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## **My dear Mrs. Ames : a study of the life of suffragist cartoonist and birth control reformer Blanche Ames Ames, 1878-1969.**

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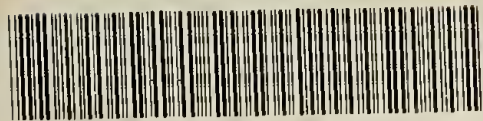
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MY DEAR MRS. AMES:  
A STUDY OF THE LIFE OF SUFFRAGIST CARTOONIST AND BIRTH  
CONTROL REFORMER BLANCHE AMES AMES, 1878-1969

A Dissertation Presented

by

ANNE BILLER CLARK

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 1996

History

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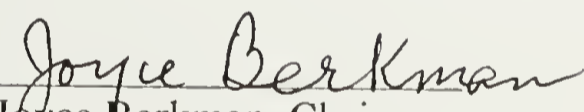
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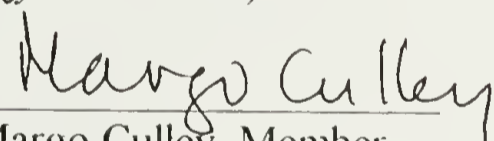
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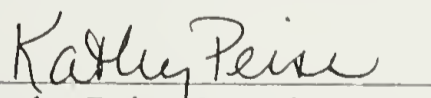
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## ABSTRACT

MY DEAR MRS. AMES: A STUDY OF THE LIFE OF SUFFRAGIST  
CARTOONIST AND BIRTH CONTROL REFORMER BLANCHE AMES AMES,

1878-1969

MAY 1996

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Blanche Ames Ames, an elite graduate of Smith College and a distinguished state and national leader in the woman suffrage and birth control causes, was one of a small cadre of educated women who, in the early 1900s, recast the iconography of political cartoons, long a means of discourse used only by men, to promote women's rights. In this, she was most unusual. Fortunately, because of her prominence, Ames's extensive family papers have been preserved in the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College. She has not slid into obscurity as other women political artists and reformers have done. As a result, Ames serves as a sort of template of how an elite woman chose to become publicly involved in issues she might have funded others to pursue and also how women cartoonists went about adapting the political cartoon to promote their goals.. It becomes clear from studying her letters and diaries that Ames was an unusually logical, pragmatic and determined progressive feminist, involved and engaged, who preserved a sense of humor, of irony, of detachment that allowed

her to persevere in her causes without fanaticism, while carving an autonomous place for herself in a world uncertain of the wisdom of women's rights.

Part of Ames's success was that she was buoyed at each step of her life from prep school to the presidency of the Birth Control League of Massachusetts by her fascinating family, the founder of which was the brilliant and outrageous Civil War Gen. Benjamin "Beast" Butler. Ames's parents encouraged her education and allowed her a growing autonomy in which to learn to think and then to act for herself. After an early and difficult struggle for autonomy in her marriage, Blanche and her husband, Oakes Ames, became partners in a joint campaign to create a sustaining family life at their North Easton estate at Borderland, while allowing Oakes to pursue a distinguished career at Harvard and Blanche an equally distinguished career as a suffragist, a political cartoonist, botanical illustrator, painter and birth control reformer.

Thus the study of the life of Blanche Ames Ames is not just one of individual artistic or political brilliance, but also of how that brilliance was nurtured, encouraged and sustained throughout the vicissitudes of a life defined by a desire for real social reform by a domestic support system that too often goes unrecognized. This family support system, along with Blanche Ames Ames's activism and achievements as a political cartoonist and a leader in the suffrage and the birth control fight, are the focus of this dissertation.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Gazing across the green lawn on which school children prance and race to the parking lots beyond, it is easy to think of the little fieldstone castle at Borderland as a musty museum, open to a public now that knows little of its history, as dead and gone in spirit as those who once built and loved it. But a bird's bright trill across still spring air from one of the box hedges in front of the house briefly lends the illusion that it is a spring of 70 years ago and the visitor can imagine herself as a guest of the family, privileged to poke and peer and traipse around the Ames estate and to explore its heart.

For, whatever her adventures, traveling worldwide with her botanist husband, Oakes Ames, to gather orchids, or campaigning in Boston and New York for woman suffrage and birth control, Blanche Ames Ames (1878-1969), the subject of this biography, always returned to Borderland, the 1,200-acre estate she shared with her husband and family in North Easton, Massachusetts, a town of green trees and deep welling ponds, as well as several large Ames family estates. The Borderland house itself--a small, many-windowed castle built of concrete so that Oakes's precious library would be fireproof and faced with field stone gathered on the property--was finished in 1910 and still stands, little affected by the passage of years and deaths of those who made it their mutual magnum opus, Oakes in 1950 and Blanche in 1969. The house speaks volumes about them and their desire for family privacy, their desire

to determine and control their surroundings after spending years under a mother-in-law's roof, their love for books, for rare plants, and for art. The house also reflects their privileged lives and the power they chose to wield in their lives, Oakes as a pioneering botanist and Blanche as a progressive leader for reform, always, as it seems on the border of new realms to be conquered, a sort of Borderland of the soul that kept Blanche alert and active into extreme old age.

Blanche's story is the story of how such disenfranchised groups as American women have gained political leverage without the ballot, using such tactics as petitions to Congress and state legislatures from the interested parties themselves; votes from sympathetic politicians; pressure tactics such as mass meetings, marches and picketing; the publication of newsletters, books and pamphlets along the lines of the "cahiers" of the French Revolution; and even the organization of mass arrests for their publicity value. One tactic that has been little explored for its part in the woman's suffrage insurgency, however, is the political cartoon, and it is as a political cartoonist that Blanche Ames Ames has caught and retained the interest of historians.

Since the earliest days of the American Republic, political cartoonists have presented images intended to sway public opinion in social, economic and political spheres. They have done so, however, almost entirely without the contribution of women artists and with little consideration for so-called women's issues, such as suffrage, birth control, maternal and infant health care, equal pay, or protective factory legislation.

Certainly, even a brief glance at today's, as well as yesterday's newspaper editorial pages, would make it clear to the sensitive observer that women's issues are ignored by political cartoonists and that even women's images appear less often than do those of men. The Springfield Republican, for example, a distinguished newspaper at the turn of the century, was lavishly illustrated with representations in pen and ink of newsworthy figures of the day--including a pig-tailed, deposed emperor of China--but not a single female face appeared in any social, political, or economic context whatever in illustration, photograph or advertisement.

The exception to this ongoing male dominance of political cartooning was the period running approximately from 1900 to the mid-1920s, when a number of women artists like Blanche Ames--all white, educated and middle class--took up their pens in defense of women's rights. Where they came from, why they did not persist in their work, and why they were largely unmentioned in studies of political cartooning or radical art of their era (such as the Ash Can School, whose work was published regularly in The Masses) is difficult to say with certainty (although Alice Sheppard Klak, in her recently published Cartooning for Suffrage, has done an admirable job of tracking down biographical material on some of these unsung woman artists, which is a step in the right direction).<sup>1</sup> It appears that suffrage was, temporarily, a woman's cause that engaged national attention and debate and, in the process, briefly opened to women the opportunity to participate in the debate using such weapons as political

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<sup>1</sup> Alice Sheppard Klak. Cartooning for Suffrage. University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque, 1994.

cartoons, which traditionally had been denied them. That women were able to rise to this challenge is probably a direct result of their recent admission to professional artistic training in art departments of colleges and at art academies, which endowed them with the skills necessary to draw professional-looking political cartoons and to use effective iconography. When woman suffrage was won in 1920, women's issues as central national issues once again dropped from sight, and the publications in which women cartoonists had found their visual voice themselves dried up and disappeared, as did The Woman's Journal, along with radical publications like The Masses. The latter had published women cartoonists and cartoons about women's issues and was a victim of the Red Scare following World War I.

The historical traces of these remarkable women artists that remain are few, and Blanche's family papers, located at the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College and the Women's Rights Collection at the Schlesinger Library of Radcliffe College, are unusual because they are extensive. Ames was a scion of a wealthy Massachusetts pioneer family, Smith College graduate, professional artist and political cartoonist, and a life-long women's rights activist, particularly in the areas of suffrage, birth control, and women's health. It is her life, her art, and her activism which I propose to explore, with a view to illuminating those factors and influences that made Ames, despite or, perhaps, because of her wealth, her happy, 50-year marriage, and her four children, a committed and vigorous reformer.

Along the way, as one trained in art and art history and a cartoonist myself, I shall spend considerable time on Ames's political art, because, I believe, it offers

insight into her character and intellectual disposition. More important, her art offers us a small window into how women, when the cause was right, support broad-based, and a forum for publication open to them, were able to seize a political tool traditionally wielded only by men and to reshape both iconography and audience to their own purposes. This is no mean feat.

It is important to the understanding of the courage and persistence Blanche Ames Ames showed in her reforming efforts throughout her life to study the family from whence she sprang, not only because her grandfather was the notorious and fascinating Civil War Gen. Benjamin "Beast" Butler, but also because hers was a family that had strong views on reform, on women's rights, and on the family's right and obligation to fight for their views by whatever methods were available to them. Butler himself, in turn a Democrat, a Radical Republican, and, finally, candidate for president of the Greenback Party, by 1870 favored Negro rights and woman suffrage, and also regulation of working hours and conditions for factory workers. His vigor and intelligence was passed down to the Ames family via his beautiful and independent daughter, Blanche Butler Ames, who was educated by Butler and his wife Sarah Hildreth (herself a former Shakespearean actress) as well as she could be before the Civil War and who, in turn, encouraged her own four daughters to complete their college educations. Blanche Butler Ames was also very active in the political career of her husband, Gov. Adelbert Ames of Mississippi, who lost the fight to protect Negro rights in the course of Southern Redemption. Gov. Ames also

served as senator from Mississippi and as a general in the Spanish-American War and was a strong moral influence on his family.

The history of the Butler-Ames family is not just one of public action or notoriety, however, since their numerous letters and diaries confirm a love and respect for one another between the generations, that surely must have encouraged and supported the second Blanche in her various crusades. Indeed, the ironic intelligence of the first Blanche does seem reborn in her namesake, who may have identified with her talented mother even more than the other siblings, because of her own talent and because of their shared name.

Blanche Ames Ames, then, was born in 1878 in Lowell, Massachusetts, of the lively Blanche Butler and former Gov. Adelbert Ames, the fourth of six children. She had a peaceful and comfortable childhood, as evidenced by her letters to other family members and the sporadic diaries she kept at various stages of her life. After attending a preparatory school in Lowell, she graduated from Smith College in 1899 as president of her class, with both a B.A. degree from Smith and also a separate degree from Smith's art school. In 1900, she married Oakes Ames, a Harvard botanist, who was to become a renowned collector of orchids. Oakes was the son of a former governor of Massachusetts, Oliver Ames, and of Anna Ray Coffin. Oakes' family, which was not related to Blanche's family, was the same Ames family whose name was tarred by the Credit Mobilier scandal, incidentally, so Ben Butler was not the only notorious family member.

The marriage was ultimately a happy one; together they had four children, but, in its early stages, Blanche and Oakes struggled to accommodate both of their lasting attachments to their childhood homes and natal families and their differing views of the proper roles for strong-minded men and women within the family. Oakes evidently was torn between his intellectual conviction of women's equality and the actuality of married life in 1900. He refused to give his new wife a wedding ring, which he regarded as a token of bondage, but, as their letters of 1904 attest, he was furiously jealous when she continued to maintain close ties to her parents and siblings instead of allowing herself to be meekly absorbed into his family. Oakes was persuaded to build his own home with Blanche and to leave the North Easton mansion over which his mother still presided. Apparently, the new home, Borderland, gave both Ames the scope they needed to blossom, and they went on to be devoted collaborators on Oakes' collection trips and botanical texts, and also on Blanche's reform activities. Blanche was a professional artist all her life, the illustrator of her husband's botanical texts, and the sculptor who carved his tomb with the orchids that had so fascinated his sensitive imagination.

The impression left by Blanche's letters and diaries is of a spirited and intelligent woman, who preserved a calm and slightly ironic view of the rest of humanity. Her support of women's rights seems to have been absorbed with her mother's milk, since Blanche I, like Blanche II, was an ardent feminist. "As long as I can remember, I never could see a truly reasonable argument against woman suffrage," Blanche II wrote in her diary in 1899. "They are all so trivial."

Ames was also unusual for her resistance to nativist or racist images in her cartoon art, both of which haunted the work of other Woman's Journal cartoonists, including both Lou Rogers and Fredrikke Palmer. In her art as in her life, Ames declined to deny equal rights or equal respect to other groups who might be seen as competing with her upper-class and middle-class cadre for recognition. Even the great woman reformers Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were not above pandering to racism as a pragmatic tactic to advance their feminist cause. But the granddaughter of Gen. Benjamin Butler, who conferred the Congressional Medal of Honor on members of his black troops, would not so descend.

My interest in Ames takes several forms: Among other things, I believe that who she was and whence she sprang was a central motif in her dauntless pursuit of reform, and so I will spend a chapter on the influence of her family, and in particular, her bonds with her remarkable mother, Blanche Butler Ames. I think Blanche Ames Ames's heritage explains why a wealthy, happily married, artistically active woman still hazarded her reputation in the name of reform. Even the success, or, as some might say, failure of woman suffrage, since it did not bring suffragists the power they had expected to reform society, did not discourage Ames from throwing herself into a new cause, that is, reproductive education and birth control for women.

Since I first began to research Ames's life, I have found answers to some questions concerning her life, but not to others. For example, though I know from her diary that she was a believer in woman suffrage as soon as she could form an opinion on the subject, I cannot discover if there was a central event that propelled her into

the suffrage movement. One year she is burbling in her diary over the petty childhood illnesses of her first baby; three years later, she is listed on the masthead of the Woman's Journal. In 1916, she apparently heard the charismatic Margaret Sanger speak in Boston, and, by 1917, her cartoons have disappeared from the journal and her correspondence is preoccupied with birth control. Why did the birth control cause overwhelm her long-held interest in suffrage? One is tempted to reply that suffrage had become too tame, too respectable for a leader like Blanche, but, then, if her interest was channeled in the direction of the birth control cause, why did she not use her cartooning talents in its support? There again one can only speculate, but I suspect that Blanche's cartoons for suffrage found a ready market because suffrage was respectable and cartoons on the subject publishable, whereas birth control was much more controversial and cartoons on the subject did not find a wide distribution. Those that did appear, by Cornelia Barnes and Lou Rogers, did so between the pages of the Birth Control Review or not at all.

About her marriage, I was aware that her husband, Oakes, was a self-proclaimed feminist, as his refusal to give Blanche a wedding ring indicates (she ended up wearing two wedding rings, supplied not by her husband, but by her mother and mother-in-law). Oakes also urged her from the time of their engagement to become a professional botanical illustrator, partly, to be sure, as a convenience to him. I had assumed that they were, for the most part, two minds with but a single thought, until I discovered in the Ames Family Papers in the Sophia Smith Collection a series of letters from just before their marriage in 1900 until about 1904, which

show considerable tension. Oakes, for example, went against custom and sought to dominate the marriage ceremony planned by her family. He obliged Blanche to discard her own minister in favor of his choice of a Unitarian minister, who had no association with either family, and to eliminate the ring portion of the marriage ceremony, which she wished to keep. Later, one can discern Oakes's jealousy of her attachment to her family (as he, at the same time, insisted that she make her home in his family's North Easton residence in company with his mother) and his fury at her defiance of his wishes, when she took her children from North Easton to her parent's home in Lowell, after the children's nurse came down with pneumonia. She was furious with him, too, for ignoring her fears for the children. He said he would release her from the marriage; she questioned his manhood. Yet, 46 years later, he described his great good fortune in having such a "playfellow," and she devoted her waning strength to the labor-of-love that was carving his catafalque.

Some of this leads me to the conclusion that, in addition to my obvious interest in Blanche's artistic achievements, I am drawn as well to understanding her family culture, how this granddaughter of a notorious general and politician fought for and attained her own personal autonomy, despite the strong personalities of her parents, grandparents and spouse, and how this strong character, so characteristic of all her family relations, contributed in the end to her achievements. If she was wealthy and had social power, still she had a family to raise and a husband to cajole, a mother-in-law to placate, and her own mother's fond anxiousness to reassure, as well as the demands of her artistic and reform careers. How did she juggle all this?

The partial answer may be that she was unusually energetic and resourceful, that she had the help of a large domestic staff and that, as the years passed, her interests and those of Oakes drew closer so that they aided and supported, instead of resisting, each other in endeavors that were important to both of them.

Her individual campaign to discover and perfect a workable iconography for women's rights political cartoons is particularly interesting. The questions here include possible sources of her images, such as cartoons of other artists, advertisements, or fine art and the choices she made in the manner of execution of her work. It is also intriguing to consider whether her choice of cartoons as a medium for influencing public opinion might have been affected by the fact that her Grandfather Butler was a favorite target of the influential political cartoonist, Thomas Nast. Did Butler's granddaughter have a more direct understanding of the power of political cartoons to influence (and annoy) than did other pro-suffrage and artistically inclined young women? It is certainly possible.

As a reformer, Ames was part of the staff of the moderate and middle-class Woman's Journal, the NAWSA organ, and she behaved like the socialite she was in giving pro-suffrage teas and marching in the 1914 Boston parade, which had other such lady luminaries among its thousands of participants. On the other hand, she adopted the tactics of Alice Paul and the National Women's Party in actually targeting anti-suffrage politicians for electoral defeat, as in the campaign against Sen. John Weeks. Though her forum for publication was a middle-class journal, her subject matter, particularly in her cartoon, "Meanwhile They Drown," shows considerable

sympathy for lower-class women as victims of white slavery and sweat shops, women who are otherwise depicted only occasionally in suffrage cartoons, although they are central to the later birth control cartoons of Lou Rogers. Her apparent interest in the trials of lower-class women, incidentally, is reinforced by an interview she gave a Boston newspaper editor in 1915, when she was quoted as saying emphatically that all jobs should be opened to women so that they could support themselves adequately as independent persons, although this could be other evidence of her own search for personal autonomy. As a progressive member of the upper classes, some slight whiff of unintended condescension by Blanche toward hapless lower-class womanhood may be detectable in her works.

My dissertation begins with a chapter on Blanche's family, and it discusses the lives of her progenitors and how their personalities and experiences contributed to the sense of security and entitlement that supported her desire to speak up and to act in the name of reform. The next chapter, on character formation, describes Blanche's early years as a child in a large and loving family and as a student at Smith College, where she learned the artistic skills and abilities at debate she used later in her cartoons and writings in favor of suffrage and birth control. Chapter 4 then takes up her marriage and the forging of a workable relationship with Oakes that gave them both the sense of partnership and yet of autonomy. Chapter 5 details the suffrage fight between 1890 and 1915, including Blanche's part in it as an artist and a socialite reformer. Chapter 6 examines Blanche's political cartoons and suffrage iconography and its sources and possible impact. Chapter 7 concerns the birth control fight and

Blanche's important contributions to it. Chapter 8 is an epilogue, a summing up of the remainder of her life--still very active--the death of her husband and Blanche's contributions and place in history.<sup>2</sup>

The study of Ames's life has involved delving into the very extensive collection of her family papers at Smith College, including those of her grandparents, parents, siblings, husband and offspring. It has had to be a matter of selective delving, since to examine all of the Ames Family Papers would be a lifetime work. I have decided to confine my study to the years preceding and encompassing most of her reform activities, that is, from her birth in 1878, through her years at Smith College, her marriage in 1900, through much of the birth control fight before 1940. I have also examined the suffrage collection Blanche and Oakes presented to the Schlesinger Library, and various private collections of memoirs, letters and diaries published by the Ames family itself. An example is Jottings of a Naturalist, edited by Pauline Ames Plimpton, a collection of letters and diaries of Blanche's husband, Oakes, which offers a fair view of what life was like for the chatelaine of Borderland, hunting for orchids and raising four children. Since Blanche herself was less of a diarist and more of a doer, the events of her life are of necessity often drawn from recordings of others: She herself began, but rarely completed, her own diaries. The only complete year-long diary consists of anxious recordings of the weight, growth

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<sup>2</sup> Blanche's activities on behalf of the New England Woman's Hospital will receive only passing mention, since it is necessary to restrict the scope of this study to complete it within a reasonable time frame. In any case, I am more interested in issues surrounding her political art and personal autonomy

and feeding problems of her first child, Pauline. On the other hand, at the age of 70, Blanche researched and wrote a 600-page biography of her father, which, as the historian Richard Current remarked, is a useful piece of historical work, always allowing for a thick dose of filial piety. There is also an extensive collection of letters from the early days of the birth control fight in the Sophia Smith Collection, which demonstrates the difficulty that Blanche and her fellow reformers faced in challenging the status quo. The great Jane Addams was only one of many distinguished people who declined to lend their names to the effort (although George Bernard Shaw permitted the Massachusetts Birth Control League to reprint an article of his, remarking, however, that the United States was so benighted that he didn't want to find himself barred from the country because of the reprinting of his article).

I also included my own surveys of political cartoons appearing in national U.S. newspapers during the height of the final push of suffrage, and some comparison with political cartoons today. Possibly the finest collection of suffrage cartoons available now was accumulated by Blanche and Oakes Ames themselves, via a newspaper clipping service they employed in 1915 and 1916: Literally hundreds of splendid political cartoons are ready to hand at Smith College.

In addition, I have met and interviewed some of the people who knew Blanche, including her grandson, Oakes Plimpton, and UMass historian Will Johnston. Professor James Keneally, of Stonehill College, who did a short study of Blanche's suffrage activities in North Easton, also contributed interesting perspectives. A day trip to the Borderland estate was both enjoyable and instructive

in setting the stage for the study of Blanche's adult life. Many of Blanche's activities were detailed in local North Easton and Boston newspapers, her obituary appeared in the New York Times, and she appears in Colliers' History of Easton and in various publications by her clubs and organizations, including Planned Parenthood, the American Orchid Society, and Notable American Women.

Secondary sources on women's political cartoons are virtually non-existent, although the birth control and suffrage fight are adequately described in published histories, so I have not had to reinvent the wheel in recounting the basic background and can rely on others. Alice Sheppard Klak and her Cartooning for Suffrage, is, as far as I know, the only other historian who has undertaken to study women political cartoonists, and Meyer et al. in the 1980 study, "Women in July 4th Cartoons: A 100-Year Look," identified several categories of imagery using women.

Other areas from secondary sources that are to be included in my analysis, besides woman suffrage and birth control are possible cultural sources for suffrage iconography, and a brief comparison of British suffrage art with American suffrage art, because sophisticated exponents of suffrage in the United States, including Blanche and Oakes, certainly kept a weather eye on what was going on in Great Britain. Cross fertilization of ideas and tactics unquestionably took place between Great Britain and the United States in any case.

To sum up the major themes, then, Blanche Ames Ames, descendent of an elite, politically sophisticated, and close-knit family, became a leader in the women's suffrage movement as a campaigner and political cartoonist and in the birth control

fight as president of the Massachusetts Birth Control League in part because of her family culture. Her family was privileged by education, money and rank, but it was also a family that believed in itself and in its ideas, a family that took action instead of using its wealth to fund the action of others, a family gifted with a sense of entitlement, a sense of the right to act, a sense that free speech is real and not just a constitutional issue.

For any woman, however, free speech is only as free as her family culture will permit, and it is significant that as a young wife, Blanche had very serious issues of personal autonomy to confront before she and her husband Oakes were able to form the successful partnership of their 50-year marriage. Blanche had to separate herself and Oakes himself from their strong ties to natal families in order to create a family of their own at Borderland. Within that family, Blanche supported Oakes in all his endeavors, but he supported her as well, particularly in her campaign for woman suffrage, to which she converted both him and his mother.

Witty, warm and lively, Blanche used her ironic humor to help her control difficult situations, that is, to help her to preserve that edge of detachment that separates the fanatic from the leader. Her wit, combined with the artistic skills she perfected at Smith College, enabled her to create an effective and original series of political cartoons in support of women's rights as one of a tiny cadre of women artists in the heady days of the suffrage fight, when it appeared that women's rights might just begin to equal those of men. When that goal proved illusory, Blanche, as ever buoyed by her characteristic optimism and guided by her pragmatism and ability to

lead and forge alliances, launched on the next logical reforming steps towards women's autonomy by giving women control over their own bodies through education and contraception. Her campaigns were long and hard and not always successful, but there was in her nature a willingness to continue to seek what she believed to be right not only for herself, but for all women.

## CHAPTER 2

### WELLSPRINGS OF REFORM: A TRADITION OF LEADERSHIP

"Courage to act for one's belief is part of your heritage. Courage comes from faith-in-truth," Blanche Ames Ames told her assembled family at her 80th birthday celebration. She added that she had gotten her courage, the courage to persist in a career of reform encompassing many years, from her father, who told her that, after he had made up his mind that he was likely to fall, he was no longer afraid to fight at Gettysburg.<sup>1</sup>

The handing down of social and political leadership in the Ames family was not, however, the stately progression that had characterized such other, well-known Massachusetts families as the Adamses. After all, the founder of much of the Ames family fortune, its penchant for political reform, and all of its notoriety was Blanche's grandfather, Benjamin Franklin Butler, not the acerbic, but otherwise gentlemanly John Adams. True, Butler had a distinguished record as a Civil War general, preeminent politician and accomplished lawyer, but he also was notably successful at offending the Brahmins on both sides of the Mason Dixon Line, before, during and after the Civil War, and had distinguished himself as "Beast Butler," the only Union general to have a price put on his head by the Confederacy.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is from series IV, box 4, of the Blanche Ames Ames papers in the Ames Family Papers at Smith College.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Werlich, Beast Butler, p.34.

Nor was Butler's legacy of activism passed through the male line. One son, Ben Israel, died shortly after completing his legal studies, and another, Paul, married late in life and had no children. Instead, it was Butler's only daughter, Blanche, an auburn-haired , strong-minded beauty, who passed the Butler political acumen and resolution on to future generations.

But a pronounced interest in politics and reform--Butler favored the 10-hour work day and woman suffrage before either were adopted by sympathetic members of the bourgeoisie--was not the only legacy handed to the Ames family by the Butlers. Indeed, the story of the Ames family is also a story of affection and shared values between the generations and between siblings as well. With such a family legacy of activism and support, Blanche Ames Ames distinguished herself not only as that rare bird, the woman political cartoonist, but also in the much less socially acceptable field of birth control.

For this attractive, talented, humorous, happily married and busy mother, reform was not just a right, but a duty, which she upheld all of her very long life. That she did not reject her family's political legacy and the duty it entailed to beguile herself with her husband, family and art, becomes clear from her letters and diaries as well as the observations of those who knew her: Blanche's intrepid pursuit of reform was the result of her personal drive to act on her beliefs herself instead of deputizing others to act for her. This is completely in keeping with the collective character of her immediate progenitors: Her grandmother, Sarah Hildreth, raised in a well-off, middle-class family, nevertheless persisted in an acting career at a time when women

in the theater were not considered respectable; her grandfather and father took unpopular political stands and stuck to them despite all obstacles; and her mother, though she had no formal career outside her life-long interest in art, supported first her father's, then her husband's, and finally her son Butler's varying political fortunes not only with intelligent interest, but also with shrewd advice.

This is not the place to rehash the life of Benjamin Butler, which has been chronicled many times over, but it is worthwhile to explore what is so often ignored in the life of a male public figure--his family--and to see what part the female line played in the formation of his character and the character he passed on via his daughter. As we shall see, women were not ciphers in the life of the clever boy and the successful man that Butler was to become. He had a strong grandmother, mother, wife, daughter and granddaughter, and they all matter in the story of what Harriet Robey, an Ames granddaughter, was later to describe as the "Ames matriarchy."<sup>3</sup>

Benjamin Franklin Butler was born in 1818, the son of John Butler, a veteran of the War of 1812 and a privateer, who died of yellow fever prematurely in the tropics. He left his widow, Charlotte Ellison, with little income, and she took her puny, red-haired son Benjamin to live with her mother, Abigail<sup>4</sup>, and farmed out her other children to relatives. Abigail seems to have been a forceful personality, deeply resentful of the privileges accorded to men, especially the reality that the very farm

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<sup>3</sup> Harriet Robey, Bayview: A Summer Portrait, p.338.

<sup>4</sup> Robey says that Mrs. Ellison "stood five feet 11 inches in her stocking feet and was remarkable looking, erect, imperious and with an inflexible will." She instilled in young Ben a hatred of the British and also for "injustice to women." Ben said "I revered her." Bayview, p. 25.

on which she lived was not hers, but a property to be passed down from male heir to male heir.<sup>5</sup>

Charlotte, despite her poverty, recognized early her son's intellectual precocity, teaching him to read at age four, and spending chilly nights pointing out the constellations. Eventually, she moved her children to Lowell, where she set herself up as a boarding-house keeper for the mill workers and supported her family herself. She even managed to send her son to college, although not the college of his choice. Butler had desired a commission at West Point, but ended up instead at Waterville College, now Colby, where his impudence and insouciance almost cost him his degree. He graduated at the age of 20. His brilliance and phenomenal memory won him early acceptance to the bar in 1840, when he was 22 years old, and the beginning of a climb to fame and fortune that could not be anticipated by his unprepossessing appearance and economically deprived origins.<sup>6</sup> When Charlotte died in 1870, Butler wrote his sons: "All there is good in me I owe to her." <sup>7</sup>

His enemies Butler won through his support of the 10-hour day for millworkers, his extraordinary, and some said, unscrupulous success first and last as a lawyer,<sup>8</sup> and also through his career as a politician, who became, in turn, a Democrat,

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<sup>5</sup> Dick Nolan, Damnedest Yankee, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Butler entered the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1853; became state senator in 1859; served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1867-75, and from 1877-79; and was elected governor of Massachusetts in 1882.

<sup>7</sup> Damnedest Yankee, p.334.

<sup>8</sup> Butler was admitted to the bar in 1840, and by 1842, his practice was flourishing and he had become a justice of the peace as well. In addition, he dabbled

a Radical Republican, and finally, a Greenback Party candidate for the presidency. His activities in support of Negro rights in the South and the infamous proclamation that condemned southern womanhood to the charge of prostitution if they persisted in abusing Union troops, finished the job and won him the unenviable sobriquet of "Beast." Jefferson Davis, once a fellow Democrat and an ally, put a price on Butler's head; and Harvard refused him the customary honorary degree as governor. It is worth noting that Butler behaved with such courtesy and grace on the occasion of the Harvard slight, that he quite won over the faculty and Harvard President Charles Eliot.<sup>9</sup> It was this same Butler who tagged fugitive slaves as wartime contraband; Butler who, as a Radical Republican, tried the case of President Andrew Johnson and came within one vote of impeachment; Butler who first "waved the Bloody Shirt."; but he said of himself: "In all the military movements, I never met with disaster, nor uselessly sacrificed the life of my men."<sup>10</sup>

Despite his public ambitions, Butler was a man of romantic passion, and, in 1840, he fell deeply in love with Sarah Hildreth, born August 7, 1816, one of the six daughters of a wealthy Dracut physician, Dr. Israel Hildreth. He said of her, "I was very much impressed with her personal endowments, literary attainments and

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in real estate and other business ventures in Lowell with such success that by 1853, his bank account held over \$140,000, a tidy sum in those days. He and Mrs. Butler built a villa they named Belvedere at about that time, a symbol for their rising fortunes, Trefousse, pp. 27-28.

<sup>9</sup> Damnedest Yankee, p. 344.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344.

brilliancy of mind."<sup>11</sup> Butler's enemies were eager to point out that, despite her respectable antecedents, Sarah was a promising actress when Butler courted her, and actresses had little standing in the 19th century. But Butler was undeterred in this as in so many things and he laid his accomplishments at her feet, persuading her at last to marry him in 1843, when he was 25, she was 27 years old and he was able to support her adequately.<sup>12</sup> The marriage was unquestionably a success, since not a breath of scandal ever adhered to it, despite Butler's notoriety, and Butler was known as a loving husband who took his wife with him, even on his Civil War campaigns.<sup>13</sup>

His feeling for his wife is revealed over and over again in the collection of letters and personal papers, published in 1917 after his death in 1893, as Private and Official Correspondence of Gen. Benjamin F. Butler, but often referred to as "Butler's Book" by his biographers. If he disdained her opinion or relegated her to a separate sphere, it certainly was not clear from their letters, since he kept her up to date on his various military exploits, problems as a commanding officer, and on the machinations that took place between him and politicians from President Lincoln on down.<sup>14</sup>

Butler wrote of her: "My wife, with a devotion quite unparalleled, gave me her support by accompanying me, at my earnest wish, through the War of the

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<sup>11</sup> Bayview, p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>13</sup> Even Butler's hostile biographer, Robert Werlick, could find nothing to criticise when it came to Butler's close relationship with his wife and family.

<sup>14</sup> I consulted several biographies on Butler, including Howard Nash's Stormy Petrel, Dick Nolan's Damnedest Yankee, Hans Trefousse's The South Called Him Beast!, and Robert Werlich's Beast Butler, as well as "Butler's Book."

Rebellion, and made for me a home wherever I was stationed in command. Returning home with me after I retired to civil and political life, Mrs. Butler remained the same good adviser, educating and guiding her children during their young lives with such skill and success that neither of them ever did an act which caused me serious sorrow or gave the least anxiety on their behalf..."<sup>15</sup>

"Butler's Book" displays not merely his public persona, but also his human side, the revelation of love and family affection, (as well as more than a bit of testiness). He sent a reassuring letter to Sarah Hildreth Butler on April 22, 1860, from aboard the steamer Spaulding in Charleston Harbor in which he described how seasick various acquaintances had been. "For myself," he boasted, "I ate five times a day, slept soundly, smoked incessantly, and drank sparingly."<sup>16</sup> Busy as he was with the demands of war, Butler, writing in April, 1861 to ask Sarah to join him at his post in Annapolis, sent a variety of instructions, then repented of his brusqueness to her and added contritely, "if you do not like this do not execute it. I am so in the habit of giving orders lately that I write in a peremptory style."<sup>17</sup>

When Sarah proved unable to come, he made no complaint, but did write of how he missed her companionship on May 9: "Why don't you write to me? Not one word have I had from you except by Harriet (Sarah's sister, Harriet Hildreth Heard). You telegraphed me you would write. Where is the letter? The newspapers tell you

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<sup>15</sup> "Butler's Book," p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

every move I make, but the newspapers do not tell me of the loved ones at home. Amid all this turmoil and excitement, the heart turns homeward. If I have achieved anything, I desire to share it with you, even though you should undervalue it, as you are apt to do. Don't misunderstand that last line. I mean no man is a hero to his wife. She sees too much of him in his unheroic moods."<sup>18</sup>

Sarah, who reciprocated his affection and, indeed, spent much of the war by her husband's side, had joined him by June, 1861 at Fortress Monroe on the mouth of the James River in Virginia. She apparently found her side of the war experience exhausting rather than exhilarating, for she reported to her sister, Harriet: "The time has passed for me to seize only the happy aspects of things, if there is anything disagreeable, I am sure to meet it and receive it. And the worst of it is I have no power to change it nor to divert my mind from dwelling on it. If in the course of time things come round as I desire, I have felt so harassed and worn with the struggle that success is no longer regarded."<sup>19</sup>

Returned to the safety of Lowell, she wrote sadly of her parting from her husband: "Know, dearest, how full of tears I was when I left you. Mile after weary mile I watched the houses, trees and fields with the tears brimming over."<sup>20</sup> And on

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

August 8: "I feel, I know, that you will never fathom all the deep emotion, the yearning sympathy that holds me to you."<sup>21</sup>

Her keening drew a testy reply from her busy husband on August 11, 1861: "Why do you write me so much grief and despondency? Our home is not to be broken up or our lives altered...Meanwhile, I am not so jolly as to need so mournful letters as yours to keep me from being too jubilant...Every trouble, public and private, comes pouring in at once. I hardly dare to open my mail lest I find that my house is burned or my children dead."<sup>22</sup>

By Jan. 21, 1862, in a more cheerful mood, he wrote from Washington, D.C.: "My poor, dear, little HEIGH-HO! I have treated you very shamefully, wretchedly. Will you ever forgive me? I have not written yet, but I have been each day in expectancy of getting home...Every morning I have packed my carpet bag in expectation of going home, but each day I have had to wait."<sup>23</sup>

Entangled like her parents in the separations and privations of the Civil War was the young Butler daughter, Blanche, the mother of Blanche Ames Ames, known to her affectionate family as "Little Buntie." At the outbreak of war, Blanche was a student at the Catholic Academy of the Visitation in Georgetown,<sup>24</sup> which she had

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 323.

<sup>24</sup> One might well ask why, if the Butlers were committed to female education, they did not send Blanche to Mount Holyoke College after her attendance at the Academy of the Visitation, but, in fact, according to Lois Banner, Mount Holyoke was a high school for women until 1888, by which time Blanche had been married for

begun to attend at age 13 in 1860, writing her parents, just as any daughter might, about outgrown clothes, her studies, and her worry that she was unpopular with the other girls because she was a Yankee.<sup>25</sup> She received much encouragement from both parents to work hard at her studies with the aim of making herself into a woman capable of independent thought and action.

Her father praised his "good and brave girl" for her "ambitions to excel and obtain the rewards of merit," in a letter from Lowell dated Oct. 8, 1860, and observed: "Besides, my dear, you are almost the only New England girl, and the only Massachusetts girl, in your large school, representing nearly all the other sections of the country. A Yankee girl, and Massachusetts girl, and 'My Blanche' will not be outstripped by any competition because duties are a little hard--studies a little perplexing--hours of recreation a little restrained, or because it would be a little more pleasant to run over the fields in the bright autumn." <sup>26</sup>

On Oct, 22, he wrote: "Do not pain me by hearing that you are homesick. A girl of good sense like you to be homesick. Never say it. Never feel it, never think it. The change, the novelty of your position will soon wear away..."<sup>27</sup> And no, he added,

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18 years. The first colleges to enroll women were Oberlin, in 1837, and Antioch, in 1853. See Banner's Women in Modern America, pp. 4-5. Benjamin Butler had visited the Academy in 1860, and wrote to his wife recommending it as a school for their daughter, adding "you will agree with me when you visit for yourself as we will do next winter." "Butler's Book," p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Blanche Butler's brothers, Paul and Ben Israel, as boys were sent to Frankfurt, Germany to study in 1865.

<sup>26</sup> "Butler's Book," p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

she should not give up Latin, nor adopt that "flat drawl of the South. That is a patois. Avoid it." On March 25, 1861, he advised her not to "permit idle gossip of idle people to annoy you," adding, "you see, I have written precisely as if you were a 'big girl' instead of a very little girl, but you know I have always treated you more like an adult than a child and have appealed to your good sense..."<sup>28</sup>

Butler's admonishments to his daughter here suggest that he was guiding her toward the kind of strength and willingness to work and to endure that had sustained him and his impoverished mother, Charlotte, in the hard times of his boyhood. Instead of advising Blanche to adopt the vulnerability and weakness that was the common image of women in Victorian society, he wrote to her as though she were his son, that is, as a responsible individual charged with shaping her own fate. As he put it: "Success in life is the object to be obtained, and your success at school is gratifying only as it gives assurance that you are endeavoring to fit yourself for the future."<sup>29</sup>

Sarah Hildreth Butler, less stern but still supporting her daughter's education as she did the education of her two sons, wrote Blanche while en route to New Orleans on October 8, 1862: "I am glad you are studying so bravely, but do not overtax yourself and get sick."<sup>30</sup> Blanche replied, "I began to think that you had forgotten me, when your long wished for letter arrived. I must say that my pleasure

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Chronicles, p. 81.

at receiving it was greatly diminished when I saw you were preparing to go to New Orleans. You seem so far away from me now..."<sup>31</sup>

By Dec. 14, Blanche reported that she was studying hard, "and all for you and father, to be sure, a little for my own good, but I should not have the perseverance to apply myself so diligently if it were not to please you." She added wistfully, "Mother, you have no idea how I long to see you. I would give the world to see you even for one hour, not that I have anything particular to tell you, but I wish so much to behold one kind, loving face. In this large school, among these girls all of different characters and dispositions, I cannot find one for a friend, but I do not care as long as I have you to turn to."<sup>32</sup>

This free acknowledgment of Blanche's emotional ties and affection for her mother was reciprocated. These were "the bonds of womanhood" described so clearly by Nancy Cott for the previous generations, and the "inner core of kin"<sup>33</sup> that was based upon the "intimate mother-daughter relationship...at the heart of the female world,"<sup>34</sup> which Carroll Smith-Rosenberg credits as a female support system for Victorian women. Sarah wrote Blanche on Jan. 20, 1864: "You know of course that

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>32</sup> Chronicles, p. 87.

<sup>33</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual," p. 62. This loving parent-child bond continued in Blanche Butler Ames's relationship with her namesake, both of whom wrote over and over again of their mutual affection. When Blanche Ames Ames's letters to her daughter, Pauline, become available for study, it will be interesting to see if this same bond persists by the middle of the 20th century.

<sup>34</sup> "Female World," p. 64.

I miss you very much and shall be only too glad when the time is over for schooling. Then of course you will be an infinite trouble, but I hope an infinite comfort." Sarah's support for her daughter went beyond the limits of the usual Victorian woman's world of home, family and dependency. In the same letter, she urged her daughter toward a sense of autonomy, the ability to stand alone, when she remarked: "Why I am anxious you should excel in many things is that life will be easier for you in years to come. The self poise that comes from high cultivation will sustain you better than leaning on others who will fail to sustain you when you most need support." Still, Sarah hastened to reassure her daughter that Blanche could depend on maternal love: "Many things fail, but never a mother's love for her dear daughter."<sup>35</sup>

Mrs. Butler's insistence, mirroring that of her husband, that her daughter should not emulate the Victorian ideal of woman-as-clinging-vine in need of a man to support her, but "sustain" herself instead with "high cultivation" is quite clear here. But then, Mrs. Butler herself had had a stimulating career as an actress before her marriage and resisted marriage for some time, before giving in to Ben Butler's pleas. She was, in short, no clinging vine herself, but an individual who had followed her own aspirations. It is understandable that she should seek to encourage similar traits in Blanche and that Blanche, in turn, should hold the same attitude towards her own daughters. This push toward independence, though, was bolstered with Sarah's assurance of emotional security through her own enduring love for her daughter.

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<sup>35</sup> Chronicles, p. 97.

Also noticeable in Blanche's schoolgirl letters is a certain air of detachment and ironic self observation (which would later characterize her own daughter Blanche's observations of certain West Point cadets who failed to meet her high standards) that seems to permeate these school-girl letters, presentiments of things to come. "Dear me," Blanche wrote home on April 16, 1861. "I suppose that I must be a young lady soon. I declare, I wish I was not so large. It is so troublesome to put on ladylike airs, for they are all put on with me. I feel like a little girl and I am going to act like one when there is no one to look at me. But when there is, I must draw down my face wearily, shut my eyes, and keep up a constant cough, for you know that it is not fashionable to be without a cold."<sup>36</sup>

This same young lady, on May 3, 1861, presented her own views of the fleeting quality of fame: "Poor General McClellan has to take a storm of abuse from all quarters, because he has allowed the rebels to escape him at Manassas. What a poor thing is popular favor, is it not? You see, I am beginning to moralize young."<sup>37</sup>

The war wound down at last and Butler's stormy career in law and politics continued. But Little Buntie's life took an interesting new turn, when she met in 1868

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<sup>36</sup> Blanche Butler's letters are taken from her privately published collection of letters, Chronicles of the Nineteenth Century, except where otherwise indicated. Her diaries and letters to offspring are to be found in the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College, the diary quoted in this section is in Series II, box 4. Her letters to her namesake, Blanche Ames, are in Series IV, box 26B. The quotation here is from Chronicles, p. 68.

<sup>37</sup> Chronicles, p. 69.

and was courted by a young general,<sup>38</sup> now senator from Mississippi, Adelbert Ames. That she should have met him in the Senate galleries, while listening to her father argue for the impeachment of President Johnson, illustrates how the Butler women kept abreast of the politics and other affairs in the lives of their men. A newspaper illustrator, there to record the events of the day, drew a pencil sketch of the dashing general leaning over the bench where Blanche, heavily veiled and waving a fan, was seated. The artist presented the sketch to Miss Butler, who saved it carefully as Mrs. Ames.<sup>39</sup> They were married before a crowd of 600, packing the church, on July 21, 1870, when he was 35 and she 23 years old, and they were photographed afterward with the wedding party on the verandah of the Butlers' Lowell home. The bride's face was obscured by a long, trailing lace veil.

Ames, slender, serious and morally upright, was born in Rockland, Maine, in 1835, the son of sea Captain Jesse Ames and Martha Bradbury, and educated at West Point. Ames was severely wounded at Bull Run on July 21, 1861, but refused to leave the field.<sup>40</sup> He also fought at Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville and

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<sup>38</sup> Blanche Butler's interest in politics led to her first meeting with her husband-to-be. Blanche Ames Ames writes: "It was customary for Mrs. Butler and their daughter Blanche to go to the Senate Gallery to listen to important debates," Adelbert Ames, p. 294.

<sup>39</sup> Blanche Ames Ames, Adelbert Ames, 1835-1933, p. 265.

<sup>40</sup> Captain Charles Griffin, on July 23, 1861, reported as follows: "In addition, I deem it my duty to add that Lt. Ames was wounded so as to be unable to ride a horse almost at the first fire, yet he sat by his command directing the fire, being helped on and off the caisson during the different changes of front or position, refusing to leave the field until he became too weak to sit up..." Adelbert Ames, p. 68.

Gettysburg<sup>41</sup>, among other battles. He was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his courage.<sup>42</sup>

Blanche Butler described her husband as a handsome man, with "marked brows and great brown eyes and a heavy mustache, a face that tells the story in itself of heroic work in the war..."<sup>43</sup> He wrote to her on April 27, 1870: "You can never be made more beautiful to my eyes than you are--be you dressed ever so gaily...Still, I would have you as I know you will be--equal in every particular to your surroundings, be they women or inanimate objects."<sup>44</sup>

Naturally, the courageous Gen. Ames injected his own brand of temperament, opinion and problems into the already heady Butler brew, and his new bride revealed her own spirit as well. Learning that Blanche had nearly fallen in a riding accident, Ames wrote on May 20: "I half suspect that my Love is a fearless, sensible, noble

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<sup>41</sup> Joshua Chamberlain, writing on the exploits of the 20th Maine, Ames's regiment, in a Cosmopolitan Magazine article dated Jan., 1931 and quoted on p. 104 of Adelbert Ames, described Ames's participation at Fredericksburg: "Soon, we came out in an open field. Immediately through the murky smoke, we saw that at our right a battery swung into position to sweep our front. It opened on us. 'God help us now! Colonel, take the right wing, I must lead here!' calmly spoke our brave Col. Ames to me, and went to the front into the storm." Capt. Robert G. Carter, writing "Four Brothers in Blue: The Battle of Fredericksburg" for the Maine Bugle of July, 1898, quoted on p. 236 of the Ames biography, wrote of Ames: "Shortly after, a tall, slim colonel coolly walked over our bodies. 'Who commands this regiment?' he asked. Our colonel responded. 'I will move over your line and relieve your men,' he quietly rejoined. It was Col. Adelbert Ames..."

