"I Just Had to Do Most Everything": Gender, Settlement and American Empire in the Far West

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“I Just Had to Do Most Everything”:
Gender, Settlement, and American Empire in the Far West

by

Hannah Alexandra Reynolds

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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in
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Thesis Committee:
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Abstract

The field of settler colonial studies has made huge strides in recent years toward problematizing the establishment of the United States on stolen land and the nation’s steady, violent expansion across the continent. Settler colonial framework provides a rich opportunity for historians of the American West to reframe white settlement on the frontier, especially that which was made possible through land grant legislation such as the Homestead Act of 1862. As the families who took up land grant property sought new opportunities for themselves, they also acted as drivers of U.S. territorial acquisition. This process was inherently gendered, in terms of both the ideological and legal framing of homesteading, as well as the material contributions made by gendered labor. The critical role of white women on the frontier, in particular, cannot be overlooked in settler colonial histories. This thesis argues that women’s labor, reproduction, and marriage alliances formed the backbone of U.S. settler colonialism, and that the “feminine” and intimate nature of these contributions both obscures the reality of imperialism in the West, as well as the important role of women’s agency in that structure. It does so through a microhistorical examination of three women who homesteaded on the North Oregon Coast in the late-nineteenth century, and compares their experiences with the limited record of Native women who lived in the same time and place.
In loving memory of Tom Beckett
For cultivating my deep love of storytelling, and
for being the first teacher who “unsettled” my understanding of the
American origin story.
Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful for the History Department at Portland State University for supporting me as I completed this degree under often difficult circumstances. I’d like to acknowledge Patricia Schechter and Katrine Barber, especially, for advising me over the years and shaping both the subject and methodology of my research immensely.

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Thank you to Clyfford Young for the time and effort you gave to editing this piece. It is better for your contributions.

This thesis was written on and about the ancestral homeland of the Clatsop, Nehalem, and Tillamook peoples, and others who belong to the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde. Their land was forcibly taken by white settlement in the region, and their descendants continue to suffer the pervasive injustices of settler colonialism today.
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INTRODUCTION

The following [story] happened in the place called God’s Valley by the white people, between Nehalem and Seaside. The Indians call this place ‘Cable along the bank place.’ People fished in the North Fork of the Nehalem River near there. Many people used to live in that valley in the wintertime. There were few trees there except some scattered balsams, nice-smelling trees. The women dug great quantities of fern roots; that was the best place because the very largest ones grew there.¹

Clara Pearson lived in Garibaldi, a small town in coastal Oregon, when she relayed a series of stories to ethnographer Elizabeth Jacobs in 1934. She grew up in that same area of the North Coast with her father, a Nehalem Indian, and her mother, who was described as a “Garibaldi Tillamook.” As a Native woman, Pearson would have borne witness to the dramatic changes in lifestyle that occurred for Indigenous people on the North Coast around the turn of the twentieth century.² The story quoted above is one of the few in which she includes the place name given by “the white people”—as a practice, her recounting of the stories is as close to verbatim as she remembers. Pearson was taught the tales as a child and as they were repeated at midwinter every year by elders in her community. Pearson explains that she learned most of the tales from her father, with only a few coming from her mother’s people. This collection is limited by the dual challenges of translation and transcription, but it are an invaluable record of the history and culture of the relatively small tribes that populated the region between the Tillamook Bay and Neahkahnie Mountain on the Oregon Coast.

The role of gender is another notable aspect of this excerpt, and one that emerges as a theme throughout the collection. Pearson’s Nehalem-Tillamook Tales abounds with

² Pearson and Jacobs, Nehalem Tillamook Tales, vii.
references to relationships between women and men, menstruation, reproduction, and
gendered divisions of labor. In one historical tale (defined as having occurred in
relatively recent history), she recounts the story of Neshukulayoo, a woman who was
“too brave, too strong to marry.” She “did a man’s work” and used a bow that “required
two men to bend it.” A group of men in her tribe who feared and resented her went to
her house with the intent of killing her, but she wasn’t there, so they killed two of her
brothers and their wives. Upon finding her family members dead at home, she hunted the
men who had killed them and shot them all with her bow, leaving two old men as
witnesses. According to the story, “No one ever bothered her again… It was just Indian
style to be jealous of her strength.” We cannot make meaningful assumptions about the
gender ideology of the Nehalem Tillamook people based on one story, and the time
between first contact with Europeans and that of the ethnography may have seen some
changes to a story like this. Even so, this narrative demonstrates that there was a distinct
cultural outlook on gender in the North Oregon Coast that was then interrupted and
challenged by the arrival of white settlers.

Clara Pearson lived in her coastal community at the same time as all three of the
white settler women who feature prominently in this study. She was born at least a
decade before the arrival of Mary Gerritse and her family to Nehalem in the 1880s. She
married Francis Pearson, a white man from whom she was later divorced, just two

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3 Pearson and Jacobs, Nehalem Tillamook Tales, 178.
4 Pearson and Jacobs, Nehalem Tillamook Tales, 179.
5 Pearson and Jacobs, Nehalem Tillamook Tales, 180.
6 There are multiple accounts of Pearson’s birth date. The Census of 1920 and 1930 both date her
birth to “About 1880”, though the 1900 Census lists her birthday as “Dec 1871,” and the 1880
Census identifies her birth as “Abt 1870.” She had no birth certificate. On her death certificate,
she is listed as having been born in “1861.”
years after Olive Bell married her second husband. She lived well past 1917, when Jennie Reeher left her homestead in the Coast Range and returned to the Willamette Valley. Clara’s personal story is a critical part of the history of Western expansion, even as *Nehalem Tillamook Tales* casts her as a relic of the past. As Ned Blackhawk explains, “it does little good to add Indians into a flawed mosaic of American history without first reworking the temporal and spatial boundaries of the field.”

To tell the story of white women who helped settle the North Oregon Coast is to illuminate one aspect of the story of Clara Pearson and the profound loss she and her community witnessed during her lifetime. To put this story within the dual frameworks of gender and settler colonialism is an attempt to expand the vista of those who are implicated in this process.

**HISTORIOGRAPHY OF WHITE WOMEN AND SETTLEMENT**

*The chief figure of the American West, the figure of the ages, is not the long-haired, fringed-legging man riding a rawboned pony, but the gaunt and sad faced woman sitting on the front seat of the wagon, following her lord where he might lead, her face hidden in the same ragged sunbonnet which had crossed the Appalachians and the Missouri long before.*

Clara Pearson’s ethnographic researchers were not interested in the mundane aspects of her life in turn of the century Garibaldi. Her perspective of key moments in her intimate life such as her marriage, the forced displacement of many of her people to the Grand Ronde Reservation, and the years in which she hosted boarders in her home are lost to the historical record. To those researchers, her value laid in her memory of an Indian past perceived as disappeared, not her present as an Indian woman. This is one of

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the major vacuums in the written historical record of the North Coast, one which poses a stark contrast to the broad availability of sources and analysis on white women’s experiences during the same period of settlement. The relative invisibility of Clara in comparison with white women reverberates throughout the historiography of Oregon and the West in general.

The topic of white women’s contributions to U.S. settlement in the West is hardly a new one. Although certainly overshadowed by their male counterparts, there has long been recognition of the role of women in “civilizing” the West. Even the earliest accounts of settlement, like Elwood Evans’ 1889 publication History of the Pacific Northwest, feature many women who are lauded as critical contributors to the settlement of the region. He praises the “fairer sex” for their domestic activity, the establishment of churches and schools, and for serving as the moral foundation on which Anglo-American society was entrenched in the Pacific Northwest.\(^9\) Evans was writing while still living in the cultural moment of settlement and was therefore unabashed by the human toll that U.S. expansion was having on Indigenous populations. He was openly appreciative of the ways that women “turn[ed] the course of events in favor of civilization, education and morality.”\(^{10}\) The explicit goal of “civilizing” the land was a common characteristic of literature at the time, and creates a duality that casts the land as uncivilized, uneducated, and immoral while it remained under the control of Indians. Only in later histories did the open celebration of the systematic elimination of Native populations become increasingly problematic as it became more and more taboo in academic literature.

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\(^{10}\) Evans, *History of the Pacific Northwest*, 276.
Yet this did not stop plenty of historians from continuing to glorify the contributions of white women. The perceived importance of settler women in the West in twentieth century historiography is typified by Dee Brown in 1968, whose image of women as “gentle tamers” demonstrated a cultural view of women as a force that “tamed” the land while also maintaining feminine qualities. The land, in such a history, is framed as largely devoid of human life prior to the arrival of the settler families who would bring it under their control. Not only does Brown’s work address a very small population of women in the West, but it also demonstrates a limited and exceptionalist narrative of Western settlement. Nor was he the only historian who would include white women in the Overland Trail history without a meaningful change in the arc of the narrative. John Faragher’s *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, published in 1979, also broadened the historiography to include women and family histories while not challenging larger historical perspectives of U.S. expansion. Faragher explores Midwestern gender roles as they existed prior to Western emigration, then traces how these roles were ultimately maintained on the Overland Trail and in the eventual homesteading context. He asserts that, “the homestead was built on the interdependence of male and female work,” a reality that incentivized marriage for economic reasons. Faragher portrays the small family farm as the last bastion of delineated gender division of labor in the U.S., a norm that was starting to change elsewhere in the country. Ultimately, both Faragher and Brown are concerned with “women in the West” that were white, married, and settlers.

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Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson have been defining scholars in the task of diversifying and deepening women’s history in the West. Their 1984 collection, entitled *The Women’s West*, was an early attempt by historians of Western women to “discover the real lives of western women,” including a more diverse swath of the population than only white women who travelled with their families on the Overland Trail.\(^\text{13}\) This “new western history” sought to undermine the dominant historiographical binary of Western women as either “good” or “bad,” namely “wives” or “prostitutes.” In her article, Jameson speaks directly to Dee Brown and others who framed married women as “the genteel civilizer and the helpmate,” and even questions the “separate spheres” established by Faragher by presenting the apparent class and ethnic bias in imposing these values.\(^\text{14}\) She calls for historians to “approach western women’s history not through the filters of prescriptive literature of concepts of frontier liberation and oppression, but through the experiences of the people who lived the history.”\(^\text{15}\) This thesis, by focusing on the lives of three women in one small region of the West, seeks to add to the literature that has answered this call.

Several authors responded with histories of homesteading and other settling women in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but none of these are as famous as Glenda Riley’s *The Female Frontier*.\(^\text{16}\) Her central organizing structure was comparative: she


\(^{16}\) Lesser-known examples in the historiography include H. Elaine Lindren, *Land in her Own Name: Women as Homesteaders in North Dakota* (Fargo: The North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1991); Julie Jones-Eddy, *Homesteading Women: An Oral History of Colorado*,
juxtaposes those who settled the “plains” with those who settled the “prairie”—vague regional classifications that reflect some of the challenges of Western historiography. Riley makes the ultimate point that “women, whether living on the prairie or the Plains, whether associated with a farmer, miner, or professional, whether early in the nineteenth century or early in the twentieth, carried almost total responsibility for the maintenance of home and family.” She goes on to assert that “factors [such] as social class, ethnicity, race, religion, education, and marital status did not alter the gender expectations of prairie women and plainswomen in any substantial way.”

Although one cannot deny the overwhelmingly domestic role that women played in Western society, regardless of the many factors she names above, Riley’s generalizing conclusion fails to recognize the fundamental power imbalance between women. To assert that gender is the ultimate point of analysis from which to examine a large swath of the population, while also totalizing vast regions such as “the Plains” and “the prairie,” are scholarly choices that endanger the depth and breadth of historical research on women in the American West.

Later works on women in the West have sought to challenge some of the boundaries that have limited the field, such as those found in *The Female Frontier. One Step over the Line*, also edited by Armitage and Jameson, challenges the academic separation between Canadian and American Wests. Published in 2008, it is indicative of the increasingly multicultural and critical works coming out of scholarship on Western women in the 1990s and 2000s. Yet even amid new and varied literature on women in the

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West, Margaret Jacobs reflects that Western women’s history has still fallen into a metaphorical “rut” that guides the wagon wheel of the discipline.\textsuperscript{18} She insists that as new ideas and experiences are tossed onto the pile, the white female settler still steers the story of Western women along the same path as before. Jacobs proposes a radical reconstruction, or “decolonization,” of the narrative by integrating a gendered analysis of the U.S. as a settler colonial context. She is not the first to do so, however. Albert Hurtado pointed out the significance of Anglo women’s biological, social, and domestic reproduction of settler society nearly a decade earlier.\textsuperscript{19} Ultimately, Jacobs and Hurtado call upon the work of many scholars of the gendered, “intimate” nature of empire. Jacobs explains that historians must “consider the identities of white, middle-class women in the West not just as gendered beings but as racialized, and national subjects who were part of a settler colonial project and formed their identities in relation and opposition to the Indigenous people populations in the West.”\textsuperscript{20} Placing the narratives of white women settlers within a settler colonial frame allows historians to unearth new voices from the historical record in a way that is responsible to the inequities of power that continue to shape the American West.


\textsuperscript{20} Jacobs, “Getting out of a Rut,” 593.
SETTLER COLONIALISM AND “INTIMATE EMPIRES”

*It was by the exertions of such wives and mothers, who gave all but life and sometimes even that, that our state was purchased from savagery.*

In the past twenty years, the discipline of settler colonial studies has gained significant traction among scholars of colonialism, decolonization, and the nation-state. Viewing the United States’ westward expansion as settler colonialism shifts the lens through which historians and theorists view all aspects of settlement, including the contributions of a wide array of historical actors. This perspective has lasting and important implications for American society today. Due to the systemic and enduring nature of settler colonialism, Patrick Wolfe argues that the guiding violence in these societies may not look like other forms of genocide (which is often classified as being a singular event), but rather a continual “logic of elimination.” Even when no physical violence is committed against Native groups, such as in this case study of homesteading women in coastal Oregon, this guiding “logic” of settler colonialism persists through land dispossession, assimilatory policies, and cultural narratives that frame Indigenous life as a thing of the past. This framework also allows scholars and activists alike to recognize that settler colonialism is an ongoing “structural genocide” that undergirds every institution in societies such as the United States. Even as the individual institutions of control are reformed over time, the superstructure remains intact.

Applying settler colonial theory to the study of American history, and the history of any settler nation, remains challenging for several reasons. Lorenzo Veracini explains

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that unlike the “circular” narrative structure of extractive colonialism, in which the concept of “home” remains the same, settler colonialism has a “linear” narrative structure in which the “home” ceases to be the nation of origin.24 The colonizer never leaves, therefore there is no way for the Indigenous population to achieve post-colonial self-determination without revealing the ultimate failure of the settler colonial project. Patricia Limerick has written about the pervasive “innocence” of settlers to the conquest in which they participated, an attitude that stems from this misplaced identification of “belonging” on the colonized landscape.25 In order for any sort of Indigenous self-determination to occur, settlers would have to see themselves as settlers—a reality that, by necessity, would radically interrupt the linear narrative of U.S. colonization and “manifest destiny.”

Concepts such as Turner’s “frontier thesis,” which stated that the growth of the United States can be attributed to the constant accessibility of new frontiers, have bolstered this narrative structure. These limiting frameworks continue to be enacted in public and academic discourse and have proven extremely difficult to interrupt. Michael Adas insists that this is partly due to the nature of U.S. academic history and the American exceptionalism that accompanies the field. The “frontier thesis” is a great example of this; Adas explains that the U.S. perception that the frontier was what allowed for the growth of the nation through the nineteenth century is blown out of proportion.26

The expansion of the United States is perhaps not so unique when examined through a world historical lens, and therefore U.S. hegemony cannot be justified by its own unique experience. This shift in perspective opens the door to greater applications of comparative colonial studies in understanding U.S. imperialism, including the analytical framework of “intimate empires,” which integrates gender and family into the study of colonization.

