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Charleston Girl's Boarding Schools in the Nineteenth Century

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“Mental refinement gives woman the power to cope with man, while at the same [time] teach her that her sphere and labor are different from his... though busy duties of home life can be possibly be... It is education alone that raises one above another, thus forming different grades of society.”¹

This quote revealed many aspects about the nineteenth century woman educated in Charleston boarding schools. While Moore wrote this in her composition book in 1872, she was educated in Charleston decades prior in the mid-nineteenth century. Moore first outlined that education gave women the strength and tools to adequately handle man. As a product of the Charleston education system, Moore’s quote implied that women needed education to manage plantation duties. This passage also revealed that Moore was aware that roles in society were dictated by gender. She clearly understood her role within Charleston planter society and knew the implications of “her sphere and labor [as] different” from man’s.² Lastly, Moore understood that education served as a social divider for classes. Formal education was only granted to members of elite classes during the nineteenth century in the South. Wives and daughters of Charleston planters in the nineteenth century were some of the most privileged women in the country.

Many elite planter wives and daughters who attended boarding schools during the nineteenth century around Charleston, South Carolina received a unique education. This education encompassed both domestic, “practical” traditions as well as academic subjects. Yet, in Charleston’s patriarchic society men defined the roles women played; planters controlled

¹ Elizabeth Sarah Moffett Moore, “Composition Book 1872-1874,” box (34/672) South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, 1, 4.

² Moore, 4.

feminine agency, and dictated the social roles for their wives and daughters. In Charleston, women's education was inspired by the vision of planter fathers. The boarding schools' curricula and regulations reflected planter father's expectations. Upon the successful completion of her education, a planter daughter was suited for marriage to an elite planter. Thus, education of elite females was a critical facet of the continuation and survival of the Charleston planter system. While education taught Charleston women submission, the academic environment encouraged them to cultivate their own artistic and intellectual interests. The education which elite planter women received at boarding school often aided in their expression of hopes, joys, and even acceptance with the planter system.

Numerous economic and social factors contributed to women's education in nineteenth century Charleston. The smallest section of South Carolina, the Low Country, emerged as the most politically influential and wealthy of the state. This unbridled wealth and power in Charleston and its environs was a result of the plantation economy, which dated to the eighteenth century. Low Country plantations were almost entirely dependent upon rice production. Charleston, due to its economic success as a great port city and central meeting location for southern planters, emerged as the "social and cultural capital"³ of the South during the nineteenth century. Most planters maintained residences in Charleston in addition to their plantations. Planter families traveled back and forth from city to country in a pattern structured around holidays and annual events. For the young women of these planter families, this structured pattern ceased when they commenced formal education in the city. Education in the city, thus, afforded a measure of freedom from the structure of the plantation household. In Charleston, the boarding school represented the place where a woman became refined. Planters wanted to

³ Michael P. Johnson, "Planters and Patriarchy: Charleston, 1800-1860," *The Journal of Southern History* 46, no. 1 (1980): 47.

provide their daughters with character, moral strength, education in ornamental arts, and all the essentials to make her the perfect wife and mother. The boarding school helped women prepare for their future lives as plantation mistresses.⁴ Young girls' compliance with education at boarding schools was a crucial step to the creation of future elite planter families.

Women, though unable to participate in the public sphere, were expected to educate, uphold, and instill moral virtues in their children and husbands. This concept is known as republican motherhood. Women were seen as separate from the "public sphere," which was defined as anything outside the household. The concept of republican motherhood, flourished after the Revolutionary War. Eventually, female education was associated with civic duty.⁵ Before marriage, girls were to be chaste and adhere to sexual propriety at all times. Upon marriage, wives were expected to be paragons of virtue and impart this trait upon both husbands and sons. However, republican motherhood contained a deep contradiction. According to historian Linda Kerber, "on the one hand, republican political theory called for a sensibly educated female citizenry to educate future generations of sensible republicans; on the other, domestic tradition condemned highly educated women as perverse threat to family stability."⁶ Historians note further that the educational system for elite daughters evolved drastically in early nineteenth century due to changes brought by the Industrial Revolution and the impact of republican motherhood concepts.⁷ Curriculum in boarding schools shifted away from placing a heavy emphasis on domestic skills to a more academically-based education system. Elite planter

⁴ Steven M. Stowe, "City, Country, and the Feminine Voice," in *Intellectual Life in Antebellum Charleston*, ed. Michael O'Brian and David Moltke-Hansen (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 295-302.

⁵ Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 10.

⁶ Kerber, 10.

⁷ Kerber, 199-200.

daughters with a high degree of education were expected to make good planter society marriages. As planter wives and mothers, women were dependent on husbands. Yet, while planter wives and mothers were unable to participate directly in civic duty, their instruction to children and husbands affected “moral development [and gave mothers] ultimate responsibility for the future of the nation.”⁸ While women shaped the nation indirectly, under the guise of republican ideals, their involvement created the moral foundation of America.

Many feminist historians cite the seminal work of the political philosopher Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, to foster arguments about nineteenth-century women’s education. Habermas argued that, because of the Enlightenment era’s emphasis on the importance of reason, the eighteenth century was the birth of the bourgeoisie and the public sphere of opinion.⁹ The inclusion of women and feminine voice within the public sphere of opinion marked, for Habermas, the beginning of the “dismantling of paternal authority structure ... and the leveling of familial authority can be observed in all advancing industrial nations.”¹⁰ Habermas and feminist historians have argued that as time progressed, the distinction between public and private life diminished. Habermas has often described the gradual dissolution of the “private” to a wholly “public” existence. The nineteenth century was a turning point when women began to extend their spheres of influence in society. Over time, a change in the paradigm of what public meant shifted. The gender distinctions of what were appropriate for women and what were appropriate for men changed with time.