<sup>42</sup> Chronicles, p. 1

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

woman, not to be frightened even by the substance, much less by harmless shadows."<sup>45</sup> Nor was she. In June, she informed her prospective mate, with her usual insouciance and in defiance of the Victorian popular image of women as weak and of necessity subject to masculine control: "It is the style now to leave out the word 'obey' from the Marriage Service. I thought I had better write and ask if you have any objection--at the same time to inform you that I have not the least intention of making that promise. I shall interpolate 'when I feel like it.' With this threat, I will say farewell, until tomorrow. I know I love you--a little. Is that enough?"<sup>46</sup>

"You say you are not going to promise to 'obey.' Well, Love, that does not frighten me," Del replied on June 28:

"Do you think people love, honor and obey because they promise to do so at the altar? Do all who so promise keep their word? If one did not love and honor, how could one get married--and be honorable? If there be 'love' and 'honor' what need of 'obey'--with them there would be no need of it as promised at the marriage ceremony, no 'obey' at any time. When a wife ceases to find her love strong enough to be a motive power, no promise will control her to the good and happiness of her husband. Suppose you give 'obey' its full force. Obedience without love, obedience to the will of any master, soon will become unbearable--and unless a man be very little he would find such orders and such obedience the saddest moments of his life. No, Blanche, I do not ask that you promise to obey me--I only ask that you

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>46</sup> It is hard to know how widespread the "style" for refusing to use "obey" in the marriage ceremony may have been in 1870, but the vow was dropped from civil ceremonies in 1909, and by many churches at the same time. See Banner, Women in Modern America, p. 50. If the style was prevalent anywhere, it was surely so with the New England feminists, such as Lucy Stone, and since Blanche Butler adopted it, despite her education at a southern academy, this suggests that her father's support for women's rights through enfranchisement had transmitted itself to his daughter. Not only did she refuse to "obey," but she complained of the unequal circumstances of women's lives and joined her daughter, "Little Blanche," in her suffrage activities in 1914.

love me--love me and all that can tend to make our home happy will flow from that--honor, for we could not love unless we honored each other--obedience I do not believe in."<sup>47</sup>

With such a respectful view of women (and nothing in the subsequent history of the Ameses as a couple suggests that Adelbert was unfaithful to his high regard for his wife), the subsequent pro-woman activities of his daughter are even less surprising. The surviving evidence of their long life together--he died in 1933--suggests that they were true to their love and esteem for each other. Blanche as a new wife confided to her diary on Oct. 25, 1870: "I have hardly realized that I am a married woman. The thought comes to me in a very little while, always with a thrill of surprise and I am not yet accustomed to Del's constant presence and ways. There have been happy moods, no unkind words or thoughts. No forced affections...I had been warned that the first year of wedded life would prove most trying. That two natures could not take up the journey of life together without mutual ill feeling and fault-finding. This may be true in the majority of cases. I have a firm faith that this will be the exception."<sup>48</sup>

On the other hand, she was Butler enough to take note of the inequities of 19th-century gender roles, especially of the confines of her complex clothing and toilette that kept her "puttering around in a half cold room," while her husband lay in bed "luxuriantly situated." She complained to her diary on Dec. 19, 1870: "Men

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<sup>47</sup> Chronicles, p. 180. This speech indicates that Adelbert shared his wife's positive view of herself and her right to "honor" and consideration in marriage.

<sup>48</sup> Blanche Butler Ames' diary is to be found among the Ames Family Papers, series II, box 4, in the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

always seem to have the advantages, in dress, in law, in politics--everything. Will the time ever come when it will be equally easy for a woman to exist?"<sup>49</sup>

In fact, Ames had serious problems of his own, when he returned with his new wife to Mississippi as Reconstruction governor and son-in-law of "Beast Butler," an unwelcome and unwanted Republican.<sup>50</sup> At first, Ames had some success in holding together the Republican coalition of carpetbaggers (like himself), scalawags and freedmen. In a speech before the senate on April 11, 1871, he testified that "As provisional governor and district commander, proofs constantly multiplying, often ocular, still further force upon me the conviction that the colored people were subjected to grievous, crying wrongs. Senators whose blood is chilled at the mere recital of their wrongs can understand my position, seeing with my own eyes the scars, the sufferings, the blood and hearing the helpless cry for thousands to me, the only one to whom they could turn for succor. I would not, I could not refuse to extend my protecting hand, the nation's protecting arm, in defense of those who, innocent of offense, with upturned faces, asked for life. If my action then was wrong, may I never know the right."<sup>51</sup>

Originally opposed to black suffrage, his experience with southern violence and intimidation radicalized his views, and he tried, vainly as it turned out, to enforce

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<sup>49</sup> Diary, series II, box 4.

<sup>50</sup> "Adelbert Ames' attitude toward slavery was ingrained. He had absorbed an intense dislike for it, not only from his parents, but from his whole environment. Slavery was repugnant to the moral feelings of the majority of the people he met," Blanche Ames wrote, Adelbert Ames, p. 14.

<sup>51</sup> Chronicles, p. 255.

the enfranchisement of black men as called for by law. "Previously little versed in matters civil, with ideas of equality and liberty formed in a New England village, I could but resolve, come what may, to pursue the course I did," he insisted.<sup>52</sup> In the end, he was not only horrified by, but powerless to prevent, the rising tide of violence against blacks and carpetbag Republicans, especially after he was duped by the Democrats into disarming his black militia and found his frequent pleas for help to the Grant administration ignored.

Returned to Jackson with Blanche and their two children in January, 1876, he found a gloating Democratic legislature arrayed against him. Courageously, he denounced that body as having been elected by fraud and force; predictably, the legislature made plans to impeach him. The historian Richard N. Current noted that Ames was never charged with corruption, since even his enemies had found him unusually upright, but with a series of trumped up charges which are still, quite unfairly, held against him. In fact, his loyal daughter, Blanche Ames Ames, devoted years to writing his biography when she was in her seventies to refute the unjust charges against her father that Sen. John F. Kennedy uncritically had parroted in his Profiles in Courage.<sup>53</sup>

Ames saw his danger, but refused to resign under charges that blackened his honor. Current credits Blanche, who had advised her husband through all his political

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>53</sup> What Kennedy wrote was, "No state suffered more from carpetbag rule than Mississippi (under) Adelbert Ames, first Senator and then Governor." Profiles in Courage, p. 161.

speeches and imbroglios, with the compromise solution that her husband would resign to avoid impeachment and any imputation of dishonor. As usual, the honest Ames held to his end of the bargain, but the Democrats published the charges against him as though he had been impeached.<sup>54</sup>

Perhaps wisely, Ames sent his young wife back to her parents in Lowell during much, although not all, of his losing struggle with Southern Redemption,<sup>55</sup> for which reason so many letters passed between them detailing their lives apart. A secondary consequence of this cautious separation was that Blanche's close ties to her paternal family remained largely unbroken, even after her marriage and her husband's subsequent return to private life. Del's political life in Mississippi and later trips to Minnesota on business meant that Blanche was often left on her own as the chatelaine in charge of their home and children, circumstances that would tend to contribute to her already independent view of a wife's role in marriage, but also to her continued dependence on her parents' affection.

Writing in her diary about her mother's plan to accompany her two sons, Ben Israel and Paul to Europe, where they were to be enrolled in school, Blanche worried

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<sup>54</sup> "Three Carpetbag Governors," pp. 91-92. Blanche and their two children were with him in Jackson and she wrote her mother, "At night in the town here the crack of the pistol or gun is as frequent as the barking of dogs."

<sup>55</sup> Blanche did travel to Mississippi with him within six weeks of their marriage, but afterward, she spent most of the first six years of her marriage back in Lowell with her parents, avoiding the diseases prevalent in summer in the South and also the dangers that might result from her husband's fruitless attempt to save Mississippi blacks from the fury of southern whites. In six years, she spent only 20 months in her husband's home in Mississippi. For example, in 1874, Blanche spent a short time in the governor's mansion in Jackson, but was back north again by June. In July, Del joined her briefly, before returning alone to Mississippi, *Bayview*, p. 119.

about the fate of her family if something happened to her mother: "The pilot, the rudder, the whole controlling power of the family barque, would be lost and we should, I fear, drift helpless...Surely God will not afflict us like this."<sup>56</sup>

Her parents' reaction to Blanche's marriage was not rapturous.<sup>57</sup> This was not because they disapproved of Ames, who was somewhat "diffident about his ability to provide Blanche with all the luxuries with which he saw her surrounded," but because they apparently mourned the loss of their daughter's innocent girlhood. Though both Butlers welcomed Ames into their family, Blanche noted in her diary of October, 1870, that her father, on parting with her following a train trip in company with Gen. Ames, said to her as he kissed her, "Poor Blanche, poor girl."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Diary, January 31, 1871, Ames Family Papers, Series II, box 4.

<sup>57</sup> This ambiguity toward their daughter's marriage may have been a residue of the attitude toward marriage for women that prevailed in 1840s when the Butlers courted. Ellen Rothman noted that marriage was typically viewed then as the end of carefree girlhood and the beginning of "the demands of True Womanhood," in which "a woman would be both more isolated from the world and more exposed to its dangers as a wife than as a daughter in her parents' home. She would no longer be free to come and go from the domestic circle; she would be enclosed within and defined by it. The transition to marriage, then, appeared to women to have freedom and security at one end and confinement and risk at the other." Ellen K. Rothman, Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America, p. 73. Blanche Ames Ames, in her biography of her father, noted that Sarah Hildreth opposed her daughter's marriage, "because she wanted her to have the chance to develop her talent with freedoms similar to those she had herself enjoyed." However, Sarah liked Del for his "sense of humor and gentle courtesy," while Gen. Butler found him a "keen opponent" at billiards. Adelbert Ames, p. 316.

<sup>58</sup> It would appear that the affectionate "bonds of womanhood" described by Nancy Cott in her The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835, had become attenuated by the early 1870s. Blanche was certainly devoted to her mother and would later be so to her daughters, and she tried to be present at important female life events, such as the births of her children, but as a partner in her husband's political affairs, she was not able to reach Washington, D.C.

"Poor yourself, I retorted," Blanche wrote of her reply to her father, adding, "I do not know why he pitied me. Perhaps because he felt that I had passed a very happy and careless girlhood and that now the troubles and experience of a married woman were before me. We seem much nearer and fonder of each other than before. This may partly be owing to the fact that I no longer feel the least fear of him as I did when a child. He also feels that I am now a woman."<sup>59</sup>

Her mother, too, mourned the loss of Blanche's girlhood and also the loss of her freedom to pursue her art<sup>60</sup> as she took up the obligations of Victorian womanhood. This pursuit of art proved to be something of a theme with Butler-Ames women, since Blanche was to encourage her namesake in her own artistic accomplishments. "Mother said to me, 'Ah, Blanche, I am inclined to think it would have been as well if you had remained at home, studied the fine arts, and been contented with a simple life,'" she recorded.

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in time to be with her mother when the latter died of surgery for throat cancer. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's description of men in women's lives as somewhat shadowy in her study, "The Female World of Love and Ritual," does not seem to apply to the Butler-Ames men, either, since Gens. Butler and Ames come across as strong emotional foci for their female family members, and not as, in Smith-Rosenberg's words, "in essence, a member of an alien group." On the other hand, Ames women did "turn trustingly and lovingly to one another," as Smith-Rosenberg put it, over several generations. See The Bonds of Womanhood by Nancy Cott, and the essay, "The Female World of Love and Ritual," in Disorderly Conduct, Visions of Gender in Victorian America, by Carroll Smith-Rosenberg.

<sup>59</sup> Blanche Butler Ames diary, Ames Family papers, series II, box 4, undated, but in chronology with entries for late October, 1871.

<sup>60</sup> There is no mention that she studied art in Blanche's letters home from the Academy of the Visitation, but it was clearly a life-long interest.

In fact, Blanche found her emergence into marriage to be an unexpectedly liberating experience. She confided to her diary on Oct. 31, 1870, that "there is one thing about this married life I appreciate above all others. It is the glorious sense of freedom. No more doubt, or hesitation whether it is best or proper for a girl to do thus and so. Nearly all if not all self consciousness seems to have passed away. Determination, self possession and self reliance seem to have taken its place."

She was not quite so self possessed about her first view of the South, which was to be sporadically her home with Gov. Ames. Of Vicksburg, she wrote her diary in November, "The fleas, to be sure, took breakfast, dinner and supper from my poor flesh;" and she loathed the heavy use of lard in southern cooking, "lard for flour for bread, lard and ham for bacon, lard and beef for steak. Lard was the basis for everything."<sup>61</sup>

Worse, from her point of view, were the snubs dealt to northern women by southern women Blanche considered unworthy of the status they accorded themselves. "The southern ladies still seem to think that it must be a great deprivation to the poor 'Yanks' to be debarred from their aristocratic and delightful society. So fixed, indeed, are they in their opinion that they actually use it as a threat." The southerners had nothing to boast of, she wrote, since Vicksburg had no houses "that can begin to compare in elegance or richness with father's place in Lowell. The

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<sup>61</sup> Blanche Butler Ames diary, Ames Family Papers, series II, box 4, the entry is undated, but fits into the November, 1870, chronology.

mansion spoken of by southerners dwindles and dwindles as one approaches it. What remains to the impartial observer is just a log cabin and hogs."<sup>62</sup>

Natchez, she conceded in November, 1870, was graceful under its china trees, "a bower of roses, jasmine, magnolias, orange blossoms." Still, the idea that she and Del must live here if he was to continue his political life was worrisome, not only because of the hot and unhealthy climate, but also because of "the lack of good will and refinement in the people, no amusements, no librarys (sic), no social intercourse."

Providing her own refined amusements, she painted a little and was cheered by the results to the point of musing on the possibility, remote for a woman of her class and time, of a serious life as an artist. "It is really artistic. If I can only continue and persevere and improve, who knows? I may become a renowned artist," she wrote in her diary on Dec. 19, 1870. Reality at once intruded, however, and she continued: "I hardly think Del would like the idea. He would feel proud of my capacity, but would have some lingering fears that I might neglect him and the family." Somehow, though, the feeling of aspiration remained, even as she recognized the force of her duties as a wife. "What a glorious satisfaction it would be to feel absolute mastery over an art or profession. To know yourself so gifted that you can carry some one thing to the highest human perfection. Shall I ever attain to anything of this kind? No. I fear not."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Op. cit., November 18, 1870.

<sup>63</sup> Having a career, apart from the necessity for self support, was still alien to the upper-class woman of the 1870s, and the "New Woman" of the 1890s, with her educational and career ambitions, was still 20 years in the future.

Although Blanche's "fear" that she would not attain human perfection as a fine artist was justified, she never gave up her art entirely even in advanced old age. In July, 1873, she wrote to Del<sup>64</sup> that she was painting a picture of their children, and she continued to paint and to sculpt so long as she was able. When her sight began to fail her, she hooked rugs of her own design, one of which, a peacock design, still can be seen at the Borderland estate. "I will work along as well as I can, however, and my little endeavor may amount to something," she told her diary prophetically.<sup>65</sup>

By 1874, Blanche and Del had managed to produce two children, Butler and Edith, despite their frequent separations, he in Mississippi, she in Lowell with her parents. But, in April of that year, Mrs. Ames temporarily resided in the governor's mansion

and gave what she described in a letter to her mother as "the nicest entertainment it was possible to prepare, and such quantities it did not seem as if it would ever be eaten. Thirty-six chickens made into salad, an equal weight of celery, and for the dressing it took six dozen eggs." And, for the piece de resistance, as a fashionable Victorian, Mrs. Ames caused to be made a centerpiece of tropical fruit, in this case bananas and oranges, standing like a tripod and "crowned with flowers branching nearly to the gas," the foot of the punch bowl that supported the bananas hidden by more bananas, oranges and flowers. "Yet nothing as left but three empty brown

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<sup>64</sup> Adelbert Ames, p. 377.

<sup>65</sup> Blanche Buter Ames diary, Nov. 1870, series 2, box 4.

stalks." The next day, she reported that she had "what seemed to be a bilious headache."<sup>66</sup>

By August, she was gone again, to stay with the Butlers at their new property of Bay View on Cape Ann, Massachusetts. Del pined for her. He wrote on August 2, 1874, that the governor's mansion was "more like a hotel" than a home and that "this is not a home and never can be. Where our own vine and fig tree are to grow I know not, but it is true in imagination I plant them not here."<sup>67</sup>

Blanche's responses to his mournful letters were prosy descriptions of her life in Massachusetts with her parents and children, although she advised him not to dwell too much on his political troubles: "We are, I think, superior to the good or evil fortune the state has power to bring us."<sup>68</sup> He was unconsolated. By August 12, he admitted to her "Mississippi, which has commanded my thoughts and time for the last six years, has lost its power over me forever."<sup>69</sup>

Mississippi had still to eject Ames by threatening him with impeachment in 1876, though, as Current wrote of Ames, "he was about as pure and incorruptible a governor as Mississippi or any other state is likely ever to have."<sup>70</sup> Ames' actual communication to the Mississippi legislature, presented in a letter dated March 29,

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<sup>66</sup> Chronicles, pp. 668-669.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 695.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 706.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 707.

<sup>70</sup> "Three Carpetbag Governors," p. 97.

1876, read in part: "In reply to your suggestion, I beg to say that, in consequence of the election of last November, I found myself confronted with a hostile Legislature, and embarrassed and baffled in my endeavors to carry out my plans for the welfare of the State, and of my party. I had resolved, therefore, to resign my office..."<sup>71</sup>

Retired from the military and forced out of political office, Ames reentered civilian life in the north at last, beginning his new life as a partner in his father's flour milling operation in Northfield, Minnesota, where Blanche and the children did not accompany him, although the possibility of living there had been discussed in the first days of their marriage. Even this placid occupation proved to be embattled, since the partnership with his father and brother broke up in a series of lawsuits that drove Ames's mother to frantic pleas for family unity. Del's brother, John, as a business man was "erratic, impractical and undependable."<sup>72</sup> It was while visiting Northfield, that the doughty retired general, hearing gunshots in the distance as he walked downtown one day, was just in time to witness a raid by the James gang. Ames remarked in a letter to Blanche that the bank clerk had been murdered and two outlaws shot and killed: "Yesterday, this town was the scene of a very remarkable tragedy, " he wrote Blanche on Sept. 8, 1876. "The two dead robbers were left lying in the street in pools of their own blood, to be looked at by the world. Men, women and children had their fill. Country folks came in or were in town and sat in their

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<sup>71</sup> Chronicles, p. 352.

<sup>72</sup> Bayview, p. 33.

wagons by the dead bodies and chatted by the hour. I now refer to women and children."<sup>73</sup>

His later career is uncertain: Current noted that Ames had made a fortune from various pursuits, including real estate, although letters from Blanche Butler Ames to Blanche Ames Ames at the end of his life suggest that Blanche Butler was concerned that her husband's finances might not be adequate to allow him to continue to have a comfortable life (including a chauffeur, several houses and daily golf games in Florida with John D. Rockefeller) and she left instructions for his support from her own fortune if she should die before him. The James gang raid was, in any case, not the only excitement left to him in life, because Ames did serve in the Spanish-American War in 1898, together with his sons Butler and Adelbert, and saw fighting in Santiago, Cuba.<sup>74</sup>

To return to 1876, for a moment, the loss of Ames' political career was not the only loss in the Butler-Ames menages. Worse was to come. On April 1, Benjamin Butler wrote to Gen. Ames to advise him that Blanche's mother was about to undergo throat surgery: "Now, don't be unnecessarily alarmed at this, but yet I do not conceal from you that Mrs. Butler would be exceedingly gratified if Blanche could be with her and relieve her from the care of the household during this painful and perhaps dangerous operation." Blanche wrote on April 2 to "insist" that her mother should

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<sup>73</sup> Chronicles, pp. 403-405.

<sup>74</sup> "Three Carpetbag Governors," p. 93.

not have her throat "tampered with" until "you have tried the effect of summer upon it."

Sarah Hildreth Butler entered the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston on April 6, her daughter's protests notwithstanding, and died within a day of the effects of a combination of surgery and cancer of the throat.<sup>75</sup> Blanche traveled from Mississippi to Lowell in time for the funeral. Harriet Prescott Spofford, Sarah's long-time friend, wrote Blanche from Washington on April 12 that she had feared that Mrs. Butler was seriously ill, but had attempted to spare Blanche until the seriousness had become a certainty. "She gave me many of your letters to read, and was so proud of them...She was wrapped up in you, you satisfied her ambitions and affection, you were all she wanted you to be. I often thought few mothers had such another self in a child as she seemed to have in you--perfect gratification; and she seemed, too, to live her youth over again in yours."<sup>76</sup> Butler himself wrote on April 22: "I am well, but very lonely at the table and when I am alone."<sup>77</sup>

A second loss was to come. In the summer of 1881, Ben Israel Butler, the younger Butler son, who was completing his law studies at Columbia College, became ill while spending the summer at Bay View and died on Sept. 1. His father,

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<sup>75</sup> "Sarah Hildreth Butler's love and wisdom had been the guiding light and influence on her husband and their sons...Adelbert's tender solicitude for Blanche overcame his brooding on his own misfortunes; for her, everything had dropped into insignificance in the face of death. Adelbert's understanding of their individual problems led to bonds of family unity which were never broken." Adelbert Ames, p. 490.

<sup>76</sup> Chronicles, p. 356.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 359.

who had begun a cruise on the yacht "America" to Newfoundland, returned to find the flag flying at half-mast when he sailed into the Bay View harbor. Blanche wrote Del on September 20, of the loss of her brother, that "time did not cure the tendency to tears. Yesterday we went over to the grave yard. Poor Ben! The turf is already taking root on his grave, and we all go on the same as if he were still with us. It is hard to realize that we are to hear his happy laugh and see his sunny, handsome face no more."<sup>78</sup>

By 1878, the family, having lost its grandmother, had grown to include new grandchildren, Butler, Edith, Sarah and now a new little one, named Blanche, apparently by her grandfather, who wrote to her father on February 23: "Think of it, you ungrateful fellow, keeping me four days without the knowledge that I had another grandchild! What do you think the telegraph was meant for? It had been the first one, I might pardon you, for such an event might turn an addle pate, but the fourth! I have no patience with you. Blanche, poor child, had other things to think of, so I do not blame her a bit. But you! Do you suppose there was nobody anxious and waiting for news?...I am a good mind to say that I will not name the girl. But why should I punish the innocent, you would, if I do not look out, give her some horrid name or other that she will be ashamed of as well as her surname, which, I have no doubt, she will be in haste to change."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 533.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 473. Ironically, of course, Butler was wrong: Little Blanche retained her surname by marrying Oakes Ames.

This mild grandfatherly scolding aside, the arrival of a fourth Ames child was not marked by any unusual flurry of activity. Mother Blanche was no longer gathering up her letters and arranging her affairs as she had done in anticipation of the arrival of Butler, her first child. She had written to Del then, on May 13, 1871: "Dear, if anything should happen to me, I would like to have my letters arranged so that you could take care of them, or burn them, I have spent the day in putting them in order...I wish, Dearie, you would save all in regard to yourself, bad as well as good. They will be of interest to the 'little cove,' as well as to us."<sup>80</sup>

With this nod to posterity, she hastened to reassure him that she was not "fearful or hypochondriacal," but happy. "Whatever the result, Darling, I bless you for all the contentment and joy you have given me. The future cannot rob us of the past, and you have made me very, very happy."<sup>81</sup>

By March 14, 1878, Blanche was writing Del, already off on one of his business trips, that "this morning Mrs. Faunce, the baby and I went out to ride, did some shopping and made a call on Florence." The next month, she noted that "I bought a carriage for our youngest and intend to keep her in the open air a great deal of the time. She knows my voice and stops crying the moment she hears it..."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> It is fair to speculate that Blanche's concern to preserve the letters that passed between her and her husband resulted in the rich collection of Ames family papers now at Smith.

<sup>81</sup> May 13, 1878, Chronicles, p. 275.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 483.

Delight in motherhood occasionally palled, however, as Blanche fretted in a letter to Del when little Blanche was three months old: "Therefore I often feel that my time is wasted. What does it all amount to, this weighing of meat, keeping accounts, arranging and cutting out curtains, standing by to see that the walls are properly washed, scolding all dinner time trying to correct bad manners, riding out to do a number of errands and having the baby along to make music, and rest the thoughts and ears, return to nurse the baby and at the same time stand in the parlor to direct about placing the furniture...This brings me up to the present time when I am writing you and feeling cross that you are not here, and that I am what I am and that the world is what it is."<sup>83</sup>

After the birth of our protagonist, the second Blanche, Blanche Butler was to go on to have two more children, Adelbert and Jessie, and to continue to be active at various pursuits, even including sports. She wrote her daughter Blanche, while the latter was away at Smith College, of her attempt to play golf: "It is quite absurd of a grandmother, fair, fat and fifty, to stalk over the pastures striking fruitlessly at small balls"<sup>84</sup> and she continued to take dips in the sea at Bay View. She did not give up her art and sculpted her own fanciful creatures to decorate "The Whim," a home she

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 493,

<sup>84</sup> From a letter dated October 23, 1897, box 26A, folder 331, Ames Family Papers. She was, indeed, still fair but unquestionably plump in her tight corset, when in 1898 a photograph was taken of her with Gen. Ames, slender as ever, at a fete held at the Butler mansion in Lowell to benefit soldiers in the Spanish-American War. The picture is on p. 518 of Adelbert Ames, by Blanche Ames Ames.

and Gen. Ames bought late in life in Ormond, Florida, and the grounds at Bay View.<sup>85</sup>

As her physical powers failed, she gathered her family letters to be published privately as Chronicles From the Nineteenth Century, and she made notes of the various aches and pains attendant on aging, remarking in her diary: "People who are always airing their grievances physical or mental always seem great nuisances...Still I realize I am wonderfully well."<sup>86</sup> But her vigorous mind did not fail at all, and she guided her own children over the years through her letters to them at school and later in their own homes, just as she had been guided by her own parents at the Academy of the Visitation and at Vicksburg. Like Sarah Hildreth and Ben Butler, she counseled moderation in studies and pleasure in achievement for both her sons and her daughters and expressed over and over again her love for and comfort in her children.<sup>87</sup>

That it was her fourth child, her second daughter and namesake, who made a name for herself as an artist, political activist and reformer is no more accountable than the fact that it was Blanche Butler herself, a woman in a man's world, whose life, loves and observations survive her, when the lives of her brothers have slid away into

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<sup>85</sup> Bayview, p. 258.

<sup>86</sup> February, 18, 1934, Bayview, p. 269.

<sup>87</sup> She wrote Little Blanche from her seaside home, Bayview, Cape Ann, Mass. on July 17, 1923: "What can I do or say to help you? Alas, when our children are married and have children of their own, we are powerless and can do no mothering, no matter how strong the desire. The only help is limited to loving sympathy and a cheery word," box 26A, folder 333, Ames Family Papers.

obscurity. But the little Blanche was a product of two talented people who loved and sustained each other, and it is therefore unsurprising that, loved and sustained by them herself, she went on to make a name for herself and her own small niche in history.

She may have inherited this desire for fame as well, since Blanche, her mother, too, longed for some recognition of her life, as she wrote in her introduction to her collected letters on Sept. 1, 1934: "How far am I actuated in the proposed publication by a desire for public self-expression? I have been mother of six children, who will love and cherish my memory, I have no doubt. Scrub woman Mary Flynn can claim as fine a record. Am I actuated by a silly desire to have a posthumous distinctive entity and capture an ephemeral renown as a writer of some letters which in themselves have no especial merit? I must be frank with myself and acknowledge that, while refusing to consider that I stand at the gateway of death, I am inclined to enjoy, in thought, a hope of becoming a personality together with my father, mother, and husband."<sup>88</sup>

By 1934, she would have been justified, although she did not do so, in adding to her list of personalities, "my daughter," since, by then, the younger Blanche was already a college graduate, mother, political cartoonist, painter, respected botanical illustrator, and well-known as a reform leader for suffrage and birth control, but she

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<sup>88</sup> Blanche Butler Ames died on Feb. 18, 1954. Robey reported that she refused medication in her last days, because it "disrupted the clarity of her mind," and that she chose her own time for going. She persuaded her doctor to give her a lethal injection and died with her daughters surrounding her, her namesake feeling her pulse until it stopped. *Bayview*, pp. 273-274.

did not do so. Perhaps in her last years, her mind turned not forward, but back to the happy days of her youth and her marriage to Del.

One element that often goes hand in hand with the reforming spirit in women is conspicuously absent from Ames family diaries and letters, however, and that is a dominant religious faith. Neither in the Butler nor in the Ames menages was strong religious faith inculcated in the children. Nancy Cott, among others, makes a telling case for religion as the organizing principle for women's reform activities during the early 19th-century Second Great Awakening, when women, newly charged with the moral education of children, formed first religious maternal societies to support each other in the task, then Magdalen societies to rescue female prostitutes, and then branched out into areas such as abolitionism, temperance, and eventually, women's rights.<sup>89</sup> In the voluminous correspondence between spouses or between parents and children of the Ames family, however, there is little mention of religion. It is possible that the Butler-Ames families were peculiarly secular in their views, or else that religion as a motivating force for reform had dampened by Blanche Ames's generation. Blanche Ames Ames wrote of her father, "his broad outlook had strengthened his children's religious experience with philosophical foundations tending toward Unitarianism."<sup>90</sup> But Adelbert and Blanche were also interested in

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<sup>89</sup> The Bonds of Womanhood, pp. 126-159.

<sup>90</sup> Adelbert Ames, p. 537. Blanche may have been attributing to her father her own adoption of Unitarianism, which apparently began when her fiancé insisted that a Unitarian minister marry them, and not the Anglican minister chosen by her parents. The Butlers also had been married in the Anglican church. I have found no evidence that any of Blanche's forebears were Unitarian, although she and Oakes were buried in the cemetery of the North Easton Unitarian church.

"controversial theories, Darwin and the Theologians, Freud, Jung, and their detractors, or the fiction of the day. Scientific and religious theories were discussed as their enterprising children vied with each other to bring forward the latest treasures of thought."<sup>91</sup>

Harriet Robey, daughter of Blanche Ames Ames's sister Edith, wrote of the Ames family's view of religion: " I have no recollection of any parental stress on a belief in God. I also know that I, at least, have never found the humility that can give a simple, trusting cry to God, 'Help me, for I am alone and afraid.' No, I must depend on myself emotionally, not on my parents, not on my children."<sup>92</sup>

This refusal on the part of Ames family members to depend upon or be guided by religion was long standing. In 1864, Sarah Hildreth Butler, distressed and alone while her husband was on the battlefield, wrote to him of her decision to join St. Anne's Episcopal Church, the church in which they were married. Butler, though he disclaimed any desire to "throw a single thought in the way of an obstacle," still challenged her by asking : "Can you say the Creed (I believe) with a firm and full faith? It is much to say. Can you believe the dogmas of the church? That your life and thoughts are pure enough for the church or anywhere else I have never a doubt. The point is, do you believe in the 'Holy Ghost, the Holy Catholic Church, the remission of sin' as taught by the church? If you do, and I do not say one word against so believing, not even expressing doubt, then be a member of the church--but

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<sup>91</sup> Adelbert Ames, p. 540.

<sup>92</sup> Bayview, p. 342.

not with any expectation of finding any more contentment in it than now unless you become a devotee, and that is a species of mania."<sup>93</sup>

He ended his advice: "If I could believe, I would become a member of the church, but alas! I haven't faith." There is no evidence that Mrs. Butler ever did follow up on her plan to join the church.<sup>94</sup>

Del Ames, a gentler soul than Butler, writing to his daughters Edith and Sarah at Bryn Mawr, advised them not to offend others by parading their indifference to religion: "Your mother tells me that your mates think you a little irreverent as to religious matters. In our free intercourse with each other we often say, perhaps more than we mean. We have been freer in our own house than we would be in another's...One's religion is very sacred and disrespect to it offends. Innumerable wars have taken place because of insults to nations' God...I suggest you steer clear of every Religious topic."<sup>95</sup>

Blanche Ames Ames, creative in so many things and nurtured by such a family, grew to be creative in religion, while sharing her family's distinct secular bent. Although the exact date is unrecorded, she did join her husband Oakes in his choice of Unitarianism sometime after their marriage ceremony was conducted by a Unitarian minister. However, her only recorded religious commentary, written in 1950 at age 72, was as individual as Blanche was herself, and it radiated her sense of

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., pp. 342-343.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 343.

<sup>95</sup> Adelbert Ames, p. 499.

cosmic optimism in a universe that is "planned for good." She wrote: "I believe in the Motherhood of God," and then went on to state her belief in the "sacredness of the human body;" "salvation through economic, social and spiritual freedom;" and in the fact that "we are now living in Eternity as much as we ever shall;" that "there is no devil but fear;" in "freedom--social, economic, domestic, political, mental;" in "every man minding his own business;" in "death as a manifestation of life."<sup>96</sup> All this is liberal thinking for a Brahmin woman approaching the end of her life, clearly a far cry from traditional religion, from the traditional view of woman's secondary status, and from the sonorous verses of the Nicene Creed in which Butler, "alas," was unable to believe.

To sum up then, Blanche Butler Ames, the conduit to Blanche Ames Ames of the Butler family penchant for politics, for reform, and for a conscious tradition of leadership supported by the family's collective talent and privilege, received from her parents a number of lessons in life unusual for a 19th-century woman. First, of course, her parents gave her a good education and encouraged her in its pursuit, just as they did for their sons. Her father, in particular, was firm in his insistence that she take her studies seriously and he addressed her as a mature individual; her mother advised her that education should be her chief support in life. Second, the Butlers encouraged her to be individualistic instead of self sacrificing, when they offered Blanche the opportunity to eschew the cares and submission inherent in Victorian marriage and choose art instead-- hence their less than enthusiastic response to her

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<sup>96</sup> Ames Family Papers, series IV.

engagement to the otherwise admirable Adelbert Ames. Third, Butler's belief in women's rights, drawn from his own family experience and expressed in his support for woman suffrage in 1870, was mirrored in his daughter's adoption of the New England feminist refusal to include "obey" as a marriage vow. Finally, as Sarah Hildreth Butler had been a participant in her husband's active military and political career, so Blanche Butler was a valued advisor in her husband's career. It was no accident that she should have met the handsome Gen. Ames while listening to her father argue for the impeachment of President Johnson, because Butler's wife and daughter, notwithstanding the separate sphere ideology of the day, were privy to his public as well as his emotional life. Blanche Butler advised Ames as governor on his speeches and is credited with suggesting the solution to the problem of his possible impeachment as governor of Mississippi.<sup>97</sup>

This is not to say that the Butler genius for politics and reform was the only source of the kind of family elan that led Blanche Ames Ames to take society to task for its failure to enfranchise women or grant them access to birth control. Her father,

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<sup>97</sup> Blanche Ames Ames does not write directly of any specific influence on her of her notorious grandfather, but she does write that her adored father Adelbert consulted Butler on political matters and both "admired and respected" him, Adelbert Ames, p. 298. When Butler died in 1893, Ames grieved at the loss of a "rare friendship dating from the war period and based on intimate knowledge of the high standards and loyalty of each other," Adelbert Ames, p. 500. Granddaughter Blanche wrote that Butler's death "caused real sorrow among his neighbors and employees in Lowell, for he had always been generous with time and money to protect their rights, to procure shorter work hours and to use his phenomenal capacity as a lawyer to freely defend them in court. The streets through the city and to the old burying ground in Dracut were so thronged with crowds that twice the funeral cortege was delayed," Adelbert Ames, p. 500

Gen. Ames, who spoke so feelingly of love and honor in marriage, who fought so bravely in the Civil War, was a hero to his daughter. We have seen how Ames, faced with the united forces of Southern Redemption, spoke passionately to the Senate of the abuse of the freedmen and his belief that the nation must defend them. Even when the Democrats of Mississippi undertook to impeach him, they could uncover no trace of corruption against him. His crime in their eyes was that of trying to uphold the law that had freed the slaves and made them citizens. Though it was Blanche Butler who wrote most of the many cheery, sensible and encouraging letters that reminded her homesick daughters at college of the family warmth and also its will to achieve, Gen. Ames, from the sanctum of his study, was a quiet but firm influence on his family. When the oldest son, Butler, decided to go into politics, it was his father who instructed him in the art; when Little Blanche at Smith sought a topic for a class debate, it was to her father that she applied, and he set obligingly to work informing her of the issues and polishing her prose. His quiet fortitude and undoubted courage played into his daughter's resolve to commit herself without reserve when the cause seemed right to her.

## CHAPTER 3

### DEAR BLANCHIANA: CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION

Blanche Ames Ames naturally did not spring fully armed for the reform battle from the collective foreheads of her illustrious progenitors, but was raised quietly in the warm, safe and privileged bosom of an affectionate upper-middle-class family. As Blanche remembered it, her early life at the Highlands in New Jersey, where the family lived for a period after her birth in 1879 until they moved in 1893 to the Butler mansion in Lowell at the death of Gen. Butler, was "the happiest " of her early years, despite the "vicissitudes of Del's business ventures during national depressions."<sup>1</sup> However, it is clear that the most formative period of her adult character was actually during her years at Smith College, when Blanche began to demonstrate an independence and selectivity of mind concerning men and politics: She supported the Spanish-American War when other students did not, was a steady believer in woman suffrage when the subject was only just becoming respectable to discuss at a woman's college, and she refused to admire male faculty and lecturers merely because of the high opinions they held of themselves. In the course of her education away from home, first prepping for college with tutors in Deerfield and later as a student at Smith, she defined and refined the relationship she was to have with her family, so that she could depend on their active support and advice for her projects, even as she gradually stepped away from the family into a life of her own. In this respect, she

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<sup>1</sup> Adelbert Ames, p. 495.

followed in the footsteps of her mother, who married and raised six children while keeping close touch with the Butler parents. Daughter Blanche did the same, creating a life of marriage and political action with Oakes at Borderland, while maintaining enduring supporting ties with her mother, father and siblings.

Her earliest childhood memories suggest an active and happy life, as when she wrote her brother Butler 1887 that she had been allowed to adopt a turkey of her own, when she gloated over the ice cream that was prepared for her birthday that year, and in her description of the pursuit of a squirrel by the Ames children: "It was so cold that the squirrel was afraid to jump from tree to tree so he ran down and I came about a foot from catching him," she related to Butler.<sup>2</sup>

As has been noted in the previous chapter, the Ames parents had an affectionate relationship with each other, and this affection spilled over to include their six children, Butler, born August 22, 1871; Edith, born March 4, 1873; Sarah, born Oct. 1, 1874; Blanche, born Feb. 18, 1878; Adelbert, born Sept. 19, 1880; and Jessie, born Nov. 2, 1882, who continued to maintain close ties with their family even as they moved from within its confines to colleges, marriages or careers. Their father enjoyed the respect usually accorded the Victorian father: "Adelbert was glad to settle into the repose of home with Blanche, whose devotion protected him from too many confusing activities of their energetic children. His favorite writing table or seat by the fire or morning paper was never usurped. What was best for Del was best

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<sup>2</sup> Blanche's letters to Butler are to be found in box 22A, folder 240, of the Ames Family Papers at the Sophia Smith Collection, Nov. 16, 1887, Feb. 9, 1888, and Feb. 21, 1888.

for all because they wanted it to be so. Why he was not spoiled or selfish is surprising unless it is that he, on his side, was equally considerate."<sup>3</sup>

Blanche wrote in her biography of her father, whose courage she admired: "Love and compromise were a form of Adelbert's religion...He felt that courage is an attribute of faith. To me, he would say when things went wrong, "keep a stiff upper lip, Little Blanche,' and somehow, by understanding perhaps, he could make me happy again frequently by saying, 'keep on smiling.'"<sup>4</sup> He was a "kind, fun-loving father and teacher" who was "fierce" only in "his denunciations of lies or acts of injustice, then he could be scathing indeed."<sup>5</sup>

Her eulogies for her mother appear not in a printed biography, such as she accorded her father, but in the numerous exchanges of letters that Blanche senior and junior shared when Blanche was away at school. Mother Blanche described events at home in Lowell, such as preparations for a dance at a cousin's house, while Daughter Blanche recounted her basketball triumphs and such joys of communal living as making fudge in a chafing dish to share with her friends.

Blanche's sharp sense of humor, so like that of her mother, was already well developed by the age of 15, when she traveled with her father and sisters to West Point, to visit oldest brother Butler, and then to the Chicago World's Fair. She left an impish little trail of snippy observations behind her in her diary and letters home to

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<sup>3</sup> Adelbert Ames, p. 528.

<sup>4</sup> Adelbert Ames, p. 528.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 528.

her mother. Blanche's ironic humor, however, clearly emerges in the letters she sent home from her travels to Westpoint to visit Butler, and then from Westpoint to the Chicago World's Fair. In addition to complaining of her sister Sal's eating habits, Blanche spared no one in her detailing of the dress and habits of her fellow travelers. Passing through Hell's Gate to New York City on the S.S. Providence, Blanche described "three Irish girls all dressed in their best things. One had a lite (sic) yellow wig, another wore a thick bang right down to her eyebrows. I don't remember the third, but she was just as ridiculous as the other two and their queer anticks kept me with a broad grin all the time."<sup>6</sup>

Her upper-class fastidiousness continued, as she recorded the "anticks" of "two Irish children, the dirtiest little creatures and the mother gave them raw sausages to eat; great, big, red, raw ones. How they did it I don't know but they seemed to relish them and as they were both fat children I suppose their sausages agreed with them, but I know they would have made me ill."<sup>7</sup>

Once arrived at West Point, where brother Butler was a cadet, the Misses Ames had dinner, then went "calling without gloves or cards" upon the Misses Hawkins, the eldest of whom "as I remember, did most of the talking, while I slipped in a word edgewise which she did not hear," Blanche recorded. Butler, as eldest brothers have ever done, teased his sisters by introducing them as "The Misses Ames 1.2.3., which Sal did not like."<sup>8</sup> Even in church the next day, kneeling in prayer,

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<sup>6</sup> Blanche diary, n.d.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., n.d.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., n.d.

bright-eyed Blanche observed a fellow worshipper, Mrs. Mills, who "began kicking like a duck when he is swimming and arranged her skirts under the seat, but it did not do any good for there was no one there but little me and I rather laughed at than admired the pretty folds of her skirt."<sup>9</sup>

Her observations of men were no more respectful, for she disdainfully described the preacher as looking like "half one of the colored waiters downstairs and Mr. Mackey our butcher at home" and also as preaching "a pretty poor sermon," while Blanche enjoyed the view of "the back of a whole lot of cadets' heads. Most interesting." Taking a walk with Butler's fellow cadet, a Mr. Preston, she observed that he was "a very queer kid. He was either dreadfully boarded (sic) or bashfull (sic) and as Butler says none of the cadets are bashfull, I think he must have been boarded. He watched his feet a good deal. I think I will have to buy a pair of shoes like his."<sup>10</sup>

This ironic, even arrogant, sense of humor and acute observation of the foibles of humanity offer a broad hint that this self confident, young, upper-class white woman was unlikely to be quietly absorbed in the toils of True Womanhood, with its emphasis on passivity and self abnegation, although, the long record of women's history has demonstrated often that social pressure can bend the liveliest young woman into conformity. However, the youthful Blanche, although she was not employed for money in the year between her graduation from Smith in 1899 and her

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., n.d.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, n.d.

marriage to Oakes Ames in 1900, was in many ways a "New Woman."<sup>11</sup> She was eager to engage life and self conscious enough to comment upon it in terms that did little to cushion the blows she dealt to the self esteem of a married lady concerned with the folds of her skirt, or a boring preacher, or the self absorbed Mr. Preston, so palpably uninterested in entertaining the kid sister of a fellow cadet.

Arrived with her father and sisters at the World's Fair in Chicago on August 19, 1893, Blanche took the elevated railroad to the fair, standing up all the way, and meeting up with Butler and other cadets, who were encamped at the fair. She enjoyed the ice cream sodas more than the mining and engineering buildings, and marveled at the plenitude of grasshoppers. Despite her future career as an artist, she took little note of the art building, writing that it "was mostly French art," although her lack of interest may have been caused by an intense headache, a recurring problem. "In the French pictures there were lots of people without much on, but even if there was a young man in our party, we did not mind as one doesn't need to see some of the pictures if one doesn't want to,"<sup>12</sup> she wrote, adding that Butler took a nap instead of

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<sup>11</sup> The so-called "New Woman" was the generation that followed that of the Victorian woman, described by Blanche Butler as fragile and never without the cough that underscored her delicacy. The New Woman, by contrast, was vigorous, healthy, educated and a sportswoman, although her duty in life, like that of her mother, was still primarily domestic. Her better health and education ideally served to make her a better and more efficient wife and mother, not a competitor with men for jobs. Nevertheless, many college educated New Women determined to pursue careers not only as teachers and nurses, but also as social workers, doctors, artists, writers and sometimes lawyers. In general, it was still thought that careers interfered with family life, so that many career-minded women had to choose between career and family as men did not.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, n.d.

going to the art building. They dutifully took in the transportation building, were disappointed in the horticultural display, and made no comment about the women's building. What she did comment on was a scene that appealed to her artistic nature: "We went to see illuminations in the evening. I never want to see anything more beautiful. There were four great search lights--that looked like great eyes keeping watch over all the fairgrounds. And when they moved around up and down slowly or quickly as if they had seen something that surprised them one did not want to say anything, but only wanted to watch and be enchanted."<sup>13</sup>

The diary serves as a bridge between Blanche's warm, safe girlhood years and her emergence into the world. This emergence was facilitated by Blanche's increasing preoccupation with her education, first at Rogers Hall in Lowell, from which she graduated in 1895,<sup>14</sup> and then at Deerfield, Mass., where she spent the summer being prepped in French and history before her entrance at Smith the following fall.<sup>15</sup> In many ways, Blanche's letters home are not unlike those her mother had once written home to Sarah Hildreth Butler, because both young women were concerned about academic success or failure, both worked hard, both moped and missed their families: "I have been going to Rogers Hall for a week and two days and I can't say I am in love with the place yet. I don't find any trouble with my

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., only date indicated is August 19, 1893.

<sup>14</sup> Edward James, Notable American Women, pp. 15-16.

<sup>15</sup> Ames Family Papers, box 4, folder 238, July, 1895.

French, Caesar or Cicero, but German and geometry are the terrors of my life,"<sup>16</sup>

Blanche wrote her traveling parents.

What the budding "New Woman" Blanche most enjoyed were the daily sports activities. In the future, in fact, she was to play on the Smith College basketball team, and participate in a wide range of sports, from ice skating and skiing to tennis (at which she won several prizes with Oakes as a partner), bicycling, horseback riding, and golf. She reported of her activities at Rogers Hall: "We girls play football almost every afternoon for the exercise and air you know. It's lots of fun." But, she went on, "to get back to the subject that is always on my mind, if I study as hard as I am now I ought to know something when I get through. You see it is kind of hard for me as I'm almost all the studies in with girls two or three years older than myself." In fact, she wrote, she studied so hard that she suffered from stomach ache, and this effort to achieve was to manifest itself all her life in headaches.<sup>17</sup>

After leaving Rogers Hall, she departed for a summer of study of languages and mathematics at Deerfield, and she seemed surprised that her separation was not more traumatic: "This is the morning of the second day I have been in Deerfield alone and as yet no severe attack of homesickness has come. People seem

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<sup>16</sup> Ames Family Papers, box 4, folder 238., October, 1893.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Blanche described one of her headaches to her mother in a letter home from the Chicago World's Fair on August 20, 1893: "I thought my head would go into a thousand little pieces and when I closed my eyes I saw all kinds of queer things." Box 21. On Nov. 27, 1897, she reported her headache as the result of living in such a "misty wet valley. I think blueness and despair really float around, waiting to wrap me up in a chilly fog."

determined not to let me be alone so that I could possibly be homesick."<sup>18</sup> She confessed later that she had not studied hard enough at Deerfield, and was not rebuked by her mother, who urged her only to complete her work that summer: "Your remarks about being lazy and stopping study does not disturb us at all. If you do not want to go to college next fall, why don't go."<sup>19</sup>

Her observations about other people she encountered, true to form, were critical, but not cruel. She wrote about being friendly with a girl named Ada, who could sing well but otherwise had an unpleasant voice, and of meeting a physician whose Roman nose should have been attractive, but wasn't. On the other hand, leaving the confines of her family for the first time, as well as their all-important social circle at Lowell, she understood that her social circle at home was not necessarily the only one of importance after all: "I have considered those little towns about Lowell as no account places compared with the mighty effect our little crowd in Belvedere has upon the world, but I don't know but that I will change my mind." Like her mother before her, she readily acknowledged her ties to home, writing her parents: "You don't know the joy of going to the post office and finding a letter or so waiting for you."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., June 18, 1895.

