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“Defenceless Wives” and “Female Furies” / Botany and the Early American Family

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“Defenceless Wives” and “Female Furies”/Botany and the Early American Family

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A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty of The College of William & Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of Master of Arts

Lyon G. Tyler Department of History

College of William & Mary
August 2017
APPENDIX PAGE

This Thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Holly Lynn Gruntner

Approved by the Committee, May 2017

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ABSTRACTS

“Defenceless Wives” and “Female Furies”:
Late Eighteenth Century Periodicals’ Depictions of Frontier Women

The frontier had a firm hold on late eighteenth century popular imagination, trailing through newspapers and magazines of the era, which included, time after time, prominent accounts of the women who had made their homes on the outskirts of the “settled” colonies and early republic. My project examines the ways in which eighteenth century newspapers and magazines discussed frontier women’s experiences. Periodicals sought through their representations of women to illustrate the perils of the frontier by dramatizing women’s tales of trauma and woe, appropriating them in order to generate arguments in favor of political and military causes: anti-British sentiments, the Revolutionary War, and campaigns against Native Americans. Pursuing a multicultural consideration of the frontier, my paper compares the ways in which periodicals discussed white and Native American frontier women’s experiences. Ultimately, I demonstrate the pervasiveness of the female frontier in eighteenth century popular culture.

Botany and the Early American Family

As botany became increasingly popular and formalized in the eighteenth century, several well-known British North American botanists emerged, including Cadwallader Colden, William Byrd II, and John Bartram. These men collected, named, and categorized the flora of the New World, exchanging specimens and ideas with members of the British Royal Society. While historians have commonly portrayed these and other early American botanists as working alone or in the company of other learned men, I argue that scholarship of early botany has missed the most local of knowledge producers: the family. Early American botanists – and the knowledge they proliferated – were dependent upon family labor and connections. Participating family members included immediate family (spouses and children), as well as members of their household (slaves and servants) and kin who lived far away. My paper illustrates the ways in which botanists’ families assisted them in their projects. It demonstrates the importance of botanical knowledge production undertaken by entire families to our understanding of early American botany.
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Intellectual Biography

When I wrote a personal statement for my application to the College of William & Mary’s Master’s program in history, I knew only that through my research, I wanted to find a way to fit together my interests in women’s and gender history and early America. Heavily influenced by an undergraduate Honors Thesis on Virginia Woolf’s heroine Mrs. Ramsay, and by a longtime fascination with colonial Jamestown, I thought my research might include, simply, women at Jamestown.

As tends to happen, however, my research has taken turns and deep dives I couldn’t have foreseen, beginning with my first few weeks on campus, when the Omohundro Institute’s Editorial Apprenticeship training brought me and some of my cohort to Swem Library’s Special Collections. There, librarians had laid out a number of collection items for us to see, including the papers of Archibald Woods, a land speculator in the Ohio River Valley in the mid to late eighteenth century. At first, I idly flipped through his correspondence, but it wasn’t long before it captured my attention. “I find you are in great danger,” a far-removed family member wrote to Woods, “Surely you always live in the near views of Death – and have solemn warning to prepare for his approach – to be unprepared how dreadful! The man is lost, and lost for ever!”¹ As I read, fascinated by the peril his correspondents perceived Woods to be in – real or imagined – I began to wonder how others were perceiving this early frontier. Was it a place of opportunity? Of peril? Did they view it as in need of “civilization,” or was the sanctuary of its “wilderness” part of its appeal?

¹ Letter to Archibald Woods, August 24, 1790. Folder 52, Swem Library Special Collections, Williamsburg, VA.
A month later, when it came time to begin researching my first portfolio paper, for Professor Hiroshi Kitamura’s “Popular Culture and Power” course, I went straight to eighteenth century newspaper databases. As I looked through periodicals from early American metropolises, I was surprised to find that the word “frontier” hardly appeared without also a mention of a Euro-American or Native American woman. It was as if for newspaper writers, and perhaps, by extension, for its readers, the frontier was inextricably linked to the presence of women: their peril, their death, and their femininity or lack thereof. My paper, “‘Defenceless Wives’ and ‘Female Furies’: Late Eighteenth Century Periodicals’ Depictions of Frontier Women,” developed into an analysis of those “back east” newspapers. In it, I argue that newspapers utilized and manipulated frontier women’s stories in order to generate arguments in favor of political ideologies and causes, such as anti-British sentiments and military campaigns against Native American communities. As a secondary argument, I also theorize that, based on periodicals’ characterization, frontiers were believed to be spaces where female femininity was compromised by a lack of society. Thus, newspapers’ manipulation of women’s experiences also served to bind womanhood against threats posed by the frontier’s relative freedom and unpredictability.

I primarily view this paper as my first stab at an unfamiliar historiography, rather than a paper that might be groomed for publication. However, there is currently only slim scholarship that considers early American easterners’ perceptions of frontier women. I believe there is more work to be done to trace these perceptions, and to connect them to ideas about the frontier as a space where femininity might be compromised, a concept I only briefly engage with in my paper. Further, the project could be extended by
considering a larger swath of sources that contain perceptions of the frontier: letters to relatives and friends living on the frontier, diaries, and novels, to name a few.

Over the course of researching “Defenceless Wives,” I became increasingly interested in the natural spaces of early America, which are inextricably tied to conceptions of the frontier. For my second research portfolio paper, written for Professor Josh Piker’s “Colonial America” course, I narrowed in on eighteenth century botanists, who were working in an age when botany – and natural philosophy overall – was beginning to be formalized into a science. My attempt to connect early American botany to gender revealed female botanists who had remarkable careers, but also that much had been written about them already, especially by Susan Scott Parrish in her marvelous book, American Curiosity. Using a framework I had only recently become familiar with through Professor Karin Wulf’s course, “Gender, Sexuality, and Family in the Early Modern Atlantic World,” I began to look at the work of botanical knowledge production not only as gendered work, but also as work enabled and supported by the family. In my second research portfolio paper, “Botany and the Early American Family,” I argue that bringing families to the forefront of eighteenth century botany gives us new insight into the operations of early botanists as they studied the flora of the New World. My paper analyzes three families headed by botanists: the (Cadwallader) Coldens, the (John) Bartrams, and the (William) Byrd IIs. It highlights the extent to which botany demanded the labor of many related – and unrelated, in the case of slaves and servants – bodies within families, households, and kinship networks. The subject matter of this paper lent

2 Susan Scott Parrish, American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2006).
itself particularly well to the inclusion of material culture in my analysis; as evidence, I incorporated drawings, paintings, and ideas about physical spaces – particularly gardens – and how families might have moved within them.

In order to strengthen this paper for potential publication, I would like to engage additional family case studies, particularly families in which botanical undertakings were led by a female, such as in the (Eliza) Pinckney, (Martha) Logan, and (Elizabeth) Lamboll families. I would also like to deal more extensively with families’ geographic location and class, conditions which undoubtedly impacted the character of their workshops. Third, I would like to grapple with informal botanical knowledge production as it existed within families who did not necessarily consider themselves to be scientific. How, for instance, were Native families producing and sharing knowledge of the natural world? How were enslaved families applying their knowledge of African plants and herbal remedies to their experiences in America? Finally, were this paper to be turned into a dissertation-length project, I would like to explore how botanical knowledge transformed families, if at all. Did these family workshops transform how parents educated their children, or how women’s work was viewed, for instance? Did they create botanical legacy families, in which the children of the botanist went on to pursue similar careers with their own families?

Through these two portfolio papers, my research interests have solidified into themes of gender, family, and perceptions and knowledge of the natural world. Increasingly, my work has used diverse source material, and has spanned geographic spaces from the American frontier to “back east,” and from British North America to bonds of kinship and knowledge across the Atlantic. As I continue on in William &
Mary’s history PhD program, I plan to continue to write across these archival, thematic, and geographic expanses.
“Defenceless Wives” and “Female Furies”:
Late Eighteenth Century Periodicals’ Depictions of Frontier Women

“Men had given us all their experience, from Moses down to the last village newspaper; and how much that is palatable have they said of women?”

-Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Una*

“There was never just one west on either side of the border: there were always multiple Wests, multiple women’s Wests, multiple sites of identity, conflict, and community building.”


**Introduction**

The frontier is a remarkably vast place to study, and a nigh intangible one. From the time when the first Europeans pushed onto the American continent, they have attempted to comprehend this vastness, which often seems more idea than place. It still had hold of popular consciousness in the eighteenth century, driving Euro-Americans to western settlement, Indian wars, and not least, vivid imaginings of what the frontier *was*, and what it *meant*. Using the lens of periodicals, my paper will attempt to capture these conceptualizations. In particular, it will explore how late eighteenth century newspapers and magazines—periodicals, collectively—depicted frontier women. While some scholars have dismissed these writings as ‘one-dimensional,’ I find them to be rich sources of popular imagination, worthy of closer examination. Further, there are opportunities in these sources to revive some of the multicultural eighteenth century

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3 Throughout this paper I use the term “frontier.” I do this for clarity’s sake, as I refer to eighteenth century depictions of borderlands spaces, for which eighteenth century Americans used the word “frontier.” I take a few lines here to respectfully note recent scholarship’s substitution of “borderlands” for “frontier.” Use of “borderlands,” as Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron point out, is a recognition that Euro-Americans’ movement west was not made of “straightforward conquests,” but rather, “accommodations between invaders and indigenes and the hybrid residuals of these encounters.” Adelman and Aron, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History,” *The American Historical Review* 104 (1999): 815.
frontier, examining gender along what Kathleen Brown calls “gender frontiers,” where “cultures in contact” interact.\(^4\) The frontier was a meeting place for many women of different races, classes, and backgrounds, although the periodical record focuses primarily on Euro-American and Native American women, with little differentiation of the complexities of their individual circumstances. So, too, will I focus on these women, aware that they represent but a small sampling of the multicultural frontier experience.

The intent of this paper is not to describe at length ‘what actually happened’ on the frontier, though I will explore the social contexts of periodicals’ representations. The intent is to present the picture of Euro-American and Native American frontier women that periodical readers would have had. Sandra Gustafson argues that “forms of state power … that Euro-American men designed in the early republic were shaped in crucial ways by their proximity and resistance to the speech of Euro-American women, Native Americans, and African Americans.”\(^5\) I, too, will argue that periodicals were spaces Euro-American men utilized in order to resist the speech of women. In the face of what they depicted as a dangerous and unpredictable frontier, periodicals sought through their representations of women to maintain control over womanhood, in part through appropriation of women’s experiences and stories. These appropriations were frequently manipulated to generate arguments in favor of certain political and military ideologies and causes: anti-British sentiments, the Revolutionary War, and campaigns against Native Americans on the frontier. Quite accidentally, as periodicals sought to


simultaneously bind womanhood against the hazards of the frontier and to utilize women’s perils for political gain, they also succeeded in writing frontier women into the late eighteenth century public arena, carving them a space within the political and cultural climate of the era.

