

**“HITCHED TO A STEAM ENGINE”
MARRIAGE AND CRISES OF GENDER AT PARK CHURCH
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY ELMIRA, NEW YORK**

A Thesis

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Bridget Reddick

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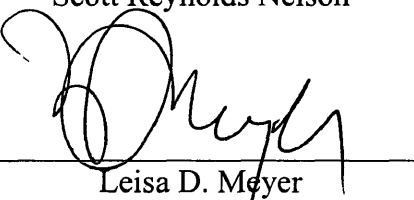
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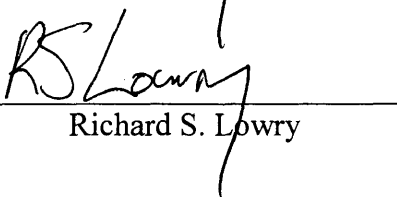

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ABSTRACT

The following portrait of Thomas and Julia Beecher’s marriage, religious work, and place in their community is an attempt to explore several areas of historiography by focusing on a few individuals whose lives intersected with many cultural forces in a time of great change.

The small city of Elmira, New York, where the Beechers built their ministry at Park Congregational Church, remained agricultural and small until after the Civil War when it became a hinterland center of business and business agriculture. The story of Thomas Beecher’s first wife, her death, and his subsequent marriage to her friend, Julia Jones, illustrates the nineteenth century practice of “romantic friendships” between women, as well as the perceived sexual potential of those relationships. This thesis also looks at friendships between men and women as a bridge between what other historians have described as separate, emotional, gendered spheres, and at attitudes towards sex and love. By examining friendships that brought men and women together, and at the prevailing idea that sex without love, even within marriage, was considered impure, it is possible to further demonstrate that the ideological separation of spheres described in nineteenth-century rhetoric did not accurately describe the lives of many.

The creation of the Park Church and its mission of Christian socialism, championed by the Beechers, and the ways in which the Beechers compromised with the members of their communities to challenge gendered ideals illustrates that this community, like other small-town communities, contained the seeds of some of the most influential movements of later decades. Rather than beginning in urban areas and radiating out into more rural areas, economic and cultural changes could begin in communities like Elmira.

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Introduction

Detailed biographies of individuals, biographies which pay special attention to close readings of texts of all kinds, help to question, complicate, and provide evidence to support or contradict theories of cultural and economic development in nineteenth-century America. The following portrait of Thomas and Julia Beecher's marriage, religious work, and place in their community is an attempt to explore several areas of historiography by focusing on a few individuals whose lives intersected with many cultural forces in a time of great change that continues to influence American culture and history today. Victorian sexuality, love, friendship, sublimation of emotion in religion, social mission, and eventually politics can be connected to each small town and each individual relationship of the nineteenth century. By first creating pictures, as accurate as possible, of the lives of individuals, stories about the entire nation and nineteenth-century world can be brought into better focus.

Chapter One: “Perhaps Unusual”:
Elmira in the Nineteenth-Century

If we made a tour through space ourselves, might we not, in some remote era of the future, meet & greet the first lagging rays of stars that started on their weary visit to us a million years ago? – rays that are outcast & homeless now, their parent stars crumbled to nothingness & swept from the firmament five hundred thousand years after these journeying rays departed – stars whose peoples lived their little lives, & laughed & wept, hoped & feared, sinned & perished, bewildering ages since these vagrant twinklings went wandering through the solemn solitudes of space?

– Mark Twain, in an 1869 letter to his fiancée, Olivia Langdon, who lived in Elmira, New York¹

Scholars who have written about the history of Elmira, New York have generally done so for one of two reasons: one, the Civil War prison camp erected there, recently dubbed the “death camp of the north”; or two, Mark Twain.² Twain’s wife, Olivia Langdon, was born and raised in Elmira and those interested in her husband’s life and work have showered attention on her hometown. Since only a few decades after Twain’s death, Elmira’s character has been the subject of debate. Some have insisted Elmira was a provincial backwater, and others have been firmly committed to a history of liberalist progress representing the vibrancy of the small city. In 1933, Van Wyck Brooks wrote, in The Ordeal of Mark Twain,

Perhaps you know Elmira? Perhaps, in any case, you can imagine it? Those ‘up-State’ towns have a civilization all their own; without the traditions of moral

¹ Susan K. Harris, The Courtship of Olivia Langdon and Mark Twain (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 53.

² Michael Horigan, Elmira: Death Camp of the North (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 2002).

freedom and intellectual culture which New England has never quite lost, they had been so salted down with the spoils of a conservative industrial life that they had attained by the middle of the nineteenth century, a social stratification as absolute as that of New England itself. A stagnant fresh-water aristocracy... ruled the roost, imposing upon all the rest of society its own type, forcing all to submit to it or imitate it.³

The economic and cultural development of the rest of small-town America has been similarly characterized by historian Robert Wiebe. Brooks's stunted, provincial Elmira fits among Wiebe's "island communities," isolated and provincial towns who resisted the modernization pressed upon them by the more advanced urban areas. However, Brooks's description was not accepted by all Elmirans, nor was it ultimately accepted by other scholars. Max Eastman disagreed with Brooks in print only five years later when his essay "Mark Twain's Elmira" appeared in Harper's Magazine in 1938.⁴

Max and Crystal Eastman moved with their parents to Elmira in 1894 when their mother, Annis Ford Eastman, became associate pastor in Thomas K. Beecher's Park Church, the church to which Mark Twain's in-laws belonged. Both Eastman children grew up to leave Elmira for New York City's Greenwich Village; they were both well-known radicals, socialists, and activists who supported many causes, lived communally with other activists for much of their adult lives, and were at the center of a network of both male and female social reformers. They both wrote and published prolifically about their political views. Crystal Eastman graduated from Vassar College and later received a

³ Van Wyck Brooks, The Ordeal of Mark Twain (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1933) as quoted in Max Eastman, Heroes I Have Known: Twelve Who Lived Great Lives (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1942) 108-09. Also referred to in Laura Skandera-Trombley, Mark Twain in the Company of Women (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994) 66-67.

⁴ Robert H. Wiebe, The Search for Order, 1877-1920 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967) see especially 54, 67, 84, 133. For Eastman's essay see Robert D. Jerome and Herbert A. Wisbey, Jr., Mark Twain in Elmira (Elmira, New York: Mark Twain Society, Inc., 1977) "Mark Twain's Elmira," Harper's Magazine, 176 (1938): 620-32, entire essay reprinted, 129-147, for bibliographic information on the essay see 166. The essay was reprinted in 1942, with minor changes, in Eastman's book, Heroes I Have Known: Twelve Who

masters degree in sociology from Columbia and a law degree from New York University. Her work helped establish one of the first workers' compensation laws in the United States.⁵

Crystal and Max Eastman were well-known and wrote about their childhood experiences in order to establish their radical heritage as well as to explain their unusual lifestyles and political views. In 1927, before Brooks's book had appeared, Max Eastman's sister, Crystal Eastman, had published an anonymous essay about her childhood years in Elmira, in which she said, "The little city where we lived was perhaps unusual."⁶ Max Eastman went further and, in his criticism of Brooks, asserted that when Mark Twain came to Elmira in 1869 he arrived in an "extraordinary cultural situation," a situation to which Max Eastman could speak because he believed the Elmira of 1894 was relatively unchanged from the time of Twain's 1869 arrival.⁷ In truth, the "cultural situation" in which the Eastman children grew up was somewhat extraordinary, especially compared to the town in which it was located.

From 1828, when Newtown, New York was renamed Elmira, until the end of the nineteenth century, the town's population grew from 1,246 to over 35,000. New York State as a whole experienced a similar population boom between the 1780s and 1820s.

Lived Great Lives. References to and quotes from the essay come from the 1942 edition. See also Eastman, Heroes I Have Known, 108-09 for discussion Van Wyck Brooks.

⁵ Blanch Wiesen Cook, "Introduction" to Crystal Eastman, Crystal Eastman on Women and Revolution, Blanch Wiesen Cook, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) see especially 6. Nancy F. Cott described Crystal Eastman as "a feminist-pacifist-socialist lawyer and cultural radical" when discussing her participation in the National Women's Party, "Feminist Politics in the 1920s: The National Women's Party," Journal of American History 71 (June 1984): 48. See also Blanche Wiesen Cook, "Female Support Networks and Political Activism: Lillian Wald, Crystal Eastman, Emma Goldman," in A Heritage of Her Own: Toward a New Social History of American Women, ed. Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979) 412-44, see especially 413-15.

⁶ Eastman, Crystal Eastman on Women and Revolution, Cook, ed., 45.

⁷ Eastman, Heroes I Have Known, 108-09.

Elmira experienced these state trends slightly later than many neighboring cities.⁸ The Chemung Canal opened in 1833 and connected the Chemung River, which flows through Elmira and is a tributary of the Susquehanna, to the Erie Canal.⁹ As late as the 1840s, however, Frances Miriam Whitcher, a local novelist, still described Elmira as “frontier” compared to her hometown to the east in Oneida County.¹⁰ In the 1850s, downtown Elmira still had the feel of a backcountry center, complete with messy dirt roads and pigs in the main streets.¹¹ In the 1850s and 1860s, Elmira became a hinterland town that supplied agricultural products to neighboring urban centers including New York City, comparable in many ways to what Cooperstown had become in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Elmira did participate in the industrialization and population growth of the 1830s and 1840s, but not to such a great extent that the “bustling village”

⁸ Alan Taylor, William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), “Slow to develop as a colony, New York became the most dynamic state in the newly independent American Republic. During the four decades that followed the end of the war in 1783, thousands of Yankees flocked from crowded New England into upstate New York to replace the Iroquois. New York's population quadrupled from 340,120 in 1790 to 1,372,812 in 1820,” 4. Myra C. Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher: Minister to a Changing America, 1824-1900 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996) 69-75. Glenn looks at the immediate impact of the opening of the Chemung Canal and the New York and Erie Railroad in Elmira in the 1830s and 1840s, comparing Elmira to Mary P. Ryan's portrait of Utica, New York in Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), and Paul E. Johnson's Rochester in A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978). Glenn's observations about the demographic changes in Elmira's population during this period are valuable, but I believe she overdraws the connection between Elmira, Utica, and Rochester. Both Utica and Rochester were geographically closer to the Erie Canal and more directly involved in its economic and cultural impact. Michael Horigan points out that Canal traffic was already lagging by the 1850s in Elmira and railroads were not as prosperous for the hilly Elmira area, until the Civil War made more railroads necessary. Horigan, Elmira: Death Camp of the North, 2.

⁹ Skandera-Trombley, Mark Twain in the Company of Women, 67. Whenever possible, I have tried to verify facts cited by Skandera-Trombley. While her work is relevant to my discussion of Elmira, she makes constant errors, including attributing the Chemung Canal's 1833 start date to the Erie Canal. The Erie Canal's complete length between Albany and Buffalo was completed in 1825, but portions began operating as early as 1819. See Carol Sheriff, The Artificial River: The Erie Canal and the Paradox of Progress, 1817-1860 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996). For opening of Chemung Canal see Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 69.

¹⁰ Linda A. Morris, Women's Humor in the Age of Gentility: The Life and Works of Frances Miriam Whitcher (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1992) 96.

¹¹ Diane L. Janowski and Allen C. Smith, Images of America: The Chemung Valley (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 1998) for 1858 photograph of downtown Elmira see 10.

could be called a city.¹² Immediately after the Civil War, years after commercialization and industrialization brought by the canal had begun, the people of Elmira continued to refer to their home as an agricultural community. The introduction to the 1868-1869 City Directory said,

Agriculture is the chief pursuit of the inhabitants [of Elmira]. For many years lumbering was carried on to a great extent, 10,000,000 feet being floated down the Chemung and Susquehanna from Elmira, annually. Since the disappearance of the fine forests, the attention of the people has been turned to stock raising, dairying and wool growing. Commerce and manufacturers have received increased attention since the completion of the canals and railroads, though these are still subordinate to the agricultural interests.¹³

Elmira's story is similar to those told in many New York State community studies, but no town is exactly like another and the various processes of industrialization occurred differently in each area. Elmira's development began late and happened very rapidly.¹⁴

So, before the Civil War, Elmira may have been something of a backwater, removed from the Erie Canal and more agricultural than industrial, but it was not entirely provincial in the ways suggested by Van Wyck Brooks. Some members of the community were connected to national trends through science and religion and through the politics of abolition that would soon find new expression in the Civil War. The War brought thousands of soldiers, Northern and Southern, into Elmira. In 1861, the town first became a military depot and two years later a federal draft rendezvous. From July of

¹² Horigan, Elmira: Death Camp of the North, 2-4; Taylor, William Cooper's Town. William Cronon's discussion of the evolution of Chicago's hinterland has informed my interpretation of Elmira's economic development. His observations of the close connection between rural and urban life allows for an important correction to Robert Wiebe; modernization does not originate in urban areas and slowly radiate into the rural support areas, rather urban, rural, and national economies evolve, as do cultures, together. William Cronon, Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991).

¹³ 1868-69 City Directory. All atlases, City Directories, and census records, unless otherwise listed, are housed at the Steele Memorial Public Library, Elmira, New York.

¹⁴ For various modernization stories see Johnson A Shopkeeper's Millennium, Ryan, Cradle of the Middle Class, Sheriff, The Artificial River, and Taylor, William Cooper's Town. Some aspects of all of these

1864 until July of 1865 more than twelve thousand Confederate prisoners were housed in the Elmira prison camp.¹⁵ The camp, sometimes referred to as “Helmira,” was one of the most unpleasant detainment centers in the North. It had an overall death rate of 24.4 percent. The average death rate for Union camps was 11.7 percent, and even Confederate prison camps suffered only a 15.3 percent death rate. The influx of soldiers and the terrible and unhealthy conditions of the camp had a profound effect on life in Elmira. As early as 1861, a Rochester newspaper printed a story about fighting between soldiers downtown and concluded “Elmira is getting to be a pretty rough place to live in.” Elmira had already been a fairly rough place to live during the 1840s and 1850s, but many of the newer city residents would not have experienced that for themselves. The people of Elmira, long-time residents and new canal arrivals, were fascinated by the prison camp, and while it remained in operation it became a local tourist attraction. Two competing viewing towers were built outside the prison walls, and local people paid ten or fifteen cents admission to peek into the camp.¹⁶ The War also transformed Elmira’s attitudes towards some of its most important leaders, as shall be further discussed in Chapter Three. After the war was over, Elmira buried the dead in Woodlawn Cemetery, and attempted to return to life as it was. However, in spite of the 1868 City Directory’s assertion that Elmira was still primarily an agricultural community, the introduction of so

stories are relevant to Elmira, but their chronologies do not always include the possibility that other towns developed differently, while a part of the same geographical systems.

¹⁵ Horigan, *Elmira: Death Camp of the North*, 1.

¹⁶ Statistics taken from Skandera-Trombley, *Mark Twain in the Company of Women*, 99 n.11. Lonnie R. Speer, *Portals to Hell: Military Prisons of the Civil War* (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 1997) xiv, 10, 14, 57, 166, 241-48, 259, 285, 289, 294, 306, 325. For quote about Elmira being “rough” see Horigan, *Elmira: Death Camp of the North*, 13, 201 n.32. See also Michael P. Gray, “Uncovering a Ring Leader,” an excerpt from a doctoral dissertation at Kent State University, *Chemung Historical Journal*, 43 (June 1998): 4734-39.

many people and new government contracts had changed Elmira's economy permanently.

By the time a young Rudyard Kipling arrived in 1889 to visit the famous Mark Twain, he described a town "whose streets were desolated by railway tracks, and whose suburbs were given up to the manufacture of door-sashes and window-frames." Kipling went on to say that Elmira "was surrounded by pleasant, fat, little hills, rimmed with timber and topped with cultivation."¹⁷ Factory production was taking over, though business agriculture remained important, led by Elmira's own captains of industry, Jervis Langdon, John Arnot, and Arculous Wyckoff, among others. Businesses ranged from knitting mills to engine and boiler works, to bridge companies, breweries, and an organ company. In the 1880s and 1890s, grocery stores and dry-goods shops like the N.J. Thompson Co., carpet dealers like Durland and Pratt, and many other kinds of retail operations opened.¹⁸ However, Elmira's promise as an industrial center was never fully realized. The town's prosperity evaporated as the Chemung River flooded the town over and over again, in 1889, 1902, 1947, and most recently in 1972. When Kipling visited in 1889 he remarked, "The Chemung River flowed generally up and down the town, and had just finished flooding a few of the main streets."¹⁹ The rolling river water disrupted the industrial base for the "stagnant fresh-water aristocracy" of Brooks's imagination. As Elmira became more industrial and commercial, it remained directly connected to the rest of the nation. John Arnot, an Elmira native, served as a representative to Congress in

¹⁷ Jerome and Wisbey, Mark Twain in Elmira 102, reprint from American Notes (New York: International Publishing Company, c. 1889) 250-67.