<sup>19</sup> Ames Family Papers, box 26A, July 8, 1895.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., July 11, 1895.

Still, her studies were not too burdensome, because she bicycled, played tennis, dabbled in the local river, <sup>21</sup>and described going on a picnic to the Connecticut Valley: "I have not enjoyed anything more for a long time. We had to cross the river in a funny little ferry boat just big enough for one team at a time and pulled by a wire cable that the man on the ferry pulls with his hands. We felt very old fashioned, it was such a queer arrangement."<sup>22</sup>

Blanche also reported, for the first time, receiving the attentions of a masculine admirer, in this case, one Capt. Williams, who asked her to go driving. He "prepared the way for I suppose he is bashful (sic), he sent me a lovely bunch of flowers. I looked in vain for any billet douce (sic), but the old warrior has evidently had experience," she wrote with her usual humor.<sup>23</sup> A Mr. Cilley was also smitten, she wrote in the same letter, and the brother of her friend, Mary Ling, told her that his sister was the prettiest girl in Deerfield until the arrival of Blanche. "Dreadfully forward of him wasn't it? I never had any fellow say such a thing to me before and I was quite surprised."

Blanche Butler Ames responded to her daughter's forays into the larger world with the same kind of loving support that she had received from Sarah Hildreth. Addressing her letters to "Dear Little Blanche" or "Blanchiana," she wrote often "so that you may not fail to get a daily letter, at least until your homesickness wears

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<sup>21</sup> July 5, 1895, she wrote to ask for a bathing suit, adding "I am the only girl that can swim."

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ames Family Papers, box 21, July 16, 1895.

off."<sup>24</sup> That Little Blanche was not as devoted a correspondent as her mother is a constant theme of the mother-daughter exchange. "We have been growling about you because we had no letter Saturday, Sunday, Monday or Tuesday. This morning's mail brought me one in which you say you have written daily. Now what has become of the letters? I must interview the post master."<sup>25</sup> And, two days later, Blanche senior wrote: "We are anxiously waiting for another letter from you. It is possible that we are more Blanche-sick than you are homesick."<sup>26</sup>

Little Blanche's eventual decision to enter Smith College, happily for historians, continued the mother-daughter correspondence begun at Rogers Hall. In these exchanges, Blanche Butler was warm and encouraging to her daughter, demonstrably proud of her successes, concerned about her illnesses and occasional small injuries earned from playing basketball,<sup>27</sup> never pressuring the younger Blanche to succeed beyond her strength or disposition. Her advice was inevitably sensible and led in the direction of developing her daughter's critical judgment and independence of thought. Blanche Butler was the link between her daughter in the world and the family still at Lowell, as she described the family's activities day-by-day and their

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<sup>24</sup> Ames Family Papers, box 26A, June 19, 1895.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., June 26, 1895.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., June 28, 1895.

<sup>27</sup> Blanche wrote her mother on Jan. 9, 1898, that she had sprained her ankle playing basketball, saying "I am afraid that I am pretty well out of temper for the pain in my foot is constant," signing the letter, "your bunged-up-cross-as-a-bear daughter," folder 224, box 21.

intense interest in and love for Little Blanche, the absent member.<sup>28</sup> There was humor in the exchanges as well, as this letter from Blanche junior, newly arrived at Smith, demonstrates: "You ought to have stayed here over today just to see the sight of a lifetime. You may have thought you saw a crowd of girls at Bryn Mawr (where sisters Edith and Sarah were educated) but it would not have compared with the rush at chapel this morning. Hattie and I went up there this morning but did not know exactly which way to go. But as we turned a corner a queer babbling sound like a thousand brooks struck our ears. Of course we went to find out where it came from and there were girls, girls, and girls, rising one above the other, trying to get up the stairs. It quite took the breath away and we went and added two more to the crowd."<sup>29</sup>

The question arises at this point if the two Blanches, in their mutual affection, esteem, and support for each other, were unusual or commonplace in the world of women in 1895. Blanche senior, it is true, had had more education in her youth than many other Victorian women enjoyed, and had been included, to some extent, in the male world of politics in which her father and husband had been so active; nor did she ever give up her art, but continued sculpting and painting throughout her life<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> It should be mentioned that Blanche Butler's liberality in matters of education did not extend to sex. As we shall see, even when her daughter was engaged to Oakes Ames, she did not permit Little Blanche to travel to Boston to meet Oakes on his return from Cuba in 1900, or to stay overnight at his North Easton home.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., Sept. 13, 1895.

<sup>30</sup> On February 14, 1899, writing to the younger Blanche at Smith, Blanche senior described herself as "claybound," because she was hard at work on a clay

This maternal autonomy suggests that, no prey to the Cult of True Womanhood herself, Blanche Butler would be, as she was, a supportive mother for a "New Woman." In this, as an upper middle-class woman, she was not unique, according to Linda Rosenzweig in her study of middle-class American mothers and daughters. Although there was confusion in the minds of late 19th-century mothers how best to support their daughters' growing individualism within a society still bound by "older Victorian social mores,"<sup>31</sup> many, like Blanche Butler, were delighted that their daughters could go to college. As Rosenzweig noted, "Support for daughters' goals and objectives in the face of contradictory social imperatives had characterized American mothers' attitudes as early as the eighteenth century."<sup>32</sup> Such maternal allies helped daughters to challenge the "behavior patterns prescribed for them by the traditions of a patriarchal society."<sup>33</sup>

In fact, Rosenzweig concluded, despite the family tensions that arose inevitably when middle-class daughters made unconventional choices in their lives, most of their mothers reacted positively, with "tolerance and understanding."<sup>34</sup> The sharing, tolerance and understanding usually continued after marriage, as well.

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sculpture. She wrote little Blanche on May 21, 1899, that her father was anxious to hear of his daughter's "art successes...I laugh at him and tell him that art workers do not proceed with 'seven league boots' although your course up to the present time might lead him to suppose so," box 26A, folder 332.

<sup>31</sup> Linda W. Rosenzweig, The Anchor of My Life, p. 87.

<sup>32</sup> The Anchor of My Life, p. 91.

<sup>33</sup> The Anchor of My Life, p. 101.

<sup>34</sup> The Anchor of My Life, p. 112.

Rosenzweig's study of mother-daughter relationships between 1880-1920, concluded that, for women, "mutuality and connection rather than tension and conflict defined mother-daughter interactions," and also that female roles within the family have not necessarily limited women's expansion into new nontraditional roles.<sup>35</sup> Rosenzweig's position seems consistent with what can be known about the character of the relationship between Blanche Butler and Blanche Ames.

It is interesting to contrast this demonstrated intergenerational affection between women with Nancy Chodorow's Freudian view of mother/child relationships, which insists that both sexes "learn to feel negatively toward their mother during the oedipal period. A girl's negative feelings, however, are not so much contempt and devaluation as fear and hostility." The analysis assumes that both males and females, as they mature, automatically feel contempt for the mother and value the father. The result is self depreciation in the female child and a "normal" devaluation of women as part of the formation of masculine character.<sup>36</sup> This psychoanalytical interpretation of the "bonds of womanhood" does not seem to be borne out in the Ames-Butler family, where women maintained close and affectionate ties from childhood until the ultimate death of the mother. Chodorow does agree that mothers tend to identify more with their daughters than with their sons,<sup>37</sup> which would explain the attention both Sarah Hildreth and Blanche Butler lavished on their

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<sup>35</sup> The Anchor of My Life, pp. 214-215.

<sup>36</sup> Nancy Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender, p. 182.

<sup>37</sup> The Reproduction of Mothering, p. 109

daughters, but Chodorow goes on to describe daughters as seeking to make themselves independent by becoming highly critical of their families, especially of the mother.<sup>38</sup> If the Butler-Ames daughters experienced such a critical reaction to their mothers, it is not expressed in any of their writings, although both were certainly critical of their society outside the family.

At Smith, as at Rogers Hall, Blanche's confidence continued to be buoyed by home ties, particularly by the love and support of her mother, for she wrote on Feb. 4, 1896: "Mother, what kind of a thing do you call yourself, always ready just when you are wanted to cheer your big flock...It seems as if you must be something more than just a woman."<sup>39</sup> Struggling with a personal problem at Smith in 1897, she wrote in her diary, "but oh! Mother, if you were here perhaps I could go to you as I always have, but you are not..."<sup>40</sup> That fall, she wrote her mother a contrite poem: "If evil shadows cross your path, and you to your mother crossly speak, the mind once quiet now disturbed; hath a yearning her kind forgiveness to seek."<sup>41</sup>

Blanche senior's letters of her daughter continued to be "prosy and full of advice,"<sup>42</sup> as she put it. "Do not undertake too much and get pulled down, " she advised young Blanche. "Make it a rule to be in bed by half past nine and do not get

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<sup>38</sup> The Reproduction of Mothering, p. 137.

<sup>39</sup> Box 21, folder 223, Feb. 4, 1896.

<sup>40</sup> Series II, box 4A, diary.

<sup>41</sup> Box 21, folder 223, Nov. 8, 1896.

<sup>42</sup> Box 26B, folder 338, Jan. 16, 1896.

up too early or you will get out of condition and that you must avoid, even if you have to give up going to teas."<sup>43</sup> Blanche senior also expressed her own loneliness without her daughter, writing "we miss your bonnie face, my deary" and "I never sit down to the table without thinking where is Blanche? Every night I have to locate you and feel sure that I have not locked you out."<sup>44</sup> In response to her daughter's self criticism, she responded tartly, "I do not like to have you use such strong words in connection with your self as 'fool.' You may sometimes be a little foolish, but never a fool."<sup>45</sup> To daughter Blanche's characteristic anxiety over her exams, she advised: "Be content about your exams as far as your father and I are concerned. If you failed in every one it would not alter our estimate of you or your capacity. We know if you should fail it would be owing to excitement and nervousness. These are due to temperament, and to a certain extent beyond one's control."<sup>46</sup>

Blanche senior's letters offered advice in other areas as well. When Blanche junior complained of the conceit of a male lecturer, her mother's sensible response was: "You ask if you ought to look upon such men as F. Hopkins Smith as tin gods. Certainly not. Your powers of observation and discrimination were given to you to be used upon all occasions and all persons. You want to be able to give a man credit for genius and to admire all that is admirable, but because you do this you are not to

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<sup>43</sup> Box 26A, folder 331, Sept. 18, 1895.

<sup>44</sup> Box 26A, folder 331, Sept. 30, 1895.

<sup>45</sup> Box 26A, folder 331, Jan. 12, 1895.

<sup>46</sup> Box 26A, folder 331, Jan. 14, 1896.

be blind to his weaknesses unless he is a member of your own family and you are so on principle."<sup>47</sup>

With this kind of encouragement for her own powers of discrimination and choice, it is scarcely surprising that Blanche while at Smith became confident enough to talk against holding the junior prom when the Spanish-American War was on, in spite of the hostility of her classmates, and that they learned to look to her for leadership, making her class president her senior year in 1899. It is also characteristic that Blanche senior included a boost for family loyalty, since family had been so important in her own life and was important as well for her daughter. Young Blanche did not demonstrate any eagerness to sever her family ties, as a more contemporary young woman might have done. As she wrote her mother: "I think I am getting hardened to coming out here, but still I have that funny feeling somewhere in the stomach or throat or head--I don't know just where--even if I don't go and cry; and I always have that feeling that I have left something, some duty, undone at home, and a longing to go back do and be all that I know I could if I would only try and be less selfish."<sup>48</sup>

The younger Blanche and her sisters were fortunate not only in their supportive mother, but also because they did not have to fight male opposition to attend college,<sup>49</sup> since their father supported their endeavors in much the same spirit

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<sup>47</sup> Box 26A, folder 331, March 6, 1896.

<sup>48</sup> Box 21, folder 223, Jan. 7, 1896.

<sup>49</sup> On March 11, 1898, Blanche senior wrote little Blanche: "Your father has been looking anxiously for a letter from you giving an account of your success in the

as their mother. If Chodorow is correct in assuming that all children naturally learn to value their father over their mother, then Del's gentle support of his daughters' educational endeavors must have been significant to the formation of their character as women. Indeed, Barbara Solomon, in her book, In the Company of Educated Women, emphasized that college women often had fathers who supported their advanced education because the fathers had been raised in the "ante-bellum tradition of intellectual and social reform," such that they "viewed college education for both sexes as the path to a fuller life intellectually, socially and economically"<sup>50</sup> This attitude is reflected in the supportive letters written by both Butler parents to their daughter, who passed on an equally supportive attitude toward her own daughter's education at college.

Writing to Sarah and Edith at Bryn Mawr, Del told them, "Since you must go away from home we rejoice that you are absent under such favorable conditions. Edith seems to question whether it is all worth while. A half suspicion that there is saw-dust in her doll seems to have entered her mind. The fact is there is no end of saw-dust about. You can find suggestions to that effect even in the records of the most ancient peoples--as well as in 'Edith's Epistle to her Parents' this year A.D. 1891...I expect to hear that you are getting along well in your studies. To get on well

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debate (at Smith). He takes a very lively interest in the literary efforts of the family and in one way or another, the family manages to keep his interest on the 'qui vivre,'" box 26A, folder 332.

<sup>50</sup> Barbara Solomon, In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America, p. 65.

means, with me--to have a fair standing--letting the earth revolve its same old way from west to east."<sup>51</sup>

Like Benjamin Butler before him, Gen. Ames encouraged his girls to study, writing on October 11, 1891: "It is a pleasant thought to me that you are among congenial companions and are learning from your books day by day. It seems to me that Edith may be too anxious about her studies. Should she consider for a moment she will see that she really has no cause to be. The college is quite as anxious to have her as she is to stay. She was admitted and required to study Greek because the authorities wanted more Greek students and because they thought she was likely to do well in that branch."<sup>52</sup>

Smith College, which Blanche attended from 1895 until her graduation in 1899, was founded and funded by a woman, Sophia Smith. Nevertheless, as Helen Horowitz explains in Alma Mater, the college was entirely a "male creation," devised to make a college education available to women, but within the confines of the male view of the proper role for women. Among other things, this meant keeping young women away from the rowdy male undergraduates of the day without isolating them in the rarefied atmosphere of a woman-dominated institution like Mount Holyoke Seminary. As Horowitz wrote: "The original buildings and plan of Smith college reflect this tension between innovation and conformity."<sup>53</sup> The founder herself

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<sup>51</sup> Adelbert Ames, p. 498, Sept. 30, 1891.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 499.

<sup>53</sup> Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, Alma Mater, p.69.

reflected this inner tension, since she wanted to develop women's minds while keeping them conventionally feminine. She declared herself unwilling to "render my sex any the less feminine, but to develop as fully as may be the powers of womanhood & furnish women with means of usefulness, happiness & honor now withheld from them."<sup>54</sup>

Smith students were encouraged to participate in social life of Northampton instead of clinging to their college sanctuary with the intention of keeping them "free from the affected, unsocial, visionary notions which fill the minds of some who graduate from our girls' schools," as John Morton Greene, the pastor who persuaded Sophia Smith to found the college, expressed it. Greene believed that Mount Holyoke had secluded its students from "real, practical life."<sup>55</sup> To counteract this impracticality, Smith students were to be housed instead in family-style cottages; obliged to use the town library instead of a college library, so that they would be exposed to ordinary town life; and to see men in their proper leadership roles as president of the college and as chief members of its governing boards and faculty. Part of the reason for this array of male officials also was to make it clear that Smith was not a mere female seminary, but a real and rigorous college.<sup>56</sup> The first

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 70

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 71

<sup>56</sup> Evidently the idea that women had limited energy and would suffer from exposure to a rigorous higher education, put forth most effectively by Dr. Edward Clarke of Harvard Medical School, in his Sex in Education, published in 1873, did not impress the founders of Smith College. A survey of coeducational colleges in 1885 effectively refuted Clarke when it found that education had a positive effect on women, In the Company of Educated Women, pp. 56-7.

president, L. Clark Seelye, joined the college in 1873 (it opened officially in 1875) and declared that women should be educated not to avoid their traditional domestic role, of which Seelye heartily approved, but to become members of society and to accomplish the "duties to her race."<sup>57</sup> Without stepping outside their feminine sphere, women at Smith could pursue through education "that all-perfect Mind, which is neither male nor female."<sup>58</sup>

By the late 19th-century, Horowitz observed, educators like Seelye were increasingly concerned about the possibility that women secluded in colleges would form sexual attachments, or at least, intense female friendships, the infamous "smashes" or "crushes."<sup>59</sup> The solution was the Smith cottage system, a series of households headed by faculty women or families, which would preserve healthy family attitudes (and control) at a college that would be a home away from home. In the views of its first president, Smith parents could entrust daughters to a college that would "preserve her womanliness."<sup>60</sup>

By 1895, when Blanche Ames entered Smith, the family ideal was already breaking down, as female faculty refused any longer to live their private lives as proctors of students, and they joined male faculty in abandoning the campus to the

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<sup>57</sup> In this case, race does not mean Asian, Caucasian, or Negro, but the "race" of Americans in the language of the day. Italians, Irish, Slavs and Jews were also referred to frequently as a race, and, in Victorian England at least, even the lower classes might be referred to as a race of servants.

<sup>58</sup> In the Company of Educated Women, p. 73

<sup>59</sup> In the Company of Educated Women, p.99.

<sup>60</sup> Alma Mater, p. 75.

students themselves, who were then free to develop their own version of college culture.<sup>61</sup> In any case, in consequence of the fact that men held so many of the important positions at Smith, female faculty had less influence on their students than was the case at other contemporary women's institutions.<sup>62</sup> The campus also had grown since its founding beyond its small, family-oriented prototype to include numerous classroom buildings, a separate library, and art and a music school, and a gymnasium, since the alumnae favored "physical training."<sup>63</sup>

Such college cultures as did develop on campuses of women's colleges were generally much less unruly than those of men's colleges. As Horowitz noted, "students in the women's colleges generally took their studies seriously, and they did not cheat." On the other hand, as college going became more acceptable, more affluent young women<sup>64</sup> joined the serious scholars and turned the atmosphere toward the social niceties. Blanche herself recorded such events as the sophomore dance, in which women partnered each other on the dance floor and gave each other flowers, and also numerous little social occasions in which fudge or pancakes were cooked over hot plates, or packages from home were shared.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p 196.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>63</sup> Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the 18th Century to the Present, p. 217.

<sup>64</sup> Barbara Solomon noted that, in the decade before World War I, upper-middle-class families "found college a convenient parking place for adolescent daughters...Thus both private and public institutions had increasingly affluent student bodies," p. 71. In 1905, tuition at Smith College was \$100 compared to \$30 at the University of Michigan.

The social hierarchy of women's colleges developed around such types such as the wealthy "swells," the studious "grinds," and the untouchable "freaks," who were ostracized for reasons of class or race. Another type, the "all-around girls," of which Blanche Ames was certainly one, though keeping up their grades as fraternity men disdained to do, were active in extracurricular activities, including team sports and class politics. They benefited by learning skills not ordinarily available to them as women. Such an education in power, Horowitz concluded, "contrasted with the feminine upbringing and led to no known future," thereby creating a "growing cadre of untraditional, unconventional women, who began to pursue social reform and even to enter public life,"<sup>65</sup> as Blanche was to do some years after her marriage. She was somewhat unusual in marrying however, since, by the end of the 19th-century, almost half of female college graduates did not marry and many of the remainder postponed marriage, possibly because employment possibilities made marriage less enticing.<sup>66</sup> By 1900, however, the trend away from marriage waned so that, by the 1940s, three-quarters of women graduates married.<sup>67</sup>

One by-product of the growing cohort of women collegians was the rise of a peer culture that became gradually more influential with students than did the opinions of faculty. As Solomon put it, "being young together created bonds that

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<sup>65</sup> Campus Life, p. 197.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 197-198,

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

removed college girls from adults."<sup>68</sup> Regardless of the intentions of college founders, women valued the opinion of their fellow students more than they did that of their faculty and they held their female friendships dear. Many preferred the separation of women from men students at the private women's colleges and the "richness of girl companions." It was not until 1920 that close friendships bordering on the erotic were actively discouraged between women, and before that date, most women collegians had little association with male students, even at coeducational institutions. The exception to this was the rise of dancing as an acceptable form of social contact between men and women, which occurred at the turn of the century. Solomon recorded that at Smith, the "forbidden waltz" was danced spontaneously by women and their male partners in 1897, bringing to an end to an era in which women danced with each other or were permitted to walk, but not dance around the floor with men (as at Mount Holyoke).<sup>69</sup>

That is was at Smith that the barriers to social dancing with men came down is not surprising, because the student body was large and fairly autonomous, with comparatively relaxed student regulations. Smith students enjoyed a "ripe college life, unsurpassed by other institutions,"<sup>70</sup> which may be why the lively Blanche chose the college over Bryn Mawr, which her older sisters, sober Edith and Sarah, attended. Smith treated its students as though they were "sensible and honorable," an attitude

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<sup>68</sup> In the Company of Educated Women, p. 98.

<sup>69</sup> In the Company of Educated Women, pp. 100-1.

<sup>70</sup> Alma Mater, p.214.

that would appeal to Blanche's nature, and they were allowed comparative freedom to participate in clubs, societies, athletic activities and even to attend musical and dramatic performances in town. This social freedom was in keeping with Smith's designed break with the isolated seminary tradition and it was clear that the Smith women took advantage of it, leaving the campus to attend concerts and the theater in town and at surrounding colleges, and taking day trips to climb mountains or picnic. As Horowitz noted, this freedom was an "essential part of Smith's experimental design to protect students' femininity by keeping them within the heterosocial culture of village life."<sup>71</sup>

Whatever generalizations can be made about college life for women, Blanche Ames found her life at Smith active and absorbing. Her first roommate was a girl from New York, whom Blanche described as "the funniest character, she is so funny she keeps us roaring all the time,"<sup>72</sup> a comment that demonstrates Blanche had begun to expand her social horizons immediately beyond the parochialism of the little social world she had known at Lowell by appreciating the wit of an outsider.

She began her political career at Smith almost immediately, by challenging a clique of girls from one of the Smith residences who were "trying to make one of their number president of the class." She persuaded her friends and housemates to

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<sup>71</sup> Alma Mater, p. 80.

<sup>72</sup> Ames Family Papers, box 21, Sept. 18, 1895.

put forth a candidate of their own. "I told the girls which way they must vote, and they almost always did as I said,"<sup>73</sup> she reported unabashedly.

Her political interests continued to be indulged at Smith, where the women debated whether the United States should be involved in the Spanish-American War and whether women should have the vote. Even though 21-year-old Smith women would not vote officially for another 24 years, in Nov., 1896, they held a mock election, in which most of Smith voted for McKinley, with 785 ballots cast."<sup>74</sup> It is significant that Blanche took the trouble to record the event and the results. On May 11, 1899, she recorded in her diary her fury that a confirmed suffragist like herself should be obliged to debate woman suffrage from the anti-suffrage side: "Am all out of temper and the visible reason a debate in history which I hoped to avoid and had sprung on me this morning...Resolved that women should be given the right of suffrage and put me on the negative side. Me of all people! As long as I can remember I never could see a truly reasonable argument against women's suffrage. They are all so trivial."<sup>75</sup> Blanche went on to argue that increasing the number of votes by allowing woman suffrage, or complaining that the polls were held in locations unsuitable for women, or predicting family discord if women voted were insufficient reasons to deny the vote, because women were individuals like men

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<sup>73</sup> Ames Family Papers, box 21, Nov. 3, 1896.

<sup>74</sup> Box 21, folder 223, Nov. 3, 1896.

<sup>75</sup> Series II, box 4A, diary, May 11, 1899.

whose voices should not be silent just "because a woman may have a mind and think, if she were given the vote."<sup>76</sup>

Blanche continued to express strong interest in letters from home and wrote many in return, but whatever her protests of homesickness, she clearly enjoyed the attention she got from fellow students at Smith for her beauty, her artistic talents, and her athletic prowess. At the sophomore reception held for new students, her "own sophomore" treated her to roses<sup>77</sup> and she told her mother "You know that up here I am noted as the Miss Ames with the beautiful, magnificent hair!!"<sup>78</sup> She enjoyed Mountain Day, when Smith students have a day off to climb a local hill, the numerous parties the young women held for each other, and she even had an occasional "good loaf." Being so busy "kept me happy for I really have had a very nice time since I have been here."<sup>79</sup> The overall tone of the letters describing her early days at Smith are observant and lively, but also self contained, and although she appears to be hardworking, Blanche was also ready to have fun if the opportunity offered.

Confronted with her first exams, the anxiety over academics that she had expressed at Rogers Hall reappeared, and she wrote her mother that she feared that "Father and you would feel and think I was too big a fool to pass my midyears and

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Box 21, Oct. 13, 1895.

<sup>78</sup> Box 21, Sept. 30, 1895.

<sup>79</sup> Box 21, October 28, 1895.

then what would the rest of the family think of me?" Blanche took her exams that first year in Latin, literature, harmony, Bible, and French, and her mother contributed her perspective and advised her not to be too worried about the exams, since "college is not the only place in the world."<sup>80</sup>

Blanche proved herself to be an eager athlete as well as a scholar, although she wrote her mother that she accidentally knocked down another girl during a basketball game, who refused to accept her apology. The next game, the same girl fell on Blanche, who accepted her apologies gracefully, demonstrating the sort of tact she would employ later to rally her troops behind her beloved causes: "I showed my good manners in being as sweet as I could in accepting it. She said it made her feel quite small to have made such a row because I knocked her down...I never saw such a temper nor heard such a sharp tongue."<sup>81</sup>

In May of that year Blanche's house gave a "man dance," although she did not invite anyone "on account of the trouble taking care of him," but she did dance with some "Northampton fellows we had a nice chance to flirt and be merry."<sup>82</sup> Blanche's surviving diaries and letters, in fact, make little mention of men and their attentions until the end of her college career. Her future husband, Oakes Ames, did attend a Smith dance with Blanche's brother, Butler, on Dec. 7, 1897. Blanche commented: "I suppose that even if Oakes does not dance, he will just as soon sit out with the

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<sup>80</sup> See box 21, folder 223, Jan. 5, 1896, for little Blanche's comments, and box 26B, folder 338, for the comment of her mother.

<sup>81</sup> Box 21, folder 224, Jan. 30, 1897.

<sup>82</sup> Box 21, folder 224, May 23, 1897.

girls." By 1898, Oakes had begun to send her presents, including "some of the queerest orchids," which she confessed to have enjoyed receiving.<sup>83</sup> Shortly after her 21st birthday, she coolly reviewed her "so-called admirers" in her diary, noting that "they don't admire me much, really, only rather like to talk to me and as for loving, as some say, they aren't within a hundred miles of such a thing."<sup>84</sup> As one might expect of her, Blanche's assessments of her admirers are anything but admiring, since she described one George Trask as having a head "that looks like it had been cut with a dull hatchet from a block and the corners never smoothed off nor the flat surfaces filled out...Poor man, for he is always one idea behind the conversation and usually more."

Blanche's lack of interest in courtship in her last year of college is, obviously, a far cry from the modern preoccupation with dating as a sign of female success. This suggests that Blanche might have been one of the nearly half of college women in 1900 who, for various reasons, chose not to marry or to marry late, if it had not been for Oakes Ames's keen interest in her. Blanche pondered briefly why she had received no proposals, airily concluding: "I know I am fairly attractive to look at and can talk when I take the trouble, so I guess its the way I treat the dear things that keeps them in their right senses and proper places."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Box 21, folder 225, April 24, 1898.

<sup>84</sup> Series II, box 4A, Feb. 25, 1899.

<sup>85</sup> Box 4A, Feb. 25, 1899.

Not all of Blanche's college career was happy or successful. In March, 1897, she fell sick with a severe sore throat and did not return to college until May. The length of the absence from college is puzzling, but bacterial infections could not be treated in those days with antibiotics, so it is possible that Blanche had to wait out a serious infection that would not be serious today. In October of that same year, she was smarting from having been "blackballed from the glee club," despite the praise her voice had received from a music professor.<sup>86</sup> (She had the opportunity immediately thereafter to blackball the glee club president from an honor society, but did not take it. Blanche recorded her disgust in her own "goody goody" smugness over not taking her revenge). In another incident, she learned that her fur boa had been manhandled by a fellow art student, who was jealous of Blanche's artistic talent: "Ethel was envious of my work and not daring to take it out on me, relieved her feelings on my wrap."<sup>87</sup>

A more complex problem than jealous art students or homesickness was Blanche's realization in October, 1896, that her friendship with a Miss Wood had been misinterpreted by the latter as a crush, and for Blanche, a crush was "most degrading...I actually blush to write the word of all things most to be despised, that is the worst," as she wrote in her diary. "Never for one moment did I think of her as anything but a friend...I was innocent of even the idea. I did not know that such a

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<sup>86</sup> Box 21, folder 224, March 24 and October 12, 1897.

<sup>87</sup> Diary entry for March 24, 1899.

thing existed and we used to have fine times together."<sup>88</sup> Blanche was furious with the other woman, describing her as "unhealthy, silly, mawkish," and making Blanche "loathe" rather than love her. Switching from her diary to a long letter home, Blanche raged: "How much under the sun she wants, nobody knows. I did all I could, kissed and hugged her " because "I hated to see her cry, but after all she was not satisfied." Blanche insisted that she had not wanted to "keep up this farce," since she "didn't believe in this kind of friendship she has idealized ours into," adding that: "I offer up thanks that I am not in such a state of mind that I must lie awake all night and weep my eyes out over some idiot as Miss. W. has done over me. And I pray I may never be so afflicted. Yes, I think I am cold-blooded, for when I hold her in my arms and she sobs on my shoulder, I sigh and wonder how soon she'll get over it..."<sup>89</sup> In the end, Blanche reported, "I bolted. I am glad if I did break that silly, hot, quick beating heart, she has a good sensible one to put in its place."<sup>90</sup> That Miss Wood should have struck Blanche as silly and mawkish is not be wondered at, but her reference to female love as "unhealthy" may be telling. After all, her family kept the most up-to-date reading matter at home, and educators and social scientists alike were beginning to come to the conclusion that same-sex intimacy for women was not, after all, an

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<sup>88</sup> Box 4A, diary, Dec., 1897.

<sup>89</sup> Box 21, folder 223, Oct. 1, 1896. In her private diary, begun Dec. 16, 1897, Blanche wrestled with the problem of whether or not to give in to her friend, but revealed as well her revulsion at "such affection, such a sensual show of affection between two women. Why should she desire my caresses?" From series II, box 4A, Dec., 1897.

<sup>90</sup> Box 4A, diary, Dec. 1897.

innocent thing. By the 1920s, female love was more resolutely identified as inappropriate and the emphasis on male-female socializing firmly established.<sup>91</sup>

Her life at Smith College did little to reduce the secular view of life that Blanche's family had displayed since Gen. Butler had chided his wife on her desire to join the Episcopal church and Gen. Ames had suggested to his eldest daughters that they avoid offending other students with their skepticism. Blanche's religious attitudes during her college years were rarely discussed in her correspondence, but she did not display any of the "visionary" ideals that critics complained of as characteristic of the denizens of female seminaries. What she did say, "I know of no higher life," certainly suggests skepticism about the tenets of the Christian religion, but her beliefs made her resolve to be in this life "as complete and noble as I can," to eschew pessimism, and to live to do good "here and any place or honor I might have attained be the monument that one poor weak person tried to do her part and her best."<sup>92</sup> The manner in which she subsequently lived her life suggests that this youthful assessment of her religion would stand her in good stead in later life, when, as a Unitarian, she sought social reform in this world and not consolation in the next.

Blanche and her roommates lived out their creed at Smith by sleeping in on Sunday mornings and making breakfast pancakes in a chafing dish, although they did go to required chapel Sunday evenings. When the college choir went to sing at a

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<sup>91</sup> Lillian Faderman's Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America provides a fascinating overview of how 19-century romantic friendships between women came to be defined in the 20th century as sexual, and therefore unnatural and unhealthy.

<sup>92</sup> Box 4A, Dec., 1897.

church in which an especially moving sermon was preached by the evangelist Dwight Moody, Blanche reported in her usual irreverent way: "We had a lovely view of the whole congregation weeping...Men wept, Moody wept, and the women blubbered."<sup>93</sup> By 1898, Blanche the collegian directly referred to herself as a "bluestocking," who cared "very little about parties and dances and teas and that sort of thing...I don't believe that I was made for society anyway."<sup>94</sup>

Blanche's response to the Spanish-American War, though, was exactly what might have been expected from the scion of generals and one who retained the self confidence to decide for herself what issues to support.<sup>95</sup> She fretted that her father and brothers would leave the family to serve (as they did), and she exhorted the other students to cancel the junior prom out of patriotism, or "out of expediency, since many of the men can't come, on account of the war, and the patriotic girls have lost interest."<sup>96</sup> She wrote her mother, "and what do you think about Father's wanting to get into that scrap? Seems to me he has done enough in that line."<sup>97</sup> She was not able to persuade the other women against the prom, which she then attended herself since

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<sup>93</sup> Box 21, folder 223, Nov. 8, 1896.

<sup>94</sup> Box 21, folder 225, May 5, 1898.

<sup>95</sup> In this she was not alone. Her mother wrote to her that her sister Sarah "longed to be a man that she might go to fight for her country too...Sarah hoisted the flag this morning, and it is to fly night and day while the war lasts." While Blanche was at Smith, her family in May, 1898, planned a large entertainment at their Lowell home to raise money for the war effort. Box 26A, folder 332.

<sup>96</sup> Box 21, folder 225, April 24, 1898.

<sup>97</sup> Box 21, folder 225, May 1, 1898.

she was not a sore loser in any of her fights, but she remarked that she had been "very much in earnest and knew what I had to speak about, so was not at all ill at ease, indeed I was so carried away by the subject that I gave a most flowery patriotic speech."

Blanche had an unusual opportunity to serve the war effort directly, when, joining her father at his post on Long Island with her mother, she worked briefly as nurse for the troops. This is another instance of Blanche choosing to take action for a cause in which she believed, especially remarkable for such a fastidious young lady. How long she actually served as a nurse is not recorded, but her adventure was sufficiently well-known that she was invited to give a speech at Smith to the Phi Kappa Psi organization on army hospitals, observing to her mother, "I'm afraid my 'personal recollections' wouldn't be of much value."<sup>98</sup>

All these activities were accompanied by a growing interest in art, which Blanche took up seriously only after she had been at Smith for several years. She attended life- drawing classes, studied painting, and sculpted a bas-relief<sup>99</sup> in the course of her studies. Her talent won her more praise by Mr. Tryon,<sup>100</sup> the art teacher,

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<sup>98</sup> Box 22, folder 231, March 3, 1899.

<sup>99</sup> Diary, series II, box 4A, May 11, 1899. Blanche senior wrote on April 18, 1899, that the younger Blanche's bas-relief had been viewed by member of the Boston Art Club and pronounced "an exceedingly good work." The mother added that "this family feels very proud that we have such a genius in our midst... You cannot complain of lack of encouragement, can you?" From box 26A, folder 332.

<sup>100</sup> Mr. Tryon must have been a teacher of some vision, because he advised Blanche to continue with her art after college, "which is a thing he had rarely to recommend," as Blanche noted, evidently because he thought "it better that a girl would sew and cook and keep house," Diary, March 24, 1899, series II, box 4A.

than other young women who had been working "at drawing for years" received, and "he praised my picture far above any of the others and said he could not believe that I had not drawn all my life. I am afraid it makes the other girls tired. I must say I think my work is better than theirs but that does not mean much."<sup>101</sup> Still, fired with ambition, she wrote her mother: "At present my ambition is soaring on the art line. You see I am puffed up and my fancies take wild flights to what I may do. I can see visions of a studio with beautiful pictures by my own hands, great casts of men and horse and crocodiles--I don't know why I think of them--and elephants--I saw some in a Sunday paper, and portraits and dainty Venuses and things possible and impossible."<sup>102</sup> As it transpired, Blanche was enabled, partly by her art training and innate talent, partly because of the time and opportunities her privileged life granted her, to fulfill her ambition to be an artist as few other women of her day were able to do.

It would be interesting to know if she and her talented mother ever discussed their views of art, but if they did, they did not include the discussion in their surviving correspondence. Those books that Blanche might have read or admired while she

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Eventually, Prof. Tryon agreed to give Blanche a separate diploma in art as well as her bachelor's degree from Smith, although Blanche had been in the art program for only a year and a half, while most students spent four years in art to get such a degree. Blanche remarked that it was "pleasing to get all the frills possible." From box 22, folder 231, Jan. 25, 1899, March 3, 1899.

<sup>101</sup> Box 21, folder 225, May 27, 1898.

<sup>102</sup> Box 21, folder 225, Dec. 5, 1898.

was at Smith are also unrecorded, except for her negative response to the work of John Stuart Mill.

In September of 1898, Blanche returned to Smith to be met by a cortege of girls "screaming, hugging and congratulating" her for her election as senior class president, which, she remarked with her usual humor, gave her "some idea of how the president of our United States must feel smiling and shaking hands with everyone."<sup>103</sup> Her impassioned denunciation of holding the junior prom despite the war effort and her self identification as a "woman's rightist"<sup>104</sup> evidently did not alienate her classmates, for she added "they say my victory over the other candidates was easy." She was in that senior year, as her Smith yearbook picture shows, a lovely, light-boned, fragile-faced beauty, with large eyes, a full mouth, her "magnificent" hair pulled up into a Gibson Girl style to reveal a long neck above a scoop-neck, embroidered blouse. Her beauty alone might have garnered her popularity at Smith, but if so, it was aided and abetted by her lively nature, her skill at sports, her success at art, music and academics.

That winter, as her college career drew to a close, she appeared for the first time in a play, "A Winter's Tale," in the part of Florizel, which she resisted performing on the pretense that her parents would not approve. In reality, she wrote them, "I hate to do the old thing," but explained that the casting committee threatened

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<sup>103</sup> Box 21, folder 225, September 30, 1898.

<sup>104</sup> Box 22, folder 234. In a letter dated Jan. 11, 1898, to her father, she wrote, "don't be afraid that because I am a woman's rightist I shall become nihilistic in my beliefs. Moderation in all things!"

to write Gen. Ames to "implore you to let me act. I'll do the part worse luck. I don't want anymore honors nor work here. I'm getting lazy in my old age." Her view of life continued sunny, as it would for much of her adult life as well: "I've been thinking lately that there is nothing that I lack. Nothing in all the world you haven't given me. I am the most fortunate person in the world and I guess I'm duly thankful. I do have such a good time just being alive!"<sup>105</sup> In an introspective diary notation of Feb. 17, 1899, she accused herself of lacking concentration, being a dreamer, but also of being "truthful, honest and persistent--but woefully critical, not at all brilliant nor entertaining...some say conceited."<sup>106</sup> Clearly, some of Blanche's happiest years were her college years, and not just her years within the family circle as a child, which her nostalgia in old age remembered as "happiest." What is less clear is whether or not her friendships at Smith were lasting, since Blanche's surviving private letters passed between and were preserved by family members, but it would be surprising is so attractive a person did not carry some of her friendships with her.

Even as Blanche reveled in her happiness, fate in the form of Oakes Ames was already hovering in the wings. On February 17, 1899, the day before her 21st birthday, Blanche received a beautiful set of 17 art books bound in yellow leather and gold, with her name printed on the front. The gift was extravagant, "being just what I longed for...It most beautifully fills a vacancy," but she naturally had to ask herself who could have sent such a thing? No card was enclosed. Blanche immediately

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<sup>105</sup> Box 22, folder 235, May 7, 1899.

<sup>106</sup> Series II, box 4A, Feb. 17, 1899.

suspected the wealthy Oakes, as the giver, although, as a proper young woman, she felt that she could hardly write to thank him since he had no "right to presume that he could outrage custom and dare to send me so expensive a present."<sup>107</sup> On the other hand, "it would be just like him to throw propriety to the winds and send them because the fancy took him. But I don't suppose I can accept such a gift from a young man. How silly it looks, even if we are avowed friends like two girls and he rich enough to afford it."

She did accept the gift, however unorthodox the giver, and more than that, she accepted the attentions of Oakes, which were not so entirely high-minded as his gifts of orchids and art books. Oakes noted in his own diary that he intended from the first to marry Blanche, as soon as he met her in company with her brother Butler, who was a member of the same voluntary regiment as Oakes. His response to Blanche was not in the least that of "avowed friends like two girls."<sup>108</sup>

Blanche's experiences in her years at Smith enhanced and encouraged her personality and her sense of entitlement to speak and act according to her beliefs that her privileged social and academic status, as well as her supportive family, gave her. She was a person of many gifts, not the least of which was her artistic ability: She was endowed with an ironic sense of humor and a clear perception of human folly, a healthy self esteem, a belief in the value of hard work, the desire to win the approval of her family and of others with her achievements as well as her affection. At Smith,

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<sup>107</sup> Series II, Box 4A, diary, Feb. 17, 1899.

<sup>108</sup> Series II, box 4A, Feb. 17, 1899

Blanche learned to speak her mind and to speak it publicly, as when she fiercely defended the nation's participation in the Spanish-American War and woman suffrage. She consulted her own views concerning conceited "tin gods" of male lecturers; she remained aloof from religion in keeping with her family's preferences; she pursued art with the ardency once expressed by her mother, and she took with a grain of salt the praise she won thereby. Her dark moments revolved around a fear of failure at academics, a realization that her talents had won her the jealousy of her peers, the embarrassment of finding herself in a semi-erotic relationship with another woman, and a persisting problem with severe headaches. In addition, her character was not free from traces of class arrogance and outright snobbism. Nevertheless, her overall view of life was sunny, generous and optimistic as it would remain all her life. Her personal independence and autonomy, however, almost unchallenged in the nourishing atmosphere at Smith, would be confronted directly by Oakes Ames before and after their marriage in 1900. How Blanche managed to preserve her personhood, her opinions, her vigor and her art, while contending with the constrictions of the traditional female sphere of her own marriage and motherhood, was the next trial to be overcome, before Blanche could blossom fully and lastingly as a public figure for reform.

## CHAPTER 4

### OAKES: MARRIAGE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR AUTONOMY

Viewed from a distance of 95 years, the marriage between Blanche Ames and the eminent Harvard botanist Oakes Ames takes on an almost fairy-tale quality. There is Oakes in the role of egalitarian prince, who offered his lady his hand, heart and help in her drive for reform; and there is Blanche, beautiful, bright and witty, reigning equally with him over their domain of Borderland until her husband's death, which she mourned by carving his catafalque with her own hands. There is some truth to this pretty story, of course, since the Ameses did live together in apparent harmony for most of their 50-year marriage and they unquestionably assisted and supported each other in some, if not all, of their life endeavors, while successfully raising and educating four children.

But this happy consummation of their early vows of love was, in fact, hard-won over a period of years. It started before their engagement, when Blanche had to struggle with the propriety of accepting Oakes's extravagant present of art books; through their engagement, with its attendant heartaches over sexuality and disputes over the marriage ceremony itself; to the early years of their marriage. In those early years, both sought to define their roles as husband and wife in a confusing era of mixed messages about women's positive role in social reform and yet profound resistance to change in the traditional, male-dominated family structure. Oakes was

only one of the liberal-minded men of his day who found that it is one thing to preach women's equality as an abstract principle and quite another to live it.<sup>1</sup>

William O'Neill criticized suffragists like Blanche and her cohort, because they did not first attempt to reform the family by equalizing the relationship between husband and wife. Carl Degler, on the other hand, insisted that the vote would never have been won if the gargantuan task of reforming the traditional family had to come first. There seems to be some truth in Degler's position, since Oakes theoretically believed in equality for women and certainly in their right to vote, while in practice, he still wished to control his wife and his family. Peter Gay noted that by Victorian times, the need for an "intermediate zone between hearth and politics" for women had been recognized to reduce the tyranny of men and the dependency of women. The enlightened Victorian expectation was that women over time would receive access to better education and also to a limited selection of suitable professions, such as teaching, nursing, or writing. Feminists naturally found such limitations galling and pursued full civil and economic rights aggressively, as men continued aggressively to

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<sup>1</sup> Floyd Dell, an editor of the left-leaning magazine, "The Masses," reminiscing about the Progressive Era in Greenwich Village, observed: "The difference between the masculine and feminine idealists of the period is now apparent. We were content with what was happening to women because we wanted something for ourselves--a glorious playfellow--but they wanted something different, something for themselves...We thought they would be content with the joy of the struggle. But they needed the joy of achievement," from June Sochen's The New Woman, Feminism in Greenwich Village, p. 130.

refuse them: "The emotional investment in keeping man on top was too sizable and too cherished to be easily jettisoned."<sup>2</sup>

Oakes's interest in Blanche, if it was not love at first sight, was nevertheless intense. He met her in 1897 in the company of her older brother, Butler, and , as he wrote in his autobiographical "jottings": "I decided at once that she was worth cultivation. The rest is history."<sup>3</sup> A fuller description of the first meeting of the future lovers is included in a letter Oakes wrote Blanche from London in 1905: "It was in Battery 'A' (a militia company) that I met Butler and through Butler I made the acquaintance with you which has had such an influence on our lives...I shall never forget my first visit to your Lowell home and the impression you made upon me when we met before the first meal we ever took together, nor shall I soon forget the happy days I experienced in your company."<sup>4</sup> In that same letter, Oakes told her that: "I believed that a companionship such as chance had established between us could lead but to one end, and I never lost hope in the good fates which watch over human life." It is, perhaps, characteristic of his sensitive and gloomy disposition, that although he believed that fate had conspired to unite them, he still managed to cast doubt on the reality of his joy in marriage to Blanche as he went on: "Perhaps

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<sup>2</sup> Carl Degler, At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present, p. 330; William O'Neill, Everyone Was Brave: The History of Feminism in America; Peter Gay, The Cultivation of Hatred, pp. 364-367.

<sup>3</sup> Oakes Ames, Jottings of a Naturalist, p. 66.

<sup>4</sup> Jottings of a Naturalist, p. 188.

nothing could be a greater source of grief for me than the thought that you regretted the day which marked for us a critical period of life."<sup>5</sup>

Oakes appears to have been from his letters and from the testimony of his family, an acutely sensitive man, hiding the intensity of his feelings under a mask of austere remove. He was tall, thin, and patrician, with a large nose and heavy-lidded eyes, like a morose raptor, precise in his actions, careful in his work, "very austere,"<sup>6</sup> and revealing his passionate feelings about Blanche and about life in letters and diaries rather than to other people. His grandson, George Plimpton, in his foreword to Oakes's collected book of reminiscences, remarked upon his grandfather's acute sensitivity, his silence, and his penchant for writing instead of speaking his feelings, even to a grandson, in a series of letters written in his "minuscule" handwriting.<sup>7</sup>

Plimpton remembered, however, that his Aunt Evelyn denied her brother Oakes' apparent coldness: "His lack of demonstrative reaction doesn't mean he doesn't have feelings. He has terrifically powerful feelings--more than he knows what to do with," she is reported to have said.<sup>8</sup> Oakes's daughter, Pauline Ames Plimpton, in her introduction to the "jottings," wrote: "My father was rather melancholy, pessimistic, moody--my mother counteracted with her gaiety. He was shy, diffident

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<sup>5</sup> Jottings of a Naturalist, p. 189.

<sup>6</sup> George Plimpton, in his forward to his grandfather's book of "jottings," p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> Jottings of a Naturalist, p. 28-29

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

and reserved, while mother was outgoing, perfectly willing to make a fool of herself and delighting in controversy."<sup>9</sup> She added, "I have never known a more harmonious or devoted couple, each interested in what the other was interested in and sharing it."<sup>10</sup>

In Oakes's interactions with Blanche during their engagement, it is the sensitive, emotional Oakes that comes through, and an Oakes who is prepared to cede nothing to her, to her family, or to tradition when it came to courtship and the marriage ceremony itself. There is an acutely uncomfortable passage in Blanche's diary, which Ellen Rothman in her Hands and Hearts refers to as the "Oh, Naughty" episode, when it is clear, even from Blanche's guarded language, that she and Oakes ran slap into their own sexuality and were rendered acutely miserable by it.

