Lettie Conrad and Victorian ideals in the American West

Jennifer Delaney Rose

The University of Montana

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LETTIE CONRAD AND VICTORIAN IDEALS IN THE AMERICAN WEST

By

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American society during the nineteenth century demonstrated social and economic changes that occurred due to massive industrialization. People structured their lives to stabilize or ease the effect of these changes. A new influential middle-class of men and women created strict attitudes and standards of class and gender. This philosophy became known as Victorian ideals. As men further participated in business and politics in the public world, women gained power and influence from within the home. These “separate spheres” of gender structured the entirety of a man’s or woman’s life. Women’s separate sphere centered on their roles as wives and mothers. Women were considered more pious and nurturing than men, therefore better candidates for caring for the physical and moral welfare of the family. As the nation physically expanded, so did Victorian ideology. Men and women who relocated to the American West carried with them, not just material items for survival, but attitudes and behaviors that reflected Victorian ideals of morality and gender.

Though the field of American family history has expanded over the past decade, there are still many individual families to be discovered and analyzed. The Conrad family from Kalispell, Montana is just one such family. Married in 1881, Alicia Stanford, nicknamed “Lettie,” and Charlie E. Conrad, known as “Charlie” dedicated their lives to adherence to Victorian family ideals. They had three children. Charlie (1882), Kate, (1885) and Alicia (1892). Fortunately, the family left a substantial amount of material to research. The Conrad, Campbell, Stanford Collection is housed in over 206 archival boxes at the K. Ross Toole Archives at the University of Montana. The family home, the Conrad Mansion, is located in Kalispell, Montana and available for tours daily during the summer.

This project documents three themes of a nineteenth-century woman’s life: marriage, domesticity and motherhood. Lettie Conrad’s experiences are illustrations of a white, well-to-do woman in the American West. Throughout her marriage, Lettie demonstrated Victorian ideals of marriage, domesticity and motherhood.
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Thanks to my family and friends for supporting me beyond all…
It takes a village.
Charlie, Alicia Ann, and Kate Conrad

Catherine E. Stanford
The Conrad Mansion, Kalispell, Montana
Introduction

"Her home and surroundings reflected her character: rich but simple, elegant but refined." These words, written by Sidney M. Logan on Alicia Stanford Conrad's death in 1923, demonstrated "Lettie" Conrad's success at representing Victorian ideals. Living in the American West during a period of drastic change, Lettie Conrad subscribed to and successfully lived according to the ideals the dominant culture of the time, Victorianism.

Victorian ideals and standards set the standard for nineteenth-century Americans. Named for the period of English Queen Victoria’s reign, 1837-1901, Victorian culture generated strict ideals and standards on gender and family. In his article, "American Victorianism as a Culture," Daniel Howe defines culture as an "evolving system of beliefs, attitudes and techniques, transmitted from generation to generation and finding expression in innumerable activates people learn."¹ Victorian culture appealed mainly to men and women from middle and upper class, white, Protestant families. This class set the standard for the rest of society. These "white" Victorian Americans usually were of Anglo-Saxon ethnicity. Their family values derived from colonial and English culture. Most were Protestant and from the middle and upper classes. Reacting to the changes from industrialization, Victorian Americans created a distinctive set of attitudes and behaviors to stabilize their world.

Drawing on the notion of distinct spheres of activity and influence for women and men, Victorian Americans defined their world through roles and responsibilities determined by gender. Victorian ideology encouraged public restraint with outlets for private expression. As Steven Mintz states in his book, A Prison of Expectations: The

Family in Victorian Culture, "The Victorian family issues have two sides: they are private, individual, and psychological; yet these issues are also intensely public and connected with fundamental shifts in society and in the roles and expectations attached to the family."2 Private expression encouraged the emotional connection between husband and wife, parents and children. Conversely, Victorian society segregated people by gender. While men participated in the world of business and politics, women embraced their roles as wives and mothers. These "separate spheres" gave both genders authority over the other in unique areas of life. Through their roles as wives and mother, women gained authority within the family home and a means to influence the outside world.

From this group of Victorian Americans, adventurous some individuals and families moved to the American West. In this project, the American West refers to the physical region located west of the Mississippi River. Many individuals and families relocated to west of the Mississippi to create a better life. These travelers brought their values and principles with them. As families continued to spread through the West, Victorian culture expanded also. As Robert Griswold states in his essay, "Anglo Women and Domestic Ideology in the American West in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," "When nineteenth-century Anglo women left their homes...they carried more than material items necessary for survival. The also took a set of values, assumptions, and ideals that enabled them to make sense of their lives."3 Women carried their Victorian ideals to burgeoning Western communities.

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Lettie and Charlie E. Conrad were two individuals who carried Victorian ideals to the American West. Charlie relocated to Fort Benton, Montana in 1868 from the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia. The Conrad family had been large plantation owners until the Civil War and continued to enjoy upper-class status. Lettie moved to Fort Benton in 1879 from Nova Scotia, Canada. Her father was a wealthy tanner, merchant, and musician. Her mother, also a musician, moved from her upper-class family in England to the United States. Although from separate sides of the Mason-Dixon Line, Lettie and Charlie were both from upper-class backgrounds and believed in similar Victorian ideals.

Alicia Davenport Stanford Conrad, known as Lettie, lived in western Montana from 1879 to 1923. She married Charles E. Conrad on January 4th, 1881 in Ft. Benton, Montana. Eleven years later, in 1892, Lettie, Charlie, and their two children, Charlie and Kate, moved to the burgeoning town of Kalispell, Montana. Charlie helped establish a town, while Lettie helped create a community. In both places, Ft. Benton and Kalispell, Montana, Lettie upheld Victorian values. She was a companion to her husband and a comforting wife in his last days. She created a home that emphasized Victorian values. Lastly, she reared her children according to Victorian ideas of morality and gender.

This project only analyzed a certain period of Alicia Stanford Conrad’s life: from her arrival to Fort Benton in 1879 until Charlie’s death in 1902. During this time of her life, Lettie adhered to Victorian principles of marriage, domesticity, and motherhood. After Charlie died, Lettie began to lead a life less restricted by Victorian ideals.

Chapter One portrays Lettie’s marriage to Charlie Conrad. From the anticipation of her marriage to Charlie’s death, Lettie expressed Victorian principles in her marriage.
Analyzing the Conrad’s correspondence housed in both the K. Ross Toole Archives at the University of Montana and the Letter Collection at the Conrad Mansion Museum, this chapter documents Lettie’s adherence to Victorian ideals of companionate marriage and separate gender roles and responsibilities.

Chapter Two describes Lettie’s domestic domain. Through a combination of correspondence located in the K. Ross Toole Archives and an analysis of the Conrad Mansion’s design and decorations, this project examines Lettie’s commitment to Victorian domestic ideals of caring for the physical and moral well-being of her family. The Conrad Mansion is Victorian domesticity in physical form. The floor plan of the house illustrates how every space expressed domestic ideals and shaped domestic life.

Chapter Three evaluates Lettie’s ideas on motherhood and her childrearing methods. Again using letters from the K. Ross Toole Archives and evidence from the Conrad Mansion, this chapter demonstrates Lettie’s intention to raise her children according to Victorian ideals of motherly love and distinct gender roles.

The intent of this project is to document three major themes in nineteenth-century women’s’ lives- marriage, domesticity, and motherhood- through Lettie Conrad’s life. Lettie Conrad’s experiences are illustrative of a well-to-do white, western woman’s life. She married, kept house, and raised children according to Victorian values and ideals of gender. Lettie adhered to Victorian principles in all aspects of her life. Marriage, domesticity, and motherhood were central to Lettie Conrad’s identity as a successful Victorian woman.
“Charlie and I have no concealment between us and he trusts me- as I do him perfectly.”¹ This romantic ideal of marriage stated by Alicia D. Conrad to her mother in 1881 was in keeping with the middle-class standards solidifying during the Victorian era. John C. Spurlock states in his book, *Free Love: Marriage and Middle-Class Radicalism in America, 1825-1860*, that many nineteenth-century, white, middle-class Americans believed “society came into existence when a lone individual took and became a spouse. Marriage gave character to all other human relations.”² The institution of marriage influenced all other relationships. Depending on the level of satisfaction within their marriage, couples focused their individual attentions on different areas of family and society. Stemming from Enlightenment and evangelical philosophies of the eighteenth century and in response to the change and anxiety due to industrialization, a rising white middle class accentuated strict gender roles and responsibilities within society while promoting ideals of romantic love and companionate marriage.

Previously, during the colonial period, marriage constituted a merger of two members in society with responsibility to their families, their communities, and their God. Marriage was a legal institution; a couple bound themselves together in allegiance to their community. As historian E. Anthony Rotundo states, “each wedding united a couple in mutual duty and bound it solemnly to the community through the presence of

¹ Alicia D. Conrad to Catherine E. Stanford, April 2, 1881. Folder 9, Box 9, Series III, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
legal authority." The union, sanctified by the community, benefited the community. It was not the union of two minds and souls, but the foundation of a mini-society. In his book, *Past, Present, and Personal: The Family and the Life Course in American History*, John Demos expands on the connection between marriage and community, stating, "individual families are the building blocks out of which the larger units of social organization are fashioned. Families and churches, families and governments, belong to the same world of experience...Their structure, their guiding values, their inner purposes, were essentially the same."^4

Based on John Locke's "Two Treaties of Government," American Republicanism during the eighteenth century advocated a voluntary or companionate marriage; that is, a marriage based on mutuality and affection. Men and women viewed their union as a joining of cooperative individuals and their marriage as a model for democratic society. Similar to colonial ideals, family was the center of society, but marriage was no longer a communal affair. Marriage became a spiritual and emotional union as well an economic and political incorporation of two people. Historian Jan Lewis argues this point in her book, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia*: "Love, more than property, was to be considered in marrying, for poverty could be overcome; indeed, love would make it easier to do so."^5 Over the course of the antebellum era, the spiritual and emotional quality of the marital relationship gained precedence and became the measure of marital success.

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During the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, the evangelical movement of the Great Awakening complemented the emerging companionate ideal of marriage. Evangelical leaders advocated the concept of free will or grace and invited men and women to form personal relationships with God, their loving Father. Like marriage, religion during the nineteenth century became a personal endeavor. Even though communication with God was a personal issue, religious events and revivals allowed men and women to congregate and develop friendships. Spurlock suggests, “Camp meetings and conversion allowed many young men and women to express their independence and also helped them establish a stable identity in a confusing world.”

Religion and romantic relationships coincided to alleviate the disassociation with community and alienation from spirituality produced by industrialization and urbanization. As a result, this incorporation of Republicanism and evangelical Christianity in an industrializing nation inspired Victorian couples to construct ideals of marriage based on romantic love and mutual companionship. Nineteenth-century middle-class society advocated a marital standard that couples created through mutual respect. Couples’ respect for the sanctity of marriage was similar to Republicanism’s democratic cooperation and emotional commitment, and akin to evangelicals’ personal connection with a loving God.

In response to industrialization and a changing society, men and women in nineteenth-century America searched for control of both their material and emotional world. In an increasingly artificial or segregated world, people began to feel a sense of disassociation with their larger community. The romantic relationship between men and women rectified this sense of loss and, in turn, focused on individual or personal

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enhancement. In her book, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men and Romantic Love in Nineteenth Century America*, Karen Lystra defines romantic love as "a process of individual development that involved emotional expression, the reciprocal demands of personal disclosure, and the self-enhancing exchange of reassurance and praise."³⁷ Men and women attempted to stabilize their lives though concentrated emotional connections with one another. With the emotional support of a romantic relationship, together couples explored their innermost desires and deepest fears about society and themselves. As Lystra states, "through the actual experience of romantic love, both men and women gained greater self-definition and validation, and mutual affirmation."³⁸ Victorian standards of limited or controlled public expression restricted middle class men and women from open emotional exhibition. Romantic love allowed men and women to complement their controlled public image with a private emotional outlet.

The approval of private expression coincided with Victorian standards of strict gender roles. In a further attempt to stabilize their industrializing world, middle-class men and women accentuated strict gender roles and responsibilities. According to these Victorian gender ideals, women were physically and mentally weaker than men. Therefore, women were permitted more emotional expression than men. "Victorian men were expected to hide their emotions in public and loosen their expressive controls in private, communicating their hidden selves to the woman they loved."³⁹ Romantic love and companionate marriage helped alleviate tensions resulting from the strict separations

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³⁸ Lystra, *Searching the Heart*, 54.
³⁹ Lystra, *Searching the Heart*, 125.
between men and women. These changes in the ideals of marriage and the emphasis on romantic love also altered practices of courtship.

The path to romantic love and companionate marriage began through a period of mutual disclosure known as courtship. Living in the gender-segregated and class-oriented world of industrialization, middle-class men and women believed it necessary to conceal and protect one’s “true” self behind a public image. As Lystra explains, “Privacy was essential to nineteenth-century middle-class romantic love because the meaning of love was so deeply rooted in acts of protected and exclusive self-revelation.”

The revelation of this “true self” to another person was a major function of courtship. Cultural constraints of public behavior and self-control “defined the very essence of Victorian privacy.” Lystra claims, “courtship exchanges of self revelation and disclosure held the highest priority.”

Through letters, men and women could fully express their innermost thoughts and desires without restrictive boundaries. Personal revelations not only developed the romantic relationship, but also strengthened personal identity within an increasingly impersonal society.

Alicia D. Stanford, or “Lettie,” and Charles E. Conrad, or “Charlie,” from Kalispell, Montana, offer an example of a couple who attempted to adhere to nineteenth-century middle-class Victorian standards for romantic relationships in the American West. During their courtship and marriage from 1880 to 1902, Lettie and Charlie conducted their lives according to Victorian ideals of strict gender roles, romantic love, and companionate marriage. In a statement written during their honeymoon, Lettie remarked, “Charlie and I have no concealment between us and he trusts me- as I do him.

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10 Lystra, Searching the Heart. 18.
11 Lystra, Searching the Heart. 17.
12 Lystra, Searching the Heart, 30.
Lettie’s words demonstrated her belief that disclosure and mutual respect held the highest priority of her marriage. She insisted that she and Charlie “have no concealment between” them and trusted each other “perfectly.” Lettie and Charlie created the foundation for their marriage based on romantic love and mutual trust.

Nineteenth century young people usually commenced courtship within the context of their daily lives and social events. After choosing potential mates, young couples would get to know each other in the company of other couples, privately, or through correspondence. Courtship allowed couples a period of revelation of their thoughts and emotions. It also enabled them to develop the structure of the relationship itself. Some historians suggest that couples utilized this period to test one another and the strength of their relationship. Women tended to create more dramatic and difficult tests than men. Women attempted to overcome an economically and socially subordinate position by increasing their value through emotional ties in courtship. As Lystra states, “courtship spirals of doubt and reassurance intensified the emotions and solidified the identification of couples going into marriage.” In both the form and content of their courtship, Lettie and Charlie’s relationship was typical of Victorian courtships.

Like many other couples in nineteenth-century America, Lettie and Charlie met though family associations. Charlie Conrad was a friend of Lettie’s older brother, James Stanford, who was part of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, stationed in Ft. Benton, Montana. It was in James’s absence that Charlie greeted Lettie, her mother Catherine and her youngest brother, Harry, upon their arrival from Halifax, Nova Scotia to Ft. Benton.

14 Lystra, Searching the Heart, 158.
15 Lystra, Searching the Heart, 190.
Montana in June of 1879. Shortly after arriving, Lettie became a co-teacher at the Select School for Young Ladies and Children. Charlie continued to expand his business in trade, transportation and cattle. Despite the ten-year difference in ages, Lettie Stanford, eighteen, and Charlie Conrad twenty-eight, began courting.

Like other nineteenth-century couples, Lettie and Charlie commenced their courtship through social functions and correspondence. Charlie’s business required him to travel frequently in the surrounding Northwestern area, compelling him and Lettie to develop their relationship through correspondence. As historian Ellen Rothman notes, “correspondence was by far the most common form of personal writing… in many cases [letters] were. for a time, the relationship itself.” Concurring with standards of his economic and social class, Charlie maintained a formal demeanor in his writing. For instance, on November 24, 1879, Charlie sent a written request for Lettie’s company at a community social: “My dear friend. May I have the pleasure of your company to the concert tomorrow evening, at Frontier Club Hall. Your friend, C. E. Conrad.” Using a language that created a conventional, yet affable atmosphere, Charlie encouraged Lettie to develop a friendship with him. The pair’s courtship continued through social events, private visiting, and correspondence.

Similar to courtships described by Lystra, there was an apparent testing in the relationship when Lettie responded to Charlie’s lack of attention and her own insecurities within their relationship. In December of 1879 she wrote:

16 School Announcement, Folder 3, Box 20, Series VII. Collection 185. K. Ross Toole Archives.
My dear Mr. Conrad. I am ever so sorry my note pained you but it was written on the spur of the moment and one of my sudden impulses took possession of me. It occurred to me that your beautiful present (given and accepted by me in the same spirit of friendship, not to you or I but to others) might appear as an obstacle in the way of your paying attention to other ladies- and I thought it would be better to act as I did. There you have it all in a nutshell and I know you will understand when I say- it was not that I valued your friendship less- but I do not want to lose it. About the other note of mine, is your large business so engrossing that you forget the school ‘marm’ on the way to the store for a perfect age- so long I don’t wonder you forgot it. I did not think of mentioning it because I thought you would know. Let us shake hands since it’s a perfect understanding. Yours very sincerely, Lettie Stanford.

Lettie began her letter with the couple’s original formality with “My dear Mr. Conrad…,” denoting her treatment from Charlie as a mere friend. Immediately softening, she apologized for causing pain with “one of her sudden impulses,” and continued by relating the reasoning for her “possession.” Commending Charlie on the beautiful present he had given to her, she made clear to him that to onlookers the gift could be seen “not to you or I but to others” as evidence of a promise of marriage or “as an obstacle in the way of your paying attention to other ladies.” Here Lettie is calling attention to Charlie that to onlookers, their relationship was either progressing to marriage or merely friendship. “In a nutshell and I know you will understand when I say-it was not that I valued your friendship less- but I do not want to lose it.” She wanted to be more than just a friend.

The underlying message to Charlie was for him to make it clear to everyone that the gift was a declaration of pursuit or courtship and that she was valued above all other ladies.¹⁹ Lettie utilized emotional aspects of their relationship, friendship and companionship, to test Charlie’s intentions and commitment. Historian Ellen Rothman also argues, already situated in a subordinate position, “it was risky for a woman to express her feelings

¹⁹ Alicia D. Stanford to Charles E. Conrad, December 1879, Conrad Mansion correspondence.
²⁰ In her book, Searching the Heart: Women, men and romantic love in Nineteenth century America, Karen Lystra dedicates Chapter 6 to the testing of nineteenth-century American couples within courtship.
before she had an offer of marriage." Thus, Victorian courtship patterns allowed Lettie to test Charlie’s level of commitment without overtly revealing her own feelings.