⁸ Kerber, 229.; Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* no. 2 (1966): 151-174.; Catherine Clinton, “Equally Their Due: The Education of the Planter Daughter in the Early Republic.” *Journal of the Early Republic* no. 2 (1982): 39-60.

⁹ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 117.

¹⁰ Habermas, 156.

Women began to have an identity that was not solely connected with domesticity as they became more educated by the end of the nineteenth century.

An important conversation among women's education historians is of the utilization of feminine space. Many historians have engaged in the discussion about women and their use of both private and public space and how this affects society.¹¹ Historian Catherine Allgor acknowledged that the movements of upper-echelon white women were a source of anxiety for both women and men in the nineteenth century.¹² Men in the nineteenth century sought to protect women. This southern chivalric characteristic was rooted in the male obsession with feminine virginity and purity. Both southern men and women held a commitment to uphold female sexual purity. The virtue of feminine sexual purity was perhaps the most significant to the southern planter class. A woman's deficiency of this virtue brought social ruin as she was damned unfit for marriage and motherhood.¹³ Women were regarded as bastions of virtue during the antebellum period. Yet, ironically, society dictated that men either played the role of the corruptor or the guardian of woman's sacred virtues. Men protected feminine virtue through the manipulation of space. The finite space within the walls of the boarding school appealed to planter patriarchs as a safe place for their daughters. Also, the physical distance between plantations outside the city and the schools within downtown Charleston was important: historians have noted that boarding schools operated separately from the plantation symbolically,

¹¹ Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).; Nina Baym, *American Women Writers and the Work of History, 1790-1860* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995).; Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001).; Catherine Clinton and Lumbridi eds. *The Colombia Guide to Women's Education in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Colombia University Press).

¹² Allgor, 55.

¹³ Welter, 155-156.

in both task and mentality for the girls.¹⁴ Women came to boarding schools to receive domestic and academic education. Some women enjoyed their years at boarding school and thrived.

The single greatest purpose that planter fathers had in the education of their daughters was for her future marriage. A planter daughter's education was to insure a socially and financially secure marriage with a bachelor planter. When educated young women married planters, they perpetuated both the cycle of the planter system and the elite Low Country society. Women who were educated in boarding schools in Charleston and its vicinity were considered highly desirable. Charles Izard Manigault illustrated the importance of his daughter's education in a letter to his son. In this letter, Manigault explained to his son that his daughter Henriette, was educated so that she would be more suitable for society and hence, marriage. Her education at a Paris school would make her "destined to be a great character *de jouer une role en societe*."¹⁵ Manigault felt the need to differentiate his daughter from other educated Charleston elite girls to increase her chances of acquiring the ideal husband.

In other correspondence, Manigault detailed the characteristics that Henriette needed in her future planter husband. Manigault wrote this letter well before his daughter Henriette had completed her education. Manigault believed that certain characteristics were necessary in an appropriate suitor. In a letter to a friend, Manigault said that he would leave a larger share of his estate to his daughters as long as he approved of their choice in husbands. He stated that his daughter's choice must meet his approval and that they have "industry-perseverance-training-propriety of deportment, and virtuous control over all his actions This produces domestic

¹⁴ Steven M. Stowe, "City, Country, and the Feminine Voice," in *Intellectual Life in Antebellum Charleston* ed. Michael O'Brian and David Moltke-Hansen (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986): 295-302.

¹⁵ Charles Izard Manigault to Charles Henry Manigault, October 1, 1846, "Manigault Letter book," South Caroliniana Library, Columbia.

happiness.”¹⁶ Charles Manigault prescribed specific traits that his daughter should seek in a worthy husband, such as “industry” and “perseverance,” qualities that would indicate wealth and strong work ethic. Manigault hoped that his daughter’s expensive education would bring a wealthy suitor. Hence, “an advantageous marital liaison [facilitated] by the planter parent purportedly offset any temporary financial setback,” which was caused by his daughter’s education.¹⁷ Planter fathers and mothers alike knew that their daughter’s education secured financial stability and the fulfillment of a society ritual.

Prior to marriage, elite women of the Low Country planter class were expected to be virginal and asexual. Advertisements for girl’s boarding schools reflected planters’ strong desire to protect virginity and chastity. Purity was a chief value for nineteenth century women. Historian Mary Ryan discussed how “virgin pure” women were elevated to an iconic and symbolic status in early republic and antebellum public ceremonies.¹⁸ Anne Firor Scott found that the antebellum woman’s feminine “charm lay in her innocence.”¹⁹ First and foremost, the Charleston southern belle was to be innocent, chaste, and pure. Therefore, many boarding school advertisements depicted the nature of supervision as parental. The language of these advertisements reflected the planter audience. One such Charleston ladies school advertised that “the discipline of the School will be mild and parental.”²⁰ Planter fathers demanded that strict

¹⁶ Charles Izard Manigault to Alfred Huger, April 1, 1847, “Manigault Letter book,” South Caroliniana Library, Columbia.

¹⁷ Catherine Clinton, “Equally Their Due: The Education of the Planter Daughter in the Early Republic.” *Journal of the Early Republic* no. 2 (1982): 42.

¹⁸ Mary Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 26-28.

