

2019

"We Are a Very Happy Family": 19th-Century Familial Power Dynamics

Stella A. Ress

University of Southern Indiana

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.valpo.edu/mssj>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Business Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), [Economics Commons](#), [Environmental Studies Commons](#), [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#), [Geography Commons](#), [History Commons](#), [International and Area Studies Commons](#), [Political Science Commons](#), [Psychology Commons](#), and the [Urban Studies and Planning Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ress, Stella A. (2019) "'We Are a Very Happy Family': 19th-Century Familial Power Dynamics," *Midwest Social Sciences Journal*: Vol. 22: Iss. 1, Article 12.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22543/2766-0796.1011>

Available at: <https://scholar.valpo.edu/mssj/vol22/iss1/12>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ValpoScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Midwest Social Sciences Journal by an authorized administrator of ValpoScholar. For more information, please contact a ValpoScholar staff member at scholar@valpo.edu.

***“We Are a Very Happy Family”:
19th-Century Familial Power Dynamics****

STELLA A. RESS
University of Southern Indiana

ABSTRACT

This article examines the roles of family members in the mid-19th century in America, using the Willard family as a case study. Ultimately, this thick description of the Willard family demonstrates that power within the family structure was neither intrinsic nor static; moreover, one person did not control the family and its decisions at all times. Instead, each family member, depending upon circumstances, situations, and his or her own nature, negotiated and laid claim to power through various sources of authority. Josiah Willard’s authority stemmed from his role as father and husband; society crowned him king of the household, and he had the physical size to maintain it. His wife, Mary Hill Willard, often won power struggles through love and through demonstration of her moral superiority. The children, Oliver, Frances, and Mary, exhibited their power through a variety of acts—negotiation, playing to their positions as inferiors within the family, and simple rebellion. In these ways, the Willard family provides us with a template for understanding many of the middle-class families of the mid-19th century as well as the power dynamic between parents and their children.

KEY WORDS: Family; 19th Century; History; Social History

A middle-aged man, distinguishable by his tall stature, vivid blue eyes, dark brown hair parted on his left, and a strong, slightly cleft chin lounges in an easy chair by the fire. Everyone in the family knows that this easy chair is his; on the relatively rare occasion when Josiah Willard is home in the afternoon, he spends many hours in this chair, reading from the bible or from one of his many treasured horticulture books. He looks around at his family lazily, contentedly. His wife, the beloved matriarch, Mary Hill Willard, sits across from him on the sofa. Occasionally, her square face lights up and her full lips part into a smile. She casts amusing remarks into the animated conversation held by her children.

* Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Stella A. Ress, Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of Southern Indiana, 8600 University Blvd, Evansville, IN 47712.

Their son, Oliver, ever the rascal, interjects humor into the conversation whenever he can. He sits on the floor and plays with the family dog. Frequently, he pushes his overly long, straight hair away from his face. His full, curly brown beard adds age and authority to this young man of 26. Perhaps his spirit is more elated than usual, as he has recently fallen in love. Little more than a year after this casual family gathering, he will graduate from the nationally renowned Garrett Biblical Institute, marry his love, and move to Wisconsin to start a family of his own.

The position of Oliver's sisters within this scene is a mystery, but one can be assured that they sit near each other, as Mary and Frances Willard were ever close to one another. The older daughter, Frances, looks severe, but she laughs easily and naturally. Her ginger-colored hair is pulled back tightly, and her bright blue eyes purposefully survey the situation. Always protective of her younger sister, Frances probably steals frequent glances at her out of the corner of her eye. This sister, Mary, a tender girl of 18 years, might at this very moment be envying Frances, or Frank, as she calls her elder sister. Mary greatly admires her sister, and she can barely contain her jealousy throughout the pages of her diaries. Like her sister's, Mary's hair is parted down the middle, the fashion of young ladies of the day. She is more jovial than the rest; later, family members often remembered Mary as full of life and humor. As Mary and Frances take leave of the sitting room, Mary thinks, *Indeed, we are a very happy family*" (Willard 1885:108).

Gleaned from the journal of the young Mary Eliza Willard, the glimpse of the Willard family in the introductory passage demonstrates the kind of day-to-day interactions that occurred between adults and their children in the mid-19th century. In an attempt to illuminate the power structure inherent in families, this case study examines the Willard family from the early 1850s through the late 1860s: father Josiah, mother Mary, son Oliver, and daughters Frances and Mary Eliza. This family's story sheds light on a "new" understanding of power dynamics between parents and children that developed in the 19th century—one that allowed for a more fluid interpretation of the roles between fathers, mothers, and their offspring. In the Willard household, no one person had absolute control, as everyone, parents and children alike, wielded power at times. Power within the family structure was neither intrinsic nor static; moreover, it was not controlled by one person at all times. Instead, each family member, depending upon circumstances, situations, and his or her own nature, negotiated and laid claim to power through various sources of authority. The Willards' was no patriarchal, authoritative family structure, and they were not alone in this.