In considering late eighteenth century newspapers and magazines, it is important to have a sense of how they worked, and, perhaps more importantly, who could read them. Between 1691 and 1820, around 2,100 newspapers were published, one quarter of which were published for over ten years. While the magazine arrived later, Mark Kamrath and Sharon Harris argue that in the late eighteenth century, it operated similarly to the newspaper “in terms of content, format, and publication frequency.” Magazines, in other words, “published news and newspapers published poems and prose tales.” Whatever the medium, colonists were fiercely protective of their right to print; for Virginians, “the ability to read, listen to, and disseminate ideas by print became so important that they created a constitutional protection for the press.” Samuel Goodrich, recalling his 1790s childhood, commented on Early America’s reverence toward print: “Books and newspapers—which are now diffused even among the country towns, so as to be in the hands of all, young and old—were then scarce, and were read respectfully, and as if they were grave matters, demanding thought and attention.” This all, of course,

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8 Ibid.
prompts the questions: who exactly was reading periodicals with such “thought and attention” in the late eighteenth century? Who were these periodicals—and those writing for them—evolving conceptions of frontier for? Although literacy in this era is difficult to discern, studies have convincingly demonstrated that literacy rates were high, especially among Euro-American male merchants, gentry, and professionals, although rates varied slightly by region.  

Scholars have also found that “Americans of all classes and rank”—including some slaves, apprentices, indentured servants, rural farmers, women, and Native Americans—“could read.” Further, Julie Hedgepeth Williams points out that not only did early Americans read, but they also enjoyed reading: “In their personal writings, colonial Americans spoke fondly and often of reading … their efforts to obtain books, pamphlets, and periodicals illustrate the fact that they were, indeed, readers.”

History scholarship of the last one-hundred years has increasingly focused its eye on the frontier, beginning with Frederick Jackson Turner’s “Frontier Thesis” in the late nineteenth century. Turner argued that the frontier was the site of “Americanization” and the birthplace of democracy; the frontier found the colonist “a European” and “strip[ped] off the garments of civilization and array[ed] him the hunting shirt and the moccasin.” Rather than focusing on the replacement of “a European” with an

12 Julie Hedgepeth Williams, *The Significance of the Printed Word: Colonists’ Thoughts on the Role of the Press* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 9.
13 Ibid, 9.
American, however, subsequent scholars, such as Bernard Bailyn, have argued that conflicts between Americans, in America, helped spur the American Revolution.\textsuperscript{16} Easterners’ perceptions of the west “as representing a constant challenge to the authority and institutions of eastern elites” created a paranoia in the east, which hit a boiling point and turned to revolution when the British made attempts to centralize power in the 1760s and 1770s.\textsuperscript{17} In the 1980s, scholarship of the American West commenced what has been deemed a “post-Turnerian” approach, a “collaps[ing]” of “Turner’s binaries between wilderness and settlement, savagery and civilization.”\textsuperscript{18} Included in this “collapse” was the rise of women’s frontier history, which Turner largely overlooked. First by way of “her-stories” inserted into existing frontier narratives, and then, increasingly, in full-fledged gender studies, women have been making their way back into the history of the frontier.\textsuperscript{19}

\textbf{“Defenceless Wives”}

Euro-American women were mentioned in news pieces about the frontier far more than Native American women. In most instances, they were depicted as innocent, “defenceless” victims of Native American violence—usually in the past tense, as in ‘slain.’\textsuperscript{20} Annette Kolodny argues convincingly that these images of helpless damsels were remnants of the Puritan \textit{Judea capta}, “recast as the eighteenth century’s sentimental

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\textsuperscript{17} Susan Elizabeth Leath, “East is East and West is West: Philadelphia Newspaper Coverage of the East-West Divide in Early America,” (Master’s Thesis, University of North Texas, 2007), 4.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Connecticut Journal}, May 5, 1778.
\end{flushright}
In response to the numerous, graphic accounts of Euro-American women perishing at the hands of Native Americans in Revolutionary-era periodicals, Peter Silver characterizes these publications as having a “special interest in domestic death.” Their reports, whether exaggerated or not, were intended to illicit an emotional response, and through it, to garner support for a political agenda:

As it is an Affair which must concern not only the Inhabitants [on the frontier], but every feeling Heart, and being assured of your Friendship, we now make bold to trouble you on this important Occasion, and solicit you to promote and forward the Petition we now send down for that Purpose.

Calling upon the reader’s “feeling Heart[s]” and “Friendship,” while simultaneously presenting scenes of the unprovoked slaughter of women and children, “suggests how much authority the right mix of sorrow and anger, and its anchors in Indian-injured bodies and families, had taken on.” To characterize these emotional reports, Silver proposes an “anti-Indian sublime,” which emphasizes “a ripping apart of … families” and an “obsession with the helplessness before attack of mothers and infants.” The “anti-Indian sublime” was easily “redirected toward political issues,” most strikingly in the years surrounding the Revolutionary War. Silver’s “anti-Indian sublime” is useful in describing patterns of periodical reporting, but although he notes the frequency of women’s and children’s deaths mentioned in these newspaper reports, he focuses on the

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24 Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors*, 82.
26 Ibid, 94.
general shock value of “the rhetoric of family violation.” He does not analyze in detail the gendering of the “anti-Indian sublime,” nor does he explore the ways in which Native American women were part of it.

One instance in which periodicals “redirected” the emotional impact of the slaying of Euro-American women on the frontier towards political issues was just before and during the Revolutionary War, when patriot-leaning periodicals sought to arouse colonists’ anger against the British. A pervasive fear of the era was British alliances with Native American communities, and the violence frontier colonists faced from such partnerships:

Let the destruction of thousands of innocent and helpless women and children on our frontiers, which was mediated, and was to have been carried into execution by all the tribes of savages, which a Carleton, a Johnson, a Dunmore, or a Connolly, could stir up against us …

As exemplified here, “women and children” was a common refrain. Rarely were men mentioned in appeals such as these; they were not viewed as “helpless,” but as actively fighting against the Native Americans and the British to protect their families. Further, the listing of British government appointees, all of whom were known to have facilitated treaties or alliances with Native Americans, legitimizes the claim that these men could “stir up” tribes “against us.”

While his agents are most frequently mentioned in connection with violence against women on the frontier, King George III is referenced as well:

Thus, while our defenceless wives and children are cut off by merciless savages, and our country laid waste and destroyed, is the humane king of Britain offering his idle and delusive proposition of peace!

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27 Ibid, 81.
28 “Mr. Purdie, Jan. 20,” Virginia Gazette, January 26, 1776.
In line with the rhetoric of the Revolution—that the king was oblivious to the needs of his American colonies—the king is depicted here with a similar level of ignorance. Although the atrocities detailed above were committed under his orders—or at the very least, in his name—the “delusive” king seeks to make up for them with an unsatisfactory “propo

sition of peace.” The king’s 1778 Peace Commission, sent to Philadelphia a few months before this article ran in The Connecticut Journal, offered to satisfy all of the colonies’ demands, save independence. The Journal utilized frontier women to criticize the Commission’s “propo

sition,” tying these women’s plights directly to the king.

In another case, a news report criticized the king as incapable of halting the frontier atrocities his regime had begun. In what Silver calls the “gravest political mistake George III made in response to the American crisis,” the king gathered allies, including Native Americans, to “more definitively destroy his subjects.”30 This was worry enough for colonists; if they had not believed it when war was first declared, they now came to see that their king had become “an unnatural destroyer instead of a guardian.” From this realization stemmed a deepening fear that the king, even should he want to, would not be able to halt what he had started on the frontiers. The Virginia Gazette declared in 1777 that the “tyrant” could not “stop the uplifted knife or hatchet, ready by his command to strike the fatal stroke on many a helpless woman and innocent babe.”31 The Gazette article is certainly a disparagement of the king’s faulty authority over his allies, and of the “merciless” Native Americans who wouldn’t spare even women and children, but it also

30 Silver, Our Savage Neighbors, 231.
31 “Tyrant’s Speech,” Virginia Gazette, February 28, 1777. “Speech” refers to King George III’s address to Parliament on October 31, 1776, his first since American independence had been declared.
reflects colonists’ fears that escalating frontier violence could not be easily be ceased, even by a king.

In the face of such violence, when the danger of remaining in their homes became too great, “country people commonly found themselves holed up for long stretches in forts or fortified houses, waiting.” Forts served as hubs for military operations, and were thus constantly filled with male soldiers—not to mention the male settlers who had retreated there with their families—but periodicals often depicted forts as spaces for women and children only. Regarding an anticipated Indian attack, The Pennsylvania Evening Post reported that “women and children [were] almost all moved out of town, and barracks built for them in the country.” The New-England Chronicle described a siege in which “500 women and children [were] in this little fort, [having] fled there for shelter on hearing that the Indians were marching into that part of the country.” The same report mentioned men at the fort as an aside, but not as taking shelter with the women and children. Rather, it simply noted that “we lost not a man in this long affair, except for four or five who ventured out to drive in some cows—some were found scalped.” Reports rarely depicted men as being ‘in’ the forts; their presence was only noted insofar as they ventured outside of the fort for an offensive attack or to tend to other business. In this way, forts—while actually housing and protecting both men and women—were portrayed as spaces of exclusively female refuge. Periodicals’ depictions of women barricaded in forts while men fought and worked outside of them served to bind women against the dangers of the frontier, while, in reality, women frequently

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32 Silver, Our Savage Neighbors, 48.
33 Pennsylvania Evening Post, November 9, 1775.
34 New-England Chronicle, September 9, 1776.
fought with the men, and sometimes alone, to defend the fort. “During an Indian raid,” argues Steven C. Eames, “everyone—the privileged, the militiamen, the ‘have-nots,’ and even women and children—became soldiers to a certain extent.” Periodicals’ gendering of forts was also used to justify the significant spending and manpower needed to construct them, as well as to garner support for the construction of additional forts. In a 1774 speech, printed in *The South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal*, Lieutenant-Governor and Commander in Chief of South Carolina William Bull justified “building … Stockade Forts along our Southern and Western Frontiers” to the General Assembly at Charles-Town as a means to “afford a safe Retreat to the Women and Children.”

Despite the pervasion of “defenceless wives” rhetoric, frontier women were far from helpless. Elizabeth Clapp argues that “military leaders, male petitioners, and newspaper reports” sought to perpetuate the idea that “women were defenseless without male protection.” Such passivity was hardly realistic; for a woman to shrink back during an attack “would put her and her family in danger.” Clapp reserves the bulk of her analysis for memoirs and interviews, as they reveal, according to Clapp, how women play “a far more active part in the face of Indian attacks.” But in 1779, striking reports were printed in *The Virginia Gazette*, *The United States Magazine*, and *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, recounting a woman’s violent axe assault on a group of raiding Native American men. These reports reveal that although they did so less frequently, periodicals were

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38 Ibid, 66.
capable of appropriating stories of women’s triumphs just as easily as they appropriated tales of woe.

