“SOMEBODY’S SPINSTER”:

ROLES, INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS, AND IDENTITY

OF JULIA GRAYDON SHARPE

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Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
Master of Arts
in the Department of History,
Indiana University

June 2020

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty of Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my chair, Dr. Nancy Marie Robertson, for not only sticking with me through this project, but for pushing me towards better analysis and encouraging me every step of the way. This would have been immensely difficult to complete without you. I would also like to thank my other two committee members, Dr. Anita Morgan and Dr. Katherine Badertscher, for all of their suggestions, comments, and encouragement along the way. Thank you all for helping me to frame and develop what was at first (and luckily, remained) a passion project.

Other wonderful community members helped to shed light on the woman that I would spend two years writing about, and though all of their suggestions may not have made it into this paper, the insights I received helped me to frame and better understand Sharpe. Here I am referring to Jim Ross at Eckert & Ross Fine Art, who showed me one of Sharpe's nineteenth-century sketchbooks early on in my research; to Vanessa Burkhart at the D.A.R., Caroline Scott Harrison Chapter, for enlightening Sharpe's D.A.R. years; and lastly, to George Hanlin, my coworker and fellow historian at Indiana Humanities who never got tired of talking with me about Sharpe and her many acquaintances on North Delaware where she grew up.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Kelly and John Mahon, and my dearest friends, Camille Walker, Allissa Brown, Hope Babbitt, and Danielle Ticherich for always believing in my abilities and encouraging me in my passion for history. Above all, I dedicate this work to all the single women out there—past and present—and the full lives they lead.

Leeah Nicole Mahon

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Single women living in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America faced ever-changing, but constant, analyses of their lives. It seemed privacy was revoked when a woman chose to remain single in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, leaving them to be hyperaware and conscious of all other choices that they made in their lives. Not only was their business not theirs alone, but single women were often also defined by their lack of spouse, regardless of their accomplishments or fulfilled lives. Despite the full life that she led and ways in which her singleness allowed her to contribute to her family, friendships, and community, Julia Graydon Sharpe, a white, elite woman from Indianapolis, Indiana, was one of the many women whose legacy has been defined by her marital status.

Sharpe was many things in her life: an artist and clubwoman being two of the most visible. However, it was her role as a sister, aunt, daughter, and friend that were the most fulfilling and important to her in her life as a single woman. An examination of what Sharpe saw as her defining roles within her immediate family and close friendships, as well as what coming from elite family afforded her, helps reveal the life she was able to lead and how she chose to present herself. The exploration of her many intimate roles also put into context how indispensable Sharpe's commitment and contributions, albeit

not monetary, were to her family and friends. Understanding these roles challenges the way we view the “spinsters” of the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth century.

Nancy Marie Robertson, Ph.D., Chair

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INTRODUCTION

"Spinster Hermit" or "Somebody's Spinster": Competing Views of Single Women

In December 1895, the *Indianapolis News* ran an exclusive story from Kokomo, Indiana. The piece, "Mouth Filled With Red Pepper," was about a "spinster hermit" named Sallie Beatty who had died and had "sat four days dead in her chair before discovery."[1] When Beatty's body was found, it was determined (and reported) that "her mouth was found filled with red pepper, that she had evidently attempted to swallow as a remedy for stomach and heart trouble."[2] This story about an unfortunate single woman from Indiana revealed two overwhelmingly common attitudes related to female singleness in the nineteenth century: pity and embarrassment. What happened to single women like Beatty did not need to be broadcast in one of the state's leading newspapers, but it was. Being a spinster, as suggested by the story, led to a horribly unfortunate, lonely death. This negative depiction of spinsterhood displays the climate in which single women were living in nineteenth-century America, as well as how carefully considered their every move had to be. Even the way one died was not treated with a respectful silence, as these women's lives were thought to be open for anyone's scrutiny or opinion. It seemed privacy was revoked when a woman chose to remain single in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, leaving them to be hyperaware and conscious of all other choices that they made in their lives.

I came to be interested in single women's lives and experiences in nineteenth-and twentieth-century Indianapolis not by this news article, but through my discovery of a

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[1] "Mouth Filled with Red Pepper," *Indianapolis News*, December 12, 1895, p. 6.
[2] "Mouth Filled with Red Pepper."

Julia Graydon Sharpe, a single, but elite contemporary of Beatty. Sharpe was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1857 to Joseph Kinne, Sr. and Mary Ellen Graydon Sharpe. Her father was a prosperous leather merchant and traded real estate, and her mother was an avid writer, although never published in her lifetime. The couple had nine children, only four of whom survived to adulthood, including Sharpe. She had two sisters, Anna and Eleanor, and a brother, Joseph Kinne, Jr. Anna was the youngest of the four, and the sibling that Sharpe with whom was the closest. Eleanor (Ella) was the oldest and Joseph the second oldest, with Sharpe the third born. Sharpe attended the Chegaray Institute, a prestigious French finishing school for girls in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and subsequently studied art at Love and Gookins' First Indiana School of Art and the Second Indiana School of Art in Indianapolis, then later in New York at the Art Students' League and William Merritt Chase School of Art. She was involved in many prestigious social and philanthropic organizations throughout the city, including the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Flower Mission, the Red Cross, and the Second Presbyterian Church.