In addition, testing created a private system of courtship supervision to make up for the loss of parental control that emerged within the American family. During the nineteenth century, courtship modified from family selection to personal preference. Parental consent and community favor became mere formalities. As Ellen Rothman states in her book, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship*, by the end of the eighteenth-century, “young women and men looked for a mate whom they loved and who loved them, rather than for one with the right family connections, financial prospects or religious affiliation.” As American society changed from a rural agrarian culture to an urban commercial culture, parents lost their authority through the weakening of land inheritance. As a result, children gained more freedom to select partners according to their own standards. Lystra explains, “Parents bowed out, not just because the family became less of an economically productive unit in an industrializing economy, but because of acceptance of the ideas and values of love and the self gave them no basis to act upon- except as advisors and manipulators of the pool of eligibles.” Testing allowed couples to individually evaluate the depth or stability of their potential partners’ commitment to the romantic relationship. In the case of Lettie Stanford and Charlie Conrad, neither were economically dependent on their parents. As a result, Lettie and Charlie sought a partner based more on personal chemistry and romantic love than economic considerations and familial approval.

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21 Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 33
23 Lystra, *Searching the Heart*, 158.
Even though parents were not formally influential, parents were involved in the courtship rituals, and couples commonly sought their consent. After the marriage, during her honeymoon, Lettie continued to assure her mother, Catherine, of her importance to both she and Charlie.

Dearest Mother;
I hardly know where to begin. I have so much to say to you. I want to see you ever so much, I have been very worried about you of fear you would be ill after all the excitement and hard work you went through. You never think of yourself until last- and I know it was too much for you- 'My boy' and I have been talking about you lots, and you must not worry one bit about the future-...you must not think you have lost your little girl. Darling don’t you know “a daughter’s a daughter all the days of her life. And don’t you think I have enough of you in my nature to be miserable unless my mother was happy too- and Charlie would not have it otherwise for anything…”

Just four days after her nuptials, Lettie confirmed to Catherine the whirlwind of changes that recently occurred in her life; “Dearest Mother; I hardly know where to begin. I have so much to say to you. I want to see you ever so much.” Reaffirming her mother’s importance, Lettie expressed her concern for Catherine’s health “after all the excitement and hard work” of the wedding, where Catherine demonstrated her tendency not to think of herself until last. Including Charlie’s concern with her own by stating, “‘My boy’ and I have been talking about you lots, and you must not worry one bit about the future.” Lettie informed Catherine that she and Charlie appreciated her consent and approval of their marriage and intended to demonstrate it by supporting her future. Closing with an illusion to Catherine’s self-sacrificing nature- “And don’t you think I have enough of you in my nature to be miserable unless my mother was happy too- and Charlie would not have it otherwise for anything,”- Lettie reiterates Catherine’s influence on her daughter’s

24 Alicia D. Conrad to Catherine E. Stanford, January 7, 1881, Folder 9, Box 9, Series III, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
character and importance to both her and her husband. Lettie and Charlie did not marry because of their parents’ preference, but because they both believed ideals of the companionate marriage. Even though Charlie and Lettie accepted Victorian ideals of the companionate marriage and chose each other based on love and camaraderie. Lettie continued to reassure her mother that the couple valued Catherine’s parental support and influence.

For most middle-class Victorian couples, the objective of courtship was to create the foundation for a companionate marriage. In his book, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present*, Carl N. Degler states, “the marriage which initiated the modern family was based upon affection and mutual respect between the partners, both at the time of family formation and the course of its life.”

No longer restricted by parental control, couples chose marital partners in the romantic hopes of lifelong companionship. Yet, the ideals of romantic love and companionate marriage did not always harmonize with Victorian ideals of gender.

Once married, men and women endured a period of adjustment, reconciling expectations with reality. During the Victorian era, women and men separated themselves both physically and mentally according to the responsibilities of their gender. Middle-class society encouraged wives and mothers “to nurture and maintain their families, to provide religious example and inspiration, and to affect the world around by exercising private moral influence.” Society assumed that due to their passive, nurturing nature, women belonged in the home, tending to the needs of the family. Men,

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who were thought to be callous creatures, were fit for the outside world of business and politics. Despite gender inequalities, as Nancy F. Cott argues in her book, *Bonds of Womanhood: ‘Woman’s Sphere’ in New England, 1780-1835*, as early as the eighteenth century, the designation of a women’s sphere provided strength and power to women. “Women made use of the ideology of domesticity for their own purposes, to advance their educational opportunities, to gain influence and satisfaction, even to express hostility to men… [the women’s sphere was] the basis for a subculture among women that formed a source of strength and identity.”\(^\text{27}\) As such, the two gender spheres allowed a space for both women and men to contribute to their marriage, family, and community.

Lettie expressed the overlap of her responsibility as caretaker and Charlie’s role of husband. On June 11, 1881, Lettie expressed to Catherine her “great blessing” of having Charlie for a husband. “He is like the most irrepressible school boy, out for fun-and fairly over with good nature- oh Dear Mater- only you and I know what a great blessing that same good nature is in the master of a household.” Fulfilling her role as mother of the family, she affectionately referred to Charlie as an “irrepressible school boy.” In the same sentence, she designated Charlie as the “master of the household,” yet within the context of the letter it is evident that Lettie was neither resentful nor intimidated. She personified Victorian ideals of gender roles and responsibilities.

Companionate marriage did not mean egalitarian marriage, and separate spheres and the ideals of the companionate marriage did not always connect. According to Lystra, “the challenge of nineteenth-century marital relationships was to adjust an essentially voluntary and volatile romantic bond to the involuntary obligations and duty-bound roles

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of husband and wife.” For many women, after the glow of courtship and nuptials, deference and submission defined the marital relationship. A common law heritage remaining from English ancestry, the “principle of coverture” still held precedence in Victorian America. The idea of coverture retained greater emphasis on the innate weakness and vulnerability of the wife and provided a fresh façade for the older and more forthright rationale for her subordinate statues. And the erudite explications of the ways in which equity had ameliorated the wife’s common law disabilities provided a cogent justification for keeping the essentials for the baron-femme relationship intact.

In other words, despite middle-class society’s attempts to address the inconsistencies or inequalities in the companionate marriage, men continued to legally dominate their wives. For in marriage, women were obliterated in the eyes of the law. The common law denied married women the prerogative to authorize contracts, own property, or appear in court without their husbands’ permission; a wife was her husband’s ward.

In response to legal, economic, and political dispossession, many women searched out alternate avenues of authority and accomplishment. Victorian ideals of womanhood designated women as moral authorities. In her book, Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939, Peggy Pascoe claims that well-to-do white women created a “program of using gender difference to strengthen women’s voices in society.” Their roles of wives and mothers empowered women as the moral authority within the family, and women expanded that authority beyond family to society. In this way, women relieved some of the inconsistencies due to standards of separate gender spheres and the romantic ideals of companionate marriage.

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28 Lystra, Searching the Heart, 192.
Women gained power and respect within their own homes and as the moral authorities of society.

For others, the separation of gender spheres could create an emotional distance within the marriage that left women feeling alone, undervalued, and resentful. John Spurlock maintains that “the high standards of happiness and moral improvement inherent in the ideal of bourgeois marriage, frequently in conflict with the sharp separation of sexual spheres, inevitably created disappointments.” Both men and women experienced dissatisfaction within marriage. As E. Anthony Rotundo notes in his book, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*, “With their values, aspirations, sensibilities, and social worlds so different, many men and women must have found it hard to meet on common ground.” In response to their marital disappointment, men retreated physically and mentally, usually to the workplace, men’s clubs, or taverns, while women enclosed themselves within their world of domesticity, focusing on each other, their children, and their homes. This separation could lead either to further marital estrangement or to increased personal fulfillment via other resources, such as female friendships and masculine hideaways.

During the nineteenth-century strong, emotional same-sex relationships were commonplace, if not expected. In her essay, “The Female World of Love and Ritual,” Carroll Smith-Rosenberg asserts, “American society was characterized in large part by rigid gender-role differentiation with the family and within society as a whole, leading to the emotional segregation of women and men.” From an early age, men and women

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existed in physical worlds designated by gender, women in the home and men at work. Due to the segregation of gender spheres, women lived in a realm occupied almost exclusively by women. Romantic love and companionate marriage conflicted with Victorian gender-role socializations. Girls and boys were raised in gender segregated worlds; “with marriage both women and men had to adjust to life with a person who was, in essence, a member of an alien group.” As a result, many middle-class wives found personal comfort with their female friendships as opposed to with their emotionally estranged husbands. Along with their strong female friendships, many women alleviated emotional dissatisfaction by building their world around their children. Instead of attempting emotional reconciliation with their husbands, some women focused on their children’s activities and livelihood, depending on them for emotional comfort or satisfaction. Fully immersing themselves in the principles of true womanhood, middle-class women created their own space dedicated to the promotion of each other, their children, and ideals of domesticity.

With the home as a sphere designated to women, it is not surprising that men of the nineteenth century who were dissatisfied with their marriage chose to seek refuge or solace outside the home. Due to his station within the public world, a middle-class “man with an unsatisfying marriage could withdraw into a variety of activities.” Taverns, coffee-houses, fraternal lodges, and men’s clubs were all available for dissatisfied married men to carouse with other men, offering understanding and an alternative to their domestic alienation. Work was the only alternative sanctioned by Victorian ideals of

34 Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly Conduct, 75.
35 In her book, Marriage in the Republic, Anya Jabour further demonstrates this emotional reconciliation of women and their children through analyzing Elizabeth and William Wirt’s marriage. 52-53.
36 Rotundo, American Manhood, 143.
gender roles and responsibilities. As Anthony Rotundo states, “It was a legitimate past-time, one that most middle-class husbands enjoyed. More than that, men had a marital duty to work, and this soothed men’s consciences even as the work kept them from their wives.” Overall, men had the greater opportunity to retreat physically and cope with a desolate marriage. With fewer options outside the home, women created intimate female friendships and focused on their domestic roles to alleviate emotional dissatisfaction.

A similar pattern the Conrads developed during their courtship was the division between work and personal life for Charlie Conrad. Whether work was intended as a retreat or not is unknown, but throughout the Conrad correspondence there is evidence documenting Charlie’s numerous absences from the family home. As Lettie noted in her letter of December in 1879, Charlie’s business would continue to be “so engrossing” throughout their marriage. Charlie attempted to compensate for his work-related absences. In September of 1880, he attempted to make up to his “Darling Lettie” for allocating too much attention to work and forgetting the “school marm” with a gift of $300 to cover the schoolhouse rent from October to April. However, a lasting pattern of an overriding commitment to first work, then family, had developed. Moreover, attempting to rectify the issue through money only required more work-related desertion. Again, in late September, Charlie informed Lettie:

My Darling Lettie, I am on a Jury, which convenes again this evening at 6-30- I do not know how long I will be detained, but will come and see you as soon as I get off. I am to leave in the morning for the HoBoken District, to be gone several days, Yours Sincerely, C. E. Conrad Do not retire until I come. C.

37 Rotundo, American Manhood 144.
38 Charles E. Conrad to Alicia D. Stanford, September 27, 1880, Folder 3, Box 20, Series VII, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
39 Charles E. Conrad to Alicia D. Stanford, September 29, 1880, Folder 3, Box 20, Series VII, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
Adhering to Victorian gender ideals, Charlie wholly committed himself to provide the monetary means for Lettie and their family. According to prevailing ideals of middle-class manhood, Charlie’s dedication to his work supported his devotion to his family, rather than detracting from it. Even so, Charlie’s absence was a continual occurrence throughout the Conrad’s relationship.

Due to their adherence to Victorian ideals of gender roles, Lettie and Charlie, like other nineteenth century couples, experienced some distress and frustration in their marriage. Lettie and Charlie Conrad endured numerous physical separations because of Charlie’s business. Lettie utilized those periods of absence to devote her energy to perfecting the family home and strengthening ties with her female friends and children. During a separation after the birth of Charles Davenport, their first child, Lettie wrote to Charlie describing her behavior during his absence:

My dear better Half- for I find what is life of me in Benton as a very stupid, blue, cranky sort of person that I am disgusted with; I am keeping the household in smooth running order...Dear old Ashby is just as kind and considerate as he can be, and does everything he can think of for our comfort-Everything misses you even the chickens

In keeping with Victorian ideals of romantic love, for Lettie everything missed her “dear better Half,” even the chickens. Other letters Lettie sent to Charlie during this business trip to Canada in 1883 depicted changes in their young son and the various family and community members with whom she spends her time with in his absence. Overall, Lettie kept with ideals of separate gender sphere by finding solace in her family and female friends.

40 Through her examination of Elizabeth and William Wirt’s marriage, in her book, *Marriage in the Republic*, Anya Jabour further illustrates the marital frustration that occurred due to men’s work-related absences from the home, 155-158.
41 Lettie to Charlie, February 26th, 1883, Conrad Mansion Collection. Ashby Conrad is one of Charlie Conrad’s younger brothers.
Separations distressed both Lettie and Charlie. During one of his early business absences, Charlie wrote to Lettie: “I have several of your letters that I have not found the time to answer. I have been and am still very busy, but feel as if the worst is over...Give my love to one and all. Goodnight darling how I wish I could step in and see you and the Boy tonight.” \(^{42}\) Assuring Lettie that it is business that kept him from writing, Charlie expressed his desire to be with his young wife and baby boy. Almost ten years later, in 1892, Charlie was diagnosed with diabetes. During this time, Charlie began to combine his trips to include doctor visits and vacations. On one such excursion back East, Charlie wrote to Lettie: “My darling Wife, I feel like having a little talk with you this morning, as I am getting pretty homesick...” \(^{43}\) Five years later, Charlie expressed his continued yearning for his family by asking Lettie:

...Drop me a note, as often as you can, at Hotel Helena telling me how the Mothers are getting along. Don’t try to write a long letter, for I know you are too busy, just a line.

Goodbye sweetheart. Love to all, I leave on the 11p.m. train,
Your devoted husband
C. E. Conrad NB
Hug Alicia, close and keep her warm, while I am away \(^{44}\)

Lettie and Charlie Conrad’s adherence to Victorian gender ideals caused them both emotional anguish due to frequent separations.

Complicating many Victorian Americans’ marital frustrations resulting from discrepancies between expectations and realities, were exterior disruptions created by women’s increasing involvement in the public sphere. Higher education and developing opportunities for women outside the home- such as religious revivals, moral reform movements and political crusades- called Victorian gender roles into question. Around

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\(^{43}\) Charlie to Lettie, August 19th, 1896, Conrad Mansion Collection.

\(^{44}\) Charlie to Lettie, January 4th, 1901. Conrad Mansion Collection
the middle of the nineteenth-century, women began to participate more openly in the public world, challenging established gender roles. In her essay "Beauty, the Beast and the Militant Woman," Carroll Smith-Rosenberg states, "One of the most controversial aspects of the early women’s-rights movement was its criticism of the subservient role of women within the American family, and the American man’s imperious and domineering behavior toward women." Anthony Rotundo supports her statement, claiming, "The growing power—or at least the decline in submissiveness—that was expected of wives showed publicly in certain key settings." Woman participating in moral reform movements publicly condemned certain male behaviors. Women began to claim that their husbands’ “male vice posed a threat to the moral sanctity as well as economic stability of their homes.” Victorian women asserted their needs in the public arena, part of the masculine sphere, challenging both men and women to reassess gender roles and responsibilities.

Feminist activists also entered the masculine political arena. Women such as Antoinette Brown, Lucy Stone and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, created America’s first women’s rights movement. Organizing the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, women activists addressed various issues oppressing the female gender and demanded justice from what they considered the tyranny of man. In particular, the demand for women’s suffrage challenged established Victorian gender ideals and roles. Nineteenth-century suffragists challenged women’s indirect influence in the public arena, arguing that the designation of women as subservient or dependent to men marked them as politically

inferior. As Ellen DuBois notes in her book, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869*,

On what basis were women excluded from any consideration in the distribution of political power, even when that power was organized on democratic principles? At least part of the answer seems to lie in the concept of 'independence,' which was the major criterion for enfranchisement in classical democratic political theory, and which acted to exclude women from the political community.48

Through the demand for suffrage, feminists publicly disputed Victorian gender ideals of female subservience and inferiority. They demanded women's direct involvement in the public arena, specifically though suffrage. Many women involved in the political women's movement were wives and mothers. This caused controversy for these women with their husbands and, sometimes, their fathers. Similar to the emotional support described by historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, DuBois states, “In the face of such obstacles, the major resource on which women’s rights activists drew to support themselves and advance their cause was one another.”49 Again, when contention between spouses arose, women turned to other women for understanding and support.

For all these reasons, romantic love was not necessarily a sufficient basis for a stable and satisfactory marriage. Though a strong motivator, love could not be the sole foundation of a marriage. Glenda Riley states in her book, *Divorce: An American Tradition*,

Most courting couples believed love was the crucial ingredient for marriage. They expected love to bridge the gap between the separate worlds of men and women, to create a closeness between mates that would negate the dissimilarities in men's and women's values, attitudes, and activities... Ultimately, love would prevent spouses' differences from creating discord in their marriages.50

Unfortunately, “the rising divorce rate demonstrated that growing numbers of people refused to live with the eccentricities of their mates’ personalities. Instead of erasing their difficulties, love often evaporated, leaving them to confront their problems without assistance.” In an unintentional circular pattern, while dissatisfaction within marriage led many women to publicly challenge Victorian gender roles and responsibilities, the social challenges presented to gender roles amplified marital disappointment.

Before the late nineteenth century, state legislators maintained the responsibility to grant a divorce. State legislators usually determined divorces based on very limited grounds. Historian Elaine Tyler May explains that this began to change during the antebellum era, when many states utilized “‘omnibus’ clauses which gave courts or governing bodies the power to grant a divorce for any reason, if they felt there was adequate justification.” Ruling came only after intense scrutiny of the spouse’s behavior and based on adherence to accepted gender roles and responsibilities, however. Historian Robert Griswold states, “If the defendant could prove that his or her behavior was actually in line with prescribed morality, he or she would likely win the case in a counter suit, or at least have the case dismissed.” During the nineteenth century, a perceptible rise in divorce rates caught the public’s attention, and state legislatures reacted with stricter divorce laws. Each state initiated various levels of restrictive legislature, some to the extreme; in 1895, South Carolina banned divorce altogether. The new austere divorce laws did not halt nor decrease the divorce rate. In fact, historians

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51 Riley, Divorce, 81
Glenda Riley and Anthony Rotundo both link the rising divorce rate to the increasing significance of marital intimacy. "As the nineteenth century progressed, intimacy became the goal of marriage. Under these circumstances, it occurred more often, and when it did not occur, there was a greater sense of failure and disillusion. Thus, the late nineteenth century saw both an increase in marital intimacy and an increase in the divorce rate."  

Other Victorian couples succeeded in maintaining a content and happy marriage. Many men and women expected challenges and changes in their marriage and continued to affirm the love and support of their spouse. Lystra claims, "Middle-class expectations of marriage had much more to do with settled comfort than unmatched ecstasy and bliss. Though courting couples anticipated loving marital relations, they also predicted the routinization and habitual flavor of married life." Both men and women expected their passionate romantic love to transform into tender affection and devotion. Lystra documents that romantic love continued to infiltrate Victorian marriages and "moments of intimacy were often affirmations of uncontested love, based on taken-for-granted emotional commitment and long-standing resolution of emotional doubt."  