Blanche had been allowed to spend New Year's Eve in 1900 at the home of her mother-in-law elect, Mrs. Anna C. Ames, in Boston. That evening, after talking with Mrs. Ames, Oakes and Blanche "then sat on the sofa on the landing merrily until the 'oh naughty' episode. Assumed a forced gaiety for a time, then bade Oakes a formal good night and retired to my room to do penance for two hours. It was a day of alternating pleasure and grief--the latter was entirely my fault."<sup>11</sup>

Following the 'oh, naughty' episode, Blanche and Oakes "tried to efface the effects of last night's pentance (sic). Oakes and I talked of certain resolves...Serious

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 22-23.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 24

<sup>11</sup> Ames Family Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Blanche Ames diary, series II, box 4A.

conversation, the condition of friendship resolved upon. I'm maintaining moderation."<sup>12</sup> Evidently, Blanche was unsuccessful in "maintaining moderation," because she noted laconically, "Resolve broken. Light heartedness, considering the circumstances."

Oakes' response to his sexual longings was also guarded, but he condemned himself in a Feb. 5 letter to Blanche for allowing "myself to cry in your ear all the dreadful dictates of a vulgar tendency."<sup>13</sup> Oakes' language in his letters is otherwise that of the rapturous and respectful young lover: "When you sat with me listening to the Angelus, you must have read in my eyes...the reverence I am capable of. I revere you. I sometimes feel jealous of you. Why? I don't know."<sup>14</sup> However, Oakes persisted in trying to understand the nature of his emotional and sexual response to Blanche and, in January, 1900, six months before their wedding, he wrote: "I do not understand myself, Blanche, dear! Either I am ill with some ordinary disorder or else my feelings of unrest and ennui are due to the recent strain brought about by my love for you...I begin to wonder if love is not after all a kind of mental disease."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ames Family Papers, box 23C, Feb. 5, 1900, letter from Oakes Ames to Blanche Ames.

<sup>14</sup> Ames Family Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, box 23C, Feb. 5, 1900, letter from Oakes Ames to Blanche Ames.

<sup>15</sup> Box 23C, January 2, 1900, Oakes Ames to Blanche Ames.

Evidently, he was able to resist the "animal passions which might rise and cause me too much anxiety,"<sup>16</sup> but only with difficulty. He complained to her in a letter of Feb. 28: "We seem to think that after that hour during which we publicly accept each other for better or worse, that the real joy of our lives is to begin...Why should we ever be able to establish an equilibrium? What is in the intercourse of married life that brings balance of feeling?"<sup>17</sup>

Oakes was an intelligent and self critical young man, and he was, as Ellen Rothman suggests, "raising questions that would preoccupy the century just beginning. How did the 'laws of sexual affinity' (Oakes' words) work? Did they apply equally to men and women? What were the consequences of breaking them?" These questions raised by Oakes would be examined by scientists and psychologists, including Sigmund Freud and sex researchers like Havelock Ellis, and would have ultimately a "profound effect on the attitudes and behavior of a wide spectrum of the American population."<sup>18</sup>

Although Oakes and Blanche restrained themselves sexually in the course of their engagement, within the next few decades "what had been reserved for those who were married became acceptable for those who were engaged to be married: Engagement functioned like the safety net under the trapeze artist. It did not

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<sup>16</sup> Oakes to Blanche, March 12, 1900.

<sup>17</sup> Oakes to Blanche, Feb. 28, 1900.

<sup>18</sup> Hands and Hearts, p. 240.

eliminate missteps and falls, but it minimized the cost of mistakes."<sup>19</sup> Certainly, by the time of Blanche and Oakes' courtship, the Victorian concept of the passionless woman was largely eroded. As William O'Neill put it: "Once pioneering social scientists had done their work, cultivated men and women would never again be able to express their moral convictions with the old certitude."<sup>20</sup> What emerged after the turn of the century was what O'Neill termed the "New Morality," which did not put an end to marriage. Instead, "the new sexual ethic, when it came, operated to strengthen many of the existing norms. Divorce and promiscuity did increase, but in ways that did not affect the popularity of marriage or cohesion of families." In practice, male sexual privileges endured, while women's continue to be more theoretical.

In anticipating her marriage, Blanche was aware of the significance of her impending departure from her family and had begun to suffer from it as early as Jan. 3.<sup>21</sup> She wrote: "In the morning I was harassed by strange feelings of homesickness and loneliness for the first time since my engagement, a disagreeable realization of what I am going to have and the responsibilities before me trouble me. When Oakes

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 242.

<sup>20</sup> William O'Neill, Divorce in the Progressive Era, p. 93.

<sup>21</sup> As Ellen Rothman wrote, "while men chafed under the restrictions of engagement and felt the strain of keeping their balance on the sexual tightrope, it was women for whom engagement was most stressful." As Blanche discovered, accepting a man's suit brought a sense of the fulfillment of her "girlhood fantasies," but also a sense of doubt in the face of public exposure of her feelings and an awareness of her future responsibilities. On the other hand, young women of Blanche's era showed less doubt about their own fitness of marriage than had been the case for previous generations of women. Hands and Hearts, pp. 270-71.

is with me such thoughts do not visit." On the other hand, having fallen in love with Oakes, she observed: "But now that I have known his sympathy, the family, though very dear of course, does not suffice and I feel alone."<sup>22</sup>

It is interesting to note that, during the period of Blanche's engagement, her parents expressed none of the wistful regret of their daughter's impending emergence into adulthood as a married woman that had characterized the response of the Butler parents to their daughter's engagement to Gen. Ames. Blanche told her diary only that her mother "gave me a great deal of good advice, among other things she told me not to let the sun go down on my wrath, if I were ever put out with Oakes."<sup>23</sup>

While Oakes went about his masculine career obligations, Blanche whiled away her time during her engagement in traditional pursuits, shopping for a trousseau,<sup>24</sup> trying to paint a miniature of herself on ivory for Oakes, "pining and moping"<sup>25</sup> receiving daily gifts of flowers from Oakes' greenhouses in North Easton. It was not, perhaps, an impressive performance for a New Woman, but lovers have been and still are notoriously self absorbed. Blanche had no reason to anticipate that storm clouds were brewing already, and that her beloved parents and her adored Oakes would clash over issues of Blanche's autonomy in the ambiguous period of her

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<sup>22</sup> Jan. 3, 1900, Blanche Ames Ames diary, series II box 4A.

<sup>23</sup> Blanche Ames diary, Jan. 6, 1900.

<sup>24</sup> Blanche Ames diary, Jan. 8 and 9. Rothman noted that a well-off bride like Blanche would have to procure numerous household items, although, since she planned to live in her mother-in-law's house, Blanche's wedding purchases appear to have been mostly clothes.

<sup>25</sup> Blanche Ames diary, Jan. 4, 1900.

engagement, when she was passing from her parents' control to the home of her new husband. Passions ignited when Blanche's mother refused to allow Blanche to go to Boston to meet Oakes as he returned from a botanical collecting trip to Cuba. "I entered upon the hottest discussion of my life," Blanche wrote in her diary entry of Jan. 16. "Father joined Mother's side--being engaged is useless as far as privileges are concerned."<sup>26</sup>

It is clear that, although Blanche Butler Ames had been quite liberal in allowing her daughter to attend college with no parental supervision, she took quite a different view when it came to allowing her Little Blanche more freedom and autonomy in the matter of sexual relations. Oakes, who had professed himself puzzled by the proprieties of tipping his hat to a woman as though she were a flag and who had thrown caution to the wind when he sent his splendid but unsuitable gift of books to a girl to whom he was not yet engaged, was infuriated by the prohibition of the visit and other such limitations on his access to Blanche. "I have tried hard to conform to the apparent laws of your house," he fumed. In a second letter sent the same night, he acknowledged that "perhaps in this present case the burden of right is with your mother, yet I cannot forget past events and the absolute want of justice characteristic of them." He added, with a hint of contrition, that his rage was the result of "my wretched disposition."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Blanche Ames diary, Jan. 15, 1900, series II, box 4A.

<sup>27</sup> Feb. 5, 1900, Oakes Ames to Blanche Ames

Oakes' ire was not so unreasonable as it might seem, because, as Ellen Rothman noted, freedom during courtship was customary for American couples until about 1900, when the "stream of late-Victorian society...flowed steadily in the direction of increasing formality, regularity and structure...Couples who married around 1900 continued to follow the rituals that had emerged out of the social changes of mid-century, " which involved increasingly elaborate courtship and wedding rituals.<sup>28</sup> Some wealthy families reduced the freedom engaged couples had once enjoyed by insisting on chaperones and other means for restricting access to each other.<sup>29</sup> Obviously, the supervision by parents of young women at work or at college would be more difficult, but "young people were more closely watched than earlier generations had been." Parents did not, however, "encroach on the process of mate selection,"<sup>30</sup> as, indeed, Blanche's parents did not. Instead, as Rothman (and Oakes) discovered, once a couple became engaged they "acquired the privileges, and were bound by the conventions of engagement. By 1890, engagement had become a distinctive state in the transition to marriage--a stage with its own rites of initiation (the announcement), its own ceremonial object (the ring), and its own rules of conduct. Intimacy was allowed, but was kept within the lines demanded by propriety."<sup>31</sup> That Oakes should resist propriety so stoutly while Blanche sought to

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<sup>28</sup> Hands and Hearts, p.273.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

appease her parents by following their dictates obviously made for tension between them.<sup>32</sup> It is also surprising that Oakes should have been the one to resist social constraints for engaged couples, when it is clear from memoirs written by the children of Blanche and Oakes that it was Oakes's mother, the matriarch Anna Ames, whom they regarded as traditional and hidebound in her behavior and her expectations of behavior in others, not Grandmother Blanche Butler Ames.

Another theme that was to enter the Oakes-Blanche relationship was sounded as well, when Oakes wrote Blanche in the Feb. 5 second letter that his mother resented his constant attendance upon Blanche at Lowell, and that, when Oakes decided not visit Lowell because he was offended with Blanche's parents, Anna Ames "clapped her hands for joy." The jealousies of Mrs. Anna Ames were not unusual in a late-Victorian or even a modern mother, whose emotional intimacy with her children was likely to be greater than had been the case for the less child-oriented generations that went before.<sup>33</sup> But they were still to be reckoned with in the struggle for marital happiness, and, more specifically, for the autonomy of Blanche and Oakes first as a couple, and then as a family. She was no inconsiderable figure in the drama of courtship and marriage, especially since it was within her walls that Oakes planned to make his first home with Blanche.

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<sup>32</sup> Oakes' attempts to control the wedding ceremony were unusual for his time, since "the bride was the center of the show, and she and her family were in control," Hands and Hearts, p. 275.

<sup>33</sup> The closeness Victorian mothers enjoyed with their children declined after 1900, as modern life loosened family ties, Hands and Hearts, p. 218-222.

The initial tensions between the engaged couple were to continue. Oakes expressed himself miffed at having to comply without comment with the wedding plans being developed by Blanche's family. "I am too sweeping in my opinions and on that account antagonism will be the inevitable result of interference on my part," he wrote Blanche loftily on Feb. 28, 1900. "Past experience and a condescending bow to the dictates of custom and prejudice are all well enough in the long run and as I awaken to the fact that weddings are the last gun that a family can fire off over the heads of children, I see clearly that all opposition is out of order and apt to create ill feeling if indulged."<sup>34</sup> Having written that Blanche should "expect nothing from me in the way of suggestions or otherwise regarding the wedding,"<sup>35</sup> Oakes settled himself down to the task of shaping the entire event according to his own lights. He complained about her putting her social obligations above being with him: "Of course your calls are important and I realize what close attention to social obligations mean to one in your position, but under the circumstances I am of the opinion that you would have done better to remain with me."<sup>36</sup>

He was only occasionally contrite in the process of gaining control over the wedding plans<sup>37</sup>, writing on March 14, "you must be daft to feel as you do about any

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<sup>34</sup> Oakes to Blanche Ames, Feb. 28, 1900.

<sup>35</sup> Oakes to Blanche, Feb. 28, 1900, folder 284, box 23C.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> In fact, Oakes exhibited many of the popularly recognised signs of male controlling behavior, since he was persistently jealous of Blanche's family and other associations, objected to her fulfilling her social obligations as an engaged woman, was easily upset over trivialities and experienced discernable mood swings, and

man who ever breathed. Men are a bad lot. True, the best part of them is methodical, and perhaps honorable. But men as a rule are not worthy of such confidence as you put in me."<sup>38</sup> By April 20 he was suggesting that musicians be hired from the Boston Symphony for the wedding, to avoid just having "dance music and two-steps." Even as he asked, "why are all the older people so set on making a wedding a season for show and noise?"<sup>39</sup> he was preparing to tamper with the wedding ceremony itself.

For reasons that are not entirely clear, perhaps only that he so resented doing "other people's bidding," Oakes decided not to give Blanche a wedding ring<sup>40</sup> and to demand a change of clergymen, so that a Unitarian service<sup>41</sup> would be substituted for

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blamed her family for his discontent. This comes from a set of "warning signals" for women to watch out for in a mate, that appeared in the Ann Landers column of Dec.3, 1994.

<sup>38</sup> Oakes to Blanche, March 14, 1900, folder 285, box 23C.

<sup>39</sup> Oakes to Blanche, April 21, 1900.

<sup>40</sup> Pauline Plimpton, in her introduction to her father's reminiscences, noted that "my father thought a wedding ring would be a sign of bondage to him...and her mother gave her the wedding ring of her grandmother, Sarah Hildreth Butler. When Oakes' mother and sisters found out that he was not going to give her a ring for the ceremony, they insisted that he buy one--so she had two rings. She always wore them both," Jottings of a Naturalist, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> It is not clear if Oakes's family had been Unitarian, but, as Ronald Story points out in his book, The Forging of an Aristocracy: Harvard and the Boston Upper Class, 1800-1870, conservative politics and liberal religion in the form of Unitarianism were the hallmarks of the Harvard-educated elite, of which Oakes was unquestionably a part. In insisting on a Unitarian ceremony, he may have been imprinting on his new bride the religion appropriate to their rarified social status as Boston Brahmins. It is irritatingly difficult to gain any sort of perspective on female members of the American elite, who are scarcely mentioned in the few available studies of the American upper classes. Story marks out only male institutions as having shaped the Boston aristocracy, while the possible influence of, say, Republican motherhood receives no salute. Despite the snobbishness that emerges in

the traditional Episcopalian service Blanche's parents had planned. "Remember, please, my main objection to a ring<sup>42</sup> and how readily it is resolved by the present plan," which was, evidently, to give her a ring privately instead of during the marriage ceremony.<sup>43</sup> "Follow the Episcopal ring service and there is nothing left but disgust and discontent," he assured Blanche.<sup>44</sup> That Blanche's parents might object to Oakes's demands he discounted by denying the family's mutual love and attachment and branding Blanche's father's views as mere "self gratification and self glorification." As for Blanche, her attempts to defend her family's plans were forgivable only because "you are acting, anyway, in the nature of a dutiful daughter and I admire your conduct when I view it from a disinterested point of view."<sup>45</sup> Although Oakes claimed that "I have given ground at every point, every objection I have had to any plan has been driven away by a mere breath," he insisted that Blanche should support his proposals or "for heaven's sake don't marry me, for I shall

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Blanche's juvenile writings, one still senses that, in the spirit of her Grandfather Butler, she was something of a class renegade, if not in her pursuit of suffrage, then certainly in her support for birth control.

<sup>42</sup> If it is true, as the Ames family remembers it, that Oakes saw the wedding ring as a sign of bondage to him, he was completely in line with the reasoning of such intellectual feminists as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who, in the words of William O'Neill, "blasted the marriage contract as an instrument for the oppression of women" and who considered that marriage as an institution could manage to survive "a new type of womanhood...demanding larger freedom in the marriage relation, justice, liberty and equality under the law," Divorce in the Progressive Era, pp. 207-8.

<sup>43</sup> Oakes to Blanche, April 30, 1900.

<sup>44</sup> Oakes to Blanche, n.d.

<sup>45</sup> Oakes to Blanche, April 30, 1900.

make but an ill husband and a most unsatisfactory companion." That Blanche's Episcopalian minister would refuse to officiate at Oakes's planned Unitarian service was of no importance, Oakes declared: "Is his presence at the solemnization of our marriage ceremony of more consequence than my feelings?"<sup>46</sup>

Thus goaded, torn between her love for her family and her love for Oakes, Blanche's response was apparently to express "indifference" toward Oakes' schemes, and he took her to task for that as well.<sup>47</sup> "Your indifference, I do not like it and it is unnatural. You must have an opinion of your own underlying your professed indifference and if for good reason you conceal it, you ought at least to be frank with me and let me know your true feeling."<sup>48</sup>

Oakes was almost more successful than he intended in scuttling the marriage plans. His choice for a clergyman, a Dr. Chaffin, a Unitarian unknown to either family, was sick on the day of the wedding and was almost unable to officiate. Still, somehow, the marriage did take place and Blanche, wearing the de rigueur white dress,<sup>49</sup> received not one, but two rings during the ceremony, the rings supplied by Blanche Butler Ames and Anna C. Ames. The ceremony took place at the Butler mansion in Lowell, where Blanche's parents had married, and was described as

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<sup>46</sup> Oakes to Blanche, May 7, 1900. It is evident from her writings that Blanche tended toward the Unitarian viewpoint anyway and that she adopted Oakes's chosen sect after their marriage: She is buried in the Unitarian cemetery in North Easton.

<sup>47</sup> Oakes to Blanche, May 14, 1900.

<sup>48</sup> Oakes Ames to Blanche, May 13, 1900.

<sup>49</sup> Hands and Hearts, p. 273.

"brilliant" by the Lowell Daily Courier in its May 16 edition. Blanche wore "point lace and chiffon" and carried lilies-of-the valley to the refined sounds of the musicians from the Boston Symphony Oakes had been determined to hire. The house was lavishly decorated with masses of hemlock and apple blossoms, palms and ferns, and Blanche Butler wore a "Worth gown of black and white lace," while Oakes' mother wore a "becoming imported creation." The Courier took note that Blanche's marriage certificate "did not class her with the countless society girls whose occupation is given as 'at home,' but the work she has done gave her the right to be known as an artist."<sup>50</sup>

The couple then "slipped quietly away on their wedding tour," a commonplace enough event by 1900.<sup>51</sup> Their trip to Europe was largely uneventful, and Blanche bubbled cheerily about her experiences with Oakes in Europe in her letters to her parents. She seemed uncomfortable only with Oakes's habit of referring to foreigners in derisory terms, such as "frog-eaters,"<sup>52</sup> and calling the local food "aboriginal food,"<sup>53</sup> while she herself employed her schoolgirl French to mitigate any

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<sup>50</sup> Lowell Courier, May 16, 1900.

<sup>51</sup> Hands and Hearts, p.280.

<sup>52</sup> Letter of July 14, 1900 to Blanche Butler from Blanche Ames, box 21, folder 226.

<sup>53</sup> Letter of June 24, 1900 from Blanche Ames Ames to Blanche Butler Ames, box 21, folder 226. Blanche's sharp tongue was not entirely controlled, though, because in the same letter she told her mother that, although English women had good skin, "most of the women I've seen are pretty near the rank of frights--and such get ups!!" She thought the Flemish of Bruges even uglier. From a letter of July 10, 1900, to Blanche Butler Ames.

bad impression upon their Parisian landlady, whom she found intelligent. They stayed at an art studio they borrowed from a painter friend, whose easel Blanche borrowed as well.<sup>54</sup> Otherwise, her burblings need not detain us: It was a wedding tour like countless others and Blanche revealed no secrets about her new-found sexual life in her letters home.<sup>55</sup>

Returned to the United States in August, Blanche and Oakes set up housekeeping at his mother's North Easton residence, the Homestead, and despite the comforts of new wallpaper and servants, it is apparent that Blanche did not feel at home, which Oakes resented. Even more, he resented her continued attachment to her family. She began bravely enough by writing to her mother on August 30: "We feel in fine feather. You surely ought to want to see into what kind of soil I've been transplanted." But, by Nov. 7, she wrote her mother: "Oakes has been troubled because he says at the first proposition of anyone to go away I am eager to go. He thinks I will never make this really my home. Of course, it is not quite so bad as that,

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<sup>54</sup> Letter of July 20, 1900, to Adelbert Ames from Blanche Ames Ames, box 22, folder 236. Blanche referred in the same letter to a visit to the Luxembourg Museum of Modern Painting "which by the way is atrocious," and her view of the Impressionists was that they were "really vile." She and Oakes preferred the old masters and were "becoming very fastidious." Fastidiousness seems characteristic of Oakes, and his bride may have been adapting herself to his coloration in this case.

<sup>55</sup> A typical entry, on June 19, reads "we sighted land about four o'clock. It was the Irish coast, rolling down to the water in smooth round hills." Oakes and Blanche did visit the National Portrait Gallery in London on June 23, a "modern" show at the Royal Academy featuring work by John Singer Sargent and J.M. Turner, and another at the Victoria and Albert. As she wrote her mother, "I am becoming a crank on water colors and if I find any I like exceedingly I would not be surprised if I got one," box 21, folder 226.

but upon thinking it over, I find he is right to a certain extent, for any plan of meeting you people or going somewhere with you makes my heart go up."<sup>56</sup>

There is a hint as well in Blanche Butler Ames' letters of mid-April, 1901 that she did not feel comfortable visiting her daughter in North Easton<sup>57</sup>, and this made Blanche Ames Ames indignant, but to little effect: "Pretty soon you will feel that you can run in here any time and do just as you please in my house as my mother and my company," she wrote her mother, adding "I wish we could all live together."

By 1901, she was already the mother of her first child, Pauline,<sup>58</sup> to whose nurture she managed to dedicate her only year-long diary, which is a paean to motherly devotion and to just how much Pauline weighed day-by-day, how pretty each relative said she was, and what she ate. In May, 1902, Blanche wrote her father: "I've been playing tennis and think it agrees finely with me for I'm getting stronger and feel better than I have since I was married. Two years ago this month, if you please, Ma'am. Amn't I an old stupid married woman."<sup>59</sup> That same year, she and Oakes collaborated on a book on orchids, Blanche peering at specimens under a

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<sup>56</sup> Blanche Ames to Blanche Butler Ames, Nov. 11, 1900.

<sup>57</sup> Little Blanche wrote her mother in an undated letter of 1900: "I wonder often why you try to wean us so completely and won't cozy into our nest even for a little while," box 21, folder 226.

<sup>58</sup> Pauline was born in 1901, Oliver in 1903, Amyas, whose unusual name apparently was an early form of the name Ames, was born in 1906, and Evelyn, the last child, was born in 1910, when Blanche was 32. Her mother, by contrast, had six children, the last by the age of 35.

<sup>59</sup> Blanche Ames to Adelbert Ames, box 21, folder 227.

microscope, Oakes getting "blue and discouraged at his own limitations."<sup>60</sup> The couple also made one of their orchid collecting trips together, leaving Pauline with her parents and traveling to Cuba. Blanche (displaying a resurgence of the racial snobbery that cropped up in her diary of her travel to the Chicago World's Fair at age 15) described Cuba as muddy: "Even the people seem to like to wallow in it. Their houses, almost all, are built right on the ground out of palm leaves & bark and consequently, women, men and children beginning at the top, white, or yellow, or black according to the degree of Cuban or Negro they are end up at their feet one mass of red mud."<sup>61</sup>

In 1903, Oakes went alone to Cuba, Blanche having elected to stay home with the new baby, Oliver. She refused to go to the old Butler family summer home at Bayview that same year, because she was not yet hardened, as she put it, to going there without Oakes, who could not go. "Oh, I've been counting on picking up all the threads again," she wrote her father in disappointment. "So you must give me what you can by writing."<sup>62</sup> Aside from this longing to be with her natal family, there is little indication that family life with Oakes was not completely fulfilling, and yet, it was not.

The fly in the ointment makes its appearance in a series of letters between Oakes and Blanche in beginning in August, 1904, which demonstrate that Blanche

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<sup>60</sup> Blanche Ames Ames to Adelbert Ames, n.d., 1901, box 21, folder 227.

<sup>61</sup> Blanche Ames to Adelbert Ames, Nov. 17, 1902.

<sup>62</sup> Blanche Ames Ames to Adelbert Ames, n.d.

was by no means the mistress of her home with Oakes. The ostensible reason for the clash was Blanche's decision, in opposition to Oakes' will, to leave North Easton for her parents' home in Lowell in company with her children, Pauline and Oliver, because the children's nurse had become seriously ill with pneumonia and she feared infection. Oakes, who had shown his mettle during their engagement and marriage, was not prepared to let his wife make such decisions for the family, and he indulged once again in displays of jealousy over her attachment to her family. In her responses to his accusations and demands, Blanche, in turn, demonstrated a clear recognition of and exasperation with that jealousy. Oakes disregarded her reasoning and denounced her action as a betrayal.

He wrote her bitterly from North Easton to ask why she had not stayed nearby with their children at Oakes' brother's house, adding that she adopted any excuse<sup>63</sup> to leave him for her family : "In other words, you do not see your way clear to remain with me under a few inconveniences, but saw brilliantly the path that led from me to Lowell."<sup>64</sup> He insisted that she must finish her drawings for his book and not "fritter away time with gossip."<sup>65</sup> Her fears for her children had "no foundation in fact," and your shortcomings are of the exasperating kind which makes a man wonder whether

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<sup>63</sup> Blanche had refuted this claim already when she wrote Oakes on February 2, 1902: "You dear old thing--where you are my home is, otherwise it is merely a camp," folder 245, box 22A.

<sup>64</sup> Oakes Ames to Blanche Ames Ames, Oct. 3, 1904.

<sup>65</sup> Oakes Ames to Blanche Ames Ames, October 2, 1904.

the new woman is such a desirable social adjunct as she is inclined to consider herself."<sup>66</sup>

Blanche replied that she had taken the decision to leave North Easton in the absence of any action from Oakes: "You did not take the trouble to put down your herbarium sheet and glass, but with one eye screwed up and the other on a dried flower, you answered me in scarcely more than monosyllables...I left the room prepared to bear the whole burden of the decision and the responsibility of taking two babies and a new nurse, with whom neither was familiar, all the way to Lowell."<sup>67</sup> She underscored and then repudiated his jealousy of her family: "The recitation of your jealousy of my affection for my family does not surprise me, for I know how ineradicable (sic) your feeling is."<sup>68</sup> Her recognition of his jealousy was substantiated by his own reply: "The truth of the matter is not hard to get at: You have but one home, but one real love, and it is only a kind of existence for you, fed on hopes of returning to that home and that love, that makes my being one bit tolerable," he raged. "What sign is there here to show that you think it home? Not a cozy corner to come to since the return from Bay View, not a homelike atmosphere in any part of the house which we used to consider ours. Not a thing to show love; not an object that shows a gentle touch. All crude, topsy-turvy, and, I suppose, all my fault...Day by day of late I have seen the desire for something work upon you in spite of my earnest

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<sup>66</sup> Oakes Ames to Blanche Ames Ames, Oct. 3, 1904.

<sup>67</sup> Blanche Ames Ames to Oakes Ames, Oct. 4, 1904.

<sup>68</sup> Blanche Ames Ames to Oakes Ames, August 3, 1904, folder 245, box 22A.

hope you would soon settle down and find a home here. You seemed like one with no ambitions, and in a way, homesick."

Blanche retorted: "...your exasperation was so much greater than any other feeling at the hour of parting that you had no loving thoughts for any of us. It is my great misfortune that I arouse your dislike and such a misfortune is not thrown off with a change of abode."<sup>69</sup> She complained as well that he failed to offer her the "small politenesses of life, the little attentions that men pay women are always acceptable, but I have passed them by in feeling sure that in a crisis you would show up considerate and helpful. However, a few moments in the herbarium showed me that I could expect no aid, as I had received none the night before when Pauline had her nosebleed...Do you remember what you did? Without offering the slightest assistance, without asking if I needed anything, you closed the door and went to bed."<sup>70</sup> That "any other man of my acquaintance would have left his work to help me and you from whom I should expect aid, deserted me entirely--and moreover consider you have a grievance against me," she declared was particularly irksome. "I find that marriage has added to my burdens and has given me none of the personal care and attention that would make these burdens easier to bear."<sup>71</sup>

Having vigorously said her piece, by her letter of Oct. 15, Blanche had begun to be conciliatory, apologizing for "wounding you too deeply" and insisting he was

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<sup>69</sup> Blanche Ames Ames to Oakes Ames, August 3, 1904.

<sup>70</sup> Blanche Ames Ames to Oakes Ames, October 4, 1904, folder 245, box 22A.

<sup>71</sup> Blanche Ames Ames to Oakes Ames, Oct. 4, 1904.

"manly" after all and that his inattention to her needs was not "an indication of contempt." Oakes was probably right to accuse Blanche of failing to make his home her home, since Blanche herself admitted that she longed to be in the midst of her family,<sup>72</sup> as Oakes was in the midst of his, by bringing her to live in his mother's home. In fact, they did live with Mrs. Ames in the Homestead for six years, enduring her disapproval of Blanche's harum-scarum horseback riding and habit of walking around barefoot.<sup>73</sup> As Pauline Ames Plimpton observed of her mother, "full of energy and fun, my mother was brought up in a very different manner from my father's family."<sup>74</sup>

The plan had been that Oakes would inherit the family house from his mother and would occupy it with both his mother and his wife until that day. However, as Blanche became ever more discontented, the likelihood of their marriage lasting that long became more remote. Oakes finished his long letter to Blanche on Oct. 3, 1904 by asking: "Do you think I want to make you suffer? My real want is to free you from such an unhappy union and to give you back your home and all your

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<sup>72</sup> Blanche Butler continued her loving letters to her daughter, writing on April 11, 1901: "You are in my mind with always such a tender sympathetic feeling that it seems as if you ought to be where I could at least catch a glimpse of you daily and assure myself that you are doing fairly well, as well as poor mortals are allowed to do," folder 332, box 26A.

<sup>73</sup> Pauline Ames Plimpton, in her introduction to her father's "jottings," explained that Blanche Ames Ames had been "brought up in a very different manner from my father's family" and annoyed her more proper mother-in-law with her antics, Jottings of a Naturalist, pp. 7-8

<sup>74</sup> Jottings of a Naturalist, p. 7.

freedom...Go to your parents, you sisters and brothers and forfeit the love of an inconsiderate cad."<sup>75</sup>

Blanche's reply was equally heated, as she insisted upon her love for him ("will you never understand that you are the foremost of any in the world, you make or mar my existence"), and that: "Nothing could cause me greater grief than the knowledge that you could let me go, or wished your own freedom..."<sup>76</sup>

She declared: "If I felt that your affection was as strong and forgiving and enduring as mine, I should be certain that life would work out serenely for us both," as, in the end, it did. Blanche and Oakes solved their mutual problem of emotional dependency on their respective families<sup>77</sup> at Blanche's instigation, by founding their own estate of Borderland in North Easton. This happened only after several false starts, beginning with an attempt by Blanche to induce Oakes to buy an estate near Bay View on Cape Ann as a permanent residence. Oakes, true to form, resisted.<sup>78</sup> Writing to her from shipboard on a trip alone to London, he declared:

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<sup>75</sup> Oakes Ames to Blanche Ames, Oct. 6, 1904.

<sup>76</sup> Blanche Ames Ames to Oakes Ames, August 3, 1904, folder 245, box 22A.

<sup>77</sup> Marriage to Oakes can never have been unalloyed bliss, however. As Harriet Robey noted in her Bay View memoirs, Oakes continued to resent Blanche's affection for her family and demonstrated this graphically by his invention of the "In-Law Club." At a family gathering, he ceremoniously presented his fellow sons-in-law with an "emblem" of a lemon attached to a ribbon and topped with a tag reading "In-Law Club." Under his direction, the family then sang "A Lemon in the Garden of Love," a popular hit of the day. Robey recollects that this acid commentary on Ames family ties was made by Oakes in the early 1900s, the period of his struggles with Blanche. Robey considered that Oakes had a point and she wrote: "Uncle Oakes was speaking the truth. The in-laws felt like outlaws," Bay View, p. 331.

<sup>78</sup> Jottings of a Naturalist, p. 178.

"Out here on the sea I realize the hopelessness of one who is unidentified with a birth place and I dread the ordeal of leaving behind me someday family and personal associations, but I am ready to make the move that pure reason dictates, and to abide by the verdict of common sense. Although I have followed a course which I considered the only wise one, I realize, dear one, that my decision to live in the old homestead was not fair to you or kind... To be happy, really happy, we must hold strongly to the belief in equality, and cultivate intensively that mutual ground, with the ambition to establish in our relations a permanent and admirable affection."<sup>79</sup>

Having acknowledged at last that "you gave up your home to come to me," Oakes was rewarded in the end by not being wrested from his native soil after all, because they chose to found their new home in North Easton. At least Blanche was now able to be mistress of her own home. As their daughter, Pauline Ames Plimpton, observed: "It was probably just as well that they were finally able to move into the freer atmosphere and larger sphere of their own land and home."<sup>80</sup> Oakes himself wrote in his diary: "Blanche and I are tasting happiness to fullness now, and as we look toward the completion of our little house and the development of our estate, our enthusiasm rises beyond control. To have a house of our very own to do with what we please, to have land on which to exercise the most inordinate of whims, is an experience to match which we know nothing in our past."<sup>81</sup>

They called the forested property Borderland, because it bordered several other towns, but also because it was well away from town center and from the noisy

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 194, Oakes Ames to Blanche Ames Ames, October 16, 1905.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 243.

shovel works which had been the mundane source of Oakes's family's fortune.<sup>82</sup> It was a name with symbolic significance as well, since Oakes and Blanche chose to found their family on a new frontier for both of them, not in Oakes's family home under the eye of his mother, nor next door to Blanche's family at Cape Ann, but on their own land and in a home they designed to meet their particular needs. Together, Oakes and Blanche willingly chose to live their lives on the borderland of acceptable behavior for their class: Both were notorious suffragists, his money funded her birth control campaign, and his dedication to science and teaching, rather than more usual and lucrative professions of law or business, marked them as original, confident in their right to make their own choices, supportive of each other, and willing to act outside and beyond the socially accepted boundaries of the elite.

It would be pleasant to relate this move as a happy ending (or as Blanche wrote Oakes at the end of their quarrel in 1904: "Please don't talk about the end. There is not going to be any end")<sup>83</sup>, except that Oakes' mother was bitterly hurt by their departure. Oakes reported finding her in a "most unenviable mood," and noted, "she seemed to feel with acuteness the fact that I had moved away and demanded my reasons for going. I assured her that many reasons had influenced my course of action and begged her to construe my motives in the kindest possible light. When I went away I could not dispel from my mind a melancholy painful to experience and all the way to Borderland I revolved in my thoughts the sad passage in my life which

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>83</sup> Blanche Ames Ames to Oakes Ames, Oct. 15, 1904, folder 245, box 22A.

my mother's unfortunate attitude has instituted."<sup>84</sup> Mrs. Ames's "unfortunate attitude" led her to forbid her son to remove any of his carefully collected plants from the greenhouses at the Homestead, and the "strained relations" continued for some time.<sup>85</sup> Mrs. Ames apparently thought better of her attitude, because, after a month of giving Oakes a difficult time, she wrote to him: "Try and be happy and I will. Do not reflect anything upon me. I have had a hard winter and I am very tired and then you know what a sensitive old mother I am. It was not that I did not want you to live at Borderland or build but everything went so hard with me and finding things carried away which I might have cared for, etc. Let us drop our feelings against each other."<sup>86</sup>

While Oakes and Blanche delighted themselves with improving their new property, spending hours in the open air walking or on horseback (daughter Pauline said they were "devotees of exercise")<sup>87</sup> Mrs. Ames' capitulation extended to other areas as well. As Blanche and Oakes undertook to replace the farmhouse in which they lived at first at Borderland with a magnificent castle-like structure with a huge library for Oakes' treasured books, Anna Ames changed her views not only on Oakes' life plans, but also on woman's rights and suffrage to bring herself more in line with her daughter-in-law's progressive beliefs. In a letter to Blanche of April 30, 1900, Oakes had reported that his mother had made "a good many sensible remarks" against

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<sup>84</sup> Jottings of a Naturalist, p. 248.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 250-1.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

suffrage, "which she suggested would make you feel a little out of sorts with her, " especially since Blanche had revealed at a dinner with Mrs. Ames that she was "very set" in her views concerning the rights of women. Anna Ames had declared that "women are fortunate creatures after all and that they have a good many more blessings in this world in their present condition than could be expected if the ways of the land should change...She wonders if equality is anywhere near possible under existing circumstances and if more rights were given to women she asks if the chances for inequality would not be greater."<sup>88</sup> Mrs. Ames also expressed an idea common to anti-suffragists of the day, that the companionate relationship between men and women in marriage would be disturbed by possible political differences, which would "take exceptionally broad-minded people to tolerate it and still have a friendly relationship."

It was Anna Ames who changed her position, since she and Oakes joined Blanche as ardent supporters of suffrage in opposition to the anti-suffrage position taken by most of the rest of their family,<sup>89</sup> led into the fray by the valiant Blanche, whose own support for women's rights never faltered. In this, as in so much else,

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<sup>88</sup> Oakes Ames to Blanche Ames, April 30, 1900.

<sup>89</sup> Oakes's father, Gov. Oliver Ames, in his 1889 inaugural address as governor of Massachusetts, unreservedly supported woman suffrage, saying that women would "become an important factor in the settlement of great questions. If we can trust uneducated men to vote we can with greater safety and far more propriety grant the same power to women, who, as a rule, are as well educated and quite as intelligent as men." He had made the same plea in 1887. From the History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 4, 1883-1900, edited by Susan B. Anthony and Ida Husted Harper, p. 706. Other Massachusetts governors who supported woman suffrage since 1870 included, of course, Blanche's Grandfather Butler, and also Messieurs Clafin, Washburn, Talbot, Brackett, and Long, p. 718.

Blanche was supported by her family, in particular, by her mother and sisters, who joined in her suffrage efforts and gave her a sort of community of women within her own family to support her efforts as Hull House had supported Jane Addams. The conversion of Oakes and Anna Ames to the cause, and also the idyllic family life at Borderland which Pauline Plimpton described so lovingly in her introduction to her father's reminiscences, suggest that Blanche Ames Ames did become a force within her own home and influence upon the minds of its occupants. Like her mother before her, Blanche never stopped drawing, painting and sculpting, even while she tended a growing family, managed a large household, and maintained her artistic collaboration with her husband on his books.

Some important questions concerning her married life remain unanswered, such as how she viewed issues of sexuality, including birth control, in the early days of her marriage, because none of her letters or diaries make any mention of sexuality. Then, too, the only surviving description of the birth of one of Blanche's children is from Oakes, and the information he provided was that the evening was lovely and Blanche was attended by a male physician. Her last birth was at age 32, but that was not unusual for women of her generation and reveals little. Her "Pauline" diary suggests that she was an attentive mother, who, though she had a live-in nanny to assist her, still loved and cuddled her daughter and fretted over her diet. Later, sporadic diary entries reveal her singing songs to her growing brood, telling them stories, helping them with homework. When she traveled with Oakes, the children stayed not with the servants, but with their Grandmothers Ames at North Easton and

Lowell. The two grandmothers gradually became sufficiently reconciled to each other to join Blanche and her sisters in their suffrage activities. Even jealous Oakes came to appreciate his mother-in-law as a calm and intelligent personality to be welcomed at Borderland.

With all of these demands upon her time and attention, Blanche managed to become an outstanding advocate for women's rights, one of the new college-educated cohort of women who brought specialized artistic skills to the task for advocating for the rights of women, even as they struggled with their personal lives as women. For, as William Leach concluded: "Feminists did not, however, achieve their goals of true love and perfect union. It would be mistaken, of course, to say that they obtained, even temporarily, complete equality for women in marriage or equal power with men within the hierarchical institutions and disciplines advocated by mid-century reformers and later by Progressives."<sup>90</sup>

The reason for this failure, Leach wrote, was not only the "ethnic, religious, regional, political and economic opposition" women reformers faced in trying to "shape the sexual relation of American society," but also their inability to convince society that women should be accorded the same "possessive individualism" routinely accorded to men. This was because "the feminist attachment to individualism would leave feminists open to the charge that female emancipation would desex women," and, as we shall see, suffragists, to succeed in their political reforms, fell back on domestic feminism and the vote-as-protection-for-the-home argument as the most

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<sup>90</sup> William Leach, True Love and Perfect Union, pp. 347-348.

effective strategy for winning suffrage from reluctant American males.<sup>91</sup> The strategy backfired in that, although women did win the vote, they gained little in the way of emancipation in other areas of their lives. Women remained reliant on their traditional moral standing as mothers, rather than their rights as individuals, to excuse their political activism.

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<sup>91</sup> True Love and Perfect Union, pp. 347-348

## CHAPTER 5

### SUFFRAGE

While Blanche and Oakes strove to create a balance of power that would allow their own family at last to take root and flourish in privacy, without undue interference from either of their natal families, the fight for woman suffrage, long an interest of Blanche, had coalesced again in 1890 into a coherent movement following its split over passage of the 15th amendment. Both Blanche and Oakes, seconded by their respective mothers and by Blanche's sisters, became active suffrage campaigners despite strong opposition from Oakes's own family. His cousin, Mary Ames, later Mary Frothingham, was one of the chief Massachusetts anti-suffrage leaders, a fact that was made much of in local and Boston newspapers as an amusing scrimmage between society dames.

By the time Blanche and Oakes became most active for woman suffrage, between 1914-1919, the movement had become a respectable cause for Protestant members of the bourgeoisie, although the Catholic church still opposed it as disruptive to traditional family life. Middle-class women of the day were presumed by their society to be paragons of motherhood and domesticity, and suffragist women sought to use this virtuous view of themselves as a reason for seeking an equality between the sexes via the ballot, which would include equal access to education, equal suffrage, and an end to the double standard of sexuality. In general, upper and middle-class suffragists did not envision a new social order in which the role of

women would be transformed; instead, as progressives, most sought not transformation, but reform. The vote also appealed to other subgroups of women, such as working-class or black women, especially as they began to invade what Nancy Cott called "terrain culturally understood as male," such as streets, factories, stores, offices, college campuses, law, medicine and so on, even if many of these women pioneers were tokens merely.<sup>1</sup> Some wealthy and elite women were, like Blanche, active in social and political reform, including Jessie Ashley, Alva Vanderbilt Belmont, Carola Woerishofer, and Mary Van Kleeck.<sup>2</sup>

Massachusetts had had a distinguished record for woman suffrage, as Susan B. Anthony and Ida Husted noted in their monumental History of Woman Suffrage. The first suffrage convention ever held at a national level was held at Worcester in 1850, and the New England Woman Suffrage Association was founded in 1868, with Julia Ward Howe as president. Seven Massachusetts governors had supported woman suffrage since 1870, Governors Claflin, Washburn, Talbot, Brackett, Long, Butler, and Ames, two of them Ames family relations. Major regional newspapers supported at least municipal suffrage for women by 1873, and these included the Boston Transcript, the Globe, the Advertiser, the Traveler and the Beacon, the Springfield Republican, and the Greenfield Gazette and Courier. On the other hand, the first anti-suffrage organization was up and running in the state by 1884, and by 1885, Kate Gannett Wells and her associates persuaded 140 influential men to back

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Cott, The Grounding of Modern Feminism, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> These examples of prominent wealthy women reformers were provided by Prof. Gerald McFarland of the University of Massachusetts.

an anti-suffrage "remonstrance," which was published in the Boston Herald.

President Eliot of Harvard was one of the staunch anti-suffrage supporters.<sup>3</sup>

Blanche joined other suffragists in employing in defense of suffrage two lines of argument, the first of which was founded on the rhetoric of the American tradition of Enlightenment rationalism, liberalism, and bourgeois individuality. Ideas about natural rights and the liberty of all humans underlay women's demands for the removal of those social barriers erected to contain them only, provoked environmental analysis of gender differences, and justified claims to liberties and opportunities equal to those of men. However, as suffragists refined their arguments to the expediency of winning more adherents, they fell back upon a second, more conservative argument that was based on the Victorian idea that women as nurturers were inherently more moral than men and thus should wield the vote on the side of the angels. The effectiveness of this argument was that, although Protestant churchmen had striven generally to preserve customary gender differences as an anchor for society and religion and to limit women to benevolence roles, still, the 19th-century belief in woman's higher moral character as propagated by such clergymen could not help but fuel the demand for an equal say, not only before God, but also in government.<sup>4</sup> The natural rights argument, strongly based as it was on

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<sup>3</sup> Susan B. Anthony and Ida Husted, History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 4, pp. 701-745.

<sup>4</sup> Ann Douglas in her Feminization of American Culture describes a sort of collusion between women and the clergy as two powerless groups in American society to gain some control by reducing intellectuality and promoting sentimentality in which women and their clerical allies excelled.

traditional American values from revolutionary days, lost force as women actually began to win the access they had been denied to education, employment, and legal and civil rights, without, however, winning the franchise.

The situation in Massachusetts for suffrage supporters, though many respectable people now supported woman suffrage, nevertheless was not encouraging. In 1915, for example, Massachusetts voters had defeated a suffrage amendment and also a non-binding referendum even earlier. Worse, the Republicans who controlled state politics were some of the most conservative in the country, consistently voting down factory and child labor reforms and temperance, refusing even to contemplate woman suffrage. By 1919, however, the innovative activities of Blanche's generation of younger activists had turned things around to the point that stuffy Massachusetts distinguished itself by becoming the eighth state to ratify the 19th amendment.

Sharon Hartman Strom, in her "Leadership and Tactics in the American Woman Suffrage Movement," attributed the success of suffragists in Massachusetts to the selective adaptation of English suffragette tactics to the American cause, in particular winning publicity and sympathy through open air meetings. This direct appeal to the Massachusetts public replaced the more ladylike approach of preaching indoors to a select audience of the already converted. Blanche skillfully used both tactics in her own efforts to win adherents to the cause, since she held lavish teas at Borderland to impress and convert the local elite, and yet preached suffrage as well from the platforms at two North Easton granges. Heckling anti-suffrage politicians,

canvassing voters, and handing out suffrage newspapers and flyers were also among the successful tactics Massachusetts suffragists employed, and Blanche participated in this effort by writing to women voters in her town urging them to vote and offering transportation to the polls if necessary. Fortunately, too, women activists in the state were able to forge an alliance with working-class women, especially the membership of WTUL, and Blanche's cartoons and public remarks reflect this new, sympathetic alliance of wealthy and working-class women. Another example of this alliance was the collegial relationship between the educated Florence Luscomb and working-class, Irish orator Mary Foley.<sup>5</sup>

By 1908, suffragists in America and Massachusetts also were exploring possible alliances with like-minded forces in Great Britain, and the widely publicized exploits of the Pankhursts in support of the enfranchisement of British women were watched closely on both sides of the Atlantic. Blanche and Oakes demonstrated their interest by collecting newspaper clippings concerning British suffrage efforts which are preserved in the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College. All the smashing of windows and hunger strikes left NAWSA leader Carrie Chapman Catt "impressed, but not converted,"<sup>6</sup> but the Progressive Union for Woman Suffrage in New York did organize a street parade in 1908 as a demonstration of behavior that was out and beyond the traditional woman's sphere. A massive parade held in Boston in 1914 included amongst its luminaries both Blanche and Oakes. These uprisings by masses

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<sup>5</sup> Sharon Hartman Strom, "Leadership and Tactics in the American Woman Suffrage Movement: A New Perspective from Massachusetts," pp. 296-315.

