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An Enlarging Influence: Women of New Orleans, Julia Ward Howe, and the Woman's Department at the Cotton Centennial Exposition, 1884-1885

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An ‘Enlarging Influence’: Women of New Orleans, Julia Ward Howe,
and the Woman’s Department at the Cotton Centennial Exposition, 1884-1885

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Urban Studies
Urban History

by

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Table of Contents

List of Illustrations	v
Abstract	vii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1—Backstory: The Women, The City	33
Chapter 2—Arrivals: Stops and Starts	75
Chapter 3—Bowers, Balmy Days, and Bailouts	119
Chapter 4—Special Days, Powerful Visitors	149
Chapter 5—A Hot Spring: Testing Howe’s Authority (Again)	188
Conclusion	245
Works Cited	259
Vita	267

List of Illustrations

“The Promenade,” <i>Century Magazine</i>	30
The Government Building	32
“Grabbing for the Prize,” <i>Mascot</i> cartoon	33
Julia Ward Howe.....	40
Caroline Merrick	46
Caroline Gratia Walmsley.....	49
Mary Ashley Townsend	51
Catharine Cole	54
Eliza Poitevent Holbrook Nicholson	57
Grace King	60
“World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition”	74
“What the Ladies Are Saying,” <i>Picayune</i>	81
“Opening the New Orleans Exposition”	90
“Creoles,” <i>Century Magazine</i>	91
The Ground Plan	94
Women’s Work in the Colored Department	101
WCTU Pavilion, Woman’s Department	110
Julia Ward Howe.....	115
Ohio Section, Woman’s Department	119
Burke Explains Finances, <i>Mascot</i> cartoon “	138
WCTU Pavilion, Woman’s Department	149
The World Pays Respect to Miss New Orleans”	154
Dr. Julia Holmes Smith.....	156
Frances E. Willard	160

May Wright Sewall	163
Susan B. Anthony	167
“Frank Leslie”	185
“Exposition Scrapbook”	188
“Society Bee” graphic, <i>Picayune</i>	197
Congress and the Boys, <i>Mascot</i> cartoon	210
Detail from “Grabbing for the Prize”.....	222
Women’s Press Association; Men’s Home Duties Association, <i>Mascot</i> cartoons.....	232
Maud Howe.....	237
“World’s International Cotton Centennial Exposition”.....	244

Abstract

This study investigates the first Woman's Department at a World's Fair in the Deep South. It documents conflicts and reconciliations and the reassessments that post-bellum women made during the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition in New Orleans, the region's foremost but atypical city. It traces local women's resistance to the appointment of northern abolitionist and suffragist, Julia Ward Howe, for this "New South" event of 1884-1885. It also notes their increasing receptivity to national causes that Susan B. Anthony, Frances E. Willard, and others brought to the South, sometimes for the first time. This dissertation assesses the historical forces that goaded New Orleans women, from the comfort of their familiar city, to consider radical notions that would later strengthen them in civic roles. It asserts that, although these women were skilled and capable, they had previously lacked cohesive force and public strategies. It concludes that as local women competed and interacted with women from across the country, including those from pioneering western territories, they began to embrace progressive ideas and actions that, without the Woman's Department at the Exposition, might have taken years to drift southward.

This is a chronological tale of the journey late-nineteenth-century women made together in New Orleans. It attempts to capture their look, sound, and language from their own writings and from journalists' interpretations of their ideals, values, and emotions. In the potent forum for exchange that the Woman's Department provided, participants and visitors questioned and revised false notions and stereotypes. They influenced each other and formed alliances. Although

individuals spoke mainly for themselves, common themes emerged regarding education, jobs, benevolence, and even suffrage. Most women were aware that they were in a defining moment, and this study chronicles how New Orleans women seized the opportunity and created a legacy for themselves and their city. As the Exposition sought to (re)assert agrarian and industrial prowess after turbulent times, a shift occurred in the trajectory of women's public and political lives in New Orleans and, perhaps, the South more broadly. By 1885, southerners were ready to insinuate their voices into the national debate on women's issues.

Women—World's Fairs—19th century—History—Cotton Centennial Exposition—New Orleans—Julia Ward Howe—Caroline Merrick—WCTU—Social Life and Customs—Women in Public—Suffrage—Women's Club Movement—Feminism—Gender—Women's Work—Lady—Reconstruction—Post-bellum—New South

Introduction

But it was not that which was built with hands that gave this exposition its historical importance. It was not the exhibits. It was the people who came to it. It was the visitors from a distance . . .

—Grace King¹

With considerable fanfare, the Woman's Department at the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition formally opened on March 3, 1885, but women had been gathering exhibits for months. As Julia Ward Howe, the department's president, welcomed visitors that afternoon, she first declared that wherever industrial items were shown at the Exposition, women's work was there. Then she noted that the designated spaces around the assembled crowd celebrated women's special accomplishments. As evidence, Howe pointed not only to needlework, china paintings, and silk culture but also to women's inventions, scientific specimens, and literature. In boudoir-like curtained spaces or in professional wooden cabinets and display cases, the Woman's Department housed an immense variety of items women produced: everything from a delicate pin cushion to a sturdy chain forged by a female blacksmith, from a vibrant crazy quilt to a collapsible house made by woman's hand. The world was uneducated about women's capabilities, Howe asserted, but the department would illustrate what they could achieve in the home and the marketplace.

The story of these post-bellum women has not yet been fully told. While their exhibits were impressive, it was the combustion of their divergent opinions in the Woman's Department

¹ Grace King, *Memories of a Southern Woman of Letters* (New York: McMillan, 1932), 51.

that ignited a transition toward progressive ideas. I examine this transforming process by tracing the details of their preparation, resistance, collaboration, turmoil, and celebration, always with an eye toward what women of various regions and social backgrounds discovered and reconsidered along the way. The storm that swirled around the figure of Julia Ward Howe, as northern abolitionist, suffragist, and haughty-tempered woman, spurred the southern women to cultivate their own voice in national debates. Women of the host city seized the opportunity for their first collective exchange with visitors previously unknown, dreaded, ignored, or rejected by them. Their journey helps explain the first seeds of southern women's interest in suffrage as a path to higher education, increased remuneration, and better civic results. It also demonstrates that they were taking action earlier than previously assumed. Because historians too often overlook southern women in studies of World's Fairs, and because I have an allegiance to New Orleans, my focus here is especially on what local women learned at the Cotton Centennial Exposition. Recognized leaders in the Crescent City did not come to the Woman's Department empty-handed, but they did develop a newfound awareness and confidence that served their own agendas long after the displays of the Fair were dismantled.²

New Orleans businessmen and politicians fashioned the Cotton Centennial in their own image, as was the custom in the creation of World's Fairs, but women had their say, too.³ Commercial, political, and social concerns were always forces in a host city's preparation; urban issues and editors' ambitions often influenced how local newspapers covered the events. Although male promoters set overall goals and attempted to control messages, female leaders

² In the nineteenth century, as now, "Crescent City" was a commonly used moniker for New Orleans, referring to the city's location on a crescent-shaped curve of the Mississippi River.

³ I use the terms Exposition and World's Fair interchangeably throughout, although the former was preferable in the nineteenth century.

sometimes contradicted them. Consciously or inadvertently, they supported or defied the stated agenda of developers. If “progress” was a major goal of this Cotton Centennial Exposition, as men of the Board of Management claimed, did they realize how the idea might alter traditional agreements between southern women and men? Once management designated an area to women’s work, did women control their own internal, separate messages, and were these revealed in the way they ordered the spaces of the Woman’s Department? If much of what they produced was exhibited elsewhere with states or manufacturers’ displays, would there be enough work left to illustrate their competence? How did they prove their worth in an age obsessed with machines and merchandise? These questions drive this study as it pays special attention to local women’s assessment of ideas and people they encountered and to the roles they expected to play at the Exposition. I assert that Howe was a smart choice to head the Woman’s Department, despite the public controversy surrounding her appointment. In addition, I claim that local women’s interactions in the department markedly altered their sense of power and their affinity for women’s issues, including suffrage. More than any other factor in the late nineteenth century, the Cotton Centennial prompted an awakening in southern women that impacted their organizations, their civic projects, and by their own assertions, their lives.

An “Enlarging Influence”

The Cotton Centennial Exposition offered economic, social, and political acknowledgement to white women in the Woman’s Department and black women and men in the first-ever Colored Department. In separate and adjacent spaces, participants had similar aims. They came to justify their place in industry and society, but first they had to *disprove* that they were *incapable* of full partnership in a marketplace so highly prized. Neither group had previously enjoyed so substantial a public platform. Because World’s Fairs mirrored

contemporary culture, the inclusion of women and African Americans broadcast their value to this commemoration of a hundred years of exporting cotton. Developers created the Cotton Centennial as a harbinger of a “New South” ready to re-enter the Union, and the Woman’s Department and the Colored Department were signs of this new spirit. If successful, the event would revive the economy and status of the Crescent City and would bring northern investments and machinery to New Orleans and rural Louisiana. If the Woman’s Department accomplished its aim, women from various sections of the country would share glory in their fields of competence. They would reflect, compete, exchange ideas, and clarify dreams and needs. Caroline Merrick, the most outspoken activist in New Orleans, identified women’s experience in the Woman’s Department as an “enlarging influence” on their later public actions.⁴

A separate Woman’s Department presented a dilemma, however. If women’s factory work was integrated into general exhibits, then this category of achievement would be absent from their own displays. This scattering caused some critics to perceive the women’s separate showing as merely “elaborate trifles” from genteel hands. A male essayist in *Appletons’ Journal* had leveled similar criticism at the first Woman’s Pavilion at the Centennial International Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876.⁵ Another national journalist called the displays in the Woman’s Department in New Orleans “woman’s play rather than woman’s work,” but he did acknowledge that woman’s work was “so entangled with that of man” that it could not be

⁴ Caroline Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land: A Southern Matron’s Memoir* (New York: Grafton, 1901), 218.

⁵ The journalist ignored the fact that suffrage had been center stage on July 4, 1876, when representatives of the National Woman Suffrage Association delivered their “Declaration and Protest” for equality with men. Women were also active in seventy-six different occupations and demonstrated their skills in Machinery Hall, the Government Building, and the Main Hall, but the journalist wanted more education and hospital work shown in the Woman’s Pavilion. Willaim H. Rideing, “At the Exhibition,” Part III, *Appletons’ Journal: A Magazine of General Literature* 15.378 (June 17, 1876): 793, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/acw8433.1-15.378>.

recognized for its own merit and, incidentally, that almost every exhibit of student work in the nearby Educational Department was “in reality woman’s work.” One leader’s worthy idea was to attach a ribbon to every item in every exhibit that women helped to produce, but the suggestion was impractical to undertake.⁶ In many respects, this dilemma regarding the placement of the work of women in general exhibits versus in separate ones was a reflection of larger questions about women’s roles in society. While wrestling with such questions at the Cotton Centennial, women were in fact trying to come to grips with a time when redefinition was needed in the whole of their lives in a modernizing “New South.”

How and Where I Entered

I have long had a vague awareness of a “Cotton Centennial” that had taken place in Audubon Park. I knew it had been an important event in the history of the South and the city, but I discovered only one scholar who had made a comprehensive study, and that had been in 1964. D. Clive Hardy included information on the Woman’s Department in his master’s thesis at Tulane University, but no one had written solely on the women at this event.⁷ Several factors

⁶ Eugene V. Smalley, “In and Out of the New Orleans Exposition,” *The Century Magazine* 30.2 (1885), 189. Smalley thought the pretty alcoves filled with needlework and ornamentals were admirable and peaceful, albeit inadequate. He hinted at the feminine label idea, and Dr. Julia Holmes Smith suggested ribbons on each item that women made. Julia Ward Howe, however, is often credited with the idea at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, 1893, where women also considered it but realized the task would be overwhelming.

⁷ D. Clive Hardy, “The World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition” (master’s thesis, Tulane University, 1964). See also, Samuel C. Shepherd, Jr., “A Glimmer of Hope: The World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition, New Orleans, 1884-1885,” *Louisiana History* 26.3 (1985): 271-90; Thomas D. Watson, “Staging the ‘Crowning Achievement of the Age’—Major Edward A. Burke, New Orleans and the Cotton Centennial Exposition,” *Louisiana History* 25.3 (1984): 229-57; 25.4 (1984): 341-66. Those who gave the Woman’s Department importance in theses are Pherabe Kolb, “Broadening the Horizons of Life: The Beginnings of a Women’s Literary Club in Nineteenth Century New Orleans” (master’s thesis, Dartmouth College, 1994); Antonette Tardo, “An Earlier Dawn: The ‘Southern Lady’ Enters Public Life in New Orleans 1876-1898” (master’s thesis, University of New Orleans, 1989); Miki Pfeffer,

might have contributed to the omission. Feminist history was negligible in the mid 1960s, and the northeastern region took precedence when scholars did begin to investigate women's activity. Southern feminists wrote their own histories, but the influence of World's Fairs on women's progress received only passing notice. Other historians studied World's Fairs but ignored this event, sandwiched as it was between the greater and more innovative expositions in Philadelphia and Chicago that siphoned attention away from the Cotton Centennial. But for me, it was a perfect match.

I came to the subject in 2004 while searching for an appropriate topic for a History seminar in History on "Gender and the City" with Dr. Madelon Powers. Students were to rely solely on primary sources, and an English professor suggested that I look into the papers of an infamous New Orleans politician, "Major" Edward A. Burke. Although his file included letters from Clara Barton of the American Red Cross and Frances E. Willard of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), I puzzled about how I could make this man fit this course on gender. Then the archivist in Tulane Special Collections told me that Burke had been the Director General of the Cotton Centennial; that Julia Ward Howe had been the president of the Woman's Department; and that important women had come to New Orleans for the event. When he placed Howe's *Report and Catalogue of the Woman's Department* in my hand, this research journey began.⁸

"Exhibiting Women: Sectional Confrontation and Reconciliation in the Woman's Department at the World's Exposition, New Orleans, 1884-85" (master's thesis, University of New Orleans, 2006).

⁸ I was a graduate student in English but was already drawn to History, and the title of the seminar "Gender and the City" beguiled me. Dr. Carol Gelderman suggested E. A. Burke; Dr. Wilbur E. Meneray was the archivist at Tulane. I thank them all for setting me on this path.

In her *Report*, Julia Ward Howe (1819-1910), the obvious lynchpin for a study of the Woman's Department, devoted several paragraphs to countering her critics as best she could after the fact. The stuff of drama lurked in her commentary. As a venerable celebrity in the Northeast, she received deference; as a stranger in a distant southern land, she disrupted established norms and bred contempt. Although Director-General E. A. Burke apparently engaged Howe's services, she wrote that he denied her the platform of his New Orleans *Times-Democrat* to rebut charges against her because he feared "a newspaper war." Howe was left with no way to answer the "animadversion" lodged against her.⁹ What was the source of this conflict, I wondered. How and why had a northern suffragist and abolitionist been chosen as chief of the Woman's Department at a southern exposition? What else about her had caused women to react so strongly to her presence? These questions and a desire to grasp Howe's significance to the Exposition prompted my investigation of her correspondence, journals, essays, and the biography her daughters wrote of their mother.¹⁰ Howe had published poems, plays, essays, sermons, and a reminiscence of her life, so there was much public material on which to draw. Forty-seven years of journals and a rich reserve of correspondence of this Boston wife and widow are housed at Harvard University and Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Because other family papers are in Portland, Maine, in Providence, Rhode Island, and in New York City, this research begat travel.¹¹

⁹ *Report and Catalogue of the Woman's Department of the World's Exposition, Held at New Orleans, 1884-1885* (Boston: Rand, Avery, 1885), 26.

¹⁰ Laura E. Richards and Maud Howe Elliott, with Florence Howe Hall, *Julia Ward Howe: 1819-1910* (Boston: Houghton, 1915). Howe's daughters won the first Pulitzer Prize (1917) for biography at a time when there were only four categories. They developed a literary industry of presenting their famous parents and relatives heroically.

¹¹ Julia Ward Howe is buried in the family plot in historic Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, MA. Daughter Laura E. Richard's papers are with the Maine Historical Society in

In New Orleans, my investigation began not only with the papers of Edward A. Burke (1841-1928) but also with a slim file of memorabilia from journalist Martha R. Field (1855-1898), who wrote under the pseudonym “Catharine Cole.” Curator Susan Tucker of the Newcomb Research Center for Women had pulled the file on Cole when class members of “Gender and the City” visited the archives. She wondered aloud why no one had written about this fascinating woman, and I secretly wished I could be the person to do so.¹² I was startled and pleased to realize later that it was Cole who instigated the “animadversion” about which Howe complained, so she became the dramatic contrarian through which this story comes to light. Cole apparently had the approval of her employer, Eliza Nicholson of the New Orleans *Picayune*, to attack Howe, but her papers offer no private musings or correspondence. They include only a scrapbook, pamphlets, and a short, biased recollection of Martha Field, alias Catharine Cole, by her daughter Flo. In Nicholson’s papers at The Historic New Orleans Collection, one letter from Nicholson to Field ends their professional relationship on a sour note that entailed hearsay, gossip, and jealousy, all characteristics the two women publicly eschewed.¹³ Other details of Cole’s life must be construed from her columns and what contemporaries wrote about her.

Portland, Maine; Maud Howe Elliott’s are with the John Hay Library at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island; some of Howe’s brother Sam Ward’s letters are with the New York City Public Library.

¹² Burke Papers (MS 680, Folder 2), University Archives, The Tulane Libraries, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA; Catharine Cole Papers (MS NAC-32F, 02-015), Newcomb College Center for Research on Women, New Orleans, LA. H. Sophie Newcomb Memorial College was founded in 1886 as the first coordinate woman’s college within a university (Tulane) in the United States. After Hurricane Katrina disrupted the campus, curricula, and finances in 2005, Tulane restructured it as Newcomb-Tulane College, a single undergraduate institution not quite a successor to the former female institution. Newcomb heirs and alumnae brought suits against the changes. See <http://tulane.edu/nccrow/newcomb-archives/history-of-newcomb-college.cfm>.

¹³ On *Picayune* letterhead, 189_____, n. d., Nicholson Papers (MSS 219, Box 1, Folder 54), The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA.

Bountiful archives in New Orleans and Baton Rouge make it possible to enlarge the circle around Cole and Howe from papers of local women: the correspondence of Mary Ashley Van Vooris Townsend (1832-1901), the Exposition's poet; minutes of the Christian Woman's Exchange, a key philanthropic organization that also temporarily housed exhibits until the Woman's Department was ready to receive them; the later correspondence of Caroline Elizabeth Thomas Merrick (1825-1908), a local counterpart to Howe in age, experience, and militancy; clippings of the Southern Art Union, an educational group whose circulating library received the collection of women-authored books from the Woman's Department at the end of the Exposition; and voluminous correspondence of Grace Elizabeth King (1852-1932), a writer whose career began because of editors she met through Howe and her daughter Maud.¹⁴

These archives reveal the predilections of persons and groups. Papers of the Southern Art Union suggest that the organization was sometimes adrift about its mission and that it struggled financially. Conversely, minutes and correspondence of the Christian Woman's Exchange show that leaders there ran a successful, businesslike operation and that the organization helped local women by selling their jams, jellies, pies, needlework, and family heirlooms. The Exchange was chartered in 1881 to keep impoverished women from "beggary and sin," and in the single year ending in spring of 1885, it had turned over approximately \$40,000 to women for products and

¹⁴Townsend/Stanton Papers, 1846-1946 (MS 19), University Archives, The Tulane Libraries, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA; Christian Woman's Exchange Papers (MSS 257, Box 1, Folder 8), University Archives, The Tulane Libraries, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA; Merrick Family Papers, 1865-1913 (MS 64, Folders 1-6), The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA; Edwin Thomas Merrick Papers (MSS 1137), Louisiana State University Libraries Special Collections, Baton Rouge; Southern Art Union (Artists' File), The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA; Grace King Papers (MSS 1282), Louisiana State University Libraries Special Collections, Baton Rouge.

items from their homes.¹⁵ Mary Ashley Townsend's papers tell of a wealthy society woman devoted first to family and entertaining, second to poetry and art; Eliza Nicholson's correspondence reveals a coquettish woman as well as a professional one making sharp decisions. Grace King's intimate letters to her sister May expose a keen but peevish observer of the city's people and of her temporary neighbors, the Howes. Caroline Merrick's late letters show an activist at work, whereas her earlier letters bare a bereaved mother struggling to make sense of the deaths of adored daughters and the serious war injuries of her Confederate son.

No local woman left a private cache as rich as the journals of Julia Ward Howe, although she wrote only occasionally while in New Orleans from the end of 1884 to the middle of 1885. In years when she wrote frequently, the journals indicate what she was reading, writing, and planning. In apparently guileless entries, she worried over family members and relished group entertainments and the sisterhood of her beloved New England Woman's Club. She fretted a little over occasional clashes with activists and much over her own shortcomings. She feared she might leave debt for her children, and she mourned deaths of friends and family, beginning with that of her youngest son, Sammy, in 1863, the point at which she began forty-seven years of journal-keeping. In the volumes, she also praised and critiqued sermons of others and recorded how they inspired her thoughts, and she likewise gauged her successes and failures by how her audiences responded to her lectures and sermons. Although she regularly vowed to do better in her marriage, about the real battles, less is known, since she burned letters between herself and husband Samuel Gridley Howe for the years 1850 and 1851, apparently the stormiest time in an

¹⁵ About the Exchange, see Catharine Cole, "Woman's World and Work" (hereafter "WWW"), *Picayune* April 19, 1885.

uneasy alliance between a woman determined to be an independent thinker and a man hell-bent to control her spirit.¹⁶

By the time Howe came to New Orleans, her most private battles were behind her, but her headstrong temperament provoked public skirmishes. The self-important style that caused her suitors to call her “Diva” in her youth was perhaps the same that prompted Susan B. Anthony to carp in 1885 that “her Ladyship” was unwilling to share power and thought herself the only one capable of speaking for other women.¹⁷ Local newspapers in the Crescent City judged her as haughty, harsh, insensitive, rude, a dictator. Howe seems to have come to the Exposition with the right intentions but the wrong comportment. Her manner repeatedly offended women from various regions, but southern women were particularly insulted by her presence, especially after men of the Exposition insinuated that none of them was competent enough to lead the Woman’s Department.

That Howe prevailed in her role there validates her tenacity; that she drew controversy like a lightning rod makes her a compelling figure for study. When she came to New Orleans and stayed through the six demanding months of her tenure, she was sixty-five, famous for her “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” still energetic, and generally in command of her own life (widowhood had its rewards), even if her final *Report and Catalogue* suggests she was weakened

¹⁶ Julia Ward Howe Papers (MS Am 2214), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. See also, Valarie Ziegler, *Diva Julia: The Public Romance and Private Agony of Julia Ward Howe*. (Harrisburg, PA.: Trinity, 2003); Mary H. Grant, *Private Woman, Public Person: An Account of the Life of Julia Ward Howe from 1819 to 1868* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson, 1994); Deborah Pickman Clifford, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: a Biography of Julia Ward Howe* (New York: Little, Brown, 1979). Writer Gary Williams focuses mainly on Howe’s literary works but includes aspects of her life in *Hungry Heart: the Literary Emergence of Julia Ward Howe* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999) and in the introduction to his edition of Julia Ward Howe, *The Hermaphrodite* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

¹⁷ Susan B. Anthony to Caroline Merrick, May 15, 1885, Merrick Papers.

by critics and challengers. As soon as I read that volume, I found Howe captivating. As a woman near her age with a similar marital history, I can relate to her defense of self, her commitment to causes, and her lingering need for intellectual approval even after a lifetime of successes.

No matter how revealing are the personal papers of women, the rich cache of microfilmed newspapers at various university and public libraries in New Orleans offers the fullest account of the Exposition. Rival conservative morning dailies (E. A. Burke's *Times-Democrat* and Eliza Nicholson's *Picayune*), a populist afternoon New Orleans *States*, and the satirical weekly New Orleans *Mascot* (replete with scathing cartoons) describe and react to daily activity on the fair grounds, detail by detail. The *Times-Democrat* was strongly political and perhaps more literary than the *Picayune*, printing serialized fiction and translations; the *Picayune* was slightly more reforming than the *Times-Democrat* but not as uncompromisingly so as the *Mascot*. It claimed the label "family newspaper" and avoided the kind of lurid scandals that the *Mascot* relished. Both the *Times-Democrat* and the *Picayune* had theater reviews, poetry, and columns for women and children on Sundays, but Nicholson's society column was the star in its category. Both newspapers carried columns from New York and/or Boston, vied for advertisement dollars, and claimed the largest circulation in the South. Neither bucked the Louisiana Lottery. The *States* was a weaker paper in features and ads but a stronger voice for working people. During the Cotton Centennial, the *Times-Democrat* was its greatest booster and printed nothing that was not praise of the event and Burke, whereas the *Picayune* covered all complaints, especially those of the Woman's Department. The *Mascot* unmasked all hint of corruption and scandal and rebuked Director-General Burke every Saturday. What journalists wrote is treated here as a kind of "truth" of the time, since they were present. Yet, to rely on their interpretations layers irony on this history, since writers were, after all, deducing and inferring

from their own experience.¹⁸ As institutions, the English-language newspapers reflected and helped shape public perception and expectations of the Exposition, as did the Spanish, German, and French press for their populations in the Crescent City. Absent, however, from the range of local newspapers was an Afro-Creole or African-American perspective.

The Woman's Department was essentially a white woman's province, as it was at every nineteenth-century exposition, but at least in New Orleans, black women's exhibits were an important part of the adjacent, first-ever Colored Department. The *Picayune* and *Times-Democrat* gave their displays favorable coverage, yet there was no local "race paper" to offer an insider view of the department.¹⁹ Each of the three daily newspapers assigned a female journalist to cover women's work, but none wrote about the Woman's Department as fervently as did Catharine Cole in the *Picayune*. In addition to reporting every preparation, exhibit, and conflict, in the department, Cole commented (and sometimes gossiped) on a variety of other activities and issues of women in her weekly column, "Woman's World and Work." In addition, her "Sunday Talk" columns were opinion pieces that urged women to go to work, polish their manners, appreciate their families, expect and give respect for work well done, and more.²⁰ Cole was the

¹⁸ For insights about how newspapers shape the news, see Nancy J. Parezo and Don D. Fowler, *Anthropology Goes to the Fair: The 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 12.

¹⁹ For coverage of the Colored Department from an avowed "race paper," see the *New York Globe* (by December 1884, the name changed to *New York Freeman*) and the *Southwestern Advocate*, a Methodist organ that recorded that denomination's involvement with African-American causes. For an article on the department that includes the women, see Miki Pfeffer, "'Mr. Chairman and FELLOW AMERICAN CITIZENS': African American Agency at the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition, 1884-1885," *Louisiana History Journal* 51.4 (2010): 442-62.

²⁰ Cole also wrote travel reports from all over Louisiana during the summer months, a typical time for New Orleanians to leave the city, due to threats of yellow fever and other epidemics. See Joan B. McLaughlin and Jack McLaughlin, eds., *Louisiana Voyages: The Travel Writings of Catharine Cole* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006).

working woman's most ardent and outspoken advocate, especially about equal pay for equal work, but she was also local clubwomen's surrogate with regard to Howe's missteps. Cole's persistence in seeing that southern women were honored and that working women were taken seriously matches my own inclinations. I admire her outspokenness and professional fidelity. I am impressed that she commented so extensively on women's public and political activism in a city that probably valued the security of traditional "ladylike" decorum over the need to redefine "true womanhood." I am amused that she jostled with a national figure as acclaimed as Julia Ward Howe.

The Story in Time and Place

This study stitches together disparate sources into a version of women's experience in a particular time and place: from early December 1884 into early June 1885 at the Cotton Centennial Exposition in New Orleans. The event was fleeting and temporary in a city where populations were still trying to re-establish footholds after war, economic deprivation, and social upheaval. Because the Woman's Department and the Exposition had a beginning and end, a chronological narration seems appropriate for this previously untold story. It recounts how women defined themselves in relation to each other and to local and national issues as they went through the episodes of the Cotton Centennial Exposition. In the process, many southern women encountered a spectrum of women from the Northeast, near West, distant Territories, and the Pacific Slope for the first time. To chronicle the process is to note how they discovered surprising similarities in some cases and startling dissimilarities in others. Nevertheless, the participants ostensibly had one mission: to show what women had done and to prove their value in an industrializing nation.

The study traces what women proposed, resisted, welcomed, and argued. It begins with how local women lived in New Orleans in 1884, the year of preparation for the Exposition, and how they prepared to re-present themselves and their city to the country and the world. As the Fair got under way, controversy that surrounded the appointment and arrival of Julia Ward Howe intensified when Howe named an all-northern staff. Of necessity, however, women rallied to raise money so the department could exist, and they cooperated to arrange viable exhibit spaces to celebrate the opening of the Woman's Department by early March, 1885. National figures arrived for the occasion, drawn by a ready assembly of women and because media attention would be focused on women's issues. Despite the congenial interlude of cooperation for the opening, conflicts and humiliations returned. Yet, brave farewells characterized the department's closing ceremonies. As a result of the progression, seeds of transformation can be detected in local women as they mingled with the many-opinioned women who converged in the Woman's Department in New Orleans for six months in the mid-1880s.

This study makes several assertions. First, although local women insisted they were prepared to assume leadership of the Woman's Department from its inception, there was no national figure among them. Despite the significant roles local leaders played in charities and clubs, the celebrated Julia Ward Howe had the expertise and cachet the department needed, so men of the Board of Management had chosen well. Most southern women were as yet untested in organized advancement for women, and they had been wary of a suffrage movement begun in abolitionism.²¹ Second, although women denied sectional feelings toward Howe, evidence suggests that sectionalism persisted and carried an emotional charge. Just seven years after

²¹ Pherabe Kolb adds that the issue of female suffrage would also remind southerners of issues of racial equality and voting rights that the South preferred not to address. See Kolb, "Broadening the Horizons of Life," 24.

federal troops had left the area, management's bravado about a "New South" was more intellectual construct than reality.

Lastly, I assert that the Exposition began a transition that released southern women from unexamined resistance to suffrage and other feminist causes and prompted them to consider these issues seriously. Whether or not an individual woman seized the opportunity that the Cotton Centennial offered was a personal matter. However, for women generally, the event created a dividing line between drifting mindlessly toward a predictable future and being confronted publicly with bold proposals of a modernizing age. The Exposition endorsed a platform for progressive ideas that might otherwise have taken decades to drift southward without the Woman's Department. The spike in club membership, the founding of Sophie B. Newcomb Memorial College for Women in 1886, and the formation of the Portia Club (Louisiana's first suffrage organization) in 1892 did not happen spontaneously; they were part of the legacy of the Woman's Department. Without realizing it, some leading southern men had hastened radicalization (relatively speaking) of southern ladies. The chronicle of that transition deserves a place in history.

I take methodological cues from two decades of historians who see World's Fairs as metaphors of a cultural time and place. Scholars have analyzed these stylized worlds through lenses of gender, race, class, space, agency, and more. Yet, grander expositions than the Cotton Centennial have captured most attention: in Philadelphia (1876), Chicago (1893 and 1933), St. Louis (1904), San Francisco (1915), and New York (1939). I declare that this southern exposition, important in its time, has been too little studied for its own merit and commonly ignored in academic dialogue. When scholars refer to the Woman's Department at the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition, it often garners only a few lines. When southern

scholars focus on the growth of activism in the South, even they give this event short shrift. One mentions it in connection with the growth of the club movement in New Orleans, for example; another tells of the influence of Julia Ward Howe in the founding of Sophie B. Newcomb College for Women; another in the rise of literary clubs. Even southern feminist historian Anne Firor Scott reduces the Cotton Centennial's importance when she claims that, in the years 1884-1887, women's clubs in the South came *spontaneously* to life. Rather, I assert it was the occurrence of southern expositions that planted new ideas in the region. This dissertation offers the first full investigation of this Woman's Department, and I argue that its impact was great, particularly on women in the South's premier city.²²

No exploration of an event in New Orleans can ignore the allure of that city. It was in the nineteenth century, as it is today, a palpable, essential presence. It is a character in whatever event or media it appears, and so it was with the Cotton Centennial Exposition. Fences around Exposition grounds did not keep participants and visitors from becoming part of the Crescent City for the duration of their stay. They reached out into its distinctive milieu, and the idiosyncrasies of this atypical city poured onto the grounds. Included here is not only what women exhibited in their department, but also what activities carried them beyond it. Their influence spread to clubs and schools; in turn, the charm of the French Quarter, the festivities of

²² For a scholar who asserts that feminist historians too often write women's history "New Englandly," see Anne Goodwyn Jones, *Tomorrow Is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); for the growth of the club movement in New Orleans, see Tardo, "An Earlier Dawn"; for the growth of the literary Quarante Club, see Kolb, "Broadening the Horizons of Life"; for the history of Newcomb College, see <http://tulane.edu/nccrow/newcomb-archives/history-of-newcomb-college.cfm>. See also, Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 152, 157. She first states that clubs grew spontaneously, but on page 157, she acknowledges that the Cotton Centennial Exposition in New Orleans played a role in the organization of clubs and instructional classes, as also occurred after the Philadelphia Centennial eight years earlier.

Mardi Gras, and the attractions of New Orleans impacted these tourists, as several women attested. If World's Fairs both reflect and shape society in the cities that host them, that is reason enough to scour newspapers for the context of women's lives as reported in post-Reconstruction New Orleans, an era ripe for more investigation.

Although many feminist scholars view World's Fairs from specialized vantage points, I still consider it valid to approach this Exposition chronologically, because the complete story has not yet been told. Alone worth noting is that Julia Ward Howe, a leader in the conservative arm of the suffrage movement and in the Association for the Advancement of Women, left the comfort of the northeast to work diligently for six months in a southern city. This extended period is not fully accounted for in biographies of this commanding figure. In addition, Susan B. Anthony made her first sortie into a South she had long wanted to lure to her radical wing of suffrage. Most of what New Orleans women knew about the suffrage movement previous to the Cotton Centennial came from Catharine Cole's weekly column in the *Picayune*, "Woman's World and Work," but Cole did not identify herself as a suffragist. Worth noting also is that, although Frances E. Willard of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) had previously made small inroads in the South, she had never before had such a visible platform as the central pavilion in the Woman's Department or as ardent an audience in New Orleans as she did in early 1885. The department was also a stage upon which other national figures, now less known, shaped a new conversation on women's issues. As literature on other World's Fairs suggests, women's presence at the Cotton Centennial Exposition in New Orleans was inherently political.²³

²³ Jeanne Madeline Weimann's chronological account of the Chicago Exposition of 1893 is now decades old but is still the definitive work. Weimann, *The Fair Women* (Chicago: Academy, 1981). Although Howe spent several long periods in Europe and in the Caribbean

Literature on Women and Fairs

This study owes a debt to historian Robert W. Rydell for providing the analytical ground on World's Fairs. His seminal books claim they are utopian ventures that promoted ideologies of progress and national identity. Rydell traces the development of modern expositions from their beginning under the single roof of London's Crystal Palace in 1851 to the cities within cities they later became, as they encompassed manifold and massive structures on vast acres of reclaimed or repurposed land. Although Rydell's focus is not gender but rather the subordination of nonwhite people as part of a national justification for imperialism and restricted immigration, his work is vital to all research on World's Fairs, since he alone devotes full scholarly attention to the historical sweep of these events.

As Rydell suggests, in addition to vast displays of engines and machines that appealed mainly to men, technology introduced at World's Fairs promised better lives and entertainment for the entire family. Women of the day benefitted from electric lights, the sewing machine, typewriters, telephones, elevators, and elevated railways; they enjoyed cotton candy, ice cream cones, the Ferris Wheel, and mass entertainment. Rydell's categorization of World's Fairs into events that advanced the age of industrialism or promoted visions of empire (1876-1916) and those that defined a Century of Progress (1833-1933) offers a way to grasp the goals of promoters. Since Rydell first delved into the significance of World's Fairs, scholars have further examined the events as arenas for late-nineteenth-century ideological conflicts in matters of race,

years earlier, she had never ventured to work in another place for six months as she did to New Orleans in 1885, and she had never spent time in the Deep South. For her travels, see Julia Ward Howe, *Reminiscences, 1819-1899* (New York: Houghton, 1899) and Laura E Richards and Maud Howe Elliott with Florence Howe Hall, *Julia Ward Howe: 1819-1910* (Boston: Houghton, 1915). For Merrick, Anthony, and Willard at the Cotton Centennial, see Caroline Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land: A Southern Matron's Memoir* (New York: Grafton, 1901).

gender, class, and ethnicity, and in aspects of sectionalism, spatial dimension, education, science, pseudoscience, and popular culture.²⁴

In the nineteenth century, women participated in the search for order in a troubled world of booms, busts, and unsettling changes. Rydell claims that expositions attempted to assuage concerns by projecting optimistic futures that, incidentally, matched the visions of fair proponents. In other words, developers manipulated spaces to propagate collective values, political consensus, and solutions to contemporary problems. The Woman's Department at the Cotton Centennial can be viewed in this light. Where women were located as well as what they exhibited, and in what manner, reveal their relationship to the overall aims of the exposition. Rydell asserts that between 1885 and 1907 in the South, signals of sectional and racial accord were intended to alleviate businessmen's qualms about investing in a socially, and therefore economically, problematic South. It is not surprising, then, that promoters carefully chose two celebrated national figures as leaders of the Woman's Department and the Colored Department, because both departments were indicators of the broader message of the Cotton Centennial. According to Rydell, southern "Negro" departments helped create the impression of racial harmony and suggested that a ready workforce was available to potential investors and "New Markets." The appointment of Julia Ward Howe was a sign of sectional accord, as part of the promise of a "New South."²⁵

²⁴ Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) and *World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Expositions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). Also, Robert W. Rydell, John E. Findling, and Kimberly D. Pelle, *Fair America: World's Fairs in the United States* (Washington, D. C: Smithsonian, 2000).

²⁵ Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 73. Other signs of accord were: parallel bivouacs for Union and Confederate veterans, the loan of the Liberty Bell from Philadelphia, and presidential appearances (but not in New Orleans). Director-General E. A. Burke received credit for

This study of how women and their leader occupied a particular public space in a “New South” exposition also benefits from various analyses of sociability, cartoon messaging, and agency. Communications scholars Manon Niquette and William Buxton note that as people moved through spaces to see and be seen, they negotiated self-identity in those face-to-face interactions. This was the opportunity at the Cotton Centennial. Traditionally insulated southern women and somewhat isolated western women could compare their dress, deportment, and development to those of urban northeastern women with whom they temporarily convened. Niquette and Buxton further enhance these insights with their examination of cartoons for visual messages of the interactive give and take. Their work has guided my choice of compelling illustrations from the local weekly *Mascot* and national magazines that show people observing each other.

Other pertinent analyses contribute to this study. Educators Brad J. Porfilio and Mike Watz study Victorian World’s Fairs in which promoters claimed that expositions would socialize disparate peoples. In addition, promoters claimed that the events, as world “universities,” would teach new methods and processes, but these developers also sought to establish industrial superiority and dominance of the United States in its imperialistic quests. Valuable also is historian Abigail M. Markwyn’s insight that expositions were more than the products of their elite planners; other groups and individuals used the premises to forward their own visions of America. The public stage of World’s Fairs enticed politicians, celebrities, leaders of movements, and people with counter-messages to deliver. Women were among those who assumed agency in the dialogue, as the Woman’s Department at the Cotton Centennial

including the Colored Department and the Woman’s Department. Rydell claims that Burke’s selection as Director-General of the Cotton Centennial was the high point of his career, but the wily politician had several peaks and one great fall, an embezzlement charge in 1889.

demonstrates. In New Orleans, women gained a space to reassess personal identity as they socialized, and they also used the arena to propagate their own agendas.²⁶

The variety of scholarly interpretations of the Columbian Exposition in Chicago is instructive for this examination of a less grand World's Fair. Chicago's "White City" of 1893 was the greatest use of exposition-as-freestanding-system to demonstrate what could be accomplished when architecture, technology, and precise planning coalesced. Urban historian Timothy J. Gilfoyle calls that event the "interpretive smorgasbord" of historians. Scholars from various disciplines have investigated its many angles and interstices. From its controversial architecture to the positioning of its buildings (Gilbert, 1992), from its "heterotopic" spaces surrounding Buffalo Bill (Bank, 2004) to its history-making artifacts (Marling, 1992), the Columbian Exposition is a methodological and analytical goldmine. Particularly stimulating for this study is the way Jeanne Madeline Weimann documents the details of women's experience in her comprehensive work, *The Fair Women*. Her seminal work provides a ground for other examinations of the Woman's Building, Board of Lady Managers, and the remarkable Women's Congresses (where Julia Ward Howe and Catharine Cole spoke).²⁷ Historian Laura L. Behling,

²⁶ Manon Niquette and William Buxton, "Meet Me at the Fair: Sociability and Reflexivity in Nineteen-Century World Expositions," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 22.1 (1997), <http://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/articles/viewArticle/977/883>; Brad J. Porfilio and Mike Watz, "Promoting Critical Literacy in Social Studies Classrooms: Guiding Students to Remake Themselves and Their World through a Critical Analysis of Victorian World's Fairs and the Neoliberal Ordering of Today's Social World," *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 1.2 (2008): 129-47; Abigail Margaret Markwyn, "Constructing 'an Epitome of Civilization': Local Politics and Visions of Progressive Era America at San Francisco's Panama-Pacific International Exposition" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2006).

²⁷ Timothy J. Gilfoyle, "White Cities, Linguistic Turns, and Disneylands: The New Paradigms of Urban History," *Reviews in American History* 26.1 (1998): 175-204; James Gilbert, "A Contrast of Cultures," *History Today* 42.4 (1992): 33-40; Rosemarie K. Bank, "Telling a Spatial History of the Columbian Exposition of 1893," *Modern Drama* 47. 3 (2004):

for example, decries the paltry African-American presence at the Chicago Fair, as did the fiery journalist Ida B. Wells in 1893. Others trace expanding notions of womanhood from the Philadelphia Centennial in 1876 through the Columbian Exposition in 1893 to the St. Louis Fair in 1904, by which time women forfeited the separate strategy that gave special attention to their accomplishments. These studies are progenitors of this examination of the World's Fair in New Orleans in 1884 and 1885.²⁸

Because the Cotton Centennial and its Woman's Department have been ignored, I am drawn to offer the kind of comprehensive detail that Weimann provides, but I am also intrigued by the variety of ways World's Fairs have become frameworks of analysis. Robert W. Rydell's introduction to *Gendering the Fair*, for example, claims that the essayists therein view the entire discursive mapping and structure of expositions through a gendered lens. In cross-discipline papers, they examine how gender shapes "ideological and material reality." They look at relationships of identity, nationality, authority, and performance at American and foreign fairs to see how the events defined culture in the modern world. Contributor Mary Pepchinski reminds readers that fairgrounds were sites of power with gender built into their design and rhetoric, and they were also places where patterns, themes, and language exposed the ideological assumptions

349-66; K. A. Marling, "Writing History with Artifacts: Columbus at the 1893 Chicago Fair," *The Public Historian* 14.4 (1992): 13-30; Weimann, *The Fair Women*.

²⁸ Laura L. Behling, "Reification and Resistance: The Rhetoric of Black Womanhood at the Columbian Exposition in 1893," *Women's Studies in Communication* 25.2 (2002): 173-97; Ida B. Wells, "The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition: The Afro-American's Contribution to Columbian Literature," <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/wells/exposition/exposition.html>. For comparisons of women at several fairs, see William D. Andrews, "Women and the Fairs of 1876 and 1893," *Hayes Historical Journal* 1.3 (1977): 173-83; Mary F. Cordato, "Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere: Women's Work and Culture at the World's Fairs of 1876, 1893, and 1904" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1989); Virginia Grant Darney, "Women and World's Fairs: American International Expositions 1876-1904" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1982).

of promoters and women participants.²⁹ Editors T. J. Boisseau and Abigail M. Markwyn note that expositions were “highly contested spaces where gender served both as a prime vehicle and an explicit target of political struggle.” They claim that embedded messages in exhibits, architecture, and positioning are “visual lessons” and “spatial manifestations” relevant to an understanding of history and gender. Some of the visual and spatial messages, they claim, articulate a gender status quo; others suggest transformation.³⁰ At expositions where women occupied a separate place, as they did in New Orleans, they could more easily shape meaning as they saw fit. Yet, a designated space also put women in the ambiguous position of being part of the exposition but somewhat apart from the main action.

In their essay in *Gendering the Fair*, Boisseau and Markwyn assert that although expositions claimed to be international, they manifested nationalist tendencies.³¹ I suggest they were also inescapably local, as expositions allowed the hosting community to convey its grasp of larger movements and forces. In the Woman’s Department in New Orleans, “hosting” was complicated by having an outsider’s footprint on its leadership, which left local women straddling roles as hosts and subordinates to Julia Ward Howe. It was an unusual, hierarchical arrangement, for at every other exposition local leadership had the greatest sway in shaping the messages of the department. Howe’s presence supported the promotional aspect of the exposition, but it skewed the results local women expected had they been able to welcome others

²⁹ T. J. Boisseau and Abigail M. Markwyn, *Gendering the Fair: Histories of Women and Gender at World’s Fairs* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), viii, 5, 10; Mary Pepchinski, “Woman’s Buildings at European and American World’s Fairs, 1893-1939,” in Boisseau and Markwyn, *Gendering the Fair*, 187-207.

³⁰ Boisseau and Markwyn, *Gendering the Fair*, 11.

³¹ Ibid., 9.

from a position of power. Ironically, the selection of Howe prevented local women from dividing into factions, so determined were they to band together and demonstrate they were as capable as this northern woman. Likely, the need to assert local influence pulled more New Orleanians into the public spotlight and debate than would have been the case had the department been without its fiery conflict.

Women of this Woman's Department held the typical range of nineteenth-century attitudes toward stepping beyond the home to become consumers, wage-earners, and reformers, and historian Mary P. Ryan offers guidance to consider these public roles. Ryan examines how women moved through city streets and civic ceremonies and how sexual imagery was present in public language and in physical representations of woman. She looks at ceremonial space, everyday space, and political space that nineteenth-century women inhabited. Ryan claims that the term "public" evokes "an arena where women can strive, along with men, for empowerment and justice," but she also asserts that the notion of a public sphere was "the exclusive domain of the bourgeoisie." However, as this chronicle of the Woman's Department at the Cotton Centennial Exposition shows, journalist Catharine Cole interjected working women's attitudes into the public debate, thus complicating what might otherwise have been the prerogative of middle class and elite women.

At this late-nineteenth-century event, various women tested the capacity of the public sphere to accommodate their expanding public roles. Ryan makes pertinent use of three model cities as she assesses the artificial barriers placed between private and public realms. Unlike those who focus solely on New England or the South, Ryan compares San Francisco for the Far West, New York for the Northeast, and New Orleans for the South. As do historians like Suzanne Lebsock, Ryan notes the ways women practiced politics no matter how confined their

lives otherwise appeared. One of the ways women did this at World's Fairs, as historian Estelle B. Freedman points out, was to employ a strategy of separatism, as the women did in New Orleans. Freedman asserts that the messages of that strategy alternately reinforced and challenged the constrictions of femininity and domesticity. Whatever women did or thought while at home could be private, but when they stepped into the public arena, their very presence became political. Of necessity, they re-imagined "womanhood" when they shifted into a public persona. World's Fairs provided a heightened opportunity to compare expectations and definitions of womanhood and sisterhood, professionalism and independence.³²

Whenever nineteenth-century women are discussed, decades of scholarly dialogue about "true womanhood" become relevant. Terms like "separate spheres" and the "cult of true womanhood" with its tenets of domesticity, purity, piety, and submission form an underpinning even if the subject is not in the foreground. Historian Barbara Welter (1966) first showed how the separation of gender into "spheres" was bound to the age of specialization and industrialization; later historians revised her findings considerably, noting that her terms had become tropes too glibly applied even by historians. Feminist historian Gerda Lerner (1977) suggested that the preponderance of evidence Welter uncovered should be read as proof that women had a conflicted relationship to domesticity rather than as evidence that they adhered to its tenets. Revisionist Linda Kerber asserted that those who control space and the way it is structured provide a mirror of the era's ideology of gender, class, and race. Yet, she reminded

³² Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 12, 13; Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). In both books, Ryan compares women in New Orleans, San Francisco, and New York. For political stances and strategies, see Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: Norton, 1984); Estelle B. Freedman, "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930," *Feminist Studies* 5.3 (1979): 512-29.

historians that “true womanhood” is a construction, not a fact, and she helped shift the focus of analysis to language. Although one speaker at the Cotton Centennial described southern ladyhood in terms that match the submissive tenets Welter described, many women at the event attempted to redefine womanhood and sisterhood beyond such narrow concepts, but not in a way unrecognizable to them or the men in their culture.³³

Participants in the Woman’s Department identified complex selves in the rhetoric they employed. Historian Nancy Cott offers a way to grasp the nuances of women’s positions in a different century. She calls for flexibility when attempting to apply terms. Cott places more importance on women’s *self-naming* in the public sphere than on a scholar’s need to assign concrete, separable entities that impose “mutually exclusive ideological orientations” on organizations, individuals, and issues. For example, instead of needing to decide whether the term “feminism” is applicable to activists like Julia Ward Howe who exploited domestic tropes for certain ends or to Cole who did less so, Cott looks for more gradations. She suggests that allowance must be made for aspects of a woman’s behavior or belief that comes to the fore at different times in different forms or concurrently, depending on the conditions.

Cott thus offers a way to grasp aspects of nineteenth-century women that seem contradictory. She proposes that one type of feminist consciousness might have an oppositional position to male dominance, as did radical suffragists, for example; another consciousness might demand attention for woman but not challenge her domestic role, as of many women in the temperance movement. A third alternative might find women acting out of a communal consciousness, that is, being publicly active but mainly on behalf of their own class, race, or

³³ Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18.2 (1966): 151-74; Gerda Lerner, ed. *The Female Experience: An American Documentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Linda K. Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: the Rhetoric of Women’s History,” *The Journal of American History* 75.1 (1988): 9-39.

ethnicity, as did women in the Colored Department, for example. This communal orientation might cause some women to support stasis over change, although their actions might still have a gendered aspect. In other words, given the moment or the experience, the same woman might strongly oppose gender hierarchy, shore it up, or express an intention to alter it.³⁴

Cott's approach speaks to what might otherwise seem ambivalence in southern white and black women in relation to women's issues and to words they might choose as self-identifiers. Cott declares that all three aspects of consciousness about feminism are necessary to fashion a "full portrayal of women as political actors" without forcing their experience into distinct categories; all three might inhabit a woman's mind simultaneously as she participated in public life. Cott provides a way to assess the gender component in women's diverse activism in politics, the marketplace, and civic life, all a part of the language in and about the Woman's Department. The terms "lady" and "woman" deserve a similar plasticity as Cott's shades of "feminism," because southern women lived complicated lives in post-Reconstruction times. Whether they stood with men of their region in their history; whether they pushed for the vote but respected allegiances; whether they demanded positions of leadership in their own area; or whether they needed every possible new venture that would allow them support for families, southern women walked the finest of lines in the proposed "New South."

To grant these women a full portrait, this study also draws from the style, innovation, or interpretation in other historical works. Suzanne Lebsock, for example, skillfully inserts scholarly insights into the storyline of free women who changed their status in Petersburg,

³⁴ Nancy F. Cott, "What's in a Name? The Limits of 'Social Feminism'; or, Expanding the Vocabulary of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* 76.3 (1989): 823-29.

Virginia. Kathryn Kish Sklar, in her biography of Catherine Beecher, seamlessly and unobtrusively inserts the language of another century into her narrative. Justin Lystrom breathes life into post-bellum New Orleans and its people with a lively storytelling style. Dorothy Hayden, in the way she arranges visual space in *The Power of Place*, reinforces her declaration that women shape and are shaped by built environments and preservation practices. Edward L. Ayers offers a complex version of a region struggling to create a “New South,” and his comprehensive work provides a landscape of everyday life that includes the experience of the black population and of women. A host of other writers impact this study: those who investigate women in the labor force, in benevolent societies, in suffrage movements, and in urban environments, for example. Although few studies of New Orleans include the nature of the city in relation to its women (there are pertinent books on the city’s prostitutes, however), this research benefits from scholarly assessments of politics, business, constructed and natural environments, and of the diverse influences in the Crescent City.³⁵

³⁵ Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg*; Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973); Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995). On New Orleans, see Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans 1865-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004); Justin A. Nystrom, *New Orleans after the Civil War: Race, Politics, and a New Birth of Freedom* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010); Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). See also, Joy J. Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age: Politics and Urban Progress, 1880-1896* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969).



"The Promenade" at the Cotton Centennial Exposition, Century Magazine, June, 1885

Brief Overview

The chapters in this study follow the chronology of the six-month-long event. Because expositions did not exist in isolation, chapter one establishes what kind of place New Orleans was for women in 1884. It relates what newspapers had to say of women's character, style, modes of entertainments, work life, and privileges in a city with a history of a three-tiered racial culture and a host of immigrants in the mix. It notes the pluckiness and business acumen that both white and black women inherited or devised in the only state under a French/Spanish civil code rather than English common law. Although New Orleans culture was heavily invested in inflexible tradition, this chapter also notes that society columns hinted that a new generation was beginning to relax some customs. It suggests that clashes among women at the Cotton Centennial often resulted from a difference in personality or from disparity in what constituted good manners. The chapter also tells how the Woman's Department came to be, when a cabal of

powerful men decided to create a World's Fair and include special-interest features (Woman's, Colored, and Educational Departments) to entice more visitors.

Chapter two outlines Howe's arrival and rumblings over her appointment, then shows women banding together to develop their department. Powerful local female journalists, especially Catharine Cole, reported every perceived insult. As participants worked together toward a common goal, personal aspirations often collided, yet these women found common ground quickly when the Board of Management reneged on a promise of \$50,000 to fund the department. Chapter three enumerates the city's celebrations, the exposition's financial crises, and strong editorial opinions that cast various shadows as the work proceeded. Cole, as the surrogate for working women, and her potent column, "Woman's World and Work," are major factors in this chapter.

Chapter four records the peak of cooperation as the Woman's Department formally opened with fanfare. In public utterances, Howe not only elaborated on women's accomplishments, she reinforced the mission of the exposition: reunion and reconciliation. As celebrated activists and suffragists delivered feminist messages on the grounds and around town, locals softened their opinion of "strong-minded" women. Despite harsh criticism and an unexpected humiliation as the event grew to a close, Howe indefatigably solidified her value to the exposition and its goals. Newspapers assessed the variety and quality of women's work in finally completed exhibits. The conclusion of the study looks at some participants' own assessments of their experience and evaluates the department's legacy.

An aim of this study is to identify seeds of transformation and to assess the Woman's Department as a reflection of late-nineteenth-century culture. My hope is that it adds a dimension to understanding women's leadership in the era and makes a place for the Cotton Centennial

when scholars research World's Fairs. If only the grandest events are examined, the impact of these fabled spectaculars on women's lives is incomplete. I assert that too few southern expositions have received due attention, but I also acknowledge that this is a tale of a significant event in the *atypical* city of the South. Although the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition began as a major fair, it lost that status later when it was overshadowed by greater ones; it may now be a star only among the minors. Nevertheless, I expect that this study can enlarge its repute in the scope of World's Fair history, New Orleans and southern history, and feminist history. I am confident that this chronological approach is comprehensive enough to serve as a frame of reference for those who might use it to investigate specialized areas of gender, race, class, customs, and generations.



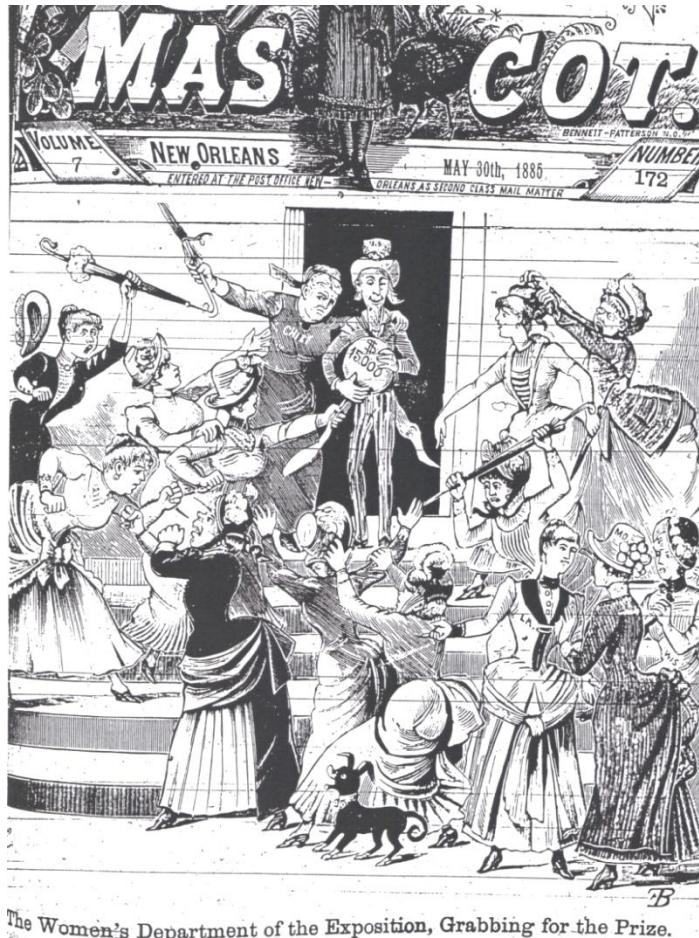
Government Building, Collection of Ken Speth

Backstory: the Women, the City

Some of the ladies of the South . . . feel it an insult that a Yankee should be placed in such an honorable position. They, perhaps, do not understand that the Exposition is not entirely Southern because it is to be held in Louisiana.