THE FAMILY: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite the fact that family units provide the foundational structure of most societies, the study of families as a historical subject of inquiry is relatively new and developed only in the 1960s with the rising popularity of the "new" social history. In those first decades, family histories focused on the relationship of the family with larger institutions, such as the community itself, and often used demographic data and analysis to uncover the changing dynamics within the home, and the resultant impact on the larger society (Boyer and Nissenbaum 1974; Demos 1970; Easterlin 1980; Goode 1963; Harevan and

Vinovskis 1978; Seward 1978). Though meticulous in their methods and (at times) audacious in their findings, studies such as these often obscured the individual within the family. As the feminist movement emerged in the culture at large, academics and feminists alike used it as a tool to guide their research questions. This sometimes meant focusing on qualitative social and cultural analyses in lieu of quantitative demographic data. In family studies, it translated into a bevy of publications that examined women's roles within the home specifically (Alter 1988; Anderson 1981; Bloch 1978; Boydston 1986; Tilly and Scott 1978), as well as ensuing scholarship that focused on men's roles (Furrow 1998; Griswold 1994; Pleck 1979; Pleck and Pleck 1980; Rotundo 1991). Meanwhile, others extended family roles beyond mothers and fathers to look at their children, intersecting with a new area of inquiry, the history of childhood and youth (Aries 1962; Demos and Demos 1969; Fass 1977; Mergen 1975; Mintz 2004; Sammond 2005; Sommerville 1972; West and Petrik 1992; Zelizer [1985] 1994).

In more recent decades, scholars, particularly of childhood and youth, are using both age and gender as categories of analysis. These historians started examining not children in general but rather male and female children in particular. Their works highlight the gender *and* age differences inherent in children's varied life experiences (Alexander 1995; Douglas 1995; Kasson 2014; Rotundo 1993; Schrum 2004). Despite the influx of scholarship in this area, family-area scholars have not kept abreast. Few have attempted to examine the roles of mothers, fathers, and their offspring in a single manuscript or study, although doing so illuminates not only the various experiences these persons had but also the associated structures of power and authority inherent in their familial relationships.

POWER AND AUTHORITY IN A FAMILIAL CONTEXT

In his groundbreaking work *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, political scientist James C. Scott articulated the nature of power, examined those who wielded it, and revealed the ways in which the powerless resisted it. For Scott, power and authority were inextricably linked to discourse and performance: Those in power shaped both the public transcript (i.e., the discourse and performance that the subjugated used in front of the powerful) and the hidden transcript (the discourse and performance used behind the backs of the powerful; Scott 1990:4). As family historian Shawn Johansen shows, power, or the ability to control, and authority, the right to do so, are inextricably linked (2001:9). Power is the action, and authority is the motor. Authority usually comes from institutions, such as society, religion, and even the family itself; power, in contrast, is manifested in the individual (e.g., physical size). In any social interaction, power and authority are given, taken, accepted, challenged, and/or negotiated. In the aforementioned excerpt from Mary Willard's diary, a power dynamic is evident from the physical positions of the family members to the last person left in the sitting room.

Heavily indebted to Johansen and his findings, this paper ultimately agrees with Johansen's overarching assumption: the belief that, at least in the 19th century, "it is more accurate to see familial power as varied, shared, and negotiated, and even as something for which family members vied" (2001:86). Johansen's book, however, relies

on sources left behind by a select group of 20 fathers. He examined their letters, journals, autobiographies, and wills. Thus, the story that he tells is that of fathers. Because of the nature of the primary sources used in this study—that is, the diaries of Mary and Frances—the focus shifts from parent to child. In this way, fathers do not lose *authority*, but rather, children gain *power*.

Josiah Willard's authority stemmed from his role as father and husband; society crowned him king of the household, and he had the physical size to maintain it. His wife, Mary Hill Willard, often won power struggles through love and through demonstration of her moral superiority. The children, Oliver, Frances, and Mary, demonstrated their power through a variety of acts—negotiation, playing to their positions as inferiors within the family, and simple rebellion. In these ways, the Willard family provides us with a template for understanding many of the middle-class Yankee families of the mid-19th century and the power dynamic between parents and their children.

PROBLEMATIZING THE WILLARDS AS A CASE STUDY

The Willard family is atypical in that the family cultivated in Frances fierce ambition, stubbornness, and a propensity to turn her back on gender norms. Perhaps because of this, she became a local, national, and international celebrity; she was a visionary leader, social reformer, and women's rights advocate. In other words, Frances Willard grew up to be an avid supporter of worker's rights, a temperance leader, and a suffragist, to name only a few. By some accounts, she was the most well-known woman in America, and upon her death, more than 18,000 people waited in Chicago's snow and cold to view her casket and say their good-byes (Anonymous 1898). Her accomplishments and fame were obviously uncommon.