Introducing gender into settler colonial studies allows for another layer of analysis. As Joan Scott asserts, “Gender is one of the recurrent references by which political power has been conceived, legitimated, and criticized.”\textsuperscript{27} Analyzing the gendered aspect of colonialism has inspired a shift in historical perspective. There is a significant historiography that supports the “intimate” matters of sex and family as sites of imperial discourse and function, often typified in the “tense and tender ties” presented by Ann Laura Stoler. Building on works that implicate “imperial concerns over reproduction, domestic space, and identities formed in the process of settlement,” Stoler’s work invites the comparison of North American imperialism with that of other empires.\textsuperscript{28} This framework supports an approach in which white women’s work and familial relationships are analyzed for their connection to settler colonialism. As Stoler asserts, “it was in the gendered and racialized intimacies of the everyday that women, men, and children were turned into subjects of particular kinds, as domination was routinized and rerouted in intimacies that the state sought to know but could never completely master or

\textsuperscript{27} Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis.” \textit{The American Historical Review} 91, no. 5 (1986) 1073.

work out.” Examining the lived experiences of women who homesteaded provides another window into the intimacies that worked to cement settler domination in the American West.

Evelyn Nakano Glenn likewise explores the racialized and gendered nature of settler colonialism, asserting that, “Masculine whiteness...becomes central to settler identity, a status closely tied to ownership of property and political sovereignty.” Her framing of “race and gender as co-formations,” which mutually reinforce one another to exclude racialized “others” from property ownership and social mobility, well describe the foundations on which whiteness and patriarchy reign supreme in the settler colonial system. In this context, it becomes even more important to acknowledge and explore the ways in which this very “masculine whiteness” is both created and reinforced by the social and physical reproduction of feminine whiteness. Thus, in examining the ways in which women’s bodies were critical to the labor that maintained homesteads and built communities, the face of American Empire becomes increasingly feminized.

As the use of her article above suggests, Margaret Jacobs has been a leader in writing white women’s history in the West through this critical settler colonial framework through her studies of settler women who contributed to the removal of Indian children.

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29 Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties,” 57.
32 Margaret Jacobs, White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009). See also her article “Crossing Intimate Borders: Gender, settler colonialism, and the home” in ed. Jane Aaron et al., Gendering Border Studies (University of Wales Press, 2010).
There are other historians who have published works on white settler women through such a frame, most of which have been published within the last decade. Many of these authors, however, are on the Canadian side of the “West,” as they grapple with the gendered nature of settler colonialism in their country. Sarah Carter explains that the campaigns by British women who attempted to promote white women’s agricultural roles in Canadian expansion did so while remaining discursively entrenched in British notions of empire. Perhaps the more boldly imperial identity of British settlers and their descendants has made it easier to glimpse colonial designs in westward expansion, in comparison to the pervasive myth of the U.S. as a “post-colonial” society. The most notable such work in the American context, also by a Canadian author, is Laurel Clark Shire’s *The Threshold of Manifest Destiny: Gender and National Expansion in Florida*, published in 2016. She addresses how “large numbers of women from the invading culture helped to colonize settler colonies, providing vital domestic and reproductive labor to create homes and reproduce white families and societies,” which is an approach I seek to emulate in this thesis. My perspective, like Shire’s, asserts that even when white women do not directly interact with or displace Indigenous people, their contributions were critical to U.S. imperial expansion and must be recognized as such.

THE NORTH COAST OF OREGON

How I loved this beautiful green state and its mountains!35

The history of Oregon is rich in opportunities for examination of the Overland Trail, homesteading legislation, and the settlement of white communities through a settler colonial lens. Oregon has a deeply entrenched history of white supremacy, which was codified into law with a series of Black exclusion laws in the 1840s and 1850s.36 Racialization in Oregon accompanied white settlement and demonstrates the inextricable link between settler colonialism and white supremacy. As Katrine Barber explains, racialization of constructed “others” in early Oregon settlement played the dual role of justifying land removal from Indigenous people as well as denying the possibility of property ownership to Black, Chinese, Japanese, and Mexican immigrant groups. Based on the time of their arrival and history in the region, these groups had at least an equal, if not greater, right to land claims. This led to the espousal of white supremacist logic (bolstered by racialized science) that denied access to land grant property and full personhood to nonwhite populations.37 Barber also recognizes the continuity of settler colonialism, and the many ways in which the structure continues to enact systemic violence on communities of color in Oregon into today. Applying this framework to research on settlement in Oregon exposes important key players in land displacement, most centrally the contributions of white women.

37 Katrine Barber, “‘We were at our journey’s end’: Settler Sovereignty Formation in Oregon,” Oregon Historical Quarterly 120, no. 4 (2019): 399.
The geographical region explored in this thesis is commonly known as the “North Coast” of Oregon and encompasses modern Tillamook and Clatsop counties, both of which are named after the Indigenous peoples who long populated the land prior to white settlement. Although a few settlers attempted to claim land in the region under the Oregon Donation Land Claim Act of 1851, its remoteness and topographical variance made it inconvenient for early settlers interested in farming.\(^{38}\) Most of those who took advantage of land grant legislation to settle in the region would do so under the Homestead Act of 1862. According to the U.S. Census, which almost certainly ignores large swaths of the Native population, the population of Tillamook County grew from 95 to 408 between 1860 and 1870, increased to 970 in 1880, and then reported 2,932 people living in the county in 1890.\(^{39}\) This pattern of population growth coincides with the history of settlers in the region. As scholars of the Overland Trail have noted, most settlers hailed first from the U.S. Northeast and Midwest, and many of those who ended up in Oregon made the journey with their families in tow.\(^{40}\) The lives of the women who are featured in this thesis reflect both the temporal and geographical trends of settlement: Jennie Reeher made the trek with her husband and children from their home in Kansas in 1887; Mary Gerritse and her parents came from New York and lived a couple of years in Minnesota before arriving in Oregon in the 1880s; and although Olive Bell Scovell was


born in Tillamook, Oregon in 1876, her parents were born in Indiana before emigrating West together.\textsuperscript{41}

Homesteading on the North Coast of Oregon presents a unique temporal frame in that “permanent” white settlers did not meaningfully establish a presence in the region until the 1870s, and not until the 1890s in more remote areas. This presents a challenge to the fundamental historical narrative of the Western frontier, which was supposedly “closed,” or certainly in the process of closing by the time of Frederick Jackson Turner’s “frontier thesis” in 1893. Despite his claim that “the frontier has gone,” the women whose stories of homesteading and settlement are featured in this work explicitly define themselves as “pioneers.”\textsuperscript{42} As David Wrobel has demonstrated, there was a generalized cultural anxiety over the closing of the frontier that proliferated at the end of the nineteenth century, but also a permeating, glorified narrative of the frontier as critical to U.S. identity and nation formation.\textsuperscript{43} The settlers captured in this history would have seen themselves within this already solidifying cultural story of pioneer life. As women, they would have been intimately affected by changing notions of turn of the century gender expectations, even as the norms of rural, agricultural life continued to demand relatively “traditional” gender divisions of labor in the first couple of settling generations.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{41} Jennie Reeher, “Memories of Jennie Allen Reeher: The Homestead Years, 1887-1916” (Manuscript Courtesy of Nehalem Valley Historical Society); Mary Gerritse and Eleanor Irons, “the Journal of Mary Gerritse,” collected between 1906 and 1910 (Manuscript, Nehalem Valley Historical Society); U.S. census, population schedule. Oregon, Tillamook County, 1880.
\textsuperscript{42} Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1894): 227. Both Jennie Reeher and Mary Gerritse refer to themselves as “pioneers” multiple times in their accounts.
\textsuperscript{43} David Wrobel, \textit{The End of American Exceptionalism: Frontier Anxiety from the Old West to the New Deal} (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993).
\textsuperscript{44} Cynthia Culver Prescott, \textit{Gender and Generation on the Far Western Frontier} (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2007).
Perhaps the later timeline of settlement was a contributing factor to one of the most pervasive, and inaccurate, aspects of the local historical narrative: the myth that in the late 1860s, “all the Indians suddenly disappeared.”\textsuperscript{45} Certainly, the Indigenous populations of the North Oregon Coast made a different impression on white settlers than those to the south, where settler colonial violence exploded into what would be known as the “Rogue River War” of 1855-56.\textsuperscript{46} The southern Oregon coast was populated by fur traders as early as the 1820s, and so there was a longer history which framed the local Indian population as “rogue.” A series of minor skirmishes over the years eventually erupted into the Lupton Massacre in October of 1855, in which a self-appointed white militia violently murdered the inhabitants of several Native settlements. It was this action that incited full-blown Indian retaliation and erupted into months of warfare that has largely defined the history of settler colonialism in the South Coast.\textsuperscript{47}

By contrast, the fact that the northern coastal region witnessed relatively little overt violence against Indigenous groups obscures the settler colonial reality of the area. While many were forcibly removed to the reservation formed at the Grand Ronde for the survivors of the Rogue River conflict, others remained in the area and their descendants continue as members of the North Coast community. When Clara Pearson was living in Garibaldi, she lived in one of the few nonreservation Indian settlements that survived into

\textsuperscript{45} Satern, \textit{The Nehalem River Valley}, 7.
\textsuperscript{46} E.A. Schwartz, “Rogue River War of 1855-1856,” \textit{Oregon Encyclopedia} (Oregon Historical Society) \url{https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/rogue_river_war_of_1855-1856/#.YhvYHtHMJH0}.
the twentieth century, called the Hobsonville Indian Community. As men in the community continued to struggle to find work in the area and gradually left, the settlement became known by the derogatory moniker, “Squawtown.” Despite their relative invisibility in the pioneer history, Native people, and particularly Native women, remain a critical part of the past, present, and future of the Oregon Coast.

Native women are difficult to find in the history of white settler women such as Jennie Reeher, Olive Bell Scovell, and Mary Gerritse. Even though this thesis does not attempt to claim that Reeher, Scovell, and Gerritse and their families were self-proclaimed soldiers of settler colonialism, it remains important to note that their settlement would have been propelled and reinforced by explicitly imperialist discourse. As Elwood Evans puts it, “It was by the exertions of such wives and mothers, who gave all but life and sometimes even that, that our state was purchased from savagery.” This is especially true considering the later timeline of settlement on the North Coast; westward expansion and the frontier was already becoming a mythologized aspect of American exceptionalism, even as these women became a part of that continued story. Pro-settlement publications such the 1883 piece, *Our Western Empire, or, The New West Beyond the Mississippi*, were not shy about framing Manifest Destiny as an expansion of the imperial state, and settlers as the heroes in this colonial endeavor. Although Jennie Reeher never mentions Indigenous communities in her account, Mary Gerritse mentions Indians multiple times, most notably that, “I was never afraid of Indians as they were all

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48 Douglas Deur, “Hobsonville Indian Community,” *Oregon Encyclopedia* (Oregon Historical Society)  
https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/squawtown_at_hobsonville/#.Yhu5EvHMIJH0.  
harmless, if you left them alone.”50 Without imposing present-day moral judgements on historical subjects, we can still acknowledge that the colonial nature of settlement was not entirely unknown to the women who reinforced it. I argue that women’s labor, reproduction, and marriage alliances formed the backbone of U.S. settler colonialism, and that the “feminine” and intimate nature of these contributions both obscures the reality of imperialism in the West, as well as the important role of women’s agency in that structure.

Chapter 1 explores the “expanded” nature of domestic labor in the homesteading context, as well as its importance in establishing and maintaining settlement communities on the North Oregon Coast. It begins by explaining Laurel Clark Shire’s framework of “expanded domesticity,” which establishes the broadened capacity of what constituted “domestic” labor in the frontier context. Using the narrative of Jennie Reeher, this chapter demonstrates that Jennie’s daily labor on the homestead was greater than that of white, middle-class women in other parts of the country at the time, and that her husband and family were entirely dependent on this work to successfully establish ownership of their land grant property. As her husband often had to work away from the homestead to make money, Jennie was the one doing most of the labor of “settling” their land. Reeher’s story also reflects the importance of women in reproducing whiteness, and how motherhood was critical to homesteading not only ideologically, but also quite literally in terms of creating the next generation of settlers.

My second chapter analyzes the role of marriage in settler colonialism through the life of Olive Bell Baxter. First, theoretical framing establishes the ways in which marriage can facilitate racialized, gendered, and classed populations, particularly in frontier spaces in which the initial flexibility of these categories becomes solidified during the homesteading years. The second section explains how land grant legislation incentivized marriage and, in concert with anti-miscegenation law, sought to exclude Native women from the legal benefits of inheritance in their marriage partnerships. Finally, I explore the example of Olive Bell, who was married on the North Oregon Coast three times in her life between the ages of 15 and 35, and whose legal process to maintain her first husband’s land (and then continue to live on her second husband’s land after his death, as well) is preserved in a Clatsop County case file. Her life demonstrates the significance of wives in solidifying familial land claims among white settlers in the far-from-rare eventuality of death on the frontier. Moreover, the legal system’s protection of her role as administratrix of her deceased husband’s estate when challenged by her former in-laws shows how the significance of marriage was supported by the legal and social structures of settlement.

Chapter 3 addresses the non-traditional, wage-earning labor that women performed. It begins by exploring the ideological significance of women performing jobs which were seen as outside of their gender roles, and how the West has often been lauded as a critical site in the formation of the “New Woman” in U.S. society. This progressive perspective of the West has further obscured the settler colonial reality of the region in the historical narrative. Then, I examine how the feminization of teaching reflects this process, and how women teachers played a crucial role in the development of white,
“American” communities in frontier regions of Oregon. The life of Mary Gerritse, who labored as a mail carrier in the North Coast and gained significant local notoriety for her work, dominates the third section of this chapter. Gerritse’s narrative reflects how the apparent fluidity of gendered labor in the construction of frontier communities has been lauded and ultimately deemed non-transgressive in the historical memory. Her occupation as a mail carrier also had distinct settler colonial implications by facilitating the web of communications that allowed for the construction and maintenance of U.S. state control.

While there are many limitations to capturing the full breadth of experience lived by Jennie Reeher, Olive Bell Baxter, and Mary Gerritse, their lives remain much more accessible in the archive than that of Clara Pearson. By understanding how their intimate lives created and perpetuated settler colonialism in the West, one can explore how “settlers are intrinsically relational subjects, defined by a perpetual process of Indigenous replacement.” Framing white women as key actors in this replacement reveals the ultimately gendered nature of U.S. empire. As Mary Gerritse put it, “I just had to do most everything.”

CHAPTER 1
“It was all in the day’s work”\textsuperscript{53};
“Expansionist Domesticity” in the Coast Range

There they lived for nine succeeding years, the pioneer home echoing the voices of children, and attesting daily the blessings that a loving and gentle woman can bring to a habitation in a comparative wilderness and amid the most primitive surroundings.\textsuperscript{54}

Mrs. Sarah Fairbanks King was one of many women who traveled the Overland Trail and settled on land acquired through the Oregon Donation Land Claim Act in the early days of Western Oregon settlement. Elwood Evans captures the ideal image of a woman’s contribution to the “pioneer home” in the above quotation, which captures both the romanticization of women in the west, as well as the perceived connection between domesticity and the process of “civilizing” the “primitive” frontier. Women’s domestic contributions to the settlement of Oregon were idealized as peacefully ushering the territory into the U.S. polity, and national historical memory of settlement of the American West continues to perpetuate this narrative. The above quote also suggests how white women were rhetorically placed as oppositional to Native women, who would have been assumed to be a part of the “comparative wilderness,” if they were considered at all. Yet the role of white women in the home was more than just ideological—their reproductive and domestic labor materially facilitated the survival and land acquisition of countless white settler families. Homemaking and motherhood, solely considered to be the realms of women in the nineteenth century, were two of the most critical factors in the success of settler colonial expansion.

\textsuperscript{53} Jennie Reeher, “Memories of Jennie Allen Reeher: The Homestead Years, 1887-1916” (Manuscript Courtesy of Nehalem Valley Historical Society), 10.

The fact that women’s domestic labor helped to facilitate the settlement of the American West has never been in question. Though often marginalized compared to the contributions of men, images of domestic white women have been immortalized in the figure of the sacrificial “pioneer mother.” This is apparent in settler recruitment literature, early historical accounts of lives on the mythologized frontier, and subsequently in the historiography of the women in the American West. The name of the “Homestead Act,” and subsequent term “homesteading” for the settlement of government-given plots of land, recall the contemporary woman’s sphere of influence as well as the labor they performed. This terminology also reflects the distinctly interdependent nature of state-building and the family lives of individuals across the expanding American empire. Understanding the intimate experiences of women such as Jennie Reeher, who is quoted in the title of this chapter and lived for almost thirty years on a homestead in the mountains outside of Tillamook, Oregon, is therefore critical to understanding how the goals of land grant legislation were realized and perpetuated for generations. Reframing white women’s domestic and reproductive labor as critical to settler colonialism invites new questions, and hopefully some new answers, around the intentions and consequences of such a system.