—U. S. Commissioner for Wisconsin¹

Twisting plot lines, gendered settings, and fanfare aplenty characterized the grand theater of World's Fairs in the nineteenth century. Promoters attempted to manipulate spaces and messages, but inevitably, contrary positions intervened. A rousing conflict marked the Woman's Department at the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition in New Orleans from late 1884 to the middle of 1885. Women struggled first to accept a leader they resented and



"*The Woman's Department of the Exposition, Grabbing for the Prize,*" the Mascot, May 30, 1885

¹ Reprinted in the *Times-Democrat*, November 20, 1884.

then attempted to execute plans that repeatedly went awry. Yet, Lady Commissioners worked to create separate spaces for their states in the collective arena of the Woman’s Department where remarkable characters met, clashed, and (somewhat) reconciled.

Most skirmishes swirled around the pivotal figure of Julia Ward Howe, the department’s president, who was controversial for her former abolitionism, present northern authority, and questionable early decisions. Her demeanor rankled women of New Orleans, and journalists judged her as haughty, rude, and dictatorial. Months of controversy dogged the preparations for a celebratory opening of the department, yet by March, 1885, women made a show of unity as they seized the spotlight available to them. A look at Howe’s family history and her career as writer, speaker, and organizer is pertinent here, as are the life experiences of several local luminaries and the relationship between the Fair, the city of New Orleans, and the women in it.

Conceived and Decided Upon

When Julia Ward Howe compiled her final report and catalogue of the Woman’s Department at the World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition, she declared that the department had been “conceived and decided upon” in the spring of 1884 to display the “special industries of women.” It was not the first such display. Women had earlier had a place at the American exposition in Philadelphia in 1876, where Philadelphia women had helped raise funds for the nation’s centennial and had expected a space to show women’s work. After some disappointments, they did occupy a Woman’s Pavilion—what Mary Pepchinski calls a “gendered building”—to display their art, crafts, and inventions. Howe seems to have been unaware of the

Philadelphia effort when she claimed that the Mechanics' Institute Fair of 1883 in Boston housed the first recognized Woman's Department.²

In any event, it is doubtful that Louisiana women participated in either northern event, and as the Cotton Centennial approached, it was apparent that wartime sectionalism lingered. In 1876, former Confederates had not yet been in the mood to celebrate the nation's centennial or were too financially strapped to make a showing in Philadelphia, and the 1883 Boston fair had been more regional than national.³ However, in New Orleans during the six months of the Cotton Centennial in 1884 and 1885, southern women were at last ready to showcase their contributions to the nation's heritage. This first Woman's Department in the Deep South also provided opportunities for national leaders of women's causes to achieve their first inroads into the area.

From the outset, local women puzzled over why southern men who were touting a "New South" exposition would name a noted northern suffragist and former abolitionist as president of the Woman's Department. In the words of Caroline Merrick, New Orleans activist and clubwoman, "There was much criticism of the authorities that this honor had not been given to a Southern woman; notwithstanding that this world-renowned Bostonian was not a stranger to our people—they fully appreciated the power of her 'Battle Hymn of the Republic.'"⁴ This sarcastic

² *Report and Catalogue of the Woman's Department of the World's Exposition, Held at New Orleans, 1884-1885* (Boston: Rand, Avery, 1885), 2; Mary Pepchinski, "Woman's Buildings at European and American World's Fairs, 1893-1939," in T. J. Boisseau and Abigail M. Markwyn, eds., *Gendering the Fair: Histories of Women and Gender at World's Fairs* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 188; Julia Ward Howe, *Reminiscences, 1819-1899* (New York: Houghton, 1899), 394.

³ About women at the Philadelphia Fair, see John E. Findling and Kimberly D. Pelle, eds., *Encyclopedia of World's Fairs and Expositions* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 57. Also see Mary F. Cordato, "Representing the Expansion of Woman's Sphere: Women's Work and Culture at the World's Fairs of 1876, 1893, and 1904" (Ph. D. diss., New York University, 1989); Virginia Grant Darney, "Women and World's Fairs: American International Expositions 1876-1904 (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1982); William D. Andrews, "Women and the Fairs of 1876 and 1893," *Hayes Historical Journal* 1.3 (1977): 173-83.

reference to the set piece of Howe's celebrity would not have been lost on southern readers; Howe's iconic Civil War anthem had placed God squarely on the side of the North. “[I]t seemed unnecessary,” Merrick wrote, “to seek so far for a head of the Exhibit. If Southern women could create it, some one of them was surely able to direct it.” This was the crux of local women’s ire.⁴

By choosing Howe, the Board of Management forced local women to stifle sectional allegiance in order to be the gracious and welcoming ladies they were expected to be. Despite obvious umbrage, Merrick (as dutiful a hostess as other elite women in the city) did extend hospitality to Howe during her six-month stay in New Orleans. And she acknowledged Howe’s skill, writing that Howe “performed this duty with marked ability, and displayed a force of character which commanded respect.” Yet, Merrick added that “it did not always win for her acquiescence in her decisions or affectionate regard from all her colleagues.” She trusted that when Howe recollected, her memory might match that of “her Exposition coadjutors” as they remembered “her own regal self.” However, Merrick averred that at the time she had found “naught special” to excite her own gratitude.⁵

When Julia Ward Howe looked back on her work with Woman’s Departments at fairs for her *Reminiscences* (1899), she offered her own explanation of her New Orleans appointment. In her memoir, she speculated that her connection to the 1883 Boston fair had led to “receiving and accepting an invitation” to preside over the Woman’s Department at “a great World’s Fair to be held in New Orleans.” Furthermore, her appointment in each of the two cities had occurred because of the progress of “the woman question.” The question of the fundamental role of

⁴ Caroline Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land: A Southern Matron’s Memoir* (New York: Grafton, 1901), 176.

⁵ Ibid.

woman and her rights had fostered “a fresh interest in the industrial capacity of the sex,” Howe wrote. She insisted that “experts in these matters” knew that the work of women had “entered almost every department of service and of manufacture.” In order to prove their mettle, however, women had asked that “a separate place” be assigned at some of the great industrial fairs for women to have a special showing of their wares. The Boston department had emphasized three areas as manifestations of women’s capability: inventions, scientific work, and books by women authors, and Howe later urged the same categories for the Cotton Centennial. She wrote that her acceptance of the New Orleans invitation was on condition that fellow Boston clubwomen Henrietta Wolcott and Ednah Cheney help her; the three women worked out of the Park Street building that housed their New England Woman’s Club (NEWC).⁶

Howe seems to have been unperturbed that her appointment came late in autumn of 1884 just months before the event was to open, but women who had to gather exhibits in other states fretted over the shortness of time. In her journal for September 17, Howe wrote that Boston newswoman Marion McBride asked her to lead the Massachusetts exhibit for the New Orleans Exposition. By October 4, however, her journal entry indicates that “the Chiefs invite me to become Chief of the Department of Women’s Work, all expenses secured to me beforehand.” She would have welcomed an inflow of cash in that year when her finances were shaky, when she considered having to rent out her Beacon Street home for the winter.⁷ Apparently, Colonel

⁶ Julia Ward Howe, *Reminiscences, 1819-1899* (New York: Houghton, 1899), 395. Scientific work had come mainly from “lady students and graduates” of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The early letterhead for the Woman’s Department at the Cotton Centennial lists the Park Street address of NEWC.

⁷ Howe, *Reminiscences*, 394, 395. Dates in Howe’s memoir and journals occasionally disagree. Because she composed *Reminiscences* while in Rome in 1898 without benefit of her journals, she mistakes some dates concerning the Cotton Centennial. Her recollection of the sequence of her appointment, however, fits with other evidence. About her financial shortfall,

Franklin C. Morehead, the Cotton Centennial's ambassador, met Howe at the Boston Fair and recommended her to Director-General "Major" Edward A. Burke for the similar Woman's Department they were planning. Morehead and Burke were two of the enthusiasts that launched the bold idea for an exposition that would celebrate the centennial of the exportation of cotton from America. Although Howe was confident that she would create a viable department, when Lady Commissioners looked back on their experience for the department's *Report and Catalogue*, they complained that their presentations suffered from having only weeks instead of months to collect work from women in their states.⁸

It suited the purposes of Morehead, Burke, and advocates of a "New South" to have Howe as president, and her appointment suggests that the Woman's Department was intended as more than a mere gesture to the ladies. The Cotton Centennial Exposition was, above all, a public relations event fashioned to boost the city's economy by claiming that the South was anxious to be reintegrated into the Union. Trumpeting harmony and amity was part of the scheme to draw investors southward. "Happily the era of sectional bitterness is with the past," local papers chirped. The *Times-Democrat*, ever the booster of the Exposition, declared that "passions and animosities" had subsided and "feelings and prejudices" had weakened. With astonishing rhetorical reversal, however, it contended that southerners were "in a mood to forgive" as only they knew how, for the South, "having suffered long and sorely, can afford to be

she worried to her sister Annie that she "may let the Beacon St. house next winter" because she had "fallen behind" in finances and needed to make "a little lee-way." Julia Ward Howe to Annie Mailliard, May 9, 1884, Julia Ward Howe Papers (bMS Am 2119; Letters; 1883-1887, folder 1), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Catharine Cole announced that McBride would head the Woman's Department at the Boston Institute that was to open on September 3, 1884. "Woman's World and Work" (hereafter "WWW"), *Picayune*, August 3, 1884.

⁸ *Report and Catalogue*, 42-176.

generous, and she will.” The *Picayune* added: “The political embarrassments of the South are over, we trust forever,” and “strictly business considerations” would guide future action. The South needed to enter the industrial age, and “New South ideologues” were determined to arrange that.⁹ As part of that strategy, they chose national figures for key positions.

Whatever role the Woman’s Department played in this “great fete of the new South,” the Board recognized that Howe could serve their intended goals, so they gave women a conspicuous presence.¹⁰ In addition to Howe’s renown as an experienced organizer, she could help attract women and families to the event. She would elicit more media coverage than any local woman, and she would draw other well-known women from around the country to the platform offered in New Orleans. All of this would enhance the national and international profile of the event and the city. With a northern woman at its helm, the Woman’s Department would be a special expression of reconciliation and of a “New South” safe for investors. It was all a good plan, but the reality in the Woman’s Department and elsewhere revealed cracks in management’s carefully crafted image.

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, all newspaper references are from “World’s Exposition,” a daily column in each paper under that heading. *Times-Democrat*, November 23, 1884; “Some Reflection about this Exposition,” *Picayune*, November 25, 1884. Rydell cogently presents these ideas about new markets and a “New South” in *All the World’s a Fair*, 72-104; his “New South Ideologues” reference, 76. For how proponents of the “New South” used it surreptitiously to celebrate aspects of the Lost Cause and the “Old South,” making the term a myth or mockery, see Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (Montgomery: NewSouth Books, 1970), 23-37.

¹⁰ *Picayune*, December 17, 1884. The Board also made a strategic choice for the Colored Department, naming Mississippian Blanche K. Bruce, the only African American who had served a full term as a United States Senator and who, in 1884, was Register of the Treasury. See Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 33-36; Lawrence Otis Graham, *The Senator and the Socialite: The True Story of America’s First Black Dynasty* (New York: Harper, 2006).



*Julia Ward Howe, circa 1879-1880,
Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study*

The Bostonian

Who was this Yankee woman who stirred emotions in friends and foes? By 1884, Howe (1819-1910) was a celebrated activist in women's causes. She was neither the first nor the only nineteenth-century woman to escape domesticity by becoming a zealous clubwoman, but she had polished the role to a fine art. Oliver Wendell Holmes called her one of the most "eminently *clubbable*" women in America.¹¹ She was the perpetual president of the New England Woman's Club and of the Association for the Advancement of Women, through which she advocated opportunity for women in all fields, especially in education and the professions. For two decades, she had also been a leader in the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA), the conservative wing of the suffrage movement that welcomed males, worked to change state laws

¹¹ Howe, *Reminiscences*, 400.

on women's rights, and did not protest the Fifteenth Amendment that enfranchised black males.¹²

New Orleans women would have learned of Howe's activities through newspapers, magazines, and articles she wrote on political, educational, philosophical, and travel themes. They probably knew she was from Boston, and some might have realized she had had a famous husband, Samuel Gridley Howe, deceased head of the Perkins Institute for the Blind, where he had devised a way for a blind and deaf woman to communicate with others.¹³ Local women would have known that Howe had been part of the abolitionist movement and that her fame rested in her "Battle Hymn," in which God took the Union's side.

New Orleanians were probably familiar with some of Howe's personal achievements, but they were unlikely to know of her emotional ties to their city. Perhaps they knew that Howe was a minister, editor, and dedicated leader in all organizations to which she lent her name; that she was intelligent, logical, indefatigable, and strong-minded; and that she was devoted to her New England Woman's Club and to world peace.¹⁴ They would not have known that the youngest of

¹² Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton began the all-female radical wing, the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), which pushed for a national law and protested the Fifteenth Amendment for its inclusion of the word "male." The two groups joined in 1890 as the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). For more information on the early suffrage movement, see Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996); Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds. *History of Woman Suffrage*, Vols. 1, 2, 3 (Reprinted, New York: Arno Press, 1969).

¹³ Dr. Howe developed his method for deaf-blind student, Laura Bridgman. Helen Keller's teacher, Annie Sullivan, later learned teaching methods at the Institute. Elizabeth Gitter, *The Imprisoned Guest: Samuel Howe and Laura Bridgman, the Original Deaf-Blind Girl* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2001). In his early life, Dr. Howe was a hero of Greek independence (a "chevalier"); in later life, he was one of the "Secret Six" who funded John Brown's Raid on Harper's Ferry. See Edward J. Renehan, Jr. *The Secret Six: The True Tale of the Men Who Conspired with John Brown* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997).

¹⁴ Howe is also often credited with having created Mother's Day, inspired by her "Mother's Day Proclamation," published in 1870, a poem calling for mothers to strike for peace. See Laura E. Richards and Maud Howe Elliott with Florence Howe Hall, *Julia Ward Howe: 1819-1910* (Boston: Houghton, 1915), I: 318, 319.

her three brothers, Marion, was buried in Girod Cemetery, having died in New Orleans of yellow fever in 1847 while in the city to open a branch of the family banking business, Prime, Ward and King. Few would have known that Julia Ward Howe was still in mourning when she set out for New Orleans and the Cotton Centennial. Sam Ward, her treasured older brother and mentor, died in late May of 1884. Local papers later noted that he had been the husband of a fiery New Orleans belle, Medora Grymes, but they had not connected him to Julia Ward Howe.¹⁵ Few women would have suspected that Howe was more vulnerable than her history suggested.

As her journals attest, Howe's struggles as a wife and her life-long devotion to study prepared her to push women to achieve and to pursue higher education, charges she led in the Woman's Department. Her abiding interest was in philosophy and languages. She grew up in New York as a girl with "remarkable beauty, wit and wealth," the eldest of privileged but motherless daughters, or the "Three Graces of Bond Street." Her father was a staunchly Calvinist, propertied banker whose home included a substantial library and an art gallery. Tutors educated the "high-spirited and self-willed" redhead, but Sam Ward's books and worldly learning broadened her "heroic outlook" on life. As a popular belle, she married the "dashing" Bostonian Samuel Gridley Howe in 1843 when she was twenty-four and he was forty-two. She was a woman of literary ambition; he was a man of substance but not of wealth. Although the men of her family attempted to protect her inheritance, her husband eventually won the battle to have control transferred to him. Over time, he sold parcels of her valuable real estate in New

¹⁵ Sam Ward's first wife Emily, eldest granddaughter of John Jacob Astor, died in childbirth. Medora's father was John Randolph Grymes, New Orleans lawyer and irrepressible gambler. Her mother had been the widow of Louisiana Governor William C. C. Claiborne before marrying Grymes. See Lately Thomas, *Sam Ward "King of the Lobby": One of America's Most Versatile and Fascinating Sons*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 84-98, 118-24; see also Maud Howe Elliott, *Uncle Sam Ward and His Circle* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), 387.

York and invested in less desirable property in South Boston. What fortune her husband did not diminish, her brother did. After their father's death, Sam Ward made imprudent banking decisions that decimated her remaining inheritance. By the time Julia Ward Howe came to New Orleans, all she owned was the house Sam Ward bought her (during one of his flush financial periods) on Boston's Beacon Street and a small place near Newport, Rhode Island.¹⁶

Howe had early been a published author, and she was willing to share what she knew with others. Her first piece as a young woman had been a literary critique of eighteenth-century French poet Lamartine. However, although her family had celebrated her intelligence and ability, her husband did not. Being headstrong, she defied his wishes when she anonymously published her first book of poetry. Another collection followed after the two years she spent alone in Rome where she found freedom at last, and its blatant romantic tone was an embarrassment and an insult to Samuel Gridley Howe. She also eventually saw her play performed on Broadway, her travel accounts serialized, and a myriad of essays published on a wide range of topics, especially her passions of education, women's advancement, world peace, and suffrage. She would lecture on the same subjects and on spiritual matters.¹⁷

Howe discovered the significance of connecting with like-minded clubwomen, but only after wresting personal space and a semblance of self-determination from a domineering husband. Dr. Howe uprooted the family regularly and imposed his will into household affairs normally considered a wife's domain. The girl who had grown up praised and cherished became a woman often disparaged for her lack of domestic skill and motherly instinct. She suffered bouts of loneliness and depression, especially during six pregnancies. One young son died at three

¹⁶ See Howe, *Reminiscences*; Richards and Elliott, *Julia Ward Howe*.

¹⁷ Ibid.

years old; the other five were alive when Howe went to the Cotton Centennial in 1884. Her youngest daughter, Maud, was most available to be Howe's companion to New Orleans and to head the literary section in the Woman's Department. During Howe's limiting marriage, her best personal time was spent in travel, study, and writing. Unitarianism offered her a spiritual justification to develop her potential and prompted her to seize a degree of autonomy. The New England Woman's Club offered a sisterhood among women that could be matched only by her devotion to her far-flung sisters, Annie and Louisa. The resources she found in her club may have spurred Howe's commitment to matters of spirit and gender. She never took the comfort of women lightly.¹⁸

Howe's journals reveal her non-conformity and the "scanty income" she earned from numerous speaking engagements that only slightly assuaged her fear that she would leave debt for her children to pay. Yet, Howe did not put herself in the hands of a promoter; she continued along her independent way. Nineteenth-century cultural critic and essayist, John Jay Chapman, offered glimpses into Howe's determined character when he called her a "doughty, gallant battler in the drawing-room" who "rode her charger straight at the opponent." However, to "collective Beacon Street" elite, he wrote, she was *persona non grata*, because she would not conform. Instead, she filled her house with "Persians, Armenians, and the professors of strange new faiths. She sat at the gate and entertained all men, including a lot of people who Boston thought ought

¹⁸ Howe Unpublished Journals 1863-1910 (bMS Am 2119), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; Richards and Elliott, *Julia Ward Howe*; Howe, *Reminiscences*. Also see Howe biographers: Valarie Ziegler, *Diva Julia: The Public Romance and Private Agony of Julia Ward Howe* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2003); Mary H. Grant, *Private Woman, Public Person: An Account of the Life of Julia Ward Howe from 1819 to 1868* (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1994); Deborah Pickman Clifford, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: a Biography of Julia Ward Howe* (New York: Little, Brown, 1979).

not to be entertained. But there she sat, nevertheless,—all courage, all wit and all benignity.”¹⁹

When Howe did set out for New England towns or to the Far West, she made her own arrangements to speak, sent her own telegrams, and arrived by train ready to do what she had promised. Despite being alone to direct her affairs, in widowhood Howe was most free.

Most of her published essays followed the triumph of her “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” and wherever she went, she was called upon to repeat how she had written the famous verses. She would tell how early in the Civil War, while in Washington D.C. with her husband, who was a member of the Sanitary Commission, she heard soldiers marching and singing the stirring tune, “John Brown’s Body.” Her minister, riding in the wagon with her, challenged her to write new lyrics to the rousing music. She claimed that in the middle of the night she had awakened with the lines complete as if divinely guided; she rose and wrote them in the dark, a practice she had earlier developed to keep from waking husband or children. The verses were published in *The Atlantic* in February 1862 and soon became a sensation and an inspiration. Everywhere Howe went in the North, bands played her “Battle Hymn,” and she became accustomed to the deference it brought her. Although southerners were familiar with that iconic anthem, during her stay in New Orleans, she recorded it performed only twice.²⁰ While in the city, she shared the literary expertise that had made her famous with fledgling local writers in the literary club she

¹⁹ Jacques Barzun, ed., *Selected Writings of John Jay Chapman* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968), 221-26.

²⁰ Howe’s volumes of poetry were *Passion Flowers* (1853) and *Words for the Hour* (1857). For other writings, see Richards and Elliott, *Julia Ward Howe*; Howe, *Reminiscences*. James Freeman Clark was the pastor who suggested she write new verses to “John Brown’s Body.” The chorus of Leland University, one of four universities for people of color in New Orleans, performed her “Battle Hymn” when Howe spoke there for commencement. Richards and Elliott, *Julia Ward Howe*, II: 108. Howe also wrote that her audience in the Colored Department “sang my Battle Hymn.” Howe Journal, May 16, 1885.

revived, the PanGnostics. Two whom she mentored achieved a measure of renown: journalist Elizabeth Bisland and “Southern Woman of Letters,” Grace King.

A Galaxy of Local Women



Caroline Merrick, New York Public Library

Stephen A. Schwarzman Building / Print Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs Identifier: Digital ID: 1687096

In New Orleans, the woman closest to Howe in age and accomplishment was activist Caroline Merrick (1825-1908), and many thought her qualified to lead the Woman’s Department. The two women’s crucial experiences during the Civil War were poles apart. When Julia Ward Howe was composing her “Battle Hymn” in the middle of a dark night in 1862, Caroline Merrick was single-handedly managing her brother’s plantation in Feliciana Parish, according to her memoir. All the men were at war, and her husband had spirited their slaves to another parish. Merrick claims that at Myrtle Grove Plantation she was responsible for the welfare of slaves and family as well as clothing and crops. The plantation was in the path of two armies that regularly took what they needed as they passed from Baton Rouge to Port Gibson. Merrick wrote in her memoir that when emancipation came, she declared, “Thank heaven! I, too, shall be free at last!” But then she added, reflectively, that in declaring so, she was “forgetful of the legal disabilities to which white women of these United States are still in bondage.” Relatives in her husband’s birthplace (Wilbraham, Massachusetts) did not understand why he hesitated to sign the post-war

oath of allegiance, but Merrick did. Their only son had fought for the Confederacy and been shot through the head in battle; he survived but lost an eye. By 1884, both Howe and Merrick had mourned the death of children, but Merrick no longer had the comfort of daughters, as Howe did.²¹

Both women had grown up advantaged, tutored at home, and with household staff to tend them. Those in Howe's household were paid; in Merrick's, they were slaves. Merrick was of "good pedigree," the daughter of a planter in Clinton, Louisiana. Her father gave her domestic slaves at her marriage, as was customary, but she claimed she never coveted their ownership. At fifteen, she married Edwin T. Merrick, her stepmother's nephew, a man more than twice her age that she credited with her "bringing up" in their companionable marriage. She wrote that she noticed early that girls had a sphere—"woman's exclusive path"—in which they were expected to remain, but this was not her path. Akin to Julia Ward Howe, Merrick had an "impetuous temper" when young, and her memoirs trace the course of her radicalization as an adult. Society columnists often called her Mrs. Judge Merrick, because her husband had been twice elected Chief Justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court before the Civil War and during it. Like Howe and other activists, however, she always referred to herself as Caroline Merrick.²²

Almost alone as a suffragist in New Orleans, this elite woman became politicized while working with her favorite charity. As Merrick and others told it, one of the inmates of St. Anna's

²¹ Both of Merrick's daughters died as young women: Laura of yellow fever in the 1878 epidemic, Clara in 1882. Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land*, 116, 156. Howe's eldest daughter Julia Romano would die in early 1886, but at the time of the Exposition, all four daughters thrived.

²² Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land*, 5, 12, 17, 19. For Judge E. T. Merrick as an elite who in 1872 owned \$100,000 in real estate and \$13,000 in property, see Justin A. Lystrom, *New Orleans after the Civil War: Race, Politics, and a New Birth of Freedom* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 250.

Asylum for Women and Children, the charity she led, wanted to bequeath the institution \$1000. The woman drew up a will, Merrick and another officer witnessed it, and learned only after the woman's death that the gift would go to the state instead, voided because women, along with "idiots, insane, criminal, and minors," had no legal standing. Soon, Merrick was working to secure property rights, at the very least. For the 1879 Constitutional Convention, she and Elizabeth Lyle Saxon, "already a well-known and fearless reformer," gathered a petition for the "right of representation" as a "question of civilization." Merrick wrote that out of old-fashioned decorum she planned to have her son read it to the male legislative body, but Saxon said, "You do not want a man to represent you at the polls; represent yourself now, if you only stand up and move your lips."²³ Thereafter, Merrick increasingly became a force in women's issues for the South.

Although national organizers sought Merrick as a prominent leader, Julia Ward Howe paid her scant attention in her memoir (and misspelled her name). When Frances E. Willard came to New Orleans in 1881, she convinced Merrick to become president of the local Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Susan B. Anthony engaged Merrick to write the Louisiana section for *History of Woman Suffrage*, volume three. Yet, Howe waved her off with a sentence in her *Reminiscences*: "A New Orleans lady who was present, Mrs. Merritt [sic], also made a brief address, bidding the colored department remember that 'they had good friends at the South also,' which I was glad to hear." Merrick had made a lengthy address on that occasion, but perhaps she had purloined too much of Howe's limelight. She could have been an effective president of the Woman's Department; instead, Julia Ward Howe named her honorary vice-president for

²³ Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land*, 124-128, 226. Merrick gave her husband credit for recognizing the opportunity that the Constitutional Convention offered for women to make their appeal for rights.

Southern States. Effronteries of those days in 1884 and 1885 lingered in Merrick's memory. When she wrote of them later, her words reflected the "keen wit and gentle sarcasm" that the *Times-Democrat* said was her style in impromptu speaking and platform orating as the first advocate of woman suffrage in Louisiana. At her death at eighty-two, the *Picayune* called her "a beloved leader in many a good cause during her long, useful and brilliant life."²⁴

Caroline Gratia Walmsley,

*Collection of Kathleen Loker Gibbons, from
Women Who Cared:
The 100 Years of the Christian Woman's Exchange,
By Charles L. "Pie" Dufour
(New Orleans: Christian Woman's Exchange, 1980)*

Another illustrious local woman, but one who eschewed confrontation, was Caroline Gratia Williams Walmsley (1832?-1905). One of the founders of the Christian Woman's Exchange in 1881, she was its president from 1882 until a year before her death in 1905. The founding members' husbands had "authorized" their wives' signatures for this "first association chartered by women in New Orleans," according to the history of the organization. Mrs. R. M. Walmsley (as she was known) was, like Merrick, a Methodist woman devoted to the church's various missions, but her



²⁴ Howe, *Reminiscences*, 398; Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land*, 142-44, 176. Merrick wrote that her husband advised her to accept Willard's appointment of her as president of the local Woman's Christian Temperance Union. For Merrick's obituaries, see "Mrs. Caroline E. Merrick Yields to Grim Reaper," *Times-Democrat*, March 30, 1908; "Mrs. C. E. Merrick, Dies, Aged Eighty-Two," *Picayune*, March 30, 1908. Merrick was buried from her home at 1404 Napoleon Avenue.

passion was helping needy women help themselves through the Exchange. According to the *Times-Democrat*, Walmsley was social, home-loving, and modest. The *Picayune* quoted Mrs. T. G. (Ida) Richardson, her friend and vice president of the Exchange, as having said that Walmsley “did not like display into an ovation in her honor.” Unlike Howe, she wished to remain in the background and avoid notoriety.

Yet, in colorful parlance, the New Orleans community dubbed Walmsley the “queen whose throne was philanthropy and whose scepter, benevolence.” With her forceful personality, she not only led what the *Picayune* called a “small and determined band of noble women,” she also negotiated two of the largest gifts that women made in their own names in the late nineteenth century. In 1887, Mrs. Charles T. (Floristelle) Howard gave \$20,000 and Mrs. M. L. Whitney gave \$10,000, which Walmsley and her Board used to pay cash for a twenty-six- room mansion facing Lafayette Square in New Orleans. There, they rented rooms to working women, operated a restaurant, and sold homemade items and genteel families’ furniture. Walmsley was a “distinguished and noble figure among the womanhood of New Orleans,” a splendid manager, and wise counselor to individuals and to her organization, the *Picayune* declared at her death.²⁵

In her social life, Walmsley resembled other elite women in New Orleans. The *Times-Democrat* described her as “an impressive-looking woman, tall of stature, fair complexioned, and as she grew towards middle age, silver-haired.” The daughter of a Methodist minister, she spent her early life in Massachusetts among cultured, educated, and religious people. She married in the mid-1850s and lived in Natchitoches, Louisiana, a few years before moving to

²⁵ “Mrs. R. M. Walmsley,” *Picayune*, August 23, 1905; “Mrs. Walmsley Dead,” *Times-Democrat*, August 23, 1905. Walmsley’s moniker is quoted in Kathleen Waters Sanders, *The Business of Charity: the Woman’s Exchange Movement 1832-1900* (Champaign: University of Illinois, 1998), 100, 67. See also Louise Hoehn Hogan, *History of the Christian Woman’s Exchange* (New Orleans: Christian Woman’s Exchange, 1956).

New Orleans with her husband. He was a “distinguished financier and president of the Louisiana National Bank,” the *Picayune* related, and together, as philanthropists, they “defrayed all the expenses of a Methodist Mission in Brazil.” Mrs. Walmsley was superintendant of her church’s Sunday School and sang in the choir. She was “intensely domestic in her tastes,” the *Times-Democrat* claimed, and was active in the “household affairs” of her grand residence on Prytania and First Streets, where she raised three sons and a daughter. She was in her fifties at the time of the Cotton Centennial, a woman highly praised as lovable, sympathetic, sweet, and unassuming. The *Times-Democrat* called her an enthusiastic but cautious leader of the Exchange, “its mainstay, its leading spirit,” and a woman of action.²⁶



Mary Ashley Townsend, Times-Democrat, June 8, 1901

Mary Ashley Van Voorhies Townsend (1832-1901) moved in social and philanthropic circles and, in her early career as a poet used the pen-name, “Xariffa.” She became a popular rhymester for patriotic and commemorative occasions, including the openings of the Exposition and of the Woman’s Department. She was also the poet laureate for the king of Carnival (Rex). As the *Times-Democrat* wrote at her death, “For every public occasion of moment in this city she sent up the silver note of her bugle” and recorded the history of New Orleans with her words. The Louisiana Historical Society, of which she was a member, dubbed her “Poet Laureate of Louisiana”; the *Picayune* called her “the sweet-

²⁶ “Mrs. R. M. Walmsley,” *Picayune*, August 23, 1905; “Mrs. Walmsley Dead,” *Times-Democrat*, August 23, 1905.

voiced singer.” Her granddaughter wrote that she submitted all poems to her husband before delivering them and that Townsend “was wont to say, if he were pleased, she was satisfied.” But earlier, Cable had written to her that he wished she “had to write for a living with a heartless editor to beat, beat, beat your fine gold [poems] mercilessly into the last fine crevice of perfection’s mold.”²⁷

Townsend was raised in affluence in Lyons, New York, and married husband Gideon, a merchant of stocks and bonds, in 1853, and they moved to Iowa. In 1860, they moved to New Orleans, where her “sentiments before and after war [were] strictly Southern,” according to Audrey May Meyer’s 1938 thesis on Townsend’s life. It also asserts that the poet was a social force in the city, with an “unmistakeable stamp of aristocracy [but] not a trace of haughtiness.” In glowing phrases, Townsend’s granddaughter wrote that her grandmother would cross her long apartments, “her gown trailing in a little frou-frou and whisper of silk about her tall form, her large, white nervous hands outheld in welcome, her soft hair brushed back and braided in a golden-brown coronet above a brow that makes one feel it is thought-crowded.” According to Meyer, she “loved fine things, the best materials, beautiful surroundings, choice foods, without in any way being a sensualist.” She could serve a ten-course dinner with aplomb, as she described in a letter to her mother. Her granddaughter claimed that Townsend relished travel and horse-riding long distances (up to fifty miles); that she was an able critic and a decent painter;

²⁷ Obituaries included reprints of several of her poems and testimonies from local literary lights like Grace King and Mollie E. Moore Davis. “Mary Ashley Townsend,” *Times-Democrat*, June 8, 1901; “The Voice of the Singer is Silent,” *Picayune*, June 8, 1901; for the life of Townsend by her granddaughter, see Townsend/Stanton Papers, 1845-1946 (MS 19, Box 2, Folder 10), University Archives, The Tulane Libraries, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.; for letter from Cable, see George Washington Cable to Mary Ashley Townsend, n.d., Townsend/Stanton Papers, Box 1, Folder 1. Townsend’s papers also include many handwritten poems and evidence of published pieces. Among her collections of poems were *Down the Bayou and Other Poems* (1870) and *Distaff and Spindle* (1895).

and that she was a sensitive, modest, retiring woman, a charming hostess, and a sympathetic friend. Yet, “she let nothing interfere with her duties to her husband and her children. They came first in everything.”²⁸

She was outwardly “reserved,” according to writer Mollie E. Moore Davis, quoted in the *Times-Democrat*, but her few intimate friends saw in her “a playful sweetness and every quality that goes to make noble womanhood.” Writers like Eliza Nicholson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Charles Dudley Warner, Joaquin Miller, George Washington Cable, and others were visitors to her home. Townsend’s granddaughter claimed the poet was an “insatiable reader and seeker after knowledge,” a linguist who spoke French and Spanish and translated German, and a woman with a strong spirit of benevolence. Although her obituaries mention only her membership in the Daughters of the Confederacy, she and her husband were active supporters of the Southern Art Union at the time of the Exposition, and she was later president of the literary Quarante Club, formed in 1886, and an editor of its *Art and Letters* publications. According to one historian, the “existence of a vocal women’s presence in the press in the mid 1880s” created a “favorable climate” for such a club as Quarante, especially that of Catharine Cole, who “promoted and defended women’s move into the realm of intellectual improvement.”²⁹

²⁸ Townsend/Stanton Papers, Box 2, Folder 10; Audrey May Meyer, “Biography of Mary Ashley Townsend” (master’s thesis, Tulane University, 1938), 5, 28, 29. For one of her dinners at her home on the corner of Carondelet and Constantinople, see Mary Ashley Townsend to her mother, May 31, 1884, Townsend/Stanton Papers, Box 1, Folder 1. On the evening she described, she served soup, then fish, then artichokes, soft-shelled crabs, chicken croquets and Saratoga potatoes, stuffed tomatoes, roast of beef with potato croquets, then eggplant, then asparagus, then ice cream and strawberries, and black coffee.

²⁹ “Mary Ashley Townsend,” *Times-Democrat*, June 8, 1901; “The Voice of the Singer is Silent,” *Picayune*, June 8, 1901; for her granddaughter’s comments, see Townsend/Stanton Papers, Box 2, Folder 10. Although she mentions Cable as Townsend’s friend, the newspaper obituaries treat him as *persona non grata*. For the history of clubs, especially Quarante, see Pherabe Kolb, “Broadening the Horizons of Life: the Beginnings of a Women’s Literary Club in Nineteenth Century New Orleans” (master’s thesis, Dartmouth College, 1994), 33.



Catharine Cole,
Newcomb College Center for Research on Women

As the *Picayune*'s foremost female staff journalist, Martha Reinhard Field (1855-1898), writing as "Catharine Cole," did indeed impact women's intellectual and employment opportunities. Because she left no journals, however, her personal life must be sketched from tidbits in her columns and the opinions of others. A contemporary journalist described her as a "rather slightly built woman with light brown hair, grayish blue eyes, topping a large nose and mouth, a soft, pleasant voice, and an unassuming quiet demeanor." Mollie W. Moore Davis, a local literary light, wrote that Cole's words and actions forwarded the "progress of the cause of womanhood." Another source, *Notables of New Orleans*, labeled Cole the "Pioneer Working Woman in the South," a superior conversationalist, and an exquisite word-painter. As observer of the Woman's Department and spokesperson for working women, Cole was also Howe's public antagonist. Her daughter, Flo Field, later groused that her mother's adversary Howe, "remembered [Cole's] friendship when she was too old and fat, one would have thought, to remember anything."³⁰

³⁰ May W. Mount, *Some Notables of New Orleans: Biographies and Descriptive Sketches of the Artists of New Orleans, and Their Work* (New Orleans: the author, 1896), 153; Bernard Shields was the contemporary journalist who described Cole and whom Moore quoted in her introduction to Martha Reinhard Field, *Catharine Cole's Book* (Chicago: Way and Williams, 1897), 10, 11. Both of these sources are in Catharine Cole Papers (MS NAC-32F, 02-015), Newcomb College Center for

Field had worked as Catharine Cole for the *Times-Democrat* before moving to the *Picayune* in 1881, where she helped owner Eliza Nicholson expand the newspaper's appeal to women. In addition to bolstering Nicholson's innovations (columns on fashion, home, health, and other domestic interests), Cole drew praise as a plucky journalist. Every Sunday, her "Woman's World and Work" sparkled, and her weekly moral homilies hardly needed the byline they carried; blunt opinions and muscular prose identified her as their author. In summer months when elite and middling classes fled the city, Cole journeyed to every nook of Louisiana, sending travel articles back to the *Picayune*. She worked there until 1894, when she and Nicholson had an unpleasant parting over a younger journalist Cole perceived as a threat. She continued at the *Times-Democrat* until her death in 1898.³¹

Cole was known in New Orleans as a tenacious reporter with a robust writing style. In a tribute to her in the *Picayune* in 1887, an admiring author claimed that Cole was "[y]oung, active, with a mind ever open to fresh impressions and steadily developing" into one who would make a mark on national literature. Further, the unidentified reporter wrote that Cole's style was characterized by individuality that was not pedantic, formal, or "over-intense." Instead, she wrote and talked with dash, verve, piquancy, and "brilliancy" and painted pictures with "vivid description," and that she was "entirely free from the vice of 'fine writing.'" The writer feared, however, that Cole occasionally showed too little deference for the subjects she covered. "She takes the step from the sublime to the ridiculous with absolute indifference for authority," the columnist wrote, citing as an example Cole's audacious description of Queen Victoria as "a

Research on Women, New Orleans, LA; Flo Field, unpublished biographical notes, 1, 27, Cole Papers.

³¹ See Eliza Holbrook Nicholson to Martha R. Field, 18____, n. d., Nicholson Papers (MSS 219), The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA.

short, stout, elderly lady with a rather red face.” Julia Ward Howe would also feel the sting of Cole’s impolitic pen more than once during the Cotton Centennial Exposition.³²

For the duration of the Exposition, Cole worked from the newspaper’s office in the Main Building. Her assignment was the Woman’s Department and all things of interest to women, apparently with a free reign from Nicholson to critique everything as she saw fit, which Cole did. One fellow journalist wrote that as a woman and a reporter, Cole assailed evil “with unflinching courage” and was “intrepid in the cause of right.” Suggesting her complexity, the writer added: “Her wit, though trenchant, is qualified by a tender heart.” Myth-making daughter, Flo, claimed that her mother penned such strong articles for the *Picayune* that many readers believed them to have been written by a man. She called her mother the Walter Winchell of her day: “She knew everything and told most of it.”³³ All of these characteristics would be on display during the World’s Exposition.

How Cole and Howe saw their earliest literary feats is revealing of their class. Howe had been thrilled to garner minor acclaim for her first published piece, while Cole had been exhilarated to receive remuneration (five dollars) for her first article. Throughout her adult life, Cole remained a wage-earning woman, even as a degenerative disease (Parkinson’s) caused her

³² “Mrs. M. R. Field: our ‘Catharine Cole,’” *Picayune*, April 24, 1887.

³³ “Letter to the Editor” from the president of the Woman’s Club, signed “B” (probably Elizabeth Bisland), *Times-Democrat*, November 30, 1884. Bisland was the literary editor for the *Times-Democrat*. Like Cole, she was a working woman; unlike Cole, she was regularly included in the social scene. For Cole’s travel writings, see Joan B. McLaughlin and Jack McLaughlin, eds. *Louisiana Voyages: The Travel Writings of Catharine Cole* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006). Flo Field, unpublished biographical notes, 1, 27, Cole Papers. Cole’s great-granddaughter, Toni Bacon, claims that Flo Field spent much literary energy eulogizing her mother and “myth-making” her life. Flo Field also remembered her grandmother Emmaline (Martha Field/Cole’s mother) to Bacon as “difficult, domineering and bad tempered.” Bacon speculates that Field/Cole might have been “partially acting out against ‘mamma’” when she lashed out at Howe. Toni Bacon, email to author, May 25, 2006.

to have to dictate her stories to her daughter, Flo. Her allegiance was always to fellow laborers, and she saw the world through that lens. Her father, William Smallwood, was a salaried newspaper editor and ostensibly gave her that first assignment in 1870, when she was fifteen, to fill in for an ailing male reporter and write an article for the *New Orleans Republican*.³⁴ The 1880 United States Census lists the Smallwoods in a mixed neighborhood of laborers. The family of five included Cole's 50-year-old father William, 55-year-old mother Emmaline, 20-year-old sister Bessie (who was also a journalist and later a traveling press agent), 4-year-old daughter Flora Field, and herself, 25-year-old Mattie Field, birthplace Virginia. She claimed to have been married in California some time around 1875. Cole would have been twenty-nine when the Exposition opened, with more than a generation separating her from Howe and Merrick. Like Howe, she would have been in mourning in December, 1884, her father having died two weeks earlier. Her sister had already left the household, which left Cole with added financial pressure as the family's sole support.



*Eliza Poitevent Holbrook Nicholson,
Picayune, February 16, 1896*

Cole's employer, Eliza Poitevent Nicholson (1843-1896), although from comfortable origins, faced other challenges. As a young poet ("Pearl Rivers"), she left the Louisiana-Mississippi border for New Orleans

³⁴ Stella Pitts, *Times-Picayune*, May 16, 1976, Sec 3, page 2.

out of ambition and/or need and became the *Picayune*'s literary editor and the city's first female journalist. In 1872, the golden-haired, blue-eyed "delicate and fragile beauty" married the *Picayune*'s owner and publisher, Alva M. Holbrook, forty years her senior. Shortly after the nuptials, his outraged first wife broke into Eliza Nicholson's bedroom, "shot at her twice but missed; then beat her over the head with a bottle of bay rum," then took an ax to the furniture, and was later arrested and jailed, according to an account her daughter-in-law later gave. She also commented that "the shock and humiliation of it must have left a deep mark on such a sensitive spirit."³⁵

Four years after the wedding, Holbrook died, leaving the paper \$80,000 in debt and Nicholson, at age twenty-seven, the first female owner of a major newspaper. An oft-told tale was that she called the staff together, told them she was taking control, and gave them an opportunity to leave or to support her. Over time, she paid off her husband's debts and fashioned a successful, responsible newspaper focused more on family issues than sensational ones. Her second husband, George Nicholson, the long-time business manager of the paper, whom she married in 1878, helped steer the *Picayune* to solvency. Eliza Nicholson ruled the newspaper with "an iron hand in a velvet glove" from 1876 until February, 1896, when she and her husband both died of pneumonia eleven days apart. According to the *Picayune*'s obituary of her, no other woman had controlled "the policy of a metropolitan journal devoted largely to politics and commerce."³⁶ At the time of the Exposition, Nicholson was thirty-six years old.

³⁵ In her paper, Nicholson's daughter-in-law asserted that the newspaper gave a full account of the proceedings and arrest of Mrs. Jennie Bronson, the first wife. Box 8, Folder 498, Nicholson Papers.

³⁶ Lamar Whitlow Bridges, "A Study of the *New Orleans Daily Picayune* under Publisher Eliza Jane Poitevent Nicholson, 1876-1896" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1975); for the "velvet glove" comment, see "Dorothy Dix Recalls Builder of Paper," *Times-Picayune*, January 25, 1937; for Nicholson's control of policy, see the *Picayune*, February 16, 1896.

Eliza Nicholson avoided the limelight and would have disdained the term feminist, but she led the *Picayune* with firmness and good business sense. She stealthily employed the power of her paper, often in service of the advancement of women, and she regularly hired female reporters. Considering herself first a working newspaperwoman, she encouraged other women to choose journalism as a career. She left no diaries or memoir, but her rich correspondence shows an expressive range from sly coquette to loyal friend to hard-nosed businesswoman. Letters to her express admiration, ask favors, or offer protection to the “little woman.” Nicholson rarely appeared in public; rather, she sent Cole to represent the newspaper, especially in women’s affairs. She joined only two causes in 1885, the year of the Cotton Centennial: the newly created local chapter of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and the National Women’s Press Association that formed during the Exposition and elected her president.³⁷

Aside from the attention Nicholson paid to her husband and sons, she reserved her energy for taking independent editorial positions in her conservative, family newspaper. She increased its advertisements and readership by adding special features that informed and entertained women and children. She expanded the column of book reviews and published much poetry. Her personal and pioneering contribution was the “Society Bee,” a column that appeared each Sunday (except in summer when the Nicholsons were on the Mississippi Gulf Coast). Even if somewhat frivolous, the column institutionalized elitism and propagated suitable conduct for polite society in New Orleans. When Nicholson began the society column in March of 1879, proper women thought their names should appear in a newspaper only twice: at their birth and

³⁷ Nicholson Papers; Bridges, “A Study of the *New Orleans Daily Picayune*”; for the SPCA, see the *Picayune*, March 25, 1885. This organization’s initial concern focused on the ill treatment of mules and horses that pulled public conveyances.

death. But as the column increased in popularity, members of the local elite vied to have their travels, events, and wardrobes detailed in the “Society Bee.”³⁸



*Grace King,
Louisiana State University Libraries
Special Collections*

One who must have searched for her name in society columns (but did not often find it) was aspiring writer Grace King (1852-1923), whose career began as a result of people she met who were in New Orleans for the Exposition.

From the generation of Cole and Nicholson rather than of Merrick and Howe, the Civil War had impacted King’s impressionable years. She seems

never to have accepted the family’s loss of their plantation, aptly named L’Embarrass, and the status it had offered. During post-bellum years, and exacerbated by her father’s death, the King family lived in several urban neighborhoods that they considered beneath their dignity. By the time of the Exposition, mother King, daughters, and sons resided in rented apartments on South Rampart Street near where Julia Ward Howe and Maud would settle for the duration.

King’s letters reveal that the thirty-three-year-old was merely a frequent visitor to the Woman’s Department and not a worker in it, although her mother seems to have participated

³⁸ Nicholson’s editorial promise the day she became “Proprietor” (January 4, 1876), on the occasion of her first husband’s death, was that the newspaper would be devoted to “principles rather than to parties.” When the *Picayune* took political positions, they were often against radical causes. See Bridges, “A Study of the *New Orleans Daily Picayune*,” 29, 296; also B. H. Gilley, “A Woman for Women: Eliza Nicholson, Publisher of the New Orleans *Daily Picayune*,” *Louisiana History* 30.3 (1989): 233-48.

occasionally. King was as ambitious for fame as Howe had ever been, and that desire colored her reaction to those she judged unduly fortunate. King gladly joined the literary club, the PanGnostics, which Howe nurtured during her stay in New Orleans. King's first published piece, "The Heroines of Literature," appeared in the *Times-Democrat* on the final day of the Exposition, May 31, 1885. Through the Howes, she met editors and publishers Charles Dudley Warner and Richard Watson Gilder, who steered her literary career. As she told in her memoir, when she had complained to Gilder that George Washington Cable did not portray the Creoles accurately, he had challenged her to write her own stories. Warner mentored her writing and helped her get those stories placed with publishers. Thus, King's biographer, Robert Bush, names the Exposition as the dividing line in Grace King's life: "Had there been no Cotton Centennial Exposition, no visiting editors, no contempt for Cable, no challenge from Gilder, no encouragement from Warner, and no need for money, she might never have entered the larger world she became a part of."³⁹

By the time King wrote her memoir in 1932, she was gracious to Julia Ward Howe, but in 1885, her letters to her sister May reveal a less charitable pundit. As she fitfully worked to preserve gentility, she ranted to May about those who, like Maud Howe, captured the spotlight this ambitious woman wanted for herself. In 1884, King was not earning money (an option Cole would have thought foolish) but was instead managing the six-person household on \$50 a month that her brothers provided, in the customary practice of genteel families. But in her memoir, King

³⁹ For Gilder's impact, see Grace King, *Memories of a Southern Woman of Letters* (New York: McMillan, 1932), 59-61. On the back cover of Pelican Publishing Company's 2007 reprint of her memoir, the publisher writes: "Some may have quipped that King was a living oxymoron in her day, but her widely documented life and work speak of Southern life." For the Exposition as the dividing line in her life, see Robert Bush, ed., *Grace King of New Orleans: A Selection of Her Writings* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 15. Also see, Robert Bush, *Grace King: A Southern Destiny* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983).

wrote that it was Director-General Burke's stroke of genius to invite Howe as head of "our Women's Department." She claimed that Howe was "the embodiment of the Victorian ideal of womanhood" and one who took her place "with impeccable ease and polish of manner" and organized the department "with what used to be called, 'masculine competence.'"⁴⁰ Yet, in candid correspondence to her sister May (the only one of four King daughters who married), she opined on the tussles between Howe and Director-General Burke and described Howe as an "old lady [who] perches herself up and looks like a ridiculous old owl."⁴¹ However, no matter how King or other local women and journalists rebuked, criticized, or jeopardized Howe's reputation, they were all supporting players during the World's Exposition. Julia Ward Howe was the star.

A City for Women

New Orleans women recognized Howe's clout; they were no strangers to power, even when it came to them perversely. There was no timidity in the ladies of a city where, when occupied during the Civil War, women had emptied chamber pots on the heads of Union troops, had crossed streets rather than share sidewalks with them, and, from their balconies, had shown troops their pantaloons rather than their faces. Their defiant actions had prompted General Benjamin Butler to issue Women's Ordinance #28, threatening women who insulted his troops with being treated as common trollops plying their trade. If a contemporary romance novel of

⁴⁰ In a Sunday column titled "Mrs. Cromer and the Girls," Cole berated prideful women who chose to live grudgingly hand-to-mouth rather than to endure "the shame of being called working girls." It was evocative of the King girls. *Picayune*, August 10, 1884. For King's comments on Howe as Victorian ideal, see King, *Memories of a Southern Woman of Letters*, 54.

⁴¹ Grace King to May McDowell, March 4, 1885, Grace King Papers (MSS 1282), Louisiana State University Libraries Special Collections, Baton Rouge. In her letters, King commented on places and gossiped about people in late-nineteenth-century New Orleans. In her published works, she cloaked those opinions in sentimental prose, as she did in *New Orleans: The Place and the People* (New York: MacMillan, 1911). She considered her fiction realistic, yet it is usually classified as "local color."

1884 was indicative of “New Orleans manners, customs, habits and social features,” as the *Picayune* claimed, it was a city where flirtatious women pitted men’s affections against one other and where men still considered it “honorable” to settle disputes by dueling with swords or pistols. It was also a city in which the most common crimes men and women committed were burglary and assault and one in which people either carried weapons or kept them handy.⁴²

Proper women who visited New Orleans for the Woman’s Department might have been frightened by the city’s unsavory conditions, especially if they read the *Mascot*. The indignant and outrageous weekly ranted that law and decency were flouted in the “metropolis of the southwest; the queen city of the valley, the centre of southern civilization, culture and refinement.” The reform-pushing tabloid berated those who pursued Mammon and heedlessly chased pleasure instead of propriety, claiming that those actions allowed machine politics to thrive and bankrupt the city and daily sink it “deeper in the chasm.” Promoters of the Exposition might have wanted to hide these warnings from visitors, but anyone could see the city streets were “filthy beyond description” and its “entire drainage system destroyed,” as the weekly proclaimed. It was not surprising that developers banned the *Mascot* from Exposition grounds to keep investors from reading that the city’s trade and commerce were “fleeing from its shores!” The muckraking tabloid raged in January, 1885: “Your industries paralyzed! Your prisons full to overflowing! Your pauper population increasing yearly with frightful rapidity! Your city’s pay rolls filled with

⁴² The *Picayune* claimed that a current novel was true to life in the city, April 5, 1885, that of Edward Clifton Wharton, *The War of the Bachelors: a Story of the Crescent City, at the Period of the Franco-German War* (New Orleans: the author, 1882). For guns being common, see, for example, the *Mascot*’s satirical and muckraking penchant that brought on a three-way gun battle in its offices between an editor and two men outraged about the paper’s exposé of a local judge. *Mascot* (Extra), January 14, 1885. Even small boys seem to have had access to guns. When thieves stole chickens from St. Mary’s Boys Asylum, one of the orphans fired two shots at the burglars. *Picayune*, April 17, 1885.

ignorant hirelings whose tenure of office depends solely on their readiness to commit any crime at the command of their dictator! Your schools neglected! Your police a mockery and a farce! Your press subsidized or muzzled! Your laws trampled under foot! Your courts ignored and contemned! [sic] Your grand juries derided and scoffed at! Crimes increasing in number and horror, while your streets are thronged with criminals flourishing under the fostering protection of official friendship.” At the source, it claimed, was public indifference, an “explicable characteristic of the Southern people and one that has often struck their Northern neighbors with wonder.”⁴³ It was enough to make a genteel visitor flee.

In gothic tones, the *Mascot* contradicted the rosy pictures that the *Picayune* and *Times-Democrat* painted for visitors, especially about “French Town” (currently, the French Quarter). This oldest portion of the city charmed tourists, but as the *Mascot* pointed out, it also teemed with gambling dens, concert saloons, and prostitutes operating just blocks from fancy restaurants and hotels like the new Hotel Royal, where many ladies stayed, including the Howes.⁴⁴ The *Mascot* bashed the dens as contaminating “gilded hells of Royal street [where] dismal strains of dyspeptic violins and asthmatic pianos keep time with the cracked-voiced harridans who disturb the midnight stillness at ten dollars a week.” It complained that even police dignitaries frequented places where men and women engaged in debauchery for nine or ten hours a night and from which, in the wee hours, throngs of women young and old “under the influence of intoxicating liquor or that still more terrible curse to womankind, opium, [were] escorted by men

⁴³ *Mascot* (Extra), January 14; January 31, 1885.

⁴⁴ *Times-Democrat*, January 12, 1885, offered suggestions for touring the city. About the night life, see *Times-Democrat*, January 24, 1885. The *Chicago Herald* claimed that New Orleans had forty all-day/all-night gambling houses and that it was “for the time being the wickedest city in the Union.” Reprinted in the *Picayune*, March 1, 1885. The *Picayune* countered that the worst of the wickedest men in New Orleans came down from Chicago.

and boys still more intoxicated” from Royal Street “to the slums of Bienville, Conti, Burgundy, and Dauphine” streets.⁴⁵ The city must have challenged the decorum of women from the hinterlands, but all manner of peoples from many places were gathered in its ancient milieu.

Yet, misconduct in dens and streets also propelled local women into action to protect the destitute against the city’s ills. The Christian Woman’s Exchange formed in 1881 partly to keep women from falling into such a life, and the *Mascot* in 1885 called on “the Women’s Aid Society, the Christian Unions, the Prison Aid Association and all other humane bodies” to attack this corruption. Although the tabloid sometimes disparaged women’s activities, here it was clearly calling for women to act politically. As Catharine Cole wrote in the *Picayune*, wherever action succeeded, it was “due to the wives and mothers of the voters of the community” who were “not afraid to electioneer in the good cause.”⁴⁶ There was a good chance that local women would enhance their power and add political strategy to their reforming tendencies once they compared experiences and worked with strangers in the Woman’s Department.

