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“MOB SISTERS”:

WOMEN REPORTING ON CRIME IN PROHIBITION-ERA CHICAGO

A Dissertation in

Mass Communications

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the work of five women who were employed by the *Chicago Tribune* as general assignment reporters during the 1920s, and whose unique way of covering the city's epidemic of crime – with sarcastic humor, a cynical viewpoint and slang-infused prose – merits the creation of a new “category” of female reporter, dubbed here the “mob sister.”

Histories of American media generally place women reporters who worked at newspapers prior to World War II into narrowly proscribed roles, leading to a widespread assumption that women were only allowed to cover topics such as fashion, society, and news of interest to homemakers. In addition, most histories tell us that those women who did make the front pages worked either as “stunt girls,” performing daring feats and then writing about their exploits to shock or titillate readers, or as “sob sisters,” covering trials in maudlin prose intended to bring readers to tears. However, a significant number of women broke those barriers during the Prohibition era, especially in Chicago, where the *Tribune*, in particular, gave women journalists wide latitude to pursue beats traditionally considered more suitable for men in that period. The female *Tribune* journalists whose work is examined in this dissertation are Genevieve Forbes Herrick, whose byline was a fixture on the paper's front page throughout the Roaring Twenties; Maurine Watkins, who drew upon her work as a crime reporter to write the enduring social satire *Chicago*; Kathleen McLaughlin, a confidante of mobsters whose crime reportage in Chicago earned her a coveted spot in *The New York Times*'s once exclusively male newsroom; Leola Allard, who covered Chicago's juvenile and domestic courts, reporting on crimes ranging from spousal abuse to kidnapping; and Maureen McKernan, whose clear-

thinking, no-nonsense coverage of crime for the *Tribune* began to move closer to the modern ideal of objective, factual reporting.

This dissertation also explores factors that allowed for the emergence of the mob sisters, including the explosion of gangland crime – and murders by women – in Chicago during Prohibition; the increasing professionalization of journalism during the 1920s; a female-friendly culture at the *Tribune*; and the intersections of crime, celebrity and entertainment during the Jazz Age, all of which helped to create a window of opportunity for these women to not only cover crime, but to develop a new acerbic, witty, anti-sob-sister voice that reflected the changing attitudes of a city whose residents were concerned – yet proud of and even amused by – the chaos around them.

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Chapter 1: Introduction, Literature Review and Methodology

Ever since the first true American circulation wars – Charles Dana’s *New York Sun* versus James Gordon Bennett’s *New York Herald*, circa 1870 – stories about crime, police activity and courts have enjoyed prominent, often front-page, placement in U.S. newspapers. As Smythe and Kilmer note in their study of the post-Civil War press, “In its treatment of news, the *Sun*, like its chief competitor, the *Herald*, emphasized murder . . .”¹ Indeed, media historians Emery, Emery and Roberts credit Bennett’s “aggressive” treatment of stories about sensational crimes with saving the fledgling paper.² Even in 2012, when the presidential election garnered by far the most media attention, stories about crime still claimed approximately 5 percent of the newshole, according to The Pew Research Center’s annual State of the News Media survey for 2013.³ And a truly shocking crime can steal the media spotlight entirely; an earlier Pew study found that the massacre at Virginia Tech University in April 2007 was *the* most covered story of that year.⁴

Therefore, it stands to reason that a significant number of reporters have worked and are working to produce crime-related stories. For example, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, *Patriot-News* crime reporter Sara Ganim was awarded the 2012 Pulitzer Prize for local reporting for her series of articles about a sex scandal involving former Pennsylvania State University assistant football

¹ Ted Curtis Smythe and Paulette D. Kilmer, “The Press and Industrial America, 1865-1883,” in *The Media in America: A History*, 5th ed., ed. Wm. David Sloan (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 2002), 202.

² Michael Emery, Edwin Emery, and Nancy L. Roberts, *The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media*, 9th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000), 102.

³ At 5 percent of the newshole, crime in 2012 was the eighth most covered topic among the ten subjects that were tracked. See The Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism, “The State of the News Media 2012: An Annual Report on American Journalism”; accessed 26 Aug. 2013, <http://stateofthemediamedia.org/2013/newspapers-stabilizing-but-still-threatened/newspapers-by-the-numbers/>.

⁴ The Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism, “The State of the News Media 2008: An Annual Report on American Journalism”; accessed 26 Oct. 2013, www.stateofthemediamedia.org/2008/a-year-in-the-news-intro/.

coach Jerry Sandusky.⁵ In fact, all of the prizes for local reporting, as listed on The Pulitzer Prizes website, have been awarded for coverage of crime-related stories, ranging from “mass killings” to taxpayer fraud leading to state and federal prosecutions.⁶ In short, crime is – and long has been – news.

And yet, beyond recognition by the Pulitzer committee, crime reporters have received little attention from media scholars and historians compared to journalists who’ve worked in other “categories” of news. For instance, certain names are readily associated with sports reportage: Grantland Rice, Ring Lardner, Westbrook Pegler. The same is true for war correspondents: Ernie Pyle, Ernest Hemingway, Edward R. Murrow. Muckraking also instantly brings to mind certain names: Ida Tarbell, Upton Sinclair, Lincoln Steffens. Even the often denigrated “women’s pages” and “society pages,” popular at the turn of the century and well into the 1900s, are likely to spur mention of a few particular journalists – Rheta Dorr Childe, Beatrice Fairfax, and Judith Martin (“Miss Manners”) – among media historians who are familiar with that part of newspaper history.

But crime? One of the few arguably recognizable names in the history of crime reportage is Jake Lingle, who covered Chicago’s gangsters during the 1920s. And he is largely remembered for being exposed as in league with his subjects after his 1930 murder.⁷

⁵ Mallery Jean Tenore, “Sara Ganim, 24, Wins Pulitzer for Coverage of Penn State Sex Abuse Scandal”; accessed 26 Aug. 2013, <http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/mediawire/170392/sara-ganim-24-wins-pulitzer-for-coverage-of-penn-state-sex-abuse-scandal/>.

⁶ “The Pulitzer Prizes: Past Winners & Finalists by Category”; accessed 26 Aug. 2013, www.pulitzer.org/bycat. Note: Not all years’ winners are recorded; some gaps exist.

⁷ See Laurence Bergreen, *Capone: The Man and the Era* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 373-386, and Lloyd Wendt, *Chicago Tribune: The Rise of a Great American Newspaper* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1979), 529-534.

Even more invisible are *women* who've covered crime for print media, especially prior to World War II. In fact, some media historians argue that, discounting sob sisters and some “stunt girls” who interviewed murderers to shock audiences,⁸ female crime reporters were all but nonexistent during American journalism's most formative eras, from the days of the Penny Press up through the war years.⁹

While it may be true that women during this period faced barriers to reporting crime, including editors who considered them too fragile to handle the sight of blood or too vulnerable to walk the streets of newly urbanizing America at night,¹⁰ this dissertation argues that the number of women covering police stations, courtrooms and trials on par with their male counterparts – meaning not as stunt girls hoping to titillate or sob sisters mining trials for emotion – is underestimated.¹¹ In addition, this research asserts that the 1920s, an era remarkable for the expansion of organized crime in cities, not only allowed some women to break free of the traditional “hen's coops” and women's pages at newspapers, but to develop a brash, attitude-laden, “anti-sob sister” style of crime coverage. Christened by this researcher as the “mob sisters,” these ground-breaking reporters of the Roaring Twenties didn't use gender to scandalize readers with the novelty of women getting close enough to killers to interview them. Nor did they write prose intended to make audiences weep over the plight of victims or sympathetic courtroom defendants, which was a hallmark of sob sister reportage. On the

⁸ Maurine Beasley, “The Emergence of Modern Media, 1900-1945,” in *The Media in America: A History*, 5th ed., ed. Wm. David Sloan (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 2002), 287.

⁹ Research on women who have covered crime is treated in greater detail in this dissertation's literature review, which follows in Chapter 2.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Ishbel Ross, *Ladies of the Press: The Story of Women in Journalism by an Insider* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1936), 124.

¹¹ The literature review in the next chapter attests to this in greater detail.

contrary, the mob sisters wrote about some of the decade's most sordid crimes in a style that reflected the new attitudes of a changing nation, in which "[m]oney, mobility and celebrity would be the motifs"¹² and whose citizens would become obsessed with "motion pictures, baseball, prize fights, automobiles, dress, murder and divorce."¹³ Disposing of sentimentality and embracing the "anything goes" attitude of the era, the mob sisters' work is a journalistic reflection of fiction written by the Jazz Age's "flippant, ironic" standard-bearer, F. Scott Fitzgerald.¹⁴

Specifically, this dissertation identifies three characteristics that defined the mob sister style: use of sarcastic humor; a pervasive cynicism; and the employment of popular, sometimes coarse, slang.

To establish this new type of reporter, this research focuses upon the work of five women – all of whom covered crime for the *Chicago Tribune* during the 1920s – and whose work incorporated those characteristics to varying degrees. The women are:

* Genevieve Forbes Herrick, who produced hundreds of often glib, humorous crime-related stories for the *Tribune* during her time as a general assignment reporter, which lasted throughout most of the 1920s and into the 1930s;

* Maurine Watkins, whose cynical, biting wit distinguished her brief career as a *Tribune* crime reporter in the early 1920s, and who used her experiences covering female killers to create the enduring social satire *Chicago*;

¹² Nathan Miller, *New World Coming: The 1920s and the Making of Modern America* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2003), 10.

¹³ Lucy Moore, *Anything Goes: A Biography of the Roaring Twenties* (New York: Overlook Press, 2010), 137.

¹⁴ Miller, *New World*, 10.

* Kathleen McLaughlin, another *Tribune* general assignment reporter whose factual, unflinching coverage of rapes, murders and the doings of mobsters helped her to later earn a ground-breaking spot in the once male-dominated *New York Times* newsroom;

* Leola Allard, a driven journalist who specialized in covering domestic and juvenile courts for the *Tribune* during the early 1920s; and

* Maureen McKernan, who joined the *Tribune* during the mid-1920s and whose more straightforward reportage on crime may have signaled a shift away from opinion-infused news reporting – either sentimental or sarcastic – and toward the more modern goal of objectivity.

This research also explores factors specific to the 1920s that may have allowed these women to move beyond previously proscribed roles for female journalists. For example, how did the rise of the culture of professionalization, with its emphasis on merit-based workplace promotion, impact female reporters' opportunities? Did the related expansion of journalism programs at universities – most notably Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, which was closely allied with the *Tribune* in the 1920s – help to provide new opportunities for female graduates? And did the growing fascination with “celebrities” – whose ranks in Jazz-Age Chicago included flashy, high profile criminals such as Al Capone and several attractive, charismatic female murderers – enable some women reporters to cross the line from more conventional feature writing into hard news by blurring the line between society-and-entertainment coverage and front-page reportage? By answering these and other questions, this dissertation seeks to not only identify a previously overlooked sub-genre of female reporters, but to place their work within a broader social context.

This dissertation also compares the journalistic output of the mob sisters to that of the sob sisters and male news reporters working in the same time and place, and argues that the mob

sisters' work represents a significant break from the sob sister tradition and is more squarely aligned with the output of the mob sisters' contemporary male colleagues.

But first, this research examines a variety of resources, from media history surveys to specialized literature on crime in Chicago during the Jazz Age, to determine what – if anything – has been written about women covering crime during this period, especially in Chicago.

Literature Review

Much has been written about female print journalists and the history of their work at American newspapers. However, relatively few sources mention, let alone explore in depth, the lives and work of women who covered crime-related stories, especially during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In fact, only one study, Phyllis Abramson's *Sob Sister Journalism*, provides the subject with a book-length treatment.¹⁵ However, the volume is slim and focuses narrowly on four women who provided melodramatic coverage of high-profile criminal trials at the turn of the twentieth century. Specifically, Abramson examines the reportage of Winifred Black (pen name Annie Laurie), Elizabeth Gilmer (Dorothy Dix), Ada Patterson and Nixola Greeley-Smith, all of whom covered the infamous 1906 New York City murder trial of architect Stanford White by socialite Harry K. Thaw. While *Sob Sister Journalism* does establish all four women as influential courtroom fixtures, the overwrought, overly emotional style of the sob sisters' writing clearly detracted from women's efforts to be considered serious reporters by their contemporaries. Even today, Abramson's portrayal of Black, Gilmer, Patterson and Greeley-Smith's work on the Thaw trial – she refers to their writing as “mawkish” and “soppy”¹⁶ – makes

¹⁵ Phyllis Leslie Abramson, *Sob Sister Journalism* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

it difficult to regard the four as anything but essentially swooning romance writers, which has perhaps inadvertently contributed to the dearth of information on female journalists who covered crime on the heels of the sob sisters.

Yet a careful study of journalist Ishbel Ross's 1936 book *Ladies of the Press* demonstrates that a growing number of women were covering crime in the wake of the sob sisters – but, unlike their melodramatic forerunners, were not restricted to courtrooms nor beholden to the maudlin style popularized by their melodramatic forerunners. In her 600-page examination of women working in newsrooms from the Civil War era through the mid-1930s, Ross, herself a well-respected hard-news reporter during the 1920s and 30s, mentions more than 100 women who covered crime during or around the time of her own career.¹⁷ And although Ross's rambling memoir leaves space for only superficial treatment of these women's work, she gives the distinct impression that their reporting veered closer to that of male colleagues than had the sob sisters' at the turn of the century. As Ross notes, “. . . [T]he newspaper girl of today . . . dashes off to the East Side at a moment's notice when a baby is kidnapped or an indignant wife polishes off her husband.”¹⁸ She adds, “Is [the modern female reporter] emotional in her work? Rarely . . . News writers have too much sense . . . to beat their breasts in public now . . . The public would laugh.”¹⁹

The women Ross identifies as part of this new breed of more analytical, straight-news reporters covering crime range from East Coast to West Coast, from broadsheets to tabloids.

¹⁷ This number is based on a careful combing of Ross's memoir and includes any female journalists who she mentioned as having covered crime, regardless of whether the context suggests that such coverage was a singular/rare event for a particular woman or a more steady assignment/beat. Admittedly, the context often leaves unanswered just how frequently any particular woman drew crime assignments, although it can be safely argued that upwards of two dozen women identified by Ross seem to have covered crime-related stories quite regularly.

¹⁸ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 45.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

Sometimes, they merit only a sentence or two, suggesting that they covered a singular or rare crime event. Other times, though, their careers are provided more extensive description, attesting to frequent crime-related assignments and even police beat coverage.

Among the most prolific of the female crime reporters highlighted by Ross circa the 1920s and 30s was *New York Journal* reporter Dorothy Kilgallen, who covered her first execution at the age of 21, writing a story that “crackled and sang,” and which was “different from the sentimental style of Nellie Bly,” who’d covered a similar story fifteen years earlier.²⁰ Killgallen went on to cover crime extensively, starting as a feature writer but subsequently earning lead-story status. As Ross notes, for a time, “. . . [S]he practically lived in police stations, court houses, hospitals and the morgue.”²¹

Among the many others who earn mention by Ross are:

* New York reporter Helen Nolan, who covered several high-profile crimes, including the Lindbergh baby kidnapping, and who is described as “a clever digger and investigator as well as a good reporter”;²²

* *New York World* and Associated Press reporter Elenore Kellogg, who “deplored anything in the way of a feminine assignment or the woman’s angle” and who “saw many murderers on their way to the chair”;²³

* Anne Dunlap, also of New York, who “. . . learned what it was to stay up all night in court . . . to wait for hour hours outside jails . . .”;²⁴

²⁰ Ibid., 241.

²¹ Ibid., 242.

²² Ibid., 190.

²³ Ibid., 166-167.

²⁴ Ibid., 184.

* Dorothy Roe, described as a “leading woman star” with the Universal Service newswire and whose assignments included coverage of a six-person slaughter by bank robber “Pretty Boy” Floyd;²⁵ and

* Dorothy Ducas, who covered crimes – including murders and the Lindbergh kidnapping – for newspapers and the I.N.S. wire service, and who “pride[d] herself on being a straight news reporter.”²⁶

In addition, quite a few women are identified as having covered stories about organized crime, which reached unprecedented scope and levels of violence during the Prohibition era.

For example, Ross profiles Julia Harpman, a New York reporter who “talked to gangsters in their haunts and listened to the ravings of their molls.” Harpman is described as a straight-news reporter who covered her first murder in 1920, when she did field reporting on a slaying, “rounding up details” with “an impersonal approach.” As Ross relates, “Miss Harpman covered crime with such thoroughness and skill that she left her competitors trailing far behind . . .” To illustrate, Ross includes anecdotes in which Harpman “watched a murdered man’s body being grappled out of a quicksand swamp and the bones of a baby being scraped from forest soil . . .”²⁷

In addition, Ross pays significant attention to the work of Philadelphia *Ledger* reporter Evelyn Shuler, who “worked night and day” to expose organized crime in Philadelphia, resulting in police action, and who compiled a “crime survey of the underworld” that contained some information too “full of dynamite” to print. Shuler is also singled out as the only “girl reporter in the country” to write the lead story of Bruno Hauptmann’s trial for the Lindbergh baby

²⁵ Ibid., 214-215.

²⁶ Ibid., 210.

²⁷ Ibid., 261-262.

kidnapping. Ross adds that Shuler was “often . . . ahead of the police in rounding up facts, for she is fast, accurate and resourceful.” Again distancing Shuler from sob sisters, Ross adds, “Her stories are objective and businesslike . . .”²⁸

Ross also discusses the career of New York’s Grace Robinson, relating an anecdote about the reporter’s interview of bootlegger Jack “Legs” Diamond. According to Ross, Robinson was “always to be found at the front row of any great murder trial” and boasted “a record of big stories . . . that any man would envy.” And Ross is again quick to point out that Robinson did not follow the sob sister tradition. Along with working both in and outside the courtroom, Robinson is described as churning out “astonishingly sharp” copy that created a “pyrotechnic picture of the criminal world.”²⁹

Other women who covered at least one organized crime story, as documented by Ross, include:

* New York journalist Michelene Keating, described as covering a mob-related trial and interviewing a gangster before his betrayal and murder by a rival;³⁰

* *New York Mirror* reporter Jane Franklin, who helped cover the murder of gangster Frankie Marlowe;³¹ and

* Norma Abrams, also of New York, who worked “on absolutely even terms with the men . . . and most of the time cover[ed] a steady court beat.” According to one anecdote related

²⁸ Ibid., 511-512.

²⁹ Ibid, 270.

³⁰ Ibid., 304.

³¹ Ibid., 299.

by Ross, Abrams was part of a team of reporters assigned to cover one of several murder attempts against aforementioned gangster “Legs” Diamond.³²

Ross also explores the careers of several women who covered crime and organized crime in Chicago at the height of the Prohibition era. This is notable because the city was the epicenter of mob-related violence and the site of some of the Jazz Age’s most notoriously bloody slaughters, including the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre. Discussing the city’s organized-crime wave, *Chicago Tribune* chronicler Wendt relates, “Before the [1920s] ended, more than 1,000 combatants would be killed, victims of machine guns, sawed-off shotguns, knives, and baseball bats in bloody battles fought mostly in the Chicago streets.”³³

Meanwhile, Chicago at the turn of the twentieth century was also the site of an unusual – and increasing – trend: namely, killings by women. According to Lesy, in *Murder City*, Chicago saw a 420 percent increase in murders by women between 1870 and 1920.³⁴ And the mid-20s, Ross notes, was “the heyday of the murderess.”³⁵

One could argue that female reporters – considered by many editors too vulnerable to walk the streets alone at night, even in relatively placid places – could have found their work especially constrained in a city that was essentially under siege. Yet Ross describes Chicago, and especially the *Chicago Tribune*, as a perfect “training ground” for women who wanted to write straight news.³⁶

³² Ibid., 296-297.

³³ Wendt, *Chicago Tribune*, 530.

³⁴ Michael Lesy, *Murder City: The Bloody History of Chicago in the Twenties* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 308.

³⁵ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 544.

³⁶ Ibid.

Among those who rose to prominence covering crime in Prohibition-era Chicago was Genevieve Forbes Herrick, a subject of this dissertation, as noted earlier. Forbes Herrick is described by Ross as “constantly on the front page of the *Chicago Tribune*, a guarantee of good writing and sound reporting.” Ross adds that Forbes Herrick’s “subject was often crime” at a time when “crime raged in Chicago on an unprecedented scale.” Along with covering the infamously shocking 1924 Leopold-Loeb “thrill killing,” Forbes Herrick delved into the world of gangsters, interviewing Al Capone and exploring “the lives of the women of gangland.” As Ross explains, Forbes Herrick learned “to talk to gangsters and their wives” and “to write about them in the vernacular.” Ross also separates Forbes Herrick from earlier sob sisters – and stunt girls – noting, “Mrs. Herrick never favored the indirect approach or daredevil doings to get her story. She collected facts by sensible means, weighed them shrewdly, then put the utmost emphasis on good writing.”³⁷

Ross also briefly profiles two other subjects of this dissertation: *Chicago Tribune* reporter Maureen McKernan, highlighting her bylined work on two of the city’s more sensational murders,³⁸ and *Tribune*, then later *New York Times*, reporter Kathleen McLaughlin.³⁹

In addition, Ross discusses the brief but prolific *Tribune* career of Maurine Watkins – a fourth subject of this dissertation – noting how Watkins’s coverage of the 1924 trial of murderess Beulah Annan gave the reporter enough fodder to write the cynical and wildly successful play *Chicago*.⁴⁰

³⁷ Ibid., 539-542.

³⁸ Ibid., 544.

³⁹ Ibid., 161-163, 543-544, 547.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Ross also spotlights Chicago *Herald Examiner* and *Tribune* reporter Leola Allard – a fifth subject of this research – who was “in the thick of things during gangland’s wildest days. Like all the Chicago newspaper women of this period most of her stories dealt with crime.”⁴¹

Another notable woman who covered crime in Chicago at the end of the decade was Ruth Cowan – later Cowan Nash – who, according to Ross, “watched Capone accept his irksome fate . . . when the government finally got him.”⁴²

Yet while Ross pays homage to the groundbreaking work of these pioneering female crime reporters, her recounting of their specific accomplishments is far from fully developed. However valuable a starting point Ross may have provided for subsequent examination of crime reporting by women, few if any scholars have picked up the baton. Aside from one scholarly retrospective on Forbes Herrick’s career, which devotes six paragraphs to her work as a crime reporter,⁴³ no specific studies about Watkins, McLaughlin, Allard, McKernan or any other female crime reporter of the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries have been assembled. Without such biographical treatments, a scholar seeking to learn more on this topic is left to cast the net more widely, to see if perhaps female crime reporting has received a more general academic treatment in any of the overall histories of women’s journalism or in media history survey texts. Or, if interested in Forbes Herrick, Watkins, McLaughlin, Allard or McKernan, a scholar might look to see if histories of the *Chicago Tribune* – or of the 1920s Chicago crime scene – make mention of these women working as crime reporters.

⁴¹ Ibid., 548.

⁴² Ibid., 550.

⁴³ Linda Steiner and Susanne Gray, “Genevieve Forbes Herrick: A Front-Page Reporter ‘Pleased to Write about Women,’” *Journalism History* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1985), 10.

But as the remainder of this literature review will demonstrate, most of these sources have little to offer, either by way of documenting the evolution of female crime reporting generally, or the careers of Forbes Herrick, Watkins, McLaughlin, Allard, or McKernan, specifically.

Histories of Women in Journalism

One of the most comprehensive and well-respected U.S. media history overviews, *The Media in America: A History*, repeatedly emphasizes that for the greater part of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, during the heydays of print journalism, women were generally considered unfit to cover hard news, such as crime. As Smythe and Kilmer assert in their chapter of the book – which examines the era during which news was first compartmentalized into the equivalent of “beats” by the *Chicago Tribune*’s Joseph Medill and when reporters first earned regular salaries – “[t]he few female reporters generally covered meetings, weddings, and social events. There were few exceptions.” Among those exceptions were women who covered politics in Washington, D.C., “but even they were confined largely to background or social items.”⁴⁴ In their subsequent summary of “The Age of New Journalism, 1883-1900” – when the beat system achieved “perfection” – Everett and Campbell make little mention of women at all, aside from female publisher Mrs. Frank Leslie and stunt girl Elizabeth Cochrane (Nellie Bly).⁴⁵

Further, according to Beasley, in her chapter titled “The Emergence of Modern Media, 1900-1945,” women during this time period continued to be largely confined to specific roles that did not include coverage of crime or other straight news. In a section subtitled “The

⁴⁴ Ted Curtis Smythe and Paulette Kilmer, “The Press and Industrial America, 1865-1883,” in *The Media in America*, 215-217.

⁴⁵ George Everett and W. Joseph Campbell, “The Age of New Journalism, 1883-1900,” in *The Media in America*, ed. Sloan, 226-228, 232-234.

Newspaper as Male Preserve,” Beasley primarily focuses on the work of turn-of-the-century stunt girls, with a brief, somewhat vague mention of the “few women journalists who could ever hope for front page bylines.” Moreover, although Beasley notes that stories about “crimes and scandal” were the stock-in-trade of the era’s popular tabloids, she only references one woman who tried to cover a crime shoulder-to-shoulder with male reporters: Lorena Hickok of the Associated Press. And that anecdote is included only to point out that Hickok’s desperate attempt to get a scoop on the Lindbergh baby kidnapping was fruitless. Beasley explains, “All she received for her exertion was flu due to exposure. Her editors were annoyed . . .” Beasley also discusses the work of advice columnist and sob sister Elizabeth Gilmer (Dorothy Dix), who, as noted earlier in this literature review, did cover murder trials – but Beasley stresses that Dix “emoted in lurid human interest accounts” and was otherwise best known for “advising women that the means to happiness . . . was a determination to be content.” For the most part, Beasley contends that between 1900 and 1945, “the women’s and society pages provided [women’s] only viable opportunities for newspaper careers.” Further, she asserts that prior to passage of civil rights legislation in 1964, “editors assumed that most women were unfit to be general assignment reporters and did not belong in city rooms.”⁴⁶ However, even those chapters that cover the latter part of twentieth century fail to link women to any significant coverage of crime.

In their popular survey text *Voices of a Nation: A History of Mass Media in the United States*, Folkerts and Teeter echo the scholars in Sloan’s *The Media in America*. For example, the chapter on the Penny Press makes no mention of female reporters.⁴⁷ Subsequently, in their discussion of westward expansion and the pre-Civil War press, Folkerts and Teeter mention

⁴⁶ Beasley, “The Emergence of Modern Media,” 285-291.

⁴⁷ Jean Folkerts and Dwight L. Teeter Jr., *Voices of a Nation: A History of Mass Media in the United States*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1994), 119-137

correspondent Margaret Fuller,⁴⁸ but no other female reporters, let alone women who covered crime. Moreover, their examination of the turn-of-the-century press primarily positions women as consumers swayed by advertising as opposed to producers of any news, with the exception being stunt girl Nellie Bly and women who worked on magazines targeting female readers.⁴⁹ Indeed, in their discussion of reporters and professionalization, they note, “. . . [D]aily journalism was largely a male occupation, although women were hired to write copy aimed at other women.”⁵⁰ In addition, although Folkerts and Teeter assert that newspapers expanded coverage of “murders” and “crimes” in the 1920s,⁵¹ they do not discuss the reporters, male or female, who provided the stories.

Emery, Emery and Roberts, in their survey text *The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media*, follow a similar pattern. While noting the growing importance of news gathering during the Penny Press era,⁵² they identify only a handful of female journalists working during that time. These include Margaret Fuller, described as “one of the truly great literary figures of the period”;⁵³ anti-slavery crusader Jane Grey Swisshelm; and “unconventional but competent writer and editor” Anne Royall.⁵⁴ In addition, they discuss heightened crime coverage and the work of stunt girls and sob sisters during the Hearst-Pulitzer circulation wars,

⁴⁸ Ibid., 165.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 243-278.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 275.

⁵¹ Ibid., 362.

⁵² Emery, Emery, and Roberts, *The Press and America*, 105.

⁵³ Ibid., 107.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 110-111.

and provide a long list of women who worked in journalism then.⁵⁵ However, while some of these women are identified as covering politics or engaging in “muckraking,” there is no mention of any of them covering crime. Further, in their examination of “the rise of interpretive reporting” during the New Deal era, the authors list no female reporters, and include only four women, total, in their roster of foreign correspondents and political columnists working during that era.⁵⁶

One of the most comprehensive books on the history of women in American journalism, Maurine Beasley and Sheila Gibbons’s *Taking Their Place*, also makes scant mention of women covering crime. The broad historical overview chronicles how, prior to the women’s movement in 1963, women were largely confined to writing news considered of interest to women – namely fashion and homemaking stories – for “women’s pages.” Writing about the nineteenth century, Beasley and Gibbons note that women generally covered “sentimental” topics. Rare exceptions included aforementioned New York *Tribune* scribe Margaret Fuller, who covered the Italian revolution, and Swisshelm, who demanded a seat in the U.S. Senate press gallery. Discussing the early twentieth century, Beasley focuses on stunt girls, sob sisters, and reporters for women’s and society pages, as well as those women who wrote, more substantively, about suffrage. She adds that journalism schools during that era encouraged female students to “excel only at ‘soft news,’” while male students “edited the school newspapers and wrote ‘hard news . . .’” Moreover – in her first specific mention of women as potential crime reporters – she quotes a 1930s-era textbooks as stating flatly, “Most women are incapable of covering police and court

⁵⁵ Ibid., 175-176, 180-181, and 194-196.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 310-317.

news.”⁵⁷ In short, Beasley does not link women reporters to crime coverage during the era which this dissertation will reveal as having fostered several high-profile female journalists who covered crime and courtroom dramas outside the sob sister/stunt girl formats.

In her study of American female journalists, *A Place in the News: From the Women's Pages to the Front Page*, Kay Mills notes that “the same names pop up over and over again” in most histories of U.S. journalism.⁵⁸ She then provides a long list of more obscure female editors, publishers and reporters. However, Mills points to only one woman “best known for her crime reporting” between the turn of the twentieth century through the Roaring Twenties: Genevieve Forbes Herrick.⁵⁹ In her discussion of the 1930s, Mills also focuses on the career of Los Angeles editor and crime reporter Aggie Underwood,⁶⁰ a name heretofore uncovered in this literature review. For the most part, however, Mills sums up the work of female reporters in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with the conclusion, “There were stunt girls and there were sob sisters.”⁶¹ Ultimately, she marks the 1960s as the watershed decade for women who wanted to cover hard news such as crime, noting, “Women were moving off the women's pages and sometimes onto the front pages.”⁶² Even then, however, she shares an anecdote about an

⁵⁷ Maurine H. Beasley and Sheila J. Gibbons, *Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism* (Washington, DC: American University Press, 1993), 1-13.

⁵⁸ Kay Mills, *A Place in the News: From the Women's Pages to the Front Page* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 15.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 67-71.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 88.

editor who advised a job applicant not to aspire to be “a cop reporter” on the grounds that “you don't know what you might see.”⁶³

In her history of female journalists, *Women and the Press: The Struggle for Equality*, Patricia Bradley also digs deep to uncover women whose work is not normally included in broader survey texts. In particular, she identifies a large number of female editors working at the turn of the century, as well as scribes who tackled an extensive list of topics that included international affairs, dressmaking, cooking, child-care, and Native American activism.⁶⁴ Bradley adds, “Women could also be found as writers of specialty columns on topics such as architecture, fly-fishing, livestock and horseracing . . .”⁶⁵ She also discusses the work of stunt girls.⁶⁶ However, Bradley does not point to one woman who specialized in the coverage of crime and courts at that time – with the exception of sob sisters, whom she also calls “agony writers.”⁶⁷ But Bradley explains that these women were marginalized and mocked by male colleagues, adding, “There was no affection or respect in the term . . . Rather, the name served to define female reporters, and by implication the female readers they were supposed to attract, by their perceived nature as female, only able to write in emotional terms because that was what their nature demanded.”⁶⁸ According to Bradley, the interwar years saw an increase in women covering crime on more equal footing with male reporters; she identifies five women – including Kathleen McLaughlin – who covered highly publicized crimes and trials. However, writing

⁶³ Ibid., 81.

⁶⁴ Patricia Bradley, *Women and the Press: The Struggle for Equality* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 116-118.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 117.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 120-129.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 123.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

about women who reported on the 1932 Lindbergh kidnapping, Bradley points out, “When it came to awards, the women who had covered the story so assiduously and aggressively were ignored in favor of a male reporter . . . who won the Pulitzer Prize . . .”⁶⁹ Even today, Bradley contends that while “[s]ob sister journalism is no longer in vogue,” women continue to be pressured “to write according to a perceived type, a logical demand from an industry that finds profit in dipping into the culture’s easy stereotypes.”⁷⁰

Marion Marzolf, author of *Up from the Footnote: A History of Women Journalists*, suggests that some women may have been covering crime as early as the 1860s in cities such as New York and Chicago. However, she points out that “articles were rarely signed and editors still resisted identifying female writers as such.”⁷¹ Marzolf writes that later, at the height of yellow journalism, women’s “career paths were still fairly limited to women’s pages, feature writing . . . stunts, columns and sob sister reporting,” but adds, “some did hard news.”⁷²

However, she subsequently focuses on the work of sob sisters and stunt girls – with one notable exception: Ishbel Ross, who, as noted earlier, covered straight news in an objective manner for the “traditional” and “serious” New York *Tribune* in the early decades of the 1920s and ’30s.⁷³

In addition – quoting a 1970s interview with Ross – Marzolf explains that tabloids’ “emphasis on covering murder trials and crime in the 1920s” helped to propel some women – including Julia

⁶⁹ Ibid., 190.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 268.

⁷¹ Marion Marzolf, *Up from the Footnote: A History of Women Journalists* (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1977), 19.

⁷² Ibid., 33.

⁷³ Ibid., 39-41.

Harpmann, Grace Robinson and Agnes Underwood, all mentioned earlier – to prominence.⁷⁴ However, Marzolf writes that, while the 1920s saw an increase in “serious-minded” and “outstanding newspaperwomen,” “[m]ost of their jobs were still on the women’s pages, magazines or in book publishing.”⁷⁵ This changed during World War II, when women covered “nearly everything,” according to Marzolf.⁷⁶ However, while she includes “police” in her list of beats covered by women, Marzolf focuses primarily upon female war correspondents. After the war, she adds, women’s “beats were likely to be education, health, welfare or features” as men returned to U.S. newsrooms and reclaimed their spots as hard-news reporters.⁷⁷

References to women covering crime are even fewer and farther between in Schilpp and Murphy’s *Great Women of the Press*. Of the eighteen notable female journalists profiled, only three are mentioned as having covered stories related to trials and crime, and two of those are sisters. The third, Ida Wells-Barnett, covered crime extensively, but is identified as a “crusader” as opposed to a straight news reporter because her stories about lynching were meant to incite the public to condemn the practice.⁷⁸

In *Out on Assignment: Newspaper Women and the Making of Modern Public Space*, Fahs contends that quite a few female journalists were covering straight news, including crime, by the turn of the twentieth century. Although women who were sent on hard news stories were usually expected to return with a “woman’s angle” – difficult to define as that may be – they

⁷⁴ Ibid., 46-47, 53.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 52.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 69.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 69-72, 74.

⁷⁸ Madelon Golden Schilpp and Sharon M. Murphy, *Great Women of the Press* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 121-132.

nevertheless were given much-valued opportunities to write front-page stories, according to Fahs, who explains, “The demands of newspaper work inevitably undercut editors’ desires to ‘contain’ newspaper women” to the women’s pages.⁷⁹ She points to women such as *New York Evening World* reporter Zona Gale, who is best remembered as a “stunt girl,” but who also served as an “all around” reporter and had “many exciting experiences” doing “‘regular’ newspaper work” that included covering crime.⁸⁰ Still, Fahs asserts that as late as the 1890s, the police and court beats remained largely off limits to women, standing as “a barrier that most women could not cross.”⁸¹ Fahs ultimately concludes that “most newspaper women either began on, cycled through, or remained stuck on the woman’s page,”⁸² and focuses her book on how women used those pages to explore spheres once closed to women and to create public lives.

By treating the subject categorically, as opposed to chronologically – and by broadening the definition of journalism to include “literary journalism” and even fiction – Whitt allows readers to view the work of women journalists in a slightly different way in *Women in American Journalism: A New History*. However, in her first chapter, which discusses thirty-five reporters, editors and columnists most familiar to readers of more traditional survey texts, only five are specifically referenced as having covered crime or police beats: Martha Winifred Sweet Black Bonfils (Annie Laurie) and Elizabeth Meriwether Gilmer (Dorothy Dix), both of whom are designated as sob sisters; Genevieve Forbes Herrick, who “covered the police and political beats”; Nan Robertson, who “covered crime, the courts and fires” for *The New York Times* after

⁷⁹ Alice Fahs, *Out on Assignment: Newspaper Women and the Making of Modern Public Space* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 5.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 13.

World War II; and Molly Ivins, “the first women . . . to cover the Minneapolis police beat” in 1967.⁸³

Although her book is titled *Front-Page Girls*, Lutes identifies even fewer women who covered hard news such as crime and courts. Instead, Lutes essentially consigns women reporters working at the turn of the twentieth century to the broad categories of crusader, sob sister or stunt girl. While acknowledging that sob sisters did cover “news events,” she notes that their overly emotional writing style “indicted them . . . as careless writers” using a “formula” that “potentially undermined the authenticity of all women’s reportage.”⁸⁴

Belford, in *Brilliant Bylines*, shows women working in broader capacities between approximately 1810 and the mid-twentieth century. While identifying the usual roster of stunt girls, sob sisters, fashion writers and “woman’s angle” reporters, she also lists the aforementioned Ishbel Ross as a “front page reporter” who “covered the crimes of the twenties and thirties.”⁸⁵ Belford also cites *New York Journal* reporter Margaret Gilman’s coverage of several murders, but makes a point of noting that, as a member of a tabloid staff, Gilman’s work wasn’t necessarily factual. According to Belford, “Gilman was usually assigned to murder cases because she could bring a novelist’s touch to the stories.”⁸⁶ In addition, although most texts describe Dorothy Dix as a sob sister – indeed, Dix is one of the subjects of Abramson’s *Sob*

⁸³ Jan Whitt, *Women in American Journalism: A New History* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 15-26.

⁸⁴ Jean Marie Lutes, *Front-Page Girls: Women Journalists in American Culture and Fiction, 1880-1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 2.

⁸⁵ Barbara Belford, *Brilliant Bylines: A Biographical Anthology of Notable Newspaperwomen in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 231.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 243-247.

Sister Journalism – Belford paints Dix as a hard-news reporter whose coverage of at least one sensational trial “was praised for its analytical quality.”⁸⁷

In summary, most scholars who’ve written book-length media history survey texts and more focused studies of women’s roles in the development of American print journalism place most newspaperwomen of the late-nineteenth and early- to mid-twentieth centuries into the broad categories of either sob sister, stunt girl or society/women’s page reporter. A handful of authors do acknowledge that some women covered crime during this period. However, references are few and far between, and, for the most part, treated superficially. Moreover, there is virtually no record, nor examination, of the actual content or style of the articles that the women produced when they did cover crime.

Female Crime Reporters: Academic Journal Articles

In an attempt to determine whether other media historians provide more in-depth looks at women’s coverage of crime during the Prohibition era or any other time period, this research next examines scholarly journals. However, these resources also yield little information.

To begin with, in general, very little is written about crime reporting from an historical perspective. And those media history articles that do reference crime do not focus, for the most part, on individuals’ reportage. Rather, crime is viewed through the lens of race, gender or politics. Examples of this approach include Schwalbe’s examination of news photographs documenting U.S. racial violence;⁸⁸ Reel’s research on gendered portrayals of sex, crime and sports for *The National Police Gazette*;⁸⁹ Thornton’s study of accusations of culpability against

⁸⁷ Ibid., 78.

⁸⁸ Carl B. Schwalbe, “Images of Brutality: The Portrayal of U.S. Racial Violence in News Photographs Published Overseas, 1957-1963,” *American Journalism* 23, no. 4 (Fall 2006): 93-116.

⁸⁹ Guy Reel, “This Wicked World: Masculinities and the Portrayals of Sex, Crime, and Sports in the *National Police Gazette*, 1879-1906,” *American Journalism* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 61-94.

the *New York Journal*, related to the assassination of President William McKinley;⁹⁰ and Ross's discussion of how the city of Cleveland's black newspapers handled a 1906 murder that pitted white citizens of a Texas town against locally stationed black soldiers.⁹¹ Libel and free speech are also frequent subjects of study, but again, reporters are not the focus. Newspapers and famous cases take the forefront, as in Cumming's⁹² and Digby-Junger's⁹³ examinations of the *New York Times v. Sullivan* case; Flamiano's research on a 1929 obscenity case;⁹⁴ and Scheidenhelm's discussion of James Fenimore Cooper and New York libel law.⁹⁵

Several scholars have tackled the subject of investigative journalism, including Weinberg, who traced the career of twentieth-century investigative journalist Drew Pearson.⁹⁶ Again, however, most research focuses upon the concept of investigative reporting rather than specific reporters. Examples include: Aucoin's "The Early Years of IRE: The Evolution of Modern Investigative Journalism"⁹⁷ and "The Investigative Tradition in American Journalism",⁹⁸

⁹⁰ Brian Thorton, "When a Newspaper Was Accused of Killing a President," *Journalism History* 26, no. 3 (Autumn 2000): 108-120.

⁹¹ Felicia G. Jones Ross, "The Brownsville Affair and the Political Values of Cleveland Black Newspapers," *American Journalism* 12, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 107-122.

⁹² Doug Cumming, "Building Resentment: How the Alabama Press Prepared the Ground for *New York Times v. Sullivan*," *American Journalism* 22, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 7-32.

⁹³ Richard Digby-Junger, "'News in Which the Public May Take an Interest': A Nineteenth Century Precedent for *New York Times v. Sullivan*," *American Journalism* 12, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 22-38.

⁹⁴ Dolores Flamiano, "'The Sex Side of Life' in the News: Mary Ware Dennett's Obscenity Case, 1929-1930," *Journalism History* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 64-77.

⁹⁵ Richard Scheidenhelm, "James Fenimore Cooper and the Law of Libel in New York," *American Journalism* 4 (1987): 19-29.

⁹⁶ Steve Weinberg, "Avenging Angel or Deceitful Devil?: The Development of Drew Pearson, a New Kind of Investigative Journalist," *American Journalism* 14, no. 3/4 (Summer/Fall 1997): 283-302.

⁹⁷ James L. Aucoin, "The Early Years of IRE: The Evolution of Modern Investigative Journalism," *American Journalism* 12, no. 4 (Fall 1995): 425-443.

Blevens's "The Shifting Paradigms of Investigative Journalism in the 20th Century";⁹⁹ and Marron's "The Founding of Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. and the Arizona Project: The Most Significant Post-Watergate Development in U.S. Investigative Journalism."¹⁰⁰

Even less is written about women and crime news and/or reporting. Beasley briefly discusses 1920s journalist Lorena Hickok's work as a crime reporter in an article that covers Hickok's entire career.¹⁰¹ In addition, in her article, "A 'Front Page Girl' Covers the Lindbergh Kidnapping: An Ethical Dilemma,"¹⁰² Beasley treats more comprehensively a subject briefly mentioned in the chapter she wrote for Sloan's survey text, *The Media in America: A History*. Steiner and Gray also devote six paragraphs of their study, "Genevieve Forbes Herrick: A Front-Page Reporter 'Pleased to Write about Women,'" to Forbes Herrick's work as a crime reporter.¹⁰³ However, while noting that "Herrick was best-known by colleagues and readers for her crime coverage,"¹⁰⁴ the authors subsequently focus upon her more traditional coverage of the Washington social and political scene, ultimately concluding that she "was a pathfinder neither as woman nor journalist"¹⁰⁵ – an assertion that this dissertation will seek to dispute. Only one

⁹⁸ Aucoin, "The Investigative Tradition in American Journalism," *American Journalism* 14, no. 3/4 (Summer/Fall 1997): 317-329.

⁹⁹ Frederick Blevens, "The Shifting Paradigms of Investigative Journalism in the 20th Century," *American Journalism* 14, no. 3/4 (Summer/Fall 1997): 257-261.

¹⁰⁰ Maria Marron, "The Founding of Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. and the Arizona Project: The Most Significant Post-Watergate Development in U.S. Investigative Journalism," *American Journalism* 14, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 54-75.

¹⁰¹ Maurine Beasley, "Lorena A. Hickok: Woman Journalist," *Journalism History* 7, no. 3/4 (Autumn/Winter 1980): 92-95, 113.

¹⁰² Beasley, "A 'Front Page Girl' Covers the Lindbergh Kidnapping: An Ethical Dilemma," *American Journalism* 1, no. 1 (1983): 63-74.

¹⁰³ Steiner and Gray, "Genevieve Forbes Herrick: A Front-Page Reporter 'Pleased to Write about Women,'" 8-16.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

scholarly article is devoted almost entirely to straight-news crime reporting by a woman: Adamson's profile of reporter Nellie Kenyon, who investigated a "black market baby" ring and covered the Scopes "Monkey Trial," as well as other trials and crime-related stories, for Tennessee newspapers in the early- to mid-1900s.¹⁰⁶

These exceptions aside, most scholarship on female reporters examines their coverage of society news and First Ladies,¹⁰⁷ or their crusades for causes such as suffrage or improved working conditions for laborers.¹⁰⁸ Such scholarship, unfortunately, has minimal relevance to the subject of this dissertation: female *crime* reporters of the 1920s. And so, in winding down the search for information about women who covered crime during the Jazz Age, this literature review concludes by looking at sources about Chicago, the city that was not only the epicenter of 1920s crime, but also the home of the *Chicago Tribune* newspaper, where the women of this dissertation plied their trade and pioneered what this research calls "mob sister" journalism.

Histories of Chicago and the *Chicago Tribune*

As noted, the *Chicago Tribune* took pride in its large staff of female reporters in the 1920s and 1930s, and often gave women – such as those subjects of this dissertation –

¹⁰⁶ June Adamson, "Nellie Kenyon and the Scopes 'Monkey Trial,'" *Journalism History* 2, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 88-89, 97.

¹⁰⁷ Marilyn S. Greenwald, "'All Brides Are Not Beautiful: The Rise of Charlotte Curtis at the *New York Times*,'" *Journalism History* 22, no. 3 (Autumn 1996): 100; Lewis Gould, "First Ladies and the Press: Bess Truman to Lady Bird Johnson," *American Journalism* 1, no. 1 (1983): 47-62; Liz Watts, "Magazine Coverage of First Ladies from Hoover to Clinton, from Election Through the First One Hundred Days in Office," *American Journalism* 14, no. 3/4 (Summer/Fall 1997): 495-519; Maurine Beasley and Paul Belgrade, "Media Coverage of a Silent Partner: Mamie Eisenhower as First Lady," *American Journalism* 3 (1986): 39-49.

¹⁰⁸ Karla K. Gower, "Agnes Smedley: A Radical Journalist in Search of a Cause," *American Journalism* 13, no. 4 (Fall 1996): 416-439; Mary Ellen Waller-Zuckerman, "Vera Connolly: Progressive Journalist," *Journalism History* 15, no. 2/3 (Summer/Autumn 1988): 80-89.

opportunities to cover hard news on par with members of the male staff.¹⁰⁹ However, Wendt's *Chicago Tribune: The Rise of a Great American Newspaper* – the definitive history of the paper – focuses almost exclusively on the men who shaped the paper. For example, although Genevieve Forbes Herrick was and continues to be widely regarded as one of the *Tribune*'s star reporters during the 1920s, she is remembered by Wendt only as one name in a laundry list of twenty-five female staff members.¹¹⁰ Wendt identifies Herrick as having interviewed Al Capone, but makes no mention of her abundant bylines on other big crime-related stories of the day. Forbes Herrick is also mentioned in Wendt's discussion of the famous 1924 Leopold and Loeb trial – but the recognition is mainly due to her marriage to John Herrick, whom she met while he was also covering the trial for the *Tribune*. In fact, Wendt makes a point of stating that the new bride “did not write the *Tribune*'s lead story.”¹¹¹ Wendt also notes that reporter Maureen M'Kerman covered the funeral of gangster Dean O'Banion. However, he credits M'Kerman's male colleague, Jake Lingle, with identifying the “judges, city aldermen, and state legislators” so M'Kerman could write the “color story.”¹¹² (Wendt is clearly referring to the journalist referred to in this dissertation as Maureen McKernan. Although “McKernan” is spelled as such on a 1957 book that she wrote about the Leopold and Loeb trial,¹¹³ conflicting spellings occur elsewhere, including in her bylined stories for the *Chicago Tribune*.) In short, Wendt gives women scant credit for the varied work they performed for the *Tribune* during the Prohibition era.

¹⁰⁹ Bradley, *Women and the Press*, 209-210.

¹¹⁰ Wendt, *Chicago Tribune*, 492.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 481.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 484.

¹¹³ Maureen McKernan, *The Amazing Crime and Trial of Leopold and Loeb* (New York: Signet Books, 1957).

The same is true for McPhaul in *Deadlines and Monkeyshines: The Fabled World of Chicago Journalism*, a rambling, anecdotal history of the city's reporters and newspapers from the early nineteenth century up through the book's publication date of 1962. While McPhaul does mention several women reporters, including 1920s journalists Peggy Doyle and Kathleen McLaughlin, noting that they covered mobsters,¹¹⁴ he is more often than not dismissive of female colleagues. For example, McPhaul complains, as part of an anecdote about a female colleague who beat him to a murder scene, "A city editor has enough on his conscience without the added pang that his little girl reporter is wearing a bandage on her head . . ."¹¹⁵ In that same chapter, titled "Nothing Like a Dame," he adds, somewhat indulgently of female journalists, "They like to feel like they can handle any story that comes along."¹¹⁶ Further, the prolific Forbes Herrick is again practically dismissed as a novelty, most notable for her inter-office marriage,¹¹⁷ while Maurine Watkins earns a single sentence for writing *Chicago*.¹¹⁸

Several broader histories are more generous in crediting at least one female, Prohibition-era *Tribune* reporter for her hard-news, front-page work – if only, again, because she later went on to write the musical *Chicago*. Regardless, Maurine Watkins plays a key role in Perry's *The Girls of Murder City: Fame, Lust and the Beautiful Killers Who Inspired Chicago*. The book, which casts Watkins as an important player in a series of famous Chicago murder trials –

¹¹⁴ John J. McPhaul, *Deadlines & Monkeyshines: The Fabled World of Chicago Journalism* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 128-129.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.

describing her repeatedly as a straight-news reporter on par with her male colleagues – also refers to Genevieve Forbes Herrick as a “formidable” “police reporter.”¹¹⁹

In addition, a 1997 printing of the screenplay *Chicago* – sold as a book under the title *Chicago*, by Maurine Watkins – includes a substantive forward by editor Thomas H. Pauly, who applauds Watkins for savvily using her “lowly job of covering police reports” to rise in prominence at the *Tribune* by injecting her copy with “wry humor.”¹²⁰ Pauly also notes, “That Maurine Watkins and her comedy should be so forgotten today is almost amazing . . .”¹²¹ The bound volume includes articles written by Watkins, so readers can connect her original *Tribune* copy to the script.

Watkins also receives brief mention in the text of *For the Thrill of It: Leopold, Loeb, and the Murder that Shocked Jazz Age Chicago*, Baatz’s study of perhaps the most infamous 1920s Chicago murder case.¹²² However – although they are not credited in the text, itself – a review of the book’s footnotes reveals that the author actually drew upon articles written by four of the women mentioned as subjects of this dissertation. In fact, the names Watkins, Forbes Herrick, Allard, and McKernan are scattered liberally throughout the notes, which also reference articles by *Chicago Herald and Examiner* reporter Betty Walker and *Tribune* illustrator/reporter Maude Martin Evers, both of whom will also be discussed later in this research.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Douglas Perry, *The Girls of Murder City: Fame, Lust, and the Beautiful Killers Who Inspired Chicago* (New York: Viking, 2010), 12.

¹²⁰ Thomas H. Pauly, “Introduction,” in Maurine Watkins, *Chicago* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), xiii.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, viii.

¹²² Simon Baatz, *For the Thrill of It: Leopold, Loeb, and the Murder That Shocked Jazz Age Chicago* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 326.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 467-503.

Forbes Herrick and McKernan are also mentioned briefly in Higdon's *Leopold & Loeb: The Crime of the Century*. The author, like others, notes the novelty of Forbes Herrick's marriage to a fellow reporter¹²⁴ and references an article by McKernan and her subsequent book about the trial.¹²⁵ It is quite possible that Higdon also drew upon articles written by at least some of the women credited by Baatz, but Higdon's footnotes uniformly reference newspaper articles only by paper and date, never providing bylines or page numbers.

Finally, Forbes Herrick is quoted in Bergreen's comprehensive biography of Al Capone, the dominant underworld figure in Prohibition-era Chicago. Interestingly, though, Bergreen does not refer to Forbes Herrick's much vaunted interview with the legendary mobster, but rather to a prizefight she covered for the *Tribune*, and which was attended by Capone.¹²⁶

In summary, a careful review of literature about media history, in general, as well as more narrow studies of women journalists from an historical perspective, coupled with histories of Prohibition-era Chicago and Chicago newspapers, reveals almost no substantive information on women's roles as crime reporters during the 1920s and 1930s.

However, this dissertation, as stated, proves that several largely overlooked women were, indeed, covering crime in a new style and to a notable degree, earning them distinction as a unique type of reporter that this scholar refers to as the "mob sister."

¹²⁴ Hal Higdon, *Leopold & Loeb: The Crime of the Century* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 263.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 194-195 and 259.

¹²⁶ Laurence Bergreen, *Capone: The Man and the Era* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 234.

Methodology

As a work of history, this research of course draws heavily from primary source material – most notably articles written by female (and male) journalists working at the *Chicago Tribune* and the rival *Chicago Herald and Examiner* in the 1920s.

This dissertation focuses on reporters working in Chicago based largely upon Ishbel Ross's survey of women reporters, *Ladies of the Press*. While Ross indicates that women were covering crime in other cities in the 1920s, she suggests – through comments such as “[I]ike all the Chicago newspaper women of this period most of [Leola Allard's] stories dealt with crime”¹²⁷ – that female crime reporters were most common in Chicago. And by compiling the names of *all* the women Ross mentions as covering crime during the 1920s and linking them to the cities in which they worked, this researcher found that – while women in cities such as New York or Philadelphia might have written about crime, perhaps even extensively – a more sizeable cluster of female crime reporters did seem to exist in Chicago during the Prohibition Era.

It was also necessary to study newspapers that provided women with bylines. As Alice Fahs notes in her book-length study of women who wrote for metropolitan newspapers during the early twentieth century, one of the challenges inherent in researching women who *didn't* write features or domestic-advice columns is that news writing was, by comparison, seldom bylined in that era.¹²⁸ This research by necessity focuses on women whose journalistic output can be identified, without doubt or speculation. The women identified as mob sisters – Forbes Herrick, Watkins, McLaughlin, Allard and McKernan – were chosen because they produced significant numbers of bylined stories about crime for the *Tribune*. Forbes Herrick, Watkins and

¹²⁷ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 548.

¹²⁸ Fahs, *Out on Assignment*, 5.

McLaughlin, in particular, produced substantial bodies of bylined work. Allard and McKernan have fewer attributed news articles, but did produce crime-related stories that incorporate elements of the mob sister style. These articles, and others by male contemporaries as well as women working at the *Herald and Examiner*, serve as the primary source material for this dissertation.

In addition, *Editor and Publisher*, the chief newspaper trade journal circa the 1920s, was consulted for background information about the women discussed in this research. Further, this dissertation drew upon several journalism textbooks of the period, including Brazelton's *Writing and Editing for Women*, which – along with detailing women's expected roles at newspapers in the early part of the twentieth century – provides direct insights from Genevieve Forbes Herrick, whose career is featured in the book as a model for others to emulate.¹²⁹

Although the author attempted to locate and access Forbes Herrick's diaries, last cited in 1985 as in the possession of a family member, as well as correspondence, oral histories or other personal papers generated by Watkins, McLaughlin, Allard and/or McKernan, the efforts were unsuccessful. Unfortunately, although members of Forbes Herrick's and McLaughlin's families were located and contacted, they declined to respond. However, additional insights into Watkins were available thanks to her success as a playwright, which led to interviews by *The New York Times*, the *New York World*, and *The New Yorker* magazine.

In other words, primary documents received significant consideration beyond mere reliance on the articles written by the women who are subjects of this dissertation, in an attempt to not only analyze their writing, but to provide valuable personal insights that help to enhance understanding of their professional output.

¹²⁹ Ethel M. Colson Brazelton, *Writing and Editing for Women* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1927), 8-10, 172.

Further understanding of the times in which the mob sisters worked was accomplished through an immersion in secondary sources about the 1920s, including but not limited to works such as Miller's *New World Coming: The 1920s and the Making of Modern America*, Moore's *Anything Goes: A Biography of the Roaring Twenties*, Dumenil's *Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s*, and Okrent's *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition*, as well as more gender-specific histories focusing on women, such as *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity and the Women Who Made America Modern*.¹³⁰

In addition, the newspapers for which the mob sisters wrote served to shed light on the era, its gender mores, and newspaper practices. As Tuchman notes, journalists are the “I-was-there” recorders of history, and their work can be used to both draw conclusions about the times in which they were produced as well as to enhance the narrative with the “vivid details”¹³¹ that Tuchman – and Startt and Sloan – consider so important to successful historical scholarship. As Startt and Sloan write in *Historical Methods in Mass Communication*, “Dates, names, and places provide little more than the raw data for history,”¹³² and the historian must weave that data into a cohesive, compelling, factual and meaningful account.

In summary, using articles produced by the mob sisters, as much biographical information and personal insights as were available, and secondary sources, this dissertation establishes that, contrary to popular belief, a significant group of women who were not sob sisters or stunt girls covered crime-related news as early as the 1920s, often earning front-page

¹³⁰ Miller, *New World Coming*; Moore, *Anything Goes*; Lynn Dumenil, *Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995); Daniel Okrent, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* (New York: Scribner, 2010); Joshua Zeitz, *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity and the Women Who Made America Modern* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006).

¹³¹ Barbara Tuchman, *Practicing History: Selected Essays* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1981), 17.

¹³² James D. Startt and Wm. David Sloan, *Historical Methods in Mass Communication* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1989), 19.

bylines. Further, by examining articles produced by several women working at the *Chicago Tribune* during the Jazz Age – Genevieve Forbes Herrick, Maurine Watkins, Kathleen McLaughlin, Leola Allard and Maureen McKernan – this research identifies three stylistic elements – sarcastic humor, slang and cynicism – and uses those elements to establish a new “category” of reporter: the mob sister, who worked side-by-side with, and produced stories stylistically similar to, male contemporaries in the newsroom.

By doing so, this dissertation ultimately seeks to open new inquiry into longstanding assumptions about women’s roles in newsrooms during the early part of the twentieth century. While most media histories assert that women were, with very rare exceptions, confined to specific gender-based roles at newspapers well into the twentieth century, this research endeavors to prove that a significant number of female journalists were, as early as 1920, also routinely covering subjects traditionally believed to have been off-limits to women at least until World War II, if not later.¹³³

While focusing on five women, this research also begins to identify other female reporters who covered crime in a similar fashion – enough to raise questions about whether it is necessary to reconsider conventional notions about women’s evolution as journalists and re-evaluate the assumption that early twentieth-century female reporters were either sob sisters, stunt girls or writing about home, fashion, and “society.”

In short, this dissertation argues that, while the majority of pre-World War II female reporters were no doubt limited to certain roles at American newspapers, as media historians

¹³³ In her history of the struggle for equality in newsrooms, *A Place in the News*, Kay Mills relates an anecdote about her 1966 job interview with United Press International, during which an editor rebuffed her by explaining that he needed someone he could “send anywhere, like to riots,” and who wouldn’t lose a potential interview because the subject “ducked into a men’s room.” Mills, 1.

have long asserted, the historical record needs to be expanded to recognize the work of mob sisters, too.

Chapter 2: What Constitutes a “Mob Sister?”

Because this dissertation establishes a new type of reporter, it is necessary to define and explain mob sisters, collectively, before examining the women and their work on an individual basis or exploring factors that may have led to their emergence in at least one twentieth-century newsroom.

Of course, women have long been involved in newspaper work. The first sentence of Marzolf’s history of female journalists, *Up from the Footnote*, points out that as early as Colonial times, widows frequently took over production of newspapers when their publisher husbands died, and sometimes started papers on their own. This trend continued into the early days of the Republic; Anne Royall is a good example of a woman who started a long-lived newspaper in Washington, D.C., in the early 1830s.¹

During the Civil War era, women used the press to advocate for causes such as temperance, dress reform and suffrage.² A prominent publisher from this era was abolitionist Jane Grey Swisshelm, who “could not be purchased at any price or intimidated by any threat.”³

Subsequently, a shift occurred. As Smythe and Kilmer explain, in the post-Civil-War era reporting and editing became “largely male domains” and the “few female reporters generally covered meetings, weddings and social events.”⁴ And historians tend to agree that those women who broke those molds at the turn of the century were essentially being exploited or reinforced gender stereotypes with overly emotive reportage. The emergence of the “New Journalism” near the close of the nineteenth century created opportunities for women, as publishers such as Hearst

¹ Marzolf, 1-11.

² Beasley, *Taking Their Place*, 61.

³ William E. Huntzicker, “The Frontier Press, 1800-1900,” in Sloan, ed., *The Media in America*, 193.

⁴ Smythe and Kilmer, “The Press and Industrial America, 1865-1883,” in *The Media and America*, 216.

and Pulitzer used any means necessary to increase circulation, but these opportunities weren't the same for men and women.

Women who didn't occupy the "hen's coop," writing about fashion, home and society, were often cast as stunt girls or sob sisters – two roles that will be explored in more depth later in this dissertation. To summarize, however, stunt girls drove up tabloid sales by placing themselves in risky situations, then writing about their experiences in ways intended to thrill and titillate the audience.⁵ And by romanticizing – essentially novelizing – high-profile, high-drama trials in mawkish, emotional prose, sob sisters met yellow journalism's goal of providing not just news but "escape entertainment" for readers.⁶

As noted earlier, historians tend to argue that these proscribed roles – occupier of the hen's coop, stunt girl or sob sister – continued to largely constrain women up until World War II, if not beyond. However, this dissertation argues that the mob sisters constitute a notable sub-genre of female reporters, worthy of their own classification like stunt girls and sob sisters – but whose roles at newspapers were closer to, if not on par with, those of male colleagues.

So what was a mob sister?

First, she was primarily, or in some cases exclusively, a general assignment reporter as opposed to, for example, a society reporter, book reviewer, theater critic, or advisor to the lovelorn who sometimes covered hard news. Three subjects of this dissertation – Genevieve Forbes Herrick, Kathleen McLaughlin and Maureen McKernan – were identified as general assignment reporters in a 1925 *Chicago Tribune* display ad titled "Why Women Read the *Tribune*," which notes, "Each of these women . . . work under the direction of the city editor, just

⁵ Beasley, "The Emergence of Modern Media, 1900-1945," in *The Media and America*, 288.

⁶ Abramson, *Sob Sister Journalism*, 3.

as men reporters do, taking any assignment which he sees fit to give them . . . Today they may interview a visiting prince, tomorrow a notorious gunman . . .”⁷

Interviewed in her retirement, Kathleen McLaughlin also identified herself as a “general reporter” whose assignments included covering “the trials of the well-known gangsters and the many shootings and assassinations in the gangster world.”⁸

Had she continued with the *Tribune* after the summer of 1924, Maurine Watkins almost certainly would have earned a listing as a general assignment reporter, too. Most accounts of her life refer to her as a police or crime reporter,⁹ and Perry, who wrote about her extensively in *The Girls of Murder City*, specifies that Watkins was hired by city editor Robert M. Lee to cover crime and hard news.¹⁰ In a 1927 interview for the *New York World*, Watkins expressed her desire to not only cover hard news and crime, but to specifically cover murder. She told readers, ““Being a conscientious person, I never prayed for a murder, but hoped that if there was one, I’d be assigned to it.””¹¹

Less is written about Leola Allard, but, as noted in this dissertation’s literature review, her contemporary, Ishbel Ross, observed that “most of [Allard’s] stories dealt with crime”¹² – an

⁷ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, “Why Women Read the *Tribune*,” 6 Sept. 1925, E2.

⁸ Jean E. Collins, *She Was There: Stories of Pioneering Women Journalists* (New York: Julian Messner, 1980), 29-30.

⁹ See, eg., Lesy, *Murder City*, 196, 307; Pauly, *Chicago*, xiii.; Alison Leigh Cowan, “Waiting 80 Years, Diva Takes a Bow,” *The New York Times*, 1 Dec. 2009, accessed 10 Dec. 2012, http://theater.nytimes.com/2009/12/02/theater/02watkins.html?_r=1&adxnnl=1&pagewanted=all&adxnnlx=1355253364-C2eeuVyP3H26hb/zgU61GA; Judith Ann Schiff, “How Yale Begat Chicago,” *Yale Alumni Magazine*, May/June 2012, accessed 11 Dec. 2012, http://www.yalealumnimagazine.com/issues/2012_05/oldyale.html.

¹⁰ Perry, *The Girls of Murder City*, 11-17.

¹¹ Flora Merrill, “Pistol Fire Lights Up ‘Chicago’: Or Telling It to the Maurine,” *New York World*, 16 Jan. 1927, M1.

¹² Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 548.

assertion backed up by Allard's bylined journalistic output for the *Tribune*. Most of her stories involved cases before Chicago's municipal, juvenile and domestic-relations courts, including coverage of crimes ranging from thefts and kidnapping to murder and spousal and child abuse. Writing in 1957, Ben Hecht – a fellow Chicago journalist during the Roaring Twenties – also included Allard in a list of otherwise almost exclusively male “prime ministers” of reporting during that era. Hecht wrote, “Most of these gentlemen (including . . . Leola) were not only truth sticklers, but they sneered at obscurantism . . . They were for lucidity and laughter, when sober . . .”¹³ Clearly, Hecht considered Allard “one of the guys” on the newspaper staff and judged her work as equal to that of male reporters.

Hecht also alluded to one of the mob sisters' key shared characteristics: The inclusion of humor in all but the most grim stories – and even some of those were mined for comic vignettes. More often than not, the humor was subtle, dark and sarcastic, slyly poking fun at the journalists' subjects, be they murderers, bootleggers, gun molls, swindlers or any other variety of criminal.

Maurine Watkins's 1924 story about jury selection for the trial of killer Beulah Annan, who shot a suitor, provides a good example. Describing the jurymen selected, Watkins breezily wrote:

And they're a good looking lot, comparatively young, and not too “hard boiled” – for Beulah herself passed on them And she's a connoisseur in men! Perry Stephens, who divorced her down in old Kentucky; Al Annan, the husband who's “standing by”; Harry Kalstedt, the farmer boy she killed –¹⁴

In this and other articles about the case, Watkins clearly indicated that she, at least, had already passed judgment on Annan and found her not only guilty of murder, but of being a ludicrous, shallow, self-centered woman who deserved public ridicule.

¹³ Ben Hecht, “Charlie Finds Chicago Gloriously Alive,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 15 July 1957, B9.

¹⁴ Maurine Watkins, “Select Jury to Pronounce Fate of Beulah Annan,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 23 May 1924, 6.

Genevieve Forbes Herrick similarly laughed at gangland culture in her article about a mob hit. The story begins with a lead that pokes fun at the deceased and his bootlegging confederates. Forbes Herrick wrote, “Henry Spignola, most literate of all the alky gangsters, had his enterprising career ended Sunday night when four assailants (they are always unknown around Taylor and Halstead streets) fired at him from behind . . .”¹⁵

Forbes Herrick’s blackly humorous story also includes another mob sister stylistic hallmark: pervasive cynicism. All of the subjects of this dissertation wrote articles that express “an attitude of scornful or jaded negativity, especially a general distrust of the integrity or professed motives of others.”¹⁶

The mob sisters often wrote cynically about Chicago’s corrupt government and mobsters who pretended to be legitimate businessmen and pillars of respectability – see Forbes Herrick’s description of the “enterprising” and “literate” Henry Spignola – but they reserved special scorn for women who committed murder and relied upon their feminine charms to get away with it, thanks to all-male juries who were swayed by pouting lips and tears on the witness stand. In this way, the mob sisters’ work presents an especially sharp counterpoint to that of sob sisters, who were known for their sympathetic portrayals of women on trial.