“EXPANSIONIST DOMESTICITY”

_It was taking a chance, but pioneers everywhere must take chances._

In her work on gender and U.S. settler colonialism in Florida, Laurel Clark Shire introduces the concept of “expansionist domesticity” to frame women’s contributions to

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55 Reeher, “Memories” 19.
empire. Her term includes both “the needed physical, material and reproductive labor” that women provided, as well as the ideological ways in which white Anglo women made formally contested territories their own, thereby incorporating them into the U.S. nation-state. Shire’s framework is critical to the legal history of American settler colonialism, which informed women’s access to property and rights. The Armed Occupation Act, which is the most relevant piece of legislation to her work on Florida, laid the groundwork for much of the gender non-specific language that guided the Oregon Donation Land Claim Act. Even at the time, it was apparent that women’s process of homemaking was critical to national imperial interests, which can be seen in these government policies promoting women’s movement West. In retrospect, these contributions gain even more credence as critical examination of settler colonialism reveals a form of empire that sought to be as invisible as women’s traditional work.

Using Shire’s framework, this chapter will focus on “the needed physical, material and reproductive labor” of “expansionist domesticity” and explore the wide range of duties that were deemed “women’s work” in the context of Oregon homesteading. “Expansionist domesticity” on Oregon homesteads required a fundamentally expanded domesticity when compared to the predominant white, middle-class ideal of the mid-nineteenth century. Cynthia Prescott explains that although white Oregonian settlers, most of whom came from the Midwest, were interested in maintaining relatively conservative gender roles, in reality “frontier conditions required men and women to remain flexible about this spatial division of labor,” particularly in the first

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years of settlement. While the realities of pioneer life necessitated that women perform different kinds of work than their counterparts in more settled communities back East, the majority of Oregon settlers were still committed to national ideals and saw them as an important marker of the class status toward which they strived. This tension between women’s expanded roles coming into conflict with a desire for separate spheres of gender influence can be seen in the case of Colorado homesteader Julia Buskup Kawcak, who proudly asserted that she “never did wear pants! And I haven’t yet, I leave that to the men.” Just a bit later in her oral account, however, she explains that when working in the field in freezing weather, she would “put a pair of overalls of Paul’s—my husband—on.” This commitment to the ideal of separate spheres, but straying when necessary, is seen across homesteading contexts by white women who aspired to middle-class membership through their behavior and private property ownership. As Prescott states, “Oregon settlers, like their counterparts in the Midwest, accepted women’s field labor only when they deemed it necessary for survival, expecting that women’s work and social roles would take a conventional form when circumstances permitted.” In these cases, however, it was only done on their own family’s homestead, and not for wages but for subsistence. Especially for the first generation of settlers, such as those who will be featured in this study, this work was almost always necessary, and therefore done.

The manner in which women’s work on homesteads diversified beyond the traditional sense of “homemaking” has been idolized and recognized as transformative

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for both Western settlement and women alike. In his 1889 publication *The History of the Pacific Northwest*, Elwood Evans recognized the importance of domesticity on the homestead and how critical this labor was to the survival of settler families. Speaking of Mrs. Rachel Kindred, who settled near Fort Stevens on the northwestern tip of the state, Evans explained that “There fell to her a large if not the larger share of making a home. Her husband’s business made frequent absences necessary; and the care of a farm as well as that of the house was hers at such times.”61 This was not a rare phenomenon, as it was common for homesteaders to rely on outside work to meet their needs, thus expanding the realm of the home and of domesticity. Evans’ attribution suggests that without these women to do the daily physical work of caring for the homestead, most settler families simply would not have been able to survive on the land long enough to “prove up,” or file for full ownership of the land from the federal government. Mary Gerritse, whose own account of settlement dwells largely on her labor outside of the home, includes her own account of a period when she and her children lived alone on their Nehalem homestead. She describes how “John worked at his job till November…I kept house and looked after the children.”62 If the Homestead Act and other land grant laws contributed to the successful acquisition of land on behalf of colonial interests, then women’s work in (and around) the home was paramount in making this possible.

While adherence to traditional domesticity was critical to white, middle-class aspiring women in nineteenth century Oregon, actual daily homemaking duties rarely feature as central in the accounts that women wrote about their time homesteading. Tasks

61 Evans, *History of the Pacific Northwest*, 408.
like mending clothing, preparing food, and taking care of domesticated animals would have necessarily been the backbone of survival. Yet the recollections of Jennie Reeher and others suggest that when writing their personal accounts of homestead life decades later, this labor was not deemed particularly interesting or necessary to include. This difficulty in accessing women’s recollections of their daily domestic labor reflects a general erasure of women’s work in public discourse. As Cynthia Prescott asserts, “Both through their memoirs and through monuments, first-generation Oregonians unconsciously shaped the ways in which they would be remembered.” The erasure of women’s labor occurs across Oregon frontier narratives, as “in memory, even more than in daily life, Oregonians erased women’s productive work by hiding behind the rhetoric of their domestic ideal,” and focused instead on “their role of protecting and nurturing future Oregon leaders.” Even when done by middle-class white women in the pursuit of national interest, women’s work in the home is simply expected, and therefore rarely written down. As settler colonialism was driven by these feminine contributions, this phenomenon of dismissing or omitting women’s work likewise perpetuates the hidden nature of Western expansion as purposeful colonial progression across the continent.

Though rare, the documentation of women’s domestic work in the homestead demonstrates how extensive and critical it was to the survival and social reproduction of families. Prescott cites a list of chores recorded by Maria Locey, who homesteaded in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. The list, written after her own children had grown up and

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63 Prescott, *Gender and Generation*, 144.
moved out, still demonstrates a considerable amount of labor. She even refers to the fact that she normally excludes these actions in her daily accounts:

I do not often write down anything about my work but I thought one day last week I would pay attention and it ran something like this

Got up at five and got breakfast.
Went into the sitting-room and assisted at family prayers.
Prepared the little boy’s dinner, washed him and made him ready for school (his mother is away) on their homestead.
Skimmed and strained the milk.
Went to the henhouse to feed my setting-hens, swept and dusted the sitting-room.
Washed the break-fast dishes. Then ironed till eleven.
Got dinner, rested for an hour.
Made the beds, worked at mending or some other necessary work for an hour or two, then got supper, washed dishes again, etc.

This is about a sample, with a change of sometimes instead of ironing I put in the time washing, howe-cleaning, gardening etc., with many occasional stoppages and side-tracks. Sometimes late in the afternoon I write a letter, and so far this year I have read three chapters in the Bible each day besides the ones we read at family worship.\textsuperscript{64}

The physical and ideological elements featured in Locey’s account represent the fact that “the homemaking that [settler women] performed operated at both national and household levels.”\textsuperscript{65} Maria Locey’s work has profound material value in terms of feeding, clothing, and caring for herself and the settlers of her household. Importantly, she also demonstrates the cultural labor that white women were expected to do in the home. Her references to “family prayers” as well as the extra Bible reading that she did of her own volition represent the importance of ritual practice in women’s lives, as well as her association of religious teaching with domestic labor. This social reproduction of “Christian” values was a critical part of bringing white middle-class culture to Western

\textsuperscript{64} Prescott, \textit{Gender and Generation}, 14. Prescott cites this primary source from the “Locey Family” files at the Oregon Historical Society, number 2968.
\textsuperscript{65} Shire, \textit{The Threshold of Manifest Destiny}, 15.
territories and incorporating them further into the American fold. Indeed, all forms of reproductive labor would ultimately form the backbone of settler expansion.

MOTHERHOOD AND (RE)PRODUCTION

*My wonderful children! What joy I had in bringing them up.*

Perhaps the most remarked-upon aspect of domesticity, particularly in the context of Western settlement, is the topic of motherhood. As the case of Maria Locey demonstrates, the concept of “republican motherhood” had made its way West to Oregon, as even on the frontier women were expected to be civic and religious teachers in the home and in their communities. However, as Elizabeth Jameson points out, this Victorian womanhood reflected the lives of an elite class, whereas “the ideal was far from the reality for homesteaders or for working-class women.”

Even so, many white women who homesteaded desired the acquisition of property for the same reasons that they attempted to fulfill these cultural roles: as key tools of social mobility for themselves and their families. Due to these interests, which do not necessarily take away from their commitment to morality or religiosity, the recollections of women such as Maria Locey and Jennie Reeher abound with references to their contributions to the “cult of true womanhood” in the American West. These accounts are useful in understanding the considerable ideological labor that mothers performed on behalf of settlement efforts in the West, as they raised white, Christian, “Americans” on colonized soil.

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Unlike the erasure of women’s other domestic labor, white women have received quite a bit of credit for their role as mothers in the historical discourse on settlement. This can be seen broadly across primary source material as well as in the more traditional historiography of the West, from Elwood Evans to Dee Brown’s *The Gentle Tamers.* According to Prescott’s analysis of gender ideology among descendants of settlers in Oregon’s Willamette Valley, society’s separate spheres were maintained in settler colonial mythology so that “Frontier farmers became Indian fighters and community and nation builders, while their wives were subsumed under a single iconic pioneer mother.”

This “pioneer mother” has been memorialized in word as well as in statues located across the West, from Kansas City to (until recently) the University of Oregon campus. The conspicuous placement of these monuments demonstrate the ideological importance of motherhood to citizens’ psychological understanding of settlement. Elwood Evans invokes familial roles in his assertions that, “Women…have been the *mothers of the state,* and deserve no less credit than its fathers.” By raising the second generation of white settler children, these mothers were also serving a distinctly political purpose by raising “the state.” The fact that women’s contributions have been most often memorialized through their roles as mothers demonstrates the importance of this labor to the society that developed in the American West.

Motherhood has another aspect, one more bodily and literal, which may not feature on statues but nonetheless was and continues to be a major theme of gender in the West: the role of physical reproduction. The population boom among white Americans in

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the nineteenth century worked to justify and enable the rapid Western settler expansion that dramatically encroached upon the land initially set aside to be “Indian Territory.”\textsuperscript{72} For early land-grant families bringing new regions into the Union, reproduction served to provide important familial and community labor. The presence of women and children in the West inspired deeply gendered arguments for the protections and justifications of violence against Indigenous groups still living in far-flung frontier locations.\textsuperscript{73} As Albert Hurtado reflects, “There are two things that are well known about non-Indian women in frontier regions: There were relatively few of them, and they reproduced at heroic rates.”\textsuperscript{74} He places this in direct contrast to birth rates of Native women, who saw a steep decline in birth rates at the same time, no doubt due to the many strains and forms of violence embedded in the settler colonial system. Tessie Liu captures the many levels of this phenomenon, asserting that “In the eyes of the state, responsibility for the fitness of the nation rested on women’s reproductive capacity, their place in the economy, and their role as mothers in protecting the welfare of their children.”\textsuperscript{75} Demographically and functionally, white women’s reproductive capacity and maternal labor were perhaps the most critical factor in rapid Western expansion and therefore the success of imperial acquisition across the continent.

\textsuperscript{73} Shire, \textit{The Threshold of Manifest Destiny}, 59.
The women who settled the Oregon Coast cannot be separated from the deeply racialized perspectives that were prevalent around the turn of the century and played their own role in U.S. imperial thought. Their reproductive capacities were central to the expansion of the white settler population in the region, as “white fecundity (rather than aggressive policy and violence) would ultimately triumph over the inferior races supposedly destined for extinction.” Shire continues, stating that “this view of natural reproduction as colonization was a common theme…when boosters of the nation’s Manifest Destiny believed that large white families revealed God’s design for an Anglo-Saxon North America.”

The North Coast of Oregon, in stark contrast to the profoundly violent history of the South Coast “Rogue Indian Wars,” was much more dependent on this gradual, demographic, colonial conquest, making women’s reproductive capacities even more important.

Colonialism as physical reproduction is described in contemporary settler literature, as well, such as Brockett’s *Our Western Empire*. As the titular phrase “our western empire” suggests, this particular source was committed to framing American expansion within the larger context of global colonialism, largely as a way to attract European immigrants to the U.S. West. There is a distinctly racialized component to the target audience, one which the author himself does not shy away from. Brockett’s settler recruitment opus demonstrates the national interest in reproducing whiteness. In his appeal to European immigrants, he insists that “the natural increase in [the colored] race is not likely to be large, for in time they too will become extinct, under the pressure of a

higher civilization.”77 This explicitly racialized and colonial language demonstrates the settler colonial interest in elimination of racialized “others.” In Brockett’s book, the “extinction” of people of color in the West, which includes Black, Indigenous, and Chinese populations, depends on the active multiplication of the white population, making the “pressure of higher civilization” about the social and physical reproductive capacities of women. This notion of white pronatalism for the betterment of “the race” became a critical aspect of maternalist thought at the turn of the century, which included “emphasizing the reformulation of women’s roles in public policy in terms of the biology of motherhood and a eugenic ideal of family and race betterment.”78 It is no coincidence that these ideas gained national prominence during the late stages of Western expansion. Jennie Reeher, who would raise eleven surviving children on her homestead in the Coast Range mountains outside of Tillamook, Oregon, is a profound example of “white fecundity” in the regional context of this study.

**JENNIE REEHER: EXPANDING DOMESTICITY IN THE COAST RANGE**

*Our own home, own trees; the blessed land, so fertile, so easy to cultivate, all ours through the gift of our country.*79

It is clear in Jennie Reeher’s account of her life that she was raised and existed in a value system that idolized private property, particularly that which was fertile and undeveloped. Her reference to “our country” giving her family the gift of land ownership demonstrates the way that her intimate life on the homestead was inextricably tied to the

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77 Brockett, *Our Western Empire*, 243.  
interests and actions of the state. Early in her narrative she expresses that while her husband could find good work in Tillamook, “we wanted land, with trees on it.” It was this desire that propelled them to procure their homestead on the Wilson River in 1887, on which their family would live for the next three decades.\textsuperscript{80} Jennie’s domestic labor and familial reproduction on their land grant property in the mountains off the Coast in many ways typifies the critical nature of women’s contributions to the survival of white settler families.

The Reehers came to Oregon from Kansas, a transition which likely inspired her awe for the mountainous and treed landscape of the Coastal Range mountains. After arriving in Tillamook, it took a couple of years for her husband James to build a home to house Jennie and their children, and they got by on the money he earned in a logging camp until they could move to their land grant plot. It was not until 1889 that she moved to the homestead where she felt “the joy of that great adventure in [her] soul.”\textsuperscript{81} Jennie’s recorded recollections of her time on their property in the Coast Range are overwhelmingly positive. This could be due in part to her relative distance from the experience by the time she was writing in the 1930s, but is also likely a reflection of her own disposition. Jennie Reeher was proud of her labor that maintained the family through the difficult early years, labor which was echoed across settler colonial families in the construction of the U.S. West.

Apparently, not all women were equally prepared for this role: in her recounting of their arrival to the homestead, she compares herself to another woman who she viewed

\textsuperscript{80} Reeher, “Memories,” 3.
\textsuperscript{81} Reeher, “Memories,” 8.
as not as hardy or dedicated to settlement as she was. Compared to this neighbor of hers, who tried to turn around during their trip and return to Tillamook, Jennie asserts that “People had to help them the next winter to live. No one ever needed to help us.”

This story also demonstrates that the Reeher family was perhaps exceptionally successful compared to others who attempted to survive on such remote homesteads, which may suggest the limitations of her account in telling an overarching narrative of women homesteaders. The role of memory aside, Reeher’s account of her time homesteading with her family demonstrates the profound importance of women’s labor to the survival and reproduction of white families in new settlements on the coast of Oregon.