While gender conventions could interfere with marital intimacy, for some couples, compliance with the ideals of separate gender spheres regulated or stabilized their marriage. Rotundo explains that many couples believed that adhering to Victorian ideals of gender enhanced their marriages. "Having different skills was more conducive to harmony in a marriage than having the same ones...[some Americans believed] that

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55 Lystra, *Searching the Heart*, 197.
56 Lystra, *Searching the Heart*, 205.
their marriage would benefit from clear separation in their spheres of activity.⁵⁷ Despite the various challenges to marital happiness and gender roles, many nineteenth-century couples succeeded in creating and maintaining companionate marriages while remaining true to Victorian gender ideals.

Throughout their twenty-one year marriage, Charlie and Lettie maintained a harmonious relationship founded on Victorian gender roles and romantic love. Interestingly, Charlie had legal obstacles to overcome before he could fully pursue Lettie. According to a 1957 Charles E. Conrad biographer, James E. Murphy, sometime before 1876 Charlie had married a Blackfoot Indian woman, Sings in the Middle, who gave birth to a son later that year. Murphy also claims that in 1878 the Indian wife chose to leave the couple’s son, Charles E. Conrad, Jr., in Fort Benton to receive a white man’s education while she traveled with her native people on their exodus to Canada. Sings in the Middle never returned. Charlie sent his first son to a Catholic boarding school in Canada and continued to provide for him monetarily until his death in 1902.⁵⁸

Eventually, Charlie discovered that his Indian wife had passed away and he was legally free to pursue Lettie. In a letter to Lettie, Charlie explained his situation, the distress his former marriage caused him, and his desire to marry her.

My dear Miss Lettie; Undoubtedly, you will not be surprised at me saying that I am very much in love with you, as my actions have betrayed me in this. Dear Miss Lettie, I feel that there is a great barrier between us, and that is, my former character. Previous to the advent of ladies into the Northwest, I like many others, led a somewhat reckless life (undoubtedly of which you have heard) but meeting you, and my love for you has made a new man of me. If you will consent to share your life with me, I will be to you a kind and true Husband, leaving nothing undone to make you happy. I think you will find accords with my disposition. I have felt at times not worthy of you, and have tried to suppress my

⁵⁷ Rotundo, American Manhood, 154.
feelings (thinking I would lead a bachelor’s life) but time only adds flames to my love for you, and I feel that my life will be a blank without you. Awaiting your reply with a great deal of anxiety, I am as ever, Yours Affectionately, C. E. Conrad

Charlie began his letter by reassuring Lettie with a declaration of love. Charlie then clarified his situation or “the great barrier between” them, that is, his “former character”. Undoubtedly, Lettie had heard of Charlie’s previous marriage to an Indian woman, yet Charlie does not acknowledge the relationship, stating simply, “previous to the advent of ladies into the Northwest, I like many others, led a somewhat reckless life.” Clearly, Charlie did not consider Sings in the Middle a Victorian lady worthy the title of wife, but rather a foolish youthful escapade. He made no mention of his child from that “reckless life.” Quickly moving on, Charlie commended Lettie, claiming; “meeting you and my love for you have made a new man of me.” According to Victorian protocol, Lettie’s conduct perpetuating Victorian ideals of womanhood had changed Charlie to a humble and moral man. Charlie identified with notions of Victorian gender roles and companionate marriage. As a morally superior female, Lettie reined in Charlie’s masculine transgressions, fulfilling part of her responsibilities in their companionate relationship. Charlie proclaimed his intention to fulfill his masculine responsibility, in turn, stating, “If you will consent to share you life with me, I will be to you a kind and true husband leaving nothing undone to make you happy.” Charlie indicated that he would support Lettie emotionally as well as financially. He continued to reiterate companionate ideals, stating, “I think you will find [this] accords with my disposition.” In other words, the couple already had a relationship that was complementary and would continue to be so within marriage. Reiterating his need for her, Charlie praised Lettie.

59 Charles E. Conrad to Alicia D. Stanford, September 15, 1880, Folder 3, Box 20, Series VII, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
claiming, "I have felt at times not worthy of you." As a morally inferior male
undeserving of Lettie’s honorable love, Charlie “tried to suppress” his feelings for Lettie,
thinking he “would lead a bachelor’s life.” Through unmistakable language of love,
Charlie concluded, “but time only adds flames to my love for you, and I feel that my life
will be a blank without you. Awaiting your reply with a great deal of anxiety I am as
ever, Yours Affectionately…” Through the language of romantic love and
companionship, Charlie elaborated on his shortcomings without Lettie and his desire to
have her share the rest of his life. He did not propose to Lettie through allusions to his
wealth, position, or power, but through declarations of intimate desire and a lifelong need
for her support and companionship-and moral guidance. Charlie and Lettie began their
courtship built on ideals of companionate marriage and gendered responsibilities. Charlie
reiterated those principles by asking Lettie to be his wife through romantic language
describing a supportive companionship based on Victorian ideals of gender.

Ultimately, Charlie secured Lettie’s affection and, on January 4, 1881, her hand in
marriage. That previous October of 1880, Lettie wrote to Lillian, a “home friend” from
Halifax, Nova Scotia;

Is Mr. B.60 on the look out for a help-mate? Or has he found a ‘Lilly of the Field’?
fess up! Young lady-because- I’m going to –my dear- on the fourth of January (if
nothing happens) Lettie Stanford will be a thing of the past- as that is the date
fixed for my wedding day- I have always said I would tell you first of all my
home friends- so as soon as the time was settled I sat me down and wrote- Of
course I think ‘Prince Charlie’ one of the best men in the world- I have been
doomed to the C.E.C (Charles E. Conrad)- I don’t want you to think me silly, Lill
dear; but I am very fond of him- it is not a singular [?]- he is the gentleman who
brought that tiresome package of jewelry to James (do you remember the one Pa
Lordly stamped for us) long before we thought of coming to this country- he was
one of the first I met in Benton- we have been ? since making up our minds…I
have found my master! And have had to lower my colors- and surrender all
discretion and I expect we [?] all I am very glad to-and you think me silly dear.

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60 Mr. Butler, clergyman in Chester, Nova Scotia where Lillian and Lettie previously resided.
but I am very fond of him. Start East immediately after the ceremony...perhaps
we may meet after all, I hope so-^1

Lettie revealed to Lill her impending marriage by asking about Lill's own romantic
progress. Inquiring if Mr. B. has found his "Lilly of the Field"? fess up! Young lady-
because- I'm going to," Lettie announced, "on the fourth of January (if nothing happens)
Lettie Stanford will be a thing of the past." Referring to her maiden name as "a thing of
the past", Lettie expressed the loss of her own identity with marriage to Charlie Conrad.
At the same time, Lettie assured Lill that the change was agreeable. Most likely based on
his position as an established businessman, who had already professed his emotional need
for her, Lettie described Charlie as "'Prince Charlie' one of the best men in the world."
She continued to compliment him through romantic language, claiming: "I don't want
you to think me silly, Lill dear; but I am very fond of him." Lettie does not allude to
Charlie's wealth or prestige, but her own fondness for him as the determinant of
marriage. Adhering to Victorian ideals of gender, Lettie commented, "I have found my
master! And have had to lower my colors- and surrender all..." There is no question to
Lettie that in becoming Mrs. C. E. Conrad, she relinquishes her identity as Lettie
Stanford. As appropriate for gender and class, she submitted to masculine authority.
However, priority for the companionate marriage surpasses Victorian gender roles. Even
though she is again embarrassed to say so, Lettie remarked: "I am very glad to- and you
think me silly dear, but I am very fond of him." For Lettie, demonstrating a firm belief in
romantic love and companionship, the fondness that she felt for Charlie took precedence
in determining the integrity of her prospective marriage.

^1 Alicia D. Stanford to Lillian October 21, 1880, Folder 3. Box 20, Series VII. Collection 185. K. Ross
Toole Archives.
A short notice marking the wedding appeared in Fort Benton’s newspaper, *The River Press*. It stated:

Charles E. Conrad and Miss Alicia D. Stanford were married on Tuesday morning at the residence of the bride’s mother, by Rev. C. S. Blackston, and left immediately for a trip to the States. Mr. Conrad is one of the successful businessmen of Benton, and his lovely bride one of the most popular of its fair daughters. *The River Press* wishes them a pleasant trip and safe return.  

The phrasing of the notice highlighted various components of Victorian gender ideals and companionate marriage. According to companionate ideals, the notice emphasized the couple—“Charles E. Conrad and Miss Alicia D. Stanford”—not their parents. Charlie is described as “one the successful business men of Benton” and Lettie, “his lovely bride one of the most popular of its fair daughters.” There is no mention of her parents’ consent or “giving” of the bride, just that the ceremony took place “at the residence of the bride’s mother.” Within those same words, the notice reinforces Victorian gender ideals. The announcement portrayed Charlie as a successful businessman and Lettie as a lovely and popular daughter of Ft. Benton. According to Victorian gender roles, Charlie would provide for the family monetarily, while Lettie would be his lovely wife. This description also supported the ideology of a hierarchical relationship between husband and wife, describing Charlie as a man and Lettie as a daughter.  

Lastly, instead of a detailed account of the wedding ceremony, *The River Press* announcement accentuated the new convention of the honeymoon, stating that: the couple was married on Tuesday morning “and left immediately for a trip to the States…. *The River Press* wishes them a pleasant trip and safe return.” *The River Press*’s wedding announcement reaffirmed popular

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62 *The River Press*, 5 January 1881, microfilm  
63 This ideology is demonstrated throughout their marriage through the words they chose to open and close their letters. On February 26th, 1883 Lettie opened and closed with, “My dear better half…Your loving little girl, Lettie.” Lettie to Charlie. February 26th, 1883, Conrad Mansion Collection.
opinion of the companionate marriage and Victorian gender roles that Charlie and Lettie established during their courtship.

Like a growing number of well-to-do couples in the late nineteenth-century, Lettie and Charlie engaged in what Lystra describes as “an exclusive ritual in which bride and groom alone participated”[^64]: the honeymoon. Changes in post-wedding practices during the early 1800’s introduced the practice of bridal tours for the newlyweds to practice their new roles as husband and wife before setting up household.[^65] Due to Charlie’s wealth and business connections, the Conrads’ honeymoon lasted ten months, allowing plenty of time for both marital synchronization and for Charlie to conduct business with his eastern associates. Continuing the pattern developed during their courtship, Charlie spent a great deal of time during the newlyweds’ honeymoon negotiating and meeting with various business partners or contacts. During their ten-month honeymoon from Ft. Benton, Montana to Halifax, Nova Scotia, to the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia, and finally back to Ft. Benton, Lettie attempted to communicate with her mother, Catherine, on a weekly basis. Most of the correspondence from Lettie during this time referred to the various cities and people Charlie and she encountered during their travels. In a few letters Lettie revealed to Catherine her expectations of marriage and the reality she was experiencing.

From the beginning of their relationship, Lettie and Charlie strove to adhere to Victorian ideals of gender and roles while creating a companionate marriage marked by romantic love. On January 16, 1881, shortly after their nuptials, Lettie described Charlie’s disposition as a new husband and an early attempt he made to relate to his wife and her domestic duties.

[^64]: Lystra, *Searching the Heart*, 175.
[^65]: Lystra, *Searching the Heart*, 81-83.
Charlie is quite well- but looking very meek and subdued, and heaves deeper sighs than ever- says ‘it is business’- Do you know Mater? He makes the funniest kind of married man- tonite he was going over the wash list for me- got over his own part all right- and I sat demurely watching him, trying to keep solemn, when I heard ‘What in the world is a chemizette?!’ I began to laugh, and that finished it.66

Perhaps in an endeavor to involve himself in all aspects of his wife’s life- more likely, because the wash involved payment for services- Charlie attempted to comprehend a portion of Lettie’s domestic matters. Corresponding with Victorian gender spheres, Lettie did not expect her husband to concern himself with domestic affairs and considered him to be “the funniest kind of married man.” Even though in the early letters to her mother Lettie referred to Charlie as her “big boy,” Lettie expected her husband to be assertive and powerful, not a deeply sighing “meek and subdued” man. For instance, in a previous letter Lettie remarked to Catherine, “…he is the best man, and the sweetest gentleman I ever knew- and I have such confidence in him that I think if he told me the skies were going to fall I should look up and be sure.”67 She appeared to accept the excuse of “it is business” from Charlie for his uncharacteristic disposition and found it amusing to have her husband include himself in her feminine duties. Lettie adhered to her own gender roles by sitting “demurely, trying to keep solemn” during her husband’s excursion into her domain, until the outburst of Charlie’s ignorance made her “laugh, and that finished it,” thus ending the crossing over of gender spheres. Despite Charlie’s attempt at relating to his wife as expected in a companionate marriage, the incident reaffirmed both Lettie and Charlie’s Victorian comprehension of clearly demarcated gender roles and separate responsibilities.

66 Alicia D. Conrad to Catherine E. Stanford, January 16, 1881, Folder 9, Box 9, Series III, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
67 Alicia D. Conrad to Catherine E. Stanford, January 1, 1881, Folder 9, Box 9, Series III, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
In a later letter, Lettie reaffirmed her happiness and adherence to Victorian ideals of romantic love and companionate marriage. On April 2nd, Lettie described her special bond with her new husband: “Charlie and I have no concealment between us and he trusts me- as I do him perfectly.” A week later, she repeated to Catherine her amorous declaration, “yes darling! My marriage is all right, all is well with us. We don’t need to say much about it. Charlie and I—because we know there are no secrets between us.” It is apparent, for Lettie, the romantic ideal of complete openness with one another was a major mainstay of her companionate marriage. Lettie’s letters affirmed to her mother both gender roles and romantic companionship.

The Conrads’ wealth was another mainstay of their marriage. Charlie’s position and prosperity allowed the couple the ability to comply with Victorian standards and the freedom to enjoy nineteenth-century luxuries. During her honeymoon, Lettie expressed her joy at traveling and enjoying the leisure Charlie could provide. On March 27th, Lettie exclaimed, “I can’t tell you Mater, how happy your little girl is, but I know you will understand! Just as well as if I spent a week trying to tell you- I am afraid I shall be sadly spoiled when I come home again- but you will have to tell me and I will try and keep sensible…” Lettie expected her married life to be less luxurious than her honeymoon. Even so, from an encounter during an unexpected delay in Washington D. C., Lettie understood due to Charlie’s wealth and position, her life would not be as rigorous as others’:

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68 Alicia D. Conrad to Catherine E. Stanford, April 2, 1881, Folder 9, Box 9, Series III, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
69 Alicia D. Conrad to Catherine E. Stanford, April 9, 1881, Folder 9, Box 9, Series III, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
70 Alicia D. Conrad to Catherine E. Stanford, March 27, 1881, Folder 9, Box 9, Series III, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
...and the poor woman with half a dozen little ones clinging to her skirts and another one at her breast-waited on the table as much as we would let her... and seemed so proud, contented and happy among all the hard work and ‘no play’ of her life- that it made me feel as if I could not be thankful enough!  

Lettie did not view herself as woman who would have “half a dozen little ones clinging to her skirts and another one at her breast.” Further demonstrating Lettie’s privileged status, in later years her cousin Nan teased Lettie about her endowment of wealth and position provided by Charlie. “You should use economy,” she wrote. “There is many a slip between the ‘cup and the lips’, and your millionaire may slip between this and that far distant state and then your hopes of a mansion, carriage and pair [of horses], footman and all the paraphernalia of high life will fade from your longing eyes.” It was already apparent that due to her position as an affluent white woman, Lettie would have the advantages of planned parenting, the help of servants, and the luxury of leisure time.

Although Victorian gender ideals were widespread, only certain groups of society, such as the white, Protestant upper and middle class, could maintain them. Class and race significantly shaped a woman’s ability to abide by Victorian gender roles. In her book, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860*, Christine Stansell portrays the difficulty urban working-class women encountered when attempting to adhere to middle-class standards of womanhood. She demonstrates not only the “social conflicts in which laboring women were involved and the social pressures they brought to bear on others,” but also how “female class relations then, were central to the tremendous...
efflorescence and self-confidence of bourgeois life.”\textsuperscript{74} Stansell maintains that while middle-class women utilized Victorian gender ideals to enhance their authority outside the home, the bourgeois women criticized working-class women—regardless of their circumstances—for lack of adherence to Victorian ideals. Women in urban moral reform societies attempted to improve working-class women through programs based on Victorian ideals of womanhood, domesticity and motherhood. Historian Peggy Pascoe, reiterates the difficulties of non-white women to adhere to Victorian principles of gender and the same rehabilitant desire of middle-class white women in the American West. Through the establishment of rescue homes, bourgeois women in the American West attempted to reform non-white, non-Protestant women. As Pascoe states, “home mission women envisioned themselves as moral maternalists reaching out to desperate, powerless women. They offered a typically Victorian solution to the problem of female victimization: the emancipation of women through the extension of the Christian home.”\textsuperscript{75} By attempting to instill Victorian principles in the lives of working-class and non-white, non-Protestant women, affluent white women enhanced their realm of domestic and virtuous influence.

Unlike the middle-class female reformers of Stansell and Pascoe’s monographs, Lettie Conrad utilized her wealth and position to improve her own home and family, not to reform the community. She demonstrated her moral authority in attempting to maintain a Victorian public image for her entire family. Unfortunately, her three brothers’ behavior made this a difficult task for her. In 1894 during a vacation at the family cabin, Hawksnest, on Foy’s Lake, Montana, Lettie demonstrated this manipulation


\textsuperscript{75} Pascoe, Peggy, \textit{Relations of Rescue}, 69.
in a letter to her mother Catherine. Catherine was not in attendance because she stayed in Ft. Benton to obtain some needed rest after an illness.

One reason I write you today is this- George has been very much taken with a little girl here 'Bessie Mayors' and as it looks now, will marry her- she seems like a proper modest little thing and is very much respected here-though her relations are by no means nice in any way- still as George can never marry a lady and may make something of himself if he has a wife-and as we have reason to know through Harry, might do very much worse-and as nothing we would say would change him any way- we may as well make the best of it, and him, it comes- by being nice about it...be sure and do not seem to know anything about—as he wished to tell you himself, but I thought a little preparation would do no harm- we can manage the people here very nicely about it- and carry things right over their heads...76

Despite the fact that Bessie Mayor’s “relations are by no means nice in any way,” Lettie approves of her attachment to George. Deeming her to be “a proper modest little thing,” and “well respected around here,” Lettie determined that Bessie would do for George. This was because George could “never marry a lady and may make something of himself if he has a wife.” Lettie believed in Victorian gender ideals, including the conviction that only the influence of a proper woman could transform an immoral man. Lettie reiterated this belief by reminding her mother; “as we have reason to know through Harry, [George] might do very much worse.”77 Lettie attempted to utilize her position to reform her family, not her community. It was important to Lettie that not only her husband and children but all other family members as well to adhere to Victorian standards.