¹⁸ Skandera-Trombley, Mark Twain in the Company of Women, 67. See City Directories from 1868-69, 1891, 1904. See also CCHS, BF60-550, local paper, hand-dated 4/30/17, and CCHS, BF54-600, local paper, 5/6/23, evening edition, "Death of Timothy Pratt."

Washington, D.C.; the Elmira Water Cure, discussed below, brought people from all over the Northeast; and Park Church became ever more active in political and social causes.²⁰

As an adult, Max Eastman said of his childhood experience at Park Church in Elmira, “I was at the exact center of one of the most interesting clusters of people and ideas that American churchdom ever produced or found room to contain.”²¹ Part of Elmira’s isolation from the Erie Canal culture of neighboring cities was its disregard for the so-called Second Great Awakening, which had “burned-over” so much of New York State.²² There were, however, very active and political churches in the community, including the Eastman family’s church. In 1846, a small group had broken away from the Presbyterian Church in protest of the Church’s failure to officially condemn slavery. That group founded the Independent Congregationalist Church, which was later renamed Park Church. In 1854, the new church hired Thomas K. Beecher, a younger son of Lyman Beecher and a sibling of Henry Ward Beecher, Catharine Beecher, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. In many ways less radical than his famous siblings and parent, Thomas Beecher was an unusual and eccentric minister and man who made a good fit for the growing city’s most liberal church.²³ Unlike Henry Ward Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe and much of his congregation, Thomas Beecher was not a strong supporter of abolition before

¹⁹ Jerome and Wisbey, Mark Twain in Elmira, 102. For dates and photographs of the Elmira floods see Janowski and Smith, Images of America: The Chemung Valley, 19-21, 51, 111.

²⁰ Park Church Archives, Memorial Address on the Life and Character of John Arnot, Jr. (Washington: Government Printing Office, Published by Order of Forty-Ninth Congress, Second Session, February 8, 1887). Elmira’s brief flirtation with manufacturing and its late existence as an agricultural hinterland that was profoundly connected, culturally, to the national scene contradicts the “island community” theory outlined in Wiebe, The Search for Order.

²¹ Eastman, Heroes I Have Known, 106.

²² Morris, Women’s Humor in the Age of Gentility, 96. Morris refers to Whitney R. Cross, The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850 (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1950).

the War. He also frequently criticized members of his community and congregation for behaviors Henry Ward Beecher may have excused, and he did not condone his brother's emotional religious message. Unlike their father, neither Thomas Beecher nor Henry Ward Beecher found strict theological debate or the traditional Puritan community beneficial to the causes of Christianity.

In spite of his differences from them, Thomas Beecher's famous relatives connected Elmira to a national community, as did many of his constituents and his wife, Julia Jones Beecher. A granddaughter of famous dictionary author Noah Webster, Julia Jones Beecher took a very active role in her husband's ministry and organized various church activities, including the missionary aid society. Chapter Two of this thesis focuses on the marriage of Thomas and Julia Beecher, and Chapter Three focuses on their Elmira ministry. Early members of their church included the Langdons, Mark Twain's in-laws. Jervis Langdon had recently made his fortune in the lumber and coal businesses after years of struggle as a shopkeeper. He was an active abolitionist and is believed to have allowed his home to be used as a stop on the Underground Railroad.²⁴ Drs. Rachel and Silas Gleason also joined the new Congregationalist church. They had come to Elmira only two years before Thomas Beecher, when Elmira's canal culture was finally beginning to blossom and the busy town was experiencing an influx of immigration.²⁵

In 1852, the Gleasons founded the Gleason Water Cure, sometimes called the Elmira Water Cure, a sanitarium where hot and cold baths were used to treat the

²³ Susan Harris, The Courtship of Olivia Langdon and Mark Twain, 2. Park Church Archives, Manual of the First Congregational Church, Elmira, N.Y. (Published November 14th, 1848, Elmira: Geo. W. Mason, Printer, 1848). See also Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher.

²⁴ Harris, Courtship of Olivia Langdon and Mark Twain, 1-2; Skandera-Trombley, Mark Twain in the Company of Women, 73; Eastman, Heroes I Have Known, 109-10.

²⁵ Horigan, Elmira: Death Camp of the North, 3-4.

chronically ill. Situated on East Hill, overlooking the Chemung Valley and the entire city of Elmira, the Water Cure attracted clientele from all over the Northeast. The Gleason establishment, run by a married couple, who both had medical degrees from accredited universities, was exceptional in its combination of mainstream and sectarian medical practices. Both Gleasons participated in mainstream medicine, as defined by the American Medical Association, by obtaining and valuing degrees from accredited medical schools. However, their adherence to hydropathy, the practice of administering the water cure, placed them in contact with the sectarian doctors of the period, doctors who experimented with many kinds of medical treatment not accepted by most mainstream doctors, including mesmerism, vegetarianism, and homeopathy. In an 1860 advertisement, the Gleasons described their practice,

We do not pursue the extremes of Hydropathy or of Vegetarianism. We intend the condition of the patient shall indicate the diet and regimen necessary to promote health in each case... WATER IS OUR CHIEF REMEDY. But we [do] not hesitate to use Homeopathic remedies, Electricity, or any other means within our knowledge, to facilitate the recovery of the Sick.²⁶

When the Gleasons came to Elmira, Rachel Gleason had just finished training and had received her degree from Syracuse Medical College. Before her enrollment she had completed five years of sanitarium work with her doctor husband at Glen Haven in Cuba, New York and at the Forest City Water Cure on Cayuga Lake. With her husband's help, in 1849 she joined a class of four women and seventy-five men at Syracuse.²⁷ The

²⁶ For a reproduction of the Gleason Water Cure advertisement from the Chemung County Historical Society, see Skandera-Trombley, *Mark Twain in the Company of Women*, 76.

²⁷ CCHS, BR26-200, Unlabeled 1905 newspaper clipping, "Death of Rachel Brooks Gleason." CCHS, photocopy of Rachel Gleason's matriculation form, Course of Central Medical College, Syracuse, dated November 20, 1849 and December 1, 1849. See also 1904 City Directory. See also Regina Markell Morantz-Sanchez, *Sympathy and Science: Women Physicians in American Medicine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) 33, 153. Morantz-Sanchez lists Rachel Brooks Gleason as having graduated from both New York's Central Eclectic School of Medicine and Central Medical College, Syracuse. I believe the

Gleasons were rather unusual among medical sectarians. Most historians of hydropathy and other experimental medical movements of the nineteenth-century agree that many nineteenth-century reform movements were directly connected to sectarian medicine. Sectarians viewed nature and the body, specifically women's bodies, as beneficial rather than dangerous. This interpretation of women's bodies often led to a different view of women's role in society. Also, Water Cure establishments allowed women the leisure and the access to a wider world to create female communities, communities which led women into activism of various sorts.²⁸

While the Elmira Water Cure certainly helped create communities and connected Elmira's wealthy and liberal groups to a wider world, the Gleasons were not strictly sectarians.²⁹ They had mainstream medical school educations and, while liberal, supporting the politics of Park Church and Thomas Beecher, they were not extremists who agitated for major social reforms in Elmira or the rest of the United States. Rachel Gleason's book, Talks with My Patients, which grew out of her series of lectures about health and wellness to the women of Park Church, illustrates her middle-of-the-road position on the balance of good and bad in women's bodies. In the book, she cautions "women of business" that they might destroy their unborn children's lives with too much

listing of the first school to be a simple error. Dr. Gleason's only known medical degree came from Central Medical College, Syracuse.

²⁸ Susan E. Cayleff, Wash and Be Healed: The Water-Cure Movement and Women's Health (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987); Ann Braude, Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989) 143, 154-56.

²⁹ Harris, The Courtship of Olivia Langdon and Mark Twain, for Olivia Langdon's friendship with Alice Hooker and Isabella Beecher Hooker, begun at the Gleason Water Cure, see 3. For Isabella Beecher Hooker's letters home during her stay at the Gleason Water Cure see Jeanne Boydston, Mary Kelley, and Anne Margolis, The Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women's Rights and Woman's Sphere (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988) 101-08. Also, Catharine Beecher spent the last year of her life in Elmira, with her brother Thomas K. Beecher: During that time she "visited and encouraged the cure residents," Kathryn Kish Sklar, Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1976) 172-73.

activity, and she warns parents that “our growing girls can’t learn ‘every thing and more too,’ and keep in good health beside,” suggesting that girls’ academic progress in childhood be curtailed for the sake of their physical health. She does not condemn such activities as education and careers for women entirely, she just says that the “fast” lives of modern Americans must be tempered with sense about health and rest. She also discusses at length the problems of exaggerated shame about female bodily functions, the dangers of “unduly compressed” breasts during puberty, and the risk for young women from being kept in ignorance about reproduction until they begin menstruating.³⁰ She often refers to an earlier time in which Americans had healthier ideas about medicine and especially women’s bodies. This conservative message of a better time gone by seems to have resonated with the Park Church community.

Gleason is not known to have participated in the suffrage movement, nor did she try to break aggressively with her community’s ideas of domesticity. She and her husband lived at the Water Cure where she was able to maintain a domestic female image of herself while working as a doctor. In her book, she belittles her expertise as a doctor and emphasizes her value to medicine as a woman. She assures her readers that her book is not “unscientific,” if only “a simple compend[ium] of such motherly hints as seem to be needed.” Simultaneously diminishing the importance of what all doctors are able to give their patients and maintaining her own humble image, and thereby creating a new image of the fitting place of women in medicine, she writes, “good nursing is the better part of doctoring.” Her writing values the motherly caring of nursing and the daily

³⁰ CCHS Book archive, Mrs. R.B. Gleason, M.D., Talks to My Patients; Hints on Getting Well and Keeping Well (New York: Wood & Holbrook, Publishers, No.15 Laight Street, 1871) for discussion of “women of business” see 64, 224, for dangers of too much education for young women see 30, for problem of ignorance and shame see 24-25.

comforts of sanitarium life over the heroic efforts of medical interference.³¹ Rachel Gleason participated fully in her liberal church community and in the national community of sectarian healers, but she maintained a conservative compromise between strict sectarianism, which led many other women doctors into greater political activism, and the growing field of medicine as practiced by the American Medical Association, which often forced women out of medicine entirely. She saw women's bodies as delicate and dangerous, but also naturally healthy and beneficial to the world because they allowed women a role as mothering nurturers, which included a place in professional medicine.

The church community to which the Gleasons belonged expanded rapidly during the second half of the nineteenth century. After Thomas Beecher's arrival in 1854, his congregation grew, and, after his marriage, the women of the church became increasingly active in social reform movements. There were women's reading clubs, like the Wednesday Morning Club founded in 1892, the talks for women given by Dr. Rachel Brooks Gleason, temperance societies, and a church "sewing circle" which eventually became a part of the Sanitary Commission, a national organization of tremendous influence in which women supported the Union soldiers during the Civil War through widespread efforts at sanitation, nursing, and organization. The first foreign missionary aid society in Elmira was established in 1885 by Park Church women as well.³² There

³¹ Gleason, Talks to My Patients, v of "Introduction."

³² Skandera-Trombley, Mark Twain in the Company of Women, 109-10. Leonard I Sweet, The Minister's Wife: Her Role in Nineteenth-Century American Evangelicalism (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983) 217-19. CCHS, Vertical File 090-195, Wednesday Morning Club, CCHS Archive Box MC16, Lucy Billings Diaries, 1891-92. See also Bridget Reddick, Women of Elmira, NY, 1870-1906 (a thesis presented for the A.B. degree with honors in history at Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio, 1999). For a very brief introduction to the United States Sanitary Commission see David Herbert Donald, Jean H. Baker, Michael F. Holt, The Civil War and Reconstruction (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001) 431, 441, 442. For a discussion of upper-class women working for the Sanitary Commission see Kristie Ross, "Arranging a Doll's House: Refined Women as Union Nurses" in Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War, ed.

were certainly other socially active organizations in Elmira, but the Park Church group tended to be the biggest and most visible.³³ When Annis Ford Eastman arrived in Elmira with her family in 1894, she arrived in a church that was already very involved in the local community and in national service projects. Her children came of age surrounded by active women in a town that had recently become a fairly modern city. While Max Eastman's assertion that the Elmira of 1894 was the same as the 1869 Elmira that first greeted Mark Twain is certainly not accurate in terms of the city's economic development, very different by the end of the century, the church community had been actively political and vigorously intellectual since at least the 1850s. However, women's activism was evolving in the Park Church just as it was changing all over New York State and the rest of America.

Like Elmira's economic development, which began slowly in the 1830s and 1840s, but did not expand until after the Civil War, social activism in Elmira seems to have remained fairly minimal during the early part of the nineteenth century. As with New York State economic development, the stories of women's activism in various communities resist simple periodization and occurred differently in different communities. There is currently little evidence of a network of women's activism or benevolent activity in Elmira during the 1830s or 1840s, though the ideology of women's benevolence certainly affected Elmira as it did other Americans. Instead of benevolent genteel women's groups, in the 1840s, the middle- to upper-class reformers in Elmira, those who founded the Independent Congregationalist Church which became Park

Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 97-113. For further discussion of Julia Beecher and the women of Park Church, see Chapter Two.

³³ For a brief introduction to women's activism in Elmira during the nineteenth century, see Erin K. Hanley, "Temperance and Suffrage In Elmira, New York 1852-1917," *CHJ* 47 (March 2002) 5183-92.

Church, were active mostly as married couples, men and women participating equally, if somewhat separately.³⁴ Park Church women listed themselves in the earliest available church rolls by their own first names, on the same page with their husbands' names, but grouped by gender.³⁵ The group apparently limited their activities to the foundation of the church itself, a big project for both men and women, rather than expanding into political action or social services for non-church members. In the 1850s and 1860s, women's networks willing to work for larger causes, including abolition, began to appear in the church, and by the 1870s and 1880s, members of the Park Church congregation worked with the Beechers to create an extensive social service network and infrastructure to support the town's poor.³⁶

When Annis Ford Eastman joined Julia Jones Beecher at Park Church, in spite of their generational differences, they cooperated and compromised in order to maintain their friendship and to further their social service work through the church (see Chapters Two and Three). The Elmira community of active women was relatively small. While the

³⁴ Mary Ryan's discussion of the importance of family identity rather than simply male and female identities among working class evangelical church-goers seems to be the best existing description for Elmira's activists, though they were the wealthy community leaders, not new-comers or young people, as were Ryan's subjects. Ryan, Cradle of the Middle Class.

³⁵ Park Church Archives, 1846 Constitution of the Independent Congregational Church: Includes a Confession of Faith and a Covenant, Articles of Faith, copied, apparently, in 1859. Ends with "Roll" from 1846-1859, including pencilled in deaths. See also Minutes book from 1845, includes record of decision to formally withdraw from Presbyterian church and includes signatures of first members. Men's and women's names are listed on the same page, but men's names are listed first, as a group, followed by all the women's signatures.

³⁶ Unlike the timelines described by historians of women's activism in the rest of the Northeast, in its rougher backcountry agricultural days, Elmira did not have much of a genteel female network that preached female moral superiority or experimented with political protest. For discussion of other communities in which women's activism became more widespread earlier, see Ellen Carol DuBois, Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); Lori Ginzberg, Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990); Nancy A. Hewitt, Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Nancy Isenberg, "'Pillars in the Same Temple and Priests of the Same Worship': Woman's Rights and the Politics of Church and State in Antebellum America," Journal of American History, 85 (1998): 98-128.

female reformers frequently disagreed, as did male reformers, the competition among different groups of women was not as exaggerated in Elmira as it seems to have been in Rochester.³⁷ However, the ideology of benevolence did evolve slowly in Elmira as elsewhere as younger generations joined the older female reformers. Perhaps because of limited size of the reform community in Elmira and a related reluctance to allow the community to fracture into age groups, the transition from one mode of reform, from a benevolent volunteerism based on gender to a more structured system of social services based on class distinctions, seems to have been more gradual in Elmira than in other comparable cities. In the 1870s, Park Church was just beginning to expand their social welfare services, though industry was booming rapidly, and the most powerful women's social service organization in Elmira's history did not appear until the early twentieth century.³⁸

Annis Ford Eastman, herself, represented an unusual combination of religious conviction, public moral persuasion, and disregard for gendered ideals and social customs, all of which helped her participate in the small Elmira community of reformers. Her daughter, in the 1927 essay mentioned above, described Annis Ford as a "Middle-Western girl" who met Samuel Eastman, a divinity student at Oberlin College, the well-

³⁷ Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change*. Some of Hewitt's most important contributions have influenced my interpretation and seem to fit in Elmira. Though Elmira's women's activism did not become very widespread until industrialism had expanded, women's activism in the area did begin while Elmira remained a fairly rural town. The Second Great Awakening was relatively unimportant in Elmira, but this did not hinder female activism. Hewitt's discussion of women's activism blossoming in rural communities as well as urban and before the Second Great Awakening, which contradicted some earlier scholarship, seems to fit Elmira. Hewitt's picture of competing women's networks, however, fits Elmira less well. Elite benevolent women worked alongside with "perfectionists" in Elmira and cooperated on many projects. "Ultraists" in Elmira were comparatively rare. For discussion of these three groups in Rochester see especially Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change*, 40.