Much of the labor that Jennie Reeher did must be assumed by the reader, as there is no list of daily chores in her manuscript like that of Maria Locey. Yet this daily labor must have occurred as Reeher shares a key commonality with Mrs. Rachel Kindred whose story began this chapter: her husband also left to work outside the homestead for weeks at a time. As the only adult in charge of caring for their newly acquired land as well as her eleven children, her work must have been considerable and almost entirely self-sustaining. She references her work subsistence farming, milking the cows (though this terrified her), raising chickens, and fishing as ways to feed her family. These forms of labor which she describes in greater detail fall under the “expanded domesticity” category and demonstrate the apparent significance that doing non-traditional women’s work had for her, both in terms of her individual satisfaction and perceived role in the glorified settlement process.

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82 Reeher, “Memories,” 8.
Fishing was a point of particular enjoyment and pride, and she references that “fishing, to me, was a most necessary part of my job the first few years we lived on the river.” In fact, the only time she mentions traditional homemaking tasks is when she explains that “after my housework was done, I went to fish for food, and as soon as enough were caught to last until next day, was glad enough to get home.”

Despite the limited space it received in her narrative, her “housework” still consisted of those tasks which needed to be completed before she could engage in the other forms of labor that supported her family. This would have included practically every task necessary to maintain the homestead, particularly during the weeks-long absences of her husband. Her efforts demonstrate the reality that the Reeher family, at least, depended on Jennie’s labor and presence on the homestead to successfully prove up on their land.

Wives and mothers were not the only women supporting the homesteading project through their labor. Women learned early that they would be responsible for caretaking in an environment that demanded all hands on deck. When discussing her avid berry-picking in 1890, Jennie references that her “poor children had to stay alone,” and that she left her eldest daughter in charge of the other children. She describes how she “explained to my dear little girl why it was necessary. That we needed the food, and she did her part nobly.”

Considering the vast array of daily tasks that women had to complete to have any hope of proving up on their land, they had to lean on their children as laborers as well. Daughters were given gender-appropriate tasks from a young age, learning their role in the household economy even as they watched many women work above and

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beyond it. This is seen in the case of Olive Bell Baxter’s family as well, who homesteaded near the Kilchis River outside of Tillamook. After the death of her mother soon after her birth, Olive Bell’s older sisters assumed the roles of housekeeping and raising the younger children.\footnote{U.S. Census, population schedule. Oregon, Tillamook County, 1880. Digital images. Accessed through Ancestry.com, 2021.} Jennie Reeher’s eldest daughter was hardly the only young woman who “did her part nobly” in U.S. settlement by performing the domestic labor that was critical to the maintenance of homesteading families.

Jennie Reeher’s discussion of motherhood captures the themes of moral instruction and reproduction of white bodies in the settled West. Certainly, the sheer number of children she raised on the homestead in Oregon represents her contributions to the multiplying populations of white Americans in the Coast region. Her fertility, however, was not the aspect of motherhood on which she dwelled. In her words, “A child is the greatest pleasure and joy a man or woman can ever have and hold,” and her narrative makes it clear that the “pleasure and joy” fell much more to the woman of the household than the man.\footnote{Reeher, “Memories,” 7.} Yet the “joy [she] had in bringing them up” came with its’ difficulties, and certainly a remarkable amount of work. Some of this labor was ideological, much in the spirit of both republican motherhood and maternalism. She describes her sincere, and perhaps severe, belief in teaching children right from wrong in her reflection:

I had too many children to waste much time explaining or arguing. They must mind me and that was all there was to it...All people like well behaved children, but spoiled ones are a pest on the earth. Every one must be disciplined, and obey that law, and if begun in babyhood it becomes a habit to behave.\footnote{Reeher, “Memories,” 6-7.}
Her approach to motherhood as the loving yet stern disciplinarian is akin to the ideal republican relationship between citizen and state. Regardless of the value systems which shaped her parenting, Reeher’s proclivity for reproduction reflects a major point of contribution she and many other white women made to settlement.

Much like Maria Locey, Reeher’s role as a mother included the social reproduction of white, Christian values. Her Christianity, she felt, was shaped by her motherhood: “By my own love for my children I knew how infinitely more He must love his children on earth.”90 In reading her account, it seems as though motherhood imbued everything she did. She took great pride in the lasting religious beliefs of her children and recognized her own role in guiding and shaping them. As she recollects, “Every child of mine is a member of some church, they were taught to love God and keep his commandments but no creed.”91 The fact that she served as a familial religious instructor, and by including it in her narrative of homesteading, speaks to the importance of this aspect of motherhood for white women who aspired to reflect prevailing middle-class values. This moral and behavioral instruction was also very gendered as she sought to shape the next generation. Jennie explains that, “shoes were an encumbrance to my children. I disliked to see my girls go barefoot, and the boys after they were twelve years old. The girls would put their shoes on when company came, but not my sons.”92 Part of her job as a mother was to impart expectations of respectability on her children, ones which would be necessarily different for her daughters and her sons. Although

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90 Reeher, “Memories,” 22.
91 Reeher, “Memories,” 22.
92 Reeher, “Memories,” 35.
reproducing gender notions did not lie exclusively in the realm of women, it was a critical part of a colonial system that necessitated gendered forms of labor to thrive.

Jennie tells another story which perhaps lies outside of the realm of “expansionist domesticity,” but nonetheless powerfully demonstrates the gendered experiences that shaped women’s settlement. She describes how, “a wretch coaxed my eight-year-old girl to take a walk with him,” suggesting the potential danger that could have come from this encounter. Her account of this traumatic event begins with the assertion that, “I always had an eye on my children,” but on this afternoon she noticed that one of her three younger daughters, all of whom normally traveled together, was not with the other two. The two sisters explained that she had gone to “bring home the cows” with a male stranger, and Jennie raced after them. When she found her daughter with the unknown man Jennie recounts that, “The child did not know what was wrong, but the fellow was scared stiff. I knew nothing against him, but my instinct warned me, and later I found out after he had left the mountains that my suspicions had been well founded.”

She does not say any more about what particular danger this stranger may have posed to her daughter, but this story brings up several interesting points. Often in pioneer narratives, such fears of violence and kidnapping were saved exclusively for the realm of “Indian stories,” but the fact that she did not mention the racial identity of the man in this case suggests that he was a white man. Her fear for her young daughter also suggests acute concern around sexual violence in the homesteading context which would have added an extra layer to the labor and strain upon women and their female children. To place the labor and

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reproduction of women within the context of their contributions to settler colonial structural violence does not negate the real challenges that they faced within a society that witnessed rampant gendered violence as well.

CONCLUSION

*Hope I do not fall into preaching habits in this record. Most old people do. I am writing it to preserve some of the incidents of my life for my children and grandchildren, also for fun, because I like to write, and Oregon winters are long and the time must be passed somehow.*

As would occur in many cases of homesteading near the Oregon Coast, the Reeher children did not inherit the homestead in the Wilson River, all eleven of them who survived into adulthood stood to gain from the financial transactions that came about as a result of the land sales. Reeher’s children continued to inhabit and create their own families in the colonized land of the American West.

It is important to note the conspicuous absence of Native women like Clara Pearson from this chapter and the settler women’s accounts. As the next chapter will

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95 Reeher, “Memories,” 38.
96 Reeher, “Memories,” 38.
explore, there were some Indigenous women in the North Coast region who married and conducted domestic labor in the homes that they shared with white men. These examples were few but provide a powerful counter-narrative to the singular and mythologized view of white settler families in Oregon. Such Native women gave birth to mixed-race children who particularly challenged the racial ideology of settlement and empire. Their absence from this chapter reflects the fact that they occupied a complicated, liminal space in terms of the meaning of their “contributions” to American empire, as their very existence challenged its central tenet of white supremacy. The stories of Native women are entirely absent from the recollections of Reeher, who does not make a single mention of Indians in her manuscript. Erasure like Reeher’s from the source base further perpetuates the settler colonial fiction that Native populations in the United States had been effectively “eliminated” from the land by the twentieth century.

How do we reconcile the often-difficult life of Jennie Reeher with the harsh consequences of settler colonialism? Jennie Reeher’s maintenance of considerable acreage while her husband was away, all while raising eleven children on their land over the course of thirty years, demonstrates the remarkable feat of will and labor that it took to lay claim to government-issued land. In her committed identity as a homemaker and a mother, she appears to be the quintessential pioneer woman. Despite her cool assertion that, “It was all in the day’s work,” it is apparent that this work, when multiplied by countless homesteading women, contributed greatly to the success of U.S. settlement in the West. Regardless of the differences between the women covered in this study, one thing they all had in common was that they married, had children, and performed domestic labor in a way that contributed to their family’s successful acquisition and
maintenance of land grant property. While white women have been lauded for these contributions to “manifest destiny,” accounts of their labor rarely go far enough in asserting that long-term white settlement was entirely dependent upon them. The general erasure of women’s daily labor which was witnessed in this chapter has critical implications in the broader disregard of settlement as a form of colonization as well. If domestic labor is not written about, it is much easier to ignore the imperial expansion that results from its performance.
CHAPTER 2
“A little wife well willed”:
Marriage and the Reproduction of Settler Land Ownership

A little home well filled,
A little farm well tilled,
A little wife well willed...97

The above short stanza, taken from the 1883 publication, Our Western Empire, or, The New West Beyond the Mississippi, demonstrates the critical role of marriage in the settlement of the American West. This phrase not only captures the instrumental role women’s labor played in the maintenance of land, but particularly how their position as wives, bound by the legal institution of marriage, facilitated the successful acquisition and maintenance of private property in white settler families. The very title of Our Western Empire reflects the understanding, even at the time, that westward expansion was an act of colonialism by the United States, and the discourse on this imperial venture included marriage as a key institution in the process. This chapter uses historical examples of when wives were not “well-willed,” or when their husbands died without leaving a will, to demonstrate how courts and individuals fought to ensure that land grant properties were consolidated and held by white families. I argue that settler colonialism is dependent on both private property and generational reproduction, and that marriage is a primary and under-recognized institutional vehicle through which these two forces are combined to perpetuate white supremacy and imperial expansion.

97 Linus Pierpont Brockett, Our Western Empire, or, The new West beyond the Mississippi: the latest and most comprehensive work on the states and territories west of the Mississippi (Philadelphia: Bradley, Garretson & Co., 1882), 490.
Historical discussions of marriage often focus on the idea of coverture, which captures the many ways in which the independent rights and interests of women are subsumed by their husbands in the marital bond. While women have been disenfranchised in the process, histories that only focus on white women’s victimization by patriarchy ignore how marriage and the patterns of social and material inheritance it reproduces have also been wielded by men and women alike as exclusionary tools of empire. In the American West, this can be seen through the marital negotiations of settlers who sought to maximize their returns from land grant laws such as the Homestead Act of 1862. The federal government and land speculators had a shared interest in the use of marriage to consolidate and maintain land holdings among white families. This is apparent not only in the legislation and broader discourse of Western settlement, but also in the examination of those who homesteaded in the North Coast of Oregon. In their role as wives, women’s bodies and interests were crucial to the settler colonial project. Marriage, as a fundamentally gendered institution, was a tool wielded by settlers and the U.S. government to facilitate the westward expansion of American empire.

In January of 1883, The West Shore, a magazine which promoted settlement, republished the following advertisement that had been featured in the Astorian, a coastal Oregon publication:

Two young ladies of Tillamook county, aged respectively 19 and 21 years, good-looking, one blonde and the other a brunette, good housekeepers; each owning 160 acres of good land, all under cultivation, also 75 head of fine cattle, two span of horses, three yoke of oxen and a lot of poultry, wish to say that if any respectable, good-looking young man wishes a wife, now is his opportunity.
The advertisement is followed by an editor’s note, which exclaims that “This opportunity, as well as the young ladies, should be embraced by some of our new settlers at once.”

Certainly, the link between property and marriage is not unique to settler colonial societies, but it is significant when considering the role of the government in issuing land grant claims which would then be inherited across generations. That each of the marriageable young women owned “160 acres,” the size of a homestead, suggests that the land advertised was likely government-issued and therefore a tradeable commodity among individuals through the institution of marriage. The extremely public nature of this advertisement suggests that such messages were common and served the interest of further settling the region. It also indicates that the system was not built for this property to remain in the hands of these two women indefinitely, but rather that, perhaps after the death of a father or other male relative, the “young ladies” were the vehicle through which their acreage and other goods would be passed to another man. Even though their ownership of the land is contingent on men, they still play a critical role in how, and by whom, it would be inherited.

*The West Shore* advertisement also demonstrates that while marriage is a legal institution, it remains, by definition, fundamentally intimate. The personal characteristics shared about the young women and their desire for a “respectable” husband for whom

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99 Act of May 20, 1862 (Homestead Act), Public Law 37-64 (12 STAT 392); 5/20/1862.

100 Marriage advertisements were not uncommon at the time, and particularly in the decades after the Civil War were a socially acceptable way of finding an appropriate marriage match. Marcia A. Zug, *Buying a Bride: An Engaging History of Mail-Order Matches* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 132.
they can be “good housekeepers” reflects that their search for partners was not purely economic: being married would also influence their daily, familial life considerably.\textsuperscript{101} The shared lives of individuals discussed in this study cannot, therefore, be limited to the acreage amassed between them. This is evident in the case of Olive Bell Baxter, who married her first husband at fifteen years old and her third at thirty-six, and whose partnerships determined her access to property during her lifetime, as well as the inheritance of her descendants. She gave birth eleven times, although only four of her children survived to be recorded in the U.S. Census.\textsuperscript{102} Examining the intimate experience of marriage, alongside the structural narratives of settlement and inheritance, reveals the role that a wide array of individuals, and especially women, played in U.S. expansion. On the western edge of the American empire, these experiences and their lived manifestations are as critical to understanding settler colonialism as any legal code.

Empires of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were built on racialized systems of power, and settler colonial states are no different. In the United States, European immigrants and their descendants created new racial hierarchies through intermarriage and reproduction resulting in the ideological foundation of modern American “whiteness.” Mary Gerritse, the primary subject of the third chapter, grew up on a homestead in the coastal town of Nehalem and married a Dutch immigrant. Their union facilitated their acquisition of more land on the Oregon Coast than either could have received individually. Although John Gerritse did not speak English when he arrived in

\textsuperscript{101} The West Shore, February 1883.
\textsuperscript{102} U.S. Census, Oregon, Tillamook County, 1900-1940. The fact of her eleven pregnancies and labors was shared with me by local historian Mark Beach in conversation in Manzanita, OR on May 2, 2021. These intimate details help us build a more complete view of women’s experiences on the frontier and the bodily experiences of marriage and reproduction.
the American West, the opportunities of homesteading and integration through partnership allowed him to become “white,” propertied, and therefore “American.”

Their greater access to property, actively reinforced in law and practice, concretized racialized distinctions and stereotypes in a way that disenfranchised Indigenous Americans and established racialized peoples as second-class (or third-class) citizens in the West. In the North Coast of Oregon, this reality is underscored in the differing experiences of Native women and white women as they sought to inherit land after the deaths of their spouses.

Understanding the confluence of race, gender, and class as systemic tools of settler colonialism draws greater attention to the significance of marriage, as “racial metaphors… pervaded the rationale behind marriage alliances and inheritance,” in the U.S. just as they had in Europe.

Even when women sought to defy such roles, such as Gerritse, who worked outside of the home as a mail carrier and insisted that she “was not doing a lady’s work anyway,” the overall arc of their contributions remained geared toward the process of settlement. The racialized nature of this process is made even more apparent by comparing Olive Bell’s experience with that of Native women who were the wives of white men. Marriage acts as a vehicle through which white property ownership can be produced and reproduced on the land.