The first report, printed in *The Virginia Gazette* under the pseudonym “The Honest Politician,” uses the story of the woman with the axe in order to disparage the crown. Specifically, the Politician draws a connection between the woman’s story and Britain’s complaints about France’s support for the American Revolution. Britain, the Politician writes, “has begun to object” to France’s “ambition of extensive conquest,” an utterly “groundless” charge made by “a nation who is herself the tyrant of the ocean.” He recounts the woman with the axe killing one man, and then wounding a second. The second yells “hideously” and calls out “murder … just as if he himself … had not been about to commit murder.” The Politician connects this to Britain’s hypocrisy:

[Britain commits] an outrage against common decency to talk of the ambition of her neighbours, when the war she wages is an offensive war, and the very principle is the desire of foreign, unnatural, and extensive dominion. If the savage, who was about to draw his hatchet on the woman, might cry out for help, so may Great Britain call out for assistance on the war which she carries on against America.

The woman’s actions are far from the focus of the Politician’s article. Although he refers to her as “a bold amazon,” she is a primarily a vehicle for his discussion of the “savage’s” ironic pleas and Britain’s falseness. His piece goes on to defend France’s noble intentions. The woman’s actions, thus, ultimately serve to highlight a man’s—and an empire’s—weakness rather than to present the reality of a woman’s “active part” on the frontier.

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In *The United States Magazine*, a second account of the woman with the axe utilizes her story to a different end. The title of the account—“Signal Prowess of a Woman, in a Combat with Some Indians. In a Letter to a Lady of this City”—is significant, argues Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, because it implies triumph, “whereas captivity narratives about men are entitled ‘Affecting History of Dreadful Distresses’ or ‘Sufferings of.’” To be fair, there are many captivity narratives about women that feature great “Distresses” and “Sufferings,”—*Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* comes to mind—and many about men in which they overpower their captors. In this case, however, the departure from periodicals’ usual language of the “defenceless” frontier woman is notable. Both “Signal” and “Combat” give Mrs. Experience Bozarth—she is named in this account—a degree of notoriety. Mrs. Bozarth is deliberately engaging her enemies in combat, not unlike a fighting man.

And yet, as the “Letter” unfolds, it becomes clear that the unnamed “gentleman” author did not title it “Signal Prowess of a Woman” to bestow acclaim upon Mrs. Bozarth. In the “Letter”—likely reprinted, as was common practice, from an actual letter—the gentleman writes to a “Lady of this City.” He recounts Mrs. Bozarth’s story for this lady so she can “see how a person of [her] sex acquitted herself in defence of her own life, and that of her husband and children.” Mrs. Bozarth’s “Prowess” allows her to

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42 “‘Signal Prowess of a Woman,’” *United States Magazine*, May 1779.
“with one blow cut out the brains of the indian,” and then give “several large cuts” to another. More Indians come running to their aid, “one of whose heads Mrs. Bozarth clove in two with her ax.” Unlike The Virginia Gazette’s account of the woman with the axe, this author names Mrs. Bozarth “the burthen of the story.” He takes pains to provide biographical details of her life, including her name and place of residence. Still, in concluding the letter, the gentleman characterizes Mrs. Bozarth’s experience as one of “several extraordinary adventures.” He notes that he has written a male acquaintance of the “Lady of this City” with another “remarkable” story from the frontier. Thus, while the gentleman gives an unusual amount of care to Mrs. Bozarth’s tale, he is ultimately writing to entertain an urban lady with a tale of the ‘wild frontier,’ a story different from the one he has shared with a male correspondent. He is presenting a tale to indulge her interest in “a person of [her] sex.” In printing the letter in a magazine, he is of course presuming wider interest, although he takes care in the end to characterize the story as fiction-like entertainment—a mere “extraordinary adventure”—rather than a traumatic, and likely transformative, experience for Mrs. Bozarth. Perhaps the gentleman’s fictionalization stems from his familiarity with captivity narratives, most of which were based in truth, but which were often dramatized to the point of reading like “extraordinary adventures.”

The gentlemen’s letter provides further clues that he is reimagining Mrs. Bozarth’s story in a fictional way: he inserts humor. When the “second indian” Mrs. Bozarth turns on cries “murder, murder”—as we learned in The Virginia Gazette’s

In what reads like slapstick comedy, and serves also to imply Native Americans’ incompetence, another Indian is laid “flat upon the foil” by Mrs. Bozarth as he sticks his head inside the house to see what has happened to his companions. Even after the immediate battle is won, for safety, Mrs. Bozarth is forced to garrison herself into her little cabin “for several days” with “the dead man and dead Indian both in the house with [her].” It is a macabrely comical scene. Thus, the gentleman’s treatment of Mrs. Bozarth, while allowing her a more central role than The Virginia Gazette’s account, still minimizes her realness, her trauma, and her triumph by placing her in an “extraordinary adventure,” a comedy of errors in which she escapes harm not through her own power, but through the incompetence of her attackers. In this, a “slapstick” retelling of ‘the woman and the axe,’ the absurdity of a woman taking up a man’s weapon is presented as the driving comic force in the tale.

Underlying this comedic portrayal were anxieties surrounding women’s behavior in frontier settings. In the case of Mrs. Bozarth, they center around her wielding of an axe. The Pennsylvania Gazette printed a letter from General Schuyler to George Washington containing a mention of a woman presumed to be the same Mrs. Bozarth: “We have certain accounts here of a woman on [the] Cheat River killing one Indian, wounding another with a broad ax, and making her escape.”

Thus, all three accounts, however brief, mention the detail of the axe. For writers and readers alike, the axe, especially in the context of the frontier, represented masculine transformation of
‘untamed’ wilderness; the clearing of trees that not only prepared the land for planting, but also granted the axe wielder control over his environment. A woman taking up an axe, then—albeit briefly—was perceived as her claim to physical mastery of the frontier. This, in a society that considered women to be the ‘social civilizers’ of the frontier, and men the physical, militant ones, suggested an uprooting of roles. At the very least, periodicals had motives for depicting Euro-American women as “defenceless wives”: to justify retaliating atrocities against their Native American attackers. To do this, periodicals simultaneously expressed two ideas: that women were under siege, but that their gentle sensibilities remained intact. These ideas were, of course, intimately connected; in order for periodicals to make political pleas, they needed women’s lives to be at stake. And in order for women’s lives to be at stake in the most emotionally dire manner possible, these women needed to be helpless.

“Female Furies”

While Native American frontier women did not appear in periodicals nearly as often as did Euro-American women, the written word coded and utilized their presence and actions on the frontier in a similar fashion. Native American women, like Euro-American women, were alternatively discussed as being in need of Euro-American male aid and as demonstrating a startling ability to act violently. What separated portrayals of Native American women, however, is that they were portrayed as lacking the innate femininity and innocence that Euro-American women frequently exhibited. This served to ‘other’ Native American women from Euro-American women, and to justify Euro-American men’s violence against them and their communities.

46 Ibid, 179.
In the precarious years following the American Revolution, accounts of frontier women continued to appear in periodicals, but with new political purpose. By July 1787, Shay’s Rebellion—a protest by poor landowners in backcountry Massachusetts—had been quelled. The 1787 Constitutional Convention—during which the young country attempted to address Americans’ complaints that the current government was not working—was underway. It was in the context of this political turmoil that The Columbian Magazine decided to revive the story of Colonel Crawford’s torture and death at the hands of Native Americans; an event which had occurred four years earlier, in 1783. An anonymous author presented his account of Native Americans’ “barbarous treatment” of Crawford as an addition to other writers’ recent submissions to the magazine relating “the cruel mode by which the Indians torture their prisoners of war.”

When considered alongside the events of 1787, Crawford’s story recalls the cold-heartedness of the recently-vanquished British and Tories, and by extension, the triumph achieved by winning the war. In light of the civil unrest of Shay’s Rebellion and the failed Articles of the Confederation, the account reminds the country of the common enemies that had once bound it into solidarity: the British, Tories, and “barbarous” Native Americans. Finally, Crawford’s story points to the United States’ ongoing struggle; although the Revolutionary War had ended, frontier battles were far from over.

In writing his account of Colonel Crawford’s death for The Columbian Magazine, the author makes Native American women Crawford’s primary torturers. To be sure, in many Native groups, “it was the women who determined the fate of captives,” selecting

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47 Columbian Magazine, July 11, 1787.
the severity of torture and even deciding who would be saved and adopted.\textsuperscript{48} However, other recollections of Colonel Crawford’s torture—including that of eyewitness John Knight—only mention women’s involvement to the extent that “squaws took broad boards upon which they would throw a quantity of burning coals and hot embers and throw on him, so that in a short time he had nothing but coals of fire and hot ashes to walk upon.”\textsuperscript{49} \textit{The Columbian Magazine’s} version proceeds as follows:

The bloody business commenced with Mr. Crawford, the father, [being] delivered over to the women, and being fastened to a stake, in the centre of a circle, formed by the savages and their allies, the female furies, after the preamble of a war song, began by tearing out the nails of his toes and fingers, then proceeded, at considerable intervals, to cut off his nose and ears; after which they stuck his lacerated body full of pitch pines, large pieces of which they inserted (horrid to relate!) into his private parts … after thus glutting their revenge … they cut off his genitals.\textsuperscript{50}

By placing Native American women in a central role, the author makes the situation even more “horrid”: Colonel Crawford, a government agent and one of the “most respectable planters in Virginia” was brought so low as to be tortured not by male warriors, but by “the women.” The “female furies,” unlike Mrs. Bozarth, are allowed their ferocity. They

\textsuperscript{48} Merril D. Smith, \textit{Women’s Roles in Eighteenth-Century America} (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2010), 103.
\textsuperscript{49} John Knight and John Slover, \textit{Narratives of a Late Expedition Against the Indians; with An Account of the Barbarous Execution of Col. Crawford; and the Wonderful Escape of Dr. Knight and John Solver from Captivity, in 1783}, ed. Hugh Henry Brackenridge (Philadelphia: printed by Francis Bailey, 1783), 11. Although \textit{Narratives of a Late Expedition} claims that Knight recorded his own account, a heavy editorial hand was at work: that of Hugh H. Brackenridge, who conducted an interview with Knight at Fort McIntosh following Knight’s escape from the Native Americans who had killed Colonel Crawford. As Parker B. Brown points out, in editing Knight’s account, Brackenridge “transform[ed] the recollections into a piece of virulent anti-Indian, anti-British propaganda calculated to arouse public attention and patriotism.” Brown, “The Historical Accuracy of the Captivity Narrative of Doctor John Knight,” \textit{The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine} 70 (Jan.1987): 53-4. Included in \textit{Narratives} is an essay by Brackenridge, calling for the removal of Indians westward, until “their practices shall be obscured, and the tribes gradually abolished” (38).
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Columbian Magazine}, July 11, 1787.
are depicted with a bloodthirstiness, a deliberation, a mastery of torture, that Euro-American women were not permitted.