³⁸ Though Lori Ginzberg's fairly rigid periodization does not seem to fit the Elmira women's groups, her discussion of the evolution of the rhetoric and ideology of the "woman's sphere" from a definition based on

known seat of reform where many eastern liberals were educated, while she worked as a school teacher. Samuel Eastman was a Civil War veteran who had contracted typhoid pneumonia during his service and whose health never fully recovered.³⁹ After their marriage and the birth of their children, while the family was living in Glenora, New York, a small town not far from Elmira, Samuel Eastman became too ill to work. To support the family, Annis Ford Eastman began teaching English in a local girls' school. Within a few years, she also began to work as what her daughter called a "supply-preacher," filling in when ministers in the surrounding areas were absent. Eventually, Annis Ford Eastman became the first woman in New York State to be ordained as a Congregationalist minister.⁴⁰ After her ordination, Eastman worked quite successfully in and around Glenora for three or four years while her husband, less successful, "turned small farmer." Crystal Eastman said that he "cheerfully... had begun, on days when he was well enough, to peddle eggs and butter at the back doors of his former parishioners." The butter and egg trade was traditionally part of the women's economy, and Samuel Eastman's apparent willingness, whether or not his daughter's characterization as "cheerfully" is entirely accurate, to not only support his wife's adoption of the masculine duties of breadwinning and preaching but to embrace female responsibilities for himself, seems surprising.⁴¹

gender to one based primarily on class has influenced my interpretation profoundly. Ginzberg, Women and the Work of Benevolence, see especially the introduction, 1-10.

³⁹ Eastman, Crystal Eastman on Women and Revolution, Cook, ed., 41. CCHS, Vertical File "Eastman," obituaries of Samuel Eastman. Park Church Archive, obituaries of Samuel Eastman. Taylor and Myers, "Elmira's Apostles of Women's Lib," CHJ 17 (1971).

⁴⁰ Eastman, Crystal Eastman on Women and Revolution, Cook, ed., 41-43.

⁴¹ Eastman, Crystal Eastman on Women and Revolution, Cook, ed., 44-45. For discussion of the female economy see Nancy F. Cott, The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835, Second Edition with a new Preface (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997, first published in 1977) and Nancy Folbre, "The Unproductive Housewife: Her Evolution in Nineteenth-Century Economic Thought," Signs, 16 (Spring, 1991): 463-484.

As with all autobiographical memoirs, Crystal Eastman's motives for writing this story of her parents' gender reversal must be considered.⁴² She uses her family's unusual behavior to support her own public reputation (and probably personal self-image) of herself as a feminist by birth as well as by training and conviction. For example, she connects her father's support of her mother directly to his support of herself, saying,

Without his coaching and without his local prestige, it is doubtful if she [Annis Ford Eastman, Crystal's mother] could have been ordained. And my father stood by me in the same way, from the time I wanted to cut off my hair and go barefoot to the time when I began to study law."⁴³

However, in spite of her possible motives for exaggerating her parents' unusual lifestyle, Crystal Eastman's story of her parents is not inaccurate. She goes on to tell of the family's eventual transplantation to Elmira where, she says, "It was my mother's reputation as a preacher that brought [the family] this opportunity and she proved equal to the larger field."⁴⁴ The Eastmans settled comfortably into Elmira, and Annis Ford Eastman participated in all of the church women's organizations already in place. She and Julia Jones Beecher became close friends and when Beecher died in 1905, Eastman wrote a short book about her life (see Chapters Two and Three). Crystal Eastman, as explained above, left Elmira for a career as an lawyer, activist, and writer in New York City. Though she was certainly an unusual Elmira figure, she was not completely without peers.

Anna Beach Pratt, born thirteen years before Crystal Eastman, followed a career path similar to those of both Eastman women. Pratt eventually left Elmira for a larger

⁴² Though she does not discuss Eastman or other writers of her time and political bent, Ann Fabian's discussion of nineteenth-century memoirs has influenced my interpretation of all autobiographical materials. Ann Fabian, The Unvarnished Truth: Personal Narratives in Nineteenth-Century America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

⁴³ Eastman, Crystal Eastman on Women and Revolution, Cook, ed., 45

city and a degree in sociology, but while she lived in Elmira she compromised frequently with more conservative Elmirans, who disapproved of woman's taking part in city governance, in order to work in social service as she desired. Her father, Timothy Pratt, was a partner in a local carpet and draperies dealership, and she graduated in 1886 from Elmira College, the local women's college and one of the first women's schools in America to offer women a full bachelors degree. She co-founded the Elmira Women's Federation, which by 1908 was wealthy and powerful enough to erect its own building. She also founded the Alpha Club, an "organization for the assistance of working girls." In 1915, when Anna Beach Pratt left Elmira to pursue a masters degree in sociology at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia where she eventually settled, the Elmira newspaper said, "Miss Pratt was retained by the [Elmira Women's] Federation. Contrary to the general supposition, Miss Pratt has not been employed by the city." It was apparently widely believed that Anna Beach Pratt had been hired by the city to do her work with the Federation and the city government. Later newspaper stories made different claims. The 1923 obituary of her father, Timothy Pratt, claimed that he had served as "Superintendent to the Poor" with the "able assistance of his daughter."⁴⁵

According to Anna Beach Pratt's own 1932 obituary,

Mr. Pratt took office [as Superintendent of the Poor] with the understanding that his daughter, well qualified for the position, should do the work. Miss Pratt herself was not chosen because it was not then permissible for women to serve in public office.

Apparently, in 1906, Elmira Mayor, Zebulon Brockway, had appointed Timothy Pratt "Superintendent of the Poor" because his daughter could not be officially chosen. Both

⁴⁴ Eastman, Crystal Eastman on Women and Revolution, Cook, ed., 42.

⁴⁵ CCHS, "Death of Anna Beach Pratt," newspaper clipping, January 4, 1932. Obituaries of Timothy Pratt, June 8, 1923, newspaper clipping about Anna Beach Pratt's departure, hand-dated August 5, 1915.

father and daughter had agreed to the compromise until 1915, when Anna Beach Pratt gave up her unofficial position.

Pratt's organization, the Women's Federation, was eventually renamed the Elmira Federation for Social Services and later became an official part of the city government, rather than an independent, private benevolent association. Many of the women involved in the Elmira Women's Federation, including Pratt's co-founders, Mrs. J. Sloat Fassett and Mrs. Fanny Bush, were also members of Park Church's "Wednesday Morning Club." Founded in 1892, the "Wednesday Morning Club" was a women's reading group that included Lucy Billings, 72 years old in 1892, and Mrs. Langdon, Mark Twain's mother-in-law, both founding members of Park Church in 1846, and Mrs. Marsh, Mrs. Langdon's twin sister. Mrs. Billings, Mrs. Langdon, and her sister Mrs. Marsh, were all of roughly the same generation, older than Mrs. Fassett or Mrs. Bush. These women of different generations participated in many of the same activities together and their cooperation helped fuel the evolution of the "woman's sphere" as the nineteenth century ended.⁴⁶

Elmira's economic and cultural development did not unfold as Van Wyck Brooks or Robert Wiebe say it did. However, Elmira did not develop just like the newer descriptions of the Erie Canal towns or Cooperstown, either. Elmira remained agricultural and smaller until after the Civil War when it became a hinterland center of business and business agriculture. The women's networks, which cannot be separated from the reform community as a whole, also evolved more rapidly after the Civil War than before, but they continued to evolve slowly as women of different generations

⁴⁶ CCHS, "Death of Anna Beach Pratt," obituary of Timothy Pratt, Vertical File "Wednesday Morning Club," Lucy Billings Diaries; Reddick, Women of Elmira, see especially 57; Park Church Archives, 1846 Constitution of the Independent Congregational Church; Skandera-Trombley, Mark Twain in the Company

compromised in order to remain effective, rather than fracture their small community of reformers. Max and Crystal Eastman, the kinds of activists whose stories fuel the idea that radicalism is an urban phenomenon, remained indebted to their small-town church community roots. Their parents, not the provincial and backwards “stagnant” types Brooks might have expected to find in Elmira, were tied to a network of reformers which included Thomas and Julia Beecher, among many other individuals, who negotiated the changes of the nineteenth century from within Elmira’s Park Church. The Beechers themselves are the subjects of the next two chapters of this thesis. Their unusual marriage, their rebellion against accepted gender ideals of their time, their commitment to faith and science, and the gossip they generated within the Park Church community provide an opportunity to explore the meanings of friendship, romantic love, and impure sex among nineteenth-century reformers, both before and after the Civil War.

of Women, 71. See notes 37 and 38, above, for discussion of Hewitt, Women’s Activism and Social Change and Ginzberg, Women and the Work of Benevolence.

Chapter Two: “A Very Good Brotherly Love”
The Marriage of Thomas and Julia Beecher

Strong upon me the life that does not exhibit itself, yet contains all the rest...
– Walt Whitman, *from the Calamus poems*¹

*Let men tremble to win the hand of woman, unless they win along with it the utmost
passion of her heart!*
– Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*²

Julia Jones Beecher once wrote to a friend, “I am an enigma to myself, and my only hope, often, is in not thinking at all, but in throwing myself with all my strength into work until I am tired enough to sleep and forget.” She also used to say, “I can feel bad about anything only *just so long*, then I *have* to go back to being interested and cheerful.”³ The details of her intimate thoughts, like her frustration with herself and her image of her own personality in the quotes above, are mostly available to the historian because her unofficial profession as a minister’s wife gave her a public persona created from details of her private personality. As the wife and partner of a well-known minister, she was constantly scrutinized by the people of her church and city. What truth can we know about the hidden emotions and mental life of a woman who was a mystery to herself, a wonder to her friends and neighbors, and whom her husband called his “strong,

¹ Walt Whitman, *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, James E. Miller, Jr., ed (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959) 84. The Calamus poems are from *Leaves of Grass*, first published in 1855.

² Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, in *The Complete Novels and Selected Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Volume I*, Norman Holmes Pearson, ed. (New York: The Modern Library, 1993. *The Scarlet Letter* first published in 1850) 564.

³ Park Church Archive, Elmira, New York, Box Bc043, Annis Ford Eastman, *A Flower of Puritanism: Julia Jones Beecher, 1826-1905* (Elmira, New York: [Press of Snyder Bros., c. 1905-10]) 72, 71.

courageous, energetic Julia – to whom belongs the credit of nine-tenths of the achievement of our long life in Elmira”⁴

By looking closely at Julia Beecher’s place in her community and her relationships within her church and town, the importance that religion and different kinds of love had in her life becomes apparent. Julia Beecher made decisions about her life for complex and largely hidden personal reasons, but the existing evidence about her choices may help to illuminate some important trends in changing American culture in the antebellum, bellum, and post-bellum periods. This chapter will focus on the marriage between Thomas and Julia Beecher, the views of that marriage by their friends and neighbors, and how their marriage reflected the attitudes in their community towards sex, love, homosexuality, and friendship.⁵ The Beechers’ unusual marriage, their friendships with men and women, and the unique styles of dress and behavior that characterized them both suggest their sometimes ambivalent acceptance of changing gender ideals and illustrate the fluid boundaries between the male and female spheres.

Much scholarship in the last twenty years has focused on complex gendered negotiations, including competition within women’s networks and changing reform

⁴ Flower of Puritanism, 36.

⁵ For discussions of sexuality, love, and friendships see George Chauncey, Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940 (New York: BasicBooks, 1994); Lillian Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1981); Carolyn De Swarte Gifford, Writing Out My Heart: Selections from the Journal of Frances E. Willard, 1855-96 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Karen Lystra, Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Lisa Moore, “‘Something More Tender Still than Friendship’: Romantic Friendship in Early-Nineteenth-Century England” in Martha Vicinus, ed., Lesbian Subjects: A Feminist Studies Reader (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) 21-40; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual,” in Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) 53-76. See also discussion of the works of Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Karen Lystra below.

communities, that complicate earlier ideas of separate spheres.⁶ These works have influenced my interpretation of the lives of Thomas and Julia Beecher profoundly. Earlier discussions of the ideology of separate spheres, ideologies that did not accurately represent the real lives of individuals but that did inform the decisions of many, have also informed my discussion, but I have focused most closely on Julia Jones Beecher's sublimation of emotional and sexual feelings into religious work and the ways in which her community interpreted her actions.⁷

Julia Jones, before she was married, had a close friendship with a young woman who became the first wife of Thomas Beecher. After the first wife's death, Julia Jones married her friend's widowed husband. Then, Julia and Thomas Beecher built a life together out of religion and friendships with people from their church community. Thomas Beecher's close friendship with a single woman seems to have caused some anxiety within their marriage, anxiety that might be compared to the pain Julia Jones felt when her best friend became involved with Thomas Beecher years earlier. The sexual

⁶ See Nancy A. Hewitt, Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," and Mary P. Ryan, "Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth-Century America" in Habermas and the Public Sphere, Craig Calhoun, ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992), 109-143, 259-288. See also Lori Ginzberg, Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990) 3 n.5, "The concept of 'spheres' is, after all, ideological, although it has too often come to represent historians' understanding of the actual experience of at least white middle-class Protestant women. What I have found in my work is that the reality of women's lives was quite different from the ideology which they themselves used and that, furthermore, the acceptance of the tenets of woman's sphere by historians has too often served to obscure that distinction, unwittingly preventing women from leaving the sphere itself."

⁷ For earlier scholarship that focuses on ideology see Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," American Quarterly, XVII (1966): 151-74; Nancy F. Cott, "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850" in A Heritage of Her Own: Toward a New Social History of American Women, ed. Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979) 162-81. For discussion of ministers' wives in terms of "spheres" see Lois A. Boyd, "Presbyterian Ministers' Wives – A Nineteenth-Century Portrait," Journal of Presbyterian History, 59 (Spring 1981): 3-17; Leonard I. Sweet, The Minister's Wife: Her Role in Nineteenth-Century American Evangelicalism (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983).

potential of friendships between women and between women and men is implied in the constant sex talk about the Beechers that came from their community. Frequent guarded speculation about the Beechers' own sexual relationship helped fuel the fires around their controversial ministry. As the nineteenth century progressed, the Beecher's role in Elmira and in their church evolved as their peers and neighbors debated all the issues – local and personal, national and patriotic – disagreed with each other, and gossiped.

Many descriptions and scraps from letters and memories about Julia Beecher come from a long pamphlet written, apparently shortly after Julia Beecher's death in 1905, by Rev. Annis Ford Eastman, called A Flower of Puritanism.⁸ As introduced in Chapter One, Eastman and her family came to Elmira in 1894, when Mrs. Eastman became associate pastor to Thomas K. Beecher at his Park Church. Her booklet about Julia Beecher is the major source of information about Julia Jones Beecher's life and personality. While writing, Eastman apparently had full access to many of Beecher's long correspondences with family and friends, from which she quotes generously but judiciously. There are hand-drawings by Beecher from letters, descriptions of her personality and her work from friends and church members, and reminiscences by Eastman herself. Beecher and Eastman had a deep friendship over the eleven years in

⁸ The phrase "flower of Puritanism" has been applied to the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, but this usage seems to post-date Eastman's use of it here. See Carl Van Doren, "The Flower of Puritanism," The Nation 111 (December 8, 1920) 649-50. "When Hawthorne, seventy years ago, in 'The Scarlet Letter' gave the world the finest flower of three hundred years of American Puritanism, he passed quietly by the ordinary surfaces of life...." The phrase was also applied to Emily Dickinson in the 1920s. See Norman Foerster, Chapter X, "Later Poets," The Cambridge History of American Literature, Book III, William Peterfield Trent, John Erskine, Stuart P. Sherman, and Carl Van Doren, eds. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1921) "There is no better example of the New England tendency to moral reverie than this last pale Indian-summer flower of Puritanism," 32. Before Eastman used the phrase, Henry James used it in his story "Four Meetings," first published in Scribner's Monthly, 15 (November 1877) 44-56. "She was as gravely, decently, demurely pretty as before. If she had struck me then as a thin-stemmed mild-hued flower of Puritanism, it may be imagined whether in her present situation this clear bloom was less appealing," from The Novels and Tales of Henry James, Volume 16 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909) 278-79.

which they both lived in Elmira and during several years before the Eastmans came to town. As Eastman's son, Max Eastman, said many years later,

Mrs. Beecher and my mother were the closest of friends, and their friendship consisted largely of a voyage together, and in the company of Emerson and William Morris and Walt Whitman, beyond the confines of churchly ethics and religion... I cherish the image of her sitting by my mother's hammock beside a brook reading aloud, with an expression of grim and yet joyful determination on her gentle features, the Calamus poems in Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself*.⁹

Even this memory, from a published book of essays about Max Eastman's heroes, reflects the constant observation by the church community of all of the Beechers' relationships. Julia Beecher's could not be called a life "that does not exhibit itself" for she spent her adult life under constant watch.¹⁰ As a minister's wife, she had little privacy and many of the details of her life and marriage were published in newspapers, books, and church records, even during her lifetime though especially after her death.