<sup>6</sup> Grounding of Modern Feminism, p. 27.

of women did force municipal politicians to take some account of women's demands as a group, if not as individuals.

Blanche's views about militant tactics were reported in the Brockton Times. While she cautiously did not endorse them, neither did she wholly condemn them: "It seems to me that some of the papers are making use of the reports of militant activities in England to try to discredit our efforts to obtain suffrage here; of course without success, as no one can be so unjust as to punish American women because of the behavior of a few English women." In the interest of preserving the idea that woman suffrage was not inherently disruptive of the social order, Blanche argued that "militant efforts are of local interest primarily. They are confined entirely to England which is the only country that has used such methods to obtain suffrage out of the 20 odd countries where suffrage exists or is being worked for." Whether or not one approves of militant tactics, she concluded, "one must recognize their devotion to the cause for which they are glad to suffer and die if necessary."<sup>7</sup>

The increased public acceptance of the progressive argument for improved government regulation of housing, factories, health and safety, also began to bridge the gap between woman's traditional role as family protector and moral beacon and the need for woman's particular concerns to be directly represented in politics by women themselves. Voting began to be touted by suffragists as a duty, not just a privilege, for women. As the reasoning went, if women's differences could be said to complement men's within the family, society and the electorate, then women voters as

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<sup>7</sup> Brockton Times, June 1, 1914, Schlesinger Library.

protectors of the family posed no destructive challenge to the family nor to politics. Instead, woman's vote would expand her natural role as family protector and who could object to that? It was an argument with considerable appeal, and even the embittered (but fabulously wealthy) Alva Belmont joined Oakes' socialite mother Anna Ames in heading a suffrage society. By 1910, it seemed exciting to join the ranks of independent women by supporting suffrage, and wealthy women were joining working women and suffragists as a "vanguard to be emulated."<sup>8</sup>

The vanguard included some allies with different agendas, and Blanche, as a life-long reformer, found herself shoulder-to-shoulder for the first time in support of suffrage and later of birth control with socialists and radicals, who, as Nancy Cott put it, "embedded their criticism of gender hierarchy in a critique of social systems," a criticism which Blanche herself did not adopt. Modern Bohemia, predictably took pleasure in throwing off Victorianism in a "revolt against formalism."<sup>9</sup> For other women, though, even if they were not politically active, suffrage was a practical vehicle for transforming the traditional confinement of women to the home to a more active life outside it. More radical feminists saw the ballot as women's right, as indeed, did Blanche, but sneered at the old ideals of woman's purity or moral superiority as an excuse for bestowing the vote upon women, a point of view that did not coincide with Blanche's. Like many moderate women, she accepted that women's right and women's duty to vote were grounded in their moral superiority as mothers,

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<sup>8</sup> Grounding of Modern Feminism, p. 33.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

and she carefully deployed maternal images in her political cartoons supporting suffrage.

Educated women naturally were more able than overburdened working-class women to identify with Charlotte Perkins Gilman's belief that women should be able to choose their work regardless of sex and that child care and housework should be done by paid employees, a situation that wealthy women like Blanche enjoyed already and a point of view with which she seemed to sympathize. Few underprivileged women were likely to support more esoteric feminist demands, though, such as Nina Wilcox Putnam's assertion that women had a right to ignore the vagaries of fashion as men did, or Fola LaFolette's insistence that women have the right to keep their own names after marriage. These issues in any case were tertiary compared to the growing conviction of many reformers that women's enfranchisement would right many social wrongs.

All this feminist *joie de vivre* did not seem to be bringing women any closer to the vote, however. Male socialists, like Massachusetts Republicans, showed little disposition for promoting women's specific concerns, for example, and it appeared that more radical women themselves would have to take action. In 1913, a couple of hard-nosed women's activists, Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, founded the Congressional Union and then the National Women's Party. Paul and her associates were tired as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony had been of waiting for the political party currently in power to condescend to give them equal rights, so they broke with the moderate National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), began

publishing the Suffragist, and determined to "punish the party in power" (in this case, the Democrats) for failing to give women the vote.<sup>10</sup> By 1916, a Woman's Party had been established in the 12 states that had woman suffrage, and the group turned their attention from their usual middle-class audience to seek out new allies in the working and elite classes of women, the latter because they had more money and influence.

The Congressional Union proved to be the prototype of a "modern, single-issue pressure group"<sup>11</sup> that sought a constitutional amendment for woman suffrage with all the determination that Paul could muster (and she ruled her organization with an iron hand). These radicals worried the more decorous suffragists, like NAWSA presidents Anna Howard Shaw and Carrie Chapman Catt, because they feared that punishing the Democrats could turn that party against woman suffrage just at the point when many men had begun to be persuaded that woman suffrage was not unthinkable. There is no record of Blanche's position on the Congressional Union, but she was characteristically pragmatic when it came to forming alliances between disparate groups during the birth control campaign and may have been willing to accept Alice Paul's more hard-driving tactics if they looked to be successful. In any case, following the lead of British suffragettes, the National Woman's Party picketed the White House in 1917 and were arrested and imprisoned for obstructing traffic, giving them considerable publicity. When the country went to war against Germany,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 53-54.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

they dubbed President Wilson a "kaiser" for denying women their rights, and for this they were generally excoriated.

Scandalized by such antics, moderate woman suffragists continued to try to organize for suffrage at the state level, but the failure of state referenda for woman suffrage in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New York and New Jersey drove many suffragists to seek a national cure through the federal Anthony Amendment, which Blanche supported. Moderates found themselves condemned for failing to support the more radical pickets and this was certainly the case, more especially since they hastily dumped their socialist allies when the wartime sedition laws were directed at socialists. By 1917, Catt complacently called the NAWSA "a bourgeois movement with nothing radical about it," in which assessment she was quite correct, and the National Woman's Party was left to be the magnet for smarting radicals..

But NAWSA and the moderates had called it correctly: The link to socialism did the radicals no good, because woman suffrage began again to be linked in the public mind with dangerous ideas, such as socialism, pacifism, free love and free women. By 1918, both houses of Congress had rejected a constitutional amendment for suffrage, although the National Woman's Party kept up its pressure and demonstrated against Wilson on his return from Europe. This tactic made them appear unpatriotic, and the suspicion against them held because, although many suffragists did support the war, as many others remained firmly pacifist. Still, the fight against suffrage, fought successfully since the 1848 Declaration of Sentiments, collapsed all at once. In June, 1919, the Senate passed an amendment in favor of

woman suffrage and by August, 1920, 36 states had ratified it. Both the NAWSA and NWP took credit.

Ideologically, the arguments mounted against woman suffrage in its conclusive, final resurgence seem contemptuous and patronizing, especially when directed at the many women who, like Blanche, were college educated and professionally trained. A good example of such patronization of women can be drawn from Grover Cleveland's remarks in the 1905 Ladies' Home Journal, in which he claimed to represent "thoughtful and right-minded men" in their insistence that it was woman's "endearing frailties" and not her other qualities that won her the "homage" of men. These frailties include the substitution of intuition for rationality, the sentimentality which makes practicality impractical, the moodiness which is the prelude to "bright smiles and sunny endearments." In urging women to remain in their God-given role as man's helpmeet, Cleveland assured them that men would protect them and their property and thus women would have no need of the vote, especially since by awarding the vote to women, the so-called ignorant vote would be doubled. From Cleveland's perspective, and the perspective of many of his fellows, ignorant women would be worse voters than their men, because they would be corrupted more easily and would vote to gratify their envy of the rich.<sup>12</sup>

In Cleveland's excuses for denying voting rights to women we have a fairly typical sample of the "anti" response to woman suffrage. They include: woman's

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<sup>12</sup> Aileen Kraditor, Up from the Pedestal: Select Writings in the History of American Feminism, pp. 199-201.

innate incapacity to vote; the absence of the need for women to vote since they are protected by men's votes; and the danger of increasing the ignorant vote by enfranchising women. One other anti argument is implied but not specifically cited, and that is the conviction that the vote would somehow masculinize or denature women, depriving them of their charm, by allowing them to leave their proper place and to exercise political power with men.<sup>13</sup> This denaturing argument was a central one used by cartoonists opposed to suffrage. No attempt was made by Cleveland or his cadre to explain by what mechanism justice, natural rights, or property rights of women will be guaranteed them; and there is no real attempt to employ reason against woman suffrage at all, although Cleveland was not above attempting to cajole women to his viewpoint with a bit of flattery. Apparently, women with their "bright smiles" would have to continue to trust male chivalry to protect them with no other court of appeal.

The suffragist response to this kind of windy reasoning was, of course, various, and ranged from an indignant repudiation of men's chivalry to Jeffersonian demands for natural justice. Susan Anthony, for example, took the high ground in her constitutional argument for suffrage, made in 1872, in which she said: "It was we the people, not we the white male citizens, nor we the male citizens; but we, the whole people, who formed this union. We formed it not to give the blessings of liberty, but

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<sup>13</sup> It is ironic that as late as 1952, when Simone de Beauvoir published her The Second Sex, she still had to refute male insistence that the risk to woman's charm was too great to permit the granting to women of political, social and economic equality.

to secure them; not to half of ourselves and half of our posterity, but to the whole people, the women as well as the men."<sup>14</sup>

This dignified assertion of women's right to citizenship by Anthony was met also by the arguments of Thorstein Veblen in his Theory of the Leisure Class. Veblen added insult to injury to the role of privileged women of his day by stating baldly that such women functioned only as "chattel" employed to display their husbands' status by wearing ostentatious and uncomfortable clothing and buying needless and expensive items. Such a woman was at once the "chief ornament" of her family and yet still a dependent, the "chief menial of the household" dressed in the finery that represented her livery.<sup>15</sup> One can imagine how Blanche would have responded to the idea of being Oakes's "chief menial." However, there is other evidence that women in the upper classes were regarded by their men as innately frivolous and unworthy of serious consideration, let alone civil rights, and this may help to account why Oakes's upper-class family, with the exception of himself, his wife and his mother, should have opposed woman suffrage. According to E. Digby Baltzell, Oakes' family was considered elite at least by the late 19th century and was still in the Boston social register by 1940.<sup>16</sup>

The opposition to suffrage mustered by the majority of Oakes' family is not so surprising if one considers that, even today, the upper class is a bastion of

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<sup>14</sup> Up from the Pedestal, pp.243-252.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 135-136.

<sup>16</sup> E. Digby Baltzell, The Protestant Establishment Revisited.

conservatism for a number of reasons suggested by Susan Ostrander, in her Women of the Upper Class, and Baltzell, in his The Protestant Establishment Revisited. Both authors remark upon the exclusivity of the upper classes and how it is maintained by the passing on of upper-class traditions within the family in private schools and at the exclusive dancing classes and private clubs that are the domain of the privileged.

Ostrander, in her contemporary study, the only in-depth study of elite women as a class to be found, noted that upper-class women, even those with wealth of their own, maintain a subject position within the family, adapting themselves apparently without complaint to the needs of their husbands, even if meeting these needs means that the upper-class wife cannot undertake any demanding or lasting project of her own, except the volunteer work that keeps control of social reform firmly in the hands of upper-class patrons. Upper-class women, Ostrander found, run their households and their children's lives without sharing the mundane details with their husbands, and most told Ostrander that, while they worked to support their husbands' egos, they kept their own concerns, even their emotions, under wraps. That these women were well educated and well aware of the ancillary nature of their roles Ostrander found puzzling, since they, of all classes of women, had the most financial means available to achieve independence for themselves. Ostrander concluded that these women had struck a bargain with life: In return for unearned wealth and privilege for themselves and their children, they would do nothing to disrupt the power of their men to control society both at home and in the world outside the home. By their reasoning, any

attempt to reduce upper-class male power could result in a diminution of class power, to which such privileged women cling.

It is difficult to say with assurance if these contemporary upper-class conservative attitudes can be attributed to the earlier period of Blanche's active reform years, because no broad study exists of the ethos of Brahmin women of the pre-war era. However, Ostrander's finding that the majority of contemporary upper-class women are social conservatives is supported by the fact that Oakes's upper-class relatives, in spite of the support Gov. Oliver Ames had given to woman suffrage, were active anti-suffragists.

Blanche's family was wealthy, but perhaps a bit more parvenu, although the Butlers took all the usual upper-class precautions of enrolling their children at exclusive schools to ensure that they moved only in the right social circles. By the time Blanche had graduated from Smith in 1899, she was a worthy mate for a socialite like Oakes, except that the family background was not so staid with an original like Benjamin Butler as the founder of the family fortune. Nurtured by reform-minded parents, Blanche, unlike some other members of her class, was more willing to rock society's boat for the sake of women's rights, while most of the women of Oakes' family followed their men in taking the traditional position of opposing any alteration of the status quo, a status quo which shored up their privileged lives.

The defection of Anna Ames, Oakes' mother, to the suffrage cause is interesting since clearly there had been tensions between the respective Ames families since the engagement between Blanche and Oakes and since she herself had

expressed her doubts to Oakes of the rightness of the suffrage cause. Anna Ames was not recorded among those who assisted Blanche Ames Ames, her mother and her sisters, at the big charity ball and bazaar in support of suffrage that was held in 1914 at the Copley Plaza, but she did act according to her new convictions by serving as honorary head of a local suffrage organization in North Easton and allowing suffragists to use her automobile and her home for meetings.<sup>17</sup>

It is difficult to imagine this dowager and relict of a Massachusetts governor as *declassé*, so some other explanation must account for her support of suffrage. The most obvious solution is that Mrs. Ames decided to change her opinions and adopt those of her son and her deceased husband, who repeatedly had advocated woman suffrage as governor of Massachusetts. Nelson W. Aldrich, Jr., in his paean to American aristocracy, Old Money, also suggests a solution for the conundrum of the blue-blood reformer in his discussion of Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt. The solution is that aristocrats, who come by their wealth and power effortlessly by birth, find it easier than the hard-striving and acquiring middle classes to pursue such reforms as the redistribution of wealth to the unfortunate in hard times, as during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Aldrich wrote that it was Eleanor herself who suggested that Franklin, never having had to struggle for his position, although he did

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<sup>17</sup> The Brockton Times of June 3, 1914, reported that Blanche Ames Ames awarded a prize she had sponsored for the best essay on suffrage to a high school student, Marian Lewis, at a meeting for the Equal Suffrage Association held in Anna Ames's home. This is included among the holdings of the Woman's Rights Collection, 1853-1958, Woman Suffrage Campaign and Cartoons Clippings, 1913-1915, collected by Oakes Ames and Blanche Ames Ames and held at the Schlesinger Library of Radcliffe College.

have to struggle with the disabilities caused by polio, was more able to be "sensitive" to the sufferings of others than members of the middle class, who wanted to hold on to property they had won by their own efforts. An aristocratic woman like Eleanor, especially one whose life in the upper classes had been privileged but not happy, was excellently placed to assist her husband in being sensitive to the sufferings of the poor.

Working against Eleanor and other wealthy woman reformers has been the tendency of the aristocracy in America to trivialize women as either "wanton or indulgent," Aldrich wrote. "Women were as potentially corrupting, debilitating, and degenerative as wealth itself." On the other hand, a determined upper-class woman could demonstrate "mercy" by urging reform if, as Aldrich put it, "history or fate" cooperates by "creating a depression to hurl huge masses of the less fortunate below the market..." Eleanor's mercy was as unappreciated by other patricians as was Mrs. Ames's conversion to suffrage. As Alice Roosevelt Longworth said scathingly about Eleanor, the president's wife could "take the whole world for her slum project." This is a devastating put down of aristocratic reformers for breaking ranks and seeking change,<sup>18</sup> but it doesn't alter the fact that some elite women did pursue reform anyway, including the Mesdames Ames.

For Blanche Butler and Blanche Ames Ames, natural justice and the importance of a female viewpoint within the electorate were probably more of the motivating force behind their support of suffrage than any other, although a concern

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<sup>18</sup> Nelson Aldrich, Old Money, pp. 252-256.

for the rights of the common man or woman was part of their heritage: They were proud that Grandfather Butler had won the gratitude of working people in Lowell by seeking shorter work hours for them. Blanche Ames Ames was unusual, although not unique, in choosing to make the suffering of poor women a central theme of her pro-suffrage political cartoons, as well as the conventional themes of natural justice and support for home and motherhood through suffrage. It is these cartoons that make Blanche's actions in support of suffrage so unusual, not her tireless efforts at the polls nor her rounds of teas at Borderland for suffragists.<sup>19</sup> Also unusual was Blanche's willingness to exploit her socialite status to gain publicity for her cause, since many upper-class women chose to fund suffrage without disturbing their privacy and status as ladies by breaking into print and speaking from public platforms as the chatelaine of Borderland was prepared to do.

An example of this willingness to mount the public platform and also of Blanche's social feminist interest in the fate of common women is demonstrated by an interview she gave to the Boston Sunday Post on April 18, 1915.<sup>20</sup> The article, entitled, "If I were a poor girl, by Mrs. Oakes Ames," featured a photograph of Blanche in black, feathered hat and boa. Her gallant interviewer, Paul Bliss, estimated her age to be 29, although she was 37. Blanche's view of the proper life for a poor

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<sup>19</sup> One such tea, reported in The Brockton Times of Jan. 14, 1915, specifically targeted upper-class women of Brockton, club women whom Blanche sought to woo for suffrage. Maud Wood Park, of the educational committee of the Massachusetts Federation of Women's Clubs, was the speaker and her topic was how suffrage would form part of the advancement of women. Schlesinger Library.

<sup>20</sup> Boston Sunday Post, April 18, 1915, Schlesinger Library.

girl was employment.<sup>21</sup> She acknowledged that competition might be alarming, "yet it is the healthiest thing in the world." For competition to work the way it should, though, Blanche said that women should be allowed to compete with men for all the jobs they could do, such as elevator operator or streetcar conductor. While it was true that, during this period, many more jobs were opening for women, still sex-segregated job categories were common and many desirable jobs were, as Blanche put it, "taboo" for women. "So you see," Blanche told the interviewer, "I as a poor girl would find many occupations closed to me."

Blanche noted that women had been devalued as economic partners in their households when the old domestic tasks of churning, spinning and weaving were lost to them, leaving only cooking and scrubbing as jobs at home. An educated, upper-class woman like Blanche must have appreciated that many would view her as a parasite, or like Thorstein Veblen, as a vehicle for the display of her husband's wealth. It may be of her own idle class she was speaking when she told the interviewer: "It is now time for adjustment. Women must become economic equals again and cease to be parasites." She insisted that, had she been a worker rather than an aristocrat, she would have tried to break down the barriers that limit jobs for women and she would work after marriage as well, allowing other women the job of

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<sup>21</sup> It is natural to wonder if Blanche read Olive Schreiner or Charlotte Perkins Gilman and derived her ideas from them. Unfortunately, the record that survives her does not record her reading matter, so one can only surmise that, as a feminist, she must have read the works of other feminists.

caring for her family as she worked at a profession of her own choosing (which sounds very much like Olive Schreiner and Charlotte Perkins Gilman).<sup>22</sup>

Work would be a positive good for women, Blanche said, adding that, "I know many women of wealth who are literally dying because they have nothing to do. Life means nothing to them because they have no responsibilities." Such women should enter science, medicine, city planning, and the vote for them then would be a "tremendous psychological effect which will be just as valuable as the political effect. Women are going to use the ballot to lift themselves out of the parasitic class...They are equal in importance to the human race by every law of biology." She concluded her remarks by advising poor women not to waste their time envying the "isolation from reality of the upper classes," but to "map out their lives " to "realize the highest individuality." That, said Blanche, "is freedom and that is individuality."<sup>23</sup>

Since Blanche was primarily a doer rather than a writer, her activities for suffrage and perspectives on reform must be traced through newspaper accounts like

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<sup>22</sup> Lest anyone deride Blanche for preaching to others what she would not do herself, it is fair to say that she worked long and strenuous hours to illustrate her husband's botanical texts, using a microscope to view the specimens as she drew them. Even after her children were born, her diaries record her attempts to keep up with Oakes's demands for perfection and productivity. Doubtless she would not have been able to do this work without the aid of servants, a point she makes in her interview.

<sup>23</sup> Boston Sunday Post, April 18, 1915. The issue of the rights of women to individual autonomy has not been settled today. Americans seem ambivalent, on the one hand exhorting women to eschew careers (and thus economic autonomy) to work within the family, and on the other, insisting that welfare mothers display individual initiative and especially economic autonomy by getting themselves off the dole. No explanation is afforded these mothers about why their children do not need their domestic solicitude nor, for that matter, who will provide care for their children when they go out to work.

that above, rather than through direct commentary from her letters and diaries. Oakes's prolific diaries preserved at Borderland were laconic when it came to Blanche's activities, although he did note that she attended four suffrage meetings in January, 1915, and five meetings in February. Blanche's participation in the suffrage fight from her base in North Easton started in 1913, when she joined the ways and means committee of the Massachusetts Woman Suffrage Association, and between 1914 and 1916, when she served as treasurer of that organization. In addition, she was an organizer of a large suffrage festival at the Copley Plaza Hotel in Boston. Somewhere along the line, Blanche also joined The Woman's Journal as an art editor.<sup>24</sup> "From 1914 through 1916 she invested a great deal of time and energy" on her suffrage activities, working "to the point of exhaustion,"<sup>25</sup> and attending over 30 suffrage meetings and rallies, many in Boston.<sup>26</sup> She also traveled to Western Massachusetts to march in a large suffrage parade in Springfield.<sup>27</sup> The Brockton Journal described Blanche as "working tooth and nail for suffrage"<sup>28</sup> during this

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<sup>24</sup> James Keneally, "Blanche Ames and Woman Suffrage: The Story of the Fight for Passage of the Woman Suffrage Amendment in the Town of Easton and the State of Massachusetts, 1915-1920," p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> "Blanche Ames and Woman Suffrage," p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> An unnamed news clipping with an Easton dateline dated May 4, 1914, reported that Blanche had been one of the marchers in the great suffrage parade in Boston. Schlesinger Library.

<sup>27</sup> "Blanche Ames and Woman Suffrage," p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Brockton Journal, June 4, 1914, Schlesinger Library.

period, her children cared for by a large domestic staff while their mother pursued her goals from Borderland to Boston.

Blanche's conviction that women should vote drove her on to these activities. As a progressive, she believed that opposition to woman suffrage was "reactionary" and in opposition to the "advancement of civilization." For her, the moderate suffrage view that mothers should vote to right social wrongs was only part of the issue, although she was perfectly willing to exploit this view, as she did in her participation in a suffragist-backed "Home Day" in 1914, when suffragists planted a liberty pole on the Boston Common and then spent the next day deliberately celebrating a Sunday at home. Blanche told a local newspaper that Home Day was an "earnest of what they intend to do continuously (stay at home) as soon as the vote is won."<sup>29</sup> This was disingenuous, of course, since Mrs. Oakes Ames left home and children repeatedly with her husband both for pleasure and for his botanical collecting expeditions worldwide, and she also traveled between Borderland and her other homes in Cape Ann and Florida. The argument that women will remain confined by the home despite enfranchisement can only have been made from expediency.

Blanche also believed that suffrage was a "worldwide, moral issue, involving justice and progress" and requiring a "fundamental and absolute faith in women." She deplored the anti's lack of faith that women could manage the full rights of

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<sup>29</sup> From an unnamed newspaper of May, 1915, in the Schlesinger Library Collection.

citizenship, as men did.<sup>30</sup> As she put it in an introduction to a suffrage rally speech, "woman suffrage is infectious. Where once tried, it catches and spreads."<sup>31</sup> She wrote also: "We ask only that we be given a hearing and we are confident that the men of our State will be only too glad to give the women a square deal. I for one should like to be able to express my wish legally and the way to give that wish weight is to express it by my vote."<sup>32</sup>

She did not forget the particular role of woman in civilization and that role was central to the moderate pro-suffrage theme. Blanche put it this way: "A man may build the fine buildings and schools and monuments, but a man's wife raises her hand to help in an entirely different way. She gives of herself, her thought, her love, her personal care, year in and year out to the physical and moral welfare of the children...and this woman or mother instinct is what we need in affairs of the State today."<sup>33</sup>

By 1915, the Massachusetts legislature had passed a constitutional amendment which was to be submitted to the voters. Blanche and Oakes, by now a sturdy suffragist himself, attempted to encourage members of the Republican state committee to vote for the amendment (meanwhile, Oakes's "anti" cousin Mary Ames was attempting to influence the same committee against the passage of woman

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<sup>30</sup> Brockton Times, June 14, 1914, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>31</sup> Blanche Ames Ames speech reported in the Brockton Times, June 11, 1914, Sophia Smith Collection.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ames speech, "Blanche Ames and Woman Suffrage," p. 3.

suffrage). In any case, 1914 and 1915 were heady years for both sides, since suffragists and anti-suffragists attempted to spread their messages at "ball parks, picnic grounds, nickelodeons, and rallies."<sup>34</sup> In May, 1914, Blanche founded and became president of the Easton Woman Suffrage League, while Mary counterattacked by forming an anti-suffrage league of her own. Both leagues resolutely sponsored talks in Easton's library, in local grange halls, in various elite homes, just as leagues were doing all over the state and the nation. Blanche sponsored a prize for the best essay written on the issue of suffrage by high school students;<sup>35</sup> Mary sponsored an anti rally at the Oakes Ames Memorial Hall a month later. A week after that, more than 700 people attended a suffrage rally presided over by Blanche. The speakers were Oakes, state Rep. Leo Harlow, and Maude Wood Park, vice-president of the College Equal Suffrage League.

Local newspapers, predictably, had a field day with this battle of the society dames, The Brockton Times reported on May 5, 1914, that the suffrage battle in Easton was of particular interest "owing to the prominence of the leaders of the two factions in this town, members of the Ames family."<sup>36</sup> But neither side was daunted by seeing their names held up for ridicule in print, or their faces, for that matter, since a local newspaper on May 4, 1914, published large pictures of Mary and Blanche

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> The prize went to Miss Marian Lewis of the Oliver Ames High School and was awarded at a suffrage meeting at Anna Ames' home, according to the June 3, 1914 edition of the Brockton Times, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>36</sup> Schlesinger Library.

Ames as squaring off against each other. Blanche wore a graceful gown and was photographed in profile, while Mary Ames confronted the camera, but with flowers in her hair.<sup>37</sup> Blanche graciously granted interviews to local and Boston columnists and allowed pictures of herself to be published looking slight and motherly with her blond-haired daughter Evelyn in her arms, an aggressive use of an essentially conservative argument for the vote. The paper cautiously described the Blanche-Mary rivalry as a "friendly split in the famous Ames family" and a "friendly campaign of rivalry for their respective causes."<sup>38</sup>

That Oakes's mother, who had carefully avoided political issues while her husband was governor, should have been converted to suffrage merely added to the publicity the suffrage issue received. James Keneally, who studied the suffrage fight in North Easton, wrote of Anna Ames: "She resisted the entreaties of her daughter-in-law Daisy (Mrs. William Ames) that she join the antis, but after listening to appeals from her son Oakes and from Blanche, she became convinced of the necessity of providing for women's influence in politics."<sup>39</sup>

Anna's assumption of the honorary presidency of the Easton woman suffragists,<sup>40</sup> her willingness to loan her home for rallies, her automobile for parades

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<sup>37</sup> Clipping from unnamed newspaper with a March 4, 1914, Easton dateline. Schlesinger Library.

<sup>38</sup> Unnamed news clipping with an Easton dateline, March 4, 1914, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>39</sup> "Blanche Ames and Woman Suffrage," p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> Her ascension was reported in an unnamed Easton newspaper dated May 12, 1914, Schlesinger Library.

and to drive suffragists about,<sup>41</sup> the band she sponsored to play for suffrage events, potted plants to decorate stages and the rumor that she had contributed \$25,000 to the constitutional amendment campaign simply added fuel to the fire of anti bitterness.

All the Ames wives except Blanche and Anna became active antis, and cousins Winthrop and Oliver Ames attended anti rallies<sup>42</sup> and lent their prestige and financial support to the Massachusetts Anti-Suffrage Association. The pro-branch of the Ames family remained unperturbed and Anna Ames held a meeting in her home of the Easton branch of the Massachusetts Equal Suffrage Association, of which Blanche was president.<sup>43</sup> Both Mary and Blanche Ames canvassed the local Easton and

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<sup>41</sup> In May, 1914, an unidentified newspaper clipping noted that Mrs. Ames loaned her vehicle to the suffrage cause, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>42</sup> Their names are listed as in attendance at an anti rally held at the Oliver Ames Memorial Hall on May 12, 1914, according to an unidentified newspaper with an Easton dateline, from the Schlesinger Library. Oakes and Blanche also attended with their two youngest children, apparently to learn the tactics of the opposition. The speaker at the meeting, Mrs. A. J. George, said that most women were indifferent to suffrage because they were too busy at home being mothers. Charles Underhill accused suffragists of being socialists, and then inconsistently gave of his opinion that women voters would not vote for the "best man," but to the one "that goes to their church," an odd means for socialists to select the best "man" for election. At this meeting, the antis sold red roses to oppose the yellow jonquils of the suffragists. The Boston Hibernian of June 16, 1914, carried a particularly virulent attack on suffrage by Thomas S. Lanegan, who claimed that suffrage would destroy the family, promote free love and socialism, kill chivalry, and challenge Christian civilization. Women had no aptitude for government and only "poor types" would demand the vote, Lanegan wrote, adding that suffrage is a right, not a privilege, and the privilege of government was based on force, which only men could wield, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>43</sup> Brockton Times, May 18, 1914, reported the meeting at Mrs. Ames residence, Schlesinger Library.

Harmony Granges, as part of the new tactic of winning adherents through direct appeal to the as yet unconverted.<sup>44</sup>

Blanche planned to establish a toehold for women's suffrage by backing a woman candidate for the school board, since by 1874 the state had allowed women to serve on school committees and by 1879 to vote for school committees. Many suffragists had hoped that allowing women to vote for school boards would make woman's vote in municipal elections more acceptable, but this hope died fairly quickly. Republicans had backed the school board vote for women as a tactic to counteract growing Catholic influence in the state, but having no other interest in woman's rights, they abandoned them.<sup>45</sup> Even the school board vote was a grudging achievement, because the steps required of women to register to vote for school committee members were made intentionally so cumbersome that few women were likely to bother. They were obliged to request a poll tax assessment from the town, pay the tax, and then register for every election, a process that had resulted in only five Easton women ever voting at all.

Blanche's thought was to rally women around a school committee candidate of their own, such that a large number of women could be persuaded to register and to vote, thus demonstrating women's true interest in the franchise. The candidate was Mrs. Sadie Waldron Hurst, a principal of the South East School. With her customary energy, Blanche wrote directly to women to encourage them to vote, distributed

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<sup>44</sup> Unnamed newspaper clipping with Easton dateline, March 4, 1914, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>45</sup> "Leadership and Tactics," p. 299.

flyers and notices, called women on the telephone, and then offered rides to the polls, and so on, but found the going tough. Since women were scarcely viewed as citizens, few of them were listed in the town records of 1915, and those that were rightly feared male wrath if they stepped out of their accustomed sphere to vote. Altogether, 245 women braved the disapproval of the masculine establishment to register to vote and 188 actually voted. Hurst, who was running unopposed, nevertheless had the satisfaction of being voted for by women.<sup>46</sup> It was certainly a first step, however, outside the traditional woman's sphere, and it was a step taken with the direct participation of an elite woman like Blanche, which suggests that a coalition among women of various classes described by Strom was a fact.

Several times in 1915 Borderland itself was drafted into service as a site for suffrage activities,<sup>47</sup> and NAWSA president Dr. Anna Shaw and suffrage speaker and agitator Margaret Foley both were guests there. Oakes's precious library served as lecture hall when Maud Wood Park of Boston spoke on suffrage as the "logical next step to take in the progress of world civilization" and an important source of protection for poor women and children.<sup>48</sup> Oakes hosted a Massachusetts Men's League for Woman Suffrage meeting there on March 30, 1915, at which the speaker

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<sup>46</sup> "Blanche Ames and Woman Suffrage," p. 10.

<sup>47</sup> Oakes hosted a Massachusetts Men's League for Woman Suffrage meeting there on March 30, 1915. This is from an unattributed news clipping in the Schlesinger Library suffrage collection. By Nov. 1915, Oakes had been elected chairman of the Massachusetts Men's League for Woman Suffrage, according to another unidentified clipping from the Schlesinger Library, which is probably from the Brockton Times.

<sup>48</sup> Brockton Times, Jan. 14, 1915, Schlesinger Library.

was James L. Laidlaw, president of the National Men's League for Woman Suffrage. The Brockton Times of Jan. 14, 1915, devoted considerable space to describing a suffrage event at which Blanche was the "charming hostess," which included "a color scheme that was pink and a table decorated with pink-headed candles." Sandwiches, bouillon, ices and cakes, coffee and sweets were served, and the newspaper noted that Mrs. Ames's family life was a direct answer to the anti contention that "a woman cannot be a suffragist and a homemaker," since her two youngest children, "little Miss Evelyn and Master Amyas," were at the well organized event.

Blanche and Oakes even tried to convert the intransigent Harvard President Charles Elliot to the cause.<sup>49</sup> When Elliott rejected her arguments, Blanche remarked that the great man was a "victim of arrested development."<sup>50</sup> Teresa O'Leary Crowley, chairwoman of the legislative committee of the state suffrage committee, also joined Blanche at Easton rallies, and it may have been under Crowley's influence that Blanche joined those working directly to defeat anti legislators such as Sen. John Weeks, who was replaced by pro-suffrage candidate David Walsh. Crowley was the

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<sup>49</sup> The arguments in favor of woman suffrage put out in a flyer by the Massachusetts Woman Suffrage Association made the following points: That those who must obey the laws should help make them, that laws affect women as much as men and yet they are not consulted when laws are passed, that laws affecting children should be approved by women, also laws affecting the home, that disenfranchisement lowers woman's position and makes her irresponsible, that woman's experience would be helpful to legislators, that thousands of women want the vote and are denied it only because of prejudice, and that women's vote would be "for the common good of all," Schlesinger Library.

<sup>50</sup> "Blanche Ames and Woman Suffrage," p. 7.

brains behind the political campaigns that helped to target for defeat eight anti-suffrage state senators.<sup>51</sup>

Whatever his previous views on suffrage in his youth, Oakes was there beside his wife, attending the suffrage meetings in Boston and Easton, marching in parades, writing letters to the editor. He was the chair of the Men's League for Woman Suffrage of Easton, which, with the Massachusetts Suffrage Association, worked for passage of a suffrage amendment. A shy man, Oakes was willing to speak in favor of suffrage as he did when he joined Blanche on the platform of a suffrage event in Brockton, in which he noted that, as a chairman of the school committee, he could not help but notice that women graduated from high school in larger numbers than did men,<sup>52</sup> demonstrating that "they have a degree of intelligence surely equal to that of man."<sup>53</sup> As Keneally pointed out, Oakes's constant presence at the side of a prominent pro-suffrage leader belied the anti contention that suffrage would denature

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>52</sup> A point Blanche also made in an interview with the North Shore Breeze on August 14, 1914, when she noted that, since more women graduate from high school than men, they could hardly be said to "double the ignorant vote." The vote would improve conditions for women of all classes, she said, adding that her father, husband and mother-in-law all supported these views as well. Blanche left her summer home on the cape to attend a meeting on July 21, 1914, in which the speaker, Margaret Foley, decried the classification of women with imbeciles and insisted that women wanted the vote to be better women, not to be like men. The home and family would be their chief care; working women need the vote for their protection. The votes of men do not make up for the lack of representation by women, Foley declared, since "the vote you have is to represent yourself alone and no one else." Blanche introduced Foley and Anna Ames supplied a band concert at the event, as reported in the July 21, 1914, Brockton Times, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>53</sup> Brockton Times, June 11, 1914, Schlesinger Library.

both men and women, and, indeed, if Blanche was a suffragist, in 1914 she was also a mother of four and Oakes's spouse and collaborator for 14 years.

As the suffrage fight progressed, Blanche continued to be willing to enter the public eye and use her status as newsworthy socialite to call attention to her ideas in print. This she did in an interview with a reporter from the Brockton Times, in which she denounced an effort by the local antis to tie suffrage to "vicious interests," including particularly the liquor interests, an effort she termed "astonishing," in view of the large number of churchmen who had joined the suffrage effort. The suggestion that suffragists could be tied to liquor interests she said, was "tiresome and hardly worth rebutting. The suffragists are not allied with any party and this includes the prohibition party. No one is justified in advocating her pet schemes for reform from the suffrage platform." In reality, she said, the antis were rightly "chagrined" to find the liquor interests firmly lined up on **their** side.<sup>54</sup> "Not only the liquor interests, but the so-called vicious interests<sup>55</sup> work against suffrage, fearing the effect of the vote backed by conscience. In regard to the effect (of woman suffrage) in Massachusetts, the women will vote for what they believe are the best interests of their home and children. If any one sees 'liquor' in that, then she has not read the facts of history and rightly belongs among those antis who consider women mentally, morally and

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<sup>54</sup> Brockton Times, July 1, 1914, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>55</sup> Blanche may be referring here to the supporters of prostitution as a business which progressives like herself were in the habit of denouncing as "white slavers." White slavery is, indeed, one of the evils Blanche portrayed in a cartoon of women unaided as the drown in a sea of poverty and vice.

physically inferior,"<sup>56</sup> she told her interviewer. To the anti-suffragist women, she delivered this back-handed compliment: "It is always a pleasure to suffragists to have women demonstrate their capacity for organizing."<sup>57</sup>

Possibly the most exciting suffrage event in which Blanche and Oakes participated was the great parade in Boston held on May 2, 1914, National Suffrage Day. Breathless newspaper accounts noted the dignitaries who would participate--including Mrs. George Bernard Shaw and Gardiner Hale and Oakes Ames of the Harvard Equal Suffrage League--the delegations from various towns and cities, including, as The Worcester Telegram noted, 100 women marchers from Worcester, and described the various floats that had been constructed for the affair. The lead float was entitled "Massachusetts Asking for Justice" and was adorned by 10 young women representing existing suffrage states and carrying streamers. The Woman's Journal itself contributed a float named, appropriately, "The Pen is Mightier than the Sword," and various marchers represented famous women from history, including Anne Hutchinson, Jeanne d'Arc, Semiramis, Pocahontas, Hapshetsut, and Isabella of Castille. The Boston Advertiser pronounced it "a monster parade" over which suffragists were "keen."<sup>58</sup> Boston Mayor Curley and Massachusetts Gov. Walsh, who said he supported votes for women,<sup>59</sup> reviewed the parade, which had suffrage

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<sup>56</sup> Brockton Times, June 1, 1914, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>57</sup> Brockton Times, June 1, 1914, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>58</sup> Blanche Ames to the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College, and held in the woman's archives.

<sup>59</sup> Boston Globe, May 3, 1914, Schlesinger Library.

contingents from other states as well. Blanche, too, added her person to the swelling ranks for suffrage, which, the Boston Globe reported, included women "of a very high grade, most good looking and all in dead earnest."<sup>60</sup> Some of these women were "women of gray hair or white, with motherly faces in quiet costumes."<sup>61</sup>

Other pro-suffrage activities by Blanche and Oakes also can be tracked via regional newspapers. For example, it was about this time, according to the Boston Advertiser, that Blanche Ames was elected treasurer of the Massachusetts Woman Suffrage Association under President Alice Stone Blackwell. Blanche was a host of a social hour in tandem with Mrs. Robert Gould Shaw for suffragists in Boston and she served on the ways and means committee of the MWSA.<sup>62</sup> Whether these suffragist socialites were also friends in private life, is, unfortunately, not recorded by Blanche.

Also important was the Bay State Suffrage Festival held at the Copley Plaza in Boston, which the Boston Sunday Herald predicted would be "a brilliant and successful affair," headed by socialite suffragists Mrs. Oakes Ames and Medill McCormick of Illinois.<sup>63</sup> The plan was to take over the large ball room of the Copley Plaza and to engage Boston society in a several-day affair that was to include a "mammoth auction bridge party," box lunches, teas, "cabaret dancing," a symphony concert, a bazaar, and a ball attended by 600 people in a ballroom in which "large

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<sup>60</sup> Boston Globe, May 3, 1914, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>61</sup> Boston Advertiser, May 1, 1914, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>62</sup> Boston Advertiser, n.d., Schlesinger Library.

<sup>63</sup> Boston Sunday Herald, Nov. 2, 1913, Schlesinger Library.

pennants of yellow and white, the suffrage colors...hung from the ceiling to the ballroom floor."<sup>64</sup> Admission to the event was free, but people were expected to purchase items at the "bazaar" to support suffrage. Young women attired in "Roman peasant dress" drifted through the bazaar selling "bright-colored Roman umbrellas" and stalls and stands sold jellies and cakes. Blanche presided over her own stall, described by the Sunday Herald as "a beautiful collection of lampshades and cushions." She was assisted by a committee consisting of her mother and sisters, and Mrs. Spencer Borden, her sister's mother-in-law. The event raised \$6,000 for the cause,<sup>65</sup> some of which was donated to the Red Cross for its work in Europe.<sup>66</sup> Participants in the event were described as "brimming over with enthusiasm and delight at the splendid success of their venture."<sup>67</sup>

In April, 1914, a huge rally was held at the Tremont Temple in Boston, attended by 3,200 people, including Blanche,<sup>68</sup> and addressed by Dr. Anna Shaw, who spoke about the injustice of giving the vote to immigrants and denying it to

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<sup>64</sup> Boston Record, Nov. 24, 1914.

<sup>65</sup> Woman's Journal, May 16, 1914, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>66</sup> Boston Record, Nov. 24, 1914. It is unclear if this means that the Boston suffragists were supporters of the war in Europe or just willing to ameliorate its worst effects.

<sup>67</sup> Boston Record, Nov. 24, 1914. Schlesinger Library.

<sup>68</sup> Boston American, n. d., reported that "among the prominent women who are active in preparing for the meeting (was) Mrs. Oakes Ames." The paper reported that Blanche "espoused the cause from a conviction that it would be in the best interest of her four children." Schlesinger Library.

women.<sup>69</sup> Oakes himself spoke in favor of suffrage to a crowd of 700 at the Oakes Ames Memorial Hall in North Easton as the Brockton Enterprise reported on June 12, 1914: "Spectators were afforded the opportunity to see Oakes Ames, one of the best known of this influential family, on a public platform urging equal suffrage. He was introduced by his wife, president of the Easton Branch of the Massachusetts Woman Suffrage Association."

A certain element of glee began to enter the continued reporting by newspapers of the "merry suffrage war"<sup>70</sup> in North Easton, when in the same article the paper noted that the pro-suffrage group had met "just to show 'em," meaning the antis, who had met in the hall the previous week. "The leaders of the equal suffrage movement deny that they inaugurated the warfare" in competing meetings, the paper noted.<sup>71</sup> It also reported that Anna C. Ames sent the school band she supported financially to play at the pro-suffrage event. The club notes of the Boston Mass Record recorded that Blanche was elected president of a new suffrage association in

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<sup>69</sup> Boston Transcript, April 2, 1914, Schlesinger Library. Among the many clippings concerning events of regional interest to Blanche and Oakes as suffragists were also clippings concerning the activities of suffragists abroad, for example, one headed "Another Militant Bomb" from the June 14, 1914, Boston Herald, concerning the bombing of a window at St. George's, following a "bomb outrage" at Westminster Abbey. Oakes took the Transcript to task in a letter to the editor of May 15, 1914, for giving heavy play to such outrages while ignoring "the praiseworthy actions of the women of Colorado in connection with the rioting at the mines." He concluded: "Why are so-called militant suffragettes, of a foreign nation, whose methods may be unfortunate according to our views kept so clearly and persistently in the eye of the public by your paper?"

<sup>70</sup> Journal, May 19, 1914, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>71</sup> Brockton Enterprise, June 12, 1914, Schlesinger Library.

North Easton which met to hear Winona Pinkham speak.<sup>72</sup> She was also vice chairman of a reception committee to entertain the wealthy Mrs. O.H. P. Belmont of Newport and her daughter, Consuelo, duchess of Marlborough, also a suffragist.<sup>73</sup> No details of this encounter with the elite of America and Great Britain survives, unfortunately, but it does demonstrate that Blanche and her mother-in-law were part of a movement of elite women in favor of suffrage, regardless of the position taken by Oakes's family.<sup>74</sup> "Miss Mary Ames, the most ardent of our antis, who is working with but little success on the conversion of her handsome relative, Mrs. Oakes Ames, who is just as strong a suffragist. But this is not the only family where splits over the cause are making much interest,"<sup>75</sup> The Boston American noted under a picture it ran of Miss Ames.

Despite all this energy and enthusiasm, the attempt to win woman suffrage on a state-by-state basis, as approved by NAWSA, didn't work and the amendment failed in Easton as elsewhere.<sup>76</sup> There were disagreements among Massachusetts

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<sup>72</sup> Boston Mass. Record, May 20, 1914, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>73</sup> Boston American, n.d., 1914, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>74</sup> As a member of the upper class, Blanche could restore herself from the rigors of the suffrage fight by retiring to her summer home at Cape Ann. She was reported to be "resting in her pretty island home, spending the time in painting and playing tennis and with her interesting little family recuperating strength for the 1915 campaign..." North Shore Breeze, Aug 8, 1914, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>75</sup> Boston American, April 10, 1914, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>76</sup> This is from an undated article in the Schlesinger Library collection of news clippings accumulated by Blanche and Oakes which reported that women's suffrage lost in the Massachusetts house 204 to 174 for the second time within a year, that is, by Jan. 1915.

suffragists about which tactics should be adopted to overcome remaining resistance. The moderate Woman's Journal championed the Shafroth Amendment, which would have allowed a petition of eight percent of the voters in a state to put the suffrage question to a popular vote which, if successful, would then establish woman suffrage in that state only. Blanche, who disagreed with the tactic, wrote to the journal: "Can we blow hot and blow cold? Play fast and loose? Can we with honor win the Shafroth Amendment with the support of the advocates of States Rights and then outrage that doctrine by passing the Anthony Amendment, when three quarters of the States will have adopted woman suffrage?" To back the Shafroth Amendment would be to agree that "suffrage is a matter for the states to decide," Blanche argued, adding that "men opposed to woman's suffrage and opposed to a national amendment enfranchising women are not going to help us and are not going to make it easy for us to get enough free states to turn about and force suffrage down their throats." Indeed, she insisted, "their real reason for supporting this amendment leaving woman suffrage to the states, (is that) it would be impossible later to pass the Anthony Amendment. They could very well argue that such an amendment would be a breach of faith, a repudiation of the terms of the Shafroth Amendment." The Woman's Journal chided Blanche for her "needless fears" that the journal was abandoning support for the federal approach. Blanche retorted that to support state's rights might seem expedient in the short run, but, in the long run, it would serve to undermine federal efforts to win the vote for all American women via the Anthony Amendment.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Woman's Journal, May 9, 1914.