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105 Gerritse, “Journal of Mary Gerritse,” 27.
DISCOURSES OF HOMESTEADING AND MARRIAGE

To the man who has energy and pluck, who is not cast down because everything does not go just as he expected it would; the man who has given pledges to fortune, who has a wife and little ones dependent upon him, or who is looking forward to having a home to which he can bring one dearer to him than life... there is no part of the world where he can do better, whatever his calling, than this great Western Empire.106

The significance of marriage to federal land grants is apparent in the legislation itself, as marriage and widowhood are mentioned several times in both the Donation Land Claim Act of 1850 and the Homestead Act of 1862. The exploration of legal and popular references to marriage in settlement discourse reveal the way in which institutional marriage functioned to reinforce white supremacy and expansion across the United States and sets the stage to understand the experiences of the individual women explored in this chapter. In “Marriage and Women’s Citizenship in the United States, 1830-1934,” Nancy Cott explains the developing interplay between marriage and American citizenship that privileged white men and, for a time, could strip American women of their place in the political body if they married a foreign man. Although she does not examine the phenomenon of state-sponsored westward expansion, Cott does establish a connection between marriage and political power in the United States, in particular the role of racialization in family formation.107 The Donation Land Claim Act of 1850, specific to the Oregon territory, was explicit in its racial classification, asserting that “every white settler...American half-breed Indians included” would have access to its opportunities.108 The Act explicitly ties marriage into its expansionary goals by

106 Brockett, Our Western Empire, 192.
108 Donation Land Claim Act of September 27, 1850 (9 Stat. 496).
establishing that married men would be entitled to twice the land (one half “on behalf of his wife”) and that their heirs would be able to either share in the land or wealth emerging from it on the chance of their death.\textsuperscript{109} The privilege of married couples demonstrates the concerted, empire-building interest of the federal government in the institution of marriage and the ways in which it would allow white settler families to reproduce, physically and culturally, on the land they sought to incorporate more fully into the United States.

The likelihood of early death on the frontier contributed to the explicit role of wives as property inheritors and administrators, as the cases of Ophelia Paquet and Olive Bell will demonstrate. Richard Chused frames the changing women’s property laws of the mid-nineteenth century within a larger context and asserts that, “Alterations in general land grant practice during the first half of the century to permit some women…to obtain federal land patents, were designed to perfect the claims of deceased men rather than to recognize cultural changes in the nature of the American family.”\textsuperscript{110} In cases where other extended family or next of kin may not be available, marriage was a ward against the loss of land ownership in case of death, as is apparent in both pieces of land grant legislation. The Donation Land Act went as far as to specify that a widow not only had the right to keep her family’s property until their children could inherit it, but was herself entitled to an “equal part”:

\begin{quote}
\ldotsuppon the death of any settler before the expiration of the four years’ continued possession required by this act, all the rights of the deceased under this act shall
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{109} Donation Land Act of 1850.
\end{flushright}
descend to the heirs at law of such settler, including the widow, where one is left, in equal parts.\textsuperscript{111}

Thus, white women’s right to some of the land of their homesteading husbands was not only through their capacity as mothers of heirs, but rather, as married citizens themselves. By being married, or having been married, the opportunity to own and therefore help settle land was opened to white women in Oregon as early as 1850. This served the interests of the U.S. government seeking to populate the furthest reaches of the continent and justify its claims to the land through the lives and labor of those who resided on it.

Historians have identified the apparent gender ambiguity of the Homestead Act of 1862 in its specification that “any person who is the head of the family” may be entitled to the opportunities encompassed in the act.\textsuperscript{112} This notion has promoted a historical narrative which views the Homestead Act as fundamentally progressive due to its inclusion of white women.\textsuperscript{113} Yet even the Act’s clarification of “he or she” as head of household, while seemingly gender-inclusive, does not negate the fact that for married women to be legally recognized as a “head of the family,” it was necessary that they had been married, had children, and then been widowed. While some single women did take up homesteads “in their own name,” these white women almost always filed neighboring land claims to kinfolk, and if they stayed on the land after proving up, most likely married homesteading men.\textsuperscript{114} As Tonia Compton argues, “nineteenth-century federal

\textsuperscript{111} Donation Land Act of 1850.
\textsuperscript{112} Julius Wilm, \textit{Settlers as Conquerors: Free Land Policy in Antebellum America} (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2018).
\textsuperscript{114} H. Elaine Lindgren, \textit{Land in Her Own Name: Women as Homesteaders in North Dakota} (Fargo: The North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1991).
land policies addressed women’s property rights only in relation to their marital status, and solely because women figured prominently in the national project of westward expansion.” Development concerning women, marriage, and property were inextricably tied to imperial concerns.

Further limiting the classification of who could access land grant property is the stipulation that they be “a citizen of the United States,” which clarified any racial ambiguity. As Cott writes, “racial exclusiveness was a fundamental tenet of American naturalization policy,” meaning that the wives, or widows in this case, “who were welcomed into the American polity…were free white wives.” Despite the lack of explicit racial signifier in the Homestead Act, which the Oregon Donation Land Claim Act did contain, Cott demonstrates that the invocation of citizenship had explicitly racial components in the U.S. legal code at the time. In the case of Oregon, racial stipulations were even more apparent due to the series of racial exclusion laws that banned Black freedpeople from entering and residing in the state. Thus, the apparent inclusivity of the 1862 act was largely limited to only white single women or widows who had borne children, and therefore would continue to socially reproduce (if not also physically) the settler colonial population on the land.

115 Tonia Compton, “Proper Women / Propertied Women: Federal Land Laws and Gender Order(s) in the Nineteenth-Century Imperial American West” (PhD diss., University of Nebraska - Lincoln, 2009), 15.
116 Cott, “Marriage and Women’s Citizenship,” 1458.
118 The interest in reproduction among legislators was apparent in the process of forming this legislation, as Julius Wilm explains. The apparent success of households headed by females was also mentioned in Wilm’s book, yet without an analysis as for why this might be the case. Not only were, “Claims entered by families were more likely to result in a land title than those entered by single men,” but more specifically, “Households headed by females were the most
In addition to legal discourse, marriage featured prominently in popular publications which sought to propagandize land grant policies and contributed greatly to the public conversation surrounding Western settlement. *Our Western Empire*, as most sources from the time do, assumes that the immigrant is male, and its authors make note of writing to appeal to the “hard-working man.”119 Even so, mention of wives and the family abound, and are often expected, as accompanying entities in the journey. The explicit description of an ideal settler as one “who has a wife and little ones dependent upon him, or who is looking forward to having a home to which he can bring one dearer to him than life” demonstrates the values of and interest in having reproducing families as the primary forces of expansion, and also suggests that property ownership could be seen as a way to gain a wife for those who did not already have one.120 For settlers with less capital, it was recommended that a man make the initial trip alone, and establish himself on a property with some expectant income before sending back for a wife and children. Even so, the family economy is assumed, such as in the discussion of potential silkworm cultivation: “The children and young women of the household will rear the worms, gather and stifle the cocoons, and the town or village filature will reel them.”121 These material contributions were critical to successful settlement, and often recognized as such.

As the previous chapter on domesticity and reproduction showed, settler colonial literature, such as Brockett’s *Our Western Empire*, was highly racialized and explicit in its interest to build white communities as a form of eliminating Indigenous Americans as

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119 Brockett, *Our Western Empire*, 381.
120 Brockett, *Our Western Empire*, 192.
121 Brockett, *Our Western Empire*, 222.
well as other people of color who had settled in the West. It is apparent that women were
critical in this process, but even more specifically, they best served the purposes of the
state when they were bound by the institution of marriage. For property to remain in the
hands of white settler families, women had to be wives. Although Brockett’s descriptor
“well-willed” likely referred to the desired fortitude of a frontier wife and mother, these
texts were just as interested in the legal aspects of marriage as they were with the
romanticized ideals of women’s labor and familial roles. The opportunity for widows and
their children to inherit homesteads was clearly seen as attractive to settlers who might
otherwise be concerned that their efforts would be wasted upon their death. This concern
was shared by the federal government, for which the goal was the long-term reproduction
of white American interests in the West.

NATIVE INTERMARRIAGE IN LAW AND PRACTICE

Be it enacted by the Legislative Assembly of the State of Oregon... That hereafter it shall
not be lawful within this state for any white person, male or female, to intermarry with
any negro, Chinese, or any person having one-fourth or more negro, Chinese or Kanaka
blood, or any person having more than one-half Indian blood; and all such marriages or
attempted marriages, shall be absolutely null and void.¹²²

In At the Hearth of Crossed Races: A French-Indian Community in Nineteenth-
Century Oregon, 1812-1859, Melinda Jetté explores how the processes of contact,
interaction, and then functional separation between settlers and the Native population
occurred more quickly in Western Oregon than in the trans-Mississippi West. It is well
documented that the first white settlers to arrive in most areas of the United States had
complex and deeply intimate relationships with Indigenous groups, as Anne Hyde and

¹²² “Act to Prohibit the Intermarriage of Races, 1866,” reprinted in The Oregonian, November 2,
1966.
other scholars have shown. Although Jetté focuses on the French-Indian intermarriages in a small community in the Willamette Valley, this pattern repeated itself (although at a very accelerated rate) on the North Coast, which was largely untouched by direct settler colonization until land grant laws introduced settlers to the region in the 1860s.

The traditional historical narrative of settlement in the Oregon territory tends to frame the state as a white utopia where the Indigenous population was negligible by the time white settlers arrived. However, there are many examples of intermarriage between white men and Indian women, including on the coast. It is important to mention that there is no evidence of marriages between white women and Indian men, demonstrating the importance of white womanhood to both the material and ideological frameworks of white supremacy. Greg Whaley explores how this reality was apparent even from earlier interactions in the region, through the example of a Chinook headman’s son who wanted to marry a working-class white woman who was a part of their expedition. As Whaley explains, “Interracial marriage, and any sexual interaction, worked in only one direction: male Westerner and female Native,” which was made even more obvious by the fact that the same headman’s daughter had married a white trader the year before. This double standard occurs across contexts in U.S. history, and demonstrates the systemic nature of settler colonialism and the racialization of sexual relationships. The white supremacist nature of settler expansion in Oregon comes into particularly stark relief when experiences of white wives are compared to those of Native women. Examples of Native

women who married white settlers on the North Coast of Oregon demonstrate how the gradual dispossession of Native land through marriage shaped conquest in the region.125

An early example of intermarriage on the North Coast is Norwegian settler Hans Anderson, whose wife Mary was described by a neighbor as “one hundred percent Indian.”126 The two of them, and eventually their four children, homesteaded near the Nehalem River in 1866. According to an article published in the Clatsop County Historical Society journal, “the marriage of Hans and Mary Anderson…did not appear in the local records.”127 While the author attributes this to a general trend of not recording marriages on the frontier, their lack of legal documentation may be more a reflection of shifting ideas around marriage. This settler-Native partnership in Western Oregon was formed at a fundamentally different time in American history than those that came before in the mid-nineteenth century. With statehood came more significant government intervention into intimate life, and this intrusion is typified by Oregon’s first anti-miscegenation law. Passed in 1866, the same year Hans and Mary settled their Nehalem Valley homestead, the law, as quoted previously, would have banned his marriage to Mary right around the time that they were recorded to have been wed.128

Laws such as this represent how marriage was one of many legal tools used by the state to solidify the notion of “whiteness.” Hans’ European ancestry would have placed him within the racial category of “white,” though he may not have identified any more

125 In addition to those named in this study, Nancy Sutton (wife of settler Edward Gervais) another example of intermarriage in Nehalem, specifically. Nehalem Valley Historical Society archive.
128 “Act to Prohibit the Intermarriage of Races, 1866.”
closely with the Anglo Americans he encountered than with the Native population. Due to the remoteness of their location, and the fact that Mary predeceased Hans and therefore would not have to establish her legal rights as a widow, the two managed to live out their married lives with no formal repercussions for their intermarriage.

This was not always the case. The 1919 death of Ophelia Paquet’s husband Fred resulted in her complete loss of their shared property in Tillamook County. The two had married according to “Indian custom” in 1889, with the approval of her Tillamook Indian family and a tribal council.\footnote{The acting Tillamook chief at the time, Betsy Fuller, was also an Indian woman married to a white man. Clara Pearson was also married to a white man, only a few years after the Paquet marriage. Peggy Pascoe, “‘A Mistake to Simmer the Question Down to Black and White,’: The History of Oregon’s Miscegenation Law,” in Seeing Color: Indigenous Peoples and Racialized Minorities in Oregon ed. Jun Xing et al (Lanham: University Press of America, 2007), 33.} They lived together for over thirty years, and “had managed to ignore the Oregon miscegenation law of 1866, elude grand jury crackdowns in the 1880s, and win recognition as a couple from many of their neighbors.”\footnote{Pascoe, “‘A Mistake to Simmer the Question Down to Black and White,’” 33.} The remote nature of their coastal lives likely shielded them from the harshest legal and societal critiques. Yet this did not matter when Fred died without leaving a will. Upon his passing, the Tillamook County Court initially gave Ophelia rights as administrator of his estate, and, as they had no children, it would have been expected that she would inherit their land and other property. However, Fred’s brother, John Paquet, challenged her right to the property, and their case was taken all the way to the Oregon Supreme Court.\footnote{Pascoe, “‘A Mistake to Simmer the Question Down to Black and White,’” 34.}

As Peggy Pascoe explains, the Paquet story is indicative of the real purpose and power of laws against interracial marriage, especially in the recently settled areas of the American West. She asserts that “the really crucial power of miscegenation law” was
“the role it played in connecting white supremacy to the transmission of property.”

When the Oregon Supreme Court declared that Ophelia Paquet could not inherit property from a marriage that was deemed illegal due to her race, John Paquet and his siblings were given inheritance of the property solely based on their whiteness. Although Pascoe does not place this history within a settler colonial context, the dispossession of property from an Indian woman through a racialized legal framework demonstrates the intent and effect of the structure. Importantly, Fred Paquet had proven up on a homestead in 1898, meaning that at least some of what Ophelia stood to inherit was based in the land grant system. However, it was never the intent of the federal government that homesteaded land would be owned by Indian women, and the Paquet case demonstrates how the system functioned on a deeply intimate, and effective, level. The story of another woman in the next county over, Olive Bell Baxter, contains considerable similarities to that of Ophelia Paquet, though with a different result that reflects the structural interests of American empire.

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OLIVE BELL: A WIFE WELL-WILLED?

Olive Bell Baxter, who also used the last names of Scovell, Davidson, and Moore in her relatively long life, was born on March 16, 1876. This date is documented on a birth certificate that was not issued until the year of her death, which suggests that documentation of her birth was not necessary until it could be of use in matters of her own estate. In the examination of marriage and homesteading on the North Coast of Oregon, the life of Olive Bell presents a dynamic example of not only frontier partnership, but widowhood, remarriage, and the property exchanges that these life events entail. The reality of her posthumous birth certificate reminds us, however, of the limitations of such government documents in telling the intimate stories of women such as Olive Bell.

Attempting to piece together her narrative based on Census data, marriage certificates, probate case files, and Bureau of Land Management records brings up the

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134 Decree for Registration of Birth for Olive Bell Moore, File no. 31926, State of Oregon Circuit Court (1951).
question of agency. As mentioned earlier, Olive was first wed at fifteen. How willing and able was Olive to “choose” marriage to an older man at this age? Upon her first husband’s death only a couple of years later, was her choice to remarry a neighboring homesteader the action of a savvy eighteen-year-old mother of two, or a product of pressure and desperation? It is impossible to reconstruct Olive Bell’s voice from the available archive and to know her direct experience of the land that passed from husband to husband during her marriages. These limitations notwithstanding, her story faithfully demonstrates how the institution of marriage could, and did, function as a tool of private property acquisition in the process of settling the North Oregon Coast region.

Born and raised on a farm just north of Tillamook, Oregon, Olive Bell Baxter was the youngest of eight female children born to two settlers who had immigrated to the Pacific Northwest from Indiana.\textsuperscript{135} Before acquiring their Tillamook County property through the Homestead Act, Olive’s parents William and Margaret Baxter had been granted multiple land patents in the Beaverton area near Portland under the Oregon Donation Land Claim Act of 1850.\textsuperscript{136} Olive’s mother died two years after her birth, and by the time of the 1880 Census, her eldest sister had already married, and the next eldest, age sixteen at the time, was listed with the occupation “keeping house.”\textsuperscript{137} With the death of the family matriarch, domestic and reproductive labor passed to the daughters, leaving the older sisters a greater responsibility to care for Olive and the others. The family’s history of settling and successfully proving up on multiple land grant claims suggests that

\textsuperscript{135} U.S. Census, Oregon, Tillamook County, 1880.
\textsuperscript{137} U.S. Census, Tillamook County, OR, 1880.
the Baxter women would have been familiar with the challenges of proving up on government property. Their considerable domestic responsibilities while growing up likely increased their capacity to contribute to the maintenance of land within their own marriage partnerships. Olive would have grown up familiar with land management, as well as with the role she was expected to play as a woman in the homesteading context.