A typical story by Kathleen McLaughlin illustrates just how willing the *Tribune*’s female crime reporters were to expose a culture that virtually guaranteed that attractive murderesses would walk free. Writing about killer Dorothy Pollak, who murdered her husband, McLaughlin

¹⁵ Genevieve Forbes Herrick, “Genna Slaying Revenge for O’Banion, Claim,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 Jan. 1926, 1.

¹⁶ “Cynicism,” *The American Heritage Dictionary* website, accessed 10 Aug. 2013, <http://www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=cynicism>.

began by mockingly describing Pollak as a “self-made widow.” McLaughlin then shared the courtroom scuttlebutt about Pollak’s chances for conviction, writing:

Attaches of the Criminal court have smiled derisively during the last few days at any inference that a woman as pretty as Dorothy Pollak would ever be found guilty by a jury. It never has happened like that, they know, in the cases that crowd the archives, unless the lady who fired the gun had thick ankles or didn’t know how to wield a lipstick . . . Sabella Nitti . . . was “a homely creature” who hammered her mate to death. She was sentenced to hang. After spending a year in jail she learned about powder puffs and decent hats and she was finally freed.¹⁷

Finally, the mob sisters often incorporated crime-related slang and gangland parlance into their articles, either employing it directly or by quoting others. When covering some crimes, such as murders perpetrated by mobsters, their work can read like excerpts from the pulp detective novels first popularized at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁸ For example, Genevieve Forbes Herrick’s hundreds of articles about crime are peppered with phrases such as “shot three coppers,”¹⁹ “plug him,”²⁰ “rat,”²¹ “leggers” (bootleggers),²² and references to characters from a rough neighborhood known, colloquially, as “back of the yards.”²³ Similarly, Kathleen McLaughlin used terms such as “gun widow,”²⁴ “alky dealer,”²⁵ “moonshine joints,”²⁶ and “taken for a ride” – well-known “code” for a mob hit.²⁷

¹⁷ Kathleen M’Laughlin, “Widow Pollak to Bury Her Victim Today,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 Aug. 1932, 1.

¹⁸ For more information on the popularization of pulp fiction, see, e.g., “History of the Pulps,” accessed 25 Aug. 2013, http://www.pulpworld.com/history/history_01.htm.

¹⁹ Genevieve Forbes Herrick, “Betty on Stand Sacrifices Self to Get Durkin,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 27 June 1926, 4.

²⁰ Forbes Herrick, “Durkin Outburst in Court,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 June 1926, 1.

²¹ Forbes Herrick, “Durkin Calm After Murder, Witness Says,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 July 1926, 1.

²² Forbes Herrick, “Genna Inquest Finds No Clues to Auto Slayers,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 May 1925, 3.

²³ Forbes Herrick, “Cardinal Bars Church Rites for O’Donnell,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 11 June 1925, 1.

²⁴ M’Laughlin, “Former Husband of Mrs. Pollack Found by State,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 Aug. 1932, 3.

²⁵ M’Laughlin, “Fate of Gun Widow May Be Decided Today,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 31 Aug. 1932, 1.

Excerpts from a typical Forbes Herrick story about a gangland slaying exemplify the mob sisters' use of sarcastic humor, cynicism and slang, all of which will be explored in greater depth in future chapters:

Jeanne Maison, the tiny bobbed haired girl of twenty-one who was the only person in Chicago able to manage two gun Johnnie Duffy, drunk or sober, returned to the city last night and told her theory of the murder of Duffy . . . And with the adroitness of a detective . . ., the childish looking Jeanne, in the quaintly pleasing black silk frock . . . pieced together the bits of evidence, discussed the caliber of bullets, and reminisced on the effects of booze on even a Philadelphia gangster.²⁸

From the reference to drunken “two gun Johnnie Duffy” to Forbes Herrick’s amusing – and cynical – portrayal of the “childish” (read dangerously, perhaps calculatedly, “ignorant”) Maison, who turns out to be capable of coolly discussing bullets and booze, the article is clearly at odds with the sob sister tradition and captures the spirit of a new generation of reporters who seldom viewed women as helpless victims, and more often cast them as cunning perpetrators or co-conspirators in crime.

Mob Sister v. Sob Sisters

A brief comparison of the sob sisters' and mob sisters' work shows just how dramatically different the mob sisters' writings were, in terms of tone and intent, from that of their sob sister predecessors.

Sob sisters were the first significant group of female crime reporters and predated the mob sisters by approximately twenty years (although some sob stories would continue to appear in papers well into the century). A product of the turn of the twentieth century's sensationalist

²⁶ M'Laughlin, “Police Hunt Rum Sellers as Mad Killer Ends Life,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 June 1929, 3.

²⁷ M'Laughlin, “Favor Accident Theory in Pistol Death of Girl,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 Aug. 1931, 7.

²⁸ Forbes Herrick, “Find ‘Lost’ Duffy Case Girl,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 May 1924, 1.

yellow journalism, the sob sisters were women hired to cover trials in prose intended to elicit emotion, as opposed to convey solid information. Although they often covered violent crime – or, more precisely, its courtroom aftermath – the sob sisters’ work actually reinforced prevailing newsroom notions about women’s inability to write factually and without undue sentiment. In fact, the manufacture of overblown sentiment was their goal.

Writing about the original sob sisters – Nixola Greeley-Smith, Ada Patterson, Dorothy Dix and Winifred Black (Annie Laurie) – chronicler Phyllis Abramson explained that they were chosen to cover the 1906 New York City murder trial of wealthy, prominent Harry K. Thaw because they “could most adequately satisfy the readers’ hunger for . . . emotional, heartrending, yes, even tear-producing reportage.” Abramson subsequently described the sob sisters’ copy as “so mawkish and so soppy that only those who were unusually stalwart or unconscionably insensitive could keep from shedding a tear.”²⁹

At the heart of the Thaw trial was key witness Evelyn Nesbit, a teenage ingénue who had sexual relationships with both Thaw and the man he murdered, architect Stanford White. Thaw’s obsession with Nesbit, who eventually married him, led him to kill White in retribution for his reportedly having drugged, whipped and raped Nesbit – although she continued to have a voluntary relationship with White after that incident, which was described during the trial.

Although Nesbit was eventually revealed to be far from a “poor, beautiful, foolish ignorant girl of sixteen”³⁰ – as she was described by Ada Patterson early in the trial, in articles excerpted by Abramson – the sob sisters never wavered in their portrayal of Nesbit as a fragile

²⁹ Abramson, *Sob Sister Journalism*, 2.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 71.

“lily broken on the stalk,”³¹ victimized by a predatory older gentleman. Even when cross examination exposed Nesbit as a “seemingly sophisticated, superficially clever”³² social climber willing to trade sex for money, the sob sisters refused to see her as anything but a pure-hearted child – although at least one reporter recognized that not everyone agreed. Nixola Greeley-Smith chastised readers who doubted Nesbit’s virtue and artlessness, writing, “There were those in court, who said of [Nesbit’s] confession that it was a fine piece of acting – and no emotion may be so genuine that cynics will not be round to question it!”³³

A passage by Dorothy Dix, in which she describes Nesbit’s appearance in court, is typical of the sob sisters’ unswerving portrayal of a girl who maintained an adulterous affair with White, and accepted his financial support over the course of several years, as a powerless victim.

According to Abramson, Dix wrote:

“In truth, a more piteous figure than the little chorus girl and artists’ model could scarcely be imagined. Gone was even the bravado of cheerfulness and nonchalance she had been trying so vainly to keep up for the past two days. She came into court looking like a flower that has been beaten down into the ground and despoiled of its beauty by a storm . . .”³⁴

Contrast the above passages with coverage of similar stories by the mob sisters, who by the 1920s collectively held a more jaded view of humanity and “innocent” women who happened to find themselves involved in shady dealings, such as murder.

³¹ Ibid., 70.

³² Ibid., 86.

³³ Ibid., 74.

³⁴ Ibid., 63.

Although Maurine Watkins more than once referred to boyfriend-killer Beulah Annan – mentioned earlier – as the “prettiest murderess,”³⁵ and described Annan’s “bobbed auburn hair; wide set, appealing blue eyes; tip-tilted nose” and “translucent skin,”³⁶ Watkins did not equate feminine charm with innocence. Her skepticism regarding Annan’s true character is clear in the way Watkins emphasized the young killer’s nonchalant reaction to having a dying man in her apartment. Watkins wrote, “Thursday afternoon Mrs. Annan played ‘Hula Lou’ on the phonograph while the wooer she had shot during a drunken quarrel lay dying in her bedroom . . .” Watkins also elaborated upon Annan’s appearance in ways that subtly implied that the accused murderess was using it to advantage, describing Annan’s skin as not only translucent, but “faintly, very faintly, rouged,” and summing her up as, all in all, an “awfully nice girl” who would’ve checked her victim for a heartbeat, while dancing around his body, if only he hadn’t been “so bloody.”³⁷

Even when Watkins used a metaphor that could be likened to the sob sisters’ comparisons of Evelyn Nesbit to a flower, it was only to emphasize the defendant’s blasé attitude toward justice. Watkins wrote, “Beulah, frankly bored by . . . technicalities, stared around the room like a wide-eyed kitten . . .”³⁸

In her article “Killing Ladies – The Blonde Sisters,” which recaps the murder trial of a woman who shot her husband, with her sister’s help, Genevieve Forbes Herrick was even less sympathetic toward the young women on the stand. Although the killers claimed, similar to Evelyn Nesbit Thaw, that the dead husband had been abusive, Forbes Herrick wasn’t buying it.

³⁵ Maurine Watkins, “Beulah Annan Sobs Regret for Life She Took,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 April 1924, 4.

³⁶ Watkins, “Demand Noose for ‘Prettiest’ Woman Slayer,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 5 April 1924, 1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Watkins, “Judge Admits All of Beulah’s Killing Stories,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 24 May 1924, 1.

She painted a scathing picture of both women, writing, “Hard faced, sneering, and contemptuous, these two blonde sisters . . . fenced with imperious glances as they looked toward the jury box. They primped, and slid a powder puff over their noses, and patted their yellow hair . . .”³⁹

Forbes Herrick also made it clear that, in her opinion, the sisters’ earlier attempt to evoke sympathy was fraudulent, noting how police found them waiting “in blood stained bath robes, sobbing about ‘what a demon Mike was when he was drunk,’ and babbling sorrowful incoherencies about their dismay at having to shoot in self-defense . . .” Then Forbes Herrick added, cynically, “They bought a wreath at the florist’s, draped thin black veils about their spring hats, and Anna went down, two days after the murder, to collect her husband’s insurance.”⁴⁰

Clearly, Forbes Herrick did not equate femininity with innocence. In fact, closer reviews of stories in a subsequent chapter of this research will demonstrate that she had drawn quite the opposite conclusion about most women who found themselves caught up in criminal doings.

Perhaps the best way to contrast the sob sister and mob sister style is to examine a 1926 article that Forbes Herrick wrote about Evelyn Nesbit, the original “piteous figure” that the sob sisters described so poignantly in their 1906 trial coverage. Reporting on Nesbit’s attempted suicide, Forbes Herrick began with the scathingly unsympathetic lead, “Evelyn Nesbit, divorced wife of Harry K. Thaw, for the second time in her whirligig of life paused long enough yesterday to try an hysteric fling at death. And for the second time, she is going to fail.”⁴¹

The subsequent portrayal of Nesbit’s actual attempt reads almost like slapstick comedy. Forbes Herrick recounted:

³⁹ Forbes Herrick, “Killing Ladies – The Blonde Sisters,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 20 Feb. 1927, J2.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Forbes Herrick, “Evelyn Nesbit Takes Poison, But Fails Again,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 Jan. 1926, 3.

Early yesterday morning Miss Nesbit, distracted from the effects of a three days' drinking party, stumbled into the bathroom of her apartment . . . swallowed eight ounces of lysol, and flopped to the floor in a stupor. Russell Thaw, her fifteen year old son . . . grabbed a medicine book, read a directive, and, bewildered but valiant, poured olive oil and milk down his mother's throat.⁴²

Then the girl portrayed as so innocent by the sob sisters, "moaned herself into a fretful consciousness," according to Forbes Herrick, who provided background on the famous Nesbit-Thaw-White case before summing up Nesbit's later life succinctly: "She opened a tea room; tried suicide; went to Hollywood, was reported to be a victim of dope; then reported cured." The final paragraph tells readers, "Yesterday, the doctors say, she probably would have died from the poison if her stomach had not been filled with gin, which furnished an effective antidote before her son gave her the olive oil."⁴³

Clearly, Forbes Herrick was trying to draw laughter, not tears, out of readers, as the sob sisters did when they portrayed Nesbit as a broken flower. While sob sister Ada Patterson and her contemporaries found Nesbit pitiful, Forbes Herrick found her *pathetic*, in a quite different way.

So how did this shift from swooning, arguably gullible, overly emotive sob sisters to world-weary, skeptical and darkly humorous mob sisters occur in less than twenty years? A look at several factors – some taking place on the national level and some specific to the city of Chicago and even to the *Tribune*, itself – attempts to begin to answer that question.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

Chapter 3: Chicago 1920-1930 – A Chaotic City Yields Opportunities for Female Reporters

In part, the transition to a more cynical, glib, sharp-witted style of reportage can be attributed to the changing ethos of an entire nation and, by extension, the expectations and demands of the country's newspaper editors and readers. As early as 1936, journalist and chronicler of women in journalism Ishbel Ross observed that the sob sister style was long gone. As explained earlier in this dissertation, Ross believed the post-World War I "public would laugh" at sob sisters, explaining that "[r]eporting is now largely realistic, except for the occasional word orgies at a sensational trial, and then it is an assumed frenzy, done with the tongue in the cheek."¹

As the Victorian Era faded into history and the Jazz Age took root, Americans embraced – or at least took steps toward accepting – new expectations for women, new moral codes, new ways of dancing and making music, and new ways of communicating. Describing F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise*, published in 1920, historian Nathan Miller, who says the novel "captures the rhythm and feel of the era," writes:

Flippant, ironic in tone, and drenched in alcohol and an innocent sexuality, it consigned the remnants of Victorian morality to oblivion and gave voice to the attitudes, pleasures, and self-doubts of "a new generation . . . grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken."²

While less willing to concede that the 1920s represented a completely dramatic break from Victorian culture, Dumenil agrees: "Flappers dancing the Charleston and participating in a sexual revolution, movie stars in already decadent Los Angeles setting the pace for the rest of the country, and speakeasies trafficking in illegal liquor, all suggested a world far removed from

¹ Ross, *The Ladies of the Press*, 11.

² Miller, *New World Coming*, 10.

Victorian restraint.”³ Dumenil also points to writers such as Fitzgerald and Hemingway as reflectors of their generation’s “cynicism and disillusionment.”⁴

This research does not attempt to explain the roots of the national-level cultural shift, but clearly the mob sisters were, at least in part, simply a product of their times. As Ross explains, “interests and technique” at newspapers reflect societal changes.⁵ In other words, a populace that read Fitzgerald; watched its daughters adopt bobbed-hair, make-up and “forbidden delights” such as alcohol and tobacco;⁶ adopted more new slang synonyms for “drunk” than denizens of any other modern era;⁷ and elevated mobsters to celebrities – with as many as 5,000 or more “mourners” attending gangland funerals for the spectacle⁸ – would expect its media to reflect those realities. As a 1925 newspaper reader noted, summing up the collective attitude of a generation that increasingly embraced consumerism and sought excitement, ““O, I never read the papers for facts, just for thrills.””⁹

The mob sisters, themselves, recognized that the sob sister style was outmoded by the mid-1920s. A newspaper article promoting a 1925 speech by reporter Maureen McKernan to students at Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism begins with the lead, “There still are ‘sob sisters’ typing their tearful way through the columns of the daily press, but their day

³ Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, 7.

⁴ Ibid. 8.

⁵ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 14.

⁶ Zeitz, *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity and the Women Who Made America Modern*, 23.

⁷ Okrent, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition*, 164.

⁸ Moore, *Anything Goes: A Biography of the 1920s*, 34, and Kathleen McLaughlin, “Oberta Buried in Accustomed Gangland Style,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 March 1930, 3.

⁹ Genevieve Forbes Herrick, “Married Men in Demand as Stokes Jurors,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 5 Feb. 1925, 1.

has gone. The public doesn't want them anymore. Managing editors, these days, don't mix sentimental philosophy and journalism . . .”¹⁰

However, to end the discussion there would be to overlook some key factors that allowed a specific subset of professional women to emerge in a subculture that, regardless of new freedoms afforded women in other spheres, still frequently consigned females to traditional roles. As Ross also points out, as of the mid-1930s – long after flappers became common sights at speakeasies – newspapers continued to be largely male-dominated enclaves, where women “are steered into the quieter by-waters, away from the main current of life, news, excitement and ticker machines.”¹¹

To provide more specific reasons for the mob sisters' ability to become successful crime reporters in a changing, but still restrictive, decade, this research next examines the culture at the *Chicago Tribune*, then works its way back toward those broader forces at play in the Prohibition Era.

***Chicago Tribune* – Focused on Women Readers and Reporters**

While most media outlets recognized the power of women as consumers by the 1920s, targeting them with advertisements and special newspaper sections devoted to homemaking and other subjects considered of interest to female readers, the women's pages were “barely tolerated” at most male-dominated newspapers, according to Beasley. And few women reporters could hope to escape the “hen's coop” and land work in other areas of the paper. “Relatively

¹⁰ “Miss McKernan to Tell of Woman Reporter,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 Jan. 1925, 21.

¹¹ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 3.

few women journalists could ever hope for front page bylines,” Beasley explains. “In most cases the women’s and society pages provided their only viable opportunities for newspaper careers.”¹²

Perry sums up the topics most female journalists could expect to cover in the 1920s in just four words: “Clubs, cooking, and clothes.”¹³

While commending some publishers and editors for giving women opportunities to cover more than just society news, fashion and similar topics, Ross largely backs up Beasley’s and Perry’s conclusions about women’s limited newsroom opportunities during the early part of the twentieth century. In a chapter primarily devoted to discussing the attitudes of editors and publishers toward women, Ross says Roy W. Howard, head of the Scripps-Howard chain, had “mental reservations about the accuracy of women reporters on straight news.” She also lists the wire services and *The New York Times* as “stubborn points of invasion for women.” The *Times*, according to Ross, was particularly exclusive of female reporters while under the control of publisher Adolph S. Ochs during the 1920s and early 1930s. “It was an understood . . . policy, that Adolph S. Ochs was opposed to having women on the general news staff,” according to Ross, who adds that Managing Editor Carl Van Anda “turned all suplicants aside . . . with an amused glitter in the eye, saying he could not possibly send [women] out for the *Times* after dark.”¹⁴

The AP was also late in hiring women, according to Watts, who notes, “As of 1926, the Associated Press had not hired women to work as reporters.”¹⁵

¹² Beasley, “The Emergence of Modern Media,” in *The Media in America*, 288.

¹³ Perry, *The Girls of Murder City*, 17.

¹⁴ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 25

¹⁵ Liz Watts, “AP’s First Female Reporters,” *Journalism History*, 39, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 15.

The climate for women wasn't receptive at the New York *Herald-Tribune* in the late 1920s and early 1930s, either, while Stanley Walker was city editor. In his classic 1934 newspaper history *City Editor*, Walker claimed that newspaper women existed in a "twilight zone," and that it was "easy for a newspaper to get along without them." He then listed a roster of perceived faults that, in his opinion, made women unsuited for work in a newsroom, including "slovenly . . . habits of mind," a tendency to "sulk" and "burst into tears," failure to "understand honor," and a mistaken belief that they wrote wittily when in truth their attempts at humor were "feeble compared with the work of dozens of men." Although the women profiled in this dissertation had already proven otherwise, he added, "There are few women who can handle an important, involved murder mystery competently."¹⁶

Breaking into newspaper work in Chicago during the 1920s, journalist Dorothy Jurney also found barriers at the *Chicago Daily News*. In a 1990 oral history with the Washington Press Club Foundation, she recalled, "I would have liked to have worked for the *Chicago Daily News*, which just didn't have any women in its newsroom."¹⁷

Only one newspaper of note during the Prohibition era has been consistently credited with giving women opportunities equal to those of men. The *Chicago Tribune*, Ross writes, "has been the training ground of many fine newspaper women . . . It has given its women broad executive powers."¹⁸

¹⁶ Stanley Walker, *City Editor* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1934), 248-250.

¹⁷ "Dorothy Jurney – Session One," oral history for the Washington Press Club Foundation, 16 Jan. 1990, accessed 28 April 2013, <http://beta.wpcf.org/oralhistory/jurn1.html>.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 542.

Tribune historian Lloyd Wendt also notes that the “*Tribune* of the 1920s was proud of its women’s staff . . .”¹⁹ – an assertion backed by *Tribune* publications and advertising from that decade.

A 1925 display ad titled “Why Women Read the *Tribune*” touts the features pages as of particular interest to women, but also plays up the substantive role of women who covered news for the paper. The ad explains:

It took American newspaperdom a long time to learn the value of women on the reportorial staff. There was an old time axiom that the local room of a newspaper was no place for a woman.

All that was years ago. Today most newspapers of any consequence employ women reporters. The *Tribune*, always sensitive to the trend of the times, can count three women reporters on its staff. Each of these women – Genevieve Forbes Herrick, Maureen McKernan, and Kathleen McLaughlin – work under the direction of the city editor, just as men reporters do, taking any assignment which he sees fit to give them in the course of the day’s routine.²⁰

Clearly, the *Tribune* advertised women’s prominence at the paper in order to attract female consumers and the advertisers who targeted them. The 1925 ad notes that “countless Mrs. Smiths . . . get a particular enjoyment” from news stories written by women, “as seen with a woman’s eyes and with a woman’s super-sensitiveness to truth.”²¹ The *Tribune*’s employment of women journalists to appeal to advertisers is spelled out even more plainly in a similar 1926 display ad, also titled “Why Women Read The Chicago *Tribune*,” which describes features such as fiction, book reviews, fashion and home, and again lists Forbes Herrick and McLaughlin as “reporters,” this time in a sidebar. The ad then directly addresses advertisers, reminding them,

¹⁹ Wendt, *Chicago Tribune*, 492.

²⁰ “Why Women Read The *Tribune*,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 Sept. 1925, E2. Note: The *Tribune* did not italicize its title in its own publications, therefore, this research does not italicize the word, either, in direct quotes from those publications.

²¹ *Ibid.*

“Because of its special appeal to women, The Tribune makes advertising directed to women pay exceptionally well . . .”²²

However, evidence exists to indicate that the *Tribune*’s promotion of opportunities for women journalists was attributable to more than just an attempt to increase the bottom line by drawing advertisers and female readers. The paper also fostered a culture that simply allowed women decent opportunities to succeed in various capacities, dating back before the 1920s.

In 1981, the *Tribune*’s famed long-time literary critic, Fanny Butcher, recalled joining the paper in 1913 and quickly taking on a variety of roles, including “crime reporter,” a position that she didn’t necessarily even want. Sent to cover the attempted murder of a mother by her son, Butcher balked, explaining in the later interview, “It was a horrible assignment, asking an old lady, ‘What was it like to have your kid try and kill you?’ but I was able to do it . . .”²³

The *Tribune* gave even broader latitude to employee Maude Martin Evers. During her first several years with the *Tribune*, in which her attributed drawings appear as early as 1915, Evers illustrated fashion stories,²⁴ including a recurring feature called “Patterns by Clotilde.”²⁵

Then, in January 1919, Evers’s name suddenly appeared not under an illustration, but atop a humorous feature story about a banquet “served” to an opera singer by a local zoo’s monkeys.²⁶ A little over a month later, Evers earned another byline – this time, in a fairly

²² “Why Women Read The Chicago Tribune,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3 Jan. 1926, D4.

²³ Joye Brown, “11 City Journalists Honored,” *Chicago Tribune*, 7 Nov. 1981, 5.

²⁴ See, e.g., Louise James, “Every Shape, Even the Chinese, Is Popular,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 Feb. 1915, E1; James, “Smartest Styles at Common Sense Prices,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 Feb. 1915, C6; and James, “French Styles in Mourning Are Coquettish, American Styles Are Smart,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 Nov. 1915, C7.

²⁵ See, e.g., “Patterns by Clotilde: Summer Blouses to Please the Practical Woman,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 23 May 1915, C6; “Patterns by Clotilde: Vacation Clothes for the Small Boy and Girl,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 May 1915, C2; “Patterns by Clotilde,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 27 June 1915, C3.

²⁶ Maude Martin Evers, “I Went to the Animal Fair,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 Jan. 1919, 7.

dramatic shift, for covering a murder trial in a tone that foreshadowed the work of the later mob sisters.

After explaining in her lead that a woman's trial for killing her husband ended "almost before it started," Evers added, with cheerful sarcasm, "Chicago sure is a place for a lady to get rid of her troubles." Then, in another more acerbic passage, Evers "defended" the decision to let the killer walk free, writing, "But, then, Miss Burke . . . proved she held a vast amount of affection for this man, proved by shooting him six times: for, you know, 'each man kills the thing he loves.'"²⁷ In another sarcasm-laden article, Evers quoted a young killer as blithely asking her, during a jail visit, "'Say . . . did that guy I shot today die? I hope he did.'"²⁸

For the next few months, Evers continued to cover crime in that same mocking vein, arguably setting the tone for the women who covered crime more extensively in the 1920s. She also earned bylines for "club news,"²⁹ politics, if from a "woman's angle,"³⁰ and even sports, covering a prize fight staged by the Chicago Athletic Club. ("And was there blood? There wuz.")³¹ In addition, she continued to illustrate fashion stories, sometimes earning a byline for accompanying text.³² Clearly, the *Tribune* recognized and capitalized upon her versatility.

In 1925, the *Tribune* produced a 72-page booklet that highlighted the paper's policy of rewarding hard work and good writing by women and supporting their hiring and advancement. The foreword explains the rationale for the publication, which profiled key female employees:

²⁷ Evers, "'Silent' Nellie Freed, Almost as Trial Opens," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 Feb. 1919, 11.

²⁸ Evers, "Girl Who Killed Attorney Calls the Scene Funny," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 July 1919, 2.

²⁹ See, e.g., Evers, "Beauty Editor Gives Business Girls Good News," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 5 Feb. 1919, 5.

³⁰ See, e.g., Evers, "Home Fires of Candidates Are Kept Burning," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 Feb., 1919, 2.

³¹ Evers, "Women at Stag Yell for More as Gore Spouts," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 May 1919, 5.

³² See, e.g., Evers, "Fashions from 'The Masquerader,'" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 March 1919, B6.

The following pages contain brief sketches of the work performed by women holding important positions on the Chicago Tribune. These sketches were prepared to show how important a cog in the modern industrial scheme woman has become, and in the hope of shedding a little light on the triumphs, the responsibilities and the difficulties of the women who do so much to keep in successful operation that complex machine known as the modern metropolitan newspaper.³³

While the booklet no doubt served a commercial purpose for the paper – either to attract advertisers or as a public relations piece to show female readers that the paper prized women as employees – its stated purpose was to present prospective newspaperwomen with a path to success. After boasting that “The Tribune has made an opportunity for women within its organization” and backing that up with numbers – 16 female employees in 1896 versus 369 in 1925 – the pamphlet’s introduction concludes with, “But perhaps the best way to tell how to attain success in any line of endeavor is to tell how it was attained by the successful. That is the reason for this book.”³⁴

Reporter Kathleen McLaughlin found that the *Tribune* lived up to its boasts of providing opportunities for women. Hired in 1925 as a general assignment reporter, she recalled in retirement, “Fortunately, the Chicago Tribune in those days gave its women reporters precisely the same chance the men had . . . If you were good enough you got a top assignment. It didn’t matter whether you were Miss or Mrs. or Mr. on the city editor’s assignment sheet.”³⁵

Whether directed by upper management or simply acting on his own accord, city editor Robert M. Lee played a key role in leveling the playing field for male and female reporters during the 1920s. Speaking to the Chicago Woman’s club in 1933 about her career as a reporter,

³³ *Women and The Chicago Tribune*, publication of The Business Survey of *The Chicago Tribune*, 1925.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 9.

³⁵ Collins, *She Was There*, 30.

Genevieve Forbes Herrick indirectly credited him with at least contributing to her success by conceding that a woman couldn't be a successful journalist without an editor willing to let her tackle tough assignments.³⁶ (Douglas Perry, author of *The Girls of Murder City*, in turn credits Forbes Herrick's professionalism and writing style with helping to persuade Lee that women could cover straight news. Discussing Maurine Watkins's hiring, he notes, "A 'girl reporter' named Genevieve Forbes had covered [murders and trials] with such panache that the *Tribune's* city editor – a man named Robert Lee – didn't need to be convinced that women could write about crime."³⁷)

In 1925, Maureen McKernan, who also worked under Lee's direction, told Medill School journalism students that editors, in general, no longer considered gender when hiring and assigning stories. While women at other newspapers – see Ross's earlier description of the climate at *The New York Times*, for example – may have disagreed, by working at the *Tribune*, McKernan had come to believe that "[e]ditors have learned that women can think as well as feel . . . If she has an average understanding of the doings of mankind and the love of telling a story in her makeup, she will receive an equal chance with a man in any newspaper office."³⁸

Bylines bear out this claim. For example, in 1924, one of the *Tribune's* top male reporters, Orville Dwyer, produced 56 bylined stories, while Genevieve Forbes Herrick produced more than 140, and Maurine Watkins produced 48. And while Dwyer did cover crime and trials, he also produced articles that might typically have been considered the purview of female

³⁶ Kathleen M'Laughlin, "Reporter Tells Women's Place in Journalism," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 Sept. 1933.

³⁷ Perry, *The Girls of Murder City*, 196.

³⁸ "Miss McKernan to Tell of Woman Reporter," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 Jan. 1925, 21.

reporters, such as a 1923 piece on a speech by the president of the National Association of Retail Clothiers, about the state of men's fashion.³⁹

To truly grasp the significance of the opportunities afforded women at the paper, it is necessary to understand the reach and influence of the *Tribune*, itself. The modern version of the paper began with Joseph Medill's purchase of the *Tribune* in 1855, when Chicago was experiencing rapid growth.⁴⁰ Medill quickly "revitalized news coverage" and altered the paper's editorial stances.⁴¹ By the end of the century, under the leadership of Robert Patterson, the *Tribune* had become the "People's Paper" in Chicago, with Sunday editions running up to 48 pages, while prices were kept low, to keep circulation high.⁴² The arrival of William Randolph Hearst on the scene, through his establishment of the *Evening American*, amped up the city's already tough circulation wars – a battle that the *Tribune* "won . . . with sales numbers that soared . . ."⁴³ By the 1920s, the paper was the dominant news provider in the city, publishing nearly a half-million copies daily and upwards of 827,000 on Sundays, compared to its closest competitor, Hearst's newer *Herald and Examiner*, which had press runs of approximately 397,000 daily and 731,000 on Sundays.⁴⁴

In other words, to be a bylined reporter with the *Tribune* was to have a significant voice in American journalism – and the *Tribune* allowed women to have that voice.

³⁹ Orville Dwyer, "Men's Garb Is O.K. on Top, but Shabby Next the Skin," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 25 Sept. 1923, 2.

⁴⁰ Wendt, *Chicago Tribune*, 63.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 314-317.

⁴³ Megan McKinney, *The Magnificent Medills: America's Royal Family of Journalism During a Century of Turbulent Splendor* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 131.

⁴⁴ Wendt, *Chicago Tribune*, 486.

Perhaps the *Tribune*'s acceptance of women as powerful presences in the newsroom shouldn't be surprising. Founder Joseph Medill's strong-willed wife, Kitty, was the daughter of a newspaper editor and "as dedicated to newspapers as her father," according to Medill family biographer Megan McKinney. When Medill began working at the *Tuscarawas (Ohio) Advocate*, owned by his future father-in-law, Kitty taught the budding journalism magnate how to set type and operate the presses, working "with him as he learned every aspect of producing a newspaper." Eventually, Kitty encouraged Medill to buy his first paper, and after their marriage she "worked steadily with him on his newspaper."⁴⁵

Although founded by a man, the Medill "dynasty" – with the *Chicago Tribune* as its heart – was largely made possible by women, McKinney adds, explaining that the story of the Medill family is "a powerful chronicle of the gains made by and for women in the past century."⁴⁶

First, Joseph Medill's "extraordinary newspapering DNA" was passed to his two intelligent and imperious daughters, who received an education in journalism, along with "the expected feminine subjects," thanks to their father.⁴⁷ In addition, Medill took a keen interest in his granddaughter, Cissy, and even when she was a child, he would hold adult-level conversations with her on topics such as history and journalism. According to McKinney, Medill "sensed in Cissy a capacity that surpassed that of his grandsons and he fed that intellect."⁴⁸ In 1896, the adventurous Cissy, by then a divorced countess and renowned big-game hunter, wrote her first newspaper article for the *Omaha World Journal*. Later, a friendship with *Tribune* – and later *Herald and Examiner* – editor Walter Howey led the rebellious Cissy to

⁴⁵ McKinney, *The Magnificent Medills*, 10-13.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, x.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, x, 43.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

write for the rival paper.⁴⁹ And, of course, Eleanor Medill “Cissy” Patterson would eventually become a force in journalism in her own right, editing Hearst’s *Washington Herald* and subsequently owning the *Washington Times Herald*.⁵⁰

Before that, though, another Medill fostered the talents of a creative, intelligent woman – this time in the *Tribune* newsroom. Circa 1910, when Medill’s son, Joe, took over the paper’s Sunday edition, he found a partner in Mary King, who had served as a secretary to previous Sunday editors. Joe, however, tapped King’s imagination and ability to predict what type of material would engage readers to help him dramatically expand Sunday readership. “Mary,” McKinney writes, “was central to . . . the creation of editorial material to captivate the newspaper-reading public.”⁵¹ Ishbel Ross also credits King with advancing opportunities for women at the *Tribune*, explaining that she “backed women consistently, gave them opportunities wherever there were openings and steered them into original channels.”⁵²

Meanwhile, Ruth Hanna McCormick – married to Medill McCormick, who helmed the *Tribune* at the turn of the century – was a suffragist and political activist who earned election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1930.⁵³ She was also, by most measures, the stronger partner in her marriage, as Medill suffered with lifelong mental illness and struggled with substance abuse.⁵⁴ Although Ruth McCormick’s granddaughter and biographer, Kristie Miller,

⁴⁹ Ibid., 150-156.

⁵⁰ Richard Norton Smith, “Paper Tigress,” *The Weekly Standard*, 10 Oct. 2011, accessed 19 April 2013, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/keyword/Cissy-Patterson>.

⁵¹ Ibid., 137.

⁵² Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 542.

⁵³ Kristie Miller, *Ruth Hanna McCormick: A Life in Politics, 1880-1944* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992), 1.

⁵⁴ McKinney, *The Magnificent Medills*, 92-94.

does not believe her grandmother had any significant influence over *Tribune* policies,⁵⁵ McCormick was nevertheless yet another woman in the Medill-McCormick dynasty who set an example as a capable, intelligent leader. Patricia Bradley, in *Women and the Press*, also posits a potential link between Ruth McCormick's status in the family and opportunities for women at the *Tribune*.⁵⁶

In sum, women were formidable presences both in the newsroom and behind the scenes from the paper's earliest days.

Bradley also suggests a possible connection between the paper's support of women employees and Northwestern University's 1921 founding of a journalism school that was later named for former *Tribune* owner Joseph Medill and closely aligned with the paper. According to Wendt, the *Tribune* often "supplied" the school with professors,⁵⁷ and reporters such as McKernan served as guest lecturers, speaking to the "flood" of women who attended the Medill School, hoping to break into the increasingly professionalized field of newspaper work.⁵⁸

In her 1927 textbook *Writing and Editing for Women*, Medill School "Lecturer on Departmental Work in Journalism" Ethel Colson Brazelton praised the *Tribune* for "having shown the way" for other papers by allowing women to fill all sorts of positions, from reporter to Sunday editor,⁵⁹ a comment that further suggests a strong link between the *Tribune* and the school.

⁵⁵ Kristie Miller, e-mail message to author, 21 Jan. 2003.

⁵⁶ Bradley, *Women and the Press*, 210.

⁵⁷ Wendt, *Chicago Tribune*, 493.

⁵⁸ Bradley, *Women and the Press*, 210.

⁵⁹ Brazelton, *Writing and Editing for Women*, xv.

And in her Washington Press Club oral history, journalist Dorothy Journey, who attended the Medill School in the 1920s, recalled the *Tribune*'s staff and students having a very close – and sometimes practical – relationship. She explained that some of the Medill School “. . . instructors were *Chicago Tribune* reporters or editors, which was a great experience. They came with the assignments that the *Tribune* reporters had that morning and then they would assign us to these stories.” According to Journey, the students would then be required to go out into the city and cover their assigned events, including trials. As a matter of course, students would also meet up with actual reporters from the *Tribune* or *Herald and Examiner*, she added. While covering one trial, two of these more veteran journalists asked Journey to leave the courtroom and travel with them to a murder scene. “And I said, ‘Sure,’ I would go along,” Journey related. “It never occurred to me that might be dangerous.”⁶⁰

Clearly, there was a symbiotic relationship between the school and the *Tribune*, no doubt related to the increasing professionalization of journalism in the early twentieth century. While lawyers, doctors and others in white-collar fields such as the research sciences began to adopt the trademarks of professionalism – such as codes of conduct and requirements for higher education – as early as the pre-Civil War era, journalists did not begin to consider themselves as professionals until the end of the nineteenth century,⁶¹ and a college degree was not a prerequisite for employment even well into the twentieth century. By the 1920s, however, leaders in the field of journalism were making a serious effort to establish themselves as professionals, with Pulitzer's 1912 founding of the Columbia School of Journalism and the

⁶⁰ “Dorothy Journey – Session One.”

⁶¹ Mitchell Stephens, *A History of News* (New York: Viking, 1988), 262.

subsequent establishment of the Pulitzer Prizes,⁶² and the Tribune Company's endowment of the Medill School in 1925.⁶³

One of the hallmarks of professionalism is merit-based hiring and promotion, and while by the 1920s many professions established earlier, such as law and medicine, had erected barriers to women's advancement, journalism was just coming of age – coincident with women's increasing public presence as voters, workers and consumers.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, writing had long been at least a semi-respectable way for women to make money. These factors – along with the presence of a journalism school aligned with a newspaper in Chicago that was promoting professional conduct – ostensibly combined to create a brief window of opportunity for a handful of women who wanted to write about more than fashion, society and home economics. In his history of the *Tribune*, Wendt hints at the paper's shift toward professionalization even in its "women's news" when he relates that in 1925, publisher Joseph Medill Patterson, seeking to make society news more interesting and relevant for modern readers replaced a longtime editor with a young college graduate.⁶⁵

It is likely not coincidental that four of the five mob sisters profiled in this dissertation attended college: Genevieve Forbes Herrick held a bachelor's degree from Northwestern University and a master's degree in English from the University of Chicago;⁶⁶ Maurine Watkins

⁶² Columbia Journalism School, "History of the Journalism School," accessed 15 Jan. 2013, <http://www.journalism.columbia.edu/page/5-history-of-the-journalism-school/5>.

⁶³ Wendt, *Chicago Tribune*, 493.

⁶⁴ For discussions of women's changing roles in 1920s society, see, e.g., Sarah Jane Deutsch, "From Ballots to Breadlines, 1920-1940," in Nancy F. Cott, Ed., *No Small Courage: A History of Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Barbara J. Harris, *Beyond Her Sphere: Women and the Professions in American History* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978); and Zeitz, *Flapper*.

⁶⁵ Wendt, 492.

⁶⁶ Ross, 540.

studied the classics at Radcliffe;⁶⁷ Leola Allard was the first co-ed editor of Northwestern's student newspaper;⁶⁸ and Maureen McKernan attended the University of Kansas.⁶⁹ (Although Northwestern alumnae, Forbes Herrick and Allard graduated before the founding of the Medill School, so no connection can be made there.)

Crime in Chicago

A very practical reason also might have contributed to the mob sisters' ability to cover crime for the *Tribune* during the Jazz Age. Namely, that Chicago in the 1920s was so crime-ridden that newspapers assigned whatever capable reporters were available to cover it. In fact, so many people were meeting violent, often booze-related, ends that in the spring of 1924, the *Tribune* began to periodically publish a bizarre graphic feature called "Hands of Death," which was a crudely drawn clock that showed "the number of deaths by autos, guns and moonshine in Cook County since Jan. 1." For example, as of June 28, 1924, the curiously cheerful-looking clock showed that 114 residents had been killed by moonshine, 160 by guns, and 296 by autos.⁷⁰

The epic scale of crime – vice, corruption and especially homicide – have earned 1920s Chicago a special place in "America's bloody mythology," according to *Murder City* author Michael Lesy, who says the entire era and its setting are as grimly infamous as the massacre at Little Bighorn, the Kennedy assassination and the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. He adds that during the height of the Prohibition era, when Chicago's homicide rate spiked at 24 percent

⁶⁷ Perry, *The Girls of Murder City*, 19.

⁶⁸ "First Coed Editor of Northwestern," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 25 May 1903, 11.

⁶⁹ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 543.

⁷⁰ "Hands of Death," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 June 1924, 8.

higher than the national average, denizens of tamer East Coast cities wondered what had gone awry in “the slaughterhouse that had turned from killing hogs to murdering its own citizens.”⁷¹

Al Capone biographer Laurence Bergreen believes the city was destined by geography and bad timing – serving as a gateway to the frontier in the mid- and late-nineteenth century, and tinged with the West’s lawlessness, but caught up in the trend toward urbanization and “wild, almost wanton expansion.”⁷²

The combination of “urban corruption and Wild West” disorder was a “volatile and deadly compound,” Bergreen adds. By the 1920s, the city was in a “state of near anarchy,” overseen by a government and public institutions whose members were almost universally corrupt. “The judges were fixed, the juries were fixed, the reporters (half of them, anyway) were on the take from their sources,” he explains. And, perhaps most alarmingly, “It was *expected* that the police were on the take; citizens bribed them just to be on the safe side.”⁷³ Corruption went all the way to the top; “Big Bill” Thompson, the city’s mayor through good portions of the 1920s, was “as wet as Lake Michigan” and supported by Capone, who “didn’t want to be the mayor” but rather “wanted to *own* the mayor.”⁷⁴

As early as 1904, crusading journalist Lincoln Steffens had called Chicago “[f]irst in violence, deepest in dirt, loud, lawless . . .”⁷⁵ And the city’s “specialty” was “vice,” according to 1920s biographer Lucy Moore, who says the neighborhood known as the Levee was, for many years, the center of a booming prostitution trade, so dangerous that police didn’t even attempt to

⁷¹ Lesy, *Murder City*, 303-304.

⁷² Bergreen, *Capone*, 72.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁷⁵ Bergreen, *Capone*, 77.

shut down the seemingly endless string of brothels in which young girls were forced into “white slavery.”⁷⁶ And the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, banning the manufacture, sale and transportation of alcohol, was like dumping logs on an already big fire, creating a massive blaze of crime in a city already legendary for literally burning down.

Chicagoans, many of whom were already inclined to flout the law, seemed to take Prohibition as a challenge to drink more, and the city collectively went in search of sources that could slake its massive thirst. Already a “brutal” “Capone of a city,” suddenly trying to throw a non-stop illegal party, Chicago was practically custom-made for an ambitious New York City gangster looking to build an empire on the trade of sex and booze.⁷⁷ And the arrival of Al Capone in 1921 would change the history of American crime forever – and enhance Chicago’s reputation for mayhem many times over. A strange hybrid of public benefactor and ruthless thug, Capone would become the scarred face of the gang warfare that erupted in the city during the 1920s, as rival mobsters fought for supremacy. As early as 1924, the *Chicago Herald and Examiner* printed a story about a Chicago Crime Commission bulletin that revealed a city incapable of curbing a rising homicide problem – and jaded enough that news about a record-setting murder rate didn’t even make the front page. In an article buried on page thirteen, the *Herald and Examiner* quoted the bulletin as saying, ““The record . . . is almost a murder a day. The situation seems beyond the control of the authorities.””⁷⁸

According to Wendt’s history of the *Tribune*, the gangland warfare spiked in 1926, with “29 men falling in street shootings, others dying by torture in gang dungeons such as that

⁷⁶ Moore, *Anything Goes*, 30.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ “One Slaying a Day is Chicago’s Record,” *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 3 May 1924, 13.

maintained by Capone . . .”⁷⁹ Lesy puts the number of mob-related deaths for that year at 96 for Chicago and Cook County, adding that police killed 60 more gangsters.⁸⁰ The violence was intensified by the use of machine guns, originally developed for use in World War I, that could fire eight hundred rounds a minute – weapons tellingly referred to as “Chicago typewriters.”⁸¹ And the killing continued throughout the decade. In 1928, Chicago saw twice as many murders as New York City – and, of course, the city would be linked for the ages with the culminating savage act of the decade-long drama, the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre, in 1929.⁸²

Chicago’s newspapers not only reported on the crime wave; they helped to brew it, through hard-fought circulation wars, especially between the *Tribune* and Hearst’s *Examiner*.

In the first twenty years of the twentieth century, newspapers had undergone a dramatic evolution, led by moguls like the McCormicks and Hearst. In increasingly urbanized America, journalism became big business, and most cities were home to multiple, competing papers. Sensationalism, screaming headlines and stories with shock value – often about crime – kept readers clamoring for multiple editions, a trend that began with the “yellow journalism” of the late nineteenth century and carried through the even more garish post-World-War-I tabloid era.⁸³

While a broadsheet in physical form, the *Tribune* in many ways exemplified the ethos of “jazz journalism.” A typical edition had a banner headline about a crime or tragedy – consider the February 15, 1929 headline “Slay Doctor in Massacre,” with the subhead, “Officials Probe

⁷⁹ Wendt, *Chicago Tribune*, 509.

⁸⁰ Lesy, *Murder City*, 216.

⁸¹ Moore, *Anything Goes*, 36.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 41.

⁸³ For detailed information on this evolution, see, e.g., Beasley, “The Emergence of Modern Media, 1900-1945, in Sloan, ed., *The Media in America*, 283-302.

Booze Deals in Gang Shooting.” Then, scattered throughout the paper would be more news of crime, tragedy and titillation: “38 Slain in Four Years of Gang Warfare,” “Former Russian Princess Taken to Psychopathic,” “Aimee Used ‘Love Gifts’ to Aid Kidnap Tale, Says Witness,” “How Moran Gang Was Wiped Out,” “Bullet Widows Weep, But They Refuse to Talk,” and “Has Love Nest in Laboratory, Wife Charges.”⁸⁴ The tone was often tough, humorous and shot through with slang, an echo of the city’s image. Illustrations, especially of celebrities and celebrated killers, in the form of photographs and drawings, were numerous and vivid, designed to lure readers away from rivals, such as the *Examiner*.

But the circulation battles weren’t just confined to the Chicago papers’ pages. Both the *Tribune* and *Examiner* hired thugs to set fire to newsstands, bomb delivery trucks, and intimidate news dealers – practices that McKinney calls “the beginning of gangsterism and racketeering in Chicago.” McKinney adds that some of the toughs who worked for the rival papers “soon graduated to the gangster hall of fame.” She also notes, “The systematic newspaper beatings and murders . . . set a climate of lawlessness that would escalate and permeate Chicago for decades. Out of the circulation wars would rise racketeering, bootlegging and the universal lawlessness of the gangster era.”⁸⁵

So pervasive was crime that in the middle of that era, at the height of Prohibition, Chicago Mayor William Dever, elected during a brief break in Big Bill Thompson’s corrupt tenure, asked with obvious frustration, ““Are we living by the code of the Dark Ages . . . ?””⁸⁶

⁸⁴ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 Feb. 1929, 1-10.

⁸⁵ McKinney, *The Magnificent Medills*, 128-132.

⁸⁶ Lesy, *Murder City*, 216.

The violence was a strange point of pride, as well as a source of black humor, for Chicago denizens. In 1928, *Tribune* reporter Kathleen McLaughlin was sent to interview out-of-town visitors, asking them, tongue slightly in cheek, if they were scared to be there: “At close quarters, does [Chicago] look like a bad actor with an itch in her trigger finger?” McLaughlin humorously inquired. “Is she too careless with machine guns for comfort or safety?”⁸⁷

As evidenced by the page-one byline McLaughlin earned for the story, rampant crime might have scared out of towners, but it also created opportunities for women.

Discussing the careers of mob sisters Forbes Herrick and Watkins, Perry explains, “More than anything else [they] could thank the Eighteenth Amendment for their burgeoning career opportunities. No one had foreseen that Prohibition would have such disastrous consequences.” He adds that, after impulsively banning women from the local newsroom in 1924 – because male reporters were paying too much attention to newcomer Maurine Watkins – managing editor Teddy Beck quickly backtracked because there was “simply too much work to do for Beck’s order ever to be implemented . . .”⁸⁸

In her chapter on Chicago’s female journalists, Ross similarly indicates that women reporting on crime in the city during the 1920s was not a novelty, but a matter of course. Writing about Leola Allard, Ross notes, “Like all the Chicago newspaper women of this period, most of her stories dealt with crime.”⁸⁹

Quoted in her 1927 *New York World* interview, mob sister Maurine Watkins also indicated that violent crime was so common in Prohibition-era Chicago that every available

⁸⁷ Kathleen M’Laughlin, “Chicago Looks Toughest from Afar, It Seems,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 24 March 1928, 1.

⁸⁸ Perry, *The Girls of Murder City*, 69.

⁸⁹ Ross, 548.

reporter was needed to cover it. The article explains that Watkins interviewed 30 killers during her brief career with the *Tribune*, which “only barely touched the Chicago field, but even a reporter can’t work more than eight hours a day.” Watkins added, in a quote that indicated how blasé Chicago residents were about murder, in general, compared to their New York counterparts, ““A murder assignment out there [in Chicago] doesn’t put any one in a flurry.””⁹⁰

The observation may have been meant to shock more staid East Coast residents, but it was also apparently true. According to journalist Dorothy Journey, in her oral history, one of the lessons she learned as a Medill School student in the 1920s was that murder was so common that not every killing merited coverage. Journey recalled, “. . . [T]here were many overnight murders in the city of Chicago, most of which there was no reason to cover . . . because they didn't have any particular . . . hook . . . that would get the reader into it. You had to have money or sex or some sort of drama . . .”⁹¹

And writing in the early 1960s, McPhaul, in his anecdotal history of Chicago’s newspaper culture, concluded, “Modern girls pursuing, as virtually all of them are, the bland beats of religion, education and cornerstone dedications must envy their predecessors of the 1920s. Then many of the girls were the Boswells of the lives and deaths of the bootleg barons.”⁹²

⁹⁰ “Pistol Fire Lights Up ‘Chicago’: Or Telling It to the Maurine,” M1.

⁹¹ “Dorothy Journey – Session 1.”

⁹² McPhaul, *Deadlines and Monkeyshines*, 128.

The Intersection of Crime and Celebrity

A key word in that last sentence might very well be “barons,” when trying to corral the various factors that allowed the mob sisters to earn so many crime-related bylines in 1920s Chicago.

Much has been written about women reporters’ consignment to “women’s pages,” which featured stories assumed to be of interest to female readers. Traditionally, one of the topics frequently covered by women reporters was “society” news, meaning reports on the doings of notable families.⁹³ Well into the mid-twentieth century, society reportage was considered both a suitable career choice for women reporters and a possible gateway to other beats or advancement to editorship. The first chapter of Genevieve Jackson Boughner’s 1942 textbook for budding female journalists, *Women in Journalism*, is titled “The Society Editor.” In the chapter, she explained that society writing “is one of the oldest journalistic careers” for women, and “the most familiar route to other newspaper positions.”⁹⁴

Meanwhile, the 1920s saw the rise of a new kind of notable member of society: the celebrity. While not necessarily “respectable” or born into wealth and privilege, these individuals – “personified by entertainers and even Prohibition-era gangsters”⁹⁵ – were of interest to the public, if only because media *told* the public that celebrities were interesting.

Neimark traces the creation of the celebrity to journalist Walter Winchell’s first mid-1920s gossip columns. By reporting ““who was romancing whom, who was cavorting with

⁹³ For discussions of women reporters’ confinement to “women’s pages” and their coverage of society news, see, e.g. Whitt, *Women in American Journalism*, 37-61, and Beasley, “The Emergence of Modern Media,” in Sloan’s *The Media in America*, 288.

⁹⁴ Genevieve Jackson Boughner, *Women in Journalism: A Guide to the Opportunities and a Manual of the Technique of Women’s Work for Newspapers and Magazines* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1942), 1.

⁹⁵ Beasley, “The Emergence of Modern Media,” in Sloan’s *The Media in America*, 283.

gangsters, who was ill or dying, who was suffering financial difficulties . . . and dozens of other secrets,” Winchell “ . . . expanded the purview of American journalism forever . . .,” according to Winchell’s biographer, Neal Gabler, quoted in Neimark’s article, “The Culture of Celebrity.”⁹⁶

Coverage of the activities of celebrities – dubbed by one researcher “media-spun heroes,”⁹⁷ who were often wealthy, but not necessarily possessive of a traditional pedigree – was, like more sedate society coverage, name driven, usually “soft” news. In other words, it was essentially a new kind of feature writing, and therefore suited to women, according to the prevailing ethos in newsrooms. As editor Stanley Walker, succinctly condensing the mid-century newsroom mindset, wrote, “Ship news is covered by men, and women are used only on special interviews with particular individuals who may be arriving.”⁹⁸

Yet, as Walter Winchell’s biographer pointed out, covering this new denizen of “society” could mean rubbing shoulders with people such as gangsters, who were flashy and fascinating – but also violent. This was especially true in Chicago, where gangland culture was particularly strong and mobsters such as Al Capone became both feared and revered. As Roaring Twenties biographer Lucy Moore explains, Capone “wanted to present himself as the acceptable face of crime,” and would make a show of greeting other celebrities who visited the city, including such an heroic figure as Charles Lindbergh.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Jill Neimark, “The Culture of Celebrity,” *Psychology Today*, May 1995, 54-57+, accessed 21 April 2013, <http://search.proquest.com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/docview/214238944/1401676FFB7364B6CA6/1?accountid=13158>.

⁹⁷ David Kaszuba, “They Are Women, Hear Them Roar: Female Sportswriters of the Roaring Twenties” (PhD. diss., The Pennsylvania State University, 2003), 42.

⁹⁸ Walker, *City Editor*, 250.

⁹⁹ Moore, *Anything Goes*, 22.

Chicago residents, perhaps fueled by ambivalence over Prohibition, which had both generated the mobs and encouraged ordinary citizens to flout the law, became fascinated with the individuals who were at war on their streets, but also supplying the endless party – and, as a consequence, becoming as wealthy as, if not more wealthy than, the more stolid families whose doings were the usual fodder for the society pages. In 1927, the U.S. Attorney’s office placed Capone’s estimated wealth at a whopping \$105 million, which Lesy notes would be worth approximately ten times that amount in modern currency.¹⁰⁰ Mobsters *were* “society,” only more interesting and unpredictable than most families of means.

The denizens of gangland were also rewriting gender roles, according to Ruth in *Inventing the Public Enemy*. While male gangsters – in real life and media portrayals – embodied many traditionally masculine traits, such as aggression and the protection of territories, their women were breaking rules for what defined the feminine. The gun moll “brought to life a variety of roles women might assume” by “[l]oving and fighting, helping and competing . . .” alongside her violent man.¹⁰¹ Ruth adds that “gangsters’ female accomplices, mothers, wives, girlfriends, and casual lovers illustrated a range of possibilities for women in modern society” that were recognized by journalists.¹⁰² And the mob sisters, as will be demonstrated in this dissertation, frequently portrayed gangsters’ mothers, girlfriends and wives as fierce protectors of and willing conspirators with their men.

In other words, in the chaotic Jazz Age, the lines between gender, society, celebrity and crime blurred, especially in Chicago, where mob culture was so prevalent. Thus, a female

¹⁰⁰ Lesy, *Murder City*, 305.

¹⁰¹ David Ruth, *Inventing the Public Enemy: The Gangster in American Culture, 1918-1934* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 87-88.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 97.

reporter used to covering noteworthy weddings and funerals of the rich and powerful might by necessity find herself writing about the nuptials or burial of a known killer. Regardless of whether the media began the profound interest in the doings of manufactured celebrities such as gangsters, the people of Chicago eventually demanded glimpses into the often flamboyant, frequently violent lives of their pet underworld figures.

The headline for mob sister Kathleen McLaughlin's article about the wedding of Al Capone's sister, Mafalda, demonstrates how fuzzy the line between society and crime coverage had become in Prohibition-era Chicago: "Capone Sister Wed; Five Armed Guards Seized." While the story contains the requisite society-news descriptions of the bridesmaids' gowns, the lead plays up the fact that the ceremony was strategically held "in the recognized domain of the Capones, but far enough from the 22d (sic) street sector to be out of the battle zone."¹⁰³

If the public was bothered by the hypocrisy of a white wedding for gangsters whose hands were stained with blood, it didn't show in their attendance rates. McLaughlin – who more often reported on trials – included vivid descriptions of the crowds whose "wrenched necks, mashed toes and bruised fingers marked the big shove" toward the church. Tongue-in-cheek, she even made a direct correlation between her story and traditional society news, noting that the Capone family's finery "jibed with the customs of north shore families in sending their daughters to the altar" – the "north shore" a reference to Chicago's wealthiest neighborhoods.¹⁰⁴

Gangland funerals were also subjects for tremendous public interest. Again, the headline for McLaughlin's 1930 article about the burial of murdered mobster John "Dingbat" Oberta demonstrates Chicagoans' collective fascination with their homegrown anti-heroes: "Oberta

¹⁰³ Kathleen McLaughlin, "Capone Sister Wed; Five Armed Guards Seized," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 15 Dec. 1930, 1.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Buried in Accustomed Gangland Style: 10,000 Struggle to See \$15,000 Coffin.” Society, celebrity – and crime coverage – came crashing together again as McLaughlin described the floral arrangements, but also noted that a “detachment of police battled helplessly against an estimated crowd of 10,000 swarming the block” to see the body of a man who’d suffered the same fate as his widow’s first husband, “who died from machine gun bullets on the lawn . . .”¹⁰⁵

The story’s final paragraph both demonstrates how entrenched gangsters were in Chicago’s institutionalized power structure, and likely served as a cynical reminder about the city’s rampant corruption. McLaughlin pointed out that the Oberta’s pallbearers included one state representative, a congressional candidate, and a ward committeeman.¹⁰⁶

Meanwhile, given that sob sisters had long attended trials and women often covered entertainment, too – notably in Chicago, where *Tribune* reporter Fanny Butcher was for years a venerated literary critic¹⁰⁷ and mob sister Maurine Watkins eventually critiqued movies – the fact that female reporters also covered Jazz-Age trials that became public spectacle does not seem surprising. Like gangland weddings and funerals, trials became massive entertainment events. Writing in 1926 about the sentencing of a bootlegger, mob sister Genevieve Forbes Herrick quoted the Cook County state’s attorney as complaining to jurors, ““Why, the bootlegger of today is more popular than the mayor of Chicago . . . even the president of the United States.””¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ McLaughlin, “Oberta Buried in Accustomed Gangland Style,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 March 1930, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Kenan Heise, “Fanny Butcher; Knew Giants of Literature,” *Chicago Tribune*, 17 May 1987, A7, accessed 26 Aug. 2013, <http://search.proquest.com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/news/docview/607124872/140203719DA18B8125/2?accountid=13158>.

¹⁰⁸ Genevieve Forbes Herrick, “Fix Durkin’s Fate Tonight,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 9 July 1926, 1.

And when the verdict finally came in, Forbes Herrick reported, “Crowds of men and women rushed to Criminal court at midnight . . . Five deputy sheriffs were stationed at the entrance of the building to prevent the throng from rushing the courtroom.” In addition, “Two policemen, armed with shotguns, were patrolling the street, in order to keep the crowds in control.”¹⁰⁹ Indicating that Forbes Herrick equated the trial to a movie or theater event, she also referred to the bootlegger’s mother as having “a big gate” for her testimony, which became so chaotic that, “[t]hree times the bailiffs closed the doors and ordered the crowds back into line . . . Women’s hats were tossed to the floor; men’s feet were stepped on.”¹¹⁰

Similarly, in 1926 Forbes Herrick reported on a well attended trial in which the “judge twice threatened to clear the courtroom of its more frisky spectators,” while advising them, ““This is no movie show”” – an assertion Forbes Herrick countered by noting that the “heroine,” on the witness stand, “didn’t do a bad job of combining farce and pathos.”¹¹¹

Along with being rampant, crime in Chicago in the 1920s had become inextricably mixed up with the increasing demand for entertainment, with the new culture of celebrity, and with the old traditions of society. Therefore, covering trials – already sometimes considered a suitable job for female reporters – arguably became an even more appropriate use of female journalists’ talents, even when those courtroom dramas didn’t necessarily involve romantic affairs, as was the case with the Harry Thaw sob sister trial of 1906, but centered upon cop killings, rapes, and the murder of innocent children.

¹⁰⁹ Forbes Herrick, “Jury Gives Durkin 35 Years,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 July 1926, 1.

¹¹⁰ Forbes Herrick, “Mother Battles for Durkin: Son Signals to Curb Rush of Her Words,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 July 1926, 1.

¹¹¹ Forbes Herrick, “Shepherd and Billy’s Cousins War for Million,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 Jan. 1926, 2.

Finally, women in 1920s Chicago, at least at the female-friendly *Tribune*, likely got better opportunities to cover crime than women in other decades at other papers because *women* in Chicago were committing serious crimes, such as murder, at an alarming rate. As Perry puts it, “Women in the city seemed to have gone mad. They’d become dangerous, especially to their husbands and boyfriends.” Enough so, Perry adds, that the Chicago Crime Commission in the mid-1920s “felt compelled to publicly dismiss the . . . rash of killings by women.”¹¹²

But statistics, and the roll calls on what the mob sisters dubbed “Murderess’s Row” at the Cook County jail, seem to indicate that there was cause for concern. According to Lesy, murders committed by women in Chicago increased by 420 percent between 1875 and 1920.¹¹³ And during the height of the Roaring Twenties, when the line between crime and entertainment was virtually eradicated, a group of women murdered their men in narratives that were particularly ripe for media exploitation. Drunk, unfaithful, often beautiful, and eminently quotable, these murderesses were ready-made for the front pages. However, as Perry explains, “[m]ale reporters often took offense when assigned to a ‘girl bandit’ or husband-killer story . . .” He adds, “[B]ut somebody had to cover the female crime phenomenon.”¹¹⁴

This research will explore that phenomenon in detail, and discuss how the mob sisters stepped in to fill that gap. To summarize, however, this dissertation finds that the *Chicago Tribune* in the 1920s was a unique newspaper operating at a unique time, with a confluence of factors allowing a talented group of women reporters to break free of the traditional “hen’s coop” and write about crime, including violent crime. Those factors include the *Tribune*’s willingness

¹¹² Perry, *The Girls of Murder City*, 3.

¹¹³ Lesy, *Murder City*, 308.

¹¹⁴ Perry, *The Girls of Murder City*, 17.

to give women uncommon opportunities, perhaps related, but not limited to, a history of high-level female influence both on the editorial staff and behind the scenes; a mob culture that became intermingled with more traditional society; the growth of celebrity and the demand for entertainment and entertainment coverage; as well as an increase in crime, especially murders committed by women.

However, one cannot discount the ways in which the women, themselves, successfully exploited that confluence. As Perry also notes, unlike its close competitor, Hearst's *Herald and Examiner*, "the *Tribune* didn't run sob stories. It didn't play to its women readers' innate decency with sentimental tales of woe."¹¹⁵ In a 1927 interview with the *New York World*, Maurine Watkins also said, "The Chicago Tribune doesn't use sob stories. We were a real hanging paper – out for conviction always."¹¹⁶

The *Tribune* gave women like Forbes Herrick, Watkins, McLaughlin, Allard and McKernan opportunities, but they would have to develop a style that would suit the Jazz Age and meet the *Tribune*'s expectations in order to survive there. And this they would do, with great success, by creating a different, edgier, and less emotive voice for women reporters. This dissertation next examines the work of the five aforementioned female *Tribune* reporters in an effort to demonstrate the ways in which they navigated these challenges and carved out niches in the newsroom, establishing what this dissertation calls mob sister journalism.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 16.

¹¹⁶ "Pistol Fire Lights Up 'Chicago': Or Telling It to the Maurine," M1.

Chapter 4 – Genevieve Forbes Herrick

The most compelling illustration of Genevieve Forbes Herrick's clout as a Chicago crime reporter is actually the story of her marriage. Or, more accurately, how one of the biggest court cases ever to take place in the Windy City stopped, temporarily, so "Geno," as her friends called her, could tie the knot with fellow reporter John Herrick.

The two were assigned to cover the 1924 trials of "thrill killers" Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, and became such courtroom fixtures that Judge John Caverly timed the verdict to accommodate their wedding plans.¹ The story is often repeated in accounts of Forbes Herrick's life and the still infamous case, but she explained the circumstances in her own words at the end of a book review she wrote for the *Chicago Tribune* in 1956, long after her retirement. After giving author Meyer Levin's novel based on the case, *Compulsion*, mixed reviews, Forbes Herrick added a reminiscent, italicized aside:

Late in August, 1924, Judge Caverly announced that . . . he would deliberate on the evidence and render his verdict Sept. 6. Mr. Herrick and I went to him; reminded him that we were to be married Sept. 6 and that he had been invited, along with Clarence Darrow and States Atty. Robert E. Crowe. Bob Lee, then editor of the paper was to be an usher. Many of our newspaper colleagues were to be guests. We wanted to be there ourselves. Judge Caverly postponed his verdict until Sept. 10.²

The anecdote, while brief, illustrates much about Forbes Herrick and her work for the *Tribune*, where she was employed from 1918 until 1934.³ Clearly, based upon the guest list, she was prominent and well-respected by colleagues and those she met while covering Chicago's courts. Not to mention influential enough to cause a judge to postpone a verdict that was eagerly

¹ The story pops up frequently in accounts of the trial and Forbes Herrick's life. See, e.g., Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 540, and Hal Higdon, *Leopold and Loeb: The Crime of the Century* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 263.

² Forbes Herrick, "Novel Based on Loeb-Leopold Case," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 Oct. 1956, G2.

³ Steiner and Gray, "Genevieve Forbes Herrick: A Front-Page Reporter 'Pleased to Write about Women,'" 15.

awaited by not just Chicagoans, but an entire nation. And, last but not least, Forbes Herrick demonstrated her trademark dry wit by noting, deadpan, that she hoped to attend the wedding, herself.

Of course, it could be argued that the judge primarily wanted to accommodate the male reporter, John Herrick. But the *Tribune's* own account of the wedding makes it clear that the bride was the truly important partner. The article – which gives Forbes Herrick top billing with the headline, “‘Geno’ and John Married; Trib’s Almost Scooped” – is basically a public apology to the couple for the *Tribune's* near failure to cover the ceremony, largely because the church was mobbed with the bride’s friends, acquaintances and admirers, making it difficult for the assigned reporters and photographers to get anywhere close. (As the subhead also explains, “Staff Is All There, but Not Writing.”) Throughout the piece, the groom is a secondary player, as established in a lead that prepared readers for the tale of the wedding “of a young woman whose name is better known to Chicagoans, perhaps, than that of any other in the city, and of a bridegroom also well known.”⁴

John Herrick is further relegated to the sidelines in a paragraph subtitled “Friends Are Everywhere,” which explains:

Now, besides having interviewed more celebrities than almost any one else, besides having been the confidante of lady murderesses, the reporter of important trials, the interviewer of premiers and statesmen, Geno has the knack of making friends. She has them by the hundreds. And among them those who love her the most are her coworkers.⁵

No mention is made of John’s friends or his work. In fact, he is only mentioned, briefly, two more times in the twenty-one paragraph article.