*The Columbian Magazine*’s depiction enters another realm that accounts of Euro-American frontier women do not: the “female furies” torture Crawford in a sexualized way, inserting “pitch pines … into his private parts” and “cut[ting] off his genitals.”

The women not only inflicted physical pain, and eventually death, on Crawford; they also, quite literally, emasculated him. “The erotic side of culture contact has most often been reserved for [Native American] women, and usually with an implication of surreptitiousness,” argues Tom Hatley. By painting Native American women as antithesis to Euro-American women, as sexualized “female furies” to their “defenceless wives,” periodicals could justify military campaigns against entire Native Americans communities. In Emer de Vattel’s *The Law of Nations*, which Peter Silver calls “probably the century’s most consulted work on war,” Vattel writes that “women, children, feeble old men, and sick persons, come under the description of enemies … inasmuch as they belong to the nation with whom we are at war.” As they make no defense of themselves, they are not to be harmed, much less killed. However, Vattel goes on to single out women, adding,

if the women wish to be spared altogether, they must confine themselves to the occupations peculiar to their own sex, and not meddle with those of men by taking up arms. Accordingly the military law of the Switzers, which forbids the

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51 Ibid.
soldier to maltreat women, formally excepts those females who have committed any acts of hostility.  

Because Native American women tortured and killed Colonel Crawford—*The Columbian Magazine* emphasizes their “hostilities”—they were not protected from harm under *The Law of Nations’* code.

“Female furies” was not newspapers and magazines’ only characterization of Native American frontier women. When convenient, they transformed “furies” into “vanquished people,” in need of Euro-American male aid. These “vanquished” women were not the same as “defenceless wives” however. Not serene in the sanctuary of their own purity like Euro-American women, “vanquished” Native American women were weary, oppressed by their own people and by what periodicals portrayed as stunted femininity. A serial in *The New York Magazine* features an agonizing scene in which Maria, a Euro-American woman, begs for her infant’s life: “Holding him still fast, while the Indian applied his strength to tear him away, knashing his teeth at her opposition; ‘Help! God of heaven!’ screamed she, ‘help! have pity, have mercy on this infant!’”  

In contrast, an essay in *The Pennsylvania Magazine* describes “[t]he women among the Indians of America … slaying their daughters out of compassion, and smothering them in the hours of their birth. They consider this barbarous pity as a virtue.”  

The author of the essay, titled “An Occasional Letter on the Female Sex,” mocks this “barbarous pity” as part of Native American women’s unsuccessful attempts to perform the “virtue” that Euro-American women innately possess. However, the author also partly justifies this

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“barbarous[ness]” by implying that it stems from Native American women’s existence as “a vanquished people, obliged to toil for their conquerors.” These “conquerors” are not Euro-American oppressors, but Native American men, who “exercise a most despotic authority over their wives, whom they consider in the same view they do any other part of their property, and dispose of them accordingly.” Native American women are portrayed as if they are enslaved by their husbands, forced to undertake “the toil and hazard of procuring food,” and to do all other sorts of difficult works that make them “less than the European ideal of femaleness.” Politically, this characterization of Native American men as murderers of Euro-American women and oppressors of their own women helped justify continued killing of Native American men; it transformed the Indian Wars, in popular consciousness, into deeply gendered encounters that protected Euro-American women and emancipated Native American women.

According to printed accounts, in order to escape their Native American “conquerors,” Native American women frequently allied with Euro-American men. In some cases, Native American women helped Euro-American men escape from the clutches of Native American men: The Virginia Gazette reports that Richard Pearis and Jacob Hite were “warned by some Cherokee Women to provide for their Safety; they have, in Consequence, moved off with their Effects from the Cherokee Lands.” In other instances—sometimes under duress, although that was not reported—Native American women informed on their communities, helping Euro-Americans to plan military campaigns against them: “An old Indian woman, whom they took prisoner, informed

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them, that the Indians they had the engagement with were 300 from the Overhills, and as many from the middle settlements and vallies …”

Through these reports, periodicals argued that Native American women shared Euro-American women’s need to be saved from Native American men. In actuality, argues Jane Merritt, these observations of Native American women’s willingness to cooperate with Euro-American men likely stemmed from Native American women’s roles as “agents of communication” for their communities. Merritt points out that “because of their central roles in matrilineal kinship networks … women were often the first to interact with outsiders who ventured into their villages.” In other words, Native American women’s authority in their communities was overturned by periodicals in order to further the image of the oppressed frontier female in need of Euro-American male saviors.

Conclusion

The frontier had a firm hold on late eighteenth century popular imagination. It trailed like a ribbon through periodicals of that era, as did the women who lived on the frontier. Molded into caricatures, mostly unnamed, rarely speaking for themselves, still these women were, to popular consciousness, inextricably associated with the frontier. Their stories prompted sympathy, inspired political commentary, and justified military action, for better or for worse. And even while newspapers and magazines sought to control frontier women’s agency—turning them into damsels, farces, or furies—by using

61 Ibid, 65.
their stories frequently and printing them widely, they guaranteed frontier women a place in public discourse.
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Botany and the Early American Family

On February 2nd, 1727, John Bartram wrote to his friend and fellow in England’s Royal Society, Peter Collinson, as he often did. With his usual flair for storytelling and eagerness to capture every detail of the natural world, he described:

My wife observed two Snakes pretty near together in my Yard, the one a large black Snake, which is the most domestick of all others: as their Bite is not dangerous, they are permitted to harbor about the House to destroy Ratts, Mice, Froggs &c. The other was a middle striped Snake. The black Snake lay still with his eyes fixed on the striped one, which crept directly into the black Snake’s mouth. My wife seeing this fetch’d the Tongs & pulled very hard to get him out of the black Snake’s mouth for he was near half swallowed down. But the black Snake, far from being scared at such usage, crept about as in search of his Prey, that he had been robbed of, and would not go of the Premises, till a Stick made him run away.63

Scholars of eighteenth century botanists – or naturalists, or natural philosophers, or students of Linnaeus, as they sometimes called themselves – might note Bartram’s keen observations of the snakes’ behavior in this passage.64 They might note that Bartram, of

63 John Bartram to Peter Collinson, February 27, 1727 in Edmund Berkeley and Dorothy Smith Berkeley, eds., The Correspondence of John Bartram 1724-1777 (Gainesville: The University Press of Florida, 1992), 40. Note that in the eighteenth century, botanists did not restrict themselves to the study of plants. They considered the entire natural world to be under their purview, often collecting and cataloguing both flowers and animal skeletons.

64 The flora of the New World was of intense curiosity to colonists. Plants were objects of interest because of their newness, their strangeness, and as Joyce Chaplin argues, because “Learned men were expected to describe the natural resources of the places they saw and help realize profits for the investors in new world ventures.” These resources were identified, shipped to England, and either sold as commodities or as curiosities. Plants, as microcosms of larger ideologies of nature, were also sites of conquest; to identify, to label with a Euro-American name and use, was to exert ownership. Driven by this quest for botanical knowledge, the Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge was incorporated in 1662, an event that began a “London-centered global epistolary network of natural history.” But until Carl Linnaeus, a Swedish naturalist, developed a system of categorizing plants, American botanists were overwhelmed by the “sheer volume of plants … that were generally organized alphabetically.” Not to mention, botanists often ‘discovered’ the same plants, leading to the same specimens being named and catalogued several times over with no one being the wiser. Linnaeus’s taxonomic system made it easier for botanists to look up a plant, and to thus determine whether it had already been categorized or was in need of categorization. Linnaeus’s system spread to the colonies relatively quickly; by at least 1742, Cadwallader Colden was being shown Linnaeus’s Genera Plantarum (1730) in New York by a friend who had brought it back from abroad. Joyce E.
Philadelphia, was writing to Collinson, who lived in London, an example of the transatlantic exchange of botanical knowledge. They might even note the cultural curiosity that was the “domestic” black snake, which was “permitted to harbor about” eighteenth century houses – or at least, about this zoologically-inclined one – to keep other critters at bay. But no one has yet made much of the presence of Bartram’s wife, Mary, nor her central role in the collection of this particular piece of natural observation. It was Mary who “observed two Snakes,” who “fetch’d the Tongs” to try and save the “striped one,” and who, presumably, wielded the branch that banished the black snake. Further, no scholars have yet mined the holistic family from this moment; none have seen Mary’s observations as part of a larger structure: that of the family workshop, in which botanical knowledge was collectively produced.

Scholarship of eighteenth century botanists and scholarship of the eighteenth century family are disparate bodies. The historiography of early American botanists is immense, filled with accounts of savants such as Cadwallader and Jane Colden, William Byrd II, and John and William Bartram, and their contributions to natural science. More recently, scholars have written about the relationships between botanists – often between American botanists and their correspondents in the Royal Society – and how these relationships were mutually beneficial: European savants depended on American botanists for their expertise and proximity to unfamiliar plant species, while American botanists

scientists relied upon the Royal Society for connections, funds, publishing, and prestige. A related thread of recent historiography argues that botany was a collective knowledge, produced in conversation with other scientists and through extraction of knowledge from non-Anglo cultures. But in stretching these scientific conversations across nations and oceans, scholars have missed the most local of knowledge producers: the family. It was the family framework that informed all others; it situated botanists within domestic conditions that enabled their intellectual work. It was the family, further, that contributed in perhaps most significant part to the production and compilation of botanical knowledge. Both within and away from the home, early American botany was dependent upon family labor and connections. This took many forms, from parents educating their children in the science of botany, to extended family facilitating introductions of a budding botanist to a more experienced one, to a botanist instructing his servants or slaves to collect plant specimens in the woods. Regardless of exactly how they operated, however, bringing families to the forefront of eighteenth century botany gives us new insight into the operations of these early botanists and the families that assisted them as they determinedly sketched, plucked, described, and categorized the flora of the New World. It highlights the extent to which knowledge was not a solo pursuit for these savants, or even a pursuit undertaken only in the company of other scholars; it was a

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family project, demanding the labor of many bodies, both in the botanists’ households and in widespread kinship networks.