Moreover, Josiah and Mary Hill Willard did not subscribe to all aspects of the domestic sexual division of labor expected of middle-class women of that era. These activities were defined by Madame Willard's contemporary, author and abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe, as the "mak[ing] and keep[ing] of a home" or the "training and guiding of a family" (Easton-Flake 2013:37). Frances Willard noted in her autobiography, *Glimpses of Fifty Years*, "Mother never said, 'You must cook, you must sweep, you must sew'" (1889:25). Instead, Mary Hill Willard allowed her children to pursue their own interests, which for a young Frances meant constructing the toys she and her siblings played with. The Willard parents also practiced what they prescribed and shared in the household chores such as cooking. When the family lived on the farm in Wisconsin, for example, Sunday-evening dinner preparation and cooking rotated between all members of the family. As historian Anne Scott Macleod suggests, the Willards' disregard for the sexual division of labor within the home made them representatives of an open-minded parenting style that was atypical (2000:89). Thus, in many ways, the Willard family was unusual.

By other markers, however, the Willard family was not extraordinary; in fact, they exhibited characteristics of many middle-class families of the mid-19th century. One of those characteristics was their physical mobility. For example, like many other families of the time, they migrated west from New York to settle in the southwest portion

of Wisconsin. In the decades between 1810 and 1860, the Old Northwest, comprising what is now Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin, grew, as western historian James Belich noted, from less than a half million to more than seven million (2009:82). In the 1840s, the same decade that the Willards moved to Wisconsin, that territory grew tenfold. Thus, the Willards were a part of a great migration to the Old Northwest Territory that transformed the borders of our nation.

Likewise, the growing force of urbanization and the transformation from the agrarian to the market economy resultant in the expansion of the white-collar workforce also played key roles in the life of this family. In 1858, Josiah uprooted his family from their farm in rural Wisconsin to settle in the outskirts of Chicago. Instead of farming in Janesville, Josiah became a banker in Evanston (Gifford 1995:8–9). In his article about the stages of urbanization, scholar David Goldfield notes that in 1790, only 5 percent of Americans lived in urban centers. By 1870, however, that number had jumped to 25 percent (1990:27). The growth of the market economy fueled this shift from rural farms to urban centers. Already familiar with a pioneering lifestyle, Josiah took a gamble, and it paid off. The Willards enjoyed a comfortable middle-class lifestyle in a city that provided them with all the amenities and comforts they could ask for.

Finally, in addition to the moves, first from the east to the west, and then from rural to urban America, the family also lived through other fairly common life-changing events: the father's change in careers, the education and marriage of children, as well as the death of loved ones. Thus, a thick description of the Willards illuminates the complex family ties and power dynamic within a rather typical American family of the mid-19th century.

JOSIAH WILLARD: BENEVOLENT PATRIARCH

Josiah Willard, born in Wheelock, Vermont, in 1805, was the eldest child of farmers and pioneers Catherine (Lewis) and Oliver Atherton Willard. Josiah grew up in Churchville, New York, however, as his family looked for better farming prospects and more available land. They were not alone. Indeed, between 1790 and 1820, more than 700,000 New Englanders migrated to New York state in search of much of the same (Covart 2012:4). Through the practice of dividing larger tracts of land between male heirs, New England plots were getting smaller and smaller, all but ensuring primogeniture in later generations. Thus, many Yankee families migrated westward as new land opened up. Churchville was, in fact, along a well-tread migrant path between Albany and Buffalo (Meinig 1986:226). Perhaps not surprising, then, it was in Churchville that Josiah met and married another Vermont transplant, his neighbor Mary Hill. They began their family in Churchville but did not stay there too long, as in 1841, Josiah, like hundreds of thousands during this Second Great Awakening, heard the call; he could no longer live on the farm, as he needed to save others. He packed up his family and followed evangelical minister Charles Finney to Oberlin, Ohio, where Finney was professor of religion. Both Josiah and Mary would take classes there; his focused on theology and languages, hers on domesticity and piety (Baker 2006:138–39).

Their time in Oberlin was fleeting as well, as just before his matriculation, Josiah started to show signs of tuberculosis, a nagging and painful illness from which he and

many of his family members suffered. Following the best practices and advice of the time, the Willards moved to an area that had a climate that better suited those afflicted with consumption. They wound up in Janesville, Wisconsin, very near the large Yankee communities of Beloit, Wisconsin, and Rockford, Illinois (Meinig 1986:227). Although he came from rather modest and humble beginnings, Josiah transformed his fortunes and became a gentleman farmer. He did this first in New York, then in Wisconsin. Willard had a knack for growing business. The farm in Janesville, for example, developed from a mere 360 acres into a sizable estate of 1,000 acres by the time the Willards left in 1858 (Bordin 1986:19).

That year, Josiah and his wife moved to Evanston, Illinois, to reunite with part of their family. Their daughters, Frances and Mary, began classes at the North Western Female College in 1858, and their parents wished to be near them. Their son, Oliver, joined them within the year and enrolled at Garrett Biblical Institute. The move to Evanston proved permanent; although some members of the Willard family left periodically, they always returned to this place. In fact, all were eventually buried just outside the city limits in Rose Hill Cemetery (Gifford 1995:255).