¹⁹ Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 4.

rules be imparted on their daughters while they were away from the plantation. Other advertisements boasted a small number of boarders to ensure the protection of each student. For example, Mrs. M.R.D. Meyniac's boarding school advertisement stated that the headmistress would "bestow exclusively on those entrusted to her care the most unremitting attention [and] the number of her boarders will be so limited as to secure to each the full enjoyment of every accommodation."²¹ Similarly, Ms. S. Colcock's announcement of her boarding school cautioned that she would only take in several boarders for the school year.²² Some boarding school advertisements rigidly outlined the movements of their boarders. For example, Madame Tongo's boarding school announcement stated, "No boarding pupil is permitted SPEND A NIGHT AWAY FROM MADAME TONGO'S HOUSE, nor will any young Lady be permitted to go out in the evening, or attend places of public amusement with friends or visitors, unless she holds a written request to do so, signed by a Parent or Guardian. No Parlor boarders are received."²³ Clearly, many boarding school headmistresses knew the parents' expectations for these Charleston schools. Thus, these advertisements played on plantation father's fears. In Madame Tongo's advertisement, the last sentences are particularly of interest. They imply that forces outside the guarded walls of the school could physically and psychologically corrupt innocent planter daughters. Thus, according to the language of these advertisements, the boarding school headmistresses served as surrogate parents, and this rhetoric was successful with planters. This language revealed that headmistresses were aware of their audience. Low Country planter's

²⁰"Advertisement for Mme. Demings' Boarding School," *Charleston City Gazette*, 1/12/1820, issue 12687, page 4.

²¹"Advertisement for Mme. Meyniac's Boarding School," *Charleston City Gazette*, 11/22/1821, issue 13491, page 1.

²²"Advertisement for Mrs. Colcock's Boarding School," *Camden Gazette*, 1/28/1819, issue 146, page 4.

²³ "Advertisement for Mme. Rosalie Acelie Guillou Tongo's Boarding School 1855," (43/157) South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston. Capitalization original to document.

expectations were acknowledged and accommodated. Historian Catherine Clinton finds that most planter father accompanied their daughters in the inspection of a school and if he deemed it suitable, he would leave the daughter at that boarding school.²⁴ Protectionism of female beauty and virtue was a major component of the planter patriarchal system in Charleston.

Under the Low Country planter tradition, even educated women were regarded as childlike. Women were seen as infirm and dependent on men to protect, feed and clothe them.²⁵ In this respect, plantation wives and daughters relied upon the planter master for material comfort just like slave men, women, and children. In many letters to her husband throughout the 1840s and 1850s, Adele Petigru Allston voiced approval and compliance with the Charleston planter patriarchy system. Moreover, her letters illustrated that Adele Allston compared her identity to that of a slave. In a letter to her planter husband, R.F.W. Allston, Adele closed her correspondence with “your faithful servant,” and scattered throughout her letter were numerous allusions to slavery. She completed the slave metaphor when she called him her “master” at the end of the letter.²⁶ R.F.W. Allston provided further evidence of his wife’s dependent status with his letters. Allston opened a letter to his wife with, “my dear child.”²⁷ Clearly, some planter wives accepted their role and position within this patriarchal system.²⁸

²⁴Catherine Clinton, “Equally Their Due: The Education of the Planter Daughter in the Early Republic.” *Journal of the Early Republic* no 2. (1982): 51.

²⁵ Welter, 159-161.

²⁶ Adele Petigru Allston to R.F.W. Allston, March 14, 1948, “Allston Family Papers,” South Caroliniana Library, Columbia.

²⁷ R.F.W. Allston to Adele Petrigu Allston, June 2, 1950, “Allston Family Papers,” South Caroliniana Library, Columbia.

²⁸ Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 217.

Although fathers controlled many elements of the logistical aspects of his daughter's boarding school education, mothers who had spent their girlhood in Charleston boarding schools often served as links between the plantation and their own daughters once they departed. Mothers often communicated important plantation news to their absent daughters. For example, Mary Motte Alston Pringle was educated in Charleston at a boarding school around 1818. After her education, Pringle married and relocated to her husband's plantation, Runimede, which was in close proximity to Charleston. From the 1820s to the 1840s she often wrote to her daughter, Susan Pringle, at boarding school and to her sons at college. In her letters to her daughter Susan, Mary Pringle detailed news of female family members, friend's engagements and weddings, ailing relatives, the births of children, home medicinal remedies, and cooking recipes. But, the majority of her letters to her daughter detailed the intricate daily routines of the Runimede plantation. This is in contrast to the subject matter that Pringle wrote to her sons. While they were at college, she wrote about their futures, education and seldom mentioned the plantation. On those rare occasions when Pringle addressed the subject of education to Susan, it was accompanied by lengthy discussions of morality, religious duty, and virtue. Pringle opens a letter to Susan, "your Papa and I are satisfied that your conduct is discreet and that your strong sense of moral and religious duty may be entirely relied upon...the uninterrupted system of education that is placed within your reach is of great and important benefit."²⁹ In true republican-mother form, Mary Pringle reminded her daughter Susan that her education was aligned with a moral cause. The goal of Susan Pringle's education was to equip her to manage her own plantation household. Therefore, Susan's mother served an important role within her

²⁹ Mary Motte Alston Pringle to Susan Pringle, February 21, 1841, "Alston-Pringle-Frost Family Papers," (1285.00) South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

education. This evidence shows that the Low Country mother worked, even unintentionally, to remind the daughter of the purpose of her education.

Charleston boarding schools, like most women's schools of the time, did not properly prepare girls in the practical skills of sewing, needle work, washing, and cooking. Many account books and advertisements for boarding schools from the nineteenth century Charleston note "domestic training" only briefly. However, more evidence referred to the instruction of ornamental, artistic pursuits such as music, dance, and art. Mrs. Colcock's account book rarely mentioned allocated funds for yarn and needles, but bills to boarders' parents repeatedly mentioned dance and music lessons and tickets to art events.³⁰ Mrs. Deming's advertisement for her girl's school boasted that students would learn "Music, Painting, Painting on Velvet, and many other ornamental branches."³¹ Similarly, Adele Petigru Allston's accounting book reflected the same pattern. Most of Allston's entries included tabulations for academic textbooks, and lessons in music and dance. Allston's account book included only three references to items with practical instruction value. The words "muslin sack ruffled round card cotton buttons" and "making skirt" appeared on one boarder's tuition and board bill.³² Further, the physical placement of this particular entry within the account book seemed to indicate that it was written by the author as an afterthought, written on a small piece of paper in the far right corner of the page. Thus, one might assume that many Charleston boarding school headmistresses spent more time on ornamental and artistic studies than those with more practical, domestic worth.