These sources create problems of reliability and accuracy for the historian. The deep regard in which Annis Eastman held Julia Beecher suggests both that she knew her intimately and that she might hold back the negative in her description of her friend's life and work. However, *A Flower of Puritanism* does not read as a pure hagiography. The minor controversies over Beecher's unusual dress and manners are not ignored, though there is an attempt to apologize for some of them. Annis Ford Eastman and Julia Jones Beecher were indeed close personal friends, but they came from different generations and in some ways different backgrounds. They disagreed about many issues, as their peers, the audience for Eastman's book about Beecher, well knew. Eastman did not try to hide what her readers already knew, that Julia Beecher had been somewhat controversial,

⁹ Max Eastman, *Heroes I Have Known: Twelve Who Lived Great Lives* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1942) 127.

¹⁰ See note 1.

though well-liked and respected, during her lifetime.¹¹ From A Flower of Puritanism, together with letters uncovered by Beecher's husband's biographer, Myra C. Glenn, and previously unpublished materials from the Park Church archives, it is possible to create an impression of a woman who apparently had few secrets and whose reputation was built of private and personal details which allowed her community to explain her unusual lifestyle and marriage.

Early Life:

According to her Elmira biographers, Julia Jones, born in 1826 to an educated and distinguished Bridgeport, Connecticut family, which included Cotton Mather and Noah Webster, was energetic and insistent from early in life. Eastman quotes Jones's mother, writing to her own mother, "You know what it is to run after a baby brim full of mischief all day; Julia creeps like a rabbit and needs constant watching."¹² Eastman goes on to tell stories of Jones's childhood antics as an outdoorsy tomboy who "hated to be dressed up in the afternoons with starched pantalettes on and to have nice little girls come and see her; often she would run away to the woods to escape such a fate and play with a brook all alone until night."¹³ Eastman's story of Julia Jones's active and unusual childhood compliments the Julia Beecher already well-established in Elmira when Eastman wrote. Usually, a small-town minister would visit the homes of members of his congregation, accompanied by his wife, on a regular schedule. When Thomas K. Beecher came to

¹¹ Ann Fabian, The Unvarnished Truth: Personal Narratives in Nineteenth-Century America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Though different in many significant ways from the works discussed by Fabian, her thoughtful book has helped me maintain a sense of prejudice and audience expectation in reading A Flower of Puritanism and other local contemporary writing about the Beechers.

¹² Flower of Puritanism, 8.

¹³ Flower of Puritanism, 11.

Elmira in 1854, after the death in 1853 of his first wife who had hated making the traditional regular pastoral visits, he made the controversial announcement that he would not carry on the visiting tradition.¹⁴ When Julia Jones came to Elmira to be the new Mrs. Beecher in 1857, she upheld Rev. Beecher's insistence that regular pastoral visits not be part of their ministry. She was an unconventional minister's wife and her biographer gave her an unconventional childhood personality to accompany that reputation.

Stories of Julia Jones's great popularity and energy as a young woman in Connecticut, while undoubtedly based on fact, provide evidence that Eastman and her church sought to explain the unusually driven woman they knew. During her youth in Bridgeport, Connecticut, Julia Jones and as many as thirty young men and women from her social group formed a club. Called the "Battledore Club of Bridgeport," the group apparently specialized in a kind of "general frolic," according to Julia's letters. These "smash-up[s]" were games of "battledore," an early form of badminton, which appears, from Jones's drawings, to be a group game played without a net. Jones's illustrations also portray young men collapsing into chairs and a young woman fainting into the arms of her comrades, apparently exhausted from the game.¹⁵ The Julia Jones of Eastman's pamphlet was energetic and outgoing and did not stand on social conventions, just as she and her husband did not follow conventional norms during their life in Elmira. Julia Jones's father, Henry Jones, had opened a private boys' school when the family moved to

¹⁴ Myra C. Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher: Minister to a Changing America, 1824-1900 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996) for Olivia Day Beecher's dislike of making pastoral calls see 63-64, for Thomas Beecher's refusal to make pastoral calls in Elmira, see 76-77. See also, Eastman, Heroes I Have Known, Thomas Beecher quoted, "I cannot make pastoral calls. I am not constructed so that I can. But I am yours all times of the day and night when you want anything of me. If you are sick and need a watcher I will watch with you. If you are poor and need some one to saw wood for you I will saw wood for you. I can read the paper for you if you need somebody to do that. I am yours, but you must call me the same as you would a physician," 115.

Bridgeport, Connecticut from Greenfield, Massachusetts, where he had been principal of a school for girls. It was during this period that one of the boys at her father's school is supposed to have said to her, "Miss Julia, you pour coffee with indiscriminate fury."¹⁶ This favorite anecdote about Julia Jones in early life was repeated often, and was sometimes attributed to a friend from Elmira.¹⁷ There was a clear connection between these early stories and the woman who came to be known in Elmira for her abrupt kindness and rushing enthusiasm.

Of all the stories of Julia Jones's early life, the most notable give special attention to her close friendship with her cousin, Olivia Day, who became the first wife of Thomas K. Beecher. Eastman introduces Julia Jones's feelings for her friend, saying, "Her love for 'Livy,' as she always called her, was the background for all other loves; the consciousness of Livy, and the adoration of Livy's perfections were as fresh and vivid during the last year of her life as the earliest romance of a girl's heart."¹⁸ Eastman also quotes Charles Beecher, one of Thomas Beecher's older brothers, describing Day and Jones in a letter. "The only way I can express their relation to each other is in the words, one soul in two bodies." Romantic friendships between young women, friendships that were expected to change with marriage but did often continue in their new forms throughout women's lives, were a common nineteenth-century social custom. Historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's now famous article "The Female World of Love and Ritual" outlined the pattern of these friendships and established the belief, long accepted by

¹⁵ Flower of Puritanism, 12-13. For definition of "battledore" see American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000).

¹⁶ Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 42; Flower of Puritanism, 11.

¹⁷ Heroes I Have Known, 125; Robert D. Jerome and Herbert A. Wisbey, Jr., eds., Mark Twain in Elmira (Elmira, New York: Mark Twain Society, Inc., 1977) 138.

¹⁸ Flower of Puritanism, 16-17.

scholars, that these friendships were a normal part of a young woman's heterosexual development and were not sexual in nature, though they were often demonstrative and loving.¹⁹

However, the transition from girlhood friendships to marriage was often tremendously painful and sometimes included the acknowledgment of sexual feeling for a female friend. Frances Willard, the early President of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, who brought that organization to national prominence, suffered terribly when her dear friend Mary King married Willard's brother. Willard poured out her love and longing for her friend in her diaries, clearly expressing the sexual nature of her feelings. She believed she was the only woman ever to have felt so, but her family understood that the sexual potential of a close friendship between young women was very real.²⁰ Eastman's language, "the earliest romance of a girl's heart," certainly suggests to a modern reader a homoerotic relationship of some sort, as does the common practice, adopted by Willard to King and Jones to Day, of using a male name in correspondence with the partner in romantic friendship.²¹ The worries suffered by Willard's family suggest a cultural understanding of the sexual potential of such friendships. Historian Lisa Moore has criticized Smith-Rosenberg and her followers for ignoring such family worries. In his book, Gay New York, George Chauncey has persuasively shown that even by the 1890s modern rigid definitions of homosexuality and heterosexuality did not yet exist. Smith-Rosenberg's discussion of "romantic friendship" has led scholars away from

¹⁹ Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual." A sign of its popularity, the essay was not only anthologized in Smith-Rosenberg's own collected works, Disorderly Conduct, but also in A Heritage of Her Own, ed. Cott and Pleck, 311-42. See note 25 for further discussion.

²⁰ Gifford, Writing Out My Heart, xii, 19 n.5, 115-16, 134-35, 152-53.

interpreting homosocial friendships as potentially sexual, but in the absence of a definition of “homosexuality,” it seems possible that many young women may have seen their sexual feelings as a progression, first focusing on women friends and then turning to men later in life. Their families recognized the potential for those girlhood homosexual feelings to continue later in life.²²

In 1849, Olivia Day, Julia Jones’s dear friend, became a teacher in a Hartford, Connecticut school where she met Thomas Kennicut Beecher, one of the younger sons of Lyman Beecher, the renowned Calvinist preacher. As mentioned in Chapter One, Thomas Beecher was also half-brother to the famous Henry Ward Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Catharine Beecher, and full brother to Isabella Beecher Hooker, the suffragist and women’s rights activist. In 1849, Thomas Beecher wrote to his sister Isabella Beecher Hooker about his engagement to Day in words reminiscent of his family’s religious background.

I opened the floodgates of my heart – & poured out mightily yea & have prevailed.
And now at last – the valiant Tom – the careless Tom – the foolish Tom – the
teacher Tom – is the accepted one – more than this – the loved one of Livy Day –
I’m proud – yet happier than proud.²³

²¹ Gifford, Writing Out My Heart, Willard’s nickname throughout her life was “Frank,” 2. Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, Olivia Day and Julia Jones Beecher referred to Beecher as “Jule,” a contemporary male name, 44-45.

²² Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual,” 53-76. Chauncey, “Introduction,” Gay New York, 1-29. Lillian Faderman expanded on Smith-Rosenberg’s work and defined a lesbian relationship as one “in which two women’s strongest emotions and affections are directed towards each other,” regardless of the presence or absence of a genital/sexual relationship, conflating the modern understanding of female homosexuality with nineteenth-century “romantic friendships” (Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men, 17-18). Lisa Moore criticizes Faderman and Smith-Rosenberg for “obscur[ing] the wariness and even prohibition that sometimes surrounded women’s friendships” and goes on to examine the perceived potential for sexual relationships between women in nineteenth-century literature, law, and personal papers (Moore, “Something More Tender Still than Friendship” in Vicinus, Lesbian Subjects, 21-40, quote on 23.) For further exploration of romantic love and friendships in nineteenth-century America, see below.

²³ Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 46, quoting TKB to IBH letter dated 17 or 18 January 1850, from Acquisitions at the Stowe Day Library in Hartford, Connecticut. In his Hartford school, Thomas Beecher had some disagreements with the school board. In 1849 the “school visitors” reported that Beecher’s methods of teaching and discipline were “peculiar” and “radical.” Glenn quotes from his diary in December of 1849, the same year in which he met his first wife, when he was particularly frustrated about the school

Eastman's biography of Julia Beecher touches on the pain felt by both Day and Julia Jones at their separation, though Jones seems to have interpreted her pain as part of a religious conversion crisis (see below). Eastman focuses more on the events after Olivia Day Beecher's death. Day died after only three years of marriage to Thomas Beecher, apparently from complications during pregnancy. Julia Jones then married Thomas Beecher in 1857, four years after the death in 1853 of Olivia Day, his adored first wife and her beloved friend.²⁴

Julia Jones and Thomas Beecher:

The marriage of Thomas Beecher and Julia Jones, they both claimed, was built first on their mutual grief for Livy Day and then later on their mutual commitment to Christian work. Thomas Beecher's biographer reports a somewhat apocryphal story that when Olivia Day told her friend about Beecher's proposal, Julia Jones responded, "Well, if Tom Beecher ever asks me to marry him I'll do it so quick he won't have a chance to change his mind."²⁵ This quote, written long after Beecher and Jones were married, seems unlikely to be accurate, but adds to the sense that the Beechers' marriage was a public affair. Their private jealousies and emotions, imagined or not, became part of their mythology. In A Flower of Puritanism, Julia Beecher's friend Annis Ford Eastman wrote of her marriage to Thomas Beecher, "It was a strange marriage for the girl who had been

board's pressure. "How little do they know & appreciate the longings of my soul! How little do they know the burden I feel myself called upon to bear for the sake of... [the] children!" If his frustration with the school board was evident in his writing, his excitement over his engagement was no less clear, Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 40, quoting, TKB Diary, 13 December 1849, Stowe Day Library, Hartford, Connecticut. Also quoted on 40, "Report of the Board of School Visitors," 8.

²⁴ Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 64.

sought by so many others of high character and unusual gifts, strange also for the man who all his life long frankly declared that in Livy's death he died to this world."²⁶ Julia Beecher accepted, we do not know how readily, that even her distant relationship with her husband would be part of her reputation, that her community would discuss her marriage in great personal detail. Her biographer included these details that were already a part of the local expectations about the Beechers' story.

Whether or not Julia Jones had always secretly wished to marry Thomas Beecher, after many years of marriage Julia Beecher claimed that she had never replaced her husband's first wife in his affections, and perhaps she also felt that Beecher had never replaced "Livy" in her own heart. Eastman reports in A Flower of Puritanism that Julia Beecher said often in her last decade, "When I get to heaven I will find Tom and take him to Livy and say, 'Here he is, Livy, I have done my best, but I could not make him happy, now take him.'"²⁷ Memories of Olivia Day and the contrast between Olivia Day and Julia Beecher became an important part of the public image of the Beechers' unusual marriage and almost certainly of Julia Beecher's own feelings about her marriage. Eastman, however, goes on to draw the contrast between them, saying, "Livy was slow of heart, somewhat afraid of life, full of doubts of herself and of the universe, and given to moods of profound melancholy; where Julia plunged into life she stood shrinking on the verge."²⁸ Eastman, probably having learned to do so from Thomas Beecher, saw the contrasts between Olivia Day's and Julia Jones's personalities and presumably thought of

²⁵ Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 47, quoting "Editor I. Seymour Copeland Pays Tribute to Rev. T. K. Beecher," a newspaper clipping, Thomas Beecher Scrapbook, No. 5, 78, Stowe Day Library, Hartford, Connecticut.

²⁶ Flower of Puritanism, 36.

²⁷ Flower of Puritanism, 38.

²⁸ Flower of Puritanism, 17.

this contrast as an explanation for the lack of emotional connection between Thomas Beecher and the second Mrs. Beecher.

While Julia Beecher felt that she could never live up to Livy's image, which was probably hyperbolized by both Beechers after her death, their mutual friends also witnessed the distance in their marriage. As introduced in the previous chapter, Samuel Clemens, better known as Mark Twain of course, married a woman from Elmira, daughter of the Langdon family, co-founders of Beecher's church. The Clemenses spent summers in Elmira while their children were young. As an adult, their daughter Clara wrote that her father had been "devoted to some of Mother's friends and relatives there [in Elmira]." ²⁹ Samuel Clemens and his wife wrote about the Beechers' relationship in 1869, the year of their own marriage. Samuel Clemens said,

Mr. Beecher robs himself of the best happiness of his life when he enjoys his pleasures in solitude... And then the glaring wrong of the thing: for Mrs. Beecher shares his sorrows, & this earns the right to share his pleasures. But it seems that when the two are done carrying all the burdens of the day, he has no more use for her – she may sit down in sadness & weariness, while he loses the memory of the drudgery in the happy relief of pleasure. It is selfish – though, superbly gifted as he is, let us charitably try to fancy that he don't know it. ³⁰

Clemens understood that the Beechers had a professional relationship and that they worked together, but he also saw that they did not enjoy a close personal connection and that it was Julia Beecher who suffered most from the distance.

Eastman also acknowledges that Thomas Beecher could be a drain on his wife's spirits, while hinting at some of the public concern around Julia Beecher's unusual role in the community, saying,

²⁹ Clara Clemens, *My Father, Mark Twain* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1931) 60.

³⁰ Victor Fischer and Michael B. Frank, eds., *The Mark Twain Papers, Mark Twain's Letters, Vol. 3: 1869* (Berkeley: University of California Press) 240-41.