Despite his wife's description of Josiah as a "fine caretaker of the children, sharing with [her] far more than husbands usually do ... the work of bringing up [the] little ones," among most of Frances Willard's biographers, Josiah is not remembered favorably (Willard 1889:4). Often, they portrayed him as domineering in the home, reserved in nature, and irritable on account of his perpetual bad health. For example, Frances Willard's friend and biographer, Anna Gordon, said that Josiah Willard had an "inflexible will" (1898:3). Biographer Mary Earhart simply argued, "Mr. Willard held the reins too tightly" (1944:39). Ruth Bordin described him as an "autocrat of the household" who "made most domestic decisions, did all the family purchasing, and oversaw household expenditures in detail" (1986:16). More recently, Jean Baker called Josiah "often ill, absent, and authoritarian" (2006:140). According to these interpretations, Josiah Willard distanced himself from his family through his hard-line stance on religion, education, and family, and through his command over all domestic matters; he controlled his household and was the ultimate authority on all matters. In some ways, he was what historian Joseph Pleck might refer to as a remnant of the early-19th-century type of father, the "father as moral overseer" (1987:351). In this interpretation, fathers ruled the household because mothers were too morally weak to do so.

In truth, evidence does suggest that Josiah Willard was strict, and in some cases, his authority was not to be challenged. When Frances was born, for example, she was almost named after the English matriarch, Queen Victoria. Indeed, her "mother was quite bent upon it" (Willard 1889:9). Her father, however, had another name in mind—that of his recently deceased fourteen-month-old daughter, Carolyn Elizabeth. He not only wanted to honor the memory of his beloved infant but also feared that in naming his daughter after the queen of England, his family would appear un-American and undemocratic (Willard 1889:9). In the end, he won out, and Frances Elizabeth Carolyn Willard was named accordingly.

In another demonstration of his power, Josiah Willard allowed his daughters to leave the protective cocoon of his home only upon the constant barrage of Frances, who

promised "to give Father no peace of his life, till he sends me to some school away from home" (Earhart 1944:35). Both Frances and Mary were allowed to study at Milwaukee Female College while their aunt, Sarah Hill, was a history professor there. Alas, the arrangement was a temporary one; it lasted for a mere semester. Much to Frances's chagrin, the girls' aunt returned to the east coast and Josiah, upon converting from Congregationalism to Methodism, wanted them to attend a school of that denomination (Willard 1889:97). Frances and her sister were not permitted to return to Milwaukee to further their formal education at that time. The 17-year-old Frances defiantly wrote in her journal on August 15, 1857, "Had 'final conference' with Father, in which he said he should not send me to Milwaukee.—I am able, I can do, I *will* send *myself*! Note the vow!" Despite her best efforts, Frances knew that this was one battle she could not win. For the time being, she resigned herself to her father's decision.

Although not evident in the above incidents, Josiah Willard's power in the household was neither all-encompassing nor constant. His authority within the family was contested and anything but absolute. In one Frances Willard biography, Mary Earhart describes a battle between father on one side and mother and daughters on the other (1944:32). During one of Josiah's signature long absences from the home, and without his approval, Madame Willard hired a tutor for her daughters and began their formal education. Upon his return, he purportedly realized that education was important and beneficial for his daughters. Not only did he acquiesce to their schooling, he raised funds to actually build a facility!

Despite Josiah Willard's strict religious upbringing of his children and "his funny ways, his sterling manliness ... his sheltering of [his children]," in her March 6, 1862, diary entry, Frances remarked that her father meant the world to her. Though he spent most of the hours in his average day working outside the home, reading alone in his study, or on long sabbaticals in distant locations to care for his ailing health, his children regularly sought their father for advice on matters of utmost importance. Josiah Willard often bailed his son out of financial trouble, for example. In her November 22, 1867, diary account, Frances Willard reported that even upon his deathbed, when he tried to make financial arrangements for his wife, Josiah Willard knew that he was crippled by his "heavy obligations on Oliver's account."

Josiah's role as father and confidant, however, extended beyond the financial realm. On a few occasions, Mary Eliza Willard lamented when her sister engaged their father in a conversation about her "deeps" (a common term of the era used to describe a vexing thought, emotion, or feeling). One such conversation took place in late January of 1862, an especially trying time for Frances as she debated whether to call off her engagement with Charles Fowler. In her journal later that evening, Frances lovingly wrote, "A long, kind, Fatherly talk from Father...He was never nicer to me;—how frankly, humorously & then seriously, he advised me." Thus, for a man often depicted as stoic, standoffish, and surly, Josiah Willard showed remarkable depth of character and understanding of his fatherly responsibilities. His economic power was evident in his control over domestic duties, yet he also commanded emotional power over his children. The simple truth remains, with either strong, harsh actions or soft, mild words, Josiah Willard was there when his children needed him the most. Perhaps as Shawn Johansen

argues, using “a mixture of reason, affection, and force to control [his] children,” Josiah Willard was very much a typical middle-class Protestant father (2001:99).