³⁰ Mrs. Colcock's and Mrs. Ferguson's "Accounting Book, 1818-1820," South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

³¹ "Advertisement for Mme. Demings' Boarding School," *Charleston City Gazette*, 1/12/1820, issue 12687, page 4.

³² Adele Petigru Allston, *Accounting Book 1866-1868* "Adele Petigru Allston Papers," (1164.02.03) South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

Wealthy nineteenth century Charlestonians also encouraged their daughters to learn the classics. Many girls' boarding schools in Charleston included instruction in Latin and Greek. Mary Pringle, throughout her adult life, often used Latin phrases when she wrote letters to her sons and her daughter, Susan. However, historians noted that the classics in most boarding schools were not taught to women. It has been noted that women's education in the nineteenth century underwent a shift with "the wholesale elimination of classics from the curriculum. Classics were coming to be regarded as a decorative accomplishment for men" only.³³ Another Charleston educated woman, Elizabeth Sarah Moffett Moore, used her knowledge of classics when she described the meaning of the word "education." She wrote in her composition book, "the word is derived from two Latin words... sincere and to lead... we see that the true meaning of the word is to draw or lead out."³⁴ Yet, this was not the case for women's education in Charleston. Also, it was not common for southern women to be educated in Italian. Yet, Mary Pringle in a letter to her daughter Susan, informed her that her younger sister was to be educated in Italian.³⁵

Many Charleston boarding schools during the antebellum period discouraged the instruction of poetry and literature; instead, teachers taught history to their pupils.³⁶ History enshrined great male figures and was considered an "anti-intellectual" subject fit for the study of

³³ Kerber, 215.

³⁴ Elizabeth Sarah Moore Moffett, "Composition Book 1872-1874," (34/672) South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

³⁵ Mary Motte Pringle to Susan Pringle. February 4, 1841. "The Alston-Pringle-Frost Family Papers" (1285.00) South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

³⁶ Mary Kelley, "The Sentimentalists: The Promise and Betrayal in the Home," *Signs* 4, no 3 (1979): 434-446.; Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980);. Laura McCall, "Shall I Fetter Her Will?": Literary Americans Confront Feminine Submission, 1820-1860," *Journal of the Early Republic* 21, no. 1 (2001): 95-113.; Catherine Clinton "Equally Their Due: The Education of the Planter Daughter in the Early Republic," *The Journal of the Early Republic*, no. 1 (1982): 39-60.

a future republican mother.³⁷ The study of history, prior to the twentieth century, did not include many female figures. Therefore, the study of history served as both a means to solidify the white male status quo and as a means for planters to maintain their place in the southern hierarchy. Because women were not included in historical events in the study of nineteenth century history, women learned that men were the actors, the prime movers of society, and women were in the background. A history with men at the forefront was the only version of history that women were taught. Therefore, though the history curriculum, women's submission within the male dominated system was implicit and subtle. Historical hierarchies within academic curriculum also served women by seeming permanent. History exemplified for Charleston women that functioning outside the established gender roles was not an alternative. Furthermore, the study of history "allowed women to envision themselves as members of the polis and to contemplate ideal rhetorical practice therein."³⁸ Thus, history educations during the nineteenth century gave women the illusion that they had attained public success and were full citizens with civic rights and duties. Mary Motte Alston Pringle extensively recounted the history of Greece and Rome in her commonplace book which she wrote during own her years at boarding school. In 1818 She wrote:

Cincinnatus and Fabricus taught Rome the virtues of citizens-but ages have slept upon the ruins of Athens and the vices of Nero and Caligula made Roman virtues a mockery. ...All the efforts of purity from Rome, Athens, and Sparta was false,

³⁷ Kerber, 210.

³⁸ Janet Carey Eldred and Peter Mortensen, *Imagining Rhetoric: Composing Women of the Early United States* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), 8.

and after their fall the world... The necessity of resistance to vice, this ever active spirit of reform still remained.³⁹

This passage implies that Pringle was comparing ancient European societies to that of her own Charleston. The manner in which Pringle wrote about history conveys she that she conformed to the Low Country planter ideal and expectation of republican motherhood. Thus, Pringle used history as a tool to educate her sons on the path of righteous citizenship.

Throughout her letters to her sons, Pringle drew upon a myriad of historical and literary quotes which illustrated the classical Republican and Enlightenment values of reason, action, duty, and social responsibility. Evidently, although Pringle's own education in 1818 included a considerable amount of history, when she wrote to her own sons in 1826 she subtly used it as a didactic teaching device. She wrote to her sons,

In almost every celebrated personage we detect some infirmity or weakness- Henry the fourth of France, cast a shade over his bright qualities by his love of women, Elizabeth of England by the vanity of her own personal beauty subjected herself to the ridicule of her courtiers. We could select so many instances of the foregoing kind, as almost to be discouraged about correcting any foible of our own...⁴⁰

Pringle goes on to caution her sons that human reason and virtue should triumph over vice. Mary Pringle was fulfilling the republican motherhood model by craftily using history as a

³⁹ Mary Motte Alston Pringle, Commonplace Book Two, 1818, "Mary Motte Alston Pringle Papers" (1285.01.01), South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, 23-24.