Despite the *Mascot*’s ranting, the *Times-Democrat* and *Picayune* continued their conscious efforts to engage visiting women, and in the process, they romanticized an already exotic city. For the *Picayune*, visiting poet Joaquin Miller wrote that the semi-Latin city’s “air of languor and ease” reminded him of “the *dolce far niente* [carefree idleness] of Italian land.” He delighted in its absence of “fierce and selfish pursuit of wealth which dominates all ordinary

⁴⁵ *Mascot*, January 10, 1885.

⁴⁶ A mission statement from the charter of the Christian Woman’s Exchange was included in the organization’s cookbook. Its stated main purpose was to sell items for needy women who worked from their homes or for those who had “any valuable articles which her necessity may oblige her to dispose of.” The Christian Woman’s Exchange, ed., *Creole Cookery* (1885; reprint, New Orleans: Pelican, 2005), iv. For the call for women to act, see “Who is to Blame?” *Mascot*, January 31, 1885. The law called for such businesses to close at midnight. For Cole’s claim that women took action, see “WWW,” *Picayune*, June 8, 1884.

considerations in some other communities.”⁴⁷ At the same time, columns directed strangers to the city’s cemeteries, churches, lakefront, and quaint old streets and buildings of “Cable’s New Orleans.” Although George Washington Cable’s recent novels and social commentary in *Century Magazine* sent many New Orleanians into a rage, his romantic tales in *Scribner’s* had introduced scores of readers to his native city and its diverse population. In “Our French Town: Bits of New Orleans as Seen by a Stranger,” a Kentucky woman had combed streets for Cable’s people and houses, but she also noted that everyone spoke bitterly of him. In this column, the stranger gushed over the foreignness of this “piece of the Old World” with its market women, “their heads bound round with turbans of various colors.”⁴⁸

Daily, visiting women entered the city; newspapers listed their arrivals at various hotels, especially at the Hotel Royal in “French Town” or the St. Charles Hotel outside it. The over-promising *Times-Democrat* declared that twelve hundred teachers from the Northwest would

⁴⁷ *Picayune*, October 19, 1884. Miller had covered other expositions and declared that this one was going to surpass them all. Because of the city’s carnival, he wrote, New Orleans knew well how to entertain. *Times-Democrat*, November 10, 1884. He read his poems to help raise funds for the Woman’s Department in January, 1885, on the bill with the lecture by Julia Ward Howe.

⁴⁸ For touring, see the “Society Bee,” *Picayune*, March 29, 1885. Attractions were remarkably similar to those still recommended in the twenty-first century. For the Kentucky woman’s remarks, see the *Picayune*, April 15, 1885. Other visitors must have wondered why the celebrated author, George Washington Cable, was repeatedly maligned in the newspapers. Cable’s stories were collected and published as *Old Creole Days* in 1879 and followed by several popular novels, romantic portraits but with undertones of social satire. Creoles were particularly incensed over his portrayal of them in *The Grandissimes* (1880) and *Dr. Sevier* (1884). Creole historian Charles Gayarre lectured repeatedly during the fall of 1884 and spring of 1885 on “Who Are the Creoles?” He attempted to reserve the term “Creole” for whites only, although for at least a century there had been Creoles of color. The greatest scorn of Cable came for his essay “The Freedmen’s Case in Equity,” in which he insisted that free (and freed) men must have access to all public venues. By 1884, Cable had moved to Massachusetts to escape physical threats. For some of the lectures and controversy, see the *Times-Democrat*, April 25, 1885; *Picayune*, January 6, March 8, 9, 26, 1885.

come to the Exposition, with as many more to follow from Chicago, Texas, and other points west.⁴⁹ New Orleans was poised to purposefully attract women, not to ignore them. The Woman's Department at the Cotton Centennial was part of the attraction to convince investors that sectionalism had passed and that the city was now safe for families and even for women traveling together.

Women seeking urban amusements as they traveled would have found a variety in New Orleans.⁵⁰ In addition to the entertainments to which men flocked (gambling, horse racing, wrestling, boxing, billiards, cock fighting), replete also were balls, dances, musicals, operas, and theater, which newspapers faithfully reported. While frivolous crazes engaged many, including home poker parties and sidewalk dancing to hand organs, roller skating was the most popular pleasure that fall. Crescent City Skating, about two miles downriver from Exposition grounds, attracted young ladies to sociable Saturday evenings and daily practice in “falling gracefully,” according to the *Picayune*’s “Society Bee.” Despite dire moral warnings from a celebrity cleric, even the *Mascot* gave skating its blessing as a great way to “while away a few hours pleasantly.”⁵¹ The Exposition, when it opened, would offer an additional array of amusements,

⁴⁹ *Times-Democrat*, December 23, 1884.

⁵⁰ Historian Kathy Peiss recounts how hungry young women were for entertainment in *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

⁵¹ Newspapers ran regular theater columns; even “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” played New Orleans, see the *Mascot*, February 24, 1883; for local street crazes and skating, see the *Mascot*, March 21, 1885. For the Crescent City Skating, see the *Picayune*, March 22, 1885. This rink claimed to be the largest and most complete in the United States, with a surface 70 feet by 199 feet, a splendid hard wood maple floor, and a seating capacity for 600 persons, including some “grand and brilliant” private boxes. A corner building, 105 feet fronted Prytania Street and 141 feet fronted Washington Avenue, described in the *Picayune*, October 30, 1884. For the boxes, see “Society Bee,” *Picayune*, January 18, 1885; about the floor, *Mascot*, January 17, 1885. The building still exists as a small retail mall called The Rink. For a second venue, the Exposition Skating Rink, that occupied part of Washington Artillery Hall, see the *Times-Democrat*,

including lectures, a form of entertainment not as common in New Orleans as in the Northeast. During the Cotton Centennial, however, women flocked to hear well-known figures like Susan B. Anthony and Frances Willard speak on what women had done, were doing, and could be expected to accomplish in the future.

The city was also home to women serious about the arts, business, charity, and ways to earn a living, as visitors could note if they read the local press, as New Orleanians faithfully did. Newspapers consistently praised Creole society's female artists, musicians, and literary lights, like the multi-talented Leona Queyrouse. New Orleans women with an eye for earning were preparing to "Take boarders!" as the Exposition approached, while in Baton Rouge, women were readying embroidery and handwork. The *Times-Democrat* claimed that 4000 families had registered available rooms with the Bureau of Accommodations, advertised for \$25 to \$125 a month and most including board. Some were near the Exposition; others were in the French quarter and promised "elaborately turbaned French negresses, with their courtly manners and curious patois [that] would transport visitors to a scene in a foreign town and compensate for the distance from Exposition Grounds."⁵² Much romanticizing of the city took place that year; the Cotton Centennial likely initiated the tourism on which the New Orleans economy still relies.

February 1, 1885. A stern New York minister, Rev. T. DeWitt Talmage (whose sermons the *Picayune* regularly reprinted), cautioned parents not to let girls go skating without a proper escort or keep late hours; nor they should not be allowed to attract male attention by giggling and unseemly conduct at the rinks. "Flirtation is damnation. I repeat flirtation is damnation," the preacher warned. "Gotham Gossip" *Picayune*, April 18, 1885; *Times-Democrat*, April 13, 1885.

⁵² For author, musician, and lecturer Leona Queyrouse as a particular Creole favorite, see the *Picayune*, October 13, November 30, 1884; March 22, 1885. For taking boarders, see "WWW," *Picayune*, August 3, September 21, 1884. For prices and locations, see the *Times-Democrat*, November 15, 1884.

Catharine Cole, on the other hand, thought New Orleans women's plan for boarding visitors was shortsighted when they should be gathering an impressive showing for the Exposition. It was easy to see that the city was home to women of skill. Female milliners, dressmakers, hairdressers, a flag-maker, and at least one "ladies' physician and midwife" placed large advertisements among the ads for restaurants and food suppliers, home furnishings and clothing stores, professional and personal services, and physicians and outrageous medicinal cures.⁵³ Women also advertised the boarding and day schools they founded, although education for young New Orleans women did not always rank highest in importance. Cole quoted Julia Ward Howe as having said that some "women of fashion" placed more value on "a good figure, good clothes, and a handsome equipage" than on a true education. They were apparently smart property owners, however. Almost half of the real estate transactions involved unmarried women, widows, and women listed simply, for example, as Mrs. A. A. Boullemet, Mrs. Annie Mary Allen, or Margaret Schneider. The ownership caused the *Picayune* to quip that women possessed few rights, but "[t]hey have the right to pay taxes on their property [while] rights of voting and holding office are reserved for men, many of whom are without property or respectability." In all kinds of ways, women needed the ballot in the South but were not yet pressing for it. Other newspaper announcements reflected elite women's effective management

⁵³ For examples of ads, see the *Picayune*, October 18, December 17, 20, 28, 1884; January 1, 5, 1885; February 18, 1885; *Times-Democrat*, February 18, 1885 and every day during the Exposition. Long-time residents of New Orleans would recognize advertisers: the St. Charles Hotel, St. Charles Theater, D. H. Holmes, Kreeger's, Solari's, Acme Oyster Bar, Antoine's, Victor's, Werlein's, and Grunewald's. Women consumers were the targets of other ads for corsets, female tonics, sewing supplies, devices for nursing and menstruation, and health-related items that included testimonials for cocaine and were cited as "invaluable for Diseases peculiar to Women, and all who lead sedentary lives." *Picayune*, March 11, 1885.

of charities and clubs. And more and more frequently, women lower on the class scale were becoming competent and confident wage earners.⁵⁴

Despite these achievements, the *Times-Democrat* goaded southern women to prove they were equal to the occasion that the Exposition offered. It pressed women to make a good showing, as the event would be an opportunity to make “interesting comparisons, as to the relative value of woman’s work from the different sections,” and to discover what progress other women had made since the Philadelphia Centennial, “where the woman’s pavilion was such a revelation as to woman’s capacity,” although Louisiana women had not participated. In one of its contradictions, the *Times-Democrat* denounced sectionalism while, at the same time, it goaded southern women not to let other regions overshadow them. It may have been part of the prod that the *Times-Democrat* reprinted a comment from the Wisconsin commissioner that needled local women for resisting the “Yankee woman” appointed to lead the Woman’s Department instead of getting ready to make a good showing. In his territory, he claimed, women were busy preparing exhibits, while those in southern states “dawdled.”⁵⁵

While women across the country prepared creditable representation for their states, a core of energized leaders in New Orleans began to act. For example, a hastily formed Commission of City Exhibits assembled “art treasures, family heirlooms and rare possessions of every conceivable description” that would show the history and progress of Louisiana. Although Julia

⁵⁴ For the deficit in education, see “WWW,” *Picayune*, January 25, 1885; for women of property, see “Transfers,” for example, in the *Times-Democrat*, February 19, 1885; *Picayune*, October 19, 1884; about paying taxes, see “Our Picayunes,” *Picayune*, February 20, 1885. Announcements of meetings and benefits listed names of women officers, like Caroline Merrick and Mrs. R. M. Walmsley, for example.

⁵⁵ For women’s progress since the Philadelphia Centennial, see the *Times-Democrat*, November 2, 1884; for the reprint of the criticism of southern women’s dawdling, see the *Times-Democrat*, November 20, 1884.

Ward Howe is often credited with inspiring this collection that eventually helped New Orleanians appreciate their own heritage, the women had begun it well before Howe's arrival. The Christian Woman's Exchange, in addition to having contacted women across the country, became a temporary receiving center as exhibits began to arrive, and it continued to take applications for spaces in the department as late as November 25, 1884.⁵⁶

Other women looked to the Exposition as a potential employer, but most were disappointed when they did not land a job. Approximately fifty clerks would be hired, but the *Mascot* noticed that positions went more often to "friends of the heads of departments" than to those who needed them. The dissident tabloid further exposed the partiality when it answered an imaginary letter from Howe, mentioning how the ladies employed there disliked the idea of her elevation above them. Then the fake correspondent added ironically, "They don't like the idea of any stranger being admitted into their family circle; and as the majority of them have secured their own positions through favoritism and family interest, rather than from the possession of peculiar fitness, we do not think they will care to tolerate your interference."⁵⁷ This statement emphasizes Howe's outsider and intruder role at the Exposition and one from which she would be able to detect corruption that had become too customary to locals.

Many local women were in search of wages in 1884, even if the United States Census of 1880 showed a huge increase in employed women. The *Times-Democrat* declared that the Woman's Department would be an additional spur to women's earning capacity. When the *Picayune*'s Catharine Cole compared figures for New Orleans to those of Boston, she concluded

⁵⁶ About the exhibit of heirlooms, see the *Picayune*, October 30, 1884. Grace King first reported Howe's involvement; others may have used that erroneous report. King, *Memories of a Southern Woman of Letters*, 55. The collection was included in the state exhibit; it was not in the Woman's Department.

⁵⁷ *Mascot*, November 15, 1, 1884.

that workers in the Crescent City represented a higher class of society, received better wages and more consideration, and had better homes. Almost three million women were employed in 1880 (compared to almost fifteen million men) in 205 different gainful occupations that did not include women who worked from home. As was the case in New Orleans, the Census indicated that females dominated domestic work, millinery, dress-making, nursing, teaching, and the manufacturing of cotton goods. Of the 600,000 women in agriculture, “most of them [were] colored women in the South.” The Census indicated that female educational institutions and female students had doubled from 1870 to 1880, that education had improved, and that women had begun to work in shops and offices. The *Times-Democrat* predicted that the Census of 1890 would be even better and that the Woman’s Department would be “a splendid opportunity” to show what women had done in the ten previous years, “the period of their greatest improvement.” As women straddled domesticity, professionalism, and salaried employment outside the home, they would attempt to reflect those transitions in their exhibits in the Woman’s Department.⁵⁸

As newspapers reported every aspect of the preparations for the Exposition and employed optimistic rhetoric, the city’s distinctive cultural blend spoke for itself. Boosters claimed that the region had put animosities aside; they meant those of the Civil War and Reconstruction, but they often left the specifics unsaid. A “New South” was ready for Union, they broadcast; one that accommodated the needs of its black citizens and supported and appreciated the skills of its

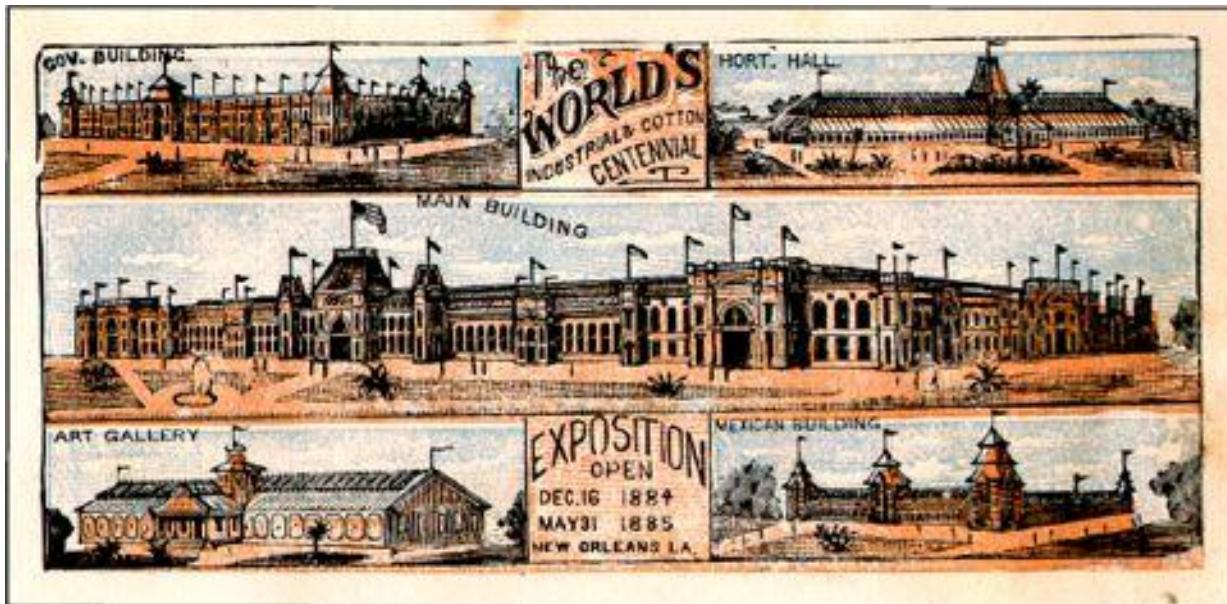
⁵⁸ For census information, see “Census,” *Times-Democrat*, November 26, 1884. The Census revealed a fifty-percent increase in numbers of employed women everywhere from 1870 to 1880, more rapid than the population expansion. Only 43 occupations remained closed to females. For Cole’s comments, see “WWW,” August 17, 1884; about domestics and female institutions in the Census, see the *Picayune*, May 3, 1885; also “Work for Women,” *Times-Democrat*, November 26, 1884.

women. In actuality, despite the Crescent City's deficiencies and the loss of its economic edge, it had a measure of cosmopolitanism not found in most American cities, and not at all in the South. Its semi-tropical splendor, its old-world architecture, and its blend of people of assorted shades and origins added flavor and excitement. Historic links to French, Spanish, English, South and Central American, Caribbean, and African influences shaped its *savoir faire*. The addition of Irish, Jewish, and Germanic immigrants (natives of Austria, Germany, Alsace, Bavaria, and elsewhere) enhanced its grit and resilience. The city's seven newspapers (printed in English, French, German, and Spanish) reflected and impacted local opinions and perceptions. Beginning at least in autumn of 1884, these newspapers provided continuous commentary on the most newsworthy event that had occurred in New Orleans since the Civil War: the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition, opening December 16, 1884 and closing May 31, 1885. By extension, the Woman's Department was in journalists' sights as well. And when she came to town, so was its president, Julia Ward Howe.⁵⁹

As local women contemplated their early arrangements for the Woman's Department, they might have reached several conclusions. Although they knew capable female organizers in the city, not one of them carried a national reputation that the Fair's male management perceived strong enough to draw women from across the country. Nor had the local women yet learned to act as a collective force with defined strategies. Indeed, they might also have secretly recognized that they lagged behind women from other regions in lobbying for their rights and causes. Those

⁵⁹ For New Orleans as a dysfunctional place, see the *Mascot*, May 9, 16, 1885. During the Exposition, the city had no African-American or Creole-of-Color newspaper, as it had had before and after that period.

who were aware of these unpleasant truths might have seen the Woman's Department as their greatest opportunity to step fully into the public arena and to reach goals they harbored but formerly thought unattainable. If men were going to proclaim this a progressive "New South," women must make that edict work in their favor.



"World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition,"
University Archives, The Tulane Libraries, Tulane University

Arrivals: Stops and Starts

[I]t seemed unnecessary to seek so far for a head of the Exhibit. If Southern women could create it, some one of them was surely able to direct it.

—Caroline Merrick¹

Before a single exhibit could be placed in the Woman's Department, local women had to come to terms with several divisive issues. The Exposition's all-male Board of Management had passed them by and selected northerner Julia Ward Howe as department head. Howe herself had then aggravated local tensions by appointing her own northern cronies as assistants in Boston and as an advance organizing staff in New Orleans. How would local women respond when Howe finally did arrive in the city, only to step on more local toes? How could they put on brave faces at the Exposition's grand opening when the arrangements and fund-raising for their department had barely begun? How could they accomplish the myriad difficult tasks ahead while contending with continual affronts to their competency and to their sense of social propriety? For the southern ladies with wounds still stinging from the war's aftermath, these were daunting challenges. Yet they did rise to the occasion admirably, and in the process they cultivated their talents for resourcefulness and resolve while gamely stepping forth into the public glare.

A Wrong-Headed Beginning

The mêlée over Julia Ward Howe's appointment began well before her arrival, but back in Boston she might have been unaware of what was brewing in New Orleans. On behalf of local

¹ Merrick, Caroline, *Old Times in Dixie Land: A Southern Matron's Memoir* (New York: Grafton, 1901), 176.

women, the *Picayune*'s star reporter, Catharine Cole, confronted Secretary Richard Nixon of the Board of Management about why they had chosen Howe over a southern leader. His answer appeared in Cole's weekly "Woman's World and Work" column on November 2, 1884. First, he claimed that no southern woman possessed the national reputation and executive ability nor the wealth, time, and physical capacity as did Howe. He added that no southerner could unite women from all over the country as successfully as would the famed Bostonian. Then he heaped insult by asserting that no local woman selected would be accepted by other women in New Orleans, implying jealousy prevailed among them. Cole acknowledged that Howe had an admirable national reputation "founded upon intellectual power and upon social position" and that she had written "many kind things" about southern women. But, as Cole and others asserted, local women had led a great many benevolent organizations and done it well: everything from war fairs to post-war asylums and charities that sustained broken men, destitute women, and orphaned children. Besides, it was 1884. Only seven years had passed since President Rutherford B. Hayes had removed occupying troops from New Orleans, and local women were in no mood to accept northern authority again.² Despite such objections, however, the Exposition's Board firmly supported Howe's appointment.

No one doubted Julia Ward Howe's ability to advance the cause of woman; no one questioned her ability to lead. But she did have a tendency to rankle. Her commitment was well

² For what Cole said of Howe, see "Woman's World and Work" (hereafter "WWW"), *Picayune*, November 2, 1884. Most historians agree that the "Bargain of 1877," in which "Major" E. A. Burke had a role, affected the removal of troops from the South. Also known as the "Compromise of 1877," the "Wormsley House Bargain," and the "Corrupt Bargain," it settled the Hayes-Tilden election of 1876. For Burke's involvement, see Joy J. Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age: Politics and Urban Progress, 1880-1896* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 25; Hans L. Trefousse, *Rutherford B. Hayes* (New York: Henry Holt, 2002), 80-3; Nicholas Lehmann, *Redemption: The Last Battle of the Civil War* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux, 2006), 179.

known even if her fame rested mainly in abolitionism, suffrage, and her emblematic “Battle Hymn of the Republic.” Cole had written in May of 1884 (before Howe’s appointment) that the Bostonian was “president of more societies and clubs than any other woman on the Continent.” Now, she acknowledged Howe’s skills as lecturer, dramatic reader, preacher, and “writer of rather dull and prosy books,” but despite disappointment, Cole promised that local women would extend gracious hospitality to the visitor. It was not because Howe was a northerner that women objected, Cole insisted. They would work under her direction. But Cole named at least six other southern candidates “equal to the emergency and as competent for the work.”³ Although Howe was skilled in organizing improvements for women’s social, mental, and moral condition, many southern women’s lives and fortunes were still upended, and her power over them simply provoked sectional ire.

Howe poured oil on the sectional fire when she snubbed local women by naming an all-northern personal staff, but the *Times-Democrat* promised she would be harbinger to a progressive future. Julia Ward Howe, who had no history with women of the South, chose her friend Isabel Greeley as Secretary of the department, Lizzie Judson Cloudman as its Chief of Installation, journalist Marion McBride as head of the Press Department (although this was rescinded), and daughter Maud as chief of the Literary Department. Women reporters of the *Picayune* steamed, but Director-General E. A. Burke’s *Times-Democrat* blithely declared Howe the “most noted advocate of women’s progress in America” and proclaimed that the Woman’s Department was devised as a result of a heightened interest in women’s work across the country.

³ For what Cole wrote of Howe, see “WWW,” *Picayune*, May 25 1884. Cole named Caroline Merrick, Mary Ashley Townsend, Mrs. R. M Walmsley of the Christian Woman’s Exchange, and several others as women who could have easily led the department. “WWW,” *Picayune* November 2, 1884.

Burke's paper vowed that the success of the Exposition would "mark a new era in woman's progress in this country."⁴ The term "progress" was a useful catchphrase of industrialists and advocates, like Burke, of a "New South." The idea might have sat awkwardly, however, in a city known for *toujours la meme chose* and for dragging its past with it into the future. Were Burke and the Board of Management really urging Howe to push New Orleans women toward evolution, awareness, advancement? Change? Progress?

With accustomed diligence, Howe worked from faraway Boston urging women across the country to send significant exhibits for the Woman's Department. She and her Henrietta Wolcott (acting as General Manager and also in Boston) contacted all the clubwomen they knew, and they stirred interest in the Northeast by traveling to various organizations and clubs. The *Picayune* reported that Howe was confident that women's work would come from all "avenues of labor," including art and art textiles; scientific specimens from Vassar, Wellesley, and Smith colleges; state exhibits from the many branches of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Also, women would show the process of silk culture, complete with cocoons, worms feeding on mulberry leaves, and the operation of reeling silk. Howe promised a literary department "filled with books, papers and magazines written or published by women," and a pressroom "for use of lady members of the journalistic profession." Howe reserved the right for the department to reject undesirable items, but she expected large and fine displays would also come from Western and Southern states.⁵

⁴ For Burke's comment about the Woman's Department as an avenue for progress, see the *Times-Democrat*, December 17, 1884; about "a new era," see the *Times-Democrat*, January 8, 1885. Unless otherwise indicated, all newspaper references are from the daily columns titled "World Exposition."

⁵ Howe and Wolcott were in Hartford on November 25, 1884. Also see the *Picayune*, November 26, 1884. Early stationery listed the address of the Woman's Department as 5 Park Street, Room 10, Boston, the location of New England Woman's Club. Julia Ward Howe Papers

Meanwhile, in New Orleans, local women expended considerable energy on behalf of the department, and that effort led them to feel justified in their upset when Howe appointed a northern staff. The *Picayune* reported every detail of preparation at the Christian Woman's Exchange (CWE), and the paper asserted that local women shouldered much of the responsibility to make the department a success. It credited Mrs. D. A. (Viola) Given, local superintendent of the Woman's Department, and Mrs. Theo (Mary Emma) Auzé, secretary of the department—women of the Exchange used their husband's initials—with having urged women “individually, from Maine to California,” to begin work that would represent them. The CWE's Board of Managers had appointed the women to their positions when promoters created the Woman's Department. Given and Auzé were “thoroughly conversant” with the needs of the department and were daily in their offices at the Exchange, that exceptional organization so vital to needy and wage-earning women. The *Picayune* dubbed Given an “inspiration” and reported that her office, as “headquarters of all the State women commissioners,” was daily “besieged by callers” interested in the Woman's Department.⁶ Some who conferred with Given were Lady Commissioner Mrs. Paul Dejoie and other representatives of The Colored Ladies' Centennial

(A-24), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Cambridge, MA. On rejecting undesirable items, see the *Picayune*, November 2, 1884; on regional displays, see the *Picayune*, December 5, 1884.

⁶ For how Given and Auzé worked to contact women, see the *Picayune*, February 5, 1885; for appointments, see the *Picayune*, February 15, 1885. This Exchange had recently renovated their rented building. *Picayune*, November 2, 1884. They fitted up four large rooms for rent for 75 cents a night to parties of ladies (mainly school teachers) during the Exposition. *Picayune*, November 23, 1884. The organization sold 1500 fifteen-cent lunches each day, mostly to working women (a “bowl of soup, bread, butter, a cup of coffee and a slice of cold beef or ham”), from which it realized about \$100 profit a day. *Picayune*, November 23, 1884. The Exchange, however, was predominantly a salesroom and clearinghouse for food and clothing that women made at home. It also sold heirlooms for genteel families who were trying to stay afloat.

Association as they prepared what the *Picayune* wrote were “exhibits exceedingly handsome, valuable and complete.”⁷ As local women waited for Howe, they continued to hope that she would name a New Orleans woman as chief clerk. She did not.

Given and Auzé told the *Picayune* that they could not “arrange matters” until Howe arrived, for “fear to conflict with her purposes.” Yet, her advance guard probably conveyed Howe’s views. By early December, Howe’s secretary, Isabelle Greeley, and the “charming avant courier,” Chief of Installation Cloudman, were in the city. Cloudman, whom the *Picayune* called “bright, handsome, energetic” and “distinguished for her practical ability,” apparently worked out of an office at the Exchange. The *Picayune* related a story about Cloudman meeting one Mrs. Montgomery of Dallas at the Exchange. The Texas lady said she had been “born, reared, educated and prejudiced a Southerner, had spent the best part of her childhood on two cotton plantations, where over a hundred negroes were worked.” She had never been farther north than South Carolina and had never heard a woman lecturer. Cloudman cried out, “‘You are the very woman I’ve been wishing to see; you are the representative Southern woman. . . . I wish the Boston papers to know this.’”⁸ Perhaps the *Picayune* was being ironic when it called this a “pleasant incident”; it seems to bespeak a prejudicial image northerners held of southern women

⁷ For CWE as besieged, see the *Picayune* December 5, 1885. These meetings suggest that women of color intended to be included in the Woman’s Department. In the end, they exhibited with men of their states in the Colored Department. *Picayune*, November 2, 1884. The history of the CWE from 1956 indicated that the group “appropriated \$250” for material in order that “the colored women of New Orleans might have work to exhibit” and that it was “the only money given in the South to assist women to exhibit.” Louise Hoehn Hogan, *History of the Christian Woman’s Exchange* (New Orleans: Christian Woman’s Exchange, 1956), n. p.

⁸ For what the advance guard said, see the *Picayune*, November 2, 1884. For staff in the city, see the *Times-Democrat*, December 13, 1884. For the description of Cloudman, see “Women’s Work,” *Picayune*, December 5, 1884. Given offered Cloudman a room in her private residence. Tulane board member Dr. T. G. Richardson and wife Ida entertained her at dinner. *Picayune* December 11, 1884.

as sheltered, uninformed, unsophisticated, and prejudiced. And prime candidates for conversion. For New Orleans women, the Woman's Department would be an opportunity to alter such stereotypes.

Despite the warm local reception given Howe's envoys, as she took leave of cold Boston, anger was beginning to boil down south. Back in October of 1884, no outcry had seemed evident. The *Picayune* had announced that Howe would head the department, that she was calling for exhibits and books written by women, and that she requested all newspaper editors send a woman correspondent for a month or longer to promote public recognition of women's work. The paper had even seemed optimistic when it suggested that Howe would draw "a train of lesser literary lights" to the Woman's Department. But by early November, rumblings of

YEAR OF SORROW
Community should wreak upon
terrible vengeance.

What the Ladies are Saying.
The principal topic of conversation among the ladies of New Orleans for the past few weeks has been the appointment of Mrs. Howe, of Boston, by the managers of the Exposition, as Chief of the Woman's Department. Expressions of disappointment and disapproval are general and growing stronger. Not that our New Orleans women have any fault to find with Mrs. Howe. They say she is all that has been claimed for her, but they say also, and justly, that the honor should have been bestowed upon some representative Southern woman: that there are women in the South who embody all the qualifications assigned
reason for selecting Mrs. Howe
Exposition manager.

Picayune, November 2, 1884

"disapproval and disappointment" over Howe's staff exploded with an article, "What the Ladies Are Saying." In early December, as Howe set out, another piece titled "Lacking in Courtesy" appeared, and resentment escalated. The reporter (perhaps Cole, perhaps Nicholson) speculated that Howe

followed the dictum that Exposition managers had initiated: that southern women

were incompetent to lead. The sarcastic conclusion to the article was: “Ah, well, we live in the hope that our Southern women will not be looked upon as such ‘ninnies’ at the next Centennial celebration.”⁹ The plot was already beginning to thicken.

The raging public debate exposed a lingering sectionalism. Although a respected former New Orleanian (Dr. Julia Holmes Smith, a homeopathic physician in Chicago) wrote a letter to the editor of the *Picayune* urging patience until Howe could appoint local women, an editorial the same day claimed that southern women were “left out in the cold.” They would be playing “second fiddle to her staff officials already appointed,” the editorial continued on the very day Howe was to arrive. The fault was with Exposition Managers, the writer asserted again, for in selecting Howe, they “as good as said that there were no Southern women capable of filling the position.” Again, the *Picayune* writer claimed that Howe had followed managers’ lead in supposing the women “a set of incapables.”¹⁰

That news spread northward. The *New York World* quipped that by selecting New England women, Howe was “heating more hot water for her Crescent City tea-kettle” than she had intended. But when the *New York Evening Post* wrote that “the Southern women are the only irreconcilables to be found in the South,” Cole accused the *Post* of being “determined that the war of the blue and gray shall be fought over again, and [this time] by women.” Those who met Howe spoke of her “with enthusiasm,” Cole granted. But she claimed: “Nearly all persons,” including well-wishers, agreed that Howe would have been wiser to choose staff from all over the United States. As late as June 7, 1885, a *Boston Post* editorial (that the *Picayune* reprinted)

⁹ Over a hundred women journalists answered Howe’s call. “WWW,” *Picayune*, November 23, 1884. For Howe drawing women to the department, see the *Picayune*, October 26, 30, 1884; “What the Ladies Are Saying,” *Picayune*, November 2, 1884; “Lacking in Courtesy,” *Picayune*, December 9, 1884.

¹⁰ Mrs. Howe’s Appointments,” *Picayune*, December 10, 11, 1884.

quipped that “Mrs. Howe had been determined to run her kingdom with her own courtiers.”¹¹

She had indeed committed a double courtesy: to the South and to the confrere of women. The subject would come up again. Julia Ward Howe’s first task would be to bring women together.

Howe Arrives

Early Thursday morning, December 11, 1884, the southbound Louisville and Nashville (L & N) train crossed over the three-mile bridge at Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, carrying Julia Ward Howe toward the Crescent City and the challenges of the Woman’s Department. On this, her first trip into the Deep South, Howe marveled at the “quasi tropical” foliage outside her train window: the lush “orange trees in full bearing, magnolias of great size, palmettos” with prickly spikes. Apparently, she had no presentiment that thorny women awaited her. She had left her home on Boston’s Beacon Hill seven days earlier, picked up her daughter Maud in New York, and headed for the World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition. For the next six months, Howe would experience a milieu unlike the one she left where she had enjoyed deference and harmony with like-minded women. The world she would enter treasured ladylike decorum more than intellectual pursuits and privileged old-line family history (with or without wealth) more than hard-earned individual achievement. To the all-male Board of Management of the Exposition, luminary Julia Ward Howe would turn the brightest light on the Woman’s Department. In the end, she perhaps was indeed “the fittest that could have been made,” as the

¹¹ *New York World* quip reprinted in *Picayune*, December 12, 1884; about the blue and grey fight, see “WWW,” *Picayune*, January 25, 1885; about staff that should come from all over the United States, see “WWW,” *Picayune*, December 14, 1884.

Times-Democrat editorialized.¹² Yet, when the men chose Howe, they betrayed their own; it would not be the last betrayal of the season.

Two officials met Howe and Maud at 9 a.m. at the train station at the intersection of the Mississippi River and Canal Street and squired the women to their temporary quarters in one of the city's most elegant hotels. Escorts Dr. Dabney and Secretary Richard Nixon, the man who had defended Howe's credentials to Cole, transported the Howes to the Hotel Royal, a place illustrative of the way the city looked backward to grandeur as it claimed to step forward. Glowing newspaper reviews had gushed over this lavish addition to "French Town" (the French Quarter) that, incidentally, had been rebuilt to include a refashioned rotunda from the old St. Louis Hotel, of slave market infamy. It is likely that Dabney and Nixon deposited the Howes at the ladies' entrance on Royal Street, a foyer gleaming with a black and white marble floor, urns of flowers, and a "grand stairway covered with a thick velvet carpet . . . a trifle too brilliant in colors," as the *Picayune* had reported at the hotel's opening. Lady cashiers, hired especially to register ladies without escorts, would have directed Howe and her daughter Maud to rooms with hot and cold water, electric lights, and electric bells (available even in the "dollar rooms") that the *Picayune* had described at the opening.¹³ In the nineteenth century, gendered courtesies such

¹² *Times-Democrat*, December 17, 1884; for Howe's comments, see December 11, 1884, Howe Unpublished Journals 1863-1910 (bMS Am 2119), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

¹³ The *Picayune* reported that the State of Louisiana owned the 400-room building. January 19, 1885. It later reported that Auzé and Given had greeted Howe when she came to town, but it is possible they awaited her at the hotel. *Picayune*, February 5, 1885. In typical New Orleans style, the hotel opened with a grand dinner and ball. The lobby's furniture was "crimson brocaded velvet in ebony frames"; chandeliers were of silver gilt, crystal, and gold; curtains of "crimson satin, lined with copper-colored satin and looped away from the long old fashioned windows by long goats' hair tassels." *Picayune*, November 15, 1884. From its broad veranda, the Howes could have looked past "musty book stores and beer shops" in Exchange Alley to Canal Street and the St. Charles Hotel beyond. If they dined in one of three spacious dining rooms, they saw "splendid and historic paintings," ate from monogrammed imported porcelain (of the design

as ladies' rooms and ladies' entrances attracted women's business but, although men could use them, also marked their separateness; it was apparently a gentlewomen's agreement. In any event, the Howes must have welcomed the comfort.

Although Howe was fatigued from the journey (and daughter Maud "coughing violently"), she granted a short interview to a male journalist from the *Times-Democrat* in which she began to demonstrate her steadfastness.¹⁴ When he asked Howe if she would stay all winter, she replied that she did not know; she had work to do elsewhere, but if her presence was needed, she would stay. Howe did remain for the entire six months of the exposition and saw her job to completion, leaving town only for brief excursions to Baton Rouge and the bayou country. At that early juncture, the reporter could not have known how much Julia Ward Howe was a woman of her word or how indefatigable she was.

Possessing the stamina and enthusiasm of a far younger woman, Howe was not to be deterred. Her journals show that she once gave a speech aboard ship during a turbulent storm (because she said she would) while hugging a post to remain upright. On another occasion, in order to arrive on time for a promised lecture, she convinced the engineer of a freight train to let her ride in the caboose. As Maud Howe told in the later biography of her mother, an older cousin had "said with emphasis, 'Julia, do not allow yourself to grow old! When you feel that you cannot do a thing, get up and do it!' Julia never forgot this advice." In 1884, Howe was still

used in the Grand Hotel in Paris), and drank from bohemian glassware. *Picayune*, October 30, November 2, 1884. Or they might have gone around the corner to Antoine's, where travelers in "elegant furnished rooms" partook of Widow Alciatore's "superior cuisine" by the day, week, or month. Located at (former street numbering) 63, 65, and 67 St. Louis Street, Antoine's advertised "elegant furnished rooms for travelers" and private dining rooms upstairs. *Times-Democrat*, February 18, 1885.

¹⁴ Dr. Julia Holmes Smith examined Maud Howe, found "a lung a little congested, advised mustard leaves, and left medicines." Dr. Holcombe, for whom Howe had already sent, approved Dr. Smith's remedies. Howe Journal, December 11, 1884.

arranging her own bookings and traveling alone across New England to lecture and speak. However, the small amounts she earned (never the kind of money that Mark Twain and George Washington Cable made from their “Twins of Genius” tour) barely paid her bills. In her own way, Howe was a working woman. Her dire financial condition was incentive enough for her to have taken the position that “the chiefs” offered at the Exposition. This indefatigable woman expected to earn expenses and perhaps a bit more for her efforts. She surely did not anticipate the Centennial’s own desperate straits.¹⁵

Although generally complimentary, reporters’ assessments of Howe’s capabilities sometimes contained sharp barbs regarding her age, her “masculine” talents, and her privileged upbringing. The male reporter who interviewed Howe at the Hotel Royal portrayed her as “a lady of advanced years [she was sixty-five], slight and small, with an intellectual head and a noble countenance, which when lit by her rare, slow smile, is very charming. Her voice is extremely soft and sweet.” He then added pointedly: “the general impression is that her masculine mind has not affected her femininity of manner, which gives one a delightful sense of restfulness and repose.” In 1883, Cole, the inimitable prose stylist, had depicted Howe as a “brilliant and essentially womanly woman” of medium size with a strong, rather florid face, brown or black eyes, white hair, and “of that age that one cannot now say to her *au revoir*, without fear it may be adieu.” She called Howe’s style “gentle and dignified, with much, I suspect, of the Bostonness [sic] in it.” The *Picayune* called Howe a “thorough Bostonian, especially in manner and speech,”

¹⁵ Howe Journals, 1883, 1884; for cousin’s advice, see Laura E. Richards and Maud Howe Elliott, *Julia Ward Howe: 1819-1910* (Boston: Houghton, 1915), 9. Twain and Cable began their remunerative tour in New Haven on November 5, 1884 and appeared in Boston December 13, a week after Howe left for New Orleans. From November 4, 1884 through February 1885, Twain probably netted \$17,000; he paid Cable \$450 a week and \$60 extra for each matinee after the first. Cable netted slightly less than \$15,000. See Guy A Cardwell, *Twins of Genius* (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1953), 9, 11.

possessing a pleasant speaking voice and a conversational tone that was “low and soft and gentle.” Although “born with a silver spoon in her mouth, and fed with one all her days,” Howe had great intellectual accomplishments, even by Boston standards, the *Picayune* asserted. She might have a thorough comprehension of woman’s work, but the newspaper doubted that she would understand “the woe of want or children clamoring for food.”¹⁶ In the typical style of the century, reporters began to assess Howe in part through her appearance and demeanor, always with an eye toward whether or not she acted in womanly (some would say ladylike) fashion. How would Julia Ward Howe apply her considerable talents to the goals of the Woman’s Department and the Exposition, given the obstacles in her path?

Ready or Not

When the Howes arrived, the area for the Woman’s Department was an empty shell, but the daily newspapers painted optimistic portraits of buildings nearing completion. “At the Park all is bustle,” the *Picayune* wrote and noted that the “softer sex” wandered the grounds as carpenters buzzed. The paper assured readers that the Government Building, where the Woman’s Department would be, was “fully lighted up with electricity” so work could go on into the night. New Orleans newspapers might raise Exposition fever with such reports, but visiting journalists (and the local *Mascot*) put in the unfortunate corrections. Water poured down through faulty roofs; the grounds were a muddy mess; few exhibits were in place anywhere; buildings were incomplete; and grounds were bleak without promised walkways, lakes, parks and race-courses.

¹⁶ For the interview, see the *Times-Democrat*, December 12, 1884; for the description of Howe, see “Catharine Cole in Chicago,” *Picayune*, October 21, 1883. The *Picayune* also described Howe’s Beacon Street house given to her by her brother, Sam Ward. It had a “reception room, dining room and kitchen on the first floor, drawing room and library on the second, bedrooms on the third floor.” *Picayune*, October 26, 1884. The climb must have been a hardship for a woman who lived to be 91 years old.

The reports were enough to “disillusionize visitors,” the *Mascot* averred. It called the premature opening “A Caesarian Operation,” one that “has not covered that enterprise or its management with glory; on the contrary, it has only served to reveal their ugliness.” It called the Main Building a “colossal magnitude [but] like the stupendous length of a railroad, or the extraordinary depth of a well, somewhat more impressive on paper . . . than realizable by inspection.” Although the Exposition was supposed to be an opportunity for men of a “New South” to show they were “as capable of managing an Exposition as any other people,” they were failing with buildings and exhibits clearly not ready.¹⁷ Yet, by Congressional decree at the time of the loan, the event had to open in the year 1884. The women were called upon to be willing collaborators in the grand opening of the World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition.

Before participants in the Woman’s Department could even think about preparing their own spaces, they first had to take part in the Opening Day celebration. On Tuesday, December 16, 1884, the weather was fair and the sky alternately overcast and brilliantly lit with sunshine. Streets, businesses, private clubs, and residences were gay with flags, flowers, banners, and bunting in colors of the United States and of other nations. In true New Orleans fashion, banners also furled in colors of the king of Carnival, “his august Majesty Rex”: purple, green, and gold, ostensibly signifying justice, faith, and power respectively. Downtown Canal Street sidewalks were crowded with promenaders (some who continued well into the evening), and flag-bedecked streetcars to Exposition grounds were filled to overflowing.

Glowing reports by the *Times-Democrat* and *Picayune* detailed every facet of the day. They told how the route of official travel was “densely thronged” from the St. Charles Hotel to

¹⁷ *Picayune*, November 19, December 12, 1884; *Mascot*, December 6, 20, 19, 1884.

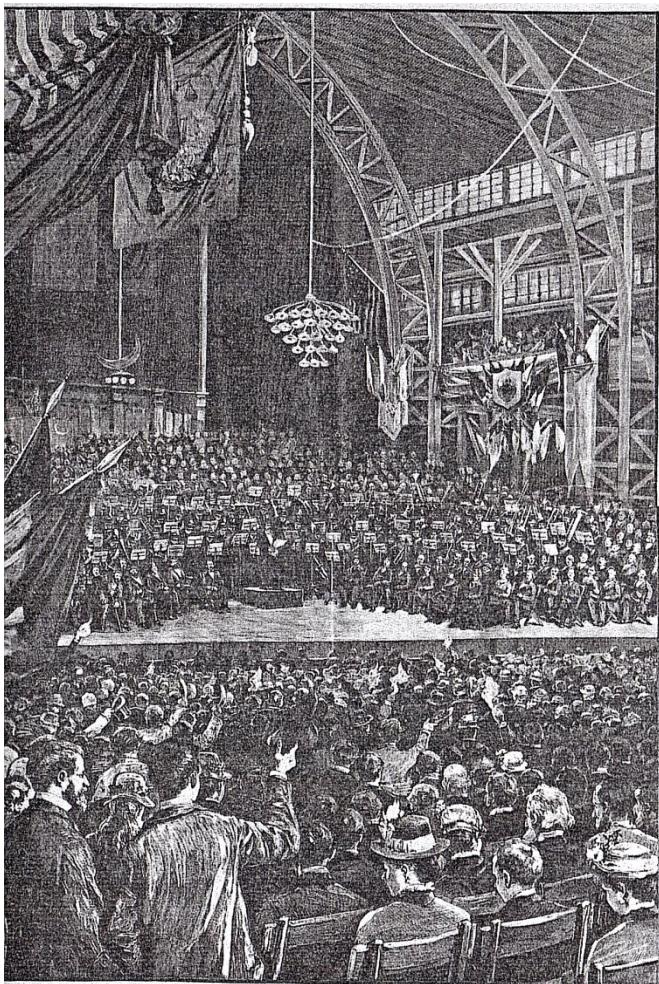
the levee at Canal Street, where officials boarded the *Fred A. Blank* steamship for the five-mile trip to Exposition grounds. The *Picayune* listed fifty-three names of women onboard, including Howe and her daughter, many Lady Commissioners and wives of dignitaries, Clara Barton of the American Red Cross, and representatives of the Christian Woman's Exchange. It also listed Mrs. Marion McBride (Howe's appointment as chief of the Press Department), but this is surely a mistake; this Bostonian's late arrival proved so steamy that she could not have been there on opening day.¹⁸

The *Picayune* called the trip to the grounds an "enjoyable ride," and Julia Ward Howe concurred. She wrote in her journal that she was ready by 10 a.m. when Richard Nixon came in a carriage and took her and Mrs. Erminine A. Smith of New Jersey to the steamer. As they approached, she saw her Lady Commissioners on the upper deck waving their handkerchiefs in greeting to her, and soon she was seated among them. Another steamer "decorated with flags of all nations" accompanied them. Then the invited guests and dignitaries "arrived in force" with a military escort and two bands, one of them the popular Mexican band. "The river was gay" with boats, Howe continued. Flags decorated river banks and streets, and crowds of people greeted the river pageant. As the *Picayune* described it, boats arrived at the grounds, "workers lowered a stage, and the landing was effected." Dignitaries walked through crowds onto the long path of ancient live oaks, "their gray heads of Spanish moss quiver[ing] in the light breeze." Howe wrote that women bravely marched from the river to the Main Building as part of the procession in an assigned place. They entered the building, and police opened a way for them to the platform. "Maj. Burke greeted us, looking very ill," she added.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Picayune*, December 17, 1884.

¹⁹ *Picayune*, December 17, 1884; Howe Journal, December 16, 1884.

"Opening the New Orleans Exposition—Colonel Breaux Reading the President's Address,"
The Historic New Orleans Collection



Ladies of the department had honored places for the day in the vast Music Hall of the Main Building, and the *Picayune* provided ample description that might entice female readers to meet these women. It told how several hundred of the 600 chairs on the stage "were devoted to the representatives of women's work" and how the stage was surrounded by a great throng that filled every one of "ten thousand seats and ample galleries." Shields, arms, insignia, and a "wilderness of flags" draped every pillar of the hall and its high, vaulted roof.²⁰

The *Picayune* crooned that a fifty-piece band entertained the crowd and that Julia Ward Howe, her personal staff, and Lady Commissioners "were placed in positions of honor" at the front of the platform. Howe wrote, "we were somewhat conspicuous." As was the paper's style, it colorfully described Howe as a woman of about sixty, "dressed entirely in black, wearing a Russian dolman [a coat with dolman sleeves], a short black bonnet, and short mourning veil" (honoring her brother's death). She was of "below medium size [less than five feet], with silver

²⁰ *Picayune*, December 17, 1884

white hairs [she had been a fiery redhead when young] brushed smoothly back from an exceedingly kind, sensitive and mobile face, lighted by small, expressive eyes." She was "essentially a womanly woman, and by her demeanor invariably attracts the attention and commands the respect of all who meet her," the *Picayune* wrote.²¹



"*Creoles*," Century Magazine, June, 1885

Flowery word-painting of women's style was customary in the language of clothes in the period, as a woman's physical presentation might impart her personality or origins.²² The *Picayune* wrote that sitting next to Howe was Mrs. Given, a "lovely looking woman, with soft brown hair and eyes" wearing a "rich peacock blue satin de Lyon." Clara Barton was "noble, distinguished, and well-known," as head of the four-year-old American Red Cross. She had a "grandly philanthropic face, framed in with its old fashioned bands of brown hair," and she wore a "dark green satin dress, with bonnet to

²¹ *Picayune*, December 17, 1884; Howe Journal, December 16, 1884.

²² Grace King was well aware of the messages that clothing sent. She continually described in letters to her sister May Mc Dowell the ways she was refashioning old dresses. She moaned to May in February, 1884: "It seems almost strange to me now that any one can have a season for getting new things—instead of a pocket-book—& that there are people in the world who really go out & have pleasure instead of duties." Grace King Papers (MSS 1282), Louisiana State University Libraries Special Collections, Baton Rouge, LA.

match, and black satin wrap.” Lizzie Cloudman was simply “fine looking.” Also near Howe, “Mrs. Dr. Julia Holmes Smith” was attractive, gentle, and unassuming, with a “pleasant face” that reminded all “she was a Southern woman—and of the race one of the most honored.” (The term “race” was used in diverse ways in 1884.) Mrs. Ordway of the Scientific Department was a “small fair-haired woman” whose husband had been recently hired by Tulane. Mrs. Felicia Grundy Porter of Nashville, whom Howe named vice president of the Southwestern Department, was “a stout, dignified, rather awesome looking lady; her fine, florid face, framed in with a lot of silver-gray curls, looped over her ears.”²³

Descriptions continued that made these distinguished women seem more accessible, more familiar. Mrs. Theodore Auzé was “a Southern woman—small, with olive complexion, and nervous, and a tremendous worker.” This New Orleanian that Director-General Burke named Secretary of the Woman’s Department occupied one of the front seats near him. Mrs. E. A. Burke sat near her husband “displaying the greatest solicitude, and when he made his speech she stood up and applauded him in the most wifely manner,” the reporter fawned. (If this “wifely” comment is Cole’s, it is probably sardonic; if intended as a compliment, the sentiment might be Nicholson’s.) She wore “a handsome brown cloth dress with boa and muff of yellow fur.” Yet, it was Maud Howe, “an exceedingly handsome and brilliant young woman,” whose “appearance on the platform created quite a sensation.” Curiously, the journalist did not describe her outfit, but Cole had written months earlier that “Miss Maud Howe aims at characteristic costumes. If she goes to a party she invariably wears ivy on her head. At home she is given to long, clinging,

²³ *Picayune*, December 17, 1884.

odd colored cashmeres, touched with velvet here and there, and with old Italian laces about the open throat.”²⁴ The Howes, inadvertently or intentionally, could create quite a stir.

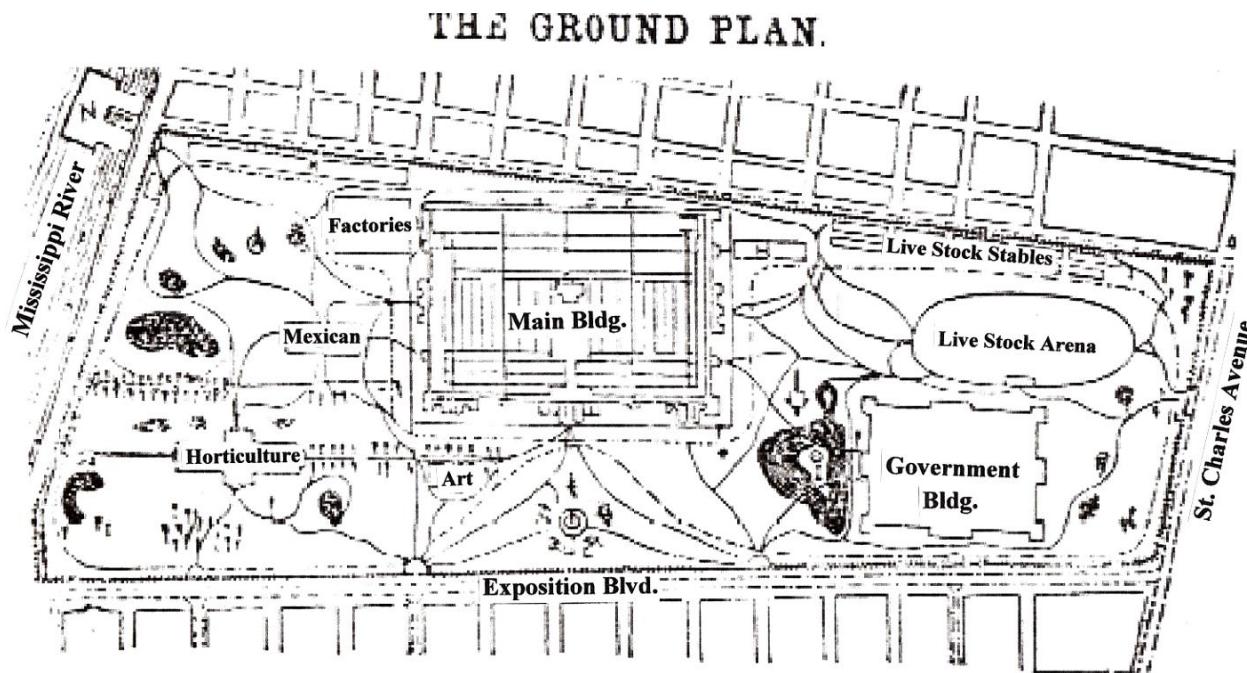
At the opening, in the Music Hall, women must have perked up as the “Centennial Poem” was read. A “well-known Southern poetess, Mrs. Mary Ashley Townsend,” had gained the honor of the occasion but was too proper, modest, or small-voiced to recite it herself. Although Major Page M. Baker, managing editor of the *Times-Democrat*, read it “in excellent style and with clear voice,” even he “was unable to make himself audible to the thousands anxious to hear the glowing words.” With jubilations of “Oh Freedom! . . . Sweet Liberty!” and “with shouts of exultation,” Townsend’s verses celebrated the plantations, “the merry cotton picking,” the “sweet-sapped cane-fields,” “majestic live oak,” and “the opulent magnolia” with its “pomp of perfume.” She characterized the Exposition as “the great school” and the “tabernacle of the free. . . . Invention, science, agriculture, art and genius in these triumphs all take part.” Glories were exclaimed in countless stanzas. The poem was later ubiquitous in printed versions.²⁵

Everyone waited in great anticipation for the moment when Republican President Chester A. Arthur would formally open the Exposition through the marvel of telegraphic wires having been laid from Washington City to New Orleans. The outgoing president had little investment in being at the Exposition in person, so he and his guests waited in the Presidential Mansion an embarrassingly long time to receive the word to strike the telegraphic key. Finally, after everyone in New Orleans had had his say, and two hours and ten minutes after the scheduled time, Arthur pressed the key. “‘CLICK!’ and the electricity flew through the wire, across half a continent,” and the gigantic Corliss engine roared power into all the machines in the Main

²⁴ Ibid.; “WWW,” *Picayune*, October 24, 1884.

²⁵ For the poem and descriptions, see the *Picayune*, December 17, 1884; for being unable to hear, see the “Society Bee,” *Picayune*, December 21, 1884.

Building, the *Mobile Register* declared. Although the *Picayune* praised the Corliss machinery for running silently and smoothly, the halls would never again be quiet enough for voices to be easily heard.²⁶



Exposition Grounds from a Visitors' Guidebook to the Fair, enhanced by the author

Like so many attendees to the Exposition's opening, Julia Ward Howe and daughter Maud returned to the hotel "by land," she wrote, through "streets gay with decorations, in which the colors of the orthodox flag were conspicuous."²⁷ According to the *Picayune*, long walks were "all the rage" at the time, and young ladies thought "nothing of 'stepping' from Esplanade street

²⁶ *Mobile Register*, December 15, 1884, reprinted in *Picayune* December 19, 1884. Grace King wrote that people in New Orleans were "indignant over Arthur's refusal to open it—they say it is another slap at the South." Grace King to May McDowell, December 11, 1884, King Papers. About the sound of the machinery, see the *Picayune*, December 18, 1884.