Some have felt that Mrs. Beecher's natural endowment of enthusiasm hindered rather than furthered her usefulness. . . . But those who knew her real life, her task, realized that she had need of every increment of vital energy and spiritual fervor she possessed. Often, when seeing her press on with some matter of domestic improvement or of church work in the face of Mr. Beecher's despair and disapproval, I have thought of a strong swimmer in a heavy sea, needing all the strength and courage he could command to keep his head above water.³¹

Eastman saw the great effort Julia Beecher made to keep her husband's spirits up, but she also saw a church community divided by the distant marriage between two of their leaders. Eastman herself was taking part in the community debate about the Beechers, and, interestingly, she used the image of Julia Beecher as a male swimmer to provide a personal explanation for Julia Beecher's controversial personality. Eastman goes on to describe the friendly teasing and coaxing Julia Beecher used to help her husband avoid depression. Thomas Beecher's biographer uncovers letters written by Thomas Beecher during the early years of their marriage which illustrate the effects of Julia Beecher's careful efforts. Thomas Beecher wrote to his sister that he was "very well governed" by his bride and "illustrate[d] a gentle and submissive spirit – a pattern to all husbands." He went on to say that Julia, reading the letter over his shoulder, claimed she could give them evidence to contradict this picture of a docile husband. She teased him gently, and clearly to his enjoyment.³²

This combination of close female friendship with Olivia Day and distant love relationship with her husband shows interesting parallels to the ideas of two historians whose works provide somewhat contrasting pictures of gender ideals in Victorian America. As mentioned above, Smith-Rosenberg's essay "The Female World of Love and Ritual" highlights the separate gendered emotional social spheres in which men and

³¹ Flower of Puritanism, 37.

women were isolated. Although Smith-Rosenberg does not acknowledge the sexual potential of romantic friendships, her study of how these separate emotional spheres led women to form especially close friendships that can be viewed as social phenomena rather than as personal “psycho-sexual” experiences is still valuable.³³ Her study of passionate friendships between women that lasted into adulthood and through married life certainly describes the relationship between Olivia Day and Julia Jones, although Day did not survive into middle age. Day’s and Jones’s letters about their great love for each other and Day’s constant reassurance of Jones that her marriage to and love for Beecher did not diminish her feelings for her old friend fit Smith-Rosenberg’s pattern.³⁴ There is another complication to add to Smith-Rosenberg’s work, however.

In Searching the Heart, Karen Lystra writes that the separate male and female emotional spheres were not as disconnected as Smith-Rosenberg’s work leads one to believe. For Lystra, romantic love was a universally understood middle-class concept which united the male and female spheres in an experience that was intensely emotional and profoundly tied to personal identity.³⁵ Thomas K. Beecher’s elation at his

³² Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 88, quoting TKB to IBH, 26 February 1857, Joseph K. Hooker Collection, Stowe Day Library, Hartford, Connecticut.

³³ Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual,” in Disorderly Conduct, “American society was characterized in large part by rigid gender-role differentiation within the family and within society as a whole, leading to the emotional segregation of women and men... Within such a world of emotional richness and complexity, devotion to and love of other women became a plausible and socially acceptable form of human interaction,” 60. See also Disorderly Conduct, “I would like to suggest an alternative approach to female friendships – one that would view them within a cultural and social setting rather than from an exclusively individual psychosexual perspective,” 54.

³⁴ Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 41-44, 46-47; Flower of Puritanism, 16-18, 20-23, 26-29.

³⁵ Lystra, Searching the Heart, “A too-rigid view of separate spheres has led to a sense of male-female emotional segregation and distance in Victorian America that must be modified. No doubt nineteenth-century middle-class women had intense and emotionally fulfilling relationships with other women, but sisterhood did not preclude many of them from seeking and attaining deeply engaging and satisfying romantic relationships to men,” 11. See also Chapter 5, “Blurring Separate Spheres: Sex-Role Boundaries and Behavior,” 121-56. The major criticism of Lystra’s work is that her evidence is too limited to support her ideas. Specifically, her failure to examine letters between women or between men and in different times of life besides courtship was seen by reviewers as an important failing in her book. See William G. Shade,

engagement to Olivia Day illustrates the kinds of emotional out-pourings Lystra examines. The same friends who worried over the emotional distance between Thomas and Julia Beecher explained the distance by saying that the Beechers lacked the kind of romantic love described by Lystra. Lystra sees a tension in the Victorian concept of marriage between the beliefs that romantic love is an uncontrollable inspiration and that marriage embodies duty – whether or not inspiration is present – and, for many women, economic necessity.³⁶ Apparently, the Beechers' marriage was viewed by their peers as a kind of tragedy because the emotional, romantic love, which they could not control, was absent in their marriage. Eastman and Clemens believed, probably because Thomas and Julia led them to believe, that Thomas Beecher's feelings for his first wife were different. Samuel Clemens's letter to own his wife about Thomas Beecher's attitude towards his marriage continued,

Only, my dear, I will suggest that his heart & brain would not have been so dull in these matters with his first wife. I think he possesses a very good *brotherly* love for his present wife – & you furnish me ample proofs that he possesses nothing more. Therefore, with such a love, let us not expect of him the noble things that are born only of a far higher & sublimer passion.³⁷

The Beechers did not share the “higher and sublimer passion” that Victorian Americans expected in a happy marriage.

“Looking for Love,” Reviews in American History 19 (June 1991): 211-17; Mark C. Carnes, “Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America [book review],” American Historical Review 96 (February 1991): 260-61.

³⁶ Searching the Heart, “Romantic love was based upon the ‘fiction’ of the independent self, acting as a ‘free’ agent in terms of personal needs. Yet within marriage, the economic dependence of women, the entanglements of family, and the whole web of the social fabric acted to challenge the underlying premise of nineteenth-century American romantic love: atomistic individual freedom. Nineteenth-century culture applauded application of the ideal of individual freedom to a variety of social situations, but fought against its application within marriage, clinging to older traditions of social responsibility tied to spousal role obligations,” 226.

³⁷ Mark Twain's Letters, Volume 3, 240-41.

Karen Lystra also connects the Victorian ideal of romantic love to a concept of sex as the “ultimate expression of the individual’s inner self.” Lystra argues that for Victorian Americans the difference between pure and impure sex was the presence or absence of romantic love.³⁸ If Henry Ward Beecher can credibly be accused of believing that sex outside of marriage could be condoned if an “affinity” existed between the people involved, then perhaps Thomas Beecher believed that sex even within a marriage would be impure without the presence of romantic love, as did Frances Willard and her fiancé. Willard was briefly engaged to a man while she was suffering about her female friend’s marriage to her brother. Willard and her fiancé clearly expressed their belief that a sexual relationship, even within marriage, would be wrong if love was not present.³⁹

Thomas and Julia Beecher never had children of their own, though they adopted three daughters of their friend Charles Farrar after his wife’s death and took several other orphaned or threatened young people into their home over the years.⁴⁰ It is possible that the Beechers had a limited sexual relationship, if any. Thomas Beecher’s biographer suggests his ambivalence towards sex may have been related to his first wife’s death from complications of a pregnancy. She points out that Beecher always tried to describe his relationship with his first wife in terms of spirituality rather than sexuality, as if denying

³⁸ Searching the Heart, 84, 85.

³⁹ For discussion of Henry Ward Beecher and “affinity” see Altina L. Walker, Reverend Beecher and Mrs. Tilton: Sex and Class in Victorian America (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), 6, 19, 114, 115, 140, 149. For Frances Willard’s brief engagement, see Gifford, Writing Out My Heart, 153.

⁴⁰ Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 116-17, and Flower of Puritanism, “Mrs. Beecher always lamented her childless estate, and one can but sympathize with her regret, not only for the joy she missed, but from the conviction that the experience of motherhood would have added to her character a certain deep tenderness and comprehension which would have made her almost faultless... It may have been this fact [her childlessness] that made Mrs. Beecher seem so often a being apart from all others; good and fair beyond the rest, but not quite *comprehending*,” 46-47.

that side of their relationship.⁴¹ If Thomas Beecher was ambivalent toward sex, we should not infer the existence of a Victorian culture of sexual repression based on Lyman Beecher's rigid Calvinism. Isabella Beecher Hooker, Thomas Beecher's sister, to whom he was very close, clearly had a sexual relationship with her husband to which she did not hesitate to allude in letters. While staying at the Gleason Water Cure in Elmira, being treated apparently for a prolapsed uterus, she wrote to her husband that she had asked the doctor, probably Rachel Gleason herself, if she "might make [him] most heartily welcome" if he came to visit. In the context of the letter, she clearly means that she was healthy enough to have sex with her husband if he came to visit.⁴² Thomas Beecher's attitude about sex and the interpretation of that attitude by his friends and peers, was informed by the Victorian understanding of the connection between romantic love and sex, rather than by a simple rejection of sexual expression. Concepts of love and the sexual potential of friendship form a link between Thomas Beecher's ambivalence about sex and his wife's pain at ending her girlhood friendship with his first wife.

Other Friendships:

Interestingly, the Beechers in Elmira – like other Beechers in other parts of the country – experimented with male-female friendships. Neither Lystra nor Smith-Rosenberg discusses this complicated area of overlap between what are believed to be separate men's and women's emotional spheres, but heterosocial friendships were an important part of the marriage of Thomas and Julia Beecher, and possibly a source of

⁴¹ Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, "Not surprisingly, he [Thomas Beecher] tried to deny the reality of his carnal relations with Livy, depicting their love as pure (asexual) and ethereal. '[W]e have walked hand in hand in heaven,' he said, 'more hours than on earth,'" 65.

tension between them. Like friendships between young girls, friendships between men and women, single or married, were seen as valuable but potentially sexual and therefore potentially dangerous relationships.⁴³ Thomas K. Beecher's biographer, Glenn, has discussed the friendship between Thomas Beecher and Ella Wolcott, a single woman and a Civil War nurse whom he met while staying at the Gleason Water Cure during his early years in Elmira. Glenn provides ample evidence that Beecher's friendship with Wolcott became closer during his first years of marriage to Julia and continued throughout his life. After the Civil War, Wolcott relocated to Elmira and became very active in the Park Church community.⁴⁴ The Civil War was a tumultuous time for Beecher during which he fought some local political battles over the military assignment of his alcoholic brother, James Beecher, who later committed suicide. In this difficult time, during which he contemplated leaving the ministry, Beecher and Wolcott's letters grew more intimate.

Glenn posits that the relationship between Wolcott and Thomas Beecher did cause some tension between Thomas and Julia Beecher. She quotes Thomas Beecher's letters to Wolcott that mention Julia Beecher's affection for her and her hopes to meet her again in person. Glenn believes the words are insincere and represent a husband covering his wife's irritation. While Wolcott also corresponded with Julia, Glenn sees their letters as having "an undercurrent of tension." Glenn believes that Wolcott's reassurances to Julia Beecher that "Mr. Beecher" missed his wife while he was away were a response to the friction Thomas Beecher's relationship with Wolcott was causing between Thomas and

⁴² Jeanne Boydston, Mary Kelley, and Anne Margolis, The Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women's Rights and Woman's Sphere (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988) 104-05.

⁴³ Moore, "Something More Tender Still than Friendship" in Vicinus, Lesbian Subjects, 23. See note 25 above.

⁴⁴ Eva Taylor, A History of The Park Church (Elmira, New York, 1946, revised and enlarged, 1981) 19-20. Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 87, 90-91, 102, 109, 110, 112, 115, 116-17, 119, 128, 141, 157, 158.

Julia Beecher. This interpretation fails to take into account the distance Julia Beecher always felt from her husband. Wolcott's letters may well have been the sincere reassurances of a woman who knew that her friend loved his wife more than she knew. They may also, of course, have been the guilty words of a mistress, though Glenn finds that extremely unlikely, and I find no evidence to contradict her conclusion that their relationship remained non-sexual, whatever sexual undercurrent or potential the relationship had.⁴⁵

Whether or not Thomas Beecher had a sexual affair with Ella Wolcott, their friendship – intimate and personal – provides an example of a kind of relationship not unique in their society, though not yet much explored by historians of Victorian America. Even Julia Beecher herself had close friendships with men of their congregation. Her correspondence with Samuel Clemens and the many jokes they shared provide evidence of such a friendship. Julia Beecher held deep religious beliefs, which were much more firm than those of “that great infidel,” Samuel Clemens.⁴⁶ Their joking disagreement about life after death illustrates their close friendship. In July of 1895, Clemens had a poem he wrote for Julia Beecher inscribed onto a little stone booklet she had made from some flat, found river rocks.

If you prove right and I prove wrong
 A million years from now.
 In language plain and frank and strong,
 My error I'll avow
 To your dear mocking face.

If I prove right, by God His grace,
 Full sorry I shall be,

⁴⁵ Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 90-91, 116-17. Unfortunately, I have not been able to study the entire text of the correspondence between Ella Wolcott and Julia Beecher. My interpretation is based on the quotations provided by Glenn.

⁴⁶ Heroes I Have Known, 107.

For in that solitude no trace
 There'll be of you and me,
 Nor of your vanished face

A million years, O patient stone,
 You've waited for this message
 Deliver it a million hence
 Survivor pays expressage.⁴⁷

This friendly joke illustrates Julia Beecher's religious conviction, the importance of disagreement within her circle, and her friendship with Samuel Clemens. Other letters exchanged between Clemens and Julia Beecher, as well as Clemens's comments about the Beecher marriage, further illustrate the closeness of their friendship.

Of course, one of the most infamous male-female friendships of the day was that between Henry Ward Beecher and Elizabeth Tilton, the wife of a member of Henry Ward Beecher's congregation. This more famous Beecher's friendship with a woman other than his wife brought them both much unpleasant publicity and historians are still debating the nature of their relationship. While many scholars simply assume that Beecher and Tilton did have a sexual relationship, it cannot be definitively confirmed or denied. Some of the most recent treatments of the scandal focus entirely on its many cultural implications.⁴⁸

Some of the most important aspects of late-nineteenth-century culture that are illustrated by the Beecher-Tilton scandal surround the issues of friendship and marriage. Whether or not Henry Ward Beecher did have a sexual affair with Elizabeth Tilton, it is

⁴⁷ Park Church Archives, Box Bg047, newspaper clipping from March 8, 1935. This story is retold elsewhere, as well. See Jerome and Wisbey, Mark Twain in Elmira, 198 for photograph of stones from Elmira College's Mark Twain Collection.

⁴⁸ For treatments that assume Beecher and Tilton did have a sexual relationship, see Boydston, Kelly, and Margolis, The Limits of Sisterhood; Barbara Goldsmith, Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1998); Walker, Reverend Beecher and Mrs. Tilton. For treatments of the culture surrounding the scandal see Richard Wightman Fox, Trials of Intimacy: Love and Loss in the Beecher-Tilton Scandal (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Glenn Wallach, "'A Depraved Taste for Publicity': The Press and Private Life in the Gilded Age," American Studies (Lawrence, Kansas), 39 (1998): 31-57.

certain that the scandal began with a friendship sanctioned by her husband and not unusual in their social circle. That their friendship became unusually close and that rumors, fueled by fact or fancy, eventually made that friendship the subject of adultery inquiries does not diminish the cultural norm of male-female friendship. It is interesting to note that Thomas K. Beecher's comment on Henry Ward Beecher's involvement in an adultery scandal were some of the least sympathetic to come from the Beecher family. He said in a letter to his sister, Isabella Beecher Hooker, who also did not publicly support their famous half-brother, "In my judgment Henry is following his slippery doctrines of expediency, and, in his cry of progress and the nobleness of human nature, has sacrificed clear, exact integrity."⁴⁹ Thomas Beecher's lack of sympathy for his possibly adulterous brother suggests that his friendship with Wolcott remained non-sexual, and that his own spiritual evolution and unusual marriage did not seem as threatening to his community as Henry Ward Beecher's new "Gospel of Love."

Religious Crises:

From the 1820s and 1830s, when Thomas Beecher, Julia Jones, and Olivia Day were children growing up in Calvinist (or what Annis Eastman calls "Puritan") homes, until the 1890s, when Eastman joined the Beechers at Elmira's Park Church, American Calvinistic religions evolved dramatically. Other biographers of various Beechers have detailed the painful conversion experiences of and intense pressure placed on the children of Lyman Beecher. Catharine Beecher, for instance, had a very strained relationship with her father after her fiancé was killed in shipwreck without having been "saved." She

⁴⁹ Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 172, Glenn quotes Beecher's November 6, 1887 speech, "Election" found in

mourned his loss all the more because her family's beliefs dictated that he was doomed to eternity in hell. She eventually renounced her family's strict Calvinism, apparently over this issue, to be able to believe her drowned fiancé safe in heaven. Henry Ward Beecher, too, had a rocky relationship with their father over Henry's evolving religious beliefs.⁵⁰ Of course, eventually Henry Ward Beecher's new form of Calvinism, the "Gospel of Love," which ironically came to be known as "Beecherism," led to other controversies, including the Beecher-Tilton scandal mentioned above. Many of Henry Ward Beecher's contemporaries and some modern historians viewed the adultery charges against Beecher as the result of backlash from the more traditional religious establishment against his new religious ideologies. His more emotional and less theologically rigorous approach appealed especially to the young and upwardly mobile, the new elites, as did his accepting attitude towards commercialism.⁵¹ There were similarities between Henry Ward Beecher's congregation and that of his younger half-brother, but Thomas K. Beecher mistrusted his brother's "Beecherism" and instead founded a church that was unusual in its socialist mission and acceptance of many religions rather than in its emotionalism (see Chapter Three for further discussion).⁵²

Box 12, in the Thomas K. Beecher Papers at Cornell University Library, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Ithaca, New York.

