Crayon Drawing,..... 12.50</p> <p>Greek and Palating,..... 12.50</p> <p>Washing, a separate charge, at Landlady's price.</p>
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The scholastic year consists of but one session of nine months, commencing the 1st of October and continuing, with an intermission of only a few days at Christmas, until last of June following. The session consists of two terms of twenty weeks each, the one commencing the 1st of October, and the other the 15th of February. Profits will be received at any time and charged from date of entrance.

For Circular and Catalogue containing further particulars, address

REV. R. BURWELL & SON,
CHARLOTTE, N. C.

Figure 3.5: *Charlotte Female Institute: A Boarding and Day School for Young Ladies.* The public image of the Charlotte Female Academy's management became more masculine as its name evolved. Here the Reverend Burwell began publicly sharing the leadership of the school with his son, giving the institution an even more paternal image that hid the involvement of Anna. This broadside is likely from around 1867-71, after John Burwell was added to the staff but before Anna died. Source: "Charlotte Female Institute: A Boarding and Day School for Young Ladies," 1870 1850. Broadside and Ephemera Collection. Duke University Libraries. http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/broadside_bdsnc112213/.



Figure 3.6: *Presbyterian College for Women, Charlotte, North Carolina*. This post card shows the Presbyterian College for Women. This building and institution was previously known as the Charlotte Female Institute under Reverend Burwell and his family. Source: "Presbyterian College for Women, Charlotte, N.C.," 1905. Historic Charlotte Postcards from the Mary Boyer Collection. J. Murrey Atkins Library University of North Carolina at Charlotte.
<http://digitalcollections.uncc.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15483coll1/id/1267/rec/14>.

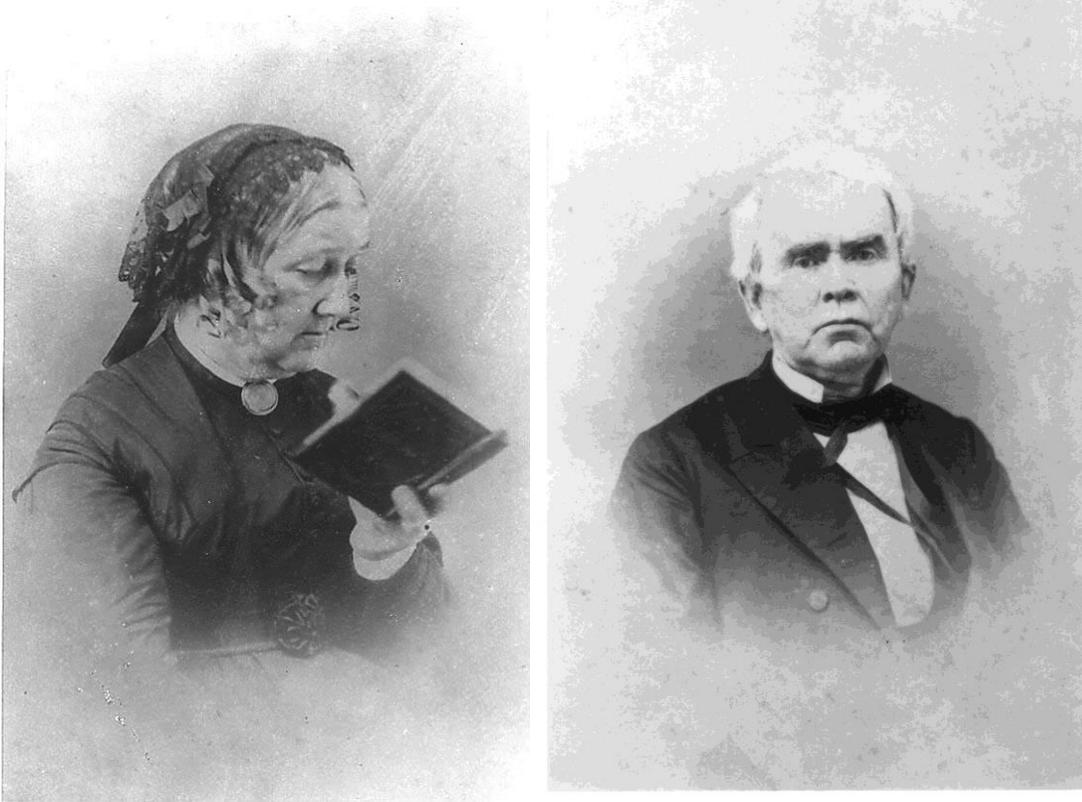


Figure 3.7: *Margaret Anna Burwell and Reverend Robert Burwell*. Historic Hillsborough Commission. "History of the Burwell School." *Burwell School Historic Site*. Accessed February 21, 2016. <http://www.burwellschool.org/overview>.