MARY HILL WILLARD: THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE

Mary Hill Willard shared many things in common with her husband. They not only grew up in the same town but lived on adjoining farms. In addition, both of their families were actively involved in the Methodist Episcopal Church (Bordin 1986:155). They were even born in the same year. Whereas Josiah is described by biographers, perhaps mistakenly, as controlling, ill-tempered, and unapproachable, Mary Hill Willard is memorialized as gentle, affable, and an easy conversationalist. According to biographer Ruth Bordin, unlike Josiah, who lacked affection, Mary Hill Willard exuded “understanding and love” (1986:18). Indeed, Mary Hill Willard opened her house and her heart to all of the young ladies involved in the Women’s Christian Temperance Union; in many respects, she was mother to them all.

Though it might be accurate, this loving portrayal of Mary Hill Willard is one-dimensional. Indeed, historians of this period tend to focus on the differences between the mother and the father in the family; those who have studied the Willards are no different. Contrary to the description of the father as demanding, historian Collen McDannell noted in her 1986 text *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840–1900* that antebellum mothers were often perceived as Christlike in their devotion to family (p. 130). Historian Steven Mintz examined the dissimilarities between mothers and fathers in his 1983 family study, *A Prison of Expectations: The Family in Victorian Culture*. According to Mintz, the most recurrent image of mothers stressed their supposed selflessness (Mintz 1983:51). By describing mothers as complete antitheses to their husbands, scholars have effectively hidden or masked mothers’ authority and power within the family dynamic, but Mary Willard *was* powerful. Though quiet, helpful, and dutiful, Mary Hill Willard often got what she wanted. Like her husband, however, she did not need to use fear or corporal punishment to maneuver and influence the dealings of her children and her spouse; love and the moral high ground worked just as well.

Mary Willard’s authority came from her role as wife and mother; part of her authority came from her designation as one half of the parental unit, and the other part came from society’s value of the mother herself. It was during this time, for example, that mothers were considered angels. In her 1991 book *Boys Will Be Girls: The Feminine Ethic and British Children’s Fiction, 1857–1917*, Scholar Claudia Nelson explains how there was a single definition of the ideal woman: the Angel in the House. A life lived in the house (i.e., the very real life of a dutiful wife and mother) was conducive to producing this model, as the dog-eat-dog world outside the home was seen as cruel, insensitive, and capable of producing men in its hardened image. Thus, the idealized image of the mother was necessary to combat the commercial values of the public world. A wife’s praiseworthy ethics, hopefully mirrored in her children, encouraged her husband to pursue a path of righteousness. This Angel in the House is moral, obedient, sensible, honest, courteous, self-disciplined, and, above all, influential (Nelson 1991:9). According

to her biographers, Mary Hill Willard fit this model perfectly; her influence within the home was substantial and unparalleled.

It was her idea, for example, to allow her daughters to cultivate skills outside the world of domesticity. Frances remembered that her mother, lambasted by friends and family for not educating her daughters in the arts of domesticity, countered with her theory that children should not be forced to do housework but to find work that pleases them (Willard 1889:661). In another show of their mother's strength, the children often went to her to challenge the authority of their father. One such instance occurred when the Willards were living in rural Janesville. At this time, her maturing son, Oliver, felt stymied by life on the farm, but because Oliver's services were needed at home, his father refused to allow him to attend school away from the family unit. Knowing that his options were limited, Oliver went to his mother, the only person who exhibited enough strength, resolve, and authority to challenge his father on this decision. Oliver implored his mother, "Unless you put this thing through, I see no way out of the wilderness" (Earhart, 1944:31). Madame Willard intervened on his behalf and cajoled her husband into letting Oliver attend Beloit College in 1852.

Mary's authority was not always in direct opposition to her husband's. Sometimes she went head-to-head with her children when they questioned her. Once, when she returned to Janesville after a prolonged visit with her family in New York, she was aghast at her children's manners, which she believed had "fallen away to some extent" (Willard 1889:57). Frances Willard remembered how, to eradicate the wild behaviors that her children had developed while in the charge of their father, their mother made her and her sister "walk with books upon our heads so as to learn to carry ourselves well, and she went with us through the correct manner of giving and receiving introductions" (Willard 1889:57).

More often, however, Madame Willard simply used kind gestures and words to manipulate her children into doing her bidding. Thus, her greatest power is demonstrated through the long-lasting influence and effect she had on her household and on her children. She encouraged each and every one of her children to keep journals, a lifelong practice they all pursued.

Mary's children were so close to their mother that they would get sick without her. After poring over and painstakingly transcribing all of Frances's journals, historian Carolyn De Swarte Gifford suggested that Frances's love for her mother was so great that when Madame Willard died, Frances was suicidal. In the introduction to her work on Willard's diaries, *Writing Out My Heart: Selections from the Journal of Frances E. Willard, 1855-96*, Gifford wrote, "Willard, who once feared dying, began to welcome death because she yearned to join her mother" (1995:15).