When the Massachusetts house at last did vote for suffrage, The Boston Post reported that a "shower of yellow flowers descended gently upon the heads of the members of the House of Representatives," while outside the "Star-Spangled Banner" was played and jonquils were distributed. Blanche was in the house gallery with Alice Blackwell and Maud Wood Park. They had been warned not to make any noise, and had chosen this silent tribute instead. Nevertheless the house speaker, Channing Cox pounded his gavel.<sup>78</sup>

Attention then turned to seeking a federal amendment in support of woman suffrage, as Cady Stanton and Anthony had urged so long ago. By 1918, such an amendment nearly passed and it was to ensure that it would pass the next time that intransigent anti-suffrage legislators were targeted for defeat by suffragists. John Weeks, Republican senator from Massachusetts, refused even to consider changing his anti-suffrage views, remarking "I would not vote for the suffrage amendment if the whole state of Massachusetts urged me to do so."<sup>79</sup> So saying, his fate was sealed. Blanche as chair of the congressional committee of the state suffrage association specifically targeted Weeks for defeat by mailing to registered Republicans and all progressives information about Weeks' voting record and his anti-suffrage stance. Handbills with the same information were distributed to 35,000 women. In addition, special interest groups were encouraged to work against Weeks. Catholic suffragists urged the election of Catholic David Walsh in Week's stead; Jewish women

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<sup>78</sup> Boston Post, Feb. 7, 1915, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>79</sup> "Blanche Ames and Woman Suffrage," p. 15.

castigated Weeks for voting against the confirmation of Louis Brandeis to the Supreme Court. Unionized workers were given information on his anti-labor stands, newspaper advertisements against Weeks were placed in influential newspapers.<sup>80</sup> It must have been difficult for Blanche and Oakes to work against their own Republican party to support the Democrat Walsh, but in doing so they succeeded in helping to elect the first Catholic and fourth Democrat to enter the senate from Massachusetts. At this success, the irrepressible Blanche is said to have danced around the library table, apparently unaccompanied by Oakes.<sup>81</sup>

By this time, the suffrage fight was nearly over. President Woodrow Wilson called a special session of Congress in May, 1919, to consider the suffrage amendment, and the Massachusetts Congressional Suffrage Committee under Blanche's leadership sent 5,000 letters and telegrams to the state's delegation urging their support. In August, 1920, they had won and Blanche immediately helped to organize the Easton League of Women Voters to guide women voters through the political maze that now awaited them.<sup>82</sup>

The last stages of the suffrage fight, 1914-1919, had been very active for Blanche, and she emerged as a leader, someone who organized and participated in suffrage events at the local and state levels, not just hosting teas for upper-class women, but also writing and distributing flyers, telephoning possible allies,

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 27

addressing the public through the press and from platforms such as the North Easton granges. She was acquainted with important suffrage leaders such as Anna Howard Shaw, Mary Foley and Maud Park, and she used her home and her notoriety as a socialite unstintingly, whatever such publicity may have cost her privately. She marched in the great marches in Boston and Springfield, she drove women to the polls to vote in municipal elections, she helped to target and defeat anti-suffrage politicians such as Sen. John Weeks, she used her status to try to persuade important antis such as Harvard's Pres. Elliot to change their minds and support women's rights. She served on numerous committees, she was art director for the Woman's Journal, she did, indeed, work "tooth and nail" for the cause. In this she was supported at every stage by Oakes, who overcame his shyness to speak for a cause in which he also believed. Both of them, despite their love for their family retreat at Borderland, were willing to make their home part of the public platform for discourse, both were willing to thrust themselves forward into the hard light of public scrutiny. With her husband as a firm ally, Blanche used her base of family support, self confidence, wealth and social standing to push at the borders that defined women's place, an effort that was to last her the rest of her long and productive life.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE MIGHTY PEN

Blanche joined the Woman's Journal in 1915 as art editor, at which time her cartoon, "Cradle of Liberty," appeared in a Boston American suffrage supplement and was used as well as a state suffrage poster.<sup>1</sup> She remained on the masthead through 1917, publishing cartoons both for the Woman's Journal and for the Boston Transcript. Her access to a mainstream newspaper like the Transcript, which sympathized with suffrage, meant that her audience was likely to be pro-suffrage and would include men, and not just the white, middle-class women who composed the chief audience of the Woman's Journal. She was very active that year as a cartoonist, and Oakes's diaries at Borderland note that she produced three finished political cartoons between Sept. 10-30. She left no notes describing her work habits when creating a cartoon, but sketches and even photographs of models remain in her studio at Borderland to testify to the professional approach she took to cartooning. In this, as in so many things, Blanche was no dilettante.

That Blanche was one of less than a dozen women artists<sup>2</sup> who had received their art training at colleges and art schools that had once been closed to them and

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<sup>1</sup> Alice Sheppard Klak, Cartooning for Suffrage, p. 116.

<sup>2</sup> Klak lists these women, besides Blanche, as Nina Allender, Cornelia Barnes, Edwina Dumm, Rose O'Neill, Fredrikke Palmer, May Preston, Ida Proper, Lou Rogers, Mary Sigsbee, and Alice Winter, women she described as "women of rich talent, keen ambition, and intense loyalty to the cause," an honorable roster indeed. Cartooning for Suffrage, p. 96.

who were bold enough to use that training to promote their political agenda did set her apart from the ranks of most other devoted suffragists. One has only to scan the editorial pages of present-day newspapers--few of which ever run political cartoons by women or even about causes of particular concern to them--to appreciate what a bold move it was for newly trained women artists, the majority of whom were middle-class progressives (Lou Rogers was a socialist, however)<sup>3</sup> to seize the cartoonists' pen, wielded hitherto and since almost exclusively by men, and to use their new power through art to blazon forth the rightness of their cause. Belonging to this small coterie of artistically talented woman reformers, not just her persistent zeal for reform, is what makes Blanche so remarkable.

This is not to say that Blanche was the most prolific or even the most gifted of the women suffrage artists<sup>4</sup> since that honor probably goes to the protean Lou Rogers, who was a professional down to her toes,<sup>5</sup> but Blanche's work made an undeniable impact on her society--enraging ex-president Taft sufficiently to cause him to write

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<sup>3</sup> Cartooning for Suffrage, p. 96.

<sup>4</sup> Klak said of Blanche that she was a member of a New England tradition of "strong, intellectual women, and the Ames family was no exception." Blanche was "outgoing, independent and popular" (p.108) and she was not alone either in coming from a family whose males had served courageously in the military. Nevertheless, as Klak remarked, the females of their family lines nevertheless had "individual personalities (that) remained distinctive and unconventional," Cartooning for Suffrage, pp. 100-103.

<sup>5</sup> Lou Rogers was one of the first of the phalanx of women suffrage cartoonists to publish her work in Judge. She continued continued working as an illustrator after suffrage was won and published some pro-birth control cartoons as well. She was an avowed socialist and member of Heterodoxy, but, according to Klak (p. 121), she married late in life and died of multiple sclerosis, to be buried as Annie R. Smith. This seems a sad, obscure ending for so irrepressible an artist.

an editorial denouncing one of her cartoons in the Ladies' Home Journal. Taft wrote of her cartoon in the Saturday Evening Post of Sept., 1915: "I have before me the Woman's Journal and Suffrage News of June 5, 1915, with a cartoon entitled 'Meanwhile They Drown.' The implications from such a cartoon are so unjust to opponents of suffrage that they ought not to aid the cause."

Her style of drawing was essentially the pen-and-ink sketch, worked out first with a pencil and then inked in with strong cross-hatching to provide contrast, so that the drawings are striking compositions in black-and-white tones, with no grays in between. This may be because the printing capabilities of The Woman's Journal were limited and thus limited the artist's choice of a medium. Half-tones do require a fairly sophisticated printing technique, not unlike the differences between the art works that can be created by etching, which results in a linear style like Blanche's approach to her cartoons, and lithography, which permits more use of half-tone grays. Blanche was primarily a painter, skilled in both oil and water color, but none of her cartoons employ washes, so it would seem that Blanche must have elected to use a powerful, linear style by intention. By contrast, Nina Allender's cartoons in The Suffragist appear to have been done with charcoal pencils, because of their soft, fuzzy lines which lend her cartoons a light, airy almost winsome quality. The same medium, but with much more heavy lines and shadowing, was employed by Cornelia Barns and Lou Rogers in their cartoons which appeared between 1917 and 1919 in The Birth Control Review. The pen-and-ink style that Blanche employed also was used by the sophisticated and prolific cartoon artist, C. D. Batchelor, as late as 1937, in a cartoon

published by the New York Daily News depicting War as a prostitute with a death's head. This suggests that the style was accepted as suitable for political cartoons even where more sophisticated printing techniques were available. Blanche also made good use of geometric structuring in her designs, as, for example, the rectangle of the dock on which Taft sits, in her cartoon "Our Answer to Mr. Taft," which anchors her figures and gives them a stage for action. The mother with children in the "Double the Power of the Home" cartoon turns the mother herself into a strong, solid, durable triangle, so that the design itself underscores the overall reliability and strength of women-as-mothers.

That these women artists have fallen largely into obscurity today, in any case, is not because their work was not effective or artistically able, but because, in the words of Alice Sheppard Klak, "the cause they represented, the winning of the vote for women, has not been central to political history" and their political art has been dismissed as well as mere "agitation by symbol" and "not worthy of serious study,"<sup>6</sup> even though the images women cartoonists deployed "shed light on the discourse about women that took place...They show the depth and extent of American ambivalence, fears and hopes about the roles that women might play."<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it is the great achievement of the cartooning women of the suffrage era that they were able to contribute to the "discourse" of their society woman-crafted images of woman, some of which differ importantly from the images of women pro-suffrage male

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<sup>6</sup> Cartooning for Suffrage, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

cartoonists, such as those of the sympathetic Rollin Kirby of the New York World. One thinks immediately of Kirby's charming, slender little suffragist lady in feathered hat and fur collar, an ephemeral vision perched like a bird with her hands outspread atop the ballot box, no threat at all to the unchanging world of male dominance.

The themes suffragist cartoonists employed in their art, as listed by Klak, reflect the arguments suffragists also made in other media. The arguments are that woman suffrage is simple justice or else a constitutional right; that suffrage will redress such wrongs as child labor or exploitation of women workers; that women voters would be above politics and would end political corruption; that woman suffrage represented progress; that women voters would be moral crusaders; that women voters would be pure and virtuous because they are mothers; and, pragmatically, that women's participation in World War I justified full citizenship. In general, Klak believes, the justice argument declined over time from the 19th to the 20th century, although women did not back down from the idea that suffrage was the inalienable right of all citizens, or at least all citizens who were literate. In the later stages of the suffrage fight, suffragists tended to urge upon the American public the idea of women's right to vote in order to support reform, not radical social change, which might rock the boat of patriarchy.<sup>8</sup>

To conceive an alternative to the standard misogynist images of women as ugly and denatured if they demanded equal rights or interfered in men's world of politics was no mean feat. On the other hand, as Klak noted, the images the woman

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

artists mustered stayed within recognizably traditional boundaries such that they did not succeed in "freeing women from a narrow conceptualization of their social roles in American life."<sup>9</sup> What the political cartoons drawn by suffrage women did do, was to present a "visual rhetoric that could be highly effective in getting a viewpoint across to a wide public,"<sup>10</sup> and therein lay their strategic value to the suffrage cause.

The chief forum for woman's suffrage cartoons was the Woman's Journal, founded in 1870 by Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell to counter the radical and short-lived Revolution of Cady Stanton and Anthony. By 1890, the journal had become the official organ of NAWSA and was purchased by that organization after 1917 and incorporated with the Woman Voter to become the Woman Citizen. The publication was self congratulatory in tone, inclined to herald small professional advances by women as great achievements.<sup>11</sup> The magazine was unquestionably directed at the middle class and did not intend to be radical, but it did make some effort to defend those less privileged, as when an angry editorial of June, 1881 decried the refusal of a high school to allow a black woman to graduate with her classmates; denounced lynching on Jan. 8, 1916, and in the same issue demanded improvements in prison conditions; and worried over the problem of how freedom of contract could be made to work for the voteless woman worker. Other persistent themes included opposition to child labor, commercialized vice, and white slavery, and to the perniciousness of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> This is the opinion of Patricia Smith Butcher in Education for Equality: Women's Rights Periodicals and Women's Education, 1849-1920.

the liquor interests. These issues were taken up not only in editorials, but also in editorial cartoons by staff artists Blanche Ames and Fredrikke Palmer and by other syndicated men and women artists.

Examining the images of women that appear in these political cartoons as well as the cartoons that appeared in other periodicals of the period, one is struck by the paucity of types and by their essentially conservative nature. The pro-suffrage side invariably depicted suffragists not as they were, that is, women of all classes, races and ages, but as young, attractive, white, middle-class and slender; while the anti-suffrage side countered with their well established images of suffragists as desexed women, either masculinized, cigar-smoking, bloomer-wearing haridans, or else as neurasthenic old maids.<sup>12</sup> Women of color simply did not appear in the white press.

The most common image of woman drawn to defend suffrage as for other subjects as well, was woman as the symbol for such abstractions as Justice, Columbia, Liberty, Truth, or Art. These female figures are more heroic in build and older than the inoffensive young suffragists drawn by Rollin Kirby or Nina Allender, but they were not intended to represent real women and, as abstractions, were understood to represent no threat to the male voter. Very few positive images of older women appear on either side of the suffrage debate, although the three-generation "Waiting for Returns" cartoon by Fredrikke Palmer does show a pleasant-

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<sup>12</sup> The old maid image has long been a pictorial synonym for priggishness and is a common one for anti-prohibition cartoonists. Lou Rogers was unusual in using strong-faced, older women as a positive image, as in her cartoon of Mrs. Uncle Sam thrusting her chin at her goat-bearded mate as she demands the vote as her due.

looking older woman joining the equally comely younger generations waiting in passive patience for the vote to be conferred upon them. Blanche's rather blocky mother in "Double the Power of the Home" also goes against the youthful image of the suffragist, for, although the mother's face is sweet, even saccharine, she is a solid entity with something of the inner strength usually depicted only in female goddess-abstractions.

One might with justice consider the absence of a variety of positive images of women to be the direct result of the historical absence of women's issues from political consideration and also the reality that very few women were cartoonists themselves and therefore unable to craft their own positive self images to counteract the misogynist images marshalled against them by the antis. Nevertheless, women artists successfully used their limited palette of images to make arguments that educated moral women should not be classified with idiots and criminals as disenfranchised; that educated women could counteract the vote of ignorant men, especially blacks and immigrants; that woman's innate moral goodness and domestic expertise could and should be employed to clean up everything from politics to tainted milk and dirty city streets; that women's vote would not denature them or emasculate men but, on the contrary, would serve to strengthen the home and pose no threat to the family.

The desexed, masculine harridan who led the fray for the antis has had a long history in American political art, as Linda Kerber noted in her Women of the Republic. One has only to glance at the derisory drawing of the Edenton, N.C.

women meeting to boycott tea to see the longevity of the image of women made ugly by overstepping their place and entering men's political world. Images of women as shrews, witches, evil and unnatural step mothers have also long haunted the European and thus the white American mind, of course. The traditional counter to the denatured woman was the positive image of a woman who was not a woman at all, the previously mentioned woman-as-symbol, which was adopted readily by the pro-suffrage side.<sup>13</sup> The anti-suffragists not only drew ugly, old, hysterical or masculine women to represent their views, but they also placed them in settings not considered appropriate to women, such as bars and street corners, to underline how far these women had overstepped the bounds of their proper sphere. That many of these women were depicted smoking simply underscores their predation on men's prerogatives.<sup>14</sup>

The exact sources for these images of women, limited as they are, are open to speculation. However, possible sources include the misogynist post cards that amused Edwardians; the savage British anti-suffrage cartoons in Punch and its

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<sup>13</sup> Positive images of women as symbols are common to political art outside the United States and Great Britain as well, as can be seen in the image of Marianne, the symbol in Phrygian cap of French liberty. Marianne is unusual in that she charges barricades instead of merely looking stately as do most woman symbols, including our own Statue of Liberty.

<sup>14</sup> Women's smoking may not always have been regarded as an infringement on male rights. A Puritan woman, Mary Rowlandson, remarked in her account of her captivity among the Indians upon her desire to smoke, without any suggestion that this was in anyway improper. The account appears in Puritans Among the Indians: Accounts of Captivity and Redemption, 1676-1724, edited by Alden T. Vaughan and Edward W. Clark. The first tentative advertisement showing an American woman smoking appeared first in 1919, according to Robert Lynde in his article, "The People as Consumers," Recent Social Trends, 1933.

American counterpart, Life; burlesque posters, which placed beautiful young women in culturally inappropriate positions of domination over upper-class male habitués of the "lobster palaces;" advertising; and even fin-de-siècle fine arts.

As a suffrage artist who collected the works of other suffrage artists via a news clipping service, Blanche was certainly aware of what the discourse on suffrage was in political art in the United States and also what sort of images could be deployed most effectively, as her social feminist subjects make clear. There is also no question that information about the progress of suffrage on both sides of the Atlantic was eagerly followed by both sides of the struggle (Oakes and Blanche kept newspaper clippings concerning the suffrage fight in Britain), so that American political artists might well have been influenced by British-generated images of women. Lisa Tickner, in her splendid work on images of women in British suffrage art, Spectacle of Women, noted that the British, in part because of their acute class anxieties, were even more resistant than were Americans to women stepping outside of their traditional sphere and possibly their assigned class through education and the professions. They argued that the vote would not only disrupt the family, but also the empire, by allowing unnatural women to intrude on what was properly men's sphere. The anti images generated in Britain were virulent: Suffragists were depicted not just as desexed in the humorous way employed by Life in the United States, but as horrible hysterics with lumpy umbrellas, cigar-smoking man haters, robbers intent on taking away the status of all ranks of men, utterly undeserving of the vote or, indeed, any other consideration, because of their hideousness. Tickner believes these images

were derived from Edwardian joke post cards. Such poisonous hatred of women seeking equal rights is not a characteristic of American anti-art, possibly because the idea that equal rights are natural is deeply ingrained in the American national spirit to an extent not possible in class-anxious Britain.<sup>15</sup>

Positive images of British suffragists were usually an appeal to British fair-mindedness, demonstrating that women are not protected by anyone as working girls are exploited ruthlessly or made victims of white slavery. The brutal force-feeding of hunger strikers also made a striking image. A successful British icon that did not translate into American pro-suffrage art was the pure and militant Maid of Orleans, who appears as a positive female image in several British suffrage cartoons.<sup>16</sup>

The perception of misogyny in political art in Great Britain is backed up by Bram Dijkstra, who sees it as well in fin-de-siecle British fine arts, with which many Americans also would have been familiar. In his study, Idols of Perversity, Dijkstra noted that the image of women in art of the suffrage era was very negative, possible as a result of male reaction to the demand by women for more equal status at the very time that male scientists were proving to their own satisfaction that women were a lower order of evolutionary development than men. The threat that women, with their debased animal nature, would drag rational man down translated itself into

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<sup>15</sup> Patricia Marks in her Bicycles, Bangs and Bloomers, noted that the British were especially leary of the educated woman, who was suspected of trying to rise above her class through education. One such woman was drawn with a scorpion's tale beneath her academic robes. Anti-suffragists insisted that women's proper role was to be the eternal feminine, fickle, vain, dressed in cumbersome clothes, protected by men for her charm alone.

<sup>16</sup> Lisa Ticker, The Spectacle of Women.

numerous paintings of women as unhealthy monsters, like Circe (who turned men into pigs) or Medea (who killed her children); murderesses like Salome or Judith; harpies, sphinxes or the febrile Ophelia; and also nubile female children--all images that are weak or evil and represent genuine threats to man as pinnacle of evolution.<sup>17</sup>

An intriguing possible source for anti-women images in America are the burlesque posters described by Robert Allen in Horrible Prettiness. Burlesque began in America with the arrival of Lydia Thompson's "British Blondes" after the Civil War. The Blondes were women who cross-dressed, joked boisterously, played trumpet and banjo, and aped the male persona, contributing to an alarming vision of the possible inversion of what was traditionally right and proper about women's sphere. Delicate-minded viewers of burlesque, like middle-class William Dean Howells, were most horrified by the gender blurring that was the Blondes' contribution to burlesque, and an echo of this horror can be traced to the cigar-smoking, bloomer-sporting, bowler-hatted suffragists hanging out in male territory in bars and on street corners. Inversion of the so-called cult of true womanhood by the Blondes more than hinted that such women were using sexuality and the aping of men's manner to break up the middle-class social and moral codes with the intention of usurping man's rightful place on top.<sup>18</sup>

That pro-suffrage artists used beautiful images of suffragists in reply to the barrage of ugly images mustered by the antis is hardly surprising, although the image

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<sup>17</sup> Bram Dijkstra, Idols of Perversity.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Allen, Horrible Prettiness.

they selected for their cartoons is reminiscent of what Lois Banner, in her book American Beauty, describes as the "steel engraving lady," that is the tiny-footed, tiny-featured, tiny-waisted prototype of the Godey's Lady's Book. This lady is a creature of unconquerable innocence and fragility, derived apparently from Lord Byron's romantic descriptions of pale-faced loveliness, and also on his well-known predilection for dieting himself.<sup>19</sup>

The "New Woman" of the new century was not so frail and fainting as Godey's Lady, nor so buxom and sexual as the Blondes, and she was defined as a "natural woman" exemplified by Lily Langtry and Alexandra, Princess of Wales. The "natural woman" was, like Charles Gibson's famous "girl," a classic beauty, tall, athletic, and with larger, longer features than the tiny retrousse nose and bow mouth of Godey's Lady. She could have been the prototype, in fact, of Blanche's ladder-climbing suffragist.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, as Martha Banta pointed out in her Imaging

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<sup>19</sup> It is interesting that young college women at Smith in 1890 recorded no interest in dieting, but, instead, in their letters and diaries, they recorded stuffing themselves with heavy goods like tongue and fudge, according to Margaret Lowe in her study, "Food and Fashion: Female Beauty on Campus in the Late 19th Century." Lowe speculated that the relatively liberated college atmosphere at Smith and the absence of the usual strains of middle-class courtship may have allowed Smith women to create for themselves a freer definition of self and appearance than would have been the case for non-college women of the same age and class. In any case, the appearance of the attractive "New Woman" was not so strictly defined as the image of beauty required of women now, when only extremely tall and thin women are defined as beautiful.

<sup>20</sup> Gibson's portrayals of older women were not so complimentary. They are usually drawn as ugly, thin or stout, a sad denouement for the lovely Gibson Girl when she finally fulfills her destiny, marries and becomes a matron herself. The Gibson Girl was, in any case, a somewhat ambiguous vision of the New Woman, because, although she was athletic and wore practical shirtwaists, she was never depicted working or going to college, but only as a jolly companion for men, no real

American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History, the image of the New Woman had to be carefully designed so that she would not appear unfeminine, or worse, anti-family. Many photographs of women's rights leaders were of highly respectable women wearing large hats and holding flowers, poses of unthreatening femininity<sup>21</sup> and pro-suffrage cartoonists repeated this image. One can detect the small-featured, aristocratic lady charmer in the Rollin Kirby cartoon of the young, slim, delicate, aristocratic and unthreatening woman perched atop a ballot box.

Advertising should not be neglected as a source of possible imagery for political cartoons. Examining The Saturday Evening Post, The Ladies' Home Journal, Life, the Woman's Home Companion, and Harper's Monthly between 1908-1920, it is no surprise to find that the almost exclusive positive image of women used to promote consumption as well as suffrage was young and slim and upper-class. The appearance of the placid, elderly Quaker, Lydia Pynkham, on her tonic in 1879 seems to have been one of the few times that an older woman's image was used to sell anything, even suffrage.<sup>22</sup>

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threat to their supremacy. Gibson's own views on woman suffrage were summed up in several anti-suffrage cartoons.

<sup>21</sup> A portrait of Blanche Ames in the Torch Bearer, a special publication of the Woman's Journal, shows an aristocrat in ball gown and upswept hair, a different image entirely and not one that Blanche herself usually employed. Most public portraits of the pro-suffrage Mrs. Ames showed her with downcast eyes holding her blond daughter, Evelyn.

<sup>22</sup> These positive images of women were not created just by men, as Stephen Fox noted in his The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and Its Creators. Helen Resor at the J. Walter Thompson agency made a career out of persuading women that love and class could be won through the use of various soaps and cold creams, and she used aristocrats, for example, the Queen of Romania or the

Philosophically, of course, advertisements were not intended to lead feminine resistance against a limited domestic sphere, since they were directed at enhancing the role of women as domestic consumers. But they did help to define what constituted a positive female image. As early as a 1908 advertisement in Life, unnaturally tall and thin beauties were already the fashion, even if they were New Women enough to wear the popular shirtwaists and to trip off to play tennis after taking Pabst Extract for Listlessness. Most of the beauties depicted in advertisements were very well dressed, even if they were depicted doing housework, and they oscillated ceaselessly around gendered domestic tasks, such as cooking, cleaning and ministering to the health of the family, or else beauty regimens. Not only advertising images, but also magazine covers offered an ideal that was treacly, small-featured, young, and WASP and it is hardly suprising that pro-suffrage artists were attracted to and also employed such images of women which, unfortunately, tended to reinforce gender stereotyping instead of suggesting new avenues of advancement for women.<sup>23</sup>

It is impossible to say whence Blanche drew the images for her cartoons, but as she was an active woman, she doubtless came in contact with many of the advertising and political images common to her day, and then shaped them to her own

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Duchesse de Richelieu, as testators to the efficacy of Pond's cold cream.

<sup>23</sup> Erving Goffman, an anthropologist from the University of Pennsylvania, noted in his book, Gender Advertisements, that advertisements, which are obviously intended to enhance consumerism, depend upon the tactic of gender stereotyping for their effect, and that the stereotyping applies to such areas as authority, social power and rank. In advertising, women are frequently shown in puckish or childish poses, or sitting below men, or being instructed by men. Their submissive, subordinate status is underlined and their proper role in society is clearly defined as domestic consumerism.

discourse with her society. Certainly, she made use of the image of the domestic woman in "Double the Power of the Home."

In any case, the traditional female poses adopted by many suffragists in their photographs and the young and winsome women depicted in many suffrage cartoons rightly may be suspected of conveying the reassuring message to men that enfranchised women would remain subordinate, submissively in their proper spheres and presenting no threat to man's predominance. They would remain pure, devoted to the home, secluded in their proper place, and they would never, ever join Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the later feminist theorist, Simone de Beauvoir, in inventing a new kind of love between men and women that would be love between equals. Even if the vote is won, these cartoons hint, social justice will be achieved, but the patriarchal family somehow will remain undisturbed.

Elizabeth Israels Perry raises just this point in her introduction to Alice Sheppard Klak's Cartooning for Suffrage, when she noted that using images of young, well-dressed middle-class women to suggest that women voters would be "idealistic and non partisan housekeepers of municipal concerns" also tended to limit how women and men ultimately envisioned the role of voting women. If women were represented as victims of unscrupulous men in cartoons, this underlined the idea of women's weakness, and the exalted woman-as-virtuous-voter image only raised "impossible expectations."<sup>24</sup> In fact, few political cartoons drawn by women went so far as to suggest that women would challenge the status quo and the images of

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<sup>24</sup> Cartooning for Suffrage, p. 7.

"decorative, nurturing and moral" women suffragists just served to underscore this refusal to challenge the male political hierarchy.<sup>25</sup> Heroic images of women, except as allegories, were generally avoided, Perry observed, because they raised the specter of "sex warfare."<sup>26</sup> The result was that suffrage cartoons did not, in fact, very far advance the "dialogue about woman's public place," and they did nothing as well to counter class and race prejudices.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, the irrepressible Lou Rogers, a former cartoonist for the humor magazine Judge, a socialist, and a member of Heterodoxy, a Greenwich Village professional woman's club, got into trouble with NAWSA president Dr. Anna Howard Shaw for drawing a cartoon mocking a man for clutching the ballot box like a greedy child. The cartoon was rejected for publication in the Woman's Journal (although published later in the New York Call) because Rogers had the audacity to "defy tradition in the target of her satire--male pretentiousness and power."<sup>28</sup> For women to undertake to caricature male politicians "challenged gender definitions," Klak noted, because it meant that women like Ames and Rogers had seized the power to ridicule society.<sup>29</sup> This was a power that society was unwilling to accord. The problem, which cannot be overstated, is that the language of political cartooning had

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

so long been controlled by men that the imagery that was recognizable to viewers trained to "read" political cartoons reflected a male perception. Women cartoonists had to find a way to employ these readable cartoon images to serve a female point of view. They had to "reinterpret" allegorical figures<sup>30</sup> to serve their sensibilities, such as making allegorical figures to represent suffrage and so on, always with the caveat that no female figure should be devised that would alienate male voters.<sup>31</sup> This was particularly difficult, since women still had few public roles to draw upon for positive images. The cartoonist's view of social reality was still overwhelmingly male.<sup>32</sup>

In general, male cartoonists "consistently dichotomized individual women as virtuous/corrupt, good/evil, and powerful/weak," Klak noted, while women, who better understood the "underlying conflict or tensions" and complexities of their suffrage cause, tended to avoid such dichotomies. Women artists concentrated on depicting women as "inherently capable and as contributing unique virtues to society, and as limited by their environment..."<sup>33</sup> Looking at Blanche's cartoons, it is

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<sup>30</sup> That female figures have been used since classical times to represent various abstractions or virtues, according to Marina Warner, author of Monuments and Maidens, appears to be a reflection of the fact that Indo-European languages have assigned the feminine gender to such nouns. For example, *esperance*, which means hope in French, is a feminine noun. It was natural, therefore, for artists to render in female form the personifications of abstract concepts. As Warner put it, "the predominance of feminine gender in words for virtue seems to have given virtue a monopoly on the the feminine category..." Monuments and Maidens, p. 153.

<sup>31</sup> Cartooning for Suffrage, p. 34.

<sup>32</sup> Blanche Ames turned the male cartoonist vision of women as silly and preoccupied with fashion against itself when she drew an empty-headed fashion plate as an anti and a loving and intelligent mother as a suffragist.

<sup>33</sup> Cartooning for Suffrage, p. 203.

immediately apparent that she does not portray her cartoon women dichotomously as wholly good or evil, black or white, natural or unnatural. In no case does she portray a female anti-suffragist with the kind of savagery male cartoonists reserved for suffragists, but depicts most of them as possibly foolish, or merely uninformed.

Alice Klak's roster of women cartoonists, which included Blanche very prominently, shared much in common, besides their predilection for using art to support their cause.<sup>34</sup> Most of the women had more education than their mothers and had attended college or art school, many were more mobile geographically, and several married late or not at all. Some of the women artists joined collectives that served their self development, such as Heterodoxy in New York, and others substituted socialism for the usual female Christian adherence to duty.<sup>35</sup> Most of the women, including Blanche, were in their 30s and 40s when they became involved in the push for suffrage, and they also shared a family life in which mothers as well as fathers were intellectual and interested in self development. By temperament, they were "resilient," and "retained an optimistic faith in personal and social evolution."<sup>36</sup>

In my own surveys of women's images in suffrage political cartoons, it appears that the use of female images to represent symbols or abstractions such as Liberty or Truth was the most common; the second most common was a fairly realistic depiction of women in unexaggerated, contemporary dress; the third most

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<sup>34</sup> She lists Rogers, O'Neill, and Dumm as professional cartoonists, Blanche as a professional botanical illustrator, as indeed she was, p. 115.

<sup>35</sup> Cartooning for Suffrage, p. 104.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 104-106.

common image, employed by the antis, was that of women in masculine or otherwise foolish dress (such as bloomers). Least common were caricatures of real women, a few of whom--Victoria Woodhull, Fanny Kemble and Susan B. Anthony--are examples, actually appeared in the earlier stages of the suffrage fight. Since those days, Margaret Thatcher, Eleanor Roosevelt, Indira Gandhi, Golda Meir and Hillary Clinton are among the few who were caricatured by political cartoonists as active figures. First Lady Barbara Bush was sometimes drawn as a sort of background prop to her husband's doings.<sup>37</sup> Women as symbols seem to appear most often prior to and contemporaneously with World War I and, of course, they exist today as well (an example is a 1989 drawing by the prolific Herbert "Herblock" Block of a woman in classical robes symbolizing Justice being strangled).

The forum for pro and anti-suffrage cartoons included not only the Woman's Journal and some mainstream newspapers, such as the Boston American where Blanche published, but also popular humor weeklies such as Life, Harper's Weekly, Puck, and Judge, the latter a publisher of Lou Rogers. An unpublished study by William Frauenglass, using Life and Judge as examples, found that 1913 was the peak year for jokes and cartoons in support of suffrage. Life, notorious for its anti-

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<sup>37</sup> The long-standing use of woman's image as symbol has not always been appreciated. Writing for the New York Times in 1927 (this excerpt is taken from Martha Bensley and Mary Beard's Laughing Their Way, pp. 61-63), Miriam Beard complained that men have denied women civil rights while making them personifications of justice; denied them custody of their children while personifying them as the spirit of motherhood; and denied them education and property rights while representing them as spirits of knowledge or plenty. Beard observed, "Today, man, being only human, is the first to complain when his dreams come true--because his allegory walks out of the canvas."

suffrage position, registered on Frauenglass's scale as having published cartoons of which 62 percent were anti suffrage,<sup>38</sup> while Judge registered as 72 percent pro-suffrage.<sup>39</sup>

To get a taste for the actual cartoons published by these various journals, one has only to turn to the collection of suffrage clippings compiled by a newsclipping service for Blanche and Oakes, which includes the years 1915-16. Besides Blanche's own published work, there was a 1916 cartoon by Rogers from the Woman's Journal that deployed a tactic invented by the pro-suffrage forces to counteract old images of misogyny. In this cartoon, a respectable and affluent woman is shown paying taxes, although she has no vote, while a drunken male voter (with Irish features, a trace of the nativism suffragists displayed at times) lolls nearby. In another Rogers cartoon, the point is made that American democracy is only half achieved. She depicted a tiny, conventionally dressed woman bearing a sign reading "one-half the people" and looking up at an enormous, fat, ill-favored man sitting on the dome of the capital with a sign reading "government of the people, for the people, and by the people." His giant feet rest heavily on "the vote." Rogers again was willing to lampoon men. Also in the Woman's Journal, cartoonist Katharine Mulhouse made the point that women's work as mothers, nurses and factory workers was not considered too arduous for them, only voting was.

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<sup>38</sup> Life also lampooned woman temperance advocates in a marvelous cartoon of a mob of women with Carrie Nation's blunt features and also ridiculous corkscrew curls attacking a man brewing liquor at a still.

<sup>39</sup> Frauenglass's study was quoted by Alice Sheppard in "There Were Ladies Present."

A male cartoonist, C. D. Batchelor, in a 1915 cartoon "Do It for Their Sakes," showed three generations of beautiful, intelligent and "womanly" women in contemporary dress, including a grandmother, a mother with a baby, and a school girl with a large bow carrying a slate, wait patiently for their rights to be conferred upon them. This is, obviously, the conservative image that many suffragists consciously and cautiously employed. Batchelor also drew a woman-as-symbol in classical dress, a goddess holding up a puppet labeled "vicious politician," which holds a paint brush dripping with paint. Overhead a sign reading "democracy" has been defaced with the word "DeMockracy." Batchelor's imagery is essentially conservative, although the natural rights theme of the second cartoon is less so.<sup>40</sup> There are many other such uses of the woman-as symbol image, including the goddess Athena,<sup>41</sup> representing

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<sup>40</sup> It has always seemed to me that, if women have a natural right to the vote and to natural rights, this is a more liberal position than suggesting that they should have the vote because they are morally pure and reform-minded. If women have a natural right to the vote as men do, then they have a natural right to vote any way they please. If they must always vote high-mindedly, then what happens to their self interest? Men can vote their self interest, and women should have precisely the same freedom. The late suffrage position that woman's vote would bolster domesticity is essentially conservative.

<sup>41</sup> Athena, the virginal warrior and goddess of wisdom, who leaped full-grown out of her father's forehead, was a favorite image of virtue for pre-and post-Christian philosophers as well as political cartoonists, because she was a female symbol completely untainted by the carnality that men attributed to women and which made them uneasy about their power to corrupt masculinity. Athena was not born of a mother, nor was she ever a mother herself, in short, defying St. Paul's injunction that women win salvation through child bearing. "This warrior woman could not have been acceptable as a figure of good to Western civilization, almost at any time and certainly not to the Victorians, if she were not predicated on an unimpeachable ethic of proper feminine conduct. Domestic fidelity and moral justice are embodied by Athena..." Warner wrote, in her Monuments and Maidens p. 103. Female warriors personifying virtue and defeating vice are the more effective, Warner believes, because "the victory of the girl redounds all the more blazingly to her cause's justice

woman suffrage, with the caption "the first trenches taken;" and another of a woman in classical dress carrying a huge x-shaped crucifix and captioned "the vote against."

A few other pro-suffrage cartoons include one by syndicated cartoonist Nell Brinkley, which equated suffrage with Preparedness and Americanism, personified by three Clara Bow-like Graces. Pancoast, a cartoonist whose gender is unclear, underlined the nativist element in suffrage arguments in a cartoon which depicted Uncle Sam welcoming rough immigrants to the vote, while ignoring a well-dressed native-born woman. Fredrikke Palmer, wife of a Yale professor, was another artist whose work was published in the Woman's Journal, and she went so far as to show a white little girl ignored by Congress depicted as Santa Claus, who gives the vote to a pickaninny, representing male Puerto Rican voters, a clear demonstration of racism in political cartoons in 1915.

On the anti-suffrage side in the same collection, a cartoon from Life dated 1916 depicted the easily recognized denatured woman in pants, a bowler, and sporting a cigar talking to a weeping cupid, who claims that men will not marry anymore, while a crowd of suffragists in the background attack some men. This is typical of the anti-suffrage cartoon argument that suffrage is innately desexing to women. In the same publication, Ronald McKee depicted an ugly woman in spectacles and military dress leading the way into the teeth of a cannonade. She

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because she is weak; that is the underlying premise of the triumph of good over evil when it is represented as a battle between feminine virtue and brute vice." Warner, p. 149. As women's power over their bodies and their property began to grow, the virgin warrior declined in its popularity as an ideal image of what Warner terms "father right." p. 126.

wears a sash inscribed with "votes" and the caption was "Nothing is lost save Honor." Less common was the image of an attractive blonde skater, again from Life, who is abandoned near thin ice by her escort because she talks too much about suffrage. Her attractiveness is unusual in anti drawings, since a desire for suffrage was usually sufficient to turn a belle to a beast. Another attractive image of a suffragist, by Oster, in Life, showed a youngish woman in a mannish suit sitting in a rocking chair and holding a baby-sized roll labeled "the ballot." The caption was "hugging a delusion."

The Saturday Evening Post in 1916 used the old maid figure as an unsexed suffragist. She is shown making the various political parties jump through hoops. Even the graceful art of Charles Dana Gibson was turned against women's rights in the 1890s, when Gibson depicted women in kilts at a council of war and in another drawing, as ambassadors at a futuristic ball, wearing all the orders, ribbons and honors themselves. Apparently the mere idea of women functioning so far out of the appropriate sphere was as side-splitting as showing them in bowler hats with cigars.

When Blanche turned her hand from botanical illustration to political cartooning, her characteristic insouciance colored her work, for, when ex-President Taft objected to her "Meanwhile They Drown" cartoon published in the Woman's Journal, she simply drew a new cartoon entitled "Our Answer to Mr. Taft." The subject of both cartoons was the indifference of the antis and the government to the suffering of needy women.

In fact, although Blanche was trained as a fine artist and did not have Lou Roger's professional experience as a cartoonist to draw upon when she turned her

skills to cartooning, her cartoons are nevertheless a casebook of many of the kinds of images that suffrage cartoonists used most often to defend their cause, except that Blanche, characteristically added in her individual touches that marked her as more than a plodding copyist of other people's ideas. "Meanwhile They Drown," the cartoon which so offended Mr. Taft, was published in the Woman's Journal in July, 1915, and it shows seated on a dock an "anti" woman with her trim ankles neatly crossed, wearing a feathered hat and telling a stout man in vest and bowler, who is holding a life preserver inscribed "votes for women," "we don't need it." The man declares: "When all women want it, I will throw it to them." Meanwhile, below the dock, several women drown in waves marked "white slavery," "disease," "sweatshop" and "filth." One pair of hands, their owner already submerged, desperately holds a cherub-like infant aloft. The cartoon itself is well realized, the drawing of the hapless woman swimmers and the enclosing waves are skillfully drawn; its point is easily understood by the viewer and is essentially that of social feminism. It is interesting to see that Blanche did not adopt the tactics of anti cartoonists in making the wrong-headed anti woman on the dock in anyway desexed or denatured: She is a perfectly attractive woman, conventionally dressed, and her foolishness in refusing the vote has not deformed her.

In her "Our Answer to Mr. Taft" cartoon, of September, 1915, in the Woman's Journal, the anti-suffrage woman has left the dock with her overstuffed male companion, and it is now Mr. Taft who sits on a soap box left him by the anti-suffrage pair, with his foot on the life preserver. He crosses his hands over his round

belly and says, with his mustache turned foolishly up, "they don't need it."

Meanwhile, the women and the infant continue to struggle below, although a line of women and girls are now shown with life preservers of their own, which they have used to gain the ladder to the dock and even to climb out of the water. The life preservers the women have relied upon are labeled votes for women (in those states that allowed woman suffrage) and the women say in overhead balloons what reforms have been made with this vote: "mother's pensions in all suffrage states, the age of consent raised in all suffrage states, red light abatement laws in seven suffrage states, and garbage clean up in Chicago." The women range in age and include a slight young woman, who represents the red light abatement laws, a matron with a tiny girl who represents the age of consent, a middle-aged woman representing mother's pensions, and so on. The women are barefoot and dripping with water and what makes them striking is that it is quite clear that these women have rescued themselves with the vote, an active rather than a passive role. They are fairly attractive, but not refined in any way, and in this they differ from the usual pro-suffrage image of women as dainty and inactive.<sup>42</sup> The headline for the cartoon is hand-lettered: "Taft puts his Foot down on Suffrage, Meanwhile the Rest Drown!" and he is quoted below the cartoon as saying : "But though I am opposed to woman suffrage now, I recognize that it is likely to come some time. There is no great evil which their being

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<sup>42</sup> Nina Allender created a beguiling suffragist image in lively young women in balloon skirts who do such things as chide the Democratic donkey. They don't swim or climb ladders, but they do partake of some of Blanche's brand of insouciance.

kept out of the franchise continues." Apparently Blanche's irreverence toward a male--in this case Taft--was not objected to by any of the other editors at the Woman's Journal, possibly because of her elite status.

In her "the Next Rung" cartoon, published in Nov. 1915, in both the Boston Transcript and the Woman's Journal, a sense of this individuality of Blanche's flavors the drawing itself. In the center of the drawing is a ladder propped up on a black stone wall, very gloomy, with strong, cross-hatchings characteristic of Blanche's botanical illustrations as well, the rungs labeled "education, property, professions, business, votes for women," and on the top rung, "true democracy." Overhead a sunrise of "progress" beckons a vigorously climbing woman, who is menaced as she climbs by two bat-winged demons, Injustice, who is blindfolded, and Prejudice, who is not.<sup>43</sup> Beneath them clouds of greed and ignorance float. The concept that woman suffrage represents progress is not original, but the image she drew to illustrate it is. The woman's image in the cartoon is distinctive because she is unencumbered by elaborate dress, since she is barefooted, bareheaded, with a simple coiffure and apparently uncorseted, and she is climbing vigorously toward her own goal of true democracy and progress instead of adopting a virtuous posture of waiting for the vote to be conferred upon her. She has a vaguely contemporary look about her, however, which distinguishes her from the usual identification of women in political cartoons with goddess abstractions. The woman climbing the ladder is not Athena.

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<sup>43</sup> The demons, incidentally, are clearly male, which is in keeping with many depictions from the high Middle Ages on of triumphs of virtue over vice.

When Blanche does use the goddess-like symbol of Liberty, so common among suffrage artists, her use is also surprisingly original. The drawing labeled "The New Cradle" depicts Lady Liberty with her usual goddess powers, but this time Liberty is shown not as the traditional, virgin goddess Athena, but as a mother affectionately holding a small boy and girl. Lady Liberty in this drawing retains her goddess-like power as a symbol an abstract good, Liberty, but that power is augmented by a second, equally powerful good that is invested in her, and that is motherhood. At her feet, a workman is adding a new plank, labeled "suffrage amendment," to the "cradle of liberty," a cradle which is somewhat mysteriously formed partly out of Faneuil Hall in Boston. The caption reads "Vote--we will make it big enough for both boy and girl." Again, turning the woman-as-symbol into a mother of children is an original twist entirely Blanche's own.<sup>44</sup>

A standard late-suffrage theme appears in a September, 1915, cartoon, called "Double the Power of the Home--Two Good Votes are Better Than One." In this cartoon, which is a simple and effective pyramid design showing a matron<sup>45</sup> holding an infant on her shoulder while two children lean on her knees, is clearly a set piece arguing that woman's vote will be solidly domestic and anything but individualistic.

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<sup>44</sup> The drawing is dated only 1915 and appears in an undated news clipping in the Schlesinger Library collection of cartoon clippings.

<sup>45</sup> The matron is pretty, but definitely solid in figure, almost like the goddess figures of the woman-as-symbol persuasion. She does not have the delicacy of feature usually lent suffragists by pro-suffrage artists. This is not because Ames could not draw such a figure, since a surviving Christmas card in Blanche's portfolio at Smith of a fragile and aristocratic madonna establishes her skill. The square, blocky, but powerful figure of the mother, then was a matter of deliberate artistic choice, rather than limited artistic skill.

The home depicted is very respectable, with a kettle steaming on a stove in a back room, gleaming dishes in a sideboard behind the madonna and her progeny. A cat sits behind the boy, the little girl clutches a doll, a sewing basket with artfully dropped scissors beside it underscores the purely domestic theme.<sup>46</sup> That the boy is showing the book to the girl makes the picture even more conventional, its chief redeeming character being that the mother is not the usual slender, young suffragist, but a woman of some age. On the other hand, her expression is saccharine and the drawing conservative.<sup>47</sup>

"The Map Blossoms" employs one of the few male symbolic figures to appear in political cartoons, Uncle Sam. He is shown in the familiar top hat, striped pants and starry tails pruning a potted liberty tree shaped like a map of the United States. The tree is depicted with flowers blooming in the states where suffrage for women has been accepted--in western and midwestern states solely--and four eastern states are also highlighted. Above these four states a worm labeled "anti" hovers. Uncle Sam reaches up with a small pair of pruning shears (he has other tools lying around him, a watering can labeled justice, a spray device labeled logic, pruning shears labeled education and truth) to trim away prejudice. The caption reads: "Prune away

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<sup>46</sup> As has been pointed out already, Blanche was perfectly capable as representing herself as an icon of motherhood in newspaper photographs, when she appeared with little Evelyn in her lap. It is not automatically a conservative move to point out through the presence of a girl child the need of future generations for suffrage, however.

<sup>47</sup> It was published in both the Boston Transcript and the Woman's Journal.

Prejudice and these four States will blossom in November."<sup>48</sup> The meaning of the drawing is easily understood, although the blank white background makes the reaching figure of Uncle Sam stark and the foreshortening of the right arm is awkward. The use of a male figure in support of suffrage is not unique--Lou Rogers used Uncle Sam as well--but it is unusual and effective.

"Two Pedestals" is an engaging use of the woman-as-symbol approach to imagery. In this cartoon, the heavy, goddess-like mother is again present with her two loving children, and she is now placed on a rock-solid pedestal complete with steps and pilasters. The pedestal is inscribed with all the female virtues that Blanche could think of: equal suffrage, justice, motherhood, sisterhood, cooperation, service, companionship, love, education, religion, school vote, Red Cross, teaching, guardianship, professions (spelled proffessions, since Blanche was always a poor speller) and property. Next to the calm, classically dressed mother, again depicted in the strong triangle design of the "Double the Power of the Home" drawing, is another woman on another pedestal. This time, the pedestal rests on a tiny footstool labeled "sham chivalry," which supports a slender, twisted, baroque column labeled with all the vices Blanche despised: inferiority, irresponsibility, idleness, ignorance. At the top of this precarious platform we see the anti-suffrage woman, wearing an objectionable dress trimmed with ugly dark fur. She inclines her head to yawn, stifling her yawn languidly with one gloved hand. The other hand supports a silly bird labeled Dodo. She is accompanied by a repellent lap dog labeled Fido (no lover

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<sup>48</sup> The drawing was published in the Woman's Journal in May, 1915.

of children this anti suffragist) and a pair of shoes labeled Tango completes the triad. The anti woman is slender and contemporary looking, the usual image allotted the suffragist by the pro-suffrage artist, but she is slender like a reed and obviously no match for the ageless maternal image beside her. The drawing is captioned "Which will the voters choose for Women on Nov. 2nd?"<sup>49</sup> The drawing makes good use of the goddess image of woman, which in Blanche's work had the effect of underlying her magnanimity and power while stressing her goodness, a goodness which is the greater because she loves and cares for children.

