

Murder and Turmoil: Honor and Crimes of Passion in Two Nineteenth-Century Murder Trials

Stephanie A. Pisko

I began researching for my seniors honor thesis in my junior year, Fall of 2010, and continued until April 2012. I initially wanted to research gender scandals in the nineteenth-century and I was very quickly captivated by the murder of Albert Richardson in 1869 and the trial of his killer Daniel McFarland. I knew I had found something unique. The case encompassed questions of gender, honor, divorce, insanity, and family disintegration. There was minimal to no scholarly work published on the case and I needed to find original resources.

I immediately searched the online databases available, and *The New York Times* historical archives had newspaper accounts of the murder as well as the trial. I was able to locate almost every *Times* article written about the case, and from the editorials and testimony began constructing an account of the trial while incorporating my own analysis. I wanted to expand the research and include the salacious murder trial of Laura D. Fair; research for my senior thesis began. I did an identical search of the databases and once again found accounts of the murder and trial in *The New York Times* Historical Archives online. I had a plethora of original newspaper accounts but I needed even more. Dr. Poulson retrieved original newspapers of the *New York Tribune* and the *San Francisco Daily Call* from the New York Public Library and the San Francisco public library, respectively. I transcribed the newspapers.

After I had the transcripts and testimony I need to place the trials in a larger context; at this time I used the library the most. I checked out all the books we had relating to nineteenth-century female morality including: *Being Good: Women's Moral Values in Early America* and *Women and the American Experience*. Then I located over two dozen articles from online

databases such as ProQuest and JSTOR, about half of which I used in my thesis. These article topics ranged from the history of divorce to the prevalence of the temperance movement.

The use of interlibrary loan was critical in my research. I borrowed many books from PALC and Interlibrary loan that I would have not been able to access otherwise. Some of these books were from the nineteenth-century and were rare. I located a manuscript from 1873 that was one of three in all the library systems, according to World Cat. After some slight persuasion, The New York Historical Society agreed to copy and send me the manuscript. I read microfilms of Susan B. Anthony's *The Revolution* newspaper on our microfilm reader and was able to print copies from the machine with the help of the reference desk.

As a commuter I felt a special appreciation for the library. It truly became my home away from home. The quiet atmosphere, technological access, and physical space were essential to my research. I visited the library six times a week, on average, in the Fall and Spring semesters. I used the printers, the copiers, and accessed online resources multiple times every week. Having a safe place to transcribe my materials and write my thesis enhanced the process and eased my nerves.

Throughout the entire process, the library and the librarians helped me with all my questions, and there were many. Sometimes I would have trouble with article linker and the librarians would help me locate the article I needed; their knowledge of online databases is incredible. One time, when I was under a deadline, I forgot my Royal Card and they provided me a loaner to print materials. As an undergraduate I had never taken on extensive research like this before and their guidance was invaluable. From learning to use the microfilm machine to locating articles in a bound journal, the library was there every step of the way. The research

skills I gained are as sophisticated and as numerous as those of a graduate student. I feel confident of how to research, how to evaluate scholarly sources, and how to integrate the sources. This research project would not have been of the same quality without the librarians' extensive knowledge and constant assistance.