⁴⁰ Mary Motte Alston Pringle, Letter book 1826, "Mary Motte Alston Pringle Papers 1822-1881" (1285.01.01), South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, 22.

means to teach civic virtues to her sons. By being an effective and caring republican mother to her sons, Pringle embodied patriarchal Low Country planter ideals.

Literature was widely taught in Charleston boarding schools; yet, historians have noted that literature instruction was a rare commodity in the nineteenth century southern boarding school.⁴¹ The study of literature was considered dangerous for women to participate. Some popular novels of the nineteenth century highlighted heroic, strong women. Men interpreted these fictionalized female characters as a challenge to the social hierarchy. Perhaps most importantly, literature contained plots in which women were placed outside of the household. The mere possibility of a woman who renounced her role as wife and mother undermined the republican mother standards of planter society. Moreover, literature often exaggerated events to mythic proportions. Men held to the Enlightenment belief that women were emotional creatures and as such were also estranged from reason. Literature provided examples of embellished truths which men feared that the feeble female mind could mistake as reality. However, Charleston educated women used literature as a way to express joy and acceptance with their planter society. In her boarding school account book, Adele Petrigu Allston recorded numerous entries for literature textbooks. Allston's account book revealed that she repeatedly ordered editions of *Shaw's English Literature* and *The Shakespearean Reader* for her boarding school.⁴² Instead of using literature to question or reflect upon the patriarchy and its inequalities, Charleston educated women used it as a tool to justify inequality within the planter system. Mary Pringle often used literary quotes to rectify men's actions. In her common place book she

⁴¹ Catherine Clinton, "Equally Their Due: The Education of the Planter Daughter in the Early Republic." *Journal of the Early Republic* no. 2 (1982): 50.; Laura McCall, "Shall I Fetter Her Will?": Literary Americans Confront Feminine Submission, 1820-1860," *Journal of the Early Republic* 21, no. 1 (2001): 95-113.

⁴² Adele Petigru Allston, "Accounting Book 1866-1868," (1164.02.03) Allston Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

often transcribed quotes from which it is possible to infer her views. Most of the quotes that she highlighted were ones that mentioned virtue, reason, and, most notably, action. Pringle also quoted passages that hinted at social and gender inequality. Pringle may have thought submission and inequality characterized the relationship of the Low Country husband and wife. At the time Pringle wrote in her commonplace book she was not yet married. Mary Pringle would marry the wealthy planter, William Bull Pringle shortly after she completed her own education. During her days at boarding school, years before her own marriage, Pringle was thinking about marriage. Accordingly, Pringle quoted Bulwer's *Alice on the Mysteries* that husband and wife with "sufficient time, the leash which at first galled often grows easy and familiar and unless the temper be insufferable, what was once a grievous yoke becomes but a compassionate tie."⁴³ This transcribed quote revealed that Pringle was aware of the daunting challenges that awaited her in marriage. In a Low Country marriage, women were taught a submissive model of behavior. In most cases, Low Country women, not men, felt the restraint of the "grievous yoke" in marriage. Pringle's transcription of this passage revealed that she privately sought justification for the unbalanced marital relationships.

Boarding school curricula in nineteenth century Charleston also featured artistic instruction. A fundamental knowledge of artistic subjects was expected of the nineteenth century Low Country woman. Thus, dance, art, and music functioned symbolically within the planter ideology. Much like academic education, the more familiar a woman was with the arts, the more valuable potential suitors deemed her. An artistic education marked a planter daughter as desirable. Therefore, her artistic development functioned as an indication of her planter father's status with elite society. Unlike academic instruction, the study of artistic subjects was relatively

⁴³ Mary Motte Alston Pringle, *Commonplace Book Two*, 1818, "Mary Motte Alston Pringle Papers" (1285.01.01) South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, 23-24.

frivolous: plantation wives, consummate hostesses, were encouraged to display their creative talents at social gatherings. While at boarding school, many girls took a genuine interest in the artistic subjects they studied. The boarding school environment encouraged girls to cultivate their artistic talents. Elizabeth Allston Pringle was the daughter of Adele Petigru and planter R.F.W. Allston. At boarding school Elizabeth Allston Pringle, played piano and declared, “music had become my great pleasure!”⁴⁴ While at boarding school, Pringle’s interest in the piano progressed into a passion. Pringle wanted to practice the piano more than the allotted two hours a day. When the headmistress refused to give Pringle another hour of practice within the school day schedule, she encouraged Pringle to use the spare drawing room piano before the start of the school day. Therefore, Pringle practiced piano everyday at six in the morning. She recalled, “all that winter I got up...broke the ice in my pitcher to perform my hasty ablutions, and [put] on my cloak and took my candle into the drawing room, and ... often practiced that hour.”⁴⁵ Hence, while the boarding school taught girls decorative artistic subjects as a means of subjugation for their roles, some found art appealing and used it as a channel of artistic expression. It is also important to note that Elizabeth Pringle’s artistic refinement was successful in that she later married a planter family son, Mary Motte Alston Pringle’s son, John Julius Pringle.

While artistic instruction in girls’ boarding schools was favored in the Low Country, some planter fathers felt only France could adequately provide the proper “ornamental” finishing for their daughters. Charles Manigault described France as far superior to America for a woman’s musical education. When Manigault described Henriette’s talent for the piano, he boasted that it would propel her into society. Manigault further commented, “Music that in *this*

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Waites Allston Pringle, *Chronicles of Chicora Wood*. (Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing Company, 1976). 179.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Waites Allston Pringle, *Chronicles of Chicora Wood*, 180.

country ... is justly celebrated and of course they know how to teach it here.”⁴⁶ Manigault explicitly wedded Henriette’s musical education with her finishing as a lady. Her education, and especially her musical education, would make her, according to her planter father ready for society.⁴⁷ While the cost of relocation was high, the cost of the proper education for an elite planter daughter was without measure. Surely, Manigault knew that his Parisian educated daughter would fetch an exceedingly handsome and wealthy suitor.