⁵⁰ Limits of Sisterhood, 17-18; Kathryn Kish Sklar, Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1976) Chapters 1-4, 3-55; Stephen H. Snyder, "Transformation of Tradition," Chapter 3 in Lyman Beecher and His Children: The Transformation of a Religious Tradition (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1991), 55-105.

⁵¹ Walker, "The Scandal and Local Politics: The 'Radical Rumpus,'" Chapter 6 in Reverend Beecher and Mrs. Tilton, 82-92. The Feminization of American Culture, 83-4, 133-34, 255. For Henry Ward Beecher's endorsement of growing consumerism see Selling God, 206-8. For demographic breakdown of Beecher's congregation and the appeal of "Beecherism" to the upwardly mobile, see Walker, Reverend Beecher and Mrs. Tilton, 101-06.

⁵² Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 161, 172-73. For examples of Thomas K. Beecher's sermons, see Notable Sermons By Thomas K. Beecher, Vol. I. (Published by the Osborne Press, Elmira, NY, Copyright 1914 by Frances Farrar) from Park Church Archives. For his acceptance of other religions see Our Seven Churches, (New York: J.B. Ford & Co., 1870), discussed in Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 129.

Thomas K. Beecher himself, like his more famous siblings, rebelled against his father's religious teachings throughout his early life. Though possibly more like his father in some respects than his more flamboyant brother, Henry Ward Beecher, Thomas K. Beecher also avoided rigorous theology as an enemy of true religious experience. He struggled through several conversion experiences, mostly brought on by his brothers' sermons. He spent time with Edward in Ohio and Henry in Brooklyn (both also ministers, like all the sons of Lyman Beecher) and in both places suffered personal religious crises. Thomas Beecher was also adamant about his wish to find a career path outside of the family tradition in the church. He briefly pursued a career as a scientist, spent a few years teaching, as mentioned above, but finally he fulfilled his father's dream and become a minister, like all of his brothers and half-brothers.⁵³ The Beecher family were cultural celebrities and their individual breaks with their father's brand of Calvinism did not go unnoticed in their own lifetimes. Max Eastman described Thomas K. Beecher's place in his famous family by saying,

He belonged to the second Beecher brood, those with more integrity and less sentimentalism than the children of Roxanna Foote [mother of Henry Ward Beecher, Catharine Beecher, and Harriet Beecher Stowe]. They all had genius; they all had unconventional and imposing force; they all had large-featured good looks and magnetism. He was the best-looking and the brainiest... and he had by far the most distinguished gift of expression.⁵⁴

⁵³ Glenn, "Growing Up a Beecher," Chapter 1 in Thomas K. Beecher, 1-18. See also Snyder, Lyman Beecher and His Children, "Thomas especially struggled with his father over his wish to enter first engineering or mathematics, and then medicine," 53. Snyder claims that after the death of Roxanna Foote, Lyman's "role in the establishment of the family religious tradition was virtually complete. What remained were his efforts to press upon the children the decision to affirm that tradition. There would be no new ideas, techniques, or causes that would alter what he had already accomplished," 33. Two of the sons of Lyman Beecher committed suicide, both suffering from depression exacerbated by the tremendous family pressure to pursue ministerial careers against their own personal wishes. Sklar, Catharine Beecher, for death of George Beecher, see 146-47. Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, for death of James Beecher, see 171.

⁵⁴ Heroes I Have Known, 113.

Thomas Beecher would certainly not have described himself in such terms, but Eastman's depiction provides a context for understanding how Thomas K. Beecher's religious views were seen by those around him.

Julia Jones, like her minister husband and so many of their peers and contemporaries, had several religious crises during her lifetime. Eastman's A Flower of Puritanism describes a gentle childhood religious experience and says that it was not until Jones heard Henry Ward Beecher preach when she was twenty years old that she began to consider religion with more serious attention. After Olivia Day and Thomas K. Beecher were first married, Day wrote to Jones, who was about to embark on a year-long trip to Europe and was apparently both nervous about her trip and experiencing some kind of spiritual crisis. Thomas Beecher's biographer, Glenn, suggests that Jones's religious doubts may have been brought about by the marriage of her friend to a man in whom she herself had romantic interest, but it seems equally possible that the source of her anxiety was not her desire for Thomas Beecher but her pain at separating from her girlhood friend, possibly pain at losing that friend to a male romantic partner. Jones sublimated the emotional crisis into a spiritual conversion crisis, a part of the Christian faith of her family and community. Just as Catharine Beecher's grief over the death of her fiancé led to her religious crisis, Jones's pain at her friend's marriage became a catalyst for her religious conversion. Day also suffered during this time, though she saw it more clearly as concern over her friend's upset. Apparently Jones was very hard on herself during her spiritual and emotional crisis, prompting Day to write,

Sometimes I feel afraid that you in your repentant hatings of yourself will fairly battle out of existence all my darling Jule. Do keep fast hold of all that your conscience will let you! I love you and I know nothing that I can spare out of you; I suppose you will say that you know enough you would like to spare, but do not

exterminate too fiercely. Oh, my old frolicsome Jule! full of whims, fancies and hasty impulses, I cannot, I cannot give you up!⁵⁵

Day was feeling unable to let go of her girlhood friend, though she understood that it was expected of her. Jones chose to experience her pain as the same kind of religious anxiety that plagued her future husband throughout his life. However, after her marriage, Julia Jones Beecher did not allow her own religious crises to continue. The crisis of youth remained in the memories of her friends and in her letters, but she gave up the public enactment of religious anxiety to help her husband through his melancholy.

Conclusion:

Julia Jones Beecher's distant marriage, passionate feelings for her girlhood friend, and her professional religious life illuminate several important aspects of nineteenth-century American culture. The first of these is the sexual potential of romantic friendships between young girls observed by families and by the young women themselves. Although an explicitly homosexual identity did not seem to be part of the experience for most, homosexual feelings were an accepted possibility. That Thomas and Julia Beecher's church community watched and discussed the Beechers' friendships and marriage with constant scrutiny and careful attention to detail, even including a published biography by their close friend, forms another important addition. A third important aspect of Victorian American culture illustrated by Julia Beecher's biography is that friendships between men and women, single or married, created an important bridge between the male and female emotional spheres, in addition to the bridge created by heterosexual romantic relationships and marriages, showing that the male and female

⁵⁵ Flower of Puritanism, 27.

emotional realms were not as separated as they may seem through study of nineteenth-century ideological rhetoric alone. Finally, Julia Beecher's life demonstrates that the religious conversion crises that were such an important part of Puritan heritage could provide an opportunity to express emotional pain at separation from a girlhood friend, a drowned fiancé, or even – as for Thomas Beecher – separation from father and possibly from chosen career..

The Beechers, though part of an unusual church community in a unique town, represent many of the important changes taking place in American culture during their lifetimes. Just as their marriage and relationships can allow us to see some of those changes more clearly, their religious community and their at times aggressive rejection of gendered ideals and duties exemplify the changing relationship between religion and gender and the evolution of women's charitable work in small-town communities. The next chapter will focus on the Beechers in Elmira, as part of the social reform community and as early practitioners of Christian socialism.

Chapter Three: “Hitched to a Steam Engine”
Julia Jones Beecher, Minister’s Wife

There is nothing comparable to the endurance of a woman. In military life she would tire out any army of men, either in camp or on the march.

– Mark Twain, in his autobiography¹

Pass to thy Rendezvous of Light,

Pangless except for us –

Who slowly ford the Mystery

Which thou hast leaped across!

– Emily Dickinson²

While the Beechers were a part of a community at the Park Church in Elmira that had much in common with other reform groups around the Northeast and other parts of the country, their relationship to each other and treatment of gendered duties at church were exceptional. Because the Beechers were under constant scrutiny by their peers and neighbors, their unusual gendered behaviors formed a crucial part of their public image and reputation. Both Thomas and Julia Beecher negotiated their challenges to gender norms through compromise. Where they might provide a challenge in one area, they found an area of concession in another. Thomas Beecher struggled to maintain an image of himself as masculine while women took over more and more of the duties of his church; Julia Beecher refused to defer to her husband or even to fashion trends, but she made efforts to keep her reforms from alienating those around her. The Beechers’

¹ Mark Twain, Mark Twain’s Autobiography, Albert Bigelow Paine, ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1924) as quoted in R. Kent Rasmussen, The Quotable Mark Twain: his Essential Aphorisms, Witticisms, and Concise Opinions (Lincolnwood, Illinois: Contemporary Books, 1997) 299.

ministry provides an unusual window into a time and culture in which science and religion and the importance of gender to both of these overlapping areas were being explored in new ways.

Faith and Science:

The quotation at the heading of Chapter One comes from a letter Samuel Clemens wrote to his future wife, a member of the Park Church congregation, during their courtship correspondence. Clemens had recently read several articles about astronomy and was expressing some of his most fundamental reservations about the new scientific rhetoric that so many Americans were adopting during the mid-nineteenth century. His flight of fancy about space and time embraced some of the wonder of contemporary science, but rejected the methodologies of scientific writing. His poetic description of space/time travel represents his discomfort with the scientific rhetoric whose importance in his life was expanding as he became intimately involved with the Elmira community. As Susan Harris has explained, Clemens's acute sensitivity to the ways in which language shapes ideas made him skeptical about the ability of scientific discourse to represent reality. As a part of the Elmira community, Olivia Langdon, his future wife, had a fairly extensive scientific education through her church community and in lessons with Professor Darrius Ford from Elmira College.³ Harris puts Olivia Langdon and Samuel Clemens at opposite ends of the debate about the value of science: Langdon strongly in favor of the benefits of science, and Clemens filled with doubts that science would

² Emily Dickinson, *Final Harvest: Emily Dickinson's Poems*, Thomas H. Johnson, ed. (Boston, Massachusetts: Little, Brown and Company, 1961) 299. Poem first published in 1924, written c. 1883.

deliver its promised answers. Harris also believes that the tension between Langdon and Clemens about science was one of the early compromises of their marriage that finally strengthened their relationship.

Thomas Beecher, like Olivia Langdon, was a great believer in science. Science had always been a part of his thinking and his world view. As a young man, Thomas Beecher had seriously considered a career as a professional chemist. Throughout his life, he continued his work as an amateur scientist, and in 1861 he and Charles Farrar, another professor at Elmira College, a church member, and father of the three girls eventually adopted by the Beechers, founded the Elmira Academy of Sciences. However, according to his biographer, Beecher experienced the same ambivalence towards the sciences that many ministers and other Americans, including Samuel Clemens, did. His constant crises of faith often centered around related subjects.⁴

Beecher's congregant and neighbor, Dr. Rachel Gleason, also strongly favored scientific inquiry and discourse combined with a religious social order. Gleason's book, Talks with My Patients, which began as a series of lectures to the women of Park Church, contains the admonition, "Physicians should be like ministers – guides to the people, and when their patients want to go wrong, they should lead and hold them to the right."⁵ Gleason, like Beecher, saw science and religion, medicine and ministry, as related professions. Her unique blend of sectarian and mainstream medicine introduced in

³ Susan K. Harris, "'Philosophy and Chemistry': Science Study in 1860s Elmira," Chapter 2 in The Courtship of Olivia Langdon and Mark Twain (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 46-69, see especially 48 and 52.

⁴ Myra C. Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher: Minister to a Changing America, 1824-1900 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996) 155. Harris, "'Philosophy and Chemistry'" Chapter 2 in The Courtship of Olivia Langdon and Mark Twain, 46-69, see especially 60.

⁵ Chemung County Historical Society "616 GLE Loc. Auth." Mrs. R.B. Gleason, M.D., Talks to My Patients; Hints on Getting Well and Keeping Well (New York: Wood & Holbrook, Publishers, No.15 Laight Street, 1871) vi, 157. See also Chapter One.

Chapter One suggests that she found unusual ways to integrate her religious views with her medical practice most fully. Perhaps in trying to make a similar combination of religious social order and scientific study, Thomas Beecher explored some health-related areas of science that today seem quite unscientific. During the 1850s, not long after his first wife's death, Beecher had a phrenological reading of himself performed.

Phrenology, a method of interpreting personality by examining the shape and features of an individual's head and skull, grew in popularity during the nineteenth century; Mark Twain even lampooned practitioners of the science in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. The report Beecher received was scientific in language and focused largely on health recommendations.⁶

In their efforts to combine science with a life governed by Christian faith, both Thomas and Julia Beecher emphasized the importance to theology of change. The challenges for people of faith posed by the constant litany of new scientific discoveries during the nineteenth century kept the necessity for adaptability in their minds. Thomas Beecher was quoted as having said, "He has reason to doubt that he is really growing up into God who finds no changes taking place in his theology."⁷ His wife, too, believed in the importance of new ideas, but also in the importance of appreciating the path to knowledge. Eastman recalled that when an old and discredited doctrine was discussed, Julia Beecher would say, "But it was necessary in its time."⁸

⁶ Park Church Archive, Box Bc003, report form says, "Given at Fowler and Wells Phrenological Cabinet, Clinton Hall, 129 and 131 Nassau Street, New York," dated November 23, 1853. Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn in The Portable Mark Twain, ed. Bernard De Voto (New York: Penguin Books, 1946, Huck Finn first published in 1884) 354. One of the "king" and the "duke's" many cons involves posing as an expert on phrenology.

⁷ Eva Taylor, A History of the Park Church from the Park Church archives (1946, revised and enlarged 1981) 23.

⁸ Park Church Archive, Elmira, New York, Box Bc043, Annis Ford Eastman, A Flower of Puritanism: Julia Jones Beecher, 1826-1905 (Elmira, New York: [Press of Snyder Bros., [c. 1905-10]), 67.

Shortly before her death in 1905, Julia Jones Beecher wrote a letter to the members of the Park Church that was not mentioned in Eastman's biography. Ill and aging, Beecher was writing to say good-bye to her friends with whom she had been serving for almost fifty years. Her Christian faith was strongly demonstrated in her words, as was her interest in Spiritualism and the afterlife. She said,

I believe in Jesus Christ my Shepherd – I know His voice and follow him tho far behind – And I believe it opens, right into life a Light, and that our friends come to <?> us unless the veil opens, And we no longer see on this side – unless for a moment we can see on both sides – as I am sure Mr. Beecher did, tried to let me know that he did.⁹

On March 11, 1900, Thomas Beecher had suffered a major stroke. His wife was with him while he waited for help to come from the Gleason Water Cure across the street, and three days later, he died. Presumably, the mention in Julia Beecher's letter of Mr. Beecher's being able to see "on both sides" referred to an incident during those last days of his life.

Annis Eastman documented both Julia Jones Beecher's commitment to scientific research and her interest in Spiritualism. Eastman had no faith in Spiritualism and wrote that Julia Beecher never received a communication from the "spirit world" in life because she "never could be deceived."¹⁰ Like Thomas Beecher's beloved sister Isabella Beecher Hooker, who was a devout believer in Spiritualism all her life, Julia Beecher dabbled in what seemed to her dear friend Annis Eastman, only a short time after Beecher's death, unscientific and almost un-Christian. As Ann Braude has described in detail, for many Americans during the mid-nineteenth century, who saw the relaxation of the strict Calvinism from their early lives, faith in heaven led to belief in a spirit life on earth, a

belief that could provide comfort in a changing world.¹¹ Perhaps because of her involvement in the scientific community at Park Church in Elmira during the later years when the combination religious and scientific language employed by Gleason and the Beechers was replaced in much of the country by a professionalized scientific discourse on health and the social order, Spiritualism seemed a less plausible pursuit to Eastman than it had to Julia Beecher. However, Eastman's insistence that Julia Beecher did not communicate with spirits during her lifetime, belies Beecher's own acceptance that her husband saw beyond the "veil" as he died.¹²

The disagreements between Julia Beecher and her friend, Annis Ford Eastman, illustrate that as the torch was passed from one important, female, public, religious figure to another, the issues changed. Julia Beecher sought personal religious explanations for the set of circumstances in which she lived: a distant marriage, the early loss of her girlhood friend, the dramatic upheaval in her community caused by the Civil War. Annis

⁹ Park Church Archive, Box Sb014, letter from "Julia J. Beecher" to "Friends of the Park Church," dated January 2, 1905.