An apt metaphor for my project, Figure 1 (right), sent to Peter Collinson in 1758, contains a single figure – John Bartram – standing alone in a garden. The drawing demonstrates the pragmatism of using family as a mode of analysis. It was sketched by John’s son, then nineteen-year-old William Bartram, who sometimes served as a substitute correspondent for his father, especially when illustrations were called for. Family labor thus created the drawing: John Bartram recruited his son to make it at Peter Collinson’s request, and then perhaps suggested edits to the finished product before mailing it to Collinson. Curiously, then, the result is a landscape devoid of communal efforts; the garden that pen-and-ink John Bartram stands in is obviously too

66 In response to the drawing, Peter Collinson wrote to John Bartram: “We are all much Entertained with thy draught of thy House and Garden the situation is most delightful and that for our plants is well chosen.” April 6, 1759 in Berkeley and Berkeley, Correspondence, 463.
vast for him to care for alone. And even if it were not too large for one lonely botanist to
care for, the walking stick John Bartram is grasping in the drawing reminds us that early
botanists often traveled far afield in search of diverse American flora. When he traveled,
Bartram left behind a garden in need of constant upkeep, not to mention the other tasks
related to an eighteenth century scientific workshop: correspondence, finances, record
keeping, and experiments. In short, William Bartram’s drawing represents – both through
what it depicts and what it omits – a botanist’s need for a competent, educated family
able to do botanical work as well as he. My project will sketch in the empty spaces
surrounding John Bartram in the drawing: a wife staring down two snakes here,
brandishing a hoe and simultaneously observing all she can to tell her husband later. A
daughter gathering silkworms from the mulberry trees by the river. A slave weeding in
the garden rows. Our understanding of American botany cannot be complete without the
addition of these laborers.

The family, as other scholars have suggested, was a unit that took many forms,
was of many sizes, and could extend to the household and beyond. It included people
who were related to one another, and some who were not. My essay revolves around
three families, of which the patriarchs were three botanist ‘savants:’ Cadwallader Colden,
William Byrd II, and John Bartram. The Colden, Byrd, and Bartram families included, on

67 Families themselves are a burgeoning mode of analysis in recent early American scholarship. In
their essay, “Introduction: Centering Families in Atlantic Histories,” Julie Hardwick, Sarah M.S.
Pearsall, and Karin Wulf point out that while the historiographical social turn included “demographic
studies and social historical approaches that treated family history as a subfield,” the cultural turn
“largely bypassed families and focused on selves or on other collective identities.” It is vital, they
argue, that historians again find ways to talk about families, as “invoking family as a category of
analysis opens up and complicates our understanding” of early modern history. Studying the ways in
which family members interact with each other and with economic, legal, ideological, and gender
structures can teach us about these structures, and about the choices people made within and against
them. Julie Hardwick, Sarah M. S. Pearsall and Karin Wulf, “Introduction: Centering Families in
Atlantic Histories” The William and Mary Quarterly 70 (2013): 205, 206, 211.
one level, the savants, their wives, and their children. In terms of botanical production, the boundaries of ‘family’ blurred into that of ‘household,’ which included servants and slaves who shared intimate domestic spaces and work with the family. The families I analyze also reached beyond the bounds of home and garden to relatives living in homes of their own. These extended families, as I will show, often formed kinship networks with each other, exchanging introductions, chaperoning each other’s visiting children, and sharing knowledge. ‘Family’ botanical labor, in this essay, includes the work of parents, children, extended relations (grandparents, grandchildren, aunts, cousins, in-laws), slaves, and servants.\(^{68}\)

I. The Coldens

The Colden family, headed by savant Cadwallader Colden (1688-1776), moved from New York City to a rural tract of land sixty miles north of Manhattan in 1727.\(^{69}\) There, Cadwallader intended the Colden family seat to be an isolated haven of intellectual labor, away from the corruption of town. In the bounds of this sanctuary, his family – assisted by slaves – labored over the garden and other scientific projects together. It was there, too, that the aging Cadwallader began to view his children and grandchildren differently: their labors were no longer simply supporting his botanical enterprises, but replacing them. Cadwallader groomed his descendants to be “proxies” for himself, and in turn, to be inheritors of his scientific legacy.

\(^{68}\) For the purposes of this essay and its clarity, and guided by the language used by the families I will discuss, I have chosen to define family thus. However, I am very much aware that ‘family’ is a nebulous concept. It is notoriously difficult to define, in large part because in the eighteenth century, just as now, people had diverse and ever-changing conceptions of their own families, as well as of other people’s families. These conceptions are often tricky to access, especially when paired with sometimes conflicting state and legal definitions of family.

Cadwallader and his wife, Alice Christy Colden, were both raised in Scotland, emigrating to British North America as young adults. Cadwallader received a degree from the University of Edinburgh before moving to London to study medicine, and then to Philadelphia to practice. He was inclined to a variety of intellectual and mechanical pursuits, including politics, mathematics, botany, medicine, philosophy, and printing. Alice Christy, meanwhile, is generally said to have “eagerly embrac[ed] new Enlightenment thought” as a young woman in Edinburgh. The Coldens moved to New York in 1718, after Cadwallader was promised the surveyor-generalship of the province, an appointment he received in 1720. Shortly thereafter, they moved to a rural New York property of 3,000 acres along the Hudson River, an area far enough from New York City to be considered an isolated wilderness.

It was here that Cadwallader envisioned a rural Eden of industry and harmony for his family. At first the land – which the family named Coldenham – was “the

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72 Meghan Roberts’s Sentimental Savants traces what she argues is a new kind of family workshop in early modern France. These workshops were characterized by the same ties of work and affection Cadwallader and his family exhibit in New York. Roberts argues that Enlightenment-era scholarly men began to see the virtues of family life, and to utilize these virtues in their knowledge production. Not only, then, were these scholars able to obtain free labor in this way, and to use their families as “testing ground[s] for larger social reforms,” but also they began to exhibit their affectionate family ties in their public lives as well. This affection became a public “self-fashioning tool,” a mark of good character and scientific authority. Cadwallader demonstrated this sort of self-fashioning when he wrote to Peter Collinson and others of his ideal family industry, noting to Collinson that his “chief pleasure, like yours, is in my own family, with my wife and children” and describing the intertwining of family harmony with industry. Meghan K. Roberts, Sentimental Savants: Philosophical Families in Enlightenment France (The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 9. Cadwallader Colden to Peter Collinson, May 1742 in Asa Gray, ed., Selections from the Scientific Correspondence of Cadwallader
habitation only of wolves and bears and other wild animals,” but with the Colden’s settlement, Cadwallader proclaimed that it became “no unfit habitation for a civilized family.” Indeed, a later history of Orange County, New York wrote, in grand tones that Cadwallader would likely have approved of, that “by talents, learning and industry … this family rose up like some mountain elevation, clad with the evergreens of wealth and adorned with the stately trees of honourable station.” And yet, Cadwallader also believed that Coldengham, in all its “wilderness, far from good schools, but [with] a valuable personal library” had the advantage of “free[ing] [his children] from many temptations to vice, to which youth is exposed in the city.” It was here that Cadwallader undertook to train his children to “provide for themselves by their own industry,” which he believed would “prove more advantageous to them than leaving such estates as that they can hope to live without thought or care.” Thus, it was the very “wilderness” of the area that made Coldengham desirable to Cadwallader, while at the same time driving his impulse to transform it into a fit place “for a civilized family.”

This ‘civilizing’ impulse and desire for family industry naturally extended to the Coldens’ garden. Cadwallader considered his botanical research to be “a route to prestige and sociability,” a route he wished to sustain, and if possible, to extend to his children. A well-tended garden was central to the Coldens’ botanical experiments and to Cadwallader’s “prestige” in the field; visitors such as the famed botanists Alexander

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Gray, Selections, 38.
Ibid, 37.
Ibid, 38.
Garden, John Bartram, and Peter Kalm had high expectations for the Coldens’ garden. Additionally, an impressive garden, even to non-scientist guests, represented an enlightened family. The Colden garden would have contrasted with the untamed fields and woods beyond the garden fence. It thus represented, with this dramatic visual contrast, a physical manipulation of nature, and, as a result, a conquering of nature into neat, labeled rows. Relatedly, gardens, and knowledge of the plants that grew within them, were both visible and discursive signals of status and respectability in the eighteenth century. Eye-catching, and especially exotic, plants represented wealth: the ability to acquire uncommon breeds. They also functioned as “conversation pieces, providing the pretext for elegant discussions.”

For men and women, the desire to elaborate with authority on the contents of their gardens motivated them to study rudimentary botany. Thus, knowledge of plants and an interest in collecting them was a well-established family pursuit in early America, one that Cadwallader formalized in his efforts to facilitate family industry at Coldengham.

The epistolary record demonstrates that all of the Coldens had a keen interest in the family garden. In her work Female Alliances, Amanda Herbert argues that this work was “often undertaken by elite women, aided by their servants.” However, she only notes the extent to which discussions of “Gardening and cultivation” occurred in circles of “female friends, relatives, and servants.”

Although the Colden family’s language suggests that Alice Colden was primarily responsible for overseeing the garden, it also

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79 William E. Burns, Science and Technology in Colonial America (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 141.
80 Ibid.
81 Amanda E. Herbert, Female Alliances: Gender, Identity, and Friendship (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 87.
reveals that the garden was a frequent source of conversation, and even intrigue, for all. In 1747, Cadwallader wrote to his wife that he had requested a Mr. Ellison to send “some Garden seeds from Mrs. Clinton.”82 In 1753, Jane Colden similarly mentions acquiring cuttings and seeds for her mother’s garden: “I am very glad … that you have been impoy’d in improving your Garden, as I know the pleasure you take in it would prevent your time seeming [page torn] to you, Mrs. Nicholls has promised me some Tuby [torn] Roots & I shall beg her for some, others kinds & [torn] Seeds.”83 In another instance, Alice’s son David teases his mother about her passion for her garden: “I suppose Madm you will long to see how rich Mr. Bartram has made your Garden, but all's now under ground, & we must wait next Spring to produce the fine Tulips Snow drops … you will be obliged to turn a good deal of the usefull things away to make roome for the Gaudy show, which I expect you will have next Summer”84 The reference to John Bartram’s visit reminds us that the Coldens’ garden had purposes beyond providing fruits, vegetables, and herbs for the family’s use; it was also a “Gaudy show,” a site of botanical experimentation that sometimes superseded “usefull” plants. These experiments were also under Alice and the children’s care, especially when Cadwallader was away.

