

## False Witnesses

“Getting to the Source: Hetty Shepard, Dorothy Dudley, and Other Fictional Colonial Women I Have Come to Know Altogether Too Well” by Mary Beth Norton, in *Journal of Women's History* (Autumn 1998), Dept. of History, Ohio State Univ., 106 Dulles Hall, 230 W. 17th Ave., Columbus, Ohio 43210-1367.

It appears that “women’s history has finally joined the mainstream,” says Norton, a historian at Cornell University and author of *Founding Mothers and Fathers* (1996). But she detects a few dismaying impurities in the new tributary. Examining several recent documentary readers aimed at undergraduates, Norton finds that certain “diaries” or “memoirs” of colonial women included in the books are 19th-century fakes. And two of them, she points out, were previously exposed as such.

In *American Women Writers to 1800* (1996), editor Sharon M. Harris included excerpts from a purported colonial diary by “Dorothy Dudley.” It was actually written for an 1876 book compiled by the Ladies Centennial Committee of Cambridge, Massachusetts, Norton says, and was an imaginative re-creation of a local colonial woman’s life that was not intended to fool historians. “In 1976,” she says, “I pointed out that the contents of the ‘diary’ resembled no other 18th-century woman’s journal in that it focused almost exclusively on public events and revealed an author with remarkable access to other people’s correspondence.”

Harris also was taken in (as Norton says she herself once was, to an extent) by a purported 1859 memoir of the American Revolution by one Sidney Barclay. In 1995, scholar Sarah Buck, in “an excellent piece of historical detective work,” exposed

it as “‘an inspired hoax,’” showing, Norton says, that the people and places the “memoir” mentions are mostly fictitious, and “the attitudes it expresses are those of the antebellum rather than the revolutionary years.” But while acknowledging Buck’s exposé, the editors of a series of books for young readers, Judith E. Greenberg and Helen Carey McKeever, nevertheless published an edited version of the “memoir” under the title, *Journal of a Revolutionary War Woman* (1996).

Another document that Norton argues (at some length) is fake is a “Puritan Maiden’s Diary” purportedly kept by “Hetty Shepard” during 1675–77. Robert Marcus and David Burner include passages from it in the latest edition of *American Firsthand* (1998), a reader widely used in basic survey courses in American history. “I am fifteen years old to-day,” the diarist writes in her first entry—in defiance of the fact, Norton says, that “most 17th-century people did not know the year of their birth (much less the day).”

Even if the 19th-century author of the diary “had not made so many obvious errors, historians should have been more skeptical,” Norton maintains. Women in 17th-century America simply did not keep diaries, she explains, because they lacked three essentials: paper (which was scarce and expensive), a high degree of literacy, and leisure—“all of which most American women did not achieve until the 19th century.”

## How Welfare Lost Its Good Name

“The Invention of ‘Welfare’ in America” by Michael B. Katz and Lorrin R. Thomas, in *Journal of Policy History* (1998: No. 4), Saint Louis Univ., P.O. Box 56907, St. Louis, Mo. 63156-0907.

In the early 20th century, *welfare* was a proud term, signifying the best in modern social policy. How it came to connote the worst, write Katz, a historian at the University of Pennsylvania, and Thomas, a doctoral student there, is an instructive tale.

During the New Deal era, when America’s welfare state emerged, the term *welfare* seldom appeared in public without being accompanied by an adjective enhancing its meaning of “well-being.” *Social welfare* or *public welfare* referred to a broad array of gov-

ernment programs intended to ensure economic security. *Welfare* “retained its Progressive Era association with modernity, progress, science, and efficiency, and with services rather than relief” for the poor, the authors observe.

The Committee on Economic Security, appointed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1934, called for a comprehensive program of “social welfare activities,” including insurance for unemployment, old age, and sickness; expanded public health programs; pensions for the uninsured elderly; and aid for “fatherless children.” This, say the authors, is what “welfare,” at its inception, was: an expanded system of social insurance coupled with public assistance for those ineligible for coverage. By replacing “the old poor laws and their invidious distinctions” with Aid to Dependent Children as part of a broad concept of “welfare” to which Americans were entitled as citizens, Katz and Thomas write, the committee thought that the stigma of family assistance could be erased.

Eventually, it was hoped, public assistance would become “almost unnecessary,” the authors note. Even in 1950, this expectation “did not appear unreasonable.” Amendments to the Social Security Act in 1939 and 1950 extended social insurance to widows and their children, as well as to many domestic

and farm workers originally excluded. Meanwhile, labor unions were winning medical insurance, pensions, and other fringe benefits for more and more Americans.

But Cold War controversy over whether the “welfare state” was “socialistic” or even “un-American” rubbed off on the word *welfare*, and as more of the “deserving poor” became eligible for social insurance, those left on public assistance—chiefly unmarried mothers with children—“inherited the degraded mantle” of past “relief” efforts. Welfare cheating scandals didn’t help matters. And the rolls of those receiving aid, later renamed Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), rose 41 percent during the 1950s, with recipients disproportionately black, and 169 percent during the 1960s.

By the mid-1960s, the definition of *welfare* had narrowed, becoming synonymous with AFDC, and identified with the “undeserving poor.” After 1973, the value of “welfare” benefits, in constant dollars, plummeted. By 1996, a Democratic president was proud to claim that by abolishing AFDC, America was “ending welfare as we know it.” But America did not end welfare as we *used* to know it, the authors note. Welfare in the form of social insurance, especially Social Security, for those who weren’t so down-and-out, “remained unsailable.”

## *The DNA Case against Jefferson*

“The Thomas Jefferson Paternity Case,” letters from E. A. Foster et al., in *Nature* (Jan. 7, 1999), Porters South, 4 Crinan St., London N1 9XW, England; “The Tom-and-Sally Miniseries (Cont.)” by Lewis Lord, in *U.S. News & World Report* (Jan. 18, 1999), 1050 Thomas Jefferson St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20007.

How certain is it that Thomas Jefferson fathered at least one child by his slave Sally Hemings?

Since dropping their scientific bombshell last November making Jefferson seem, in all likelihood, guilty in the paternity case (see *WQ*, Winter ’99, pp. 115–116), pathologist Eugene A. Foster and his colleagues have returned to the pages of *Nature* to elaborate.

They reiterate that the simplest—and, in their view, on the basis of the available historical evidence, the most probable—explanation of the DNA data (matching the

Jefferson male line’s Y chromosome with the Hemings male line’s) is that Jefferson fathered Sally Hemings’s last son, Easton. However, Foster and his colleagues point out, that is not an absolute certainty, as the headline on the original *Nature* story misleadingly suggested. It is possible, they note, that Jefferson’s brother, Randolph, or any of Randolph’s five sons could have fathered Sally Hemings’s later children.

Herbert Barger, a retired Pentagon supervisor and genealogist married to a Jefferson descendant, had helped Foster’s project by