¹⁰ Flower of Puritanism, 67.

¹¹ Ann Braude, Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989) 50. "In her study of the Beecher family, Marie Caskey has shown that orthodox Christians of the early nineteenth century reconciled themselves to death by developing concepts of the hereafter that pointed in the direction of Spiritualism. Patriarch Lyman Beecher, one of the best-known evangelists of the early nineteenth century and father of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Henry Ward Beecher, described heaven as a place of great beauty, where individuals would retain characteristics and proclivities of their earthly personalities. He taught his children that their dead mother, Roxanna, watched over them from heaven and continued to play an active role in their spiritual development. The personal presence of the sainted Roxanna Beecher was strong enough to prompt some of the Beecher children to investigate Spiritualism, while it moved all of them toward a more liberal theology. Caskey argues that the Beechers' Spiritualism resulted from the persistence into the nineteenth century of their Calvinist anxiety about the fate of the soul after death." Refers to Marie Caskey, Chariot of Fire: Religion and the Beecher Family (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1978). For Isabella Beecher Hooker's commitment to Spiritualism, see also Jeanne Boydston, Mary Kelley, and Anne Margolis, The Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women's Rights and Woman's Sphere (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988) 2-3, 189, 218, 292, 299, 324, 326-28.

¹² For discussion of changing religious beliefs during this period see Robert H. Abzug, Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) see especially 8. For an interesting example of the perceived connection between science and religion see Braude, Radical Spirits, 4-5.

Ford Eastman, who came to Elmira in 1894, dealt with different personal and national cultural changes. As discussed in Chapter One, the network of female reformers in Elmira formed late and remained relatively small. Reforming women of various generations and backgrounds in Elmira certainly disagreed, just as Eastman and Beecher disagreed about Spiritualism, but they continued to work together and for the same organizations.¹³ The disagreement between Beecher and Eastman about Spiritualism provides just one example of the generational differences between them, differences that did not prevent their close friendship nor their sense of sisterhood. Just as Clemens and Langdon built a marriage from their disagreements about science as well as their mutual values and interests, Eastman and Beecher, like fellow female church members throughout the Northeast, built their friendship on disagreement and discourse about the changing relationship between faith and science.

The Beechers' Ministry:

As outlined in Chapter One, the church that became Thomas Beecher's was founded in 1846 by a group of abolitionists who withdrew from the Presbyterian Church when the national organization did not officially condemn slavery. Beecher came to Elmira in 1854, the year after his first wife's death. Thomas K. Beecher was not an ordinary minister. When he first came to Elmira, his second ministerial position, he wrote that he did not believe in preaching to convert, nor to fill pews. He said, "My exclusive aim is to help men as individuals to be Christians. No church prosperity dazzles; no

¹³ See Lori Ginzberg, Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990); Nancy A. Hewitt, Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), as discussed in Chapter One.

church poverty or adversity troubles me.” He refused to be made the official minister, but requested that his relationship with the church be renewed on a month-by-month basis, saying, “we must owe nothing but to love one another.”¹⁴ From 1857, when he married Julia Jones, until the 1870s, the church rented meeting rooms in various buildings. Beecher even gave sermons from the Elmira Opera House, to the chagrin of the ministerial association of Elmira.¹⁵ After the Civil War, in 1871, when Thomas Beecher had been in Elmira for seventeen years and Julia Beecher had been there with him for fourteen, the trustees of what was then called the Independent Congregational Church made official their plans to erect a new church building. In 1872, construction began and the church was renamed the Park Church.¹⁶

Called the “first institutional church in America,” the concept of the church was unusual, even revolutionary. Between 1870 and 1900, years during which Samuel Eastman received his theological education at Oberlin and when the Park Church building was conceived and constructed, Christian socialism began to appear in seminary curricula and in the national imagination. Even Frances Willard, the President of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union who had been so broken-hearted over her friend’s marriage, began to interpret the WCTU’s mission to “help forward the coming of Christ into all departments of life” as one in which the socialist goal to take the “entire plant that we call civilization... and make it the common property of the people” took precedence. Labor leaders tended to criticize religion as overly conservative and hypocritical, but

¹⁴ Taylor, *A History of Park Church*, 13. See also Glenn, *Thomas K. Beecher*, 76-77.

¹⁵ Louis J. Budd, ed., *Mark Twain; Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches, & Essays, 1852-1890* (New York: The Library of America, 1981) 291-5. Mark Twain’s essay defending Rev. Beecher when the ministerial association expelled him from their group for his Opera House sermons, mocked them heartily. For a brief first hand account of a Beecher Opera House service, see Chemung County Historical Society, Archive Box MC16, Edward Billings Diary, June 5, 1870.

urban activists, seminary students, and small-town reformers were beginning to develop a socialism of Christianity anyway. While many studies of Christian socialism focus on the urban activists and professors at divinity schools, churches like the Park Church embodied some of the same characteristics as the rest of the movement, including a strong antitheological basis. As discussed in Chapter Two, Thomas Beecher, like his brother Henry Ward Beecher, rejected rigid theological debate as counterproductive. The term “institutional church,” taken from the writing of Max Eastman who borrowed it from his own contemporaries, referred to the infrastructure the church provided for the entire Elmira community, especially the poor. Thomas Beecher called the new church an “experiment in Christian socialism,” and a “church home” where the “Christian family” could work, play, and worship together.¹⁷ Samuel Clemens wrote about the proposed new church building in an 1871 article in the Elmira Daily Advertiser,

When a Beecher projects a church, that edifice is necessarily going to be something entirely fresh and original. It is not going to be like any other church in the world;... it is going to have a deal more Beecher in it than any one narrow creed can fit in it without rattling, or any one arbitrary order of architecture can symmetrically enclose and cover... There is only one word broad enough and deep enough to take in the whole affair... and that is Beecher.’¹⁸

The new Park Church building was designed to embody a sense of Victorian decorative opulence, but also a Christian simplicity. Kitchens, bathrooms, classrooms, parlors,

¹⁶ Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 147; Taylor, A History of The Park Church, 17-18.

¹⁷ James Dombrowski, The Early Days of Christian Socialism in America (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936) 8-12; John C. Cort, Christian Socialism: An Informal History (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988) 261-62, see 262 for Willard quotes. For Park Church, see Taylor, A History of The Park Church, 17; Max Eastman, Heroes I Have Known: Twelve Who Lived Great Lives (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1942), 122.

¹⁸ Mark Twain’s “A New Beecher Church,” reprinted in Robert D. Jerome and Herbert A. Wisbey, Jr., eds., Mark Twain in Elmira (Elmira, New York: Mark Twain Society, Inc., 1977) 123, from the Elmira Daily Advertiser, July 25, 1871, entire article, 123-128.

nurseries, a library, and offices made up the small group of buildings which allowed the church to care for local poor and provide a domestic environment for public activities.¹⁹

The decision to build the new “church home” came after the community changes of the Civil War, and after the Beechers had endured some complicated local controversy. Thomas Beecher had served as chaplain to the 141st New York Regiment from September 1862 until very early 1863, only a few months. He did not get along with the Colonel in charge of the regiment and resigned after sending a letter to the Colonel’s superior complaining of his leadership. During his few months as chaplain, Beecher used his influence to obtain a commission for his brother James as lieutenant colonel of the 141st Regiment. James Beecher was living in Elmira with his disturbed and alcoholic wife after Henry Ward Beecher and his wife Eunice had refused to care for James and Annie Beecher any longer. James Beecher replaced a local respected man as lieutenant colonel and his service was brief and controversial. After Thomas Beecher had left military service James Beecher felt abandoned in a hostile environment, forced to defend his brother and himself against the disapproval of the other men of the 141st. Eventually Thomas’s and James’s sister Isabella Beecher Hooker intervened and asked a family friend to secure an honorable discharge for her brother James, whose own alcoholism was worsening in his lonely situation. While the family was saved from the major scandal of a dishonorable discharge, Thomas Beecher’s reputation in Elmira was tarnished. He wrote

¹⁹ Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 147-150. The “informal public” defined by Mary Beth Norton as a part of the gendered power of seventeenth-century American culture was codified and institutionalized in the domestic publicity of the Park Church. Norton delineates the “formal public” sphere in which legal power mattered and the “informal public” sphere in which social power mattered, and in which women therefore exercised much greater power. Mary Beth Norton, Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 20-24.

to Ella Wolcott, “Even here at home among my own people... the air is full of suspicion & distrust of me.”²⁰

After his military service was over, Thomas Beecher returned to his congregation, although he was frustrated with the tedium of ministerial duties. While his congregation seems to have always supported their unusual minister, throughout the 1860s and 1870s Beecher was involved in various unpopular activities. He resigned from the local Republican Party, he published Our Seven Churches, whose message of religious acceptance angered his fellow clergymen, and he publicly disagreed with his wife and many of the women of his congregation, about temperance.²¹ The growing controversy surrounding Thomas Beecher in Elmira and the constant scrutiny within their own congregation focused on Julia Beecher and the Beecher marriage may have been related to the same mood of conservatism that Beecher himself embraced during the War. In defending the Civil War draft, he said “No discussion is proper... when the question is the execution or obedience to law.”²² He participated to some extent in the same spirit of conformity that made his unusual ministry, marriage, and public image seem less acceptable to his community as he became involved in unpopular controversies. However, before the fervor of wartime had faded, the Park Church building was begun.

Julia Beecher at Park Church:

²⁰ Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 106-12, quote on 112. Thomas Beecher’s discharge did not become formal until 1863, though he may have left service in late 1862. Park Church Archive, Bc 008, form honorably discharging TKB from service in the “Army of the Potomac” as Chaplain.

²¹ Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, for growing disagreements with Elmira community see 129-133. This disagreement was part of the spirit of debate within the church community, and Thomas Beecher did not seem to be alone in his dismissal of temperance. In January of 1862 the church had revoked their ban on “intoxicating liquors.” Taylor, A History of the Park Church, 6.

²² Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 119.

As the depression of the 1870s worsened, Elmirans had greater need for the new “institutional” church in their midst, and the role of women in the church continued to expand. The church provided one of the few resources for the newly indigent, even functioning as an unemployment office and housing the only public library in Elmira until 1899 when the Steele Memorial Library opened.²³ Within the new church building, Julia Beecher’s role in the congregation continued to expand, as well. One of her biggest projects, and perhaps the church’s most significant innovation, was the Sunday School. Annis Eastman described Julia Beecher’s role in the school by saying,

It grew under her hand from the small unorganized institution which she found it, until it became one of the most thoroughly organized and splendidly drilled bodies in the country, a forerunner of the modern, graded Sunday School, to whose possibilities all churches are now awakening.

Eastman goes on to discuss some dissent among the congregation about the system of awards for attendance creating too much pride in students. Eastman clearly implies that it was Julia Beecher and not Thomas Beecher who both created the controversial new system and who won the congregation over to it.²⁴ This is not to say that Thomas Beecher was not heavily involved in the church’s youth programs and Sunday School. One of the motivations behind the creation of the new Sunday School, which eventually grew to have almost one thousand students, was the Beechers’ joint commitment to the youth of the community, especially what we would today call the “at-risk” youth. Beecher regularly gave sermons for the children of the congregation, many of which were printed

²³ Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 151-52; Taylor, History of the Park Church, 19. Ella Wolcott, friend of Thomas Beecher, managed the library for many years and organized a number of church literary clubs.

²⁴ Flower of Puritanism, 52.

as pamphlets for circulation within the congregation and published in the community at large.²⁵

Part of the Beechers' commitment to children consisted of a prevailing church atmosphere of fun, which accompanied the growing American relaxation of rigid Calvinism. The Beechers created many projects which allowed Julia Beecher to express her artistic abilities and which brought play into the church. One of the more striking was an almost life-size elephant costume, named "Columbus," whose nose squirted real water and which Thomas Beecher himself wore and operated, assisted by his wife dressed in "oriental costume." Glenn attributes the creation of this dramatic toy to Thomas Beecher's scientific and mechanical expertise. Annis Eastman refers to the elephant as Julia Beecher's creation and includes a letter to her mother describing "Columbus's" exploits, which included a drawing of the elephant laid out in the back of the buggy after the performance.²⁶ This elephant was part of an on-going tradition of plays and performances for the young people of the church.

Julia Beecher also expressed her artistic talents by creating toys to sell on behalf of the church. The Beechers certainly worried about money, and there is ample evidence that Thomas Beecher did not pay close attention to expenses and that his wife often managed the family finances. Eastman said, "That Mr. Beecher would have been impoverished by his generosity without Mrs. Beecher's thrift and foresight seems more

²⁵ Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 152-3, 158. Park Church Archive, Bj 001-016, Thomas K. Beecher, In Time with the Stars: Stories for Children (Elmira, NY: Hosmer H. Billings, Publisher and Bookseller, 1901). Concludes, "Fathers will find in these parables good reading for the little children on Sunday afternoon, when the mother is getting her needed rest; preachers will find in them good five-minute sermons to the children to precede the longer sermons which they preach to the adults; and older people will find them interesting as stories and profitable as sermons."

²⁶ Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 152, also see photograph, 125. Flower of Puritanism, 8-10.

than likely.”²⁷ Yet, Julia Beecher worked tirelessly to raise money for charity while never taking payment for her church work. Some of her most popular inventions were toy creatures made from tree roots and decorated with other bits and pieces of nature. These creatures were often inspired by literature, especially Lewis Carroll’s Alice books. She sent a collection of these “jabberwocks,” as they were called by Samuel Clemens, to Hartford to be auctioned off as a church fund-raiser. Clemens wrote to her,

I have arranged your jabberwocks, and other devils, in procession according to number and rank on the piano and in the drawing room... If I come down at midnight (with my usual dose of hot Scotch stowed), I shall very easily be able to imagine I see them climbing about the furniture... You have had a genuine inspiration; you have wrought it out not lamely, but to perfection... But don’t go to the last limit – that is don’t breathe natural life into them, for I know (if there is anything in physiognomy and general appearance) that they would all vote the democratic ticket, every devil of them.²⁸

Clemens apparently served as auctioneer himself to sell these popular creatures.

Julia Beecher’s creations ranged from such toys to more serious efforts including a bust of her husband, which was highly praised by Eastman at least. But most successful of all her projects were the Beecher “rag babies” as they were called in the 1880s and 1890s, “Beecher Baby Dolls” to modern collectors.²⁹ In the mid-1880s, just as interest was beginning to perk among the women of Park Church in forming a women’s auxiliary in support of foreign missionary work, Julia Beecher made a doll from a “pair of unbleached hose” for her niece. The doll was a success and she made another from silk stockings and with a few more stitched features for another family friend. In Julia Beecher’s own words, “Then came a chance to sell one at a fair, for fifty cents, and the

²⁷ Flower of Puritanism, 45.

²⁸ Flower of Puritanism, 61-62; Eastman, Heroes I Have Known, 124-25.

²⁹ Flower of Puritanism, description of bust of Thomas Beecher, 49. Michelle L. Cotton, Mark Twain’s Elmira, 1870-1910 (Elmira, New York: Chemung County Historical Society, 1985) 15, see figures 8 and 9 and caption.

missionary rag baby, improved by various dimples in arms and feet, was fairly launched upon an eager child public. All profits, of course, went into the still starveling treasury of the little auxiliary.”³⁰ In 1895, Julia Beecher figured the dolls had raised more than \$1,100, and Eastman tells us that after 1895 that figure increased significantly. Eventually, Beecher charged as much as eight dollars for larger dolls, less fifty cents if material was provided. She printed cards advertising “Mrs. Beecher’s Missionary Ragbabies” to distribute at church with prices and described the desired material as “old silk jersey underwear.”³¹ For a woman who always regretted her childlessness, the success of her “rag babies” seems almost pathetic and disturbing, but if Julia Beecher herself saw the irony, no evidence of her recognition remains.

The successful “ragbabies” also represent the compromises made by the Beechers between materialism and Christian poverty. As early as the 1860s, Thomas Beecher expressed disgust with his community’s obsession with “money making” and profiteering from the war. He expressed none of the anxiety of his neighbors about the Elmira prison camp, almost seeming to believe that a prison uprising might purge the town of its sinful ways. In spite of this harsh view, he participated in the creation of a wealthy congregation and opulent, if unusual, church building. Perhaps Thomas Beecher felt some reservations about his wife’s fundraising but she did not stop, and Thomas Beecher himself participated in the same kind of showmanship for which he had criticized his famous half-brother, Henry Ward Beecher.³²

³⁰ Flower of Puritanism, 62-63, quoting article by Julia Jones Beecher in the Woman’s Edition of the Elmira Daily Advertiser, April 13, 1895.

³¹ Park Church Archive, Box Bc006, card advertising “Mrs. Beecher’s Missionary Ragbabies.”

³² Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 122, 161.