²⁷ Howe Journal, December 16, 1884.

to Napoleon Avenue,” made more comfortable by the “fashionable low, broad heels” women wore in 1884. Visitors who had stamina enough to stay after the opening ceremonies looked at the few exhibits in the Main Building, but most people tried to catch streetcars home, which caused a great delay, followed by an unpleasant journey. Many walked the five miles or so back to homes and hotels, because, as the *Picayune* wrote, a ride “at a jog-trot speed in an overcrowded car was not a pleasing prospect.” Like so much about the Exposition, transportation was delayed or ill-planned, and there were vast empty spaces in the halls of the Main Building. Over in the Government Building, the Woman’s Department virtually did not exist.²⁸

“Thimbles and a Teacup”

On December 18, 1884, two days after the grand opening ceremony, a core of women met in Howe’s private parlor at the Hotel Royal to discuss finances, hiring policies, and the placement of exhibits. In a show of solidarity, the workers reaffirmed the Lady Commissioners’ ambition to “render the Woman’s Department a credit to women from Manitoba to Mexico.” The women were expecting \$50,000 for expenses that Management had promised Howe and which had been announced in newspaper reports of opening day, but it was not forthcoming. Regarding hiring policies, the *Times-Democrat* wrote diplomatically that Howe “acquiesced” to the wishes of the women’s Committee of Employees (Mrs. Eugene Soniat, Mrs. Pierre Lanaux, Mrs. Theodore Auzé) and to management: she would employ only New Orleans women as clerks in

²⁸ For the streetcar ride, see the *Picayune*, December 28, 1884. During two streetcar strikes (in early November and again in late December), there were only three choices of travel: by boat, by standing up in a “crowded horse car,” or by walking. The steamboat *Heroine* took 25 minutes from the foot of Canal St. to the Exposition. It made five trips each way each day “with splendid accommodation for ladies and children [with] Refreshments on board.” *Times-Democrat*, January 14, 1885. The “elegant sidewheel passenger packet *Clinton*” charged a reduced rate of 25 cents round trip. *Picayune*, January 2, 1885. On the Woman’s Department not yet existing, see the *Times-Democrat*, December 17, 1884.

the department. In an attempt to smooth ruffled feathers, she also named five honorary vice presidents for various regions of the country, including Caroline Merrick for the Southern States. At the meeting, one Creole leader addressed the group in French. The *Times-Democrat* crowed that Howe was “perfectly conversant” in the language, which facilitated her “intercourse” with “that large and influential half of [the] population” and, perhaps, partly justified her appointment as a woman for all women. The paper reported that the Louisiana Historical Society would get the largest space in the Woman’s Department for their exhibit but, instead, this significant collection became annexed to the Louisiana exhibit on the ground floor by request of the United States Commissioner for the state.²⁹ Despite the Woman’s Department’s delay, however, participants were trying to push forward.

In a communiqué to her New England Woman’s Club back home, Howe later described this trying period. She and ten Lady Commissioners had met “somewhat dolefully and disconsolately, in the parlor of the Hotel Royal,” she wrote. “When I attended the opening of the Exposition, on Dec. 16, 1884, the floor was not laid in the gallery assigned to the Woman’s Department, nor was it laid for some time afterward.” Once the department was “floored,” the roof “leaked badly, which it long continued to do.” At first, the women had sent requisitions for what they needed to decorate the spaces and got them for a while, Howe wrote, “but presently

²⁹ The Vice Presidents were: Northwest, Dr. Julia Holmes Smith, Chicago; Southeast, Mrs. Felicia Grundy Porter, Nashville; Mid States, Mrs. E. T. Gillespie, Philadelphia; Eastern, Mrs. Henrietta Wolcott, Boston; Pacific Slope, Mrs. J. G. Lemmon, Oakland, CA. Mrs. Evelyn Ordway supervised the scientific area and Maud Howe the literary sector. For the meeting, see the *Times-Democrat*, December 13, 1884. The Creole woman who addressed the group was one of those gathering an exhibit of notable historical relics. Howe spoke several languages; in 1884, she was also studying Greek, as her journals attest. For the historical display, see the *Times-Democrat*, December 24, 1884. Another group of Louisiana women did place an exhibit in the Woman’s Department but in a smaller space.

we were told that we could not have any more. Then there was no lumber for us, and there were no carpenters, and by-and-by we found out what was behind all this—no money.”³⁰

Howe would not be deterred, however, and local women also found an opportunity to shine. At this “fireside talk” with Lady Commissioners and some local leaders, Maud Howe wrote later, her mother said: “Ladies, we must remember that women have sometimes built churches with no better instruments than thimbles and a teapot!”³¹ So the women rallied and devised a way to raise \$3000 for their immediate needs: for exhibits, for the rest of the decorations, and for a small security force. They would have three entertainments, they decided, and Howe offered to lecture at the first. Excitement filled the room as plans developed. The Woman’s Department needed local women to sell enough tickets. Very well. They would gather a large audience from the best people in town, as they knew well how to do. Catharine Cole would later publicly remind Howe that the women of New Orleans had helped her achieve this success. Now, as plans for the fundraisers progressed, Lady Commissioners and other workers began to create a semblance of a Woman’s Department.

Let Us Make Spaces

At first, the department was in “chaotic disorder.” The Installation chief, Lizzie Cloudman, began to allot spaces and oversee the painting of dividing lines between states, the *Times-Democrat* wrote. Mrs. Given supervised the “large force of carpenters” that the navy “gallantly” provided to lay the 2000 feet of planking that “a good lumber dealer” provided. Finally, some offices were enclosed and papered; bamboo and willow furniture was moved in. Caroline Merrick began to arrange the large quarters of the Woman’s Christian Temperance

³⁰ “Howe It Was Done,” *Picayune*, April 5, 1885.

³¹ Richards and Elliott, *Julia Ward Howe*, II: 102.

Union in the front aisle of the department. Other women began to place exhibits, including Mrs. Greeley who had brought the New England exhibit with her to the Hotel Royal. Dr. Julia Holmes Smith, vice president for Northwestern States (Nebraska, Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana), stayed two weeks to install her exhibits, left, and returned for the department's opening. She suggested a ribbon be placed on items everywhere in the Exposition that women had helped to produce, as on tobacco and textiles. But there was neither time nor information to accomplish that.³²

Despite real progress, there were disappointments. Iowa's exhibits were damaged in a train wreck near Burlington; jars of honey had broken and "their liquid sweetness had trickled down over the paintings, lace work and embroidery of Iowa's fair daughters." By late December, an estimated one hundred newswomen were in the city, "wandering over the vast building with their note-books and pencils in hand . . . evidently doing a vast deal of work," as the *Picayune* told it. But their reports sent home must have expressed dismay that so little was ready in the Woman's Department. Then teachers, "largely ladies," from the Northwest and Texas arrived over the Christmas holidays "to study in the World's University." On Christmas Eve, many of those teachers sought the Woman's Department, the *Picayune* wrote, but were "disappointed in finding nothing to look at except distinguished women."³³ During a meeting at the Christian Woman's Exchange the day after Christmas, when Maud Howe asked for women's books from all of the exhibits, one woman peevishly claimed that she and the other ladies would not be

³² *Times-Democrat*, December 23, 1884. The *Times-Democrat* gave E. A. Burke credit for arranging more workmen to push the work forward by working "with greater zeal." *Times-Democrat*, December 24, 1884. Smith interview with a male reporter, *Times-Democrat*, December 10, 1884.

³³ *Times-Democrat*, December 13, 1884. In the *Report and Catalogue*, the Lady Commissioner for Iowa listed all the items that would have been shown had they not met with disaster in the train wreck. For visiting women, see the *Picayune*, December 23, 1884. Women stayed at the Hotel Royal, the St. Charles, the Park Hotel, or in cheaper private quarters costing 50 cents to 1.00 a day or 1.50 to 2.00 with board. For having only women to look at, see the *Picayune*, December 25, 1884.

coerced. “I said it was not a question of coercion,” Julia Ward Howe wrote in her journal. “None of us had come to New Orleans to do exactly what we please. All had come to sacrifice something of particular preference and pleasure to the public good.”³⁴ Notions of the public good varied, apparently, and a crack was forming in the recent levee of cooperation in the Woman’s Department.

As head of the literary division, Maud Howe continued to insist that she wanted to place all of the works written by women together. That would create a greater impression than if they were with their state exhibits. Rhode Island’s commissioner, Mrs. Cleveland, declared that the books she brought should be donated locally after the event. Maud Howe agreed that they should go to “some association of women in New Orleans in remembrance of the Exposition,” and she began to request permission of writers, editors, and publishers to donate them. The *Picayune* reported that the books “were mainly secured from publishers” for the Literary Department. A likely recipient was the Southern Art Union’s two-and-a-half-year-old, 4000-volume Circulating Library. That association’s officers claimed the library was the only one that loaned “modern, current literature” in the city. It had recently added two hundred new books and had suspended the rule of residents-only circulation for the duration of the Exposition. Sales of duplicates in the department would be divided one-third to the publishers, one-third to the Woman’s Department, and the remaining third to Maud for expenses of the department.”³⁵

³⁴ Howe Journal, December 26, 1884.

³⁵ For books secured, see the *Times-Democrat*, December 28, 1884; for the library, see the *Picayune* February 5, 1885; for sales of books, see the *Picayune*, December 17, 1884. The Union’s twenty-woman Board of Managers took “entire charge of the business details” of the Industrial Branch that disbursed \$12,300, nearly \$9000 to women, \$5000 of which was for “articles made by women and sold through Industrial.” Individuals supported the association with an annual \$10 subscription, and they donated books. For the claim that 40-45 books left the premises daily, were returned, and others taken, see the *Times-Democrat*, December 14, 1884.

Apparently, Julia Ward Howe was busier than even the newspapers recorded. She wrote in her journal that on Saturday, December 27, she and daughter Maud “removed from the Hotel to Mrs. Cobb’s boarding house at 22 South Rampart Street” near Mrs. W. W. (Sarah Ann Miller) King and her three unmarried daughters, including Grace King, and two bachelor sons.³⁶ Howe “approved the hotel bills, and left them for the management to pay, as per agreement,” she wrote. Mrs. Montgomery, who Cloudman had earlier met as a typical “southern woman,” came to Howe’s office “bringing with her another Texas lady, who claims to have got up the whole Texas exhibit. She was pretty insolent, for which I reproved her.” This kind of nattering must have caused Howe to say, as daughter Maud later quoted: “It was like having a big, big Nursery to administer, with children good, bad, and middling. The good prevailed in the end, as it usually or always does, and yet I used to say that Satan had a fresh flower for me every morning, when I came to my office, and took account of the state of things.”³⁷ Newspapers had a different view of the problem, especially Catharine Cole, who laid most of the department tirades at the feet of Julia Ward Howe.

That same day, December 27, 1884, Howe met with representatives of the Colored Ladies Exposition Association “by appointment.” The women said they were “very unwilling to have their work put in promiscuously with that of the colored men, wishing very much to be classed as in our Dep’t. I promise to make an effort for them,” Howe wrote. “They also wish to

³⁶ Howe Journal, December 27, 1884. The *Picayune* of January 4, 1885, tells of the move. Later, on March 30, 1885, Howe wrote in her journal that they moved again to the house of John A. Morris, who left for a trip north. The *Times-Democrat*, April 5, 1885, reports that they were “enjoying the hospitality of Mr. John A. Morris,” a principal in the Louisiana Lottery. For some of Morris’s dealings, see the Nicholson Papers (MSS 219) The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA. Grace King, in letters to her sister May, regularly expressed jealousy toward Morris’s daughter, Belle. King Papers, 1884, 1885.

³⁷ Richards & Elliott, *Julia Ward Howe*, II: 109.

appoint attendants from their own number.”³⁸ This last could have been a stumbling block for the southern white ladies of the Woman’s Department. Because Howe made no further entry in her



Women’s work visible in the Colored Department, collection of Ken Speth

journal about her promise, however, there is no certainty about why the women placed their work with the men of their states in the Colored Department. It is possible that white women rejected the idea of their inclusion in the Woman’s Department, but it is as likely that the black men convinced the ladies that their items were needed in the Colored Department, as the Louisiana Commissioner had convinced the Historical Society that their collection should be with the state. In any event, women of the Colored Ladies Exposition Association faced that additional dilemma: to enhance their gender or their race. In the end, their work was invaluable

³⁸ Howe Journal, December 27, 1884.

to the acclaim accorded to the Colored Department on its Opening Day, on Colored Education Day, and on Louisiana Day. There is no mention that they mingled with the white women of the Woman's Department, although they were free to roam all areas of Exposition grounds at will.³⁹

As women worked to prepare the Woman's Department and the Colored Department, they faced a startling and disturbing personal predicament that bespoke the (mis)planning of men. Inadequate “closet accommodations” caused “thousands of women daily on the grounds untold embarrassment and inconvenience.” It was inconceivable that there were no toilets in the Government and States Building which held the Woman's Department, Colored Department, and the Educational Department where there were so many female teachers. It was a problem that went on for months, exacerbated when the weather was “cold and drizzly, with a keen wind from the northeast,” as it had been on Christmas day.⁴⁰ Women demanded “better accommodations and politeness, justice and humanity.” They were “absolutely suffering,” the *Picayune* declared. The nearest restroom was a separate Department of Public Comfort (with a ten-cent charge) or in the Main Building, where there was a “ladies’ dressing room,” but both involved “putting on of wraps and much loss of valuable time.” Women could hardly afford to rent one of the roller chairs (available at entrances of the Main and Government Buildings) in order to save time. It was “a delicate subject to write about in a public way,” one woman wrote to the *Picayune*, but

³⁹ A few Lady Commissioners in the Woman's Department identified items made by “colored” women in their exhibits. Charles Dudley Warner, editor of the *Hartford Courant*, wrote that, on Louisiana Day, “white and colored people mingled freely, talking and looking at what was of common interest” and that “colored citizens took their full share of the parade and honors.” *Studies in the South and West* (New York: Harper and Bros, 1889), 13, 15.

⁴⁰ *Picayune*, December 25, 30, 26, 1884. The weather did not keep two female baseball teams—the Cincinnati Combination and the New Orleans Bachs—from parading the streets in full uniform, creating “the impression that base ball, played by shapely, active girls, must be attractive.” Their game at Sportsman’s Park was cancelled, but a large crowd went out anyway on Christmas day. *Picayune*, December 26, 1884.

this was “unprecedented in the history of public exhibitions of any kind in this country.” The *Mascot*, as it always did, needled Director-General Burke, tying the problem to finances: “The exposition management having strangely neglected to provide for the accommodation of visitors in the matter of gratifying the commonest necessities of nature, the receipts from this source alone will probably equal . . . gate money taken at the door.”⁴¹ Perhaps men were unaccustomed to providing for the comfort of proper ladies in public places. In any event, despite these hindrances and others, women pressed ahead.

Pressing Ahead

By the end of December, exhibit spaces were beginning to take shape, and perhaps no woman had greater expectations of the Woman’s Department than did the *Picayune*’s Catharine Cole. Howe announced that the area was organized enough for her to “hold public receptions,” and she began to greet visitors every Thursday in the reception rooms, a custom that would regularly bring additional guests into the department. Cole declared that the Woman’s Department would be “food for thought and will” and would awaken “new ambitions amongst women.” Although to simply display fancy work was lovely, the “test of comparison” should prevail, she wrote, urging competition and awareness. She looked forward to seeing exhibits that showed “something stronger than the point of a microscopic embroidery needle” as proof that women could “work in steel as deftly” as they could make wax flowers and crazy quilts.⁴² At the time, women were in a psychological trap of needing to utilize domestic skills to make money from home and, on the other hand, almost devaluing those products in favor of something more

⁴¹ For the nearest restrooms, see the *Picayune*, January 4, 1884; for advertisement for roller chairs, see the *Times-Democrat*, February 18, 1885; for restrooms as a delicate subject, see the *Picayune*, January 5, 1885; for finances, see the *Mascot*, December 27, 1884.

⁴² For bringing visitors to the department, see the *Picayune*, December 30, 1884; for Cole’s comments, see “WWW,” *Picayune*, January 4, 1885.

“industrial.” The exhibits in the Woman’s Department varied in quality and orientation and so reflected the spectrum of women’s daily lives. They told a more straightforward story of what women were actually doing than if contributors had had time to make something special for this occasion.

Cole envisioned that there would be woman-designed health garments, cooking utensils, farming implements, delicate astronomical instruments, inventions, and literary and scientific works that presented a “wholesome surprise.” Participants and visitors would “learn the a b c of the great alphabet of work,” Cole wrote, that “there is no sex in the world of work, and that the accomplishments of human beings are not valued or estimated by the sex of the maker.” Women would find a thousand congenial employments besides teaching or drudgery, she predicted, and “greater things of more permanent value than pincushions.” Ideas for a woman’s own future would surely come to her “as she stands in the Woman’s Department,” she wrote, preparing her readers for limitless possibilities. Given such high hopes, Cole was the department’s severest critic where and when it failed.⁴³

Newspapers repeatedly stated the purposes of the Woman’s Department, and the women, as they worked, continued to refine their own goals. The *Times-Democrat* called the Woman’s Department “a striking feature” of the Exposition, “a wise and pretty idea, that the women of the United States should have an opportunity of showing what they have done and what they are capable of.” Director-General Burke congratulated himself that “[o]ther expositions have seemed to take no interest in the weaker sex and have given them no aid, assistance, or representation.” The department would show “how many and what trades, occupations, and professions women have made for themselves—places and what careers are now open to women.” In a way, it could

⁴³ “WWW,” *Picayune*, January 4, 1885.

demonstrate what the 1880 Census had shown: that more and more women were working in more and more occupations.⁴⁴ It was the kind of emphasis that Catherine Cole attempted every Sunday in her column, “Woman’s World and Work.” Whether or not work outside the home contradicted the ideology of domesticity, World’s Fairs had been, and continued to be, paeans to a better future. Women participants helped define what they wanted that future to be. In an age that placed confidence in science, education, and inventions to solve problems and speed progress, there should be new roles for women. In a “New South,” there should be new jobs and new rights for southern women.

In early January 1885, these expectations of the Woman’s Department were premature. The burning question two weeks after the Exposition’s official opening was: “When will the Exposition be fully ready?” Exhibitors everywhere were “straining every nerve to get their exhibits into place.” The Main Building was a “vast workshop” where visitors encountered confusion, hammering and sawing, dirt, and trains moving in and out making deliveries. The *Picayune* wrote, “after a while this sort of thing [would] cease and the business [of] a real World’s Fair” would begin. But, for days, rains continued and hampered progress. “Violent rains driven by wind, found every weak place in the roofs of the various buildings and a number of leaks developed,” including over the Woman’s Department, where green lumber had shrunk, leaving spaces between planks. There was talk of property damage, but general merchandise exhibitors, though riled, tried to be agreeable. They demanded a date when the Exposition would announce itself “complete and in readiness for visitors.” Burke promised extra carpenters and

⁴⁴ For Burke congratulating himself, see the *Times-Democrat*, January 10, 1885; for more occupations, see the *Times-Democrat*, January 13, 1885. Mrs. J. C. Croly (“Jennie June”) wrote that the Woman’s Department in New Orleans ought to emphasize what women could do to make money, especially as a result of inventions. *Times-Democrat*, December 11, 1884.

plumbers to complete the Government Building “within four or five days.” The *Picayune* claimed that an electric railway between the Main and Government Buildings was almost ready; walks were being laid, the cottage for Life-Saving demonstrations was being built on the little island in the Exposition’s lake, and the Art Gallery was finally ready to receive paintings.⁴⁵ Almost a month of the Fair’s six-month run had already passed.

Problems for management—and by extension, for women—mounted. A few days of sunshine promised hope that wagons “stalled in the mud of uptown streets” would finally move, the *Picayune* declared, but adverse reports had already “gone forth over the country” concerning “the unfinished state” of the Exposition. Exhibits stuck in warehouses might be delivered and streetcars might be able to transport visitors if the sun cleared the mud, but 5000 carloads of exhibits were stuck in a logjam because they arrived during the peak shipping season of cotton and sugar. Some of these were surely headed for the Woman’s Department. Criticism kept visitors away, throwing “a damper on the great enterprise” and adding to the “financial embarrassment” of management.⁴⁶ By early January, officials had already declared a debt of \$250,000 and had appealed (unsuccessfully) to sectional pride to stir up more loans. The Philadelphia Centennial of 1876 had cost seven or eight million, they claimed; New Orleans promoters had tried to make a show with a million and a half. The financial straits were affecting all departments and manufacturers.

Feigning cheer, Director-General Burke continued to assert the marvels of the Exposition, and in the Woman’s Department, “hammering and sawing of planks” made it a noisy

⁴⁵ For demands to open, see the *Picayune*, January 4, 7, 1885. Daft Electric Railway would run the railroad line. *Picayune*, January 13, 1885. Well into the six-month run of the Exposition, Director-General Burke was still discussing plans to build a double track rail route to the grounds. It was never begun.

⁴⁶ *Picayune*, January 8, 1885.

place in early January. The *Picayune* declared that ladies were employing the “happy knack” of “careful economy” by making use of carpenters’ decorative scraps. They were themselves building the needed “easels, picture frames, pedestals,” and other small items. Meanwhile, the *Picayune* reported that Burke claimed that visitors would have to “travel for twenty summers around the globe” to discover what was available at this “grand International Exposition”: the “wondrous things of this earth, of man’s ingenuity, of a nation’s wealth, of the effort of woman in her battle to advance her progress in life, of the colored race in their struggle to align themselves with a progressive spirit of the age,” of education, live stock, agriculture, and art. The paper also noted that, as the days brightened and the Woman’s Department took shape, the “perplexed and worried look” that had sat “upon the gentle brows of the woman President” almost disappeared.⁴⁷

The department began to have “a very busy and bustling look” in early January, and workers and Howe began to draw positive attention there. Over the gallery railing, women hung a large banner with the legend “Woman’s Department” painted in good fat letters, so it could be read almost entirely across the great building, the *Picayune* declared. The banner was the best answer to the “oft-repeated question, ‘Where is the Woman’s Department?’” According to the *Picayune*, many visitors were “curious to simply look at that distinguished lady, Mrs. Julia Ward Howe” who became so “daily besieged” that she added a second reception day to her announced Thursdays.⁴⁸ The *Picayune* also reported that most callers expected to meet “a stout, tall, stern, masculine looking woman, the idealized nightmare of suffrage,” the bane of old local lore.

⁴⁷ For women building partitions, see the *Picayune*, January 7, 1885; for wondrous things, see the *Picayune*, January 9, 1885; for department taking shape, see the *Picayune*, January 7, 1885.

⁴⁸ *Picayune*, February 10, 1885.

“Fancy their surprise when, after climbing the tall, broad stairs, they discover in the sunny little sitting room” with “all the graces of a boudoir,” that there sat “a small, eminently womanish and gentle, motherly old lady, always dressed in black, and with snow-white hair and the superb, if somewhat old-fashioned manners of a duchess!” Her daughter Maud proved to be “an indefatigable worker” who also possessed “charming manners and amiability” and was “another capture of the Southerners,” the *Picayune* declared. The nasty problem of “toilette rooms” for visitors and participants in the Government Building, however, was still not solved, and women continued to suffer “in health.” They required that “serious defect” to be “remedied immediately.”⁴⁹

As some exhibits took shape, the whole aura of the Woman’s Department brightened. As a visitor might wend her way through myriad and curious displays on the ground floor of the Government Building, she would mount the wide staircase to the large open gallery where light streamed through long banks of skylights. Windows in the pretty little alcoves allowed visitors to look out onto the grounds and promenaders below. Although Lady Commissioners were busy placing treasured items in cases or hanging diaphanous curtains around their spaces, they happily stopped to greet guests and explain exhibits there to date. Two important organizations occupied the central spaces of the department: the city’s Christian Woman’s Exchange with a large variety of homemade items for sale, and the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), where members would tell visitors of the organization and its training potential for reformers and activists. Near these two spaces was a “handsome and artistic” exhibit of some Louisiana

⁴⁹ *Picayune*, January 7, 8, 1885.

women's work that the Young Ladies Auxiliary Society hastily put together when the state's male Commissioner requested that the historical collection be lodged downstairs.⁵⁰

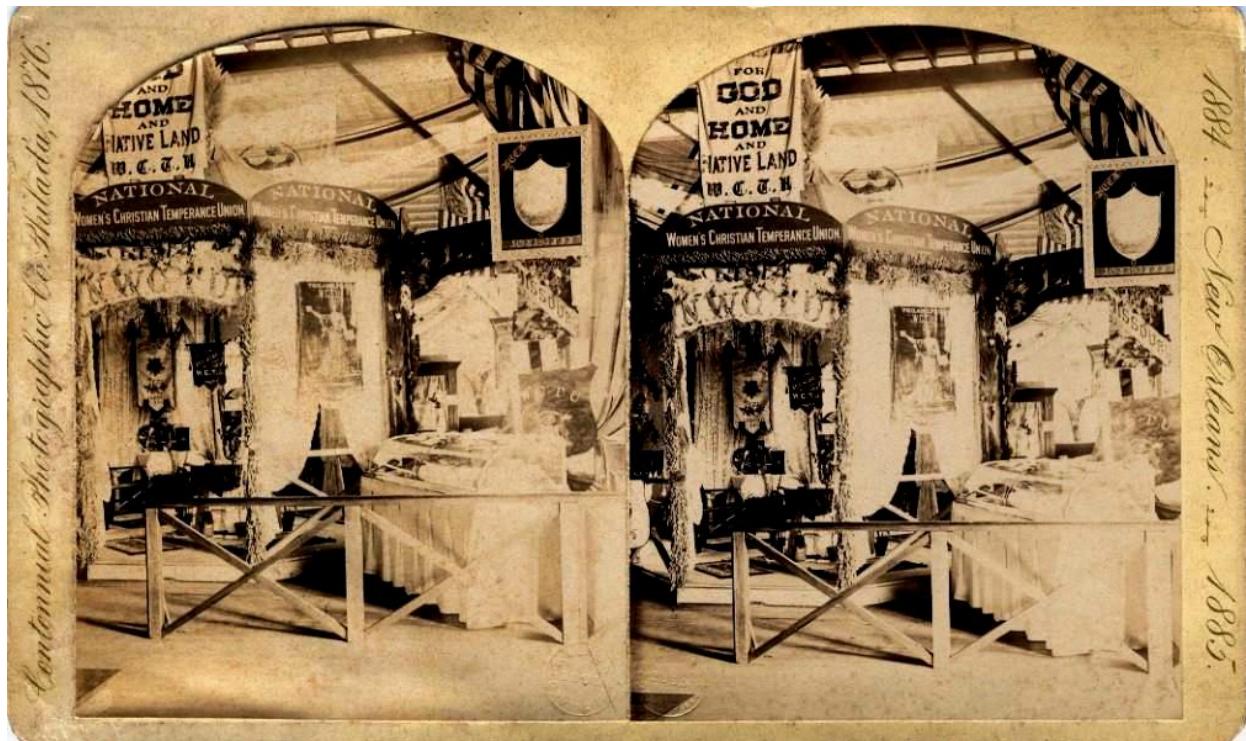
By early February 1885, newspapers described how Caroline Merrick and her house guest, Mrs. Josephine Nichols, busily supervised the decorating and hanging of "blue draperies and lace curtains" in the Temperance pavilion. Most local women were familiar with Caroline Merrick, the *Times-Democrat* declared, as "the well-known president of the WCTU in Louisiana, and vice president of the Woman's Suffrage Association." She was one of only a handful of avowed suffragists in all of Louisiana. Josephine Nichols, assisting her, was "a lovely and cultured woman" who had previously arranged hundreds of temperance exhibits at State and county fairs. According to the *Picayune*, she was also a "charming writer" whose letters from the Exposition appeared in the *Indianapolis Journal*. From that pavilion, women would later hand out thousands of pounds of temperance "leaflets."⁵¹

Although this organization was part of the larger temperance movement that included men, these were strategically gendered spaces. However, only the tactics in the WCTU's visuals and rhetoric of domesticity had a feminine slant. The "dainty pavilion" that sat "immediately opposite Mrs. Howe's office" should not have lulled visitors to think that the female approach to the problem of strong drink was any less forceful than that of the national temperance movement. In this case, the women employed an additional tactic of handing out hundreds of cups of ice water from two large "beneficent" coolers, a commodity "in great favor," the *Picayune*'s Catharine Cole declared. As it drew scores of visitors to the pavilion, advocates could press their temperance agenda. The theme of the WCTU, "the largest society composed of women in the

⁵⁰ *Times-Democrat*, February 4; *Picayune*, February 3, 10, 1885.

⁵¹ For Merrick's role, see the *Times-Democrat*, February 4, 1885; for WCTU pavilion, see the *Picayune*, February 3, 1885;

world, was ‘For God and Home and Native Land,’” a famous phrase that would be carried out in flags, grains, and grasses that women from various states contributed to this combined effort in the center of the Woman’s Department.⁵²



The Woman's Christian Temperance Union Pavilion, collection of Ken Speth

As soon as there was something to write about, female journalists meticulously detailed exhibits in the Woman’s Department and of women’s work in the Colored Department, listing every doily and painted cup. For example, the *Picayune* declared, in the Mississippi area of the Woman’s Department, exhibits varied “from a daintily knitted baby cap to beautiful wood

⁵² For ice water, see “WWW,” *Picayune*, February 15, 1885. Drinking fountains were not yet in place, but women promised they would be supplied. When Nichols lectured on temperance at the St. Charles Methodist Church, January 6, 1885, a special collection helped defray the costs of the fountains. *Picayune*, January 7, 1885. For the theme of the WCTU, see the *Times-Democrat*, February 23, 1885; for décor, see the *Picayune*, January 14, 1885.

carvings and statuary”; they were “in apple-pie order and ready for visitors and inspection.” One “curious specimen” was a hair wreath fashioned of locks from the “many laureled heads” of George Washington, Andrew Jackson, Thomas Jefferson, John C. Calhoun and others, its hair flowers from the “mingled gray and brown hairs” from the head of the gentlemanly governor, Robert Lowry. Although only a few commissioners brought work of African-American women, one example from Mississippi was “a lot of very nice bureau mats” from an “old colored lady from up in Aberdeen” and, the *Picayune* reported, a viewer might “fancy how proud she was over the making of them, and that she too could testify to what the women of the South can do.”⁵³ A sectional competition seems to have been gaining speed, at least as journalists told it.

“The Men Went to Begging and the Women Went to Work”

Because men of the Board of Management were unable to keep their promises of financial support, the women were thrown upon their own resources. The *Picayune* chronicled the loud complaints male exhibitors voiced in repeated meetings; meanwhile, the women busied themselves with the tasks at hand. Cole put it plainly: “The men went to begging and the women went to work.” To begin raising funds so the Woman’s Department would “reflect nothing but credit upon her sex,” Lady Commissioners from various states gathered in Howe’s office to settle plans for her lecture.⁵⁴ Given and Auzé had secured Werlein’s Music Hall, and Mrs. King had convinced Joaquin Miller, the “Poet of the West,” to read some of his poems. In her journal, Howe expressed some annoyance with Mrs. Auzé. She wrote that she volunteered to give a lecture and “suggested two or three subsequent occasions” to raise funds, and then Auzé “immediately rushed off to make capital for herself, pretending that the whole plan originated

⁵³ *Picayune*, January 9, 1885.

⁵⁴ “WWW,” *Picayune*, January 25, 1885.

with her, which was flatly untrue.” Howe was gracious to a point, but she expected credit when it was due. Nevertheless, Auzé was zealous about selling tickets, and she and Mrs. Given looked forward to having offices in the department for their invaluable work. Mrs. Jennie Nixon of the *Times-Democrat* attended the planning meeting in her official capacity as State Lady Commissioner of Louisiana, Governor McEnery having appointed her in December, after which the male Commissioner pressured her to place most exhibits downstairs with the state exhibits, which she did. Women from Texas, Missouri, Wisconsin, and Ohio also showed with their states on the ground floor. Some of these states displayed items in both spaces, which further diluted the power of complete women’s exhibits.⁵⁵

Local women nevertheless rallied support for Howe’s lecture. “Responding with their usual public spirit,” the *Picayune* wrote, thirty-three active women of the city met in the Ordinary of the St. Charles Hotel. They formed “a temporary association ‘for the purpose of giving entertainments and devising methods of raising money to assist the Woman’s Department,’ thus enabling it to be properly installed.” Given and Auze figured \$2000 to \$3000 would prepare spaces for exhibits presently “lying boxed up.” The *Picayune* reported that male management had conceded that whatever was needed “must be raised by the ladies,” and the paper complained that male management “ought to have been able to have squeezed out a poor little \$3000” out of their million and a half dollars. This was a lesser sum than ladies paid in at the Exposition gates in one day, the newspaper chided. “But the ladies of New Orleans . . . will not let the department languish, and will accomplish what they are asked to do.”⁵⁶ As most

⁵⁵ Howe Journal, January 8, 1885; *Picayune*, February 1, 6, January 8, 1885.

⁵⁶ “The Woman’s Exposition Aid Association,” *Picayune*, February 15, 1885. By January 7, 1885, there were sixty members; by the time it disbanded in mid-February, eighty-five women had enrolled at \$1 each. In the end, the organization presented Howe with \$576.50 as the result

women assumed agency to run their homes, they would employ those transferable skills to create this public department.

Women would assert their “reputation for pluck, energy and ambition,” the *Picayune* declared, to help those from the North and West who found themselves in a “forlorn condition” without money for expenses. Those participants had come “honorably and laboriously” and had done their share of the work and were now “tapping on our Southern door” for help, the *Picayune* declared. As Cole asserted, “New Orleans women—who for all their reputed ‘Southern languor’ were never known to sit with folded hands when they could do a helping work—have already organized into a practical working association.” She called upon the women of the city, “whatever their race, nationality or sect,” not to be found “lacking.” The Exposition promised to have inestimable value to “the women of the South,” as it would show “the many ways a woman may earn money: new plans, new hopes, new energies.” Women would see what other women had done “and will learn what they may do themselves,” the *Picayune* reminded its readers.⁵⁷ This was the repeated message that journalists at the *Picayune* conveyed: look to see what among the exhibits you can do and begin to do it. There are new fields to explore. Work has nobility and dignity in it and is not to be eschewed, as do those who are too busy chasing gentility to pursue a day’s work for a day’s pay.

of the first entertainment and \$1979 from the other two events and from membership fees and contributions. See also, *Picayune*, January 16, 1885.

⁵⁷ For the forlorn condition of participants, see the *Picayune*, January 16, 1885; for needing help, see “The Woman’s Exposition Aid Association,” *Picayune*, February 15, 1885; for calling on the women of the city, see “WWW,” *Picayune*, January 25, 1885; for what women would learn, see the *Picayune*, January 16, 1885.

Several women of the newly formed Woman's Exposition Aid Association stepped up immediately; women of New Orleans were no strangers to benevolence.⁵⁸ One member contributed the services of a skilled carpenter for ten days; Mrs. Ava Hildenbrand, "the plucky little editor of the Gretna Courier," offered to do all the "job work" of the association, including the printing of tickets. One woman said that ladies only should manage the series of entertainments; another urged none to say "excuse me" when asked to use her talents. In their experienced manner, the women devised dues and promised to solicit more members. They elected officers; Mrs. R. M. Walmsley of the CWE was chosen as president pro tem. They formed ongoing executive and decorating committees and a temporary one to invite the Mexican Band to play at Howe's lecture. The women assessed the immediate needs of the Woman's Department: they needed money enough to purchase show cases, hire custodians, and even to "provide the necessary toilette rooms so badly needed for the ladies, and to pay for policing the department," the *Picayune* reported. The women of the new Association sold 1000 tickets for Howe's lecture.⁵⁹ Cole congratulated them for their selfless support and would later berate the President for forgetting their generosity. But for now, the evening was set.

⁵⁸ *Picayune*, January 10, 1885. In addition to CWE, WCTU, and the Art Union, women initiated many asylums for widows and orphans, including the Relief of Jewish Widows and Orphans, St. Anna's Asylum (Merrick's favorite charity), and others.

⁵⁹ For the band at Howe's lecture, see the *Picayune* February 3, 1885. The *Picayune* credited Maud Howe with engaging the band through her "personal solicitation." For the women selling tickets and a complete list of Lady Commissioners, see the *Picayune*, January 11, 1885.



*Julia Ward Howe, Frontispiece,
Richards and Elliott, Julia Ward Howe*

A Matter of Propriety

On a balmy Tuesday evening in mid-January 1885, Charles Gayarré, the “venerable historian” and famed white Creole, escorted tiny Julia Ward Howe to her seat on the platform at the Werlein Theatre in New Orleans. She had donned a

long black silk dress and, over her gray hair, a lace cap, an item she considered respectable for speaking and preaching and not as distracting as a perky bonnet. “The stage was prettily adorned with flags and tall plants, a grand piano was open at one side, a table covered with flowers immediately in the front and sofas in the rear.” The city’s “best people” filled the hall, “best in the sense of being the most refined, most cultivated and intellectual. It was Polite Society coming to hear itself criticized,” the *Times-Democrat* rhapsodized. First, long-haired, western poet Joaquin Miller recited his “The Fortunate Isles.” Then, Howe rose and, in a small voice, presented a lecture she had delivered many times in the Northeast: “Is Polite Society Polite?” In general, it was an anecdotal address that enumerated ways to treat neighbors, servants, family, and brief acquaintances. Howe recorded in her journal that she had been “very anxious” about the lecture that appeared to her “very homely for a Southern audience accustomed to rhetorical productions.” The reception she received, however, she judged “most gratifying.” She noted that the house was packed and many were sent away. “Every point of the lecture was perceived and

applauded,” she wrote, and she felt more than usual “in sympathy” with her audience.⁶⁰ The lecture raised about \$600.

Howe’s topic, “Is Polite Society Polite?” reflected a late-nineteenth-century preoccupation with propriety and presentation of self. As economic disparities in industrializing America restructured class, etiquette books divulged the secrets of social refinement that, if followed, might guide the *nouveau riche* and ambitious to distinguish themselves from the unapprised. World’s Fairs, as “universities,” could advance that process. Although that seemed at least a partial aim of Howe’s lecture, her talk meandered some and had thematic undertones of abolition and caste. Yet, New Orleans newspapers treated it civilly. The *Times-Democrat* reported that Howe named sincerity as the “true foundation of all politeness,” disparagement as the greatest sin against it, and courtesy as “more in the way of speaking *of* than speaking *to*.” Howe enumerated the ways that current “so-called polite society” set a lower standard of manners than in her youth, but she ended on a positive note, declaring that women “outside this charmed circle of fashion” were leading “nobler and better lives.” Nicholson told in her “Society Bee” column how several members of society at the event recalled similar incidents and expressed a disdain for fawning. The *Picayune* concluded that the lecture “dealt with the broad question of social offenses which are offenses against sincerity, generosity, and delicacy of heart,” and had stated in sum that “if one is tolerant, generous, respectful, modest, [and] reverent, one is polite.”⁶¹ It seemed a surprising choice of topic when so much had been written about

⁶⁰ “Mrs. Julia Ward Howe’s Lecture,” *Times-Democrat*, January 14, 1885; “Mrs. Howe’s Lecture,” *Picayune*, January 14, 1885; see also Howe Journal, January 13, 1885.

⁶¹ “Mrs. Julia Ward Howe’s Lecture,” *Times-Democrat*, January 14, 1885; “Society Bee,” *Picayune*, January 18, 1885; “Mrs. Howe’s Lecture,” *Picayune*, January 14, 1885. For a version of the full text of “Is Polite Society Polite,” see Julia Ward Howe, “*Is Polite Society Polite?*” *And Other Essays* (1895. Reprinted by Upper Saddle River, NJ: Literature House, 1970). For the expectation that World’s Fairs would socialize disparate people, see Brad J. Porfilio and Mike Watz,

Howe's own insults toward local women. Her audience was polite, but if she was professing a position of arbiter of etiquette, Cole and the *Mascot* would later remind her of the words she spoke on this occasion.

In an era also replete with conduct books and ladies' magazines offering advice, many of which were available in the literary nook of the Woman's Department, proper etiquette could move one to higher rungs in society, especially in newer communities not bound by tradition. Southern women, however, were less likely to look northward for manners than to their own chivalric roots, even if the myth of a protected "Southern Lady" was at odds with much of the reality of their post-Reconstruction lives.⁶² How then did New Orleans women establish new modes of conduct but retain what was good about the old? In addition to social mores that kept conduct in check, local society columnists inserted guidance amidst descriptions of social events and, in another category, Cole both guided and defended working women's demeanor in her "Woman's World and Work." Although the Crescent City's elite was influential, New Orleans was nevertheless a multi-cultural urban society with concurrent social codes that complicated behavior. The spotlight on the Woman's Department as a convergence of life experiences, regions, and generations amplified a concern with decorum, but Howe's presence also exacerbated sectional differences. As local newspapers traced the activities of participants in the

"Promoting Critical Literacy in Social Studies Classrooms: Guiding Students to the Neoliberal Ordering of Today's Social World," *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 1.2 (2008): 129-47.

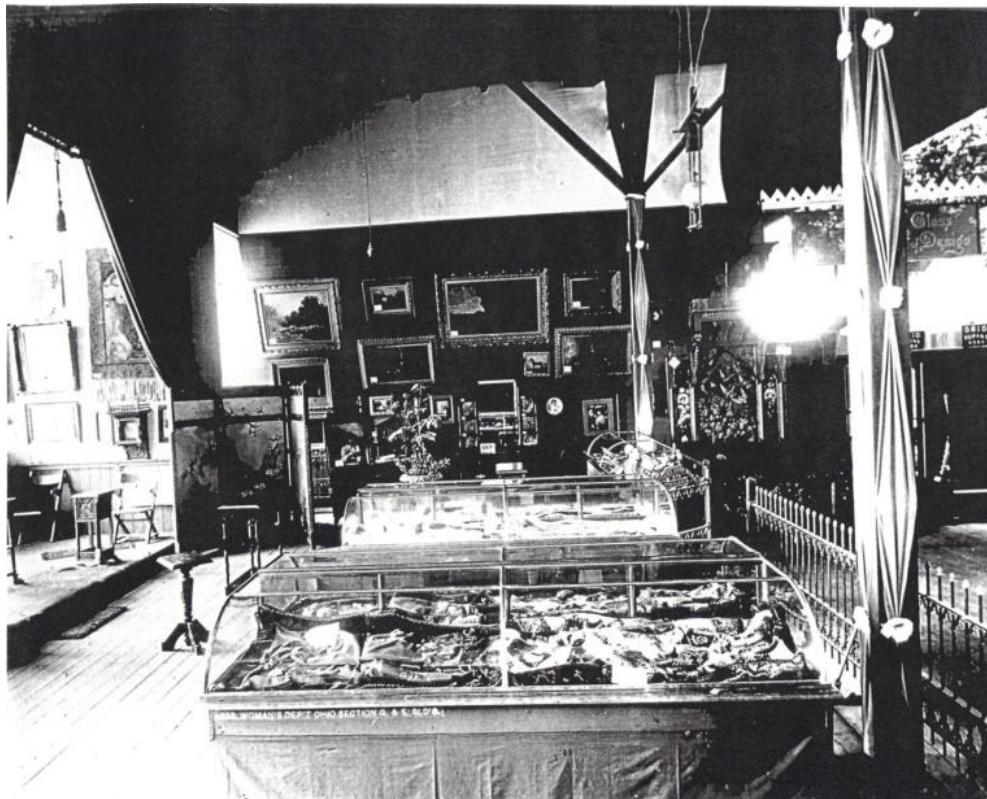
⁶² "Southern Lady" is as slippery a term in the spectrum of the South as is "Creole" in New Orleans. For some scholars who focus on ladyhood, see Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 16; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "'Scarlett O'Hara: The Southern Lady as New Woman,'" *American Quarterly* 33. 4 (1981): 391-411. Also informing these comments is Jane Turner Censer's study of elite women of North Carolina and Virginia in the historically neglected, transitional decades of the 1870s and 1880s, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood 1865-1895* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003).

Woman's Department, they also were participating in the redefinition of women's behavior, however minor, as agents in a public setting and apart from family. In that way, the department became a kind of Petri dish.

Overarching all of the Woman's Department's conflicts over comportment, management, and content of exhibits was the catastrophic dearth of funds. Yet even this great adversity seems to have produced some positive effects. Local women gained an opportunity to showcase their expertise in crafting success and to reaffirm their ability to lead. Howe might have proposed events, but local women executed them with confidence and power. The women learned again that they could not rely solely on the support of men and that their triumph had rested on women pulling together. They also realized they would have to work with Howe. They discovered that attributes of strong-mindedness and womanliness were not mutually exclusive, an important lesson for those who did not already know it. Furthermore, that realization helped to soften resistance to suffrage leaders and women activists of other causes. Doors were now ajar; the next phase of the Woman's Department would see portals to progress swing wide.

Bowers, Balmy Days, and Bailouts

It may be that here . . . she will say to herself,
‘I can do that. I can earn my living at that.’”
—*Picayune*¹



*Ohio Section,
Woman’s
Department,
The Historic
New Orleans
Collection,
1982.127.116*

As January of 1885 wore on, Julia Ward Howe, Catharine Cole, and other women preached that work was the new gospel of womanhood, that woman had the right and obligation to develop her skills and to seek advancement. To do so did not require them to reject gendered responsibilities or usurp men’s roles. Howe verbalized this wherever she was asked to speak on

¹ “World’s Exposition,” *Picayune*, February 11, 1885.

the grounds and in the community; Cole opined on it in print, especially with regard to wage-earning women outside the home. Meanwhile, the Exposition's widespread financial difficulty continued to impede the Woman's Department and the entire event. Yet, more and more women arrived with exhibits. Many from western states brought a pioneer spirit, and they adorned their spaces with grains and natural grasses. Their robust displays balanced the boudoir-like spaces that women of New England and the South were creating. All exhibits drew ample attention and, in their way, revealed the variety of work women were doing in their ordinary lives in urban or isolated places. How did women rise above financial woes and the strangeness of disparate experience to meld together and rally as before? Did the inclusion of western women diffuse sectional rhetoric between northern and southern participants? When the gloom lifted as Mardi Gras and balmy days brought crowds to the grounds, what was the tone in the Woman's Department? Would a public description of southern women as submissive give hearers comfort or shock, or did it present an opportunity to reexamine stereotypes and perhaps recalibrate them?

Work, the New Gospel of Womanhood

In her many public speeches, Howe referred to work as "the new gospel of womanhood," whether in domestic, industrial, or charitable spheres. Of the many extemporaneous and formal comments Howe offered during her stay, one of her favorite topics was the work accomplished by women's clubs. In addition, during her stay in New Orleans, Howe was a dedicated soldier for the good of the department and the Exposition, and she raised money for various benevolent groups. Mostly, she gave speeches as the representative woman at special events on the grounds. She was a willing and popular lecturer around town, telling especially of her beloved New England Woman's Club (NEWC), where she first found the comradeship of women. She drew large audiences; almost three hundred women gathered in the lecture room of Tulane University,

“many of them belonging to that noble sisterhood of workwomen,” the *Picayune* proclaimed. Members and friends of the Woman’s Club of New Orleans, formed in mid-1884, came to hear one “widely known as a working woman herself.” On that Wednesday evening, January 28, 1885, their “distinguished guest” imparted “words of wisdom, encouragement and womanly advice,” as the “Society Bee” confided. The mission of this local “young organization” was to influence and support working women and remained so even when it later welcomed non-working members. Bessie Bisland, the *Times-Democrat*’s literary editor, was the group’s president; Catharine Cole (that is, Martha Field) was an active leader. Cole hoped that as the New Orleans club grew in strength, it might do “such noble work as the building of workingmen’s homes, or sanitarium for the poor, sick children,” as did Howe’s club in Boston.²

Cole judged Howe’s performance at the Woman’s Club “brighter and more original and more entertaining” than her polished but uninspired first lecture on “Polite Society” that had raised money for the Woman’s Department. Cole had called that benefit lecture simply “admirable as an eloquent padding of the golden rule.” At the Woman’s Club, however, the speaker was “friendly, informal and delightful, so that each listener experienced all the charm of a conversation.” When Howe described the work of her dynamic New England Woman’s Club and its powerful publication, the *Woman’s Journal*, she outlined the range of accomplishments possible when women worked together as a force. She also “drifted off to talk of work for women, and spoke of the infinite variety of employments now common to them,” the *Picayune* reported. That was exactly what women wanted to hear and to have demonstrated in the

² On Howe and work, see the *Picayune*, January 29, 1885; at the Woman’s Club, see “Society Bee” *Picayune*, January 25, 1885; for Cole’s comments, see “Woman’s World and Work” (hereafter “WWW”) *Picayune* February 1, 1885. Unless otherwise indicated, all other newspaper references are from columns titled “World’s Exposition.”

Woman's Department. Howe highlighted work in medicine, law, ministry, and the trades, and she contended that "women were now finding out their latent value."³

Because Howe's own fulfillment had begun years earlier with a religious revelation that, as a child of God, she had a right and a command to develop her talents fully, she couched women's work in spiritual terms. Women were "learning to be true and faithful rather than foolish, and to know that on them depends the great uplifting of morality, the binding of society together, and that the great work of progress for women would go on and on to civilize." This surpassed the early nineteenth-century vision of domesticity's "angel of the house"; rather, it was slanted toward women in an industrial age. Howe's address to the Woman's Club brought frequent applause that sent her home, according to the *Picayune*, "rich in the possession of two or three hundred new friends."⁴ It was the kind of response that delighted Howe; furthermore, she would need friends when harsh censures began again.

³ "WWW," *Picayune*, February 1, 1885; "The Women's [sic] Club: Lecture by Julia Ward Howe at Tulane Hall," *Picayune*, January 29, 1885. At a point in her life when Howe felt dominated by her husband, her spiritual awakening in the Unitarian Church gave her personal freedom to develop autonomy as "a child of God."

⁴ "The Women's Club: Lecture by Julia Ward Howe at Tulane Hall," *Picayune*, January 29, 1885. Although women at the Cotton Centennial were proving they were capable of contributing to industry, one of the themes of the period was to question notions of womanhood. The Victorian feminine ideal and sentimental image of woman as the "angel in the house" was bound to the age of specialization and "separate spheres," with men in the marketplace and women at home. She was to be wife and mother, nurturer and guide to the next generation. Historian Barbara Welter uncovered so many incidences describing woman as domestic, pious, pure, and submissive that she labeled the tenets "The Cult of True Womanhood." Since the 1970s, however, feminist historians compared the veracity of women's experience to the ideal and found fewer adherences than originally thought. They revised the image. Other historians and linguists examined the rhetoric of the concepts and found them too glibly applied. To trace the scholarly debate, see Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18.2 (1966): 151-74; Gerda Lerner, ed., *The Female Experience: An American Documentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Aileen S. Kraditor, ed., *Up From the Pedestal: Selected Writings in the History of American Feminism* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968); Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996). For the turn toward rhetoric, see Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's

The social community was warming to the Bostonians' presence. Local women extended hospitality, and Howe also hosted small gatherings of interesting people, as she did regularly when in Boston or Newport. In relaxed settings, she could be charming company, playful in parlor games, and a good conversationalist. The *Picayune* happily reported a season of activity. Mrs. Richard Allen invited Howe and her daughter Maud for a weekend on the (Bayou) Lafourche. Judge and Mrs. Merrick entertained Howe at dinner. Young ladies feted Maud Howe; Mr. Shattuck honored her with a charming dinner followed by an opera party that he and his wife chaperoned. The Howes became visible at Mardi Gras festivities. Howe danced like a belle at Twelfth Night Revelers; Maud Howe graced a ball at the tony Pickwick Club wearing "graceful folds of creamy velvet, her wreath and garniture of ivory leaves." Howe, also fond of entertaining, gave a tea in late January, and even the city's flooded streets "did not hinder a pleasant gathering of the best social elements." Howe's gatherings also brought important literary figures together. At one of her later dinners, Howe would fete publisher Charles Dudley Warner and other friends. The occasion was fortuitous for Grace King, ambitious New Orleanian and aspiring writer. As a result, King gained a champion and mentor in Warner, well-known editor and *bon vivant* columnist of the *Hartford Courant*, who steered her career. The beginning of King's assent, then, came directly as a result of the Cotton Centennial Exposition and of her association with Julia Ward Howe.⁵

Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* 75.1 (1988): 9-39; Nancy A. Hewitt, "Taking the True Woman Hostage," *Journal of Women's History* 14.1 (2002): 156-62.

⁵ *Picayune* January 11, 1885. If the Howes traveled to Lafourche on the steamer *Assumption*, it would have cost them \$5 each for the round trip that included meals and staterooms, see advertisement in the *Times-Democrat* February 18, 1885. Many social occasions included Warner and/or Gilmer: for a January 20 dinner, see "Society Bee," *Picayune* January 25, 1885; for a January 18 occasion, see "Society Bee," *Picayune* January 25, 1885; see also

If Howe preached work as the gospel of womanhood, Catharine Cole lived it and wrote about it continuously. As a full-time professional writer, Cole was progressive, encouraging, and always informative in her weekly “Woman’s World and Work.” Every Sunday in the *Picayune*, she also used that column as a vehicle for her unconstrained opinions. In 1884 and 1885, nothing occupied Cole more than the Woman’s Department to which Eliza Nicholson assigned her. She poured into her column of February 22, 1885, all hope and expectation of what the department could be for the nation’s women. She labeled the Woman’s Department in New Orleans “a most magnetic force” and “our first hearing before the work, not as individual workers but as the women of the United States in the nineteenth century.” Although she acknowledged that women had participated in the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876, she nevertheless claimed that “this is the first time in the history of Expositions that woman has been accorded the full opportunity of giving proof of her power and her progress.” She added her voice to those of progressive women everywhere: “this is the woman’s century.” If a man “hurrahs in public just because he is a man,” women should do the same, she prodded. These now-public women should gather in the department “to rally like soldiers to their standard, to touch shoulders like soldiers marching into battle, to make friends” with each other, and “to show their pride in their own sex.” Cole might not claim the title “feminist,” but that is what she was. She saw women together

“Society Notes,” *Times-Democrat*, February 1, 8, 15, 1885; *Picayune*, April 12, 1885. King’s letters to her sister May are replete with how she captured Warner’s attention; correspondence between Warner and King indicates how he helped her place early stories with publishers. Letters suggest a mutual admiration between a determined, coquettish “southern belle” and a flattered, knowledgeable older man-about-town. Later, Warner also introduced King to his literary circle that included Mark Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe. The momentous dinner where Grace King met Warner occurred on Thursday, April 10, 1885. See Grace King Papers (MSS 1282), Louisiana State University Libraries Special Collections, Baton Rouge.

as a driving force, and she urged a Woman's Day to celebrate that. It would prove "the greatest congress of the world," she asserted.⁶

About Woman's Day as a declaration of woman's ability, Cole enumerated points she had long championed. She first suggested that skill rather than class was on display in the Woman's Department, insisting that the department drew "the best writers, the physicians, the teachers, the scientific women, the missionaries, the women of fashion, as well as the sunbonneted wife of the laborer." In keeping with the theme of the Exposition, she declared that women wanted to "forget geographical limits, and talk not of the women of the North or of the South, of the West or East, but of the women of the United States, made more than sisters by one common cause." That cause was to prove what women could do. She wanted the Woman's Department to inspire women "not to rest contented with cheap joys," but "to accomplish some telling work, either at the home hearth or out in the world." The work should not be judged as 'very good *for women*'; that kind of "qualified approval has gone never to return," Cole contended. No "sex distinction" should be placed on work, "although it is undoubtedly true that as yet the genius of woman has been directed into certain familiar grooves."⁷ Those familiar grooves, however, would be challenged during the course of the coming months.

For Cole, the "chief advantage" of the Woman's Department was that it could suggest "new remunerative employments." Not in the literary department or through inventions, unless a

⁶ *Picayune*, February 22, 1885. The idea of a congress came to greatest fruition at a World's Fair with the famous Congress of Women at the Columbian Exposition in 1893. Cole spoke there advising, "Come South, Young Woman," see Mary Kavanaugh Oldham Eagle, ed., *Congress of Women, held in the Woman's Building, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893* (Philadelphia: International Publishing Company, 1895; Google digitized book): 776-81.

⁷ *Picayune*, February 22, 1885.

woman had a talent for these, she declared, and not in the inspection of painted pictures or needlework already "natural to a woman." Instead, an "alert woman" would look for examples of what women were doing as factory laborers, office workers, designers, farmers, and artisans. On the whole, however, Cole found the Woman's Department "deficient" in the practical. If it was going to show typewritten pages as evidence of woman's ability, it should show how to use the "type-writing machine"; if it was going to declare how many women were post-office clerks, it should give the answers to the examination that a woman would need to pass in order to attain such a position. If an exhibitor was going to show preserves and pickles, crazy quilts, sofa cushions, and painted plaques, it would be "more interesting still to know just how many of these lady exhibitors earn *a living* by making these very pretty things." As a model working woman herself, Cole maintained that the "woman of to-day, particularly the Southern woman, wants to become acquainted with employments that are to be acquired through study and perseverance."⁸ No one understood better than Cole the plight of a wage-earning woman.