A significant amount of labor, in the garden, the fields, and the home, was performed by the Coldens’ slaves. Cadwallader’s papers reveal that he purchased slaves several times, such as in 1721, when he ordered “‘two negro men about eighteen years of age’ for labor, and ‘a negro Girl of about thirteen years old … my wife has told you that

84 David to Alice Colden, September 10, 1754 in Ibid, 141-2.
she designes her Cheiffly to keep the children & to s[e]w."*85 The number of slaves the family owned increased over time, although Cadwallader often sold off individual slaves, deliberately separating families when he feared their intimacy would detract from their labors. In 1717, for instance, he sold a “good House Negro” to a buyer in Barbados because he had “several other of her Children which I value and I know if she should stay in this country she would spoil them.”86 While separation of slaves for this reason was not uncommon, it is notable that the value Cadwallader placed on his own family’s cooperative labor did not extend to his slaves’ families. His botanical work, however, likely did fall under his slaves’ purview. John Dixon notes that it is difficult to tell “how often slaves were employed as scientific assistants” at Coldengham. 87 However, speculation can fill in some of the gaps in the archive. We know for sure that after buying the Coldengham property, while he still lived in New York City, Cadwallader “left the management of his rural property to a ‘very good laborious carefull Slave.’”88 In another instance, we know that Cadwallader’s slaves assisted him in a medical experiment involving a bladder filled with corned beef. A slave “massage[d] the bag gingerly for thirty minutes” and then “pressed the bladder for a further two and a half hours” to replicate the movements of the stomach.89 And we know from above that Alice hired a “negro Girl” to “keep the children” and to sew. Given these instances of the Coldens’ reliance on slaves for other kinds of work, including scientific labor, it is reasonable to

88 Ibid, 84.
89 Ibid, 55.
assume that slaves would have shared the family’s botanical work as well. And although
the Coldens never explicitly mentioned doing so, Susan Scott Parrish points out that
botanists throughout the Atlantic World were aware of and relied upon slaves’ plant
knowledge, brought with them from Africa to the New World.90 It seems unlikely that the
Coldens would have failed to tap a source of knowledge so immediately available to
them.

“From his early fifties,” John Dixon notes, “Colden sought to pass down his
intellectual discoveries to his progeny.”91 “My children,” Cadwallader wrote, “give me
reasonable hopes of their doing well in the world, as they grow up, by their industry and
virtue.”92 Sara Stidstone Gronim notes that by the time the Coldens’ middle children were
young adults, “the family’s income yielded some degree of leisure for them all.”93 Likely
this leisure was enabled in part by the purchase of more slaves. But even as there was
more time for botanical pursuits, Cadwallader’s failing health made the family’s
assistance in these pursuits more vital than ever. Cadwallader felt himself too old to go
hunting for plants, and too blind to properly observe and categorize them, or to conduct
professional correspondence. Cadwallader needed “a proxy” to carry out the labor he
could no longer perform, and he famously chose his daughter Jane for the task.94 Jane’s
botanical skills, Gronim argues, “soon surpassed her father[‘s],” and as a result, she is
often credited with being America’s first female botanist.95 But Cadwallader’s son David

90 Parrish, American Curiosity, 1–23, 217–306.
92 Cadwallader Colden to Peter Collinson May 1742 in Gray, Selections, 38.
94 Ibid, 37.
95 This claim, common to many ‘firsts,’ contains a string of qualifiers, the most valid one being that
while women in British North America – including and preceded by Native American women – had
long practiced gardening, foraging, agriculture, and herbalism, all forms of botany in their own right,
Jane was the first woman to master formal Linnaean practices. Gronim, “What Jane Knew,” 33, 41.
also assisted his father, in large part by serving as his secretary. Several of Cadwallader’s surviving manuscripts are written – entirely, or in part – in David’s hand, including a draft of the 1747 edition of Cadwallader’s History of the Five Indian Nations. It was to David, consequently, whom Cadwallader bequeathed his books and manuscripts. Further, in a letter to Cadwallader in 1768, Peter Collinson paid his respects to “thy son David,” adding that “I shall be greatly obliged to him for the information he intends me on the Rattlesnake.” This suggests that David, beyond copying and transcribing Cadwallader’s ideas, also sent his own observations of the natural world to Cadwallader’s correspondents.

As his children grew and had children of their own, Cadwallader increasingly looked to his grandchildren as vessels for his scientific legacy. To memorialize his life and work, and to demonstrate its continuation through his descendants, Cadwallader commissioned two portraits of two of his grandchildren (Figures 2 and 3, both on page 45) in the 1770s. His daughter Jane, whom he had once considered to be his scientific inheritor, had died a decade earlier. John Dixon observes that “In both images, [Cadwallader] is seated at a desk, beside scientific papers and equipment, and next to a

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97 Ibid, ix.
99 Peter Collinson to Cadwallader Colden, February 10, 1768 in Gray, Selections, 49.
100 Dixon, Enlightenment of Cadwallader Colden, 99.
101 When Jane married at the age of thirty-four, her father “assumed her marriage would end her botany, as if he imagined that, having left his household, she would no longer do the work of his household.” We don’t know what Jane’s intentions were regarding the continuation of her botanical work. She might have found a new patron in her husband, a widower who was a friend of botanists Alexander Garden and Charles Alston. But at least in the year she was married, before passing away shortly after her child was born, there is no evidence that Jane continued to study plants. Gronim, “What Jane Knew”, 49. Sara S. Gronim, “Ambiguous Empire: The Knowledge of the Natural World in British Colonial New York” (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 1999), 216n.
grandchild.” Zara Anishanslin adds that the differences between the portraits “express
gendered ideas about what was appropriate for men and women to pursue in the world of
transatlantic Enlightenment thinking and science.” While Figure 2 depicts a grandson
being educated in “math and astronomy,” Anishanslin argues, the unidentified
granddaughter in Figure 3 “wears Spitalfields flowered silk and holds a basket of
cherries,” implying the “suitability women had for botanical studies.” Anishanslin
suggests that depicting his granddaughter “connected to flowered silk and plants might
also have been Colden’s homage to her aunt and his daughter, Jane.” This is perhaps
true, but “botanical studies” is not all Cadwallader thought his granddaughter “suitable”
for. In the same portrait of Cadwallader and his granddaughter, Dixon notes that “a copy
of [Cadwallader’s] Principles [of Action in Matter] lies open, next to works of Newton
and ciceron, as well as a seventeenth-century physician, Lazare Rivière.” Thus, his
granddaughter may be wearing and carrying evidence of botanical pursuits, but
Cadwallader’s tight grasp of her hand and the scientific books at his side suggest that she
is also to be educated in other subjects as well, subjects similar to the ones his grandson
will study. Further, her very visage – painted to be nearly identical to Cadwallader’s own
– suggests that in his granddaughter he saw his own image; a scientific legacy projected
onto her countenance. The elderly Cadwallader demonstrated, through these portraits,
that family was vital to botanical production not only for the labor they contributed to the
savant’s intellectual projects, but also for their ability to bear his scientific legacy.

102 Dixon, Enlightenment of Cadwallader Colden, 102.
103 Zara Anishanslin, Portrait of a Woman in Silk: Hidden Histories of the British Atlantic World
(New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 97.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
106 Dixon, Enlightenment of Cadwallader Colden, 102.
Figure 2. Matthew Pratt (1734-1805), 
_Cadwallader Colden and His Grandson Warren DeLancey_. ca 1772. 
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, USA.

Figure 3. Matthew Pratt (1734-1805), 
_Cadwallader Colden and His Grandson Warren DeLancey_. ca 1772. 
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, USA.
II. The Byrds

The Byrds’ contributions to botanical knowledge were characterized, to a greater degree than the other families in this study, by transnational kinship ties and slavery. Kinship ties facilitated William Byrd II’s education, gained him introductions to savants abroad, and, ultimately, secured his membership in the Royal Society. These were advantages that were available to the Byrds on a much larger scale than to the Coldens or Bartrams. The Coldens and Bartrams – of New York and Philadelphia, respectively – were well off. They were financially stable enough, at least in the latter half of the savants’ lives, to own a few slaves and hire servants and laborers. The Byrd family, in contrast, was extremely wealthy, an old, well-known family in the Virginia’s planter class. These grand circumstances impacted the dynamics of the Byrd family workshop; rather than relying on his wife and children to assist in his botanical work, William Byrd II (1674-1744) relied upon slaves and servants.

In part due to his wealth and to a colonial tradition of sending sons – especially eldest sons – to be educated in England, but also in part due to kinship ties – and the introductions those ties enabled – William Byrd II was able to join elite scientific circles in London. Although both the Coldens and the Bartrams joined these networks remotely through a transatlantic exchange of letters, manuscripts, and natural specimens, Byrd II’s family connections enabled him to do so in person, and at the beginning of his career. William Byrd II’s father, William Byrd I (ca. 1652–1704), had an interest in natural science, and was associated with the Temple Coffee House Botany Club in London.107 A

107 “Byrd II” throughout this section refers to William Byrd II. This is done to distinguish him from his father, William Byrd I, and his son, William Byrd III. William Byrd I appeared – if not by name then by implication – in the records of the Royal Society throughout the 1690s. In 1694, the Society “received a live rattlesnake with fifteen rattles from ‘Coll.
fellow club member and naturalist was Dr. Hans Sloane, whom Byrd II later corresponded with, likely at the introduction of his father.\textsuperscript{108} Byrd I’s Virginia estate’s location, on the cusp of the frontier, attracted visitors who wished to study Virginia’s flora and fauna. Byrd I encouraged these pursuits, hosting at least two known botanists: the Reverends John Banister and John Clayton. Banister – and likely others – would have visited the estate when Byrd II was a child, perhaps sparking the boy’s own interest in botany.\textsuperscript{109} William Byrd II’s formal education was conducted abroad; at age seven or eight, he was sent to England to be schooled in the care of his maternal grandfather, Warham Horsmanden.\textsuperscript{110} In this way, although they lived far from the Byrd seat in Henrico County, Virginia, his mother’s family was able to have a stake in the boy’s education.

When he grew to adulthood, Byrd II’s father’s family enabled another sort of education for him – an introduction to the world of learned gentlemen. Sir Robert Southwell, a connection of his father’s, acted as the twenty-two-year-old Byrd II’s sponsor for his petition to join the Royal Society. Southwell held such clout – he was president of the Royal Society from 1690 to 1695 – and young Byrd II showed such promise, that he was accepted into the Society in April 1696, making a highly unusual addition to a group of middle-aged and elderly gentlemen.\textsuperscript{111} Introducing his son to

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid, 482.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid, 481.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid. As a testament to the closeness between Byrd and Southwell, part of Byrd’s (probably self-written) epitaph reads: “under the care and direction of Sir Robert Southwell/He made a happy proficiency in polite and varied learning./By means of the same noble friend, He was introduced to the

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Southwell, and in turn to the world of botanical study, was partly self-serving for Byrd I. Byrd I’s estate contained a large, beloved garden (considered today to be one of the “best-documented late seventeenth-century plantation garden[s]”), and his son’s new connections in England likely allowed him to send English plants home for his father’s garden. In this way, Byrd II’s education was not merely one of preparation; it was also one of convenience for his father’s botanical pursuits. In his own right, Kevin Joel Berland notes that later, the “abundance of natural history detail in his dividing line narratives indicates Byrd [II]’s commitment to the empirical mission of the Royal Society.” These webs of family connection and introduction that allowed young men to be educated abroad – both in school and in business experience and gentlemanly pursuits – were hardly uncommon. However, historians have not yet tied them to direct enablement of botanical interest, study, and production in the American colonies. Through his parents, their families, and the friendships enabled by his parentage, Byrd II was able to make a “happy proficiency” in the study of plants, and to bring it back to Virginia, where he began conducting experiments of his own.