Mary Willard wielded the authority that she received from society, yet as the quintessential Angel in the House, she used this authority as a compass to guide her children and husband to flawless morality. Her influence on the lives of each of the family members—her real power—is evidenced by all of the journals they left behind in which they cherished her.

OLIVER, FRANCES, AND MARY: FORTUNATE SON ... AND DAUGHTERS

Historians of the 19th-century family have long agreed that children enjoyed more autonomy within the household at that time than they had in previous generations. One of the most consistent and primary reasons for this phenomenon, which appears in the historiographic analysis of 19th-century childhood, is related to the supposed inherent nature of the child. Historians such as Deborah Gorham, Catherine Robson, and Gretchen Galbraith have located one distinct discussion about the inherent nature of childhood along the good/evil axis. Deborah Gorham notes how 18th-century thinkers such as Rousseau helped to establish one end of the dichotomy by creating a romantic image of the child as innocent and identifiable with nature (1978:370). This romanticized view of children gave them authority; like their mothers, they became bastions of morality and innocence. As Carl Degler has argued, children became the reason for the family's being, its justification (1980:66). This source of authority is perhaps best understood in the person of Mary Eliza Willard.

Mary Eliza Willard was the last of Mary Hill and Josiah Willard's children. In her journals, Mary comes across as a young woman who was judgmental, self-pitying, and irrationally jealous of her sister. She did not make friends easily. Moreover, she frequently railed against the loneliness she felt when her siblings abandoned her for school, and she loathed the relationship that Frances cultivated with Mary Bannister. Mary Eliza's biting sarcasm is evident in this passage she wrote in December of 1860: "Mary Bannister[,] the town's darling, in general & Frank's in particular has come."

According to her own accounts, Mary Willard was not particularly moral or good. Her family members, however, remembered her as such. Perhaps it was because Mary died at the tender age of 19, becoming, quite literally, the angel in the house. Because she died before she reached adulthood, Mary is forever representative of one type of authority that children had within the home. As the youngest of three children, she lacked a definitive amount of power during her lifetime, but in death, she wielded a power greater than even that of her father.

Like any good Angel of the House, Mary Willard could change the hearts of men and make them more moral. Frances Willard remembered a time in her childhood when Mary had guided a party through the garden. When one in the group picked up a stick to disturb an ant farm, Mary implored, "Please don't! Think how you would like to have your house torn down by some great ugly giant, and yourself turned out of doors!" (Willard 1885:22). People listened to Mary precisely because she was a child, and her authority over others only grew when she died tragically after contracting typhoid.

Mary best demonstrates one type of authority that children had within the home. Additionally, she and her siblings flaunted the power that accompanied their status as children: their ability to negotiate and their readiness to rebel. For example, the Willards did not force their daughters, Frances and Mary, to learn domestic tasks. In fact, when Josiah Willard really needed his children to do the chores, he often negotiated with them. In early March of 1855, a 15-year-old Frances described one such occasion in her journal (no doubt to keep her father honest): "Father made a bargain with Mary & me-viz-to give us (through the summer) two eggs for every dozen that we bring into the house." This

scene connotes the fact that Josiah Willard did not have all of the power within the family. With regard to obeying the parents' orders, the children were often successful in negotiating for better terms.

The Willard children did not always listen to or negotiate with their parents; sometimes they were insubordinate. Both Oliver and Frances were rebellious in nature. As he was a boy, Oliver's rebelliousness was perhaps tolerated more openly, but it was still privately a source of concern. According to Frances, Oliver's use of tobacco at the age of 14 perhaps alienated father and son forevermore: "I think my brother's taking up tobacco at fourteen was a thing my father never got over" (Gifford 1995:418). And Oliver's rebellious behavior went further than tobacco use. He struggled with alcohol abuse his entire life and, to a certain extent, poisoned his relationship with each of his family members. Whenever Oliver decided to devote his life and career to God, for example, Frances and Mary exulted in their diaries but also wondered what had taken him so long to finally do God's will. Oliver's ministry, however, did not keep him from the bottle, nor from other troubling acts. His surprising death at the age of 43 actually brought comfort to Madame Willard, who asked Frances to "Praise Heaven with me—I've grown gray praying for my son—and now to think, your brother Oliver is safe with God!" (Bordin 1986:94). Though Oliver's authority was strengthened by his sex, it was undermined by his personal decisions that deeply troubled his family. His unruly behavior, however, was perhaps a family trait.