Cole could reach the core of a matter in a few sentences. As she described the skill of the "intelligent newspaper woman," she illustrated with her writing that "faculty of seizing facts and swiftly chaining them down in the black and white of printer's ink [with] a careful eye to detail." Cole declared the Exposition a "world's university," as others had done, and added the specifics: that it was for the instruction of all peoples; that visitors would learn new and better methods in agriculture, commerce, manufacturing, mining, and "the arts of life"; that they would see opportunities to improve their industries and develop resources in order to turn out finer products, find new markets, and generate more capital. Especially women would glimpse "what others have done in various industries, often in the face of greater difficulties" than those

⁸ "WWW," *Picayune*, February 15, 1885.

southern women experienced, and they would learn of enterprises “not previously dreamed of.” Cole wrote that “This, after all, is the grand object of the World’s Fair, which is not merely a curiosity shop in which to show off premium pumpkins, astounding crazy quilts and general bric-a-brac” but to raise awareness and foster hope for a better future.⁹ None of the *Times-Democrat*’s flowery phrases and hyperbolic descriptions captured the significance of the entire Exposition as well as did her prose. Cole could create far-reaching prospects with her pen, but she could also use it as a rapier when provoked. Howe would feel its sharpness by Easter, but in January and February, cooperation still reigned in the Woman’s Department.

The Displays

Despite financial constraints, the Woman’s Department continued to take shape, and local journalists assigned to cover the exhibits did so generously. To reach the department on the gallery of the Government Building, a visitor crossed fourteen acres of artifacts and services of the federal government (in the center of the building, under a bank of skylights) surrounded by curious and preposterous arrays of natural resources and products from forty-four states. Finally then, a visitor would the staircase to a sea of women’s work. Exhibits from women of New England occupied “a large space at the head of the left flight of stairs, going up into the Woman’s Department,” as the *Times-Democrat* told. Needlework both dainty and frivolous filled the outside portion of the gallery, much of it from leisured hands. Occupying the center of the department was the “rose-colored bower” of the Christian Woman’s Exchange, an honored

⁹ “WWW,” *Picayune*, February 15, 1885; *Picayune*, February 10, 1885. Although there is no byline on this piece, it immediately follows Cole’s description of the Woman’s Department and is indicative of her impeccable style.

location rewarding the organization's early support. Next to that space was the Temperance Pavilion, replete with banners, flags, frills, and a raised platform.¹⁰

Several graceful alcoves held items of special interest. Art reigned in one of these, surrounded by cream-colored pongee curtains, "stained glass windows, flowers, and graceful lace draperies at windows." Literary and Scientific nooks in the care of Miss Maud Howe and Mrs. Evelyn Ordway, respectively, shared a long, narrow alcove, its "pretty arched window daintily draped with screen curtains." Maud Howe placed books on open shelves arranged by states, and over her desk, she hung a group of portraits of "Eminent Women," the "next best thing to having the authors there in person," the *Picayune* asserted. A dainty woman's desk filled one space and a "wide work-a-day table" another. The Literary Department was a "quiet and peaceful place of repose" with potted plants softening the corners. Nearby in the patent department, excitement reigned, as dual-purpose and ingenious space-saving household inventions arrived: a combined commode and dressing case, a combined kitchen table and ironing board, a pie-lifter, a portable kiln, a controllable beehive. More industrial items included a cistern spout trap, a flexible halter for hitching horses, new draft flues on a section of a brick chimney, and a machine for cutting books.¹¹

Exhibits of women's work arrived well into February, almost two months after the Exposition opened, and reporters captured the various displays "from the iron chain to the finest laces." The Tennessee space near the Literary alcove was "dainty and inviting," and overflowed with art and portraits. The *Picayune* called it "one of the popular places of resort for Southern women" with its pale blue and white lace curtains draping the central pavilion and pulled back

¹⁰ *Times-Democrat*, February 28, 1885.

¹¹ *Picayune*, February 12, 1885.

into “fanlike” shapes over arched separations that divided Tennessee from other states. On the other hand, Rhode Island emphasized woman’s role in industry, showing 11,400 spools from the Rhode Island Thread Works and products from Bannister Button Manufactory, Goff’s Braid Manufacturing Company, and Slater Stocking Works, where labor was done entirely or mainly by women and girls. The Dakota Territory exhibit was like no other, the *Times-Democrat* declared, with its “predominance of grains, grasses and birds.” Pennsylvania brought “one of the most unusual exhibits in the entire Exposition”—silk culture—and began placing it in the north end of the gallery beyond displays from the Northwestern States. The *Picayune* recommended that drawings and designs from Pennsylvania’s School of Industrial Arts “should be examined by every woman and young girl in that wretched state of indecision when she is asking herself what she shall do for a living and how she shall use her life. It may be that here she will find the answer, and . . . will say to herself, ‘I can do that. I can earn my living at that.’”¹² It was exactly what Catharine Cole hoped the Woman’s Department would accomplish.

Cole noted the various displays from Louisiana women. Those exhibiting with the state on the lower floor of the Government building showed their items “against turkey red walls,” on screens, and in showcases. Cole assessed their origin with “house-keeping women bending over their embroidery frames, or in happy perplexity over the colors for a wreath of hand painted flowers.” It was a rather back-handed compliment for the quilts and pillow shams, afghans and toilette covers, and other such everyday handwork, probably from Baton Rouge and smaller towns around the state. The display included a “picture of a colored woman” who had “been decorated by the French Government with a medal of honor for her services to the [local] Soniat

¹² For the Tennessee exhibit, see the *Times-Democrat*, February 6, 1885; for the Rhode Island exhibit, see the *Times-Democrat*, February 9, 1885; for the Dakota and Pennsylvania exhibits, see the *Picayune*, February 11, 1885.

family.” Louisiana ladies also made a twelve-foot-square quilt “in the shape of a magnificent and gigantic map of the State” with various parishes in colored satin, embroidered with pertinent “pictorial representations.” In the Woman’s Department, in addition to the Exchange’s central space, Louisiana women created a “striking feature” of “beautiful work made by aged women” in their 80s. Because the Louisiana Historical Society’s display was elsewhere, Mexican women occupied the alcove originally allotted for Louisiana in the Woman’s Department, an action “much applauded,” this foreign display giving the department a trace of the international.¹³

As spaces in the Woman’s Department began to look complete, fund-raising efforts to cover expenses continued. At last, the office of the Superintendent and Secretary (Given and Auzé) was carpeted, a stove was in place, and the room became “quite cozy” and a place where visitors were made “heartily welcome.” To raise additional funds, her Majesty’s Opera Company gave a benefit concert that the *Picayune* declared a “social and financial success.” But, the newspaper reported, there were still no toilette rooms in the building, and ladies were “rightly and justly indignant at such absolute and criminal indifference to their health and comfort.” Tempers flared, and among some local women, covert sectional rumblings apparently continued. On February 10, 1885, an unidentified New Orleanian wrote Eliza Nicholson urging the publisher’s presence at a meeting at the St. Charles Hotel “apropos of the Woman’s Day at the Exposition” and begging the influence of her paper, the *Picayune*. The woman asked Nicholson

¹³ Turkey red refers to a complicated, therefore expensive, dye process that produced a luscious color highly prized in the nineteenth century, especially by quilters. For description of the Louisiana display, see the *Picayune*, January 16, 1885; for the quilt, see “World’s Exposition: A Map of Louisiana,” *Picayune*, February 2, 1885; for the Exchange’s space, see “WWW,” *Picayune*, February 1, 1885; for space for a Mexican exhibit, see the *Picayune*, January 30, 1885. Miss Halleran (“Clara Bridgeman”) urged Mexican representatives to place a Mexican exhibit in the Woman’s Department. The *Picayune* declared that Halleran “corresponded all summer with Mrs. Secretary Auze [sic],” confirming that New Orleans women were soliciting exhibits long before management appointed Howe. *Picayune* February 10, 1885.

to write an editorial about Woman's Day "which we are all desirous of making a great success, for every reason." The "underlying thought" to make the day a huge success, she confided, was "to out-do old Julia Ward Howe and her clique of Boston women!"¹⁴ At the least, Howe's presidency galvanized local women, keeping factionalism to a minimum, and motivated them to show what southern women could do.

Publicly, women affirmed Howe's leadership. Lady Commissioners met to endorse her management and express confidence in her leadership by issuing a formal Resolution. The women acknowledged "the difficulties of her position" and "her strict adherence to duty, her high sense of honor and her devotion to the work" in a "manner gentle, winning and impressive that allowed the department to overcome many of the obstacles found in its way." The resolution was "furnished the Associated Press for publication throughout the country." The *Times-Democrat* published the formal document and a return "Letter of Thanks" from Howe expressing "great obligations" to many friends for "united efforts" and to the management of the *Times-Democrat* for "frequent mention and generous commendation of our undertaking."¹⁵

According to the *Picayune*, this Resolution was "not an expression of a shaky condition of affairs in the woman's department, as some might suppose." Howe had the support of the State Commissioner and was in harmony with all of the women, the paper claimed. Then the reporter (probably Cole) claimed, with a barb, that Howe "is held in the highest esteem by the few Southern women who have places on her board of management." The journalist applauded

¹⁴ For offices ready, see the *Picayune*, January 23, 1885; for the benefit concert, see the *Times-Democrat*, February 4, 8, 1885; for no toilette rooms, see the *Picayune*, January 20, 1885; for letter, see (unknown) to Eliza Nicholson, February 10, 1885 (final pages missing), Nicholson (Mss 219, Box 1, folder 134) The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA.

¹⁵ For the resolution, see the *Times-Democrat*, February 6, 1885, *Picayune*, February 5, 1885; for Howe's letter of thanks, see the *Times-Democrat*, February 8, 1885.

the “inestimable value of the pioneer work that Auzé and Given had achieved” that offered Howe, when she arrived, “willing, friendly, enthusiastic support from the Southern women and their two representatives, and it is good to be able to record how that support has been received.”¹⁶ Received poorly was, of course, the implication.

Cole also made pertinent observations about what was missing in the department. Ignoring the fact that the work of factory women was scattered among general exhibits everywhere, Cole complained that these workers were “scarcely represented at all.” Like critics before her, she wanted to see professional products in the Woman’s Department made by women who earned a living with their labor, not “the amateur work” of hand-painted dainty teacups and saucers. It was “curious to note that not a single dressmaker or milliner” was represented. “There is not a dress nor a bonnet,” she complained, and added: “Somebody suggests that such was debarred as smacking of advertisement, but this can hardly be true. Exhibitors from all over the world have taken part in this Exposition in order to advertise their goods, and there are many other exhibits in the Woman’s Department that advertise their exhibitors quite as much as a beautiful dress would a dressmaker.” Cole thought it did not look well that “not one New Orleans modiste, or from any other city” took the trouble to send “specimens of her art” to the department, an art so highly valued and so much a part of a woman’s self-presentation.¹⁷

The Proverbial Financial Woes

As exhibits drew attention, the Woman’s Department still needed money, as did other departments of this elaborate affair. Any state that had not already drawn what had been

¹⁶ *Picayune*, February 5, 1885.

¹⁷ *Picayune* February 11, 10, 1885.

designated for exhibits forfeited the balance, because there were no longer any funds from which to draw. Still, the newspapers, exhibitors, and commissioners waited for Director-General E. A. Burke to release the promised statement of financial account. To solve the needs of the Woman's Department, the Woman's Exposition Aid Society continued to meet. Members of this temporary Society sought to devise a scheme to raise \$3000 in a day. The *Picayune* recorded the proposals and made suggestions of its own. Howe told the group that "in her part of the world women were used to assume great responsibilities" and had raised \$350,000 to save the old South Church of Boston. She assumed the same spirit existed in New Orleans, shown by the fine audience at her lecture. Eliza Nicholson, in her *Picayune*'s "Society Bee," suggested other ways. Her ideas mirrored popular pastimes of elite women: a calico ball, "private theatricals and tableaux." A "prominent society woman pleads for lectures," the "Society Bee" intoned, "but we are not a lecture loving people; the climate is not sufficiently stimulating for such demands upon our attention." She observed that the "large audience that greeted Mrs. Howe, assembled to do honor to that estimable lady, and not because their souls yearned for lectures." In languid tones, Nicholson advised: "The spring weather that will so soon be upon us will incline us to take life easily; we wish to be amused."¹⁸

Fundraising suggestions proliferated and reflected the interests of those who presented them. Mrs. Erminine A. Smith, attaché to the United States Bureau of Ethnology, offered a benefit lecture on the French Catholic Indian Missions of Quebec. Mary Ashley Townsend donated 1000 printed pamphlets of her Centennial Poem read at opening day ceremonies. A "brilliant group of Creole and American ladies" of New Orleans created a *tea dansante*. Mrs. R.

¹⁸ For demanding Burke's accounting, see the *Picayune*, January 20, 1885; for Howe's proposal, see the *Picayune*, January 18, 1885; for Nicholson's proposal, see "Society Bee," *Picayune*, January 18, 1885; for Nicholson's assessment of Howe's audience, see the "Society Bee," *Picayune*, February 1, 1885.

M. Walmsley, president of the Woman's Exposition Aid Society and the Christian Woman's Exchange, expressed her desire that, in the Woman's Department, "all the women in the land should rise to prove to the world the vast strides made by them in all avenues of work . . . how much broader are the fields . . . since the exhibit of '76, and how varied are her opportunities."¹⁹ Because local attendance in the department remained lackluster at the end of January, 1885, Catharine Cole pushed for the designated Woman's Day to draw crowds and stir local enthusiasm and support.¹⁹

Even before enough money was secured, contrary opinions surfaced about how it should be spent. Howe told the Woman's Exposition Aid Society that lady exhibitors had difficulty getting (male) Commissioners or legislators to apportion funds so they could represent their states, that they had expected the fair's management to pay their expenses, and now they were "left without means to go home." Howe claimed that she herself had received only a "small amount of money from the Exposition treasury" and that states would have to make a statement about the Exposition funds they received to aid women's work. She wanted only that the stranded women receive at least return fare to their homes. Local staff workers Auzé and Given had other priorities. They thought immediate needs of the department should be funded: the need to install exhibits and outfit offices, to pay New Orleans women hired as custodians for the displays, and to engage a small security force to protect women's treasures. And there remained the matter of "no sanitary or toilet arrangements." The *Picayune* explained the women's plight.

¹⁹ For Erminine Smith's offer, see the *Picayune*, February 20, 1885. The *Times-Democrat* wrote that Smith was "well-known in scientific and literary circles" and spoke seven dialects of Iroquois. *Times-Democrat*, December 25, 1884. When she did speak, the *Picayune* lamented that this "young-looking lady, tall and prepossessing in appearance, her manner characterized by a most gracious and winning lack of affectation" had digressed and "had not confined her talk wholly to the Indians, their life, manner and customs." *Picayune*, February 22, 1885. For suggestions from Townsend, Walmsley, and Cole, see the *Picayune*, February 1, 1885.

“At the moment the Management was lamentably pressed for money, and the ladies had forbore to bother them” but now “something must be done by the women to remedy these needs.” When the third benefit was complete and the women had raised \$1979, the Woman’s Exposition Aid Association turned the amount over to Howe and formally disbanded. It was clear that the Exposition’s financial condition—the *Mascot* called it mismanagement—was impeding progress in the Woman’s Department and adding to stress among the women involved.²⁰

The Exposition’s financial problems were becoming obvious to all; the *Picayune* now joined the *Mascot*’s regular demands for an accounting of funds expended. Imagine the women’s shock, however, when the *Picayune* reported that Director-General Burke claimed “that the sum of \$50,000 never was set aside for the Woman’s Department and that he never said so.” Burke’s own *Times-Democrat* had trumpeted that amount in its hyperbolic depiction of opening day, December 16, 1884, but from the outset, the *Mascot* had accused Burke and his collaborators of mismanagement. Now it labeled the Exposition “The Great Failure” that sent the “high and lofty crowned heads of the greatest show on earth” in great supplication to Congress for deliverance. “Yes, the crisis has come!” the satirical paper proclaimed, the “result of undeniable failure” of the Exposition Company. Management had not kept faith with the people. “They secluded themselves behind the screen of compatibility of interest,” but once forced to show their hand, “they can give us nothing but vaporizing stuff that a small boy would refuse to believe.” The *Mascot* ranted that there was “more indebtedness than the entire receipts” of the Exposition

²⁰ For Howe’s opinion for use of the money, see the *Picayune*, February 5, 1885; for other opinions, see the *Picayune*, February 20, 1885 and “Society Bee,” *Picayune*, January 25, 1885. Proceeds from a Creole concert were \$203 before expenses. For offices without carpets, curtains, stoves, or inkstands, see the *Picayune*, February 1, 1885; for the need for toilet arrangements, see also the *Picayune*, January 18, 31, 1885; for the benefit receipts, see the *Times-Democrat*, February 15, 1885.

would ever be able to pay. The tabloid castigated a “mismanagement that has stultified a public enterprise to its private purposes.” The Exposition could never be a success, the paper claimed, “as long as it is doctored by the quacks who have been self-appointed to regulate its system.”²¹ The *Mascot*’s editors had never minced words. Although women could ill afford to be as trenchant, they publicly worried over how they would fare.

By February 5, 1885, less than two months after the Exposition opened, a shrewd E. A. Burke was putting together a committee to go begging in Washington for another subsidy. Julia Ward Howe was one of the individuals that Burke asked (as he did of various groups) to write a letter to her Congressmen in support of his new mission. Her actions, through a set of circuitous circumstances, rescued the Woman’s Department finances, but only after the event closed. In the meantime, the *Mascot* opined that people of the city were “tired, sick and disgusted with the management” Burke had fostered. Thus, it claimed that citizens would get behind any movement that transferred the whole thing to the Federal Government.²² The scandal-busting tabloid had repeatedly fingered Burke as a villainous politician in league with the local machine, the “Ring.” Whether or not he was as corrupt as the *Mascot* painted him, one thing was clear. With E. A. Burke directing the course of the Exposition, the plot would have more intrigue than a five-act melodrama.

In a way, “Major” Burke was like the tugboat that Captain James Eads named for him. As the *Times-Democrat* told it, the *E.A. Burke*, a brand new tug, was to be the largest and most powerful in the harbor, but on her maiden voyage from Philadelphia to New Orleans, a storm pounded her bottom with a violent force that might have wrecked other boats. The hull of the

²¹ For the money set aside, see the *Picayune*, February 5, 1885; for indebtedness, see the *Mascot*, January 24, 31, 1885.

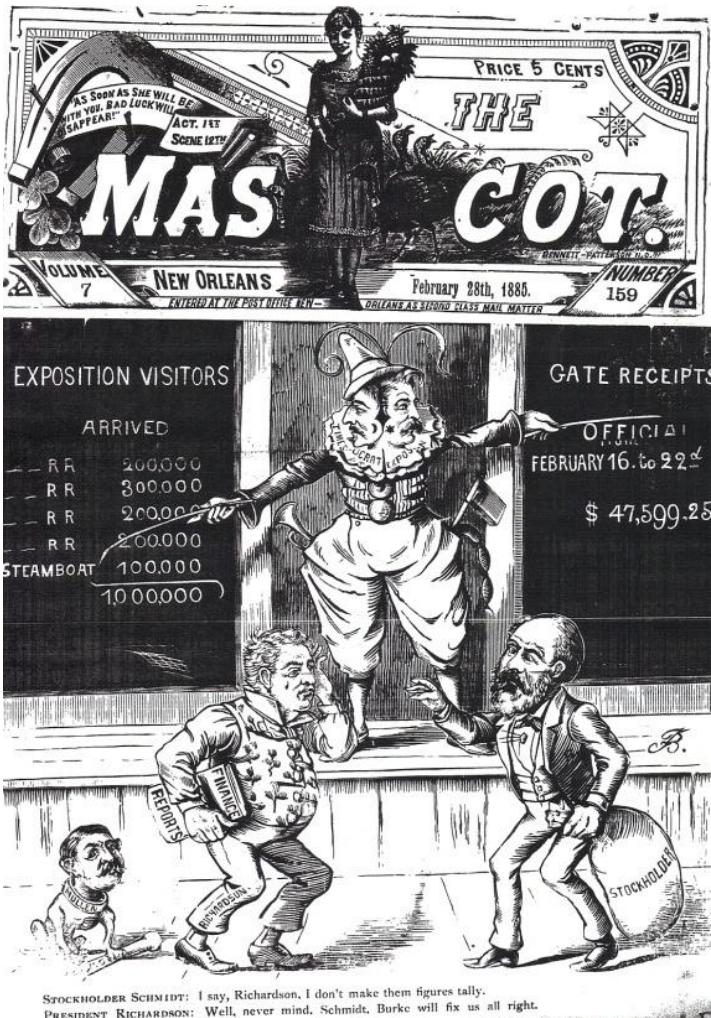
²² *Times-Democrat*, February 5, 1885; *Mascot* January 24, 1885.

E. A. Burke, however, was plated with steel, like this “Iron Man” of the Exposition. The *Burke* arrived in New Orleans just four days later than a usual trip but with such severe damage that she had to be consigned immediately to dry dock (on the other side of the river) for long-term repairs.²³ Burke’s trip to Washington brought a similarly skewed result. Like the tug, he had begun in impressive grandeur but was now in tempestuous times and needed salvaging. He would get his loan, but less than he wanted, and the distribution of those funds was instantly removed from his control. The women had more success. A letter Howe wrote to Bostonians begging for private donations crossed her communiqué on behalf of Burke’s mission and landed in the hands of Massachusetts Senator George F. Hoar. He was in a position to attach \$15,000 onto the congressional appropriation for Burke and to designate it specifically for the Woman’s Department. Thus, eventually, he and Howe redeemed the Woman’s Department’s financial woes.

The Gloom Begins to Lift

The gloom over the Exposition and in the Woman’s Department was beginning to lift, but first Director-General Burke finally explained the finances that had caused woe for women and other exhibitors. Of the Woman’s Department, Cole wrote that almost complete harmony prevailed. “Tempers have improved along with the weather, and if there were only a few carpenters the work would go on swimmingly.” The *Times-Democrat* wrote that the weather was finally bright and at last “attendance was immense,” the most prosperous to date. The increase was perfectly timed with Burke’s departure for Congress seeking money to keep the Exposition

²³ “The E. A. Burke,” *Times-Democrat*, February 9, 1885. Eads was famous for channeling the Mississippi with jetties. For descriptions and measurements of the ship, see the *Times-Democrat* February 10, 1885. In addition to the ship, Burke received other accolades during the course of the Exposition: a portrait, a musical composition, and more.



open. However, the *Mascot* remained highly suspicious of Burke's long-awaited account addressed "To the President" that showed Receipts and Expenditures too perfectly balanced to suit the tabloid, and its cartoon told the story.

*"Stockholder Schmidt: I say, Richardson, I don't make them figures tally.
President Richardson: Well, never mind, Schmidt, Burke will fix us all right,"*

Mascot, February 28, 1885.

Burke's apologia to the President enumerated the many countries and businesses that had

clamored to be a part of the Exposition, so had caused the event to expand enormously. His report also provided a detailed account of buildings and sizes; it listed the square footage of the Department of Woman's Work at 35,400, the Colored Department at 22,600, and the Educational Department at 58,000. An accompanying editorial in the *Times-Democrat* claimed the report was "in brief and concise form, the history of the enterprise—what has been done and what remains to be done."²⁴

²⁴ For harmony, see the *Picayune*, February 3, 1885. With the same kind of inflated figures that characterized the event, he claimed to have turned away 1200 exhibitors for lack of space. His report was probably accurate in its claim to have "done much" with a meager \$2 million when the Philadelphia Centennial had spent three times as much. It also related how

Newspapers regularly linked attendance to the weather; spirits also rose and sank with the temperature. It was convenient to blame poor attendance on “cold, bleak and overcast” weather and a cutting, gusty wind “that found its way everywhere” in buildings without insulation. Although there had been glimpses of spring, overnight the weather could just as easily change forty-five degrees back to midwinter, and women who expected the South to offer a balmy setting shivered in light clothing they brought from their home states. Gigantic icicles hung from the pipes of fountains at the same time that flower-beds bloomed in bright colors, making the spectacle “strange in the extreme.” Only women’s tempers heated up as Lady Commissioners were as indignant as were other exhibitors at management’s inability to furnish simple identification passes so they could enter the grounds without harassment. Male exhibitors stormed the gates, women complained less forcefully, but Burke and the *Times-Democrat* maintained a happy countenance. However, his declarations that the Exposition was ready turned to excuses, and words like “not yet delivered,” and “delay” began to creep in. Cracks in the façade were evident now, and the *Mascot* deflated the *Times-Democrat*’s rhetorical flourishes.²⁵

When the weather was cold and stormy, however, visitors were more likely to spend time in the “bright and sunny home-like library” that Maud Howe created. As an author herself, she had great love and respect for the books that filled the shelves. Publishers and writers were responding generously to her requests for donations, especially when she proposed that the books be given to a New Orleans library at the end of the Exposition. Some writers even added their famous autographs. Nevertheless, Cole found something to complain about in the literary nook:

exhibits arrived just as staple crops were being shipped, causing an unavoidable blockage and delay, and it told of “a constant succession of storms that frightened people from the grounds.” *Times-Democrat*, February 8, 1885.

²⁵ *Times-Democrat*, February 12, 1885; for unhappy exhibitors, see the *Picayune*, February 12, 1885.

an “ugly gray eruption of signs” that appeared on the shelves: “Do not handle these books”; “For sale”; “Please do not touch”; and more. But Cole wrote that the “handsome chief” smiled forgiveness for “trespasses,” as “pretty volumes” and radical ones passed through the hands of visitors. Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island had sent the greatest number of books; Texas had sent only two, Louisiana only four. Cole assumed “the moral of this” was that well-known writers were yet to send their works. Although the literary alcove held only five-hundred volumes by mid-February (mainly novels, children’s stories, travel tales, essays, and magazines and newspapers edited or owned by women), there would be at least fourteen hundred volumes when Maud Howe donated them to the Southern Art Union at the end of the Exposition.²⁶ Women had begun to browse the shelves, and visitors increased, especially as the city’s Carnival season moved into full swing.

New Orleans was taking on a festive appearance, and the Exposition and Woman’s Department benefitted from the increase of visitors, now called tourists. Just in time, the *Picayune* declared, “the great show” was nearly complete in all departments. The temperature was fair and warm, and management extended viewing hours, illuminating the grounds until 10 o’clock p.m. Visitors could walk the miles of aisles from 8 a.m. until 9:30 p.m.²⁷ Commissioners

²⁶ *Picayune*, February 12, 1885. Books from each state were listed in the *Report and Catalogue of the Woman’s Department of the World’s Exposition, Held at New Orleans, 1884-1885* (Boston: Rand, Avery, 1885), 188-214.

²⁷ *Times-Democrat*, February 18, 1885. The *Picayune* explained the marvel of the electric lights, because they were an innovation. To light the lights, for example, five different companies “worked under the same general principle”: friction passing through “multiple coils of wire” with generators worked by steam power. The Brush Company of Cincinnati used five dynamos to power 325 arc lights in the Government Building. The other companies were Edison of New York with 6000 incandescent lights in the Music Hall, 1200 in the Art Gallery and in offices in the Main Building. The Louisiana Electric Light Company hung 750 arc lights and five 26,000-candle-power to light the entrances of the Main Building; the Jenney Electric Light Company of Fort Wayne supplied 240 arc lights for the 6 towers, which were 125 feet high, bearing 9 lights each; and the Thompson-Houston company of Boston placed 100 lights in Horticultural Hall and

became excited about the approaching Carnival and wondered if, as “perfect strangers,” they would be invited to exclusive Mardi Gras balls. Now the local elite population was in a position to extend Carnival *noblesse oblige*. Julia Ward Howe and daughter Maud had already been included, and the *Picayune* assured others that they would have access to “all facilities for viewing the Carnival festivities in comfort.” The Exposition might be the “World’s University,” but the *Picayune* called Mardi Gras “an immense kindergarten” that would “edify and enlighten all classes.”²⁸

Early spring weather and the appearance of Rex, the King of Carnival, in the Exposition’s Music Hall created a minor boom in attendance. On Shrove Monday, February 16, the day before Mardi Gras, the “royal fleet” of Rex arrived with flags and streamers furling to the same wharf where Howe and the women had alighted on opening day of the Exposition. However, even the most elegant woman would on this day be outshone by the splendor of this King as Charles VII of France. His blue satin tunic embroidered in gold was bound with a crimson velvet belt and

the machinery annex. The Daft Electric Lights Company worked one dynamo for the electric railroad on the grounds. The newspaper also attempted to answer the question “What is Mardi Gras?” for visitors unfamiliar with Shrove Tuesday in the “gay Latin-American city.” *Picayune*, February 14, 1885.

²⁸ For Mardi Gras, see the *Picayune*, February 10, 1885. The *Picayune* wrote: “Shrovetide in Anglo-Saxon signified ‘confession-time,’ the season of preparation for the penitential period of Lent.” In countries with large Latin populations, the day preceding Fat Tuesday is also celebrated as a great festival. In New Orleans, Mardi Gras “originated with the Creoles and French residents” who adopted from Paris a day of “indiscriminate masquerading.” By 1827, “grotesque bands of maskers paraded the streets; in 1857, the first of the secret societies (Mystick Krewe of Comus) began, followed by other elite “kindred secret associations” as well as the humorous Phunny Phorty Phellows. “Only since the war have the displays been systematized and grown into the grand pageants which have delighted all spectators” and are “known throughout this country and Europe.” They exerted “a powerful influence from an educational and literary standpoint,” as they brought together not only “the works of the historian, the novelist, the poet, but also from scientific sources.” They were a “system of object teaching on a vast scale.” See “The Carnival,” *Picayune*, February 16, 1885.

enhanced by a mantle of light blue velvet with gold embroidery, bordered with ermine and topped with an additional caplet of white fur. His crown was gem-laden; he had gauntlets and a sword, and he rode a white Andalusian horse with housings of purple. Local newspapers described every detail: how distinguished guests greeted him and how throngs lined every walk and lawn and clustered under every spreading live oak. The Mexican band played the ubiquitous “imperial anthem,” “If Ever I Cease to Love,” then played “Dixie,” “Yankee Doodle,” and other tunes. Inside the buildings, “processions of sight-seers marched up and down every aisle in every department” before they crowded into the Music Hall “from floor to roof” to see Rex mount his “magnificent throne.” The *Picayune* wrote that the King sat under a canopy hung with royal colors of purple, green, and gold that bore aloft “an enormous gemmed and gilded crown.” In uncharacteristic style, “ladies on the outskirts of the crowd stood on boxes, ladders and every possible point that could form a perch.” Julia Ward Howe and the Lady Commissioners surely occupied some of the “thousand seats in the front part of the auditorium, reserved for distinguished visitors.” Despite a “loud uproar of cheers and wild applause,” Rex maintained order and received “fair ladies” and gentlemen for several hours. In the kind of rhetorical pomp that lingers to this day, the *Picayune* wrote, “Then the curtains were closed, the wonderful pageant was shut out of sight, and the King and his Court, with its vast following, melted mysteriously away.”²⁹

Although the *Times-Democrat* noted that Exposition was “almost entirely neglected” the next day, Mardi Gras, the crowds continued as the mild-weathered days set in. On Tuesday, February 17, 1885, a day “soft and sweet and balmy,” the great crowd was downtown where the

²⁹ *Picayune*, February 20, 17, 1885. In New Orleans, the spectacle of Rex’s arrival by boat the day before Mardi Gras, Lundi Gras, is now revived and celebrated with festivities in Spanish Plaza at the Mississippi River. About the day preceding Mardi Gras, also see *Times-Democrat*, February 17, 1885.

Krewe of Rex rolled along the five-mile route. A “swaying mass” of men, women, and children, “rich and poor, native and stranger,” witnessed the King’s procession. The *Times-Democrat* made certain that readers understood the tribute Rex paid the Exposition. In a role as King of Industries, female figures of Agriculture, Trade, Navigation, and Mining surrounded him on his mule-drawn float.³⁰ People who swarmed the city streets on Mardi Gras crowded Exposition grounds on following days, days “warm with luxurious sunlight, and mellow with southern breezes.” The *Picayune* claimed that visitors blocked every entrance, jammed all the avenues and walks, and spread out “like a vast wave over the entire area, filling the [buildings] in every available spot” to witness “the collected wonders of the world.”³¹ The *Times-Democrat* claimed that the crowds were “reward enough for all the disappointment and depression of the first weeks

³⁰ *Times-Democrat*, February 17, 1885; *Picayune*, February 17, 1885. The *Times-Democrat* reported that “it was the largest crowd that New Orleans [had] ever seen on any occasion.” The *Picayune* reported there were fewer “promiscuous maskers” than usual, many as tribes of Indians, and these congregated mainly on North Rampart Street. Crowds gathered as they had the previous two nights for calcium-illuminated parades of elite Krewes of Momus and Proteus.

³¹ *Times-Democrat*, February 18, 1885; *Picayune*, February 18, 1885. The Rex parade’s real theme was Sir Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe*, a favorite subject of chivalry-loving southern spectators. Rex began in 1872 with the street parade beginning in 1877, the year federal troops left the city. The ever-popular “Bouef Gras” was in 1885 a live ox surrounded by butchers; it preceded Rex as King of Industry. Cadets from the State University at Baton Rouge followed as did the “King’s Division” of foreign representatives, added as a courtesy to countries present at the Exposition. The Louisiana float and twenty others followed, interspersed with numerous bands, often playing “If Ever I Cease to Love.” The *Picayune* and *Times-Democrat* also described in shimmering detail the “dazzling tableaux” of the balls of Proteus and Momus. Ladies filled the “loges, decouvertes, baignoires, parquette, and second and third tiers” of the French Opera House, where many balls were held. At the swank Louisiana Club on Canal Street, boys scuffled as “generous members of the club, seated on the balcony, were, as is their annual custom, casting coins among the throngs below.” Pickpockets and “sneak thieves” plied their craft, yet strangers marveled, “as always before, that such crowds could so stand together in the streets for hours without the least exhibition of ill temper or the faintest appearance of a row.” Thieves committed the majority of “dishonest doings” in New Orleans at the time, either breaking into homes and businesses or accosting persons on darkened streets. Washington D. C. also held a Mardi Gras “street pageant and grand masked ball” in 1885, as it does to this date. *Times-Democrat*, February 18, 1885.

of the World's greatest Fair.”³² They would not be enough to redeem the ever-flagging finances, but the increased attendance did cheer participants of the Woman's Department and exhibitors everywhere.

The Crossroads

Just when women were beginning to bask in a department that promised to show the progress they had made, Julia Ward Howe and others had to hear a description of Louisiana women that must have staggered the activists among them. They attended the formal opening of the Louisiana Woman's Exhibit of historic objects that Creole ladies had assembled and that now was on the ground floor annexed to the state exhibit. The *Times-Democrat* described one or two items as “pathetic” or “odd,” but generally, the art, relics, and heirlooms the women had gleaned “from house to house” received interest and praise as a “priceless collection.”³³ But women who were striving for rights and equal pay and the expansion of employment for women must have cringed to hear Judge Felix P. Poche of the Louisiana Supreme Court offer his version of the “true woman of Louisiana.”

The *Times-Democrat* printed part of Poche's address verbatim in which he described the Louisiana woman as “essentially modest in character and retiring in disposition,” not “inert and indolent,” as she was falsely accused of being. But, he said, she did not crave power. He called

³² *Times-Democrat*, February 19, 20, 1885. Yet, on most days, gate receipts remained well under \$4000 a day. Hotels were nevertheless filling with guests, “and the principal streets were again lined with passengers, bag in hand, on their way to private lodgings.”

³³ *Times-Democrat*, February 21, 1885. Rev. Father Pierre Lanaux, S. J., delivered the prayer, and Commissioner C. J. Barrow made introductions. Barrow declared that he received his commission to the department on February 7, 1884, and that it was the “first time that the State ever participated in an Exposition of this kind.” *Times-Democrat*, February 26, 1885. Grace King wrote that Lucie Claiborne “is bedeviling me to beg curiosities to be exhibited at the Exposition which I am not going to do but don't like to tell her so.” Grace King to May McDonnell, November 17, 1884, Grace King Papers (MSS 1282), Louisiana State University Libraries Special Collections, Baton Rouge, LA.

her diffident and patient; she had waited to be asked to participate and only then had collected this “sentimental part” of the Louisiana exhibit. She has “never clamored for the right of suffrage or other prerogatives of men, the parasitic ambition of certain strong-minded women of the day. Her power is in the reign of her heart. Her strength is in the weakness of her sex, for she is the queen of the household, as she is the angel of kindness and sweetness to suffering man.” Then Poche continued in the same traditionalist way: “As a maiden, she rules society through her gentleness, her liveliness and her matchless beauty. As a wife, she shines through her modesty, her fidelity and her devotion. As a mother, she rules by her self-sacrifice and her complete abnegation.” Poche added: “In every condition of life she conceives that the true position of woman is far and remote from the strife for power and the sharp contests for fame or glory. Her domain is ever the heart of man.” Surely, he meant these remarks as compliments, but they were conjectures.³⁴

For many female hearers from Louisiana, Poche’s description of the southern woman was surely familiar and, to some, comforting. However, for progressive women from other regions, descriptors thus expressed by a distinguished jurist and printed in the newspaper must have confused them or convinced them that southern men confirmed commonly held images. Southern women might not have wanted to abandon the notion of “ladyhood,” with its overtones of leisure and grace, in favor of “womanhood,” a label that seemed to demand more, but many hearers surely wanted to claim both. Part of the reason women watched so critically the strong-

³⁴ Merrick wrote kindly of Mr. Poche in her memoir who, as chairman of the Suffrage Committee and later a member of the Louisiana Supreme Court, asked Merrick if she were afraid to speak for women’s rights at the Constitution Convention in 1879. “‘Afraid,’ I said, ‘is not the word. I’m scared almost to death!’ He tried to encourage me by recounting the terrors of many men similarly placed.” Caroline Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land: A Southern Matron’s Memoir* (New York: Grafton, 1901), 127.

minded women who came to New Orleans (like Julia Ward Howe and Susan B. Anthony) was to ascertain whether their activism and independent action “unsexed” them, as was rumored. Other southern hearers might have rejected such notions as Poche’s, especially those attempting to assert their worthiness and right to be included as full partners in an industrial age in a “New South.” Wisely, no one asked Howe to make a formal address on this occasion of the opening of the Louisiana exhibit. Instead, her role was to present a good-luck crescent wreath to the ladies, who then decided to give it to Director-General Burke. Although she must have been aghast, Howe managed to be gracious; in a few short weeks, she would have the stronger say at the formal opening of the Woman’s Department.³⁵

On the one hand, men of the Exposition urged women to be progressive, while traditional men like Poche urged them to submit to men’s wishes. It was a crossroads for women who were participating in the Woman’s Department. On the other hand, these mixed messages would have been incongruous for women who had families to support. Financial need prevented them from waiting to be asked. Their surrogate, Catharine Cole, continually pointed out what niceties were appropriate and inappropriate to ask of women who worked; she preached respect for working women in all of her columns. Cole was at times strident, but she was realistic about women’s needs. Visiting activists would soon tell women and girls not to depend on men to provide for or protect them, and they would challenge the male pressure to submit. These admonitions were also the implication of work as the “new gospel of womanhood” that Howe espoused. Yet, not all women were ready or able to work outside the home, so Cole reminded them to view exhibits

³⁵ *Times-Democrat*, February 21, 1885. Just when it appeared that Howe had overcome her first missteps, “Our Picayunes” column reprinted that “The sarcastic *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette* that stated: ‘The Southern ladies at the New Orleans Exposition have got now where they like Mrs. Julia Ward Howe. They were jealous of her intellectual gifts.’” *Picayune*, February 20, 1885.

with an eye toward learning new skills or applying familiar domestic proficiency in new ways, as inventors or spinners of silk, for example. Cole also elevated the value of New Orleans dressmakers, milliners, and able craftswomen by calling attention to their absence from the Woman's Department. When dreamers like Grace King viewed the hundreds of published books by women writers, she envisioned the possibility of a different future. The collection of books might also have spurred the Christian Woman's Exchange to publish the cookbook the organization had been working on since 1883. In 1885, the *Times-Democrat*'s Lafcadio Hearn published *La Cuisine Creole* and the Exchange published *Creole Cookery*, placing collected Creole recipes in print for the first time. The Exchange also used the cookbook as a fund-raising tool for years to come.³⁶

When the financial need was greatest in the Woman's Department, local women confirmed their ability, and when Carnival arrived, they validated their generosity. They knew well how to organize and direct a benefit, even if the particular form (lecture) was not as familiar as balls and theatricals. With aplomb, they produced audiences for benefit entertainments that raised funds for the Woman's Department. During the Mardi Gras season, they could display splendor not seen in other cities and boast an entrée to an entire cultural *monde* to which visitors desired access. It was finally local women's privilege to extend *noblesse oblige*, as they must

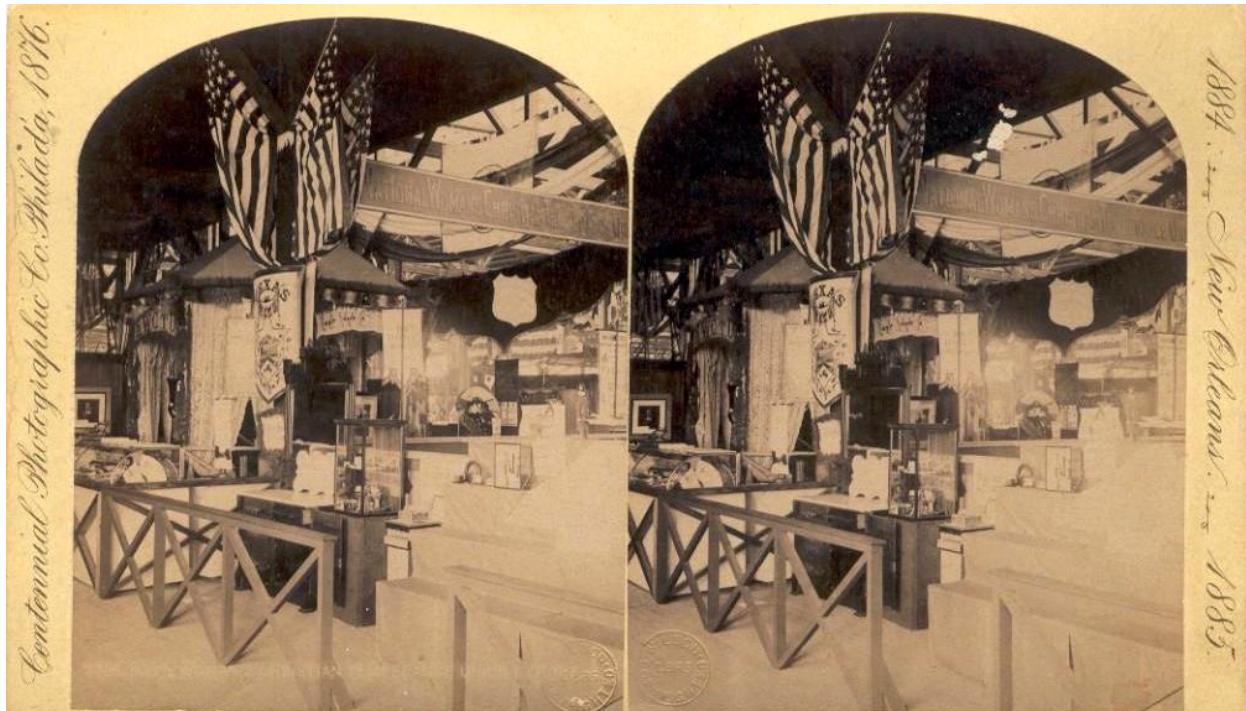
³⁶ The Christian Woman's Exchange, ed. *Creole Cookery* (1885; reprint, New Orleans: Pelican, 2005). Their self-published history states that women had started working on the cookbook as early as 1883; see Louise Hoehn Hogan, *History of the Christian Woman's Exchange* (New Orleans: Christian Woman's Exchange, 1956), n. p. Local journalist Lafcadio Hearn published *La Cuisine Creole: A Collection of Culinary Recipes, From Leading Chefs and Noted Creole Housewives, Who Have Made New Orleans Famous for its Cuisine* (New Orleans: F.F. Hansell & Bros., 1885). These two might have been published later in the year, ready to sell at the reconstituted fair that opened in the fall of 1885 as the North, Central, and South American Exposition.

originally have thought they would do as hostesses of the Exposition. New Orleanians took a certain pride in their city whether or not they were part of Carnival elite. Yet, as local women compared themselves to other participants in the Woman's Department, they must also have realized (and perhaps admitted to each other) that, despite social advantages, women in New Orleans had lagged behind other regions in educational resources, political activism, and progressive tendencies.

As Louisiana women attempted to prove parity with others, Judge Poche's public description of submissive southern womanhood sat well or ill with them. Perhaps his sentiments reassured some like homemaker and poet Mary Ashley Townsend and others who used their husband's name rather than their own, like Mrs. R. M. Walmsley. Yet, a stereotypical or monolithic version of "southern lady" did not exist any more than did one of "true womanhood." Even the staunchest independent activist, for example, Caroline Merrick admitted that she deferred to her older husband at the same time that she embarked on temperance work and women's rights. Ambitious women of a younger generation, like Catharine Cole and Grace King, might have rankled at Poche's version of them. Yet, many southern women, including King and stalwart publisher Eliza Nicholson, were also practiced in a covert performance of submission as a strategy to have their way, evidenced in their intimate correspondence. More importantly, then as now, physical constraints, social conditioning, and the facets of the prevailing occasion complicated the self-identification of black and white women. As they contemplated "progress" in a "New South" while attempting to maintain a familiar image, New Orleans women and those from less urban southern places reached a crossroads that would take years to sort out. But the Woman's Department at the Cotton Centennial Exposition was an intersection that forced women to reconsider old protected identities, and it helped them to envision a different future.

Special Days, Powerful Visitors

She said the right words, the womanly words, and led us gallantly.
—Dr. Julia Holmes Smith¹



*Near the Location for the Opening of the Woman's Department:
Pavilion of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, collection of Ken Speth*

More than two months after the Exposition began, Julia Ward Howe and her southern female compatriots were finally ready to declare the Woman's Department formally opened. Funds had been raised for immediate needs. The floor had been laid, offices outfitted, spaces

¹ *Picayune*, March 4, 1885. Unless otherwise indicated, all reports from newspapers are from columns titled "World's Exposition."

assigned and curtained off, and most exhibits placed. Individual Commissioners and assistants who had already greeted scores of visitors could now shine as a cooperative team of workers. Distinguished women visiting the city for the occasion intensified the enthusiasm and activity that electrified the occasion. Knowing well how to turn a phrase, Howe hit all the right notes for a day honoring women's ability in a unified country. New Orleans had never before had such a positive public platform for women's work. How would local women contribute and what would they gain from all of the famous visitors in the Crescent City? They might have assumed nobility towards visiting social supplicants during Carnival, but in the coming days, they had most to learn from national activists.

Opening the Department at Last

On Tuesday, March 3, 1885, the "sweet New Orleans sun" shone warmly in the western windows of the Woman's Department, and "the air was heavy with the perfume of flowers." Far and away in every direction stretched the crowd, "in which persons of the female persuasion predominated," the *Times-Democrat* declared. Women commissioners "from every State and Territory," wearing "knots of light-blue ribbons as badges," and "thousands of ladies" filled the department for "one of the brilliant celebrations of the Centennial," according to the *Picayune*. The invited audience included prominent national women and numerous representatives of the press. The *Picayune* called the day "one of the most important in the history of the women of this country." Visitors were aware that everything on exhibit was "directly and indirectly the work of a woman." As guests waited, they admired the treasures women had brought from across the country. Participants had arranged as many chairs as possible around the raised platform, in adjacent offices, and in the Temperance Union Department. The afternoon newspaper, the New Orleans *States*, noted that many visitors stood beyond the area cordoned off for invited guests

and that some who should have been invited had been slighted. “This thing of excluding people who may not happen to enjoy that prominence which secures invitations,” the *States* asserted, was against American institutions. The paper wondered “who had the right to say that this one should be admitted.” Surely, the “humblest woman” had as much right to enter as “the richest, the highest, the proudest.”² Catharine Cole must have agreed.

By the “appointed hour, 3 o’clock, the gallery was literally blockaded,” the *Times-Democrat* enthused. Guests sat or stood in every nook and alcove, waiting for the celebration to begin. The department was in “gala dress, flags draped everywhere.” The *Picayune* described the “neat platform . . . just in front of the offices of the Woman’s Department” as carpeted and “superbly decorated with plants, potted shrubs and cut flowers.” Window ledges were “literally banked with jugs crammed full of blue, white and pink hyacinths, double jonquils and tulips.” In its florid style, the *Times-Democrat* described the same scene: “Great bowls and vases of glowing golden and crimson tulips, like those the old Dutch merchants so joyed [sic] in, spikes heavily hung with waxen white, violet and rose flushed bells of the hyacinths and clusters of the English daffodils.” Promptly at three, “the band of the flagship *Tennessee* struck up ‘My Queen,’ and Mrs. Howe appeared on the arm of Colonel Franklin C. Morehead, Commissioner General of the Exposition, whom she introduced to the audience.”³

Morehead made astonishing remarks for a Mississippi man. He said that when he first envisioned the Exposition from his Vicksburg cotton office, he knew he wanted it to include a Woman’s Department. As he traveled the country promoting the Cotton Centennial, he claimed that he had seen “marvelous contrivances by which a woman can earn her own livelihood at

² *States*, March 4, 1885.

³ *Picayune*, March 4, 1885; *Times-Democrat*, March 4, 1885.

home,” especially at the New England Institute (where he probably met Howe). Because of what he saw of women’s work in New Orleans, he declared himself a “Woman’s Rights man” (to great applause), the *Picayune* stated. Morehead went even further; he believed in “giving her the same pay for the same work, allowing her the same power to earn a living.” Women had put their “brave shoulders to the wheel and helped themselves, and when they helped themselves they helped the whole American nation. [Applause.]”⁴ Despite the rampant hyperbole of World’s Fairs, a public statement such as this made by a man of importance was still rare. And welcome. Yet, he had mentioned women working from home, which, for genteel women was more desirable than seeking wages outside it, and for men in the vein of Judge Poche, was acceptable.

Then Julia Ward Howe spoke in a way that thanked her supporters, answered her critics, and shored up the goal of the Exposition’s promoters, that of broadcasting the South’s readiness for reunion in an industrializing nation. Howe’s celebrity and her “venerable appearance” captured the attention of the audience, the *Picayune* claimed as it described the occasion. “Coming to the front of the little platform and leaning her white hands on the small flower-loaded stand,” she began by apologizing for the weakness of her voice and for the department’s incompleteness, as did speakers throughout the days and celebrations in various departments. Their excuse was always that time had been too short. Yet, the women had seized the moment to open the department while so many famous women were in town. Howe, being Howe, took the opportunity to rebut criticism lodged against her and to correct misconceptions about the spirit of the participants. She contested rumors that women had “appeared like covetous children

⁴ The *Picayune* printed Morehead’s and Howe’s speeches verbatim with the emphasis on earning a living. The *Times-Democrat* paraphrased the speeches but did quote Morehead as having said: “I am a woman’s rights man, and I wished that woman should have a chance to display the work she was doing in her home,” a domestic slant not as evident in Cole’s version. In the *Times-Democrat*, there was also no mention of equal pay. Both newspapers asserted that it had been women’s first chance to “thoroughly display her capacity,” March 4, 1885.

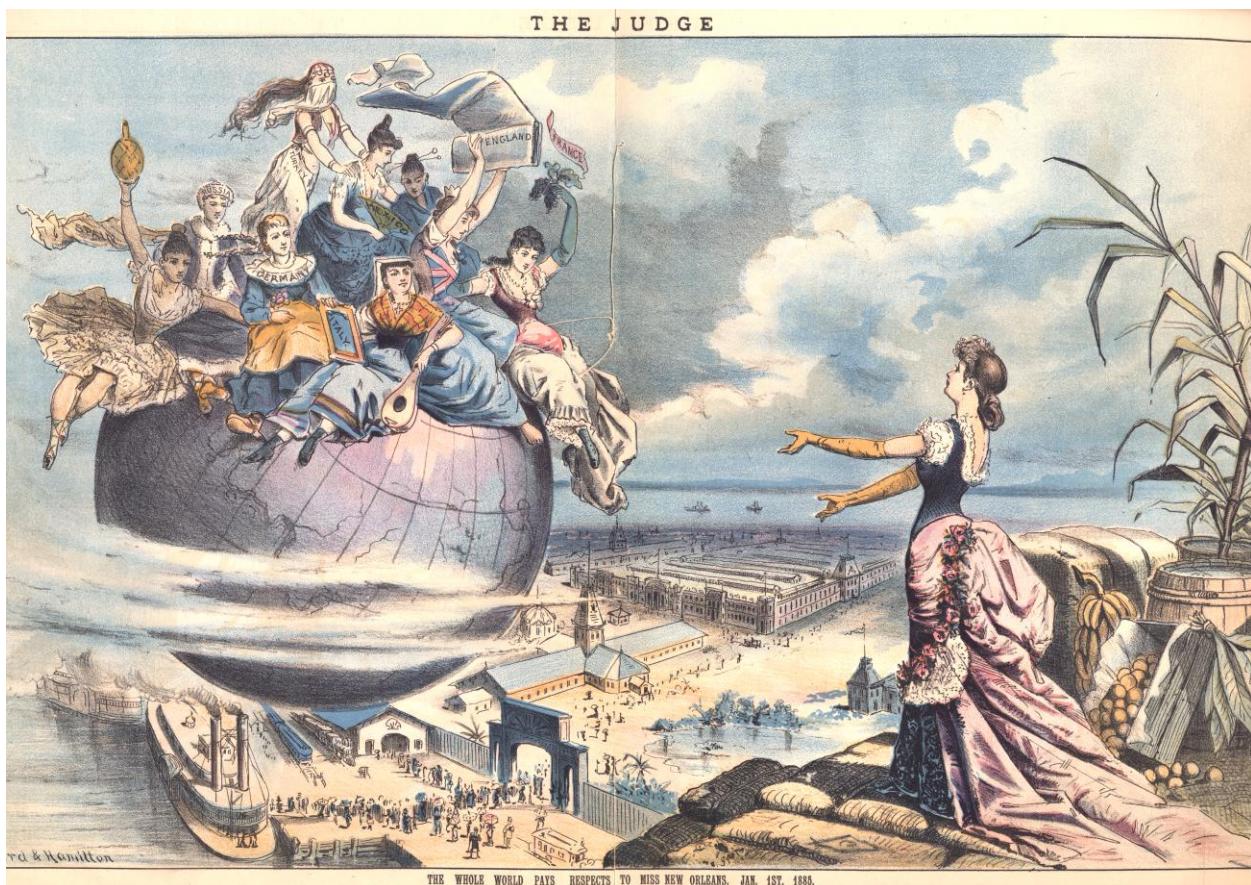
squabbling.” No; like “wise and patient mothers,” they had worked harmoniously and loyally despite adversity and dearth of material. They had raised their own funds to complete the spaces. She thanked officers and workmen of the United States Navy who had helped them with construction. They had “charged gallantly” up the stairs and wielded saw and hammer in answer to women’s “discouraged cry for help,” in their “darkest time,” when the Board of Management had financially abandoned them.⁵

Howe spoke of the importance of woman’s assuming “an industrial point of view.” She insisted that “there were few manufactures in which the hand and brain of women have not their appointed part.” Because the products were made by men and women together, however, women’s part was “dimly recognized” and made “no distinct impression” of women’s progress. Thus, with the Woman’s Department, women employed a strategy of separatism to disprove the common opinion that they were “a non-producing class.” She had heard women and men frequently ask, “What have women ever invented?” So it gave her especial pleasure, Howe said, to point to a few of the many patented inventions of women (a ventilated chimney, a kiln, a bed with a secret drawer to prevent thievery), many of which focused on the “comfort and adornment” of the home. “Those who show how women can excel are examples to shame those who do not try,” she said.⁶ Most important about the day was the public platform and media attention women enjoyed as never before in the Queen of southern cities. The world had come to

⁵ *Picayune*, March 4, 1885.

⁶ All quoted material of the opening is from the *Picayune*, March 4, 1885. The *Times-Democrat*, March 4, 1885, paraphrased Howe as having said, “the women were somewhat overshadowed by that mighty creature man, [and] she pointed with pride to this triumphant answer to that stupid and oft-repeated inquiry, ‘What has woman done? What has she ever created or invented?’”