At fifteen years old, Olive Bell had her first opportunity to demonstrate these skills in marrying Ezra Grant Scovell, who at that time had just proven up on his first of three major homestead land holdings on the border between Tillamook and Clatsop counties. Olive’s eldest sister, Mary Alice, had married Ezra’s older brother in 1879, and the young, motherless Olive would have likely spent considerable time with the Scovell family while she was growing up. Ezra, twelve years her senior, may have noticed Olive from a young age, or perhaps the idea was suggested by their mutual connections. Whatever prompted the union, Olive relocated to Ezra Grant’s landholdings in Nehalem and became a wife for the first time in 1892.

Olive Bell Scovell gave birth to her first child in 1894, though young Melissa Jane would also lack an official birth certificate until 1945. By the time her second child, Cynthia, was born in 1895, Olive had been made a widow. The death of her husband was apparently unexpected, and Ezra’s lack of a will gave her the opportunity to act as administratrix of his estate. The ensuing period of her life is preserved in a

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139 U.S. census, Oregon, Tillamook County, 1900.
140 Decree for Registration of Birth for Melissa Jane Barber, File no. 11085, State of Oregon Circuit Court (1945).
141 Clatsop County, OR, Probate Case Files, No 196-246, Case No. 11.
probate case file, spanning five years, associated with the administration of Ezra’s estate. Her legal role as an administratrix is the only space in which Olive’s voice comes into the historical record, in this case as a response to a legal challenge from her husband’s family and a local creditor who accused her of mishandling her husband’s debts. It is unclear why it took her so long to sell the portions of the property that would satisfy the debt, but when her role as administratrix was challenged, she responded by writing several letters to the court, in which she explains her attempts to sell the land.\textsuperscript{142} These documents are powerful testaments to the significance of marriage in the system of private land ownership in this community on the edge of the continent. Especially when compared with the story of Ophelia Paquet, Olive Bell’s ability to maintain her rights as administratrix demonstrates the relative power that the legal system provided her as a white, married woman on land grant property.

In the first declaration from the court in October of 1895, Olive had successfully petitioned that “all of the personal property of [the estate] may be set apart for the use of Olive B. Scovell, widow of deceased,” as well as setting aside a monthly allowance for the care of her daughters.\textsuperscript{143} However, early in 1896, outstanding debts came to light in court documents that demanded that some of the land be sold, and Olive was summoned to court for the first time. In 1897, the Clatsop County judge stated that some of the land must be sold in order to satisfy the debts of the estate as well as the accruing administrative fees.\textsuperscript{144} These legal contests continued into late 1899, and make it clear that Olive Bell did not want to rid herself of the land she had shared with her first

\textsuperscript{142} Probate Case Files, No 196-246. 
\textsuperscript{143} Probate Case Files, No 196-246. 
\textsuperscript{144} Probate Case Files, No 196-246.
husband Ezra. When exerting her full legal rights over the estate as a widow did not prove successful, she turned again to the power of marriage.

Olive married August Davidson in 1898, the year before her role as administratrix was formally challenged by her former husband’s family. Davidson was not only a neighboring homesteader but had served as an appraiser of Ezra’s property when his estate was initially valued. Olive’s new union, one that would have been prudent for the care of herself and her two young daughters, likely incited the critical response by the Scovell family and their desire to strip her of her role as administratrix. In a letter the Scovells wrote to the judge challenging Olive’s administration of the estate, they use the word “intermarried” to refer to her new partnership. Despite the fact that August was a white man, the Scovell men demonstrated their acrimony toward her remarriage by calling upon a distinctly negative and racialized term. Mistrust is likewise indicated by the inclusion of a stipulation that new, unbiased parties perform another appraisement.145

When challenged by the court to present her activity in handling the estate, Olive responded in a letter that clearly states how and where she had advertised the property for its sale. She refused to acknowledge any wrongdoing or purposeful delay in selling the property and reasserted her right to remain administratrix despite the familial request that she be removed from the office.146 Olive Bell clearly understood the power inherent in her legal control over the fate of Ezra’s property, and did not acquiesce to those who attempted to take it from her.

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145 Probate Case Files, No 196-246.
146 Probate Case Files, No 196-246.
Interestingly, it appears that the creditor and Ezra’s father Stephen Scovell may have been the mistrustful parties in the account. As they themselves admit, both Stephen and another son Francis also signed to the debt as principals, though they proclaim that, “said note was a note really of Ezra G. Scovell, deceased, and was signed by Francis G. Scovell and Stephen Scovell at his request, as sureties, but, as aforesaid, they all signed as principals.” To posthumously declare Ezra’s intent to take on the debt which was signed equally by his father and brother is, to put it simply, sketchy. It seems that the weight of the debt should not have fallen entirely on Olive, but interested male settlers were able to manipulate the creditor and the court to place the burden of it all on her husband, and therefore, on her. Although they were not able to successfully undermine her role as administratrix, they were able to make sure that this debt was paid out of Ezra’s estate, rather than either of their own pockets. This detail in the story demonstrates the limitations of Olive Bell’s legal resistance, and the power that white men still ultimately held in such legal processes.

The final chapter in the saga of Ezra Scovell’s estate lies in the last letters Olive addressed to the court. In November of 1899, she had sold the first tract of his property to the Astoria Company, which was a local railroad operator at the time. In the letters, she had to describe in full the process by which she put the property on the market and assure the court that the land went to the highest bidder. In the case of her second sale, she writes that she, “offered said property… at public auction to the highest bidder for cash, subject to confirmation by this court,” and that, “at such sale August Davidson became

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147 Probate Case Files, No 196-246.
148 *Astoria & Columbia River Railroad v. United States*, 41 Ct. Cl. 284 (1906)
the purchaser thereof.” Although her second husband certainly paid the appraised sum of six hundred dollars, it seems likely that his intimate and legal companionship to the administratrix of the property in some way eased his access to purchase Ezra Scovell’s second tract of land. This tract he purchased not only housed the homestead on which Olive had lived with Ezra but was also the parcel closest to the neighboring Davidson property. The final sale was not made until June of 1900 and brings up many unanswered questions about Olive’s intentions and the Scovell family’s fears. Regardless, Olive’s intimate unions and legal marital status were critical to the ownership and maintenance of land for a white settler like August Davidson and those who would inherit from their partnership. Although Olive Bell was not so “well-willed” by her first husband in a strictly legal sense, she adeptly used her status as a wife to guarantee access to some of her first husband’s land for herself and her children.

After twelve years of marriage and the birth of two sons who survived into their older years, Olive Bell was widowed again. August Davidson also left no will, and again Olive asserted that she was “in every way competent and qualified to serve as administratrix of said estate.” As a woman of thirty-four who had already served that role, this was entirely true. Unlike her first marriage, in which she was not guaranteed ownership of her deceased husband’s property due to Ezra’s debts and her daughters’

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149 Clatsop County, OR, Probate Case Files, No 196-246, George McLean-Katie Thrall.
151 Probate Case Files, No 907-954, Gor, James Angus and Dorothea L-Christians, Mathias Theodor.
questionable status as heirs, August had no debts and matters were made much simpler by the inheritance rights of her two male children.

Olive remarried again prior to the close of her duties as administratrix, this time to a farmer from Tillamook named James Milton Moore. This did not cause any major hindrance to her ownership and habitation on the Davidson property, however, as the final document in the court records concludes that:

…the real property of said estate, as set forth in the inventory and appraisement, be, and the same is hereby distributed to the heirs at law of said deceased, to-wit: to Carl August Davidson and Raymond Oscar Davidson, subject to the dower of Olive B. Moore, formerly Olive B. Davidson, the widow of said deceased, in the manner provided by law.\textsuperscript{152}

James and Olive Bell Moore’s occupation of the property once belonging to August Davidson is apparent in the 1920 and 1940 Census records, in which both are listed as living in Clatsop County with her male children.\textsuperscript{153} James Moore was the same age as Olive, and they would remain married and living on the property until Olive’s death in 1951, though they would have no surviving children of their own. The property on which they shared the rest of their lives together was not only tied to her second marriage, but included the land of Ezra Scovell, which she had first moved to as a fifteen-year-old wife.

We cannot fully ascertain the level of agency Olive Bell wielded in these exchanges. Even so, her ability to resist the interests of her first husband’s family and facilitate continued control over said land in her second marriage suggests that both the courts and settlers recognized the value of marriage, between a white man and a white woman, to the regime of private property ownership. Her continued maintenance of her

\textsuperscript{152} Probate Case Files, No 907-954.
\textsuperscript{153} U.S. Census, Clatsop County, OR, 1920-1940.
second husband’s property through her dower rights and the inheritance of her sons facilitated her comfort through her third marriage, as well. Over the course of her life, Olive became intimately acquainted with the legal aspects of marriage and inheritance in a way that demonstrates the significance of her institutional role as wife and administratrix. The consolidation and settlement of this land in the Davidson family reverberates through the Nehalem community even now, where the last name still holds considerable local recognition and power.¹⁵⁴ The North Coast of Oregon provides a dynamic example of the way in which the history of early homesteaders continues to justify and reinforce settler colonial occupation of the region today.

CONCLUSION

The undersigned, Administratrix of the Estate of Ezra G. Scovell, Deceased, respectfully makes the following return of her proceeding...That at the time and place mentioned in said notices of sale... she offered said property... at public auction to the highest bidder for cash...That at such sale August Davidson became the purchaser thereof...That said sale was fairly and legally conducted...Wherefore the Administratrix prays for an order of the court confirming said sale and authorizing and directing a conveyance to be executed to said purchaser.¹⁵⁵

The story of Olive Bell Baxter-Scovell-Davidson-Moore is valuable to the study of settler colonialism because it demonstrates how white supremacy acted on a daily, intimate basis through the gendered institution of marriage. While she may have been subject to the whims of the men she married, as well as their families and the courts who

¹⁵⁴ This knowledge has been collected by the author, who has lived as a member of the North Coast community since 2017. In the author’s first class of high school students as a teacher, there was a graduating senior by the name of August Davidson, named for his local homesteading predecessor.
¹⁵⁵ Clatsop County, OR, Probate Case Files, No 196-246, Case No. 11.
presided over their estates, Olive was also given key points of access to power in the form of administrating private property. This was based on her role as a wife, and the legal recognition of that title, as well as her whiteness. The similarities to Ophelia Paquet’s case are stark: both of their husbands died without a will, both of their husbands had incurred some debts which necessitated the legal administration of their estates, and both had their husbands’ families challenge their right to the position of administratrix. Considering the longevity of their relationship and her considerable economic contributions to the marriage, Ophelia Paquet perhaps had even more of a “right” to decide what would happen to her husband’s property. The fact that Ophelia and Fred Paquet’s miscegenation was not legally called into question until she stood to inherit property demonstrates the inextricable relationship between marriage and settler colonial interests. The fact that Olive Bell was able to maintain the title of administratrix and live on a portion of her first husband’s land for the rest of her life was dependent on her being a white woman.

Settler colonialism is particularly insidious for its perceived passivity. There is no evidence in Olive Bell’s story that she or her husbands ever directly repossessed the land of Indigenous people or committed violence against them. By examining the land grant laws and discourse surrounding settlement, however, it is clear that the actions of these individuals served a far greater purpose on behalf of the federal government than they would have been able to see or critique. State-sanctioned marriage, and its legal implications in terms of property ownership and inheritance, are key tools of imperial expansion in the U.S. West. This system depended, and continues to depend, on the lives of white settlers to uphold their entitlement to the land. Olive Bell clearly advocated
strongly for her “right” to the land that she married into and recognized the power it gave her. Complicity in and perpetuation of settler colonialism implicates both white men and white women, and has since the earliest waves of settlement. These individual stories of private property ownership, and the intimate relationships that facilitate their reproduction, are the building blocks of empire in the American West.
CHAPTER 3

“I was not doing a lady’s work anyway”:
Wage Labor and the Discursive Power of the “New Woman”

When I carried the mail, I rode astride on a saddle. I got a lot of criticism, because it was not lady-like. I wore boots and overalls, had a thin skirt to button over the overalls to keep from shocking the neighbors. What was the difference? I was not doing a lady’s work anyway.156

As discussed in the first chapter on domesticity, men’s and women’s labor on farms and homesteads in Oregon was almost entirely delineated by gender, even as women were responsible for an “expanded domesticity” in settlement contexts. However, there were exceptions to this rule—intrepid women who defied gender norms to participate in the local settlement economy in unexpected ways. The stories of these women who engaged in wage-earning work outside of the home are dynamic in their apparent rejection of gendered expectations and are therefore often celebrated in local and national history.157 Popular histories such as Winifred Gallagher’s recent publication, New Women in the Old West demonstrate how the common trope of the West as a region where (white) women were more liberated and participatory in public society continues to be perpetuated in the broader U.S. historical narrative. Gallagher and others who highlight this idea point to the states that extended suffrage to women long before the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified in 1920 and the varied forms of labor that women practiced outside of the domestic context.158 This narrative plays two roles: first, it casts

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156 Mary Gerritse and Eleanor Irons, “The Journal of Mary Gerritse,” (Manuscript, Courtesy of the Nehalem Valley Historical Society) 27.
157 Just one example of this is an exhibit in the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum entitled, “Not Just a Housewife: The Changing Roles of Women in the West.” Article available online: https://nationalcowboymuseum.org/explore/just-housewife-changing-roles-women-west/.
Western expansion in a positive, progressive light by equating it with the expansion of white women’s rights; second, it distorts the fact that these opportunities were only extended where they served the larger structure of settler colonialism. Using the story of Mary Gerritse as a case study, I argue that white women’s wage labor was societally sanctioned in settlement contexts when it bolstered the interests of U.S. empire in the West.

Much has been written about white women’s reform movements in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and how these movements allowed for a limited group of middle-class women to involve themselves in the public sphere under the guise of national “social housekeepers.” In some ways, Western women’s advocacy mirrored the political goals of Eastern reformers at the time, notably the issues of women’s suffrage and temperance. The Western context, however, changed both the form and function of these debates. Eastern social reformers relied on already existing communities and networks to connect with one another and grow their agendas—this was rarely the experience of first-generation settlers and homesteaders such as those who occupied the Oregon Coast during the late nineteenth century. On the Oregon Coast, the efforts of “social housekeeping” happened largely through women’s work in religious groups and the church. Jennie Reeher took pride in her contributions to her religious community in Tillamook, explaining that on her arrival, “People told me I was the only church member in town, but I found others.” Eventually, she gathered this group to form “a Sunday school, and a big meeting was held in the schoolhouse one Sunday morning.”

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insisted that “I presided because they forced me to.” Although this example can be seen as an expansion of women’s roles into the public sphere, their ideological contributions remain reflective of the moral role of nineteenth century “republican motherhood.” While white women’s reform and other community work certainly played a distinct role in building and bolstering the settler colonial state, this chapter adds to the historiography by exploring how white, middle class women’s introduction into wage labor contributed to settlement.

The prevalence of white women working for wages was changing across the U.S. around the turn of the twentieth century, a reality that was often noted with concern. The rate of women who worked outside the home went from 15% in 1870 to 24% in 1920, with the greatest increase seen among white, middle-class populations. Women of color and those in poverty had long been working, so it was not until the increase among “respectable” women that these numbers became significant to Americans. Most of the historiography of women workers during this time focuses on the role of industrialization and urbanization and is therefore not necessarily reflective of similar patterns in rural areas. In rural areas of the West, the subject of women’s paid labor is often limited to prostitution. This chapter will not address sex work, though it is a critical topic in understanding the labor undertaken by women that both settled and unsettled the American West during the period of expansion. The white homesteading women whose stories dominate this narrative aspired to middle-class values and never mention

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prostitution. They also do not mention how Native women would have been able to access the labor market. Clara Pearson, for example, is never listed as having an “occupation” according to the Census, though she does apparently house a boarder (almost assuredly to make money) in 1920.\footnote{US Census, 1880-1930.} Classed, racialized, and gendered expectations would continue to rule access to—and interest in—labor for women settling the North Coast well into the twentieth century.