In fact, of all the siblings, Frances was, by far, the most rebellious. Given her precocious nature and her love of school, one of her many acts of rebellion was, not surprisingly, in regard to her education. Her father wanted her to study music. Although in February of 1859 she confided, Music ... talks with me and tells me that which I did not know before, and makes me by that much, wiser than I was," she did not think she was talented enough for this course of study. Moreover, as an admirer of a classical education, she thought that music was not challenging enough for her. She wrote in her diary in February 1859, "I have asked myself, 'what is ... the ability to strike in succession several chords upon the piano, melodeon, or organ worth?'" and answered, "I have decided with myself that it is worth comparatively nothing." Despite her father's wishes, Frances did not pursue a career in the musical arts.

Another example of her defiant nature is in regard to her brief romance with Charles Fowler, a minister and a friend of Oliver's. Never head over heels for Fowler, Frances nonetheless accepted his proposal of marriage. More in love with his intellectual capacity and the fact that they had much in common, Frances agreed to marry him because, as she wrote in her journal from October 1861, she "admired him, honored him, [and] sympathized with him." Within months of their engagement, however, she questioned her decision. In her journals, she agonized over whether to proceed with the wedding. In January 1862, she wrote, "Oh! My heart aches for the wavering and darkness over us," and continued, "Now I must face the Dilemma—Judgment goading me in one direction, Advice of Friends urging the same way, *Heart* fearing to take it—trembling & worrying. And yet I honor, admire, *like*, possibly *love* him somewhat—and yet not as ought—not as I *would*."

She tauntingly told Fowler of her indecisiveness and her lack of love for him; she had numerous conversations with her parents about the relationship. Both of her parents encouraged her to follow through with the marriage. It was always her father's wish to have her "married to a strong, healthy kind man who [could] take good care of [her] & make [her] happy," she wrote in December 1867. Cautioning Frances to learn from the actions of her aunt Sarah that had led to Sarah's single life, her mother also wanted to see Frances "comfortably and happily 'settled in life,'" Frances wrote on February 14, 1859. Bravely, Frances made her own decision regarding her engagement to Charles Fowler. After months of trying to justify her loveless relationship with Fowler, Frances finally and plainly refused him. In a letter to him that she then copied in her journal in late January 1862, she matter-of-factly wrote, "Looking into my heart I see for you respect, honor, admiration, and regard. I do not see *love*."

Frances's family turned on her. Distressed, she confided in her journal in October 1862, "Mother blamed me without limitation and I saw that the whole family was disgusted with my conduct." For days, Frances felt alienated from her family. She wrote, "Mother cried yesterday about my affair as I never heard her cry before. Father had a wretched day;—'he would not have another like it for all Wisconsin'—so he said. Oliver was greatly worried." The only person who did not seem too distraught over her decision was her sister, Mary, who, though she wanted to see Frances happy, was no doubt pleased to know that Frances would not yet leave her. Frances wrote, "Mary sympathized with me in what I have done, & didn't mind it much. It seems to me that through it all, she has acted best, most temperately & wise." Although her parents did not approve of Frances's decision, in the end, they did not withhold their love and affection from her. Frances Willard's rebellion disappointed her parents, but it did not permanently damage their relationship.

Although many scholars imagine the 19th-century family as a unit where parents in general, and fathers in particular, dominated, the Willards challenge this claim. With the time they spent listening to, disagreeing with, and trying to impose their wills upon each other, the Willards were a typical family unit. As parents, Josiah and Mary's authority came from society at large. They ruled over their children, but at the same time, a new 19th-century interpretation of the child and childhood gave children more room to negotiate with their parents. Moreover, the Willard parents loved their children, and in many ways, this love increased their obligation to respect Oliver, Frances, and Mary's desires (Johansen 2001:106). Thus, within a typical 19th-century Yankee middle-class family, no one person was all-powerful, just as no one person was powerless. The family unit provided a safe place where all members could experiment with their authority and the power that developed from it because, as Frances's relationship with Fowler demonstrated, no matter what one did, for better or worse, one would always be a part of the family.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, Ruth. 1995. *The Girl Problem: Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900–1930*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