In general, Blanche does not make a mockery of her anti women by making them desexed or denatured. In her "Anti Allies and the Dog" cartoon, a mounted suffragist finds her horse is hobbled on the journey toward suffrage by a long rope in the hands of corrupt politicians, liquor interests, unspecified vicious interests and an anti woman, all of whom tug vigorously. The anti woman is depicted as older and pug-faced, and her hat sports a plume that resembles a stalk of broccoli. The suggestion here, though, is that the anti-woman is conservative, older, unwilling to accept new roles for women, and she is not treated with the relentless dislike that so many male anti-suffrage cartoonists directed at suffragists. She does suggest, however, a certain generational stereotype. The equestrian suffragist, holding a banner reading "woman suffrage," is also strongly built. The men who join the anti woman in tugging on a rope to halt the suffragist's horse are quite humorously drawn: One of them, wearing a bowler hat labeled "boss," is bracing his foot on a building

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<sup>49</sup> The drawing was published in the Boston Transcript in 1915.

while he tugs against the horse. Unlike Lou Rogers, Blanche evidently was allowed license to ridicule men, although, again, without any suggestion of bitterness or hatefulness in her depiction of them.<sup>50</sup>

In her unwillingness to deride or humiliate other women, Blanche is somewhat unusual even among suffrage cartoonists. Lou Rogers cheerfully used a stout old woman as the symbol for an anti. Fredrikke Palmer and Rogers both used racist and nativist images, as we have seen, to further the cause of suffrage, the implication being that suffrage should be for the white, middle-class, educated woman. Blanche did not descend to such tactics and did not express them in any of her recorded comments. Her concern for the working-class woman was expressed in two cartoons and in her comments concerning working women to the press. This class sensitivity may be the result of a sense of upper-class noblesse oblige, or a family concern for workers that began with Benjamin Butler's various attempts to reduce working hours in the Lowell mills which won him so much dislike from his fellow plutocrats. Neither can be confirmed because Blanche did not leave a record of her thoughts on the matter in her letters, diaries or portfolios.

In other respects, Blanche's cartoons succeeded in solving the problem described by Klak, of creating images that remained acceptably feminine while promoting the cause of woman suffrage. The use of traditional symbolic images of women "enhanced the belief in woman's inherent goodness and power, while

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<sup>50</sup> This drawing was published in the Woman's Journal in October, 1915.

sanctioning political values and goals."<sup>51</sup> To achieve an acceptable pro-suffrage female image, Blanche employed scenes with children and older women such as her matronly mothers. The use of the goddess-like Lady Liberty image<sup>52</sup> helped to make the demand for the vote seem to be a little more "remote" in order to make woman suffragists' "role discrepant behavior more tolerable." The trick was to make the demand by women for justice seem to male viewers to be a reasonable aspect of the dutiful and virtuous role assigned to women and not mere insubordination.<sup>53</sup>

Blanche did show the dichotomy of the anti and the pro-suffrage women in the "Two Pedestals" cartoon, but she did not render the anti-suffragist as inherently corrupt or despicable, only silly. For a woman trained in the fine arts only, she did a remarkable job in a short time of developing workable and easily understood cartoon images. Her choice of social reform and protection of the home as the basic theme of her work was completely in keeping with the expediency arguments<sup>54</sup> then in vogue among suffragists and with her own status as a mother of daughters, whose rights she had every reason to wish to enhance.

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<sup>51</sup> Cartooning for Suffrage, p. 202.

<sup>52</sup> An early personification of Britannia shows a woman representing Britannia being conquered by the Roman Emperor Claudius. The Victorians converted Britannia into the warrior virgin Athena, and Columbia is usually depicted in much the same mode. See the illustrations between pp. 104-105 of Monuments and Maidens.

<sup>53</sup> Cartooning for Suffrage, pp. 202-203.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128

In addition to her published cartoons, Blanche also left several unfinished, undated and interesting cartoons. Of these, the most finished was of a family in a canoe caught in rapids, in which the mother asks for the vote--a paddle--to help her family to safety. The subject is still that women will use the vote to support the home, but the figure of the woman is active and heroic, as is the figure of the father. A series of pencil sketches intended as a sort of suffrage cartoon strip showed a woman losing her home for debt, becoming homeless, and eventually being hanged for a crime she did not commit, the unwilling and innocent victim of a male-run justice system in which she has no voice, only the obligation to obey laws made by men. One of the jury men is labeled "Col. Irish," the only nativist reference I have found in Blanche's work and that in a drawing she did not publish. The drawing is still an early stage and I cannot say if it was ever finished or published, but it is well conceived, in particular the rather humorous first frame, which shows an winsome young woman arrested by a burly cop for having too long a hat pin.

Of these images, one entirely original and arresting image remains obscure in her portfolio, unfinished, undated, unpublished. It is the exquisite drawing of a young, beautiful, naked woman being crucified by men in bishop's miters and robes, and it is an image quite radical and unrepeated in American women's political art, so far as I can tell. It suggests that Ames used her art to give visual force to Elizabeth Cady Stanton's recognition of the church's conservative role in women's oppression, an attempt to oppose through art the relentless grip the Roman Catholic church maintained over access to birth control in Massachusetts for many years after it was

legal in most other states. The fury which might have greeted such an image probably accounted for why Blanche never finished the work, but her growing interest in birth control, beautifully rendered in the drawing, drew her away from her adopted role as suffrage cartoonist to a new field of combat. It was a logical choice for a woman determined to give to women the individuality and autonomy over their persons and their careers that had been for so long enjoyed as a male prerogative only.

CHAPTER 7

PRESIDENT BLANCHE AND  
THE BIRTH CONTROL LEAGUE OF MASSACHUSETTS

Blanche's enthusiasm for the suffrage fight was on the wane by 1917, although she was present in the gallery when the 19th amendment was ratified by the Massachusetts Legislature. No more political cartoons were forthcoming. Her attention had shifted to the birth control movement. Ellen Chesler, biographer of Margaret Sanger, attributed Blanche's conversion to the birth control cause to a speech given by Sanger in Boston in 1916, and, certainly, Blanche remembered that she had been struck not only by Sanger's beauty and gentle demeanor, but even more by her "spirit and eloquence" and by the diversity of her supporters, which ranged from radicals, anarchists, socialists, Republicans, Democrats, and members of many religions.<sup>1</sup>

Blanche's new interest in birth control was consistent for a reformer who wanted to give women autonomy and control over their own lives, of which control over their bodies was an essential first step. That birth control as a cause attracted a diversity of adherents was not an obstacle for a pragmatist like Blanche. She had always been prepared to take her allies where she found them, and she found herself

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen Chesler, Woman of Valor: Margaret Sanger and the Birth Control Movement in America, p. 171.

courted by both Margaret Sanger and Mary Ware Dennett, mediating between their respective views while pursuing her own.

The logic behind her espousal of birth control is incontrovertible, but birth control was not, as suffrage had become by 1915, a respectable cause for a elite woman or for anyone else. Her decision to pursue birth control reform over decades was made in the teeth of the opposition of the Roman Catholic Church, a very powerful force in Massachusetts, and in the teeth of the conspiracy of silence with which polite people papered over the issue. Even such great women reformers as Alice Paul, Jane Addams and Charlotte Perkins Gilman were content to dodge the issue of birth control and the odium that attended it. Gilman agreed that too many children was a hardship for the poor, but recommended as a cure the avoidance of "excessive sexual indulgence," while the unmarried Paul serenely pursued her feminist agenda while ignoring the gender inequality inherent in marriage.<sup>2</sup> Neither the National Women's Party nor the League of Women Voters would take up so controversial and disreputable an issue, so Blanche's decision to do so represented a real risk to her reputation and social position. Other elite women supported suffrage publicly, but few would support birth control.

The question then arises why Blanche should have chosen to forge herself into a social warrior in defense of a cause few respectable people cared to confront in public, regardless of how they believed and behaved in private. The answer was that

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<sup>2</sup> Carole McCann, Birth Control Politics in the United States, 1916-1945, pp. 47-50.

Blanche was not simply a Brahmin with progressive leanings, but a true feminist who believed in social justice and in women's autonomy, and despite her aristocratic status, she had a genuine feeling of compassion for those less privileged than herself. She also had a sense of entitlement, a sense that she, of all people, had a right to her opinion and to be politically active and even outrageous in defense of it. This faith in the entitlement of Blanche Ames to control her own destiny and to help others to control theirs descended to her through her family from the original and outrageous Benjamin Butler. Nevertheless, even Blanche's self confidence might have quailed before the prospect of being lambasted repeatedly in the press as a frivolous socialite who preferred poodles to children, and even as a person of neither religion nor morality because she dared to confront the powerful Roman Catholic Church. Why she did it is inherent in her character and the character of her family.

How she did it was also in her character. She defied the opposition, rejected their characterizations of her, pursued every avenue with her usual pragmatism, formed alliances with diverse groups of people using her charm, wealth and determination, devoted considerable thought to the issue--mustering both religious and secular arguments in her writing-- employed her taste for invention to devise homemade contraceptive pessaries from rubber canning jar rings, offered determined leadership at the state and national level, and never, ever gave up. That her courageous and determined actions were occasionally tainted by elitism, her risks somewhat cushioned by her wealth and privilege, does not mean that the risks she ran were not real, nor her efforts and beliefs any less sincere. As always with Blanche,

she operated on the border lands of what was not only acceptable, but even possible for a respected and respectable woman of her age and class.

The personal element her espousal of birth control can only be hinted at. The sole record that exists describing the birth of one of Blanche's children was written by her husband, Oakes, and it is characteristically poetic and cool. After the child's birth shortly after 4:00 a.m., Oakes noted that the "morning hours were extremely beautiful and peaceful," adding only that "Blanche is well and her new acquisition prospers."<sup>3</sup> The new acquisition, son Amyas, was born in 1906, when Blanche was 28, and her last child, Evelyn, was born in 1910, when she was 32. After that, there were no more children. It is not recorded whether this was a conscious decision by Blanche and Oakes, but in view of the predilection of the upper classes for limiting their families, it would not be surprising to learn that the birth of Evelyn was Blanche's last by choice. If she used any particular form of contraception, however, there was no mention of it in her letters or diaries, although it may be that this matter, among others, may be elucidated when Blanche's letters to her daughter Pauline are made public.

There is reason to think, however, that the pangs of birth Blanche felt herself four times may have motivated her impassioned writings on behalf of women later in life. Blanche described birth control as "woman's right to live," and complained that since medical science had found the "way to save us from dying," it should be used.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Oakes Ames, Jottings of a Naturalist, pp. 254-255.

<sup>4</sup> From an undated document written by Blanche, folder 491, box 40.

As she wrote: "Christ crucified on the Cross supported by God's personal promise suffered but a day. The suffering of women in labor is recorded to continue for three and four days, continually mounting cries (sic) of pain up to the moment of death itself."<sup>5</sup> She also wrote of the "exhaustion of the mother's body and spirit by too frequent child-bearing."<sup>6</sup> It is difficult to imagine Dr. Robert Dickinson, the physician ally of Margaret Sanger, or Edward East, a Harvard eugenicist who was a member of the Birth Control League of Massachusetts under Blanche's presidency, writing with such desperate feeling about a natural event that was of only academic interest to themselves. Blanche's crusade may have been inspired by personal experience, not only as a mother, but as a woman who was unable to obtain legally any form of information on limiting her family.

In the United States, information about birth control and contraceptive devices themselves had not been prohibited officially until the passing of the federal Comstock Laws of 1873. Before that date, abortions could be procured before "quickening," the movement of the infant felt within the mother. Various poisonous combinations of aloes, black hellebore, savin, ergot, tansy or rue were taken as "female pills" that sometimes poisoned the mother as well as the fetus. Rubber douching syringes and diaphragms were available by the 1840s, and condoms and

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<sup>5</sup> From a draft of a booklet defending birth control in box 36 of the Ames Family Papers at the Sophia Smith Collection. The booklet is undated, except for a mention of 1935 contained within the text itself.

<sup>6</sup> From Blanche's undated views of what the Massachusetts Birth Control League stood for, folder 481, box 39.

contraceptive sponges by the 1850s.<sup>7</sup> After the adoption of the Comstock Laws, however, no contraceptive information or devices could be mailed, clinics which provided contraceptives to women were raided and closed by police, and some physicians were prosecuted even for speaking of birth control, as was Dr. Antoinette Konikow, a Birth Control League member in Massachusetts in 1928.

Comstock did not operate in a vacuum, however, and his success in banning public discussion of birth control was supported by many religious or philosophical Americans who believed that intercourse was intended by God or nature for procreation alone.<sup>8</sup> In this view, birth control became an unnatural vice, an exploitation of women for sex rather than for children that turned any woman who countenanced it into a sort of prostitute.<sup>9</sup> Artificial birth control itself became equated in the public mind with the sexual liberation and corruption of women, and some of this public anxiety over relaxing rigid sexual codes for women probably

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<sup>7</sup> Janet Farrell Brodie, Contraception and Abortion in 19th Century America, pp. 210-216.

<sup>8</sup> The argument against birth control is summed up neatly in a Nov. 8, 1938, article in Look magazine, which Blanche preserved. The article, entitled "Experts Debate the Birth Control Issue," by the Rev. Edward Lodge Curran, repeated the common assertion that birth control violates God's law that sex was for procreation only, that the declining birth rate would damage the economy, that large families are a joy, that birth control leads to immorality among the young and to divorce, that birth control contributes to race suicide and also damages women's health. Dr. Eric Matsner, a Sangerist, replied in the same edition that, on the contrary, birth control permits early marriage and thus reduces immorality, that it reduces destitution, juvenile delinquency and abortion, and that it results in healthy babies.

<sup>9</sup> "Voluntary Motherhood," or spacing of children to improve their opportunities for health and education and to preserve the health of the mother, was a respectable cause by the 20th century, but abstinence was the preferred method for achieving the goal.

descended from a misogynist Judeo-Christian tradition, which made virginity or motherhood the only virtues of the daughters of Eve.<sup>10</sup>

Blanche would have none of this sort of reasoning, which she described as "an insult to our womanhood."<sup>11</sup> She did not join Sanger in her early view that sexual gratification for women would be a positive outcome of birth control, but insisted instead that immorality would not increase with the use of birth control except in a "class of women immorally inclined." This is not sufficient reason, she wrote, "why the vast married population of the present should suffer and the racial future be endangered." By racial future, Blanche referred to the race of Americans, although it is unclear if she meant black as well as white Americans, who would experience "race improvement" if mankind could fulfill its duty "to control the number and the time of bearing their children." The arguments against birth control she dismissed characteristically in one word: "silly."<sup>12</sup>

The most obvious difficulty in denying birth control to women, however, was that under patriarchy, men controlled the incidence of sexual intercourse, while women, as their dependents, took the consequences of repeated pregnancy.

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<sup>10</sup> Linda Gordon believes that the early Christians inherited a Judaic tradition of woman hating that was, if anything, expanded by the church when adopted as its chief positive female icon the unattainable one of Virgin Mother of God. Eve's transgressions earned for women self loathing and subjection, while men were accorded the sexual privileges known as the double standard. Men could have recourse of prostitutes, women had no choice but self restraint, and the fear of pregnancy was a goad for that self restraint.

<sup>11</sup> From an undated document written by Blanche, box 39, folder 481.

<sup>12</sup> From an undated document by Blanche, box 39, folder 481.

Exhorting men to self restraint and women to duty in the style of the 19th century could not obscure the reality that women with negligent or self indulgent mates suffered without recourse.

In Massachusetts, support for Comstockery nevertheless was widespread and popular in and outside of the church, so that anti-contraception laws were not at all controversial when they were passed, but were a legal support of a popular attitude that opposed obscenity and included all but a few supporters of freedom of the press.<sup>13</sup> In 1879, Massachusetts passed laws against the dissemination of contraceptives and contraceptive information in keeping with the federal Comstock laws, an action that was protested only by a handful of Boston liberals led by Ezra Heywood, editor of the periodical, "The Word," who objected not only to the suppression of freedom of the press, but also to the suppression of "heterodoxy in medicine," all of which he labeled a "contemptible conspiracy to deprive the people of their liberties."<sup>14</sup> The New England Society for the Suppression of Vice, though, saw the law as the means to prevent and punish "offenses against public morality, chastity and decency."<sup>15</sup> The Massachusetts laws also prohibited any "instrument or article" that could be used for "self abuse" or abortion.<sup>16</sup> There was remarkably little

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<sup>13</sup> Carol Flora Brooks, "The Early History of the Anti-Contraception Laws in Massachusetts and Connecticut," American Quarterly, vol. XVII, Spring, 1966.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

protest and publicity against the adoption of such laws, probably because the discussion of sexual matters was regarded as "bad taste."<sup>17</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church was an even more formidable opponent to birth control reformers than public opinion, because the views of the church had remained unchanged for centuries. John Noonan, in his study of the church's opposition to birth control, wrote that church doctrine on contraception had been enunciated in the 12th century and had been merely added to since. The established doctrine was that contraception was a form of homicide because it prevented life; that it was an unnatural vice like sodomy or bestiality because only "natural coitus" was established by God; that it was a form of lechery and a sin against marriage because conception was not the goal. These same views had been held by the great Protestant leaders Martin Luther and Jean Calvin.<sup>18</sup>

Protestant opinion was not as monolithic as Catholic opinion. Even before the 1928 Lambeth convocation of Anglican bishops, who agreed to permit the limited use of contraception,<sup>19</sup> spacing of children for the health and well-being of mother and children began to be accepted among married Protestants. James Mohr has noted that until Comstock burst upon the scene, Protestant clerics generally had gone along with the popular idea that abortions before quickening were acceptable if not desirable. Unwilling to offend their congregations by bringing up sexual matters, the clergy

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> John T. Noonan, Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists, pp. 232-353.

<sup>19</sup> Contraception, p. 232-353.

infuriated physicians by refusing to support a joint cause against abortion.<sup>20</sup> Some Episcopalian and Presbyterian ministers did begin to speak out against birth control and abortion by 1870, however, when their voices would have supported what was already in effect: The Comstock Laws.

Thus, it was against the combined forces of public opinion and religious doctrine that Blanche tilted when she and Cerise Carman Jack, also the wife of a Harvard professor, became involved in the birth control fight and the founding of the Birth Control League of Massachusetts in 1916. The event that galvanized supporters of birth control in the commonwealth was the arrest of Van Kleeck Allison, a young socialist, who was arrested when he gave a police agent a pamphlet on limiting births among the poor, which he was distributing at a factory gate. A defense committee, consisting of Blanche, Cerise Carman Jack, Edward and Mary East, and Stuart Chase, was established on Sept. 26, 1916, to defend Allison.<sup>21</sup> It was from this committee that the league itself was descended, and the league was, as Linda Gordon described them, a mix of radicals, liberals, socialists and eugenisists, many of whom, including

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<sup>20</sup> James Mohr, Abortion in America, pp. 182-96. Martha Ballard, an 18th-century Protestant midwife whose diaries form a study by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich called The Midwife's Tale, did apparently gather and employ tansy, a known abortifacient, although Ulrich believes that she used it to expel worms. Ulrich wrote that 17th and 18th-century Americans were acquainted with the contraceptive use of savine, pennyroyal, tansy and other herbs as contraceptives, which they apparently used regardless of religion. As for Quaker women, procreation and maternal duties were not the only role assigned to them, since preaching was open as well, so it is possible that they, too, might have limited birth by artificial means. See "Catholic and Quaker Women" by Michael J. Galgano in The World of William Penn, edited by Richard and Mary Maples Dunn.

<sup>21</sup> From a paper written by Blanche in 1958 entitled "Margaret Sanger's Influence," which is included among her papers in the Sophia Smith Collection.

Blanche, shared "civil libertarian principles,"<sup>22</sup> such as the belief that banning contraceptives and contraceptive information was a free speech issue. The controversial Dr. Antoinette Konikow, a socialist, was the only physician to be a member and would herself be prosecuted under state Comstock laws in 1928. The defense committee was unsuccessful in persuading the Massachusetts Supreme Court under Chief Justice Rugg that laws should be overturned against distributing printed material on birth control or manufacturing contraceptive devices or drugs. Rugg declared that Massachusetts statutes against birth control were "designed to promote public morals...to protect purity, to preserve chastity, to encourage continence and self restraint...to engender in the state and nation a virile and virtuous race of men and women."<sup>23</sup> The Birth Control League took counsel with its attorney, Samuel J. Elder, and learned that the only legal tactic for informing the public about birth control was word of mouth.<sup>24</sup>

Somewhat daunted, the league nevertheless adopted a constitution on Nov. 27, after Allison was convicted of disseminating obscene material, and elected Blanche its first president. On April 4, 1918, it voted to raise \$2,000 to open a birth control clinic, and adopted Margaret Sanger's tactics of making birth control a public issue by holding rallies, public meetings and debates and soliciting women's organizations and

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<sup>22</sup> Linda Gordon, Woman's Body, Woman's Right, p. 266.

<sup>23</sup> From Blanche's own history of the birth control movement in Massachusetts in the Ames Family Papers.

<sup>24</sup> Elder wrote to league member Preston F. Hall on May 19, 1917, with this opinion. Ames Family Papers.

individuals for their support. Support, as Gordon noted, was accepted from anyone who would give it, and a socialite Republican like Blanche found herself listening to speakers, such as Frederick Blossom of Sanger's Birth Control Review or Theodore Schroeder of the Free Speech League of America, a radical group organized by Emma Goldman.<sup>25</sup>

Sometimes such ill-matched bedfellows did not get along, because of their profound disagreement on what birth control should mean and how it should be used in society. Liberals like Mary Ware Dennett believed that birth control laws should be overturned by applying to Congress to change the laws and making the issue one of free speech. Sanger began by gaining public attention by defying the laws and opening public clinics, and ended by forging alliances with physicians, eugenists and wealthy patrons to support a "doctor's only" approach which left birth control in the hands of male physicians. Feminist socialists like Dr. Konikow wanted to empower women by putting them in charge of their own sexuality. Eugenists, like Edward East, were generally uninterested in empowering women, whom they viewed primarily as breeders of human stock, but they did believe that birth control would reduce the numbers of the unfit while promoting more births among the fit.

Blanche's surviving papers suggest that she shared Dennett's civil libertarian view that banning access to birth control information under the Comstock was an egregious violation of free speech, a denial of the "right to knowledge" which is "not

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<sup>25</sup> Woman's Body, Woman's Right, p. 267.

prohibited under any statute."<sup>26</sup> She also saw access to birth control as necessary to female autonomy; and she was moved by a concern that poor women without access to contraception were forced to bear unwanted children that they could not support and to damage their own health into the bargain. She did not share the view of eugenicists that birth control should be forced upon the poor, defined as the biologically unfit, as a way of controlling their numbers, and she resigned her presidency of the league after 19 years when such ideas were imputed to her. She did write of "race improvement," but seemed to be in the social feminist camp rather than that of the eugenicists eager to breed the fit at the expense of the unfit, because she talked of child spacing to improve home life, reduce infant mortality, and reduce the transmission of "epilepsy and other mental and physical abnormalities." She equated the bearing of healthy children by women as similar to "man's duty to defend and give his life for his country," and discounted any other intention than to strengthen the home, which is "the foundation of town and state and nation."<sup>27</sup>

As Blanche's and Cerise Jack's names came to public attention as birth control supporters, their reformist inspiration was bolstered by the numerous piteous letters they received from poor women lauding their efforts and begging for information on birth control. For example, in a July 26, 1916, letter to Jack, a 27-year-old mother of five children wrote in response to a Boston American article concerning the prosecution of Van Kleek Allison and his defense by the league: "I don't feel as

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<sup>26</sup> From "Birth Control Ideas" by Blanche, folder 491, box 40.

<sup>27</sup> Folder 491, box 40.

though I could have any more children and give them all they should have as my husband just gets common everyday wages and everything costs so now to get along with...It just makes a slave of any man or woman to have a large family." Another woman wrote to Jack on August 12, 1916, that to have more children on her husband's salary "would be privation, starvation and slow death."<sup>28</sup>

A third writer, in a Dec. 4, 1916, letter to Blanche, reported that the Roman Catholic Church used "fear, fear, fear all the time" to compel Catholic women to bear unwanted children and to destroy their health thereby. She described "two fine healthy girls" who are now "wrecks, teeth gone, haggard and ailing" from excessive child bearing. She refused to sign her name, because, as she wrote, "I am a nervous woman and would fear a brick at my head." But she encouraged Blanche in her work: "Keep on with your good work, blessed woman."<sup>29</sup>

Even with such encouragement, the league found it a very uphill battle to win supporters. Many of the doctors and ministers they approached for support refused it for a variety of reasons, most of them common in society in 1915. For example, a lawyer, Richard M. Smith, accused the league of doing "more harm than good." Harvey Wiley, editor of Good Housekeeping Magazine, wrote that he would join the league only if it actually promoted birth among a "better class of people." Trying to limit births among the poor would be "useless." Wiley insisted. William Davis wrote to accuse women of espousing "selfish and voluntary childlessness," a very common

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<sup>28</sup> Folder 42A, box 36, Ames Family papers.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

theme, while Margaret Deland admitted that she was devoted in principle to birth control, but confessed herself worried about its possible link to abortion.<sup>30</sup>

The Rev. Sidney S. Robin of Kingston, Mass., on the other hand, encouraged the reformers by writing: "It seems to me to be a wise and far-seeing movement and the arguments used against it are those used against every attempt to substitute freedom and light for fear and ignorance as motives in human life."<sup>31</sup> Robert M. Yerkes of Harvard expressed himself "tremendously interested in sound eugenic principles," while Mary Almira Smith wrote darkly that sex was for reproduction only, and that "abstention is the proper birth control, castration for rape, eliminate liquor, obscenity and prohibit the unfit from marrying."<sup>32</sup>

Those who did not oppose birth control were often unwilling to support it publicly, as for example, when Jane Addams of Hull House declined to join the league on the grounds of illness, which prevented her from "joining any new movement," but she did pass along the league's solicitation letter to a Hull House physician interested in birth control. G. Stanley Hall of Clark University wrote frankly that he had already "born my share of odium sexicum" for writing a book on adolescent sexuality, for which he had been "pilloried severally and ostracized by my friends." Mary Frost of the WCTU wrote the league tartly that they should be putting

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<sup>30</sup> Smith's letter is dated Sept 15, 1916, Wiley's Nov. 11, 1916, Davis's letter and Deland's are undated. All can be found in the Ames Family Papers.

<sup>31</sup> Letter of Dec. 4, 1916, Ames Family Papers.

<sup>32</sup> Yerkes's letter dates from Dec. 4, 1916, and Smith's is undated. Both are in the Ames Family Papers.

their brains and money behind ending alcoholism if they truly wished to help the unborn. Even George Bernard Shaw, writing from Kerry Ireland, was reluctant to allow the league to reprint his published views on birth control, not only because he was concerned that the league's "teachings and methods may be such as I should violently disapprove of," but also because he feared the effect of the "extreme illiberality and obscurantism of American legislation in such matters."<sup>33</sup>

It probably was no surprise to anyone that the league, which renamed itself the Family Welfare Foundation in 1919, quietly disintegrated after the entrance of the United States into World War I, to remain moribund until it was revived in the 1920s. Blanche and Jack wrote to each other in discouraged tones about their inability to rouse anyone's interest in birth control, and Jack expressed herself to Blanche as "quite at sea in regard to the future of the birth control movement."<sup>34</sup> She suggested that the league should join eugenicist Charles Birtwell in a national eugenics movement, but Mary East opposed such a move, writing Blanche on Oct. 2, 1917, that Birtwell was "just bleeding the Birth Control League for money" and describing him as "rabble rousing, indefinite and visionary."<sup>35</sup> So disgusted was East with

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<sup>33</sup> Hall's letter is dated Dec. 13, 1916, Mary Frost's letter is dated April 21, 1917, and Shaw's letter is dated August 15, 1919, from folder 461, box 36, Ames Family Papers.

<sup>34</sup> Jack to Ames, June 17, 1917, Ames Family Papers.

<sup>35</sup> East to Ames, n.d.

Birtwell, that she resigned from the league's organizing committee and was, in Jack's words, "reduced to knitting."<sup>36</sup>

The hope of more radical reformers that the war and the 1917 Russian Revolution would so change society that birth control would cease to be an issue proved to be a pipe dream, despite Jack's assurance to Blanche in 1918 that "birth control will come so spontaneously wherever the radicals get control of the government, just as the war brought suffrage to so many countries, so that it seems to me that now is the time to work for the fundamentals and not just for reform measures." In fact, Jack's prediction that radicals would remake society and institute birth control was the opposite of what did happen. In the Red Scare that followed the war and the persecution of radicals, membership in the original Birth Control League scattered, and when it reformed, it did so as a more conservative organization, as Blanche herself described in the history of the birth control movement she wrote for Planned Parenthood of Massachusetts in 1958.

"It seems to me that such a movement as we contemplate must be backed up by many people, and it is beyond the ability of one or two enthusiasts to swing financially or politically," Blanche wrote Jack in 1918. The problem as Blanche saw it was that the league had no real project to fund, although Blanche expressed herself interested in a clinic conducted by local physicians and funded by "influential citizens."<sup>37</sup> Material dated 1918 from the league indicates that its members had

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<sup>36</sup> Jack to Ames, Jan. 3, 1918.

<sup>37</sup> Ames to Jack, April 19, 1918.

decided to drop its original emphasis on the "metaphysical; the right to knowledge, to freedom of speech and of the press,"<sup>38</sup> and to stress instead child welfare, reduction of infant mortality, the need for pre and post-natal care, spacing of births and so on. A medical approach was adopted, although there was still doubt that birth control should be left to be defended by doctors alone. A research committee was proposed, but never activated, that was supposed to raise the "present standard of obstetrics," in Blanche's words, while lecturers would orally offer birth control information to get around the laws prohibiting written information. "In a way, we could do a great deal of good, both educational and practical, without raising antagonism," Blanche wrote league members in a form letter.<sup>39</sup>

In the meantime, she was solicited for money by Sanger in a form letter dated May 3, 1918, to purchase shares in the Birth Control Review.<sup>40</sup> Apparently Blanche did send a contribution, because Sanger wrote on June 6 to thank her for \$20: "I greatly appreciate your assistance in this matter, particularly as you have so much to do in your own vicinity."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> From a letter written by by either Blanche or Jessie Marshall, dated Feb. 6, 1929.

<sup>39</sup> Undated letter in Ames Family Papers.

<sup>40</sup> Lou Rogers and Cornelia Barns both contributed cartoons to the Birth Control Review, which remained one of the few forums open to women political cartoons after the closing of The Masses. Both women drifted away from cartooning in favor of illustrating after only a few of their works were published in the Review.

<sup>41</sup> Box 481, folder 39, Ames Family Papers. The Margaret Sanger Papers at the Sophia Smith Collection include letter exchanges between Blanche and Sanger that are mostly unremarkable, being form letters, notes from Sanger's secretary, which duplicate letters already preserved in the Ames Family Papers.

In view of the departure of the radicals from the Birth Control League, it is ironic that an arrest of a birth control advocate should have been, in Blanche's words, the "angel of resurrection" responsible for the revival of the league. Socialist Dr. Antoinette Konikow on Feb. 9, 1928, for exhibiting contraceptive devices, for which the maximum penalty in Massachusetts would have been a fine of \$1,000 or five years imprisonment.<sup>42</sup> Dr. Konikow, though she had resigned from the league because "my time is too valuable to work in the line of social welfare,"<sup>43</sup> (sic) appealed to her old birth control league colleagues for support and got it. Once again calling themselves the Birth Control League of Massachusetts, 100 supporters met at Borderland to decide how to win other doctors over to their view that physicians should be able to give out information on birth control, which is essentially what Dr. Konikow was accused of doing.<sup>44</sup> A problem was that Dr. Konikow had a taste for stirring things up and, as she said in her own words, "I just love to be antagonistic."<sup>45</sup>

This was not the time for Dr. Konikow's brand of fun. As Blanche wrote, "we had become targets of considerable abuse and notoriety."<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, Blanche returned to the new league in her old position as president, although it may have been difficult for her to support a so-called Bolshevik like the doctor. Blanche's sister,

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<sup>42</sup> From a folder circulated by the league dated 1928, folder 464, box 464.

<sup>43</sup> No date, box 36, folder 463.

<sup>44</sup> This is the chronology Blanche provided in her history of the league.

<sup>45</sup> No date, box 36, folder 463.

<sup>46</sup> From Blanche's "The Influence of Margaret Sanger."

Jessie Marshall, also a member of the league, implored Blanche to restrain Dr. Konikow's impulsiveness so that she did not hurt her own cause by being "communistic" or "fun-poking at our courts."<sup>47</sup>

The league and many physicians recognized that the arrest of a physician under the obscenity statutes, however red her political views, was a danger to all, and an Emergency Defense Committee was organized for the defense of Dr. Konikow. The defense was offered that the doctor was demonstrating the use of contraceptive devices as part of a purely scientific lecture, which Linda Gordon rightly described as an "extremely narrow line of defense."<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, the defense was successful, Dr. Konikow was acquitted, and the league then devoted itself to seeking support from doctors for a "doctors only" birth control bill in Massachusetts, along the lines defined by Sanger as she also moved from more radical roots to alliances with conservative physicians and eugenicists. This annoyed Dr. Konikow, who had wanted to see clinics set up at once and birth control access made a fait accompli.

The slow-moving efforts of an essentially elite group of birth control reformers to win the support of physicians in changing the Comstock Laws, like the slow NAWSA approach to winning the vote, prevented the Birth Control League of Massachusetts from appealing to and winning a more popular support for their cause. Popular support was particularly important in Massachusetts because of the power of the Roman Catholic Church, which could dismiss easily a comparatively small and

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<sup>47</sup> Marshall to Ames, March 19, 1928, box 39, folder 481.

<sup>48</sup> Woman's Body, Woman's Right, p. 268.

select group like the league as a threat to "increasing impurity and unchastity," as Cardinal O'Connell put it.<sup>49</sup> Even physician-controlled birth control was defeated in Massachusetts as inimical to public morality and also as supported by "Soviet gold," Blanche wrote in her history of the movement in Massachusetts. By 1932, there were pro-birth control physicians serving at the Brookline Mother's Health Office, but it was closed by police in August of 1937.

As Linda Gordon noted, birth control was in and of itself "subversive of conventional morality in its substance, and thus no form of persuasion could fool those who benefited from the conventions. The meaning of birth control could not be disguised by describing it as a medical tool."<sup>50</sup> In fact, trying to pass birth control into the hands of doctors lost the cause its possible support as a social issue, and the "doctor's only" approach failed in most states where it was tried. In Massachusetts and Connecticut in particular, the birth control movement made little headway despite the fervor of its supporters, although by 1930 12 other states had birth control clinics.<sup>51</sup>

Blanche recognized that the Roman Catholic Church was probably the major obstacle to birth control reform, and she did resent that an "alien" church, once merely tolerated by Yankee stock, now should dictate the rules concerning contraception. But she was ready as always to try to work out a solution, as, for

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 269.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

example, when she appealed to David Walsh, the Massachusetts Democrat and Catholic whose candidacy she had supported because he favored suffrage, for support of a birth control bill, arguing that to support the bill would be "only fair to Protestant women of Massachusetts who must rely on you to represent them." Signing herself as president of the Birth Control League of Massachusetts, she asked, "can you not act with wisdom enough to avoid rousing religious animosity and conflict?" But Walsh was unwilling to go farther than to agree hear a birth control bill, and, then, only if there would be adequate time for debate, which, apparently, there was not. "Catholic and Protestant women who are opposed to this bill have as much right as those who favor it to have it heard and debated in the senate...I cannot agree to the passage of the bill as an uncontested measure,"<sup>52</sup> he wrote Blanche. Sanger, too, between 1921 and 1925 tried to persuade legislators to support a "doctor's only" bill, but this failed. Dennett, who had always believed in working within the law to change the law, gave up altogether, resigned from her own Voluntary Parenthood League, and left the field to other champions, even though she, like Blanche, did not believe that the medical monopoly of birth control would benefit the public.<sup>53</sup>

An obvious difficulty that reformers had with legislators was not merely public disapproval of birth control, but also the apparent fact that male legislators did not take the birth control cause seriously enough to persuade them to accept the opprobrium involved. Dennett lobbied in New York, Blanche in Massachusetts, to

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<sup>52</sup> Ames to Walsh, May 16, 1934, and Walsh to Ames by telegram on March 17, both in box 40, folder 492.

<sup>53</sup> From Private Vice to Public Virtue, pp. 100-101.

end Comstockery, but neither succeeded. Meanwhile, as Reed put it, "legislators practiced in private what they would not endorse in public."<sup>54</sup>

Blanche was disgusted. "The only function secured by these judicial opinions is to cause punishment to sick women or those rendered sick or foredoomed to death by pregnancy. Because they are the only ones who dare not run the risk of experimenting with pessaries...They must have help and the expert knowledge of physicians to save their lives." To make birth control illegal is to make the courts "agents of injustice instead of justice, a double disaster, since treating women unjustly, Blanche wrote, would make their children also "disdain the law."<sup>55</sup>

When it was clear that legislators in Massachusetts were unwilling to expose themselves to public odium by supporting birth control legislation, Blanche simply tried other approaches. A logical person herself, she wrote reams of arguments explaining the logic of birth control not only to her supporters in the league, but to the hierarchy of the Catholic Church against what she referred to as "the hard rules of the church."<sup>56</sup> She accused the Catholic Church of muddled thinking in linking abortion and contraception. Adequate contraception, she argued, would obviate the need for abortion and save lives: "Protestant thought is directed at the protection of human life and especially tenderness toward women and children is to the foremost," she insisted, whereas, "in sharp contradistinction," the Catholic Church denied women the

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>55</sup> Box 36, Ames Family Papers, birth control book draft by Blanche Ames Ames, circa 1935.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

"relief of therapeutic abortion," which, in turn, condemned to "lingering torture and death those women who cannot give birth normally to a child."<sup>57</sup> To force women to bear unwanted children was an "injustice to children brought into the world weak and diseased and unwanted," and a "continuation of the Godlike beliefs of the dark ages imposed upon our times and customs." Over the years, she jotted many thoughts about the church and its opposition to birth control, some of which stem from her Yankee progressive heritage. She denounced the pope as a dictator to people living in a democracy. She derided the idea that celibate men should dictate to women that they must bear children. Since these women had no court of appeal, the denial of birth control to women amounted to a church-supported, sexual slavery, and, always repellent to Blanche, "the subjection of women."<sup>58</sup>

Nevertheless, ever the optimist, Blanche was encouraged temporarily when the rhythm method appeared to have the ambiguous approval of the church, a position which Blanche described as "constructive and sympathetic,"<sup>59</sup> and she chided Sanger for proposing to "fight the Catholics" because they were using the mails to distribute information on the rhythm method, which Sanger sneered at as a "racket."<sup>60</sup> After meeting with Sanger in the winter of 1934, she wrote to her "you have seemed to us

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ames to Sanger, Feb. 5, 1934, box 37, folder 473.

<sup>60</sup> Sanger's remark was taken from a typed series of notes that Mesdames Ames and Marshall wrote up after a meeting with Sanger on Nov. 5, 1934, from box 37, folder 473.

to have always been guided by the principle that you do unto others as you would be done by. When you propose to fight the Catholics through the technical wording of the statute because they are using the mails to send out birth control information of which you do not approve, you step down from your high altruistic position and place yourself...in the place where they have previously been in relation to your work. You become the persecutor instead of the persecuted."<sup>61</sup> Sanger urged Blanche to stay with her in her "fight to the death" with the Catholic Church. "It is also the opinion of many members of Congress that we are doing a bigger work by awakening the country to the intolerance of Catholics than we are doing on birth control and that we should keep forging ahead as we are the only group in the country that is battling them,"<sup>62</sup> she wrote Blanche.

Blanche apparently objected to an amendment proposed by Sanger to federal law that Blanche feared would make federal statutes even more oppressive if it closed the loophole for the Catholics and their rhythm method. "My criticism is not directed against changing the federal Statutes wisely, but it is directed against the form and content of your amendment, on the ground that it is restrictive of our existing liberties and could be a source of oppression in the future," she wrote Sanger. Her objection was that Sanger, by 1934, was supporting legislation that would hand over access to birth control to "physicians, medical colleges, druggists hospitals," but not to

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<sup>61</sup> Ames to Sanger, Feb. 7, 1934, box 37, folder 473.

<sup>62</sup> Sanger to Ames, Feb. 6, 1934.

women.<sup>63</sup> Sanger, also pragmatic, replied that she had no particular objection to the rhythm method per se, but she wanted to "use this opening as a means for getting the same post office privileges for our kind of birth control or a reason from the post office why."<sup>64</sup>

Blanche's belief that the church was softening its stand on birth control with its support of the rhythm method, which involves periodic abstinence, was the sole reason for her interest in the rhythm method. As a method for birth control, she thought it ineffective because of women's ignorance of their anatomy and sexual function. She was further annoyed that the church seemed more anxious to ban pessaries, which women control, and not condoms, which men control. The excuse for allowing condoms was disease prevention, especially during and in the aftermath of World War I, but it did provide a loophole for male-controlled contraception.

When the church proved unmoved by Blanche's appeals to logic, she declared that birth control was a matter of "religious conviction" because it restored to men and women "the dignity of marriage." To use birth control, she insisted, "is inspired by women's way of worshipping God in the performance of every act and thought. It is a statement of the ideology of married women in their relation to husband and children and the state." She teetered off the religious obligation of women to use birth control to preserve marriage as a "holy state," to get into her real point, which is that women should have "freedom of choice" in matters sexual, else husbands,

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<sup>63</sup> Ames to Sanger, June 29, 1934.

<sup>64</sup> Sanger to Ames, Feb. 14, 1934, box 40, folder 492.

showing "no restraint in relations and bearing children, could render their marital rights merely "bestial." Returning to her original theme of the religious rightness of birth control she wrote that the "true test of religion is nobility of living, faith in the rightness of God, and charity towards our fellow women." But then she couldn't help digging at Catholics by pointing out that the Protestant church's acceptance of birth control "has all the weight of God's word" to Protestant women, and was in opposition to the "universal truth" of the Catholic opposition to it. In the end, she recognized herself that the arguments she mustered on the religious level were weak, and she jotted on the bottom of her draft of a pamphlet defending birth control: "It is evident that my skill in expressing myself in religious terms is not very great."

The church remained adamant in its views on birth control. Deaf to the arguments and pleas of reformers, its position remained as it had been since they were enunciated in the 12th century and set in the late 19th century. Russell M. Sullivan of Boston College attacked Blanche by name for a "Parents' Pamphlet" sent out under her name by the league, even though she was no longer its president. Sullivan, in a letter to the editor of the Boston Evening Transcript, heaped, in the words of William P. Everts, president of the league after Blanche, "raucous, bitter blasts" upon her head, and also "the vilest abuse."<sup>65</sup> That the church was in any way to be seen as relaxing its prohibition of birth control was anathema, Sullivan thundered, "a brazen

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<sup>65</sup> Everts's remarks came from a speech he gave to league members on April 13, 1935, and the speech was reprinted in the Ames family newsletter, "The Whim," vol.2, no. 1, Dec. 1994.

and deceitful attempt...to link the Catholic Church with Mrs. Sanger's birth control." Birth control was nothing but a "foul stain on chaste marriage."<sup>66</sup>

Blanche, who must have had a cool head, replied steadily the following day in the same publication that the league was not responsible for linking the term birth control with the rhythm method. Those who had made that link were members of the church hierarchy and they alone should be reprimanded if the link was offensive to Sullivan. "Surely he should not seek to quarrel with me on this ground," she told a Transcript reporter. She added that the Great Depression made the economic need for birth control more acute than ever, and the acceptance by the church of the rhythm method was still a change of attitude and a "recognition of this problem as one for medical science."<sup>67</sup>

That women should control their fertility themselves is an unvarying theme with Blanche. It is why she argued with Sanger against the latter's proposal to empower physicians and not women with control over access to contraceptive information and devices. "The amendment is restrictive. It specifically has to do with doctors and hospitals. How can that be of help to women who may have no disease?" she wrote Sanger. Letting men control birth control made women dependent upon "the caprice of doctors."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Feb. 12, 1935, Boston Evening Transcript.

<sup>67</sup> Feb. 13, 1935, Boston Evening Transcript.

<sup>68</sup> Ames to Sanger, June 29, 1934, box 40, folder 492.

In 1939, Blanche still resisted Sangers' increasing support for giving doctors the sole right to control contraception, in particular rejecting the designated role for women as "apologizing suppliants at the medical door step." An organized campaign by doctors could put contraception out of reach of women forever, she said, and "men and women would be handed over to the medical fraternity possibly to be denied the information as the Catholic doctors refuse women aid in case of therapeutic abortion." She warned Sanger that allowing the "wholesale exemption of this class," that is, the exemption of doctors alone from federal obscenity laws, would allow doctors license to exact huge payments for contraceptive prescriptions and to prescribe unsafe contraceptive devices, and the whole issue of who would control "that vital subject, abortion" was left undecided. And what about free speech? Any attempt to change federal law must be based on an amendment that "is based, where it ought to be based, on the rights of citizens of the Unites States to every therapeutic aid known to medical science."<sup>69</sup>

To avoid the caprice of the law, Blanche turned her inventive mind to other ways that birth control devices might be disseminated, suggesting that physicians could avoid prosecution if they prescribed for women support rings for a tilted uterus, a device that did not offend the public morality, then explained how to adapt the ring to make a diaphragm, "in entire conformity to the law," she wrote virtuously. She also experimented to see if it would be possible to make a homemade diaphragm from a baby's teething ring or from the rubber rings that line the inside of canning jars, so

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<sup>69</sup> Ames to Sanger, June 29, 1939, box 39, folder 491.

that women could circumvent the temporal powers altogether with a few, easy to obtain items. How the information would be broadcast to women in large numbers on how to fashion crude diaphragms for themselves Blanche did not discuss.

Blanche's objections to Sanger's "doctors' only" stance did not prevent her from working together with Sanger, whom she clearly admired, and with Dennett. Dennett had written a booklet called "The Sex Side of Life," explaining the facts of life to young people, and had mailed it to those who requested it in defiance of the Comstock laws. In 1930, this respectable mother was tried and convicted of sending obscenity through the mails, and Blanche sent money to support her defense. She apologized to Dennett's supporters that she had not done more, but confessed herself "much occupied with medical legal work for the Massachusetts Birth Control League." Dennett had written to Blanche in 1918 to win her support for representing birth control as a "public health measure," an idea with which Blanche clearly agreed. On the other hand, as it became clear that Dennett wanted to use Blanche primarily as a fund raiser, work she herself did not want to undertake, Blanche refused. Dennett tactfully suggested that she accept appointment to a National Council of the Voluntary Parenthood League, so that she could be listed "among the significant citizens who realize that responsible parenthood is a basic social necessity."<sup>70</sup>

Dennett , as director of the Voluntary Parenthood League of New York City, had hoped to avoid the necessity of a state-by-state effort to end Comstockery and win women the right to birth control. Instead, she favored congressional action.

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<sup>70</sup> Dennett to Ames, April 7, 1919, box 37, folder 470.