⁴ Don Maxwell, “‘Geno’ and John Married; Trib’s Almost Scooped,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 Sept. 1924, 4.

⁵ Ibid.

By 1924, Genevieve Forbes Herrick was indisputably a star on the paper, a general assignment reporter whose byline and banner headlines regularly eclipsed those of her male colleagues. Throughout the decade, she would turn out hundreds of stories, often on crime – enough that she also wrote a series of columns giving readers an inside look at the life of a crime reporter and offering her insights on the criminal mind. Whether it was a wife killing a husband in a booze-fueled rage or Leopold and Loeb committing the “crime of the century,” chances were, Forbes Herrick had a role in covering it.

Her rise was not meteoric; it took her three years, during which she “looked longingly toward the city room while she clipped papers and used her paste pot”⁶ to get her first assignment with the *Tribune*. But when she did get a chance, it was a big one, and she made the most of it.

Sent to Ireland, she was charged with returning in steerage in the guise of an immigrant, documenting her life on the ship and at Ellis Island. Essentially, the *Tribune* was using her as a “stunt girl,” not unlike Nellie Bly and many other female reporters had traditionally been used by papers. Forbes Herrick’s assignment even offered the potential for sexual titillation that historian Jean Marie Lutes identifies as central to the stunt girl phenomenon, which frequently placed women in the positions of vulnerability to men.⁷

According to Lutes, Nellie Bly’s famous series of articles about her experiences masquerading as an insane woman to gain entrance to an asylum served as the prototype for subsequent stunt stories. During the course of Bly’s 1887 adventure, the “well-bred, middle-

⁶ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 539.

⁷ Lutes, *Front-Page Girls*, 15.

class young woman” – also described as “modest and comely”⁸ – found herself at the mercy of doctors who questioned her chastity and made overtures, such as placing an arm around her while she sat on a bed.⁹ While tame by today’s standards, the images of an attractive, usually proper, young lady placing herself at the mercy of powerful men were fairly scandalous for their time.

In Forbes Herrick’s case, the indignities were worse – and not just potential, but realized. While on the ship to New York, she, along with other immigrants, was subjected to endless tests of health and cleanliness, one of which left Forbes Herrick’s face bruised and another which required her to strip to the waist “on . . . the open deck, in plain sight of any male passenger or employee who chooses to look.”¹⁰

However, while the *Tribune* might have wanted to drive up sales by playing up the salacious aspect of half-naked, completely vulnerable women being “Mauled at Inspection” by guards, as the subhead to one article noted, Forbes Herrick’s writing was never coy, like Nellie Bly’s, but rather straightforward and often outraged.

A comparison of Bly’s description of her time in the asylum with Forbes Herrick’s account of her days in steerage helps to illustrate the vast differences between Bly’s stunt reportage and Herrick’s.

Describing a medical examination at Bellevue – under the subhead “A Handsome Doctor” – Bly wrote:

⁸ Ibid., 16-18.

⁹ Nellie Bly, “Behind Asylum Bars,” *New York World*, 9 Oct. 1887, accessed 30 Jan. 2013, <http://dlib.nyu.edu/undercover/sites/dlib.nyu.edu.undercover/files/documents/uploads/editors/Behind-Asylum-Bars-Nellie-Bly-1.pdf>.

¹⁰ Genevieve Forbes, “Insults Heaped on Immigrants at Quarantine,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 20 Oct. 1921, 5.

He was a handsome young man. He had the air and address of a gentleman. The air he wore was somewhat deceptive. He came forward, seated himself on the side of my bed, and put his arm . . . around my shoulders . . . “But you are sick, you know,” he said. “Oh, am I?” I replied . . . and turned my head and smiled.¹¹

A few paragraphs later, Bly again described an examination by yet another “handsome” doctor; she emphasized his appearance, mentioning it three times. The two seemed to flirt, with Bly asking him to release her from the asylum, which prompted the doctor to say, ““If I take you out, will you stay with me? Won’t you run away from me when you get on the street?”” Bly’s response: ““I can’t promise I will not,’ I answered with a smile, because he was handsome.”¹²

Forbes Herrick’s descriptions of medical examinations stand in stark contrast to Bly’s fluttery accounts. Describing an encounter with a brusque shipboard inspector, she quoted the inspector’s order to female passengers, ““Strip to the waist; no monkey business. Do as I tell you and do it quick, d’ye hear?”” Then Forbes Herrick explained, “Women are biting their lips to keep from crying; the old woman next me [sic] is shaking so she can’t hold her clothes in her hand,” before adding, impressionistically, “Up before the searchlight shoves, pushes, the nauseating smell of flesh, punches, never a word of explanation except the rough command.” And when the inspection concluded, “. . . the examiner, with the brutal strength of a man, shoves us, stripped to the waist, out of her way on to the open deck . . .”¹³

Forbes Herrick’s description of the intake process at Ellis Island was equally brutal – and the doctor she described, while young like those in Bly’s article, was far from a romantic figure. She wrote, “The line moves forward a foot . . . A young doctor yells at us, examines our hands

¹¹ Bly, “Behind Asylum Bars.”

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Forbes, “Insults Heaped on Immigrants at Quarantine.”

and skin, stamps our cards . . . If we delay more than a moment . . . this young doctor yells at us or pushes us forward.”¹⁴

While degraded at some points, Forbes Herrick was ultimately infuriated – and empowered – by her experience. Her anger is apparent in one of the final stories in the series, in which she described trying to help two real immigrants who were inexplicably detained, although technically approved to leave Ellis Island. She got into an argument with an inspector she depicted as a supercilious buffoon, pathetically enjoying his power over weaker individuals. The exchange became so heated that Forbes Herrick was ultimately dragged away and shoved by two men “down a long passage and out to America.”¹⁵

Forbes Herrick exacted revenge upon her tormentors, though, not only by portraying them as brutal goons in the *Tribune*, but by testifying before a Congressional committee investigating conditions at Ellis Island and naming the inspector who had her kicked off the island.¹⁶ The article about her testimony placed Forbes Herrick on page one as the *subject* of a story, but she would soon earn that spot as a writer, repeatedly. And she never again did a “stunt” for the *Tribune*. From that time on, she was a more traditional general assignment reporter, a position that allowed her to use her wit, intelligence, and easy way of attracting friends to become one of the Chicago’s top print journalists and a celebrity in her own right.

In 1924, one *Tribune* reader even wrote to the paper, begging to see a picture of Forbes Herrick. Fan P.F. O’Brien requested:

Please do your readers this favor: Let us have a picture of that incomparable reporter – Genevieve Forbes. My! how that girl can handle the king’s English. It

¹⁴ Forbes, “Women Herded as Are Cattle at Ellis Island,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 23 Oct. 1921, 5.

¹⁵ Forbes, “Ellis Island Wrong Place to Show Kindness,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 25 Oct. 1921, 5.

¹⁶ “Tribune Expose Aids Immigrants,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 Dec. 1921, 1.

thrills and pulsates with life, particularly her articles on the Frank [sic] murder trial. Curiosity once killed a cat, but, Miss Forbes is distinctly a “personality,” and for this reason you ought to publish her picture. Just a guess: She is young: she is a close observer: she is a remarkable woman.¹⁷

The paper did eventually use Forbes Herrick’s image in advertising, but first answered the writer’s question in the headline over the question, which read, “Yes, Genv. ‘Is Young, She is Beautiful, a Close Observer, a Remarkable Woman.’”¹⁸

She had relatively unremarkable roots, however. Born in 1894 to Carolyn and Frank Forbes, the latter a Chicago salesman and tailor-shop owner, Forbes Herrick graduated from the city’s Lakeview High School. She was clearly ambitious, though, attending Northwestern University, where she double-majored in French and English and served as the first woman editor-in-chief of the *Daily Northwestern*. She subsequently earned her master’s degree in English from the University of Chicago and taught high school in Waterloo, Illinois, for a year.¹⁹ However, newspaper work drew her with the possibility of meeting “interesting people,” and she landed a job at the *Tribune* in 1918.²⁰

Her first *Tribune* position – as an assistant to the Exchange Editor – wasn’t all she hoped for, though, even after the editor left, allowing her to take over that leadership role, if not the title. In her profile in the booklet *Women and The Chicago Tribune*, Forbes Herrick related, “I held sway with a pair of scissors and a pot of paste, keeping track of what the folks were writing out in Maine and down in Florida, and wishing mightily that I was writing something in Cook

¹⁷ “Yes, Genv. “Is Young, She is Beautiful, a Close Observer, a Remarkable Woman,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 July 1924, 6.

¹⁸ It is interesting to note that the letter, as printed, does not include the word “beautiful;” it is only in the headline.

¹⁹ Steiner and Gray, “Genevieve Forbes Herrick: A Front-Page Reporter ‘Pleased to Write about Women,’” 9, and Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 539-540.

²⁰ Steiner and Gray, “Genevieve Forbes Herrick: A Front-Page Reporter ‘Pleased to Write about Women,’” 9.

County.”²¹ Ross concurs that Forbes Herrick’s subsequent “brief period as assistant literary editor had not eased the pain” of wishing for more compelling assignments.²²

The immigration story, though, “skyrocketed [her] to fame in journalistic circles because of her clear and sparkling style, her vivid way of nailing the right phrase, her instinct for handling news.”²³

“Skyrocketed” might have been a strong word, for Forbes Herrick’s first bylined articles were, in fact, largely mundane pieces that might’ve been assigned to, and written by, any woman in that era. Along with covering fashion and “club” doings, she penned a semi-regular book-review column titled “Informally.”²⁴ And her first bylined crime stories read almost like sob-sister pieces or overwritten novels.

Consider her first attributed crime story, about a teenage boy named William Dalton who robbed a bank and then disappeared, much to his widowed mother’s dismay. The story is light on details and heavy on description of the solemn mood at the Dalton family’s church – perhaps because the inexperienced Forbes Herrick was apparently unable to get past a Pinkerton detective stationed at the boy’s home to deter the curious. Obviously stuck outside, Forbes Herrick painted a gloomy, borderline maudlin picture of the alley behind the house, writing, “On the back porch a single clothes line . . . swings in the dark its ghost-like burden of two shirts, a pair of stockings, and several soft collars. They belong to William and no one has thought to take them in.”²⁵

²¹ *Women and The Chicago Tribune*, 34.

²² Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 539.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ See, e.g., Genevieve Forbes, “Informally,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 5 March 1921, 9.

²⁵ Forbes, “‘Poor Boy, Poor Mother,’ Cry of Church Friends,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 Feb. 1921, 2.

Her second bylined crime-related story is even more melodramatic and weighted down by minute details about the appearance and demeanor of a woman on trial for murdering her married lover. The prose is so convoluted and focused upon the killer's clothing that it is almost impossible to follow the story, especially since Forbes Herrick wrote long passages without providing names. In fact, she only included one quote from the actual testimony and devoted the first ten paragraphs of the nineteen-paragraph article to tedious description of the defendant's attire and small movements, such as her "chiffon blouse . . . hidden save for a tiny fragile ruffle, which escapes at the neck and is held in place with a platinum and sapphire bar pin."²⁶

Stylistically, the story is a far cry from Forbes Herrick's cynical, sharply written 1925 article about police questioning of a murdered gangster's girlfriend: "[Gladys Bagwell] cried a lot, but she didn't say much. For she doesn't know much about the bootlegging and black hands and murder and sawed off shot guns . . ."²⁷

So how did Forbes Herrick go from near sob sister to acid-penned skeptic? For she clearly didn't believe that Bagwell was unfamiliar with "bootlegging and black hands and murder."

A closer look at Forbes Herrick's second crime story – the overly descriptive article – reveals that she was already on track toward becoming a cynic who, in particular, had little time for women who used their appearances and feminine charms to get away with murder. Buried amid the long-winded descriptions of silk, suede and jewels are small, but telling, details, such as Forbes Herrick's reminder to readers that the defendant's fur cape was "bought for her by another woman's husband." Forbes Herrick also noted that the "luxurious mink" on the

²⁶ Forbes, "'Herb, It Had to Be Done,' Moans Mrs. Orthwein," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 March 1921, 2.

²⁷ Forbes Herrick, "Tony Genna's Fiancee Quizzed; Little Learned," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 19 July 1925, 3.

defendant's shoulders was "a birthday gift from the man she has slain" – in one fell swoop succeeding in painting the defendant as both a callous cheater and, although the trial was not yet concluded, convicting her of murder.²⁸

As early as spring of 1921, Forbes Herrick's soon-to-be trademark humor was also cropping up in her more traditionally "feminine" assignments, such as club coverage. Covering what could have been a very dull lunch meeting by a men's business club, Forbes Herrick focused on the men's discomfort as shouting from a women's club meeting, in an adjacent room, began to bleed through the walls. "Thirty spoons, midway between bouillon cup and mouth, wobbled uncertainly and stopped with a jerk as through the heavily paneled walls came feminine shrieks. 'That's a lie. I never took \$100 from the treasury . . . It's a lie.'" Then Forbes Herrick added a humorous quote, "'That ain't nothin' mister, only a bunch of women,'" a bus boy told the men. 'Illinois Colony club council. They think they got the dope on Mrs. Fulton.'"²⁹

Along with taking a non-traditional approach to covering a very traditional "society" subject – the article contained nothing about whatever business the men discussed – Forbes Herrick's amusing inclusion of the bus boy's observation was a reminder that the servant class might seem invisible, but that the wait staff heard and understood everything that went on in the hotel's "private" chambers. It was a typical Forbes Herrick understated, witty observation, the type that she would make repeatedly throughout her journalistic career.

Still, throughout 1921 and 1922, she continued to primarily cover clubs, celebrity visits, and fashion-related articles about topics such as the debate over "scanty beach costumes."³⁰

²⁸ Forbes, "'Herb, It Had to Be Done,' Moans Mrs. Orthwein."

²⁹ Forbes, "Commerce Men Get an Earful on Women's Club," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 March 1921, 17.

³⁰ Forbes, "Tabloid Bathing Suits Blamed to Manufacturers," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 Aug. 1922, 5.

However, in 1922, she also covered a high-profile paternity suit, writing at least fifteen articles on the court case.³¹ The stories, at first placed on page three, soon earned front-page status.³²

By early 1923, Forbes Herrick rarely covered anything but straight news and crime, and her prose was no longer overwrought, but consistently sharp, witty and peppered with slang. Her alternately bemused, censorious and always mocking attitude toward female criminals, whom she frequently portrayed as simultaneously dim-witted and calculating, was also regularly on display, as in a January 1923 front-page article about a young woman who organized a series of robberies.

Forbes Herrick was clearly a regular at the Cook County Jail by then, and she wrote wryly of awakening the “diminutive, bobbed hair girl of 21, who thrilled with pride on being told she resembled Clara Phillips, the hammer slayer,” to interview her. Without holding back on the curses, Forbes Herrick related, “Elizabeth Sullivan is her name, but she pertly requested that it be given as ‘Honey,’ explaining that was ‘the fellows’ called her . . .,” before adding, “‘Honey’ mingled her story with many a ‘My Gawd!’ and ‘That’s the hell of it!’ and resentfully explained that her arrest came when a ‘bunch of those damn police overheard me telling about one of the jobs I pulled.’”³³

Forbes Herrick’s use of the young woman’s coarse language both for humorous effect, and to let readers know that “Honey” might have had a sweet name, but was far from innocent, became one of her trademark tactics. Instead of highlighting physical action or focusing on

³¹ Forbes, “Vindication, Not Cash, Tiernan’s Object in Suit,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 Sept. 1922, 3.

³² See, e.g., Forbes, “Tiernan Lets Wife Go Alone in Baby Suit,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 Sept. 1922, 1; *Ibid.*, “Mother Points to Poulin, Says Child is His,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 19 Sept. 1922, 1; “Wife Reveals Why Her Baby is Not Tiernan’s,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 20 Sept. 1922, 1; and “Confession of Poulin Claimed by Professor,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 Sept. 1922, 1.

³³ Forbes, “Girl, 21, Tells How She Ruled Holdup Gang,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3 Jan. 1923, 1.

clothing such as ruffles and bows, as she had done in her first crime stories, Forbes Herrick at one point apparently realized that she could most effectively use her subjects' own words to reveal their true characters. In a subsequent paragraph, she quoted Honey as stating, proudly, that she was prepared to "blow [his] brains out" when one of her gang balked at committing a holdup. The only physical descriptions Forbes Herrick offered were brief notes about Honey's haircut and her "cheap jewelry."³⁴

The vast degree to which Forbes Herrick had by 1923 separated herself from the sympathetic-toward-women sob sister style is perhaps most evident in her flippant mention of the girl bandit's attempted suicide. Forbes Herrick explained, tongue-in-cheek, "She is sincere when she tells, a bit theatrically, of her attempted suicide . . . Hazy as to details, she is sure that she bought some poison and was ready to take it . . ."³⁵

Clearly, Forbes Herrick not only didn't buy the suicide story, but expected readers to find it laughable, too.

Obviously the flip tone resonated with Chicago's Jazz Age readers, because throughout the 1920s, Forbes Herrick continued to write as though she and her audience were all in on some collective joke about the city's crime problem – as if they'd all thrown up their hands and decided to laugh at the absurd level of public corruption, the way mobsters passed themselves off as legitimate businessmen while making Chicago's streets war zones, and especially the way women were getting away with murder.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

Covering Female Criminals – A Jaded View

In case some readers were missing the sarcasm and cynicism in her regular news articles, in 1927 Forbes Herrick wrote a series of “insider” columns about her life as a crime reporter, explaining everything that she’d learned by working closely with female killers, drug dealers, bandits and gun molls. For by the mid-1920s, she had identified several strategies that female criminals used to evade jail sentences and the noose – and several traps that men fell into, which almost inevitably allowed women killers, at least, to go free in Cook County, Illinois.

In columns alternately titled “Informally . . .,” “Killing Ladies,” “Lady Murderesses,” “Ladies in Crime,” and “Nine O’Clock Ladies,”³⁶ Forbes Herrick explained that female killers were, first and foremost, cognizant that women defendants were almost always acquitted in Chicago, which bred in them a somewhat bemused contempt for the law. In addition, murderesses – most of whom Forbes Herrick tended to portray as vain, to begin with – were aware that appearance counted with juries. Smart female criminals also used repeated refrains and patterns of behavior when protesting their innocence, both at the scene of the crime and before juries. When committing murder, they used guns, as opposed to poison, in order to make their crimes seem spontaneous, and they always had an explanation for why they owned a gun, in the first place. Finally, on a related note, Forbes Herrick found that women almost always played upon male jurors’ sympathies by painting themselves as victims of the men they killed,

³⁶ As noted earlier, Forbes Herrick began writing a sporadically published column titled “Informally” in 1920. It began as a book review feature, then vanished in the early 1920s, presumably as Forbes Herrick’s reportage turned to straight news and crime. However, the *Tribune* sometimes used the same title – “Informally” – when she resumed periodically penning columns in 1927, although the topic was no longer books. Instead, she usually used the space to provide readers with personal insights about her life as a reporter. See, e.g., Forbes Herrick, “Informally – Watching the Trains Pull In,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 July 1927, N3; “Informally: Their Rhetoric Too Often Becomes Supertwaddle,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 June 1927, C2; and “Informally: Hollywood Admires Chicago’s Sky-Line,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 June 1927, C5. At other times, the “Informally” was dropped and her columns ran under various other headlines.

protesting that they'd been abused to the point of having no choice but to eliminate their tormentors.³⁷

While the series was meant to explore the inner workings of female criminals' minds, the columns also reveal much about the development of Forbes Herrick's cynical, sarcastic, blackly humorous style and her frustration with a skewed justice system that practically rewarded self-centered women for committing murder by offering them a degree of fame and time in a jail environment that she referred to as a "spa."³⁸

In the article, "Killing Ladies – The Blonde Sisters," – referenced earlier – Forbes Herrick addressed the first conclusion listed above, i.e., that women in Prohibition-Era Chicago were keenly aware that they could literally get away with murder in their city. Early in the piece, Forbes Herrick posed a question to readers: "Can you spell murder differently for a woman than for a man?" The answer should have been "no," Forbes Herrick added, but was, in reality, "Well, er, yes," at least in Chicago. Forbes Herrick also noted that in 1927 the query was under debate by everyone from the state's attorney to members of civic and women's clubs, indicating that the average Chicago resident was aware that women were consistently acquitted by all-male juries. And this fact, Forbes Herrick explained, made women in 1920s Chicago increasingly bold

³⁷ Several of the themes Forbes Herrick explored in the columns outlined here, such as the ways in which women used their time in jail to improve their appearances, were also discussed by fellow mob sister Maurine Watkins in a straight news article "Murderess Row Loses Class as Belva is Freed," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 June 1924, 10. It is unclear whether the two reporters ever shared their thoughts on "Murderess's Row," but since both covered women incarcerated in the Cook County jail, it seems likely. In addition, in her brief time as a crime reporter, illustrator and mob-sister predecessor Maude Martin Evers wrote straight news articles that touched upon nearly every one of the themes Forbes Herrick would later extrapolate for readers, such as the rationales female killers had for owning guns. See, e.g., Evers's article, "Wife Who Slew Intruder Longs for Lost Baby," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 11 Sept. 1919, 7.

³⁸ Forbes Herrick, "Informally... Jail Can Really Do a Lot for a Woman," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3 July 1927, S2.

about knocking off their boyfriends, husbands and lovers, confident that they would get away with it.³⁹

As noted earlier, “The Blonde Sisters” article recapped the trial of two women who conspired to murder one’s husband, and who were so confident that they would be acquitted that they became, in Forbes Herrick’s view, almost dangerously contemptuous of the judge and jury. She explained, “The women hear their neighbors testify and they glare at them scornfully . . . They hear the police officers talk and they look coldly impudent . . . They won’t humble themselves to woo the twelve [jurymen] . . .”⁴⁰

However, the fair-haired killers professed to be worried about their fate – precisely because so many women had already escaped hanging. Forbes Herrick quoted one of the sisters as fretting, in richly colloquial language, ““So many really bad women have beat the rope . . . that men are scared to death of bein’ called mollycoddles. [Jurymen]’ve been kidded for fallin’ for looks, that they’re like as not to soak it to us . . .”⁴¹

Much to Forbes Herrick’s frustration, however, even open contempt on the part of women and public pressure to see women get convicted on solid evidence weren’t enough to poison a group of twelve men against a pair of “super-blondes.” Both women were acquitted of the crime.⁴²

While covering the jury selection phase of trials concerning women who committed homicide, Forbes Herrick often recorded vignettes related to men’s inability to try women impartially, and the women’s awareness of that fact. Writing about jury selection in the 1925

³⁹ Forbes Herrick, “Killing Ladies – The Blonde Sisters,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 20 Feb. 1927, J2.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

case of murderess Clara Harcq, Forbes Herrick described the defendant as bored by the whole process, explaining, “Mrs. Clara Devinger Harcq, 31 and personable, didn’t mean to retard the selection of twelve men to try her . . . In fact, toward the end of the day, when more than sixty veniremen had been excused . . . Mrs. Harcq snuggled down into her mink wrap and yawned.”⁴³

The problem, Forbes Herrick added, was finding men who could answer the state’s attorney’s question, ““Would you find it just as easy, on the same evidence, to find a woman as a man guilty of murder?”” Forbes Herrick wrote that a “goodly number” of men considered the question and essentially answered, ““Well, you know, we all of us have a tender spot in our hearts . . .””⁴⁴

Regarding the “blonde sisters” case, Forbes Herrick mocked the defense attorney for reinforcing the status quo by offering a post-verdict speech about jurymen’s “duty of treating a woman ever with consideration,” because ““the statue [sic] of Liberty is a woman.””⁴⁵

So confident were women that they could kill with impunity that some began to approach murder as a legitimate way to gain celebrity. After casually noting, ““Well, it looks like the electric chair for me,”” a murderess who clearly didn’t believe that “signed her name to her confession and made a pretty speech or two about love,” Forbes Herrick reported in a 1926 article. She added, “Then Mrs. Mullins bethought herself of beauty. She grieved angrily over the way the some newspaper photographs made her look terrible – just like this,’ screwing her face into a grimace.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Forbes Herrick, “Plead Tender Hearts to Avoid Holt Case Jury,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 Nov. 1925, 16.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Forbes Herrick, “Killing Ladies – The Blonde Sisters,” J2.

⁴⁶ Forbes Herrick, “Husband Led to Death Trap for Love, Wife Says,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 13 April 1926, 3.

Similarly, Forbes Herrick described a woman on trial for killing her husband as both reiterating her innocence to the press – but also adding the “insistent refrain, ‘Hope they use my best picture, the one over the mantel.’” A few paragraphs later, Forbes Herrick expanded upon that lament, noting that the killer “was torn between despair at the tragedy and fear that the newspaper men, in their casual flashlights, might not get so good a photograph . . .”⁴⁷

Forbes Herrick also related the story of the sole unfortunate – not coincidentally unattractive immigrant woman – who did get sentenced to hang for murder in 1920s Chicago, but nevertheless seemed to enjoy her notoriety. Even when she was awaiting execution, Sabelle Nitti craved attention from reporters who were beginning to focus on “new ladies of guns,” as Forbes Herrick dubbed them. She explained how Nitti, recognizing that interest in her story was waning, would interrupt jaded journalists’ attempts to interview other women in the jail, writing:

Sabelle, irked at even momentary neglect, would rush up and break in upon the interview with her boastful prophecy:

“Me choke, me choke.”

But the lads and ladies with pencils would turn aside, saying, “O, Sabelle, you’ll never choke. Go way [sic]; you’ve had your share of front page stuff . . .”⁴⁸

More directly – but clearly satirically – Forbes Herrick in a 1927 column suggested murder as a way for women to achieve fame. After asking female readers if they’d be interested in becoming celebrities, she urged, “Then commit murder and you’ll be famous, for at least the busy span of time between the moment the desk sergeant scribbles your name across the police blotter to the moment the foreman . . . hands over his verdict to the clerk of court.”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Forbes Herrick, “Killing Ladies – Lillian Rowland, the Story-Book Housewife,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 13 March 1927, I4.

⁴⁸ Forbes Herrick, “Ladies in Crime – Sabelle Nitti, the Senora With Wrinkles,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 April 1927, J4.

⁴⁹ Forbes Herrick, “Lady Murderesses,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 Feb. 1927, F10.

Forbes Herrick repeatedly blamed men for being foolish enough to overlook evidence and set quite obviously guilty women free. But she seemed even more frustrated by how female criminals used their looks to manipulate the system in their favor. Several of her columns focus on women's transformations in jail, and she often described female courtroom defendants in ways that let readers know that she was aware that clothing, makeup and accessories were tools that women and their counselors used to help ensure the already expected not-guilty verdict, since beauty "ever will remain the most royal road to acquittal."⁵⁰

Forbes Herrick pointed to the transformation of Sabelle Nitti – the immigrant sentenced to hang – as a classic example of jail time serving to help women beautify, and thus free, themselves. Nitti "did more than learn the value of publicity," Forbes Herrick noted. ". . . She learned, first, to take a bath." Soon, the inmate Forbes Herrick initially described as "a wizened up, crouching, monkey-like creature, with chewed-off fingernails, matted hair, leathery skin, and inarticulate grunts," was addicted to soaking in a tub, her skin further cleaned and softened by working in the jail laundry. Nitti also "bethought herself of clothes," Forbes Herrick related, explaining how other inmates would give Nitti "bits of their finery, ribbons . . . a piece of lace . . .," all of which Nitti would use to improve her wardrobe.⁵¹

According to Forbes Herrick, Nitti was a "new woman" by the time she entered the courtroom for a second trial. "Her hat was velvet . . . Her coat was fur. The high laced shoes were of resplendent patent leather . . . There was powder on her face . . ."⁵²

⁵⁰ Forbes Herrick, "Lady Murderesses – The Orthwein Case," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 Feb. 1927, F10.

⁵¹ Forbes Herrick, "Ladies in Crime – Sabelle Nitti, the Senora With Wrinkles," J4.

⁵² *Ibid.*

A short time later, the “first woman in Cook County to receive the death sentence since the days records were kept” found herself up for a new trial “on the grounds of ‘insufficient evidence,’” Forbes Herrick wryly concluded.⁵³

She described a similar, and equally effective, transformation in her profile of killer Bernice Zalimas, a piece subtitled, “Gets 14 Years Dressed in Mourning, but Gets Out in Gay Clothing.” Forbes Herrick explained, acidly, that in her first trial, “Zalimas . . . wore all black, for wasn’t she in mourning for her husband . . . even though it was for his murder that she was being tried?” But by the second trial, Forbes Herrick explained, “Bernice, her widow’s grief somewhat assuaged, wore those golden shades that combine happily with golden hair . . . She was acquitted.”⁵⁴

Forbes Herrick was even more direct about how women – on instinct, on the advice of counsel, and at the suggestion of inmates who had gone before them – helped to increase their chances of acquittal by changing their appearances in her column titled “Informally . . . Jail Can Really Do a Lot for a Woman,” which explained the various ways in which incarceration could be beneficial for women facing trial. With her typical tongue-in-cheek attitude, she noted that “[i]n these pleasant days of nearly always amiable juries,” jail was usually just an “ante-room” in which the female criminal “loiter[ed] on her way back to the kitchen or the cabaret.” Many women, she added, used their time behind bars to improve their looks by making new clothes or updating their makeup routines – because “. . .who is to say what value that new blouse, fashioned in the jail, might have on the second juryman in the first row?”⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Forbes Herrick, “Ladies in Crime – Bernice Zalimas – Two Trials and Out,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 24 April 1927, 12.

⁵⁵ Forbes Herrick, “Informally... Jail Can Really Do a Lot for a Woman,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3 July 1927, S2.

She similarly referred to jail as a spa in her straight news article, “Lady Slayer Indorses Jail as Rest Cure,” in which Forbes Herrick suggested jail as an alternative for people who didn’t find it “convenient to run down to Hot Springs.” She then quoted killer Bertha Hellman as telling reporters, ““O, the jail’s so nice . . . I get lots of time for fancy work. I’ve made a lot of pretty things.””⁵⁶

In other news articles, Forbes Herrick was also quick to point out how women used their appearances to effect while on trial. This is especially clear in her coverage of one of Chicago’s most notable homicides, often referred to as “the McClintock case.” The case involved young millionaire William “Billy” McClintock, who died of a particularly virulent form of typhoid right before marrying, which would have altered his will and deprived McClintock’s legal guardians of a substantial fortune. Subsequently, the guardians – William and Julie Shepherd – were accused of deliberately infecting their charge.⁵⁷

Although both guardians were charged with the crime, Forbes Herrick paid particular attention to Julie Shepherd, whom she dubbed “just about the most baffling feminine personality that a coroner’s jury ever charged with murder . . .,” adding, “And, it would seem, a mighty strategic woman.”⁵⁸

She went on to paint Shepherd as cunning in both appearance and manner at an early phase of what would become an extended courtroom drama, writing:

With all the fighting force of a militant, but just the right leaven of pliant femininity; with soft black for mourning; but a touch of white for the mode, perhaps; with face and phrase adapted to each changing syllable, the woman who

⁵⁶ Forbes Herrick, “Lady Slayer Indorses Jail as Rest Cure,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 23 March 1927, 13.

⁵⁷ For a brief summary of the convoluted case, see Forbes Herrick, “State’s Charge of Panhandling Jars Shepherds,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 Jan. 1925, 3.

⁵⁸ Forbes Herrick, “Mrs. Shepherd Freed on Bail; Sees Husband,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 May 1925, 1.

may or may not know the secret (if, indeed, there is a secret) of Billy's death, talked.⁵⁹

Even the older, unattractive murderess the press dubbed "Grandma Nusbaum," who hired her boarder to kill her husband, prettied herself up as her court case went on, according to Forbes Herrick's reports. A typical initial description of Grandma showed her as shabby and disheveled, with "ruffled" hair, a "near-seal coat, with the lining frayed," and "near-silk stocking . . . twisted awry." But even Grandma – who was never called by anything but that nickname in Forbes Herrick's articles – eventually made an effort to improve herself. "Grandma Nusbaum daubed a swathe of white powder over her nose; drew a wobbly red line about her drooping lips; draped a flimsy black veil over her tear stained face," Forbes Herrick explained, describing Nusbaum's preparations for attending her victim's funeral, where she knew she would be on public display.⁶⁰

Forbes Herrick even implicated herself in the problem. In her column about murder as a way for women to achieve fame, she blamed the press for making murderesses seem glamorous. "Perhaps the feminine defendant owns a book," she wrote, sarcastically indicting her own profession and newspaper readers. "Splendid. Immediately she becomes a literary killer. The public likes that for a change." Killers – even drab ones – tended to appear glamorous in comparison to their surroundings, she added. In a passage that reminds readers that Forbes Herrick visited spaces considered off-limits to most female journalists, she pointed out, "The coroner's inquest gets her off to a good start. For it doesn't require much skill or beauty to the hold the spotlight in an undertaking parlor." Then she took aim right at herself – and reinforced her status as a seasoned crime reporter – by revealing that she had preyed upon killers' attempts

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Forbes Herrick, "Grandma Love for Winn Now Turns to Fear," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 Jan. 1926, 1.

to improve their appearances by trading “a relatively new powder puff for an obvious old alibi” with “at least a half hundred” accused killers.⁶¹

Forbes Herrick even went so far as to legitimate the female criminals’ beauty strategy in an especially candid article titled “Informally . . . Feminine Fallacies in Newspaper Work.” For once abandoning her usual sarcastic style, Forbes Herrick called it “fundamentally valid” for women to primp for male juries, judges and even reporters. “And why shouldn’t she?” she asked. “I have been as guilty as the rest in underscoring, in my notes, during a trial, the costume, makeup, and appearance of the woman on trial.” Moreover, she added, men took care with their appearances, and “the judge . . . is careful to be well groomed. The assistant state’s attorneys . . . try to vary their costume day by day, in an important trial.” In addition, Forbes Herrick observed, “The haberdashery and sox of the defense attorneys are likely to be dazzling. For there is only one Clarence Darrow.” And although, throughout her career as a reporter, Forbes Herrick would continue to lament the ways in which male juries were swayed by attractive females, she did admit that – having been taught “in boarding school, at home, in every success magazine” – that a woman should always look her best, “Why, then, the inconsistency of trying to look nice to save herself from the gallows. [sic]”⁶²

As outlined earlier, Forbes Herrick also took note of repeated verbal refrains and patterns of behavior that female criminals of all stripes used when protesting their innocence, both at crime scenes and before juries. And while she may have had some sympathy for women criminals who took care with their appearances, the use of these other tropes clearly helped to contribute to her generally cynical attitude toward the women she covered.

⁶¹ Forbes Herrick, “Lady Murderesses – The Orthwein Case,” F10.

⁶² Forbes Herrick, “Informally... Feminine Fallacies in Newspaper Work,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 17 July 1927, N2.

For example, in several 1927 columns, she referred to female criminals as “nine o’clock ladies,” because they all claimed to be homebodies who went to bed before nine p.m. – and said, directly, of the type, “How I hate her.” It is obvious that by 1927, Forbes Herrick’s encounters with female criminals had left her not only jaded, but borderline angry with women who swilled gin, cheated on their husbands and wielded guns, then claimed to be mousy housewives. Of the “nine o’clock ladies,” she wrote, somewhat bitterly, “She is the 1927 alibi for most of the feminine errors. She is the embodiment of that guileless sentence, ‘Me, guilty? Mercy no. Why I’m in bed every night at 9.’” Further, Forbes Herrick added sarcastically, these “innocent” women inevitably wore “simple gingham dresses,” and claimed to have “never, never been in a night club, except when her own dear father took her there to hear the music.”⁶³

Forbes Herrick’s first referenced the “nine o’clock ladies” in a column re-examining a particular case. But later that year, she wrote more extensively on that topic in a column titled “Nine O’Clock Ladies,” in which she cynically called them the “product of a woman’s rhetoric, a smart attorney, or a good press agent.” It was the women, themselves, upon whom Forbes Herrick heaped scorn, though. Seeming to vent perhaps years of frustration with duplicitous subjects, she described the “nine o’clock ladies” as “. . . members of a dawn to dusk society who insist they love simplicity so much that they’d rather churn butter than dig for gold . . .,” adding, “If one-tenth of the women who . . . have murmured to me . . . that they are just simple souls who are always in bed by nine, really spoke the truth, most of our night clubs would put on the padlock voluntarily.”⁶⁴

⁶³ Forbes Herrick, “Lady Murderesses – The Orthwein Case,” F10.

⁶⁴ Forbes Herrick, “Nine O’Clock Ladies,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 May 1927, J4.

She added that police matrons told reporters that the same girls who insisted that they knew nothing of crime shared different stories when they were behind bars, where the “thrill of competition asserts itself,” so the “toy pistol becomes a businesslike automatic” and the “boy chum” a “bold, dashing buccaneer.”⁶⁵

In the same piece, Forbes Herrick explained how her cynicism had been heightened by an encounter with a young Polish immigrant accused of poisoning her husband. Something about the girl struck Forbes Herrick as genuine, and she found herself “ready to go her bail.” While she didn’t go that far, Forbes Herrick did return to her office “prepared to write an epic on poor Sophie.” However, when she reached her desk, she found a note urging her to call the police station. She then related, in a conversation rich with prison slang:

“Say, lady,” shouted the sergeant over the wire when I finally got him, “you know the dame you wuz just chinnin’ with? Well, she done it.”
“Done what?” I queried stupidly. For the moment I had quite forgot that an ugly murder with a packet of poison had probably been “done.”
“She bumped her old man off . . . She’s just confessed . . .”
Sophie’s in jail. Her trial’s coming along . . . And if there is a Polish equivalent for the phrase “nine o’clock lady,” I’m sure Sophie will use it the first time she gets a chance on the witness stand.⁶⁶

Forbes Herrick didn’t shy away from expressing similar cynicism in her straight news articles, either, such as her story about a murdered mobster’s fiancé, who was under questioning for her boyfriend’s death. Forbes Herrick noted, incredulously, “Why, she explained, she’s just the daughter of a Baptist minister” who couldn’t possibly “know anything about Tony’s death except that it was terrible.”⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Forbes Herrick, “Tony Genna’s Fiancee Quizzed; Little Learned,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 19 July 1925, 3.

Along with their insistence that they went to bed early every night, female criminals – in particular killers – used other common strategies that Forbes Herrick identified during her extensive exposure to that unique subculture. In fact, in 1927, she penned a satirical primer for would-be murderesses, urging them, “When the police rush in and find you, somewhat confused, between the gun and the gin, be prepared.” She then suggested that women should dress to kill, writing, “If you are smart you will don an orchid chiffon negligee before you essay to make your mark on your husband, or the other woman’s.” Finally, “as you give your statement to the officers, don’t forget to have on the tip of your tongue an anthology of platitudes . . . with a generous refrain of . . . ‘I loved him so; I had to do it.’”⁶⁸

That last phrase – “I had to do it” – seems to have been particularly bothersome to Forbes Herrick, who obviously held in special contempt cold-blooded female killers who blamed their actions on self defense.

Describing the Cora Orthwein case, referenced earlier, Forbes Herrick wrote that Orthwein claimed that she shot her abusive boyfriend in self defense and “was irked when the state thrust up an insinuating question mark over the fact that the second self defense outlet plunged into [the victim’s] back.” Forbes Herrick later quoted Orthwein as moaning, “‘Herb, I had to do it . . .’”⁶⁹

Forbes Herrick repeatedly implied that few, if any, of the women killers she covered ever “had” to do anything. While claiming self defense, most of them – as turned out to be the case with the Polish immigrant girl who nearly fooled Forbes Herrick into buying her story of

⁶⁸ Forbes Herrick, “Lady Murderesses – The Orthwein Case,” F10.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

innocence – had boyfriends waiting in the wings or insurance policies that were cashed awfully quickly.

In a 1926 article titled “He Was Cruel, I Had to Kill Him, Wife Sobs,” Forbes Herrick twice quoted killer Lillian Schaede as speaking the “not unusual syllables of women who have killed their husbands. ‘I had to do it. He was so bitterly cruel.’” Forbes Herrick then described how Schaede, “who has packed many crises into her thirty two years of life,” outlined her deceased husband’s cruelties, including his bad habit of pinching: “‘He pinched me, O, terribly,’ she made a grimace as she told it.” However, Forbes Herrick made a point of reminding readers that Schaede “did not do anything just then.” Instead, she waited until her husband was in bed, then “left the bedroom of her . . . son by a previous marriage” and “fired one shot.” Forbes Herrick next related a grisly scene in vivid detail, describing how the bullet struck the man in the heart, but he “struggled to get out of bed, got caught in a swirl of bloody blankets, and dropped to his knees, dead.” Then Forbes Herrick reiterated, yet again, the phrase that rang so hollow with her, stating that at the next day’s inquest, Schaede “sobbed ‘I had to do it; I had to do it.’” She ended the article with a quote from a witness who mentioned that the murdered man had recently discovered that Schaede was “‘running around with somebody.’”⁷⁰ Forbes Herrick clearly wanted readers to understand that, in spite of Schaede’s protests, she did have a choice, and more motive than just being pinched.

Forbes Herrick also frequently described women as fainting or crying while being questioned by police or on trial, implying that the incidents were staged for effect. Consider her description of killer Bernice Zalimas, whose case was described earlier: “Then things were about to happen in that courtroom. Bernice cut swaths in the air with her hands. Her body swayed

⁷⁰ Forbes Herrick, “He Was Cruel, I Had to Kill Him, Wife Sobs,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 17 Jan. 1926, 3.

back and forth . . . Then she swooned and court was temporarily adjourned . . .” And when the jury returned, Forbes Herrick explained, the men found Zalimas not guilty.⁷¹

Grandma Nusbaum also tried fainting when under tough questioning, but didn’t quite pull it off, according to Forbes Herrick, who wrote, “she quietly slipped into semi-consciousness . . . But she didn’t quite faint.”⁷² Similarly, in the article “Girl Wife of Taxi Robber Sobs Out Tale,” she described a “lady bandit” as crying under questioning. But, as she often did, Forbes Herrick used the girl’s own words – her slang and poor grammar – to let readers know that the tears were almost certainly false. She quoted the girl as telling reporters, “‘The next thing we knew,’ Clara’s tears seem very real, ‘a copper was knocking at the door. We thought somebody was trying to kid us, for we’d never done nothing. We never even seen a gun, much as less used one.’”⁷³

Even more cynically, Forbes Herrick reported this vignette from the inquest of Lillian Rowland, described as “the Story-Book Housewife,” who killed her dentist husband:

From where we [reporters] sat, at that inquest, it did look as if one of her friends, at the apex of the whole scene, slid his right foot over to her left one, and beat his heel, cruelly, down into her instep. Of course the tears came to her eyes. She winced and jumped with pain. And she collapsed, sobbing when her story was done.

Now the incident may have been an accident.
But – the jurors were crying when they filed out.⁷⁴

Forbes Herrick related that Rowland “[p]resently . . . recovered” enough to read a “quatrain of philosophy” from a notebook that “had been her constant and mournful guide for

⁷¹ Forbes Herrick, “‘Ladies in Crime – Bernice Zalimas – Two Trials and Out,’” 12.

⁷² Forbes Herrick, “Ladies in Crime – ‘Grandma’ Nusbaum, the Amazing Grandmother,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3 April 1927, 12.

⁷³ Forbes Herrick, “Girl Wife of Taxi Robber Sobs Out Tale,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 May 1925, 7.

⁷⁴ Forbes Herrick, “Killing Ladies – Lillian Rowland, the Story-Book Housewife,” 14.

months,” as she suffered life with her supposedly cruel husband. However, Forbes Herrick observed, “The ink looked remarkably fresh, but, shucks, a coroner’s inquest isn’t a clinical laboratory!”⁷⁵

Forbes Herrick then obligingly reprinted a sappy lyric about “true love lost,” explaining that the media-savvy Rowland had passed the book around and directed all the reporters present to copy it down, “so that the significant poem might be correctly recorded in the next edition.” When the jury returned with a not-guilty verdict, Forbes Herrick recalled, “Kisses and embraces for the six. A fresh pot of cold cream for the widow. And, maybe, some witch hazel and liniment for the sore instep.” Then she added, wryly, “Within a few days Lillian was administratrix of her dead husband’s estate.”⁷⁶

Like most “self-made widows,” as Forbes Herrick sometimes described the murderesses she covered, Rowland used a gun – which Forbes Herrick identified as yet another common strategy among female killers. She equated shooting to the ultimate temper tantrum, writing in 1927 that using a gun “is merely a more emphatic, egoistic way of stamping the feet, of bursting into tears, of screaming in shrill soprano, ‘I don’t care.’” In that same article, she added that few murderesses chose poison because it would have been almost impossible to deny premeditation, whereas one could almost always claim to have shot a man “on the spur of the moment.” She went on to point out, yet again, how common it was for women to shoot men in Prohibition Era Chicago, calling the crime “so frequent that it is almost axiomatic” and attributing it to women

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

who were only “slightly irritated,” but determined to “show ‘em. Instead of stamping her foot, she pulls a gun . . .”⁷⁷

Women, Forbes Herrick added, always had (questionably) valid reasons for owning a gun, beyond a secret desire to kill their husbands or boyfriends – even if that had been their intent, all along. From long experience in dealing with female killers, she wrote, “The gun is their favorite bit of equipment. They know well enough that it will shoot when they purchase it or beg it as protection from the man they are later to kill.” In a passage that made the women she covered seem especially menacing, Forbes Herrick observed, “They keep it and cherish it, and somewhere deep down in their consciousness is that comforting, solacing guarantee: ‘Of course, I really wouldn’t use it, but if I did . . .”⁷⁸

Forbes Herrick wrote frequently, and incredulously, of women’s rationales for owning guns, as in the case of murderess Cora Orthwein, who, on the night she killed her boyfriend – “another woman’s husband” – was “drinking one more glass of gin and grabbing from the bedside table the very gun which [the victim] had once given her for protection . . .”⁷⁹ And describing the arrest of “storybook housewife” killer Lillian Rowland, who claimed spousal abuse, Forbes Herrick wrote, “The killing wasn’t particularly original,” adding, “. . . Mrs. Rowland grabbed her gun. Yes, she had one. Needed it for self-protection, because she was so often alone . . .”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Forbes Herrick, “Killing Ladies – Emily Strutynsky, the Would-Be Joan,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 March 1927, H2.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Forbes Herrick, “Lady Murderesses – The Orthwein Case,” F10.

⁸⁰ Forbes Herrick, “Killing Ladies – Lillian Rowland, the Story-Book Housewife,” I4.

The murder weapon played an especially big role in Forbes Herrick's article, "He Was Cruel, I Had to Kill Him, Wife Sobs," subtitled, "Says Mate's Taunts Drove Her to Mail Order Gun." Forbes Herrick made a point of playing up killer Lillian Schaede's flimsy reason for owning a weapon, making sure, without ever stating it directly, that readers understood that Forbes Herrick thought the rationale was absurd and the timing suspect. She wrote, "The gun, [Schaede] explains it quite casually, she had purchased by mail order . . . about two weeks ago. The reason? 'O, nothing except that our dog was killed by an automobile and I was afraid, so I got the gun for protection.'"⁸¹

In addition, Forbes Herrick featured the weapon in her reportage on the trial of killer Florence Stokes, "who began life in an orphanage and doesn't want to end it in a jail" for killing the man with whom she'd shared "a none too wholesome love affair," as Forbes Herrick summed up the case. After describing scenes of abuse – for Stokes used the "I had to do it" defense that Forbes Herrick had identified as common by 1927 – Forbes Herrick outlined Stokes's account of the crime, which involved her boyfriend handing her his gun as a "joke," during an argument that escalated into a brawl. "'Then I fired,'" Forbes Herrick quoted Stokes as saying. "'What did I fire for – I don't know.'"⁸²

At first glance, this is a rare article in which Forbes Herrick initially seemed almost sympathetic toward a woman on trial for murder. With seemingly little or no humorous agenda, Forbes Herrick was careful to include details about a scar Stokes bore, which seemed to corroborate the killer's version of the fight-turned-ugly. Forbes Herrick also mentioned Stokes's pathetic beginnings in the orphanage, her youth, and the way her boyfriend "sneered and swore"

⁸¹ Forbes Herrick, "He Was Cruel, I Had to Kill Him, Wife Sobs," 3.

⁸² Forbes Herrick, "Florence Stokes Defends Herself at Murder Trial," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 April 1927, 8.

when Stokes asked if their relationship would ever “mean anything.” But after painting that sorry picture of a vulnerable young woman, Forbes Herrick tore it apart in two paragraphs, explaining how several witnesses corroborated that the dead man never owned, let alone carried, a gun. Meanwhile, Forbes Herrick related, two police officers testified that they had found cartridges, a brush for cleaning a gun, and “some penciled instructions, all about the proper way to manage an automatic, in Florence’s bureau drawer.” Forbes Herrick then recounted Stokes’s weak explanation of this “triple coincidence,” explaining that the murdered man had given Stokes the gun, which she “handed . . . right back, because she didn’t want it, but forgot to return the cartridges.” With regard to the instructions, Stokes insisted that someone had “told her a tale, gleaned from the newspapers, of a bootlegger who was killed by another bootlegger, all because his gun stuck.” And the cleaning equipment, “she insisted, came from her place of employment.”⁸³

Forbes Herrick’s ability to identify common threads linking female killers – their confidence in their immunity from punishment; their use of appearance to manipulate juries; their common refrains and actions, including cries of victimhood; and their reliance, almost exclusively, upon guns – clearly demonstrates that she was an experienced crime reporter. Moreover, both her columns and her straight news stories offer proof that she was a regular fixture at the county jail, coroner’s inquests and trials. One might also come away with the impression that Forbes Herrick was anti-woman, which does not seem to be the case. She was clearly dismissive of a certain type of woman – notably those who committed crimes and then refused to take the blame – but she could also be sympathetic toward victims and write with admiration of those who exhibited bravery.

⁸³ Ibid.

One article that stands out as an example – and reinforces that Forbes Herrick tackled assignments that were considered inappropriate for most women during that era – involves a brutal rape case. Under the headline “Girl Blurts Out Vivid Story of Youths’ Attack,” Forbes Herrick wrote about a girl who might have acted impulsively and gotten herself into a bad situation by taking a ride with three boys, but who ultimately stood up for herself in court, clearly winning Forbes Herrick’s approval. Although Forbes Herrick described the girl as “pale . . . fumbling her way unsteadily into the courtroom,” she also applauded her for telling the story of her assault in a “fervent burst of frankness, the like of which doesn’t often come from the lips of a woman witness.” Forbes Herrick added, “She didn’t shed a tear. She didn’t back away from a word. From out of the mouth of the young co-ed came phrases that stilled the listeners – a story of terrible explicitness.”⁸⁴

Forbes Herrick then re-related that graphic tale, herself, deftly avoiding words and details that presumably would have been inappropriate in that era – the word “rape” was never actually used – yet managing to convey the power of the girl’s testimony, without ever devolving into sob-sister-like maudlin sympathy. She wrote:

It was then, for the first time, that Dorothy said, loud and clear, the words she declared [her first attacker] said to her so many times that night. The crowd in the court room appeared to back away from the words and the girl went on. “When [he] told me that, I said, ‘How dare you?’ and I kicked, but he kept on.” The struggle – and it was a terrible one, the girl declared, lasted some time, when [the first attacker] climbed out of the car and [the second] climbed in. And always, she said, there was the everlasting refrain of shocking language. She repeated it word for word.⁸⁵

Forbes Herrick could even be sympathetic toward the female killers she so often mocked, as in the case of Kitty Malm, dubbed “The Tiger Woman” by the press. In a 1927 examination

⁸⁴ Forbes Herrick, “Girl Blurts Out Vivid Story of Youths’ Attack,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 June 1926, 1.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

of the case, Forbes Herrick pointed out that Malm “was no saint,” adding, “Maybe she did carry a gun where most girls hide their love letters.” However, Forbes Herrick blamed Malm’s mother for pulling the girl out of school in fifth grade and sending her to work in a factory, where she was essentially forced into marriage at age fifteen, after being threatened with scarring if she wouldn’t comply. “Four years later,” Forbes Herrick wrote, “she can still remember the ugly names her husband called her.” And, although pregnant, Kitty Malm couldn’t return to her mother’s house, “for her stepfather called her worse names than her husband did.” While admitting that Kitty wasn’t a perfect mother, Forbes Herrick nevertheless expressed admiration for the girl’s devotion to her child, writing, “Kitty, it is very possible, was too busy ‘prowling joints’ ever to belong to a mother’s club . . . But she did love the baby . . . and worked for her, fought for her.”⁸⁶

Forbes Herrick summed up her conflicted feelings toward Malm when she later described her as “a curious mother: fierce, sincere, inconsistent, earnest, impassioned, pathetic.” In fact, Malm, who escaped after a botched robbery resulted in a murder, turned herself in because she wanted to be reunited with her child.⁸⁷

Recounting the trial, Forbes Herrick, normally so skeptical of women’s roles in such affairs, for once sided squarely with Kitty, who was also shot during the robbery – by her husband, Otto, sarcastically derided by Forbes Herrick as “gallant.” And she didn’t use Malm’s coarse language and poor diction for humorous effect, as she normally did when covering women on trial. She seemed to agree with Kitty when the girl, realizing that her husband was trying to pin the crime on her, commented, “‘It’s always ladies’ day when it comes to shovin’

⁸⁶ Forbes Herrick, “Ladies in Crime – Kitty Malm, the Tiger Woman,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 27 March 1927, G2.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

some one up before the cops.’” For once, Forbes Herrick also believed that Kitty Malm’s tears and even her fainting spell at her sentencing were real, in part because the faint was triggered by the announcement of a life sentence.⁸⁸

She then lambasted a system that freed pretty women and condemned a girl with a “sturdy, stolid peasant figure” and “greasy black hair” who never had a chance at a decent life by first pointing an accusing finger at all the men in Malm’s life: “Stepfather, boys in the factory, husband, more men, the gallant Malm, and the 12 men who sent her to the penitentiary for the rest of her natural life, while those other ladies of uglier crimes and less ugly faces and features were given a smile and an acquittal . . .” Then she concluded, “If ever a 19-year-old girl had reason to be a cynic about men, it seems to me that Kitty Malm . . . had that right.”⁸⁹

Of course, Forbes Herrick didn’t only write about female criminals. Many of her hundreds of bylined crime-related stories involve male offenders or concern mob-related crimes, in which gun toting men and the women who stood by them – or sold them out – were often equal subjects for coverage.

Reporting on Leopold and Loeb’s “Thrill Killing”

As explained earlier, Forbes Herrick was arguably the *Tribune*’s lead reporter on the 1924 trial of “thrill killers” Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, the case that established her reputation as a hard news reporter, and during which she, by necessity, set aside her trademark acerbic wit. She wrote more than thirty bylined articles on the trial – twenty-five of which appeared on the front page, frequently with headlines that spanned the top of the paper. She

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

earned far more bylines than male colleagues assigned to the story, and was trailed only by her husband, John Herrick, whose stories more often appeared deeper in the *Tribune*.

The fact that a woman was the paper's lead voice on the Leopold-Loeb case is especially indicative of the faith the paper placed in Forbes Herrick when one considers the significance of the story, which even today has an enduring fascination. The case started with the disappearance of a wealthy boy, Robert Franks, on his way home from school and ended with the conviction of two equally wealthy and brilliant young men, Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, who admitted to killing Franks just for the thrill of the experience. The motive – or lack thereof – along with the prominence and intellectual promise of the killers, in combination with sexual overtones to the crime, shocked the nation, and the trial drew approximately 600 reporters on the first day.⁹⁰

The *Tribune* was among the papers that gave the story huge play. On June 1, 1924 – preceding a page-one story by reporter Orville Dwyer about the case – the *Tribune* printed an explanation for its extensive coverage, with the subhead, “An Unprecedented Crime.” The first paragraph called the crime “unique in Chicago’s annals and perhaps unprecedented in American criminal history.” Therefore, the *Tribune* “gives to the report many columns of space for news, comment and picture.” The blurb also explained how the paper planned to cover the developing story, and who would play what roles. Of the six reporters named as key to the story, three were men – and three were female subjects of this dissertation. The paper promised:

The Tribune has aimed to set the story forth in these general lines: the day's news developments following the early morning confession, told by Orville Dwyer; a consideration of the psychology and psychiatry of the case, by Miss Genevieve Forbes; a review of the Loeb youth's life and family, by Miss Maurine Watkins; of the Leopold youth and his family, by Miss Maureen McKernan; the detective steps by which the case was worked out, by John Herrick; the Franks family, by Paul Augsburg; and other miscellaneous features of the crime.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Higdon, *Leopold & Loeb*, 7-8.

⁹¹ “An Unprecedented Crime,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 June 1924, 1.

Each of those individuals did earn a byline that day, with Forbes Herrick's appearing on page three. However, she would soon work her way to the front page, eclipsing Dwyer in terms of bylines. And her role in the coverage, even initially, was arguably important, given that the killers' psychology and motives were of particular fascination to the audience. The *Tribune*, in its explanatory paragraph played up "the suggestions of perversions; the strange quirks . . . in the confession that the child was slain for . . . experience, for the satisfaction of a desire for 'deep plotting,'"⁹² and the trial would center upon the testimony of physicians and "alienists" who probed the defendants' psyches and explored everything from their views of the universe and elaborate fantasy lives to their sexual experiences.⁹³ The public, which might have found gangsters killing gangsters and women exacting revenge upon men somewhat amusing, was clearly alarmed by the fact that two boys from "good" families could become cold-blooded, seemingly emotionless killers, and wanted answers. The fact that the boys had "unusual intellects" and "appeared readily to know the difference between right and wrong" – yet seemed to have "extensive derangements" – only made the psychological aspects of the crime more compelling.⁹⁴

While the male reporter, Dwyer, initially handled the key stories about the boys' confessions, in the long run, Forbes Herrick had the meatiest topic, as the boys' psychological make-up, questions of sanity and insanity, and the killers' professed belief in "modernist"

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Detailed overviews of the testimony can be found in Simon Baatz, *For the Thrill of It: Leopold, Loeb and the Murder that Shocked Jazz Age Chicago* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008); Higdon, *Leopold & Loeb*; and McKernan, *The Amazing Crime and Trial of Leopold and Loeb*; as well as by reading Forbes Herrick's original trial coverage.

⁹⁴ McKernan, *The Amazing Crime and Trial of Leopold and Loeb*, vii-viii.

philosophies, such as Nietzsche's theory of the superman, became *the* central topics of the trial. Defense attorney Clarence Darrow tried to "focus" the trial on "the condition of the defendants' minds," according to historian Nathan Miller, who relates that Darrow called in three psychiatrists to testify and spotlighted Freudian theory in a twelve-hour, two-day summation, pinning Leopold and Loeb's actions on unconscious impulses.⁹⁵ *Tribune* coverage of the trial even showed the defense employing an X-ray machine to "Seek Flaws in Boy Slayers," as the headline proclaimed.⁹⁶ Clearly, the boys were guilty and had not only admitted as much, but bragged about their culpability. But . . . *why*? In a series of page-one articles with titles such as "Alienist Under Cross-fire,"⁹⁷ "Insanity Fixed, Crowe Hints,"⁹⁸ "New Sanity Clash Looms,"⁹⁹ "Slayers' Gland Systems Blamed for Diseased Minds,"¹⁰⁰ and "Call Slayers' Dream Plea Trivial,"¹⁰¹ Forbes Herrick tried to answer that question for a populace whose concern about changing sexual and ethical mores among youth had suddenly spiked closer to alarm.

Forbes Herrick's first article, "They Slew for a Laboratory Test in Emotion," set the tone for her future writing on the Franks murder. She was not flippant, but she was also more directly critical of the killers than was usually the case. For example, she accused the killers, who prided

⁹⁵ Nathan Miller, *New World Coming*, 161.

⁹⁶ "X-Ray Now to Seek Flaws in Boy Slayers," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 18 June 1924, 6.

⁹⁷ Forbes, "Alienists Under Cross-Fire," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 Aug. 1924, 1.

⁹⁸ Forbes, "Insanity Fixed, Crowe Hints," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3 Aug. 1924, 1.

⁹⁹ Forbes, "New Sanity Clash Looms," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 Aug. 1924, 1.

¹⁰⁰ Forbes, "Slayers' Gland Systems Blamed for Diseased Minds," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 Aug. 1924, 1.

¹⁰¹ Forbes, "Call Slayers' Dream Plea Trivial," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 Aug. 1924, 1.

themselves upon their intelligence, but who were caught after leaving evidence at the scene of the crime, of committing “the most stupid murder of them all.”¹⁰²

Forbes Herrick also showed off her master’s degree in English, first describing the criminals as modern versions of Oscar Wilde’s Dorian Gray, then adding, in a passage that combined obscure Italian literature with the 1920s’ fascination with Freud’s new theories, “[Leopold and Loeb] had all the material for a sixteenth century Benvenuto Cellini manuscript, shot through with black shadows and blacker passions . . . erotic whimsies . . . grotesque murder, fantastic death, all interlarded with the modern Freudian sex complex.”¹⁰³

She continued with a detailed history of both Leopold and Loeb, emphasizing their intelligence – Leopold “absorbed books and facts and theorems with a facility that became almost a ‘mental deficiency,’” while Loeb was a “prodigy” – and provided quotes from a criminologist and the director of an organization called the Institute for Juvenile Research. However, the bulk of the approximately fifty-paragraph story consists of Forbes Herrick’s personal musings on the potential dangers of precocity and the perils of intelligent boys growing up with so much wealth and privilege that they grew bored and asked, “‘What next?’” In the middle of the piece, she referred again to Dorian Gray, outlining the gist of the story and drawing the conclusion, “the quest for turning down just one more page of experience goes on to its logical conclusion: murder, suicide.”¹⁰⁴

The article is arguably too speculative by modern standards, but it does demonstrate that, very early in the case, Forbes Herrick already had a fundamental grasp of the questions that law

¹⁰² Forbes, “They Slew for a Laboratory Test in Emotion,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 June 1924, 3.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

enforcement officials, attorneys, and the public would find most interesting, and some potential explanations that might be raised as the full story unfolded.

As the trial progressed, she wrote with more reliance on facts and succeeded in translating sometimes complex technical jargon into language that most readers could understand. As Steiner explains, in her research focusing primarily on Forbes Herrick's writing specifically for women, Forbes Herrick ". . . coolly explained the various esoteric psychiatric maladies to which both defense and prosecution experts referred in a way that enabled readers to determine the potential implications of this testimony." Steiner adds that the *Tribune* assigned several reporters to the trial, "But it was Genevieve who most consistently and persuasively presented the personalities involved."¹⁰⁵

One of the personalities she exposed most effectively was that of Nathan Leopold, whom she interviewed as part of a group of reporters, prior to the trial. In an extensive article, Forbes Herrick derided Leopold as "sophomoric," like "a Scott Fitzgerald hero who's showing off after his first drink of gin" and who "finds it easy and pleasurable to speak of himself in the third person." She also made it clear that she found his pretense irksome, writing that while everyone kept referring to Leopold as "an intellectual giant . . . most of the normal minded folks who saw him yesterday would like to take Mr. Nathan E. Leopold Jr . . . turn him over their knee, Phi Beta Kappa key and all, and spank him with a hair brush." She added, in a direct editorial comment, "Perhaps they should have done it years before . . . this youth had the opportunity to assign himself the supreme problem in the behavioristic psychology he loves – before Leopold and Richard Loeb murdered Robert Franks."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Steiner and Gray, "Genevieve Forbes Herrick: A Front-Page Reporter "Pleased to Write About Women," 10.

¹⁰⁶ Forbes, "Old Fashioned Discipline Need of Leopold Jr.," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 June 1924, 3.

The reporters were invited to talk with Leopold while he ate dinner at a Chicago restaurant, under the care of police guard, and, as she frequently did with criminals, Forbes Herrick used small details to make Leopold, trying so hard to impress, look foolish. For example, when the killer compared himself to Thomas Babbington Macauley, perhaps expecting the reference to be too obscure for members of the press, Forbes Herrick made it clear that she knew Macauley as an historian with “so gigantic a memory that if all the texts of Virgil were destroyed he could rewrite them from memory.” She then described how “Mr. Leopold” made the comparison while “sitting there eating a pickle,” somehow, with one well chosen word – “pickle” – making the young man seem ridiculous.¹⁰⁷

She also deflated Leopold – yet admitted to being somewhat cowed by his intelligence – in an anecdote that began with Leopold asking reporters what they thought of the ransom note that Franks’ kidnappers, whom he coyly referred to as ‘they,’ sent to the murdered boy’s family. Forbes Herrick wrote, “Inwardly his listeners may be ready to slap him for a ‘smart aleck . . .’ Actually they fumble for words. He helps them out. ‘Contrasted to the average kidnapping letter, it’s pretty good . . .’” Other ransom notes, Leopold added, were usually “‘illiterate.’”¹⁰⁸

Just when Leopold seemed to have the upper hand, Forbes Herrick noted, wryly, “Somebody suggests that the author misspelled “kid-naper,” using the two p’s.”¹⁰⁹

Then Leopold’s attention turned to Forbes Herrick – and other women reporters at the dinner, if any were present, which is not clear. And once again, Forbes Herrick seemed to chide herself, somewhat, for failing to speak up in the presence of a boy she skewered in print. She

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

related: “‘It’s too bad . . . for a newspaperwoman to have to work on this story,’ he muses. ‘It’s too sordid for a woman.’ And nobody asks him if it wasn’t a bit too sordid for the men who did it.”¹¹⁰

Still, while Forbes Herrick might have disappointed herself by not confronting Leopold at the restaurant, she got the last word in the *Tribune*, where she concluded the article with a reference back to Leopold’s habit of referring to himself in the third person, “[l]ike Julius Caesar.” Yet, even as she poked fun at him, she also ultimately gave him some degree of credit for his cool conduct. After relating a superior joke that Leopold made, she wrote, “He’s too sure of himself to chuckle. But Mr. Leopold is glad that Mr. Leopold said that. In fact, Mr. Leopold is pretty well satisfied with the day’s conduct of Mr. Leopold.” She then conceded, “It’s been consistent; it’s been brittle and metallic in its scientific poise; it’s been undisturbed by any details; it’s been courageous in a curious sort of way.”¹¹¹

In all, the story is a compelling, revealing portrait of a young man whose psyche would be the subject of endless probing in the succeeding weeks, with experts on personality never reaching agreement on quite who he was. In Forbes Herrick’s article, though, Leopold comes distinctly, complexly alive – while Loeb seemed of little interest to her. She described Loeb standing against a wall at the county jail and dismissed him as “white and pathetic. He looks like somebody’s younger brother who’s overdrawn his school allowance and thinks it’s terribly serious.”¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

In subsequent articles, Forbes Herrick kept the spotlight on Leopold, and continued to capture his complicated personality, as in an article about Leopold's promise to commit suicide if sentenced to hang. On one hand, Forbes Herrick seemed impressed by Leopold's sangfroid when he declared that he had no fear of death and would prefer to die on his own terms, rather than hang at the hands of the state, in an article that again put her in close contact with the killer. But she also noted, cuttingly, that the "master mind" who claimed to have kept one bottle of soda laced with strychnine in the event that "things got too hot" for him, "didn't quite see the humor of" his complete failure to keep himself from getting caught, in the first place.¹¹³

Her keen interest in the baffling killer is also apparent in an article titled "Leopold Has 'Laughing' Fit in Court." Recounting testimony that questioned whether Leopold's sparse facial hair indicated any kind of mental deformity, Forbes Herrick noted that Leopold abruptly burst into laughter, a scene that she described in detail. "Then he breathed, and laughed some more. The wind went wrong, and all sorts of things began to happen with his face and throat muscles." He next "stuffed a handkerchief to his mouth . . . and the incisive eyes of the group about him couldn't tell whether he was crying or laughing."¹¹⁴

Then Forbes Herrick wrote that courtroom observers suddenly stopped asking the question, "'What's going to happen to Leopold?'" to focus on "'What has happened to Leopold?'" Again indicating her key role in the trial coverage and access to Leopold, she added that "back in the jail," Leopold told curious reporters that the line of questioning simply amused him, and that he was "'laughing now to think what a spectacle I must have made of myself."¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Forbes, "Leopold Says He'll Die Game, If That's His Fate," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3 June 1924, 3.