Situated in Montana, deviations from Victorian ideals of gender roles and responsibilities surrounded Lettie and Charlie. Life in the American West challenged conventional gender roles, and married couples on the frontier, as in the East,

76 Alicia D. Conrad to Catherine E. Stanford, August 23, 1894, Folder 22, Box 9, Series III, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
77 Harry disgraced Catherine and Lettie by living with a woman, Jo, out of wedlock.
experienced both satisfaction and disappointments. Western women’s participation in masculine activities paralleled challenges to gender roles occurring elsewhere in American society. A major regional challenge was physical separation. For various reasons, frontier couples were apart longer and more frequently than their eastern counterparts. As a result, a frontier woman often assumed duties and responsibilities customarily assigned to the husband. In her book, *The Important Things in Life: Women, Work, and Family in Sweetwater County, Wyoming, 1880-1929*, Dee Garceau explains, “studies of the effects of marital separation on American women...have shown that married women living apart from the husbands became increasingly independent.”

Some women on the frontier found themselves maintaining all areas of homesteads, including caring for livestock and cultivating the fields as well as completing their domestic duties. Many western women became “helpers” to the men, assisting with the family business or farm. But, as Glenda Riley asserts in her book, *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains*, “although their ‘helper’ role to men might marginally affect their activities, women seldom abandoned the domestic role as the focus of their lives.”

Similar to their contemporaries in the East, women residing in urban areas of the American West influenced the public arena. Women in the American West emulated their eastern counterparts, establishing themselves in the public arena and basing their participation on their moral authority. In her book, *No Step Backward: Women and Family on the Rocky Mountain Mining Frontier*, Paula Petrik describes the success of

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woman’s suffrage in Montana as a combination of conservative ideals reinforced by Western experience.

The insurgent politics... boosted women’s political aspirations and provided an environment receptive to expanded political rights and participation. At the same time, suffragists played to nativist and racist fears and promised a sure corrective to the growing number of foreign-born voters.80

Again, western women utilized their feminine role as moral authorities to promote their participation in the public world. During her marriage and childrearing years, Lettie did not involve herself in the masculine public world; she participated within the public community through her church and charity work.

Though the structure and style of contemporary marriages were mutable for different groups, Victorian ideals of romantic love, emotional disclosure, and companionate marriage were widespread. Marriages of the American West illustrated the challenges and changes to the prevailing ideology of companionate marriage during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Frontier life clearly demonstrated the inconsistencies and complexity of marital expectations and actual experiences.

For the Conrads, living in the American West did not disrupt the expected gender roles and responsibilities of their marriage. For instance, during her first few years at Fort Benton, Lettie, with Miss K. B. Tonge, opened and operated the Select School for Young Ladies and Children. The two taught elementary education with the addition of calisthenics, music, mythology, astronomy, penmanship, composition, and natural philosophy for the older students.81 Then when she married in 1881, Lettie, adhering to Victorian ideals of womanhood- or perhaps because nineteenth middle-class society

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81 School Announcement, Folder 3, Box 20, Series VII, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
demanded it- resigned from teaching to become a full-time wife. Charlie was already an
established and wealthy man. Unlike a working class man, he did not need help from
Lettie with his business or for extra income. Lettie was able to focus completely on her
expected roles of wife and mother.

Lettie and Charlie Conrad began their relationship based on the ideals of
companionate marriage. Through correspondence, traveling, and building a home and
family together, they succeeded in creating a companionate marriage based on romantic
love and strict gender roles. Despite tension and strain within their marriage caused by
the same adherence to Victorian ideals, Lettie and Charlie continued to uphold middle-
class standards. Fortunately, the Conrads’ wealth allowed Lettie and Charlie to adhere to
Victorian gender and familial ideals and behavior with less concern for basic needs such
as food, clothing and shelter. Lettie and Charlie were able to focus on the success of
their personal relationship and family lifestyle, not simply survival in the American West.
Chapter 2
The Domestic Ideal

“The children are rapidly coming to an age where it is imperative that they have the refinements about them of a good house.”¹ When Alicia “Lettie” Conrad expressed this sentiment in a letter to her mother in 1894, she demonstrated her internalization of Victorian ideals of domesticity. During the nineteenth century, middle class American ideals assigned men and women certain roles and tasks based on gender. The nineteenth-century association between women and the home was deeper than just a workspace and biological assignment. Women associated their responsibility for the home with their personal fulfillment and their unique contribution to American society. The ideology of the family home structured women’s lives. The Victorian domestic ideal designated women as naturally suited for domestic affairs, responsible for sheltering their families from the outside world and for secluding themselves from the political realm. Ideals of domesticity encouraged women to value themselves for their ability to provide a moral environment for their families, rather than for their economic contributions to the household.

Previously, during the colonial period, both women and men participated in household production. People saw the home “as serving the purely private ends of providing for the needs of those who lived in it, and the housewife had no reason to think of herself as vitally linked with the world outside the home.”² Women’s outside or public roles were secondary, perhaps even irrelevant in some circumstances. Colonial

¹Alicia D. Conrad to Catherine E. Stanford, September 28, 1894, Folder 22, Box 9, Series 111, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
women performed gender-specific roles and tasks within the household, working for the common, family-oriented goal. A woman’s contribution to household production helped provide the family with economic security. As Ruth Cowan notes in her book, More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave, “Under the technological and economic conditions that prevailed before industrialization, survival at even a minimally comfortable standard of living required that each household contain adults (or at least grown children) of both sexes.” Economic security could be gained only through cooperation of all adults within the household. Men and women performed various aspects of household production, some in tandem and others separately, but each contributing to the overall success of the family. Some women increased their authority by expanding their economic household production, exchanging products or services within the community through an informal women’s trading network. Women played a vital role in the colonial family economy. As the colonies expanded and strained against control of Great Britain, the American Revolution promoted women to a new communal or municipal value. Through their role as caretakers of the home, women became socially or politically influential on the outside world. Glenna Matthews states in her book, Just a Housewife: The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America, the home in the United States “gained a function so political that the domestic sphere could influence the outcome of history.” As with marriage, the emerging middle class constructed an ideology of womanhood and domesticity derived from philosophies of the Enlightenment and the experience of the

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3 Cowan, Ruth Schwartz, More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave, 25.
5 Matthews, Just a Housewife, 7.
American Revolution. The gendered responsibility of women as caretakers of the home and the developing concept of "Republican Motherhood" combined to increase women's value as political entities. Americans began to regard the family home as the source for communal virtue and stability, with the woman central to its direction and focus. In her book, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experiences of Women, 1750-1800*, Mary Beth Norton notes, in the Republican context, "The message was unmistakable...they located woman's public role in her domestic responsibilities, in her obligation to create a supportive home life for her husband, and particularly in her duty to raise republican sons who would love their country and preserve its virtuous character." Revolutionary Americans praised women's maternal authority. Society extended women's maternal influence of morality and patriotism over their children to civic influence with political and social consequence. However, women were not direct political participants; denied the vote, they shaped politics by influencing their husbands and sons. As historian Robert Griswold explains, "The influence that women did possess stemmed not from public power but from nobility of purpose and moral righteousness." Even though women did not gain direct political power such as suffrage, through their wifely and maternal influence within the family home, women extended their influence on the public world.

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9 In her essay, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment, An American Perspective", historian Linda Kerber cites how women's designation of wives and mothers from various Enlightenment thinkers such as, Locke, Montesquieu, and Rousseau, influenced American Republicans' desire to create a legitimate space or rationale for women to be involved in the public and political world.
Due to technological changes in nineteenth-century America, families increasingly participated in the public market for goods no longer produced at home. The home was no longer viable as the primary source of economic security. As men continued to remove the locus of their business out of the home into office buildings and state government buildings, "the home was gradually emptied of its commercial and political functions and devoted mostly to family and culture."\textsuperscript{10} During the antebellum period, industrialization increasingly drew men out of the home into corporate, business spaces, permitting women more authority within the home. The home became less of a space for cooperative production, and more a space that emphasized the gender segregation of working arrangements. Going out to earn a wage was man's work, while staying home to manage the house was woman's work.

In response to economic and cultural changes from industrialization, the nineteenth century became a time of change and adaptation for the family. Men and women constructed strict gender roles to create an atmosphere of stability in a turbulent society. In her book, \textit{Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865}, historian Mary Ryan terms the retreat to and seclusion of the family home during the nineteenth century, "privatizing." She claims, "both the cult of domesticity and the mythology of the self-made man were built on the assumption that the household was no longer the place of production, the locus of breadwinning."\textsuperscript{11} Instead, the home was an area for "quiet, seclusion, and privacy."\textsuperscript{12} According to the

\textsuperscript{11} Ryan, Mary, \textit{Cradle of the Middle Class: The family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865}. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981. 147.
\textsuperscript{12} Ryan, \textit{Cradle of the Middle Class}, 147.
new domestic ideology, it was women’s responsibility to create and maintain the secluded, moral home.

Movements of populations within society also increased women’s domestic power. In spite of- or because of- the growing population of urban centers, the disruption of family structure by wage work, and the expanding gap between economic classes, the new middle class’s domestic ideal of family set the standard for gender roles and responsibilities for American men and women. As women’s participation within the economic realm decreased, the new middle class emphasized women’s moral value within the family home. Victorian gender roles and responsibilities accentuated the changing attitude towards women’s household labor and economic contribution by emphasizing women’s emotional or nurturing value to the family.\(^{13}\)

The middle-class canon of domesticity emphasized the separation between the outside world and the private home. In her book, *The Bonds of Womanhood: Women’s Sphere in New England, 1780-1835*, Nancy Cott asserts, “the central conviction of domesticity was the contrast between the home and the world.”\(^{14}\) The home was hailed as a sanctuary from the modern world. Middle-class women became the caretakers of this isolated sanctuary. Cott explains: “The values of domesticity undercut opposition to exploitative pecuniary standards in the work world, by upholding a ‘separate sphere’ of comfort and compensation, instilling a morality that would encourage self-control, and fostering the idea that preservation of home and family sentiment was an ultimate goal.”\(^{15}\)

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\(^{15}\) Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood*, 69.
The home became a space that women created and maintained to provide men and children with moral rejuvenation and instruction.

Historian Linda Kerber expands this idea of the home as a separate space for women. In her essay, "Separate Sphere, Female Worlds, Women’s Place," she argues that the term "sphere" indicated more than just a physical placement for women, such as the home, but "described women’s part in American culture." She maintains that middle-class women of Victorian America constructed a separate female sphere designed to constrain or regulate the shifting society. Establishing themselves as caretakers of the increasingly significant and newly privatized home, women amplified their authority within the family and their importance in Victorian society.

The domestic ideal comprised more than just a moral environment for the family to retreat from the harsh modern world; it was part of a woman’s self-identification. Glenna Matthews claims the "value conferred on the home gave women a greater chance to feel satisfied about doing important work..." Historian Christine Stansell elaborates: "Domesticity quickly became an element of the bourgeois self-consciousness." Maintaining a moral household and providing for the welfare of all the members of the family was a vital part of the new middle-class’s definition of being a woman during the nineteenth century. Women considered their value according to their success as a homemaker. As Kathleen Anne McHugh states in her book, American Domesticity: From How-to Manual to Hollywood Melodrama, "while ownership attested to successful manhood, a mode of habitation infused with both moralized and ornamental values

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17 Matthews, Glenna, Just a Housewife, 29.
measured successful womanhood." Keeping a moral house, rearing virtuous citizens, and sheltering the family from worldly evils indicated success for Victorian women.

For many women, achieving the domestic ideal of the American family was unrealistic. Circumstances such as poverty and geography impeded women’s adherence to Victorian standards of supervision for the family home. Poor women could not afford to refrain from wage work and devote all of their energies to housework and childcare. Due to the inadequate wages for men and the increasing availability of wage work for women, many lower-class women sought ways to increase household income. Some women took in piecework, laundry, and boarders, and thus combining being at home with producing income. Others sent their children out to work or sold goods in the streets themselves. Others were employed in industry. Among the working poor, then, women continued to play an important role in the household economy both inside and outside the home. Historian Anne McHugh maintains that, “Working-class wives’ income and labor doubled the value of a husband’s sub-subsistence wages and allowed families to survive.” For some women, economic contributions to the household were more significant than the moral welfare of the family. However, lower class women’s work forced them to fall short of the domestic ideal.

Region also challenged women’s ability to adhere to the middle-class domestic ideal. Living in the American West posed problems for some women in their dedication to Victorian domestic standards. From wearing a bloomer costume as opposed to a fine

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20 In her book, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860*, Christine Stansell describes working class women’s difficulties with adherence to middle-class domestic ideals. The second chapter, “Female Work and Poverty,” focuses on the specific problems of economic income and working class women.
traveling dress with clean collar and cuffs, to handling the dung used to sustain their fires, the conditions of life in the American West complicated the domestic ideal. Many women desired to remain faithful to the domestic ideal, yet in some cases the domestic ideal had to be either altered or disregarded.

Women on the Montana frontier confronted these difficulties with resilience and creativity. They either imported domestic goods or manipulated what was available to maintain a semblance of domesticity. Some women kept up with various domestic items from one home to another attempting to continue their link to Victorian ideals and their families in the East. Because of their efforts, roles and responsibilities in the frontier home remained “shaped more by gender considerations than by region.” Women in the West continued to be the obvious caretakers of the home and family. As Julie Jeffrey states in her book, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880*, “If the conventional division of labor might collapse in the first stages of pioneer life, women need not fear they would become masculine. For men and women had different natures and, thus, different obligations.” Women in the American West attempted to adhere to their middle-class standards of womanhood and domesticity by improvising or compromising. The domestic ideal persisted for women of the American West even as actual observance altered to accommodate frontier life.

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23 In his dissertation, “The Character of the Family in Rural California, 1850-1890,” Robert Griswold further explains the significance of the domestic ideology and how women attempted to create a civilized American West. In her thesis, “A little bit of Paradise,” Allison Badger applies this domestic ideology specifically to women in Montana.
For some women on the frontier, the inconsistency of domestic help contributed to household conflict. Women in the West not only took on roles associated with men, but also responsibilities or chores customarily assigned to domestic servants. In middle-class and upper-class eastern households, women employed domestic servants to perform menial tasks and assist with household operation. In the West, domestic help was neither readily available nor reliable. David Katzman discusses an overall servant shortage in his book, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America*, "From the start, commentary on servants noted the general shortage, the inefficiency of those employed, and the constant turnover among household workers." Difficulties in securing domestic help plagued well-to-do women in the American West as well. Because of the shortage of preferred domestic help, such as young white women, western women found themselves employing non-white servants and performing menial tasks themselves. Regardless of their new situation in life, western middle-class women utilized what resources were available to maintain Victorian ideals.

Household maintenance, mediation between the public and private worlds, and moral influence were three main components of domesticity for middle-class women in Victorian America. Household maintenance comprised of the physical upkeep of the home. From daily dishes to organizing the Christmas dinner, whether women took care of these tasks themselves or relegated the labor to others, it was their feminine responsibility to maintain a well-run environment for their family. While doing so, women established themselves as a filter for their families. They mediated between the family and the outside world by creating homes with definite boundaries between public

and private spaces. Lastly, women created homes that encouraged Victorian standards of
morality and gender. They utilized the home as a place of influence and education.

One nineteenth-century Western couple that attempted to adhere to Victorian
ideals of domesticity was Alicia Stanford Conrad and Charles E. Conrad, known as
“Lettie” and “Charlie.” Lettie and Charlie were married in January 1881. After their
extended honeymoon, they set up house in Ft. Benton, Montana. In this house, formerly
owned by Colonel Guido Ilges, Lettie and Charlie began their settled life of domesticity.
Adhering to Victorian gender ideals, Charlie worked outside the home with his various
business networks of merchandise transportation, and later banking and ranching, while
Lettie maintained the family home. For Lettie, the purpose of a home was to provide her
family and guests a place of comfort and convenience. She attempted to do this by
abiding by Victorian domestic ideals. She maintained a household that promoted the
moral welfare of her family, while mediating between their public and private worlds.
Lettie demonstrated her desire to uphold Victorian domesticity through her attention to
the family home, first in Ft. Benton and later in Kalispell, Montana.

Lettie took part both in furnishing the family home in Ft. Benton and in designing
the family mansion in Kalispell, Montana. In a letter written to her mother during her
honeymoon from Washington D. C. in 1881, Lettie related the newlywed couple’s
excitement at purchasing their own home and their efforts to acquire furnishings:

When news came that the old house would be vacant- and we jumped at it at
once- and sent on for the measurements of the floors and windows- and then
Charlie and I went and purchased our furniture- we agree exactly in our likes and
dislikes- and first we discarded from our minds all the breakable, tiresome pretty
things - and settled down to solid comfort...we are just suited in our Mothers-
Halfway into their honeymoon, Lettie and Charlie “jumped” at the opportunity to acquire a house suitable for their social class, one owned previously by a distinguished military man. Determined to make it their own, they “sent for measurements of the floors and windows,” allowing them to utilize their location in the East to acquire goods not easily available in the American West and thus overcame some of the obstacles to domesticity in the West. Conveying the companionate ideals that linked their marital happiness to their domestic endeavors, Lettie claimed: Charlie and I “agree exactly in our likes and dislikes.” Also concurring with Victorian advice literature, Lettie and Charlie discarded “all the breakable, tiresome pretty things - and settled down to solid comfort.” Together, the couple intended to create a home that provided ordered comfort, as well as an arena to display their wealth and position. Lettie closed the letter emphasizing the couple’s need for their mothers’ experience and reiterating the romantic connection between herself and Charlie, noting: “we are just suited in our Mothers- prospective housekeeping, household god’s- and each other- and are happy and silly as two very big babies ‘playing dollhouse’.” Incorporating the ideals of companionship and domesticity, Lettie and Charlie took advantage of their travels in the East to transport Victorian ideals of domesticity to their home in the American West. In this letter, even before physically settling down to familial life, Lettie expressed her desire to create a home centered on the physical and emotional welfare of her family.

27 Alicia D. Conrad to Catherine E. Stanford, May 28th 1881, Folder 9, Box 9, Series III, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
Lettie Conrad’s adherence to Victorian domestic ideals of household maintenance is demonstrated best through the Conrad Mansion in Kalispell, Montana. The mansion was built in 1895 and Lettie resided in it until her death in 1923. Lettie’s youngest daughter, Alicia Ann, donated the family mansion to the city of Kalispell on December 27, 1974.28 It is still stands and is a museum containing many of the furnishings and personal belongings of the Conrad family. Both the architecture and furnishings of the mansion in Kalispell exemplified Lettie’s devotion to ideals of the Victorian home.

A letter to Catherine in 1894 illustrated Lettie’s excitement at meeting with architect Kirkland K. Cutter and the prospect of realizing the dream of her new home.