Although Blanche later forwarded funds to defend Dennett, she was apparently not warm to the idea. Dennett wrote Cerise Jack that she wished that Blanche would "see the point of concentrating on Congress rather than exclusively on state work. If everybody would only join to get this federal law repealed, the state laws would all go down like a card house. We ought to be at least as clever as Comstock was."<sup>71</sup>

It is discouraging to note that the birth control reformers of Massachusetts, despite their successful defense of Dr. Konikow, did not open a "new era of more openness on birth control," as Blanche hoped. A doctor's only amendment failed in 1931, despite the support of 1,300 physicians. Blanche attributed the defeat to Catholic opposition. Whatever protean manifestations the Birth Control League took, and whatever it called itself from Voluntary Parenthood to Planned Parenthood, all attempts to win the fight for Massachusetts women to access to contraception were defeated. About as far as it got was that Judge Augustus Hand in 1936, while refusing to overturn the Comstock laws, remarked that if Congress in 1873 had understood the usefulness of contraception, then birth control devices and information would not have been classified as obscene in the first place. The courts did eventually decide that physicians, at least, should be able to receive contraceptive devices through the mails, and the gradual loosening of the rigid Comstock laws by the courts may have been possible because the courts were less subject to pressure from the Catholic Church than were legislators.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Dennett to Jack, May 12, 1919, box 37, folder 470.

<sup>72</sup> From Private Vice to Public Virtue, pp. 102-228.

By 1935, Blanche's own position as president of the league was itself in jeopardy, although her commitment to birth control never wavered. It is difficult to tell exactly what happened, but appears that some Young Turks who were newer members of the league ran an advertisement in the Boston Transcript that read in part: "Taxpayers! A quarter of a million children were born last year to families entirely supported by you through public relief. Our organization exists to help those parents have only as many children as they can support. Will you help us do this Preventative Work?"<sup>73</sup> This advertisement was the work of a publicity committee, lead by Cornelia Cannon, who styled herself first vice president of the league, and also a Miss Mary Lee, both of whom had decided to take over from Blanche's Executive Committee control of all publicity for an "experimental period," in Cannon's words. Cannon assured Blanche that she would hold her "wild young committee to the course," but in this she was unsuccessful.<sup>74</sup> Though the advertisement was written by this committee, Blanche's name was signed to it and she was frankly appalled that it could be suggested that she or the league favored coercing poor parents into using birth control to save taxpayers money, although this as a position that Sanger herself had adopted, according to Linda Gordon.<sup>75</sup> Reaction to such an advertisement within the league was immediate. Helen Bailey wrote Blanche that the advertisement "makes our work appear to have selfish aims. As one

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<sup>73</sup> Boston Transcript, Jan. 5, 1935.

<sup>74</sup> Cannon to Ames, Dec. 11, 1934, reprinted in "The Whim," vol 2, no.1, Dec.1994.

<sup>75</sup> Woman's Body, Woman's Right, p. 304.

man said, you pray us to keep other people from having children. Surely we have no right to prevent them from having children when they want them...Did you really authorize this ad or appeal?"<sup>76</sup>

Using her position as president, Blanche rescinded the advertisement, writing to explain her action to league members by saying that the economic reasons for birth control did not include saving the taxpayers the cost of supporting poor children. To Cannon, she wrote "I forbid the Publication Committee to publish in newspapers or to send out notices in any form, under the name of the Birth Control League of Massachusetts, or over my name as President, and if the notice in the Transcript of January 5th is to be repeated in that or any other newspaper, it must be countermanded until the Executive Committee meet and take further action."<sup>77</sup>

Blanche also complained that the unauthorized use of her name was unconstitutional and that the advertisement itself was "untrue." "The implication that 250,000 women are to be prevented from having children unless they can support them is also untrue, such a program would be cruel and unfair to those families who are on public relief through no fault of their own," she reasoned. "We stand for something more than saving money for the taxpayers' pockets and it is a shame that our first newspaper notice to the general public should be based on such a motive."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Baily to Ames, Jan. 7, 1935, folder 464, box 36.

<sup>77</sup> Ames to Cannon, Jan. 6, 1935, reprinted in "The Whim."

<sup>78</sup> Ames to Cannon, Jan. 6, 1935.

She appealed to the executive committee to support her, and insisted that the letter would do untold damage to the league, because it could be accused of acting not for humanitarian, but for pecuniary motives. "Voluntary regulation of conception is our idea, isn't it?" she asked. In a subsequent letter to all members of the league, she repeated that the league could not support the denial of the joys of parenting to poor people, "merely because they are poor," and that "the chief motive of our organization is to give parents the opportunity of knowing how to promote the welfare of their children who are to be born by spacing their births and regulating their number, thus achieving better health for themselves and greater happiness and prosperity for their homes."<sup>79</sup>

To Mary Lee, whose committee's heavy-handed appeal to taxpayers so revolted a genuinely compassionate Blanche, she wrote: "Possibly your short time with the League is the reason you did not realize that volition on the part of the parents is the keynote of our policies. If you had known that, you would have realized that compulsory measures to force the practice of contraception on parents irrespective of their wishes in the matter (which is what that advertisement said on the face of it to the analytical, to the uninitiated, or to the unfriendly critic) is a doctrine which has never been discussed in the Executive Committee of the Birth Control League of Massachusetts."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ames to executive committee, Jan. 8, 1935, reprinted in "The Whim."

<sup>80</sup> Box 36, folder 466, n.d..

Her protestations did no good. Mary Lee sneered at Blanche for her "faux pas" in rescinding the advertisement, some undescribed action by the league was taken against her, and Blanche chose to resign. She ended her presidency of 19 years at the urging of her sister, Jessie Marshall, vice president of the league, who wrote: "Why not resign immediately. You have been given a rotten deal. My resignation will follow yours."<sup>81</sup> Marshall's primary concern, as she told Blanche, was that, if the executive committee no longer controlled publications by the league, "as president you will now bear the legal consequences of the mistakes without the power to change the form of the material."<sup>82</sup>

Blanche was replaced in office by William Everts, and this replacement of a long-time female pioneer reformer in birth control by a male was part of a trend identified by McCann, who recorded that women were being edged out of their positions of authority by professional men, who thought they knew better how to manage the organizations that women had founded and maintained for decades.<sup>83</sup> Blanche's departure shocked the older members of the league, and Mary Goodwin wrote to Blanche that the league would "suffer irreparable loss if you and Mrs. Marshall leave...I realized your nobility of character and my work under you has always been such a joy--you have always stood to me for high enthusiasm and sympathetic, generous understanding." Poor Mary Goodwin said that she and many

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<sup>81</sup> Box 36, folder 464.

<sup>82</sup> Box 26, folder 464.

<sup>83</sup> Birth Control Politics, pp. 184-197.

other members had not understood the "political methods" that had led to a motion, not described, that had led to Blanche's resignation. "Nothing that I have been able to do or say can erase the blot," Goodwin agonized, adding that she intended to resign as treasurer.<sup>84</sup>

Eleanor Little, another member of the league, wrote to Blanche that the coup d'etat against her presidency was the work of a "small minority that has been looking for trouble for some time." She hoped that Blanche and Jessie Marshall would be reinstated and the "fanatical troublemakers" discomfited. But Blanche did not return as president, although she did, at Little's invitation, join a state council of the league to smooth over the dissension over the resignation. On April 17, 1935, the league also offered Blanche a vote of "affection and appreciation."<sup>85</sup>

But things did not go better for The Birth Control League of Massachusetts under masculine leadership. In 1937, police raids began on the few birth control clinics that had been established, and they were closed down. In 1940, an initiative to amend the state constitution failed, as did a medical rights referendum in 1940. A women's Centennial Congress held in New York in 1940 refused to permit Sanger to include birth control on the program as part of women's progress over 100 years, although material prepared by the Roman Catholic Church condemning birth control was included in packets given the delegates. Blanche attended the congress and insisted on reading a statement demanding that women's voices be heard in religious

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<sup>84</sup> Goodwin to Ames, Dec. 12, 1934, folder 464, box 36.

<sup>85</sup> Box 36, folder 466.

governance, so that their opinions would figure at last in church creed. Her known support for birth control made her statement appear controversial, but the congress did allow a small mention of her statement to be included in its final report. After decades of sparring with the church, Blanche ended her statement by exhorting women to question "the authority of tradition held over them in religion itself and by realizing their own godliness."<sup>86</sup>

In 1940, Blanche was 62 and still unreconciled to control of women's bodies by the male church hierarchy. In the "Repartee" column of the Atlantic Monthly, Blanche wrote a series of arguments against the church, in particular, against an article by a Father O'Connell on "Birth Control: The Case for the Catholic," in which O'Connell argued that the church's stance on birth control was based on divine revelation, decreed by God, and binding on all persons regardless of their faith.<sup>87</sup> Blanche pointed out that all women are subject to control by their husbands and must accord them marital rights, even though only the wife "incurs all the dangers of pregnancy, often death." The church's insistence that Catholics mate and multiply demonstrated to Blanche that "after marriage, no solicitude whatever is expressed for

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<sup>86</sup> Ames, "The Influence of Margaret Sanger, " 1958.

<sup>87</sup> I am somewhat puzzled about the dating of this series of exchanges, because Blanche's letters that are preserved in her files are addressed to the Atlantic Monthly, as are copies of the letters written to her by Catholic challengers, such as one Fortunata Caliri, but copies of the Atlantic Monthly preserved in the W.E.B. Dubois Library of the University of Massachusetts do not include a letters to the editor column, although the edition dates match the dates of the letters to the Atlantic Monthly preserved amongst Blanche's letters. No copy of O'Connell's original article exists in the Ames Family Papers, and Blanche gave no indication of where it was published, but this is less important than her willingness to undertake to refute the arguments of the church in a public forum like the Atlantic Monthly.

the welfare of the children to be conceived." She quoted a letter she had received from a Catholic woman, who wrote: "If I do not have all the children God sends, and in the natural way, my Priest will not give me absolution when I die, nor bury me in Holy Ground."<sup>88</sup>

She was answered by a Catholic man with the exotic name of Fortunata Caliri, who wrote the *Atlantic* in response to one of her letters that women were harmed more by birth control than by birth, because "in interrupted intercourse and intercourse with contraceptives, the sexual organism of woman hardly ever reaches its natural culminations." Conscientiously echoing the views of his church, Caliri wrote that continence was the only acceptable form of birth control, since anything else would lead to licentiousness, concluding that "birth control is just an excuse for our own shortcomings."<sup>89</sup>

Blanche had heard it all before, but she slogged away, argument by argument. When the church appealed for support of its views to "uninterrupted Christian tradition," Blanche pointed out that Christ had not mentioned birth control, rather St. Augustine was the source of its repudiation by the church. This dates Catholic opposition to the fourth century, no earlier, she said, and it was therefore a policy adopted not by Christ, but by the church hierarchy, not itself divine. That being the case, the policy could be overturned by the same church hierarchy for "overwhelming humanitarian reasons," because "it is neither logical nor just for the Catholic Church

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<sup>88</sup> Ames to Atlantic Monthly, Feb. 8, 1940.

<sup>89</sup> Letter of Jan. 16, 1940, from Fortunata Caliri to the Atlantic Monthly.

to withhold the benefits of birth control from women and the unborn."<sup>90</sup> Nor did the Catholic Church have the right to withhold birth control from Protestant women, who were denied the right, Blanche wrote, "to live according to their faith." She asked the church to "allow them to open their birth-control clinics and thereby save the cost of further litigation in our courts and above all, to save the life and health of mothers and the life and health of children."<sup>91</sup>

So incensed was she at the obduracy of the church that she abandoned letters and wrote an article, "The Lord Slew Him: Birth Control and the Church," which, although it apparently was never published, centered on refuting the Catholic contention that birth control reduced the nobility of marriage. What costs marriage its nobility, Blanche argued, is that, for many women, marriage is actually a "prostitution of their very soul--a life of fear, a conflict of wrongs. It means a choice of wrong to husband or wrong to living children and those to be conceived. Women know that children conceived in terror and sickness and born unsound in mind and body, are not conducive to the permanence of marriage nor to the holiness and happiness of the home..." The real reason why the church forbade birth control was to increase its membership at the expense of women, and to brand as a sinner a woman who employed human reason to ensure the "well-being of her offspring" is a "false doctrine" that "overrides the design of nature's creator."<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Blanche's arguments are contained in her letters of Feb. 8, and March 6, 1940 to the Atlantic Monthly, box 40, folder 494.

<sup>91</sup> Ames to Boston Herald, May 23, 1950, box 40, folder 494.

<sup>92</sup> The article is dated Oct. 12, 1939, box 40, folder 494.

By 1940, Blanche's continued insistence of woman's right to determine for herself the timing and number of births was a feminist anthem whose time was past. The rivalry that existed between the Dennett-Sanger factions was ended in 1938 with the formation of the Birth Control Federation of America, which became in 1942 the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. It was a single-issue, otherwise apolitical, organization, which stressed its support for family values rather than its support for women's rights and autonomy. Social change in areas other than birth control were unsought, and neither "sexual inequities within the family, nor sexual or class inequities of the medical system, nor the imposition of overall cultural patterns by a dominant majority" upon the nation were addressed, according to Gordon.<sup>93</sup>

If birth control as a movement was eventually so tamed that it had become a support for the family instead of a vehicle for woman's advancement, Blanche herself was not reconciled to the loss of birth control to the medical profession and the continued control of women's bodies by men. Logical as always, she became an ardent supporter of the New England Women's Hospital, which trained women doctors to care for women patients. This cause, too, fell to the declining support for feminism, and the hospital, like the professional side of birth control, was increasingly run for and by male physicians. In 1959, a testimonial was prepared to honor Margaret Sanger, and the first entry among more than a hundred was by

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<sup>93</sup> Woman's Body, Woman's Right, pp. 341-343.

Blanche, who remarked acidly that monuments were erected to honor men's deeds since the time of the pyramids, but women's work rarely was so honored.<sup>94</sup>

In her birth control advocacy, Blanche was unquestionably implacable, logical, determined, indomitable, but also compassionate and concerned not only for her own rights as an autonomous individual, but also for securing those rights for others. It must have been difficult for her that her life's work was so hard to achieve, that women's rights proved to be so elusive, but if that was so, she did not say so. It may be that she was encouraged by the interest that her descendants continued to show in her causes. Her youngest daughter, Evelyn, whose bedroom doors were traced with beautiful paintings of cocks by Blanche, became a founder and first president of the Planned Parenthood Association of Nashville, Tennessee, and later served on the executive committee of the national association as southeast regional representative. Pauline Ames Plimpton, married under the wisteria at Borderland, served as chair of several Planned Parenthood fund drives in New York city and nationally. From 1965 to 1974, she served on the board of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, and received several awards for her work. Another relative, Bonnie Marshall Foz, helped to defeat a constitutional amendment in 1984 which would have limited choice in Massachusetts, and grandson Oakes Plimpton attended a state house rally against the amendment. Blanche's espousal of "votes for women,

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<sup>94</sup> Woman of Valor, pp. 450-451.

birth control, the rights of women doctors," as she put it, did not die with her, but was passed on as part of the Ames family's tradition of reform.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ames Family Papers

## CHAPTER 8

### BACK TO BORDERLAND

The entrance hall at Borderland, devoid now of stray gloves, school books or scarves, is still welcoming, as the viewer passes through the double Gothic-pointed front doors into a foyer at the foot of a three-story, carved and dark-stained, Jacobean staircase that decants onto the landing in front of Blanche's airy, third-floor studio. The hall, like the house itself, is eclectic, with deep Oriental carpets softening the shiny but untiled, dark concrete floor. A golden sunburst mirror hangs above a table, heavily burdened with child-sized porcelain Chinese figures of the god of the sun and the goddess of the moon from Oakes's old home, known in the family as "the Governor's House." To the side, a portrait of Grandmother Sarah Hildreth Butler, garbed as Ophelia, gazes dramatically upward, only one of numerous family portraits to grace the house. In the living room, overlooking the rolling back lawn through green-framed windows, the famous Tarbell painting of Blanche in her beribboned wedding gown gazes from above the sofa across at Oakes, melancholy and aristocratic as always, hanging above the pointed Gothic fireplace.<sup>1</sup> A Mandarin-

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<sup>1</sup> During their lifetime, a portrait of Oakes apparently hung on the lower landing of the central staircase, according to an occasional visitor to Borderland, Will Johnston, now a University of Massachusetts professor of history. He reported: "I recall the portrait she painted of him was on the lower landing of the stairs. You couldn't miss it. It honored him, but it also proclaimed her work as an artist." Her excellent work as a botanical illustrator tended to overshadow her work as a portraitist, Johnston said. "My father said flatly that she did that to please her husband... My father said that Oakes indulged her painting, but it was the drawings he identified with as her contribution to the marriage." From a December, 1994,

style sofa rests in a sort of antechamber between the living room and dining room, a companion to a Chinese cabinet that stands in the entrance hall. A chandelier made of a replica of Columbus's Santa Maria surprises the eye in the dining room. Unexpected skylights and open porches on each floor testify to Blanche's love for light and air, and charming stencils of peafowl and long-tailed roosters turn Evelyn's old child's bedroom into a place of fantasy. Unfinished portraits, carefully sketched and numbered with the code for each color she planned to use, still stand on Blanche's easel (she did not stop painting until her eighties, when her eyes began to fail her)<sup>2</sup> and a peacock woven into a rug by Blanche Butler Ames in old age still catches the eye in a second-floor bedroom. This year, for the first time in many years, the wisteria is blooming again in the arbor where daughter Pauline Ames married Francis Plimpton.

Grandson Oakes Plimpton remembered regular visits to Borderland to play with cousins, and to boat and fish on the ponds, while Oakes studied in the library and Blanche worked on her art. A particularly clear recollection was of a 1938 Thanksgiving snowfall so thick that the family was snowbound. The ever adaptable Blanche, however, improvised snowsuits from a collection of old clothes from the

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interview.

<sup>2</sup> According to her grandson, Oakes Ames Plimpton, in a 1995 interview during a private tour of Borderland.

basement, and the grandchildren played all day in the snow, building an igloo and sledding down the hill toward the swimming pool.<sup>3</sup>

Blanche's life outside of her political art, reform activities, family demands and collaboration of Oakes's books, was full in every sense of the word.<sup>4</sup> She belonged to a variety of clubs, which befitted her social standing, if not her personal inclination. She was a member of the Clover Club, treasurer of the Massachusetts League of Women Voters, president of the Easton League of Woman Voters, president and co-founder of the Birth Control League of Massachusetts, a member of the North Shore Art Association, the Chilton Club of Boston, vice president of the New England Hospital, a member of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, of the College Club of Boston, of the American Association of University Women, of the American Orchid Society, the Garden Club of Halifax County in Florida, and of the Republican Club of Massachusetts. She was also a member of the Unitarian Unity Church of North Easton, joining in a year that remains unrecorded, in whose cemetery she and Oakes are buried under the bronze catafalque she designed, near a flowering bush of trumpet-shaped, pink flowers.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> From "The Whim" and also from a personal interview with Oakes Plimpton on a tour of Borderland in 1995.

<sup>4</sup> "Mrs. Ames told my mother, you know, I could never have done all the things I did if I didn't have a full-time maid and housekeeper, and I never had to look after the children," Professor Johnston remembered. From the December, 1994, interview.

<sup>5</sup> The partial listing of Blanche's club membership is gleaned from a 1952 resume in which Blanche listed her "principal vocation" as "artist, botanical illustrator and portrait painter, which can be found in box 4, folder 21, in the Ames Family Papers at the Sophia Smith Collection.

Her views of her club activities, given to her mother in a letter dated Feb. 14, 1927, were not entirely positive, since she complained that she had "so many petty little things to occupy my attention. You know how nagging it is to have to stop in the midst of things to go to a luncheon of old ladies like myself all yelling at the top of their lungs to make their conversation heard above their neighbors. And still if I didn't do some social stuff (& Lord knows I do little enough of it) I feel I do not take advantage of my opportunities nor put myself in a position of power to help get things done that an acknowledged position gives."<sup>6</sup>

In addition to her club activities, she continued to paint and to develop theories, in partnership with her brother Amyas, concerning the use of colors to suggest distance. Together they developed a series of color charts to allow artists to match exactly any color, and Blanche tried out their system by painting copies of museum "Great Masters" herself. Portraits by Blanche still hang at Dartmouth, Harvard and Columbia Universities, and at Phillips Exeter Academy. Her portrait of Adelbert Ames in the uniform of the Union Army hangs in the Mississippi State Hall of Governors.<sup>7</sup>

This is not the place to go into an art historian's full analysis of Blanche's work as an artist, but there is little question that she had a very sensitive gift for art. Her paintings hanging at Borderland were painted with a free, confident and fluid hand in clear, unmuddied hues that one might expect from a devoted student of color.

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<sup>6</sup> Letter to Blanche Butler Ames, box 21, folder 228.

<sup>7</sup> From the 1952 resume.

The accuracy and dramatic beauty of her botanical illustrations are remarkable, since they are at once painstakingly correct botanically and yet, simultaneously, splendid works of art suggesting through their dramatic highlighting (in some of the prints) the artistic passion of their creator. The strong and effective cross-hatching technique she used in her political cartoons can also be seen in her rendering of orchids. Her botanical work is still preserved not only with her papers at Smith College, but also at the Harvard Botanical Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>8</sup>

At age 70, she was still very vigorous, dark-skinned, a little overweight with age, with high cheekbones, a deep voice and deep eyes. "She had a wonderful, dignified Boston carriage," someone who knew her remembered. "I knew her after age 70 to walk with great dignity. The house she took for granted, but she loved to show off the grounds. She would stride off to show off the pond. Borderland was a fabulous place to bring up kids. It was a full-time occupation and she talked of it with enormous affection and pride."<sup>9</sup>

In addition to her improvements at Borderland, which included the spring-fed swimming pool, and the cultivation of turkeys,<sup>10</sup> Blanche also contributed her

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<sup>8</sup> March 3, 1969, obituary for Blanche Ames, New York Times.

<sup>9</sup> December, 1994 interview with Will Johnston.

<sup>10</sup> Pauline Ames wrote: "I used to think that Mother was the happiest when she was moving water around. She built dams to make new ponds, and was just as likely as not to be wielding a shovel along with the men." After she died, the spring-fed swimming pool was useless because "no one could figure out how to make the system work." Even raising turkeys caught her lively imagination, because "she invented a system of keeping the birds off the ground on wire, so they avoided disease," from Ramblings Around Borderland.

somewhat eccentric imagination to the war effort. As her daughter Pauline wrote: "Whenever an idea would occur to my mother, she would usually carry it out...She noticed how a simple thread when snarled could stop a sewing machine. Using this principle she conceived the idea of protecting London from bombing by hanging ordinary strings from balloons over the city which would snare the bombers by snarling and stopping their propellers."<sup>11</sup> Blanche also conceived the idea of raising food for the war effort by trucking in a herd of cattle to graze the pastures of Borderland. The trouble was, as Mrs. Plimpton noted, that "there were no cowboys in town to control the cattle." On arrival, the steers Blanche expected turned out to be heifers, so she promptly "rented a bull from a farmer down the road and proceeded to raise cattle."<sup>12</sup>

The family very nearly lost one of its members during World War II, when Oliver's ship, The Liscome Bay, was torpedoed by the Japanese and blew up. Oliver succeeded in swimming away from the sinking ship and the burning oil that surrounded it, but he was forced to sustain himself for hours in the water without benefit of a life preserver or raft, until he was at last rescued.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ramblings Around Borderland.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Blanche mentioned this bit of family history in a slideshow talk she gave on "Food Plants and Atol Islands," the text of which is undated and is included in the Ames Family Papers. However, Oakes mentioned that Blanche was working on the talk in his a letter to a friend dated Jan. 11, 1945, which is included in Jottings of Naturalist, p. 366.

Thus life at Borderland was full and active, but it was destined, as all lives are destined, at last to falter and fail. On Friday, July 29, 1949, as she noted in a letter to an unknown recipient, Blanche found that, when Oakes spoke to her one morning, "he did not comprehend the meaning of my reply." Speaking more carefully, she reported herself "appalled" to note his perplexity. "I tried to cover up by blaming myself for not stating my idea properly, but he did not understand what I was saying. I was afraid his mind was gone." She was slightly relieved that he could identify the scissors she took up in her hand, "and I patted his shoulder and told him, 'you're all right.'" But later that morning, she found he could no longer comprehend what he read, although he could read individual words. "I was shocked and stupid and dare not think, because it took all my will power not to break down." Oakes had had a stroke, and, as he told their physician, Dr. Porter, "if he was going to lose his mind and be useless, he did not want to go on living." Blanche reported that he was "calm, courageous, simple--quite wonderful."<sup>14</sup> Eight months later, on April 28, 1950, Oakes, aged 75, was dead at their home in Ormond, Florida, and the sometimes stormy, often tranquil 50-year idyll with Blanche was over.<sup>15</sup>

Blanche herself still had 19 years to live, however, and she set about to honor Oakes with the bronze monument of her own making that would cover his tomb, each side carved with accurate bas-relief renditions of the orchids that he loved. The names of Blanche, Oakes, and each of their four children are recorded on the sides.

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<sup>14</sup> Box 6, folder 36, Ames Family Papers.

<sup>15</sup> Press release from the Harvard University News Office, box 6, folder 39, Ames Family Papers.

Only the remains of Blanche and Oakes actually lie there. His tribute to her, quoted by their daughter Evelyn Ames Davis, was to describe himself as "blessed with a companionable, gifted wife who has been my colleague and playfellow for nearly half a century."<sup>16</sup>

As her eyes, strained by years of peering at botanical specimens under a magnifying glass began to dim, Blanche did not repine, but switched her attention to the mighty project of writing her father's biography, a 600-page answer to a passing but derogatory statement against Gen. Ames written by the then-Sen. John F. Kennedy in his book, Profiles in Courage. It was an astonishing undertaking for an elderly woman, but typical of the resolute and energetic Blanche. She wrote Sen. Kennedy with characteristic insouciance, introducing herself as "Blanche Ames Ames, wife of former Professor Oakes Ames, daughter of General Adelbert Ames and granddaughter of General Benjamin F. Butler, Governor of Massachusetts." "Secondly," she wrote, "I wish to speak of your 'Profiles in Courage' and in the third place to ask you whether it may not be possible in future editions of it to make some corrections of errata for your own sake as well as mine." Using the example of a recent headline in the Boston Herald that maligned Senator Kennedy, she asked if Kennedy himself would "think it just if historians should seize upon such slander and repeat it over and over in varying form to defame your good name. Quotations from the testimony of a man's enemies may make sensational reporting, but they are hardly

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<sup>16</sup> Page 12 of an undated speech by Davis, in box 6, folder 41 of the Ames Family Papers.

to be relied on in seeking to record the truth...Yet this is the method you have used in writing about General Ames in "Profiles in Courage."<sup>17</sup>

Sen. Kennedy replied politely that he was "indeed sorry" if he had "slighted" Gen. Ames, noting that he did not anticipate that Profiles in Courage would be reprinted, and thus he would have no opportunity to correct his misrepresentation of Gen. Ames. "However, your letter has succeeded in stimulating me to further research with respect to the matters you mention, " Kennedy concluded.<sup>18</sup>

Blanche's energies did not appear to decline very much with age. In her last year of life, she was actively involved in restoring the splendid but dilapidated Oakes Ames Hall, a fine example of the architectural work of H. H. Richardson. Her son-in-law, Francis Plimpton, in a humorous verse written for her birthday,<sup>19</sup> took note of Blanche's causes and achievements in such lines as: "In early times, now obsolete, she put her youthful vim in, A marching up and down the street to get the vote for women." Plimpton also gave tribute to her work for birth control ("Persistently she will disturb the notion sacramental, that married folk should never curb their urge to be parental"), her various inventions, which included an "anti-pollution toilet,"<sup>20</sup> and

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<sup>17</sup> Letter from Blanche Ames to Sen. John F. Kennedy, June 6, 1956, in box 23A, folder 268, Ames Family Papers.

<sup>18</sup> John F. Kennedy to Blanche Ames Ames, July 13, 1956, box 23A, folder 268.

<sup>19</sup> Plimpton's poem can be found in box 4, folder 25 of the Ames Family Papers.

<sup>20</sup> Biographical entry for Blanche Ames Ames in Edward Jones's Notable American Women, p.p. 15-16.

her defense of the New England Women's Hospital, which she helped to save from financial troubles by her fund-raising activities when she became president of the hospital board in 1952.<sup>21</sup>

In 1969, Blanche's life was brought to a close at last by a stroke, which she suffered at her beloved Borderland.<sup>22</sup> The New York Times headline relating her death called her "Mrs. Oakes Ames, Botanist's Widow," but went on to describe her as "an artist and a champion of women's rights."<sup>23</sup>

One might think that the memory of such a champion would be preserved outside the loving circle of her family, especially since such evidence as her paintings and political cartoons survive her, but such is not the case. Blanche's rapid disappearance into obscurity was accomplished in a single generation, an instructive example of how women are written out of history. The April 17, 1995, obituary of Blanche's eldest daughter, Pauline, which appeared in the New York Times, described Pauline as the mother of "famous literary offspring" and as "the daughter, wife and mother of famous men," who "spent most of her life in the shadow of her father, Oakes Ames, the Harvard botanist; her husband, Francis T. P. Plimpton, the lawyer and diplomat, who died in 1983, and her son, George, the multifaceted editor of The Paris Review." The obituary went on to note how, at age 79, "she suddenly

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<sup>21</sup> The board of directors of the hospital, founded in 1862 to offer to women medical care by their own sex, did eventually vote to allow men on the staff, but it also, in 1955, established the Blanche Ames Fund for Medical Education of Women in tribute to her efforts on behalf of the hospital, Notable American Women, p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> Notable American Women, p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> New York Times obituary, box 4, folder 22.

came out from underneath" to become a chronicler of her family's history as the author of eight books. Somehow, though, in this chronicle, only her father, husband and son are mentioned, while for her remarkable, gifted mother, apparently "the rest is silence," because no mention is made of her at all.

The obscurity into which Blanche, Lou Rogers, Nina Allender and the other great cartooning women have fallen was lifted briefly in 1995, when the 75th anniversary of the winning of the 19th amendment was celebrated with a display of suffrage art at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington called "Artful Advocacy: Cartoons from the Woman Suffrage Movement." Cartoons by Blanche, Allender and by Rogers received a prominent place and cartoons by Blanche were featured in a documentary film on suffrage that appeared on PBS.

What can be remembered about Blanche Ames Ames is that, both in spite of and because of her family, she had the character and force of will to insist upon rights for women, not only for the ordinary civil rights accorded routinely to male citizens, but also for the right of women to control their own bodies and the number and timing of their births. Nor did setbacks seem to discourage her, buoyed as she was by a family legacy of courage, leadership and tenacity. When winning the vote proved disappointing, she sought to give women the right to birth control and to train women to understand and minister to their own bodies by training women in medicine at the New England Women's Hospital. Her example inspired new generations of her family to continue to fight for the rights of women.

Though she was a progressive rather than a radical--albeit a very haute bourgeoisie--she was prepared to ally herself with and support radicals such as Dr. Antoinette Konikow when the cause was right, or to work to defeat her own party's incumbent in the name of woman suffrage. She was flexible, eager for change, but not simply for change's sake. Like many of her progressive generation, she sought to reform not to demolish her society, but to direct it toward more widespread individual equality, opportunity and autonomy. She strove always at the border of the bonds that confined women of her generation, to push back the boundaries of what was respected and respectable, to extend the borders of her spiritual estate as she and Oakes had extended their lives to encompass their home and masterpiece, Borderland.

Though her wealth might have confined her, as it did many other women of her class, to the patronizing charity more characteristic of her caste,<sup>24</sup> she consistently demonstrated a sympathy and concern for impoverished women and their children, both in her political cartoons and in her other public activity. When one remembers her ironic, snobbish humor at the expense of poor people recorded in her diary during her visit the Chicago World's Fair at age 15, it is surprising to note that she was, as an adult, kind and thoughtful with her employees and egalitarian enough to seek to win their support for woman suffrage, somewhat to Oakes's discomfiture. Estelle Dozier,

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<sup>24</sup> The wealthy and elite Mary Hutcheson Page, for example, preferred to support suffrage by funding Maud Wood Park, instead of hazarding her own person in the harsh light of public opinion. As Sharon Hartman Strom wrote, Page was an expert at "backstage politics." From "Leadership and Tactics in the American Woman Suffrage Movement: A New Perspective from Massachusetts," Journal of American History, vol. 62, no. 2, Sept. 1975, p. 301.

who worked for several generations of Ameses in Ormond, Florida, observed that, if Blanche was the mistress of her home, she was a fair and kind one, careful to encourage and to teach rather than scold if things did not go perfectly on the domestic side. Called upon unexpectedly to serve at the table, Estelle remembered: "When I would pass the food on the wrong side, some times Professor never said anything. Mrs. Ames would smile, and later she would tell me everything worked out good. The next time pass to the other side. Keep on and you'll learn."<sup>25</sup> Education, not charitable works nor governess-led tours of Europe, was of central importance to her family for three generations, and Blanche, like Sarah Hildreth and Blanche Butler before her, saw to it that her daughters were as well educated as her sons and was as proud of their achievements as her Grandmother Sarah Hildreth Butler and mother Blanche Butler Ames had been of their children, daughters as well as sons.

With her deeply sensitive husband Oakes, she succeeded in forging a lasting relationship that preserved his position in the family while according her the opportunity to act on her own beliefs. The New Woman who began by making Oakes uncomfortable, transformed herself into the gifted and companionable wife of half a century. Devotion to family, to her parents, siblings, husband and children, was a

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<sup>25</sup> From an interview with David and Estelle Doziers which appeared in "The Whim," vol. 1, no.2, pp. 8-9. David Dozier was unable to write, but his children were graduates of Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona Beach, to which Blanche and Oakes contributed financially. It is interesting to note that interest in the well-being of black Americans continued in the family. Neither Gen. Benjamin Butler nor Gen. Adelbert Ames had been abolitionists before the Civil War, but Butler came to admire the courage of his Negro troops and Ames was a defender of the freedmen in Mississippi.

constant theme in Blanche's life and one of the main sources of her strength. She was proud of her heritage, of her Grandfather Butler, her gallant father Gen. Ames, and of her brothers, who served in the Spanish-American War. But it was to her warm and intelligent mother that she poured out her thoughts in letters sent from school and from around the world over many, many years.

As an artist, she was talented and eclectic enough to use her training from Smith College to forge new pathways in political cartoon iconography. Without resorting to divisive images in her published cartoons,<sup>26</sup> she drew cartoons that were easily comprehended, but which made her points forcefully: That the home would be strengthened by woman's vote and that woman's rights equated with genuine human progress. Her partnership with her husband over the illustration of his botany texts was ultimately very successful, but she still found time to paint the portraits and landscapes that confirmed her standing as a fine artist.

Energetic, nervous, prone to severe headaches, she nevertheless gave unstintingly of herself to support her causes, usually as a leader, and she was willingly to accept public exposure through photographs and newspaper interviews, although she was a socialite who might have chosen to keep her privacy and finance others to do the fighting. In this willingness to go public, as it were, with her views, she suffered scurrilous condemnation before the public for her support of woman's right not just to the vote, but to control her own body.

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<sup>26</sup> She did label a member of a jury judging a voteless woman "Col. Irish," but the cartoon was never pursued beyond the stage of a pencil sketch.

Withal, family members and colleagues in her clubs and campaigns attest to her warmth and humor, how they delighted to work with her, how she encouraged her pessimistic husband through a lifetime of botanical work and achievement. She was if anything the very antithesis of the misogynist view of the woman reformer as a selfish, masculinized, denatured freak, since she worried over her children and supported her husband like any other woman. If she was protected by wealth from some of the public odium she incurred in her campaigns, she did not, at least, patronize those whom she sought to help nor employ racism or nativism as part of her intellectual argument.

A remarkable woman indeed, was Blanche, but, in the end, like so many other splendid female spirits, so easily forgotten. As Sharon Hartman Strom reminds us, successful causes are rarely won by the actions of a few great people alone. Susan B. Anthony, Alice Paul and Margaret Sanger won their fights because they had great generals behind them, and such a one was Blanche Ames Ames. The history of the fight for women's rights "should remind scholars that while national leaders are important, the rank and file of any movement can be more significant."<sup>27</sup> But Blanche was not just rank and file, she was a leader in any endeavor to which she turned her hand and human memory must be short indeed to forget her.

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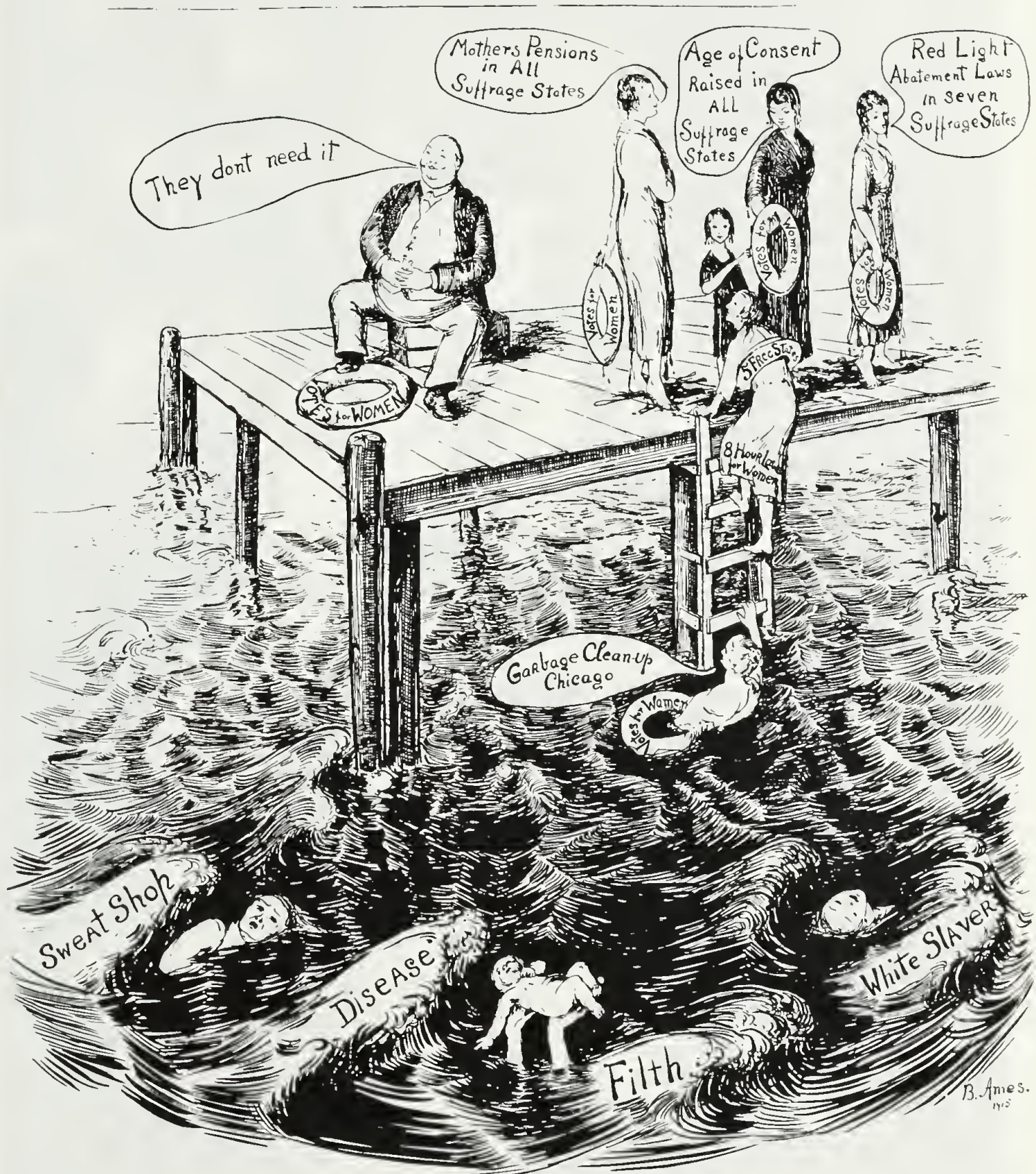
<sup>27</sup> "Leadership and Tactics in the American Woman Suffrage Movement," p. 315

## APPENDIX A

### CARTOONS



# Meanwhile the Rest Drown !



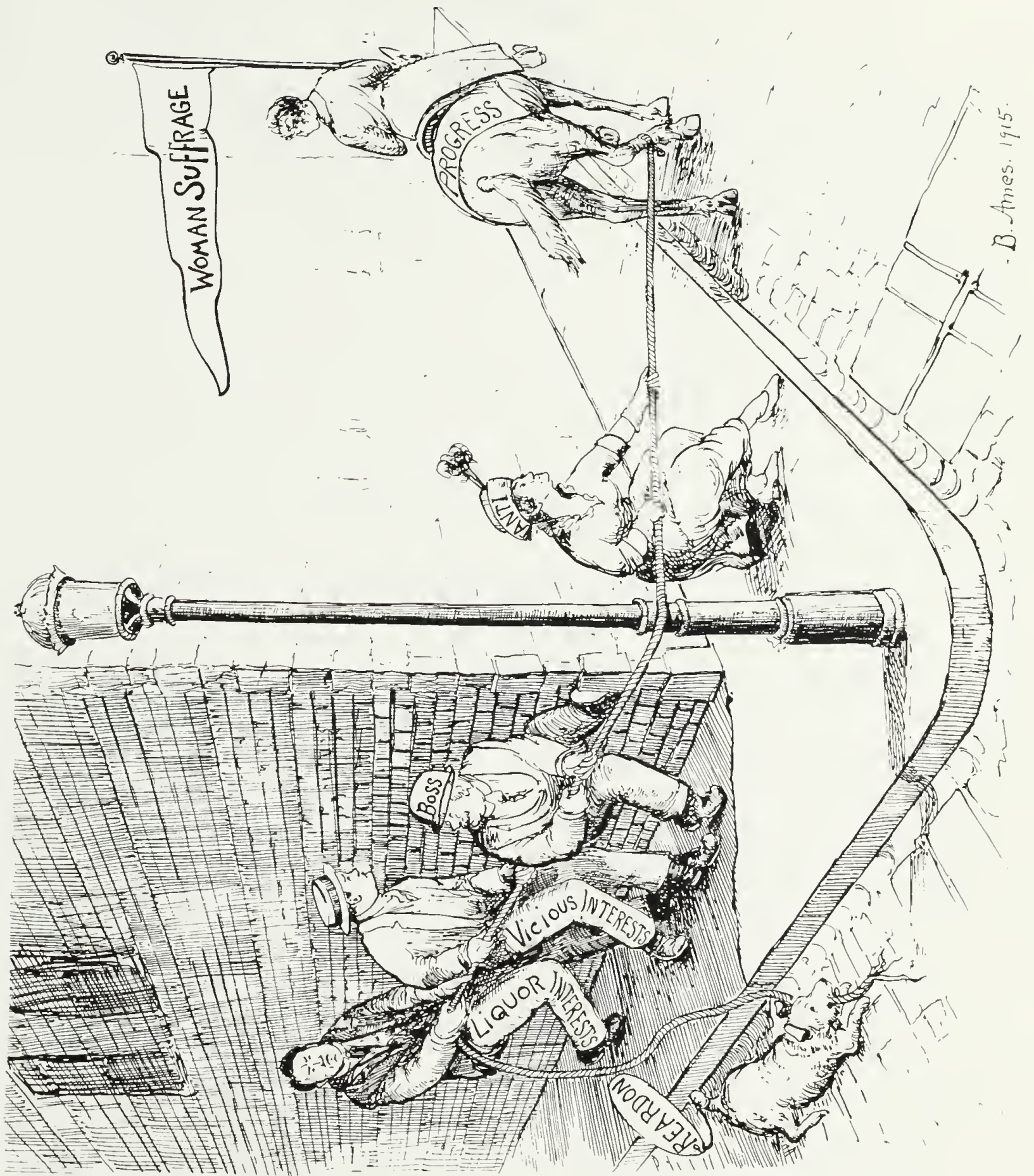
"But though I am opposed to woman suffrage now I recognize that it is likely to come some time."  
 "There is no great evil which their being kept out of the franchise continues."  
 W.H. Taft.



Blanche Ames, 1915.

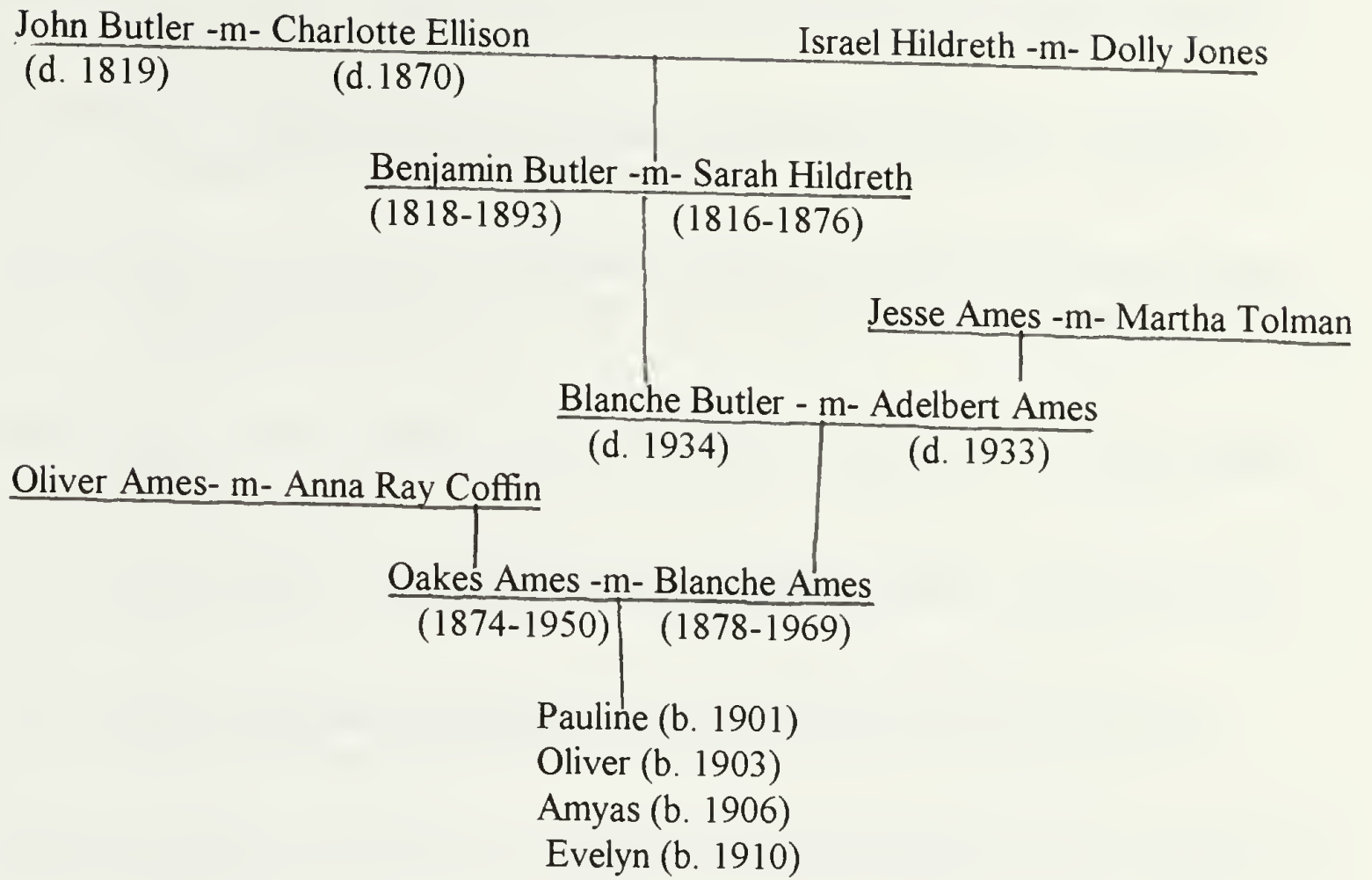
# MEANWHILE THEY DROWN.





APPENDIX B  
FAMILY TREE

# FAMILY TREE



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Woman's Journal

#### Special Collections:

Ames Family Papers, Sophia Smith, Smith College Woman's Rights Collection, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College