¹¹⁴ Forbes, "Leopold Has Laughing Fit in Courtroom," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 Aug. 1924, 1.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

It was a rare, humanizing moment in the trial of a boy whose humanity was under question, and Forbes Herrick mined it to advantage, giving readers yet another insider look at a young man who was the object of national fascination.

Another key part of Forbes Herrick's coverage of the case was her page-one article about the most heart-wrenching moments of the trial: the testimony of the slain boy's mother and father. Avoiding the sob sister trap, Forbes Herrick conveyed the parents' emotions as they told of waiting for a boy who never came home, but she never allowed the tale to become mawkish. She described Mrs. Jacob Franks as relating "with numb obedience" her recollections of the last time she saw her son, Bobby, alive. Forbes Herrick added, with the type of subtly admiring prose that she would later use in 1926, when writing about the rape victim who stood up to her accusers in court, "[Mrs. Franks] didn't shed a tear. She didn't faint, nor collapse. Not once did she protect the lines of her mouth with her hand. She didn't moan." Forbes Herrick also described Mrs. Franks's walk to the witness stand in ways that indicated that the reporter appreciated the mother's stoicism: "Very tall and very straight she was . . . Like an Old Testament figure."¹¹⁶

The grief that Forbes Herrick did capture wasn't forced by overly flowery prose, but rather by her very factual descriptions of Mrs. Franks's attempts to control her grief – as well as the spectators' collective discomfort – which gave the story a tense sense of tragedy.

Pointing out that that the mother's testimony lasted only seven minutes, Forbes Herrick reported that spectators initially seemed "a bit ashamed to stare" at Mrs. Franks. She recorded the questioning in a Q&A format, sometimes interjecting observations, such as: "Q. – When did

¹¹⁶ Forbes, "Mrs. Franks Bares Tragedy," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 24 July 1924, 1.

you next see [Bobby], his body? A. – Friday, no, Saturday night. It was easier not to look at the mother as she said this.”¹¹⁷

Finally, Forbes Herrick explained how the mother fought hard to maintain composure, and won, when handed the shoes her son was wearing at the time of his death and asked to identify their owner. “If you’ve ever seen a mute working hard to ejaculate a phrase,” Forbes Herrick described the scene, “then you know how Mrs. Franks struggled to articulate these four words: ‘My son. Robert Franks.’”¹¹⁸

Almost all of her subsequent articles dealt with debates over the defendants’ sanity and their responsibility for the murder, beginning with a front-page story in which she recapped the prosecuting attorney’s opening salvo in vivid prose that captured attorney Robert Crowe’s escalating rhetoric. She began by telling readers how Crowe established himself as a folksy layman “who didn’t know much about fancy terms for psychosis,” and who tried to connect with the jury by “suggesting that perhaps many of his comrades round about were just plain folks with plain terms for plain things.”¹¹⁹

Then she let readers in on Crowe’s strategy, explaining that he sought to lead those in the courtroom to conclusions he’d already drawn, but in ways designed to make observers think they’d deduced everything for themselves, and were thus as clever as the lawyer. “It’s an art of drama, that trick,” she explained. She also let readers know that she was aware that Crowe spoke deliberately slowly, in an almost irritating manner that in reality “teases listeners to urgent attention.” She then effectively conveyed Crowe’s sarcasm as he told the jury, in increasingly

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Forbes, “Alienist Under Cross-Fire,” 1.

loud and emphatic tones, that – if they were to believe Clarence Darrow – Leopold and Loeb might have committed murder, but that they were “mere infants running around in a boyish dreamland” who had done nothing more serious than dropping a jar of jam. “Each sentence began a little heavier than the one proceeding it,” Forbes Herrick related. “And each sentence ended on a stronger note than it had started.” The prosecution’s final sarcastic question – asking how anyone could be “so cruel and vicious” as to suggest the death penalty for boys who “say there is no God,” but who seemed to “believe in Santa Claus” – rang, in Forbes Herrick’s opinion, “Like the final high note of an aria.”¹²⁰

In Forbes Herrick’s article, the manner in which Crowe delivered his address and the underlying strategies he employed were as important – if not more important – than the words, themselves. Forbes Herrick not only provided quotes, but assigned motives, giving readers what read like an expert, insider’s view of courtroom proceedings. Although Forbes Herrick was not an attorney, she drew upon her experience as a seasoned trial observer and, arguably, her background in literature (such as when she referred to the “tricks” Crowe used to create drama) to position herself as a credible source of information.

In later articles about the trial, Forbes Herrick similarly broke down the sometimes esoteric testimony of “alienists” – psychologists and psychiatrists – in language that simplified the concepts, but didn’t leave readers feeling ignorant, in part because Forbes Herrick was never afraid to make it clear that she, and others in the courtroom, including the self-professed “layman,” Crowe, were learning along with her audience. Describing one psychiatrist’s

¹²⁰ Ibid.

testimony, she hinted at being somewhat confused, writing, “One minute it was like an old-fashioned charade,” while, “The next it was as academic as a graduate course in psychology.”¹²¹

Ultimately, however, Forbes Herrick succeeded in making even the most complex theories accessible, as she did in her article, “Alienists Pick a Rare Disease for Babe, Dickie,” which had the subhead, “So Unusual It’s Not Found in Most Textbooks.” She introduced the defense’s planned strategy by accusing the attorneys and psychology experts of trying to “befuddle” the jury, then explained the ploy in a way that appealed to the average reader: “For those twelve men will not be asked to judge the boys ‘nuts.’ But they will be asked to find the university students the victims of a ‘folie a deux.’” Next, Forbes Herrick defined the phenomenon in technical terms, explaining that “it is that particular mental disease which results from the coincidental and intimate association of two personalities, mutual supplementary in a disastrous way.” A few paragraphs later, after reminding readers that the jury might not “get” the experts’ jargon, she put the disease, which posits that two individuals can influence each other’s mental stability, in laymen’s terms: “Boiled down, it means, ‘How sane I’d be with t’other away.’”¹²²

When Forbes Herrick found testimony confusing – or perhaps feared that her audience would do so – she was quick to make fun of obscurantism. After trying to explain, in several paragraphs, the sum of the psychiatric experts’ opinions on Leopold and Loeb’s sanity or insanity and the difference between intellectual achievement and emotional retardation, during which she used diagnostic phrases such as “disintegrated personality,” “profound judgment disorder,” and “definite paranoid psychosis,” she chided both the defense and prosecution for

¹²¹ Forbes, “Expert Paints Crime-Twins,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 5 Aug. 1924, 1.

¹²² Forbes, “Alienists Pick a Rare Disease for Babe, Dickie,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 19 July 1924, 3.

being too esoteric. She wrote, tongue-in-cheek, that the debate over the killers' sanity had become a "metaphysical football that is being kicked about," while the question essentially boiled down to: "Just how insane can a sane man be without being so insane he needs a jury to determine just how insane or sane he is."¹²³

Forbes Herrick again made readers feel as though they might be justifiably confused in her article, "Loeb Hears Self 'Dissected,'" which described testimony about "gland tests" that were administered in an attempt to determine a physiological reason for Leopold and Loeb's actions. She described the scene in the reporters' gallery as the test results were discussed, writing, "The more technical the phrases grew the less noisy the typewriters which had been clicking along so busily. Presently there was but one caligraph (it was run by a studious looking man from New York) trying to follow the report."¹²⁴

In yet another front-page piece, "Slayers' Gland Systems Blamed for Diseased Minds," she seemed to be skeptical about the scientific evidence on display. Noting that neuro-psychiatry was a brand new branch of medicine, she explained, "It had to do with the endocrine system . . ." which she basically said no average person would have the slightest knowledge of, if not for the ongoing murder trial, noting that the proceedings " . . . put the word 'endocrine' into the vocabulary of the layman." Forbes Herrick then described an expert as holding up various X-rays of Leopold's chest and a "sinister enough" picture of the killer's skull, juxtaposed against technical jargon such as "thymus gland had involuted early." Over the course of several paragraphs, she showed the doctor repeatedly pointing to shadows and "calcifications" that might have contributed to Leopold's behavior. However, she undercut the seriousness of the

¹²³ Forbes, "Loeb's Girl Friends Called," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 Aug. 1924, 1.

¹²⁴ Forbes, "Loeb Hears Self 'Dissected,'" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 9 Aug. 1924, 1.

moment and managed to gently mock the doctor by adding that laymen were urged to ignore some telling streaks on the film that were made by nothing less ominous than the “unsymmetrical splash of the preparation Mr. Leopold had used to keep his hair smooth.”¹²⁵

Along similar lines, Forbes Herrick seemed to take particular delight in the way two girls called to testify about their friend Loeb’s behavior injected their commonsense diagnoses into proceedings heavy with technical definitions of “sane” and “insane.” After recounting the girls’ recollections of Loeb’s strange behavior at a party, which included sticking his thumb into every chocolate on a plate and trying on various guests’ hats, Forbes Herrick related this bit of testimony:

“I thought it was rather peculiar,” Miss Nathan is talking, “and I told my sister I thought he was idiotic. But my sister said he was not idiotic but was coo-coo.” And she explained the difference between insanity and being idiotic as best she knew . . . And later, with almost expert authority, she dubbed him “infantile.”¹²⁶

In a rare insertion of humor in her Franks case coverage, Forbes Herrick described how the girl seemed oblivious to prosecutor Crowe’s attempts to discredit her authority, mockingly calling her “doctor,” which seemed to go right over the head of the “plucky” girl, who continued to offer her personal diagnosis with “the assurance of 18.”¹²⁷

Forbes Herrick’s coverage of the Leopold and Loeb case seems to have cemented her already growing reputation as a crime reporter, and in 1925, she was a fixture on the front page for her coverage of some of the region’s most brutal crimes, writing straight news leads such as,

¹²⁵ Forbes, “Slayers’ Gland Systems Blamed for Diseased Minds,” 1.

¹²⁶ Forbes, “Girl Defies State for Loeb,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 Aug. 1924, 1.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

“Madeline White, the 16 year old girl whose daring fling at life was lopped off Thursday night when she was attacked, then murdered and her body shoved under a porch . . .”¹²⁸

Another very straightforward lead, written on the road, from Kenosha, Wisconsin, read, “Kenosha’s double murder remained still a double mystery tonight.” And Forbes Herrick pulled no punches in describing crimes, writing bluntly about the “lifeless bodies, two bullets in the head . . . pulled out of a ditch on lover’s lane . . .”¹²⁹

It is apparent that no effort was made to shield Forbes Herrick from brutalities long considered too shocking for “delicate” women reporters – and that she was able to report, dispassionately, even the most gruesome details, as when she described the death of a six-year-old boy “attacked . . . and left dying with a broken skull,”¹³⁰ or noted that “three abdominal wounds would have caused [the victim] so great and so immediate shock that she could not have fired the fourth bullet into her mouth.”¹³¹

As noted before, even coverage of rape – although the word was carefully avoided, replaced with the euphemism “attack” – was not off-limits for Forbes Herrick, whose reportage on the Madeline White case, quoted above, included the killer’s confession about his sexual assault to police. It was an “ugly story,” according to Forbes Herrick, who reported “[h]ow Mulholland strong armed the girl and stuffed Costello’s blue bandanna handkerchief into her mouth as he dragged her into a passageway.” Readers – cued in by Forbes’s reminder that police were calling the crime “two dirty deeds,” an “attack” and murder – were then invited to draw their own conclusions about what happened when the man named Costello walked away and sat

¹²⁸ Forbes Herrick, “Mother Paints Background of Girl’s Murder,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 11 July 1925, 1.

¹²⁹ Forbes Herrick, “Inquiry Adds Mystery to Murder of 2,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 17 October 1925, 1.

¹³⁰ Forbes Herrick, “Trail Riding School Killer,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 19 Dec. 1926, 1.

¹³¹ Forbes Herrick, “Doctors Make Holt Slaying Queer Puzzle,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 20 Nov. 1925, 7.

on the sidewalk, waiting for his friend to deal with the girl.¹³² One can also assume that Forbes Herrick, working at the police station and in the field on many similar stories, was not spared details and sights that were considered not suitable for print.

Underworld Insider: Forbes Herrick and Chicago Mobsters

The Leopold-Loeb case and other similar crimes described above were harsh interruptions of a decade that for the most part saw Chicago residents taking a certain amount of twisted glee, sometimes bordering on pride, in the city's reputation as a rough and tumble playground for gin-soaked female killers and especially the mobsters who controlled alcohol distribution and politics.¹³³ And when the Leopold and Loeb trial ended, Forbes Herrick for the most part again unleashed the more flippant, ironic tone that she largely suppressed during the grim proceedings about a boy killed for no reason.

With regard to her mob-related stories, she is probably best remembered for getting an exclusive interview with Al Capone and a series of insider looks at women with ties to the mob, promoted by the *Tribune* as an examination of "the status of femininity in gangland."¹³⁴ However, she frequently covered everything from mob slayings, funerals, trials and – in some of her most sarcastically, cynically humorous pieces – women who stood by their mobster men when the men got in trouble. She also used slang, often incorporated in quotes, to best effect in these articles, which not only worked to heighten the humor, but also demonstrated how familiar she was with that aspect of criminal culture. In her brief biography for the booklet *Women and*

¹³² Forbes Herrick, "Mother Paints Background of Girl's Murder," 1.

¹³³ To get a good sense of Chicago residents' pride in their city's reputation for lawlessness and coarseness, see Kathleen M'Laughlin, "Chicago Looks Toughest From Afar, It Seems," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 24 March 1928, 1, and Bergreen, *Capone*, 74-75.

¹³⁴ Genevieve Forbes Herrick, "A Gun Widow's Story of Life in Gangland," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 23 March 1930, G1.

The Chicago Tribune, she boasted of her gangland assignments, relating, “I accompanied Big Tim Murphy to jail and saw Dean O’Banion having his nails manicured.”¹³⁵

Her first bylined, page-one mob-related story came as early as 1923, and it was a substantial piece that took her on the road to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, accompanying “racketeer and bootlegger”¹³⁶ “Big Tim” Murphy, who was traveling to prison. The article “Murphy Reaches Leavenworth Today” actually focused on the journey, during which Big Tim – about to be a captive – took advantage of the captive audience *he* had on the train, a group that consisted of reporters and federal marshals, to opine on everything from Prohibition to King Tut.¹³⁷

Forbes Herrick – likely the only woman reporter there, because she quoted Murphy as calling the journalists “you fellows with the pencils” and “you guys” and referred, herself, to the “newspaper men” – brought the mobster to life by recounting the twists and turns of the conversation, and through physical description. She started, however, with a quote for a lead, which let readers know that Big Tim – while “6 feet three inches of correct tailoring” – was actually coarse, and not happy about his escort: “My grandfather didn’t have nobody with him when he started off for the civil war [sic]. I guess I don’t need no bunch of bozos to hold my hand and smooth my hair when I get into my dinner clothes at Leavenworth.”¹³⁸

This is typical of Forbes Herrick’s style when covering the mob. As she often did when she wrote about female criminals, she emphasized male mobsters’ efforts to appear respectable and educated, then used their own words to reveal them as uneducated, boorish thugs. This was

¹³⁵ *Women and The Chicago Tribune*, 35.

¹³⁶ Bergreen, *Capone*, 278.

¹³⁷ Forbes, “Murphy Reaches Leavenworth Today,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 Feb. 1923, 1.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

especially true in the Big Tim Murphy story. She referred to Murphy teasingly as “the philosopher” and described how he spoke with (misguided) authority on the need for laws that would modify Prohibition by allowing for the sale of “light” wine. Then she added, sarcastically, that “the man who has twice been implicated in a murder” offered a “disquisition on the impropriety of carrying guns,” and said, randomly, of King Tut, ““That poor cuckoo; he ought to stay buried . . .”” Forbes Herrick also made someone’s suggestion that Murphy write a book about his prison experiences seem laughable by offering the mobster’s ungrammatical, slangy response: ““No, I ain’t gonna write no bunk or keep no diary; I ain’t got no violet ink.””¹³⁹

Yet, as with Leopold, Forbes Herrick seemed to appreciate Murphy on one level – namely, his gift for storytelling. At the conclusion of the article, as the “marshals begin to yawn,” she recounted how Murphy started to tell “after dinner stories” about “the prima donnas and headliners of the jail social registry.” The last few paragraphs gave the reader the sense of being along for the ride, and served as a reminder that Big Tim might have been an uneducated killer guarded by federal agents, but that he was the star of the show and somewhat in charge. She wrote:

“Pipes,” “Skittles,” “Slim,” alderman [sic] from back of the yards, they come to life in the drawing room and “Big Tim” Murphy puts them through their tricks. They jump, they whistle, they tell stories. It is late, the soiree is over, the host waves a farewell.
“See you in the morning,” he drawls and motions toward the door. His guests depart, the host remains within, carefully but politely guarded.¹⁴⁰

That Forbes Herrick was no token female reporter sometimes assigned to cover organized crime as a novelty is apparent in other straight news articles, such as her coverage of an inquest

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

into the murder of noted mobster Angelo Genna. As many of her crime articles did, this story also indicated that Forbes Herrick enjoyed a familiarity with police officers and their standard procedures, and that she knew the key players in Chicago's underworld and the ways in which they worked. The story also incorporated gangster slang, identified as a trademark of the mob sister style.

The lead implies that Forbes Herrick already knew what to expect from the inquest, and that she was no stranger to the back story that led to the murder. She observed, "It was just as noncommittal as everybody said it was going to be – that inquest . . . into the death of Angelo Genna," whom she described as "the youngest and toughest of the Genna boys, who piled up dollars about Taylor and Halstead streets as they doled out the alcohol to 'leggers' all over town." She then noted, bluntly and succinctly, "Genna was shot to death Tuesday while riding in an auto."¹⁴¹

Forbes Herrick subsequently described how, when the inquest was suspended, a young man, "none too calm," requested to testify immediately, only to be whisked away by police to give his statement in private. The police captain later explained that the victim's mobster brothers, described as "a complacent enough group, but forbidding," might have wanted to "get to" the frightened witness. Writing with a wink to readers, who presumably would have understood that everyone at the inquest knew exactly what had happened, but wouldn't tell police, and that of course a "liquor prince" who died with a "dozen slugs" in his body would have had enemies, she added that the statement "holds no direct clew to the shooting that may or

¹⁴¹ Forbes Herrick, "Genna Inquest Finds No Clews To Auto Slayers," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 May 1925, 3.

may not be mysterious to those who know Angelo's friends and the enemies which they insist he didn't have."¹⁴²

Repeatedly, Forbes Herrick sarcastically described mob figures as misunderstood innocents, almost always trusting readers to understand that she was not serious. This is especially clear in her article, "Never Again, Terry Says; Lake Ditto," about an interview she conducted with two high-profile mobsters, who claimed "from cell 15" and "cell 19, over at the county jail," that their bad reputations were undeserved. She obviously believed that readers would get the joke in her lead, which played up the mobsters' attempts at respectability:

"They're not the bold, bad leaders of the Valley gang . . . They're just two lads who started in at the bottom . . . and just about the time they are successful . . . along come a couple of bad breaks that present them with more free advertising than they'd like." She added, mockingly, "When it all blows over, and they next enter a smart restaurant, or attend a first night, somebody is going to point a finger and whisper: 'That's him; that's Terry Druggan . . . ' And it's wrong, all wrong . . ."¹⁴³

As she did with Big Tim Murphy, Forbes Herrick noted how Druggan and his partner, Frankie Lake, with "a flair for epigram and a deal of their own sort of philosophy," engaged in a rambling conversation from "their separate cells." Along with making fun of the mobsters, Forbes Herrick's mention that they "chatted of national politics and local courts; of mothers and breweries; of fire departments and infected molars," indicates that she spent a substantial amount of time with them. She also used their own words to continue the joke about their alleged innocence, quoting both Druggan and Lake extensively as they insisted that they were simply

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Forbes Herrick, "Never Again, Terry Says; Lake Ditto," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 19 Sept. 1925, 1.

honest businessmen who worked hard to make some money and inexplicably got blamed for crimes of which they had no knowledge. For example, Forbes Herrick quoted Druggan as saying, “. . . my dad didn’t . . . set me up in a bond house . . . I had to work . . . I bet there isn’t a legitimate business I haven’t been in, except maybe being a prima donna at the opera . . . I work hard and then they pan me for wanting to live nice. What’s the idea?”¹⁴⁴

Druggan was so put upon and misunderstood, Forbes Herrick related, that people didn’t even believe that he was honest about his age. In a quote that made the gangster seem almost charming, she related, “‘That’s another bum rap I have to answer for,’ Terry mused. ‘When I say I’m only 26 they . . . think I’m trying to steal a few. Always trying to accuse me of something, even of cheating on the old guy with the scythe.’” She then reinforced the men’s potential for violence by including an honest response to a question about Druggan’s history of getting into fistfights. In this instance, the mobster’s masculine pride obviously overrode his desire to appear cultured and blameless. Forbes Herrick described how Druggan looked at his fists and said, “‘Guess I’d have to do these babies up in a silk handkerchief to keep ‘em out of trouble . . . I ain’t got round heels.’” Returning to more serious crimes, Forbes Herrick added, tongue-in-cheek, “‘But all this stuff about the two boys being the leaders of the famous valley gang – that preposterous idea irks them.’” Then she related how the mobsters went over the top in their protestations of ignorance about the gang they were accused of leading, quoting Lake as asking reporters, “‘Will you please tell me . . . just what the valley gang is?’” She followed this with Druggan’s attempt at a quip: “‘If we’re members of the valley gang, then Druggan must be the valley and Lake is the gang. That’s all we know.’”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

In a different time and place, the story might have come across as the product of a naive reporter who allowed herself to be manipulated into asserting two criminals' innocence, in effect serving as their public relations spokesperson. But in Prohibition-era Chicago, where the average newspaper reader could have been assumed to have understood that everyone was on the take, and the subjects in question had reached a degree of celebrity for their misdeeds, the tone was clearly satirical. Forbes Herrick also conveyed that she was mocking Druggan and Lake in subtle ways, such as word choice. For example, during his rambling discourse, Druggan offered what she called "a morsel on feminism," which implied that his opinions on women – recounted in a platitude-filled quote – were insubstantial. Then, playing up one of the small details that she often used to make individuals seem foolish, she added, "Then on to teeth," before describing how Druggan complained that no one was helping him with his dental problems. She quoted him as complaining that he was *so* unfairly maligned that, "Why, if I died there'd be an investigation to prove it. And then, they'd probably blame me."¹⁴⁶

Perhaps, however, to ensure that readers knew she didn't really believe that Druggan and Lake were innocents, she concluded the article by reminding her audience of something she pointed out in the first few paragraphs – namely that the men were incarcerated. She wrapped up the story, humorously, with another quote: "Money, yes, we've made it . . . Still, nobody's got us on the cuff yet,' concluded Mr. Druggan and Mr. Lake, in cells 15 and 19, yesterday."¹⁴⁷

Forbes Herrick covered Druggan again at his trial, and the headline – "Throng Sits Up When Druggan Ascends Stand" – once more reinforced how gangsters had become celebrities. She dedicated a good portion of the story to description of how even seasoned courtroom

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

veterans “tried not to look too excited” as a man whose popularity she compared to that of “movie stars” and “baseball heroes” took the witness stand. In fact, Forbes Herrick reported little of the actual dialogue, choosing to focus on the audience’s rapt attention and the way “terrible Terry” stroked his silk socks and watched the judge “through those big, protecting horn rimmed glasses that seem to be in vogue with gentlemen of somewhat mystifying professions.”¹⁴⁸

One could almost argue that the article didn’t really reveal anything about the proceedings – until the final few sentences, when Forbes Herrick took a swipe at the prison system, basically accusing Druggan’s jailers of accepting bribes in exchange for giving the famous inmate preferential treatment. She recorded Druggan as complaining that guards repeatedly told him that if he didn’t behave, he’d have to “eat iron,” a slang term that she defined as spending a lot of time in a cell. Then she concluded, cynically, and again mocking Druggan’s attempts to pass himself off as cultured, “And Terrance Druggan, connoisseur of good dinners and patron of the arts; Terrence Druggan, the country gentleman . . . didn’t like to ‘eat the iron.’ Especially when he was paying big money for a different diet.”¹⁴⁹

In her article, “Hirchie Bad? Nope, a Saint, Says His Wife,” Forbes Herrick interviewed the family of a mobster who operated behind the front of a dry cleaning establishment and whose house had been bombed by a rival gang. In text reminiscent of her “nine o’clock ladies” columns, Forbes Herrick quoted Hirchie Miller’s wife as insisting that her husband was “just a hard working man who provides for his wife and child, works industriously all day, ‘and sometimes at night,’ enjoying only a few simple pleasures.” And Forbes Herrick quoted Miller’s

¹⁴⁸ Forbes Herrick, “Throng Sits Up When Druggan Ascends Stand,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 Sept. 1925, 3.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

mother-in-law as insisting that Harchie – whose “name may have been scribbled across a police blotter a few times” – “never belonged to a gang. Not as much as these what-do-you-call-them, lounge lizards.” Yet, throughout the article, Forbes Herrick also made it clear that these protestations rang false, and that the man ““God took care of . . . when they fired those shots at his car”” was as guilty as any of the murderesses she so readily condemned in print.¹⁵⁰

Forbes Herrick’s mob-related articles were not always good-natured interviews with genial criminals and their families nor concerned with non-violent crimes, such as bootlegging. She also covered gangland slayings. In 1925, she was at a Chicago hospital where, in a lead that reads like a pulp novel, “featherweight alky purveyor” Samuel (Samoots) Amatuna “passed a fretful but silent day” hovering “between death from the bullet slugged into him Tuesday, and life which will probably be made helpless by paralysis.”¹⁵¹

The article also indicates that Forbes Herrick was doing legwork among the gangs, chasing down rumors about the attempted murder. After reminding readers that Amatuna was shot on the anniversary of another noted mob hit, that of rival Dean O’Banion, Forbes Herrick reported on the convoluted underworld relationships in a way reminiscent of her efforts to clarify medical jargon during the Leopold/Loeb trial: “. . . [A]s they whispered it out on street corners where not infrequently they shoot it out, they were recalling that . . . Angelo Genna, powerful man of the stills, had been linked with the murder of O’Banion . . .” She added, “And they were recollecting that when Bloody Angelo was killed some six months ago, the name of Samoots was toyed with in the investigation.”¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Forbes, “Harchie Bad? Nope, a Saint, Says His Wife,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 May 1924, 4.

¹⁵¹ Forbes Herrick, “Samoots Faces Death, But His Lips Are Sealed,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 Nov. 1925, 10.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

Her knowledge of the complex relationships between rival gangs, and her ability to make those interactions accessible, was similarly on display in a front page, straight news article titled “Genna Slaying Revenge for O’Banion, Claim.” Writing in short, staccato, declarative sentences, she offered a brief but comprehensible review of long-standing feuds and gangland peace accords. For example, “Dramatically, the grapevine records then told of a meeting of O’Banion’s henchmen . . . They planned to get the murderer. Then came a conference down at a loop hotel. O’Banion’s gang was represented. So were the boys from the Genna outfit . . .”¹⁵³

She continued in this unadorned style for nearly twenty more paragraphs, foregoing her usual amusing, literary writing in favor of clarity, most likely because the story was full of twists, turns and characters. Even when she described a dramatic gunfight, her prose was unusually spare: “It was a war of sawed off shot guns. When it was over, Mike was dead. So were two policemen. Anselmi and Scalice were arrested . . .”¹⁵⁴

She resumed her usual voice in another series of 1926 articles on Martin Durkin, a bootlegger and auto thief who killed a federal agent, then a Chicago police officer, and led law enforcement officials on a nationwide manhunt. The federal officer, Edwin Shanahan, was the first FBI agent killed in the line of duty, and the case drew national attention.¹⁵⁵ At the *Tribune*, Forbes Herrick was the lead bylined reporter on the story. While many stories about Durkin were not bylined, those that were most frequently appeared under Forbes Herrick’s name. She

¹⁵³ Forbes Herrick, “Genna Slaying Revenge For O’Banion, Claim,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 Jan. 1926, 1.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Durkin appears to have been more of an independent criminal than a traditional mobster, but his story is included in this section both because of its historical significance in the annals of Chicago Prohibition-era crime and because he is sometimes described as a bootlegger. Moreover, thanks to his crimes, he was romanticized and made famous, similar to gangsters such as Big Tim Murphy and Al Capone. For more information on Durkin, see the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s official website, where there is a history of the Chicago Division: “A Brief History,” accessed 18 Feb. 2013, <http://www.fbi.gov/chicago/about-us/history/history>.

wrote a total of twenty-two bylined articles on the case, far outstripping male colleagues. By comparison, in 1926 John Boettiger wrote two attributed stories about Durkin,¹⁵⁶ James Doherty wrote two,¹⁵⁷ Sidney Sutherland wrote one,¹⁵⁸ and Orville Dwyer wrote one.¹⁵⁹ Of those articles, four ran on January 21, 1926 – the day Durkin returned to Chicago after his capture. Dwyer’s and Sutherland’s stories ran on page three, while Doherty’s and Forbes Herrick’s articles both appeared on page one.

Moreover, her first article put her closest to Durkin, as she was again sent on a train ride, this time to cover the killer’s journey back to Chicago from St. Louis, where he was captured, along with a new wife he’d met while a fugitive.

The article, which noted that “a bigger crowd than paid homage to the Prince of Wales . . . welcomed [Durkin] home,” is more serious than Forbes Herrick’s coverage of the Big Tim Murphy excursion. While Durkin “laughed a lot” at first, to tell reporters stories about how he evaded the law, he grew sober, Forbes Herrick explained, when his new bride’s parents boarded the train. Apparently, young Irma Sullivan had neglected to tell her family that she had married the nation’s most wanted man. Using small details, instead of overwrought prose, to create a sense of poignancy, Forbes Herrick described how two very simple people finally shamed a blustery, self-satisfied gangster into silence, writing, “. . . [Durkin] stopped talking . . . when Bert Sullivan, a blacksmith, and Minnie Sullivan, in her so worn near seal coat and the little

¹⁵⁶ John Boettiger, “‘Hang Durkin,’ Is State’s Cry on Eve of Trial,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 May 1926, 8, and “Durkin’s Cocky; Says He’ll Be Out in a Week,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 Jan. 1926, 2.

¹⁵⁷ James Doherty, “Durkin Faces Girl Nemesis,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 Jan. 1926, 1, and “Durkin Grilled All Night: U.S. Gives Up Captured Desperado to State,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 Jan. 1926, 1.

¹⁵⁸ Sidney Sutherland, “Mob at Station Gets Glimpse of Captive Durkin,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 Jan. 1926, 3.

¹⁵⁹ Orville Dwyer, “‘Marty Is Fine, Big Boy,’ Say Mother, Kindred,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 Jan. 1926, 3.

satchel, got on the train, crying to see their daughter . . .” She added, “No, he didn’t do any talking then. He sat and jiggled the uncompromising steel bracelet on his right wrist . . .”¹⁶⁰

Durkin didn’t remain silent long, though, and Forbes Herrick again used the criminal’s own words and observations of his restless actions and voice inflections to bring him to life like a character in fiction. Durkin, she told readers, “talks fast . . . when he’s building himself up,” as he did when telling the story of his capture. She noted that he had trouble telling stories in order, explaining, “It’s like getting a bat shut up in a room and expecting to have it remain in one place to get Durkin’s narrative going in a straight line . . .”¹⁶¹

And while the main story was the double murder, which she recounted primarily in Durkin’s own slang-filled, colorful words, she again included a vignette that might have seemed peripheral to other reporters, but which she used to round out her portrait. She quoted Durkin, describing one of the shootouts that earned him “two murder stripes,” as saying, ““Sure, I fired twice in that rat hole. I was loaded nine times and had seven left when I got out.”” Then Forbes Herrick noted that the man who had just gleefully and proudly outlined a murder glanced at the door to his train compartment, where a photographer’s powder flash had left a black mark. All at once, Durkin’s bravado was again diminished. According to Forbes Herrick, he offered a mild curse, “Jiggers,” and looked like a “bad boy” caught with a “spit ball.” She also included a quote that made him seem almost sheepish: ““Better clean that up before the porter comes. He’ll think the bad man, Durkin, blew his breath on the wood and turned it black.””¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Forbes Herrick, “Durkin, En Route to Justice, Tells of Wanderings,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 Jan. 1926, 1.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid. Note: Forbes Herrick twice uses the phrase “bad man” – presumably as a euphemism for Devil. It is unclear whether it was *Tribune* policy to avoid the word or if Forbes Herrick made that choice. Given her flair for alliteration, it is easy to imagine her preferring “Devil Durkin,” though.

Then – after wryly reporting Durkin’s advice on how to steal cars, “always from dealers” – Forbes Herrick turned her cynical eye on Durkin’s bride, Irma, who claimed that she really didn’t know that she was marrying a nationally wanted murderer until long after the ceremony. However, Forbes Herrick explained, in a passage heavy with sarcasm, that an enlightened Irma decided to stick with Durkin, “reassured by his promise to reform and lead a clean life, and by the two [mink and squirrel] coats, a beaded bag, a Russian embroidery dress, a silver and grey suede toque, and much affection . . .” Conjuring yet another amusing image, Forbes Herrick described how Irma “leans her blonde, bobbed head on [Durkin’s] shoulder, with the federal agent’s hand somewhere in between.” The article ended with another reference to Irma’s loyalty to the man who provided for her so well: “The girl in the mink coat kissed him.”¹⁶³

Subsequent stories by Forbes Herrick gradually revealed Durkin as losing his bravado – and his women, of which he had several waiting in Chicago, aside from the wife he’d gained on the road. While not always the focus of her coverage – much was just straight news – this angle was consistently played up by Forbes Herrick to inject humor into what was an otherwise primarily grim tale, as Durkin quickly slipped from glamorous fugitive toward prison or possibly the noose.

The key females in the sidebar drama that Forbes Herrick wove into the murder story were Durkin’s overly emotive mother; his new wife, Irma, who initially pledged to stand by her man; and Durkin’s brash longtime girlfriend, Betty Werner, who emerged as the star of the story. In one article, written as the trial started, Forbes Herrick predicted that the wife and lover, at least, would “hold a good share of the spotlight during this trial.” She also implied that Durkin’s Lothario ways would come back to bite him, since Betty – presumably angry that the boyfriend

¹⁶³ Ibid.

she “twice saved . . . from police; the girl he swore always to stick, and the one he seems to have forgotten all about” – was going to testify, which could lead to “surprises.”¹⁶⁴ In other words, would Betty, at least, get her revenge by sending Durkin to the gallows?

It isn't clear in the 1926 articles, but Forbes Herrick was already familiar with Betty Werner, having interviewed her in 1925, shortly after Durkin shot the federal agent. In the 1925 article, which centered upon Betty's defense of Durkin, Forbes Herrick wrote, jadedly, that Betty – after wrapping the requisite ermine coat, a birthday gift from Durkin, around her shoulders – “went on to make those statements which lovely ladies, for many a year, have been making in defense of their man, when he get sin [sic] a jam.” Namely, Forbes Herrick quoted Betty as claiming Durkin “wouldn't kill a dog,” was “the tenderest hearted thing,” and “never carried a gun, except on long car trip. And everybody has to do that nowadays.” While making it clear that Forbes Herrick didn't believe a word of Betty's defense, she also mocked Betty, in her own words, because the girl, if grasping for cash, had been genuinely duped by a man before. Betty's first husband, Forbes Herrick related, drove a “swell, big car,” and, “He drove it morning, noon and night.” Impressed, Betty married the man, only to discover, as she revealed in a complaint to Forbes Herrick, that “he was a private chauffeur, and I never got another ride in the car.” Durkin, Betty insisted, was by comparison a “peach of a fellow” who “never went with another woman.”¹⁶⁵

At least, Durkin might have been faithful until he married someone else, while Betty still lived in the apartment they shared without a formal commitment.

¹⁶⁴ Forbes Herrick, “Durkin, Bravado Gone, On Trial for Life Today,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 June 1926, 18.

¹⁶⁵ Forbes Herrick, “Durkin Innocent of Killing U.S. Agent, Says Girl in Cell,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 13 Oct. 1925, 2.

Forbes Herrick set the stage for the conflict between feisty Betty Werner and new bride Irma Sullivan Durkin in a darkly funny story about Irma and Betty's first meeting at the courthouse. In a piece titled "Betty and Irma Fight Duel of Pointed Words," Forbes Herrick also convicted Durkin pre-trial, as she often did with female killers, and indicted his lovers, too, writing that the women, "all decked out in the expensive furs that a murderer had bought them, sat in . . . the state's attorney's office . . . and each, with perfumed complacency, ignored the fact that Martin J. Durkin, whose notoriety made them important, had killed two men."¹⁶⁶

Forbes Herrick seemed most dismissive of the wife, Irma Sullivan Durkin, adding that she "erased any unpleasant thought of blood and bullets" with "twaddle" about her husband's innocence.¹⁶⁷

As she also sometimes seemed when covering women who committed murder, themselves, Forbes Herrick came across as almost angry about their self-centered attitudes, especially in three paragraphs that fell under the subhead, "Seem to Forget Killing," which deserve replication in full, the better to spotlight Forbes Herrick's apparently incredulous repetition of the phrase "never once," which underscored her disbelief at the women's callousness:

Never once did blonde, good looking Betty in the summer ermine wrap, gift of Durkin, the lover who said it with furs, never once did she cringe at the knowledge that her former sweetheart had been so quick on the trigger. As for the blonde pretty girl in the mink cape, one of the two somewhat "easy" fur cloaks which Durkin, the bridegroom, had chosen for her, never once did she shiver at the honeymoon revelation, if there was a revelation, that Marty had killed twice and was ready to kill again. Instead, these two young women seemed most concerned with their beauty.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Forbes Herrick, "Betty and Irma Fight Duel of Pointed Words," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 Jan. 1926, 3.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

Forbes Herrick also subtly indicted observers for forgetting that two law enforcement officials were dead, explaining how “Sullivan fans” voted bride Irma “‘heaps prettier’” than the scorned girlfriend, Betty. However, she did give “Betty’s crowd of fans” some credit for their observational skills, at least, by reporting that, upon glimpsing rival Irma through a “door slightly ajar,” “they chorused, ‘She’s pretty, all right. But she looks awful dumb.’”¹⁶⁹

Forbes Herrick then described Durkin’s discomfort at being stuck in the presence of both his girlfriend and his wife, and how he tried to reconcile with Betty, “[h]is technique . . . unhampered by the fact that his wife sat less than three feet away.” Then, all at once, the door that was ajar was wide open, and “[e]ach heroine has the opportunity to look at her rival.” At that point, Forbes Herrick allowed Betty, the girlfriend, to come forward as the stronger, more compelling character, quoting Betty as dismissing Durkin, who had thrown his arms around her, with, “‘You couldn’t find me, so you took the next best thing. Go back to her. Don’t make a chump out of her, the way you made a chump out of me.’” Forbes Herrick continued to create in Betty a bold character by next recording her as bragging that Durkin had always been a free man while she’d looked out for him – “‘Well, Marty Durkin got caught at last. But you’ll notice he didn’t have Betty with him’” – and describing how Betty, although technically the loser, refused to act as such. The article concluded with a small, revealing scene that brought the piece full circle by returning to the detail of the coats, reminding readers that the women were gold-diggers, just as Forbes Herrick used cell numbers to remind readers of mobsters Druggan and Lake’s guilt: “Irma . . . looks over at Betty . . . Betty stands waiting to speak. ‘Sure, I’ll speak to her, but she’s got to come here,’ Betty says.” But, Forbes Herrick reported, “Irma doesn’t move.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

She sends over a sideways smile and wraps her coat around her,” while, “Betty walks into another room and wraps her coat around her.”¹⁷⁰

One other woman, not mentioned before, also came to play a different kind of role in the unfolding story, as told by Forbes Herrick. One of the most compelling vignettes in her trial coverage recorded an unexpected outburst by Durkin when the woman he had made a widow, Minerva Shanahan, took the stand to testify. According to Forbes Herrick, as the “pale, saddened” woman walked through the courtroom, Durkin stunned observers by abruptly breaking down, his “right hand shaking back and forth” as he cried, ““O, Mrs. Shanahan. I didn’t know who he was. I didn’t know who he was.””¹⁷¹

Perhaps not surprisingly, however, Forbes Herrick – by then a jaded courtroom veteran – questioned the sincerity of the breakdown, which she first referred to as an “informal step in [Durkin’s] formal defense,” which centered on his insistence that he believed he was the victim of a holdup when the armed Agent Shanahan confronted him in a garage. Forbes Herrick added, skeptically, “Now whether this outburst was a spontaneous bit of emotion, and some who were near him thought it was,” or “a not unadroit” attempt to convince the jury that Durkin really didn’t know who he was shooting, “nobody is in a position to say.” Regardless, Forbes Herrick wrote, again cynically, that the prosecution quickly asked the widow to identify the clothes that her husband was wearing when shot, which moved her to sobs. Forbes Herrick speculated that the widow’s tears were used to “neutralize” Durkin’s. She later portrayed Minerva Shanahan as a sympathetic, but ultimately strong, individual, using Shanahan’s overall composure to make the formerly blustery Durkin seem pathetic by comparison. After noting the widow Shanahan

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Forbes Herrick, “Durkin Outburst in Court,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 June 1926, 1.

successfully maintained her cool when telling the court that she last saw her husband “on a marble slab,” she exited the stand, unsteadily but under her own power. At that point, Forbes Herrick captured yet another small but important detail, noting that Mrs. Shanahan’s skirt brushed Durkin’s knee as she made her way back to her seat. The touch caused Durkin to have another outburst. Forbes Herrick described what happened next in one spare, but evocative sentence: “The woman in black didn’t turn . . .”¹⁷²

Durkin resumed his status as the story’s main character in Forbes Herrick’s next three front page stories, “Strong Guard Eyes Durkin,” “Durkin Witness Tells Slaying of U.S. Agent,” and “Durkin Calm After Murder, Witness Says.”¹⁷³ The articles were primarily straightforward accounts, but the third is notable for its illustration of Forbes Herrick’s use of slang – usually captured in quotes – to bring criminal culture to life, so the testimony reads like passages from pulp fiction. Nor did she edit out oaths. For example, she quoted one witness as saying Durkin called him “‘a damned good kid,’” before revealing that “‘a rat’” had sold him out as an auto thief. The witness then recalled, in an extensive quote how “‘a dick’” – which Forbes Herrick parenthetically explained referred to the dead officer, Shanahan – “‘walks up to me and stuck a gun in my stomach.” The following paragraph, a Durkin quote, again as recalled by a witness, reads, “‘I had a roll: I owed \$800 on the car, and I didn’t want to get caught; so I say, ‘Wait a minute, wait a minute.’ I fumbled around and I got a gun and I plugged him. He fell over and emptied his whole gun at me and missed me every shot.’”¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Forbes Herrick, “Strong Guard Eyes Durkin,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 Jan. 1926, 1; “Durkin Witness Tells Slaying of U.S. Agent,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 20 June 1926, 1; and “Durkin Calm After Murder, Witness Says,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 July 1926, 1.

¹⁷⁴ Forbes Herrick, “Durkin Calm After Murder, Witness Says,” 1.

Several other stories by Forbes Herrick demonstrate her skill as a straight news reporter who could present a case in exhaustive detail, as in her story, “Hanging Plea Wilts Durkin,” which ran across three columns and was more than sixty paragraphs long. Much of the article is direct and factual – such as her explanations of the deceased officer’s legal right to approach Durkin – but some sections are still rich enough in detail to breathe life into the dry proceedings. Unlike sob sisters, who smothered action under heavy prose, Forbes Herrick wrote simply but with a keen eye for telling movements and facial expressions, as when she described Durkin’s reaction to the prosecution’s attempt to strip him of the romantic, Robin Hood image that the public seemed so eager to bestow upon him. As the accusations seemed to hit home with Durkin, “His eyes, that have been wont to dart so alertly all about the courtroom, remained fixed on the prosecutor. His lips, that often work themselves into a nervous little grimace, half laugh, half scowl, were quiet. Much of the time, his mouth hung open.”¹⁷⁵

Throughout her coverage, though, women remained a focus, often taking center stage, as in Forbes Herrick’s page-one story, “Mother Battles for Durkin.” Demonstrating that, along with picking out crucial little details, she could see testimony through a wider lens, Forbes Herrick told readers that Mrs. Durkin “painted her son’s character in gray” to “wipe away the picture in black which the state had delineated.” In other words, Hattie Durkin first tried to describe her son in glowing terms, as a “hyperpatriot” capable of “superlative generosity to his mother.” Then Mrs. Durkin focused on Martin’s “more petty indiscretions in order to deny the more cardinal one, the murder charge.” The strategy, Forbes Herrick surmised, was to convince the

¹⁷⁵ Forbes Herrick, “Hanging Plea Wilts Durkin,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 July 1926, 1.

jury that Durkin might have been a bootlegger who didn't "always labor the legislative eight hour day," as his mother admitted, but that he was no "wanton killer."¹⁷⁶

The tense and often amusing dynamic among the various women in Durkin's life was again on display in Forbes Herrick's coverage of testimony by girlfriend Betty Werner's family, some of whom were called upon to discount Werner's credibility, since she ultimately did turn on Durkin. Forbes Herrick described a day of complicated familial relationships, culminating in snippy, jealous testimony by Werner's aunt, who condemned her niece as a liar. With her usual wink to the audience, Forbes Herrick told how the aunt insisted that her "cool and impersonal" appraisal of Werner was "not at all the result of any jealousy of Betty's fine lingerie, silk kimono's and 'high hat ways.'"¹⁷⁷

Forbes Herrick also made both girlfriend Betty Werner and wife Irma Sullivan Durkin important figures in her final bylined story on the case, "Durkin Cringes Under 35 Year Cell Sentence." In fact, the women affected by Durkin's actions were the focus of Forbes Herrick's final thoughts on the entire drama – even though all of them were missing when the verdict was read. Forbes Herrick pointed out, "Durkin, the itinerant lover, didn't have Betty in the courtroom to rejoice at the verdict, nor did he have his legal wife, Irma Sullivan Durkin . . . there to pity him." Demonstrating her usual contempt for Irma, Forbes Herrick added that, "Irma, complacent in new clothes, a new bob, and a new job, gave two days of her time to the trial, but that was several weeks ago. She hasn't been heard of since then."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Forbes Herrick, "Mother Battles for Durkin," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 July 1926, 1.

¹⁷⁷ Forbes Herrick, "Durkin Family For and Against Him at Trial," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3 July 1926, 3.

¹⁷⁸ Forbes Herrick, "Durkin Cringes Under 35 Year Cell Sentence," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 11 July 1926, 3. Note: This article is preceded by a 10 July 1926, front-page Forbes Herrick story, "Jury Gives Durkin 35 Years," which, while not discussed in the main text of this research, is notable because it clearly places Forbes Herrick at the courthouse at midnight, in spite of the prevailing belief among editors that women shouldn't be out on the streets

Then Forbes Herrick gave the final word to the widow she'd portrayed in admiring terms at the start of the trial. Becoming more serious, Forbes Herrick reminded readers that Minerva Shanahan had attended the trial every day, then revealed that Shanahan – who, unlike Durkin's limelight-seeking lovers “said the least of anyone in the room” – didn't witness the sentencing. Tracked down for her opinion, Shanahan reportedly said, with a certain amount of grace, “I still feel justified in wishing they had sentenced that man to hang. But I am so glad he is out of the way, for a while, at least, and no other woman's husband is in danger.”¹⁷⁹

The quote ended Forbes Herrick's coverage of the case.

The ostensible capstone of Forbes Herrick's crime coverage was an exclusive interview with the king of the mobsters, Al Capone, which she conducted in 1930, near the end of her time in Chicago. Many biographical references point to her article, “Capone's Story: By Himself,” as a career highlight.¹⁸⁰ However, this research argues that the story is actually quite unremarkable by Forbes Herrick's standards, in terms of everything from subject to content and style. As Moore points out in her retrospective on the Roaring Twenties, Capone knew the value of good public relations and was actually quite accessible to the press. John J. McPhaul, in *Deadlines & Monkeyshines: The Fabled World of Chicago Journalism*, says that accessibility extended to women, explaining, “Scarface Al Capone, prodded no doubt by shadowy advisors . . . granted several interviews to the girls, notably Patricia Dougherty” of the *Chicago American*.¹⁸¹ Writing about the *Tribune* reporter who most frequently covered Capone, Moore adds that “James

after dark. Moreover, Forbes Herrick related that she was among a “throng rushing the courtroom” that could only be controlled by shotgun-armed officers, arguably no place for a woman at that time.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ See, e.g., Steiner and Gray, “Genevieve Forbes Herrick: A Front-Page Reporter ‘Pleased to Write about Women,’” 8, and Forbes Herrick, “Capone's Story: By Himself,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 March 1930, 1.

¹⁸¹ McPhaul, *Deadlines & Monkeyshines*, 129.

Doherty . . . found Capone neither entertaining nor articulate, but more than willing to be profiled.”¹⁸²

Forbes Herrick’s article seems to reinforce that Capone might have been a celebrity, but that he was far from entertaining. The profile reads as rather flat compared to most of her mob coverage, and while she employed her usual skepticism and incorporated some humor – the lead notes that Capone only sold alcohol “to the best people” – on the whole, the story isn’t very revealing, perhaps because Capone’s quotes were more measured than those of mobsters like Terry Druggan, alleged leader of the “valley gang.” For Forbes Herrick to do her best work – skewer criminals with their own words – she needed loquacious, slang-wielding subjects. Capone, she observed, talked with “carefully chosen phrases.”¹⁸³ Therefore, although he was protesting his innocence, just as Druggan had done, Capone’s story is decidedly less colorful.

Given that Capone didn’t really have anything particularly interesting to say, and that Forbes Herrick was sent to interview him in his home, as opposed to when he was safely locked behind prison bars, the article actually veers close to being a stunt piece. Like her stunt girl forebears, Forbes Herrick was seemingly placed in a potentially perilous position with a man known for his brutality. But even this aspect fell flat, as there is no real sense that Forbes Herrick was in any peril. In fact, as McPhaul points out, reporters – men and women – working in Prohibition-era Chicago were not really at risk of violence at the hands of mob subjects (with the exception of *Tribune* scribe Jake Lingle, who did more than just report on gangland activities). Writing about female crime reporters, specifically, McPhaul explains, “The girls

¹⁸² Moore, *Anything Goes*, 22.

¹⁸³ Forbes Herrick, “Capone’s Story: By Himself,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 March 1930, 1.

were as safe in Cicero mob headquarters as they were in Gold Coast salons. The ruffians knew or had been tutored that the biggest chump trick of all was to harm a reporter.”¹⁸⁴

Later in the same month, Forbes Herrick produced two similar profiles, only this time about women who were affiliated with the mob through their men.¹⁸⁵ These articles are also sometimes referenced as proof that Forbes Herrick was a serious crime reporter,¹⁸⁶ but again – maybe because they were essentially memoirs of women who loved criminals – they lacked the immediacy, humor and punch of Forbes Herrick’s earlier writing, when she was positioned in the thick of the action. Perhaps, given that she had already relocated, at least primarily, to the East Coast to focus more on writing fiction,¹⁸⁷ she had also lost some of her fervor for crime reporting. Or perhaps the stories’ relatively lifeless tone reflected the nation’s new mood. The Jazz Age was over, the Depression was deepening, and there is a good chance that mobsters who wore silk undergarments and got buried in ridiculously expensive caskets were no longer quite as entertaining as they had been just a few years before, when prosperity seemed possible for anyone, and “anything went.” Most likely, the change in tone was related to a conglomerate of all those things.

These last few articles on crime might seem like a disappointing coda to a vibrant career, but Forbes Herrick left behind literally hundreds of articles that did a much better job of

¹⁸⁴ McPhaul, 128.

¹⁸⁵ Forbes Herrick, “A Gun Widow’s Story of Life in Gangland,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 23 March 1930, G1, and 30 March 1930, G1.

¹⁸⁶ See again, e.g., Steiner and Gray, “Genevieve Forbes Herrick: A Front-Page Reporter ‘Pleased to Write about Women,’” 8.

¹⁸⁷ Steiner and Gray have Forbes Herrick moving to Dorset, Vt., in 1929, but note that she occasionally returned to Chicago or traveled to Washington for stories. See “Genevieve Forbes Herrick: A Front-Page Reporter ‘Pleased to Write About Women,’” 9.

capturing the excitement, danger, and breathless, reckless mood of a city experiencing a perfect storm of unprecedented crime, prosperity, and new freedoms for its female citizens, at least.

Insights Into the Mind of a Female Crime Reporter

Forbes Herrick also left a legacy of three columns that offer rare and valuable insights into the inner musings and professional observations of a woman breaking new ground as a crime reporter, entering a man's world as their equal. In these pieces, titled "Informally . . . Some of the Stuff That Doesn't Print," "Informally . . . Feminine Fallacies in Newspaper Work" and "Dodging the Girl Reporter's Questions," all written in 1927 – when she was a newsroom veteran and writing other columns about women who killed, referenced earlier – Forbes Herrick candidly discussed everything from the meaning of the "woman's angle" in journalism to her relationships with her colleagues and her work habits.¹⁸⁸

For example, in the last of the three pieces – "Dodging the Girl Reporter's Questions" – she expressed frustration with subjects who refused to answer questions as they were posed. Pointing to an interview that she conducted at bootlegger Terrance Druggan's estate, with the criminal's mother, she recalled asking Mrs. Druggan about her son's illegal activities. In response, Mrs. Druggan told a long-winded, irrelevant story about how "Terrible Terry," as Forbes Herrick once dubbed him, refused to buy groceries on credit when he was a boy, even though he'd once been bullied out of a dollar while walking to the store.¹⁸⁹

Forbes Herrick also complained about evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson, noting that when reporters tried to ask her about everything from "green bathing suits, radio operators and

¹⁸⁸ Forbes Herrick, "Informally... Some of the Stuff That Doesn't Print," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 May 1927, E3; "Informally... Feminine Fallacies in Newspaper Work," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 17 July 1927, N2, and "Dodging the Girl Reporter's Questions," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4 Sept. 1927, N1.

¹⁸⁹ Forbes Herrick, "Dodging the Girl Reporter's Questions," N1.

Mexican desserts” (related to Semple McPherson’s still mysterious alleged kidnapping),¹⁹⁰ she offered a “blithe reply” about how she wished Chicago’s trains all went to heaven, so it could be the “union station for a great religious revival.”¹⁹¹

In another vignette, Forbes Herrick recalled a famous divorcee as answering a question about the proceedings with, “That divorce case? Oh, I’ll tell you. There is nothing like a nice mountain canyon, after a hot stuffy train ride.”¹⁹² In other words, the divorced woman avoided the question entirely, instead making an inane and completely off-the-wall observation.

In spite of the September column’s promise to discuss how people dodged women reporters’ questions, much of the text actually focused upon how evasive subjects tended to dodge *everyone’s* tough questions, including those posed by male law enforcement officers. But in her July column, “Informally . . . Feminine Fallacies in Newspaper Work,” Forbes Herrick wrote more specifically and insightfully about being a female reporter in a man’s sphere. She also blasted apart the theory that women reporters could get female subjects to talk more openly and reveal more secrets than male reporters could. She wrote:

Once upon a time, perhaps, there was a lovely lady behind the bars who told the story of her life more easily, honestly, and spaciosly to the woman reporter than the man. But I’ve never met her.

This school of journalism theory, rooted in the vigor of the nineteenth amendment, that a woman can get a story from a woman so much better than can her confrere, the unsympathetic man reporter, is pretty much a piece of fiction, at least so far as the woman reporter whom I know best is concerned.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ For summaries of McPherson’s disappearance, see, e.g., Michael Parrish, *Anxious Decades: America in Prosperity and Depression, 1920-1941* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), 134, and Miller, *New World Coming*, 233.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Forbes Herrick, “Informally... Feminine Fallacies in Newspaper Work,” N2.

She continued by dissecting that theory, beginning with the assertion that it was “perfectly logical” that it would be “ridiculous.” She next asked each reader to imagine himself or herself as a female criminal stuck in a cell, caught by the matron in her “seventh unsuccessful lie,” making it a “blue Monday all around,” and posited, “Would you take a chance on the alleged all pervading sympathy of sisterhood, with another woman, who . . . might not be totally unfamiliar with some of the tricks you employ?” Then she suggested, “Or would you cut through the conventions of the ‘woman can get a woman’s story’ and elect to give your version of last night’s shooting to a man . . . ?”¹⁹⁴

Once again referencing her experience as a crime reporter, Forbes Herrick claimed she had a “doleful number of case records” to support her belief that “a lady bandit, a lady murderess, even a polite lady forgeress” would talk “with more adjectives, more expletives, more vividness to the man than the woman.” Forbes Herrick provided examples that backed up her theory, noting that the aforementioned Grandma Nusbaum was the rare female who would speak more openly to women reporters. But, Forbes Herrick added, “Grandma was so unorthodox that she toted a big red apple to trial instead of the regulation slender orchid.” Further, Forbes Herrick lamented, the prettier the defendant, the more likely she was to address male reporters to the exclusion of the “pencil sorority,” making some of the city’s most notorious killers less accessible to women journalists.¹⁹⁵

Forbes Herrick also insisted that the reverse, unfortunately, did not hold true, meaning that male criminals were not necessarily more likely to talk to women, either – a paradox that she didn’t, or couldn’t, exactly explain. She merely informed readers that, based upon her personal

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

observations, “the percentage of men who tell their stories to women reporters falls way below the ratio of women who’ll talk their life histories to men reporters.”¹⁹⁶

Lest readers think she was too pessimistic, Forbes Herrick did note that there were some times when “a woman gets the breaks.” This occurred, in her opinion, when a woman tried to get information from “a hard-boiled desk sergeant.” Even then, she added the caveat that a male reporter who’d been on the police beat for awhile still had an advantage, because he “tosses horse shoes or plays hand ball with the officer in their holiday hours; he is on the inside.”¹⁹⁷

The best break a woman could get, she continued, was to be a neophyte who asked stupid questions at the police station. Men, she explained, were expected to be “ubiquitously competent,” and drew the wrath of law enforcement officials when they posed ill-informed queries. She continued, amusingly, but with an undertone of frustration born of experience, “But a woman is not given credit for knowing anything about a police station. And when she asks dumb questions, provided they aren’t terribly dumb, she gets good replies.”¹⁹⁸

She described this perhaps misplaced chivalry as working to her advantage on numerous occasions. The “system,” she recounted, functioned as such:

When the beautiful blonde, with the blood still trickling down last night’s party gown, declines to talk to me, it is often an obliging policeman who acts as middleman. Then the old formula works. The lady talks to the police officer, and talks expansively, partly because he’s a man and partly, too, because he wears gold braid and it’s pretty good policy not to disappoint him. Then the second half of the formula comes in. He, the man, talks to the woman reporter, and does his best for her.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

Note that Forbes Herrick didn't refer to herself as asking any "dumb" questions. Given how much time she spent covering Chicago's police stations, jails and courtrooms, it is difficult to imagine that she was asking anything less than informed questions by 1927. Instead, she basically described a formula that preyed upon men's – again, perhaps misplaced – chivalry and how she used that to her advantage. Moreover, her self-confidence as a reporter equal to any man was reinforced in the next section of the column, in which she discussed how average men she met in the course of her work frequently underestimated her role at the *Tribune* and sometimes threatened to ruin her chances at getting good stories with their well-intentioned efforts to "help" a "girl with a pencil."²⁰⁰

Under the subhead "Misguided Tipsters," Forbes Herrick expressed aggravation with the fact that when male reporters asked questions, everyone took them seriously. Those under interrogation "may not give any information. He may be cross, or evasive or talkative. But at least he knows what the other fellow wants." By comparison, she observed that when women asked questions, "it is often difficult to persuade the man or woman that she really does want serious information." She added, with evident exasperation, that people prevailed in having a "superstition" about female reporters, and believed that no matter what type of story they were covering, women would want to write something "thrilling" – the word was used sarcastically – such as a story about "a boy eating bananas on the link bridge at twilight."²⁰¹

She illustrated with a specific story about meeting a delegation of Mexican dignitaries at a train station, along with a group of otherwise male reporters. As the dignitaries disembarked, their Chicago handler approached Forbes Herrick directly and suggested that she go into the train

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

car housing the delegates' wives, so she could ask them their opinion of "American shops." Describing how she stood her ground, Forbes Herrick declared, "I didn't want to, but I had a busy ten minutes explaining to him that I didn't want to."²⁰²

In a paragraph that seems to express even greater frustration, and which demonstrates how strongly she identified herself as a serious crime reporter, Forbes Herrick expanded, again with heavy sarcasm, on the problem of "distinctly amateur journalists" who offered "gratuitous tips" about "beautiful little pieces for a girl with a pencil." She set the scene by writing, "Perhaps it's midnight at the Criminal Court building, and an important verdict is due. It means that a notorious gangster may be sent to the gallows or the street." Then she complained, "But some side line judge of news values is sure to buttonhole the woman reporter and call her attention to a dirty faced and entirely irrelevant baby squirming on the benches." Providing a concrete illustration, she referenced the Durkin case, which she covered so extensively, noting, "The night the Martin Durkin verdict came in a man impeded my path to tell me, with cautious importance, that there was a fine story to be got in the new style milk wagons."²⁰³

She also described traveling to the White House to cover an appearance by Charles Lindbergh, only to be snagged by a stranger who "pulled me away from my friends who were busy asking questions" and toward a hedge, where the president's dog was playing in the yard. She quoted the man as saying, "'Thought he'd make a good little feature story for you, see?'" She added, "I saw, and I could have killed the man . . ."²⁰⁴

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

Again clearly positioning herself as a straight news reporter, Forbes Herrick concluded that while chivalry might have been considered dead, “there’s still a lot of pesky Good Samaritans who insist upon loading a pile of journalistic deadwood onto the point of a woman reporter’s pencil in the name of that vague, terrible thing . . . ‘a little feature story for you.’”²⁰⁵

Her May column of observations, “Informally . . . Some of the Stuff That Doesn’t Print,” was a more affectionate retrospective on her work at the *Tribune*. In a series of somewhat disjointed reminiscences, she discussed career highlights and recalled moments of camaraderie with her colleagues.

Interestingly, in this article she referred to reporters as “he” and “newspapermen,” even when referencing herself, as if she truly did believe the job was genderless, as she was sometimes wont to assert.²⁰⁶ Meanwhile, it is also worth noting that, for all her complaints about law enforcement officials who discounted women’s intelligence, criminals who preferred to cooperate with men, and average citizens who thought women should only cover features, this research uncovered no recorded complaints about Forbes Herrick’s treatment at the hands of her male colleagues. If they behaved differently toward her or gave her cause to feel discriminated against, this study found no evidence of it. Moreover, the vignettes described below seem to indicate that she had a warm and collegial relationship with her fellow reporters.

In a lead that seems nostalgic, although she would continue to be a journalist for quite a few more years, Forbes Herrick explained how she had come to view the stories she’d covered as falling into certain categories, or “general silhouettes.” Then she added, “But the things that

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ See, e.g., Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 541, and Walker, *City Editor*, 262.

never found their way to my calligraph – the . . . personal, funny, insolent, inconsequential, significant things that didn't print – they still have for me a refreshing individuality.”²⁰⁷

The first anecdote, about a suicide that didn't happen, is entertaining, but for the purposes of this research worth mentioning because it shows Forbes Herrick's enterprise and the way in which she worked closely with colleagues she referred to as “Gavin” and “Mose.”²⁰⁸

The adventure started at noon, when a barber called to say that he'd seen a young man disappear into a washroom for an inordinate amount of time. Upon investigation, the barber found that the restroom was empty, save for a cryptic, anonymous suicide note. Working together, the three reporters pieced together clues, such as a reference to a minister the man hoped would bury him, to track down the man's relatives. Forbes Herrick recalled initiating her own “barrage” of phone calls that resulted in the discovery of the man's mother, and her location of his girlfriend – at midnight. This means that Forbes Herrick – obviously working at noon – was still at her desk twelve hours later, tracking down leads. The man, it turned out, had abandoned his plan, reconciled with his girlfriend and was at the movies. It was, Forbes Herrick recalled with obvious relish, “the best suicide story on which I ever worked.”²⁰⁹

She also related, with a degree of professional pride, another story that positioned her among male and female colleagues whose camaraderie she obviously enjoyed. Covering a wedding at a large estate, she joined “every newspaperman in town” to get as close to the ceremony as possible, which turned out to be outside a fence, in the middle of a snowstorm. She described a harsh but companionable scene, with reporters huddling behind the fence and some

²⁰⁷ Forbes Herrick, “Informally... Some of the Stuff That Doesn't Print,” E3.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

bushes, trying to hide from a cold wind, until “somebody spied some nice logs, cut from the estate . . . We kindled a fire there in the middle of the road and prepared to thaw out.” The next thing Forbes Herrick knew, a group of servants was trudging through the snow, toward the blaze. “Emissaries, we thought, from the . . . drawing room, with orders to stop the furnace room by the side of the road.”²¹⁰

But that was not the case. In fact, the family had sent out a “banquet” for the reporters, with “sandwiches and little pink candies and salad . . . wedding cake and coffee. Later on, too, we got the story,” she recalled.²¹¹

Again indicating that she enjoyed being part of the fraternity of journalists who faced such hardships and enjoyed such adventures, she added, “But long after the details of the story are forgotten the men and women who froze together that afternoon will recall the wedding feast . . .”²¹²

“A Reporter Until I’m 83”

In 1925, Forbes Herrick had already fulfilled her dream of meeting “interesting people,” which she had set for herself when she joined the *Tribune* in 1918.²¹³ In her profile in the brochure *Women and The Chicago Tribune*, she said, “I have been fortunate in the opportunities I have had to work on some splendid stories.” Elaborating, she pointed first to crime stories, including the Leopold and Loeb case, which she characterized as the “most interesting,” before listing the “Tiernan story in South Bend, the Stokes case, and the Tillie Klimik murder trial.” She also included a boast that she would later use in a column, adding, “I have loaned my powder

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Steiner and Gray, “Genevieve Forbes Herrick: A Front-Page Reporter ‘Pleased to Write about Women,’” 9.

puff to many a ‘lady’ murderess.” Then, speaking with the enthusiasm of youth and as a reporter at the very top of her game, Forbes Herrick declared, “I hope to be a reporter until I am 83.”²¹⁴

This wish was not to come true.

In fact, some might characterize Forbes Herrick’s later life as a disappointing fade to alcoholism, misfortune and ill-health, with a wish to write fiction never quite realized.

As noted earlier, she and husband John moved to Vermont – home to John’s family – in 1929, where they both hoped to concentrate on writing fiction.²¹⁵ Before long, however, Forbes Herrick had returned to the *Tribune*, this time at the paper’s Washington bureau, coming out of retirement for reasons that Ross, who chronicled the change, doesn’t explain.²¹⁶ However, Steiner and Gray call the move “sensible,” since Forbes Herrick “enjoyed being at the center of action and power.”²¹⁷

The shift to political reporting ultimately created a rift between Forbes Herrick and the conservative *Tribune* management, though. Ross writes, obliquely, “Soon after the Roosevelts entered the White House, Mrs. Herrick left the *Chicago Tribune*.”²¹⁸ Steiner and Gray elaborate, explaining that Forbes Herrick’s admiration of and friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt created a schism between the reporter and the conservative *Tribune* management. In 1934, publisher Robert McCormick essentially accused Forbes Herrick of biased reportage, causing her to resign

²¹⁴ *Women and The Chicago Tribune*, 35.

²¹⁵ Steiner and Gray, “Genevieve Forbes Herrick: A Front-Page Reporter ‘Pleased to Write about Women,’” 9.

²¹⁶ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 542.

²¹⁷ Steiner and Gray, “Genevieve Forbes Herrick: A Front-Page Reporter ‘Pleased to Write about Women,’” 12.