Throughout the early and mid-nineteenth century, French culture and language were essential features boarding school curricula Charleston. This expectation that a woman mastered French language and customs while at boarding school fulfilled the Charleston planter ideal. Several schools that operated from the 1830s to the 1850s instructed girls exclusively in French. For example, Madame R. Acelie Guillou Tongo’s advertisement in 1860 stated, “it is required that each Pupil join the French Class, as that language is attended to with practical usefulness, and is exclusively spoken in the School and family.”⁴⁸ An advertisement within Adele Petigru Allston’s boarding school account book advertised, “French will be the language of the school.”⁴⁹ Thus, a proper education enabled Low Country plantation daughters to write and converse in French.

Nineteenth century Low Country planter society, and women’s education, was deeply influenced by French culture and tradition. In the nineteenth century, France represented excess,

⁴⁶ Charles Izard Manigault to Charles Henry Manigault, October 1, 1846, “Manigault Letter book,” South Caroliniana Library, Columbia. italics added.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ “Advertisement for Mme. Rosalie Acelie Guillou Tongo’s Boarding School 1855,” (43/157) The South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.; Adele Petigru Allston, *Accounting Book 1866-1868* “Adele Petigru Allston Papers,” South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

⁴⁹ Adele Petigru Allston, *Accounting Book 1866-1868 Allston Family Papers* “Adele Petigru Allston Papers,” (1164.02.03) South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

grandeur, and nobility. During the antebellum period, much of Charleston's population boasted French Huguenot ancestry. Huguenots were French Protestants who had been persecuted by Catholics in the seventeenth century. Many Huguenots fled religious persecution and settled in America, especially Charleston, at the end of the seventeenth century. The first French Huguenot church in the United States was built in Charleston at the end of the seventeenth century. Many elite planters from nineteenth century Charleston wrote letters whose diction, at times, lapsed into French. Charles Izard Manigault, himself of French Huguenot heritage, wrote in French when he described his daughter's behavior at a boarding school located in Paris. Robert Francis Withers Allston also lapsed into French in a letter to Adele Petigru Allston. Mrs. Allston later operated a girls boarding school where French was the exclusive language of instruction.⁵⁰ Many of the most respected headmistresses of Charleston boarding schools were of Haitian French origin.

Some Charleston planter fathers went to even greater lengths to make French culture and customs the focus of their daughters' education. In 1845 Charles Izard Manigault moved his family to France in the interest the completion of his daughter, Henriette's, education. Henriette had begun her studies at a boarding school in Charleston, which was run by Madame Datty, a French Haitian émigré. Manigault first educated his daughter in Charleston boarding schools and then concluded her education in France. While the relocation abroad of a Low Country family for a daughter's education was uncommon it was not unheard of.⁵¹ Manigault informed his business partners about the purpose of his relocation: "our principal object in coming to Europe

⁵⁰ Charles Izard Manigault to Charles Henry Manigault, October 1, 1846, "Manigault Letter book," South Caroliniana Library, The University of South Carolina.; R.F.W. Allston to Adele Petigru Allston, May 14, 1854, "Allston Family Papers" The South Caroliniana Library, and The University of South Carolina. Adele Petigru Allston, "Accounting Book 1866-1868," Allston Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

⁵¹ Catherine Clinton, "Equally Their Due: The Education of the Planter Daughter in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* no. 2 (1982): 51.

was to finish the education of our eldest daughter...by placing her at an admirable boarding school...where under judicious instruction will fix the French language properly and permanently on [her].”⁵² Manigault thought that France was the proper place for his daughter to finish her studies. Manigault later wrote to a family member that an education in France would indeed shape his daughter into a complete, finished, young lady.

While Low Country daughters wanted to learn French culture and language, girls from other regions of South Carolina during the nineteenth century did not see the value of French education. The absence of the Low Country planter elite in upstate South Carolina seemed responsible for this educational preference. A student at Madame Tongo’s school in Charleston, Elizabeth Allston Pringle, recalled that the school moved from Charleston to Columbia, South Carolina in 1862 due to the danger of the Civil War. According to Pringle, the physical relocation of the school to the Up Country brought dramatic changes to the character of the school. Pringle recounted that Madame Tongo “still tried to make French the language of the school, but it was much harder to carry this out. Most of the girls were eighteen or nineteen and knew no French...Finding this the case, Madame made a rule that no one should speak at the table except to say, ‘*passez moi le pain s’il vous plait*.’”⁵³ Elizabeth Pringle further detailed the Up Country girls’ hatred for the French language when she described her French class. Pringle, a Charlestonian, described confusion as to why the girls did not want to learn French. Pringle further described being the pet of the French instructor because of her accent, enthusiasm, and understanding of the teacher, a Parisian, “point of view.”⁵⁴ Pringle was a product of the planter

⁵² Charles Izard Manigault to R. Habersham & Son, November 1, 1846 “Manigault Letter book,” South Caroliniana Library, Columbia.

⁵³ Elizabeth Waites Allston Pringle, *Chronicles of Chicora Wood*. (Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing Company, 1976), 178.

Low Country women's education system and as such, French instruction and its mastery was a necessary component of every elite woman's life in the nineteenth century. Therefore, Low Country girls still wanted to learn French by the start of the Civil War whereas Up Country girls did not. Pringle also recounted the struggles for coffee, bread, and other foodstuffs during the war. Perhaps the advent of the Civil War was the reason why these girls did not want to learn the refined language of French. The mastery of French language in wartime may have seemed frivolous and unpractical to the girls. Another possible reason may have been that girls from Up Country South Carolina were not surrounded by a society that held French culture in as high regard as the girls from Charleston. Thus, this difference in education preferences in South Carolina girls may have represented a vast cultural divide between the regions of Low Country and upstate.