New Orleans, and women were playing a major role in an event whose every detail was reported. Julia Ward Howe brought much of the attention to the Woman's Department, but local women were basking in the spotlight as well.



"The Whole World Pays Respect to Miss New Orleans, January 1st, 1885,"
Courtesy of the Collections of the Louisiana State Museum

Despite Howe's personal style of leadership having been rather divisive, she designed her words for the opening to bring women together in support of each other. She had found that kind of sisterhood in her beloved New England Woman's Club and recommended it to the assembly gathered. At the heart of the enterprise of the Woman's Department, she proclaimed optimistically, were loyalty, devotion, peace, and the public good, qualities that women, as "guardian spirits of the household," bestowed to following generations. She employed gendered

language in service of women's advancement. Women who had come to New Orleans as Lady Commissioners, "not bound to each other by alliance of blood or affinity of neighborhood," had worked together to counteract the undervaluing of women's work. "I tell you, sisters," she told the audience, "we have all one flag now, broad enough and bright enough to cover us all. Let us see that no rent is made in it. Let the number of its stars increase, but never diminish, and let us take, in plain, unsymbolic language, this saying [we have all one flag now] for our guide." Union, for Howe, was no mere metaphor. Her energies, her intellect, her writings, even her earlier abolitionism pointed toward saving the Union. Yet, to make unity a reality was a challenge, even among women who claimed "sisterhood" in clubs and benevolent associations. Conflicting personalities intervened; even when objectives agreed, tactics varied. Nevertheless, for the occasion of the opening of the Woman's Department, women made a point of gracious comaraderie.

Julia Ward Howe was clearly the central figure, but the program included other speakers. The *Picayune*'s coverage related how, after Howe's address, Caroline Merrick presented the Woman's Department's president with a basket of flowers that conveyed the Lady Commissioners' "unbounded admiration and esteem." Magnanimously, Merrick declared that Howe had taught New Orleans to love Boston and that she had indeed united South, North, East, and West. The reunification on display was not merely about the South and North. Howe promised, in the sentimentality common to the age, that the occasion would "always be preserved in the amber of her memory." Next on the program was the dedicatory poem by Mary Ashley Townsend. Although Howe had encouraged Townsend to read her own verses—"let us hear your verses from your own lips"—the modest and retiring poet claimed to be suffering from

hoarseness. As at the Exposition's opening, a man took her place.⁷ This time her husband, Gideon, read her eight-stanza "A Poem Dedicated to the Woman's Department of the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition" with lines singsong like: "From North and South, from East and West,/ This little band is gathered here,/ Each bringing of her stores the best."

*Dr. Julia Holmes Smith at a suffrage rally,
Chicago Daily News, February 27, 1913*

Then, Dr. Julia Holmes Smith, head of the Northwestern women's section, affirmed Howe's value and stressed the importance of women's work outside the home. As the *Picayune* reported, Smith first looked back to December when there had been no floor, when representatives of Nebraska and Iowa had sat among "heaped up boxes," when Texas had been "loaded down with riches and no place to put it, and now look!" Smith gestured toward Howe and called her the inspiration of the Woman's Department. "She said the right words, the womanly words, and led us gallantly." Smith confirmed what the men of management had wanted from Howe, that she was a "representative woman" for thousands of others with whom she was associated across the country.



⁷ Julia Ward Howe to Mary Ashley Townsend, February 25, 1885, from 22 South Rampart Street. Townsend/Stanton Papers 1846-1946 (MS 19), University Archives, The Tulane Libraries, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.; for report of Opening Day, see the *Picayune*, March 4, 1885.

Smith, a homeopathic physician, reminded listeners that, although Morehead had emphasized what could be done in the home, there was valuable work, “and right hard work,” to be done outside their homes as well. The *Picayune* indicated “[Applause!]” from the audience. Smith told of the collapsible cottage a woman designed, the patented washing machine a woman invented, the wheat and barley a Dakota woman grew, and the “beautiful butter” that a woman made (but for which a man got the premium). She declared that women had worked together in a “cosmopolitan spirit” to amass philosophical, scientific, literary, and artistic work for the department. She also announced that since Congress would give the women “a little money—only plain sailing and the admiration and congratulations of the world” were ahead.⁸ (By this time, Congress had promised \$15,000 exclusively to pay expenses of the Woman’s Department.)

Two unremarkable male speakers completed the opening day program, one of whom, according to Cole’s report in the *Picayune*, made a “rambling little address” filled with “superfluous information” and platitudes about women. Proving once more the different slant of the two dailies, the *Times-Democrat* wrote that he made “a glowing panegyric upon ‘the purer and better half of humanity,’ and upon the representative of her sex, the noble president.” The *Picayune* reported that after these short comments and “without more ado,” Howe declared the Woman’s Department formally open and invited the assembly of invited ladies and gentlemen to be served “the woman’s beverage—tea.” The He-No Tea Company then “distributed cups of their fragrant and delicious tea to the crowd, supplemented by fresh cakes and Japanese fans. The band kept a constant flow of melody, and the many visitors sauntered leisurely through the

⁸ Quoted material, from the *Picayune*, March 4, 1885.

charming exhibits, now nearly entirely complete,” including those of the Christian Woman’s Exchange and another Louisiana display that the *Times-Democrat* mentioned.⁹

The official opening of the Woman’s Department was a formality, really, a chance for Julia Ward Howe to ceremoniously transfer it to the Board of Management. Exercises such as this occurred in every department and every state exhibit over the months of the Exposition. They were part opportunity to shine and part promotional tactic to increase attendance.

According to the *Picayune*, however, the “higher purpose” of the opening of the Woman’s Department was to bring all women of the country “into friendly relations with each other” and to bask in the “harmonious congratulations” for the value of their cooperative work.¹⁰ The women had cooperated in a variety of ways. They had raised funds, they had helped build partitions, they had decorated and prepared spaces, they had spent social evenings together getting to know each other off of the grounds. In the department, women had exchanged views, and these surely varied. Yet, the special occasion of Opening Day demanded that women put personality differences and petty issues aside. Perhaps, Caroline Merrick’s comments were more predictable platitudes than heartfelt expressions, given the sarcasm with which she recalled her experiences in the department fifteen years later. Dr. Julia Holmes Smith’s sentiments, on the other hand seemed genuine, given the caution she advised when earlier “the ladies” had been enraged by Howe’s northern staff appointments. Other attendees on opening day must have

⁹*Times-Democrat*, March 4, 1885.

¹⁰*Picayune*, March 4, 1885. Given the gate receipts cited by the *Picayune*, there were only slightly more than 8000 paying customers on the grounds the day of the opening of the Woman’s Department. Other scheduled special days yet to come between March 9 and May 7 were: Knights of Honor Day, Nebraska Day, National Temperance Day, Tennessee Day, German Day, Louisiana Temperance Day, Indiana Day, Mississippi Day, Minnesota Day, New Jersey Day, New Mexico Day, Panama Day, Louisiana Day, and California Day.

fallen between these two attitudes. Women had everything to gain and little to lose by presenting a united front. It did not hold, but the worst was not yet obvious.

Temperance Power

Meanwhile, spring was arriving, and Exposition planners and women prepared pleasant celebrations, especially Temperance Day. In the Woman's Department, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) workers completed their space and anticipated the arrival of their national president. For these dedicated women, there was no division or "rent" in their solidarity of purpose and cooperation. Their displays could be seen "a long distance away" because of star-like "shining banners of satin" that blazed the watchword and "musical refrain of the Temperance Woman's working song: 'For God and Home and Native Land.'" Their central hexagonal pavilion was "one of the most charming and delightful places of resort in the building," the *Picayune* declared. "Everything about the gateways and entrances seems to say come in." A large fountain sent "a jet of filtered water into the air, which dashe[d] over a group of bronze statuary and [fell] back into a deep bronze bowl." The donated "great ice water coolers," with cup attached to each, were "on tap all day long." Ladies in charge provided a "cheery presence," temperance newspapers and pamphlets offered inspiration, and "lounging chairs" welcomed tired visitors. The reception workers now prepared was to welcome their leader, the "eloquent temperance apostle," Frances E. Willard (1839-1898).¹¹

¹¹ For the WCTU readying for its leader, see the *Picayune*, March 13, 1885; reference to Willard, see the *Picayune*, March 16, 1885. Willard and Matilda Carse, Chicago businesswoman and reformer, stayed at the "elegant residence of Mr. B. D. Wood on General Taylor Street," *Picayune*, March 14, 1885. For more on Frances Willard and the WCTU, see Ruth Bordin, *Frances Willard: A Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); Ruth Bordin, *Women and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980); Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1981).

Frances E. Willard, n. d., retrieved from http://www.bobmccaughey.com/post1865/wpcontent/uploads/2010/02/FrancesWillard.jpg

Ten days after the opening of the Woman's Department, on Friday, March 13, 1885, the WCTU held its Temperance Day meeting in the cavernous Music Hall in the Main Building. The dynamic Frances E. Willard was the featured speaker. After a musical rendition by Professor Bochert's band, a prayer, a religious song, and a psalm reading by Caroline Merrick, Willard stepped forward to the edge of the platform. The *Picayune* described her as "a bright little woman dressed in black, with a kind and expressive face, yet full of strength and resolution" and a "prompt and well-poised manner." The *States* said she had in her manner "womanly grace and dignity" and that "so much of earnest conviction was portrayed in her tone and expression, that she would have held spell-bound an audience of whisky dealers." The paper moaned, however, that her eloquence was wasted in the Music Hall, because the acoustic properties were "so execrable" that "the most stentorian orator can scarce be heard a dozen yards from the platform."¹²

Willard, however, in a "clear voice" handled "with the care that can be acquired only by experience" and in "flattering terms," introduced ex-Governor John P. St. John of Kansas who first covered the Exposition's theme of unification, then temperance. Employing the customary rousing hyperbole so prevalent at the Exposition, he called the event "perhaps the grandest ever



¹² *States*, March 14, 13, 1885.

made in the world,” the *Picayune* reported. “Not only will it tend to stimulate all legitimate industries,” he said, “but it will aid greatly in bringing North and South more closely together, and to a more full and complete realization that we are one people, with one country, one flag and one future,” a central theme of the entire Exposition and one that Howe had also emphasized. St. John was more strident when he spoke about temperance, naming the federal government a full partner in the “traffic in intoxicating drinks” because of taxes it collected on alcohol. He chided a Christian nation that spent more on drink “than the annual outlay for all the bread, meat, boots and shoes, cotton goods, sugar and molasses consumed,” fifteen times that spent on public school education and 250 times as much as was contributed to home and foreign missions. “If this is Christianity, I say, God pity the heathen.” St. John named Louisiana “the worst saloon-cursed State in the South,” claiming it had 5380 retail liquor dealers. He said that the unification of all sections of the country emboldened temperance advocates that “victory, final and complete, [was] sure to come.”¹³ Although he did not talk about votes for women, members of the WCTU knew it was an idea whose time was coming.

Cold statistics and strong rhetoric had radicalized the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union from an organization that attempted moral suasion into a political one that demanded legal prohibition. Frances Willard reminded the audience in the Music Hall that temperance work began in the same year as cotton export, thus both were celebrating a centennial in 1884. Women’s earliest temperance work began by “visiting houses of ill fame and the haunts of

¹³ *Picayune*, March 14, 1885. Bouchert’s band was popular at venues at Spanish Fort, near Lake Pontchartrain. St. John said that laws were corrupting when they protected 200,000 saloons and robbed the federal coffers of \$1,500,000,000 annually. St. John claimed that Mississippi, with 200,000 more people than Louisiana, had but 331 liquor establishments. He also said: “One political party has gone down in the futile attempt to carry a saloon on one shoulder and a church on the other, and so will it be with every party that tries the same thing.”

poverty,” but it was “a work insufficient.” So, Willard asserted, the WCTU had evolved, having learned that even “a good law was a delusion unless its enforcement was backed by good men.”¹⁴

Because women had no ballots, they used the power of their influence to put men in office that would insist laws be enforced, Willard declared. She claimed that since the presidential election on November 5, 1884, more temperance legislation had been enacted than ever before. As another speaker stated (before more He-No tea was served), the Prohibition Party “would not be satisfied till it was the power of this country.” This grass-roots movement could not foresee, of course, the unintended consequences that nationwide Prohibition could bring. They saw only that something must be done and that women must take a leading role. As the organization’s persuasive speaker and indefatigable leader, Willard had urged her followers to “do everything!,” and thousands of women took up the banner of temperance, feminism, organization, and public speaking.

The WCTU became a training ground for suffragists as well, because women of the organization realized they would need the ballot to accomplish their mission.¹⁵ Mississippian Belle Kearney cites her path in from fledgling speaker to organizer to full-blown suffrage worker as typical of workers in the WCTU. The young woman’s journey accelerated at the Cotton Centennial when she heard Howe speak publicly on “Women’s Work” before a mixed audience.

¹⁴ *Picayune*, March 14, 1885.

¹⁵ Ibid. Grover Cleveland was elected in November of 1884 as the first Democratic president since James Buchanan in 1856. For personal journeys with the WCTU as trainer, see Belle Kearney, *A Slaveholder’s Daughter* (1900. Reprinted, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969) 149-51, 123-127, 108; Caroline Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land: A Southern Matron’s Memoir* (New York: Grafton, 1901), 141-52.

She exclaimed in her memoir that she had long had an “earnest desire to behold a genuinely strong-minded woman,—one of the truly advanced type. Beautiful to realize, she stood before me! And in a position the very acme of independence—upon a platform delivering a speech!” Powerful women who brought new ideas to the Woman’s Department aroused another generation, like Grace King and Belle Kearney, and propelled their lives forward.

The Power of Persuasive Women



*May Wright Sewall, n. d.
Records of National Women’s Party: Library of Congress*

In addition to Willard, other prominent visitors poured into the city, drawn by the public platform of the Woman’s Department at this international event. The women’s presence in the department and their speeches around the city invigorated local women. Educator May Wright Sewall (1844-1920), Indiana’s Lady Commissioner, inspired a Woman’s Club audience with an hour-and-a-half-long lecture on vocations, Cole

reported for the *Picayune*. Sewall’s “comprehensive, thoughtful, logical address” was “spoken with the earnest desire of benefiting the women of the South.” The speaker claimed that there were now seven hundred ways for a woman to earn a living, where before the Civil War there had been but seven. She declared that if women decided to stay away from work on a single day, “three-fourths of the factories, schools, public and private institutions would be closed.”¹⁶

¹⁶ *Picayune*, March 5, 1885.

Sewall spoke to the working women of the Woman's Club about the quality of woman's work and its rightful remuneration, which surely struck a cord with Cole. She deplored "the false shame" women felt "in being paid for their services." One of the lessons that they had to teach men, she said, was to give up their "prejudices" that a woman's home might suffer because she must work. Even the rich man's daughter should prepare to work as well as the rich man's son, Cole reported that Sewall said. The populist afternoon *States* added a twist: "She hoped the day was near at hand when high patrician dames would have a nobler life history to meet than merely to bring forth children, make calls, loll on sofas, read novels and die." Cole conveyed Sewall's ideas: Home duties need not interfere with "women's duties in the world," yet the two were connected. Yet, Sewall also insisted that "the home cannot be without the woman" and that the family drew inspiration as it gathered around the dining room table. Woman's work need not be compared to man's work, she insisted. It was "not supplementary" but "equal and heroic and spiritual"; the gospel of womanhood reiterated. The *States* granted that the lecture was "eloquent, well seasoned and comprehensive" and that Sewall had received "a well-earned ovation." Cole dubbed the talk "the most valuable ever made in this city to the New Orleans women."¹⁷

In March of 1885, excitement was at its height about the Woman's Department and the women attracted to the city by the spotlight it offered. At a reception in the Temperance Pavilion, "several hundred ladies and gentlemen were presented to the great temperance leaders," the *Picayune* reported. Perhaps at no time before had mixed audiences heard so many lectures by women. This was an unusual occurrence in the South, but apparently, men and women were ready to hear these new ideas. May Wright Sewall drew the "largest audience ever seen . . . at an

¹⁷*Picayune*, March 5, 1885; *States*, March 6, 1885. Miss Teedie Owen Smith reported on "the Department of Woman's Work" for the *States*.

entertainment of this type” when she spoke for the second time before the Woman’s Club and, this time, their male guests. Sewall was making a direct challenge to her audience by asserting that no one had satisfactorily determined the limit of a woman’s sphere. Yet, the hall was filled, and “a hundred ladies and as many gentlemen” stood during the full two hours of her address. As Cole reported, Wright declared that the courtesy of southern men was lovely, but she hoped that chivalry was not offered in place of recognition of woman’s ability, opportunity, and education. This was an astounding confrontation, but no journalist recorded any resistance, although southern men had possibly never heard such talk. Wright was disputing whatever residual idea remained of a marble statue “southern lady” that might have existed in fiction; instead, she was promoting women’s competency for higher branches of education and professional and industrial pursuits. These subjects were repeatedly discussed during the six months of this Woman’s Department and became part of its legacy in New Orleans.¹⁸

Even Suffrage Was Heard in the Land

Perhaps no visitor grasped the opportunity of the Woman’s Department better than the most famous suffragist, Susan B. Anthony. Using this first chance to face audiences in the “Gulf States,” she would broaden women’s (and men’s) perspectives and win many to suffrage, the *Picayune* declared.¹⁹ Her organization, the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), rival of Howe’s American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA), had previously been unable to make significant inroads in the South. A factor that undoubtedly deterred white southern women from either group was the organizers’ former ties to abolitionism. In addition, the NWSA’s

¹⁸ *Picayune*, March 17, 10, 1885. For a discussion of how fiction influenced the image of “southern womanhood,” see Anne Goodwyn Jones, *Tomorrow Is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).

¹⁹ *Picayune*, March 10, 1885.

insistence on bold reforms and bolder actions in service of individual liberties and a federal mandate for universal suffrage grounded in the natural rights argument was too radical for many white southern women.

This southern Exposition offered a ready platform, however, and Anthony knew how to use a public occasion to draw attention to her cause. She had, after all, made an audacious presentation of the “Woman’s Declaration of Rights” on July 4 at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876. Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and three other suffragists, after having been denied a request to offer a copy of their declaration at an Independence Day celebration at the Centennial, defiantly marched down the aisle to deliver it anyway. Anthony read their document, then the women marched out of the gathering, sharing copies with the surprised audience as they left. The Declaration demanded natural rights, insisted there should be no taxation without representation, and included articles of impeachment. As a single woman, Anthony could take more independent action than could Stanton as a married one. In 1885, the NWSA was as radical as ever, but Anthony now would charm the South with her womanliness.²⁰

Anthony’s demeanor and style were apparently unthreatening to those she met at the Cotton Centennial. In Cole’s “Woman’s World and Work” of Sunday, March 8, 1885, she claimed to answer the question on local minds, that is, “what manner of woman is Miss Susan B. Anthony?” Was she a “hard-featured, blue-goggled, black-alpaca-robed, outré-looking woman, wearing exaggeratedly thick-soled boots, always carrying an umbrella, and forever with the word

²⁰ About the Declaration, see Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds. *History of Woman Suffrage*, Volumes 2, 3, 1876-1885 (New York: Arno, 1886; Reprinted by The New York Times, 1969); Anne F. Scott and Andrew M. Scott, *One Half the People: The Fight for Women Suffrage* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1982). See these books also for how Anthony was convicted for voting in 1872 and fined \$100, which she never paid and the government never pursued.

‘suffrage’ or rather the generally more offensive term ‘woman’s rights’ on her lips”? No! Cole boasted that she had spent an evening with “world-famous” Anthony and found her “beyond all manner of doubt, the most distinguished woman who has visited New Orleans in years, with the single exception of her dear life-long friend, Clara Barton,” head of the four-year-old American Red Cross. Anthony was not an ogre but rather a “gentle faced elderly lady” of “probably fifty-five years of age,” Cole asserted. Her expressive mouth had a “curiously attractive womanish droop at the corners.” She wore glasses, but her eyes were intense and “full of



expression, and her fine brow [was] shaded by drooping bands of iron-gray hair.” The tone of her voice was had a “full, musical, sonorous voice, not very loud, but yet the voice of one so accustomed to public speaking that not a word she [uttered] was lost.” In fact, Cole wrote, “the whole expression of this famous ranting suffragist is that of a quiet, thoughtful lady of uncertain age.”²¹ Southern opinions about suffragists must surely have been swayed by such glowing praise from a respected local journalist.

Susan B. Anthony, 1896, University of Rochester, Rare Books and Special Collections

Anthony’s reasonableness and wit warmed local women and journalists. She first visited the Exposition on March 5 and various newspaper offices in the Main Building on March 16, 1885. At the invitation of the Exposition Press Association, she spoke on “Women’s Rights” to

²¹ *Picayune*, March 10, 1885; “Woman’s World and Work” (hereafter “WWW”), *Picayune*, March 8, 1885.

four hundred people, including thirty or forty newspaper men and women; others listened at the open windows of the crowded hall, the *Times-Democrat* reported. The *Picayune* wrote that Anthony provided a “witty account” of her initial encounters with reporters and her first attempts to vote. But Anthony reminded journalists of the power of the press and then, on the spot, she persuaded many of them to sign her suffrage petition.²²

She joined forces with the aforementioned May Wright Sewall, founder and principal of the Girls’ Classical College in Indianapolis (and earlier lecturer to the Woman’s Club), to address young women at the Girls’ High School in New Orleans. Sewall told the girls about higher education and professional and industrial opportunities, the newspapers reported. Like Howe, she had written articles in support of secondary and higher education for girls. Her essay, “Position on Education and Industry of Women of Indiana,” was available in the Indiana area of the Woman’s Department. It showed that 51,422 women were engaged in 106 different occupations in her state, many jobs as uncommon as those Cole regularly described in “Woman’s World and Work.” No matter how many jobs were available, however, the educator in Sewall apparently could not resist reminding the students of the value of the liberal arts. Enigmatically, she told them, “No woman can die of loneliness that revels in the luxury of literature.”²³

Anthony then took the stage and contrasted the present experience of high school girls with her life in the past. In “Present over the Past,” as newspapers reported in detail, Anthony painted this comparison: young women of 1885 were being encouraged to prepare for a vocation,

²² For Anthony’s first visit to the grounds, see the *Picayune*, March 6, 1885; speaking on Women’s Rights, see the *Times-Democrat*, March 18, 1885; visiting the press, see the *Picayune*, March 18, 1885.

²³ Cole on Sewall, see the *Picayune*, March 8, 1885; Sewall’s statement about literature, see the *Times-Democrat*, March 7, 1885.

whereas, in her past, girls were only told they might marry. She advised her hearers to “make it their chief aim in life to support themselves; they should learn something they could depend upon and not be dependent upon the support of some man.” It is what many of their mothers had already learned, but to state this publicly to southern schoolgirls was radical. To have the *Times-Democrat* print it without irony gave the message additional clout. Then Anthony, like Sewall, spoke of the corollary, higher education. Before the war, she said, only one college had been open to women; now all the great colleges (“except Harvard, Columbia, John [sic] Hopkins, and one or two others”) were graduating two thousand young women a year. “Brilliantly educated,” she told her audience, they would be fine citizens and better “wives, mothers, hometenders,” improved by their preparation.²⁴ Although these two women held liberal ideas about public roles and were presenting progressive ideas to a younger generation, they used the gendered rhetoric of their era, either to gain a fair hearing or because women were not yet able to consider another approach.

The Woman’s Club, predominately an organization of wage earners, was an obvious group for Anthony to address that spring, since much of the NWSA’s early appeal had been made to working women because of Anthony’s own work experience. Howe and other prominent clubwomen had already energized this nascent organization during the winter, a boon to a club formed just months before the Exposition opened.²⁵ Anthony was clear, as always: “To

²⁴ For Anthony’s comparison, see the *Picayune*, March 8, 1885; for girls supporting themselves, see the *Times-Democrat*, March 7, 1885; for higher education, see “WWW,” *Picayune*, March 8, 1885. Anthony was referring to Oberlin College of Ohio, the sole institution to grant degrees to both blacks and women before the Civil War.

²⁵ Howe had spoken about her New England club; Sewall had held the audience “spell-bound” with her “Woman’s Work in a New Way”; Miss May Rogers had given her “famous lecture on ‘M’mee Roland’”; and Julia Holmes Smith had urged that “the whole world of working women ought to be kin.” “WWW,” *Picayune*, March 8, 1885.

be enfranchised would mean that women would be lifted at once to a broad plane of self respect.” As a major force in the suffrage movement, Anthony had by 1885 given thirty-five years of her life and fortune to “the ballot for women.” Again, newspapers told how she joined with Sewall and spoke to the group about the purpose and meaning of women’s clubs and about the wider sphere women were then occupying. The *States* called the two “a very strong combination” providing “genuine intellectual entertainment.”²⁶

When Anthony and Sewall declared that the Civil War had actually convinced some southern women of their own powers and capacity, women (and perhaps men) in the audience must have nodded in agreement. Women had certainly honed some of their skills while organizing the many bazaars they had held to support the southern cause. They had stepped into men’s jobs at home and as clerks and workers with the government, in factories, and in businesses. They had nursed wounded men, comforted dying men, and had propped up mentally impaired men when they returned battle weary, and they continued to do so. After the war, they had founded asylums to care for widows and children of deceased or financially strapped men, since Confederate veterans received no pensions from the government, as Union veterans did. The women had struggled to get bodies returned and had raised money for graves. They had put whatever skills they had to work to sustain their own families, and they continued to do so in 1885. Northern women had done much the same; it was a place where women’s experiences could meet.²⁷

²⁶ *States*, March 9, 1885

²⁷ For jobs Confederate women did, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage, 1997).

No doubt, most participants in the Woman's Department had been touched by war in some way, and each had her own experience of work. Many in Howe's and Merrick's generation had gone beyond adversity to strength, whether at home, in benevolent societies, or in the marketplace. The next generation, King's and Cole's, seemed more reactionary, but many were moving toward work outside the home, of necessity. Yet some like King (as her letters attest) resisted wage work and harbored anger over loss of genteel status after the Civil War. There had been no monolithic response to the war among women; each had her own story. Anthony related her life story to the Woman's Club, mainly relating her suffrage work in which she preached the "doctrine of equal rights and no taxation without representation," a point that property-owning New Orleans women were already making. Anthony's confrontational question of the evening must have rung true for someone with Caroline Merrick's experience: "Why should a woman be afraid of the vote when tramps have it?" The *Times-Democrat* reported that both women and men, apparently moved by Anthony's message of the evening, crowded around to shake her hand.²⁸ This was a surprisingly warm reception for this vigorous suffragist, and newspapers reported similar affection wherever she spoke during her stay in New Orleans.

According to Catharine Cole, Anthony's most dynamic lecture was to school teachers on Thursday evening, March 19, 1885. Cole wrote that the suffrage worker engaged "hundreds of enthusiastic listeners" who "tumultuously applauded" her hour-and-a-half-long speech. It was filled with bright illustrations and anecdotes and delivered with "dignity and earnestness." Merrick prepared the audience, in case they found the forthcoming ideas too radical, by introducing Anthony and saying that "even those who did not agree with Miss Anthony's

²⁸ For what enfranchisement meant to women, see the *Picayune*, March 10, 1885; for Anthony and Sewall as a strong combination, see the *States*, March 9, 1885; for women having a vote as well as tramps, see the *Times-Democrat*, March 11, 1885. The *Picayune* wrote that Clara Barton called Anthony "the noblest Roman of them all," March 17, 1885.

doctrines” found her “courageous, self-sacrificing [and] magnanimous.” Then Anthony made her case. Without enfranchisement, she said, people were dishonored. “Whether they are serfs, minors, negroes, or whether they are daughters of your best people, whether native or foreign, black and white, if they are disfranchised they are degraded.” This was indeed an extreme statement in the Deep South even before Jim Crow laws disfranchised so many. Anthony told how her universal-suffrage petition in 1868 had drawn ‘roars of laughter’ at the very time when ignorant men’s ideas were heeded because they had the ballot and she did not. She was not a woman to mince words. She said “men like women as pets, as household servants, but not as equals.” She added that she “found the Southern women earnestly anxious for suffrage, as they needed it so much.”²⁹

It is likely that many of Anthony’s hearers had not previously dared to consider the assertions she put forward. A male reporter from the *States* followed up on her claim that southern women were anxious for the ballot. He asked whether she had taken “a survey of the situation of our Southern women” regarding suffrage. She replied that she thought the outlook good for the propagation of the cause of woman’s suffrage in the South. “I have not met a single southern born woman who has not declared herself in favor of woman’s suffrage,” she said, claiming to have met a great many women at Exposition events and on the cars, in the streets, and elsewhere. He asked about her organization’s presence in Louisiana, and she mentioned “Mrs. Judge Merrick [as] the leader here.” To his question of what difference suffrage would make in New Orleans, she replied that teachers’ salaries would no longer be paid in scrip (a

²⁹ “WWW,” *Picayune*, March 8, 1885.

substitute for currency which is not legal tender and is often a form of credit) that they presently were compelled to discount monthly or to sell.³⁰

The report of the interview with Anthony was politely worded, but in an editorial the same day, the *States* threatened that should “the lady’s views” (attaining suffrage) prevail, “there would be an end to home life.” Then, “thousands of men who desire the blessings and sweets of the domestic hearth, would seek their pleasures and gratifications in single blessedness, in clubs and other public resorts.” This was a curious sexual threat for the *States* to make. The editor was convinced that Anthony, although a “first-rate stump orator,” argued “upon false propositions, easily exposed.” She had told the reporter what progress suffrage had made in the North and West, that it had opened avenues of industry for women in all directions: from only four occupations in the beginning (teaching, housework, factory work, and needlework) to three hundred by 1885. In many of these fields, she had said, women worked side by side with men but were paid inferior wages. She had answered questions about education, marriage, juries, and a sixteenth amendment that would give women the same right that “the ignoramuses of the nation” had. This last might have caused the (male) editor to wave Anthony off with snide remarks. “When we have more leisure for discussing pleasant absurdities we shall have more to say to our lady friends and readers of this accomplished but erring woman’s dreams.”³¹ It is likely that local women had by now formed their own opinions of Anthony’s views, which seemed to gain support from the *Picayune* and *Times-Democrat*, perhaps for different reasons.

³⁰ *States*, March 19, 1885.

³¹ “Miss Susan B. Anthony: Views of the Great Champion of Female Suffrage” and untitled editorial, both in the *States*, March 19, 1885.

The *Picayune* was a woman-friendly paper and the *Times-Democrat* was one that advocated all people and subjects that gained attention for the Exposition.

Women's three-pronged theme was consistent among those who spoke during the Cotton Centennial: jobs, education, the ballot. Despite what the *States* had to say, audiences clamored to hear Anthony speak, and she linked these topics. When she talked at Tulane Hall to an audience the *Picayune* called large and appreciative, she told how employment had opened up for women in the South. She insisted that it now only "remained to secure them the right of equality in pay as well as in work, and that clearly could only be done by the ballot." Anthony declared that "men held the key to all of woman's work, to her place in the factory, mill, store, at the desk." Although woman was dependent on man for work, he nevertheless continued to deny her "the privilege of earning as much for her work as he would get himself for it."

The right of women to earn equal pay was Cole's passion, which likely prompted her to claim that Anthony was a witty and welcome orator about issues important to women and that her knowledge on woman's advances was as "encyclopediacal [sic]" as it was on suffrage. She wrote that one could talk to Susan B. Anthony for hours at a social gathering, for example, and not have her "treat the guests to a suffrage lecture." Ladies who could speak of one passion only were "bores," Cole asserted. She wrote that Anthony left town in "possession of many new friends and newly converted admirers."³² The famed suffrage worker would later build on the contacts she made in New Orleans to expand her arm of the movement. One of her skills was as

³² "Susan B. Anthony Lectures to a Large and Appreciative Audience at Tulane Hall," *Picayune*, March 20, 1885. For other information about Anthony, including that she was willing to speak without pay, see "WWW," *Picayune*, March 8, 1885. That she could talk without being boring, see "WWW," *Picayune*, April 12, 1885. Like Howe, Anthony was the "recipient of so many social attentions" that she set Wednesday afternoon as reception day at her temporary residence, Magazine at Orange Streets. *Picayune*, March 17, 1885.

the NWSA's alliance-maker. Caroline Merrick became an important asset in the expansion of this arm of suffrage when she wrote the Louisiana section for Stanton and Anthony's *History of Suffrage*, volume three, and when in 1892 she was one of the founders of the first suffrage club in Louisiana, the Portia Club.

Next Steps in the Dance

Cole had touted the "unbounded respect" that Susan B. Anthony commanded and told of her "absolutely unselfish dedication to a cause she believes to be right and good, and for the help of womankind." Cole used the respect paid Anthony to press one of her own causes: women's attention on self. She charged that women should bury "that obstreperous thing—self"; that they should improve their intellectual condition and "help other women along" in all ways, especially through regular attendance at the Woman's Club. Thought-provoking May Wright Sewall had told members of the club that women first organized to encourage self-sacrifice but were now working together "to make that self worth sacrificing." Cole wrote that working women especially had need of the kind of club in which women could count on "the constant help and sympathy of each other." Apparently, she judged the Howes among those who did not put selves aside. As an example of self-promotion, she wrote that Maud Howe, using the pseudonym "Halcyon" in the *Boston Transcript*, had probably started "the statement going the rounds of the press that, with their own hands, Mrs. and Miss Howe have 'built counters and hung bunting' in the Woman's Department."³³ This reference signaled the first public fracture since the early rift over the selection of Howe and her appointment of a northern staff. When Cole compared Howe to Anthony, Howe apparently suffered from the comparison.

³³ About helping other women, see "WWW," *Picayune*, March 8, 1885; for Sewall's comments about self-sacrifice, see the *Times-Democrat*, March 11, 1885; for remaining quotes, see "WWW," *Picayune*, March 8, 1885.

Soon after Anthony's departure, Cole made a distinction between a woman working for a cause and one who became so accustomed to deference that she had forgotten why she took on her mission. In "Woman's World and Work," she declared: "No one in the country knows better than the newspaper reporter who are the men and women in public life working for the cause, and who are the men and women working for the actors in that cause." Those who cared about the work were "not consumed with a greedy desire to get the credit for everything, to have the most applause, the first cream of the newspaper comment." On the contrary, to do the work without public applause was "the surest and healthiest sign of the public worker."³⁴ Cole did not clarify that she was referring to Howe, but she had written that most prominent women in the city during the previous few months had not sought credit for themselves, only for their causes. She would soon become more blatant in her censure of the Woman's Department's chief.

Undeterred, however, Julia Ward Howe pressed ahead with what she came to do, to make a successful Woman's Department. No matter the obstacles (as Howe's years of journals attest), she was a vulnerable woman but not easily daunted. Once she gave her word, she proceeded despite family deaths, squandered inheritance, heavy snows, cancelled trains, pitching ships, and grumbling newswomen. In New Orleans, she shepherded the department from inauspicious beginnings to solvent end, and her celebrity brought scores of women into the department specifically to meet her. She was also innovative. When Howe noticed that attendance lagged in the Government and States Building, she instigated Saturday "Twelve-O'Clock Talks" from mid-February to the end of May. In them, offered in various departments and areas,

³⁴ "WWW," *Picayune*, March 22, 1885.

distinguished men and women addressed topics as varied as women's suffrage and Arctic explorations.³⁵

Howe supported the entire Exposition and appeared on the platform at almost every official opening. As Maud Howe recounted, it was "obligatory" for Lady Commissioners to attend opening days for each state and territory, and "the women spent many weary hours trying to hear addresses of distinguished individuals whose voices contended in vain with the din of the machinery" in the vast halls.³⁶ Officials apparently expected more of Howe than mere attendance; they wanted to hear her fitting comments. She accepted numerous invitations to speak at official events and wherever else she was asked in the city. On Saturday, March 21, 1885, the Minnesota delegation and other guests applauded when she rose to say some "pretty things" about the state. Was it an omen of ills to come that, as the *Picayune* reported, "[a] heavy rain just at that moment begun beating on the expansive roof of the building, and kept up a fusillade to the end of Mrs. Howe's address"? She remarked that perhaps the "elements were conspired against her" and apologized, as she always did, that her voice was weak. Among her many talks were two parlor lectures to benefit the Southern Art Union. Her topic for one, "Men's Women and Women's Women,"³⁷ would later be used against her.

A Place for Unusual Exhibits

Like Howe, Cole mastered her daily work and reviewed exhibits in the Woman's Department in great detail, especially the unusual ones. She commended the New York women

³⁵ Howe listed the topics of Twelve O'Clock talks in her final *Report and Catalogue*, 29-31. They proved so popular that women used the idea again eight years later at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, according to Laura E. Richards and Maud Howe Elliott with Florence Howe Hall, *Julia Ward Howe: 1819-1910* (Boston: Houghton, 1915) II: 107.

³⁶ Richards and Elliott, *Julia Ward Howe*, II: 105.

³⁷ *Picayune*, March 22, 1885.

for having no “crazy quilts, no crocheted baby sacks and shoes” and instead focusing on benevolent and philanthropic work and fine designs from the Women’s Technical School of Design on Fifth Avenue. She highlighted the valuable machine for sewing straw braid with which Mrs. Mary Carpenter Harper of Brooklyn had already “made a fortune.” She listed industries that supplemented the otherwise unremarkable paintings, needlework, and such. Among these were a noteworthy health stocking, suspenders, and braces; patented dolls; and paper nuns fashioned by an invalid woman. She admired a cloth embroidered with moose hair and other items that Indian women sent. She wrote about Miss Alice C. Fletcher of New York, “widely known for her work among the Omaha Indians,” who spent her life among them prompted by her interest in archaeology. According to the *Times-Democrat*, Howe also engaged Fletcher for a Twelve O’Clock Talk in which she disputed the stereotype of Indians as continually in a state of warfare, an image projected by Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show. Instead, she spotlighted their home life.³⁸ This emphasis on home life was in keeping with a familiar theme among women at the Cotton Centennial Exposition. Repeatedly, they were considering how women used their homes, especially when they reaped a monetary reward.

The *Times-Democrat* also reported on Indian exhibits shown with the state of Louisiana exhibit on the ground floor of the Government Building. Mrs. Charles E. Whitney of New Orleans had amassed the collection and had “made a special study of the Indian tribes represented.” She said she had wrested these specimens from Indian “savages” with “infinite difficulty” because they had “an intense aversion to the whites.” Among the items were basket work, long cane blow-guns, beadwork, and gaudy-colored “peculiar costumes” of the

³⁸ *Picayune*, March 24, 1885; about Fletcher, see the *Times-Democrat*, April 12, 1885.

Chitamachas and the Tchuahas [sic] from the Bayou Teche.³⁹ In 1885, there was not yet the voyeuristic exoticism that came later, when villages of indigenous peoples from many nations were on exhibit on the entertainment strips of World's Fairs, beginning with the Midway at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. In New Orleans, the artifacts were of interest.

Indian work and inventions were major features and curiosities in the Woman's Department as part of the exhibits of Women of the Pacific Slope. From the Washington Territory, a "curious collection of Indian treasures from the Skokomish Indians, especially shell beads, formerly used as money, and water tight baskets woven from roots of cedar trees." From the Clallam tribe, among other items were "head straps for carrying bundles which the Indians swing from across their foreheads." From the Navajos were three "brilliantly colored" blankets, and purses, shoes, and other "curious articles." From Mescalero Apache women, a buckskin garment (scrappe) and some beaded articles. From Indians at Forest Grove Training School in Oregon, a sample of their monthly newspaper, the *Indian Citizen*, and "some good pieces of Mojave pottery, fur rugs," and more.⁴⁰ The native displays were another connection among women from various sections of the country and an opportunity for them to assess (if they were aware) how they supported, appreciated, or denigrated the indigenous peoples around them.

Aside from the *Picayune*'s account of Indian displays from the Pacific Slope states, its description of the Slope's frilly décor matched that of other Victorian-draped spaces in the Woman's Department. The center pavilion had a pale blue ceiling, gold figured wallpaper, deep crimson draperies, and arched doorways that formed a boudoir, studio, and museum all in one,

³⁹ *Times-Democrat*, April 5, 1885.

⁴⁰ *Picayune*, March 25, 1885.

the *Picayune* reported. Over time, Cole acknowledged the two thousand exhibits from women of the Pacific Slope (Alaska, Washington Territory, Oregon, Idaho, California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico). The group showed farming, gardening, and ranching work; bee culture, silk culture, and educational interests; scientific and Indian work. The California Silk Culture Association sent a fascinating display of cocoons, reeled silk, silk thread and silk stockings that excited many women as a possible way to make a living from home, especially where mulberry trees were readily accessible.⁴¹

Always of interest were the inventions women sent. Those from the Pacific states showed items strange and promising: a patented snow plow, a crumb collector, a dustpan; an adjustable button-hole invention that was “a blessing to women generally”; a unique comb to hold the “most unruly hat or bonnet”; a combination fashion item to hang from the neck that was “muff, private purse, shopping bag, satchel, handkerchief holder, all in one”; a “long-handled hook” that was ingenious “for pulling open upper windows, transoms,” and more.⁴² As with many of the inventions in the Woman’s Department, these focused on easing women’s domestic burden or enhancing her costumes. Journalists responsible for conveying all the worthy details of exhibits played significant roles in propagating new products and ideas.

Cole spent a column of genuine excitement on “Women as Inventors,” describing items state by state. Some women showed patented industrial items through which they had created businesses; others “confined their inventive skill to the kitchen or to housewifely pursuits.” Most contraptions were clearly attempts to lighten the drudgery of housekeeping: ironing tables, a flat iron with adjustable handle, a bread kneader, a perforated baking pan, an egg-beater, an egg-

⁴¹ *Picayune*, May 23, 1885.

⁴² *Picayune*, March 25, 1885.

stand, a self-feeding griddle greaser, a pie lifter, a washing machine. Others demonstrated solutions to other problems around the house: an adaptable window cleaner, a chimney ventilator, a fire escape ladder, an invalid bed, a portable apparatus for vapor and hot air baths, a cistern spout trap to keep out insects. Many items improved the task of sewing, including a system for cutting garments by measure. Women seemed enamored of space-saving items or multi-use ones: a folding trunk, an extension stair rod, an improved railroad car seat, a portable nursery chair, a combination dressing case and bathtub. Most conspicuous, perhaps, were the portable wire summer house and the portable squatter's cottage with its own bow-window and folding bed. To enumerate them seemed to give Cole pleasure.⁴³

When the *Times-Democrat* reporter (probably Pavy) reviewed the scientific area of the Woman's Department, she reiterated the steps that must have led to Julia Ward Howe's appointment. Pavy's report told that in spring of 1883, members of the New England Manufacturer's Institute in Boston offered to include a woman's department there, and "a number of intelligent and public-spirited women" had collected woman's work. They had agreed to establish "a high standard," with fewer quilts and fancy work and more "work of an industrial nature having a commercial value, and work requiring more brain effort." They had attempted the experiment of a scientific section, more difficult to exhibit, and it was judged successful and credible. Howe had been president of that Woman's Department, and she had hoped to repeat in

⁴³ "World's Exposition: Women as Inventors," *Picayune*, May 23, 1885. The complete list of inventions, state by state, is included in Howe's *Report and Catalogue*. The Colorado Lady Commissioner hurriedly added her exhibit to the department, having been "delayed until very late" trying to get an appropriation from her Legislature: paintings, a large silk crazy quilt, a braided leather hat band, "a jar of jam, made from gooseberries grown 13,000 feet above sea level," and more, *Times-Democrat*, May 18, 1885. The Arkansas Commissioner arrived so late that she never unpacked her "impressive number of boxes," Herbert S. Fairall, *The World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition in New Orleans, 1884-1885* (Iowa City: Republican, 1885), 362.

New Orleans the scientific exhibits that in Boston had included astronomy, botany, chemistry, mineralogy, geology, entomology, architecture, and ethnology. Lack of time dictated a smaller exhibit in the Crescent City, yet the displays did show that the “mysteries” of science were not beyond the “grasp of the feminine mind, and that many operations requiring nice manipulation seem particularly to call for the deftness of woman’s hand.” Then, Pavy provided examples of those particulars from the woman’s Science alcove.⁴⁴

She reported on the cocoons, webbing worms, and silk that seemed to be everywhere. The Silk Culture Association showed silk in glass jars from seventy-eight growers. The famous Strawbridge & Clothier department stores of Philadelphia promised to award a total of \$500 to the ten best examples, to encourage “silk raising in America,” as if it were a patriotic undertaking. The *Picayune* reported that the association “received financial aid from the United States Government” and would begin a training school in Philadelphia to demonstrate the practical value of silk culture for women throughout the United States.” Silk-raising was also promoted as a likely vocation for African Americans. Displays of cocoons and silk-making were part of exhibits from Pennsylvania, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, New Jersey, Florida, Tennessee, and Texas. Louisiana also had “a very large display, moths, eggs, cocoons, reeled silk, most of it raised from the [highly prized] French worms from Vars.” The nuns of the Carmelite order in Louisiana raised silk enough for their own use, both in the city of New Orleans and in rural Thibodaux. Pavy of the *Times-Democrat* described the process of silk culture in great detail, claiming that this new way to earn from home seemed to fascinate all who saw the worms “in every state of their existence,” including a final tray of “great, fat, gray-green

⁴⁴ *Times-Democrat*, May 25, 1885.

creatures, two inches long and one in circumference.” She declared them “well worth a visit to the Exposition to see,” especially as they would soon begin to “web up.”⁴⁵ Visitors to the Woman’s Department could not afford to be squeamish about worms.

Pavy also took a creative approach to other displays. Instead of focusing on a single state’s exhibits, she described “types” found in many spaces in the department. For example, she devoted a column to “Jewels and Laces” from women of Washington, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Mississippi and elsewhere, many of whom earned a living with the work. In another column, she covered “Silk and Silver,” in which she told of etchings that women applied to cutlery and trays at the Gorham Silver Manufacturing Company. Clearly, her pieces in the *Times-Democrat* were designed to pique people’s interest in the Exposition rather than to hint at the department’s internal squabbles.⁴⁶ Director-General E. A. Burke’s reporters apparently followed his lead and ruffled no feathers.

The Role of Female Journalists

Catharine Cole faithfully described each detail of the Woman’s Department but also added her no-nonsense style to “World’s Exposition,” the *Picayune*’s version of the daily columns each newspaper ran under the same title and that covered all pertinent events at the Fair. Cole was an intrepid reporter who was proud of the profession, clear about the importance of her role, and trenchant in defense of women working in the public realm. When a clergyman railed

⁴⁵ For awards, see the *Times-Democrat*, April 2, 1885; about the training school, see the *Picayune*, May 9, 1885; about nuns, see the *Times-Democrat*, April 2, 1885. Description of the silk process, see the *Times-Democrat*, April 13, 1885.

⁴⁶ The largest collection of antique laces was in the section of the Christian Woman’s Exchange. The CWE also displayed hand embroidery from Scotland, which it was authorized to sell. *Times-Democrat*, April 13, 1885. For silk and silver, see the *Times-Democrat*, April 2, 1885.

that women ought to be in the home, Cole wrote that he might have been “a trifle startled” to learn that “his lecture for the next morning’s papers was in both instances reported by women, and by women who know what it is to live outside the home.” She claimed that these female journalists had to “trudge in rain or shine at all hours to and from their reporters’ desks, earning their own living—earnestly and honestly by a work that is not at any rate fireside work.” They reported other woman’s work, she wrote; they took down suffrage speeches “to furnish opponents like the Monsignor with food for thought.” They did “a variety of work as good and useful as reporting Monsignor Capel’s lectures.” Alone when she pursued the story, Cole cherished the comradeship of fellow journalists, many of whom came to report the Woman’s Department, including Mary E. Booth, editor of *Harper’s Bazar* (as it was then spelled); Lilian Whiting, columnist of “Boston Days,” a weekly report she made for the *Times-Democrat*; and writer Sallie Morgan, correspondent for the *Nashville World* and *Chicago InterOcean*.⁴⁷ Cole’s employer, Eliza Nicholson, shared her pride in her work, more than once referring to herself as journalist rather than publisher.

Cole did not need to applaud fellow journalist and native New Orleanian, Mrs. Frank Leslie. Leslie saw to that herself. A large article about her in both the *Times-Democrat* and *Picayune* (two weeks apart) seems to have been less news story than advertisement. It was sometimes hard to tell the difference between the two, given the way late-nineteenth-century newspapers folded advertisements into news columns. The two articles on Leslie told essentially the same tale under the same large sketch of a lovely waist-cinched woman and a scrawling, powerful signature. Perhaps apocryphally, the report indicated that she was “born in a big

⁴⁷ About Monsignor Capel, see “WWW,” *Picayune*, March 29, 1885; about Booth, “WWW,” *Picayune*, March 8, 1885; about Lilian Whiting, see the *Times-Democrat*, February 22, 1885. Whiting was the guest of Mrs. Harry Hall of Coliseum Street while in New Orleans. About Sallie Morgan, see “WWW,” *Picayune*, February 15, 1885.

plantation house on the banks of the Mississippi.” More importantly, like Nicholson, that she ruled her deceased husband’s publishing empire (eleven papers, including the flagship *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Weekly*) and approved the “make-up” of every issue that went to press. Like Nicholson’s elderly first husband, Leslie’s husband had also left a heavily indebted paper that needed her hard work to bring it to eventual success. The columns told how her husband made her promise to get the papers out of debt and continue running them, how she sacrificed to keep her promise, and how she honored her husband’s last request to change her name legally from Miriam Florence Leslie to “Frank Leslie.” The *Mascot* sniped that all the attention other papers paid were just “gushing eulogies over Mrs. Frank Leslie,” a woman who knew how to employ “that feminine facility of invention” to create curiosity about her paper.⁴⁸



“Frank Leslie,” *Times-Democrat*, February 22, 1885; *Picayune*, March 5, 1885

⁴⁸ In the *Picayune* version, Leslie’s name had been Marian. See “Frank Leslie,” *Picayune*, March 5, 1885. The *Times-Democrat* version (credited to “Crespo”) gave specific details about how she paid off the \$70,000 debt, how she legally changed her name, and how she overcame pursuant lawsuits. See “Frank Leslie,” *Times-Democrat*, February 22, 1885. For criticism of the articles, see the *Mascot*, February 28, 1885.

The *Times-Democrat* and *Picayune* articles do seem too fawning not to have been from Leslie's own hand, and Cole is surprisingly silent about a fellow journalist. The *Times-Democrat*'s version described Leslie as "conspicuous anywhere" with her "shapely and well-poised head," piercing yet "wondrously expressive gray eyes, . . . a mouth extremely mobile in its play." It also described her as a "winning and direct" conversationalist who could discuss "any object of social, political or business interest." She had met every obstacle in a "ladylike yet firm and positive manner," the *Times-Democrat* version maintained. Leslie asserted that two-thirds of all the women who contributed to Frank Leslie publications were "Southern women living in the South." She claimed their work sometimes lacked polish and finish but that they did "have that more valuable quality, imagination." The *Picayune* version called her an "intellectual, sagacious and fascinating widow" who managed and directed "with wisdom, skill and energy" the "immense enterprise bearing her name." It also declared that even in "a man's work" with "a man's responsibility," Leslie lost none of her gentleness, "gracious charms," femininity, or attractiveness.⁴⁹ The newspapers apparently assumed that readers wanted to assess repeatedly whether a woman could be strong and independent yet lose none of her feminine appearance and womanly ways. That kind of reassurance made it safer for women to consider progressive ideas and actions in a possible "New South."

⁴⁹ Leslie was later quoted as having said to reporters in Cincinnati that she was "too busy a woman to get married." "Personals," *Picayune*, March 13, 1885; for women working for her, see "Mrs. Frank Leslie," *Picayune*, February 20, 1885. Like Julia Ward Howe, Leslie probably discovered that widowhood had its perks. Unlike Howe, she was apparently now wealthy and flaunted it. At the Momus ball, she was one of the "most beautiful" and superbly dressed," Nicholson wrote in the "Society Bee," especially the diamonds that brightened her coronet, dog collar, earrings, and "a lovely pin for her corsage." *Picayune*, February 22, 1885.

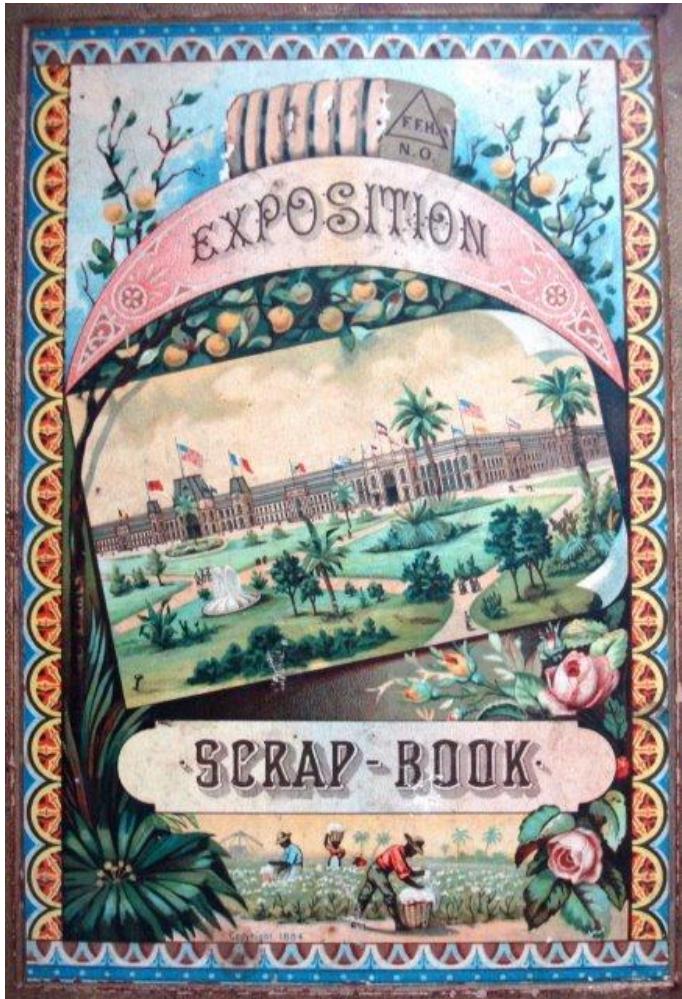
March of 1885 was an exciting time for the women of New Orleans and for participants in the Woman's Department. Powerful women spoke confrontational truths and challenged unexamined ideas. Women already knew that they could not fully rely on men to support them emotionally and financially; that visiting women said it publicly and urged daughters to seek higher education to make their own futures was new. Newspapers debunked stereotypes of accomplished and strong-minded women, opening a way for more cautious women to give their ideas a fair hearing. Radical notions no longer needed to be held at arm's length, and some women were doubtless ready to embrace them. Even if the Woman's Department exhibited leisured women's work mixed in with new options for employment at this late-nineteenth century event, white women were of necessity beginning to focus on finding jobs at home or in the marketplace.

Themes began to take shape in the Woman's Department: jobs, education, the ballot. Newspapers reported that prominent women's lectures about expanding work and rights engaged audiences; even men seemed to have received them favorably. National leaders like Susan B. Anthony, Frances E. Willard, and May Wright Sewall emphasized the dignity of work and the right to earn equal pay; they pressed for higher education and for the ballot to correct civic ills and inequalities. For many white women seeking work to support their families, the stigma of working outside the home needed to be removed, yet speakers continued to use domestic tropes while advancing progressive ideas. Powerful visitors raised the esteem of teachers and members of the Woman's Club by addressing their concerns. The three themes of work, education, and the vote had been discussed in the women's separate place (the Woman's Department), and become part of the public domain by being reported in newspapers. If southern women were to progress, they could no longer sit on the sidelines of the great debates of their century.

A Hot Spring: Contesting Howe's Authority (Again)

The office of President has never been confounded with
the office of Dictator.

—Catharine Cole¹



"Exposition Scrapbook" Showing the Government and States Building, collection Ken Speth

Brighter weather and eased tensions in the Woman's Department afforded participants some cheery occasions. Exhibits continued to receive praise, and the cause of suffrage gained an unanticipated boost. On the other hand, unexpected resignations by men of management left Julia Ward Howe without the support she had relied upon. Furthermore, if she thought all had been settled in the Woman's Department, she was mistaken. The period of unity and happy times were simply a brief intermission; final episodes shattered the

¹ "Woman's World and Work" (hereafter "WWW"), *Picayune*, April 5, 1885.

temporary accord. Rumors and innuendoes swirled again, and a hostile press raged over Howe's authority, the style of her leadership, and her apparent disregard for the sisterhood she espoused. Reports leaked that wrangling over money had begun. Yet, the harshest jolt of all came when one of Howe's home compatriots arrived in the city. A Boston journalist's challenge administered a glancing blow to Howe's composure, and Catharine Cole took up a final campaign against the president of the Woman's Department. Local women were more spectators to this squabble than players in it, and they might have been privately ambivalent. Nonetheless, despite this disruptive final turn, the large cast of women rallied once more to end the big show with appropriate fanfare and bows all around. How long did southern women take to sort the impact of six astonishing months, and were women in the South's premier, cosmopolitan city ready to shape a more progressive future?