²¹⁸ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 542.

immediately and quit a talk show she'd been doing for radio station WGN, owned by the *Tribune* company.²¹⁹

Forbes Herrick subsequently did freelance work for other newspapers and magazines, including a series about “Women in the News,” for *Country Gentleman*. Steiner and Gray, who studied her political writing, which they describe as “crisply” mocking the “transparent pretensions and egos of politicians with the flippancy evident in [her] crime stories,” characterize these later pieces as “more restrained, more dignified, less vernacular, far less ironic and punchy.” They add that, after leaving the *Tribune*, she “did not resist being pigeon-holed as a ‘woman’s writer.’”²²⁰

Although her own career might have been faltering in the 1930s, Forbes Herrick broke the mold in a different way by fostering the next generation of female reporters. Scholars who study the early days of professionalization often point to women’s celebration of individual achievements, but failure to give a hand up to those who could have followed in their footsteps, as one reason that women have traditionally been less successful than men in professions.²²¹ Forbes Herrick didn’t seem to fall into that trap. She was president of the Women’s National Press Club from 1933 to 1935, was active in the Alliance of Business and Professional Women, as well as the American Association of University Women and a journalism sorority, and “frequently lectured, often about journalism, to other groups of professional women.”²²² For example, in 1933, the *Tribune* covered a lecture that she gave to a “capacity audience” of the

²¹⁹ Steiner and Gray, “Genevieve Forbes Herrick: A Front-Page Reporter ‘Pleased to Write about Women,’” 13.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11, 14, 9.

²²¹ For more on this topic, see Penina Migdal Glazer and Miriam Slater, *Unequal Colleagues: The Entrance of Women into the Professions, 1890-1940* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 23, 134-135.

²²² Steiner and Gray, “Genevieve Forbes Herrick: A Front-Page Reporter ‘Pleased to Write about Women,’” 9.

Chicago Woman's club.²²³ Adds Ross, "She is an able platform speaker. She lectures with authority on a profession to which she herself has added real distinction."²²⁴

The mid-1930s would be, in many ways, a difficult period for her. In 1935, Forbes Herrick suffered serious injury in a car accident while on a trip through New Mexico with the wife of Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Interior. Mrs. Ickes was killed in the crash.²²⁵ Then, in 1938, Forbes Herrick was diagnosed with breast cancer, a condition that she apparently tried to deny both to others and herself.²²⁶

In spite of her health problems, Forbes Herrick worked in press relations for the Women's Army Corps during World War II, heading the office's book and magazine section from 1943 to 1945.²²⁷

In 1951, Geno and John moved to New Mexico, where John was "miserable, weary, worried, worn and ill," while Forbes Herrick "apparently felt the same." Out of money, "losing a battle with alcoholism," and both battling cancer, John died first, in 1955, while Forbes Herrick survived on until 1962.²²⁸

Crime reporting was only one aspect of Forbes Herrick's prolific career. As Ross lauds her, "She could turn her hand to anything," from fashion to politics to club reportage.²²⁹ A review of the entire body of her work during the 1920s proves that. However, this research

²²³ Kathleen M'Laughlin, "Reporter Tells Women's Place in Journalism," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 Sept. 1933, 19.

²²⁴ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 542.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Steiner and Gray, "Genevieve Forbes Herrick: A Front-Page Reporter 'Pleased to Write about Women,'" 14.

²²⁷ "Mrs. Herrick Dies; Wrote for Tribune," *Chicago Tribune*, 18 Dec. 1962, A6.

²²⁸ Steiner and Gray, "Genevieve Forbes Herrick: A Front-Page Reporter 'Pleased to Write about Women,'" 14.

²²⁹ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 540.

asserts that she was, first and foremost, a general assignment reporter specializing in the coverage of crime, and capable of adding an “ingenious little literary twist” to anything she wrote, as the *Tribune* praised her in a 1926 advertisement, “The foremost woman journalist in America.”²³⁰

She was also a pragmatist who understood that women walked a fine line in journalism, and told her 1933 audience, in a passage that seems to sum up the approach to reporting that carried her so far:

I am not crying for a new deal for women in journalism. I think they’ve had a pretty good deal. I do hope, however, that they realize that it is a different deal from the men’s.

Typewriters are sexless. If she can’t get a story as well as a man, let a woman scoop ‘em on her typewriter. Let her strive to write all her news better than as many men as she can. Let her write the way the world says a man writes, not the way a man says a woman writes.²³¹

²³⁰ “The foremost woman journalist in America,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 23 Nov. 1926, 1.

²³¹ M’Laughlin, “Reporter Tells Women’s Place in Journalism,” 19.

Chapter 5 – Maurine Watkins

Maurine Watkins's career in journalism – spent exclusively at the *Chicago Tribune* – was short-lived. But in her brief months at the paper, she captured the mood of a city new to her; reflected the populace's jaded-yet-jocular attitude toward murder in sparkling, sharp-witted prose; and ultimately used the formulas that Genevieve Forbes Herrick later outlined – the ways in which female Jazz-Age killers operated – to create a play that swept the nation and which endures today.

When Watkins is remembered at all – and scholar Thomas Pauly finds her obscurity “almost amazing”¹ – it is primarily for writing the play, later adapted as a musical, *Chicago*. However, prior to penning her Broadway hit, she was a general assignment reporter for the *Tribune*, a position that gave her all the material she would need to create the fictional characters of unrepentant murderess Roxie Hart, jaded reporter Jake Callahan, sob sister Mary Sunshine and slick attorney Billy Flynn.

While Watkins might have endowed Sunshine with a “sentimental fixation with the hardships of women”² that caused her to report sympathetically about the supposed trials and tribulations that led Roxie Hart to commit murder, Watkins was far from soft-hearted or naïve, when it came to covering crime. On the contrary, she was a shrewd observer who could wield an acid-tipped pen, closer in attitude to her male reporter, Callahan, and at least as cynically biting as her real-life contemporary, Genevieve Forbes Herrick.

¹ Pauly, in Maurine Watkins, *Chicago* (Charlottesville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), viii.

² *Ibid*, x.

Watkins was, in fact, a study in contrasts: a shy young woman with a “bland” smile,³ who nonetheless finagled a job at one of the nation’s most aggressive newspapers, without having any prior experience. A celebrity who would sometimes do unscheduled walk-ons in productions of her play,⁴ but also an intensely private person whose motivations and final years, in particular, are the subject of several contradictory reports. The daughter of a small-town minister who was at once moralistic in her condemnation of murder, but who was willing to profit off the vice that she eschewed by turning it into entertainment, both for *Tribune* readers and playgoers.

Even at the height of her fame, shortly after the production of *Chicago* in late 1926, interviews and profiles yielded a hazy picture of Watkins, with details that are inconsistent and quotes and descriptions that to this day leave the reader with an uncertain grasp of her personality. Facts as basic as her age vary; Perry, using a graduate-school admissions form, asserts that she was twenty-seven when she started at the *Tribune* in February 1924,⁵ while a 1927 *New Yorker* piece placed her age at twenty-six when *Chicago* opened⁶ – a three-year discrepancy. Meanwhile, Ross, in *Ladies of the Press*, lists Watkins’s age as twenty-six during the eight months she worked for the *Tribune*.⁷

The author of a *New York Times* profile, published in 1927, seems to have given up trying to sort out Watkins’s life story, perhaps because she came across as so provincial as to be beneath serious scrutiny – or perhaps because she was reticent and/or evasive. The summary of

³ “Young Lady,” *The New Yorker*, 29 Jan. 1927, 18.

⁴ Perry, *The Girls of Murder City*, 242.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶ “Young Lady,” 18.

⁷ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 544.

Watkins's background explains, vaguely, "She seems to have been born in Kentucky and to have gone to boarding school in Lexington . . . She also seems to have gone to Radcliffe and at one time to have had honorable intentions toward acquiring a Ph.D. degree."⁸

Some details of Watkins's life are definitive, though. She was born in Louisville and raised in Crawfordsville, Kentucky. While a student at Crawfordsville High School, she founded the school's first newspaper, *The High School Billiken*.⁹ Upon graduation, she attended conservative Transylvania University in Lexington, where she studied Greek and Latin poets. After a transfer, she graduated at the top of her class from Indianapolis's Butler University, then applied to do graduate work at Radcliffe, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her intent was to study Greek, to enhance her understanding of the New Testament.¹⁰

However, according to Perry, acceptance to professor George Pierce Baker's highly selective playwriting workshop at Yale gave Watkins hope that writing, a hobby she'd long enjoyed mainly because it was a solitary pursuit, could become a vocation. And her professor's suggestion that students could improve their art by experiencing life apparently compelled Watkins to withdraw from school and head to Chicago, a city in vibrant, sometimes bloody, chaos.¹¹

⁸ "The Author of 'Chicago,'" *The New York Times*, 2 Jan. 1927, X1.

⁹ John Elliott, "Maurine Dallas Watkins Website: Her Life," accessed 11 March 2013, <http://www.maurinewatkins.com/index1-herlife.htm>.

¹⁰ Perry, *The Girls of Murder City*, 18-19.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 19-20.

She initially secured work in the Standard Oil Company's advertising department, but "feeling dissatisfied with this state of affairs," boldly walked into the offices of the *Chicago Tribune* and asked for a job.¹²

How a profoundly religious girl whose "shyness was palpable"¹³ found the courage to not only quit school and relocate, alone, to a city renowned for its violence, let alone march into a major newspaper and request a coveted position as a reporter, is one of the many mysteries that surround Watkins. *The New Yorker* profile yields little insight, noting only that Watkins "suddenly decided . . . to be a newspaper reporter and a Chicago editor gave her a job."¹⁴ And her 1927 interview with *The New York Times*, which includes Watkins's recounting of her awkward, seemingly doomed, interview with the *Tribune*'s managing editor, only makes the whole turn of events even more baffling. The *Times* reprinted Watkins's version of the conversation verbatim:

"What paper have you worked at?"

"None."

"Had any newspaper experience at all?"

"No."

"Know anything about journalism?"

"I took it in college."

"I don't believe you'll like newspaper work."

"I don't believe I will."¹⁵

According to the article, a "frightened" Watkins – having blurted that last unfortunate answer – stood up to leave, only to be stopped by the managing editor, who apparently saw something in the diminutive girl with wide eyes and unfashionably un-bobbed hair, enough that

¹² "The Author of 'Chicago,'" X1.

¹³ Perry, *The Girls of Murder City*, 15.

¹⁴ "Young Lady," 18.

¹⁵ "The Author of 'Chicago,'" X1.

– although other, presumably more experienced reporters were waiting in the wings, clamoring for jobs on the *Tribune*¹⁶ – he “took an hour to convince her that journalism might well be her life work.”¹⁷ Ultimately, she accepted a position as a general assignment reporter and quickly earned a byline for her coverage of one of Chicago’s many murders by women.

Her first attempt at a significant story – an interview with robber and later cinema star Al Jennings, secured by hopping into a cab with him – was bold, but failed to earn her the byline she wanted.¹⁸ However, when in March 1924 a woman named Belva Gaertner shot her lover as they both sat in a car outside Gaertner’s home, Watkins, covering the police beat,¹⁹ saw the opportunity to earn front-page status. Less than a month later, Watkins was assigned to cover a similar story, about a woman named Beulah Annan who shot her lover then left him to die on the floor of her apartment, and the novice reporter again sniffed opportunity.²⁰

The incidents were, in many ways, commonplace. As Genevieve Forbes Herrick and others were observing, the Cook County jail was filled with women who had killed their men. And Gaertner and Annan’s cases – involving “lovers, infatuated older husbands, handguns, and too much to drink”²¹ – fit the traditional trajectory. But, as Lesy points out, one final thing the two murderesses shared would also be the factor that set them apart and made them celebrities: Maurine Watkins.

¹⁶ Perry, *The Girls of Murder City*, 16.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 26.

¹⁹ It is worth noting that the Gaertner was brought in for questioning after midnight, and that Watkins covered her initial arrival at the police station, further proof that the *Tribune* expected its female crime reporters to work the same odd hours that men would normally work.

²⁰ Lesy, *Murder City*, 195.

²¹ Ibid., 196.

As Lesy, Perry and Pauly assert, Watkins was savvy enough to realize that both Gaertner and Annan were potentially good subjects for page one. Gaertner, a cabaret singer who'd undergone a very public divorce from a wealthy man, already had one foot in the spotlight, while Annan was movie-star beautiful.²²

Watkins's initial articles about Gaertner did not earn bylines, even though her first story – as confirmed by Pauly – appeared on page one. The lead was fairly straightforward, compared to Watkins's subsequent cynical, humorous reportage, but succeeded in positioning Gaertner as a subject of potential interest for *Tribune* readers by describing Belva "Belle" Gaertner as "a handsome divorcee of numerous experiences with divorce publicity . . ." ²³

Although frequently described as demure, old-fashioned and sheltered, in the next paragraph Watkins didn't shy away from outlining the crime in relatively gory detail, explaining, "Law had been shot through the head. His body was found slumped down at the steering wheel of Mrs. Gaertner's Nash sedan . . . On the floor of the automobile was found an automatic pistol from which three shots had been fired, and a bottle of gin." ²⁴

The next few paragraphs flatly laid out details of the discovery of the body by police officers. However, when Watkins recounted Gaertner's questioning, the young reporter began to allow hints of opinion to filter into the story; she stressed Gaertner's repeated denials of any knowledge of the shooting, even though Gaertner did recall seeing blood on Law's face at one point. Watkins also tracked shifts in Gaertner's story, noting that when police pressed her for details, Gaertner would resort to claiming, "I don't know. I was drunk." ²⁵

²² See, e.g., *Ibid.*, 196; Perry, *The Girls of Murder City*, 32-33; and Pauly in Watkins, *Chicago*, xiii.

²³ "Shot Dead in Woman's Auto," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 March 1924, 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Watkins also included seven paragraphs that recapped Gaertner's earlier romantic exploits, essentially describing the accused murderess as a fickle, drama-loving gold-digger. While most of the story is fairly direct, the last paragraph consists of a single, telling quote from Gaertner's ex-husband, who, upon being contacted by reporters, asked, "What has happened to her now?" In one brief sentence, Watkins succeeded in making readers believe that Gaertner was prone to causing trouble and quite possibly capable of murder.²⁶

The article had problems, not the least of which were Watkins's use of Gaertner's stage name, "Belle," without ever including her real name, "Belva," and her even worse misidentification of the dead man as "Robert," instead of "Walter," Law. But the piece was obviously good enough to keep Watkins on the story, and the next day the *Tribune* ran another front page, if still unbylined,²⁷ article by Watkins about the inquest into the Gaertner case.

The story, while relatively devoid of stylistic flair, is notable because it shows Watkins reversing the sob sister tradition of positioning women as victims of manipulative men and instead painting the dead man as the young, weak, naïve, manipulated casualty of a predatory, violent, older woman.

First, Watkins made a point of noting that Law was "some five to ten years . . . junior" of Gaertner. She then recounted testimony that depicted Law as a man who wanted to be true to his family, but couldn't seem to break free of a Svengali-like grasp that Gaertner had on him, even when Gaertner threatened to kill him at knife point, prior to the shooting. Watkins quoted a witness as saying, "He tried to break away, to stick to his wife and family. She killed him rather

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Watkins's unbylined articles about the women who inspired her play can be verified because they are included in the 1997 bound edition of *Chicago*, 115-124.

than lose him.” Watkins also wrote that Law was afraid to leave Gaertner, for fear that she’d make good on threats to murder him if he abandoned her. When Gaertner pulled a gun, Law “tried to stop her, but couldn’t.”²⁸

Law was not innocent in Watkins’s story – she reminded readers that he was shot “with a steel jacketed bullet after a cabaret gin party” and “went on drinking sprees once or twice a week”²⁹ – but clearly he was the pathetic partner in the incident, while Gaertner was the dangerous aggressor who held him in her sway, not unlike the sob sisters had portrayed Evelyn Nesbit as powerless against the advances of Stanford White at the turn of the century.

The article also demonstrates that Watkins grasped the blatant hypocrisies inherent to Prohibition – the way the law was shamelessly flouted – but hadn’t quite mastered the wink-and-nod to readers perfected by Forbes Herrick. Describing testimony by the owner of the nightclub at which Gaertner and Law got drunk before the shooting, Watkins stated, flatly, that some in the courtroom thought his insistence that the club didn’t serve alcohol was “satire.”³⁰

However, Watkins’s third story on the case, although buried on page seventeen and still without a byline, shows her already gaining confidence in her ability to tell a good tale, her sharp ear for dialogue and her belief in her right to use her position as a reporter to be an “avenging angel” against the vices of the big city, as Perry describes her crusading spirit.³¹ Unlike Forbes Herrick, who in her columns directly expressed exasperation with a judicial system and long-standing prejudices that allowed women to get away with murder, Watkins wasn’t a heavy-handed moralist. Her view that something was wrong with a city in which women – especially

²⁸ “Hold Divorcee as Slayer of Auto Salesman,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 13 March 1924, 1.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 1, 6.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 6.

³¹ Perry, *The Girls of Murder City*, 21.

pretty ones – could expect to kill with impunity was shared almost expressly through the use of cynical, sarcastic humor. And while Watkins at least used words such as “alleged” to describe murderesses – unlike Forbes Herrick, who would outright convict, in print – she effectively managed to pass judgment before juries even got the chance to weigh in.³²

The piece, “No Sweetheart Worth Killing – Mrs. Gaertner,” sparkles with wit, compared to the first two stories, in part because this time Watkins – as Forbes Herrick often did with subjects – used Gaertner’s own words to reveal her true character, and to play the story for laughs. Watkins’s prose is also more flippant, sarcastic and clever in this story drawn from an interview she secured with Gaertner.

The lead sets the facetious, glib tone that Watkins would use in all future stories about female killers. She summed up Gaertner’s attitude with the tongue-in-cheek, sarcasm-laden paragraph:

No sweetheart in the world is worth killing – especially when you’ve had a flock of them – and the world knows it. That is one of the musings of Mrs. Belva Gaertner in her county jail cell and it is why – so she says – a “broad minded” jury is all that is needed to free her of the charge of murdering Walter Law.³³

Watkins next recapped the case, in one sentence reminding readers that Law was younger than Gaertner, drumming up sympathy for Law’s widow, and depicting Gaertner as not only unrepentant, but carefree: “The latest alleged lady murderess of Cook county, in whose car young Law was found shot to death as a finale to three months of wild gin parties with Belva while his wife sat at home unsuspecting, isn’t a bit worried over the case.”³⁴

³² “No Sweetheart Worth Killing – Mrs. Gaertner,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 March 1924, 17.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

Watkins then used a quote to reinforce the impression that Gaertner found the whole incident not tragic, but amusing, and that she had no sympathy for the dead man. ““Why, it’s silly to say I murdered Walter,’ she said during a lengthy discourse on love, gin, guns, sweeties, wives and husbands. ‘ . . . [N]o women can love a man enough to kill him. They aren’t worth it, because there are always plenty more.’”³⁵

Watkins also let Gaertner speak for herself in a slang-infused, breezy paragraph about Gaertner’s desire for a ““broad minded”” jury made up of men who could understand how a drunken night of fun could end, accidentally, in a shooting. Watkins quoted Gaertner as describing the coroner’s jury that had decided she should stand trial as ““narrow-minded old birds”” who probably ““never heard a jazz band in their lives.”” The result was ““bum,”” and what Gaertner needed, Watkins explained, were twelve ““worldly men . . . men who know what it is to get out a bit.””³⁶

In the most damning quote, which revealed Gaertner as completely unconcerned about her fate, or the dead man, Watkins recorded the killer as laughing before saying, ““ . . . [G]in and guns – either one is bad enough, but together they can get you in a dickens of a mess, don’t they.”” Watkins then reported that Gaertner brought up Law’s widow, if only to indicate that Mrs. Law was probably better off without her spouse: ““Of course, it’s too bad for Walter’s wife, but husbands always cause women trouble.””³⁷

Finally, as she would do in later stories, Watkins used the last paragraph to abruptly silence any laughter that her audience might have enjoyed, to read Gaertner’s breezy, humorous

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

comments on murder. Watkins concluded, “And, while Mrs. Gaertner chortled in jail, plans were completed for young Law’s funeral today. It will be held from his home and will be private.”³⁸

While Gaertner awaited trial, causing a lull in coverage of her case, another young woman, Beulah Annan, committed an even more compelling murder. Or, if the case was not more interesting, inherently, Watkins made it so by focusing on a small detail: The fact that the young, beautiful murderess played the phonograph while the man she’d shot lay dying on the floor of her apartment. And by emphasizing the name of the recording – “Hula Lou” – Watkins managed to inject an element of absurd humor into the story, even as she painted Annan as a cold-blooded killer.

Watkins’s first story about Annan lacked a byline, although it appeared on page one, under the headline, “Woman Plays Jazz Air as Victim Dies.” The lead explains, “For more than two hours . . . Beulah Annan . . . played a foxtrot record named ‘Hula Lou’ . . . Then she telephoned her husband and reported that she had killed a man who ‘tried to make love’ to her.”³⁹

Having established Annan as coldly indifferent to her crime, Watkins then chose phrases that spotlighted her obvious personal scorn for Annan. For example, instead of writing that Annan and her victim, Harry Kolstedt, had been drinking, she referred to “their little wine party.” And while a more objective journalist might have noted that Annan changed her account of the

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ “Woman Plays Jazz Air as Victim Dies,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4 April 1924, 1.

murder when she was sober, Watkins described how Annan recanted “after the fumes of the liquor had worn away.”⁴⁰

Watkins obviously worked late at the Hyde Park police station that night, because she mentioned the questioning taking place after midnight. There are also indications that Watkins may have accompanied Annan and the police to Annan’s apartment, where police tried to get to the heart of the killer’s changing story. She wrote, “There she was forced to stand in a dim light, facing the scene of the murder, while questions were fired at her in monotonous succession.” The questions included, “What about the blood on the phonograph record? What about the wine and gin bottles and empty glasses? How come that Kolstedt was shot through the back?”⁴¹

The “Hula Lou” story established Watkins’s voice as a journalist. Like Forbes Herrick, she would henceforth write cynically about criminals, employ sarcastic humor, and use direct quotes and descriptions of small actions in ways that inevitably revealed the worst aspects of her subjects’ natures.

Her second article about Annan – and first bylined, page one story – brought Annan to life as a beautiful young woman who feigned innocence and ignorance, but who was actually calculating and heartless, behind her wide, blinking eyes. Again, Watkins revealed herself as the antithesis of a sob sister. Although she described Annan’s “tip-tilted nose,” “wide set, appealing blue eyes,” and “brown georgette hat that turned back with a youthful flare,” Watkins made it clear that Annan’s beauty was only superficial. When Watkins wrote that Annan “shook her

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

head dreamily and smiled when questioned,⁴² the implication was that Annan was not a baffled ingénue, but rather an evasive manipulator.

Her conviction of Annan began in the first paragraph, when Watkins used a strategy frequently employed by Forbes Herrick, reminding readers that Annan was not only a killer, but an adulteress, by noting that Annan “shot ‘the other man’ . . . to the tune of her husband’s phonograph.”⁴³ This was similar to how Forbes Herrick would often point out that the women whose trials she covered wore fur or jewels purchased for them by lovers or, in some cases, the men they’d killed.

A few paragraphs later, Watkins reinforced Annan’s lack of remorse and complete self-absorption by quoting her. “‘I wish they’d let me see him,’ she said softly. ‘Still, it would only make me feel worse.’ The last time she saw him was when he lay dying and she dare not feel his heart or pulse because he was ‘so bloody.’”⁴⁴

Watkins also let readers know that Annan had abandoned a son in Kentucky, was divorced, and had entertained Kolstedt “a few times in her husband’s absence,” because he “shared with her a taste for ‘booze.’” With an eye for detail similar to Forbes Herrick’s, Watkins went beyond reporting Annan’s words at the coroner’s inquest, several times noting that Annan fiddled with a piece of paper, using it to create a whistle, while the victim’s relatives testified. Watkins also described how Annan “laughed lightly” when attorneys debated over a question. In fact, those details earned more attention than what was arguably the most damning fact uncovered at the inquest – namely, that Kolstedt had been alive for approximately three hours,

⁴² Maurine Watkins, “Demand Noose for ‘Prettiest’ Woman Slayer,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 5 April 1924, 1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

bleeding out on the floor, while Annan played the phonograph and debated what do. This information was not revealed until paragraph seventeen of the twenty-one paragraph article.⁴⁵

The flair for drama that would make Watkins a successful playwright was also on display when she recounted one of Annan's shifting versions of the story. Watkins built the escalating action as such:

After drinking for an hour or so they started quarreling. She teased him a little about "Billy, the boy with an auto," and he reproved her for doing things she shouldn't. Then she flared back: "You're just a four-flusher!" and called him a "jailbird." Kolstedt, it seems, had served a penitentiary sentence for a statutory crime. He retorted hotly that she was "no good."
A revolver was lying on the bed, and both sprang —⁴⁶

Just as the tale reached its climax, Watkins left the audience with a dashed cliffhanger, cutting to an interruption by Annan's lawyer, who reportedly called out, "Both went for the gun!"⁴⁷

In addition, Watkins again turned the sob sister tradition upside down by setting up Annan's husband as another male victim of a calculating female. Although reporting on the coroner's inquest, she included a vignette she'd witnessed the night before, at the police station, quoting the cuckolded husband as telling officers, "'I've been a sucker, that's all! Simply a meal ticket! I've worked ten, twelve, fourteen hours a day and took home every cent . . . I thought she was happy.'"⁴⁸

Watkins also included a dramatic contrast similar to the one she used at the end of the article about boyfriend-killer Belva Gaertner, when she juxtaposed Gaertner's laughter with a

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

mention of the victim's funeral. In the second paragraph, Watkins reminded readers that Annan played "Hula Lou" while her boyfriend lay dying – then added, "And yesterday afternoon the chapel organ at Boydston's undertaking parlors played 'Nearer My God to Thee . . .'"⁴⁹

Also similar to the Gaertner story, Watkins wrapped up her article about the inquest with a particularly damning observation: "When the finding of murder was announced, [Annan] powdered her nose, took the money her husband had borrowed, and went back to jail to await developments."⁵⁰

The next day, Watkins produced another story on Annan, the point of which is difficult to discern, since there was no real "news" to report. Given the lack of a byline or a news hook, along with the article's placement deeper in the paper on page fourteen, it's difficult to believe the city editor assigned it. More likely, Watkins wrote it as part of her regular coverage of the jail in an attempt to maintain interest in the story, because it actually concerned the *absence* of action surrounding the case. Titled "Mrs. Annan Has Lonesome Day Behind Bars," the piece seems primarily aimed at sustaining Watkins's mocking condemnation of Annan.⁵¹

The lead is less than compelling, in terms of news value: "Mrs. Beulah Annan's second day in the county jail . . . was a trifle monotonous." Watkins then reported that Annan felt deprived in her cell, noting that the accused murderess was not allowed to have cold cream or powder, and adding, in a sarcastic jab, "And they tuned in the radio for a sacred concert, instead of Hawaiian fox trots." In another seemingly gratuitous paragraph, Watkins showed Annan wondering about commonplace things that any inmate would no doubt consider: "Will the grand

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ "Mrs. Annan Has Lonesome Day Behind Bars," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 April 1924, 14.

jury indict her this week? Will she get bond?” The questions seem primarily to have been a vehicle for Watkins to point out that Annan found the waiting “tiresome,” thereby reinforcing that she was self-centered and lacking remorse. In the last paragraph, Watkins – who had contributed to Annan’s celebrity – explained that “Chicago’s prettiest woman ‘killer’” was starting to receive flowers from admirers and was spared eating jailhouse fare because a “friend” (the quotes were Watkins’s) had sent a steak dinner to her cell.⁵²

Not surprisingly, the Annan story died away for the next several weeks, during which Watkins wrote one un-bylined and three bylined crime stories. One, “Jurors Clear Boy Who Killed Brutal Father,” demonstrates that she had the good sense to know when to abandon sarcastic humor in favor of unbiased, straight news reporting. Her coverage of a coroner’s inquest into a homicide committed by a boy whose father had been beating his mother was primarily factual. However, the budding playwright still recognized the opportunity to create drama. Describing how the murder unfolded, she recounted the young killer’s testimony, using another dash to create a cliffhanger: “Threats to kill her and the children were followed by blows which he and his brother, Sam, tried in vain to stop. And then –”⁵³

The article was divided by a subhead, then readers were told, in a quoted paragraph that includes a tension-building run-on:

“He went into the bedroom, where he kept the gun, but I beat him to it. I shot up in the air to scare him, but he wasn’t scared, and come after me, and I run out on the porch and shot again – straight down. Then he grabbed my arm,” the boy finished quietly. “and [sic] I shot again – through his breast.”⁵⁴

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Watkins, “Jurors Clear Boy Who Killed Brutal Father,” 25 April 1924, 5.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

As she waited for new, newsworthy developments in the Gaertner and Annan cases, Watkins also produced two page-three stories about Wanda Stopa, a young murderess who committed suicide after killing an innocent gardener, as the gardener tried to stop Stopa from shooting Stopa's lover's wife. The case captured the city's attention, because Stopa had been an accomplished attorney before moving to Chicago's "bohemian" TowerTown neighborhood. At that point, she seemed to derail emotionally, using morphine and becoming involved with a wealthy, married advertising executive.⁵⁵

The executive, Y. Kenley Smith, had held the same kind of "hypnotic" sway over Stopa that Beulah Annan had supposedly held over the man she killed, according to Watkins's story, "No Friends on Hand to Meet Body of Wanda." And when Smith's wife failed to step out of picture by marrying another man – a chance to "square the triangle," as Watkins cynically described the arrangement – Stopa made her first attempt at suicide. Later, perhaps under the influence of morphine, Stopa tried to kill the wife, only to be stopped by the family's gardener, whom Stopa accidentally shot. Fleeing to a Detroit hotel, she successfully overdosed.⁵⁶

Watkins's article about the arrival of the train carrying Stopa's body at a Chicago station, and her subsequent coverage of Stopa's funeral, seem to reflect Watkins's sometimes confusing – perhaps competing – attitudes and aspirations. On one hand, Watkins was part of the glorification of the city's murderesses. She dutifully reported on the huge crowds that attended Stopa's funeral, and related a gossipy story about a graveside scuffle that resulted in broken eyeglasses for one of the mourners.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Paul Gapp, "Death of Bohemia," *Chicago Tribune*, 14 Feb. 1988, accessed 17 March 2013, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1988-02-14/entertainment/8803300313_1_lively-ideas-neighborhoods-russell-jacoby/2.

⁵⁶ Watkins, "No Friends on Hand to Meet Body of Wanda," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 April 1924, 3.

⁵⁷ Watkins, "Morbid Thousands Assemble at Funeral of Wanda Stopa," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 April 1924, 3.

Watkins was also guilty of a journalistic “sin” identified by Forbes Herrick, when the latter described how reporters increased public interest in murderesses by identifying them with labels, such as “prettiest killer.”⁵⁸ Stopa, Watkins wrote, was the city’s ““brainiest”” murderess.⁵⁹

Yet, at the same time, the article about the arrival of Stopa’s body, in particular, clearly – somewhat editorially – reflects the views of a conservative, religious, Midwestern girl who held traditional values. Reporting from the train station, Watkins pointed out that having “deserted” her friends in Chicago’s Little Poland neighborhood in favor of ““Bohemian freedom”” – and Watkins always put the word “freedom” in quotes that conveyed skepticism – Stopa found herself, in the end, in a plain, pine box, greeted by only a handful of reporters. She added that “two artists” who were supposed to have accompanied the remains from Detroit failed to show up.⁶⁰

Watkins’s implication is clear: That by abandoning her traditional values, Stopa had lost everything. Watkins reinforced her message by explaining how Stopa’s Polish friends eventually turned out when the body reached Little Poland, gathering to remember “the bright, happy little girl who had led in the Polish festivals.” She then reiterated that Stopa’s ““colony” friends, those who had supposedly ““understood her”” – again, the quotes were Watkins’s – “were missing.” In a subsequent paragraph, Watkins explained how Stopa would not be buried by a priest, because “she gave up the church, too, in her quest for ‘freedom.’”⁶¹

⁵⁸ Forbes Herrick, “Lady Murderesses – The Orthwein Case,” F10.

⁵⁹ Watkins, “No Friends on Hand to Meet Body of Wanda,” 3.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Moreover, the last word in the story is “freedom,” again in quotes. Watkins concluded by describing, melodramatically, how Stopa’s brother, after decrying how Stopa went on a “wild search for Life-with-a-capital-L in cheap studio parties,” “looked down at the white coffin that held his sister – a moth singed in the fires of ‘freedom.’”⁶²

Yet it seems as though Watkins may have been unable to resist at least one temptation, herself. Namely, her desire, as first and foremost a burgeoning playwright, to write compelling dialogue, even if that meant enhancing a subjects’ words. One paragraph, in particular, stands out as likely being at least partially fabricated. Although Stopa’s parents were accomplished – her father was a noted sculptor in Warsaw – they were also, by all accounts, first-generation immigrants. Therefore, it is difficult to believe that Wanda’s grief-stricken mother would have had the composure and the English vocabulary to bring forth the extensive monologue that Watkins recounted near the end of her story. Explaining how Mrs. Stopa lamented the lover, Smith’s, role in the tragedy, Watkins wrote this long quote:

“‘Nobility of character!’” repeated Mrs. Stopa with bitter sarcasm. “That was why she loved him, she said. Because he was so ‘noble’! He was so ‘good’ to his wife – willing to furnish her with another lover when she was tired of him, ready to give her a divorce! And Wanda admired his intellect; he could talk to her of books and philosophy – and then gradually and insidiously he worked in his doctrine of ‘free love’ and the ‘right to happiness’ that made my little girl call marriage a ‘scrap of paper,’ and declare that morality was nothing!”⁶³

It is possible that the quote was captured verbatim, but it rather tidily and conveniently summed up the whole story – and reflected Watkins’s fairly clear opinions about ‘Bohemianism’ – in a suspiciously well-articulated paragraph. From the use of the words “insidiously,”

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

“doctrine,” and even “lover,” to the seldom-spoken construction “talk to her of books and philosophy,” the entire paragraph seems a little too contrived.

Perhaps Watkins, herself, suffered a few pangs of guilt or inner conflict for her role in publicizing the story. After describing the crowds that attended the funeral as “morbid curiosity seekers” – although she was there, too, on behalf of all who couldn’t attend – and providing some details on the burial, she seemed to wipe her hands of the entire story in one of her trademark, blunt final paragraphs: “And it was over.”⁶⁴

Watkins next produced another sober, if not moralistic, article about a woman named Elizabeth Unkafer, who received a life sentence for killing her boyfriend. The front page story, “Woman Given Life in Jail as Murderess,” is only six paragraphs long and lacks Watkins’s usual flair for drama or ear for quotes. In fact, there are no quotes in the entire piece, which is essentially a dry recap of courtroom proceedings, with the straight lead, “Mrs. Elizabeth Unkafer, 46 years old, was given a life term in the Joliet penitentiary by a jury that found her guilty last night . . .”⁶⁵

It is possible that Watkins’s coverage of the Unkafer trial was subdued because she was more focused on a story that would appear the very next day. Although the article “Beulah Annan Awaits Stork, Murder Trial” was consigned to page six, it was obviously Watkins’s bigger priority – and, even more than with the Stopa story, she made her opinions clear in biting, cynical, sarcastic swipes at the legal system.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ “Woman Given Life in Jail as Murderess,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 May 1924, 1.

⁶⁶ Watkins, “Beulah Annan Awaits Stork, Murder Trial,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 9 May 1924, 6.

Watkins set the tone with a lead that asked a question Genevieve Forbes Herrick and others in Chicago were grappling with: “What counts with a jury when a woman is on trial for murder?” She then provided her own possible answers: “Youth? Beauty? And if to these she adds approaching motherhood –”⁶⁷

The dash again left readers with a “mini cliffhanger,” after which Watkins wrote, glibly, “For pretty Mrs. Beulah Annan, who shot her lover, Harry Kalstedt to the tune of her husband’s phonograph, is expecting a visit from the stork early this fall.” Watkins never explicitly accused Annan of fabricating the pregnancy, but she didn’t wax poetic about impending motherhood, as her sob sister forebears might well have done. Instead, she explained how rules governing the courts would allow Annan to demand a trial before her due date. Then Watkins asked another question: “Will a jury give death – will a jury send to prison – a mother-to-be?”⁶⁸

Watkins next hinted that Annan’s lawyers might have concocted the story in response to the outcome of the trial Watkins had covered the day before, in which a woman had received a life term for murder. According to Watkins, Elizabeth Unkafer’s surprising sentence had broken “the monotony of” life on “Murderess’ Row” and “startled [the inmates] into a worried analysis.” Some of the women awaiting trial, she reported, were debating the questions she’d just posed, concerning what factors swayed male juries. Then Watkins summed up the inmates’ collective opinion in a single-sentence paragraph: “Sex.” And juries also considered appearance, Watkins added, with a cynical parenthetical comment, “(Elizabeth Unkafer was not cursed with fatal beauty!)” Then – after quoting another unnamed inmate who noted that “a

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

pretty woman's never been convicted in Cook county!" – Watkins opined, sarcastically, "Gallant old Cook county!"⁶⁹

Watkins next compared Unkafer's case to those of Beulah Annan and Belva Gaertner, finding them similar, since all three women were married and had shot their lovers. However, according to Watkins, neither Annan nor Gaertner – both of whom she apparently interviewed at the jail – could see the parallels. She explained, in quotes that again revealed the women as feckless and self-absorbed, "I can't see that it's anything at all like my case," said Mrs. Gaertner, the sophisticated divorcee indicted for shooting Law, the young auto salesman, as she twirled around in her red dancing slippers." Then Watkins added, mockingly, "The cases are entirely different," said Mrs. Annan, quite the ingénue in her girlish checked flannel frock."⁷⁰

Watkins concluded the article by indicating that even within the jail, age, social class and appearance could get a woman either access to nice clothes and an easy life, or relegation to base chores. While pretty Beulah Annan was relaxing in her stylish "frock," Elizabeth Unkafer – "with her straggly mop of red hair, pale eyes, and flabby cheeks" – was scrubbing the jail floors and declaring, defiantly, that she wished she'd received the death penalty instead of life behind bars. "I wanted 'em to shoot me – why not? – at State and Madison," Watkins recorded Unkafer as saying. "[M]ake a big day of it, and give every one a front seat, but they gave me life instead."⁷¹

Watkins's strong opinions on "gallant old Cook County" were again evident in her next bylined story, about jury selection for the Beulah Annan case. Throughout the article, Watkins

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid. While Watkins may have been honing her voice, stylistically, her work remained plagued by small inaccuracies. In one story, "Woman Given Life in Jail as Murderess," she listed Elizabeth Unkafer's age as 46; the next day, in "Beulah Anna Awaits Stork, Murder Trial," she reduced that to 43.

portrayed Annan as so confident in her ability to manipulate the men who would determine her fate that she became bored by the whole exercise. In the first paragraph, Watkins described Annan as flirting with the men who would try her, explaining how she “smiled and pouted, sighed and turned r.s.v.p eyes on the jury.” Later, Watkins showed Annan as in complete control of the selection process, “with a nod of her pretty bobbed head” choosing four “bachelors,” while a “pouting no” was enough to make her male attorney move for “peremptory rejection.” When the proceedings got too tedious for Annan, she “leaned wearily on one white hand – with Raphaelite profile turned toward the jury – and pensively sighed now and then,” according to Watkins, who added that only when complete attention returned to the murderess, in the form of a question about her health, was Annan “revived sufficiently to powder her nose and pose for some pictures.”⁷²

Watkins also focused on the men who *didn't* get selected for service, and chose quotes that strongly implied that those who hadn't been swayed by feminine beauty and who would have been able to convict were sensible and right-thinking. After reminding readers that Annan had shot her lover in the back, in “her husband's apartment,” Watkins quoted one potential juror who had been excused for having “fixed opinions” about Annan's guilt as complaining, “Too damned many women getting away with murder!” And another, dismissed for “cause,” reportedly said, “I'd have given her the rope, I would!” Meanwhile, according to Watkins, in a flippantly sarcastic and darkly humorous paragraph, “Prohibition struck off four or five more, who confessed they might be prejudiced against a modern Salome who killed a man after a drinking party – and then played jazz while he lay dying.”⁷³

⁷² Watkins, “Select Jury to Pronounce Fate of Beulah Annan,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 23 May 1924, 6.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

When the case actually came to trial, Watkins earned a front-page byline for her cynical and blatantly opinionated article, “Judge Admits All of Beulah’s Killing Stories.” Observing the trial, Watkins may have felt that a pretty woman was finally going to receive just punishment in Cook County, because Annan’s stories were unequivocally contradictory, and the murderess was caught in lie after lie as the trial advanced. In her lead, Watkins explained – in a way that seemed optimistic, especially when taken in the context of the entire article – that Annan’s “chance for freedom was lessened yesterday” when the presiding judge ruled that the various stories she’d told police on the night of the murder were all admissible evidence.⁷⁴

Noting that Annan had bragged about being the only witness, so jurors would ““have to believe my story,”” Watkins asked, in a single-sentence paragraph, “But which one?”⁷⁵

Watkins added that even the previously confident Annan seemed concerned, describing her as “[p]ale, not quite so pretty,” even though Annan was dressed in a “new brown satin crepe frock, with furpiece thrown over one arm” and walked “carelessly to the stand,” where she “moistened her lips . . . seeming calm.” However, Watkins observed, her answers “were weak.”⁷⁶

Watkins then explained how witness after witness poked holes in Annan’s numerous and varied recollections of the events that occurred on the night she admittedly killed Kalstedt, starting with testimony by a police officer who told the court that Annan – supposedly drunk beyond functioning – asked for immunity and requested that he ““frame”” the scene so it would

⁷⁴ Watkins, “Judge Admits All of Beulah’s Killing Stories,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 24 May 1924, 1.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

look like an accident. According to Watkins, the officer recalled Annan as seeming “perfectly natural” that evening, perhaps “a little sorry now and then, but smiling most of the time.”⁷⁷

Watkins also recorded testimony by another witness who claimed that Annan had called her at 4:10 p.m. on the day of the killing, asking if she knew where Kalstedt was, and stating that he hadn’t shown up for an appointment they’d made. No doubt believing that Annan was getting closer to a long jail sentence, if not a hanging, Watkins described the reaction in the courtroom: “The court and jury looked at Beulah, for at 4:20 Kalstedt was lying in her apartment – dead – and she was playing jazz records on the Victrola!”⁷⁸

Meanwhile, she reported that Annan’s own version of events, which continued to evolve, caused the judge to “cast unbelieving glances at the young woman who sat so calmly,” clearly telling lies.⁷⁹

In reporting Annan’s final version of the killing, Watkins didn’t use her usual dashes and cliffhangers to create tension. Instead, she used a series of exclamation points that managed to imply that she believed the entire drama was fabricated, and the attorney’s fervor meant to distract jurors from the facts. Describing the climax of the testimony, Watkins wrote:

Then, according to her attorney, Beulah, in a frenzy, started – O no, not for the gun, but for the telephone, to tell her husband the danger she was in! And it was then Kalstedt went for the gun – conveniently parked on the bed – but she had the inside track! And in the struggle she turned around and that’s how he was shot in the back! [Attorney Stewart posed to show just how it was done.]⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Watkins then slyly used lyrics from the “Hula Lou” song to reinforce Annan’s guilt, noting that Annan played a song about a woman who ““had more sweeties than a dog has fleas”” to “keep the neighbors from suspecting.”⁸¹

Watkins also continued to reinforce Annan’s blasé – and calculated – attitude toward the murder and the trial, noting that Annan “tried to register contrition and regret at proper intervals” but was “frankly bored” by the majority of the proceedings and “stared around the room like a wide-eyed kitten.” Then Watkins used exclamation points to again create a sense of incredulity at the defense attorney’s portrayal of his client: “Beulah, the virtuous working girl! Beulah, the modest little housewife!”⁸²

Given the tremendous amount of evidence against Annan, which had obviously left Watkins with no doubt about Annan’s guilt – indeed, enough confidence in her judgment that she felt free to essentially convict the woman in a major newspaper, and to strongly imply that anyone who didn’t do the same was a fool – Watkins might have honestly believed that justice would finally come to a pretty girl on “Murderess’ Row.” Perhaps the preacher’s daughter even felt that she had achieved her goal of helping to serve as an “avenging angel,” as Perry called her.⁸³

If that was the case, Watkins was to be disappointed.

The next day, the *Tribune* again put Watkins on the front page for her story, “Jury Finds Beulah Annan Is ‘Not Guilty.’” The lead was both cynical, flippant and indicative of what must have been Watkins’s disbelief: “Beulah Annan, whose pursuit of wine, men and jazz music was

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Perry, *The Girls of Murder City*, 21.

interrupted by her glibness with the trigger finger, was given freedom last night by her ‘beauty proof’ jury.”⁸⁴

Before highlighting Annan’s testimony – for she took the stand on the last day of the trial – Watkins shared Annan’s reaction to the verdict with readers, describing how Annan breathlessly thanked the jury, shaking their hands. Writing sarcastically, Watkins also noted how Annan was trailed by her “faithful” husband, “who has stood by her from the very night he found the man lying dead in his bedroom . . .”⁸⁵

Although Watkins helped to contribute to Annan’s fame and would later use the case as fodder for *Chicago*, she also noted – no less than three times – that Annan was being followed by “motion picture” cameras and lights for a newsreel. The sense that Annan was becoming a true celebrity is heightened by Watkins’s use of the word “debut” to describe the murderess’s shift from potential killer to would-be actress, one who already had her jury under her thrall, enough that they flirted and joked with her. A sense of – improper – glamour surrounds the proceedings, as described by Watkins, who wrote, “Under the glare of motion picture lights . . . Beulah took the stand. In another new dress . . . she made her debut as an actress. And the jury laughingly nominated the youngest of their sheiks as a Rudolf for the titian haired sheba.”⁸⁶

Watkins used the prosecutor as her voice of reason in what she otherwise described as something akin to madness. Watkins reported the state’s attorney’s reaction to the verdict in a quote, with another of the exclamation points that she used so freely: “‘Another pretty women gone free . . . Beautiful, but not dumb!’”⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Watkins, “Jury Finds Beulah Annan Is ‘Not Guilty,’” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 25 May 1924, 1.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Watkins then sardonically noted that after telling two stories about the shooting, the third version – which Annan told when she took the stand – “was the charm.”⁸⁸

In the final article, Watkins also played up Annan’s falsely naive, ingénue persona – wielding her descriptions sarcastically, in complete opposition to the sob sister tradition. Annan, she wrote, “answered the questions in her childlike, southern voice, and turned innocent, pleading eyes to the jury and attorney” – although in the context of the story, there can be no doubt that Watkins believed the whole thing was an act. Her description of how Annan paused to compose herself at a crucial part of the story was also obviously mocking. Annan, Watkins wrote, “closed her eyes a moment, then went bravely on . . .” In a subsequent paragraph, Watkins again recounted how Annan paused to ostensibly control her emotions – but the reporter’s skepticism about that ploy is evident in her emphasis – again – on the movie cameras present.

Although the footage would be shown in movie theaters, it would be presented as part of a newsreel. However, Watkins always referred to the lights and cameras as “movie” or “motion picture” equipment. It seems plain that Watkins was trying to convey to readers that Annan was acting when she wrote, “[Beulah] closed her eyes – her face pale under the glare of the movie lights – in horror of the picture, and weakly described the details of the shooting.”⁸⁹

In a more straightforward fashion, Watkins also spelled out the prosecution’s very logical arguments for conviction, restating how unlikely it would be for a woman to try to placate a man by drinking with him, and to be a step behind him, yet reach the gun first – let alone how no one

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

could seem to explain how Kalstedt even knew Annan kept a gun on her bed, if he'd never been in the house before, as Annan had claimed.⁹⁰

Then Watkins became even more openly critical of Annan, describing how she flatly repudiated every statement of her initial confessions in “childishly petulant tones” before leaving the stand with “the settled complacency of a school girl who has said her piece.”⁹¹

In an even more forthrightly reproachful paragraph, Watkins re-emphasized Annan’s self-centeredness, calling her a “tender hearted slayer” – but only in the sense that, after Annan “had played the victrola while the man she murdered lay dying” and “laughed at his inquest” – she was moved to tears by “her attorney’s impassioned account of the suffering she had undergone at the hands of the police . . .”⁹²

In the last two paragraphs, Watkins laid out the arguments for and against conviction, casting Annan’s attorney in the sob sister role, the jury in the role of brainless pawns, and herself as the cynical observer. She wrote, “And again [Annan] was overcome with emotion when Mr. O’Brien painted the picture of ‘this frail little girl . . . struggling with a drunken brute’ – and the jury shook their heads in approbation and chewed their gum more energetically.”⁹³

She next quoted the prosecution as telling the jury, “[Y]ou must decide whether you want to let another pretty woman go out and say, ‘I got away with it!’”⁹⁴

Then in a final, incredulous paragraph, Watkins wrote, simply, “And they did.”⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Leopold and Loeb Mute Watkins's Voice

As the movie cameras were following Beulah Annan, giving Watkins fodder for didactic, yet humorous, observations on men, women, celebrity and justice, another murder was grabbing the nation's attention and changing, if only temporarily, Chicago's bemused attitude toward its criminal element. As noted earlier, the kidnapping and "thrill killing" of young Robert Franks by wealthy and brilliant Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb cast a shadow over the city, as everyone from reporters to social scientists to average citizens struggled to understand how intelligent boys from "good" homes could kill just for the experience of having taken a life.

As also noted previously, the *Tribune* promised its readers comprehensive coverage by a team of its best reporters – including Watkins, who would provide "a review of the Loeb youth's life and family."⁹⁶

Her first bylined story about the murder appeared just one day after Watkins's article about the verdict in the Beulah Annan case, and it was markedly different in tone. In fact, Watkins's coverage of the young victim's funeral came close to melodramatic, reading more like a piece by a sob sister than a mob sister. While her coverage of the Annan case contained frequent, mocking references to the "Hula Lou" song, she led her funeral story with a quote from a psalm – "I will lift up mine eyes to the hills" – followed by the slightly maudlin paragraph, "But her mother heart lay buried behind the marble slab with its words of gold: '1909 – Robert Franks – 1924.'"⁹⁷

A few paragraphs later, Watkins described "the little white coffin in the library," adding, in syrupy prose, "There before the fireplace where he used to dream, it stood, covered with a

⁹⁶ "An Unprecedented Crime," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 June 1924, 1.

⁹⁷ Watkins, "Simple Funeral Service is Held for Franks Boy," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 May 1924, 3.

blanket of crimson rosebuds.” The bereaved mother, Watkins noted, was in a mute haze of grief until she met a group of her deceased son’s schoolmates, at which point she “ran her hands hungrily over their faces. Some with the round features of childhood, others slim in adolescence – and four days ago her son had been with them!”⁹⁸ The exclamation point, which she’d wielded with sarcasm or to point out hypocrisies in previous articles made an already overblown observation even more maudlin, in this case.

Watkins partially regained her more predominant cynical, sarcastic perspective a few days later, when she was among a crowd of reporters who interviewed Nathan Leopold shortly after he was arrested and before he’d confessed. Although the *Tribune* ultimately assigned Genevieve Forbes Herrick the task of tackling the psychological aspects of the case, Watkins produced the first in-depth and perceptive profile of the boy who would eventually be charged with the murder and who took credit for being the “mastermind” behind the killing.

Discussing her work on the case for the *New York World* in 1927, Watkins – after noting that she was the only woman reporter to interview Leopold and Loeb on the day before they confessed – recalled how she approached her single opportunity to ask a question, calling it “the biggest gamble I ever took” as a journalist. And the query she developed must have seemed like an odd one to at least some of her fellow scribes. She asked of Leopold, ““What three men do you consider the greatest whoever lived?””⁹⁹

Watkins insisted that she wasn’t trying to be esoteric or clever; on the contrary, she told the *World* that she simply wanted to ask something that would generate a response that would

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Merrill, “Pistol Fire Lights Up ‘Chicago,’” M1.

allow her to fill column inches. She explained, “I wasn’t thinking about the crime. I was thinking about my story – how I could get two columns out of one question.”¹⁰⁰

Leopold’s response – Nietzsche, Haeckel and Epicurus – proved telling for Watkins, though. She explained that Nietzsche believed in “the superior man,” while Haeckel rejected immortality, and Epicurus “advocated the right of the individual to do as he pleased.” “With that sort of philosophy as a foundation,” Watkins explained, “one could begin to see how they might have done it . . . At 1 they confessed . . .”¹⁰¹

In spite of Watkins’s claim that the question was somewhat random, she almost certainly had more than just potentially filling space in mind when she asked it. The resulting article, as well as her analysis of Leopold’s response in her interview with the *World*, both indicate that she expected the inquiry to yield important insights – as it did.

Peppered with her trademark exclamation points, her page-three story, “Big Experience, Either Way, Is Nathan’s View,” demonstrates her own education – and her preacher’s daughter’s disgust with a brilliant, privileged boy who denied God in favor of self-indulgent philosophies and whose tastes ran toward erotic novels, cigarettes and booze.

She led with an Oscar Wilde quote that captured what would become the “theme” of the case – “experience”: “To regret an experience is to nullify it,” wrote Oscar Wilde . . .¹⁰²

Watkins then paraphrased Leopold’s answer to her question about his heroes before adding, scornfully, that the young accused killer was “having an ‘experience’ that seems to bring him no ‘regret,’ no worry, no alarm.” Instead, Leopold answered reporters’ and attorneys’

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Watkins, “Big Experience Either Way, Is Nathan’s View,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 31 May 1924, 3.

questions “Caesar-like,” lighting cigarette after cigarette, and “speaking rapidly enough to keep the questioner busy writing.” Mocking Leopold’s opinions more directly through her heavily sarcastic use of exclamation points, Watkins noted the he answered simply – “but not ‘modestly’ for modesty is only a ‘pose!’” – and “not ‘superiorly’ for that betrays an ‘inferiority complex!’”¹⁰³

Watkins also pointed out Leopold’s atheism and his hypocrisy in not recommending that philosophy for the “‘hoi polloi,’” because, “‘God, he bethinks, is a good thing to hold the common people in check.” In addition, Watkins twice played up Leopold’s interest in erotica, and added, with obvious disapproval, “He has built for himself a world beyond religion, beyond morality, beyond convention . . . And he does not preach his convictions to others, for he realizes that such meat is only for the strong.”¹⁰⁴

A modern reader aware of Watkins’s keen intelligence and Radcliffe education also gets the sense that she was personally irritated to be spoken down to by Leopold. Several times, she described Leopold as “carefully spelling and explaining” things when he “dictated” to reporters details such as the “fifteen languages” he had studied at a variety of universities. And she comes across as somewhat superior, herself, in her description of her fellow journalists’ collective failure to keep up with Leopold’s answers, writing that as he spoke, “the most conceited tribe on earth – reporters! – nibble their pencils and coughed suggestingly [sic] for spellings and definitions!”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

She concluded the story with her usual terse, sarcastic send-off – and a few more exclamation points: “If he’s not connected with the crime – what an experience! And if he is connected – still it’s experience!”¹⁰⁶

Watkins’s tone was not always pitch perfect when she reported on Leopold and Loeb. For example, her next article, a rather straightforward piece that had her in the field, trying to interview Richard Loeb’s friends and family, ends with a strangely exuberant message from the state’s attorney, “We have a hanging case and are ready to go to the jury today!”¹⁰⁷ But there is no denying that Watkins was among the first reporters, if not *the* first reporter, to latch onto that word, “experience,” which would become so central to the case.

Leaving the *Tribune* as the Murderess’ Row Empties

As the general public’s attention became riveted on the Leopold-Loeb murder, Watkins returned to reporting on a case that better suited her ironic, mocking style. In an acid-toned article, “Mrs. Gaertner Has ‘Class’ As She Faces Jury,” Watkins unleashed her arsenal of exclamation points and quotations-meant-to-imply-quite-the-opposite on Cook County’s “most stylish” murderess, Belva Gaertner. She began by calling Gaertner, the former cabaret dancer who killed her married lover, Walter Law, a “perfect lady” in the lead – then reminded readers that Gaertner’s defense would hinge on her impaired memory of the events that took place in her car, because “the lady herself was so ‘dead drunk’ after a night of gin and jazz . . . that she doesn’t remember!”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Watkins, “‘Dick Innocent,’ Loeb’s Protest; Plan Defense,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 June 1924, 5.

¹⁰⁸ Watkins, “Mrs. Gaertner Has ‘Class’ As She Faces Jury,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4 June 1924, 4.

Watkins then injected one of her about-face paragraphs meant to stop any laughter, noting that Law's widow – “a sweet-faced woman in heavy mourning” – was also in the courtroom. And of the two women, Watkins observed, the widow seemed most worried about the trial, the implication being that Gaertner was confident she would be acquitted, while the wife was afraid that justice wouldn't be served.¹⁰⁹

Then Watkins eviscerated Gaertner's character again, describing her as a “cabaret dancer and twice divorcee” who was nevertheless “as demure as any convent girl – yesterday!” Meanwhile, Watkins reported, humorously, that Gaertner's makeup made the thirty-eight-year-old appear “well on the dangerous side of 30.”¹¹⁰

Perhaps Watkins had grown in confidence as a writer, or perhaps she was exasperated by the Annan verdict, but her mocking tone seems even less restrained in this article. “‘Class’ – that was Belva,” she wrote, in a paragraph that dripped sarcasm, especially when she described Gaertner's outfit. “And a hat – ah, that hat! [sic] helmet shaped, with a silver buckle and cockade of ribbon, with one streamer tied jauntily – coquettishly – bewitchingly – under her chin.”¹¹¹

Watkins obviously found the whole jury selection process a farce, and conveyed that to readers. After explaining how potential jurors promised they wouldn't be prejudiced against a “‘lady’” who drank alcohol, Watkins wrote that the process went “merrily on to find a hat-proof, sex-proof, ‘damp’ jury who would also accept circumstantial evidence as conclusive.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

Yet the evidence, as outlined by Watkins, seemed pretty damning. Although there were “no witnesses,” there was “a man found dead, slumped over the steering wheel of Mrs. Gaertner’s car; a bullet in his head from her pistol left lying on the sedan floor; and the woman herself in her apartment . . . hysterical, disheveled, and drenched with blood.”¹¹³

Then, with the air of someone extremely jaded, given that Watkins had only been reporting on crime for a few months, she added that Gaertner’s planned defense – “loss of memory” – “will at least be unique.”¹¹⁴

Covering the second day of the trial, Watkins was even more scathing and direct in her indictment of Gaertner. In a graphic paragraph, she contrasted Gaertner’s blasé, almost bemused, attitude with the gory details of the murder, writing:

Her sultry eyes never lost their dreaminess as policemen described the dead body slumped over the wheel of her Nash sedan – the matted hair around the wound, the blood that dripped in pools – and her revolver and “fifth” of gin lying on the floor. Her sensuous mouth kept its soft curves as they told of finding her in her apartment . . . with blood on [sic] coat, blood on her dress of green velvet and silver cloth, and blood on the silver slippers.¹¹⁵

According to Watkins, the only indication that Gaertner was at all nervous lay in the former dancer’s twitching, “twinkling” feet – which, Watkins added sarcastically, had earlier “danced her into [her first husband’s] heart,” and “to – and from! – a bridle path romance” with her second husband, then had “stolen her into a ‘palship’ with a young married man . . .”¹¹⁶

She also mocked both Gaertner and the jury by first reminding readers that the jurymen had been chosen after promising not to be prejudiced against a woman who drank alcohol, then

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ “State Launches Trail of Belva for Law Killing,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 5 June 1924, 12.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

describing how they “pepped up a bit” at the introduction of the gin bottle as evidence. “. . . Belva herself leaned forward,” Watkins added, concluding with dry wit, “But it was empty.”¹¹⁷

Then, writing with dripping sarcasm that any Prohibition-era Chicagoan would have presumably understood, Watkins paraphrased testimony by the manager of a bar frequented by Gaertner and the man she’d allegedly shot: “According to his statement, the Gingham Inn is matched in dryness only by the Sahara; no liquor is sold there, no liquor is brought there, no liquor is displayed there on table, floor, or under cover.”¹¹⁸

Gaertner’s defense about being too drunk to remember what she’d done on the night of the murder might have been unique, but the verdict, as it turned out, would not be unusual for Cook County. The next day, Watkins again landed on the front page with her story, “Jury Finds Mrs. Gaertner Not Guilty.”¹¹⁹

Once again, this article demonstrates the *Tribune*’s willingness to allow women to work the same hours that men would be expected to work. Watkins noted that the verdict didn’t come in until after midnight, and that she was in the courtroom, watching Gaertner smoke cigarettes and pace near the “bullpen” while the jury deliberated.¹²⁰

Watkins was clearly incredulous about the verdict, but as usual, she expressed her feelings with bitter humor, describing – and passing her own quite different verdict on – Gaertner as “another of those women who messed things up by adding a gun to her fondness for gin and men . . .” And Watkins took another jab at the justice system and Gaertner by reporting that the acquitted woman’s first priority was to “get her elaborate wardrobe from the jail,” after which

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Watkins, “Jury Finds Mrs. Gaertner Not Guilty,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 June 1924, 1.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Gaertner intended to “remarry her divorced husband . . .” then “sail for Europe ‘to forget all this.’”¹²¹

Employing her technique of injecting sober reminders into her primarily humorous, breezy reports, Watkins then noted, “But there’s one woman who won’t forget: Mrs. Freda Law, widow of the slain man, who half fainted when the verdict was read . . .” The widow, Watkins added, cried what was obviously Watkins’s lament, too. In fact – given the sobbing woman’s convenient reference to Illinois – this quote also seems as though it might have been at least partially fabricated, or edited, to convey Watkins’s own opinions: ““There’s no justice in Illinois! No justice! Walter paid – why shouldn’t she?””¹²²

Watkins, who apparently would later revise her own age downward when she achieved her degree of celebrity, nevertheless seemed amused by the fact that Gaertner attempted to present herself as youthful. She reported that the jury, lulled into boredom while receiving instructions, “all sat alert when he reached the age of the defendant: ‘about 38,’ and turned to stare at the youthful, rounded creature . . .” In a paragraph highlighting Gaertner’s outfit, Watkins also described how a mink “choker” “softened the lines of her throat,” adding that “only her hands . . . showed her age.”¹²³ Read together, all of Watkins’s articles on Gaertner seem to indicate that she considered Gaertner too old to have been drinking in a car with a younger man and getting herself involved in a murder.

Watkins would write one more article about Chicago’s female killers – a page-ten story about the dwindling ranks on “Murderess’s Row.” And the piece, written three years before

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

Genevieve Forbes Herrick produced her series of columns on the strategies that women used to get away with murder, touches on almost all of the themes Forbes Herrick later expanded upon.

While the two women – indeed, all of the mob sisters – must have known each other, perhaps quite well, this research was unable to uncover any documents in which they comment upon each other, either personally or professionally. It is reasonable to assume that Watkins, intelligent and ambitious, would have been well aware of Forbes Herrick’s star status at the *Tribune* and studied and adopted her style, but there seems to be no proof of this. In general – while this research uncovered *male* reporters’ thoughts on several of the mob sisters – the women almost seem to have existed independently of one another.¹²⁴

Yet, while it isn’t clear how much the women talked, or how they reached their ultimate conclusions, there is definite overlap in their ideas and observations. For example, in 1924, Watkins referred to jail as a “rest cure,” that allowed Belva Gaertner to “look one hundred per cent better” when she walked out.¹²⁵ Similarly, in 1927, Forbes Herrick wrote a straight news article titled “Lady Slayer Indorses Jail as Rest Cure”¹²⁶ and touted the restorative properties of prison in two columns: “Informally . . . Jail Can Really Do a Lot for a Woman”¹²⁷ and “Ladies in Crime – Bernice Zalimas – Two Trials and Out.”¹²⁸

¹²⁴ In *The Girls of Murder City*, Perry, however, hints that Forbes Herrick may have been threatened by Watkins, writing that by 1924, Forbes Herrick “could feel her status as the top ‘girl reporter’ at the *Tribune* slipping away” and that even after Watkins left “her confidence never quite returned,” 161. This research finds no evidence of lost confidence or diminished status on Forbes Herrick’s part, however, as she continued to produce dozens of front-page, bylined stories and be celebrated by the *Tribune* throughout the 1920s. Meanwhile, Watkins earned only a few bylines in general, and produced even fewer front page stories.

¹²⁵ Watkins, “Murderess Row Loses Class as Belva is Freed,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 June 1924, 10.

¹²⁶ Forbes Herrick, “Lady Slayer Indorses Jail as Rest Cure,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 23 March 1927, 13.

¹²⁷ Forbes Herrick, “Informally... Jail Can Really Do a Lot for a Woman,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3 July 1927, S2.

¹²⁸ Forbes Herrick, “Ladies in Crime – Bernice Zalimas – Two Trials and Out,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 24 April 1927, 12.

Watkins was also the first to write directly about how women used makeup as “‘weapons of defense’” when they went to trial,¹²⁹ as Forbes Herrick also did in the columns listed above.

In addition, both Watkins, and later Forbes Herrick, described how condemned killer Sabella Nitti – the Italian immigrant characterized by Forbes Herrick as “a wizened up, crouching, monkey-like creature”¹³⁰ – greeted visitors to the county jail with cries of, “‘Me choke.’”¹³¹

It seems unlikely that Forbes Herrick would have recalled a small page-ten story written by a colleague three years earlier when crafting her 1927 columns, and she certainly had enough experience covering the jail and courts to draw her own conclusions about women who killed their men. However, Watkins may well have been the first to identify at least some of the strategies those women used to ensure that they walked free, planting the seeds for Forbes Herrick’s later reflections. And Forbes Herrick’s awareness might also have been heightened by Watkins’s play, *Chicago*, which was first produced in December 1926 and became an instant sensation.¹³² By the time Forbes Herrick wrote her columns, Watkins had essentially presented those same observations in semi-fictionalized form on the Broadway stage.

Either way, when Forbes Herrick produced her columns and *Chicago* reached New York, the days of the glamorous murderess were already passing. In her article about the release of Belva Gaertner, Watkins observed, sardonically, “Only four women, the fewest in years, are now waiting trial for murder – for they’re getting out even faster than they’re getting in!” Moreover,

¹²⁹ Watkins, “Murderess Row Loses Class as Belva is Freed,” 10.

¹³⁰ Forbes Herrick, “Lady Murderesses – The Orthwein Case,” F10.

¹³¹ Watkins, “Murderess Row Loses Class as Belva is Freed,” 10, and Forbes Herrick, “Ladies in Crime – Sabella Nitti, the Senora With Wrinkles,” J4.

¹³² Watkins, *Chicago*, 1.

she added, the loss of “pretty” Beulah Annan and “stylish” Belvah Gaertner had “plunged murderess’ row into oblivion,” as none of the remaining inmates was “cursed with the grace or beauty of Diana.”¹³³

From Chicago to Broadway

And as Murderess’ Row emptied out, Watkins prepared to leave reporting after logging less than a year on the job, in favor of returning East to resume her study of playwriting.

She wrote one more bylined crime article on the Leopold-Loeb murder, dated June 12, 1924, and while she attempted to apply her trademark voice, her witty, sarcastic style – so on point, when applied to cases involving irresponsible adults who swilled gin, committed adultery, and ended up shooting each other – again wasn’t well-suited to a story about the murder of an innocent child. Covering Leopold and Loeb’s arraignment, Watkins attempted to lighten the lead by referring to the young men as “collectors of sensation,” noting that they had a “big day . . . for it brought them a new experience: court arraignment . . .” But the joke fell flat within the same sentence, when she included “for the murder of Bobby Franks – whom they killed as they’d crush a beetle!”¹³⁴

In a subsequent paragraph, she described Leopold as “that gentleman who first won fame because ‘he loved the birdies so’” – a questionably amusing reference to Leopold’s claim that he’d been bird watching in the area where Franks’s body was found. And Watkins’s direct address to Leopold, meant to be clever commentary on Leopold’s atheism, didn’t quite hit the mark: “How it must have delighted his egocentric soul – your pardon, Leopold! – his egocentric mind . . .” to witness the crowds that had gathered at the courthouse. Similarly, her aside about

¹³³ Watkins, “Murderess Row Loses Class as Belva is Freed,” 10.