Now I have another piece of news! We have sent to Mr. Kirk Cutter to come over and if his plans suit- as I feel confident they will- will build this fall here in Kalispell... and after thinking hard on all sides I am very happy about it- so if all goes well, we shall all be together for Christmas in our own house dearie?29

This letter is dated three years after the Conrad family moved from Ft. Benton to Kalispell, Montana. Prior to the completion of the mansion in 1895, the family resided at the West Hotel and various other locations around the Flathead Valley.30

Lettie and Charlie believed the creation of their ideal family home worthy of lengthy consideration. After visiting various homes and public buildings in Spokane, Washington, built by Kirk Cutter, the Conrads found an architect whose plans suited them, as Lettie felt “confident’ they would. Lettie demonstrated Victorian ideals of domesticity through her attention to the Conrad Mansion. Notably, Lettie mentions the

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29 Alicia D. Conrad to Catherine E. Stanford, August 23, 1894, Folder 22, Box 9, Series III, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
30 Murphy, *Half Interest*. 156.
importance of being together for Christmas. The significance of Christmas to Lettie would be demonstrated throughout the Conrad Mansion.

For Lettie Conrad, as for other middle-class women, household affairs of the Victorian ideal involved the actual maintenance of house. In 1829, Lydia Maria Child established herself as a nationally known expert on domesticity with the publication of her advice book, The Frugal Housewife. Within its pages, Child described a domestic ideal that emphasized “frugality, ingenuity, and self-reliance promoted in a text patched together from discursive forms available in the home such as recipes, hints and lists.”

Utilizing a format familiar to the domestic sphere, Child advised women on how to maintain a clean, organized, and economical household. As caretakers of the home, women were responsible for maintaining an efficient, well-run household during a period of “socioeconomic transformations.” They were “charged with ‘gathering up all the fragments’ of the home and, by extension, of the nation.” By shaping the domestic sphere, women influenced the outside world.

The floor plan of the Conrad Mansion itself illustrates forethought of household affairs. The kitchen is located near the walk-in cooler and the dining room, allowing for easy execution of meal production. The kitchen also was situated at the back of the house adjacent to “the Hub.” This location kept servants concealed while they performed their duties. “The Hub,” or anteroom, was a small room at the back of the house that led to every other part of the house. Notably it was near a central stairwell, not the main entry staircase. Thus, servants and family members could navigate to any floor yet remain concealed from the public areas of the mansion.

31 McHugh, American Domesticity, 19.
32 McHugh, American Domesticity, 20.
The kitchen was also the space in the home designated as a domain centered solely on managing household affairs. The grand Conrad Mansion had two kitchens: a basement kitchen that doubled as a common area for the servants complemented the first floor kitchen. Lettie supervised a team of domestic servants ranging from six to twenty-four people at a time. The kitchen and the anteroom or “hub,” established a physical nucleus for domestic servants. The servants were able to access any floor without disturbing the public areas of the house. Ingeniously, from any floor in the mansion, Lettie or other family members could contact servants in the kitchen through a callboard, intercoms, or a whistler mechanism. In this manner, Lettie was able to supervise household maintenance from almost every room in the mansion.

One aspect of the house that deviated from typical Victorian domestic architecture was the laundry room. Initially located in the basement of the mansion, during construction it became evident that the water table was too high, and the room was relocated to the third floor informal family living area. Revealing the Conrad’s affluence, the laundry room contained many extras and modern appliances. These included an early electric washing machine, a four-paneled hot air dryer built into the wall, curtain stretchers, Saad irons, and a zinc alloy floor as a precaution against water overflow. Despite features already built into the house, such as laundry chutes on all three floors, the process of washing, drying, and ironing were not inconvenienced too much by the relocation because the mansion’s floor plan included an early elevator operated by a counterbalance hand pulley system. This elevator was utilized for hauling both

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equipment and laundry up to the third floor. In these two areas of the mansion designed exclusively for domestic endeavors - the kitchen and the laundry room - Lettie was able to manage household maintenance and provide for the physical needs of her family.

Lettie Conrad was the administrator or "Madame"\textsuperscript{37} of the Conrad Mansion. As historian Jeanne Boydston states in her book, \textit{Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic}, well-to-do women's "freedom from actual labor became a badge of class status."\textsuperscript{38} Lettie's wealth and position in Kalispell allowed her to choose which household tasks to perform. While Lettie did perform various special domestic duties such as childrearing or making the Christmas pudding, she allocated most of the daily household tasks and menial chores, such as dusting and dishes, to the servants.

Unlike some women of the American West, Lettie did not encounter many difficulties adhering to Victorian ideals of womanhood and domesticity. Her wealth allowed her to purchase furnishings and conveniences from the East and to remain exclusively within the home, managing domestic concerns. For Lettie Conrad, domestic problems arose from domestic service. Lettie’s quandary with domestic service was not a lack of funding, but a lack of available and consistent help. Biographer James Murphy claims that when residing in Ft. Benton, Lettie employed a Chinese man, Wong, as her sole domestic servant. When the family moved to Kalispell, however, it immediately became evident that the mansion would require a substantial increase in domestic help. Murphy also claims that, upon the advice of her brother-in-law, W. G. Conrad, Lettie employed three African-American women imported from Virginia. This did not work

\textsuperscript{37} Paper, undated. Folder 8, Box 40, Series VII, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.

\textsuperscript{38} Boydston, \textit{Home and Work}, xvi.
out, however, because Lettie discovered the women utilizing the cooking brandy for personal purposes as opposed to household production. After sending the women back to Virginia, Lettie employed local unmarried Scandinavian women. Like other women of her status, Lettie preferred to employ white women of western European heritage. Unfortunately for Lettie, the local single men also sought after these women, and Lettie lost much of her help to marriage.39

Reading a letter to Lettie from Seattle friends Mr. and Mrs. Edwards in 1905, it is apparent that Lettie’s trouble with household help was common and continuous. Mr. Edwards wrote, “Am sorry to learn through Mrs. Edwards that you are having trouble with servants, especially when you have a house full. Hope Florence will be able to get you some assistance before long from here, though the servant problem seems equally serious in Seattle.”40 Lettie’s servant problem was not limited to simple lack of availability, however; Lettie’s expectations of her servants may have aggravated the situation.

Lettie Conrad emulated the upper-class European custom of retaining numerous servants, each engaged in specialized tasks, such as valet, butler, lady’s maids, and laundresses. “Perhaps the growth of specialized jobs reflected the desire for upward mobility of some middle class families,” as David Katzman notes in his book, Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America. However, “the division of labor was arbitrary and ever-changing, and specialization never developed to

39 Murphy, Half Interest, 160. Also legend from the Conrad Mansion tells of an unsatisfied English mail-order bride. While residing in Kalispell and working for the Conrad family, the mail-order bride decided she did not want to stay in America. In exchange for her three large dowry plates, Charlie Conrad paid for her passage back to England, thus losing another servant.

40 J. K. Edwards to Alicia D. Conrad, July 1, 1905, Folder 9, Box 21, Series VII, Collection 185. K. Ross Toole Archives,
any significant degree... thus regardless of job title nearly all servants were general household workers." The unpredictability of responsibilities and overwhelming amount of labor created a strong dislike of domestic employment that destabilized the servant workforce.

In her “Plan of work for second Girl”, Lettie set out the daily domestic duties for one of her female servants. At the beginning Lettie noted that these instructions,

May be changed at any time, [then proceeds to outline]... Every morning before breakfast sweep front and side porches, dust and tidy hall-library-dining room except Friday. Thorough sweeping day for those rooms-on Friday dust and tidy den and office on all other days these two rooms are done right after breakfast... 

She then proceeded to detail the extra work to be done each day, including ironing, bathrooms, laundry, and other household chores, ending with everything to be prepared for Sunday, suggesting the help had Sunday off. From these instructions, it is evident that Lettie’s domestic standards served to challenge and most likely irritate female servants, possibly encouraging their easy abandonment of their service to the mansion.

As Ruth Cowan explains, “The work itself [domestic service] was sheer drudgery, since the whole point of employing a servant was to have someone do the work the housewife herself did not wish to do.” It is not surprising then, that many young women seized the chance to establish their own home with themselves as lady of the “manor”, instead of toiling in some else’s household.

Eventually, working with a man named Mokutaro Hori, Lettie contracted with young Japanese men, offering them room and board and a monthly sum (distributed through Hori) in return for household and estate service. In return, each boy would serve

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41 Katzman, *Seven Days a Week*, 118.
42 Paper, undated, Folder 8, Box 40, Series VII, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
the household until he had paid his debt of passage to the United States. Despite the
close resemblance of this arrangement to indentured servitude, a letter from K. Kawahara
in Seattle, Washington, demonstrated the appreciation of the Japanese boys for their
employment with the Conrad family- or perhaps expressed the type of sentiments Lettie
would like to hear from a previous employee:

Dear Madam,
I have arrived here duly in the time. I have looked for the proper man to
send him over to you but there are plenty work around here and I can find no
body to go over so far. I believe you have received my telegram for that effect.
I have sent you a can of Japanese cookie or wafers (whatever you call)
made in Japan. I hope you will enjoy them, though they might not taste good to
you. Just my kind remembrance of your kind treatment for so long time.
Don’t think, though my thanks and memory toward your kindness are only
confined in that small can. My thanks are far deeper and I will remember you ever
as my kind, tender madam.
Remaining yours truly, K. Kawahara

Like other mistresses, Lettie established highly personal relationships with the household
help. After his term of employment, K. Kawahara not only attempted to find a “proper
man to send over,” but sent a can of Japanese cookies as a “kind remembrance” of
Lettie’s “kind treatment for so long time.” Kawahara further demonstrated his affection
for his former employer, explaining, “Don’t think, though my thanks and memory toward
your kindness are only confined in that small can. My thanks are far deeper and I will
remember you ever as my kind, tender madam.” Kawahara and Lettie’s relationship as
servant and mistress transcended the sheer drudgery of household chores. Or, as Peggy
Pascoe relates in her book, Relation of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority
in the American West, 1874-1939, possibly servants like Kawahara-Asian immigrants
working within white households-catered to their employers’ sense of righteousness and

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44 K. Kawahara to Alicia D. Conrad, June 26th, 1905, Folder 8, Box 21, Series VII. Collection 185, K. Ross
Toole Archives.
45 Katzman, Seven Days a Week, 236.
Perhaps Kawahara sent a letter to Lettie inscribing the feeling of gratitude and friendship in order to keep an economic avenue open for both himself and other Japanese immigrants. Regardless of the authenticity of affection from her domestic help, through a combination of white women and Japanese men, Lettie was able to construct a team of domestic servants for the Conrad Mansion. This team of servants helped facilitate a luxurious life for the family and their visitors while indicating the Conrads’ wealth and position. Most important, the physical arrangement of the mansion and the presence of servants allowed Lettie to adhere to Victorian ideals of domesticity.

Along with the duty to manage an efficient and comfortable family home, middle-class women of Victorian America assumed responsibility for mediating between the outside world and their own family. Victorian domestic ideology designated women and their position within the home as righteous models for both their families and society. Because of their inherent morality, women mediated between the outside world and their own families. As society accentuated the separation of genders and designated women as the authority of the home, women were encouraged to create a space for comfort and compensation. The home was a space not only for physical respite for families, but also moral rejuvenation. As Nancy Cott states, “If a man had to enter the heartless and debasing world, his wife at home supplied motive and reward for him... to absorb, palliate, and even redeem...” Middle-class families designed their houses to support the moral, private family and protect against intrusion from the corrupt, outside world.

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46 In Chapter 4, “Home Mission Women Race, and Culture The Case of ‘Native Helpers’” of Relations of Rescue, Historian Peggy Pascoe recounts the rocky and productive relationships between white women and their foreign helpers in home missions in the American West.
48 Cott, Nancy E., Bonds of Womanhood. 69-70.
In his book, *The American Family Home: 1800-1960*, Clifford Clark asserts that architects, housing plan-book writers, and social reformers proposed that the home was the most important influence of an individual’s values and behaviors. “By tying together housing standards and appropriate family behaviors, they hoped to improve the nature of society itself and to contribute to the world advance toward civilization.”⁴⁹ The configuration of the nineteenth-century family home reflected social values. The family home became an area for seclusion and moral education, opposing the corruption of the industrialized public world. Women were in charge of this haven; they were “pictured ... as best suited, both biologically and emotionally, to counteract the disruptions caused by the expanding and transient economy...”⁵⁰ As caretakers of the virtuous private sphere, women acted as counterbalances to the dubious public sphere. As Cott claims, “The canon of domesticity answered [the amoral world] by constituting the home as a redemptive counterpart to the world... It was to fit men to pursue their worldly aims in a regulated way.”⁵¹ Victorian middle-class women created homes designed to embrace their families, making a distinct separation between the private home and the public world.

Lettie Conrad’s belief in this Victorian distinction between the public and private spheres and the woman’s responsibility to mediate between them is demonstrated through the design of the Conrad Mansion. To begin, the front room of the mansion is an entrance to a spacious living area. According to Victorian standards, the family home designated certain spaces within the home as private and public areas. This spacious

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⁵¹ Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood*, 98.
entrance area leading to the various spaces of the mansion indicates Victorian ideals of public and private areas within the family home. A grand staircase clearly separates the rooms on the bottom floor- the office, the solarium, and the parlor, all rooms available for public entertaining- from the private bedrooms above. Architectural historian Clifford E. Clark, Jr. explains that this sort of clear distinction between the private and public areas of the house was typical of Victorian homes:

Although the differentiation of public and private spaces in the house had been well underway by the end of the eighteenth century, by the nineteenth century such divisions had become an obsession... In a society where immigration, a highly transient population, and the desire to move up the social ladder sometimes strained personal relationships, the front parlor helped fill the need for a more controlled social environment in which the rules of governing social interaction could be formalized.  

Also located on the bottom floor were the kitchen and the rooms occupied by Lettie and Charlie’s mothers. Congruent with Victorian notions of separate private and public spaces, none of these rooms are visible from the entrance room.

Placement of the mothers’ rooms also demonstrated Lettie’s understanding of personal or private space. Both Lettie’s and Charlie’s mothers made their home with the Conrads. Each of their rooms is located in the back of the house, secluded from the public areas of the house. Separate bedrooms for each woman allowed for privacy. From the beginning of her marriage to Charlie, Lettie knew that her mother would live with her. Shortly after her marriage, Lettie wrote to her mother assuring Catherine that her place would be in the Conrad family home: “Mother’s room is going to be the prettiest in our little house. With nothing but sunlight and pretty things in it.” She explained how her and her new husband came to this arrangement:

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52 Clark, *The American Family Home*, 43.
We had not been married 12 hours before Charlie said quietly-'if your mother, well dear, I want her to live with us.- then neither of you will be lonely- I would have spoken sooner of it before, but it seemed like holding out inducements to you to marry me, and I wanted you to trust me, as I saw you did, that it would be allright.53

Again in 1894, Lettie reassured Catherine that her home is with the family in Kalispell at the Conrad mansion. In a letter to Catherine, describing the design of the house, Lettie makes it clear that the Conrads expected their mothers to reside with them permanently:

The two lower rooms were especially planned by my kind husband for the ‘two mothers’- so they should have every comfort- the bathroom between,, closets, etc. and no stairs to climb and in the place of the conservatory- so they could have plenty of sun...The only reason I did not put my finger on one, and say this is yours-the only difference in the comfort of the two rooms is that there is only one with a fireplace, purely a luxury for they are equally heated from the furnace- but I waited for Charlie to say which- the rooms to quote C.E. again ‘for the mothers to feel their own, for as long as they live’...54

In her statement, “The two lower rooms were especially planned by my kind husband for the ‘two mothers’- so they should have every comfort- the bathroom between, closets, etc. and no stairs to climb and in the place of the conservatory- so they could have plenty of sun...” Lettie indicated her recognition of the mothers’ need to be established on the bottom floor. Both mothers were aging, and Catherine especially suffered declining health. Lettie continued to observe Victorian gender roles and did not put a “finger on one” for Catherine, entrusting Charlie with the decision of placement. In the end, Lettie took advantage of one of Charlie’s frequent absences and established Catherine in the

53 Alicia D. Conrad to Catherine E. Stanford, April 2, 1881, Box 9, Folder 9, Series III. Collection 185. K. Ross Toole Archives.
more luxurious room, including its own fireplace, on the northwestern corner. Exhibiting the Conrads’ wealth, the mothers’ rooms shared a bathroom on the main floor equipped with indoor plumbing. The rooms also had easy access to the kitchen and main living areas. The mothers’ rooms thus allowed extended family to reside in the family home. The design also allowed the mothers’ separation from the nuclear family, maintaining personal autonomy. As Clifford Clark argues, the mothers’ separate rooms allowed Lettie to “balance public commitments with private needs, by providing where possible, individual rooms for each family member.”

Through the placement of the mothers’ rooms in the Conrad Mansion, Lettie attempted to create a comfortable and private environment for the elderly women in her family.

The Conrad mansion also provided a space for social gatherings. The public areas and many guest rooms served as haven for friends, family, and travelers. As James E. Murphy claims: “Life in the Conrad Mansion was rich and varied. Its hospitality was legendary. No traveler was turned away and the Conrad name became synonymous with generosity and sharing.”

Lettie and Charlie enjoyed the company of their friends and family, and the Conrad mansion almost constantly boarded various guests, usually for extended periods. In this manner Lettie Conrad deviated from Victorian middle-class ideals. She and Charlie enjoyed the acquaintance of many important people of the late nineteenth century, such as Charles Russell, Theodore Roosevelt and various Native American leaders. Due to their wealth and connections, the Conrad family extended more extravagant and generous hospitality than the average middle-class Victorian family. Therefore, the mansion included a large gathering area, a parlor, and numerous

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56 Murphy, *Half Interest*, 183.
guest bedrooms. Architect Kirkland K. Cutter created a large gathering area by separating the dining room, office and foyer with retractable partitions. When the partitions were opened up, the three areas created a considerable space accommodating large numbers of people. When drawn closed, the partitions established three individual private spaces. As mediator for the family, Lettie would have been the person to choose when and why the private spaces would be created.

Connected to the dining area is Charlie Conrad’s office or library. This area served as an alternately public or private space for Charlie to conduct business and personal interactions. It was also the masculine area of the house, where Lettie had less control, but still significant influence through her domestic responsibility of physical maintenance and decorating. The grand window of the study allowed guests to view the beautiful Swan Mountain Range and part of the 72 acres belonging to the Conrad family, reminding them of the family’s wealth and status.57

Concurring with Victorian ideals of separate gender spheres, the Conrad Mansion contained gender-specific social areas for men and women to congregate without unannounced intrusions by the opposite sex. Charlie could partition off his office, creating an alternate private space for men. Although the downstairs office was located in a public area of the house, due to the partitions, Charlie could close his office off to retain privacy for the men he entertained.

Lettie Conrad utilized the parlor or music room, located on ground floor, for her private entertaining. Even though her visitors could be male, such as local religious leader Pastor Thomas E. Dickey, the parlor was Lettie’s feminine social area. Small gatherings of society women from groups like the Women’s Auxiliary and Guild and

local female relatives were typical guests in Lettie’s gender-specific area. The parlor was also a space for Lettie to practice her feminine skill of music. Both Lettie and Catherine were talented musicians who enjoyed singing and playing the piano. On February 1, 1881, Lettie wrote to Catherine: “We are going to have the best times when I come back-together- I am going to bring some pretty music with me, and you must keep all the voice you can to learn the songs with me.”58 Three months later while describing some furnishings bought on their honeymoon, Lettie reported, “and I think you would have bought just what we have if you had been with us- some lovely engravings and a dear piano! With lots of music.” By constructing a place for music and female companions, Lettie adhered to Victorian ideals of separate gender spheres.