A line of Byrd II’s likely self-written epitaph dubs him a “splendid economist and prudent father of a family.” As “prudent” might imply, unlike the Coldens and Bartrams, there is little evidence in Byrd II’s diaries and letters of his affection for his wife and children. His references to his wife, Lucy Parke, suggest “that she was less of a

113 Berland, Dividing Line Histories, 8.
114 Berland, ed., The Dividing Line Histories, 3-4n.
115 Berland, Dividing Line Histories, 3.
companion with whom he was emotionally engaged than a subordinate (and sometime insubordinate) figure whom he expected to dominate in the household and in bed.”

One of Byrd II’s diary entries notes that he and his wife quarreled when she wished to send for a neighbor to lend her a slave. Dryly, Byrd II wrote: “She threatened to kill herself but had more discretion.” A few days later, they quarreled over his wife “pulling her brows. She threatened she would not go to Williamsburg if she might not pull them; I refused, however, and got the better of her, and maintained my authority.”

Frequently, the subject of their quarrels was his wife “refusing” to attend a dinner or other social event. Thus, more than desiring, as Cadwallader Colden did, a domestic life that was harmonious, industrious, and affectionate, Byrd II sought an obedient wife who did not intervene in his work or decisions, allowing him to “maintain [his] authority,” except for public appearances, where a show of family unity was of the upmost importance.

Byrd II also considered himself to be the absolute ruler of his plantation – and, by extension – of his botanical workshop made up of slaves and paid laborers. In his correspondence, he fashioned himself as the head of an idealized pastoral community. In a letter to his friend Lord Orrery, Byrd II wrote:

Like one of the patriarchs, I have my flocks and my herds, my bond-men, and bond-women, and every sort of trade amongst my own servants, so

119 Lucy “pulling” her eyebrows probably referred to plucking hairs from them.
120 Berland, Dividing Line Histories, 30.
that I live in a kind of independance on every one, but Providence. However tho’ this sort of life is ... attended with a great deal of trouble. I must take care to keep all my people to their duty, to set all the springs in motion, and to make every one draw his equal share to carry the machine forward. But then tis an amusement in this silent country, and a continual exercise of our patience and oeconomy. 121

This passage emphasizes the loneliness Byrd felt in “this silent country,” where, as he lamented, in another letter, “we have not some people of skil and curiousity amonst us.” 122 Far from the London and Royal Society of his young adulthood, Byrd felt himself a displaced intellectual trapped amongst “bond-men” and “bond-women” with whom he must constantly “exercise ... patience.” Simultaneously, however, the passage emphasizes the extent to which Byrd relied on his slaves and paid laborers. Westover plantation, during William Byrd II’s dominion, included 179,000 acres of agriculture, gardens, as well as related businesses: mills, fisheries, warehouses, and a store. 123 Hundreds of slaves, paid overseers, and tradespeople were required to run his estate, and it was this extended household Byrd II depended upon to support his botanical research.

In the habit of sending “natural productions” to his colleagues in the Royal Society, Byrd II alternated between using “we” and using “I” to speak of his botanical labors. Of course his correspondents knew he owned slaves, and knew, by extension, that when Byrd II referred to physical labor, he likely referred to their efforts rather than his own. Byrd II’s use of “we” or “servants” may have been intended to remind his correspondent that he himself was above laboring in the garden. But the “I,” for Byrd II –

my garden, my experiments – emphasized that his household’s efforts were only possible under the authority of its enlightened patriarch.\footnote{This alternation of disclosure and non-disclosure of one’s assistants is similar to that of Robert Boyle and his “invisible technicians,” as described by Steven Shapin, \textit{A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century} England (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 355-407.} The alternation of “we” and “I” is demonstrated in Byrd II’s letters to Sloane regarding “Rattle-snake Root.” In a letter dated April 20 1706, Byrd II wrote,

I have herewith sent a small box of the Root, with which the Indians us’d to cure the bite of a Rattle-Snake. And all the Traders which we send several hundreds of miles to traffick with the Indians, find it constantly to cure their horses, when they happen to be bit. I my Self have Servants that have try’d it often, and never knew it miss.\footnote{Byrd and Sloane, "Letters," 188.}

Years later, in a letter dated May 31, 1737, Byrd II informed Sloane that a Virginia physician, John Tennent, has “made many successful Tyals of One Species of Our Rattlesnake Root He has found it almost a Specifick in Pleurisys, which are the most fatal of all Deseases in this Clymate amongst the Negros & Poor Peoples.”\footnote{Ibid, 195.} In 1708, Byrd II wrote, with a brave amount of detail, “Our Common snake-root … restores the vigour of the Stomach effectually. At my first arrival here I was troubled with a violent diarraea, which no medicine would cure but I took this, and then I was cur’d presently, & have continued well ever since.”\footnote{Ibid, 190.} And then in 1741, Byrd II “called upon my own Experience” to recommend Rattlesnake Root for “Pleurisy, the Rheumatism, and easing of Pain in any part that proceeds from Inflamation.”\footnote{Ibid, 199.} Through these instances, we can see the degree to which Byrd relied upon his household for botanical knowledge; in this case, for the curative powers of Rattlesnake Root. Although Byrd II also drew upon “my
own Experience,” which lent credence to his recommendation, he also used others’
experience to provide additional case studies for his correspondents; he referenced
instance after instance of the root helping others in his household, especially his inferiors.

Although Byrd II seemed willing enough to rely upon the experience of his
household “Servants,” “Negros,” and “Poor Peoples,” in order for them to help him with
scientific collecting and cataloging, partial initiation into the intellectual work of a savant
was required. Two letters to Byrd II from James Petiver suggest that entrusting part of the
work of botanical knowledge production to slaves or paid servants meant offering them a
basic botanical education. Petiver wrote,

Obleige one of yr Servants to goe into the Fields & Woods with a Quire of
Brown Paper, (shapt into a Booke) in wch let him put the Sprigs of wt.
ever Tree, Bush or Herb he meets with … pray let him know, that the most
common Rush Grass, Moss, Thistle or vilest Weed they can gather will be
as acceptable as a finer plant, so that if they but fill the books & lay them
smooth, they cannot send amiss, Especially if you please Sr to oblige
thmm for the 3 or 4 first Weekes to go different ways & not oftener to one
place then once a Month, they would then meet with greater variety …

This, of course, was only a recommendation from Petiver. It is impossible to know for
sure whether Byrd II followed his advice, but given Byrd II’s willingness to include his
servants’ and slaves’ knowledge in the previous reports on Rattlesnake Root, it seems
likely that he would have employed their assistance in gathering plants as well. This
would suggest that slaves’ and servants’ participation in botanic projects was hardly
uninformed or restricted to the labor of gardening. Although many of Byrd II’s slaves
already knew of the properties of some local plants, as we saw in their use of Rattlesnake

129 Berkeley and Berkeley, "The Most Common Rush or Vilest Weed,” Virginia Magazine of History
and Biography, 493.
Root, by providing them with detailed instructions related to collecting and preserving botanical specimens, Byrd II recognized their existing abilities while simultaneously formalizing these abilities to fit into his scientific workshop.

While Byrd II’s extended family granted him access to scientific circles abroad, and his father’s support for botany influenced his own interest in it, Byrd II’s own ‘nuclear’ family – his wife and children – were largely and deliberately left out of Byrd II’s botanical work, allowing him to imagine himself the “prudent” father of a submissive home. To maintain this vision, Byrd II looked to his household slaves to perform the labors required for his botanical pursuits. This, however, unwittingly compromised Byrd II’s patriarchal vision; by training his slaves to do this enlightened work, Byrd II risked elevating their status above that of “bond-men” and “bond-women.”

III. The Bartrams

From his farm in Pennsylvania, perhaps at a desk near the window in his study that overlooked the garden, John Bartram added a postscript to his letter to Peter Collinson, which had thus far been a discussion of “The Rattle-Snake’s Power of Charming.”

“My wife observed two Snakes pretty near together in my Yard …” he wrote. It is possible that the postscript was simply a thought that occurred to Bartram after he finished the body of the letter and made his signature. Its first sentence suggests a continuation of his previous discussion, as it begins, “What is further observable of


\[131\] Ibid, 40.
Snakes is ….” It is also possible that Bartram intended his wife’s observation to appear as a separate, but important, piece of knowledge to share with Collinson.\(^\text{132}\) What we can glean, regardless, is the extent to which John Bartram’s botanical work was enabled by and dependent upon his family.

In contrast to Cadwallader Colden’s characterization of his botany as “a route to prestige and sociability,” and to Byrd II’s depiction of himself as king of an obedient serfdom, John Bartram frequently cast himself – somewhat falsely – as a poor farmer. In his time, Bartram was one of the most widely-lauded American botanists.\(^\text{133}\) Hardly ‘poor,’ in 1723 Bartram inherited a 200-acre farm from his paternal grandmother and uncle.\(^\text{134}\) Five years later, after the death of his first wife, Mary, Bartram purchased a new piece of land – 102 acres – on the banks of the Schuylkill River for £145, a property he continued to add acreage to throughout his life.\(^\text{135}\) The site lay – and lies to this day – in Kingsessing Township, just outside Philadelphia. Perhaps foreseeing the beginning of a long family legacy, Bartram marked his new stone house with an inscription: “JOHN X ANN:BARTRAM:1721.”\(^\text{136}\)

Bartram’s self-styled “low fortune in the world” included, from an early age, an interest in plants.”\(^\text{137}\) He often alluded, however, to having had little formal training in the natural sciences: “[I had] A great inclination to botany & natural history but could not make much improvement therein for [want] of books or other instruction,” he wrote in a

\(^\text{132}\) Ibid, 38-40.
\(^\text{133}\) Ibid, 3.
\(^\text{135}\) Ibid, 18, 27.
\(^\text{136}\) Ibid, 19.
\(^\text{137}\) John Bartram to Peter Collinson, May 1, 1764 in Berkeley and Berkeley, Correspondence, 627.
1742 letter to Alexander Catcott.\textsuperscript{138} Susan Parrish argues that maintaining his self-taught, impecunious persona was a crucial part of Bartram’s success: “Colonial men of lower rank (such as John Bartram) … having no secure epistemological profile in London, were paradoxically more at liberty to impress the curious metropolitan world as prodigies peculiar to and produced by America.”\textsuperscript{139} Unlike Byrd II and Colden, whose rank and kinship ties granted them entrance into scholarly circles, Bartram had to secure his own introductions, based on the merits of his work and the “peculiarity” of his home-grown persona. His frequent mentions of his wives’ and children’s labors in the family garden fed that persona. In the same short biography written for Alexander Catcott, Bartram wrote that his “low fortune in the world … laid me under the necessity of very hard labour for the support of my family having now a wife & seven small children whose subsitance [sic] depends on the produce that is raised on my farm …”\textsuperscript{140} Bartram did not consider botany to be hobby work; he portrayed it as a much-needed source of income that his family relied on. His emphasis on his relatively humble background, and the extent to which he took to science not as a vaunted pursuit, but a mode of breadwinning, was vital to the fashioning of his scientific authority.