In late-nineteenth century Oregon, this process through which women entered the workforce was a slow one. As the 1880 census noted, only 4% of women had “occupations” outside the home.\footnote{Cynthia Culver Prescott, \textit{Gender and Generation on the Far Western Frontier} (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2007) 73.} Even the paid work taken by women continued to follow the lines of “expanded domesticity,” their job titles listed as weaver, seamstress, laundress, and shoemaker.\footnote{Tom Fuller and Art Ayre, \textit{Oregon At Work: 1859-2009} (Portland: Ooligan Press 2009) 39.} Lower-class women were employed as domestic servants, and middle-class, educated women were increasingly filling the role of teacher.\footnote{Prescott, \textit{Gender and Generation}, 73.} In contrast, some labor which had been mostly performed by women in the first generation of settlement, such as dairying, became subsumed by men as soon as it could be monetized, demonstrating the limitations of women’s expanded opportunities to earn wages in their own right. The tension between women’s increased opportunities and the continued pressures of middle-class gender norms at the turn of the century is captured by Cynthia Prescott:

\begin{quote}
At the close of the frontier era, young women living in the Willamette Valley’s rapidly developing communities had unique opportunities to…move into a more public role than women could in the past. Yet, at the same time, greater economic
\end{quote}
security encouraged them to withdraw further into the private realm of the home.\textsuperscript{166}

Prescott establishes that even among second- and third-generation settler women, the labor economy of settlement communities remained ultimately determined by gender. The debate about whether movement West was truly liberatory for women who aspired to the middle-class is further complicated by the story of Mary Gerritse. Her insistence that she was “not doing a lady’s work anyway,” reflects both the maintained prevalence of gendered labor as well as the opportunities, if limited, that existed to transgress this expectation.\textsuperscript{167} The definition of “lady’s work” was transitioning, as occupations such as teaching became feminized and opened the possibility of earning wages to women who may not have been able to do so a generation before. The example of teaching offers a valuable window into how this expansion of “lady’s work” occurred alongside, and in support of, settler colonialism in the West.

**WOMEN TEACHERS ON THE FRONTIER**

_The children, when we moved onto our homestead, grew into tall boys and problems of schooling began to appear. We had teachers who gave some of them first year [high school] work, gave them a start in music, and a love for good reading. I am grateful to the many wonderful women who taught in our secluded glen in the mountains._\textsuperscript{168}

Jennie Reeher reflected fondly, and often, on the women who served as teachers in their remote corner of the Coast Range mountains in Tillamook County, Oregon. Some were young, but others she describes as “elderly,” and as can be supposed through the lack of racial signifier, almost certainly white. From the varying stories she told, it is

\textsuperscript{166} Prescott, *Gender and Generation*, 89.
\textsuperscript{167} Gerritse, “Journal of Mary Gerritse,” 27.
\textsuperscript{168} Reeher, “Memories,” 34.
clear that there were many who rotated through with varying degrees of success living on
the frontier.169 As Jennie notes, “Sometimes we had a school teacher almost too dainty
for our mountains,” and regales her reader with the story of a young woman who tried to
catch a fish with her bare hands in the nearby Wilson River.170 Despite the sometimes
inconsistent nature of her children’s education, Reeher’s gratitude for their teachers’
intellectual contributions to her family demonstrate the value that these women’s work
held for homesteading families on the frontier. One of the reasons that the Reeher family
eventually left their homestead was the fact that their local school closed in June of
1916.171 Teaching, as a form of wage labor that became increasingly feminized during the
period of settlement, was critical to attract and keep family units on land grant
property. Additionally, public education served a critical role in bringing settlers from
disparate backgrounds into the fold of the nation.

Some of the earliest middle-class women settlers in Oregon were teachers from
the East, as Polly Welts Kaufman records in her 1984 publication, *Women Teachers on
the Frontier*. She notes that although the demographic impact of these women who
travelled West to teach during the early-mid nineteenth century was ultimately quite
small, the figure of the “schoolmarm” has nonetheless been preserved in frontier
literature. As she writes of this almost mythical figure, “Her genteel poverty, unbending
morality, education, and independent ways make her character a useful foil for the two
other female stock characters in Western literature: the prostitute with the heart of gold

170  Reeher, “Memories,” 27.
171  Reeher, “Memories,” 38.
and the long-suffering farmer’s wife.” She notes, however, that most women in her study avoided going as far as Oregon, as it was seen as too distant and strange a destination. The five Oregon-bound women Kaufman does feature, who took a boat from the East Coast, through the Panama Canal, and finally up the West Coast to Astoria, all eventually married and settled in the state. They arrived in 1851, eight years before Oregon statehood, and as Kaufman writes, the experience “turned women who were pioneer teachers into pioneer settlers on the Oregon frontier.” This example draws an explicit link between women’s teaching and settlement, as they would not only instruct but also reproduce white children whose values reflected “American” norms.

These early examples of women teachers in Oregon were still relative outliers, but the trend of women as teachers would increase steadily throughout the nineteenth century. The feminization of teaching was not limited to the West and was a growing reality of the labor market nationwide at the time. In fact, the dominance of women teachers in the labor market was widespread in urban communities before it became commonly accepted in more rural regions. In their study of the feminization of teaching, Joel Perlmann and Robert Margo determine that:

The prevalence of women among teachers in the western states typically began at lower levels than in many other places, reflecting in all likelihood the prevalence of frontier conditions, including unequal sex ratios. However, virtually every western state rapidly reached high levels of feminization in teaching: four states reached the level of 15 percent women teachers by 1890, one more state in 1895, and three more states in 1905.

175 Perlmann and Margo, Women’s Work? 91.
By the time that the Reehers, the Gerritses, and the Scovells were settling these last frontier locations in the 1890s, this shift was well underway. As Jennie Reeher’s recollections suggest, many of the teachers in their remote region of the North Oregon Coast were women and were recognized and appreciated for playing a critical communal role for settling families.

Despite the narrative that teaching “was considered a natural concomitant of women’s domestic duties because of the inherent qualities that women supposedly possessed in the areas of child care and nurturing,” it remains that teaching was wage labor, and necessitated a woman to be educated, and in most cases, single.176 Closely related to the concept of “social housekeeping,” such changing moral justifications for women to enter the workforce in this role suggest the necessity of their labor as the American population grew alongside conceptions of public education. It is likely that the transition to female teaching was due to the growth of other critical, nominally masculine wage labor positions in agriculture, logging, fishing, and administration, making the transition of women to teaching the only possible solution to a growing labor demand in settler communities.

Teaching gave women opportunities to live on their own, and likely served as a attractive role for women who had lost their husbands on the frontier. Jennie Reeher recalls that, “Our first school teacher was a wonderful woman, a young widow, with pink cheeks and bright eyes and an understanding way with children.”177 Though we know nothing else of this particular teacher, perhaps her youth signals an unexpected

176 Riley, *The Female Frontier*, 103.
widowhood which made teaching the only respectable livelihood that she could take on to support herself. Perhaps, similarly to the women in Kaufman’s work, teaching gave a young widow the opportunity to find new communities, and new marriage partners.

Other women saw teaching as an opportunity to travel and see different communities before marrying. By traveling to rural communities, these more “urban” women brought their values and middle-class national ideals to the far corners of U.S. empire. Grace Brandt Martin was one such young teacher who worked in multiple rural schools across the state of Oregon in the 1920s, just a few years after the Reehers left their homestead behind. Martin’s experience is preserved in a two-part book series based on her recollections and extensive diary entries. She was nineteen when she took her first teaching job and “was anticipating the months ahead with a sense of adventure.” Grace writes candidly that she was “secretly hoping that [she] might meet a good-looking cowboy.”¹⁷⁸ Her second of five teaching destinations was a logging settlement in the Coast Range, further north along the Columbia River basin.¹⁷⁹ Midland, the logging community, was reflective of a rapidly growing logging industry in the forests of the Coast Range, which brought an increased number of working-class workers and families to the remote, coastal regions of Oregon.

Grace’s time at Midland represents perhaps the most important role that teachers played in a settler colonial context: ushering European immigrant communities into the realm of American whiteness. As she describes, most of the students she worked with were Finnish, and ranged in skill from speaking with a “strong accent, putting the

¹⁷⁹ Martin, *An Oregon School Ma’am*, 89.
emphasis on the wrong part of the word,” to having “not yet completely mastered spoken English.”\textsuperscript{180} By teaching working-class immigrant communities “proper” American English, teachers like Grace Martin functionally increased the number of white settlers who could be seen as fully integrated members of the U.S. settler empire.

The role of teaching in creating a white national body is not limited to the grasp of the English language, either. Teachers in one-room schoolhouses were expected to teach a broad array of subjects, including the burgeoning field of “social studies.” This discipline, which was a creation of the nineteenth century, “emerged as an attempt to use education as a vehicle to promote social welfare,” and consisted of “history, geography, and civics,” all with a distinctly moralistic and patriotic bent.\textsuperscript{181} Grace Martin, and countless teachers like her, were a critical part of instilling a common American nationalism to the most far-reaching segments of the Western empire. In this way, women who worked as teachers contributed greatly to the strengthening of national identity and belonging among settlers of European descent who may have felt only marginally a part of the U.S. polity.

Teachers, who were increasingly women, played a critical role in Western settlement. Mary Gerritse’s narrative also demonstrates her appreciation for teaching, and how schools could determine whether families remained in more remote homesteading settings. In 1902 she moved her family back to the Willamette Valley from the coast, noting that, “One reason we had decided to go to Scholls Ferry was that I thought the

\textsuperscript{180} Martin, \textit{An Oregon School Ma’am}, 93.
children would have a better chance for schooling.”¹⁸² In the effort to create long-term “settlement” in frontier regions such as the turn of the century Oregon Coast, the labor of women teachers enabled families to stay on their homesteads without sacrificing their children’s access to an education. The woman who conducted the oral history of Mary Gerritse between 1909 and 1910, which is the main primary source base of this chapter, was herself a schoolteacher in Seaside named Eleanor Irons.¹⁸³ The feminization of teaching, even in rural areas where other gender roles were maintained more strictly, was necessary to educate those who constituted the settler colonial state and capture their stories. Feminized teaching also acted as a means through which white women were brought to the furthest reaches of empire, to settle and reproduce on the land. Although not a teacher, Mary Gerritse’s story has much to contribute to the study of labor that transgresses gendered expectations, and how the understanding of such labor can be enriched and strengthened when analyzed through a lens of empire.

MARY GERRITSE - LIBERATION THROUGH LABOR?

A thin, wet fog drifted in from the sea, over the huge sand hill that rolls along one end of the beach and over the little cottage and flower garden of Mr. and Mrs. John Gerritse, early residents of Cannon beach. Inside the cottage tales were being spun about the days long past when this couple had carried mail through territory unmarked by automobile roads and haunted by Indians.¹⁸⁴

Mary Edwards Gerritse was born in Fort Jackson, New York in 1872 and lived there until she was 8 or 9 years old.¹⁸⁵ Although she found out later in life that she had been adopted by the Edwards family, she describes that she “could not have loved them

¹⁸⁴ The Oregonian, June 12 1927, 2.
¹⁸⁵ US Census, 1880, population schedule, St. Lawrence, New York.
more if they were her real parents.”186 William, Amanda, and their daughter Mary followed a similar path of many who ended up in Oregon, making their trek west in gradual stages that included several years in Minnesota before finally settling on a rented farm in the Willamette Valley when she was about eleven.187 In the oral account taken of her recollections later in life, she says very little about their journey west, other than the fact that it interrupted her schooling. Finally, after two years in Oregon, the Edwards family traveled to the coast and took up their homestead in what is now the coastal town of Manzanita in the mid 1880s.188 Mary would live on the coast for most of the remainder of her life, and even became a local legend for her gender-defying wage work as a mail carrier. Her “journal,” gathered through a series of oral histories taken in between 1906 and 1910, reflects not only the details of what she experienced as a homesteader, but also the apparent value she had for her skilled work delivering the mail on the edge of the frontier.

Like many homesteaders, the Edwards family relied on work outside of their own plot of land to make ends meet. She describes how they got a permit to leave their homestead and moved to a dairy farm which they ran “on shares” in exchange for their labor. This could be seen as Mary’s first foray into work which challenged gender norms:

My father and I milked [seventeen] cows and made butter, while Mother kept house. We packed the butter in [fifty-pound] kegs, and sold it at [eleven] cents a pound. At haying time I loaded hay and trod it down and I drove the team too.

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187 The gradual nature of settlement west is explained in Women in the American West: “The settler families who moved east to west in the most glorified of American migrations often did so in stages,” 126. Laura E. Woodworth-Ney, Women in the American West, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2008).
When I rode my pony to round up the cows, I would take our old dog Shep. However he did not know much about driving cows. He would take the first cow he saw and go home, so I quit taking him.\textsuperscript{189}

Using Prescott’s work as a reference point, driving cattle was certainly outside of the realm of wives or daughters at the time. The confidence with which Mary drove the cattle for her family set a precedent for her work outside of her traditional gender role. This account is also the first of several times in which Mary places herself in contrast to other women and their experiences, in this case her mother who “kept house.” Mary’s performance of this labor likely stemmed from the fact that she was her adoptive parents’ only child, making her work outside the home critical to the family’s success in making the money necessary to last on the frontier until they could prove up on their homestead. Yet she does not comment on why she worked these jobs in her youth. In this case, her transgressive labor was seemingly born of necessity rather than an active rejection of gender roles or a particular freedom earned from living in the West.

The marriage of Mary Edwards to John Gerritse, as mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, is an example of how intimate institutions can serve to create national belonging within the settler colonial state, provided the union did not challenge white supremacy. John had a remarkable story of his own: he was born a Dutchman from Holland and ran away to sea at fifteen. He deserted his ship in Astoria, Oregon, and learned English while working as a farmer in Clatsop Plains.\textsuperscript{190} His work as a mail carrier and quartermaster eventually brought him further south, which is how he ended up in the Nehalem region. The two married in November of 1888, when John was twenty-four and

\textsuperscript{189} Gerritse, “The Journal of Mary Gerritse,” 5.
\textsuperscript{190} Gerritse, “The Journal of Mary Gerritse,” 10.
Mary was only sixteen. As a nod to the perceived role of women in moralizing the West, there was no alcohol served at the Gerritse wedding. In Mary’s words, “The boys knew the girls would ostracize them if they drank liquor,” and her mother had prevented any post-wedding party on Saturday as it would have most certainly kept going into Sunday.\textsuperscript{191} Mary would be more than just a moral influence in her marriage, however. She was an invaluable economic partner to John, as she consistently proved willing and able to contribute to the many labors of settling land, as well as working outside of the home.

The Gerritses’ first plot of land was a “pre-emption claim” that John had taken out prior to their marriage. They lived in a cabin on a neighboring homestead “while the owners were away,” reflecting the relatively fluid nature of homesteading and the realities of how and where settlers lived, despite the attempted strictness of homestead law. She describes the work they did on their land in inclusive terms:

\begin{quote}
We started clearing a place to build, cutting and burning the logs. When the logs were too big to saw with our crosscut saw, we burned them by taking a 2-inch auger and boring one hole in the side about to the middle and then boring another straight down from the tip to act as a chimney.\textsuperscript{192}
\end{quote}

In this account, there is no gender-based delineation of labor between her and John. Her relationship to such work is likely tied to how accustomed she was to work with her father in the years preceding her marriage. No doubt, these efforts (particularly use of a crosscut saw, which necessitates two people) could not have been done by John alone, and her account underscores the importance of wives who were able to perform a variety of tasks outside of traditional gender roles. Mary’s labor, both in her childhood and the

\textsuperscript{191} Gerritse, “The Journal of Mary Gerritse,” 10.

\textsuperscript{192} Gerritse, “The Journal of Mary Gerritse,” 12.
early years of her marriage, moves beyond the concept of “expanded domesticity” that emerged across homesteading contexts and may have prepared her for the world of wage labor later on.