The billiard room, located in the center of the second floor, a predominantly private area, supplied a middle ground for public interaction that included both men and women. The billiard room contained a pocket billiard table, encouraging relaxed interaction with men participating in the game, while women congregated on the built-in window seats to converse and watch the men.59 This allowed women to monitor the men and the character of their interactions, deterring the men from transferring any immorality from the outside world into the private domestic sphere.

The second floor was a mid-point between the public and private worlds. Despite the fact that the master bedroom and two children’s bedrooms (Charlie and Catherine) were all located on the second floor, away from the public spaces of the first floor, there were also two rooms available for guests as well as Charlie’s gunroom.60 These rooms

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58 Alicia D. Conrad to Catherine E. Stanford, February 1, 1881, Folder 9, Box 9, Series III, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
permitted non-family members into the private spaces of the house. Lettie retained her position as mediator and protector, however, by monitoring and selecting those allowed to enter the private spaces of the family home.

The third floor of the mansion was the informal living area. Located on this floor were the laundry room, sewing room, taxidermy room, Charlie’s sky parlor and the children’s play area. This floor was the most private floor. Usually only the servants, family members and close friends entered this area. The third floor is further discussed in the third chapter pertaining to childrearing.

By creating various gender-associated private and public spaces, Lettie Conrad mediated between her family and the world. She permitted her family to be open to public influence only in spaces she could control. Various areas also allowed for privacy when deemed acceptable to Lettie. In all, through the floor plan that she helped design, Lettie adhered to the Victorian ideal of her responsibility as mediator between the private family and the outside world.

A final aspect of domesticity was the woman’s responsibility for promoting moral family life. As Nancy Cott states, “Wife-and-motherhood...implied responsibility for the well-being of the family.”[^61] Principles of Christianity assisted women in these efforts. In her book, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900*, Colleen McDannell describes a maternal model of domestic religion that “saw the preparation of the home itself as a religious activity...[and] welded the life of the nursery and kitchen to divine intention.”[^62] McDannell connects religion with domesticity, stating that the home was

considered "the major center of Victorian piety." Christian Victorian ideology perceived women as ministers of the home. Combining Victorian gender ideals with principles of Protestant Christianity, women's inherent piety and morality designated them as custodians of the home. Women were not only responsible for the physical home, but also for the moral well-being and personal salvation of their families.

Once more the Conrad Mansion reveals Lettie Conrad's adherence to Victorian domestic ideals. Lettie saw it as her responsibility to create a virtuous home for her family. After the conclusion of Charlie's Canadian trading efforts in Ft. Benton, Montana, the Conrads decided to relocate and initiate business opportunities elsewhere. During a trip to explore Spokane, Washington, they stopped to visit Lettie's younger brother, Harry, in the Flathead Valley. Both Charlie and Lettie fell in love with the valley and decided to establish a new home there. From 1892 to 1895 the Conrad family resided in various locations around Kalispell, Montana, considering their choices of final destinations. On September 28th, 1894, Lettie wrote to Catherine from the family cabin, "Hawksnest," on Foy Lake explaining the Conrads' decision to settle in Kalispell, Montana:

Charlie's health for years would forbid life in a city—even if it were possible—the children are rapidly coming to an age where it is imperative that they have the refinements about them of a good house—and we can enjoy friends from else where, when we have some where to invite them—then they must go east to school. The reasons against building are appallingly good—but it is full time we had a house and as it does not seem possible to have one anywhere else—we must have it here!

By 1894, Charlie's illness (diabetes) had become an undeniable reality. It seems that Charlie's health was Lettie's foremost concern in the decision of where their permanent

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63 McDannell, Colleen. The Christian Home, 151-152.
64 Alicia D. Conrad to Catherine E. Stanford, September 28, 1894, Folder 22, Box 9, Series III, Collection 185. K. Ross Toole Archives.
home would be located. Although she claimed that Charlie’s health “would forbid life in a city,” Lettie also considered the city an inappropriate place to rear her children. Lettie believed Charlie at 12 years, Kate at 9 years, and Alicia Ann at 2 years were “rapidly coming to an age where it is imperative that they have the refinements about them of a good house.” Lettie desired a stable home in a civilized community to rear her children. She needed a space to seclude her family from the corruption of the public world. Even so, she clarified that Kalispell would not be acceptable for the children’s education and that they “must go east to school.” Similar to other upper-class families in the American West, Lettie believed that a proper education could only be found in the East, but realized that it was “full time” the Conrads had a house and decided it must be in Kalispell. In choosing Kalispell, Montana, Lettie could create a family home secluded from the corruption of cities and maintain Victorian standards of education for her children by sending them to proper schools elsewhere. In the meantime, Lettie could indoctrinate her family with morality by managing a home supporting a virtuous quality of life.

Lettie’s adherence to the Victorian domestic ideal of creating a virtuous quality of life in the family home is apparent through the various religious or moral depictions and furnishings in the Conrad Mansion. Lettie decorated her home with images encouraging morality. Historian Colleen McDannell explains that these moral images were significant “because the home had important communicative roles, to present the proper image” to both family members and the outside community. Middle class women decorated their homes with religious art to convey the piety of the home and its caretaker. Lettie decorated the mansion not only with religious art, but also with

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images or words of goodness. Christmas was her favorite holiday, and Lettie utilized characteristics of Christmas when decorating her home. In the Conrad Mansion, Lettie placed inscriptions above all the fireplaces. In the great hall entrance, the inscription reads:

God rest ye merry gentlemen
Let nothing ye dismay
For Jesus Christ our Savior
Was born on Christmas Day

Celebrating the birth of Christ, Lettie reminded her family to be thankful for Jesus’s sacrifice. The inscription above the fireplace in the dining room states:

All who joy would win
Must share it
And therefore lets be
Merry

Again Lettie reminded her family to be thankful with an extra emphasis on sharing good feelings. The last inscription was located in the master bedroom on the second floor. It read:

The name of the large upper chamber
Facing the east was peace

The first two passages are sayings associated with the Christmas holiday; a holiday dedicated to charity and gratitude. The third demonstrated Lettie’s overall feeling of what the heart of a home should be, peace. These were all feelings and values Lettie wished to encourage in her home.

Lettie Conrad created a home within the mansion not only for the family, but also as a haven for Charlie. Adhering to masculine Victorian ideals, Charlie fully participated in the public world of men. Adhering to feminine Victorian ideals, Lettie created a sanctuary for Charlie to escape and regenerate from his business interactions. In a letter to her mother, Lettie clarified her position of wife and homemaker, “Of course as to business what he tells me I am always willing and interested to hear- but I don’t worry him with questions- and he knows he can come home, when he is worn out, body and mind and rest and knows I understand him- and trust him.”70 Reflecting ideals of a companionate and comforting wife, Lettie stated she was “always willing and interested to hear” about Charlie’s business, but never worried him with questions. She explained that she was there for him to vent about his work, but keeping to ideals of gender, she did not concern herself with business affairs. She emphasized her responsibility as a wife in creating a home where he can retreat to “when he is worn out, body and mind.” She claimed that it is in her home that he can rest and know he is understood. Lettie demonstrated her belief in the Victorian ideal of home as the safe place for men to retreat and feel appreciated.

In 1892, Charlie was diagnosed with diabetes and given ten years to live. In 1902, Charlie’s condition began a steep decline. Perceiving the severity of the situation, on November 5th, 1902, his brother W. G. Conrad wrote from California: “You must not think of returning here in November. I want you to stay [home] until spring and do nothing else but try to get well…you should not return to work nor have anything to worry you for at least a year…I want you to take complete rest as a trial cure and make

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70 Alicia D. Conrad to Catherine E. Stanford, September 28, 1894, Folder 22, Box 9, Series III, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
the effort of your life to get strong and well." It was during this deterioration that Lettie created a space for Charlie to rest through his painful physical ordeal. Decorating the room with a Native American Buffalo motif, Lettie constructed the Sky Parlor. Located on the top floor, the Sky Parlor became a sanctuary for Charlie from the main activities of the house. During this time Lettie’s correspondence is minimal. She apparently dedicated all her time to caring for her dying husband. On November 27, 1902, Charlie Conrad passed away.

For the Conrads, their home was more than a space to lay their heads. It was an area of familial privacy and social interaction. To accommodate both family members and visitors, Lettie needed the mansion to be efficiently structured and well managed. Moreover, she believed it was her personal and feminine responsibility to maintain an ideal domestic environment. Due to Charlie’s wealth and status, Lettie was able to adhere to Victorian ideals of domesticity. Lettie was able to create a physical environment that adhered to Victorian ideals of the family home. With a team of servants, she maintained a well-run household. She designed a house that fulfilled the public and private needs of her family and guests, while maintaining a distinction between the family and the world. In doing Lettie filtered and protected her family from unacceptable worldly influence. She encouraged separate gender spheres by creating separate living spaces, both public and private. Finally, she created a family home that displayed words and images of morality and Christianity and that offered her husband a restful retreat from his work in the public sphere. Lettie utilized every advantage she had


to accomplish what she believed was her womanly duty: to create the perfect home for her family.
Chapter 3  
Motherhood

“I have been so perfectly well in this restful quiet home – bright and sunny I have not even had the wooden feel – until this very last week... the dear little one coming is very welcome to us all... I have engaged a colored nurse, who I think will be very good and the doctor is all right...settled down here quietly to make my little preparations. I will write as soon after it is all over, as they will let me...”

Expecting her third child in 1892, Lettie appeared to be happy, content and expectant. She realized that having a new child in the family warranted preparation, especially for herself. Similar to other women of her time, Lettie assumed the responsibility for caring for this new addition. Lettie and Charlie E. Conrad both maintained a philosophy that designated the woman as the primary caregiver of the household. Even though nineteenth-century couples’ unspoken understanding of the woman designated as the primary caregiver had been a long-standing perception within American society, the philosophies of childrearing and the designation of the primary parent had endured periodic changes throughout history. From the colonial period through the turn of the twentieth century, Americans altered their conceptions of childrearing and motherhood to adapt to changing social and economic realities. Victorian couples utilized ideals of morality and separate gender spheres to indoctrinate their children into the larger society.

Up to and including the twentieth-first century, women in America have been the primary caregivers for infants. This is due largely to the biological relationship of nursing. The role of educator, however, has altered along with changes in society.

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1 Alicia D. Conrad to Catherine E. Stanford, June 16, 1892, Box 9, Folder 20, Series III, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
During the colonial era, the main educator for children was the father. Colonial Americans considered the man to be the principal teacher, better suited for molding young minds. In his book, *The Modernization of Fatherhood: A Social and Political History*, Ralph LaRossa states, “Although mothers may have been responsible for children under the age of three, fathers were the ones who were expected to guide older children and young adults—an age when... humans were ready to be socialized.”^2 As the superior gender and the representative of God within the household, it was the father’s duty to care for the academic and spiritual education of his children. As colonial theologian Timothy Edwards recalled of his father, “God gave him not only wisdome to Govern himself, but also to Govern others, that he in his providence had put in Subjection to him.”^3 Even though educating children was a fundamental obligation of both parents, fathers were judged the higher authority with responsibility for breaking the will of children and instilling Christian morals and behavior.

During the eighteenth century, drawing on ideas from John Locke and the Enlightenment, parents of the new American Republic adapted their conception of childrearing. Locke extended the republican ideal of childrearing to include the vision of a “blank slate.” In opposition to the colonial conviction that children were inherently evil, Locke believed that humans were born clean and impressionable. Utilizing a rational approach, parents had a duty to impart wisdom and self-discipline to their children.

Locke asserted:

> The difference to be found in the Manners and Abilities of Men, is owing more to their *Education* than to any thing else: we have reason to conclude, that great care

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is to be had of the forming of Children's Minds, and giving them that seasoning early, which shall influence their Lives always after. For when they do well or ill, the Praise or Blame will be laid there...⁴

This new, enlightened view of childrearing encouraged rational education, not physical force.

Adhering to John Locke's principles of self-government, Republican parents attempted to instill the virtues of integrity, industry, and charity through self-discipline. This intellectual philosophy emphasized a kinder, more nurturing type of education. The goal was to shape children into rational, contributing citizens of the community. No longer utilizing physical methods of discipline, parents attempted to instill moral behavior through emotional incentives. As Bernard Wishy states in his book, The Child and the Republic: The Dawn of Modern American Child Nurture, "love and affection when combined with 'appeals to conscience and reason,' persuasion, precept, good examples, firm and consistent treatment, and especially reminders of the pain that wickedness caused others, were to be used to guarantee that conscience would control the child and the man."⁵ Following these philosophies, childrearing practices in America transformed from strict, absolute authority to loving guidance and reason. Women were considered the gentler gender, elevating them above men in childrearing because they would be more inclined to rear their children through love and nurture.⁶

Establishment of a democratic republic enhanced women's position within the hierarchy of authority. Republican society ascribed women national significance. In her

⁶ In her book, The Mother's Role in Childhood Education, Anne Kuhn's seventh chapter focuses on this assignment of responsibilities to women due to their gentle nature.
article “The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment, An American Perspective”, Linda Kerber asserts that Republican Motherhood “justified an extension of women’s absorption and participation in the civic culture.” As mothers, women had a social and political responsibility to bear and raise virtuous American citizens. Even though they were publicly accountable for the performance of their children, women were considered citizens of a private realm, the home. Kerber noted that a woman’s “political task was accomplished within the confines of her family.” The physical positioning of a woman within the home designated her as the best candidate for childcare and education.

The religious atmosphere of the early republic also contributed to women’s new role as the primary parent. Revivalism within Christianity challenged the Puritan archetype of a damning, judgmental God. With this new evangelical movement, people began to view humans’ relationship with God as akin to that of loving father and wayward child. Evangelical ministers preached the gospel of free grace, or arminianism. Augmenting Armenian theology with republican philosophy, parents shifted their ideas of childrearing from breaking the will to nurturing the individual. Religious leaders advised parents to approach childrearing with affection, appreciation, and understanding, in the same manner that their loving God taught them.

Within this new philosophy of childrearing, the concept of nurturing was paramount. Coinciding with gender definitions, evangelical leaders believed that nurture was part of woman’s nature. As Barbara Welter notes in her book, *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, “piety was the core of women’s virtue,

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7 Kerber, “The Republican Mother,” 204.
the source of her strength." Nineteenth-century ministers, unlike colonial divines, regarded mothers as the better-suited parent to establish morals and encourage good behavior in children. Their presence in the family home located women in the most opportune space to educate children. In *The Bonds of Womanhood: Women’s Sphere in New England, 1780-1835*, Nancy F. Cott maintains, "pastors’ appeals acknowledged that child rearing had become a specialized domestic process carried on by mothers.” Rearing children was not just a parental duty, but a female responsibility, in nineteenth-century America.

Industrialization solidified this elevation of motherhood by emphasizing the value of gender roles and responsibilities. As industrialization drew men out of the household into a competitive manufacturing world, the home was transformed into a secluded domestic haven maintained by women. The new economic and social arrangement resulting from industrialization created a class that built its conventions upon selected ideals of previous generations, especially when defining gender. As the public and private spheres of men and women became more defined and more integral to the social order, many people sought to stabilize their changing environment by exercising control over gender roles. Middle-class nineteenth-century ideals defined childcare as a domestic duty for women. As Nancy Cott notes, “Legally and economically the husband/father controlled the family, but rhetorically the vocation for domesticity gave women the domestic sphere for their own, to control and influence. Motherhood was proposed as the

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central lever" for control of the women’s domestic sphere. Through their presence in the home, women gained a realm to rule. Mothering moral citizens was a woman’s responsibility. Through moral motherhood, women controlled their private sphere, the home, and influenced the public sphere through future generations.

Lettie Conrad belonged to this middle- and upper-class, white, Protestant group adhering to gender designated roles and responsibilities. After marriage, she remained in the household to tend to her growing family. She created a family home that encouraged moral and pious behavior and belief. She endeavored to influence the extended members of her family as well as her children and husband. Lettie attempted to influence all of her family because she deemed it was her personal responsibility to do so.

In Victorian America, a woman’s social position stemmed from her biological ability to bear children. The biological determinant of women as child bearers cultivated social and cultural divisions of gender according to labor and occupational spheres. In her book, *Brought to Bed: Childbearing in America, 1750 to 1950,* Judith Leavitt claims, “The physical dangers associated with childbearing—the ‘shadow of maternity’—helped provide the justification for limiting women’s lives to domestic duties of homemaking and child-rearing.” Childbirth is a singular aspect of womanhood. For women living in the nineteenth century, it was the culmination of female maturity. When describing Lizzie Neblett’s anticipation toward motherhood, Anya Jabour states in her essay, “Marriage and Family in the Nineteenth-Century South,” “Like many young women...Lizzie regarded the birth of her first child as a significant event, one that marked her full

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11 Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, 84.
assumption of the responsibilities of adulthood."  

According to historian Ellen Plane, childbirth was the Victorian woman's answer to her higher calling. Once she had given birth, she had arrived at her final destination; the journey through her own childhood, young womanhood, courtship and marriage having laid the groundwork for this daunting event... Ideally her virtuous nature would help instruct and mold good little citizens that could make the family proud.

Victorian women defined themselves as mothers. Their success as women depended on their ability to bear and raise children. Yet, along with the anticipation toward adulthood and magnitude of motherhood came the very real danger of childbirth and intense fear of death.

By the time of their own pregnancy, most women of the nineteenth century had directly or indirectly confronted death due to childbirth. Judith Leavitt explains: “If women delivered, let us estimate, five live babies during their childbearing years..., then one of every thirty women might have been expected to die in childbirth...” Even though by 1900 fertility rates for white women had dropped to almost half those in the previous century, living conditions and post-partum complications increased the risk of lifelong gynecological problems and mortality for women. In response to their fears and anxieties, women depended upon their network of female friends for emotional and practical support. Leavitt notes, “the common pattern of American childbirth was that women attended other women in their confinements.”

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16 Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 19.
17 Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 37.
childbirth,” women emotionally and physically supported the mother-to-be. They also took over the household responsibilities, allowing the mother a period of lying-in, a time “to rest, to regain her strength, and to initiate her nursing and care for the new child without interruption.” Women supported each other throughout the entire childbearing process, from gestation to recuperation. Social childbirth allowed women agency and awarded them control of their environment during delivery. As historian Laurel Ulrich’s analysis on women of early America suggests, social childbirth was an experience that united women as the authorities over pregnancy and childbirth.