New Ideas, New People, New Opportunities

Spring brought another crop of distinguished visitors, including two men who would guide the career of aspiring local writer, Grace King. One was Charles Dudley Warner, editor and proprietor of the *Hartford Courant*; the other was Richard Watson Gilder, the young and "brilliant" editor-in-chief of *Century Magazine*. On Warner's first visit to "the extreme South," the *Times-Democrat* thought him well suited "to give the North and the world a dispassionate and liberal view of the South and its present social, material, and political condition." Warner did give write a glowing report of the event, but as with so many other positive reviews, it was too late to help gate receipts at the Cotton Centennial Exposition. He also lectured on "Prison

Discipline” for Howe’s Twelve O’Clock Talk No. 12. Both editors, Warner and Gilder, were in demand among local elites and were widely entertained.²

Because Julia Ward Howe knew both men, she was often included in social events honoring them. She also hosted several gatherings at which they were among the guests. Through these soirees, Grace King met the men who would mentor her work. At last, this ambitious young woman saw a way out of her cramped financial straits. Writing fiction had long been a path to financial stability for northern women, like Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louisa May Alcott, and the Howes, but since publishers were mainly in the Northeast, southern women’s access had been cut off during the Civil War and beyond. Now Warner and Gilder had come south in part to find southern local color writers, especially since George Washington Cable had done so well for Gilder’s *Century Magazine*. The editors brought an unexpected potential for women to work from home.³

Using her position as head of the Woman’s Department, Julia Ward Howe continued to fulfill many requests for her presence and, as the *Picayune* asserted, fully exercised her “rare ability and culture.” On Thursday, April 16, 1885, Howe and twenty Lady Commissioners joined

² For the desire for Warner to treat New Orleans favorably, see the *Times-Democrat*, April 6, 1885; for Warner’s report that “the war is over in spirit as in deed” and his collected impressions of the South, of society in the “New South,” and other recollections of 1885 New Orleans as a charming, glowing city with a fascinating, diverse population, see Charles Dudley Warner. *Studies in the South and West with Comments on Canada* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1889), 3-63. For Warner’s Twelve O’Clock lecture, see the *Times-Democrat*, April 21, 1885. Unless otherwise noted, all references are from columns titled “World’s Exposition.”

³ For Howe entertaining Warner and other friends at dinner April 9, 1885, see “Society Bee” *Picayune*, April 12, 1885. Warner was listed at some six home gatherings where Gilder and/or Howe were among the guests. For how Grace King met Warner and Gilder and “grabbed” Warner’s attention away from other belles, see Grace King to May McDowell, April 17, 1885 and April 26, 1885, Grace King Papers (MSS 1282), Louisiana State University Libraries Special Collections, Baton Rouge; for the two editors’ influence on her first published stories, see Grace King, *Memories of a Southern Woman of Letters* (New York: McMillan, 1932), 58-69.

Louisiana Governor McEnergy and distinguished American and Mexican guests on a diplomatic trip to the capital city, Baton Rouge. According to the *Picayune*, the special train of four coaches left the Mississippi Valley Railroad depot on Poydras Street in New Orleans at 7:30 a.m. At the State House in Baton Rouge, the governor talked of woman's work and what he had seen in the Woman's Department, and he "bestowed a meed of praise upon Mrs. Julia Ward Howe." She responded, as she always did, that she was "glad that the idea of this unity was recognized." Whenever Howe had a chance, she counteracted rumors of squabbles and turmoil in the Woman's Department and accentuated the harmony and accord among participants.⁴

She claimed that the South had received the Lady Commissioners and visitors with "open arms and open heart." Making no distinction between the atypical city of New Orleans and the rest of the region, Howe said she was glad women were "so well loved in the South." However, she pointedly told how "[i]n some portions of the country women were allowed to come to their full moral and intellectual stature. The stone of tradition was taken off their heads."⁵ Her comments recall May Wright Sewall's earlier remonstrance to a mixed audience at the Woman's Club, that men's fine sentiments about protecting women did not replace fair and equal treatment. Howe nudged her hearers in a similar direction.

Women who had come from elsewhere, as advocates of women's advancement, apparently realized that they would have to tackle the opinions men held if their women were to be free to seek professions, higher education, and the ballot. As they no doubt saw it, to drag chivalric notions into a progressive "New South" was crippling to women's advancement. Yet, for southern men and women still enamored of Sir Walter Scott's tales, performing the gallantry,

⁴ "A Trip to Baton Rouge," *Picayune*, April 17, 1885.

⁵ Ibid.

graciousness, and courtesies between Southern Lady and her protector was familiar, thus safe and comfortable. According to Caroline Merrick, outsiders simply took “a long time to come to any true understanding of the Southern people.” They mistook “transient, exterior features” for southerners’ real character, she wrote, instead of recognizing that the “indwelling ideals” of the South (including a love of freedom) had “always been thoroughly American.”⁶ If women from elsewhere were open to revisiting stereotypes of the South, perhaps they came to better understand their southern hosts over the course of a long season of working and playing together as, for example, on the trip to Baton Rouge.

Howe’s focus was mainly on her own passions, and she linked them as often as possible to audiences large and small: the issues of education, advancement, patriotism, peace, and suffrage. With the governor’s tour group, she strategically pressed for “educational opportunities” as a way for woman “to learn her duty to home and State” the *Picayune* reported. Although Howe had resisted the confinement of duties in her own home life, she knew its value. She also knew the rhetoric of motherhood was effective. As a leader in the moderate wing of the suffrage movement, she employed the language of woman’s role as nurturer and guide in order to reach the greatest number of people, and she applied the tactic especially when petitioning for the ballot to men in state legislatures. In Baton Rouge, she also sounded another of her causes. “While woman’s work is illustrated at the Exposition,” she said, “woman’s greatest work is to keep the peace of the world.”⁷ This reference to peace was no idle proposal for Howe. She had seen the effects of war when in Washington in 1862 with her husband, an officer with the Sanitary Commission during the Civil War and with the commission in charge of the condition

⁶ Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land*, 215, 214.

⁷ Ibid.

of freed slaves. Her “Battle Hymn of the Republic” had come out of that experience. After the war, she had worked to create a Mother’s Day of world peace.

The evening after her trip to Baton Rouge with the governor, the indefatigable Howe spoke on “Woman as a Social Power” to benefit the Unitarian Church of Messiah, the denomination of her maturity. The *Picayune* reported that she “allowed herself the widest possible range in the discussion of her subject.” She was “discursive” but “at all times entertaining and sensible.” In that month, when Frances E. Willard announced the end of her continuous road travel for the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union to spend more time with her aging mother, Howe (twenty years Willard’s senior) soldiered on without pause.⁸ She was a woman of great energy and dedication; when men of management selected her, they had been right about that.

Meanwhile, Cole was forwarding her own mission in “Woman’s World and Work.” She goaded women to be proud to earn a living and to value fellow workers. She and Howe shared a desire that women lift and support each other, but Howe’s candidates were often privileged, and Cole’s were almost always working women. Cole prodded them to organize a protective union for the coming “long summer,” commonly months of illness in New Orleans.⁹ She chided young

⁸ “Mrs. Howe’s Lecture,” *Picayune*, April 23, 1885. The charge to attend the benefit at the Unitarian Church was 50 cents, the same as the entrance fee to the Exposition. For Willard’s announcement, see the *Times-Democrat*, April 13, 1885.

⁹ For Cole’s statements about working women, see “WWW,” *Picayune*, April 19, 1885. About what the Union would allow, Cole suggested: Against sickness—if 1000 working women paid 25 cents a month, the association would have \$250 a month to “look after its sick and needy. Against death—the assessment should be 50 cents.” Finally, in late April, the Woman’s Club agreed to pay \$3.50 a week to any sick member from the “reserve fund of the club.” Cole expected that those who did not need it would donate the money back to the sick fund, as was “the case in most health insurance and protective organizations.” See “WWW,” *Picayune*, May 3, 1885. For women as wage earners, see Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

women who harbored a “false idea of their place in the world.” Too many dressed up “very fine on Sundays” and were mortified if someone mentioned work, she wrote. They eschewed the ten-cent lunch at the Christian Woman’s Exchange because it was called a working woman’s lunch. Cole’s stated opinion was that reluctant workers made fools of themselves until they were married and even then tried to keep their working days a secret. “Be a working woman in all simplicity and nobility of mind and heart [and not] a giggling, spit-curled bundle of conceit, a rude, ill-dressed crank,” Cole advised. She pressed readers to understand that in their manner of regarding and using life, they either elevated or degraded their place and the esteem of work in the world.¹⁰

As part of Cole’s relentless advocacy of working women, she pressed the Woman’s Department to nurture them. She deemed it unfortunate that the young women the Exposition hired “were not invited to make the headquarters of the Woman’s Department a place of resort and rendezvous. It [was] not likely that they would have abused their privilege,” she declared. Instead, they “would have been gratified to have been invited to make themselves at home in the place known as the headquarters of the working woman.” Many were young girls away from home for the first time, she noted, and they were “lonely, homesick and ennuied. The Woman’s Department should have been a sheltering wing—a place of protection, and help and comfort and

¹⁰ About manners of working women, see “WWW,” *Picayune*, April 19, 1885; about workingwomen’s lunch, see “Christian Woman’s Exchange,” April 19, 1885. Total receipts of CWE for year March 1884 to March 1885 were \$44,387.35. It had paid out \$40,256.70 to women for their handmade items, and put ten percent, or \$4330.50, in the bank for the Exchange. The itemized report in *Times-Democrat*, May 3, 1885 also showed lunch profits that year were \$5,951.50 and rental of rooms \$828.00. Cole wrote that the CWE was “managed from A to Z by women” and had “never missed an obligation.” “WWW,” *Picayune*, April 19, 1885.

cheer to every young girl in the Exposition.”¹¹ Despite the harshness of some of her remarks, Cole was often right on target, especially when she voiced injustices against disadvantaged, wage-earning women. Hers was a voice not heard in all newspapers of the time. Although now nearly forgotten, her impact was great in the region that the *Picayune* reached.

Meanwhile, Julia Ward Howe was moving about the Exposition, finding “pretty words” to say as she represented the Woman’s Department at opening celebrations and special days. Her national celebrity brought the department greater attention than it might have gained with a local president. She also enlarged her own reputation. Howe’s journals reveal that she took a certain pride in her ability to speak extemporaneously and worried when the thoughts did not come. As one of the platform speakers on Texas Day (April 20, 1885), she first made her customary apology for the weakness of her voice. “In an unguarded moment,” the *Times-Democrat* reported, she then claimed “she had promised to say something on Texas Day, and had ever since been in a state of perplexity” as to what she should say. She quipped that nothing seemed “‘big enough’ for Texas [Laughter.].” Regaining her usual composure, she spoke “in felicitous language of the happy relations” between her own dear Massachusetts and the Lone Star State. Although smaller than Texas, she said, Massachusetts was industrious and ready to “assist her younger sisters in their development.” More importantly, she told of the change in public sentiment toward women and women’s work. Because of “the development, purity and enlightenment of the American home,” the work of women was beginning to elicit a “greater

¹¹ “WWW,” *Picayune*, May 24, 1885.

deference,” the *Times-Democrat* reported.¹² Howe was a fine ambassador for the Woman’s Department; the Board of Management had also been right about that.

Ten days later, on Louisiana Day, Howe had a larger role in the celebration than did any Louisiana woman. On April 30, 1885, after steamboats arrived with great fanfare and people streamed through the oaks as on opening day, Director-General Burke told a huge audience of the Exposition’s influence in “unifying the nation.” Then Howe joined a delegation making a tribute to Honorable C. C. Barrow of West Baton Rouge, United States Commissioner for Louisiana, for his extraordinary hospitality. She delivered a “brief and felicitous speech” and presented a “magnificent floral wreath” to Barrow. Then the group opened “sundry bottles of wine” and champagne to drink success to Louisiana Day (instead of with He-No tea, the drink most often served at events in the Woman’s Department). The *Picayune* declared that the gate receipts that day were the largest of the entire event: \$24,368.90 or 55,000 people. According to the *Times-Democrat*, the occasion became one of the “pleasantest and most gratifying,” even among the many ladies present, including Merrick and Cole.¹³ As Howe told in her journal, she was on the grounds until about 10 p.m. She wrote that Colonel Vinet of Baton Rouge recognized her and insisted she go into a side room at the banker’s pavilion “where he brought in a number of ladies, poured out champagne and insisted upon my making a speech. I said a few words and

¹² *Times-Democrat*, April 22, 1885. The *Picayune* mentioned that Howe spoke, but it did not quote her, unusual for that paper, April 22, 1885.

¹³ For gate receipts, see the *Picayune*, May 1, 1885. The *Times-Democrat* estimated the crowd at 60,000 on May 1, 1885; it raised the count to 70,000 on May 2. It also calculated that New Orleans had swollen from its normal population of 235,000 to 280,000 with visitors during many weeks of the Exposition. The *Picayune* reported that five streetcar lines and the Crescent City Railroad had moved at least 18,000 people to the grounds for Louisiana Day, *Picayune*, May 3, 1885. The *Times-Democrat* called Barrow a good choice, a successful gatherer of exhibits, and one who paid “proper courtesy to the representatives of other states,” April 21, 30, 1885.

stole out.”¹⁴ Howe would indulge in champagne again later that season, not in celebration but in recuperation.

Despite turmoil that spring, the pleasures of New Orleans social season proceeded. The *Picayune*'s publisher, Eliza Nicholson, in her “Society Bee” column at least, cloaked criticism as advice to and admiration of polite society. For example, Nicholson wrote: “It was the society women who prevented the Woman’s Department from being a dismal failure.” She noted that the same women, with their entertainments (not Howe’s lectures), had also saved the Southern Art Union, the Unsectarian Aid Society, and other important charities. In a recent entertainment, the type New Orleans relished, young ladies had acted in an “irresistibly funny” and delightful amateur theatrical performance at the Grand Opera House. Nicholson even gave some credit to

Maud Howe who participated in the farce, *Model Pair*, and in the “extremely stupid comic drama” of *Court Cards*. Maud Howe had “dressed the *Duchess* to perfection in black satin and maroon velvets, and albeit a trifle staged, played



¹⁴ April 30, 1885, Howe Unpublished Journals 1863-1910 (bMS Am 2119), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Earlier that day, Howe and daughter Maud attended the fashionable Breaux wedding and reception at the St. Louis Cathedral. On May 1, her father’s birthday, Howe recorded that she left the Exposition early and walked to Girod Street Cemetery (about four miles) to visit her “dear [brother] Marion’s grave,” a victim of yellow fever. She thought it “a lovely place” and described a typical tomb in a New Orleans cemetery. “Marion is buried above ground in a sort of edifice formed of brick, the rows of coffins being laid on stone floors, each single one divided from those on either side of it by a stone partition.” The tombstone read “Francis Marion Ward died September 3, 1847.” It was erected by William Morris, “dear Marion’s friend,” she wrote. Her journal entry is unsentimental and sparse but with an understated emotion. Although Howe was a very public figure throughout the event, she apparently kept these whereabouts private.

her part acceptably.”¹⁵ Where Cole was brash, brusque, and direct, Nicholson used the more oblique style with shades of sarcasm, to which “polite” southern ladies were more accustomed.

Graphic for “Society Bee” column, Picayune, every Sunday

Nicholson’s natural forte, however, was reporting on polite society’s splashy events, into which she wove conventional conduct lessons. Despite there once having been an aversion to women’s names being mentioned in newspapers, by 1885, everyone who was anyone clamored to see her name in “Society Bee,” as did those who attended the wedding of the season at St. Louis Cathedral. Among the guests who observed Miss Daisy Breaux marry Mr. Andrew Simonds of Charleston, for example, were CWE officers Walmsley and Fenner, the poet Townsend, the *Times-Democrat*’s literary belle Bessie Bisland, and the Howes.¹⁶ Maud Howe’s outfit was listed among the “elegant costumes”: a “cream colored silk sprigged with pink flowers—white lace bonnet.” It must have vexed Grace King, a piqued watcher of society, to be excluded, but she would make her mark later as the “Southern Woman of Letters.” As Nicholson wrote on May 3, 1885, “It is often the custom of folk to splice [sic] at society women for their frivolous and foolish lives,” yet these same elite women were the “chief help and protector of half the charities in the city.” They raised the money to “benefit the asylum, the school and the church,” she averred. Sharp-witted Cole had suggested that these generous women were blind to the young and struggling who were a “very large class of shy and unregarded people” and from

¹⁵ “Society Bee,” *Picayune*, May 3, 1885.

¹⁶ Grace King wrote about Bisland as a belle. “I went with Mrs. Gayarre to a meeting of her Historical Society yesterday & was infinitely bored. My only relaxation was watching Miss Bisland—her beauty, airs, & graces. She has usurped Catharine Cole’s place in the NO literary efforts & is a belle besides among all the men.” Grace King to May McDowell, December 11, 1884, King Papers.

whom the “ladies pull their dresses away” to avoid contact with the young urchins. Nevertheless, Nicholson insisted it was these society women who had saved the Woman’s Department.¹⁷

Surprising Occasions and “Interesting Exercises”

Nicholson gave Howe too little credit; local women had raised the money for the department, but Howe had led it efficiently. She had also added to the excitement in the Government Building by originating a plan of lectures in a series of twenty-four Twelve O’Clock talks at noon on Saturdays. She claimed the informal talks were “intended to have especial reference to the great points of interest brought together in the exhibits of the Government Building.” They were held in various state headquarters and sometimes in the Woman’s Department. Invited experts informally spoke on themes that included explorations in the Arctic, in the Yucatan, and in Egypt; others focused on Indians at home, in their social and religious life, and on Mexico and the Mexicans; others, on building the North-American Continent, prison discipline, sanitation, and charities in England and American, minerals and mineralogy, geology, education in the French Republic, sculpture, woman’s work in Japanese literature, and woman suffrage.¹⁸

On May 6, 1885, in the *Picayune*’s daily column “World’s Exposition,” an important lead story must have caught every woman’s eye. It told of an extraordinary witness for woman suffrage: ex-Governor J. M. Hoyt of the Wyoming Territory. His report, titled “Results of

¹⁷ “Society Bee,” *Picayune*, May 3, 1885; Cole, “Young and Struggling,” *Picayune*, May 3, 1885.

¹⁸ For a list of titles, speakers, locations, and Howe’s assertion that she originated this plan, see *Report and Catalogue of the Woman’s Department of the World’s Exposition, Held at New Orleans, 1884-1885* (Boston: Rand, Avery, 1885), 29-32.

Observations on Woman Suffrage in Wyoming,” took place in the Wyoming Headquarters. Although Hoyt claimed that he had never before made a speech on the subject, he cited “fourteen years of observation and experience” as evidence for his testimony. “He loved the truth,” the *Picayune* paraphrased, “and he had laid aside the prejudices in which he was educated and had taken up this subject, so interesting to every American citizen, and given it the careful consideration it merited.” Hoyt questioned why the “man who believes in universal freedom does not always favor universal suffrage,” and he asserted that if one believed in the right abstractly, “there is no argument which will hold against woman suffrage.”¹⁹ Julia Ward Howe or Susan B. Anthony could hardly have said it better, and it is unlikely that people in New Orleans would have heard this specific topic, especially from a man, had it not been for the Exposition.

Women had voted in the Wyoming Territory since 1869, and Hoyt recounted his experience with their having had the ballot. He said he had known it was “right for them to vote,” but had gone to Wyoming a “sincere skeptic,” wondering if that vote was “wise.” He looked at both sides of the woman suffrage question. He thought that women would vote smartly, he said, but feared a woman “would be harmed herself by the act, and by the discord which politics would introduce in the family.” But Hoyt assured the audience that while occasional divorces did occur in the Territory, “he never knew a single one to be caused by political differences in the home.” Instead, woman suffrage had proven “of practical value” from the beginning. Women “did not attend caucuses, but when men chose a candidate, they knew to ask, ‘How does he stand with the ladies?’” Hoyt said he knew at least one candidate who was defeated by women’s votes. He declared that it was incorrect to say, as people sometimes did, that “refined and delicate women would shrink away, and the bold and unworthy alone would

¹⁹ *Picayune*, May 6, 1885.

come to the front.” No, “nothing of this sort [had] happened, but just the contrary.” Rather, laws were “well administered,” the Sabbath was “quiet and orderly,” and the schools were “admirably managed” by teachers who enjoyed “equal pay for equal work.”²⁰

A variety of participants and visitors must have been impressed by Hoyt’s comment that woman’s “potent influence” was “a power of good to the State” and that it had strengthened “her own self-respect and her influence as mother and wife. It has been humiliating to many women to stand back with folded hands while the ignorant of the same and other races may determine the fate of her children,” Hoyt insisted, using the same domestic expression that female suffragists employed. He acknowledged that women with “a fine capacity for business” might have political ambitions, but they would be the exception. Nor did politics cause any neglect “of babies and shirt buttons.” In fact, he declared, men were more respectful toward women in Wyoming than in other sections of the country. Would any southern man dare say, as Hoyt did: “If there is any danger in this matter let us leave it to the women. No man chooses my sphere, why should I mark out woman’s?” Would a woman dare make the same bold comment he did: that some women rejected the ballot out of a desire for admiration from the opposite sex? Although people knew that strong and independent women had helped pioneer the West, these were dazzling statements from a nineteenth-century man.²¹

Hoyt must have astounded his mixed audience, and he held his ground when answering questions. Although some men conceded that women had “intelligence, virtue and humanity,” Hoyt said, they barred her having the ballot. He concluded that “if her vote is advantageous to

²⁰ *Picayune*, May 6, 1885. The *Times-Democrat* paraphrased his message similarly and elaborated on Hoyt’s “gradual conversion from the very strong prejudices he had entertained.” *Times-Democrat*, May 6, 1885.

²¹ *Picayune*, May 6, 1885.

the State, and works no evil to herself while it has beneficial and elevating influence, why not let women have the right of suffrage?" The *Picayune* reported that during the question period, "a man asked what scriptural ground could be found for woman's exercise of this right?" The Governor replied, the Golden Rule: do unto others. A "lady" in the audience confronted that questioner by asking, "what scriptural authority was there for man's exercise of this right?" Whether or not this was a southern "lady," it was a direct challenge to a man in a mixed assembly and evidence of a woman seizing agency in the company of southerners, at the least. Another "gentleman" said he thought that women were lifting themselves up and in "twenty years would find themselves in a different position from their present one." Another thought a "social convulsion" would serve this end. This *Picayune* version of Hoyt's lecture shows how engaged and verbal both men and women were on the subject. Then, three days after Hoyt's address, Howe spoke on "Woman Suffrage," by "special request," also in the Wyoming Headquarters, and then, the *New York Times* independently quoted Wyoming's then-governor confirming all that Hoyt had said.²²

About two weeks later, on Saturday, May 16, 1885, another surprising pair of speeches captured the notice of local newspapers. Commissioners and officers of the Colored Department had issued a formal request asking Howe to speak. Reprinted in the *Times-Democrat*, the

²² *Picayune*, May 6, 1885; for Howe's talk, see *Report and Catalogue of the Woman's Department of the World's Exposition, Held at New Orleans, 1884-1885* (Boston: Rand, Avery, 1885), 31. The governor of the Wyoming Territory in 1885, Francis E. Warren, confirmed that "woman suffrage has not 'lowered the grade of public officials'" and that women considered candidates carefully. Nearly all women voted, and no "domestic discord" had grown from it; the result was "good and not evil." There had been no attempt to repeal the law for ten years and none was contemplated. The "practical workings of woman suffrage commend it more and more to favor among men and women as they understand it better and know more of its government and public order." Thus, he recommended woman suffrage to the Legislature of Massachusetts, as the case in Wyoming had proven women's "political influence" to be good. "Woman Suffrage in Wyoming," from the *New York Times*, reprinted in the *Picayune*, May 14, 1885.

invitation cited her life-long sympathy with great reform leaders who helped advance the race and her willingness to instruct and elevate humanity. Apparently spontaneously, she asked New Orleanian Caroline Merrick if she would like to join her and speak in the Colored Department. When Merrick recalled the incident in her memoir, she wrote that when she agreed to go with Howe, someone said: "Well, you are probably the only Southern woman here who would risk public censure by speaking to a negro assembly." It is self-congratulatory but highlights Merrick's independence and exposes the tone that people around her took toward race. Both addresses were condescending, and they revealed how these women from North and South behaved publicly before "emancipated" people.²³

Ostensibly, the department showed the accomplishments of former slaves after twenty years of freedom, but many of the participants were Creoles of Color and "American Negroes" who had been free from birth. Sectionalism was also a part of this department as participants from New Orleans, especially, were engaged in proving that black citizens in the South had better opportunities than those in the North. Contemporary *Century Magazine* writer Eugene V. Smalley noted that blacks of the "Southern States" were "making steady progress," attaining property and education. He wrote that the heritage of their slavery was their "industry" and that a "salvation," but he also claimed that "except in rare and isolated cases," higher attainments seemed to be "traceable either to contact with the white race or to the admixture of white blood." He wrote that "[n]owhere [did the department] appear to represent the achievements of the pure-blooded negro," so it would be "more correct to call it the Somewhat Colored Department."

²³ For the invitation to speak, see *Times-Democrat*, May 11, 1885; for Merrick's remarks, see Caroline Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land: A Southern Matron's Memoir* (New York: Grafton, 1901), 176, 177; about the Colored Department, see also, Miki Pfeffer, "'Mr. Chairman and FELLOW AMERICAN CITIZENS': African American Agency at the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition, 1884-1885," *Louisiana History Journal* 51.4 (2010): 442-62.

Then he described the blue-eyed, brown-haired Kentucky woman who explained her exhibits and the “octoroon” Louisiana woman who called his attention to “embroideries and handsome artificial flowers.” He noted “Caucasian features” of “people having more or less African blood in their veins,” and he asserted that even the “distinguished bureau official” who headed the department, Blanche K. Bruce, was “three-fourths white.”²⁴ The “negro question” was as openly debated as was the “woman question” and the “Mormon question” at the time.

Smalley declared it was “impossible to say in the case of any article [on exhibit] whether the white blood or the black, in the veins of the representative of mixed ancestry who made it, produced the progressive tendency.” On the other hand, he seemed to be making a point that the existing determination of race was inadequate, “if any scientific line is to be drawn”: if the white blood was more powerful, he wrote, people like those he described should be “classed with the white race” (the “one-drop rule” is a twentieth-century phenomenon). He claimed it was as much an “absurdity” to show the work of “quadroons and octoroons as that of the black race” as it would be to call exhibits made by persons three-quarters black for a fair in Haiti a “white department.”²⁵ Smalley’s comments suggest the contortions necessary then as now to classify people, and they highlight the inappropriateness of remarks Howe and Merrick made in the Colored Department.

²⁴ Eugene V. Smalley, “In and Out of the New Orleans Exposition,” *The Century Magazine* 30.2 (1885), 192-94.

²⁵ Ibid. The attempt to define who should be classed as white also figured in the *Plessy v Ferguson* case that established the “separate but equal” law in 1896. To set up a test case, Homer Plessy, who was predominately white, called attention to the small portion of his African ancestry when he boarded the train and sat in the white car, then had to move to the segregated car. In legal distinctions in the Jim Crow era of the twentieth century, the “one-drop rule” set the tiniest portion (it varied from state to state) of “black blood” as the determining factor for being declared African American. Although a legal term, it was a social rather than a scientific definition, unique to the United States. See James F. Davis, *Who is Black?: One Nation's Definition* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001).

In that department, Howe spoke first to a “very good audience, composed largely of the best classes of the colored people,” according to the *Picayune*. Her theme was “The Friends of the Colored People,” and she “recounted incidents in the life of prominent anti-slavery advocates” who had “labored to put the colored people on a high place of civilization.” Merrick wrote that one of the examples Howe gave was “how Garrison had been dragged about the streets of Boston for their sake.” Condescendingly, Howe “urged them to show themselves worthy of their distinguished friends and all they had done for the race,” as if all help had come from their white northern “friends” and they had had no hand in it. However, the address was “extremely well received by all,” according to the *Picayune*. Howe made a journal entry about the occasion. She wrote that a “pretty hexagonal platform had been arranged. Behind this was a fine portrait of Abraham Lincoln, with a vase of beautiful flowers, gladiolas and white lilies at its base.” She recorded that she had spoken for about an hour of abolitionists William Henry Channing, William Lloyd Garrison, Theodore Parker, Charles Sumner, John A. Andrew, Lucretia Mott, and Wendell Phillips. “They gave me a fine basket of flowers and sang my Battle Hymn.”²⁶ This was one of only two occurrences she reported when groups sang her iconic hymn in New Orleans, whereas in the North, people sang it almost everywhere Howe appeared.

²⁶ “World’s Exposition: Interesting Exercises in the Department of the Colored People’s Exhibit,” *Picayune*, May 17, 1885; for the gathering as “the families of our best colored citizens,” see also “Colored Department,” *Times-Democrat*, May 16, 1885; for Howe’s comments, see Howe Journal, May 16, 1885. Creoles of color in New Orleans had long led the legal charge for black and “colored” citizenship and access to public accommodations. See Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes, *Our People and Our History: Fifty Creole Portraits*, trans. Sister Olga McCants (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973); originally published as *Nos Hommes et Notre Histoire* (1911); Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, eds. *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992); Jean-Charles Houzeau, *My Passage at the New Orleans Tribune: A Memoir of the Civil War Era*, David C. Rankin, ed., trans. Gerard F. Denault (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984).

The contrast between Howe's abolitionist roots and Merrick's plantation upbringing were startlingly revealed when "Mrs. Judge Merrick" was invited to speak extemporaneously.

Compared with Howe's intellectual approach, Merrick's was more emotional and rash. It was a recollection of childhood experiences rather than of adult decisions, even if she had written in her memoir that when emancipation came, she had declared, "Thank heaven! I, too, shall be free at last!" She told the audience in the Colored Department that the "people they once called masters" were as "warm sympathizing friends" as anyone in the world. Although the *Picayune* paraphrased Howe's words, it quoted Merrick's verbatim, and she also did in her memoir. "Some of us were nurtured at your breast, and many of us, when weaned, took the first willing spoonful of food from your gentle, persuasive hands. . . . [Y]ou always took us up and kindly consoled us. Can we ever forget it?"²⁷

Merrick talked further of her childhood and of their having borne the burdens of masters' lives: how Uncle Caleb Harris cried at her mother's death; how Aunt Rachel cared for the children; how her Confederate son's manservant attended him in the war. They had shared sympathies together, she said, "and whenever you count up your friends, . . . never count out the women of the South! They are ready now, as of old, [to] help you to march with the world in education and true progress," Merrick recounted in her later memoir. Newspapers did not record whether or not the audience included any former slaves; they claimed the audience was of the "best people." Yet as did Howe, Merrick directed her claim of friendship to freedmen and not to those who had never been slaves, although most in the gathering were probably Creoles of color who had been free since colonial times and others who had long been free.

²⁷ "World's Exposition: Interesting Exercises in the Department of the Colored People's Exhibit," *Picayune*, May 17, 1885; "Colored Department," *Times-Democrat*, May 16, 1885; Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land*, 178, 19.

Although the afternoon was a celebratory one, Merrick directed a barb toward Howe and the North, apparently resenting the Bostonian's superior, abolitionist tone. Merrick told the men and women of the audience that she was not asking them to be ungrateful to those people Howe cited as having labored to make them free. In the sarcasm in which she was practiced, Merrick said, "Be as grateful as you can to those descendants of the people who imported you first from Africa, and sold you 'down South' when your labor was no longer profitable to themselves." Rather, she told the audience, southerners had pride in their success "beyond that of others who do not know you so intimately and all your good qualities." She told them to remember "now that you are free, that we too rejoice in your freedom and have no grudges against you or anyone about it." They would have help with education, civilization and improvement, she promised, "where [in the South] you now have an honored place."²⁸ If a "New South" was to become one with industrialized America, it would need to prevent the black population from leaving the region to head for work in the north and west. Likely, this need sealed the importance of the Colored Department to the Exposition.

Merrick's words then turned to some of the tensions around citizenship and suffrage as it related to race and gender. She first reminded the audience that all southerners' history was intertwined. "We have been together too long to be separated and estranged because you are now free and have the ballot in your hands. True, some of the strong minded among the women of this nation, envy you your equal citizenship" (including herself and those of the NWSA, who had protested the Fifteenth Amendment because it did not include women) "but they are happy to see you seeking the aid of education to advance yourself to the condition of being worthy of it." Worthiness was also an issue for women, but Merrick claimed to believe that no woman would

²⁸ "World's Exposition: Interesting Exercises in the Department of the Colored People's Exhibit," *Picayune*, May 17, 1885; Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land*, 178.

deprive them of the privilege of voting they now enjoyed, and she hoped they would all “live together in the future forever in peace and friendship” and share “the great hereafter.” She ended by thanking them again for care, service, and protection through the years. Merrick recorded that “[a]t the close, many colored people with tearful eyes extended a friendly hand, and Mrs. Howe too did the same.” The *Picayune* declared that her “discourse was much applauded” and that after Honorable J. J. Spelman, Superintendent of the Colored People’s Department, read the complimentary resolutions presented to Howe, “the assemblage dispersed.” It was an astounding pair of patronizing speeches, that Howe and Merrick each recalled in their *fin de siècle* memoirs, and unfortunate that there was no New Orleans “race paper” to assess the occasion.²⁹

Exposition Leadership Shake-up

Despite the public display of unity women had made to open the Woman’s Department and to receive famous women and to speak at special events, as those events receded, enthusiasm waned and conflicts reappeared. Even Julia Ward Howe’s reliance on management began to erode. Perhaps the resignation of Commissioner-General Franklin C. Morehead, the man who had recommended her, was a portent of diminishing approval. The *Mascot* linked Morehead’s resignation to “the approaching collapse of the mammoth failure,” calling his departure the “first symptom,” because he had faithfully “gone throughout the Union as an ambassador.” Morehead had visited each state and city of importance, spreading information about the upcoming Exposition. He had labored “with tongue and pen” as the visionary of the enterprise and of the Woman’s Department. There seemed to be no explanation for his going other than that he had “completed the work assigned” to him. Now, Howe had lost part of her support. Although the

²⁹ Merrick recorded the same speech verbatim in her memoir that the *Picayune* had printed. See *Old Times in Dixie Land*, 176-78.

“paradise” of spring had arrived in New Orleans and Howe was still received socially, these would be crueler months.³⁰ Soon, Director-General Burke would also resign.

Perhaps Burke’s decision had something to do with finances. In February, he had gone to Washington to secure an additional loan to save the Exposition. By then, it was no longer possible to deny that the enterprise was in trouble; it had spent the initial million-dollar loan from Congress. In 1883, as soon as Congress designated New Orleans as the site for the Cotton Centennial, Burke had stepped easily into the role of Director General. Whether for self-aggrandizement, for national political gain, or for control of scores of building contracts without the approval of the City Council, the cunning politician (who was tied to the local Ring machine and the Louisiana Lottery Company) saw the event as an opportunity. As owner of the *Times-Democrat*, Burke made sure that he and the Exposition were always presented in a heroic light. His newspaper was the public printer, and he was also the Louisiana State Treasurer at the time of the Exposition, conflicts of interest that the *Mascot* regularly disclosed.³¹

Women of the Woman’s Department, United States Commissioners for various states, and exhibitors everywhere had waited anxiously to learn if Congress would grant Burke the

³⁰ For Morehead’s resignation letter, beginning with “Having completed the work assigned to me,” see the *Times-Democrat*, April 1, 1885; for the *Mascot* comments, see April 11, 1885; for the *Picayune*’s comments on his resignation, see April 2, 1885. For spring, see “Society Notes,” *Times-Democrat*, April 11, 1885. “Whatever the winter and early spring may have been, New Orleans is always a paradise in the month of April.”

³¹ The *Mascot* described Burke’s rise from commercial stone cutter to “ward bum” in the political “Ring,” to tax collector making \$50,000 a year, to State Treasurer, to owner of combined papers (first, the *Democrat* in his wife’s name; then, the *Times*). As tax collector, he would have retained all the interest and penalties and 12 percent of all delinquent city taxes he collected, according to the *Mascot* March 21, 1885. Every Saturday during 1885, the *Mascot* raised an issue about Burke’s management and the finances of the Exposition. For politics in New Orleans, also see Joy J. Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age: Politics and Urban Progress, 1880-1896* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969).

\$500,000 he sought. Late in February, his *Times-Democrat* had announced that the House of Representatives passed a loan of \$300,000, and everyone assumed the financial problems were over, but Burke remained out of town until early April, perhaps seeking national office. In addition to the appropriation from Congress, Senator George F. Hoar attached \$15,000 explicitly designated for the Woman's Department. Burke was to have no access to that. Moreover, the additional loan Burke secured for the Exposition included a provision that debts would be paid first to creditors outside Louisiana, then to foreigners, then to states and territories, and last to Louisianians. The United States Treasurer would send a "disbursing agent" to the city "to pay the creditors according to law." Claims would have to be audited and approved by the Board of Management. Only gate receipts were left for the Exposition's operating expenses.



Congress.—Now, boys, I am going to put this on the table, but it is not for you, mind that. You have eaten too much already.

"*Congress: Now, boys, I am going to put this on the table, but it is not for you, mind that.
You have eaten too much already,*" cover of *Mascot*, March 14, 1885.

The *Times-Democrat* claimed that Burke and his commission had accepted the government's caveat in part to disprove "malicious and scandalous newspaper stories" that had been circulating "by dyspeptic or irresponsible correspondence here," no doubt referring to the *Mascot*.³² In its acerbic style, the weekly *Mascot* enjoyed the "severe rebuke" that Burke received and declared: "Verily the way of an exposition chieftain is not strewn with roses." Yet, Congress had shown "generosity" coming to the Exposition's relief and "postponing its inglorious collapse."³³ Had Burke been more successful, his paper probably would have greeted him with greater fanfare. As it was, the United States Treasury would control how debtors would be paid, so Burke was less the conquering hero, thus, he quietly returned. The *Times-Democrat* carried only a small reference to a resolution of thanks to him signed by the Board of Management. Although Congress appropriated \$300,000 and everyone cheered that the Exposition would be saved, no money was in Burke's hands. Although Congress appropriated \$15,000 for the Woman's Department alone, no money was in Howe's hands. Journalists seemed to ignore these facts when discussing the finances of the Woman's Department in the final days. The appropriation was, as yet, salvation on paper only.

The *Times-Democrat* gave as little notice to rumblings returning in the Woman's Department as it did to Director-General Burke's arrival back in the city from his foray to Washington. The paper was focused elsewhere. The *Mascot* had publicly wondered when Burke would get back with the "boodle" and doubted a report circulating that he was ill. It also revealed that creditors of the Exposition would have to file in Washington in order to get paid.

³² For the first announcement of the proposed bailout, see the *Times-Democrat*, February 28, 1885; for details of the agreement, see the *Picayune*, April 20, 1885; for the mention of a resolution of thanks, see the *Times-Democrat*, April 22, 1885.

³³ *Mascot* March 14, 1885.

Meanwhile, the *Times-Democrat* was making a last effort to overcome the negative press that had contributed to the Exposition's failings. To visiting journalists, the paper complained that "probably no other city on earth has ever been so mercilessly assailed, so ruthlessly denounced, so untruthfully pictured." It acknowledged that New Orleans was imperfect, but it asked the press to make its criticisms "in the spirit of friendship, and not unkindly and malevolently." At last, journalists began to give the Exposition positive reviews and judge it as "greater" than the Philadelphia Centennial, as did Charles Dudley Warner, Eugene V. Smalley, and other visiting journalists that Burke entertained in the last month of the Exposition. But the good news had come too late to save it from a deficit of \$450,000 by the event's end. In April, Burke was dealing with financial problems too large to notice the internal squabbling beginning to erupt in the Woman's Department. Yet, he would be drawn into the fray as mediator.³⁴

On the day of the lowest gate receipts (\$1614.25 or approximately 3000 people), April 19, 1885, Director-General Burke made his first visit to the Exposition since his return from Washington. As if to prove the *Mascot*'s labeling of the Exposition as "the great fake," Burke had claimed he had "come back to assist in making up a statement of the indebedtness" for the "inspection of the Treasurer of the United States." The *Mascot* retorted that the National Government, after all, was "saving its own from reproach," and the "army of unpaid laborers, mechanics and small dealers who furnished the labor and supplies upon which the show was kept alive" would be "ruthlessly cast aside, while the 'fakirs' and peddlers from the entire outside

³⁴ For Burke's arrival, see the *Times-Democrat*, April 19, 1885; for *Mascot* comments about Burke, see March 28, 1885, April 11, 1885; for how criticism should be lodged, see the *Times-Democrat*, April 21, 1885. The *New York Times* wrote that the Exposition should "bring about a better understanding and a closer sympathy between the sections of the Union once so widely estranged." March 30, 1885, reprinted in *Picayune*, April 2, 1885. The *Picayune* claimed the Philadelphia event had cost \$7 million, the New Orleans one only \$2 million. *Picayune*, March 7, 1885. The local press repeatedly declared, "We are not sectional," and "There is no race prejudice," *Times-Democrat*, April 17, 19, 1885.

world” would be reimbursed for losses.³⁵ It seemed the “Iron Man” of the Exposition, a moniker Burke relished, had turned to pulp.

It was not long before Burke quit his post. With just a few weeks left for the Exposition, his resignation read that “requirements of public duty in other quarters, or, the demands of important interest confided to [his] care” called him away. The enterprise was well established, he asserted, a new management group was interested in continuing the Exposition the next fall, and Captain Samuel H. Buck had been a competent and effective acting-director in Burke’s long absence. With only eleven days to the end of the Exposition, Burke’s resignation was to take effect on May 20; the Board promised to express “sentiments on the subject,” perhaps before the closing date of May 31, 1885.³⁶ The women’s money would not arrive from Congress in time to pay women’s expenses back to their home states. And there would still be the question about whether women who showed with their states instead of in the Woman’s Department would be entitled to a share of the money. That clamor might already have begun. But at this late date, there were new controversies brewing and reported, including which of two women was the officially appointed Lady Commissioner of Kansas.

Howe v. Lady Commissioners v. Hostile Press

Strong personalities and differences of opinion among women who had spent months together likely fostered some of these late controversies. The separate department offered an opportunity for women to wrestle over issues and to gossip, but quarrels became public knowledge in reports by the *Picayune*’s Catharine Cole and the *Mascot*. The Kansas dispute had

³⁵ *Mascot*, April 18, 25, 1885.

³⁶ *Picayune*, May 13, 1885. Although Burke resigned, he continued to be part of special days through the end of the Exposition.

more to do with state politics than with Howe's judgment, but as Cole told it, it was one of several situations that Howe handled badly, one of the "broils and turmoils and constantly recurring disturbances in the Woman's Department." Cole asserted that Lady Commissioners, regional vice presidents, department staff and officers held "a secret session" every Wednesday, "and it is not unusual to see some woman come away from that session bathed in tears." Cole insisted that when women disagreed with Howe, the chief had informed the assemblage of ladies that "they were in no sense a legal body," that their meetings had "no real significance," and that their commissions were merely honorary documents. "Tears gathered in some eyes," Cole reported, and in one meeting, a vice president of one of the most artistic exhibits claimed to have "worked long weekdays and Sundays, sometimes thirteen hours a day." Rumor was that the "presiding officer" (Howe) retorted, "then allow me to add you have very little to show for it."³⁷

If this was accurate, Howe had violated the mutual esteem that women expected from their gender, and her blunt pronouncements grated the sensibilities of "polite society." In her Easter Sunday "Woman's World and Work," Cole took Howe to task. She declared that the president of the Woman's Department stood "in the same relation to the women that the Director General of the Exposition does to the Exposition people. He is their servant as well as their protector and helper. The office of President has never been confounded with the office of Dictator"; the chief was not "all-powerful." A leader should serve, Cole asserted. Yet, she also berated Lady Commissioners and vice presidents for not forming an association to negotiate with Howe. "If these troubles harass the ladies," they "have only themselves to blame," she asserted. They should have elected officers and conducted their affairs as the male commissioners and exhibitors had done in order to confront Director-General Burke and his staff. Cole declared that

³⁷ "WWW," *Picayune*, April 5, 1885.

women had an obligation to present “grievances, or suggestions, or wishes” and demands. “The miserable wrangles and ill-feelings that have prevailed and marred the harmony of the Woman’s Department might have in many cases been avoided if the actors had substituted moral courage and absolute Christian sincerity for an artificial politeness,” she maintained.³⁸

In another “Woman’s World and Work” column, Cole again criticized the representatives of states for the tone of their language but ignored her own responsibility for her written words. She wrote, “If each and every woman would only remember the responsibility of her spoken word and determine to say nothing unworthy of her sex—nothing save what would tend to keep sweet peace rather than breed rancor, jealousies and revenges—she would go far towards being the perfect woman.” Furthermore, she declared that if department leaders had formed an association, they might also have had a greater lobbying force to make some women jurors of awards, especially in categories of woman’s work, such as quality of sewing. Cole complained that management had again overlooked the ladies when it denied them that privilege. She claimed that in “matters of domestic life,” certainly, women should “be accepted as safe and practical judges.” While Burke rhapsodized the event, Cole and the *Mascot* criticized it.³⁹

In the last weeks of the Exposition, and especially on Easter Sunday (April 5, 1885), the harshness of Cole’s criticism escalated. She used Howe’s own phrases from lectures (“Polite Society,” “Woman’s woman,” for example) to condemn her. Cole might also have been cautioning all women about their conduct (and her own) when she wrote: “Polite philandering

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ For berating Howe and Commissioners, see “WWW,” *Picayune*, April 5, 1885; for women as judges, see “WWW,” *Picayune*, May 3, 1885; for two responses to the Exposition, see “The Gilbreths at the Exposition” in which a regular commentator wrote in hillbilly dialect: “I found out thar air but two deenomnyhashuns at the Ecksposition. The Crittysizers an’ the Rapsodizers,” see the *Picayune* April 26, 1885.

with one side of the mouth and incessant complaint, reproach or accusal with the other, made a very ugly visage, certainly not the visage of one of those whom the President of the Woman's Department would term a 'woman's woman.' Cole pretended to wonder "to which moral gender would belong that petticoated creature who snubs her own sex, who talks slang, who over tea cups descends to the lowest gossip, who cannot determine the intellectual or moral value of a woman until she has seen her best dress, heard of her bank account, who makes no friends that cannot materially aid her own schemes, who is viciously jealous of anybody else's successes."⁴⁰ These comments were also reminiscent of Susan B. Anthony's letter to Caroline Merrick about Howe as "her Ladyship" who acted as if she were "the only woman possessed of brain & culture to open her lips." Cole pressed on, "If you lift from such a woman her husk, of manner so satin smooth when stroked the right way, her false soft speeches, her habit of truckling to the powers that be, what do you find beneath? Surely not a woman's woman, and yet again surely not a man's woman." It is doubtful that anyone in the Northeast had written anything so caustic about Julia Ward Howe. At least, not in public. Even the *Mascot*'s words were tame compared to Cole's on this issue. The *Mascot* claimed simply that it had received "numerous complaints" about Howe's "arrogant and ill-tempered behavior towards ladies of this city."⁴⁰

Howe once again added to the controversy of that difficult spring. In addition to Cole's swipes, on that same day, the *Picayune* reprinted a sentimental, intimate, and playful letter that Howe probably meant only for her friends in the New England Woman's Club (NEWC). If Cole was privy to this communiqué, it might have triggered her severe Easter censure of Howe .

⁴⁰ "WWW," *Picayune*, April 5, 1885; for Anthony's letter, see Susan B. Anthony to Caroline Merrick, May 15, 1885, Merrick Papers (M 64, Folder 2), The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA; "The Woman's Department—Behind the Scenes," *Mascot*, May 30, 1885.

Howe's letter had imprudently been printed in that club's widely-distributed *Woman's Journal* on March 28, 1885, which the *Picayune* reprinted. She had written how "inconceivable" it seemed that she had "passed the whole winter without your aid and comfort!" She recalled the good times at NEWC and told "about matters down here. Which to say that I live beside a gutter would be no exaggeration, the same gutter being in a very discreditable condition. As to 'veni, vidi, vici' that wasn't at all in my experience when I came here. I had at first to wait a good while in order to find out what was to be done, and then had to grind and grind in order to do it, and have not ceased grinding yet." These words would not endear her to her hosts, and she went on: "And so we ran until Congress voted us that appropriation of \$15,000 which will put us through if we can only get hold of it, which is not certain." (If Cole saw the letter, she ignored this caveat.) Howe declared that she thought the reason many club members had come to New Orleans was to look after her, and she added surreptitiously, "Many things I will tell you when we meet that would not be as well told by letter."⁴¹

There were so many "broils and turmoils" about the Woman's Department that on Friday, April 10, 1885, a senior vice president (Mrs. Felicia Grundy Porter of Tennessee) called a meeting. Lady Commissioners and vice presidents of States and Territories discussed the way the press was treating Howe, and by extension, the women of the Woman's Department. They "unanimously passed" a formal "Resolution" denouncing "certain newspapers of good standing in this city" that "from time to time published editorials and anonymous articles, not only referring to the Woman's Department of the World's Exposition in a contemptuous and sneering manner, but also containing direct charges against the president and members of this department,

⁴¹ "Howe It Was Done," *Picayune*, April 5, 1885. Cole noted that the *Woman's Journal* also published in the same issue Mary Ashley Townsend's poem, written for the opening of the Woman's Department. "WWW," *Picayune*, May 3, 1885.

of extravagance, bickering and general unladylike and purile conduct.” The signers declared that these “untruthful and garbled reports” of their meetings “were inserted in such papers with no effort made to ascertain the accuracy of such reports.”⁴² They were standing by their leader.

The governors of their states had trusted the character and ability of the women they appointed, the women stated, and the delegates had come, “confident in the honor and justice, not to say chivalry of the people” whose guests they were to be. They did not expect disparaging treatment, so they noted “with astonishment and indignation the unfair and libelous articles which have appeared in said journals of this city.” They considered such publications “direct insults to the best women in the country,” whose representatives they were proud to be. They declared that the women had “worked together harmoniously, economically and successfully, having confidence in each other and in [their] honored president.” They noted “the lack of courtesy and journalistic honor” which they all had met “from the above mentioned newspapers of New Orleans.” Twenty-six women signed the “Resolution” and submitted it to the Associated Press for wide distribution. Both the *Picayune* and *Times-Democrat* printed it.⁴³ Otherwise, the *Times-Democrat*, extreme advocate of all things Exposition, remained silent.

If Cole’s Easter barrage had made Howe’s temper rise, the *Picayune*’s editorial on Sunday, May 3, 1885, increased the heat. In a scolding and sarcastic piece, the *Picayune* urged “the First Lady of the Exposition” to correct the “grave mistake” circulating that ladies of New Orleans had exhibited “a *sectional* feeling” against her. The writer, probably Eliza Nicholson, wanted Howe to admit that she had been “most graciously received on her arrival” and had been “handsomely entertained by many of the first ladies.” Any statement otherwise was “calculated

⁴² “Meeting of the Lady Commissioners,” *Picayune*, April 11, 1885; *Times-Democrat*, April 12, 1885.

⁴³ Ibid.

to work mischief.” Southern women had not made even half of the “silent heart burning” and “loud complaints” heard in the Woman’s Department; women from other regions had also grumbled about Howe’s comportment. The editorial insisted that “Northern and Western women have hearts in their bosoms and tongues in their heads as well” and that some of the signers of the “Resolutions” criticizing the press and supporting Howe were among the most outspoken complainers. Yet, through the Resolutions, the editorial snidely remarked, “we are led to believe that mutual concessions have been made and that peace has been established in the department.”⁴⁴ The Woman’s Department was, in a way, that Petri dish test of how long disparate personalities and opinions can reside in relatively confined spaces.

The editorial insisted that it was Howe’s turn to say something to dispel rumors. She should “speak out brightly and graciously, as she knows how to speak, and tell the women of the far Northern and Western States how warmly the women of New Orleans welcomed her,” how they “opened their doors and kept them open to her.” She should recount how they “filled her hands with their choicest flowers, and how bravely and heart-warmly they helped her to work and to solve the problem [of] how to make a big show with a little money.” In case there was any question, Howe should tell women from other areas of the country just “how courteous, how unselfish, how hospitable, how warm-hearted, how liberal-minded and truly *unsectional* she has found the women of New Orleans.” The complaints about Howe’s early courtesy to local women had obviously not been satisfied, and their hospitality and support as yet unacknowledged by her. Before Howe left the city, Nicholson seemed to want that public admission. The reputation of women of New Orleans was at stake.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Unfortunately for Julia Ward Howe, there were more public problems and insults on the horizon. First, there was “An Insult to Kansas” to deal with. As the *Picayune* announced, contrary to the official Resolution from the Lady Commissioners, “declarations of peace” had been misleading. The Kansas crisis required the Board of Management to mediate and “restore harmony.” At a Wednesday meeting in late April, Howe had expelled Mrs. Augustus Wilson of Kansas. Although Wilson had served as Lady Commissioner since the beginning, Howe declared that the Governor of Kansas had written her that Wilson did not hold that office. A stunned and mortified Wilson left the meeting, “only remarking ‘I will see to you about this, Mrs. Howe,’ ” suggesting there would be a future confrontation.⁴⁵

The Kansas crisis was indeed confusing, and Howe was caught in the middle of a state’s political imbroglio. Governor George W. Glick had appointed the United States Commissioner for Kansas who then chose Wilson as Lady Commissioner. But Glick lost the election in November 1884 to the now-inaugurated Governor John A. Martin. Martin had not forgiven Wilson for “being civil to the venerable [former Confederate president] Mr. Jefferson Davis,” so he appointed someone else to her place. Apparently, Martin told Howe to pull Wilson’s credentials, which she did, much to Wilson’s annoyance. Now the Board of Management was brought in to settle the issue. The Kansas Commissioner confirmed Wilson’s appointment to the Board. The Board passed resolutions endorsing Wilson and “transmitted a copy” to Howe who, the *Picayune* sniped, “will probably explain the reason of her action.”

Although Howe barred the press from Wednesday meetings, Cole heard that the matter of Kansas would probably be discussed, so she “asked permission to attend the meeting, but was refused by Mrs. Howe.” The *Picayune* declared that citizens of Kansas were “very much excited

⁴⁵ “An Insult to Kansas,” *Picayune*, May 10, 1885.

over the affair" and did not understand why Wilson, "wife of a prominent and wealthy citizen" and well known across her state, was now in this predicament.⁴⁶ The Board of Management and Howe had to publicly correct the matter. On May 22, 1885, both morning dailies listed all of the Lady Commissioners "recognized by Mrs. Julia Ward Howe," and Kansas listed two names (as did some other states): "Mrs. Aug. Wilson, Mrs. Maystaff, Commissioners." The next day, the same two Kansas ladies were included in the officially recognized list, and apparently, the rift was put to rest.



*Detail from "The Women's Department at the Exposition, Grabbing for the Prize,"
Mascot, May 30, 1885*

⁴⁶ Ibid.

In Cole's Sunday "Woman's World and Work," she declared that it was "gratifying" that Howe had "complied with the instructions of the board," had recognized Wilson as Commissioner, and had now "sensibly and justly ended a most unhappy affair." The Arkansas Commissioner had at first been excluded from the list (she had not yet arrived) but was now among those of twenty-six states, the territories, and the District of Columbia. "The Commissioners recognized by Mrs. Howe are only and properly those ladies whose exhibits are placed in the Woman's Department," it declared, although some exceptions and courtesies were made for Texas and Ohio, because they had some association with the Woman's Department, although their exhibits were with their states on the ground floor. But Lady Commissioners from Missouri and Utah were not recognized.⁴⁷ This published list would later figure in the final controversy in the Woman's Department about how the \$15,000 from Congress would be distributed, that is, whether the funds would cover expenses only for representatives' exhibits in the Woman's Department or whether women who placed exhibits with their states would also benefit. As with every other detail, it was no easy task, and Howe bore the brunt of the decision.