- Alter, George. 1988. *Family and the Female Life Course: The Women of Verviers Belgium, 1849–1880*. Madison: University of Wisconsin.
- Anderson, Karen. 1981. *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Anonymous. "Take a Final View" 1898. *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872–1922), February 24. Retrieved (<https://login.lib-proxy.usi.edu/login?rul=https://search-proquest.com.lib-proxy.usi.edu/docview/172882293?accountid=14752>).
- Archival and Special Collections. Northwestern University Archives. Frances E. Willard Journal Transcriptions.
- Archival and Special Collections. Northwestern University Archives. Mary E. Willard Journal Transcriptions.
- Aries, Philippe. 1962. *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*. Translated by R. Baldick. New York: Knopf.
- Baker, Jean. 2006. *Sisters: The Lives of America's Suffragists*. New York: Hill & Wang.
- Belich, James. 2009. *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Angloworld*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bloch, Ruth H. 1978. "American Feminine Ideals in Transition: The Rise of the Moral Mother, 1785–1815." *Feminist Studies* 4(2):101–26.
- Bordin, Ruth Birgitta Anderson. 1986. *Frances Willard: A Biography*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Boydston, Jeanne. 1986. "To Earn Her Daily Bread: Housework and Antebellum Working-Class Subsistence." *Radical History Review* (35):7–25.
- Boyer, Paul, and Stephen Nissenbaum. 1974. *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Covart, Liz. 2012. "'Dam'd Paving' Yankees and Dutch New Yorkers: The Post-Revolution New England Migration and the Creation of American Identity in the Upper Hudson River Valley, 1783–1820." *Hudson River Valley Review* 29(1).
- Degler, Carl. 1980. *At Odds: Women and Family in America from the Revolution to the Present*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Demos, John. 1970. *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Demos, John, and Demos, Virginia. 1969. "Adolescence in Historical Perspective." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 632–38.
- Douglas, Susan. 1995. *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- Earhart, Mary. 1944. *Frances Willard: From Prayers to Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Easterlin, Richard. 1980. *Birth and Fortune: The Impact of Numbers on Personal Welfare*. New York: Basic Books.
- Easton-Flake, Amy. 2013. "Harriet Beecher Stowe's Multifaceted Response to the Nineteenth-Century Woman Question." *New England Quarterly* 89:29–59.
- Fass, Paula. 1977. *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Furrow, James L. 1998. "The Ideal Father: Religious Narratives and the Role of Fatherhood." *The Journal of Men's Studies* 7(1):17–32.
- Galbraith, Gretchen R. 1997. *Reading Lives: Reconstructing Childhood, Books, and Schools in Britain, 1870–1920*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Gifford, Carolyn De Swarte, ed. 1995. *Writing Out My Heart: Selections from the Journal of Frances E. Willard, 1855–96*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Goldfield, David R. 1990. "The Stages of American Urbanization." *OAH Magazine of History* 5(2):26–31. Retrieved (www.jstor.org/stable/25162733).
- Goode, W. J. 1963. *World Revolution and Family Patterns*. New York: Free Press.
- Gordon, Anna A. 1898. *The Beautiful Life of Frances E. Willard: A Memorial Volume*. Chicago: Woman's Temperance Publication Association.
- Gorham, Deborah. 1978. "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon, Re-Examined: Child Prostitution and the Ideal of Childhood." *Victorian Studies* 21(2):353–79.
- Griswold, Robert L. 1994. *Fatherhood in America: A History*. New York: Basic Books.
- Harevan, Tamara K., and Maris A. Vinovskis, eds. 1978. *Family and Population in Nineteenth-Century America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Johansen, Shawn. 2001. *Family Men: Middle-Class Fatherhood in Industrializing America*. New York: Routledge.
- Kasson, John. 2014. *The Little Girl Who Fought the Great Depression: Shirley Temple and 1930s America*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Macleod, Anne Scott. 2000. "American Girlhood in the Nineteenth Century." In *Childhood in America*, edited by P. Fass and M. A. Mason. New York: New York University Press.
- McDannell, Collen. 1986. *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840–1900*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Meinig, Donald. 1986. *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History*. Vol. 2. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Mergen, Bernard. 1975. "The Discovery of Children's Play." *American Quarterly* 9:399–420.
- Mintz, Steven. 1983. *A Prison of Expectations: The Family in Victorian Culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Mintz, Steven. 2004. *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
- Nelson, Claudia. 1991. *Boys Will Be Girls: The Feminine Ethic and British Children's Fiction, 1857–1917*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Pleck, Elizabeth, and Joseph Pleck. 1980. *The American Man*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Pleck, Joseph H. 1979. "Men's Family Work: Three Perspectives and Some New Data." *Family Coordinator* 28(4):481–88.
- Pleck, Joseph H. 1987. "American Fathering in Historical Perspective." Pp 83–97 in *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity*, edited by M. Kimmel. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Robson, Catherine. 2001. *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Rotundo, E. Anthony. 1991. "Learning About Manhood: Gender Ideals and the Middle-Class Family in Nineteenth Century America." Pp. 35–51 in *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800–1940*, edited by J. A. Mangan and James Walvin. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Rotundo, E. Anthony. 1993. *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*. New York: Basic Books.
- Sammond, Nicholas. 2005. *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930–1960*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Schrum, Kelly. 2004. *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture, 1920–1945*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Scott, James C. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Seward, Rudy Bay. 1978. *American Family: A Demographic History*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sommerville, C. John. 1972. Bibliographic Note: Toward a History of Childhood and Youth. *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 3(2):439–47.
- Tilly, Louise, and Joan Scott. 1978. *Women, Work and Family*. New York: Routledge.
- West, Elliot, and Paula Petrik, eds. 1992. *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850–1950*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
- Willard, Frances. 1885. *Nineteen Beautiful Years: Sketches of a Girl's Life*. London: Morgan & Scott.
- Willard, Frances. 1889. *Glimpses of Fifty Years: The Autobiography of an American Woman*. New York: Woman's Temperance Publication Association.
- Zelizer, Viviana. [1985] 1994. *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.