Julia Beecher's church duties were wide-ranging. As Leonard Sweet found in his work on ministers' wives, Julia Beecher was a full and important partner in her husband's ministry.³³ Besides her supervision of the Sunday School and her fund-raising efforts, she also sometimes served as the church housekeeper. Before the new church was built, Mrs. Beecher had been accustomed to clean the rooms used by the church with the assistance of other women from the congregation. Eastman quotes a letter Beecher wrote to her mother about cleaning with the women which paints a rosy picture of fun and exercise with other church women. She mentions a "Mrs. B." with whom she "always contend[ed] for the pulling out of the tacks." "Mrs. B." was probably Mrs. Silas Billings, Lucy Billings, whose husband was a founder of the church and whose sons continued as members of the congregation through the early twentieth century. Lucy Billings's diary from the 1890s, written when she was in her 70s, has been preserved and reveals a pattern of domestic work, church reading clubs, and family visits that was probably similar to the daily life of Julia Beecher.³⁴ Julia Beecher, however, had a much more public role to play than did Lucy Billings, and therefore her responsibility to clean the church building was even more binding. The 1869 visitors' books for the church list "Mrs. Beecher" or "Mrs. T. K. Beecher" very frequently as one of the housekeepers for the week. Other women

³³ Leonard I. Sweet, The Minister's Wife: Her Role in Nineteenth-Century American Evangelicalism (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 217-19

³⁴ CCHS, Archive Box MC16, Lucy Billings Diary, two volumes. For a discussion of the diary of Lucy Billings, see Bridget Reddick, Women of Elmira, NY, 1870-1906 (a thesis present for the A. B. degree with honors in history at Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio, 1999) see especially Chapter Two, "Inside Lucy's World: Gendered Responsibilities and Household Economies," 22-46, and Chapter Three, "Churches, Clubs, and Careers: The Victorian Compromise and the Public Life of Nineteenth-Century Elmira Women," 47-70.

took the occasional turn, but – not surprisingly – Julia Beecher assumed special responsibility for the church’s housekeeping duties.³⁵

Julia Beecher’s letter to her mother about church cleaning, quoted by Eastman, went on to say, “You will ask why *I* do this – I can’t help it. It’s too good fun to lose! I’m the same girl once a year (and oftener) who used to climb the hickory tree in old Greenfield times, and be shouted at by her horror-stricken father from the back hall window.”³⁶ This cheerful picture illustrates a woman making the best of her duties and finding fun in mundane details, but the need to justify her role also illustrates that Julia Beecher’s hands-on approach to her husband’s church and her specifically female duties as his wife were unusual. Her mother would be expected to react with surprise to her physical labor on behalf of the church. Eventually, one of the innovations of the “home church” in the new building was the Beechers’ plan to employ a female live-in cleaning staff.³⁷ Women became increasingly present in the Park Church, as they were becoming in church communities across the country.³⁸ And, in spite of what his biographer considers Thomas Beecher’s strong stands in favor of patriarchalism, Thomas Beecher encouraged the “feminization” of his congregation and his church, an increase in both the number women and in female influence, while simultaneously maintaining a strong masculine image for himself.

³⁵ See Park Church Archives, Box Bu 01, Vertical black leather book, about 6x8 inches, handwritten cover page says “Church parlors/ Sept 1863-to/Housekeeper’s Journal [in pencil]/Visitors Record/ Aminidab Sleek[?penciled under]”.

³⁶ Flower of Puritanism, 43.

³⁷ Mark Twain wrote in “A New Beecher Church,” “In the second story of this third building will be the permanent home of the “Church missionary,” a lady who constantly looks after the poor and sick of the Church; also a set of lodgings and living rooms for the janitors (or janitresses(?) for they will be women, Mr. BEECHER holding that women are tidier and more efficient in the position than men, and that they ought to dwell upon the premises and give them their undivided care,” in Jerome and Wisbey, eds., Mark Twain in Elmira, 125. See note 19 above.

Crises of Gender and the Beechers:

The Beechers' relationship and their unusual behavior was constantly observed by their fellow townspeople, and Thomas Beecher's perceived masculinity was repeatedly challenged by his wife's behavior. In one of Julia Beecher's letters to her mother, quoted in A Flower of Puritanism, she describes an incident that took place during a town flood.

She writes,

I heard that the creek was rising momentarily and ran away early for fear of being kept at home. When I approached the new creek bridge the water was all around it and from there to the canal bridge, My! the road was a miniature ocean. But my boots were waterproof and my black silk dress (Alas! not a short one yet) was held gracefully up, and I proceeded a sixteenth of a mile thro' sometimes a rushing little flood – shallow of course – then upon stones that appeared above the ocean, then safely up the canal bridge thro' a crowd of men and women who were out observing the freshet. They almost cheered me when I reached safety and dryness again.

Julia Beecher went on to tell her husband's unusual reaction to her behavior, saying, "Half an hour aftward Tom came long, when it was much higher, and he did not scold me when he found me quite dry at Mrs. L's."³⁹ Julia Beecher's words imply that she might have expected a scolding for her behavior, and that her mother certainly would have expected one.

When compared to the behavior of her contemporary and church companion, "Mrs. B" from the church cleaning, Julia Beecher's decision to walk to town in a flood seems a more direct challenge to her husband's masculinity. The 1890s diaries of Lucy Billings catalogue in detail the dependence for transportation that she and her unmarried daughter Myra Billings placed upon the men of the family. The 1870 diary of Edward

³⁸ See Chapter One for more detailed discussion of growing presence of women in American churches

Billings, son of Lucy Billings, also illustrates that transportation was a male duty paid to women; Edward Billings frequently discussed care and maintenance of the family buggy, and described his own trip to the west side of town to look at flooding in 1870. Like his mother, Edward Billings expected that the men of the family would make sure the Billings women got into town, and, when they did not, the Billings women often forewent shopping, attendance at meetings or church, or visiting.⁴⁰ The Beechers, like the Billings women, lived slightly outside of Elmira, and the walk to town was a fairly long one.

Julia Beecher's show of spirit and independence challenged her husband's masculinity by demonstrating that she refused to depend on him for transportation, and she recognized his tolerance for such challenges. Her letter to her mother continued, "I like him. He lets me do anything I want to, and is rather pleased at my strong-mindedness when manifested in such ways. But we both got in the papers by it. 'Mr. and Mrs. Beecher showed a high degree of pluck in stemming the raging waters,' etc."⁴¹ The Beechers' neighbors and congregation also recognized the Beecher's relationship and behavior as unusual and commented on it in the newspaper.

Julia Beecher's hands-on involvement in every aspect of her husband's church, from cleaning, to organizing the Sunday School, to fund-raising, and her wading through floods were not the only aspects of her reputation that gave her congregation pause in the later years of the Beecher ministry. Julia Beecher was not a political dress reformer, as far as we know, but she did cut her hair short, wear low-heeled "Congress boots," and

during the nineteenth century. See also note 45 below.

³⁹ *Flower of Puritanism*, 43.

⁴⁰ Reddick, *Women of Elmira*, 33-34; Lucy Billings Diary, 1/5/1892, 2/9/1892, 3/22/1892, 10/6/1892; Edward Billings Diary, 5/15/1870, 5/22/1870, 6/26/1870.

aspire to be able to wear short skirts, as mentioned in the above quotation.⁴² Max

Eastman wrote,

Mrs. Beecher was quite as headstrong as her husband in smashing through forms and conventions, and her rebellion was not only moral but aesthetic. She bobbed her hair in 1857, anticipating Irene Castle by about sixty years, and imparting to her beauty a quality as startling to her neighbors as though a cherub had alighted in their city.

His mother, Annis Eastman, described the haircut by saying it was “perhaps, one of her mistakes,” but went on to say that “None who have loved the aureole of soft white curls about her face in these later years can regret that she made [the mistake].” Again, Eastman did not always agree with her friend, just as their church community did not always approve of Julia Beecher’s rebellions.⁴³

While Julia Beecher’s unusual dressing style clearly broke with traditions of femininity, her husband’s eccentric outfits and accessories accentuated a kind of rude masculinity, rather than the effeminate and dressy styles popular for upper-class men and especially ministers. Unlike Annis Ford Eastman’s husband, Samuel Eastman, who was, for a time at least, content to participate in the women’s economy of butter and eggs (see Chapter One) and accepted the financial support of his working wife, Thomas Beecher worked hard to maintain a masculine image of himself, in public and in his own mind. He wore working clothes, including an unusual style of cloth cap which Olivia Langdon’s married sister, Susan Crane, made for him. He enjoyed manual labor, including carpentry, bricklaying, and even plumbing. His biographer attributes many of these eccentricities to his need to revitalize the masculine side of his self image, but also of his

⁴¹ Flower of Puritanism, 44.

⁴² Flower of Puritanism, 43, see quote above.

⁴³ Eastman, Heroes I Have Known, 125-26; Flower of Puritanism, 40.

public image and the image of Park Church.⁴⁴ As women became more involved in every aspect of church affairs, Beecher, and other Americans, worried that religion was becoming too much a women's world. While Julia Beecher broke with conventions and helped pave the way for new women's roles in the public through church service and challenged her husband's reputation by roaming the flooding streets, her husband maintained the masculine image of his "home church" through his working-class affectations of manual labor and occasional visits to local bars and saloons to socialize with Elmira men.⁴⁵

Though Thomas Beecher was a playful man who made fun and joy a part of his theological message, he was also prone to deep depressions from which his wife worked very hard to cheer him. Thomas Beecher's biographer notes that during the on-going construction of the new church building, which was not completed until 1876, Thomas Beecher retreated again into the depression that followed him through most of his life. With a frame of mind so different from his wife's constant enthusiasm, Thomas Beecher doubted his abilities as a preacher throughout his career and constantly worried that his church could not possibly compete with the evils of human nature. Much like his family's famous friend, Samuel Clemens, Beecher worried that human beings were not capable of

⁴⁴ Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 86, 143, 156.

⁴⁵ Mark Twain in Elmira, 114; Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 78. Mary P. Ryan, Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), Ryan documents the increasing number of women involved in revival movements in New York State between 1790 and 1865. Sweet, The Minister's Wife, discusses role of women in religion, 3. Moore, Selling God, discusses women's numerical dominance in churches, 84. In The Feminization of American Culture (New York: Anchor Books, 1977), Ann Douglas says of the changing role of the minister "Beneath the conjunction of femininity and Christianity lies a probably unacknowledged assumption that the modern age in some sense would belong to the woman... if neither autonomous nor respected, she would be, at the least, its most carefully watched, skillfully programmed, and regarded victim. In espousing feminine values, the ministers could become a middle-man of history, a participant, or a puppet with his feminine peers in the rather cowardly new world of consumer culture," 117.

using God's gifts to good ends.⁴⁶ Thomas Beecher's resistance to his wife's energy and good spirits and her crucial role in the success of his ministry were occasionally acknowledged in his writing and correspondences. According to Eastman, and others, he would sometimes respond to inquiries about his health by saying that he was as well as a man could be expected to be who had spent so many years "hitched to a steam engine."⁴⁷ His words about their close professional partnership could demonstrate the same despondency. In November of 1857, not long after their marriage, when Julia Beecher had gone home to Bridgeport for a six-week visit with her family, he wrote to his sister Isabella Beecher Hooker that "Julie... works & loves as steadily & faithfully as can be imagined. She is pastor. I am log."⁴⁸

Many historians have credited Julia Beecher with having at least as much if not more influence on his congregation than he had, and Thomas Beecher sometimes reacted to this image.⁴⁹ Julia Beecher provided all kinds of support for her husband's "home church" and at times seems to have overshadowed her husband and intimidated him with her relentless good spirits. As discussed in Chapter Two, he created an image of his first wife as the quieter and more understanding love with whom he would have been happier. His masculine affectations, maintained while creating a highly feminized "home church,"

⁴⁶ Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 9, 12, 40, 66-67, 78, 153-54. For a discussion of similar personal crises suffered by other contemporary ministers, see Lisa MacFarlane, "Resurrecting Man: Desire and The Damnation of Theron Ware," Chapter Three in A Mighty Baptism: Race, Gender, and the Creation of American Protestantism, ed. Susan Juster and Lisa MacFarlane (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996) 65-80. See also Juster and MacFarlane, eds., Introduction, A Mighty Baptism, 8.

⁴⁷ Flower of Puritanism, 37. See also Taylor, A History of the Park Church, "As well as anyone married to a steam engine can be," 15; Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, "harnessed to a steam engine," 89, quoting Ida Langdon's Some Childhood Memories of Mr. and Mrs. Beecher, 7.

⁴⁸ Glenn, Thomas K. Beecher, 89.

⁴⁹ Harris, The Courtship of Olivia Langdon and Mark Twain, "Julia Beecher's influence on the female members of Thomas's congregation was at least as profound as her husband's," 127. Also Sweet, The Minister's Wife, "Perhaps the best Evangelical illustration of a Partner ministry in which the wife's impact was as great if not greater, as the husbands [sic], was the career of Julia Jones Beecher, the second wife of

demonstrate some of the conflicts a nineteenth-century American man, who watched the Civil War profoundly change his country and community, felt about changing gender norms and social equality, if not political equality, between the sexes. The Beechers' marriage embodied some of the ambivalence a Victorian minister felt about the growing importance of women in his sphere of influence.

This conflict over changing gender ideals was also reflected in Julia Beecher's reputation among her congregation. Stories of Julia Jones Beecher focus not only on her drive and energy, but also on her "child-likeness." In *A Flower of Puritanism*, Eastman says,

Mrs. Beecher's eminent talents and remarkable efficiency might have made her superiority painful to the average people with whom she was of necessity so largely associated, had it not been for a certain inconsequence in her mental operations at times, and a bewitching child-likeness which manifested itself in the most engaging ways and gave the dullest a feeling of superiority which re-enforced their own self-esteem while adding to her charms.

Eastman goes on to say that Thomas Beecher used to call her "my two-year old," acknowledging this mental "inconsequence."⁵⁰ A favorite story, recounted in other sources as well, features Mr. and Mrs. Beecher waiting for a train to move from the roadway when they were late. The train departed suddenly, clearing their path, and Mrs. Beecher said, "O, Tom! I wish I had prayed, it would have been such a good answer to a prayer." This story reveals a wittiness and joyfulness, but also a childishness that may well have been cultivated to prevent exactly the kind of intimidation Eastman imagined possible.

the younger half-brother of Henry Ward Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, Thomas Kennicut Beecher," 217.

⁵⁰ *Flower of Puritanism*, 64.

Max Eastman also presented a picture of Julia Beecher as self-deprecating rather than childish. He said, “She kept up a kind of hilarious joy in her pupils too because she could not herself, with all her talents, learn a Bible verse by heart, not if she spent the week on it, and she was desperately honest about such things.”⁵¹ Whether this childish turn to her habits of expression and thinking were something Beecher cultivated intentionally, or part of her reputation, developed as much by her friends, including her biographer, as by herself, is unimportant. The fact that this driven woman was accepted because of her innocence and childishness expresses some of the anxiety that even this very open church community felt about having such an active public, though not very political, woman in their midst.

Conclusion:

Elmira, always a relatively small town but briefly, after the Civil War, a growing city, provided home to the Park Church community. That community connected Elmira to a national network of religious leaders, writers, and social reformers which shaped and was shaped by the kinds of gendered negotiations which Thomas and Julia Beecher made throughout their marriage, careers, friendships, and evolving religious beliefs. Their decision to marry, in spite of a lack of the “higher and sublimer passion” that their friend Samuel Clemens expected in a marriage, their friendships with men and women, and the constant sex talk their marriage and controversial ministry provoked among their friends and fellow Elmirans demonstrate important nuances in the Victorian understandings of love and sexuality. Their religious beliefs and their creation of a church with a socialist

⁵¹ Eastman, Heroes I Have Known, 126; Mark Twain in Elmira, 138.

mission and a strong sense of fun demonstrate the grass roots development of the urban activism that the Eastman children later helped create in New York City. The Beechers' refusal to submit to gender ideals along with the compromises and contradictions which seem to have allowed them to break with those gender norms further illustrate what many historians have already begun to say: that the ideology of separate male and female spheres did not control the lives of Victorian Americans to the extent to which the rhetorical descriptions might suggest, though those ideals were internalized and profoundly influenced the lives of most of the Beechers' contemporaries, as well as the Beechers themselves.

Thomas K. Beecher and Julia Jones Beecher were compared to many Americans of their day, unusual. Their lives, however, embody many of the issues negotiated by all of their contemporaries. This thesis is an attempt to extrapolate from the Beechers' marriage, crises of gender, and place in their religious community new insights into the culture of Victorian America drawing on the works of many historians and cultural critics and many resources about Elmira, New York, New York State, and the United States as a whole.

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