While women educated in nineteenth century Charleston boarding schools undoubtedly had frustrations with the planter system, their education did not provide an adequate outlet for such expression. Rather, boarding schools in Charleston throughout the nineteenth century delivered some artistic, domestic, and extensive academic instruction that allowed women to develop their individual artistic and intellectual pursuits. While the instruction in Charleston boarding schools varied from other schools of the region, the course of study in Low Country schools reflected the unique culture of planter society. In this manner Charleston boarding schools provided girls with a time in their lives where they may be relatively free of family responsibility. At boarding school, girls' chief responsibility, the preservation of sexual purity would ironically ensure their partnerships with young planters. Some girls such as Elizabeth Allston Pringle, served as an example. Pringle, who was of planter class, whose mother was Adele Petrigu Allston upon the completion of her education married into another planter family,

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Waites Allston Pringle, *Chronicles of Chicora Wood*, 179.

the Pringles. These society marriages ultimately led to women inadvertently continuing the success of the Charleston planter patriarchy. The restrictive nature of education in Charleston facilitated women's approval with the planter system. Whereas the private feelings of Charleston educated women may have disapproved of the patriarchic system, their written sentiments often reiterated planter ideals.

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources

Advertisement for Mme. Colcock's Boarding School." *Charleston City Gazette*, 1/12/1820, issue 12687, page 4.

Advertisement from a local Charleston newspaper in 1820. This brief primary source mentions the safety and protection of the boarding school more than any other feature in the ad.

Mrs. Colcock and Mrs. Ferguson. "1818-1820 Account Book." The South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston

South Carolina Historical Society approved transcription from 1908 by Charles Woodward Huston. The original document of the accounting book of Mrs. Colcock's boarding school dates from 1818-1820 which was opened in Charleston, South Carolina. This source merely helps to illustrate the point that domestic studies were not emphasized much in Charleston ladies schools.

"Advertisement for Mme. Demings' Boarding School." *Charleston City Gazette*, 1/12/1820, issue 12687, page 4.

Advertisement goes in great detail about the variety of ornamental skills and subjects that would be taught to a girl who attended an 1820 boarding school in Charleston. This source also makes a point of the difference between domestic study and ornamental studies. Also this advertisement establishes the protective rhetoric that headmistresses used to placate planter fathers.

"Advertisement for Mme. Meyniac's Boarding School." *Charleston City Gazette*, 11/22/1821, issue 13491, page 1.

This advertisement shows the variety of academic subjects taught in an 1821 Charleston boarding school. This source serves as to evidence to further show the paternalistic attitude that many planter harbored towards their daughters.

"Advertisement for Mme. Rosalie Acelie Guillou Tongo's Boarding School 1855," (box 43/157) The South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

This source distinctly illustrates the careful language that headmistresses used to persuade parents that their daughters would be protected in boarding school.

Allston, Adele Petigru. "Mrs. R.F.W. Allston Accounting Book 1866-1868." "Adele Petigru Allston Papers." (box 1164.02.03) South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

This account book is useful throughout. It establishes for the reader that boarding schools did not emphasize girl learning domestic skills more than academic skills in Charleston. The account book also shows that women were taught literature, history, and other academic subjects. This source also shows the prevalence of French language instruction in nineteenth century boarding schools.

Allston, Adele Petigru. Adele Petigru Allston to R.F.W. Allston, March 14, 1948. "Allston Family Papers." South Caroliniana Library, Columbia.

This letter is used to establish that some Charleston educated women thought that their social status was comparable to a slave. This letter implies that some women were aware of their dependency on planter patriarchs. Some Charleston educated women acknowledged they were childlike in their dependence.

Allston, Robert Francis Withers. Robert Francis Withers Allston to Adele Petigru Allston, June 2, 1950. "Allston Family Papers." South Caroliniana Library, Columbia.

Again, to reiterate the abovementioned point that this letter further serves evidence that R.F.W. Allston thought of himself as a father figure to his wife Adele P. Allston.

Manigault, Charles Izard. *Letter Book*. The South Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina, Columbia. (Four separate letters to different individuals used in paper.)

Different letters from this published letter book to illustrate a variety of points. These letters clearly establish Charles Manigault's obsession with French language and culture. Most importantly these letters establish for the reader the importance and purpose of some Charleston planter fathers to educate their daughter. Also this letter is important to show the importance of music education in creating a finished lady.

Moore, Elizabeth Sarah Moffett. "Composition Book 1872-1874." (box 34/672) South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

Source written in the 1870s yet reflects the years of education prior in the 1860s. This is a book of quotations that Elizabeth S.M. Moore collected women and also her musing on subjects faith, education, and virtue.

Pringle, Elizabeth Waites Allston. *Chronicles of Chicora Wood*. Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing Company, 1976. Out of Print.

Source is written by Allston who was educated in the late 1850s and early 1860s, in Madame Tongo's boarding school. Reflects the nature of boarding school. Also shows the difference in the Low Country girl for French verses the upcountry girl. Allston was married to Mary Motte Alston Pringle's son, Julius Pringle.

Pringle, Mary Motte Alston. Letter Book 1826. "Mary Motte Alston Papers 1822-1881," (box

1285.01.01) South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

This source was by a Low Country woman who was educated near Charleston in 1818. In these letters to her sons, Pringle writes to her sons to convey the concepts of republican motherhood. It is interesting to see how an educated Charleston woman wrote to her sons about education. She also gives them a lot of personal advice.