In the late eighteenth century, male physicians began to practice obstetrics. Doing so they entered a female realm, the birthing room. Unlike midwives, male physicians took a more intrusive role in the birthing process. Midwives tended to let nature guide a birth, encouraging the laboring woman and slightly assisting the body’s physical changes. Physicians utilized drugs and instruments to alleviate physical discomfort and promote quick delivery. Many women of the nineteenth century combined the social childbirth setting of the home with a male physician. This combined social childbirth with scientific technology. But by the 1920’s, a quarter of women chose to delivery in maternity hospitals, attended solely by male physicians. This movement from social births carried out in the home to male-directed hospital births decreased female authority over the birthing process and their own bodies. Throughout the first two centuries of American history, as women gained authority within the home through elevated ideals of

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19 In Chapter 5 in her book, *A Midwife’s Tale,* Laurel Ulrich discusses the process of childbirth and how the incident unified women in their endeavor.
motherhood, they lost control over their own bodies through the shift from social to medical childbirth.

Lettie Conrad demonstrated the changes occurring in the birthing room. After having her first two children with her mother, Catherine, in attendance, on June 16th, 1892, Lettie sent a letter apologizing for not disclosing her “condition.” Lettie stated:

my dearest mother, you must not allow yourself to feel the least bit hurt by my not telling you of my condition. I did not feel sure until I had that severe cold in Saint Paul that maternity was coming. As I had scarcely had time to think of myself- and then I knew if it was as it was best for you not to be with me- it would have been cruel to have given you all those months of uneasiness and worry- when you had enough to bear without...I have been so perfectly well in this restful quiet home- bright and sunny I have not even had the wooden feel- until this very last week...Katie has passed her seventh birthday and is well out of hand and the dear little one coming is very welcome to us all...I have engaged a colored nurse, who I think will be very good and the doctor is all right...settled down here quietly to make my little preparations. I will write as soon after it is all over, as they will let me...²¹

Speaking to Catherine, Lettie insists, “you must not allow yourself to feel the least bit hurt by my not telling you of my condition,” clarifying that it was not a personal slight for she “did not feel sure until I had that severe cold in Saint Paul that maternity was coming” and that she postponed revealing her condition to Catherine because “it would have been cruel to have giving you all those months of uneasiness and worry.” As Sylvia Hoffert explains in her book, Private Matters: American Attitudes toward Childbearing and Infant Nurture in the Urban North, 1800-1860, “some physicians and health reformers were beginning to define the whole process of childbearing as an illness and to encourage childbearing women to view their condition as one deserving medical

²¹ Alicia D. Conrad to Catherine E. Stanford, June 16, 1892, Box 9, Folder 20, Series III. Collection 185. K. Ross Toole Archives.
attention."^^ Utilizing a language of illness, Lettie demonstrated the common conception of pregnancy, speaking of “her condition,” pregnancy, as “months of uneasiness and worry,” as a dangerous infirmity. It is not clear who was in attendance for the birth, but she did remark, “the doctor is all right.” Confirming her association of maternity and illness, she reassured Catherine that a medical professional, “the doctor”, was in attendance and that she was “perfectly well.” She also assured her mother that she had adequate help with the engagement of “a colored nurse” who she believed “will be very good.” In this manner Lettie was able to combine the medical expertise of a professional doctor and the emotional support of a female assistant.

Lettie also depended on her husband for both emotional and practical support. In his essay, “Before the Waiting Room: Northern Middle-Class Men, Pregnancy, and Birth in Antebellum America,” historian Shawn Johansen describes the changing customs of fathers and childbirth. Colonial fathers participated little in the reproductive process beyond conception, but Johansen claims that fathers of the antebellum and later nineteenth century became more concerned with the birthing process. He states, “as the nineteenth century progressed, more middle-class men sought greater participation and emotional involvement. Nothing illustrates this new approach more that the presence of husbands in the birthing room.” Charlie Conrad followed this trend, for he was there with Lettie and was the one who informed Catherine of the actual birth. On June 23rd, 1892 he sent her a telegram stating: “a girl was born to us today-mother and child doing well.”


Telegram June 23rd, 1892, Box 9, Folder 20, Series III, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
The next few communications to Catherine were also from Charlie, assuring her that Lettie and all three children are doing well and have Catherine in their thoughts.25

Lettie and Charlie emulated changing philosophies of childbirth. Instead of her mother, Lettie had Charlie, a doctor and possibly a female servant present at the birth. This indicated her endorsement of men and strangers into the birthing room. The fact that Lettie had her first two children with her mother in attendance, then her third child without her, signified Lettie's personal conversion to a more scientific or less social birthing environment.

One area of pregnancy women also shared with men was with the use of birth control, including contraception. Not to be confused with abortion, instead of preventing live births, contraception attempts to prevent pregnancy entirely. Even though Victorian philosophy encouraged women to work within the home, bearing and raising children, many couples attempted to control the number of children born, and white women of the late-nineteenth century had fewer children than previous generations. Some women had access to sponges, douches, and diaphragms or pessaries, while others charted their menses and utilized the "safe period."26 Yet, historian Daniel Scott Smith attributes the decline of fertility rates to the cooperation of middle-class husbands. He states in his essay "Family Limitation, Sexual Control, and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America": "While women did employ contraceptive methods in the nineteenth century (principally douching and the sponge), the major practices involved the control of male

25 Charlie E. Conrad to Catherine E. Stanford, June 27th, 1892, Box 20, Folder 20, Series III. Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
26 In chapters eight and nine, in his book At Odds, Carl Degler defines the various methods of birth control not dependent of male cooperation women utilized. For more on contraception see Janet Brodie's Contraception and Abortion in Nineteenth Century America.
sexuality-\textit{coitus interruptus} (withdrawal) and abstinence.\textsuperscript{27} Women utilized a variety of types of personal birth control, yet cooperation from their husbands was essential.

During the entirety of their marriage, a method of birth control that Lettie and Charlie utilized, intentionally or not, was physical separation. Due to his work, Charlie was away from the home for extended periods of time. Obviously, the absence of physical contact decreases the chances of pregnancy. Sexual abstinence due to physical separations also coincided with Victorian ideals of purity. Coinciding with the elevation of women as moral influences through motherhood, authorities claimed women displayed piety through their sexual passivity. In their attempts to morally influence men, women exemplified sexual restraint and power. In her essay, “Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850,” Nancy Cott claims that religious leaders encouraged this image: “The clergy thus renewed and generalized the idea that women under God’s grace were more pure that men, and they expected not merely the souls but the bodies of women to corroborate that claim.”\textsuperscript{28} According to their gender responsibility, women exemplified sexual restraint and purity. Even so, women still needed other methods of birth control. As Mary Ryan states in her book, \textit{Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865}, “although purity may have been a code word and rationale for sexual control within marriage, it is unlikely that this was the sole method of limiting family size.”\textsuperscript{29} Accordingly, Lettie and Charlie utilized an assortment of methods to prevent pregnancies, control fertility, and space out

\textsuperscript{27} Smith, Daniel Scott, “Family Limitation, Sexual Control, and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America,” in \textit{A Heritage of her Own}, edited by Nancy Cott and Elizabeth Pleck, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 227.
children. The spacing of their children indicates their use of birth control. There is a gap of two and half years between the first two children, Charlie and Kate, and one of seven years between Kate and the last child, Alicia Ann. Demonstrating a deviation from the unregulated pattern of childbirth every two years, Lettie and Charlie clearly utilized some type of effective birth control.

Lettie and Charlie attempted birth control through assorted methods. One direct method demonstrated by Lettie was extended breastfeeding. In their essay, "Sally Has Been Sick: Pregnancy and Family Limitation among Virginia Gentry Women, 1780-1830," Jan Lewis and Kenneth Lockridge claim that women "relied upon breast-feeding as a strategy to space their children and possibly as an effort, albeit one with feeble effect, to limit their fertility." On December 2nd, 1893, in a letter to Catherine, Lettie related her persistence in nursing the youngest Alicia Ann; "Alicia is nearly eighteen months old and I am almost ashamed to say it- still not weaned. Papa has been begging off for her. ‘Oh well! Wait until this bad tooth is through’ or ‘wait until I make that trip east’…" Lettie included Charlie in the decision to continue nursing, commenting, “Papa has been begging off for her.” From this letter it appears that both Lettie and Charlie wanted to continue Alicia Ann’s nursing, perhaps in hopes of preventing a fourth pregnancy.

Another attempt at birth control could have been allowing Alicia Ann to sleep in her parents’ bedroom until she was ten years old. This is one of the few instances in which Lettie did not adhere to Victorian ideals of childrearing. In her book, *Children in the House: The Material Culture of Early Childhood, 1600-1900*, Karen Calvert states,

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31 Alicia D. Conrad to Catherine E. Stanford, December 2nd, 1892, Box 9, Folder 20, Series III. Collection 185. K. Ross Toole Archives.
“Nineteenth-century childrearing authorities, …agreed that children should be separated from others while they slept.” However, Lettie did not designate Alicia Ann a separate, private sleeping space of her own. Perhaps Lettie justified Alicia Ann’s presence in the master bedroom with Charlie’s lengthy absences. Even though Lettie did not discuss methods of birth control, it is evident through the spacing of their children, the continuation of nursing and the living arrangements of Alicia Ann that the Conrads managed with the issue.

Along with modern advancement or medical intrusion into the birthing environment, scientific attitudes and methods reshaped the ideology of childrearing and motherhood. As Maxine Margolis observes in her book, *Mothers and Such: Views of American Women and Why They Have Changed*, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries perceived childrearing as a scientific endeavor, resulting in the professionalization of motherhood. She explains that women “were told to study the role [of motherhood], be trained for it.” Mothers were encouraged to observe their children, collect data, and then adhere to expert, usually male, advice and instructions. It was no longer simply a woman’s inherent ability to nurture children that designated mothers as primary caregivers, but their educated position within the household and society. Coupled with declining birth rates and the increasing numbers of women in higher education, “scientific motherhood” in the twentieth century meant that child-care experts provided women with a plethora of advice on how to keep busy in the ever-

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35 For more see Rima Apple’s essay “Constructing Mothers: Scientific Motherhood in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries” in the *Social History of Medicine* 8 (1995): 161-78, Rima D. Apple further depicts the evolution of scientific motherhood, from mothers evaluating information themselves to the insistence of exact adherence to professional advice.
narrowing domestic sphere.” Childrearing practices during the early twentieth century altered from nurturing, moral guidance to strategic, scheduled regulation. This philosophy continued the Victorian emphasis on education according to gender; however, even with the increased admiration for scientific methods and professionalization, “the spiritual glorification of motherhood, so typical of the previous century, was by no means lost.” Through the gendered role of motherhood, women gained an educated and professional position within society.

Yet as John Spurlock and Cynthia Magistro state in their book, _New and Improved: The Transformation of American Women’s Emotional Culture_, mothers “resisted advice that contradicted their inclinations toward affectionate nurture.” Lettie continued to observe a more indulgent, moral loving type of mothering consistent with Victorian ideals. In numerous letters to both Charlie and Catherine, Lettie remarks about the children and their presence in an affectionate, doting tone. On February 14th, 1883 Lettie revealed to her husband that having baby Charlie around soothed the pain of separation from him. “But darling! when I look at the boy, he pays us for the separation. Doesn’t he- he is getting funnier and sweeter all the time, and when I feel the lump coming up in my throat, I go and give him a big hug, and then I feel better…” Twelve days later she reiterated this sentiment, stating: “I imagine you are in Toronto tonight-I wonder if you are thinking about us? or are you saying to yourself that it is ‘kind of nice to be single again.’ My dear little lover helps me ever so much, to bear the separation-but

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36 Margolis, _Mothers and Such_ 43.
37 Margolis, _Mothers and Such_ 49.
39 In her essay, “Mother’s Love: The Construction of an Emotion in Nineteenth-Century America,” Jan Lewis explores the association of emotion and childrearing, both the use of emotion as an educational tool and the emotional interaction between children and mothers.
40 Alicia D. Conrad to Charlie E. Conrad, February 14th, 1883, Conrad Mansion letter collection.
dear Love! I know it is necessary, but its very very hard..."\(^{41}\) Revealing her fears of spousal separation and the possibility of Charlie thinking "it is ‘kind of nice to be single again,'" Lettie reminded Charlie of his rewards at home, her and their son. Lettie also remarked upon how her son's presence alleviated the loneliness from the physical separation from her husband. Later, with all three children living in the home, Lettie demonstrated the closeness of her children and the affection she felt for them. In an 1894 letter to Catherine, she stated, "baby has just come for a cuddle; and kissed the paper ‘right-here' for ‘G'am,ma'..."\(^{42}\) Lettie demonstrated not only the physical closeness she had with her children, but the emotional closeness as well. In his book, *Prison of Expectations: The Family in Victorian Culture*, Steven Mintz examines the Victorian family. He asserts that due to “the family, having lost control of many of its earlier productive functions—such as transmitting property and skills, arranging marriages and family alliances, and caring for dependent kin” led to an increased psychological isolation and encouraged intense connections between family members. \(^{43}\) The tender affection the Conrad children had for their grandmother was certainly a reflection of Lettie's emphasis on affection for family members in the household.

Identification with Victorian ideal of motherhood was more problematic for some groups of women than others. Working-class women often found themselves and their children laboring outside the home. A multiple wage income was essential for working-class families. Every person of the family had to contribute to the common good.

Children helped support the household either by earning wages or by scavenging the

\(^{41}\) Alicia D. Conrad to Charlie E. Conrad, February 26\(^{th}\), 1883, Conrad Mansion letter collection
\(^{42}\) Alicia D. Conrad to Catherine E. Stanford, June 6\(^{th}\), 1894, Box 9, Folder 22, Series III, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
streets. Historian Christine Stansell maintains that this created a growing population of street urchins, leading to middle-class insistence on the moral correctness of women staying in the home. "To [moral and social] reformers, this response [children working in the streets] was *de facto* proof of parental depravity."\(^{44}\) To middle-class Americans, children's presence in the streets designated working-class mothers as unwomanly failures.

Fortunately for Lettie, Charlie's wealth not only allowed her to stay within her gender sphere of the home, but also enabled her to hire help with childcare and domestic responsibilities. As Thomas Jordan states in his book, *Victorian Childhood: Themes and Variations*, "a feature of middle-and upper-class households was the presence of parent-surrogates- nannies and governesses."\(^{45}\) In 1883, Lettie wrote to Charlie about paying for the nurse's services, reminding him, "Mary Becknell asks five dollars per day for her services as nurse."\(^{46}\) In the same letter she implied the employment of a colored woman when she related a tale of baby Charlie's curiosity: "This morning he solved the mystery of Sallie's black skin by deliberately scratching a piece off to see what was underneath, and gave a funny crow down in his throat when he found out."\(^{47}\) Lettie evidently employed women to assist her in domestic duties and menial chores of childrearing. It is not clear whether Lettie's reference to "services as nurse" implied services for a wet-nurse or a nanny, yet it is clear Lettie chose to breastfeed Alicia Ann herself and that in doing so, she abided by developing concerns about loss of mother-child bonding and


\(^{46}\) Alicia D. Conrad to Charlie E. Conrad, March 1\(^{st}\), 1883, Conrad mansion collection.

\(^{47}\) Alicia D. Conrad to Charlie E. Conrad, March 1\(^{st}\), 1883, Conrad mansion collection.
contamination from lower class nurses. Perhaps due to her wealth and status, as with her ability to selectively choose a birth attended by both a professional doctor and a female assistant, Lettie was able to retain domestic help with childrearing, but retain a Victorian style of motherhood by limiting children’s contact with servants and promoting the mother-child bond.

Yet as with domestic help during the nineteenth-century, retaining suitable for help for childcare could be difficult. As historian Karin Calvert notes, “As fewer and fewer middle-class girls were willing to go into service, parents sought nurses among the working classes and new immigrants. Many mothers and fathers saw a serious risk in permitting children to spend considerable time with women whom they considered their social inferiors…” When their second child, Kate, was a toddler, Charlie wrote to Lettie demonstrating the difficulty allocating a proper nurse. He stated, “My darling Wife, I arrived yesterday [in St. Paul, Minn.], have not found a Nurse as yet that suits who will agree to go. I had a talk with a very capable woman today, age 35 or 38. She is to let me know tomorrow whether she will go or not. I rather think from the way she talked she will. Her name is Isrine from Canada, has no relatives here…” The foremost difficulty acquiring a nurse or nanny for Charlie was finding a woman “that suits who will agree to go.” Obviously, Charlie was concerned with finding a “capable woman” from an acceptable social class, and a Canadian with no relatives to prevent her from traveling west seemed to do. Again, Charlie and Lettie employ the word “nurse” to describe a

48 In their essays, “The Reconstruction of Childhood in the United States, 1790-1870” and “Early Nineteenth-Century American Literature on Child Rearing,” Barbara Finkelstein and Robert Sunley explain how advisors of the time dissuaded mothers from employing wet-nurses for fear of bad habits that child could retain and weakening of mother-child bond.
49 Calvert, Children in the House, 122.
50 Charlie E. Conrad to Alicia D. Conrad. November 2nd, 1887, Conrad Mansion Correspondence.
servant who helps with childcare, not specifically a wet-nurse. As with baby Charlie, Lettie employed a colored woman to help care for the newborn Alicia Ann. Despite the different impediments in employing childcare assistance, Lettie utilized Charlie's wealth and position to employ nurses or nannies for her children.

Inability to subscribe to middle class Victorian standards of motherhood applied to women on the western frontier as well as to urban working-class mothers. As white middle-class Americans settled the western frontier, family cultural norms advised parents to nurture and protect their children from the outside world. However, for most settlers, these ideas were unrealistic. The complexity of starting a farm from scratch with few resources required children to participate in all areas of production. Often, children performed these tasks with little or no parental supervision. This freedom from direct supervision encouraged independence from elders. Elliot West states,

A lot of their [children's] work and play taught them to be independent, to rely on their own device; and to move easily and confidently among adults. At the same time, their parents, especially their mothers, were trying to rear them by Victorian values, and [their mothers believed]...that they should spend most of their time under their parents close watch, that they should defer to their elders' opinions...

The inability to meet expectations of cultural norms to care for children within the home distressed mothers, and the inconsistency between reality of frontier life and expectations of parents sometimes led to conflict within the home. Western mothers attempted to instill self-discipline while retaining authority in a region that frustrated their efforts.

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51 It is apparent that this woman could not be needed as a wet-nurse. This can be determined because Charlie does not mention anything about why she would have milk, about her health and the fact that they are in Minnesota, too far for a wet-nurse to be chosen from.
52 Alicia D. Conrad to Catherine E. Stanford, June 16, 1892, Box 9, Folder 20, Series III, Collection 185. K. Ross Toole Archives.
In addition to internal distress or feelings of failure, mothers living in the American West had to contend with illness, disease, and environmental dangers compounded with the physical isolation of the frontier. As Sandra Myres asserts in her book, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800-1915*, "Frontier mothers were well aware of the additional hazards to their children that their living conditions imposed, and they did their best to protect their offspring." Women utilized traditional medicinal methods, incorporated native knowledge, and continued to surround their children with moral adult role models. Lettie Conrad confronted the same landscape that other women did in the American West. Unlike other women, however, Lettie did not appear to find compliance with Victorian ideals a challenge.