The McBride Flap

Also on the fateful Easter morning when Catharine Cole erupted over Howe's leadership style and attacked Howe personally, there was a flap that struck the two women even more emotionally. Cole was always her most scathing when she perceived working women were not being treated fairly, and she cared most about her fellow female journalists. Now Cole began a new attack over a new slight she thought was leveled at Marion McBride of the *Boston Post*,

⁴⁷ For Commissioners, see the *Picayune*, May 23, 1885; "WWW," *Picayune*, May 24.

whom Howe had earlier appointed as Superintendent of the Press Department. McBride had been named with the rest of Howe's personal staff, and the journalist's name had been circulated to newspapers and newspaper women all over the country. They eagerly awaited this Press Department, but when there were no funds, Howe rescinded the invitation. Cole wrote that newspaper women "throughout the country" wanted to know why management of the Woman's Department "failed to keep their engagement" with McBride. This journalist had the esteem of the public and other newspaper writers, Cole insisted. McBride was "the real Boston culture, not a spurious article whose other name is shoddyism." She was without "personal aggrandizement" or "personal revenges," Cole ranted, implying that Howe had these flaws. Furthermore, Cole asked why Howe issued circulars before she left Boston that there would be press rooms equipped for work if she was not going to keep her promise. The failure to institute a press department had been "a real loss to the newspaper women generally." Cole wrote that "as a class," newspaper women did not harbor "professional jealousies." They enjoyed each other's company; they admired each others' work. Howe had betrayed women again, she insinuated.⁴⁸

Writing from "long experience as a newspaper woman," Cole objected on behalf of newspaperwomen. Perhaps she exaggerated when she claimed never to have been able to record "a single instance in which a worthy woman journalist has not acted in most honorable faith with those of her craft." She insisted that, even for the two months left of the Exposition (by now it was early April), a press department could still be a "shining example of a harmonious community" to women in the Woman's Department, now obviously discordant. Cole complained that the scientific and literary sections in the department had received attention while the press needs had been ignored. Why had so much attention been given to books and so little to

⁴⁸ "WWW," *Picayune*, April 5, 1885.

journalism? She was accurate (if a bit threatening) when she declared that the Woman's Department was "dependent upon newspapers to publish its success to the world. Its best and only reporters have been women, its greatest hope for its short future lies mainly in the works of women journalists." She wrote that now that the Woman's Department was "well provided with funds," there could be "no tenable excuse" to detain McBride's arrival.⁴⁹ Cole was, of course, inaccurate about the \$15,000; the Woman's Department was still not "well provided"; the Exposition would end before Howe received any of the money.

In addition to her outburst in "Woman's World and Work," Cole devoted her other column to journalists that Sunday, April 5, 1885. They were authors just as important as novelists and biographers, she wrote, even if their works were "read once and then tossed aside forever." Journalists wrote "volumesful" in the course of a year, "from police reports to essays and editorials" and also "beautiful obituaries and marriage reports." Then Cole gave a maudlin testimony of her own experience, probably as personal as she ever became in her columns, about "pangs and throes" and how hard the work came, about the "inexpressibly wretched hours" and the deep sense of responsibility when the inkstand seemed to have gone dry. "Can one wonder that we keep those old scrap-books, piously preserving our literary remains?" she asked. She wrote that the greatest comfort to her were those "sweet congratulatory notes from other journalists" that acknowledged her work.⁵⁰

In another section of the column was a harbinger of the betrayal coming Howe's way. Cole quoted Boston journalist Marion McBride in the *Woman's Journal*, Howe's club's publication. McBride wrote that women of New Orleans "raised and paid over to Julia Ward

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ "Sunday Talk," *Picayune*, April 5, 1885. Unfortunately, Cole apparently did not keep the congratulatory notes, and only one scrapbook of late clippings is among the Cole Papers.

Howe [\$2480.50] for carrying forward the work till the Government appropriation of \$15,000 can be transferred. The Woman's Department is a great success." This rather backhanded compliment from McBride seemed to suggest that Howe hoarded funds that women had worked so hard to raise in the earliest days. Yet, those funds had come in January, long before the women even suspected they would receive an extra appropriation, and surely, they had been spent.⁵¹ It seems a curiously uninformed comment from McBride, but this was just the beginning of what must have been the harshest personal blow to Howe. That she endured censure from local newspapers was stinging enough; that a fellow Bostonian would later publicly impugn her authority would be devastating.

The portent also came in an innocuous little item in the *Picayune*'s "Personal and General Notes": Mrs. M. A. McBride of the *Boston Post* arrived on May 8 to "assist [Howe] in the good work of the Woman's Department," just three weeks before the Exposition was to end. Now, she would "at once proceed to the business of her department, notwithstanding the late hour," the *Picayune* stated on May 12. Mary A. Livermore of Boston and the ladies of New Orleans had enabled McBride to "take up her work in a place where she has been greatly needed and keenly missed all winter long," Cole added. She was adamant that if only McBride had been involved in the Woman's Department's from its opening, its success would have "been fully demonstrated to the newspaper reading world." After all, the Woman's Department was in greatly dependent upon "the newspaper fraternity," and that work had been "greatly retarded."⁵²

⁵¹ "WWW," *Picayune*, May 3, 1885.

⁵² Note on McBride, see the *Picayune*, May 9, 1885. The *Times-Democrat* wrote only that she would "write for the Boston papers a description of the Woman's Department," May 10, 1885. The "Society Bee" referred to McBride as the "superintendant of the Press Department, *Picayune*, May 10, 1885; "Women's Journalistic Department," *Picayune*, May 12, 1885; "WWW," *Picayune*, May 3, 1885.

Close to Cole's heart, McBride was an "unaffected friend of working women" who would set up a "systematic method of work." She would "present a practical report of the Woman's Department" to all the papers and to the newspaper women, whose duty it was "to be informed in regard to this work." She would hold "a meeting of confreres in the office of Mrs. Theo Auzé, Secretary of the Woman's Department and of that Press Department in which they are so specially interested," Cole reported. The *Picayune* printed an "incomplete list" of twenty-six correspondents expected at the meeting, including Lilia Pavy, Bessie Bisland, and Jennie Nixon of the *Times-Democrat*; Martha Field (Cole) and Eliza Nicholson of the *Picayune*; and Julia Ward Howe and Maud Howe. McBride's headquarters, Cole announced prematurely, would be in the secretary's office.⁵³

Howe had something to say about all this, and the Board of Management was again drawn into controversy in the Woman's Department. On May 13, the *Picayune* and *Times-Democrat* printed Howe's letter dated May 12, 1885, to Director-General pro tem S. H. Buck. She wrote: "My attention has just been called to a communication in which Mrs. Marion McBride, of Boston, is spoken of as Superintendent of the Press Department of the Woman's Department of the Exposition." The statement must have been made at McBride's "authorization," but it caught Howe by "greatest surprise." She wrote that shortly after her acceptance as president, she was "advised by a valued friend" to appoint McBride. But when she discovered the "financial embarrassment" of the Exposition, she curtailed the expenses of the department and cancelled McBride's appointment.⁵⁴

⁵³ "Women's Journalistic Department," *Picayune*, May 12, 1885. McBride was the guest of Mrs. Fuhri of Jackson Street and had "already received many calls."

⁵⁴ "The Woman's Department," *Picayune*, May 13, 1885; *Times-Democrat*, May 13, 1885.

Howe seemed to have handled the matter with business decorum. In the letter, she claimed that she had telegraphed and had written McBride of the reasons (probably in December 1884), she had told Burke (who agreed), and she had received a letter from McBride indicating “no plea of injury to herself.” Now in mid-May, therefore, Howe claimed, “Mrs. McBride’s coming at this time was entirely unexpected by me. She has not called upon me, nor in any way accepted my authority. She has announced a meeting for to-morrow in one of the offices in my department. I write to ask whether the position which she has now assumed is warranted by any authorization given or implied on the part of the management.” The newspapers also included the reply from Richard Nixon, Secretary of the Board of Management: “the board, having made no contract with Mrs. McBride, recognizes her in no official capacity whatever.”⁵⁵ Howe alone might have been satisfied with this reply.

The meeting of Lady Journalists took place anyway on May 13, 1885, in the office of the Secretary of the Woman’s Department, as planned. In attendance were Cole and Nicholson, Pavy of the *Times-Democrat*, Auzé and Given, Mrs. Augustus Wilson (the expelled commissioner of Kansas), and a few others. The Howes were absent. Even the *Times-Democrat* weighed in on the conflict this time, noting that Exposition management considered the call for the meeting “entirely without their sanction, and the principle mover [McBride] in it unrecognized by them in any official capacity.” It reported that Howe had told Auzé that “no organization should take place as any adjunct to their department,” so the ladies had “formed themselves into a Woman’s National Press Association, independent of the Exposition.” A few congratulatory speeches came

⁵⁵ “The Woman’s Department,” *Picayune*, May 13, 1885; *Times-Democrat*, May 13, 1885.

from Pavy and Cole, and the journalists agreed to meet next in a private home. The *Picayune* reported that McBride “felt it due to herself and to newspaper women generally to explain why she had not put in an appearance at New Orleans to assume the duties of the Press Department of the Exposition.” (The *Picayune* refrained from calling it the Press Department of the Woman’s Department). McBride explained that back in December “[t]here had been no money to install that office and it had been abandoned.” But Mary A. Livermore and others in Boston “felt that the women exhibitors, as working women, needed all the newspaper help to advance and advertise their work,” so they had paid McBride’s way to New Orleans in May.⁵⁶ It was as curious a late arrival as was Burke’s departure when the Exposition would close in a few weeks.

The declared purpose of McBride’s meeting, instead, was “to organize a permanent Woman’s National Press Association” for newspaper women all over the country so they could offer “mutual help, information and encouragement.” The group elected Eliza Poitevent Nicholson of the *Picayune* as president and McBride as secretary. While that meeting was in session, Miss Isabelle Greeley, Howe’s assistant, came in with a communication from the chief, but the secretary of the Press Association did not include the note in the minutes. Adding to the insult, the communiqué was considered to have “nothing to do with the meeting.” After adjournment, McBride said that she had made her personal plans for coming south before learning there was no money to bring her to the Crescent City. Then, people in Boston and Philadelphia had contributed \$111, knowing how important her role was to journalists and working women. She furnished the *Picayune* reporter (Cole) with a list of donors that included Livermore, Howe’s good friend Henrietta Wolcott, “Journalists,” and \$5 from M. Anagnos, among others. Although the *Picayune* did not identify Anagnos, the *Times-Democrat* (probably

⁵⁶ “An Incipient Woman’s Press Association,” *Times-Democrat*, May 14, 1885; “Lady Journalists,” *Picayune*, May 14, 1885.

Pavy) wrote that “among [donors] happens to be Mr. Anagnos, a son-in-law of Mrs. Julia Ward Howe.”⁵⁷ If Howe had felt earlier dishonored, this would be humiliation indeed.

Adjacent articles in the *Picayune* on Sunday, May 17, 1885, must also have been painful to Howe. The first piece told of the object of the Press Association: to provide a medium of communication in a central place, “to secure all the benefits that will result from organized efforts,” and to have journalists play a significant role in forwarding “the interests of all the working women of this country in every possible way.” Cole’s “Woman’s World and Work” was an example of this kind of advocacy, as she demonstrated every Sunday. In the second article about the Association, “A New Departure,” the writer (Cole or Nicholson) called Howe to task again for not carrying out her “original intention” of having a Press Department in the Woman’s Department. Despite the lack of funds, “we question the wisdom of economizing” in that way, the writer declared, when the “expenditure would have been so advantageous to the entire department” and to women whose work was exhibited. Had McBride come, “we feel sure that the necessary funds to keep it going would have been supplied to her by her sisters and brothers of the press” for the “untold benefit” she would have been to them and to the Exposition.⁵⁸ These comments assigned a far greater role to McBride in the Press Department than did Howe’s original plan.

The *Picayune* took the complaints further. As it was, the journalist continued, reporters and correspondents “have had a hard time of it”: no Bureau; “no one to whom to present their credentials, very little consideration, and no accommodations provided” to facilitate their work.

⁵⁷ “Lady Journalists,” *Picayune*, May 14, 1885; “An Incipient Woman’s Press Association,” *Times-Democrat* May 14, 1885.

⁵⁸ Editorial, *Picayune*, May 17, 1885; See also, the same press release in “Lady Journalists,” *Times-Democrat*, May 17, 1885. Clara Barton and Frank Leslie telegraphed their acceptance of proffered honorary memberships.

It was little wonder that some correspondents' letters to their home papers were bitter, the article observed. But now, even in the last month of the Exhibition, there would be "a change for the better." In rooms that Director-General Buck set aside, McBride would receive and examine press credentials, and exhibitors with news pertinent to women could communicate. There too, "weary newspaper women [could] find a chair to call their own." They would be able to "compare and exchange notes, arrange copy, work, laugh, 'talk shop' to their hearts' content, and, in a word, do as they please in their own home." Howe, however, was on the outside of this group's entire organizing strategies.⁵⁹ Local women who were not journalists seem to have stood back from this new scuffle, but some might have chuckled over Howe's comeuppance with some delight.

By May 18, 1885, a frustrated Howe apparently took the only action she could, given that no local paper offered her a chance for rebuttal. She wrote Edward Henry Clement, editor-in-chief of the *Boston Evening Transcript*, requesting editorial help there. She told how she was fighting her way against southern foes. "A small and very mean clique of women here soon began to oppose me in ways which I cannot now recount," she wrote. She claimed, whether accurately or not, that the *Picayune* had been "a deadly enemy to Director General Burke, and therefore to the Exposition, [and they] began to abuse me as a Northern woman before I came, and [it] has grown more and more virulent." She claimed that "its prominent woman writer, Catharine Cole, has conceived a violent attack against me which she vents from time to time in most unbecoming and undeserved abuse." Yet Howe cautioned Mr. Clement not to quote her words "because they are not such as it would be politic for me to use in public." In New Orleans, the only positive news the Howes could garner was from their announcement that they would

⁵⁹ *Picayune*, May 17, 1885.

donate all books in the Literary section to the Southern Art Union (an organization with a doubtful future unless finances could be improved). Maud Howe had been working on this gift for months; the books were “all of them, really worth possessing.”⁶⁰

Howe continued to lose support in all quarters, and sectional comments began to surface again in the press, as they had at the outset of the Exposition. This time the onus seemed to be on Howe. Newspapers from other cities picked up the ill will toward her. The *New York World* found it hard to accept that New Orleans women “entertained a ‘sectional’ feeling against Mrs. Julia Ward Howe.” McBride’s employer, the *Boston Post*, added that if there had “been any quarrel, sectional or otherwise, between the ladies of New Orleans and Mrs. Howe the former did not seek it or begin it.” The *Picayune* reprinted these snippets. The final blow came from Captain Samuel H. Buck, who had been the Exposition’s acting director when Burke offered his resignation on May 20, 1885. Now, as Director General, he had circumvented Howe’s wishes and had provided permanent rooms for the Woman’s Press Association in the Main Building that would be “open at all times to members of the press, gentlemen and ladies.” It was a good idea, but an insult to Howe nevertheless. Newswomen were “invited to use the rooms or headquarters” and exhibitors with information of interest to women were requested to “send reports of work to the headquarters for the attaches of papers now in the city.”⁶¹ Cole was correct. Had this arrangement been in place from the beginning, reporters and women’s work could have fared far better. But the maneuvers only added to the impression that women did not work well together.

⁶⁰ Julia Ward Howe to Mr. Clement, May 18, 1885, Julia Ward Howe Papers (A24), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Cambridge, MA.; for the planned gift of books, see “WWW,” *Picayune*, May 10, 1885; “Society Notes” *Times-Democrat*, April 12, 1885; “Society Bee,” *Picayune*, May 17, 1885.

⁶¹ *Picayune*, May 13, 1885.

The *Mascot* had its say on the final issues of the Woman's Department and provided accompanying cartoons. It called the National Woman's Press Association a "new march of petticoat progress" and claimed that the Exposition was "directly responsible for the impetuosity of the onslaught." Women had "cast their jealous eyes on the editorial chair" and were now poised to "invade the editorial sanctum and plant the banner of female sovereignty on the citadel of the 'safeguard of Liberty' called The Press." There was "no limit to the aspirations of women in the direction of affairs," the tabloid whined. It also satirized men who would have to "preserve the equilibrium of nature" and organize for self-protection. Cartoons showed women journalists flailing paste pots and scissors and men struggling with baby bottles and sewing needles, a kind of chauvinistic role-reversal cartoon that had been common since colonial times.⁶²



The Womens' [sic] National Press Association; The Men's Home Duties Association,"
Mascot, May 30, 1885.

⁶² *Mascot*, May 30, 1885.

In addition to these disparagements of women (and men), no matter how many gestures Howe made, every few days brought another embarrassment in the *Picayune*. The Woman's National Press Association now had named officers, and journalists were rushing to join. Before the Exposition closed, it would be a "large and powerful organization" with space and materials available, courtesy of Buck. Then, the *Picayune* counteracted a notion "being bruited about that Mrs. Julia Ward Howe never did allot a Press Department or appoint Mrs. Marion McBride Superintendant of it. In order to put an effectual quietus to such a report," the paper reprinted Howe's circular that had been "scattered over the land several months ago." Signed by her from the "Bureau for Women's Department," temporarily located in her Woman's Club in Boston, it stated that Howe had "secured the services" of Marion McBride of the *Boston Post* "as Superintendent of Press Department." In it, Howe asked representatives to begin to contact McBride. She indicated that the room occupied would be "thoroughly equipped for press work, connected by telephone with Main Department, Associated Press and telegraph offices." The Woman's Department was maintaining a special representative for press work to receive better coverage all over the country than it would if it had to rely on general reports. Below this was a reprinted letter to Nicholson from the ladies of the Mississippi Press Association accepting the offer to use the press rooms and join the organization, signed by twenty-four Mississippi correspondents. It was a brutal public blow and a calculated humiliation.⁶³ Howe must have deemed McBride's flank attack an unexpected betrayal from one of her own.

That embarrassing confrontation, exacerbated by the steamy New Orleans weather, might well have triggered the "severe illness" Julia Ward Howe suffered in mid-May. That malady

⁶³ *Picayune*, May 19, 1885.

prevented her—a woman who always kept her appointments—from speaking at commencement exercises at Straight University, one of four universities in New Orleans for people of color.

Maud Howe later wrote in the biography of her mother about that moment: “Worn out by fatigue, anxiety, and the great heat, she fell seriously ill. Those nearest her begged her to go home,” the daughter wrote, “but she would not hear of this. She would get well: she *must* get well! Rallying her forces, mental and physical, she did get well, though her illness for a time seemed desperate.” A little later, to her daughter Laura Richards, Howe managed some wit about the experience. “How hot New Orleans was before I left it, you cannot know, nor how sick I was once upon a time, nor how I came up upon iced champagne and recovered myself, and became strong again.” Howe, ever the survivor, revived enough to speak of political and educational matters at Leland University (another of the local black universities) on May 27, her sixty-sixth birthday. That morning, she took “comfort in an earnest prayer.” At Leland, she offered “a few words of timely advice, especially to the girls” and was “heartily applauded.”⁶⁴ For Howe, the perpetual optimist, perhaps things would improve.

The Big Show Ends

Soon, there began to be talk about a Louisiana Woman’s Day to close out the Exposition, its success being assured because New Orleans women would take charge, the *Picayune* declared. The plan the paper outlined smacked more of Old South nostalgia than “New South” progress. It was to be *al fresco*, with “a May pole dance” and a “characteristic old plantation cake walk. Many of the colored servants of prominent society women [were to] walk ‘for de

⁶⁴ For Howe’s illness, see the *Picayune*, May 23, 1885; *Times-Democrat*, May 23, 1885; her letter to Richards is reprinted in Laura E. Richards and Maud Howe Elliott, *Julia Ward Howe: 1819-1910* (Boston: Houghton, 1915), II:110, 111; Howe Journal, May 27, 1885; for Howe’s speech at Leland University, see the *Picayune*, May 28, 1885.

cake”” (a “fine fruit cake with a gold coin in it as the prize”) and would “doubtless be the amusing sensation of the day.” Music and dancing on the platform would end the evening. Despite the *Picayune* calling the idea a “high-toned darky cake walk,” the women did not follow this plan.⁶⁵ Instead, the celebration was far more dignified and less raucous, just as Howe’s first lecture had been higher-toned than the calico ball the *Picayune* had recommended.

At last, after months of wrangling, participants in the Woman’s Department planned a “Glowing Tribute” to Julia Ward Howe. On May 29, the day before Woman’s Day, Lady Commissioners and a few gentlemen assembled in Howe’s office after the final Twelve O’Clock Talk. Olive Wright of Colorado told of the good she and the state had gained from the Great Show. One of the women hoped that Howe would “never forget her pleasant stay.” Caroline Merrick said she expected that when Howe “returned to Boston and the smoke of the conflict had cleared away,” she would conclude that she had had a “very happy time in New Orleans” in a way similar to the way she, Merrick, had had to put the “sad time” of the great war behind her. It was an unusual comparison.⁶⁶ Then, those gathered to honor Howe exchanged additional wishes and gratitudes. In a way, Howe and local women had indeed been in a major skirmish, with each accusing the other of impolitic and impolite behavior, but to equate the Civil War with the conflict in the Woman’s Department belittled Merrick’s own war experiences. Southern women might have gained strength from their trials; Merrick confirmed that the Civil War generation had learned to rise above them and acknowledge the happy moments, giving their experience complexity and depth. However, other than acknowledgments of Howe’s efficiency in the

⁶⁵ About Louisiana Woman’s Day, *Picayune*, May 24, 1885; for *al fresco* plans, see the *Picayune*, May 26, 1885. The *Times-Democrat* also expected “a May pole dance, a concert under the oaks in the evening and fireworks followed by a dance,” *Times-Democrat*, May 26, 1885; claim of high-toned, see the *Picayune*, May 27, 1885.

⁶⁶ *Times-Democrat*, May 30, 1885.

Woman's Department, there was little magnanimity shown the Bostonian in Merrick's memoir, King's letters, or Flo Field's tribute to her mother, Cole.

Participants and visitors gathered one last time to celebrate Woman's Day at the World's Exposition on Saturday, May 30, 1885. “[T]he fair sex, who, despite the storm of rain and hail that prevailed with violence” turned out “in considerable numbers,” the *Picayune* reported. Women and interested men assembled at noon in the Literary section, an area the *Times-Democrat* called “the most attractive feature of the Woman's Department.” The room was gaily decorated again with flags and flowers. On a small platform carpeted with Arabian rugs was a gigantic armchair made of the “enormous horns of Texas oxen” with a leopard-skin cushion upon which sat the diminutive Julia Ward Howe, a woman less than five feet tall. Although it was Maud Howe's occasion to shine because the occasion centered on the gift of books, Howe presided, as Grace King wrote, “as a matter of course. She presides at everything & has done it so long that her air, manner, smile & language are actually thread bare.” King continued to her sister, May: “It is a pleasure to know that if she presides in the next world—which she will do, if she has a chance, that she will be regenerated & renewed.”⁶⁷ Local women seem to have tired of Howe's intruder personality, but she had brought them useful messages and effective tactics.

Howe rose from the Texas horned chair and introduced her daughter Maud, who spoke candidly; both newspapers quoted her curious comments verbatim, a startling piece of oral history. She said she remembered “laughing very heartily over the letter” that announced her appointment to head the Literary section. “It seemed so absurd a thing to expect me to leave my

⁶⁷ About the “fair sex,” see the *Picayune*, May 31, 1885; for the Literary section feature, see the *Times-Democrat*, May 31, 1885; Grace King to May McDowell, May 31, 1885, King Papers.

home, my friends, my work," for she was writing a book. She said she had "treated the whole thing as a jest" and did not write a "serious answer." But she realized that she must "either follow the president of the Woman's Department" and labor with her, or separate herself from her mother for six months. So she began gathering books. Then, "with a heavy heart" she left her home and study and "the men and women who had begun to live and act out [their] life drama"



in the story she was writing, and she turned her face "southward." Bizarrely, she said, "I hated the work. I hated New Orleans. I hated most of all the Exposition, and said a dozen times, 'I wish the Exposition was dead; I wish that it had never been born.'" King called the comments "extremely personal--& egotistic; while her language & manner were not up to a High School performance." Maud Howe had made much of "the trouble she had suffered, & the sacrifices she had made in coming here," King gossiped to May.⁶⁸

Maud Howe, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study

Happily, though, Maud Howe's rhetoric brightened. "It was only when I came and stood with thousands of others in Music Hall" and listened to the "inspiring words and ringing voice of the man whom I must call the genius of the Exposition, Major E. A. Burke, that my enthusiasm was roused, and my heart was really in my work." Then, she presented the fourteen hundred

⁶⁸ *Picayune*, May 31, 1885; Grace King to May McDowell, May 31, 1885, King Papers.

volumes of literature to the Southern Art Union's library, a "beautiful sisterhood of books," according to the *Times-Democrat*. She expected the collection would increase in importance each year: textbooks, conduct books, books that treated "matters of household interest," scientific books, books of the imagination, and "files of current newspapers and periodicals, edited and mainly written by women."⁶⁹

This was quite a cache for the organization and left a collection that included books that might also have helped radicalize readers. "It is in loving remembrance of the long winter of labor and of pleasure which I have passed in New Orleans that I offer to the Art Union the library which it has been my duty to form," Maud Howe said. She hoped that from time to time she might offer further books to "eventually complete what will be an almost unique collection of 'the works of women.'"⁷⁰ Curiously, it was a man, Colonel William Preston Johnson, President of the Art Union (and Tulane University), who accepted the gift and spoke some obsequious and "glowing words." Grace King thought his answer "a ludicrous effort on his part to come down to the occasion. He tried to be very grateful for the volumes of women's books—complimented books & women work in general, vague, terms--& then by a happy thought finished up by a eulogium of Mrs. Howe & her accomplished daughter."⁷⁰

Howe, of course, made "some happy remarks," as did returning former Director-General Burke, who thanked her for her "able management" and "regretted that any obstacles should have been in her way." Again, King nattered that this show of cordiality "was highly appreciated by the audience who knew perfectly well the warfare that has been going on between [Howe and Burke] for months." Burke presented a "lovely basket of roses" to Maud Howe from the Art

⁶⁹ *Picayune*, May 31, 1885; *Times-Democrat*, May 31, 1885.

⁷⁰ *Picayune*, May 31, 1885; Grace King to May McDowell, May 31, 1885, King Papers.

Union and a brass plaque painted by one of the group's ladies with "a scene on the levee, piled with cotton bales, and an anxious darkey looking for the Exposition," a memento King called "very ugly." Refreshments (punch, iced tea, cakes, and sandwiches, King wrote) were served in the president's office, and the ladies distributed copies of Townsend's Centennial Poem as souvenirs.⁷¹

Also in the Woman's Department on May 30, 1885, was one last hurrah for silk culture and the clashing Bostonians. Marion McBride, among others, spoke at a "silk culture reception" that afternoon, which Howe no doubt did not attend. McBride told the history of the Woman's Silk Culture Association that began in 1880 and how there had been no appropriation from government until January 23, 1885, when "two State flags, made of American silk, were presented at Washington, D. C. to the Senate and House by a committee of ladies from the association." Then the government's Commissioner of Agriculture "placed a portion of the Congressional appropriation for silk culture in the United States, at the disposal of the Woman's Silk Culture Association." Those women had sold hundreds of pounds of silk to be "converted into manufactured goods." McBride claimed that Mrs. Mary McBride, also of the *Boston Post*, had "introduced the worm into public institutions" and had distributed five hundred mulberry trees that spring throughout Massachusetts. An interest in silk culture had begun in that state as

⁷¹ Grace King to May McDowell, May 31, 1885, King Papers; *Picayune*, May 31, 1885. The periodicals that Maud Howe named as included were "the Leslie publications, Harper's Bazar, the Weekly Magazine, the Electra, the Picayune, the Critic, the Woman's Journal, St. Nicholas and many others," including the *Century Magazine*, which published a large portion of woman's work. The complete list of books by state is in Howe's *Report and Catalogue*. The *Times-Democrat* declared that the city owed a debt of gratitude to Maud Howe, "a most gifted and brilliant member of an unusually gifted family," for her decision to give the books to the Union's free library. "Society Notes," *Times-Democrat*, May 24, 1885. A label in each book read: "Presented to the Southern Art Union Library in the name of the Women Writers of the United States by Maud Howe." The *Times-Democrat* listed many of the categories of books included in the collection, May 31, 1885.

early as 1831, the journalist said. The United States was by 1885 the third silk manufacturing country in the world with an annual production of \$35,000,000.⁷² The work seemed especially appropriate for women of the South where climate favored the enterprise, so it probably caught the attention of some local women. That same afternoon, Howe was drawing on what the *Times-Democrat* called her “valuable fund of observation, reading and experience” to speak to the Woman’s National Relief Association in the building of the Life Saving Service. The newspaper reported that she spoke “intelligently” on the need for women to attend to sanitary laws, to cleanse and disinfect premises, and to care for the “ventilation of homes, preparation of food and airing of bed and other clothing.” Whatever Howe’s critics thought of her, the tiny woman could rally to address any subject.

Right to the last day of the Exposition, Catharine Cole was as unrelenting as was Howe. Yet, she was like one of the dual-purpose devices that inventing women created: a combination gadfly and advocate. In “Woman’s World and Work” on Sunday, May 31, 1885, she wrote that the Southern Art Union was “almost on point of final disintegration” for lack of money. She claimed it had been an Art Union only in name but was really “a shop to sell tidies, painted fans and crocheted baby socks.” She suggested that it did not have a clear mission. “It has been a public library. It has been a giver of mule races and magic lantern views. It has been almost anything except an Art Union.” She thought it should start over and teach; make a business rather than “a society affair.” In a city of 225,000 people, she wrote, New Orleans had “no free kindergardens [sic], no art schools, schools of designs, drawing classes.” She offered other practical suggestions that might make the Union “an honor and blessing to a very ignorant and in

⁷² *Picayune*, May 31, 1885.

art matters, uncultivated city.” On the other hand, she praised the progress of the Woman’s Club for having grown in prosperity and membership over that fall and spring. It had continued to provide important initiatives for women, she declared, as in recent talks on Colorado schools, teachers, and that state’s record of women having voted on educational affairs.⁷³

The *Picayune* of May 31, 1885, also carried Cole’s final assessment of the work of the Woman’s Department. She congratulated Mrs. Florence M. Adkinson of the *Indianapolis Sentinel* for her compact review, one that paralleled Cole’s own opinion “that the greater portion of the work shown may be termed amateur, the play of restless fingers rather than the industry of those who are developing the resources of the commonwealth.” It was a condition that seemed common at fairs and expositions, she asserted, because women had less money to invest, were “less willing to take risks, less disposed to expend time, work and money in advertising” their inventions. Also, “the women who collect these exhibits are frequently those who take little interest in the progress of women in industries and business, and who prefer pretty and showy articles to the more homely practical products.” They had “not learned to search for enterprise in lines outside of the stereotyped feminine occupations at home.” It was always her intention to seek out new employments every week for her “Woman’s World and Work.” The exhibits “appear to the average man as of trifling character, which the world could do without and suffer no material loss—*fol-de-rois.*” On the other hand, Cole groused, when a woman does appear with a valuable

⁷³ “WWW,” *Picayune*, May 31, 1885. A few weeks earlier, the *Times-Democrat* had lauded the Art Union for rescuing “gently bred” women whose “natural supporters” had died. They had been left in “misfortune” after the war had “deprived them of inherited means” and forced them to acquire knowledge of some means of support. From its beginning two years earlier, the Art Union had become an “educational society” for 815 pupils who gained practical stenographic training at very low cost. It had paid out \$9000 to women for items sold and had a library of 4000 volumes. It was supported entirely by \$10 membership fees. *Times-Democrat*, May 7, 1885. By 1886, however, the Union had folded and the collection of books passed to Tulane. See Artists’ Folder, Southern Art Union, The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA.

exhibit that has market value, men managers were prone “to assert that it does not properly belong to the woman’s department and must be classed elsewhere with articles of its kind.”⁷⁴ About this, Cole and Adkinson were probably right, demonstrated by women’s having to continually grapple with strategies that would best convey their talents and ability, as in a Woman’s Department, while much of their best work was in manufacturers’ exhibits elsewhere.

Even on May 31, 1885, the closing day of the Exposition, there was one more duty for the women. Julia Ward Howe and nine Lady Commissioners, including Caroline Merrick of Louisiana and Augustus Wilson of Kansas, attended Pennsylvania Day. Howe spoke of “feelings of joy at the prospective end of work and regret at the prospect of parting.” Burke, again present, related the national character of the event and his disappointment over the premature closing of the Exposition’s doors. He expressed particular “regret at the superficial manner in which the people and the scribblers of the press had treated the enterprise.” He eulogized the Board of Management. The attending band played “Dixie.” Colonel Edmund Richardson, President of the Exposition, spoke of the event’s beneficial results and influences yet to be discovered. Then, he declared the World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition officially closed.⁷⁵

Much of the final month of the Woman’s Department had churned with controversies that embroiled journalists, Howe, and some Lady Commissioners, but the battles seemed not to affect other local women. Perhaps they took a not-too-guilty pleasure in the retribution heaped on Julia Ward Howe, yet they might also have been appalled at the wide portrayal of women’s private

⁷⁴ “WWW,” *Picayune*, May 31, 1885. Grace King’s first published piece, “The Heroines of Literature,” appeared in the *Times-Democrat* on May 31, 1885. She signed it “P. G.,” presumably for PanGnostics, the literary club that Howe revived while in the city.

⁷⁵ *Times-Democrat*, May 31, 1885; “World’s Exposition,” *Picayune*, June 1, 1885. Julia Ward Howe could not leave the city until June 11, 1885, because she was waiting for the \$15,000 from Congress to pay closing expenses of the Woman’s Department.

battles, however principled, now exposed in newspapers. Perhaps they felt demeaned by so public a display of women's inability to work together without squabbling. However, if ambitious young women paid attention to the way Howe rallied from multiple setbacks, they learned a life lesson in fortitude.

Inspiration was available to women from many quarters if they were ready to take it in. If women doubted the positive influences suffrage could bring, they had only to listen to ex-Governor Hoyt's praise of voting women in the Wyoming Territory. Surely, his talk took as much sting out of fear of the ballot as did the discovery that strong-minded women and suffragists were indeed womanly. Although the Woman's Department was replete with pretty needlework and painted cups, those who looked for inspiration in wage-earning jobs could discover some new paths perhaps not previously considered. If someone wanted to work from home, there was always the marvel of silk culture. Now, after more than six months, it was left to women to digest all that they had gleaned and for southern women to consider how they would put what they had learned into action in a South professing a new era of progress.



*Now Peace hath done her perfect work—serene
Loyal and beautiful, the Southern queen
Bids the wide world welcome to her door,
Where Industry has spread a varied store,*

*Where the white splendor of her heaping bales
Answers the snow of crowding foreign sales—
Wise sister, blessed by thy welcoming hand,
Stretched to Republics of the tropic land!*

*"World's International Cotton Centennial Exposition,"
Courtesy of the Collections of the Louisiana State Museum*

Conclusion

The opening of the Ex [sic] is so near & every one seems frightened to death over the immense responsibility of the affair.

—Grace King¹

Local women's initial fears regarding the "immense responsibility" of the Woman's Department evolved into a greater sense of power and pride by the time the Cotton Centennial Exhibition drew to a close on May 31, 1885. Not everything had gone as planned, of course, but the women had accomplished an amazing feat, and they knew it. More than that, they had undergone a remarkable transformation themselves. As Grace King observed of her writing career, which was launched as a result of the Exposition, "[U]nexpectedly, there was opened to me the path leading out of and beyond the life I was living, to the life of my secret hopes and prayers."² The same was true for many women whose lives changed while bringing the Woman's Department to life. Through their interaction with outsiders, their creativity with the exhibits, and their discovery of an identity beyond "southern ladyhood," they had begun to see themselves as new women in what the men were calling a "New South."

Lessons from Interacting with Outsiders

Despite the controversy that swirled around Julia Ward Howe's appointment, she grasped the message of the exposition to unite North, South, and West, and she understood that

¹ Grace King to May McDowell, December 11, 1884, Grace King Papers (MSS 1282) Louisiana State University Libraries Special Collections, Baton Rouge.

² Grace King, *Memories of a Southern Woman of Letters* (New York: McMillan, 1932), 58.

for women to advance, the Fair would have to emphasize their domestic, professional, and commercial achievements. As a national figure, Howe used the platform of the Exposition to publicize the causes of women in speeches to mixed audiences, an audacious action for a woman and almost unknown in the South. If the Board of Management wanted progress for women, as they asserted, Howe was an apt person to lead. Although the local press criticized her, although she tangled with some women in the department, she simply pressed ahead, buoyed by a strong will, experience, and determination. The heightened criticism of her in newspapers pulled local women into the debate over issues and decorum, and the spotlight on Howe drew visitors to the department to meet the little woman who caused the big raucous. Because sectionalism lingered, reconciliation among women was often elusive, but Howe nevertheless prodded the Woman's Department through its development and celebrations. Although she was the ultimate outsider, her energy and interests served the Exposition and impelled local women to action.

In addition to Howe, other powerful women eyed the potential of the department as a vehicle to gain new advocates for their national causes. When they came to the city, famous women like Susan B. Anthony, Frances E. Willard, and May Wright Sewall not only brought messages of suffrage, temperance, education, advancement, and benevolence. They also brought a sense of woman's power to think, to act, and to command a room without losing womanly graces. They electrified and expanded membership of existing clubs, and they made new converts to causes. It was clear that national leaders aimed to woo southern women. Anthony, for example, wrote Caroline Merrick that she wanted "the Southern splendid women" to see and hear and know northern women "who felt themselves made of the same sort of stuff as other mortals" and not like "her Ladyship" Howe, who felt herself the only woman" qualified

to speak.³ Local women were ready to meet these activists, but they also used the platform of the Woman's Department and Exposition to make certain their skills were recognized.

Other northern women apparently saw themselves as missionaries to a foreign land. As Mrs. John Lucas of Philadelphia wrote to Howe, the “genius, industry, and intelligence of Northern women” could be “object-teaching” to women of the South.⁴ Proselytizers like Mrs. Lucas obviously harbored a stereotype of southern women as more backward than themselves, an image southern women had ample opportunity to correct, especially when they welcomed outsiders into their distinct local culture. Leaders in New Orleans also demonstrated that they possessed solid organizational skills and experience even if, as a group, they lacked an organized collective power. Nevertheless, their negative reaction to Howe compelled them to act together to prove they were as capable as any northern women. Further, to meet the financial needs of the department, they mustered a force and accomplished the task; working with Howe, they raised enough money to make the Woman's Department possible. They succeeded in presenting an image to their visitors of southern woman as organized, efficient, able, intelligent, and cosmopolitan.

Even if women rejected aspects of Howe's style, she established a standard for articulation, authority, and leadership. She exemplified a woman in the spotlight, into which Caroline Merrick stepped on several occasions. Although Lady Commissioners made a political statement just by their appearance on stage for celebratory days, it was Julia Ward Howe who addressed the crowds. According to Grace King, she was “[c]ool, calm, and dignified,” she

³ Susan B. Anthony to Caroline Merrick, May 15, 1885, Merrick Papers (M 64, Folder 2) The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA

⁴ Mrs. John Lucas to Julia Ward Howe, December 12, 1884, Julia Ward Papers (A-24) Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Cambridge, MA.

bowed like a queen and delivered lectures “in carefully distinct Boston articulation” spiced with “sparks of wit.”⁵ Her speaking meant that suffrage and women’s advancement were consistently and unavoidably before the public. In addition, local organizations benefitted from Howe’s willingness to act beyond her official responsibilities. At churches, clubs, and schools, she generously shared her broad knowledge of successful reforms and fund raising projects, of writing and publishing, and of women working together to lift all women into better jobs, higher education, and real human rights.

Howe also guided a group of aspirants to become published authors. As she led the literary club, PanGnostics, she methodically followed a program that had long been successful in northern groups: writing papers, reading them before the group and hearing them critiqued, and learning how to submit them for publication. The confidence and practical knowledge gained in this club helped advance the career of Elizabeth “Bessie” Bisland and begin that of Grace King and others of the group.⁶ For these women and surely for other New Orleanians now long forgotten, the year of the Exposition was a “great divide.” Emblematic of the transition that the Woman’s Department and the Cotton Centennial made possible was the shift in Grace King’s potential from a rudderless young woman yearning to be famous and financially secure into a fledgling writer doggedly on her way.⁷

⁵ King, *Memories of a Southern Woman of Letters*, 54.

⁶ Bessie Bisland left New Orleans for New York to become an editor at *Cosmopolitan*. In 1888, the magazine sponsored Bisland in a competition with stunt writer Nellie Bly. The two women traveled in opposite directions to beat Phineas Fogg’s eighty-day voyage around the world. Bisland arrived a few hours after Bly on the seventy-second day, making Bly the famous traveler. See Jason Marks, *Around the World in 72 Days: The Race between Pulitzer’s Nellie Bly and Cosmopolitan’s Elizabeth Bisland* (Pittsburgh: Sterling House, 1999). Bisland also edited some of Lafcadio Hearn’s English language works written after he moved to Japan.

⁷ Robert Bush wrote that 1885 was the “great divide” in King’s life, for without the Cotton Centennial Exposition, Warner and Gilder, and the need for money, King’s writing

All of the addresses visiting activists made about education led to the founding of a college for women in 1886. The dearth of formal higher education was a regular topic of discussion in the Woman's Department and in venues around the city. The Newcomb College website acknowledges Julia Ward Howe and Susan B. Anthony for inspiring the idea of a college for women in New Orleans and recognizes Mrs. T. G. (Ida) Richardson and her husband, professor of anatomy at Tulane University, for urging Josephine Newcomb to make the bequest. Newcomb granted funds the year following the Cotton Centennial (1886) as a memorial for her daughter H. Sophie Newcomb, and thus began over a hundred years of educating young women in New Orleans. Catharine Cole had called attention to the absence of art schools, design schools, and museums in the city. The art school at Newcomb drew its first students from art and design classes formed shortly after the Exposition, prompted by exhibits like the pottery from Ohio and by Tulane's daily drawing classes in the Educational Department. Especially successful was its now highly valued Newcomb pottery. Men threw the pots, female students decorated them with flora and fauna of the New Orleans environs, and students earned money from sales. The pottery gained fame and awards at later expositions; the city gained an esteemed institute of higher learning.⁸

Lessons from Making Exhibits

Women from across the country brought examples of their work to the Exposition. New possibilities must have inspired local women or confirmed their own skills. Journalists covered

career might never have begun. Robert Bush, *Grace King of New Orleans: A Selection of Her Writing* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State U P, 1973), 15.

⁸ <http://tulane.edu/nccrow/newcomb-archives/history-of-newcomb-college.cfm>. On the famous pottery, see Suzanne Ormond and Mary E. Irvine, *Louisiana's Art Nouveau: The Crafts of the Newcomb Style* (Gretna: Pelican, 1976), 15-19; Jessie Poesch, *Newcomb Pottery: An Enterprise for Southern Women, 1895-1940* (Exton, Pennsylvania: Schiffer, 1984), 11, 12.

every exhibit, and some judged them to be amateurish. Although Lady Commissioners mourned the lack of time to make a good showing, the displays did illustrate the regular work of ordinary women in taxidermy, dentistry, pharmacy, photography, and lithography as well as in pretty needlework, from which they could earn money from home. Other exhibits confirmed that women invented useful items, published newspapers, and mined for ore; they worked in literature, journalism, science, and other fields or in design studios, factories, stores, and offices. Displays showed samples of stenographic work and reports from women who administered prisons and charities, owned farms, and engaged in all manner of industry that might not immediately be thought of as women's work. The exhibits expanded women's options. The *Picayune*'s Catharine Cole urged visitors to look carefully at each display and imagine themselves in various jobs to see how they fit their skills. This kind of exercise would have been impossible without the Woman's Department; it was a physical amplification of Cole's descriptions of jobs in her columns, "Woman's World and Work." Despite women's production being scattered everywhere at the Exposition, there were enough exhibits in the Woman's Department to prove women's value in an industrializing nation and to suggest many new fields for those needing to earn a livelihood.

Women of New Orleans and the South had been poised in a breach between antebellum restrictions and a readiness for progressive actions. They had gained strength from their Civil War challenges, and as Caroline Merrick wrote, emancipation had been "the liberation of the general mind from captivity to the belief in the ethical rectitude of human slavery."⁹ Many local women in voluntary organizations who worked with the Woman's Department (Merrick and officers of the Christian Woman's Exchange and Southern Art Union, for example) had been

⁹ Caroline Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land: A Southern Matron's Memoir* (New York: Grafton, 1901), 214.

seeking additional ways to help lift needy women out of the troubled times that still daunted families in the Crescent City. During Reconstruction, benevolent organizations had begun, but few leaders had moved into the public arena and taken a political stand. They had not yet worked together to forge collective strength into effective strategies. As Caroline Merrick discovered when her signature on a will was judged illegal, to accomplish significant work, women would need the ballot and would need to work sometimes with surprising partners. The Cotton Centennial helped pull women toward envisioning those broader possibilities.

In the way that historian Robert W. Rydell argues that World's Fairs helped produce hope by imposing order on chaos, the arrangement of spaces in the Woman's Department helped foster optimism. Visitors moved through real spaces from one state's or region's displays to the next, literally viewing women's leisured and work lives. Distinct exhibits directed them through the spectrum of work that provided a sweep of women's productivity. Visitors to the Colored Department might have noted a similar kind of potential, as women of color presented themselves as capable and also ready to claim a place in a "New South." Their exhibits, for the most part, paralleled items in the Woman's Department, and journalists gave the items careful notice. Since no obvious controversy exposed differences of opinion, what is known is only what black women exhibited, not what they thought. Yet, it is clear that they expended much of their energy on educational advances, especially for children of freedmen.¹⁰ Because participants in each of the two departments were free to present themselves as they saw

¹⁰ Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984), 4; for the Colored Department, see Miki Pfeffer, "'Mr. Chairman and FELLOW AMERICAN CITIZENS': African American Agency at the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition, 1884-1885," *Louisiana History Journal* 51.4 (2010): 442-62. It is unclear (except for the Christian Woman's Exchange having helped the women) how that department solved its dearth of funds.

fit, the strategy of separateness seems to have been useful in this southern place, at this time in the mid-1880s.

As women examined exhibits and exchanged information about them, they could comfortably “loiter and chat,” share views, make comparisons, and engage in friendly debates or even altercations. Most of these spaces, no matter how radical the exhibited items, were enveloped by familiar feminine trappings; they were restful gendered parlors that drew women in. In this safe environment, if women looked closely, as Catharine Cole urged, they could detect possibilities for a previously unimagined future. In addition, because management located the Woman’s Department and the Colored Department in the same building with state and federal exhibits, it was an easy climb for men to gaze at women’s work. They did not have to trek to a separate location to view proof that “save helping to make the laws that govern her, woman is doing her full share to make this age a progressive and prosperous one,” as Iowa’s Commissioner Herbert S. Fairall declared. He judged the scientific, architectural, and hygienic displays “a revelation,” as were the “superior educational advances” that women achieved.¹¹

Fairall also noted that in addition to several displays in the Woman’s Department, Louisianians made a “conspicuous” exhibit of preserved treasures, placed as an annex to the state exhibit. Grace King maintained that this collection of “miniatures, jewels, laces, documents, and pieces of old furniture” opened the history of the city not only to strangers but to local citizens “in whose minds the hard chances of the Civil War and its consequences had effaced the historical traditions of the past.” The exhibit helped locals regain pride in the

¹¹ Fairall, Herbert S. *The World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition in New Orleans, 1884-1885* (Iowa City, IA: Republican, 1885), 367, 361. Fairall mentioned, in particular, as a good conversationalist the “intelligent” Mrs. Augustus Wilson of Kansas, over whose credentials Howe tussled with the state’s governor and the Exposition’s management.

heritage of their city and also helped them make connections to national history as well, since some of the artifacts harked back to the country's founders. Before this display, the items had been "shut up in houses of old Creole families who clung even in poverty to the vestiges of ancestral love of display and extravagance," King declared. Her own local color fiction and sentimental histories of the city and its people might also be laced to that collection of relics, as could her life.¹²

As revealing as displays were, however, the convergence of views among the nation's women was far more important than what they exhibited. Scholar Etta Reid Lyles, writing of King's transitional generation, called the Woman's Department a "forum from which Julia Ward Howe and other northern social reformers launched a Southern woman's rights movement and created an unprecedented alliance between women of the North and South."¹³ Even if the results were not immediately apparent, seeds of suffrage and reform were planted that year, and personal connections were formed where previously few existed. In addition, western women from middle states and the Pacific Slope contributed a pioneering, open, innovative spirit that also helped spark more progressive thinking in New Orleans and the South. Interactions among participants and visitors, and attention to lectures, especially about Wyoming women, fanned

¹² Fairall, *The World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition in New Orleans, 1884-1885*, 367. See also, King, *New Orleans: The Place and the People* (New York: MacMillan, 1911); Grace King and John R. Ficklen, *A History of Louisiana* (New Orleans: L. Graham Co., 1902).

¹³ Etta Reid Lyles, "A Transitional Generation: Grace King's World, 1852-1932 (Ph. D. diss., University of Maryland, 1987), 234, 1. Lyles looks at King as an example of women whose "lifespan bridged two discrete societal structures: the slaveholding economy of the Old South and the technological market economy of the New South." She concludes that King's generational position affected her fiction, an assessment with which I concur.

the possibility that women could use the ballot successfully and lose none of their “womanly” qualities, a realization important in a conservative southern region.

Lessons from Interacting with Strong-minded Women

Local women shifted their perspective as they realized that they need not fear new ideas brought in by outsiders and that, even in their cosmopolitan city, they generally lagged behind women from other regions. To correct the Crescent City’s ills, they would have to be open to effective tactics, wherever they originated. If they did not recognize sectionalism in themselves when organizers created the Exposition, they exhibited it soon enough when men named Howe as president of the Woman’s Department. The idea of northern authority still elicited a charged reaction, and sectional feelings cropped up periodically, but these partly due to Howe’s domineering personality. Yet, New Orleanians softened their opinions of strong-willed women when they found them womanly and non-threatening in person. This dismantling of stereotypes released local women to consider famous visitors’ causes, including suffrage. Some had to know that the ballot was the means to the ends they sought.

Catharine Cole and other newswomen helped relax resistant attitudes in the way they reported opinions and described visiting activists. They debunked old notions; by the description of outsiders’ demeanor and appearance, they transformed “radicals” into familiar figures. Western women’s voices diffused sectional rhetoric but also broadened some turmoil, as in the case of the debacle over the Kansas Lady Commissioner. Yet, powerful visitors brought the language of the “woman question,” of women’s readiness for full citizenship, and they made these public as they related success stories. Informed spokewomen addressed mixed groups in clubs, schools, and churches and presented possibilities for a rejuvenated future. Some women were obviously ready to act on new options; others moved more slowly out of the losses

of the past in the “Old South” toward the prospect of a more modern life in a “New South.”

Never before had suffrage and public activism gained so wide an audience in the region. How much women embraced the construct “New South” is uncertain, but the public platform that began in the Woman’s Department was now more widely available, and many local women seized what it offered.

Men of the Exposition’s Board of Management had confirmed what local women must have known: that they could not necessarily depend on financial or administrative aid from their men, perhaps not even emotional support. Although angered about men’s selection of Howe, local women experienced power as they pulled together to make the Woman’s Department a reality despite the dearth of funds; they also acknowledged they would have to work with Julia Ward Howe. Even as some men described southern ladies as meek and diffident, reticent and submissive, other men at the Exposition publicly urged them toward action, toward expectation of increased industrialization and changes in employment, and toward “progress,” thus toward radicalization.

The Woman’s Department helped restructure old impressions, as local women looked outward and as visitors got to know New Orleanians and women of the South. Some local women considered the possibility that they might be able to be forceful and effective while gracious and hospitable and also public and political while private and deferential to the men in their lives. Even so, when challenged to confront ideas of womanhood that did not fit traditional mores, many southern women remained conflicted. Regarding images outsiders held of the South, Merrick and others felt visitors needed time to get beyond the misconceptions about southern ladyhood. Participants who stayed for months realized that southern women’s lives were more nuanced than they appeared from afar.

As visitors arrived and departed, enough progressive women stayed for extended periods so that, over six months, there was time to reflect on previously unexamined opinions. Women exchanged and clarified views in formal settings and over dinner, and they negotiated self-identities through face-to-face interactions. Stereotypes crumbled; resistances cracked. Women saw themselves individually and collectively through others' eyes, and some expanded their perception beyond their own region. That refashioning also added to women's stronger *esprit de corps* in New Orleans. As Merrick declared, southern women became "clubbable" beings. When they compared leaders in their organizations to others, they appreciated local skills of women like Caroline Merrick, Catharine Cole, Mary Ashley Townsend, and officers of the established Christian Woman's Exchange and the expanding Woman's Club. The local Exchange became a model for similar undertakings in other locales.¹⁴

Learning how other groups of women affected politics in their areas also helped to increase local women's sense of power and affinity for issues that might improve their charming but ill-kempt city. As Caroline Merrick wrote in her memoir, New Orleans women applied the lessons they learned at the Exposition, for example, in their "great contest" to overthrow the corrupting Louisiana State Lottery, and they learned to make alliances with disparate groups to achieve that end. She acknowledged that the "vigorous propaganda for the enfranchisement" had been conducted in the North for fifty years but had "just begun in the South." By 1892, however, she and eight other "strong, progressive and intellectual women of New Orleans"

¹⁴ For women in face-to-face interactions, see Manon Niquette and William Buxton, "Meet Me at the Fair: Sociability and Reflexivity in Nineteen-Century World Expositions," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 22.1 (1997), <http://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/articles/viewArticle/977/883>; Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land*, 212. Commissioner Fairall of Iowa claimed that only Wisconsin had an Exchange that approached the success of the New Orleans enterprise. Fairall, *The World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition*, 375.

organized the Portia Club, the first suffrage association in Louisiana, and she claimed it took “a leading part in all public causes.”¹⁵

In 1895, the only other time Julia Ward Howe visited New Orleans, the Portia and Woman’s Clubs sponsored her conference of the Association for the Advancement of Women. The *Picayune* lauded the “Lady Leaders of American Thought” for honoring New Orleans with their presence; by then, Cole had moved on to the *Times-Democrat*. At one session, Howe recalled her time at the Exposition and expressed “grateful recollection” for the “many kindnesses shown me on the occasion of my first visit.” She recalled the “assemblage of people” from every state, the “fraternal intercourse,” and other fine features of those days. She noted the growth of New Orleans and also that “the great currents of national life” had by 1895 joined all sections with the same “aims and aspirations,” all under one flag. When the celebrated advocates had left the city, the *Picayune*’s “Society” columnist (Nicholson, perhaps) wrote, “It has gone out of fashion to ‘poke fun’ at the ‘advanced woman’ when she is gentle, refined, intellectual and in any way genuinely womanly, and the *Times-Democrat*’s reporter (Cole?) was not an ‘Eve Up-to-Date’ when she ridiculed the Association for the Advancement of Women.”¹⁶

¹⁵Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land*, 216-19. Among Merrick’s list of topics of discussion for the Portia Club were: “Has the State of Wyoming been Benefited by Woman Suffrage?” “Is the Woman in the Wage-earning World a Benefit to Civilization?” “Is Organization Beneficial to Labor?” “Would Municipal Suffrage for Women be a Benefit in New Orleans?” and “Disabilities of Women in Louisiana.” Many women in New Orleans acted politically despite barriers, as Suzanne Lebsock showed of the women she researched for *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: Norton, 1984). In 1896, the year of *Plessy v Ferguson*, Kate Gordon, her sister, and other young New Orleans suffragists created a second generation and offshoot of Portia, the Era (“Equal Rights for All”) Club, focused on a southern strategy of states’ rights and white supremacy. The NAWSA brought them into the organization, so anxious were members to see a federal amendment passed. Yet, the Gordons perversely fought against a federal law. See Elna C. Green, *Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Woman Suffrage Question* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

Ten years had made a difference in acceptance of progressive women. In addition, when the Woman's Club and Portia Club hosted this group of national activists, they demonstrated that women in New Orleans had also learned to be public, political, and a force in their city.¹⁶

In the separate arena of a Woman's Department, participants and visitors had been free to share, compare, compete, and wrestle with issues that confronted women in the nineteenth century. Dissimilarities surfaced, but so did surprising similarities. That which local women proposed, resisted, welcomed, and argued revealed what was important to them and planted seeds of transformation. Because of the dearth of funds with which to make a big show, their creativity and ability were tested. With the controversial Howe as the star, the Woman's Department at times became contested terrain, but her presence also galvanized local women and obliged them to clarify their passions, principles, and ideals. For six months, remarkable characters had met, clashed, and reconciled enough to make the department a success. New Orleans ladies were changed by their experience with the temporary gathering. No longer would they sit on the sidelines of the great debates of their century. The event left an enduring legacy; it created new openings both for individuals and community groups in the years to come. As Caroline Merrick aptly put it, the Woman's Department at the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition had been an "enlarging influence" indeed.

¹⁶ For the welcome of the organization and Howe's comments, see the *Picayune*, November 6, 1895. Coverage of the conference ran until November 10, 1895. Howe also acknowledged a growth of modern homes but mourned the loss of picturesque architecture in New Orleans. For the chiding in "Society," see the *Picayune*, November 10, 1895. Another few lines in the same society column noted that Mrs. W. W. King and Miss Grace King entertained Howe and another daughter, Florence Howe Hall, at an "informal reception" in their home.

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Vita

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