¹³⁴ Watkins, “Leopold, Loeb Trail Set for Monday, Aug. 4, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 June 1924, 9.

the young killers' addition of "sir" to their "not guilty" pleas seems out of place in such a genuinely tragic story. She wrote, parenthetically, "They never forgot the 'sir' – millionaires are bringing etiquette to our courts!"¹³⁵

Perhaps, if she had stayed on the case, she could've figured out a better way to bring her considerable writing talent and intellect to bear on such a grim narrative. One of the final paragraphs, in particular, seems to strike the proper tone, without sacrificing literary quality. Describing Leopold and Loeb's return to prison after arraignment, she wrote, "They were led back across the 'Bridge of Sighs,' those two young Frankensteins who have not yet realized that the monster they created – 'Experience' – has at last turned to devour them."¹³⁶ The sentence is insightful and evocative, without being too flippant, or erring in the opposite direction and becoming too saccharine, as happened with her story about Bobby Franks's funeral.

However, the piece was the last significant bylined article she would write about crime for the *Tribune*. By July, she had shifted entirely to writing movie critiques – for reasons uncertain – and by August she was gone, returned to the Yale drama workshop, where she would use her experiences as a reporter to write *Chicago* – first titled *A Brave Little Woman* – and earn the highest grade the professor ever handed out.¹³⁷

The success of the play made Watkins somewhat of a celebrity, but she remained a mystery, too. In her 1927 *New York World* profile, she painted a contradictory portrait of herself as a reporter who "thrived on murders" and found theater critiques "very tame life after killings," but who believed that the only thing that could cure social ills was Christianity – even

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ "The Author of 'Chicago,'" X1.

as she longed for a chance to cover a homicide. She also said, perhaps with the intention of shocking New Yorkers with a tough, Chicago sensibility that would have been at odds with her otherwise demure presence, “Gunmen are just divine, they have such lovely, quaint old-fashioned ideas about women being on pedestals. My idea of something pleasant is to be surrounded by gunmen.” And after describing, with apparent sincerity, her views on a Christianity that didn’t necessarily turn the other cheek, but rather allowed for justice – “there is just as much Christianity in having your sympathy with the man who was killed and in restraining the individual” – she noted, flippantly, “Murderesses have such lovely names . . . and faithful husbands.” In short, nothing seems to add up, except the *World* reporter’s conclusion that Watkins was a “clever kid.” Perhaps one who had learned a few lessons about publicity from murderesses that were uncomfortably at odds with a deep-seated morality. In a comment that indicates Watkins was well aware of her ability to craft her own image, she told her interviewer, “I think you are unfortunate in not having interviewed killers instead of writers, because you see murderers at a crisis when they come out and say anything whereas writers are always self-conscious.”¹³⁸ And a self-conscious individual, she suggested, may fashion a calculated, less-than-candid response.

It is difficult to believe Watkins’s assertion in a *New Yorker* profile, referenced earlier, that she left reporting “because she was becoming too fond of writing about murderers.”¹³⁹ More likely, Perry, author of *The Girls of Murder City*, is correct when he conjectures that Watkins either asked to leave the crime beat because it “had taken a toll on her,” mentally – or that the

¹³⁸ Merrill, “Pistol Fire Lights Up ‘Chicago,’” M1.

¹³⁹ “Young Lady,” 18.

Tribune reassigned her because her witty, acerbic style was unsuited to the Leopold and Loeb case.¹⁴⁰

In addition, although a small point, there are contradictory reports on the grade Watkins received for her play. The *New Yorker* reported that she earned a grade of 100 percent, while a story in *The New York Times* revised that down to a 98 percent.¹⁴¹ It's impossible to know if one of the journalists made an honest mistake, or if Watkins gave conflicting information, as she did with her age.

Finally, Watkins seems to have directly fibbed – at least to *The New York Times* – about the origins of her play, just as she had apparently hedged for the *World*. According to the *Times*, “the highlight” of Watkins’s career at the *Tribune* was her coverage of the Leopold and Loeb case, and it was that story that “supplied her with much of the material for ‘Chicago.’”¹⁴²

Quite obviously, the play was based on Watkins’s coverage of the Beulah Annan and Belva Gaertner cases, not Leopold and Loeb.

Pauly, who wrote the introduction for the bound edition of *Chicago*, surmises that Watkins lied about the source of her material because she didn’t want audiences to know that she had played a big part in the travesties of justice that she exploited in her play – a concern that would later evolve into “deep-seated guilt” over being “responsible for murderesses going free.”¹⁴³ However, this seems doubtful, given that Watkins, as a reporter, did her best to achieve quite the opposite goal, and to incite the public – albeit in a humorous way – to change a system that allowed women to kill with impunity. If anything, Watkins wished that she could have

¹⁴⁰ Perry, *The Girls of Murder City*, 227-228.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² “The Author of Chicago,” X1.

¹⁴³ Pauly, in Watkins, *Chicago*, xiii.

editorialized even more directly in her already slanted news reporting, and told *New York World* readers, ““In news articles, you are not allowed to write editorials – to my everlasting regret, because I have a preacher’s mind. So what I had to leave out of them, I put into *Chicago*.””¹⁴⁴

Perry posits a more plausible explanation – namely, that Watkins may have been concerned that she’d written a play so close to actual events, going so far as to include dialogue taken directly from Beulah Annan’s trial, that she might have lost credit for creating something original if Broadway theatergoers and critics found out.¹⁴⁵ In her *World* interview, she seemed to take pains to avoid direct discussion of the cases that she drew upon to create *Chicago*, calling the play vaguely, ““a composite – the result of watching justice and publicity in their relation to crime.””¹⁴⁶

Regardless, Chicago audiences were well aware of the origins of the play that poked fun at their city’s murderesses. Belva Gaertner attended the play’s Chicago opening and readily identified herself as the inspiration for the character Velma, while Beulah Annan’s attorney W. W. O’Brien heard some of his own actual words come out of character Billy Flynn’s mouth.¹⁴⁷

Genevieve Forbes Herrick also recognized all of the players in *Chicago* and wrote an open letter to *Tribune* readers after seeing the play. The letter, written in October 1927, seems almost nostalgic for a time when the women’s wing at the Cook County jail was filled with interesting characters. In jest, she asked the theater manager for a block of seats ““that I may take as my guests the women whom Maurine interviewed that May day, more than two years ago?””¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Merrill, “Pistol Fire Lights Up ‘Chicago,’” M1.

¹⁴⁵ Perry, *The Girls of Murder City*, 238.

¹⁴⁶ Merrill, “Pistol Fire Lights Up ‘Chicago,’” M1.

¹⁴⁷ Pauly, in Watkins, *Chicago*, xxvi-xxvii.

¹⁴⁸ Forbes Herrick, “This Thing and That Thing of the Theater,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 Oct. 1927, B1.

Forbes Herrick then suggested “an aisle seat” for Beulah Annan, “the Roxie of the piece,” who was “a sufficiently good shot to get her man with one bullet in the back,” but nevertheless “went free; else there might have been no play.” Forbes Herrick also identified Belva Gaertner as Velma, saw Elizabeth Unkafer in the character of Liz, and Sabella Nitti in Moonshine Maggie. Last but not least, she requested a ticket for Kitty Malm, the inspiration for Go-to-Hell Kitty and the one killer for whom Forbes Herrick, at least, harbored genuine sympathy. “She’s a life-timer at Joliet,” Forbes Herrick noted, “but, if the Harris Theater management throws in an extra ticket for a guard, I’ll try to get permission for Kitty to come along.”¹⁴⁹

Watkins’s play has, of course, endured the test of time, but she never again wrote anything that matched its level of success. Her next play, *Revelry*, an adaptation of a book about corruption in the Harding administration, fell flat, and although she eventually became a fairly prolific screenwriter up through the early 1940s, she never produced a movie with lasting impact, either. In fact, Pauly asserts that the success of *Chicago* “created more demand for her as a journalist than playwright.”¹⁵⁰ For example, the New York *World* hired her to comment on the sordid divorce case involving wealthy “Peaches” and “Daddy” Browning, and the *Daily Telegraph* contracted her to cover the famous Snyder-Gray murder trial.¹⁵¹

However, Watkins was, in general, struggling to live up to the high expectations that *Chicago* had created for her. As Perry explains, she was “just trying to hold on” by early 1928.¹⁵² In 1929, she moved to California and focused primarily on screenwriting, sometimes

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Pauly, in Watkins, *Chicago*, xxvii.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, xxvii-xxviii, and Perry, *The Girls of Murder City*, 247-250.

¹⁵² Perry, *The Girls of Murder City*, 253.

writing movies based on original short stories that she also penned. Her best received film was the 1936 MGM release *Libeled Lady*, which featured an all-star cast that included William Powell, Spencer Tracy and Jean Harlow.¹⁵³ The movie – a comedy about a newspaper editor – earned an Academy Award nomination for best picture.¹⁵⁴

By the early 1950s, Watkins – who blocked all efforts to revive *Chicago*, for reasons that remain disputed – was becoming increasingly reclusive and, in the view of some observers, eccentric. Diagnosed with lung cancer, she spent much of her time distributing her fortune in the form of bequests to universities such as Harvard and Princeton, to support scholarships for students studying Greek and the Bible. She also took to wearing a veil whenever she went outside; the affectation, which was one source of her reputation as an eccentric, was actually to hide a disfiguring skin cancer. However, it was her lung cancer that proved fatal.¹⁵⁵ She died in Jacksonville, Florida – where she'd moved to be close to her parents – at the age of seventy-three. Her estate – born, initially, of her perceptive coverage of Chicago's "Murderess's Row" – was valued at \$2.3 million.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ "Her Life," accessed 23 March 2013, <http://www.maurinewatkins.com/index1-herlife.htm>.

¹⁵⁴ Perry, *The Girls of Murder City*, 263.

¹⁵⁵ "Her Life," <http://www.maurinewatkins.com/index1-herlife.htm>.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

Chapter 6 – Kathleen McLaughlin

While Genevieve Forbes Herrick might have been the *Chicago Tribune*'s star reporter, eclipsing even her male colleagues during the 1920s, and Maurine Watkins was able to parlay her stint as a journalist into Broadway success, fellow general assignment reporter Kathleen McLaughlin arguably enjoyed the most professional and personal satisfaction over the long term.

After leaving the *Tribune*, she became one of the first women to not only crack the *New York Times*'s longstanding policy against hiring female reporters, but to earn some page one bylines,¹ eventually serving as a *Times* war correspondent in Europe near the end of World War II.² And while in Chicago, she was perhaps the most versatile of the mob sisters, covering crime; producing features, such as a much-touted behind-the-scenes series on the city's servant class;³ and serving as a political correspondent, earning *Tribune* recognition as one of the "star woman reporters of America" alongside male colleagues during the 1928 presidential election.⁴

McLaughlin's story, as a reporter, is a lesson in the rewards of hard work, in combination with a little luck in terms of being in the right place at the right time.

Interviewed in the 1970s for a book about groundbreaking women reporters, she recalled using her local paper, the *Atchison (Kansas) Daily Globe*, to learn to read. One day, scanning the articles, she asked her mother, "Who finds out what happens?" Her mother explained the role of reporters, to which McLaughlin replied, "When I grow up, I want to be a reporter."⁵

¹ Betty Winfield, "Mrs. Roosevelt's Press Conference Association: The First Lady Shines a Light," *Journalism History*, 8, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 65.

² Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 150, and Collins, *She Was There*, 27-28.

³ See, e.g., "What Ho! The Hunt in Merrie England! From a Butler's Viewpoint by Kathleen McLaughlin," Display Ad, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 15 July 1928, 117.

⁴ "Herb vs. Al – Here is Mighty Drama," Display Ad, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 5 Nov. 1928, 32.

⁵ Collins, *She Was There*, 28.

Unlike many childhood career fantasies, McLaughlin's dream of being a journalist never wavered. She explained, in *She Was There*, “ . . . I found it magnetic to find out what was happening and to tell it, preferably in grammatical form. I'm sure that I'm a throwback to what my mother would have been and done, except that she was born a little bit too soon.”⁶

A native of Greenleaf, Kansas, McLaughlin and her family moved to Atchison when she was very young. Later, she landed her first job on the paper that had inspired her childhood query about reporting. In her profile in the 1925 booklet *Women and The Chicago Tribune*, McLaughlin shared the story of her hiring:

For the past several years I pined for the life of a reporter, but didn't have the nerve to break in. I sent in a number of stories that were accepted, and finally, gritting my teeth, asked for a job on the Daily Globe – and got it. I began as a cub reporter, March 25, 1923, and the longer I worked the better I liked it.⁷

The next year she went to Chicago on vacation and, clippings in hand, stopped by the *Tribune* to request an interview. As Ross explained, McLaughlin arrived at an opportune time, because Maurine Watkins had just left the paper. Ross added, “[McLaughlin] was the girl on the spot. She had a capable manner, a persuasive tongue. The city editor studied her clippings and told her she could go to work in the morning.”⁸

McLaughlin expanded upon this story in her interview for *She Was There*, describing how she told the city editor that she needed to return to Atchison to pack up her things and make what she called “a mannerly exit” from her old job. “I was stopped cold by the day city editor, who said, ‘Do you want to work here or don't you?’ I said, ‘Of course, I do.’” She resigned

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *Women and The Chicago Tribune*, 39.

⁸ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 161.

from the *Daily Globe* by telegram and started as a general assignment reporter in 1925, during the height of what she described as “the purple chapters of gangsterism in Chicago.”⁹

The pressures of working at the *Tribune* initially took their toll on McLaughlin, who claimed to have shed fifteen pounds in her first two months on the job, “just out of worry and anxiety and trying to keep up.” The stress was heightened by the intensity of the Chicago newspapers’ legendary circulation wars at that time. McLaughlin described the competition as “but terrific,” noting that reporters engaged in “all sorts of trickery” to get scoops, adding, “If you happened to be a naïve cub reporter, a beginner, it was just too bad because you got educated in a hurry.” She found her footing, though, and earned her first byline before six months had passed.¹⁰

McLaughlin didn’t attend college, but considered her time at the *Tribune* a valuable education, recalling, “One of the best schools of journalism I could have had was the *Chicago Tribune* staff. Did they knock you into shape, tell you where you got off! I encountered incomparable people who had backgrounds I just didn’t have, but which sort of shed on me.”¹¹

“[S]wept into the whirlpool of crime reporting,”¹² as Ross describes it, McLaughlin also found covering trials educational. Without benefit of any formal legal training, either, she learned about law on the job by “covering trial after trial” over the course of a decade.¹³

⁹ Collins, *She Was There*, 29.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 29-31.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 161.

¹³ Collins, *She Was There*, 30.

In addition, McLaughlin wrote about mobsters, explaining that *Tribune* reporters were expected to “report their idiosyncrasies, their convictions, the color, the danger, the risks of their lives.”¹⁴

Covering the “Purple Chapters of Gangsterism” and Chicago’s “Lady Murderesses”

McLaughlin’s first bylined crime story – and her second bylined story of any type – shows her taking over coverage of a trial first reported on, extensively, by Genevieve Forbes Herrick.¹⁵ The case, referenced earlier in the chapter on Forbes Herrick, involved a family argument that had left a wealthy matriarch, Lillian Holt, dead with four bullets in her body. Accused of the murder were the woman’s daughter, Clara Harq; Clara’s husband; and Clara’s stepfather, all of whom, coverage implied, were involved in a complicated love triangle. The three alleged that Mrs. Holt committed suicide, and the testimony, as reported by Forbes Herrick, centered – often graphically – on whether a woman could have realistically shot herself four times. In one of several explicit descriptions of the wounds, Forbes Herrick wrote that the fourth bullet “entered the mouth, deflected a bit, severed the spinal cord and embedded itself in the back of her head.”¹⁶

Then, for reasons unclear, just as the trial was wrapping up, Kathleen McLaughlin – who had just joined the *Tribune* staff in August¹⁷ – took over for her more veteran colleague, writing the final two stories about closing arguments and the verdict. Forbes Herrick’s stories about the

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Forbes Herrick, “Medical Experts Will Clash as Holt Witnesses,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 13 Nov. 1925, 5; “Clara to Tell Own Version of Mother’s Death,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 Nov. 1925, 7; “Clara’s Counsel Says Mrs. Holt Was Demented,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 17 Nov. 1925, 12; “Suicide Note of Mrs. Holt Ruled Out,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 18 Nov. 1925, 16; “Holt Describes Stormy Scenes With Mrs. Holt,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 19 Nov. 1925, 14.

¹⁶ Forbes Herrick, “Medical Experts Will Clash as Holt Witnesses,” 5.

¹⁷ *Women and The Chicago Tribune*, 39.

case hovered between pages five and fourteen, and McLaughlin's first article, "Fate of Clara, Holt, Too Near Hands of Jury," landed even deeper in the *Tribune*, on page 19.¹⁸ However her second article – and third bylined for the paper – earned a spot on page one as *the* top story of the day.¹⁹

McLaughlin's first story on the case, which summarizes the start of closing arguments, is straightforward and unembellished, and contains the same type of blunt language that Forbes Herrick employed. McLaughlin encapsulated the prosecution's case in bullet points, including:

Bruises and lacerations on the head and face of the dead woman, admittedly not self-inflicted.
Position in which the body lay, arms close to the sides and the feet together, as though, in the words of one witness, "she was ready for her coffin."
Discoloration of one eye, indicating that she had received a blow.²⁰

It is unclear how much the more experienced – by then cynical – Forbes Herrick might have communicated with her newer colleague, but in McLaughlin's subsequent front-page article about the verdict, she did note Clara Harq's attitude of "almost . . . nonchalance," and described her as "languid."²¹ Using actions, as opposed to adjectives, Forbes Herrick had earlier told readers how Harq had "snuggled down into her mink wrap and yawned" during jury selection.²²

It is likely that McLaughlin continued to cover crime-related stories and trials after the Harq case, but she didn't earn another byline for that type of reportage until March 26, 1926, when she again landed on the front page – and again for a story initially assigned to Genevieve Forbes Herrick. Or, more accurately, McLaughlin covered the flip side of a Forbes Herrick

¹⁸ Kathleen McLaughlin, "Fate of Clara, Holt, Too, Near Hands of Jury," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 24 Nov. 1925, 19.

¹⁹ McLaughlin, "Clear 3 Holt Defendants," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 25 Nov. 1925, 1.

²⁰ McLaughlin, "Fate of Clara, Holt, Too, Near Hands of Jury," 19.

²¹ McLaughlin, "Clear 3 Holt Defendants," 1.

²² Forbes Herrick, "Plead Tender Hearts to Avoid Holt Case Jury," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 Nov. 1925, 16.

story, riding on the train carrying mobster Big Tim Murphy home from prison. Three years earlier, Forbes Herrick had accompanied Murphy to Leavenworth, capturing the larger-than-life figure in all his loquacious, colorful glory, and sometimes seeming appreciative, at least, of Murphy's way with words.²³

The gangster-slash-celebrity would engender in McLaughlin even more blatantly conflicted feelings. In fact, McLaughlin, Murphy and his wife, Florence, would forge something of a friendship that lasted even beyond Murphy's murder at the hands of rivals.

Ishbel Ross describes McLaughlin as "look[ing] after" Big Tim and his family "when they go into hot water."²⁴ In addition, as McPhaul notes in *Deadlines and Monkeyshines*, his history of Chicago reporting, after Murphy was killed, his widow Florence "gave Miss McLaughlin the first news of her impending marriage" to gangster John "Dingbat" Oberta.²⁵ According to Ross, McLaughlin was so deep in Florence Murphy's confidence that at one point, the widow broke down and revealed who had shot Big Tim, essentially breaking a gangland code. Without explaining who would have been at risk, Ross adds that the story was judged "too dangerous to use."²⁶ Further, at Florence Murphy Oberta's second husband's wake – because "Dingbat" Oberta was murdered, too – McLaughlin was allowed to remain with the widow when all other attendants were removed by bodyguards so a rival mobster could safely pay his respects. Ross adds that McLaughlin watched the tribute "somewhat cynically."²⁷

²³ See, Genevieve Forbes, "Murphy Reaches Leavenworth Today," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 Feb. 1923, 1.

²⁴ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 161.

²⁵ McPhaul, *Deadlines and Monkeyshines*, 129.

²⁶ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 162.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

In *She Was There*, McLaughlin discussed her relationship with the Murphy family extensively, calling time spent with Big Tim one of her “really pleasant memories of Chicago, believe it or not . . .” She added, “Big Tim was . . . a part of *my* education. Here was . . . apparently one of the most loving and tender husbands . . .” After describing Murphy’s affection for his adopted children, too, McLaughlin concluded, ambiguously, “There was so much good in him, along with his, shall I say, questionable operations.”²⁸

McLaughlin also recalled running late to a meeting with Big Tim, which forced her to chase after him in the street as he walked away. The small incident stayed with her because she was struck by how Murphy had to continually look over his shoulders, constantly on guard for enemies. Shortly after that, McLaughlin explained, Murphy was shot down in front of his house, an incident she related with an implied shrug, perhaps born of covering years of gangland warfare, summing up the death with, “That was it for Big Tim.”²⁹

In her first article about Murphy, McLaughlin didn’t even get close enough to the gangster to interview him. The piece’s appearance on page one, with a banner headline, was more testament to Murphy’s popularity in Chicago than McLaughlin’s skill as a journalist. Obviously relegated to the sidelines, she focused primarily on the crowd of reporters, well-wishers and family members who have traveled to Kansas to accompany Murphy home.

Nevertheless, the short article did exhibit some of the mob sister trademark cynical wit and language. For example, McLaughlin described Big Tim as “one of the best known nonpaying guests Uncle Sam has ever entertained,” and the penitentiary as the “big house.”³⁰

²⁸ Collins, *She Was There*, 31-32.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁰ McLaughlin, “Big Tim’ Murphy Released,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 March 1926, 1.

Her second article about the trip didn't show her gaining much greater access, although Murphy actually exited the jail and spoke to reporters. Again, however, McLaughlin exhibited sarcasm and cynicism, calling the prison a "boarding home for those enmeshed in difficulties with the government," and relating how the warden didn't bother to offer Big Tim a farewell. "Tim," she joked, "didn't seem to mind his host's absence." She also used a small detail to good effect by referring to Murphy as "No. 18990," which served as a reminder that, although there was talk of holding a parade to welcome him back to Chicago, Murphy was a criminal. Similarly, McLaughlin mocked Murphy's triumphant return to society by noting that the attendant flag raising was performed by an inmate "doing thirty years for knifing" someone "in a crap game in France."³¹

McLaughlin also incorporated slang, through the use of Murphy's colorful quotes. For example, she quoted Murphy as responding to a question about conditions at Leavenworth with, "I'm saying nothing right now . . . But let me tell you this, there's an investigation going on up there right now and the birds on it are straight shooters."³²

McLaughlin produced two more stories about Murphy's return to Chicago, but each was buried deeper in the paper. Her March 28 article appeared on page four, and her March 29 article – which showed Big Tim as finally en route, after some legal complications – was placed on page eleven.³³

Both of these articles primarily recap the legal wrangling that delayed Murphy's trip, and while they are sometimes humorous, they fail to capture Murphy the way that Forbes Herrick did

³¹ McLaughlin, "Big Tim Jovial as He Breathes Air of Freedom," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 27 March 1926, 1.

³² Ibid.

³³ McLaughlin, "Big Tim in No Hurry to Come Back to Chicago," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 March 1926, 4; and "Big Tim, Assured It's Safe Here, on Way Home," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 March 1926, 11.

in her travels with the gangster. However, this may not have been entirely a reflection of either reporters' skills or experience. It is quite possible that three years in Leavenworth had left Murphy less cocky and talkative than he had been before incarceration. Indeed, the quotes that McLaughlin did get seem to show the mobster as worried, irritated and even, at one point, "just one iota bewildered" by his freedom.³⁴

Two years later, McLaughlin was among the reporters who helped to cover Murphy's assassination, most likely by a rival mob. Her June 28, 1928, article about Murphy's widow's reaction to the slaying, which took place at Murphy's house, when he answered the door, wasn't the primary piece on the killing, but was notable for having a byline; other related stories, including the front page article detailing the murder, were not attributed. Her story, "Anger Mingles with Grief of Murphy's Widow," also showed that McLaughlin had gone from being a novice outsider to penetrating the Murphy clan's inner circle, as both she and Ross would later claim. In a slangy, bittersweet lead, she described how Murphy – done "forever with the 'rackets'" – was laid out in his "snug bungalow" in a "silver gray coffin, magnificent yet plain." Then she added an almost wistful aside that indicated her familiarity with the mobster: "Tim would have liked that coffin."³⁵

Then, although she would later claim to Ross, at least, that Florence Murphy actually shared the name of her husband's killer, she quoted the widow as denying any such knowledge: "If I knew who killed Tim Murphy, I wouldn't tell anybody," McLaughlin related Florence's protests. "I wouldn't wait for anybody. I'd take a gun and kill them . . ." In an instance of potential complicity with her sources, McLaughlin made a point of reiterating that claim in her

³⁴ "Big Tim Jovial as He Breathes Air of Freedom," 1.

³⁵ McLaughlin, "Anger Mingles with Grief of Murphy's Widow," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 June 1928, 8.

own words – but in a slightly humorous way that Chicago audiences probably would have understood as indicating quite the opposite. The widow Murphy, McLaughlin wrote, “didn’t have the remotest idea who might have wanted to kill the genial victim of gang vengeance.”³⁶

McLaughlin later allowed the widow to try to cast her dead husband in a glowing light that also would have been familiar to Chicago residents, who were by then used to gangsters who tried to polish their images by playing the role of generous community benefactors. McLaughlin reported Florence Murphy as asking, all innocence, ““But why should any one want to kill him? He had the biggest heart in the world – he’d have given the shirt off his back to anybody that needed it.”” Then – reminiscent of Forbes Herrick’s anecdote about how mobster Terrance Druggan’s mother insisted upon playing up her son’s past kindnesses when confronted with his current cruelties³⁷ – McLaughlin described how Florence Murphy emphasized her deceased husband’s insistence on helping others, because he’d grown up when ““times were so tough.””³⁸

Finally, in another narrative that also would have been familiar to cynical Chicagoans, McLaughlin related how the Murphy family had been just on the verge of leaving the city – and, presumably its vices – forever, in favor of living on a country farm with ““a big herd of cows.””³⁹

In early September 1928, McLaughlin wrote a sidebar on the slaying of mobster Tony Lombardo. Dispatched to interview Lombardo’s widow, McLaughlin arrived at her house to learn that Mrs. Lombardo – never identified by first name – hadn’t yet been informed about her husband’s demise. McLaughlin’s lead was brutally straightforward, describing how Lombardo “slumped to the sidewalk . . . with a bullet through his brain.” But the following paragraphs are

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Forbes Herrick, “Dodging the Girl Reporter’s Questions,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4 Sept. 1927, N1.

³⁸ McLaughlin, “Anger Mingles with Grief of Murphy’s Widow,” 8.

³⁹ Ibid.

disconcerting in a different way, as McLaughlin related her awkward efforts to cushion the blow of the news. She described reporters – it is unclear how many, if any, others were at the home – as “stumblingly” trying to lead the widow to draw her own correct conclusion. According to McLaughlin, reporters first advised Mrs. Lombardo that her husband was “hurt,” then “badly hurt.” Ultimately, when the widow begged to be taken to the hospital to see Lombardo, a reporter – perhaps McLaughlin, perhaps not – called the police station and learned that the body was at a mortuary. “The widow did not hear the [conversation], but she read the expression on the reporter’s face as the telephone was returned to the desk,” McLaughlin explained. And when the widow finally asked, point blank, if her husband was dead, “It was impossible to do anything but to nod an affirmative.”⁴⁰

Obviously, McLaughlin was sent to get the “feminine” side of the story, and she did veer close to melodrama at some points, as when she described the widow’s wails when she, in turn, broke the bad news to her children. But the story is also book-ended by the graphic reference to the bullet in Lombardo’s head and a dispassionate recap of Lombardo’s career as criminal. For example, McLaughlin explained how Lombardo “was said to have gotten a strangle hold on the dispensers of moonshine among the Italians,” and was “an enemy of the Aiellos, and it was this feature of his affairs that was credited with the direct responsibility for his death.” McLaughlin also avoided playing the role of sob sister by incorporating a sly note about how the Lombardo family’s purchase of their “snug” brick bungalow had caused “a number of the nearby residents” to declare “their intentions of placing their property on the market . . .”⁴¹ In other words, McLaughlin may have been sympathetic to the widow’s loss, but she never lost perspective.

⁴⁰ M’Laughlin, “Young Wife Stricken by News of Lombardo Shooting as She Prepares His Belated Supper,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 Sept. 1928, 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

In March 1930, McLaughlin produced two more bylined stories about the underworld, reporting on the funeral of gangster John “Dingbat” Oberta – Florence Murphy Oberta’s second husband to meet death at the hands of the mob.⁴² Once again, McLaughlin allowed the widow to repeat the phrases that so many mobsters and their families used to protest their innocence. Quoting the two-time widow, McLaughlin wrote, “ . . . if they knew things about him why didn’t the police arrest him? He never had a record. He spent more on charity . . . than any other man did, and the proof is in that stream of people marching through . . .” However, McLaughlin also made it clear that she had no doubt about Oberta’s mob connections, noting that the crowd included “some friends, perhaps foes, and certainly the morbidly curious.” She also reported that the Catholic church would not allow Oberta to be buried with traditional rites, “not even a blessing . . . on the casket.”⁴³ More directly, in a next-day story about the continued viewing, because the funeral was delayed, McLaughlin referred to Oberta as “the slain gangster” who had a “career as a hoodlum.”⁴⁴

This article also includes the incident featured in Ross’s *Ladies of the Press*, in which McLaughlin was the only person allowed to stay with Florence Murphy Oberta when one of Chicago’s most influential mobsters came to view the corpse. “‘Close the door,’ was a quick order given last evening . . . and the room was cleared,” McLaughlin wrote. She then described

⁴² It is likely that McLaughlin also covered the inquest into the murder, because in her bylined story “Yards Folk View Oberta Body at His Mother’s Home,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 March 1930, 2, she noted that Florence Oberta’s voice, at the viewing, was “as even as when she gave testimony at the inquest Thursday.” However, McLaughlin didn’t receive a byline for an article based on the inquest.

⁴³ M’Laughlin, “Yards Folk View Oberta Body at Mother’s Home,” 2.

⁴⁴ M’Laughlin, “Throngs at Oberta Bier,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 11 March 1930, 2.

how a “heavy, black-haired man strode in through the kitchen door . . .” and “Joe Saltis, who shaped the destinies of Oberta, stood there with the candlelight flickering on his face.”⁴⁵

Presumably, readers who were following Chicago’s gangland politics and the Oberta killing in particular would have understood that Saltis helped Oberta rise in the gangster ranks, but that Oberta had also likely been killed as part of a bitter rivalry between Saltis and gangster Frank McErlane.⁴⁶

McErlane reappears in a somewhat puzzling article that McLaughlin wrote primarily about two “boy bandits,” who were arrested for robbing a theater and sent to jail in Indiana. For some reason – perhaps to scare them straight, because they came from influential families – the boys were apparently shoved into a cell with McErlane, one of Chicago’s most feared mobsters. It is equally unclear why McLaughlin and, it seems, at least one other reporter were allowed to witness the boys’ interaction with the criminal. The whole scene seems quite obviously staged, and McLaughlin reported the action as if it was part of a play, starting with the lead: “A jail cell in Valparaiso, Ind., midnight, Wednesday. A huddled figure on a narrow cot. The key grating in the lock, a mumbled sentence, and two shadowy shapes are pushed forward.”⁴⁷

The “huddled figure” turns out to be McErlane, and the “shadowy shapes” are the “boy bandits” – one of whom reportedly whispered to the other, ““Got a knife?”” As McLaughlin noted, the inquiry caused “a swift, guarded movement from the cot, and the voice of Frank McErlane, late of Chicago and the business of booze and beer, cuts into the consciousness of the tired, dismayed youngsters . . .”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., “Links McErlane Hospital Fight to Oberta Death,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3 April 1930, 11.

⁴⁷ M’Laughlin, “McErlane Tells Boy Bandits to Quit Gun Game,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 Feb. 1927, 8.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

What followed, according to McLaughlin, was an unlikely encounter between the mob boss and the “defeated rookies,” with McErlane first teaching the younger criminals how to use a knife to “rip away carefully every vestige of betraying label and laundry mark in their clothes.” After burning the labels and dumping the ashes down a drain, McErlane “turned evangelist,” according to McLaughlin. In a quote rich with vernacular and worthy of a melodrama, she recorded McErlane as advising the boys, “ . . .you’re up against a bad game . . . You’re in the wrong kind of racket. Take it from me, there isn’t a thing you can get out of it but trouble. If you go straight, you can look the world in the eye . . . It’s the bunk, the game you’re playing.”⁴⁹

The boys were then subjected to a “kangaroo court,” judged by a mail thief, a burglar and a robber, while a rapist and a murderer listened from the next cell, according to McLaughlin, who added that the “shrieks and wails” of a woman who would go on trial for murder the next day, “rasps at [the boys’] nerves.”⁵⁰

Although never directly stated, the entire evening seems to have been the 1920s version of the more modern television show “Scared Straight,” reported in the newspaper, as opposed to shown on a screen. And, in McLaughlin’s view, the plan worked. The boys sounded full of regret as they lamented – jointly, in a quote that seems enhanced, if not outright fabricated, ““The newspaper stories always mentioned the loot and the getaway – they never seemed to connect up with jails and steel bars.”” According to McLaughlin, the boys’ concluded, grimly, ““Time after time we drove by the . . . prison and thought how bleak it looked. Now we’re going there – maybe for life.””⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Not only does the phrase “connect up with jails and steel bars” and the word “bleak” seem unlikely for teenage boys to use, but the fact that they were quoted jointly adds to the sense of inauthenticity. To this modern researcher, it appears that McLaughlin was dispatched to create a form of public service announcement, with the help of a mobster.

Her final bylined – front page – story about the mob was again at the intersection of crime and more typical “woman’s page” reporting, as she covered the wedding of Al Capone’s sister, Mafalda. However, while McLaughlin did include details that presumably would have appealed to women readers, such as descriptions of the bridesmaids’ dresses – “sleeveless models of pink taffeta” – and their hats – “pink duvetyn . . . with turquoise satin bands” – the overall tone of the article is cynical, sarcastic and mocking, starting with a joking lead about how “[c]ertain exigencies peculiar to his calling” kept Al Capone from attending the ceremony.⁵²

Tongue in cheek, McLaughlin then referred to the wedding as “a quiet little affair” that went off with only one hitch – the arrest of “five gun toters . . . suspected of being members of the rank and file of Capone’s booze army . . .” However, according to McLaughlin, the arrests did little to interrupt the “social aspects” of the marriage – although the five men were “rebuked for the ‘social blunder’ of appearing with guns on their hips.”⁵³

McLaughlin also focused on a rumor that Mafalda and her groom had been pressured into the union to cement ties between Al Capone and Frank Diamond, another member of the “alky aristocracy.” McLaughlin wrote that Mafalda’s decision to marry “was at least partly at the dictates of her powerful brother,” while the groom “was not consulted too much as to whether he wished to marry,” either. Reinforcing that the wedding was at least in part a sham,

⁵² McLaughlin, “Capone Sister Wed; Seize 5 Armed Guards,” 1.

⁵³ Ibid.

McLaughlin noted, cynically, that the bride's mother tried to give the ceremony "an authentic touch" by dabbing her handkerchief at her eyes when she left the church.⁵⁴

A Straight-News Reporter With An Edge

When reporting on gangland, McLaughlin almost always received bylines for covering the "feminine" aspects of any story, such as the Oberta funeral, the Lombardo widow's reaction to news of her husband's death, or the Capone wedding, as opposed to writing up the hard facts about mob-related activities.

However, of the mob sisters profiled in this dissertation, she was also used the most extensively as a straight news reporter, producing dozens of blunt, no-nonsense, and unembellished articles about some of Chicago's most grisly crimes.

For example, in 1926, she earned a page-one byline for her story "Dry Shoes Clew Solves Murder: Three Confess." She was obviously at the police station when hired assassin Loren Patrick was questioned in a murder, and described how the killer feigned nonchalance until newspaper photographers arrived, at which point "a look of alarm was visible in his eyes." McLaughlin then recounted Patrick's confession in detail, explaining how he used a lead pipe to repeatedly bludgeon his victim.⁵⁵

In another typical article, McLaughlin covered the attempted murder of a popular clergyman. The spare, factual lead explained, "The Rev. Charles Erkenwick . . . one of the best known priests in Cicero, was reported near death of gunshot wounds last night in St. Ann's hospital, while his assailant . . . alternately wept and smoked his corncob pipe in a cell . . ."⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ McLaughlin, "Dry Shoes Clew Solves Murder; Three Confess," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 27 Dec. 1926, 1.

⁵⁶ McLaughlin, "Priest Shot by Thieves' Father Is Near Death," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 March 1929, 5.

She then related, dispassionately, how the killer “was fleeing from the Holy Ghost school yard . . . where he had just shot Father Erkenswick, once in the right [indecipherable] then twice in the back as the cleric wheeled away in agony and threw up his hands.”⁵⁷

In another typical crime-related article, McLaughlin covered the suicide of a man who took his own life after committing a triple homicide. In slang-infused, forthright style, McLaughlin explained how police had searched “moonshine joints” for the killer, believed to be under the influence of “synthetic booze,” only to find his decapitated body lying on train tracks. Relating testimony at the coroner’s inquest, McLaughlin described how the suicide occurred:

Preuss crawled to his death on the North Western tracks about 8:25 o’clock yesterday morning. An outbound passenger train was thundering toward him. He stretched his body along the ground and laid his head on the rail . . . A few minutes later a tower man . . . saw the body beside the track. He called the police and they identified the decapitated body.⁵⁸

Clearly, no effort was made to shield McLaughlin from harsh details about gruesome events. Her front page, lead story about the rape and murder of a young woman offers more proof that she was given the chance to cover even the most lurid stories – and that she could do so without over-emoting or holding back on description of grim realities. Describing the killing in her lead, McLaughlin explained how the young woman’s “bruised and lacerated body was found . . . beside a lonely roadway,” and that she “had been strangled after a criminal attack,” which seemed to be the *Tribune*’s standard euphemism for rape.⁵⁹

She subsequently outlined how the crime had occurred, describing how the killer, John Preston, convinced two young women to go for a drive. When the car reached an isolated area,

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ McLaughlin, “Police Hunt Rum Sellers as Mad Killer Ends Life,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 June 1929, 3.

⁵⁹ McLaughlin, “Girl Victim of Rum Killing,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 Oct. 1929, 1.

Preston said something that scared the girls enough that they “scrambled out of the car and began running down the road.” McLaughlin then explained how Preston caught one of the girls and “drove his fist into her face,” hard enough to knock her unconscious for a moment. However, as McLaughlin related, the girl regained consciousness when Preston forced her back into the car. “He drove away with the Johnston girl screaming for aid . . .,” McLaughlin added. The body was discovered the next day, lying in some weeds, close to a “bloodstained sedan.”⁶⁰

The *Tribune* also sent McLaughlin to Minneapolis to cover the trial of architect Frank Lloyd Wright, a story that had attracted national attention. While Forbes Herrick or Watkins might have made a mockery of the complicated divorce, which involved Wright; his lawful wife, Miriam; and his lover, dancer Oligivanna Milanoff and their daughter, McLaughlin didn’t mine the saga for laughs. Instead, she did a capable job of presenting the complicated twists and turns of the case – in one of many strange developments, Miriam Wright accused her husband of violating a federal “white slavery” law by taking Milanoff across state lines – in a clear and comprehensible fashion.⁶¹

In addition, McLaughlin was dispatched to Michigan to cover the 1927 trial of cult leader “King Benjamin” Purnell, head of a utopian community known as the House of David. This was also a story of national interest, in part because the colony ran a successful amusement park and popular baseball team that barnstormed the United States, but no doubt also due to the salacious

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ McLaughlin, “I’ve Loved Only 4 Women, Frank Wright Asserts,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 Oct. 1926, 20, and “Wright Held to U.S. Grand Jury Under Mann Act,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 31 Oct. 1926, 16.

aspects of the trial, for King Ben, as he was usually referred to in headlines, was accused of forcing young initiates to have sex with him.⁶²

Again, McLaughlin treated the story as a detached observer, reporting the facts without embellishment or excess commentary. While she did include fairly vivid description – such as that of King Ben’s first wife, a “scared little old lady whose accents were replete with the twang of the Kentucky moonshiners” – for the most part, McLaughlin’s writing followed the modern dictates of objectivity. A typical dry but informative passage explained, “In his lengthy arguments this afternoon, [the defense attorney] asserted that the state has not presented any specific instances tending to support the contention that the colony constitutes a nuisance . . .” And she treated testimony regarding King Ben’s alleged sexual misconduct in an equally muted way, alluding vaguely to “‘purification rites’ that have figured for years past in litigation concerning this cult,” in a page-five article about testimony by a young woman who joined the cult at age twelve. Six hours of testimony were boiled down to a few paragraphs in which McLaughlin wrote, obliquely, that the girl’s life was threatened when she “was not amenable to [King Ben’s] wishes.”⁶³

McLaughlin also frequently reported on young people who committed crimes and produced several bylined articles about “boy bandits” and “girl burglars,” in addition to her apparently staged story about the young robbers who were thrust into a jail cell to be scared straight by mobster Frank McErlane.

⁶² For more on the House of David, see, e.g., Adam Langer, “The Last Days of the House of David,” Chicago Public Library, accessed 1 April 2013, <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/the-last-days-of-the-house-of-david/Content?oid=884861>.

⁶³ McLaughlin, “House of David Plots Bared by Ben’s Confidante,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 May 1927, 5.

For example, her page-one story “Thrill Mania Turns Boys to Banditry,” is a gently amusing article about two teenagers who robbed a cab driver due to “an attack of ‘high school malaria’” and “family friction over an adolescent love affair.” The boys, McLaughlin wrote sympathetically, didn’t even have time to purchase bullets for the gun they’d ordered through the mail, and further hurt their chances of getting away with their meager seventeen dollar haul by making themselves “conspicuous for the collegiate cut of their clothes and particularly their yellow slickers.”⁶⁴

In a passage that reinforced the boys’ youth and naivete, McLaughlin explained how the two flipped a coin to determine who would hold the gun, and quoted one youth as noting, glumly, “I won and lost.” The boys, she added, were “remorseful and sheepish.”⁶⁵

Her second article about the two, placed deeper in the *Tribune* on page sixteen, reflects a continued sympathy for the young would-be bandits. McLaughlin noted that it was “a blue Monday” for the high school students as they were held on bonds pending trial. Although the robbed cab driver described them as “sure cool ones,” McLaughlin clearly had more compassion for the boys, one of whom had been turned out on the street for refusing to break up with his girlfriend. In her lead, she reminded readers that the “bold, bad bandits” had been criminals for “a hectic half hour,” and earned just seventeen dollars with “their bullet-less mail order pistol.”⁶⁶

She was less sympathetic toward a pair of teenager girls who committed a series of residential break-ins before being captured by police at the scene of a burglary. McLaughlin

⁶⁴ McLaughlin, “Thrill Mania turns Boys to Banditry,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 March 1927, 1.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ McLaughlin, “Thrill Robbers Are Both Held to Grand Jury,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 March 1927, 16.

played up their jaded facades in her lead, “It isn’t how old you are, but how much you know that counts, according to the code of 16 year old Anna Varich and her 15 year old chum, Jean Buttick, captured last night . . . as they were making a good job of looting” a bungalow. She then described how the girls – who’d earned police officers’ “grudging admiration” for being “clever” crooks – tried to elude capture by hiding in the home’s basement when they realized police had arrived, and might have gotten away if one of the officers hadn’t noticed a “key turned softly in a lock” on the basement door. The young burglars only emerged when police threatened to kill them, and one of the girls dropped a gun when shaken down. According to McLaughlin, the two “juvenile burglaresses” also “literally dripped booty,” and “spilled rings, bracelets, beaded bags and what not from every part” of their clothing.⁶⁷

McLaughlin also covered crimes involving young victims, including her straight-news story about the murder of a 15-year-old girl. McLaughlin led with an initially unattributed quote that could have come straight out of novel: ““You could cut me up into little pieces, but I’d still tell you the same story, for that’s the truth. I don’t know who took that gun out of my house Saturday night.””⁶⁸

In a surprising twist, it turns out those words were uttered by the deceased girl’s mother, who seemed to be protecting her daughter’s boyfriend, even though he’d admitted to the murder. McLaughlin noted that the coroner quizzed six witnesses for three hours “in an attempt to reconcile their conflicting statements as to the whereabouts, the possessor, and the parts played by the revolver in the events just preceding the shooting.” While never openly condemning the mother or accusing her of complicity, McLaughlin nevertheless made it clear that the situation

⁶⁷ McLaughlin, “Police Catch Girl Burglars Looting Home,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 March 1927, 1.

⁶⁸ McLaughlin, “Mother Unable to Trace Gun in Cielac Case,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 27 Sept. 1927, 14.

was a strange one, pointing out that the gun had supposedly been kept in a pantry for fourteen years, and that the girl's mother had recently moved it because she "feared the children might find it." Two weeks later, the gun was the subject of a struggle between the girl and her mother, during an argument. "Three hours later," McLaughlin explained, "it was smoking in the hands of Frank Schlieben as he gazed down at the inert body of the girl."⁶⁹

McLaughlin also covered at least part of the murder trial of four "youthful bandits" who killed a girl at movie theater, during a botched robbery. Again – without becoming maudlin – she seemed to exhibit some sympathy for everyone involved in the death-penalty case, describing the boys as "[q]uietly attentive throughout the proceedings, a culmination to their adventure in crime which had never been included in their plans for the holdup that cost them their liberty and the girl her life . . ."⁷⁰

In addition, McLaughlin reported on the trial and controversial sentencing of a 15-year-old boy who murdered a police officer, when the officer caught him trespassing inside a high school late at night. In this case, McLaughlin was completely objective and reported the facts without editorial comment. In effect, her writing reflected the demeanor of the young killer, whom she described in a page-one story as "impassive," listening to testimony "without a flicker of expression ever crossing his face."⁷¹

And when the boy, who waived a jury trial, was sentenced by the judge to eighteen years in a prison with adult criminals, McLaughlin again provided even-handed, page-one coverage. In extensive quotes, she allowed the judge to justify the punishment, noting that he had traveled

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ McLaughlin, "Pick Two Jurors at Youths' Trial for Killing Girl," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 July 1928, 3.

⁷¹ McLaughlin, "Boy Slayer's Fate in Hands of the Judge," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 15 July 1931, 1.

to the prison to discuss how the boy would fare with adult offenders, and what his life might be like there. She also provided a quote from the young killer that again emphasized his stoic demeanor, but humanized him for readers, as he defended his parents, whom the judge had partially blamed for the crime:

“I’m no cry baby and I’ve never been a cry baby,” calmly asserted the red haired boy who throughout his trial had maintained his phlegmatic attitude. He had blinked once when the court passed sentence. If his emotion was about to betray him, nobody ever knew it, for he was quickly stoical again.

“The judge was fair and kind,” Varner mumbled when he was sought out in the . . . county jail. “Only I thought I would get about 14 years, or 1 to 14, if I was lucky. But I didn’t like to see my parents get blamed so heavily. They didn’t have it coming.”⁷²

McLaughlin didn’t always soften the edges of her crime-related stories, however. Like Forbes Herrick and Watkins, she could produce crackling prose shot through with Jazz-Age slang, as she did with her coverage of the trial of a man accused of killing a police officer. The lead to her article “Star Witness Upsets State in Doody Trial” reads like a pulp detective novel: “Eddie Maciejewski, alias Eddie Mack, sprang a sizzling surprise on the prosecuting attorneys in the trial of ‘Babyface’ William Doody . . .” Indicating that she was by 1929 familiar enough with the courts to follow the gossip, she added that rumors were spreading that witness Eddie Mack might “turn state’s evidence.” And when Mack instead refused to identify Doody as the killer, McLaughlin quoted the prosecuting attorney as complaining to reporters, in a quote that could have come from a gangster movie, ““That double-crossing rat . . . He can’t get away with a story like that.”⁷³

Her subsequent stories about the trial have a similar tone. Consider the lead for her article “Widow’s Shriek Throws Doody Trial in Uproar:” “Shattered by a scream from the

⁷² McLaughlin, “Prison for Boy Slayer; Judge Rips Parents,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 July 1931, 1.

⁷³ McLaughlin, “Star Witness Upsets State in Doody Trial,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 20 Oct. 1929, 5.

widow of the victim, Willie Doody's trial for murder . . . came within an ace yesterday of blowing up with a bang." And while a sob sister might have played up the widow's grief to elicit readers' tears, McLaughlin explained how the cry actually jeopardized the prosecution's case, ruining momentum created by Doody's landlady, who testified that Doody had admitted his guilt to her. "It looked for a short time as if [the landlady] had placed Doody in the shadows of the electric chair," McLaughlin wrote, "only to have him reprieved by the scene created by [the widow]."74

Two other 1929 articles by McLaughlin – both about a mysterious young woman who tried to hold up the wealthy occupant of a hotel room – feature even more slang and staccato prose. The lead to "Girl in Cell as Bandit Baffles Police Quizzers" again reads like detective fiction: "She's the coolest redhead the Hyde Park police ever clapped into a cell. Hardly a hundred pounds of her, but she has the entire district stumped."75

Continuing to use the parlance of a hardened detective, McLaughlin added that would-be bandit Josephine Rust didn't seem like the kind of girl who would "get into a jam" . . . Yet there she is wedged tightly between a charge of burglary and assault," possibly "taking the rap' for a man." The unnamed man in question was Rust's husband, whom McLaughlin summed up in short, machine-gun bursts of words. "Garage mechanic by trade, bootlegger when business was slow. Tall, blonde, blue eyed, two years at Alabama university. Married nine years. Sometimes they had money and lived well. Sometimes they had none – and didn't."76

⁷⁴ McLaughlin, "Widow's Shriek Throws Doody Trial in Uproar," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 23 Oct. 1929, 4.

⁷⁵ McLaughlin, "Girl in Cell as Bandit Baffles Police Quizzers," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 5 Oct. 1929, 3.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Rust was a “new kind of customer to the police,” McLaughlin added, explaining how the girl seemed polished, yet had attempted to use chloroform and an ersatz gun to steal jewelry from a woman who fought back, ultimately subduing Rust. The police weren’t buying the innocent act, though, and McLaughlin reported their skepticism, noting that the girl wasn’t a former convent student, as she’d asserted, but rather a “graduate of ‘the rackets’” who probably wasn’t married – or anything else she’d claimed to be. McLaughlin concluded the story by using a quote from a police officer to encapsulate what seemed to be her conflicted feelings, too:

“She’s one of the nicest girls I ever saw – and a slick one.”⁷⁷

Other crime-related, largely straight news stories produced by McLaughlin include “Identify ‘Cat’ Bandit as Son of Old Family,”⁷⁸ “Bandit Queen or Toiling Mother? Jean’s a Puzzle,”⁷⁹ “Three Homes Desolate After Shooting; 7 Children Fatherless,”⁸⁰ and “Woman Held in 4 Poison Deaths; Quiz Physicians.”⁸¹

McLaughlin also provided front-page coverage of a high-profile and still puzzling murder by a prominent Chicago physician named Alice Lindsay Wynekoop, who was eventually convicted of killing her daughter-in-law. The convoluted case drew national attention, and the *Tribune* sent McLaughlin to profile Wynekoop, similar to the way Forbes Herrick and Watkins offered insights into “thrill killer” Nathan Leopold’s personality. For her part, McLaughlin admitted to being baffled by the cool, collected murderess. She wrote:

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ McLaughlin, “Identify ‘Cat’ Bandit as Son of Old Family,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 Sept. 1927, 1.

⁷⁹ M’Laughlin, “Bandit Queen or Toiling Mother? Jean’s a Puzzle,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 Oct. 1928, 18.

⁸⁰ McLaughlin, “Three Homes Desolate After Shooting; 7 Children Fatherless,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 June 1929, 2.

⁸¹ M’Laughlin, “Woman Held in 4 Poison Deaths; Quiz Physicians,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 27 May 1931, 3.

The dominant personality of “Dr. Lindsay” (as she was known to Chicagoans of an older generation) emerged yesterday as the strangest element of a case already famous for the profusion of its weird details. Police officials seeking a confession indicated by many clues, wrestled hour after hour with her iron determination and profound mind. Reporters interviewing her were all but stupefied by the paradox of such a gifted woman in so incongruous a case. Alienists regarded her wonderingly.⁸²

In many cases – as with the Wynekoop killing – McLaughlin treated Chicago’s murderesses more seriously than fellow mob sisters Forbes Herrick and Watkins did, even when the killings fit the patterns those two women had identified, i.e. a woman claimed to have been wronged by her man to the degree that she had no other choice but to murder him with a conveniently available gun.

For example, McLaughlin provided straightforward, uninflected coverage of the trial of Florence Leeney, who had admitted to shooting her husband. While Watkins or Forbes Herrick almost certainly would have put a cynical spin on the defendant’s timeworn excuse that she had had no choice but to kill her husband, even though he was shot while passed out, drunk, McLaughlin merely reported that “the defense will attempt to prove Mrs. Leeney’s story to police that she shot in self-defense, after a ‘night of hell,’ due to his alleged cruelty and abuse.” Nor did McLaughlin elaborate, humorously – as Watkins and Forbes Herrick likely would have done – on the fact that the murdered husband had been carrying on an affair with the shooter’s cousin.⁸³

McLaughlin’s coverage of the adulterous cousin’s testimony was also fairly unembellished. While there are hints that Dorothy Langley was a gold-digger who repaid Florence Leeney’s offer of a temporary residence by having an affair with Leeney’s husband,

⁸² McLaughlin, “Seek Dr. Wynekoop’s Motive,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 25 Nov. 1933, 1.

⁸³ McLaughlin, “Spend Day, but Get No Jurors in Leeney Case,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 Sept. 1930, 5.

McLaughlin didn't openly mock Langley. Instead, she described Langley as "desperately uncomfortable" on the stand, her hands "fumbling nervously" and "her tongue frequently becoming paralyzed . . ." ⁸⁴ In all, the article lacks the profound skepticism so often exhibited by Forbes Herrick and Watkins when they covered similar stories.

However, McLaughlin was not a sob sister, either. While she seemed to strive for objectivity more than Forbes Herrick and Watkins, she did include some clues that would have led readers to question Langley's character. For instance, McLaughlin noted that, upon cross-examination, the adulterous cousin admitted that the deceased man had set her up in a hotel room and "purchased a coat for her" ⁸⁵ – the latter a detail that Forbes Herrick often played up in coverage of similar cases in order to establish women as greedy users of men.

Meanwhile, McLaughlin didn't gloss over the defendant's flaws, either. She recounted testimony by a man who painted an unflattering portrait of killer Florence Leeney, explaining that he "cast his sister-in-law in anything but a favorable light when he repeated at length a conversations he had with her, which he gave replete with profanity." Using a direct quote, McLaughlin recalled the man as telling the court that Florence Leeney once said of her husband, "Why, I wouldn't give a --- ----- if they brought him in here with a lily in his hand." ⁸⁶

McLaughlin's coverage of a similar shooting was equally clear-cut. Again, while Forbes Herrick and Watkins likely would have mined for cynical laughs the murder of a "Don Juan" by his young bride, who claimed she'd shot her husband while wresting a gun from his hands, McLaughlin simply reported the facts. The case also involved a gun that the young woman said

⁸⁴ McLaughlin, "Leeney's Love Affair Told at Murder Trial," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 Oct. 1930, 15.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

she'd concealed in her pocket because she'd planned to commit suicide, rather than endure her husband's cruelties – a claim that Forbes Herrick almost certainly would have treated with obvious disbelief. But if McLaughlin found the story unlikely, it didn't show in her reportage, even when the prosecution asked the young killer why, if she'd intended to commit suicide, she ran away during the confrontation. McLaughlin simply recounted the testimony, even when the defendant invoked the familiar refrain, “I don't know how exactly he came to get shot.”⁸⁷

Again, though, McLaughlin wasn't a sob sister, even if her prose wasn't as biting as Forbes Herrick's or that of McLaughlin's predecessor, Watkins. She simply reported the facts in the style of a modern journalist. Perhaps this was a reflection of her personality and her writing style, or perhaps, in the new, more sober, decade of the 1930s the public no longer found female killers amusing, while journalists, in general, were moving farther away from opinion-laden stories and toward the ideal of objectivity.⁸⁸

Most likely, McLaughlin's technique and voice were a reflection of all those factors. The nation's mood was darker by the time she covered Leeney and the “Don Juan” murderess. And McLaughlin, herself, wrote an article about what seemed to mark the revocation of the “get out of jail free” pass for female killers in Chicago, closing out an era. In her 1930 story, “Woman's Jury Holds Woman in Gun Killing,” she wrote about the second case in which Cook County women were allowed to serve on a jury, and the first time women were allowed to deliberate on a shooting. According to McLaughlin, the female defendant and her friends and relatives were shocked and dismayed when the killer was held over for trial, describing them as “apparently unprepared for anything but an exoneration.” She then quoted the defendant's supporters as

⁸⁷ McLaughlin, “Inquest Jury Clears Widow of ‘Don Juan,’” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 July 1931, 1.

⁸⁸ For a discussion of shift toward objectivity in journalism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Beasley in Sloan's *The Media in America*, 292.

crying out complaints such as, “How could women do that to a woman?” And, “They didn’t understand – they didn’t listen to the testimony.”⁸⁹

If McLaughlin was equally incredulous – or, conversely, didn’t buy the widow’s oft-told tale about just happening to have a gun that she brandished to ward off an abusive husband – she didn’t share either opinion with readers. In subdued fashion, compared to her mob sister contemporaries, McLaughlin simply allowed a spokeswoman for the jury to explain that the panel wasn’t “entirely convinced it was purely an accident and would prefer the manslaughter form.”⁹⁰

McLaughlin did produce two stories about killer Dorothy Pollak that hewed more closely to the cynical, sarcastic style of Forbes Herrick and Watkins – but the articles, which stand out as different in tone from most of her work – were printed in 1932, long after the heyday of killers Belva Gaertner, Beulah Annan and Kitty Malm. In her front-page story, “Widow Pollak to Bury Her Victim Today,” McLaughlin eschewed her usual matter-of-fact reportage in favor of a breezier, sarcastic style that included phrases that seem to have been lifted directly from Watkins’s and Forbes Herrick’s earlier reportage. For example, McLaughlin described Pollak as a “self-made widow,” who had a “hectic career” in crime, and who “put a bullet through [her husband’s] head.”⁹¹

She also noted that county jail had housed “many another, but seldom a prettier, husband slayer” than Pollak, who seemed “more intent on her costume than her crime.” Meanwhile, McLaughlin reported more vividly than usual when she described the killing, explaining that the

⁸⁹ McLaughlin, “Woman’s Jury Holds Woman in Gun Killing,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 Dec. 1930, 1.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ McLaughlin, “Widow Pollak to Bury Her Victim Today,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 Aug. 1932, 1.

“automatic pistol in [Pollak’s] hand spat flame and lead.” She then dedicated most of the remaining paragraphs to speculation about whether Pollak was too pretty to be convicted, and recapping similar cases in which attractive Chicago women beat murder charges.⁹²

One might reasonably speculate that McLaughlin was influenced by the departing Forbes Herrick, who was by then transitioning to the East Coast and perhaps waxing nostalgic to her younger colleague about Murderess’s Row. In fact, McLaughlin’s story references a 1922 Forbes Herrick article about killer Tillie Klimek and discusses other subjects Forbes Herrick observed in Cook County jail, including Sabelle Nitti, Belva Gaertner, and Beulah Annan.⁹³

While McLaughlin didn’t identify Forbes Herrick by name, and this researcher was unable to unearth a quote that McLaughlin reports as verbatim from a 1922 article, McLaughlin was clearly drawing upon Forbes Herrick’s coverage of Klimek – or the older reporter’s memory of that case – when she wrote, “‘Tillie Klimek went to the penitentiary because she never had been to a beauty parlor,’ one writer reported in 1922 . . .”⁹⁴ While the quoted sentence doesn’t appear in Forbes Herrick’s story, “‘Guilty’ Is Klimek Verdict,” Forbes Herrick did note – immediately after reminding readers that Klimek was the “first woman in Cook County ever found guilty of murder” – that Klimek “has a greasy complexion, and a lumpy figure, growls instead of murmurs . . .”⁹⁵

And McLaughlin’s description of Sabelle Nitti as a “‘homely creature’” who during a year in jail “learned about powder puffs and decent hats . . . and was finally freed,” seems

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Forbes, “‘Guilty’ is Klimek Verdict,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 May 1923, 1.

directly influenced by Forbes Herrick's 1927 column "Informally . . . Jail Can Really Do a Lot for a Woman."⁹⁶

After invoking a host of other pretty killers who went free, McLaughlin concluded, cynically, that "Dorothy Pollak, say the old timers, isn't too optimistic in predicting that she'll go into the beauty business 'when I get out of this mess.'"⁹⁷ While the final quote may have been authentic, it is also strongly reminiscent of how Watkins in 1924 quoted Belva Gaertner as saying, now somewhat famously, "But gin and guns – either one is bad enough, but together they get you in a dickens of a mess, don't they?"⁹⁸

McLaughlin continued her more slangy, cynical style in her second page-one story on the case, "Fate of Gun Widow May Be Decided Today." And, although she had covered similar crimes in a more matter-of-fact fashion, she again summoned memories of the days when Chicago was home to a group of flamboyant female killers who grabbed headlines before getting off without consequences. As Watkins and Forbes Herrick were wont to do, McLaughlin immediately indicted Pollak in a slangy lead, describing her sarcastically as a "naïve" girl who probably regretted initially describing her crime as "the dirty trick I did poor Joe," a "middle-aged . . . alky dealer and money lender . . ."⁹⁹

Further, McLaughlin, in jaded terms, noted that the crime "tallied precisely with the pattern tradition has sketched for such dramatic chapters in local history" – a pattern explained by Forbes Herrick in her 1927 columns and used to good effect by Watkins when she wrote *Chicago*. Then, before relating the tale, McLaughlin cast doubt on Pollak with a set of dashes,

⁹⁶ Forbes Herrick, "Informally... Jail Can Really Do a Lot for a Woman," S2.

⁹⁷ McLaughlin, "Widow Pollak to Bury Her Victim Today," 1.

⁹⁸ Watkins, "No Sweetheart Worth Killing – Mrs. Gaertner," 17.

⁹⁹ M'Laughlin, "Fate of Gun Widow May Be Decided Today," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 31 Aug. 1932, 1.

writing, “That was – according to the story told to the police – the final quarrel, strong language, the threatening gesture from the furious husband, the convenient gun, the fatal shot, and hysterics of remorse by the woman who pulled the trigger.”¹⁰⁰

McLaughlin subsequently directly linked her article to those of her predecessors by writing:

There were, subsequently, torrents of tears, photographs of wistful expressions and prayerful attitudes, protestations that it was all inadvertent, and a consistently chic and talkative widow who went suddenly mum on the advice of her attorney. It was all routine to the Chicago that recalled its Beulah Annans, its Cora Orthweins, its Belva Gaertners.¹⁰¹

The article stands out because McLaughlin seldom wrote with such direct indictment, and because it seems so nostalgic for a time that McLaughlin largely missed, as a reporter. In addition, the nostalgia is the focus, as opposed to the murder. Significant parts of both stories revolve around recollection of killers who’d gone before. And when McLaughlin did turn her attention to the actual trial at hand, she placed an uncommon – for her – emphasis on physical description, as Forbes Herrick or Watkins often did. For example, she wrote of Pollak, “From under the brim of her new black chapeau the blue eyes of the defendant regarded him somberly.” In another passage that was more directly skeptical than most of her other work, McLaughlin described one witness “who ‘forgot’ about” a knife that the murdered man was supposedly brandishing when shot.¹⁰²

Again, one can only speculate as to why McLaughlin suddenly altered her normally unbiased style, especially so long after Forbes Herrick and Watkins had set the standard for

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

witty, sarcastic and biased reportage. Perhaps the Pollak case was so similar to the Gaertner, Annan and Orthwein cases that she felt compelled to replicate the Jazz-Age voice to cover it. However, this seems unlikely, given that McLaughlin had covered similar stories – see the Leeney and “Don Juan” cases, above – without embellishment. And while Pollak might have been attractive, she wasn’t drunk when she committed murder, like Gaertner and Annan, whose alcohol-fueled antics were a source of humor for Prohibition-era readers that Watkins, in particular, used so effectively. Pollak was also a Polish immigrant, and therefore in a more vulnerable position – perhaps closer to Italian-speaking Sabelle Nitti than, say, Gaertner, Orthwein or Annan.

The most logical conclusion this researcher can draw is that Forbes Herrick had some influence on McLaughlin’s coverage of the case. However, what the influence was remains uncertain.

A Lighter Touch of Humor

That is not to say that McLaughlin was humorless or had no capacity for cynicism or sarcasm. She simply had a lighter touch than Forbes Herrick or Watkins. However, when it no doubt seemed appropriate, she could write with the flippant, ironic tone so popular in the Jazz Age.

Her front-page article “Embezzler Is in Cell; Played on Cop Ball Team” is a good example. After describing the arrested man as an “embezzler, bootlegger, hijacker, baseball player, and bigamist,” McLaughlin humorously spotlighted Benjamin Reynolds’s successful sideline as “shortstop extraordinaire” for a police baseball team, in spite of his reputation for breaking more than one law. In a passage that Chicagoans would no doubt have found both frustrating and amusing, she quoted Reynolds as telling reporters, ““Sure, the police knew I was

a bootlegger . . . But what did they care so long as I played good ball?” In addition, McLaughlin used Reynolds’s own words to show his complete lack of character, as Forbes Herrick often did with her subjects. In a slangy quote referencing Reynolds’s bigamy, McLaughlin recorded Reynolds as admitting, ““I don’t like to tell it, but I couldn’t get work and well – she was a meal ticket.”” The story ends on a funny note, with McLaughlin quoting the second wife as threatening, ““I’ll bust him on the nose if I ever catch up with him . . .””¹⁰³

Another humorous crime story involved the arrest of famous evangelist Billy Sunday’s son for drunk and disorderly conduct – or being, as McLaughlin wrote, “in the parlance of that street, ‘three sheets to the wind.’” Noting, sarcastically, that Sunday was the child of “that vigorous opponent of his Satanic Majesty, Billy Sunday,” McLaughlin then described the outfit Sunday was wearing when arrested, jokingly explaining that “some sportive instinct had impelled him to don his suit coat with the silk lining worn on the outside, contrary to custom.”¹⁰⁴

Proving that she wasn’t shielded from the more coarse aspects of prison life that caused some newspapers to refuse to allow women to cover crime, McLaughlin next related how Sunday complained about conditions in the “hoosegow,” as she called the jail. “[T]he temporary guest of the city took exception to the heating system, which he criticized in sulphurous phrases as considerably below par.” According to McLaughlin, this was followed by an outburst “of torrid expletives” against a news photographer that culminated in Sunday exposing himself to reporters. She quoted Sunday as telling journalists:

“Come here. If you want a picture I’ll give you one,” and even the photographer blushed. His subject was ready to pose – and in comparison Lady Godiva herself was overdressed. “I’m Lady Godiva,” shouted the cell occupant to Jimmie Burns,

¹⁰³ McLaughlin, “Embezzler Is in Cell; Played on Cop Ball Team,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 Dec. 1929, 1.