Pringle, Mary Motte Alston. *Commonplace Book 1*, 1818. "Mary Motte Alston Pringle Papers." (box 1285.01.01) South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

This commonplace book is littered with all historical stories and how those stories, in propaganda like manner are used in this composition book as a way to promote republican motherhood concepts in nineteenth century Charleston. Action, virtue, duty, and reason are all characteristics which are promoted in this text.

Pringle, Mary Motte Alston. *Commonplace Book 2*, 1818. "Mary Motte Alston Pringle Papers." (box 1285.01.01) South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

This other common place briefly addresses education, musings on education, and has quotes from classics and English literary figures.

Pringle, Mary Motte Alston. *Correspondences 1840-1884*. "Alston-Pringle-Frost Papers." (box 1285.00) South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

In this source, Pringle wrote to her daughter, Susan. I use this source to contrast the subject matter she used to write to her sons, verses her daughter. In her letters to her daughter, she rarely wrote of education, rather of family news.

Secondary Sources

Allgor, Catherine. *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government*. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 2008.

This monograph is concerned with women in Washington during the Revolutionary and Early National Period. Particularly germane to my subject is Allgor's focus upon the Early National Period and women, such utilization of political space. Allgor sees the private and public spheres of influence as fluid and blurry, apt to blending depending on the circumstance of the situation.

Baym, Nina. *American Women Writers and the Work of History, 1790-1860*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995.

Although Baym is a literary scholar many feminist historians both respect and engage her into the larger women's education conversation. In this monograph, Baym like, Kelley and other historians also addresses the question of women and private life and public life.

Clinton, Catherine and Christine Lunardini. *The Columbia Guide to American Women in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

This source has excellent information and overview of women's education in the nineteenth century. Further, it does not only detail education for women in the North but also the South.

Clinton, Catherine. "Equally Their Due: The Education of the Planter Daughter in the Early Republic." *Journal of the Early Republic* no. 2 (1982): 49-62.

Source is establishes many ritualistic parts of women's boarding school. Helpful in the histographical section of the paper.

Eldred, Janet Cary., and Peter Mortensen. *Imagining Rhetoric: Composing Women of the Early United States*. Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2002.

This book seems to be a historical and contextual analysis of major contributors to early female writers. Examines womanhood and writing in the nineteenth century.

Habermas, Jurgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989.

Habermas is significant in the histographical section of my thesis. In this study he examines the formation of spheres for private and public discourse. Many feminist historians whose research is relevant to my own thesis discuss Habermas at length.

Johnson, Michael P. "Planters and Patriarchy: Charleston, 1800-1860." *The Journal Southern History* 46, no. 1 (Feb. 1980): 45-72.

This article provides excellent background for the unique nature of Charleston, South Carolina's rice planter society. He illustrates the patriarchy and structure of Charleston's social elite during the nineteenth century. Further, Johnson provides excellent examples in the planters Charles Manigault and R.F.W. Allston as men who upheld the Southern male planter ideal. Johnson also has interesting anecdotes about how these particular planters affected their sons, daughters and wives.

Kelley, Mary. *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

Mary Kelley's monograph will provide excellent background information of the scope of republican motherhood and the nature of women's education in the early republic. Kelley seems to be in direct conversation with scholar Nina Baym and the influential theorist Jürgen Habermas. Kelley explains that Habermas is often used by feminist historians on the dialogue of private and public spaces for women.

Kelley, Mary. "The Sentimentalists: Promise and Betrayal in the Home." *Signs* 4, no. 3 (1979): 434-446.

Kelley illustrates a disconnection between the reality of domesticity and the illusion that the sentimentalists projected. The individualism and materialism of 19th century America was undermined by the reality of the sentimentalist woman's real life. Thus, these writers's moved to the moral high ground of republican motherhood ideals. This source points to many other important secondary sources.

Kerber, Linda. *Women of the Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980.

Establishes that the tie between the woman's image, myth and reality. Further the source shows how women taught citizenship and this relationship to republican motherhood.

McCall, Laura. "'Shall I Fetter Her Will?': Literary Americans Confront Feminine Submission, 1820-1860." *Journal of the Early Republic* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 95-113.

McCall's work in this article is to redefine and perhaps undermine Nina Baym and Mary Kelley's assertion that women were gently becoming independent in the antebellum southern states. She uses quantitative history as her tool to analyze novels written 1820-1860. This article studies many female writers in the antebellum period.

McCurry, Stephanie. *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

This monograph is about the regional and geographical divisions of South Carolina from the colonial period up to the nineteenth century. Further, McCurry also writes about the geographical differences in property and class status. She also establishes a tie between plantation mistresses and slaves which is useful to establish a tie between my primary source of Adele Petigru Allston's letters and the slave mentality.

Ryan, Mary P. *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.

Ryan discusses the Habermasian idea of women in the public sphere in antebellum United States. Ryan's conversation of feminine symbolic images within antebellum public ceremony is important to further an argument of the elevation of the myth of nineteenth century woman.

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

This source is also more than 30 years old but again, is used in this case, by most southern historians writing about women and sexuality, image, perception. In particular, Scott clarifies the difference between what the image and myth of the southern belle was during the nineteenth century versus the reality of their lives.

Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of Womanhood: 1820-1860." *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 151-74.

While this source is over 30 years old, nearly every feminist historian which I have encountered refers to this landmark study. The article establishes that women during this time period were expected to be in the private world of the household. This article is namely in the historiographical section in a discussion of feminine submission, purity, and innocence and how those characteristics worked to enable planter protectiveness.

Steven M. Stowe, "City, Country, and the Feminine Voice," in *Intellectual Life in Antebellum Charleston* ed. Michael O'Brian and David Moltke-Hansen (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986): 295-310.

Source describes the ritualistic aspect of boarding schools when they make the transition from plantation, to boarding school life in the city.