Bartram was married twice: to Mary Maris – the snake wrangler – in 1723, and after Mary died in 1727, to Ann Mendenhall in 1729.\textsuperscript{141} His letters are peppered with references to his “wife,” although the snake observation is the lengthiest one. It is clear,

\textsuperscript{138} John Bartram to Alexander Catcott, May 26, 1742 in ibid, 193-4.
\textsuperscript{139} Parrish, \textit{American Curiosity}, 197.
\textsuperscript{140} John Bartram to Alexander Catcott, May 26, 1742 in Berkeley and Berkeley, \textit{Correspondence}, 193-4.
overall, that “Mrs. Bartram” (usually referring to Ann), was heavily involved in Bartram’s work, even maintaining the garden and business while Bartram was away from home collecting plant specimens. For instance, Bartram wrote in one letter to Collinson: “When I was down in Virginia my wife sent a box of all spice berries which I had with some expense of time collected being most of what I could find about where I live, and for 20 miles distance.” This shows that Bartram’s wife was trusted to handle what was obviously a valued collection; perhaps meant to be sold to a customer there as part of Bartram’s lucrative, transatlantic seed business. Collinson, in turn, revealed in his letters to Bartram that he was familiar with Bartram’s wife, not only from Bartram’s mentions of her, but because she handled Bartram’s business while he was away, including his correspondence. “I am much obliged to thy good Wife for her kind Letter in thy Absence,” Collinson wrote to Bartram in 1738, alluding to Bartram’s aforementioned time in Virginia. In evaluating other people’s gardens in 1738, Bartram further noted the value of a capable wife to botanical work:

thair gardens is poorly furnished with Curiosities[.] John Clatons & Col Byrds is the best furnished with A variety of plants but falls short of our in pensilvania which is supplied from England france Holland & Germany[.] Col Byrd is very prodigal in Gates roads walks hedges & seeders trimmed finely & A little green house with 2 or 3 [orange] trees with the fruit on but I saw very few that had a good notion of either good husbandry or house wifery…

142 John Bartram to Peter Collinson, December 10, 1738 in Berkeley and Berkeley, Correspondence, 105.
144 Peter Collinson to John Bartram, January 26, 1738 in Berkeley and Berkeley, Correspondence, 107.
145 John Bartram to Peter Collinson, July 18, [1739] in ibid, 121.
It is a play on words, but Bartram’s mention of good “house wifery,” interplayed with “good husbandry” – which could denote either the cultivation of plants or matrimonial happiness – reveals that he believed the two to be tied to successful gardening. It was the lack of partnership between the husband and wife, in short, that was one of the reasons why “thair gardens” – including Byrd II’s, which Mrs. Byrd would not have tended – fell short of “our in pensilvania,” where Ann’s competent touch could be seen in nearly every aspect.

One of Bartram’s children, William, went on to become a famous botanist in his own right, and even as a child and young adult showed interest in botany. While traveling, many of Bartram’s letters home were to “Billy,” directing him to plant this or that in the Philadelphia garden. In an amusing instance, Bartram wrote a long, direction-filled letter to twenty-six-year-old William, ending with “I have sent thee for thy further encouragement two guineas … & shall remain thy loveing father.”146 This is an apt reminder that not all family members – especially not, perhaps, grown children – were always eager to participate in the family business. Besides William, Bartram had several other sons who contributed to the family seed business, and in turn, went on to work in related fields: Moses and Isaac became apothecaries, James and Benjamin became farmers, and both William and John Jr. continued to run the Bartram botanic garden and nursery.147 His daughter Elizabeth, too, undertook botanical projects. Of her, he wrote in

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146 John Bartram to William Bartram, April 9, 1777 in ibid, 665. While William was commonly acknowledged to be a brilliant naturalist and illustrator, his fortitude was often called into question. In 1766, Henry Laurens wrote to John Bartram regarding William Bartram: “Possibly, sir, your son, though a worthy, ingenious man, may not have resolution, or not that sort of resolution, that is necessary to encounter the difficulties incident to, and unavoidable in his present state of life. You and I, probably, could surmount all those hardships without much chagrin.” August 9, 1766, ibid, 672.  
147 Fry, “John Bartram House and Garden,” 27.
a letter to Benjamin Franklin: “My daughter Elizabeth hath saved several thousands of
eggs of silkworms which she expects will hatch in a few days she intends to give them A
fair tryal this spring.”\textsuperscript{148} Because Bartram described Elizabeth’s work, predictions, and
intentions, he gives us the impression that Elizabeth had some autonomy over her
silkworm project. She probably undertook it as part of her father’s botanical experiments,
and possibly under his direction, but Bartram did not mention this. Instead, he merely
noted her progress, emphasizing her independence within the purview of the family
workshop.

How slaves fit into the Bartram family workshop is a complex, contested
question.\textsuperscript{149} Tax records for Kingsessing Township note that at different times, Bartram
and his sons John Jr. and James – to whom Bartram gave large portions of his farm when
they grew to adulthood – were in possession of several “servants.”\textsuperscript{150} It is not clear
whether these “servants” were slaves or paid laborers. Popular conceptions of the
Bartram farm and slavery were colored by the 1782 publication of J.H. St. John de
Crevecoeur’s \textit{Letters from an American Farmer}. The book contains a chapter, written by
Crevecoeur under the guise of a Russian tourist, called “Letter XI - From Mr. IW--N AL-

\textsuperscript{148} John Bartram to Benjamin Franklin, April 29, 1771 in Berkeley and Berkeley, \textit{Correspondence},
739.

\textsuperscript{149} Despite the debates on slavery swirling about in his scientific network, and, closer to home, in his
Quaker community, Bartram seldom commented on the matter. Nonetheless, there is evidence that
Bartram was in favor of slavery, and or at least took part in its perpetuation. In 1776, Bartram sent a
number of slaves from Charleston to his son William, then residing in St. Augustine. In his letter to
William, Bartram notes that he has learned that “new” slaves – that is, those recently arrived in
America – made for better servants, “as [they] yet not having learnt the mischievous practices of the
negroes born in the country and town.”\textsuperscript{149} As a result of this knowledge, Bartram shipped a number of
“new” slaves to William, noting that an exception, Flora, would be all right, as “her master and mistris
solemnly declares [her] to be incorrupted with the vices of the town.” Berkeley and Berkeley,
\textit{Correspondence}, 661-2.

\textsuperscript{150} Francis D. West and John Bartram, “John Bartram and Slavery,” \textit{The South Carolina Historical
-Z, A Russian; Describing the Visit He Paid at My Request To Mr. John Bertram, The Celebrated Pennsylvania Botanist.”¹⁵¹ The chapter opens with “Mr. I W--N AL--Z” arriving at the Bartram farm, where “on a new-made bank … ten men were at work.”¹⁵² Later on, when the visitor sits down to lunch with the household, he notes that at the “long table full of victuals … at the lowest part sat his negroes, his hired men were next, then the family and myself; and at the head, the venerable father and his wife presided.”¹⁵³ When the visitor comments later on this harmonious scene, Bartram explains:

> Though our erroneous prejudices and opinions once induced us to look upon them as fit only for slavery … With us they are now free. I give those whom thee didst see at my table, eighteen pounds a year, with victuals and clothes, and all other privileges which white men enjoy … I taught mine to read and write; they love God, and fear his judgments. The oldest person among them transacts my business in Philadelphia, with a punctuality, from which he has never deviated. They constantly attend our meetings, they participate in health and sickness, infancy and old age, in the advantages our society affords.¹⁵⁴

Although most of Crevecoeur’s descriptions of the Bartram home and garden ring true, some scholars, including Frances D. West, question the extent to which John Bartram’s finances would have allowed him to “take care of his slaves in such a matter.”¹⁵⁵ Moreover, records indicate that Bartram did not own a “servant” in 1769, when Crevecoeur visited; the 7 “servants” were in the households of his sons James and John

¹⁵³ Ibid, 249-50.
¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 262-3.
Perhaps they were on loan to Bartram to work on the “new-made bank,” but if that is the case, why would Bartram speak of them as if they were his own, paid out of his pocket, rather than his sons’? It is impossible to say.

What we can know, is that just as Bartram fashioned himself into a self-made scientist; a humble farmer of prodigal success, so *American Farmer* perpetuated that image. Crevecoeur’s description of Bartram and his family workshop was one of racial harmony. William Byrd II deliberately invoked his slaves and servants to paint a scene of patriarchy and pastoral opulence, but Bartram masked the extent to which he relied upon the enslaved. As Benjamin Franklin allowed the French to mistake him for a Quaker, aware that “Paris admired the sect for its gentle and resolute merits,” so John Bartram, with the help of anecdotes from his family life, fashioned his professional image into one of guileless Quaker morality.157

**IV. Conclusion**

These are but three families in a web of botanical knowledge production that strung between the Americas and Europe in the eighteenth century. By employing families and households as analytical categories, this project has, I hope, shown that there is new insight to be found in the early modern project of categorizing the natural world. Even within eighteenth century botany alone, there is more comparative work to be done, more pulling forth of wives, daughters, slaves, and other kin and household members from the scientific correspondence and notes of male botanists, and from the material objects and spaces that surrounded them. What, for instance, were the motivations of those family members who entrusted their lives— and their livelihoods— to the generation

156 Ibid, 116.
of botanical knowledge; knowledge that they were often not in control of or credited for? When Mary Bartram stared down two thrashing snakes for the sake of her husband’s research, did she understand herself to be part of a larger, nobler pursuit; of understanding, and perhaps even conquering, the natural world? Or did she merely find herself caught up in a project led by her husband, in which her family’s future was bound up? Finally, by answering these questions, we may find that as families picked, labeled, and synthesized the flora of the New World, they also imagined their relationships with each other in new ways.
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