¹⁰⁴ McLaughlin, “Says He’s Billy Sunday’s Son, Lady Godiva,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 March 1930, 3.

lockup keeper. “Get me a horse and I’ll ride right down State street [sic] tonight.”¹⁰⁵

McLaughlin recorded the lockup keeper’s amusing response to that request, explaining that Sunday was advised that “all Chicago’s ‘paddy wagons’ are motor driven, consequently the crowds shivering in the blizzard while they waited for trolleys and buses would have to be denied the spectacle.”¹⁰⁶

Nor was McLaughlin shielded from reporting on naked bodies when the *Tribune* sent her to Michigan to cover the raid of a nudist colony called the “Sun Sport League,” which drew some of its participants from Chicago. McLaughlin was clearly amused by the local sheriff’s difficulty in talking to a female reporter, explaining that he “betrayed a tendency to blush and hem and haw when the word ‘nude’ was mentioned.” She added, “The raid was described to a woman reporter . . . with apparent self-consciousness.” McLaughlin obviously found the story funny, though. She jokingly pointed out that the colony was led by a “smallish” man whose clothed physique “did not show promise of having that husky, healthy perfection a man ought to acquire who lives the nice clean life in the open air . . .” Then she poked fun at the sheriff, too, “reassuring” readers that he “made the raid after long and careful scrutiny of the nudists through binoculars from a nearby vantage point,” so he “got a good look at men and women, totally unclad . . . playing baseball, rowing boats and swimming . . .”¹⁰⁷

McLaughlin similarly incorporated humor – often in a sarcastic manner – in her page-one story about a man whose wife tried to extort his lover for \$5,000 to pay off a mortgage. In particular, she played up the errant husband’s insistence that he simply shared a love of flowers

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ McLaughlin, “2 Nudist Camp Leaders Move to Fight Case,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 Sept. 1933, 3.

with the woman accused of being his girlfriend. She poked fun at the husband – and demonstrated her personal skepticism – with her lead, “Albert Gregory, botanical minded suburban motorman, stood revealed yesterday in Circuit court . . . as probably the first husband whose marital misdemeanors lifted the mortgage on the old homestead.”¹⁰⁸

As Forbes Herrick often did, McLaughlin played up mundane details to demonstrate how absurd the case really was. According to McLaughlin, the affair began when Jessie Erickson – a “pretty divorcee” – “passed his interurban car on her way through the station with an armful of roses and, flipping a rose into the cab, called gaily: ‘A flower for the motorman.’” Gregory – shown in an accompanying photograph as dour and middle-aged, which makes the anecdote seem even more embarrassingly childish – later crossed paths with Erickson and “admired the posies she carried,” according to McLaughlin, tongue-in-cheek. She added that the romance progressed with “more floral offerings,” “savory pastries,” and ultimately an entire roast duck at Thanksgiving.¹⁰⁹

McLaughlin then hinted at the more salacious details of the case, describing how the couple eventually took a walk “down the Great Western railroad tracks, into a pasture, and up a gully.” Although she didn’t state anything directly, McLaughlin’s readers would have understood, as modern readers can, what she meant when she wrote, “Defense Attorney Charles W. Hadley asked a direct question. Gregory said ‘Yes’ and that there had been subsequent occasions when he visited her home.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ McLaughlin, “A Motorman’s Romance Lifts the Mortgage,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 11 May 1932, 1.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

McLaughlin also made it clear that she believed the scorned wife's meek, mild courtroom demeanor was a façade, noting in an aside that the money she'd extorted "so eased Grace Gregory's aching heart that she took back her erring mate." And the article ends with a funny anecdote about testimony by Grace's friend, who – perhaps naively – gave a damning account of seeing the check. Noting that the testimony "sent the courtroom into suppressed mirth," McLaughlin quoted the witness as saying of the money, "It was right there in front of me," Mrs. Taylor stated impressively. 'Five – thousand – dollars!' And I said, 'Why, Grace! How did you do it? Were you really damaged that much?'"¹¹¹

McLaughlin continued playing the Gregory story for laughs in her subsequent article, "Divorcee Tells How Romance Cost \$5,000." In this story, she more directly depicted Gregory as a middle-aged, love-struck fool, noting in the first paragraph that courtroom spectators "snickered audibly" at the sight of the "apex" of a love triangle. She explained, wryly, "For even his best friend would not accuse Albert of rivaling Adonis. He boasts neither the Barrymore profile or the Weissmuller physique." And yet the young divorcee Erickson fell for his questionable charms and "their friendship flowered along botanical lines," McLaughlin wrote mockingly, adding – in one of those mundane details used humorously – "the suit denied indignantly that it had ever reached the point where she conferred a whole roast duck on him . . ." ¹¹² McLaughlin again glossed over the more scandalous details, but managed to make the affair seem silly when she summarized their trysts by writing that "they rambled in the woods and transgressed the conventions." In a final sentence that capped her attempt to let readers know that Gregory was no masculine prize, McLaughlin related the motorman's response to

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² McLaughlin, "Divorcee Tells How Romance Cost \$5,000," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 May 1932, 1.

questions about his testimony, scheduled for the next day: “. . . Gregory grinned. ‘Wait and see,’ he tossed back coquettishly.”¹¹³

She used a similar tone in a fourteen-article series about a high-profile breach-of-promise suit involving Chicago millionaire Franklin Hardinge and “Tulsa divorcee” Ann Livingston. Shortly before their wedding, Hardinge discovered that Livingston was seeing another man – the truth surfaced when Livingston was struck by a motorcycle on her way to a tryst – so the would-be bridegroom took a planned honeymoon trip alone and promptly married another woman.¹¹⁴ In response, the jilted bride-to-be sued.

The suit – news of which earned McLaughlin several front-page bylines – was on the surface not particularly interesting. Rather, it was the prominence of the key player, and the ways in which McLaughlin poked fun at both parties, which elevated it to entertaining theater.

As she later did with Albert Gregory, McLaughlin made sure readers understood that Hardinge was no prize, physically, and implied from the start that his money was the main attraction for the much younger Livingston. By contrasting their disparate heights in one of her page-one stories, McLaughlin painted an amusing picture of the couple, describing Hardinge as “short, stocky, and sprucely tailored . . . Lacking by some inches Miss Livingston’s height, his gray head hardly topped the back of the [witness] chair on which she had frequently rested her neck.”¹¹⁵ In addition, McLaughlin played up the farcical aspects of the trial, as when she related one of the attorney’s questions about the ways in which Hardinge wooed Livingston. “‘Did Mr. Hardinge dance well?’ Attorney Ehrlich queried slyly. The witness . . . threw back her black

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ McLaughlin, “Ann Is Bashful, But Tells Vivid Tale of Wooing,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 June 1929, 1.

¹¹⁵ McLaughlin, “Hardinge Takes Stand; Begins Story of Love,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 June 1929, 1.

bobbed head and replied almost defiantly, ‘He was a divine dancer.’” McLaughlin added, “The divine dancer joined the rest of the courtroom in a general titter . . .”¹¹⁶

Her coverage continued in this tone over the course of the lengthy trial, which included the reading of a series of cringe-inducing love letters between Hardinge and Livingston and the inclusion of a last-minute witness who revealed everything she knew about Livingston’s checkered past, with regard to men. As was her usual style, McLaughlin never outright accused Livingston of being a gold-digger, the way that Forbes Herrick and Watkins sometimes convicted female killers. McLaughlin was more even-handed, gently – and sometimes not-so-gently – ridiculing both Hardinge and Livingston. However, her opinion did come through in her front-page article on the jury’s award of \$25,000 to Livingston.

In a passage that could have come right out of Watkin’s coverage of the Gaertner and Annan trials – or *Chicago* – and which showed that male jurors were still prone to favor pretty women, at least in civil cases, if not murders, McLaughlin wrote:

Ann Livingston, staging a speedy return to excellent spirits over her victory, soon was laughing as hysterically as she had been sobbing. She was hoisted to the shoulders of two of the jurors at the request of the hardworking cameramen whose flashguns were rivaling the recent Fourth of July bombardments and with a considerable length of silk stocking perceptible, she was photographed in that pose.¹¹⁷

Then McLaughlin added, cynically, that Livingston’s professed plan to visit her “mamma” in Tulsa to “get back some of [her] health,” might “be knocked awry” by a telegraphed offer from the owner of theater chain, who offered Livingston \$1,000 to come tell her story to live audiences.

¹¹⁶ McLaughlin, “Ann Is Bashful, But Tells Vivid Tale of Wooing,” 1.

¹¹⁷ McLaughlin, “Jury Awards Ann \$25,000,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 July 1929, 1.

A Versatile Reporter Breaks New Ground

McLaughlin's style is more difficult to define, compared to that of Forbes Herrick and Watkins. Of the three women, McLaughlin was most likely to change her journalistic voice, sometimes presenting the bare facts, sometimes employing humor, sometimes writing in the style of pulp fiction, and sometimes exhibiting a slightly softer side that Watkins never revealed, and Forbes Herrick showed only on rare occasions.

Arguably, though, it was that versatility – especially her ability to write news in a more modern, objective fashion – that made her well-suited to earn a position at the staid, factual – but iconic – *New York Times*.

As had happened when McLaughlin walked into the *Tribune* offices, just after Watkins's resignation, fate was on her side when she approached the *Times*, seeking employment.

Longtime publisher Adolph Ochs, who discouraged the hiring of female reporters, had died about one month earlier. "I didn't realize it," McLaughlin would later recall, "but I had arrived at rather an opportune time . . . Fortunately for me, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, who succeeded his father-in-law as publisher, had a completely different point of view."¹¹⁸

Unfortunately, the majority of the reporters McLaughlin would work with at the *Times* weren't necessarily as open as their publisher to the prospect of sharing the newsroom with a woman. Years later, McLaughlin recalled, ". . . [I]f I may say so, and I will say so, you could have cut the ice with a hatchet." Only one male reporter approached her to extend a welcome. "For the rest of them, I just wasn't there, for months and months."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Collins, *She Was There*, 32.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

She was clearly not discouraged by the lack of a positive reception, for her career at the *Times* spanned thirty-three years and two continents. While she was initially a woman's page editor and part of the cadre of female reporters who covered Eleanor Roosevelt – more traditional roles than she enjoyed at the *Tribune* – she later served as the *Times*'s post-World War II foreign correspondent in Bonn, Germany, where she reported on the Nuremburg trials.¹²⁰

She subsequently covered the United Nations for the *Times* and wrote two books, *New Life in Old Lands*, about the U.N.'s Technical Assistance Administration, and *What's the U.N. Doing There?* based on her experiences on that beat. In her obituary, her former employer, the *Times*, recalled her as a capable reporter who “won the trust of many diplomats and became known for perceptive writing about emerging third-world countries.”¹²¹

Ross claimed that McLaughlin had earned her *Times* colleagues' respect as early as the mid-1930s, writing in 1936 that McLaughlin was “accepted in the city room on exactly the same basis as the men – a triumph in the eyes of her colleagues, who have long regarded the *Times* as the last post to capture.”¹²²

As noted earlier, this research uncovered almost no information to shed light on what, if any, relationship the primary mob sisters shared with one another. However, there is evidence to indicate that McLaughlin, at least, was generous in her support of other women reporters and strove to promote their work in the industry. For example, in 1939, she was elected president of the New York Newspaper Women's Club,¹²³ and Ross, in *Ladies of the Press*, mentions in her profile of reporter Marcia Winn, who joined the *Chicago Tribune* in 1934, that Winn was

¹²⁰ “Kathleen McLaughlin, Ex-Times Reporter, 92,” *The New York Times*, 2 Sept. 1990, 40.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 163.

¹²³ “Heads Newspaper Women,” *The New York Times*, 18 May 1939, 27.

recruited by McLaughlin after the two met at a “woman’s convention” in Hot Springs, Arkansas.¹²⁴ If McLaughlin was concerned about guarding her enviable status among journalists, as histories of professionalization tell us that women were wont to do,¹²⁵ that is not apparent in any of the materials this research unearthed related to her life or career.

On the contrary, reflecting on her career, McLaughlin said that fellowship with other journalists was the best aspect of life as a reporter. After discussing being frozen out during her early days at the *Times*, she nevertheless told historian Jean Collins:

But primarily, I’ve been grateful for the camaraderie of many wonderful journalists. You know, when you’re on a big story, a really big story, with enough variety and number of newspapers to reflect the differences of the people covering, it’s a journalism school in itself. That happened to me time after time. I wrote my story, and the other people wrote their stories. You saw what you’d missed and how you’d muffed this angle and that angle, what they had that you didn’t have . . . It was wonderful fun . . .¹²⁶

Collins notes, in a parenthetical aside, that “McLaughlin’s friendships with her former colleagues made it possible for me to locate and interview many of them,” even in the late 1970s, long after McLaughlin’s retirement in the 1960s. Moreover, Collins met with McLaughlin at a Christmas party sponsored by the Newswomen’s Club of New York, and she wrote that when the interview was concluded, “it was late at night, but McLaughlin learned that her friends were still gathered upstairs and returned to join the party.”¹²⁷ She would have been about 80 years old at the time.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 547.

¹²⁵ For a discussion of women’s failure to foster progeny in the early days of professionalization, see, e.g., Glazer and Slater, *Unequal Colleagues*, 231-235.

¹²⁶ Collins, *She Was There*, 33.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

All of the evidence – including her nephew Neil McLaughlin’s depiction of his aunt as “feisty and energetic”¹²⁸ – indicates that McLaughlin, who never married or had children, didn’t succumb to the disappointment, doubts and disillusionment that seem to have plagued fellow mob sisters Forbes Herrick and Watkins. By all accounts, she seems to have lived a full and happy life up to her death at age 92.

And unlike Forbes Herrick, who did not meet the goal she articulated as young reporter, when interviewed for the *Tribune*’s promotional brochure *Women and the Tribune*, in which Forbes Herrick expressed her hope to be a reporter into her 80s, McLaughlin met the mark that she set for herself in that same publication. In the last paragraph of her brief biography, the then-fledgling *Tribune* reporter stated, “I believe that it is customary in a sketch of this kind to confide one’s ambition in life. Mine is to be a reporter worthy of the paper I represent. That is all.”

Considering McLaughlin’s successful forty-four combined years as a journalist representing two of the nation’s largest, most influential papers, at which she earned her share of front-page bylines, it would be difficult to argue that she did anything less than achieve that aspiration.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Kenan Heise, “Kathleen McLaughlin, 1920s Tribune Reporter,” *Chicago Tribune*, 1 Sept. 1990, accessed 3 Feb. 2013 at <http://www.chicagotribune.com/1990-09-01/news/9003130488.1.chicago-area-new-york-times-park-ridge>.

¹²⁹ *Women and the Chicago Tribune*, 39.

Chapter 7 – Leola Allard and Maureen McKernan

Two other women earn mention in this dissertation because, while not as prolific in terms of bylines as Forbes Herrick, Watkins and McLaughlin, nor prone to adding cynical, sarcastic touches to their stories on a regular basis, they were *Tribune* reporters who often covered crime during, or even before, the Roaring 20s.

Leola Allard

Leola Allard, described earlier as one of Ben Hecht’s “prime ministers” of reporting,¹ earned her first *Tribune* byline in 1919, making her the first of the women profiled in this research to cover the courts and crime.

By all accounts, Allard was a tough-minded and sometimes intimidating woman who gamely tackled any assignment, whether it was covering Chicago’s juvenile and domestic relations courts for the *Tribune* or later producing more traditional “women’s” news at other papers. The first indication of what must have been her considerable drive is a small blurb in the *Tribune* dated 1903, when Allard, a native of Pueblo, Colorado, was a student at Northwestern University. The notice, complete with a picture of Allard, celebrated her assignment as the “first woman editor of the Northwestern,” the school’s student newspaper.²

Allard also earned her first *Tribune* byline as a student, writing an opinion piece about “sentiment” versus “sentimentality.” While ultimately determining that individuals need flattery – which she equated to false sentimentality – Allard also made fun of how modern young people tend to over-praise one another, coating their carefully crafted compliments in what she calls

¹ Hecht, “Charlie Finds Chicago Gloriously Alive,” B9.

² “First Coed Editor of the Northwestern,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 25 May 1903, 11. Note: While the headline seems to indicate that she would have editorial control of the paper, the caption suggests that she would control content related only to coeducational matters.

“goo.”³ While the piece is not exactly weighty, the fact that Allard managed to get published in the *Tribune* while still a university student – in combination with her rise to the position of first female editor at her school – is indicative of ambition that Ishbel Ross also recognized.

In 1936, a decade after Allard had left the *Tribune*, Ross – while typically laudatory of women’s achievements in journalism – heaped rare praise on Allard’s enterprise and stature, calling her “a formidable member of her craft” and a “dominating personality.” In just a few paragraphs, Ross paints a clear picture of a competitive, single-minded woman who looked out for her own professional interests, noting that Allard’s “colleagues worried considerably when she was around,” because she was “a genuine scoop artist” who didn’t “believe in working with her colleagues when she scents a good story around the corner.” Ross adds, “Miss Allard was not a rival to be overlooked” while at the Chicago *Herald-Examiner* and the *Tribune*, where she “was in the thick of things during gangland’s wildest days.”⁴

Her enterprise as a young reporter at the *Herald-Examiner* earned the notice of *Editor & Publisher*. In 1918, the trade journal wrote a brief article titled “Scores Murder Scoop,” explaining how Leola Allard, a “clever feature writer,” traveled to Kansas for the paper and not only secured an interview with a principal in a noted murder referred to as “the Bradway case,” but brought her subject back to Chicago, resulting in an “exclusive interview and several photographs.” *Editor & Publisher* added that the scoop “has tantalized its competitors.”⁵ In an

³ Leola Allard, “Sentimentality Increasing, Sentiment Waning,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 Feb. 1903, 19.

⁴ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 548.

⁵ “Scores Murder Scoop,” *Editor & Publisher*, 14 Sept. 1918, 12, accessed 26 Aug. 2013, http://books.google.com/books?id=ippCAQAIAAJ&pg=RA13-PA12&lpg=RA13-PA12&dq=%E2%80%9CScores+Murder+Scoop,%E2%80%9D+Editor+%26+Publisher,+14+Sept.+1918,&source=bl&ots=yN1Ya3jN3r&sig=Ofgew_cMAvMxufWhnJBP72J5AnQ&hl=en&sa=X&ei=n1wbUvStJNSo4AO6wIDoCg&ved=0CCwQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=%E2%80%9CScores%20Murder%20Scoop%2C%E2%80%9D%20Editor%20%26%20Publisher%2C%2014%20Sept.%201918%2C&f=false.

interesting juxtaposition, the story about Allard's crime-related reportage appears above another article about the *Milwaukee Journal's* hiring of five female reporters – only because male applicants were scarce.⁶

Perhaps not surprisingly in Chicago's cutthroat news market, described earlier in this dissertation, Allard was soon hired by the rival *Tribune*. Her crime-and-court related clips – which start in 1919 with a front-page story about a high-profile divorce suit – show the evolution of a fair-minded reporter who could be hard-hitting but who could also show a softer side, without crossing the line into mawkish sob-sister territory.

Her first bylined article as a *Tribune* staff reporter is a good precursor of the work the mob sisters would do in subsequent years. Covering a divorce case involving well-known socialist organizer Adolph Germer, Allard grasped the inherent hypocrisy of a husband who was always away “giving lectures on ‘Home and Fireside,’” while his wife sat alone “watching the clock hands go ‘round,’” as Allard humorously noted in her lead. She also included a sarcastic and darkly funny quote, credited to the wronged wife, who believed her husband was having an affair: “I could give his audiences some home and fireside truths that would interest them. I would tell them how I have sat in my home by my fireside, waiting for Adolph while he was out organizing.” Referring to the infidelity, the wife, according to Allard, added, “What he was organizing wasn't always miners.”⁷

⁶ “Has Five Women Reporters,” *Editor & Publisher*, 14 Sept. 1918, 12, accessed 26 Aug. 2013, http://books.google.com/books?id=ippCAQAIAAJ&pg=RA13-PA12&lpg=RA13-PA12&dq=%E2%80%9CScores+Murder+Scoop,%E2%80%9D+Editor+%26+Publisher,+14+Sept.+1918,&source=bl&ots=yN1Ya3jN3r&sig=Ofgew_cMAvMxufWhnJBP72J5AnQ&hl=en&sa=X&ei=n1wbUvStJNSo4AO6wIDoCg&ved=0CCwQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=%E2%80%9CScores%20Murder%20Scoop%2C%E2%80%9D%20Editor%20%26%20Publisher%2C%2014%20Sept.%201918%2C&f=false.

⁷ Allard, “Germer, ‘Home’ Lecturer, Sued for a Divorce,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 15 Oct. 1919, 1.

Again using a quote from the wife, Allard concluded the article by making fun of Germer for being a hypocritical socialist and cheater, and gently mocking his wife for seeming more concerned about the former. After explaining that Germer took his lovers to a restaurant called “Henrici’s,” Allard again quoted the wife as saying, incredulously, ““The waiters at Henrici’s struck five years ago and the place has been nonunion ever since. Can you imagine a labor leader eating there even to hide an affinity!””⁸

During 1919, Allard seemed to settle into covering the domestic and juvenile court beat, earning bylines for stories that effectively personalized the juvenile court, in particular. She treated the action at the courts almost like ongoing soap operas, using the judges – most notably domestic court Judge Sheridan Fry and juvenile court Judge Victor Arnold and his assistant, Mary Bartelme – as the leading characters, while those who came before the bench served as supporting players in small – or sometimes large – dramas. Often, the vignettes Allard described were little more than touching interactions between the obviously kind-hearted, thoughtful judge and the young charges he tried to protect and guide down the right path. Read as a series, they are reminiscent of episodic television.

An October 1919 article provides a good example of how Allard was alert to small but interesting courtroom interactions, and demonstrates how familiar she was with the courts by that time, although she was just starting to earn a significant number of bylines. In the lead, she noted how it wasn’t “anything unusual to have bank presidents on the Juvenile court jury,” adding, “Several times there have been three of them sitting there at the same time.” But on that day, Allard related, one of those bank presidents did something unusual. Although banker Calvin Craig’s life was “closely associated with cold hard business” and he “didn’t relish

⁸ Ibid.

particularly being called to jury service,” the story of a seven-year-old girl whose father had abandoned her and whose mother was in a tuberculosis sanitarium touched his heart, according to Allard. Allard explained that the little girl presented “a problem” for Judge Arnold, who didn’t want to send her to an institution, but had few options. Allard quoted the judge as saying, “[S]he’s a good child, only dependent, but she should have care and some one to help her.”⁹

At that point, according to Allard, the businessman spoke up, telling the judge that he would help the girl financially. Demonstrating her enterprise, Allard obviously later tracked down Craig’s wife for comment on this touching, but hardly newsworthy, tale, which she nevertheless made interesting enough to sustain seven paragraphs.

Within the same article, Allard also included a brief but humorous anecdote about the doings in domestic court, where a woman came before the aforementioned Judge Fry seeking support from a husband who had abandoned her because she didn’t iron his collars. Allard quipped that the man was “ordered to pay his wife more than half his salary or go to the house of correction for a year, where they don’t wear collars.” She concluded the story by writing, simply, “He promised.”¹⁰

For the most part, Allard had a knack for telling sad stories in a way that could genuinely tug the heart without becoming overly sentimental. Unlike the sob sisters, who purposely tried to induce overwrought emotion with overblown prose, Allard took sometimes genuinely tragic, or at least pathetic, stories and told them in simple, straightforward language that could effectively generate sympathy, without reducing a reader to tears.

⁹ Allard, “Banker Finds Happiness by Acting on Jury,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 17 Oct. 1919, 21.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

A good example is her 1919 story, “Girl Declares Life on \$10 Wage Forced Theft.” The sob sisters presumably would have made young Mildred Lawson, who participated in a theft because she made so little money at a gum factory that she was reduced to eating gum for lunch, a decidedly piteous figure. Allard, however, painted an ambiguous portrait of a typical modern girl trying to survive in an urbanizing world, using whatever means she had at her disposal. Readers may have found Lawson either genuinely desperate – or simply too caught up in the shift toward consumerism that made individuals long for goods that were unattainable on their wages.¹¹

Allard – probably drawing upon her own experience as a young professional woman in a big city – seems to have grasped the cultural changes taking place around her when she crafted the story, about “the writhing disappointment of trying to live on \$10 a week and be honest,” as she wrote in her lead.¹²

In the next paragraph, Allard quoted Lawson as insisting she’d never done anything truly wrong in her life, and was reduced to stealing because, ““You can’t get a good job, or be treated as if you deserved respect, unless you dress well. I was so tired of being snubbed, and turned down when I asked for a good job.”” The quote, as recorded by Allard, continued, ““I used to watch the girls write on typewriters where I worked, and wish I could get education enough to run a typewriter.””¹³

Allard then enumerated the girl’s expenses in table form, demonstrating that she ran a weekly deficit after paying rent and for food and carfare. And in a quote that no doubt would

¹¹ Allard, “Girl Declares Life on \$10 Wage Forced Theft,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 18 Oct. 1919, 17.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

have resonated with the droves of young girls seeking independence in urbanizing America, Allard recorded Lawson's lament, "That doesn't include tooth paste, soap or laundry, which I do at night, after work. It doesn't include a movie now and then, or any candy or any clothes. I'll bet the folks that arrested me couldn't live on that, and they are older and wiser than I am."¹⁴

Yet Allard didn't exonerate Lawson for her crime. She related, dispassionately, how Lawson helped a man steal silver from a club, and when she got her share of the money from its sale, spent it not on rent, but on "a \$30 coat, a fancy electric hot water bottle, some pink underclothes, a manicure set . . ."¹⁵ And Lawson again seems at once pitiful, but also vain and foolish in this passage, as related by Allard:

"If you knew how hard I've tried to look neat and stylish –" and Mildred twisted the button on her institutional garb until it popped off. "A lady gave me a hat. I saw a picture in the paper of a hat with funny feathers on it. I went to the 10 cent store and got some feathers and made my hat like that. I've sewed and fixed over everything I could get, but clothes get dirty when you work in a city."¹⁶

Allard concluded the story by explaining that Lawson hoped the juvenile court would send her somewhere that would allow her to get an education. She quoted the girl as saying, "I want to be somebody, but . . . you can't be anybody on \$10 a week."¹⁷

The article might not have earned front-page status, but it almost certainly would have resonated with many young women readers, in particular, who were facing the same struggle to take part in a society beginning to stress the joys of consumption – to desire the things advertised in the very newspaper that printed Lawson's tale – and affording young women new freedoms, without necessarily giving them realistic expectations for achieving either material goods or true

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

independence.¹⁸ Whether or not she intended to do so, Allard used a petty-theft case to capture a wave of change.

Allard also identified how Prohibition was having an unanticipated impact on the caseload at the Court of Domestic Relations. In her article “Kick Wives for Lack of Kick in Homemade Rum,” she explained how wives believed Prohibition would give them “new dresses, full pantries and a less irritating winter. But there is no relief yet.” However, men who couldn’t afford to lay in stores of alcohol before the law went into effect were starting to run out of purchased booze and trying to brew their own, which usually had less alcohol content. As Allard explained, “They want their kick, and they are making life miserable for their wives because they can’t get it.”¹⁹

After providing statistics on how many domestic disturbance cases had come before the court in a recent month, Allard quoted a court official as telling her that the men who admitted to getting drunk “confessed that they had such a difficult time getting that way that they had almost rather be sober than try it over again.” In a similarly tongue-in-cheek conclusion, Allard added that the court was asking wives to “be as patient as possible with husbands who are going through this period of forced reformation, and, if possible, listen to them without throwing flat irons and chairs.”²⁰

For the most part, during 1919, Allard focused on the interactions between judges Fry and Arnold and the individuals whose troubled lives were basically laid bare before the court –

¹⁸ For more on women’s changing expectations in the post-World-War I era, see Dumenil’s *Modern Temper*, 98-144.

¹⁹ Allard, “Kick Wives for Lack of Kick in Homemade Rum,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 19 Oct. 1919, 11.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

and then *Tribune* readers. For the most part, the juvenile court stories show Arnold demonstrating compassion for the youths whose cases he adjudicated.

A typical story from juvenile court is “Home in Ash Can Opens New Life to Scorned Waif.” After relating how eleven-year-old Walter Lotarski was cast out of his mother’s and stepfather’s homes, Allard explained that the boy sought refuge in a trash can. Discovered sleeping there, he was brought before the court for placement, where, Allard wrote, he cried that nobody loved him. All of this Allard related in fairly clear-cut prose, veering toward the sentimental only when she described how the boy “rolled his cap in his dirty little hands and left the courtroom with the officer crying.”²¹

Then Allard recorded a quote from the judge, who so often served as the hero of the small dramas she presented to readers, relating his response to the boy’s claim about being unloved:

“Oh, yes, they do [love you],” the court told him. “. . . The jury men here love you. They . . . want you to have a good home, and so do I . . . We love you so much that we are going to find a farm for you out at St. Mary’s school for boys . . . And after a while [sic] when we get you so you are feeling fine . . . we are going to try to find you a fine home . . .”²²

In similar stories – one of which landed on the front page – Allard showed Arnold dressing down parents who couldn’t control their children, joking with a truant boy who shared the judge’s love of aviation,²³ and welcoming back to court a young woman who had listened to Arnold’s advice to stop drinking and ended up healthy and happy.²⁴

Allard’s admiration for Arnold was transparent – but, again, she never became overly emotive, herself, about the cases she covered. In fact, she often reported on cases that could

²¹ Allard, “Home in Ash Can Opens New Life to Scorned Waif,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 Oct. 1919, 21.

²² Ibid.

²³ Allard, “Truant Brings Good Fairies to Parent School,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 25 Oct. 1919, 1.

²⁴ Allard, “How Mary, Who Drank, Quit and Found Herself,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4 Nov. 1919, 19.

have been heartrending in even-handed, emotionless prose, such as when she wrote about a father who disciplined his son by “holding the boy by the heels and bumping his head on the pavement . . . The boy’s head was cut and he was screaming.”²⁵

Then, in the same article, she could switch gears and find humor in the tale of a woman who didn’t want to “hire high-priced detectives,” and so put her son on roller skates and charged him with finding evidence of his father’s infidelity.²⁶

Precursor to Forbes Herrick and Watkins, Allard frequently found humor in infidelity and love gone awry, as in the case of a man who tried to convince his wife that “the government didn’t allow the wives of soldiers to go to the train and bid them [g]ood-by . . .” The wife, Allard noted, jokingly, was “blessed with extraordinary intuition” that led her “straight to the railroad station,” where she discovered her husband kissing another woman farewell.²⁷

Allard similarly mocked a man whose wife not only refused to let him take part in the family’s Thanksgiving dinner, but stole all of his clothes, so he couldn’t leave the house. Noting that the man was “so miserable that he cried about it, right out in public,” Allard quoted him as relating, “ . . . I had to stay indoors all day . . . and smell the dinner down stairs and not eat. It was terrible.”²⁸

In one of Allard’s most amusing courtroom dramas, she mined a minor case involving a lost trunk for comic elements that sustained the article for more than fifteen paragraphs. And, as usual, she brought the judge to life, humanizing him for readers. The lawsuit involved a woman who was suing a company for losing her trunk full of valuables – most of which were women’s

²⁵ Allard, “Bumps His Son’s Head on Paving to Reform Him,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 Nov. 1919, 17.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Allard, “Fond Good-By to ‘Other Woman’ Is Hello to Grief,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 Nov. 1919, 12.

²⁸ Allard, “Wife’s Cooking Moves Husband to Bitter Tears,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 Nov. 1919, 7.

undergarments. The judge insisted that each article be described for experts brought in to judge their worth, estimated at \$5,000.²⁹

After describing how the primarily male courtroom staff stumbled over descriptions of things such as camisoles and “quill” – meaning “twill” – dresses, Allard related an exchange between the judge and an expert there to place a value on silk stockings. She wrote:

Then the trouble began.

“I bought ‘em for my wife a year ago for \$1.50,” said Judge Cook.

“No woman would wear ‘em at that price – they cost from \$4 to \$5 per pair,” said the expert.

“I bought silk hosiery for several years and I know what they cost. I got ‘em once for 50 cents,” said the judge with some force.

The women who were present gasped.³⁰

As noted, Allard didn’t always cover frivolous cases about women’s hosiery. The cases before the juvenile and domestic courts could be serious, as when Allard described how a man used straps attached to a billiard cue as an “instrument of torture” to beat his sons.³¹ The juvenile court also handled assaults by youths, including one that Allard covered involving two teenage girls – already incarcerated for murder – who stabbed a guard and beat a nun in an attempt to escape. Allard treated the case as straight news, relating how one of the girls secured the scissors to her wrist with a chord to make it a more effective weapon, while another used broken glass to attack their jailers.³²

²⁹ Allard, “Chemises, Silk Hose, Blushes, Grins, Shudders,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 Dec. 1919, 17.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Allard, “7 Lashed Whip for Boys Arouses Court’s Anger,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 20 Jan. 1920, 7.

³² Allard, “Girls Beat Nun, Stab Guard, in Fight to Escape,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4 March 1920, 17.

She also covered kidnapping,³³ as well as robberies, both by young people and adults. Her article “Servant Routs Invading Gang at Field Home” described an armed raid on a wealthy family’s booze-laden “prohibition cellar” that was thwarted by a revolver-toting servant.³⁴

And, like the mob sisters who would earn more prominent bylines later in the decade, by 1920 she was also covering murder. In January 1920 she wrote three stories about a bizarre homicide known as the “mustard death.” The case involved a doctor accused of injecting his mother-in-law’s bladder with mustard, burning her and resulting in her death. Allard recounted, in graphic terms, how the “pain was so intense that the liquid was not retained. The substance expelled was the color of mustard,” adding that the woman’s “bladder was full of scar tissue at the bottom, where the liquid would remain if the patient were in a lying position.”³⁵

Employing a new device, Allard also referred to herself in this and several subsequent articles, making herself part of the story. She wrote, directly, “Today I visited them,” meaning the family of the accused man, then related details of the encounter.³⁶

She also placed herself in her subsequent story about how the accused doctor’s decision to turn himself in to authorities, noting that he “told me he did not know what they were going to do with him.” After adding that he “cried like a child” – as she had dismissively done in her story about the man denied Thanksgiving dinner – Allard commented, somewhat derisively, “He was a sulky, overgrown mystery.”³⁷

³³ Allard, “Masked Past of Woman Gives Up Kidnaping Maze,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 Jan. 1920, 15.

³⁴ Allard, “Servant Routs Invading Gang at Field Home,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 Dec. 1919, 7.

³⁵ Allard, “Nurse’s Tale of Mustard Death Mystery Bared,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 Jan. 1920, 5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Allard, “Weeping, Alone, Doctor Bows to Slayer Arrest,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 13 Jan. 1920, 9.

Allard's third story on the case centered on the exhumation of another individual police suspected the doctor of killing, as part of a complicated inheritance plan. Allard did not place herself in this story, which is structured as more traditional straight news.³⁸

Allard also earned a page-three byline for her coverage of a murder involving a married man who “wanted to be a devil with the women” and ended up being shot by one of his lovers – just as his wife had predicted. The shooting left the man blinded, and the girlfriend dead. Allard again placed herself in this story, describing a strange visit to the blinded man's house, where the wife was oddly complacent about the entire affair. Allard quoted the wife as saying, blithely, “I asked him why he couldn't give up other women for me. He said men liked a change, and I guess they do.” Allard concluded by explaining, “This mother of three grown children smiled at me as she ushered me to the door as she might a casual caller on a happy day.”³⁹

Allard wrote another story about the shooting, for which she visited the blinded man at the hospital. Although she was never quite as directly acerbic as Forbes Herrick or Watkins, she let readers know that she disapproved of Julius Jonas's actions and attitude, explaining that he “complained pettishly . . . because he could not open either of his eyes.” Again putting herself in the story, she described how “he had me change his pillow constantly.”⁴⁰

While Allard may have had a soft spot for orphans, neglected children and the judge who took care of them, she was also apparently a straightforward interviewer. She recorded herself as bluntly asking the blinded man – whom she repeatedly painted as weak and feckless – whether

³⁸ Allard, “Duffies' Plan to Cut Off His Own Family Is Bared,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 18 Jan. 1920, 7.

³⁹ Allard, “Mrs. Jonas Says She Predicted Love Tragedy,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 20 July 1920, 3.

⁴⁰ Allard, “Jonas Praises His Wife; Brands Pauline Vampire,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 July 1920, 17.

he thought life was worth living. ““You want to live?’ I questioned the man on the table.”⁴¹ One gets the sense that Allard thought the noble answer would have been “no.”

While Allard’s references to herself might seem at odds with modern journalistic practices, they do serve to again indicate her enterprise and to position her as a reporter who not only covered courts but also pursued stories in the field.

Allard earned bylines for several other crime stories, including two homicides – one of which had her attending a coroner’s inquest into a strangling. In this article, Allard seemed to pave the way for the more cynical mob sisters whose work would grace the *Tribune*’s pages later in the 1920s. Perhaps she was already quickly losing the relative innocence that pervaded her stories about the doings at juvenile court, in particular. In her article, “Cohen Tells How He Strangled His Love Rival,” Allard first described the killing in detail, using a quote from the slayer: ““Slavin pushed his way into the apartment . . . I threw my weight against him. At the last – I had my fingers around his throat and he kept still.”⁴²

Then, in a cynical, sarcastic aside that presaged the later mob sisters, Allard noted how the killer, Slavin, “wanted to marry the good-looking blonde” identified as “Miss Lawrence,” who was the object of two men’s affection, until a rival “took her dog walking, love’s greatest test.” And discounting the way Allard again placed herself in the story, her final observations could easily have come from any of Watkins’s or Forbes Herrick’s slyly humorous articles about faithless murderesses. She wrote, with even greater cynicism:

The same arm that strangled Slavin fanned Miss Lawrence throughout the afternoon’s ordeal, and when not fanning her it was patting her upon the back. As she left the undertaking parlor a young man with big brown eyes and a love-sick expression came and put his arm over her shoulder, and, leaning close, kissed her.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Allard, “Cohen Tells How He Strangled His Love Rival,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 Sept. 1920, 19.

“Who was that?” I asked Mrs [name missing].
“Oh, that’s –” She stopped suddenly. “O, you never mind who that [is.]”⁴³

The tone that would propel Forbes Herrick and Watkins, in particular, to the front pages had been set.

Allard only produced a few more bylined courtroom and crime-related stories in 1920, concluding with a racially and sexually charged story about a “white slave ring” that also included a few paragraphs about an armed police raid on a café patronized by a “gang” whose members were “wanted for scores of recent holdups.”⁴⁴

Abruptly, however, Allard’s byline disappeared from the *Tribune* between October 1920 and April 1921. And when it reappeared, she was no longer covering crime. Her new “beat” was a crusade to plant something called “Memory Trees,” a *Tribune*-sponsored effort to “plant trees in memory of every soldier who fought in the world war.”⁴⁵ Over the next several months, Allard would pen dozens of stories about the endeavor, with titles such as “Forester Tells How to Plant Memory Trees,”⁴⁶ “Warns Against Red Cedar as a Memorial Tree,”⁴⁷ and finally, in November, “Tree Planting, Begun Armistice Day, Will Go On.”⁴⁸ The articles, while patriotic, were a far cry from Allard’s days covering homicide.

While she may have had many reasons for doing so, the change in her beat could reasonably have contributed to her decision to leave the *Tribune* in favor of returning to the

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Allard, “Seize Two More Girls In ‘Slave Gang’ Inquiry,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 Oct. 1920, 15.

⁴⁵ Allard, “Soldier Trees Project Draws Wide Approval,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 April 1921, 1.

⁴⁶ Allard, “Forester Tells How to Plant Memory Trees,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 5 May 1921, 6.

⁴⁷ Allard, “Warns Against Red Cedar as a Memorial Tree,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 May 1921, 10.

⁴⁸ Allard, “Tree Planting, Begun Armistice Day, Will Go On,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 13 Nov. 1921, 22.

Chicago *Herald and Examiner* in early 1922. At the time, she was prominent enough that *The Fourth Estate*, a weekly newspaper covering all things related to publishing and advertising, made note of her switch in its February 4, 1922, “Staff Changes” column, calling Allard a “special writer” for the paper.⁴⁹

At the *Herald and Examiner*, she resumed crime reporting. According to Ross, Allard “unearthed Mrs. Dion O’Bannion [sic] when the . . . King of the Beer Runners was shot in his flower shop . . .” and “worked on the Billy McClintock case,”⁵⁰ discussed earlier in this dissertation in the chapter on Genevieve Forbes Herrick, who covered aspects of that murder for the *Tribune*. In fact, *Tribune* reporter James Doherty had to write about Allard – by then married and referenced as “Leola Allard Day” – in his coverage of the McClintock trial, because Allard was called to testify related to information she’d gleaned during her reportage. In the story, Allard is simply called a “reporter,” and – understandably, given that she had again unearthed information the *Tribune* didn’t have, as she had in 1918 – her affiliation with the *Herald-Examiner* was not mentioned.⁵¹

Allard also covered aspects of the Leopold and Loeb trial for the *Herald-Examiner*. Two of her articles are referenced in Baatz’s history of the case: “Agony of Mothers of Slayers and Slain in Tragedy of Crime,” printed June 1, 1924, and “U.S. Expert to Test Slayers,” published July 1, 1924.⁵²

⁴⁹ “Staff Changes,” *The Fourth Estate*, 4 Feb. 1922, 19, accessed 24 Aug. 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=66saQAAMAAJ&pg=RA3-PA19&lpg=RA3-PA19&dq=Leola+Allard+the+fourth+estate&source=bl&ots=azWENFBOx2&sig=GgSWj9HpC4XxyvcM6zaqZ0lfFlk&hl=en&sa=X&ei=eOoYUpDyNdb94AOy9IH0Ag&ved=0CCwQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=Leola%20Allard%20&f=false>.

⁵⁰ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 548.

⁵¹ James Doherty, “Germ ‘Doctor’ Appears Today; Case Nears End,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 17 June 1925, 1.

⁵² Baatz, *For the Thrill of It*, 478, 491.

According to Ross, Allard again shifted gears in 1926, moving to Pittsburgh to begin a woman's page at the *Post Gazette*, followed by a stint writing a daily column for King Features syndicate. Then, in 1931, she returned to Chicago to work for the *Daily News*,⁵³ which Midwest journalist Dorothy Journey recalled as hostile to women reporters during that era.⁵⁴ And Allard – who seemed to have retained her maiden name for professional purposes – was cast in a more traditional role as a “women's news editor.”⁵⁵ Yet even in this capacity she pushed boundaries. Journey recalled that, as a young reporter, she was “so impressed with the things that Leola Allard was doing at the *Chicago Daily News*” that Journey made an appointment to meet the more experienced journalist, hoping “to find out how she could . . . do these things in a newspaper that was so restrictive of women . . .” Journey added that “observing what [Allard] did in the paper led me to realize that . . . I could expand the stories in our newspaper, certainly in Michigan City . . .”⁵⁶

Pressed by her interviewer to explain what Allard did differently, Journey clarified that Allard was no longer a reporter, but an editor, and that “no restrictions were placed on her,” which gave Allard broad leeway to cover stories of interest to women that were beyond, as the interviewer put it, “club notices and . . . diets . . .” And, although the stories Journey referenced centered upon home and family, she credited Allard with having “the acumen to reach out for news.”⁵⁷

⁵³ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 548.

⁵⁴ “Dorothy Journey – Session One,” oral history for the Washington Press Club Foundation, 16 Jan. 1990, accessed 28 April 2013, <http://beta.wpcf.org/oralhistory/jurn1.html>.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Maureen McKernan

Another *Chicago Tribune* reporter who showed enterprise and tenacity was Maureen McKernan, whose first crime-related byline appeared in 1924.

A graduate of the University of Kansas, McKernan first worked at the *Topeka Daily Capital*, during World War I. According to Ross, she was editor of the woman's page "but varied the monotony by doing night police news." Moving to the *Kansas City Journal*, she "covered the federal beat," where she "learned about dope peddlers, automobile thieves, and the operation of the Department of Justice." In 1923, editor Robert Lee gave McKernan a job at the *Tribune*, "when she was down to \$1.15."⁵⁸

Ross adds that McKernan – described as "large and commanding" – quickly earned a *Tribune* byline for an interview she secured with murderess Wanda Stopa's mother by climbing a fire escape while other reporters tried to gain entry to the woman's house through the door.⁵⁹

In another anecdote that demonstrates how far McKernan would go to secure a story, Ross relates – in a rare, extended tale – how McKernan fought to gain access to Indian nobility visiting Chicago. The family was heavily guarded and refused to grant any press access, so McKernan convinced a hotel manager to let her pose as a maid. Donning a uniform, she "cleaned and dusted, tried to make beds but did a bad job of it," and finally grabbed a pail of water and "boldly" entered the maharajah's suite. Although she was hurried out of the chambers, she "maneuvered things so her retreat led her straight into the bedroom of the Maharanee," where she was able to confirm a rumor that the woman wore a large diamond stud

⁵⁸ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 544-545.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

in her nose. “Maureen was fired and went out in tears,” Ross adds. “But downstairs she and the manager enjoyed the joke.”⁶⁰

Given that McKernan wore a uniform and tried a humbling job, the story could arguably be called a stunt – except for the fact that McKernan didn’t earn a byline and never appears in the article that is likely the result of her enterprise. The story, “Scimitars Save Royalty From Rude City Gazes,” is a somewhat humorous, but for the most part unembellished, account of the royal family’s accommodations at the city’s Blackstone hotel, presumably as viewed by a woman working hard to recall details as she was unceremoniously ejected from the suite.⁶¹

McKernan seems to have had a very pragmatic attitude about her craft and may not have considered her efforts extraordinary. In 1925, she gave advice to students at the Medill School about how to become a reporter, and the *Tribune* summarized her speech under the headline, “Easy to Be Reporter: Just Get News and Write It, Girl Says.”⁶² After telling the aspiring journalists that some of the few remaining sob sisters were men, she added, ““Skirts will take a woman a long way in the newspaper game . . . but those who get to the top have a hard road before them, and they must have in their hearts the love of the game, willingness to play a man’s part on many occasions, and the ability, above all, to tell a story after the facts are gotten together.””⁶³

She reinforced that message about hard work and clear thinking by joking that a lot of women gravitated toward newspaper work because they ““would like to be stenographers, but

⁶⁰ Ibid, 543.

⁶¹ “Scimitars Save Royalty from Rude City Gazes,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 11 Aug. 1924, 3.

⁶² “Easy to Be Reporter: Just Get News and Write It, Girl Says,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 9 Jan. 1925, 19.

⁶³ Ibid.

haven't the training, or to be actresses . . . but can't dance . . . But the kind who wins is the girl who plays the game fair and square, who gets the story and writes it well.”⁶⁴

McKernan's crime-related output for the *Tribune* reflects that philosophy. She never reached the acerbic heights of colleagues Forbes Herrick and Watkins, or earned as many bylines as McLaughlin, even, but she was a versatile reporter who could do everything from cover the domestic courts, as Allard did, to write front-page stories about the city's most notorious homicides.

Her first bylined crime story was the result of her aforementioned fire-escape climb. Although colleague Maurine Watkins earned more notice for covering Wanda Stopa's attempted murder of her lover's wife – resulting in the accidental shooting of a gardener and Stopa's suicide – McKernan earned her first byline on the case several days before Watkins. McKernan's story, “Wanda's Mother Looses Wrath Against Smith,” is basically a mother's rant about the married “bum” who seduced her young daughter, supplemented by similar quotes from Stopa's brothers. However, McKernan did not allow the tale to become overly dramatic. Nor did McKernan betray any prejudices, as Watkins did when she fairly overtly condemned Stopa's “Bohemian” lifestyle, basically accusing her of abandoning her roots and family in favor of “freedom.”⁶⁵ On the contrary, McKernan noted that Stopa's mother said her daughter “brooded constantly upon the sin of her love for a married man,” and “begged to bring him home to meet us all . . .” A typical fact-based paragraph recounted Stopa's high grades in high school and her ambitious pursuit of a law degree.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ See, e.g., Maurine Watkins, “No Friends on Hand to Meet Body of Wanda,” 3.

⁶⁶ Maureen McKernan, “Wanda's Mother Looses Wrath Against Smith,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 25 April 1924, 2.

That's not to claim that McKernan was a consistently dry or humorless journalist, unlike the other mob sisters. Covering a blackmail case involving U.S. Senator Medill McCormick – one-time *Tribune* publisher – she noted, slangily and cynically, that one of the perpetrators was in a “‘flop’ at the county jail, pretending to be ill, and until late last night persisting in a four-day hunger strike.” Then she joked, sarcastically, “Only a vivid picture of the joys of forceful feeding brought him out of his stupor and gave him the strength to drink a little coffee.”⁶⁷

Indicating that she may have been more cynical than she usually let on, McKernan, in a different article about a public disturbance, also noted that a well-heeled defendant who claimed her nose had been broken in a melee, “would remember to lean her head back wearily and grope with her hand for the ready comforting clutch” of her friends. She then related how the court heard details of an argument that included the comments, “‘You are only a monkey . . . pin head . . . and ‘boob . . .’”⁶⁸

The light tone was rare, though. In most cases, McKernan was no-nonsense or more likely to reveal hints of sympathy for those she wrote about. Even covering the Leopold and Loeb case, during which she was dispatched several times to interview Loeb's friends and acquaintances, she tended to paint the more outgoing, genial Loeb as manipulated by the aloof and more cerebral Leopold. Although historian Simon Baatz concludes that Loeb instigated and planned the murder of Bobby Franks, and used Leopold – desperately in love with him – to fulfill his fantasies of being worshipped for his criminal prowess, McKernan seemed blinded by Loeb's charm.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ McKernan, “Gives New Clew in M'Cormick Blackmail Case,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 9 July 1924, 4.

⁶⁸ McKernan, “Rosetta Fined, Harold, Too, For Cicero Shindig,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 July 1924, 9.

⁶⁹ Baatz, *For the Thrill of It*, 52-53.

In her article, “Sensitive Boy, Girls Recall ‘Dickey’ Loeb,” which appeared after the boys’ confession, McKernan – far from succumbing to the temptation to treat him as a monster – described Loeb’s “love of reading” and noted that he was “a good loser,” who, while not naturally athletic, would play tennis tenaciously against more experienced opponents. She also highlighted his generosity before noting that Loeb had, in the previous two years, spent less and less time with his usual friends in favor of Nathan Leopold, whose “suggestion seemed law to Dick.”⁷⁰

McKernan again mentioned “the influence of . . . Leopold” in her article, “Weeping Girls Mourn Plight of Richard Loeb,” in which she also noted that while it was easy to find girls who liked Loeb, “girls who were fond of Nathan Leopold . . . are not so easy to find.”⁷¹

Again, in a story about reactions to the murder by residents of the Michigan town where the Loeb’s vacationed, McKernan wrote that the “boys of the town are agreed that Dick Loeb is a good fellow . . . They’re not so enthusiastic over Nathan Leopold.” She concluded the article with a quote from a neighbor who said, “‘If [Loeb] really was in on this thing, it’s because Nathan Leopold led him on and deceived him.’”⁷²

Of course, a popular boy’s friends and neighbors would want to believe him innocent, so in one sense, McKernan’s inclusion of such insinuations isn’t surprising. But it is difficult to read the articles in their entirety – including one in which she describes Loeb’s “pensive gentleness”⁷³

⁷⁰ McKernan, “Sensitive Boy, Girls Recall of ‘Dickey’ Loeb,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 June 1924, 4.

⁷¹ M’Kernan, “Weeping Girls Mourn Plight of Richard Loeb,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4 June 1924, 2.

⁷² M’Kernan, “Charlevoix Can’t Believe Dick Loeb’s a Murderer,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 June 1924, 3.

⁷³ M’Kernan, “Loeb Writes Letter to Girl; Jail Chills Him,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3 June 1924, 3.

– without believing that McKernan fell at least somewhat prey to the charms of the boy with “lambent eyes.”⁷⁴

Such gullibility was not typical, though. In August 1924 she demonstrated more of the typical mob sister mentality when she covered the story of a “secret bride” accused of murdering her husband. The article, written a few months after Maurine Watkins’s scathing coverage of the Gaertner and Annan cases, begins with a sentence that sarcastically positions the murderess as the “victim:” “Another pretty woman faces the ordeal of being tried for shooting her husband.”⁷⁵

McKernan’s brush with editorializing basically ended there, and she didn’t openly mock or overtly question the defendant’s fainting spells, as Watkins and Forbes Herrick almost certainly would have done. Nor did she express any personal incredulity over the killer’s shifting stories. But McKernan did use the facts uncovered during the trial and a telling quote by the coroner’s deputy to basically condemn a young woman who claimed her husband shot himself in front of her, and who then went home and slept soundly, not sure if he was alive or dead. She quoted the coroner as saying:

“Would a good wife who loved a man see him shoot himself, and only grab his gun and run away, instead of calling for help, as you admit you did? Why didn’t you call for aid, to try and save him? How could you go home and go to bed and to sleep and leave him dead in the night, if he really had killed himself?”⁷⁶

McKernan also covered a disturbing murder case involving teenagers who killed a woman who owed them money. While the case was interesting, in and of itself, McKernan took, in a page-one story, her reportage a step farther by drawing parallels between the actions and motivations of killers Anna Valanis and Lucille Marshall and Leopold and Loeb.

⁷⁴ M’Kernan, “Weeping Girls Mourn Plight of Richard Loeb,” 4.

⁷⁵ M’Kernan, “Secret Bride of Three Days Held in Murder,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 Aug. 1924, 3.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

While Valanis and Marshall expressed little remorse for joining two boys in the brutal murder of Bessie Gaensslen, coming across as almost as dispassionate as Leopold and Loeb, McKernan pointed out that the girls lacked the wealthy young men's advantages and role models. She wrote, "The pattern of their minds is one that has been cut in state institutions, in the alleys of the near west side, and in the murky, dirty white life of the Madison street 'bad lands.'" ⁷⁷

That's not to say that McKernan absolved the girls, just because they grew up under harsh conditions. She also pointed out Valanis's and Marshall's curious inability to see any connection between their crime and that of Leopold and Loeb, of whom they were keenly aware. Although the girls were able to draw a link between their possible punishment and that of Leopold and Loeb – "Loeb and Leopold probably won't hang. They're our age." – they could not see that the young killers all shared "about the same motive, too," as McKernan pointed out. She then compared and contrasted the two murders:

Here's the two [girls] at one end of society. And here's Nathan F. Leopold Jr. and Richard Loeb at the other end. Little in common have they – except youth. And the fact that they have taken human life. And the motive. "We wanted the money. She happened to get killed." That's the Valanis girl's excuse. Yet she was shocked at the cruelty of the two "intellectual" slayers. "Just think of them killing a kid for excitement – and money," she said of Loeb and Leopold. ⁷⁸

McKernan concluded that, while the two sets of young killers were separated by "the vast chasm that lies between Hyde Park and 'the Valley,'" they ultimately committed murder "for the

⁷⁷ M'Kernan, "Too Young to Hang; Boast Girl Slayers," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 Sept. 1924, 1.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

gratification of a desire” and “confessed simply, naively almost. The two girls and the two boys are calm, with no emotion, no regrets, but a chagrin that they have been caught.”⁷⁹

Then, after again reminding readers that the girls, at least, were raised in “no fertile soil for tender emotions,” McKernan nevertheless were guilty of letting a bound woman writhe and moan on the floor while they “frisked the joint,” then left her to die.⁸⁰

McKernan also covered the funeral of gangster Dion O’Banion, and – although assigning women to mob funerals was considered close to within the purview of traditional women’s roles as arbiters of society coverage – most of the article she produced was actually straight news coverage of the investigation into O’Banion’s murder.

McKernan began her extensive, front-page article with the seemingly requisite description of the ceremony’s opulence, noting that O’Banion’s casket was “priced, with a touch of pride, at \$10,000.” The coffin, she added, was conveyed from Pennsylvania by a “special express car that carried only the casket for freight.” The crowd at the viewing, according to McKernan, consisted of “perfumed women, wrapped in furs from ears to ankles” and “tailored gentlemen with black, shining pompadours.”⁸¹

McKernan also included the widow’s no doubt expected protestations that her deceased husband was “always a lover of the home, never late for dinner; always loving to fool with the radio . . .” and opposed – of course – to “vulgar ostentation.” Readers would also have grasped the hypocrisy in the widow’s insistence that O’Banion – described in McKernan’s lead as having “soft, tapered hands that could finger an automatic so skillfully” – eschewed guns, except for “

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ McKernan, “In \$10,000 Casket Dean Lies in State,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 13 Nov. 1924, 1.

‘protection against Chicago night streets,’ going “‘many a day at one time without one in his pocket.’”⁸²

Those expected formalities dismissed with, McKernan next turned her attention to the investigation into O’Banion’s murder, explaining that police had arrested a “bootlegger and hijacker.” McKernan explained that the suspect “was a frequent companion of the Genna brothers . . . whose names have cropped up in many Italian murders,” and that O’Banion “had recently toured the west side seeking the Genna brothers,” at which point O’Banion “had with him . . . the machine gun he bought out west.”⁸³

And while McKernan had given O’Banion’s widow the opportunity to proclaim his innocence, she also matter-of-factly reported that a “pal of O’Banion, partner with him in booze, beer and gambling deals” had narrowed a wider list of suspects for police. After discussing that list in some detail, McKernan quoted O’Banion’s associate as saying:

“I have no idea who killed O’Banion, but I would be willing to die smiling if I only had a chance to shoot it out with whoever did. I have known for a year and a half that I have been marked for death . . . I would like to meet the guys that shot O’Banion any time and any place they mention and I would get at least two or three of them before they’d get me.”⁸⁴

The article, from its references to mink-clad women and angel figurines holding “solid golden candlesticks”⁸⁵ to its blunt recounting of revenge threats and impending shoot outs, effectively illustrates how celebrity and crime intersected to help create opportunities for the mob sisters to shift their roles as reporters, even within a single story.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

McKernan only produced a few more crime-related stories during her relatively brief time at the *Tribune*, but four of those indicate that by December 1924 she had established herself as a serious crime reporter.

Her page-one, lead story “Quick Vote to Hang Slayer,” is a straight news account of a “salesman who ran amuck as a holdup man to make money for women and booze,” but who “was condemned to death . . . after the jury deliberated for forty-five minutes,” according to McKernan’s unembellished lead.⁸⁶

She also earned a page-one byline for her coverage of the McClintock case, referenced earlier as one of that decade’s biggest homicide stories. Again, McKernan provided factual, objective coverage of a court decision to exhume the body of the poisoned man’s brother.⁸⁷

And in April 1925 she earned another lead story by securing a confession from a woman accused of killing her three children. After explaining how the accused woman admitted that she had poisoned three of her children – ignoring one girl because she was “the least liked” – McKernan wrote, “The confession was obtained through Mrs. Cunningham’s decision late yesterday to entrust her story to another woman, myself . . .” Disproving Forbes Herrick’s later assertion that women didn’t confess more readily to other women, McKernan described how she applied “cold compresses for [the accused’s] fevered head,” which “apparently loosened the strings of reticence, which had locked the secret in her strange heart.” Then McKernan recounted how the woman gave three of her children a steady diet of arsenic-laced bread, paradoxically sparing one because she stayed out late at dances and seemed to be a liar. The

⁸⁶ M’Kernan, “Quick Vote to Hang Slayer,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 13 Dec. 1924, 1.

⁸⁷ M’Kernan, “Olson Stirs Inquest Anew,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 Jan. 1925, 1.

mother had eventually planned to poison herself and hoped to join the better-loved children in heaven, according to McKernan.⁸⁸

The article at times comes close to being overly sentimental, as when McKernan described how the disliked child “stormed out of . . . the cell . . . to do lonely penance in her tears.” Yet McKernan’s treatment of a triple homicide involving children wasn’t mawkish, in the sob sister tradition. She noted, for example, how the killer told of poisoning her offspring “with less expression than she would have used in ordering a list of groceries,” and explained how money from insurance policies taken out on the children “filtered through [the beneficiary mother’s] fingers” – a reminder to readers that the murderess enjoyed financial benefit from her crimes.⁸⁹

McKernan’s final front-page crime story – and one of her last bylined crime stories in the *Tribune* – was another paper-leading article on the McClintock case that had McKernan traveling by train with a key witness.⁹⁰

According to Ross, McKernan moved to the rival *Herald and Examiner* for six months, then got a job in public relations. In 1930, she married and moved to New York, where she was working for a county news bureau in Westchester as of 1936. Ross adds that McKernan had switched to doing “straight women’s stuff,” adding, somewhat ambiguously, that “after her exciting Chicago days she no longer runs a temperature over her assignments.”⁹¹

Of the mob sisters profiled in this dissertation, McKernan’s work was the most difficult to categorize. At times, she could be overtly sentimental, bordering on the sob sister style. But

⁸⁸ McKernan, “Admits Killing 3 Children,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 April 1925, 1.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ McKernan, “Begin Shepherd Trial Today,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 18 May 1925, 1.

⁹¹ Ross, 544.

she could write hard news, too – and sometimes cover heartbreaking or morbid stories with unflinching frankness.

Quite possibly she was well aware of her own efforts to find her proper place in an industry where women were “still infants,” as she told Medill School students in 1925. After telling aspiring reporters that a woman shouldn’t “sob over her stories,” she nevertheless admitted that women reported differently from men – and indicated that could be a good thing. She also made it clear that women had a place in covering crime, telling students and *Tribune* readers:

“Women bring to the newspaper world a new point of view, and get a fresh angle on stories, because they have been raised in a world that’s different from that of men. Girls may know that crime and political crookedness abound . . . but they don’t experience it, and when they come face to face with these things, they embody in their accounts . . . all the sense of outraged justice a man wouldn’t feel, because he is inured to these conditions.”⁹²

McKernan also wrote a book titled *The Amazing Crime and Trial of Leopold and Loeb*, an almost painfully complete accounting of the case that includes graphic descriptions of everything from Leopold’s childhood rashes to his sexual fantasies and relations with his governess, as gleaned from psychiatric records.⁹³ She penned the account in 1924, at which time it appeared in hardcover, and it was reissued in 1957 as a paperback, when interest in the case was renewed related to Leopold’s appeals for parole. Genevieve Forbes Herrick came briefly out of retirement to review the paperback edition for the *Tribune*, and noted, poignantly, that she

⁹² “Easy to Be Reporter: Just Get News and Write It, Girl Says,” 19.

⁹³ McKernan, *The Amazing Crime and Trial of Leopold and Loeb*, 82-93.

had the “sad shock” of seeing a photo of her late husband on the jacket, and herself, “[b]ehind him, hidden under a ridiculous hat.”⁹⁴

In her review, Forbes Herrick seems to have walked a careful line between judging the book as insufferably boring and praising it for its thoroughness, calling it a “documentary, sometimes dull with repetition . . . But it is a documentary of dreadful drama.” She added, “If you have the patience to start the book carefully (and it should be read carefully), you’ll have the perseverance, the eager desire, to read every word of it . . . It is a sort of combination of the Congressional Record and an Edgar Allan Poe thriller.”⁹⁵

One can only wonder what McKernan thought of her former colleague’s somewhat backhanded praise, but Forbes Herrick seems to have fairly summarized McKernan’s work as a journalist far different from herself when she noted, “The author presents; does not try to persuade . . . She inserts no purple patches.”⁹⁶ It is a decent analysis of McKernan’s sometimes conflicting style. She didn’t convict criminals in print, the way Forbes Herrick and Watkins were wont to do – but she didn’t faint away with sympathy, either. In a way, Forbes Herrick’s comment could be viewed as the most positive critique in the review; she basically called McKernan a modern, objective reporter.

⁹⁴ Forbes Herrick, “Case of Loeb and Leopold: THE Contemporary Account,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 27 Oct. 1957, D8.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Chapter 8 – Mob Sisters in Context: Male and Female Contemporaries

This research does not purport to be a comprehensive survey of news reporting in Chicago during the 1920s, nor does it seek to answer long-standing questions about the “woman’s angle” or gender differences in writing. However – beyond establishing the mob sisters as different from their precedent sob sisters – it is also necessary to conduct at least a preliminary comparison of the *Chicago Tribune* mob sisters’ work to that of their male colleagues on the paper, and to that of women working for at least one rival newspaper, the *Chicago Herald and Examiner*. The goal of the former is to determine whether the mob sisters really were covering the same type of stories as male *Tribune* reporters, and in similar fashion. The goal of the latter is to open avenues for future inquiry into women’s roles at other Roaring 20s newspapers, especially in Chicago, where so many factors combined to create opportunities for female journalists.

Mob Sisters and Male *Tribune* Reporters: A Comparison

A preliminary examination of articles produced by three of the *Tribune*’s most frequently bylined male reporters during the 1920s indicates that the paper did assign men and women similar stories. In addition, the men sometimes wrote articles similar in tone to those produced by the mob sisters – meaning the male journalists also incorporated sarcasm, cynicism and slang in their stories, although to a lesser degree than the mob sisters at their most acerbic.

Consider the work of long-time *Tribune* scribe Orville Dwyer, who covered everything from “tiresome parades to grueling murder cases” during his tenure at the paper, which lasted from 1921 to 1958.¹

¹ “Doc Dwyer, 68, A Famed News Reporter, Dies,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 24 Dec. 1958, 8.

In 1926, Dwyer covered one aspect of the capture and trial of car thief and murderer Martin Durkin, a case referenced in the chapter about Genevieve Forbes Herrick. As noted in this dissertation, Dwyer produced one bylined story on Durkin, who killed a federal agent before leading police on a nation-wide manhunt. Dwyer's article, "'Marty Is Fine, Big Boy,' Say Mother, Kindred," – which appeared on page three, while Forbes Herrick's piece appeared on page one – echoes Forbes Herrick's articles on mobsters whose mothers and spouses insisted they were kind, considerate individuals, in spite of all evidence to the contrary.² Dwyer also led the article with a literary reference – to a Rudyard Kipling verse³ – reminiscent of Forbes Herrick's references to Oscar Wilde and Benvenuto Cellini in one of her first articles on "thrill killers" Leopold and Loeb.⁴

Then, as Forbes Herrick, in particular, was wont to do, Dwyer used a quote from one of Durkin's relatives to make the whole clan seem ridiculous, recording how Durkin had silly pet names – "Toodles" and "Boo" – for the women who protected him from police.⁵

In another passage reminiscent of Forbes Herrick's coverage of women who insisted that their mobster, murderous sons, husbands and boyfriends had soft hearts, Dwyer quoted one of the women as insisting that Durkin "'never was a killer'" and had a "'heart as big as my fist and pure gold,'" before relating a long tale, meant to illustrate that point, about an old dog that Durkin couldn't bring himself to shoot.⁶

² Orville Dwyer, "'Marty Is Fine, Big Boy,' Say Mother, Kindred," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 Jan. 1926, 3.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Forbes, "They Slew for a Laboratory Test in Emotion," 3.

⁵ Dwyer, "'Marty Is Fine, Big Boy,' Say Mother, Kindred," 3.

⁶ Ibid.

As with the mob sisters' articles, the tone is cynical and shot through with subtle sarcasm, as when Dwyer quoted Durkin's female supporters as insisting that Durkin hated being seen as a sex symbol. Clearly, readers were meant to understand that the opposite was true.

Dwyer wrapped up the story with a blunt paragraph similar to those Maurine Watkins often wrote to conclude her stories. All at once, the joking tone ended, and Dwyer noted, matter-of-factly, that the state's attorney predicted that Durkin would be hanged.⁷

While Dwyer earned most of his bylines for crime-related coverage and other hard news, he also occasionally covered softer stories, including at least one fashion-related article. In "Men's Garb Is O.K. on Top, but Shabby Next the Skin," Dwyer wrote humorously about a speech by the president of a retailer's association, starting with the lead, "Men, we're in awful shape." He then noted that most men's pants were "a little frowzy" while underwear was showing up in laundries "full of holes."⁸ With its emphasis on delivering laughs over facts, the article is reminiscent of Forbes Herrick's coverage of the club meeting during which a fight broke out in an adjacent room.⁹

And while Dwyer often wrote hard-boiled crime stories – see, for example, his brusque and slang-filled coverage of the trial of "supergangster" "Machine Gun Charlie" Birger¹⁰ – he didn't shy away from writing about the emotional aspects of trials. Like the mob sisters, he didn't use overblown, mawkish prose, but the lead for his August 21, 1924, story about the Leopold and Loeb trial, which is discussed earlier in this dissertation, centers on a breakdown by

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Dwyer, "Men's Garb Is O.K. on Top, but Shabby Next the Skin," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 25 Sept. 1923, 2.

⁹ Forbes, "Commerce Men Get an Earful on Women's Club," 17.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Dwyer, "Machine Guns to Bristle at Birger's Trial," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 5 July 1927, 18, and "Birger on Trial: Nerves Jumpy in Illinois Gunland," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 July 1927, 12.

the victim's father that led to a courtroom full of tears. Dwyer described how the the murdered boy's father "got up out of his chair and walked rather blindly out of the courtroom. A woman put her handkerchief to her eyes, then another and another. Soon scores were weeping." And Dwyer veered closer to the sob sister style than the mob sister tone when he melodramatically reminded readers that the young slayers were probably set to join the "long line of men who have taken that mournful last walk from the death house in the county jail to the gallows . . ." ¹¹

While not an exhaustive study of Dwyer's work, this brief review indicates that he covered stories similar to those covered by the mob sisters, often with touches of sarcasm and cynicism, and that he could even veer closer to the work of sob sisters, on occasion.