Within a year after their marriage, Mary had the first of her three children, a daughter named Mary Belle. She describes the help of a neighbor woman as there was “no hospital, no doctor” to aid in a safe birth. This was a common practice for women on the frontier, and, as Mary explains, “I have tried to return the favor to someone else who needed help. In those days everyone did for the others whatever they were capable of.” Help during childbirth was perceived as appropriate work for women and was absolutely crucial to the perpetuation of settler families in communities like the North Oregon Coast. Only a month after giving birth, the Gerritse family moved into the cabin on their homestead and John picked up the mail route again, leaving the young mother and her baby alone, with two dogs as protection. Mary remembers the fear she felt in those first days living alone in the woods, “afraid of the dark, the big trees, storms, wild cats, bears.” In a rare mention of the Indigenous people who were still living in the area, she adds that “I was never afraid of Indians as they were all harmless if you left them alone.” Later in her account, she describes this time as critical in her development, and how when she was older she “did not know how to be afraid” of the dangers of the mail route because she “had lost it all in the woods long before.” Mary would, therefore, connect the hardiness with which she labored outside of the home with the unique challenges of settling their own property.

Similarly to Jennie Reeher, the fact that Mary’s husband worked away from the homestead for long stretches of time meant that the work of “settling” came down to her, while also taking care of the baby. Contrary to the common narrative of domesticity, however, Mary explains: “There was not much housekeeping to do. The floor was so rough I could not scrub it decently.” The only time she mentions her role as cook for the family was when she told the story of encountering a wildcat while she was going to the creek for water and ran scared back to the house. She describes how “John’s dinner was not ready when he came home and I told him if I was to live in the wilderness with wild animals he would have to get me a gun and teach me to shoot. He did.” As in other examples of women’s writing, Mary’s domestic labor is largely hidden, though it is apparent that she performed it. Unlike many other women’s homesteading accounts, however, Mary is unabashed about her introduction to non-feminine activities such as shooting, and even seems to give more emphasis to examples in which her actions defied gender roles. That she highlights these nontraditional activities so enthusiastically in her oral history suggests the discursive power that the “daring pioneer woman” trope had already garnered in the national narrative.

The Gerritse also provide a great example of how individuals and families could acquire multiple properties under the land grant system. The couple was not satisfied with their single homestead, and upon proving up, tried to get more land from the government by settling land that had not been surveyed, attempting to gain a squatters’ claim. They also spent considerable time living on another abandoned homestead, and there are times

in the narrative when it is unclear on which of the properties they were located as they were seemingly very mobile.\(^{199}\) Throughout her accounts, Mary shows a thorough understanding of homesteading and pre-emption claim law, which suggests the active interest they, as a family, had in property ownership. The Gerritises were likely not the only people who engaged in such practices, but Mary’s apparent flexibility with picking up and starting over every few months certainly differs from the homesteading experiences of Jennie Reeher and Olive Bell Moore, both of whom seemingly tried to create relative stability in their domestic lives. For example, the Gerritises once left their one-year-old baby with Mary’s mother to work on clearing the mail trail for a few months. Mary did the food preparation for the men, which included fishing, berry-picking, and cooking over an open fire. It was within this context of moving, working, and settling new spaces that their second and third children, both boys, were born.\(^{200}\) The Gerritises’ particular ability to acquire more land, rather than focusing exclusively on proving up their first homestead, was critically augmented by the paid labor that both husband and wife performed. Mary’s devotion to land acquisition even overshadows domestic or familial interests in her oral history.

The most notable work the Gerritises performed outside the home, at least for Mary, was the mail route. This is also the aspect of Mary’s life given the greatest importance by local historians and all those who are familiar with her story. An article on the Gerritises, published in *The Oregonian* in 1927, lauds how “In 1898 Mrs. Gerritse

began working for the government as the first woman to carry mail in this territory.”

In her narrative, she describes how she came to pick up the job:

It was about the end of 1897 that I started carrying the mail. John had a bid on the carrying contract, but had to keep up his work on the farm...John tried to get a man to take the mail trip when he had to work on the farm, but it was hard to find a satisfactory man. John was very particular about how his horses were handled so I begged him to let me try it. It would save the man’s wages, I was lighter than a man and I knew how to take care of the horses’ back and saddles.

It is important to note that Mary was not the original recipient of the mail carrying contract—her access to this labor came only through her economic and intimate partnership with John. It seems unlikely that if she had asked after for the contract herself, she would have been given it. Only in retrospect can her story be used to demonstrate the gender inclusivity, at least superficially, of the workforce in the West.

Mary’s case remains exceptional, however, as she was familiar with the work through John and knew she was capable and qualified due to her ability with horses. She shows eagerness for the work, and her love of this job is apparent in the sheer proportion of her account she spends recounting the five years she worked the trail.

There is no evidence in Mary’s account that this kind of work was as accessible to other women in the North Coast as it was to her. In fact, she seems to set herself distinctly apart from other women through her labor. Mary expended considerable effort on the trail accurately timing her passage with the tides, and she writes that, “It was quite a task to take women and children over the trail. I couldn’t travel fast enough to make the

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time I should to make the tides right.”204 This is one of several examples in which Mary separates herself from other women, even as she acknowledges the expectation of women’s apparent physical limitations. Her exceptional qualities are also highlighted in The Oregonian article while remaining firmly grounded within the context of her womanhood: “Mrs. Gerritse, who is a grandmother today, retains all the zest and energy which made her capable of battling the elements of older days, and prefers horseback riding to any other sport.”205 In Mary’s account, she only mentions her grandson once, and even her children take an apparent background role to her daring adventures on the mail route. It is impossible to know whether this narrative choice was to further distinguish her from other women and domestic duties, or perhaps was her way to avoid recounting the deaths of two of her children during her lifetime. In either case, Mary crafted a legacy highlighting her wage labor over the domestic.

The significance of the mail route to settlement on the North Coast creates a clear link between Mary Gerritse’s wage labor and U.S. imperial expansion in the west. Cameron Blevins explains that the “spread of the nation’s postal system during the second half of the nineteenth century shaped the history of the region, knitting the American West into a national system of communications.” He ultimately argues that “The US Post was the underlying spatial circuitry of western expansion.”206 Blevins explains that the system functioned under an “agency model” in its early years, particularly in rural frontier contexts. This meant that mail was delivered to its final

205 The Oregonian, 2.
destination by a broad web of independent contractors who did not formally work for the federal government but constituted a “gossamer network” that allowed mail to disseminate at a more efficient, if unstable, pace across even the most newly settled regions. The Gerritses were two of many such “agents” who picked up contracts to deliver mail in their remote corner of Oregon, thus connecting the North Coast to the broader “circuitry of western expansion” through their labor. Mary’s skill on horseback, her connection to John, and her adventurous attitude made her a perfect worker for the settler colonial state. In return, the decentralized nature of U.S. expansion gave her the opportunity as a woman to expand her own realm of life and labor.

In the end, Mary received the mail delivery job much for the same reason that women gained access to teaching: the labor of men was needed elsewhere. Women like Mary performed critical labor to the success of settlers, and the postal service was extremely valuable for individuals and families alike who lived on the furthest fringes of the West. Although her story is a dynamic and impressive one, it does not present a real challenge to gender normative labor overall. What her story does suggest, however, is that women’s work could contribute in critical ways to U.S. empire beyond the domestic realm. The recognition that she received in *The Oregonian* and the later publication of her oral histories in the local historical journal *Cumtux* suggests that her story of working beyond the confines of gender norms cast North Coast settlement history in a positive, progressive light.

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CONCLUSION

I have often wondered why people wanted to take up homesteads in the country where there was scarcely any farmland and apparently no way to get a living except fishing. I suppose it was my father’s desire to own land, his own that he could not be put off of. He had to leave home for months at a time to earn money.208

Mary’s quote above is an ironic one considering the efforts she and her husband made to acquire more property and her willingness to leave home herself to earn the money needed to fund these endeavors. Nonetheless, the value for amassing private property was clearly shared by Mr. Edwards’ daughter and son-in-law. Perhaps the fact that homesteading was so difficult, yet still so desirable, for women and men alike best demonstrates the power of settler colonialism in the American psyche. Although most of the labor associated with settlement was delineated by gender, exceptions to this rule such as Mary Gerritse still do not challenge the fundamental interests of the U.S. empire. As Blevins’ work on the U.S. Post demonstrates, Mary’s labor directly contributed to the consolidation of federal control in the West.

Additionally, the pervasive idea in both history and popular culture that the West was a liberating and empowering space for women further obscures the imperial nature of settlement. In the publication of the first part of Mary’s journal, the editors insist that “Mary Gerritse in our opinions, ranks with the list of Great American pioneer women. She stands beside Narcissa Whitman, Eliza Spalding, and Clatsop County’s own Dr. Owens-Adair.”209 This calls to mind the way that Patricia Nelson Limerick speaks of Narcissa Whitman in Legacy of Conquest, in which she asserts that telling the histories of such women necessitates a complex treatment that both recognizes the ways they defied

gender roles of their time as well as how they reinforced, and in fact made possible, the process of “conquest.” The settler colonial implications of women’s labor outside the home are obscured by celebratory second-wave feminist historical analyses that lift up white women’s “liberation” while the overarching structure remains the same. These women who defied the norms of “women’s work” were not benefiting from the benevolent liberation of the American West, but rather gained access to new work opportunities because their labor was necessary to the long-term success of U.S. imperialism.

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CONCLUSION

Among the few Tillamook survivors who in 1934 spoke the language, Mrs. Pearson, then in the early sixties, was conceded by other natives to be the only person who would be likely to know any substantial portion of the Tillamook literature and cultural heritage. Her surprising performance in 1933 in providing ethnographic data about the long-dissolved culture also revealed that she had an excellent repertoire of tales.\textsuperscript{211}

The above is the only background information on Clara Pearson that Elizabeth Jacobs includes in her Preface to the Nehalem Tillamook Tales collection. Clara’s spotty appearance in the historical record, despite her having been the singular ethnographical source for the researchers of the Nehalem-Tillamook peoples, reflects the power dynamics at play in the state-sponsored settlement of the North Coast of Oregon. The publication in her name tells little about the daily life of Clara, and government documents prove similarly fruitless in reconstructing her story. The challenges presented by trying to find Clara in state archives are a striking example of how colonial erasures can occur on the most fundamental, and intimate, levels.

One perplexing incongruence in the archive is her racial classification across government documents. She first appears in the state record as Clara Eskulwash in the 1880 Census. At the approximate age of ten, she was listed as the “Indian” daughter of her “Indian” father Philip and “Indian” mother, Ellen.\textsuperscript{212} This corroborates Jacobs’ insistence that Pearson was a “full-blooded speaker of Nehalem” in her preface to the collection.\textsuperscript{213} Clara’s next appearance, in the 1900 Census, lists her as having married Francis (listed elsewhere as Frank) Pearson, a white man, that same year. This is the first time in which her race “changes” in the eye of the state. Clara was listed as “white,” a

\textsuperscript{211} Pearson and Jacobs, Nehalem Tillamook Tales, vii.

\textsuperscript{212} US Census, 1880.

\textsuperscript{213} Pearson and Jacobs, Nehalem Tillamook Tales, vii.
classification that was either assumed by the Census taker, or perhaps self-reported so that their marriage would not be legally challenged as miscegenation. In 1910, however, while still listed as “Married,” Clara was no longer living with Frank, and is again listed as “Indian.” By 1920, she is listed as divorced, and retains her racial identity as a Native woman through the 1940 Census. In 1948, Clara Pearson died while living with one of her daughters in the Portland area where she had lived for the last six years of her life after leaving Garibaldi (these were apparently the only years of her life in which she lived more than 20 miles from her birthplace in Nehalem). On her death certificate, verified by her birthplace and the name of her husband Frank, Clara is posthumously categorized as “White.”

Perhaps even more mysterious is the inconsistent accounting of Clara’s children. According to the 1900 Census, in which Clara was marked as married and white, Clara is listed as having no children. In 1910, however, she was listed as having five living children, though only her mother, Ellen, was living with her at the time. The census stops listing the number of children at this point and there is no evidence of a birth certificate with Clara Pearson listed as the mother, nor would any be issued later in life as in the case of Olive Bell and her daughter Melissa. The existence of children is only found on Clara’s death certificate, which was signed by a “Daisy Schlappie,” who lived in Portland and was registered has “half” Indian on the 1937 Indian Census. On Daisy’s own death certificate, issued ten years later, her mother was listed as having been “Clara Skullwah,” a misspelling of Clara’s maiden name which was listed as both “Eskulwash” and

215 U.S. Indian Census Rolls, 1885-1940.
“Skulwash” in preceding government documents. Finding the stories of Clara’s other potential children, and why they were never listed as living with her despite Daisy being born in 1892 (before she married Frank Pearson), remains elusive. Yet these intimate, familial details were certainly of the utmost importance to Clara in her lifetime.

Clara Pearson’s misclassified racial identity on her death certificate and the difficulty of tracing the lives and lineage of her children demonstrate the institutional ways in which Native Oregonians have been wiped from the record. Living as she did—divorced, without access to (or perhaps interest in) a formal education, and on the margins of the coastal community in a nonreservation Indian settlement—served to separate her from white women in the region such as Jennie Reeher, Olive Bell Scovel, and Mary Gerritse. In stark comparison, both Jennie and Mary remain not only quite accessible in government documents but recorded their own narratives memorializing and celebrating their domestic and labor contributions to Oregon’s settlement history. While Olive Bell never left behind a manuscript of her perspective, she survives in the legal archive as a shrewd administratrix who facilitated access to land for herself and her descendants. A distinctly colonial irony of Nehalem Tillamook Tales is that while Clara animatedly told stories of her people, “her people” had already been declared dead. Jacobs’ insistence that Pearson’s stories described a “long-dissolved culture” reflects how “settler attachment to (and cooptation of) Indigenous…cultures simultaneously froze Indian cultures in a seemingly authentic past and erased contemporary Native

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peoples.” This bias in the historical memory is further illuminated by the fact that Pearson outlived Jennie Reeher and died within ten years of both Olive Bell Scovel and Mary Gerritse.

The lives of those who feature in this study demonstrate that the links between U.S. settler colonialism and gender are both ideological and material. Scholars have explored the ways that gendered language was used to justify the reinforcement of colonial violence against Indigenous communities and bolstered the legitimacy of white settlers who sought to expand their control over land and culture in the American West. This thesis seeks to further integrate gender into the analytical framework of settler colonialism by highlighting women’s contributions to U.S. imperial expansion and by investigating the gendered and colonial nature of state-based institutions such as marriage and land grant legislation. It seeks to do so through a microhistorical lens, focusing on the narratives of a few women in a small corner of Oregon whose lives reflect themes that can be projected on U.S. empire in a broader context. There is ample opportunity for future study in a variety of directions, all of which can contribute to Scott Lauria Morgensen’s potent claim that, “gendered and sexual power… generate the power relations we call ‘settler colonialism.’”

A more explicitly comparative colonial study, one that contextualizes this hyperlocal approach within world history and the larger historiography of “intimate

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empires,” would be a welcome addition to this canon. Margaret Jacobs’ work, in which she compares Indigenous child removal in both the U.S. and Australia offers a dynamic example of the scholarship that is possible in this realm.221 These comparisons can be made both between settler colonial states, such as those explored by Jacobs, but as Morgensen notes, “a methodological attention to specificity in the literature on ‘intimacies of empire’ may assist us in clarifying how franchise and settler colonialism are both distinct and relational.”222 This could be particularly fruitful when looking at the functional and experiential role of gendered institutions like marriage in such potentially different contexts and colonial structures.

Finally, what remains largely unexplored in this thesis is what “decolonization” might look like in the U.S. settler colonial context, and particularly how white women’s recognition of our role in the process might allow us to follow the lead of Indigenous activists and nations. In March of 2020, the North Coast Land Conservancy returned 18 acres of land in the Neawanna Point Habitat Reserve back to the Clatsop-Nehalem Confederated Tribes. According to a local newspaper, this action marked “the first property the tribes have owned since they began to be displaced 200 years ago.” Anthropologist Doug Deur explains the significance of this moment, considering that “people growing up in northwest Oregon 30 or 40 years ago would have been told the Clatsop people were extinct and any connection they had to the land was in the past.”223 The understanding that Indigenous people and cultures are far from “long-dissolved,” as

221 Margaret Jacobs, White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).
222 Morgensen, “Theorising Gender and Settler Colonialism,” 8.
Jacobs suggests, is an important step in inspiring more land transfers like this one. Equally important is a history that frames the often-remarkable lives of women who settled homesteads as colonizers in U.S. imperial expansion.
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