The Conrad family supported itself through the cattle, trading, banking, and other various business endeavors. Charlie Conrad alone supported the family. Lettie and the children did not have to participate in his business activities. Due to Charlie’s wealth and status, Lettie Conrad was able to create an extensive and protected environment for her children in frontier Montana. Not only did the children have a home designed for them, but they also had almost complete freedom of the 72-acre grounds of the Conrad Mansion in Kalispell, Montana. The children were able to explore the two-story carriage house and stables, the two-story log cabin built to winter the various birds kept on the grounds, and the unfenced 45 acres beside the Stillwater River. Even though their freedom was not due to chores, the Conrad children had lots of space free from adult supervision. This outdoor space also gave the children plenty of fresh air and fun.

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55 Murphy, *Half Interest*, 163-166.
Lettie believed that for her children to grow healthy and strong, the intake of fresh air was essential. When Lettie and Charlie were exploring the Flathead Valley on their way to Spokane, Washington, they discovered Foy’s Lake. This lake became their summer and get-away home. Every summer the family and servants ransacked the Conrad Mansion. They packed up goods for an extended stay at the cabin, Hawksnest, on Foy’s Lake. After packing they closed up the mansion to wait for the family’s return in early fall. On September 28th, 1894, Lettie informed Catherine of their upcoming return to the mansion: “we are still here as you see on the island—but will most likely go down by the last of the next week, though we are all loathe to do so, it has been so lovely.” Various friends and family usually accompanied the Conrad family. Some visitors stayed temporarily, but many stayed the entire vacation. As biographer James Murphy remarks, “Travel conditions did not encourage short visits. Those people who came were not only summer visitors but usually visitors for the summer.” Yet for Lettie it was the intake of fresh air and fun for her children that was a significant rationale for the family’s trips to the lake. By spending time on the lake she cared for the physical and mental health of her family. Describing a spur of the moment fishing trip, Lettie wrote:

...as we were sitting chatting after tea-Papa suddenly decided that we could go for a three day holiday to river fishing- and Sunday evening as it was-...and in an hours time we were off- bag, baggage and baby carriage-and by half past nine all in bed on the steamboat at Demersville three miles away...and returned brown as berrys- baby and all- and all better for the outing.”

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56 Murphy, James E, Half Interest, 79.
57 Alicia D. Conrad to Catherine E. Stanford, September 28th, 1894, Box 9, Folder 22, Series III, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
58 Numerous letters located in Box 9 depict the various visitors at Foy’s Lake.
59 Murphy, Half Interest, 180.
60 Alicia D. Conrad to Catherine E. May 14th, 1894, Box 9, Folder 22, Series III, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
Lettie described the positive effect of the countryside for her children. Extended visits to Hawksnest allowed Lettie to physically and emotionally care for her children.

Of course, the children also needed indoor space to play and grow, so within the mansion Lettie created individual bedrooms and a playroom on the third floor. Lettie promoted Victorian ideals of gender identity through the placement of the children’s bedrooms. According to Victorian ideology of gender-specific areas and in keeping with the Conrads’ wealth, the children occupied their own bedrooms. Charlie’s room was located down the hall from the master bedroom. Since he was away at school for most of the year, his bedroom served as an extra guest room during his absences. Even though she was equally absent from the mansion due to school, Kate’s room was solely hers and located adjacent to her parents’ room. The youngest child, Alicia Ann, lived in her parents’ room until she was ten years old, when she moved into the other room adjacent to the master bedroom. Both of the girls’ rooms were located immediately off the master bedroom, while Charlie’s was down the hall. According to gender specification, the Conrad girls were treated as more dependent, while Charlie was granted more independence. Victorian ideals viewed girls as in need of protection and boys in need of freedom. Clearly the Conrad family agreed with these associations, placing the girls closer to their parents and giving Charlie more independence and distance from his parents. Since Charlie’s room was easily converted into a guest bedroom, it is also clear Charlie was expected to reside more intermittently, whereas Kate’s room would always be hers alone.

Since all the children attended school elsewhere—Charlie and Kate attended school away from Kalispell and Alicia Ann attended the local school—the only other space in the
mansion designed specifically for the children was a small playroom on the third floor. As Karin Calvert notes, “the large, unfinished attic spaces became the playrooms of children.” By locating the children’s playroom on the most private floor, Lettie Conrad demonstrated the need to protect her children from outside corruption. Situated in the most informal and private space of the home, the playroom allowed the children to remain with the rest of the family, yet have their own space to retreat. Lettie removed the children from interfering with the domestic chores and activities that occurred in the mansion. Because of the ages that the Conrad children were when they moved into the mansion, the playroom contained mostly gender-specific toys associated with girls. Charlie was 12, Kate 10, and Alicia Ann 3 years of age when the mansion was completed. Of those toys displayed at the Conrad Mansion, most are toys encouraging womanly tasks such as cooking, mothering and music. There are a few airplanes, cars and even a zeppelin, but these toys are vastly outnumbered by the toy baby buggies, tea sets, cooking stoves, and of course, dolls. As Karen Calvert states, Victorian parents believed “the correct toys guided their [children’s] development along the path to their inevitable gender-determined roles in society.” Demonstrating her adherence to Victorian ideals of childrearing, Lettie encouraged distinct gender roles and responsibilities through her children’s toys. As Calvert explains, Victorian parents “preferred toys that they believed fostered the manliness of their sons and the femininity of their daughters... to bring out what was considered to be their inherent nature and because they honestly believed that suitably gender-specific toys would give their

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children the most pleasure.”64 When the Conrad family finally moved into the mansion. Charlie was 12 years old and more interested in life outside the walls of the mansion, such as fishing and hunting.65 Thus the toys in the playroom support skills such as mothering and domesticity. Thus, within the mansion, the children had their separate spaces to retain privacy, yet these private areas continued to encourage the values and gender ideals of Victorian society.

Dinner was a family affair at the Conrad Mansion. Lettie followed the upper class convention of relegating children to the nursery or kitchen for meals, but she also acted in keeping with Karin Calvert’s statement that “one of the most important training grounds for both manners and morals was the Victorian family’s dining table, where little children were most visible to family and company.”66 Stored at the mansion is a booster type high chair. This suggests that children ate at the table at some point. Alicia Ann confirms the children’s occasionally presence at the dining table. In an oral history taken by Dorothy Floerchinger, Alicia Ann Conrad recalls sitting by her father for dessert: “I was allowed to come down from the nursery for dessert and sat beside my father…”67 Lettie continued to select aspects of Victorian customs to rear her children. For special occasions, Lettie allowed her younger child to join the rest of the family to socialize. Reflecting Victorian ideals of childrearing, she chose to have the family spend some time together, encouraging companionship and community.

Lettie also followed upper-class customs by sending Charlie and Kate off to boarding school. This not only ensured a formal education, but also relieved the isolation

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64 Calvert, Children in the House, 110-111.
65 Murphy, Half Interest, 262.
66 Calvert, Children in the House, 127.
67 Alicia Ann Conrad Campbell, OH8, University of Montana, Mansfield Library.
of frontier life. When the older children completed their eighth grade year, they were sent to a boarding school. They returned to the mansion only during holidays and summers. The physical separation challenged Lettie’s mothering. She now had to educate her children from afar. Utilizing letters as means of instruction, Lettie continued to influence Charlie and Kate. Letter writing not only served a pragmatic function; it also distinguished a person as adhering to Victorian values. Families utilized letter writing to educate their children, both academically and socially. Historian Steven M. Stowe states: “Family bonds and the social order were jointly strengthened by a youth’s learning the elements of written self-expression.” Consequently, the practice of writing letters became an important part of a person’s social distinction. These views and practices channeled the art of letter writing to particular groups of people, the upper and middle-class. Through correspondence, Lettie evaluated her children’s education and transmitted her own values and beliefs.

Lettie demonstrated Victorian ideals of gender through her children’s education. When they completed the eighth grade, Charlie and Kate attended boarding school outside of Montana. Similar to the placement of their bedrooms within the Conrad Mansion, Lettie kept Kate and Alicia Ann physically closer to her than Charlie. She adhered to Victorian standards of gender by sending Charlie farther to school in the East, while Kate stayed closer to home in the West. Determining the appropriate environment of a same-sex boarding school assisted Lettie in maintaining a moral, proper upbringing for her children while reinforcing gender identity. Charlie Conrad first attended St. John’s

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68 Murphy, Half Interest, 239.
Military Academy in Manlius, New York and later Phillips Exeter Academy in Andover, Massachusetts.

Congruent with Lettie and Charlie’s ideas of status, the schools they chose for their children reflected the image they had carefully created through their marriage and domestic concerns. Both St. John’s Military Academy and Phillips Exeter Academy were to prepare young Charlie for Yale College in Connecticut. In hopes of educating his son the way he was not, Charlie Conrad wanted his son to go to college. Charlie wanted his son to receive a higher education and then contribute to the family businesses. When he graduated from Phillips Exeter Academy after his father’s death in 1902, however, the younger Charlie returned to Montana. Contrary to his parents’ wishes, he did not attend Yale, but remained in Kalispell, working at the Conrad National Bank. He preferred the superior position of bank Vice President to the dependent role of student. Lettie intended that her son receive a higher education, but apparently without her husband, she did not have strong enough influence to convince him. In accordance with Victorian gender ideals, Lettie encouraged higher education and employment in the outside world for her son, while limiting her ambitions for Kate to finishing school and marriage.

Kate Conrad attended Hills Academy, a girls’ school in Spokane, Washington, and afterward Delafield-Colvin Finishing School in Boston, Massachusetts. Going off to school was a rite of passage for middle- and upper-class girls during the nineteenth century. It was the first separation from her family, but more importantly her mother. The schools “served to wean the daughter from her home, to train her in the essential

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social graces, and, ultimately, to help introduce her into the marriage market.\textsuperscript{71} To ease the transition, Kate wrote to her mother frequently, sometimes more than once a day. In a letter home on January 10\textsuperscript{th}, 1900, Katie demonstrated her separation anxiety in the first line: “My dear Momma, We got here all right and have been homesick ever since we’ve been here.”\textsuperscript{72} Fourteen days and six letters later she again complained, “I wish I was home. The days drag so here one day seems like a year. When do you think you will be up, I am so lonesome here.”\textsuperscript{73} Despite her desires to be with her family, Kate fulfilled her parents’ desires and continued her education away from home at a prestigious female finishing school back East. In this manner, Kate adhered to the gendered standards of her upbringing. She remained emotionally close to her parents and more dependent and deferential than her brother.

Perhaps because of Charlie’s southern background and Lettie’s own desire for knowledge, Kate was sent to a finishing school. In her book, \textit{The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South}, Christie Anne Farnham explains the different attitudes of northerners and southerners toward female higher education. She states that unlike northerners who reared women infiltrating the professional world, southerners regarded education for women “as a marker of gentility.”\textsuperscript{74} Similar to Charlie’s attendance at military schools, Kate attending finishing school was a show of status more than an aspiration for higher education.

\textsuperscript{72} Kate Conrad to Alicia D. Conrad, January 10\textsuperscript{th}, 1900 box 20, folder 14, Series VII, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
\textsuperscript{73}Kate Conrad to Alicia D. Conrad, January 10\textsuperscript{th}, 1900 box 20, folder 14, Series VII. Collection 185. K. Ross Toole Archives.
While attending Delafield-Colvin Finishing School, Kate focused her studies on the feminine occupation of music. An instructor, Dr. Whitney, encouraged her to travel to LaScala, Italy for voice training, perhaps even sing for the LaScala Opera. Unfortunately for Kate, her parents were opposed to this plan. Evidently Lettie agreed with a young woman possessing musical skills, for both she and Catherine were musicians, but it was a different matter to engage in public entertainment. According to Victorian gender ideals, Kate was allowed to indulge herself in music, but only for the family and private entertaining. There was no possibility of her performing in public or for pay. In sending their children to school and controlling what they studied, Lettie and Charlie were able to reinforce their children’s gender identities and announce their own social status.

Alicia Ann only completed the eighth grade in Kalispell. Afterwards Alicia Ann received an informal education by becoming Lettie’s constant companion and traveling with Lettie to various countries around the world.75 Again, according to Victorian gender roles, Alicia Ann took on the feminine role of caretaker. She continued to take care of Lettie and be her constant companion until Lettie’s death in 1923. Even though Lettie obviously desired for her all children to become moral, educated citizens, her childrearing methods emphasized gendered roles and responsibilities.

Lettie did not distinguish between genders when it came to money, however. Lettie indulged all her children’s desires for material things. In almost every letter from school, Kate mentions her need for something. Whether it was a coat and gloves or money for entertainment, Kate appears to expect Lettie would honor her requests with no

75 Murphy. *Half Interest*, 242-245. The Conrad Collection at the K. Ross Toole Archives contains letters from Lettie and her personal writings during her travels.
questions. On January 31, 1900 Kate wrote to her mother of her finances. "We went to
the show last night ‘Merchant of Venice’ it was fine I took Margaret, Elena and myself
$3. Tell Papa I have $7 have not broken into my fine dollar gold piece yet and will have
$10 when I get my Saturday’s money I didn’t draw last Sat. so I have double this
week." Charlie was similarly indulged. In a letter to the Conrad parents, Charlie’s
housemother in Andover, Massachusetts informs them she has given Charlie money. She
stated, “Had there been time to communicate with you after receiving your letter and
before your son left home, I should have asked you to make the check for me for one
hundred and ten dollars instead of one hundred and fifty…I have, therefore, handed your
son forty dollars, and have given him a receipt for the term’s rent.” Instead of
requesting a new check with the correct amount or returning the balance of the boarding
fee, Abby Pease gave the money to Charlie, and his parents let him keep it.

This monetary indulgence continued after Charlie’s death in 1902, when Lettie
became the children’s trustee of their inheritance. Even though Charlie’s will stated that
Lettie would be the trustee for eleven years, until Alicia Ann was eighteen years old, she
continued to maintain control of their inheritance until her death in 1923.

Childrearing and the model of American motherhood has adapted over the
centuries to accommodate or censure different political philosophies, economies, and
physical regions. The American Revolution offered new concepts of childrearing that
enhanced women’s authority within the home. Even though this ideal was conflicting for
other groups of people, middle class Victorian Americans continued to build on these

76 Kate Conrad to Alicia D. Conrad, January 31, 1900. Folder 14, Box 20, Series VII.
77 Abby Frances Pease to Charlie E. and Alicia D. Conrad, Box 21, Folder 1, Series VII, Collection 185, K.
Ross Toole Archives.
78 Murphy, Half Interest, 227 and Final Draft of Last Will and Testament, November 2, 1902, Folder 14,
Box 3, Series I. Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.
earlier ideas of gender identification and responsibilities and to praise women as naturally suited to childcare. Women who settled the American West transported these Victorian ideals of motherhood and attempted to adhere to them in a region different from their original home. Lettie Conrad was one of these women.

Congruent with her time, Lettie delivered two of her children in a social childbirth environment, surrounded by the support of her female family and friends. Similar to the changing times, Lettie’s third child Alicia Ann was born without her grandmother in attendance, and Charlie was the herald of the new arrival. Lettie Conrad concurred with Victorian ideals of motherhood. From the beginning of her children’s lives she desired to give them the best she could. She chose her own method of nourishing them. She granted them the healthiest source and strengthened the mother-child bond by nursing them herself. She chose to enlist servants to assist with household chores and task, so that she could focus her energies on her husband and children. She continued to care for not just the physical health of her children, but their mental well being also. She created a home that emphasized morality and gender roles and responsibilities. Lettie attempted to fulfill her own life’s work by adhering to Victorian values of motherhood.

Lettie maintained Victorian standards of childrearing. She educated her children, both formally and informally, indoctrinating them with Victorian values and ideals of gender. She encouraged Victorian gender roles and responsibilities presenting her children with gender associated toys and rooms. She emulated upper class customs of sending them off to the nursery for meals, yet allowed them social interaction at the dinner table to reinforce learned attitudes and behaviors. As her children grew, Lettie believed the education available in Kalispell, Montana inadequate. Adhering to ideals of
educating contributing citizens and emulating upper class European custom, Lettie sent Charles and Kate to boarding schools. Despite the physical distance, Lettie and her children maintained close contact through correspondence and vacations. Lettie continued to nurture and care for her children through writing and later, when Charlie and Kate moved back to Kalispell permanently, through example. Lettie Conrad adhered to Victorian ideals by approaching childrearing from a moral, nurturing perception attempting to raise moral, contributing citizens.
Conclusion

All of the research in this paper demonstrates that Lettie Conrad adhered to Victorian ideals of womanhood— not because she discussed her philosophies on marriage, domesticity, and childrearing, but because she lived them. Lettie’s adherence to these values is revealed throughout her correspondence and her physical environment. In her correspondence, Lettie related to her mother what her marriage was, not what it should be. Physically, she created a private home that counterbalanced the corruptions of the outside world and encouraged Victorian morality and gender ideals. Lastly, she recorded her responsibilities to and interactions with her children, not her philosophy on motherhood and childrearing. Alicia D. Conrad utilized her wealth and authority to maintain Victorian ideals of marriage, domesticity, and motherhood in the American West.

When she became a widow in 1902 (an extremely wealthy widow at that) Lettie expanded her set of principles. Her later life can be examined for additional topics. Lettie continued to observe Victorian practices, but without Charlie, she became more involved in different aspects of the public world. As a widow, she became involved in Charlie’s investments, traveled worldwide, and increased her involvement in social organizations. There are a number of possibilities for additional research in Lettie’s papers.

When Charlie died, Lettie became both the sole executrix of his estate and the trustee of the children’s trust, retaining $2,000 a month in payment for those services.1 In his eulogy, Sidney M. Logen praised her ingenuity in Charlie’s business affairs, stating, “It was rugged, virile, dominant, almost masculine, in the field of business and civic

1 Murphy, 225. C. E. Conrad’s Last Will and Testament, 1902, Folder 14, Box 3, Series I, Collection 185, K. Ross Toole Archives.

As a widow, Lettie also became increasingly involved in various social organizations such as the American Red Cross. Again Sidney Logen praised her enterprise: “Her work for the Red Cross Organization during the war was perhaps the most conspicuous but not by any means the most important of her services to the community.” Lettie Gavin’s monograph, *American Women in World War I: They Also Served,* and others have examined women’s roles in wartime on the front lines; Lettie’s life illustrates the work of women who stayed home.

After Charlie’s death, Lettie and Alicia Ann began to travel extensively on numerous excursions throughout Europe, Asia, and North America. While on these
journeys, Lettie wrote her observation and histories of the different areas visited. There are collections of women’s travel writings such as Lila Harper’s *Solitary Travelers: Nineteenth-Century Women’s Travel Narratives and the Scientific Vocation,* which analyzes scientific women’s writings of the Victorian era, and *Women through Women’s Eyes: Latin American Women in Nineteenth-Century Travel Accounts,* edited by June E. Hahner, which documents women’s experiences in Latin American during the Victorian era. Lettie’s papers could develop the literature on women’s travels to include the individual nineteenth-century western woman.


Alicia Stanford Conrad left behind irreplaceable material that can further an understanding of women in the American West. It is my hope that future researchers will continue research on Lettie Conrad and her family.

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CONRAD MANSION  SECOND FLOOR
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