A cursory review of another of the mob sisters' male contemporaries, James Doherty, leads to similar conclusions. Doherty frequently covered trials, interviewed inmates in prison, and even covered mob funerals, just as the mob sisters did. In addition, his work demonstrates that the female reporters profiled in this research were not alone in focusing on criminals' appearance and attire.

In his article "Hortons Wear Best Clothes; Manners, Too," Doherty described in detail the clothing worn by a group of bootleggers and their wives, including description of a "sealskin coat with mink collar" and "three diamond platinum rings, platinum wrist watch, and coat of muskrat fur." ¹² Had the story not been bylined, one could have reasonably guessed that it had been written by Forbes Herrick or Watkins, both of whom often used descriptions of expensive clothing – minks and diamonds – to remind readers that the gains were ill-gotten and the people wearing the items far from respectable, no matter how costly their attire was. See, for example,

¹¹ Dwyer, "Franks Breaks Down; Women Weep in Court," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 Aug. 1924, 1.

¹² James Doherty, "Hortons Wear Best Clothes; Manners, Too," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 Feb. 1924, 2.

Forbes Herrick's article "Betty and Irma Fight Duel of Pointed Words," in which she repeatedly referred to the fur coats worn by killer Martin Durkin's wife and girlfriend,¹³ or Watkins's description of murderess Belva Gaertner's "dress of green velvet" and "silver slippers" that were covered with blood.¹⁴

Doherty's article is also shot through with sarcasm, cynicism and gangland parlance, all mob sister hallmarks. For example, he sarcastically described one of the bootlegger's wives' "most charming manner" and described her husband as "two fisted and one gunned."¹⁵

Comparisons can also be drawn between Doherty's 1924 coverage of mobster Dean O'Banion's funeral and Forbes Herrick's 1925 article on gangster Angelo Genna's burial. First and foremost, both stories involved the burial of prominent mob figures, and both appeared on the *Tribune's* front page. Apparently, the *Tribune* did not consider gender when assigning the stories. Further, the coverage is similarly jaded and cynical. For example, Doherty described how the mourners – "[s]ome of them, at least . . . sincere in their grief" – reclaimed their guns as soon as the cortege to the cemetery was beyond the jurisdiction of Chicago police, at which point the gangsters declared that no photographs were to be taken. "Cameras were taken away . . . plates were smashed, blows were struck," Doherty wrote, employing the glib, humorous tone that the mob sisters often used when describing mob violence.¹⁶

Forbes Herrick's coverage of rival gangster Angelo Genna's funeral is similarly cynical and mocking, and in some ways even more frank than Doherty's. For example, Forbes Herrick reminded readers that Genna's burial robe "hid the dozen or so bullet wounds, ugly things, that

¹³ Forbes Herrick, "Betty and Irma Fight Duel of Pointed Words," 3.

¹⁴ Watkins, "State Launches Trail of Belva for Law Killing," 12.

¹⁵ Doherty, "Hortons Wear Best Clothes; Manners, Too," 2.

¹⁶ Doherty, "Thousands at Funeral," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 15 Nov. 1924, 1.

four enemies had poured into him . . .” Then, also cynically, Forbes Herrick compared Genna’s funeral to that of O’Banion – “that other outlaw of the Volstead game” – calling O’Banion’s burial “the yardstick by which they measured Genna’s ceremonies . . . But Angelo’s pageant stood the test, and came out on top,” she concluded wryly.¹⁷

From topic to tone, the two stories are markedly alike.

Doherty’s coverage of mobster Terry Druggan – a bootlegger infamous for getting his way with Cook county jailers, and who was also covered by Forbes Herrick – is also comparable to the mob sisters’ work. For example, in his story “Druggan, King of Suds, Dons Purple in Jail,” Doherty was uniformly cynical, sarcastic and flippant about “the jovial alchemist who turned beer into gold” and who was “modest about his exploits of breaking a reporter’s nose, getting in and out of jail at his pleasure, and having jail wardens fired when service was not strictly a la Druggan.”¹⁸

The passage is remarkably similar to Forbes Herrick’s observations about the preferential treatment Druggan earned in jail, recorded earlier in this dissertation. In her article “Throng Sits Up When Druggan Ascends Stand,” Forbes Herrick explained that Druggan was upset at one point because he was spending too much time in his cell. Indicting the justice system in the same way Doherty did, Forbes Herrick noted, “And Terrance Druggan, connoisseur of good dinners and patron of the arts . . . didn’t like to ‘eat the iron.’ Especially when he was paying big money for a different diet.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Forbes Herrick, “Chicago Ne’er Had a Funeral Like Genna’s,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 May 1925, 1.

¹⁸ Doherty, “Druggan, King of Suds, Dons Purple in Jail,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 Sept. 1925, 1.

¹⁹ Forbes Herrick, “Throng Sits Up When Druggan Ascends Stand,” 3.

In short, both Forbes Herrick and Doherty not-so-subtly implied that jailers were on the take, and both approached their stories humorously, the implication being that, of course, Chicago was corrupt. There was nothing anyone could do but laugh about it.

A comparison of the mob sisters' work to that of *Tribune* journalist John Herrick – a general assignment reporter throughout the 1920s and husband of Genevieve Forbes Herrick – yields further insights into the roles of male and female reporters at the paper during that era. Perhaps most tellingly, by the late 1920s, John Herrick had drifted into covering the arguably tamer state house beat while his wife continued to cover crime, during an era of escalating violence, as outlined earlier in this dissertation.

And while – again – this research does not attempt to answer longstanding questions about gender differences in writing, an examination of John Herrick's work indicates that he was, in general, less cynical and mocking than his wife.

For example, in an article about the trial of a man accused of murdering his philandering wife, Herrick's style is low key, especially compared to that of Forbes Herrick and Watkins. When he did use humor or express cynicism, it was inserted more subtly and more sympathetically – closer to the ways McLaughlin, Allard and McKernan used humor and cynicism.

Herrick's lead reads like that of a typical mob sister story: “‘The only way to keep a man is to keep him jealous,’ was the motto of Mrs. Julia Abb Douglass. But she overplayed her philosophy.” The result, Herrick explained, was that Douglass “kept her man, but he couldn't keep her, and rather than lose her, killed her . . .”²⁰

²⁰ John Herrick, “Munding Sister Bares Thoughts of Slain Woman,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 April 1924, 2.

Although the lead seems to indicate that Herrick will take a jaded view of the proceedings, he then reported, with apparent sympathy, about how the killer broke down on the stand when an attorney mentioned his mother's ill health. While the mob sisters, especially Forbes Herrick and Watkins, might have questioned the rationale for bringing up the subject of a dying mother in the middle of a trial, let alone the sincerity of the tears the comment elicited, Herrick seemed to take the scene at face value.²¹

Herrick was slightly more cynical when he provided a laundry list of men the unfaithful victim had pursued, including a "furniture man," "the army officer," "the garage man" and a "piano man," adding that the victim reportedly said of the last, "He's awfully homely, but I'm trying to get out of paying for my piano."²²

The quote successfully painted the murdered woman as a gold-digger – a tactic Forbes Herrick and Watkins, especially, perfected – but the dig wasn't heavy handed, especially when read in the broader context of the fairly straightforward story. In general, the article is more restrained than one could have reasonably expected if Forbes Herrick or Watkins, in particular, had been assigned to report on the murder of a woman who'd dated a "piano man" just to get a free instrument.

John Herrick also covered the Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb kidnapping/murder – recall that the verdict was postponed to accommodate his marriage to Forbes Herrick – and in this case he sometimes veered closer to the sob sister than mob sister style.

In particular, his coverage of defense attorney Clarence Darrow's closing arguments is histrionic, verging on maudlin. Herrick's description of Darrow as a crying "old gray man,"

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

early in the article, presages the mawkish tone that Herrick would use throughout the entire piece, which includes verbatim repetition of a dramatic, if only vaguely apropos, verse that Darrow read about “lights . . . guttering low; Square your shoulders and lift your pack. And leave your friends and go.” After which Herrick added, continuing the drama, “Clarence Darrow squared his shoulders and settled his pack of the responsibility for the defense more firmly on them.”²³

Compare John Herrick’s use of the verse to Genevieve Forbes Herrick’s recounting of a similar ploy by murderess Lillian Rowland, who killed her dentist husband, a case examined earlier in this research. After summoning tears – with the help of a friend who slammed his foot into her instep during the coroner’s inquest, as Forbes Herrick noted – the murderess handed reporters a sappy poem that had supposedly been her guide for months. As John Herrick did with Darrow’s poem, Forbes Herrick recorded the quatrain in her story – but with the cynical comment, “The ink looked remarkably fresh, but, shucks, a coroner’s inquest isn’t a clinical laboratory!”²⁴

John Herrick continued to weave his own melodramatic touches into Darrow’s already theatrical pleas for Leopold and Loeb’s lives, describing, in prose reminiscent of the sob sisters’, how Darrow’s “arms, fallen limp, took strength, took hope, and rose embracing,” before quoting Darrow’s hyperbolic plea to the judge, ““Your honor stands between the future and the past’ . . . and he balanced time gone and time to come in his hands . . .”²⁵

²³ Herrick, “Darrow Pleads for Parents,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 Aug. 1924, 1.

²⁴ Forbes Herrick, “Killing Ladies – Lillian Rowland, the Story-Book Housewife,” 14.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Granted, a summation by legendary orator Clarence Darrow in one of the most emotion-laden cases of the early twentieth century was no doubt dramatic fodder to begin with. However, Herrick piled onto the pathos in passages suggestive of the sob sisters' and a far cry from Genevieve Forbes Herrick's bemused recounting of a plucky teenager's argument that Richard Loeb was not just "idiotic," but "coo-coo."²⁶ And it is difficult to imagine that preacher's daughter Maurine Watkins, who once insisted that "there is just as much Christianity in having your sympathy with the man who was killed,"²⁷ would have been swayed even by Clarence Darrow into exhibiting much sympathy for boys she so blatantly, unapologetically condemned in her own coverage of the case.²⁸

In general, Herrick's work is probably most comparable to that of Kathleen McLaughlin, Leola Allard, and Maureen McKernan, all of whom could be swayed into sentimental writing,²⁹ but who could at times reveal a jaded, humorous edge³⁰ – or simply write straight crime news, as Herrick did in his 1924 article "Kill Two Cops; City Aroused."³¹

Like McLaughlin, McKernan and especially Allard, Herrick seems to have shifted the tone of his crime reporting based upon any number of factors, from personal reaction to the

²⁶ Forbes, "Girl Defies State for Loeb," 1.

²⁷ Merrill, "Pistol Fire Lights Up 'Chicago,'" M1.

²⁸ See, e.g., Watkins, "Big Experience Either Way, Is Nathan's View," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 31 May 1924, 3, and "'Dick Innocent,' Loeb's Protest; Plan Defense," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 June 1924, 5.

²⁹ For examples of mob sisters' work that veered toward sentimentality, see, e.g., the following articles examined in this research: Leola Allard, "Home in Ash Can Opens New Life to Scorned Waif," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 Oct. 1919, 21; Allard, "Banker Finds Happiness by Acting on Jury," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 17 Oct. 1919, 21; and M'Kernan, "Admits Killing 3 Children," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 April 1925, 1.

³⁰ Examples of the mob sisters' use of cynical humor can be found in articles examined in this research, including: Kathleen McLaughlin, "Widow Pollak to Bury Her Victim Today," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 Aug. 1932, 1; McLaughlin, "Embezzler Is in Cell; Played on Cop Ball Team," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 Dec. 1929, 1; Leola Allard, "Germer, 'Home' Lecturer, Sued for a Divorce," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 15 Oct. 1919, 1; and M'Kernan, "In \$10,000 Casket Dean Lies in State," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 13 Nov. 1924, 1.

³¹ Herrick, "Kill Two Cops; City Aroused," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 July 1925, 1.

crime committed to public mood – motivations that are largely lost to history, and can only be subject for speculation or future study.

Most important for this research, the work of the three male reporters is similar to – sometimes indistinguishable from – the work of the mob sisters, and that, if anything, Forbes Herrick and Watkins, in particular, created a style of crime reportage that stood apart as uniquely sarcastic, cynical and humorous.

Women at the Competing *Herald and Examiner*: Mob – and Sob – Sisters

An examination of the *Tribune*'s chief rival, William Randolph Hearst's *Herald and Examiner*, during key times of mob sister reportage – the trials of Leopold and Loeb and murderesses Belva Gaertner and Beulah Annan, as well as near the city's most significant mob-related crime event, the St. Valentine's Day Massacre – indicates that the *Herald and Examiner* also gave women significant opportunities to earn bylines for covering a variety of news events, including crime. However, this initial survey also suggests that the women working at the *Herald and Examiner* rarely incorporated cynicism, sarcasm or slang in their articles and were more likely to report the news in straightforward fashion, or to follow the sob sister model.

In fact, as the Leopold and Loeb “thrill killing” case unfolded, the *Herald and Examiner* ran commentary by Hearst's original sob sister, Winifred Black, whose overly emotive work on the 1906 Harry K. Thaw murder trial is discussed earlier in this dissertation. Briefly, Black was among a handful of women whose maudlin prose at the turn of the century helped to cement the idea that women were incapable of writing dispassionately about crime.³² Yet, although the sob sister style was considered out of fashion by the 1920s and 1930s – recall Ishbel Ross's assertion

³² For a history of Black's career with Hearst newspapers, see Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 60-67, and for more information on the sob sisters, in general, see Abramson, *Sob Sister Journalism*.

that the post-World-War I reading public would “laugh” at sob stories³³ – Black produced a series of unabashedly sentimental pieces about the kidnapping and murder of Chicago youth Robert Franks by wealthy and privileged Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, who claimed to have killed the boy just for the experience of having taken a life and getting away with the ultimate crime – which obviously did not happen.

That Black’s first article on the case will be a lengthy, heart-tugging musing is augured by the title: “If Your Son Were Slayer? Would You Protect Him? Or Would You Give Him to the Law Without Comfort of Your Love?”³⁴

After dedicating four sometimes extensive paragraphs to how a mother might reluctantly come to grips with the reality that her child had confessed to a “brutal, cold blooded, cruel murder of a poor, little, friendly, unsuspecting, good-natured child,” Black asked, for example:

Would you begin to think back down the years and would you remember suddenly some little childish trait – some almost forgotten thing that happened years and years ago and would something like a cold hand on your heart tell you that now at last this boy, who has been the core of your heart all these years, is really telling you the brutal truth – at last?³⁵

This is followed by questions aimed specifically at women – mothers – regarding what theoretical steps they might take next, including the hyperbolic, “Would you turn your face to the wall and die of a broken heart?” or “Would you . . . fight for him – as you fought for him when he was strangling with the diphtheria and you . . . stayed in the darkened room and fought it out together – you and the boy and death with nothing to help you but your mother love and your mother courage and your mother faith?”³⁶

³³ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 11.

³⁴ Winifred Black, “If Your Son Were Slayer?”, *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 9 June 1924, 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Black's subsequent musings on the case continued in that same highly emotional vein. In particular, her piece, "Franks Slaying Called Fruit of Jazz Age by Winifred Black" is especially mawkish, beginning with a question that – unlike the mob sisters' staccato, pulp-fiction prose – reads like copy from a dime romance novel: "It rained in the night – did you hear it?," followed by the overblown, "The wind screamed like a thousand lost souls let loose from torment, and the storm beat at the windows like some wandering spirit, trying to desperately get back to the warmth and shelter of human companionship."³⁷

Black then condemned the values of the Jazz Age – but not in the cynical, bemused way the mob sisters did. Her thirty-plus-paragraph reflection on the dangers of automobiles, alcohol, marijuana and "perhaps a sniff of white joy powder" is a flat, if flowery, denunciation of the modern age. When Black did employ sarcasm, she wielded it not to humorous effect, but to deliver a message about lost morality, as when she wrote bitterly of the murder, "Isn't it the perfect flower of the times, the ripened fruit of our delightful and encouraging civilization?"³⁸

Black's coverage of the killing also – in the sob sister tradition – positions women as weak victims, contrary to the way in which the mob sisters at their most cynical positioned women as cold, calculating and sometimes more powerful and manipulative than men. For example, in one of Black's pieces on the killing, she wrote about how the victim's older brother – "a fine, manly, handsome young fellow" – recognized that he needed to be strong "for mother's sake . . ."³⁹

³⁷ Black, "Franks Slaying Called Fruit of the Jazz Age by Winifred Black," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 10 June 1924, 2.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Black, "'Bobby' Franks Yearned for 'Long Pants' and Legal Career," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 11 June 1924, 3.

The remainder of Black's coverage of the case continued in that same fashion, and – just as the sob sisters were swayed by Evelyn Nesbit's pretty face in the Harry K. Thaw trial that spawned the sob style – Black also fell prey to killer Richard Loeb's good looks. She created in the more charming, physically attractive killer a sympathetic, damaged, naïve character held in the thrall of brilliant, cold-eyed Leopold, not unlike the way she and the original sob sisters had portrayed Nesbit as the innocent, pliant victim of the older, more powerful Thaw.⁴⁰ Although historian Simon Baatz paints Leopold as a sometimes unwilling participant in thrill-seeking Loeb's schemes and crimes – writing that the socially awkward Leopold's "affection for Richard and his desire to be in Richard's company were . . . so strong that there was nothing he would not do to hold on to the friendship," including commit murder⁴¹ – Black, based upon appearances, concluded that the relationship functioned the other way around: "Loeb the Faun – Leopold the Svengali."⁴²

Black's byline in the *Herald and Examiner*, not to mention the articles she produced, prove that the paper was still willing to print stories in the sob sister style during the Roaring Twenties. And when mob sister Leola Allard moved from the *Tribune* to the *Herald and Examiner* in the middle of the decade, her coverage, at least in one case, also became more like the old sob sisters and less like that of a mob sister.

Specifically, Allard's reportage on the Beulah Annan murder trial – one of the key cases that mob sister Maurine Watkins drew upon when writing *Chicago* – is close to the sob sister

⁴⁰ For a review of the sob sister style and the Harry K. Thaw/Stanford White murder case, see Abramson's *Sob Sister Journalism*.

⁴¹ Baatz, *For the Thrill of It*, 45.

⁴² Black, "Winifred Black Calls Loeb the Faun and Leopold the Svengali," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 12 June 1924, 5. Note that *Tribune* reporter Maureen McKernan also seemed to fall prey to Loeb's good looks; see, e.g., McKernan, "Sensitive Boy, Girls Recall of 'Dickey' Loeb," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 June 1924, 4.

style. To recap, the married Annan shot suitor Harry Kalstedt, then played the record “Hula Lou” while he lay dying on her floor – a scenario that Watkins, writing for the *Tribune*, repeatedly used to make Annan – dubbed by Watkins the city’s “most beautiful” slayer – seem cold and calculating.⁴³

The *Herald and Examiner* – or perhaps Allard, on her own – created an entirely different narrative for Annan, though. In Allard’s article, “Beulah Annan Tells Her Tragic Story of Wife Who Could Not Love” – published three days after Watkins’s initial, scathing article about Annan – Allard painted a picture of a murderess not devoid of feeling, as Watkins asserted, but rather moved to kill by the intensity of her uncontrollable love for Kalstedt.⁴⁴

Allard’s portrayal of Annan in her lead stands in sharp counterpoint to Watkins’s description of Annan as completely unrepentant. Allard wrote, “Mrs. Beulah May Annan is the saddest of all the women who have been held for killing: the youngest, the prettiest and the most regretful.” Allard then related how Annan wished her love triangle had turned out differently – as in ““story books”” – and how no one outside of prison could understand what had gone wrong, resulting in murder. Allard added, with apparent sympathy, “Mrs. Annan sat motionless . . . Her hands were held together so tightly that the nails dug into the flesh. She didn’t cry or make any protest against an unkind fate that had to do with putting her where she is . . .”⁴⁵

While Watkins clearly blamed Annan for the homicide and railed against the fact that women in Chicago were getting away with murder, Allard allowed Annan to play the victim –

⁴³ See Watkins, “Woman Plays Jazz Air as Victim Dies,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4 April 1924, 1, and Watkins, “Demand Noose for ‘Prettiest’ Woman Slayer,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 5 April 1924, 1.

⁴⁴ Allard, “Beulah Annan Tells Her Tragic Story of Wife Who Could Not Love,” *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 7 April 1924, 3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

see the mention of an “unkind fate” that “put” Annan in jail. Further, Allard, using Annan’s quotes, made women, in general, seem powerless against men. According to Allard – paraphrasing the murderess – women suffered “physical weakness” that compelled them to practice deceit. For example, Allard quoted Annan as explaining that her infidelity was actually a way to protect herself in a male-dominated world, in which most women didn’t have the courage or resources to leave a husband without another man to cling to.⁴⁶

Allard continued to allow Annan to justify her actions over the course of nine more paragraphs, an extended quote in which Annan again lamented that no one outside of her circumstances could understand what it was like to be married young, divorced and then trapped in a second unhappy marriage. Then, in what appears to be a direct challenge to Maurine Watkins’s scathing, repeated and mocking references to Annan’s playing of the “Hula Lou” record while Kalstedt lay dying, Allard quoted Annan:

“I thought last night . . . I would never lose the vision of his body on that floor and the wail of the victrola music. How any one could think that a human being would put that record on the machine in any spirit of levity I don’t see. I had to have noise.”⁴⁷

And in a quote that Watkins almost certainly would have used as the basis for a biting critique, Allard uncritically cited Annan as complaining that “[b]eing alone with your thoughts after you’ve killed some one is the last word in suffering.”⁴⁸

Finally, putting a different spin on the Annan’s languid, sleepy poses, which Watkins took for indifference,⁴⁹ Allard concluded the article by describing how the young murderess,

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Watkins, “Demand Noose for ‘Prettiest’ Woman Slayer,” 1.

supposedly plagued by sleepless nights to the point of sick exhaustion, collapsed weakly on her prison bed.⁵⁰

The descriptions of Annan as a suffering casualty of cruel fate stand in stark comparison to Watkins's bitterly cynical, sarcastic portrayals of Annan – “Beulah, the virtuous working girl! Beulah, the modest little housewife!”⁵¹ – and a series of photos accompanying Allard's story heightens the contrast. The *Herald and Examiner* ran four images of Annan atop Allard's story, and under the headline, “Comely Slayer Rues Deed as She Waits Fate in Cell of County Jail.” Each image is clearly designed to elicit sympathy for the “comely slayer,” who is shown holding a flower, reading her Bible, slumped over in remorse, and pensively biting her finger. The captions, like most of Allard's article, consist of extended quotes that reinforce Annan's portrayal of herself as the true victim of the crime.⁵²

The paper's eagerness to stir readers to sympathy for the young murderess is especially obvious related to the image of Annan holding the Bible, which Annan supposedly opened randomly to a quote about the perils of drinking alcohol. And the *Herald and Examiner* again challenged Watkins's and the *Tribune*'s cynical take on Annan's behavior after the homicide in the caption for the final photo, which reads, ““Can you imagine patting his face and crying to him while that horrible tune kept jingling? I . . . started the victrola to make a noise. I was afraid to stop it.””⁵³

⁵⁰ Allard, “Beulah Annan Tells Her Tragic Story of Wife Who Could Not Love,” 3.

⁵¹ Watkins, “Judge Admits All of Beulah's Killing Stories,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 24 May 1924, 1.

⁵² “Comely Slayer Rues Deed as She Waits Fate in Cell of County Jail,” *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 7 April 1924, 3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

It's uncertain whether Allard was compelled by the *Herald and Examiner* to portray Annan in such a kind light, or whether Allard truly believed that Annan was genuinely rueful and as much a victim as the dead man. However, Allard did write one more bylined and heart-tugging story on the case, titled "Beulah Melts Father's Heart." In prose reminiscent of Winifred Black's sob stories on the Leopold and Loeb case, Annan wrote, sappily, that news that Annan's father would support her during the "tragedy" had left Annan "more hopeful and happy than at any time" since the murder. And Allard again cast Annan as the victim when Allard explained how the murderess had been raised in the countryside, where "where Beulah contends it is easier to be good."⁵⁴ In Watkins's hands, that assertion almost certainly would have been sarcastic, but in the context of Allard's story, it reads as a sincere lament about a girl's corruption by influences in a wicked city.

Both of Allard's stories about Annan are much closer to sob sister pieces than they are to Watkins's mob sister coverage, but a cursory review of other stories Allard covered indicates that she did not become a full-fledged sob sister at the *Herald and Examiner*. For example, her front-page article "Mother Wins Fight for Child" is much more like the work she did for the *Tribune*, covering domestic court in a usually straightforward fashion. The story about a baby held by a hospital because the mother couldn't pay her bill could have been overplayed to draw tears, but Allard primarily just reported the facts.⁵⁵

Again covering a case that earned Maurine Watkins several bylines, Allard produced three bylined articles on Wanda Stopa, the "bohemian" young lawyer who attempted to shoot her lover's wife, but killed the family's gardener, instead, then committed suicide in a hotel.

⁵⁴ Allard, "Beulah Melts Father's Heart," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 20 April 1924, 4.

⁵⁵ Allard, "Mother Wins Fight for Child," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 22 April 1924, 1.

Watkins's coverage of Stopa can best be characterized as moralistic and cold. Recall how Watkins scornfully condemned Stopa's "wild search for Life-with-a-capital-L in cheap studio parties" and desire for "freedom" – a word Watkins always put in quotes that conveyed skepticism.⁵⁶

Covering Stopa's viewing, Allard also noted Stopa's "fascination" with a bohemian lifestyle, but Allard's personal opinions on that fascination are not nearly as evident as Watkins's views are in her coverage. The only clues that indicate that Allard similarly disapproved of "free" living lie in a quote from one of Stopa's friends, who said, "I have a husband and a home . . . I couldn't live like that . . ." and a reference to women who came to view the body as having "serious faces, as if the lesson brought home was a strong one" – the lesson being the dangers of a non-traditional life.⁵⁷

Overall, Allard's story about the viewing borders on sentimental, compared to Watkins's funeral coverage. For example, Allard noted how the crowds ruined the flowers, making them "brown and broken" and briefly described Stopa's mother as lying on a couch, weeping.⁵⁸ But the article isn't heart-rending, either.

A subsequent story Allard produced on the Stopa murder – "Fear of Wanda Haunts Inquiry" – is also largely objective and factual. For example, Allard, reporting from the coroner's inquest, forthrightly described the injuries that resulted in the gardener's death.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Watkins, "No Friends on Hand to Meet Body of Wanda," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 April 1924, 3.

⁵⁷ Allard, "No Prayers for Wanda at Her Grave Because of Self-Inflicted Death," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 29 April 1924, 3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Allard, "Fear of Wanda Haunts Inquiry," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 26 April 1924, 2.

Most important, although her tone sometimes seems softer at the *Herald and Examiner*, Allard was apparently still allowed to cover crime and the courts, including events such as coroner's inquests, after she left the *Tribune*.

In addition, by May 20, 1924 – scarcely a month after her fawning reportage on killer Beulah Annan – Allard again wrote in the mob sister style when she covered a murder committed by Elizabeth Uncapher – another story also covered by Maurine Watkins, who spelled the name “Unkafer.”⁶⁰

Watkins's article about an unattractive woman who did get convicted of murder was only six paragraphs long and unembellished with opinion. Allard's article, “‘Ugly Slayer’ To Cell Today,” is longer and more opinion laden. For example, in a lead that seems directly at odds with her biased, preferential coverage of attractive slayer Beulah Annan, Allard opined, “It seems to be difficult for Cook County juries to takes the crimes of pretty women seriously.” Allard then reminded readers that out of more than fifty women tried for murder during an unspecified time period, only eight had been convicted. “Elizabeth Uncapher . . . is No. 8.”⁶¹

Allard followed this with quotes that indicate that Uncapher, who killed her lover, was as boldly unrepentant as Annan was coyly remorseful. She further described some of Uncapher's less attractive features, including burn scars, before explaining that the convicted woman wanted to fix her hair and get dressed if she was going to be photographed.⁶²

Perhaps another mob sister might have responded to that request cynically. Or perhaps not, because Uncapher couldn't have used her appearance to sway a jury at that point.

⁶⁰ Watkins, “Woman Given Life in Jail as Murderess,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 May 1924, 1.

⁶¹ Allard, “‘Ugly Slayer’ To Cell Today,” *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 20 May 1924, 11.

⁶² *Ibid.*

Moreover, the normally critical Maurine Watkins also seems to have had some sympathy for how Uncapher's appearance had apparently hurt her chances to walk free. As noted earlier, Watkins – in an article about whether prettier killers were concerned by Uncapher's sentencing – reminded readers that “Elizabeth Unkafer was not cursed with fatal beauty!”⁶³ The comment, while snide in Watkins's style, was actually a cutting comment on male juries, not Uncapher's appearance.

Allard didn't lambaste the system that favored attractive killers with as much vigor as Watkins or Forbes Herrick, but she did take a gentle swipe at it, which indicates that perhaps her sympathetic coverage of Beulah Annan was provided at the prompting of others at the *Herald and Examiner*, because, according to this admittedly truncated examination of her work at that paper, Allard didn't produce any other similarly naive articles. In fact, in a June 1924 article that compares “thrill killer” Nathan Leopold to murderess Kitty Malm – whose case is discussed in this dissertation, in the chapter on Forbes Herrick – Allard is actually more critical of Malm than Forbes Herrick was.

As explained earlier, Malm – dubbed “the Tiger Woman” – was the only female killer to elicit Forbes Herrick's compassion during the 1920s. In Forbes Herrick's 1927 retrospective column on the case, in which Malm, a young mother, was convicted of a murder related to a botched robbery, Forbes Herrick essentially told readers that Malm had been doomed to prison by abuse at the hands of men ranging from her stepfather to her husband – who shot and abandoned her during the robbery.⁶⁴

⁶³ Watkins, “Beulah Annan Awaits Stork, Murder Trial,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 9 May 1924, 6.

⁶⁴ Forbes Herrick, “Ladies in Crime – Kitty Malm, the Tiger Woman,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 27 March 1927, G2.

Writing in 1924, Allard clearly disagreed and saw Malm as perhaps disadvantaged, but nonetheless calculating and self-centered. In her article, “Leopold Like Kitty Malm,” Allard wrote that both Malm and Nathan Leopold shared a “lack of an ethical conception of life.” While conceding that Leopold had enjoyed the advantages wealth provides, while Malm had been “reared in the back alleys” and “never had a chance in life,” Allard – using information from a psychoanalyst who interviewed both Leopold and Malm – nonetheless wrote that Malm was as self-absorbed as Leopold and believed in her right to commit crimes, suffering remorse only over getting caught. Essentially, Allard concluded that Leopold “wanted to do the wrong things. So did Kitty.”⁶⁵

This survey of a brief time period turned up several other bylined articles by Allard, including what might be considered more traditional stories for women to cover at that time, such as a story a politician’s wife’s interest in charities benefiting children;⁶⁶ a piece about women doctors’ lack of support for an Equal Rights amendment;⁶⁷ and a somewhat saccharine article about a man whose baby died after his wife abandoned the family.⁶⁸

The last story might have come close to reading like an old-fashioned sob story – but it also appeared on page one, above the fold. While the stories Allard was assigned varied greatly in content, and her tone shifted, too, she was clearly a valued journalist at the *Herald and Examiner*, and used as a general assignment reporter, similar to her role at the *Tribune*.

⁶⁵ Allard, “Leopold Like Kitty Malm,” *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 2 June 1924, 3.

⁶⁶ Allard, “Mrs. Dawes is Babies’ Friend,” *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 15 June 1924, 4.

⁶⁷ Allard, “Women Reject Equality Bill,” *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 11 June 1924, 1.

⁶⁸ Allard, “Father Wants Wife to Return,” *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 17 June 1924.

Several other female bylines appeared above straight news stories in the *Herald and Examiner* during the months examined for this research, including articles by Peggy Doyle and Patricia Dougherty, both of whom earn mention in Ross's *Ladies of the Press*.

Ross notes that Doyle covered "gangster life in Chicago," starting with the *Herald and Examiner* in 1917, doing "general work." According to Ross, "Before long, [Doyle] was forced to the conclusion that none of the subjects she interviewed was more agreeable or obliging than the lords of the underworld," including Martin Durkin and Big Tim Murphy,⁶⁹ both of whom were covered by *Tribune* mob sisters discussed earlier in this research.⁷⁰ Ross adds that Murphy, a prominent underworld figure who was gunned down on his front lawn, "often telephoned Miss Doyle to let her know what was going on in the explosive domains" of gangland.⁷¹

This research did not discover any bylined mob-related articles by Doyle; a more comprehensive follow-up study is needed. However, even a preliminary survey of the *Herald and Examiner* indicates that Doyle earned frequent bylines and even an accompanying photograph of herself, next to stories she wrote while on the road.⁷²

An indication of Doyle's prominence at the paper is her story "Short Skirts and Ankles Style Again," which ran May 28, 1924.⁷³ Although, as a fashion story, it might seem to suggest that Doyle actually wrote traditional "women's" news, the article is noteworthy because it appeared amid eight unattributed articles about the biggest story of that year – the Leopold and

⁶⁹ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 489-490.

⁷⁰ See, e.g., Forbes Herrick, "Durkin Innocent of Killing U.S. Agent, Says Girl in Cell," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 13 Oct. 1925, 2; McLaughlin, "'Big Tim' Murphy Released," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 March 1926, 1; and McLaughlin, "Big Tim Jovial as He Breathes Air of Freedom," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 27 March 1926, 1.

⁷¹ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 490.

⁷² See, e.g., the image that accompanies Peggy Doyle, "Booms Woman for G.O.P. Running Mate," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 12 June 1924, 3.

⁷³ Peggy Doyle, "Short Skirts and Ankles Style Again," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 28 May 1924, 3.

Loeb murder case. Surrounded by straight, but anonymous, news stories such as “2 Machines Used for Franks Notes,”⁷⁴ “Grief Stricken Mother In Collapse,”⁷⁵ and “Witness Saw 3 Men and Woman with Bundle Where Body Was Found,”⁷⁶ Doyle’s article stands out for both its much lighter subject matter and the name attached.

The article also shows flashes of humor. A shift toward shorter skirts, Doyle wrote, was attributable to “nothing more stable than woman’s fickle nature,” while, “from a masculine viewpoint, short skirts are undoubtedly easier on the eyes.”⁷⁷

Other bylined articles produced by Doyle also involved news traditionally considered the domain of women reporters. For example, she covered a meeting by a women’s civic club;⁷⁸ a Girl Scout exhibition;⁷⁹ a reception held by a new Cardinal;⁸⁰ a meeting of the Illinois Federation of Women’s Clubs;⁸¹ a survey of women’s opinions on potential vice-presidential running mates;⁸² and the hunt for a burial place for film icon Rudolph Valentino.⁸³

Doyle also wrote one crime-related story during the periods surveyed: “Dead Jockey’s ‘Wives’ Claim His Effects,” about a man who was revealed to be a bigamist upon his death. The

⁷⁴ “2 Machines Used for Franks Notes,” *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 28 May 1924, 3.

⁷⁵ “Grief Stricken Mother in Collapse,” *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 28 May 1924, 3.

⁷⁶ “Witness Saw 3 Men and Woman With Bundle Where Body Was Found,” *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 28 May 1924, 3.

⁷⁷ Doyle, “Short Skirts and Ankles Style Again,” 3.

⁷⁸ Doyle, “‘U.S. Woman Is Envy of World,’” *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 26 April 1924, 13.

⁷⁹ Doyle, “Throng Sees 2,000 Girl Scouts Drill,” *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 3 May 1924, 5.

⁸⁰ Doyle, “Cardinal ‘At Home’ to Myriad Callers,” *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 13 May 1924, 3.

⁸¹ Doyle, “State Club Women Hit Peace School,” *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 21 May 1924, 3.

⁸² Doyle, “Booms Woman for G.O.P. Running Mate,” *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 12 June 1924, 3.

⁸³ Doyle, “‘Let Valentino Sleep Here,’ Italian Plea,” *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 27 Aug. 1926, 5.

article, while brief, hints at the potential for cynicism on Doyle's part. Describing one widow's surprise upon learning that her husband had another bride, Doyle wrote, "[The jockey's] business at the various race tracks – she was very vague as to what it was exactly – kept him away . . ."⁸⁴

Overall, the story is straightforward, with a slightly flippant, funny edge.

Another promising subject for further study is *Herald and Examiner* reporter Elizabeth Walker. Walker, obviously a general assignment reporter whose bylines appear in 1924, hewed especially close to the mob sister style and covered crimes including the Belva Gaertner murder, one of the inspirations for Maurine Watkins's *Chicago*. And Walker's page-one article, "Mrs. Gaertner Blames Rum,"⁸⁵ echoes the cynical, mocking tone Watkins adopted when writing about the case.⁸⁶

For example, budding playwright Watkins acidly described Gaertner, who shot her married lover during a quarrel in his car, as a "[c]abaret dancer and twice divorcee" whose "rejuvenating rouge made her well on the dangerous side of 30" during her trial.⁸⁷

Similarly, in the lead to her article on the case, Walker wrote, glibly, "Mrs. Belva Gaertner, dashing divorcee, one time entertainer, and accredited heroine of a score of gin and jazz parties yesterday faced the soberest task of her night-life career." Gaertner's "sober" task, Walker humorously added, was to prove that she was drunk the night of the killing, thereby relieving her of some responsibility for her actions.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Doyle, "Dead Jockey's 'Wives' Claim His Effects," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 20 Aug. 1926, 11.

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Walker, "Mrs. Gaertner Blames Rum," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 4 June 1924, 1.

⁸⁶ See, e.g., Watkins, "No Sweetheart Worth Killing – Mrs. Gaertner," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 March 1924, 17.

⁸⁷ Watkins, "Mrs. Gaertner Has 'Class' as She Faces Jury," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4 June 1924, 4.

⁸⁸ Walker, "Mrs. Gaertner Blames Rum," 1.

Walker added, mockingly, that “both the defense and the prosecution [were] apprehensive of the jury’s attitude toward . . . feminine Volstead violators,” while Gaertner showed little “tendency to rouse out of her defensive apathy.”⁸⁹

Watkins made similar note of Gaertner’s sleepy attitude, describing how the defendant’s “sultry eyes never lost their dreaminess as policemen described the dead body slumped over the wheel of her Nash sedan – the matted hair around the wound, the blood that dripped in pools . . .”⁹⁰

Walker didn’t shy away from covering the more gory aspects of the case, either, and described in blunt, factual terms the coroner’s description of the bullet to the head that ended the victim’s life and the blood at the scene and on Gaertner’s clothes.⁹¹

Walker concluded her article with a vignette that Watkins also recorded: testimony by the manager of a club where Gaertner and the victim had been seen together just prior to the shooting.

Describing the club manager’s smirking insistence that the bar didn’t serve alcohol, Watkins wrote, tongue-in-cheek, “According to his statement, the Gingham Inn is matched in dryness only by the Sahara; no liquor is sold there, no liquor is brought there, no liquor is displayed there on table, floor, or under cover.”⁹²

With a typical wink-and-nod to readers who would have understood that the inn sold alcohol, Walker similarly described how a “hurt look swept across the heretofore bland countenance” of the manager as he “indignantly answered” a question about whether Gaertner

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Watkins, “State Launches Trial of Belva for Law Killing,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 5 June 1924, 12.

⁹¹ Walker, “Mrs. Gaertner Blames Rum,” 1.

⁹² Watkins, “State Launches Trial of Belva for Law Killing,” 12.

had been drunk at the establishment. The reponse: ““Intoxicated! I should say not. There ain’t a chance. They can’t slip it under the table or set it out on the table at the Gingham.” Walker added that the entire courtroom, including the defendant and the prosecutors, laughed about that very obvious lie.⁹³

Walker applied an equally flippant, mob-sister tone to her April 1924 article, “Death Trial Is Family Party.” The story about the trial of a bootlegger who killed a patrolman is shot through with mocking references to the murderer’s family’s attempts to appear respectable by donning fancy clothes – a tactic the *Tribune* mob sisters also used.⁹⁴ For example, Walker described how the defendant’s mother’s “only response to the indictment against ‘her boy’ was a vigorous re-exploration of her gaudy cerise beaded bag for her lace-edged handkerchief,” and added, even more humorously, “while the alleged killer himself marked the moment by discovering for the first time the hole in the heel of his brand new powder blue socks.” The story is also infused with slang, including a reference to a “revolver party that ended in death.”⁹⁵

Walker concluded the article on a sober note – not unlike the way Watkins sometimes ended her stories, abruptly ending the laughter⁹⁶ – by noting that the slain officer’s widow was too anguished to testify.⁹⁷

During the time periods examined, Walker also produced a witty, bylined story about auditions for a theater production;⁹⁸ an article about the travels of a former Chicago mayor;⁹⁹ a

⁹³ Walker, “Mrs. Gaertner Blames Rum,” 1.

⁹⁴ See, e.g., Genevieve Forbes Herrick, “Betty and Irma Fight Duel of Pointed Words,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 Jan. 1926, 3.

⁹⁵ Walker, “Death Trial Is Family Party,” *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 23 April 1924, 3.

⁹⁶ Watkins, “Jury Finds Mrs. Gaertner Not Guilty,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 June 1924, 1.

⁹⁷ Walker, “Death Trial Is Family Party,” 3.

piece about a doctor fined for kissing a patient;¹⁰⁰ a political story about Democrats' search for a head committeewoman;¹⁰¹ and a straight news story about the murder of one school-age boy by another.¹⁰²

In the hands of a sob sister, the last story could have been maudlin, but Walker presented an unembellished, factual recounting of how a boy who felt threatened by a controlling older friend resorted to murder to free himself from the relationship.¹⁰³

Walker is not profiled in Ishbel Ross's comprehensive review of newspaper women up to the mid-1930s, so it's possible that her time as a journalist was brief. However, while Walker worked at the *Herald and Examiner*, she seems to have served as a general assignment reporter sometimes capable of using humor, sarcasm and slang in the style of the *Tribune's* mob sisters. Even an initial review of her work demonstrates that, at the very least, she was not pigeonholed into writing about fashion, home or society news.

Other women whose names appear above news stories published during the periods reviewed include Patricia Dougherty, who wrote an article as part of extended coverage of actor Rudolph Valentino's death,¹⁰⁴ and another story about a flapper who tried to commit suicide when her values clashed with those of her mother. Dougherty delivered the latter story, which

⁹⁸ Walker, "Coy Eyes Lose to Slim Ankles," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 19 April 1924, 3.

⁹⁹ Walker, "Carter Home, Not For Long," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 22 May 1924, 15.

¹⁰⁰ Walker, "Doctor Pays \$2,000 For Stealing Kiss," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 27 May 1924, 13.

¹⁰¹ Walker, "Women Dems in Hot Fight," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 30 May 1924, 11.

¹⁰² Walker, "Self Defense M'Carthy Plea," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 15 April 1924, 5.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Patricia Dougherty, "Rudy, on Visit Here, Saw 'Hope at Last,'" *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 24 Aug. 1926, 2.

could have been exploited for its emotional impact, in a fairly straightforward manner, including a dispassionate description of the bullet wound in the girl's stomach.¹⁰⁵

In addition, journalist Betty Shroyer produced articles about runaway flappers who ended up in jail;¹⁰⁶ a crime-related story about women mobilizing to combat "outrages" against women and children;¹⁰⁷ an interview with "Miss Australia," when she visited the city;¹⁰⁸ and a page-one story about a pianist who broke a lucrative contract in order to marry.¹⁰⁹

Finally, this research located two bylined articles by reporter Jane Eads, one on the establishment of a seismographic station in Chicago¹¹⁰ and another about how local photographers found it difficult to make Jazz Age fashions look attractive through a camera lens.¹¹¹

Even taken together, the bylined output of Dougherty, Shroyer and Eads is slim; however this research cast a narrow net, in terms of time. It is quite possible that further inquiry could uncover substantially more bylined stories by any or all of the women whose work is discussed in this chapter. For now, however, it seems safe to conclude that the *Herald and Examiner* – while still publishing sob-sister stories – also seems to have given women opportunities to not only escape the "hen's coop" and write straight news, but to sometimes wield humor, sarcasm and slang not unlike the mob sisters identified at the rival *Tribune*.

¹⁰⁵ Dougherty, "Old Ideals? No! Flapper Tries Death," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 5 Aug. 1926, 19.

¹⁰⁶ Betty Shroyer, "Flapper Plot Thickens, Then Ends at Jail," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 15 Aug. 1926, 6.

¹⁰⁷ Shroyer, "Women Will Mobilize to Protect Girls," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 20 Aug. 1926, 3.

¹⁰⁸ Shroyer, "Face Pretty? Yes, But What Is Back of It?" *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 29 Aug. 1926, 2.

¹⁰⁹ Shroyer, "Irate Father O.K.'s Marriage," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 19 Aug. 1926, 1.

¹¹⁰ Jane Eads, "Dance? Quake to Help Shake Your Shimmy!" *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 20 Aug. 1926, 4.

¹¹¹ Eads, "Snappy Styles Hard to Snap," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 28 Aug. 1926, 4.

Although only two bylined articles were located for Jane Eads during this initial comparison, in a 1990 oral history, she echoed *Tribune* reporter Maureen McKernan's earlier assertion about women's abilities to find opportunities equal to men's at newspapers in the 1920s.¹¹² Asked by historian Kathleen Currie if she'd ever been denied the chance to cover a story for the *Herald and Examiner* because she was a woman, Eads – by then Eads Bancroft – replied, “No, never.” Eads also remembered stepping over bodies to phone in a story. And recalling the St. Valentine's Day massacre, she was recorded as laughing, because the thought of seven men getting killed at once “was very funny to me. [It's usually] one at a time, you know.”¹¹³

Clearly, the *Tribune* was not unique in its willingness to employ women as general assignment reporters who often covered crime in the 1920s. Future research could determine the extent to which the rival *Herald and Examiner*, other newspapers in Chicago, and perhaps more papers in other locations followed suit, as Isbhel Ross indicates they did, based upon a careful reading of *Ladies of the Press*.¹¹⁴

Were Chicago papers alone in employing female crime reporters during the Prohibition era? Or have a substantial body of women who played this role in the Jazz Age simply been overlooked by historians?

¹¹² “Miss McKernan to Tell of Woman Reporter,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 Jan. 1925, 21.

¹¹³ “Jane Eads Bancroft,” oral history for the Washington Press Club Foundation, accessed 30 May 2013, <http://www.wpcf.org/jane-eads-bancroft/>.

¹¹⁴ For a discussion of some of the women Ross identified as covering crime in the 1920s, see Chapter 1 of this dissertation, under “Literature Review.”

Chapter 9 – Conclusion

Although the musical *Anything Goes* didn't debut until 1934,¹ historian Lucy Moore chose the phrase as the title for her biography of the Roaring Twenties, using those two simple but evocative words to sum up an era marked by “political corruption,” “cults of youth,” “excess,” “consumerism and celebrity,” and “profit as a new religion.”²

And while all of America underwent dramatic changes during the Jazz Age – Willa Cather famously wrote, “The world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts”³ – no place revealed in, and suffered from, the new lack of restraint as thoroughly as Chicago did. Even today, the city is inextricably linked to the “myths – or morality tales”⁴ that defined the Prohibition Era. Not surprisingly, the first sentence of Moore's history of the 1920s references Chicago's legendary “beer wars.”⁵ For while many things changed during the Roaring Twenties – from hemlines to music to core values – a key factor that lay at the heart of the great societal shift was crime, as Americans collectively rejected the law of the land – Prohibition – and brewing, obtaining and drinking illegal alcohol became something of a national game, not to mention a sometimes phenomenally lucrative, if illicit and dangerous, business.

Viewed through the lens of history, and perhaps even through the eyes of those who lived it at that time, the era appears exciting and full of promise, the term “Jazz Age” evoking images of flappers riding in “flivvers;” smoke-filled, secretive speakeasies; and grinning couples

¹ “*Anything Goes*,” TheatreHistory.com, accessed 9 Aug. 2013, <http://www.theatrehistory.com/american/musical020.html>.

² Moore, *Anything Goes*, 15.

³ Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, 3.

⁴ Moore, *Anything Goes*, 15.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

dancing the Charleston. But much of the fun had a dark heart, which beat strongest in Chicago, where the underground trade in alcohol was such a cutthroat enterprise that even today its kingpin, Al Capone, is a household name. Upon his death in 1947, *The New York Times* anointed Capone as “the symbol of a shameful era, the monstrous symptom of a disease which was eating into the conscience of America.” And the *Times* writer, at least, was able to see past the glitter of the Roaring Twenties to identify the source of many of its excesses: “Looking back on it now, this period of Prohibition in full, ugly flower seems fantastically incredible. Capone himself was incredible, the creation of an evil dream.”⁶

And Chicago, of course, was tethered to Capone, so the city – burdened not just with gangland violence but with corruption on all levels⁷ – became iconic, too, enough so that Maurine Watkins’s play, originally titled *The Brave Little Woman*⁸ was rechristened *Chicago*, a name rife with connotations of wickedness and profligacy that would have been understood by even those who’d never set foot in the city. While the play is ostensibly about a woman who commits a murder and becomes not an inmate but a celebrity, it is also the tale of a town with a “voracious appetite for diversion” and served, in the words of one critic, to “tell the world all it need know about the city of Chicago.”⁹ And, of course, what the play said about Chicago was that “anything went,” including murder.

Chicagoans didn’t seem to mind their bad reputation. The city was “two-fisted and rowdy, hard-drinking and pugnacious,” according to 1920s writer Robert St. John.¹⁰ Residents

⁶ Bergreen, *Capone*, 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁸ Elliott, “Her Life,” accessed 9 Aug. 2013 at <http://www.maurinewatkins.com/index1-herlife.htm>.

⁹ Pauly, in Watkins, *Chicago*, xi.

¹⁰ Bergreen, *Capone*, 74.

were also known for self-aware, self-deprecating – but paradoxically proud – humor, as evidenced by a bawdy story that circulated in the 1920s, about a Chicago woman who went to a snooty Boston tea. Told by the hostess that East Coast families were interested in “breeding,” the Chicago visitor reportedly replied, sassily, ““Well, where I come from, we think it’s a lot of fun, too, but I guess we don’t talk about it so much.””¹¹ The East Coast elite might have looked down on rowdy Chicago, but Chicagoans reveled in their hard-won ill repute.

In this context, the mob sisters’ emergence at the *Chicago Tribune*, and their sarcastic, cynical, humorous style, seems easy to understand. The paper existed in a city that took pride in breaking rules; it isn’t all that difficult to imagine the pervasive “anything goes” attitude extending into newsrooms, especially at the *Tribune*, where, as noted earlier in this dissertation, women enjoyed a powerful influence dating back to Joseph Medill’s purchase of the paper in the mid-nineteenth century¹² and, by the Roaring Twenties, had a head start on pushing boundaries.

While other newspapers – most notably *The New York Times* – erected barriers to keep women from writing straight news, sometimes confining them in “hen’s coops,” the *Tribune* was from the earliest days of its modern incarnation, under Joseph Medill, influenced by women. Examples of prominent women who helped to shape the paper include Medill’s wife, Kitty, who taught the future newspaper magnate the business of journalism, and Mary King, who in the early twentieth century moved from assistant to Sunday editors to molder of content – and advocate for women on the paper’s staff.

In an era when journalism was also becoming increasingly professionalized – with professionalization’s emphasis on merit-based, as opposed to gender-based, hiring and

¹¹ Ibid., 74-75.

¹² Tim Jones, “Joseph Medill Buys the Chicago *Tribune*,” *Chicago Tribune*, accessed 9 Aug. 2013 at <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/politics/chi-chicagodays-medill-story,0,5039945.story>.

promotion – the *Tribune* also developed a symbiotic relationship with Northwestern University’s new school of journalism, later named for Joseph Medill. Students, many of them female, learned in the classroom and in the field, covering news next to male classmates and Chicago’s working reporters. It stands to reason that the *Tribune*, whose staff often taught at the Medill School, would find the idea of women reporting on crime and courts alongside men plausible.

Meanwhile, Chicago in the 1920s was so crime ridden that newspapers apparently felt compelled to use all available reporters to keep pace with murders and the activities of mobsters. The city, rapidly urbanizing but still maintaining the lawless attitude of a frontier town, was corrupt, top to bottom, before Prohibition, and the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution made things even worse as gangsters such as Al Capone took advantage Chicago’s unique culture to build a highly lucrative, but intensely bloody, trade in illegal alcohol, so that as early as 1924, the city saw approximately a murder a day.¹³

At the same time, Al Capone and some of the more wealthy, flashy denizens of gangland became part of the new cult of celebrity. As newly minted gossip columnists such as Walter Winchell began to encourage media consumers to take an interest in the doings of notable people without “pedigree,” unlike those individuals normally reported on in the society pages, Americans became fascinated with film stars, athletes and – at least in Chicago – gangsters. Like society reportage, celebrity coverage was the type of name-driven, “soft” news most often associated with women reporters. And as the line between crime and society blurred, it no doubt seemed natural for women to cover gangsters’ funerals and weddings, just as women had long covered similar events held by more traditional “society” families in the past. In Chicago, this could result in a reporter such as the *Tribune*’s Kathleen McLaughlin providing funeral coverage

¹³ “One Slaying a Day is Chicago’s Record,” *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 3 May 1924, 13.

of a local celebrity “who died from machine gun bullets on the lawn”¹⁴ or both describing the bridesmaids’ gowns – and the arrest of “five gun toters” in a “booze army” – as part of her wedding coverage.¹⁵

Women had also long covered arts and entertainment news – notably in Chicago, where the *Tribune*’s Fanny Butcher was a venerated literary critic throughout much of the century – and reported on trials, too, in the sob sister tradition. In Jazz Age Chicago, where trials became huge entertainment – recall Genevieve Forbes Herrick noting the “gate” that a good witness could draw¹⁶ – covering trials, even related to violent crimes, no doubt seemed an appropriate role for female reporters. Only, unlike at the turn of the twentieth century, the public, especially in a jaded, jocular town like Chicago, didn’t necessarily have a taste for sob stories. A new kind of voice was needed to cover crime, and the mob sisters provided readers with a tone that fit their city’s particular ethos, and which obviously resonated, to the extent that Forbes Herrick, in particular, became a fixture on the front page.

Last but not least, Chicago and the *Tribune* were uniquely poised to foster a new type of female crime reporter because women in the city were committing murder at an alarming rate – and men still balked at covering crimes committed by females. Someone had to cover the rash of murders by women who also fascinated the public because they so often got away with their crimes, and the mob sisters – especially Maurine Watkins, but also Genevieve Forbes Herrick – stepped in to ably perform this job during the “heyday” of Murderess’s Row.¹⁷

¹⁴ McLaughlin, “Oberta Buried in Accustomed Gangland Style,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 March 1930, 3.

¹⁵ McLaughlin, “Capone Sister Wed; Five Armed Guards Seized,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 15 Dec. 1930, 1.

¹⁶ Forbes Herrick, “Mother Battles for Durkin: Son Signals to Curb Rush of Her Words,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 July 1926, 1.

¹⁷ Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 544.

As Chapter 8, which compares the work of the *Tribune*'s mob sisters to that of female reporters writing for the rival *Herald and Examiner*, indicates, the *Herald and Examiner* also seems to have given women journalists at least some opportunity to cover crime, and sometimes in a tone similar to that employed by the *Tribune*'s mob sisters. As noted, a careful survey of Ishbel Ross's *Ladies of the Press* also suggests that women were covering crime in other cities during the Jazz Age, if in less significant numbers and to less significant degrees than the mob sisters. These are potentially rich areas for future study. However, initial research proves that, by taking advantage of the dynamics outlined above, and perhaps related to other factors that will be determined by subsequent investigation, Genevieve Forbes Herrick, Maurine Watkins, Kathleen McLaughin, Leola Allard and Maureen McKernan were able to produce a distinctive body of work that deserves recognition in histories of American journalism, as surely as the stories produced by the equally distinctive, but better known, sob sisters. And the mob sisters, as individuals, merit credit for breaking down barriers in newsrooms.

Of the women profiled in this dissertation, Genevieve Forbes Herrick stands out as the most significant mob sister. She was not only a bona fide general assignment reporter for the *Tribune* – an accomplishment, in and of itself, in that era – but a star on the newspaper throughout the 1920s, often overshadowing her male colleagues in terms of bylines on major stories, such as the Leopold and Loeb trial.

Moreover, Forbes Herrick best combined sharp wit, appropriately wielded sarcasm and a cynical attitude in tune with her city's ethos with accurate, factual reporting – often delivered in a way that proved she had an ear for the slang-filled, staccato style of the day. Her work has a distinct voice, but not at the expense of solid reportage. Even her earliest stories for the *Tribune*, in which she put a new, more serious spin on the “stunt girl” trope and established

herself as a credible journalist, show Forbes Herrick as a ground-breaking female reporter – a role she continued to play throughout the Jazz Age.

One of her greatest strengths was her ability to use small details, such as an ill-gotten mink coat, a jail cell number, or a look shared between two women who wanted the same man, to breathe life into her stories about crime and criminals. Forbes Herrick was able to identify the pretentious trappings of gangsters, in particular, and to turn those affectations back onto her subjects for humorous effect. Similarly, she was able to use her subjects' own words to reveal their true characters; while a gun moll might have worn diamonds, her poor grammar or slang-infused diatribe could, in Forbes Herrick's hands, become weapons to get below the glossy surface to the greedy, grasping, sometimes dangerous interior.

Although she only remained at the *Tribune* for a few months, Maurine Watkins also made her mark as a mob sister, thanks to her biting wit – even more acerbic than Forbes Herrick's – and her shameless “out for conviction” attitude toward the killers she covered. To an even greater degree than Forbes Herrick, who was also wont to convict in print, pre-trial, Watkins aggressively inserted her opinions into her work. The daughter of a preacher, she clearly felt she grasped right and wrong and had no compunctions about using the *Tribune* as a pulpit from which she could educate readers on that topic – albeit with sarcastic humor and undisguised cynicism, especially regarding a justice system that was easily manipulated by beautiful, heartless women.

What may have been sacrificed along the way – and what makes Watkins's contributions arguably slightly less valuable than Forbes Herrick's – was a focus on accuracy and perhaps factuality. From misspelling names to writing quotes that don't ring true, Watkins seems to have been more interested in creating drama and sharing her personal views than reporting the news.

She may have been a journalist for a time, but she was obviously first and foremost a playwright – as proven by her phenomenally successful transition from the *Tribune*'s newsroom to Broadway.

Still, while Watkins may not have been a stellar reporter in the traditional sense, she was able to arrive in an unfamiliar city and not just manage to turn in some decent stories, as a less confident and competent writer might have struggled to do, but to understand the mood of Prohibition-era Chicago, capture it, and convey the mix of amusement, excitement, horror and outrage that her readers must have felt to live in a town that was known for murder but also served as the center of a raging, nation-wide party. Her body of work is small but potent and, like Forbes Herrick's, epitomizes the mob sister style.

Unlike Watkins, Kathleen McLaughlin – the third mob sister whose work is examined in this dissertation – was a reporter at heart, having set her sights on becoming a journalist at an early age and continuing as a standout in her craft even after her retirement, by fostering the careers of other aspiring women.

McLaughlin was not as uniformly sarcastic, nor cynical, as Forbes Herrick and Watkins, but she deserves recognition for her work as a general assignment reporter who often covered crime during the 1920s. More ostensibly sympathetic than Forbes Herrick and Watkins, she was also better able to be objective; even mob figures weren't one-dimensional cartoons, as they could sometimes seem through Forbes Herrick's lens. In particular, McLaughlin had a conflicted affinity for mobster Big Tim Murphy and his family; she understood Murphy's violent side, but also genuinely appreciated his acts of kindness.

While McLaughlin sometimes injected slang, humor and a cynical attitude into her stories – such as in her article about the embezzler who played on a police department baseball

team¹⁸ or her work on the breach-of-promise suit involving Chicago millionaire Franklin Hardinge¹⁹ – she was, first and foremost, a straight news reporter and covered a broad range of crimes, often in graphic detail. Her competence in Chicago, in combination with some good timing, was rewarded with a groundbreaking job on *The New York Times*, where she worked side-by-side with men in that previously exclusively male newsroom – reason, alone, for McLaughlin to be remembered as a key figure in American journalism history, even if she hadn't first been a prolific, barrier-shattering mob sister in Chicago.

The final two mob sisters profiled in this dissertation – Leola Allard and Maureen McKernan – also had a lighter touch with sarcasm, cynicism, humor and slang than Forbes Herrick, Watkins or even McLaughlin. However, Allard and McKernan are still notable because they also covered Chicago's crime scene during its wildest days.

Allard, in fact, began reporting for the *Tribune* prior to 1920, primarily covering the domestic and juvenile courts. She could exhibit sympathy toward women and children who suffered – or suffering men, for that matter – but she never wrote sob stories for the *Tribune*. For the most part, she reported the news in unembellished fashion and could, at times, insert humor that ranged from gentle to mocking into her stories. And, although one could reasonably expect that the juvenile and domestic courts handled cases less gruesome than those that came before the criminal court, as covered by other mob sisters, from the outset of her time at the *Tribune*, Allard reported on cases involving offenses as serious as kidnap and murder.

By the early 1920s, Allard was covering a wider variety of crimes, not just in courtrooms, but in the broader field, and seemed more jaded, some of her work presaging the even more

¹⁸ McLaughlin, "Embezzler Is in Cell; Played on Cop Ball Team," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 Dec. 1929, 1.

¹⁹ McLaughlin, "Jury Awards Ann \$25,000," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 July 1929, 1.

cynical mob sisters who were just starting out at the *Tribune* as Allard was leaving for the rival *Herald and Examiner*. There, her style varied, sometimes veering close to that of a sob sister, and sometimes more in line with the mob sisters at the *Tribune*.

Although her style is more difficult to categorize than that of the other mob sisters, McKernan is notable because her clear-thinking, no-nonsense coverage of crime for the *Tribune* begins to move closer to the modern ideal of objective, factual reporting. Further, McKernan's basic philosophy – “just get the news and write it”²⁰ – as the key to women's success as news reporters indicates that she was unaware of any efforts to force women into proscribed roles, at least during her time with the *Tribune*. Her career as a general assignment reporter is as much a tribute to the *Tribune*'s willingness to give women ample and varied opportunities as it is to McKernan's talent, enterprise and hard work.

That is not to discount those factors – talent, enterprise and hard work.

It is difficult to argue that the mob sisters dramatically altered women's opportunities in newsrooms for the long term. Indeed, their work has been largely forgotten for decades. However, that doesn't make their journalistic output, nor their contributions to American journalism as individuals, historically insignificant.

Regardless of what factors enabled Forbes Herrick, Watkins, McLaughlin, Allard and McKernan to break free of the hen's coop, the society pages and the home economics and fashion beats to write about crime shoulder-to-shoulder with men, opportunities are meaningless unless someone has the foresight and initiative to take them. The mob sisters – sometimes acting aggressively, as Maureen Watkins did when she strolled into the *Tribune* and requested a position as a crime reporter – all seized the chance to assume a different role for women at the *Tribune*. They also took good advantage of their opportunities, in various ways and to varying

²⁰ “Easy to Be Reporter: Just Get News and Write It, Girl Says,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 19.

degrees, whether by becoming a star on the paper for over a decade, as Forbes Herrick did; going on to Broadway fame, like Maureen Watkins; earning a coveted spot at *The New York Times*, as McLaughlin did; building a long-term career as a respected news reporter and later editor, like Allard; or being at the vanguard of a new generation of college-trained, objective reporters, like McKernan.

Further, these women have earned a place as valued contributors to the advancement of women in newsrooms through their creation of a new journalistic voice that turned the sob sister tradition on its head, proving that women could cover complex, sometimes grisly, stories factually, unemotionally, and, when appropriate, with wit and style. Moreover, the mob sisters demonstrated that women could build careers – even earn fame – by giving their writing a more modern edge.

Whether trying to change Chicago's flawed justice system; working to make sense of a crime that had the whole nation asking what had gone wrong with its youth, as the Leopold and Loeb murder did; or eliciting laughs, and sometimes outrage – or sometimes both – over the foibles of the residents of a city run amok, the mob sisters were not just a product of, but shaped, their unique place and time.

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Figure 2

Maurine Watkins's Front-Page Article, "Jury Finds Beulah Annan Is 'Not Guilty,'" Chicago Daily Tribune, 25 May 1924



Figure 3

Kathleen McLaughlin's Front-Page Article, "Girl Victim of Rum Killing," Chicago Daily Tribune, 14 Oct. 1929

2 CENTS PAY NO MORE! **Chicago Daily Tribune** THE WORLD'S GREATEST NEWSPAPER **FINAL EDITION**

GIRL VICTIM OF RUM KILLING

INSULT NAMES BOARD TO END CAR DEADLOCK

Asks 4 Bankers to Reorganize Lines.

The appointment of a committee to work on the construction of a new automobile highway is a concession which will be made by the board of directors of the Chicago Automobile Association, it was announced today.

NEWS SUMMARY

FOUND CHOKED TO DEATH NEAR WEST CHICAGO
Escort is Charged with Slaying.

BY KATHLEEN McLAUGHLIN (From our book page)

Chicago will learn in some days that a young girl, who was found dead in a rooming house near West Chicago, had been choked to death by her escort.

A VALUABLE LESSON FOR THOSE WHO WISH TO LEARN

Father and Girl Die, 4 Hurt as Car Hits Train

PARIS JEALOUS OF U. S. BRITISH NAVAL ACCORD

May Block London Conference.

BY ARTHUR REARD BERNING (From our book page)

Paris is jealous of the British government's intention to announce to the London conference that it had concluded a naval agreement with the United States.

Chicago will learn in some days that a young girl, who was found dead in a rooming house near West Chicago, had been choked to death by her escort.

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OUR PLAY ATHLETICS IN FIFTH GAME TODAY

Shop for Your Health, Urges Noted Surgeon

THE WEATHER

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Figure 4

Leola Allard's Article, "Cohen Tells How He Strangled His Love Rival," Chicago Daily Tribune, 21 Sept. 1920, p. 19



BETH FANTASKEY KASZUBA – CURRICULUM VITA

EDUCATION

- Ph.D., Mass Communications, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pa., December 2013.
- Master of Journalism, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pa., December 1995.
- B.A., English, Shippensburg University, Shippensburg, Pa., May 1988.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- Adjunct professor – Department of Communications, Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove, Pa., 2006-2009.
- Teaching assistant, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pa., 2004-2005.

PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

- Novels – Written under the pen name Beth Fantaskey; all are published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
 - *Buzz Kill* – Scheduled release date May 2014
 - *Jessica Rules the Dark Side* – 2012
 - *Jekel Loves Hyde* – 2010
 - *Jessica's Guide to Dating on the Dark Side* – 2009
- Author, “Newspapers as Collectibles,” *Editor & Publisher*, January 10, 1998.
- Author, “Judith Bogart,” *PRSA Educator*, Spring 2004.
- Freelance writer for various national and regional magazines, 1996 to present. Publications in which my work has appeared include: *AAA World*, *Central PA Magazine*, *Harrisburg Magazine*, *Shanghai Scene*, *Susquehanna Today*, and *Woman's World*. Contributions have ranged from news articles on education, health and travel to short fiction.
- Freelance writer for several newspapers, including Harrisburg (Pa.) *Patriot-News* and Carlisle (Pa.) *Sentinel*, 1993-1999.
- Spoke to journalism class at Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove, Pa., during summer 2004, about my research on Indian media.
- Spoke to international film class at Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove, Pa., during summer 2004 about India's Bollywood film industry.
- Provided guest lecture on the history of American media to a communications class at Shanghai University, Shanghai, China, during summer 2002, when I spent seven weeks traveling in China.
- Presented paper, “Answering Carey's ‘Problem of Journalism History’ 30 Years Later,” at the annual conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Toronto, August 2004.
- Gave presentation on crisis communication at U.S. Department of Agriculture employee training session held at Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pa., May 2004.