Sharpe was well-known and well-regarded by many who knew her in Indianapolis—yet, the last sentence in the metadata of one of her digitized photographs from the Indiana Historical Society, concludes, "Sharpe never married and was active socially and in charity work."[3] Similarly, the last sentence at the end of the biographical sketch written for her collection by her grand-nephew for the Indiana Historical Society, reads: "She never married, but lived with her parents and then with her two sisters, Ella

[3] Julia Graydon Sharpe, 1917, Photographic print, 3 x 4 inches, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, http://cdm16797.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p16797coll51/id/383.

Sharpe Duncan and Anna T. Sharpe."[4] While these sentences may seem just that, sentences, they struck me in a very different way. Why was her marital status, which was completely unrelated to both the photo featured and the reasoning for her collection's preservation, mentioned as the crowning thought in both sources? Was it seen as peculiar that she did not marry because she was a woman, or because she was from a wealthy family? Or both? Why was her singleness presented as something of a downside to her identity, when it occupied only a fraction of it? What pressure had she felt as a single and elite woman, and how did she respond to it? Finally, what, if anything, did her situation as a single and elite woman allow her to do with her life? These were the questions that struck me and sent me off to learn about the life and achievements of this woman.

As a single and elite woman in the late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, Sharpe was very cognizant of the way others perceived her, as well as her own view of herself. Her elite status and wealth were two things that she never had to work for, but ones which she proudly claimed and represented. In order to maintain a reputation and identity that Sharpe saw fit for the life she was born into, she was active in the process of self-presentation. Self-presentational behavior was first explored by psychologist Erving Goffman in 1959, twenty years after Sharpe died. He defined it as "any behavior intended to create, modify, or maintain an impression of ourselves in the minds of others."[5] Sharpe

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[4] Charles Latham, "Biographical Sketch," *Julia Graydon Sharpe Papers, 1878-1935* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1996), https://indianahistory.org/wp-content/uploads/julia-graydon-sharpe-papers-1878-1932.pdf. This is a part of Sharpe's physical collection, but I am referring to the metadata featured under the digitized photo here.

[5] Roy F. Baumeister and Debra G. Hutton, "Self-Presentation Theory: Self-Construction and Audience Pleasing," in *Theories of Group Behavior*, eds. Brian Mullen and George R. Goethals (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1987), 71.

engaged in this behavior even before it was understood as an aspect of social psychology, as other elite and single women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries concerned with their reputation and societal status likely did. One aspect of self-presentational behavior serves a very personal need, that of convincing others that we possess a certain attribute or quality so that we may also convince ourselves.[6] Self-presentation was an important, and constant, aspect of Sharpe's life as a single and elite woman. Because she had no husband or children to affect her reputation, positively or negatively, and because she had resources and relative freedom, Sharpe was able to carefully craft her identity as a single and elite woman. However, the absence of a husband or children left Sharpe that much more aware that the way she was perceived was her responsibility and her responsibility alone.

This process of self-presentation was, as historian Sylvia D. Hoffert noted in her biography of Alva Vanderbilt Belmont, "rarely transparent [and] presents a challenge to biographers, demanding that they work with layers of narrative texts created by a great number of people telling their stories in widely divergent contexts and at various points in time."[7] For Sharpe, such narrative texts include newspaper articles written about her work as an artist as well as the short biography of her written by the Daughters of the American Revolution, which allow for an understanding of the life this woman led.[8] In addition to the narrative texts produced *about* her, Sharpe, like Belmont, promoted her own

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[6] Baumeister and Hutton, "Self-Presentation Theory," 71.
[7] Sylvia D. Hoffert, *Alva Vanderbilt Belmont: An Unlikely Champion of Women's Rights* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), ix.
[8] Miss Ernest P. Brass, "Julia Graydon Sharpe: Prepared by the D.A.R.," Julia Graydon Sharpe Papers, 1878-1932. Manuscript and Visual Collections Department, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society (hereafter, Julia G. Sharpe papers, IHS).

understanding and depiction of herself in her notebook, photo albums, scrapbooks, and letters, which were to some degree fragmentary and fictive.[9]

The results of self-presentation, apparent in writing or in choices, pose issues for biographers interested in understanding the person on a deep and intimate level. Because people active in the act of self-presentation are determined to be perceived a certain way, they do everything in their power so not to feel exposed or understood intimately.[10] I am neither Sharpe's biographer, nor interested in understanding her deepest, most-inner thoughts and feelings. Rather, I am interested in understanding how crucial self-presentation was for Sharpe as a single and elite woman; how it contributed to and played a role in the way that she lived. The act of self-presentation was, then, tied to every aspect of Sharpe's life as a single and elite woman in the late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, specifically her relationships with others and herself.

After I dove into Sharpe's collection at the Indiana Historical Society, I realized that the intimate relationships she maintained through her life and the roles which she played in those relationships were central to her identity as a single and elite woman. As I further examined the letters, photo albums, scrapbooks, notebooks, and newspaper articles in her collection, I found that the relationships most influential and crucial to this identity were those of being a sister, aunt, daughter, and friend. In these intimate relationships, and the roles she held within them, Julia Graydon Sharpe contributed to her family and friendships in meaningful and irreplaceable ways as she sought to present herself to the people with whom she was connected and the larger society. In order to

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[9] Hoffert, *Alva Vanderbilt Belmont*, ix.
[10] Baumeister and Hutton, "Self-Presentation Theory," 71.

understand the significance of these relationships and roles and what that communicates about single and elite white women during the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Indianapolis, we must first understand the ways Sharpe viewed herself in her roles as sister, aunt, daughter, and friend. The order is intentional. Although many women's historians, Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller among them, recognize single women's first and foremost identity as that of a daughter, this appears to be untrue for Sharpe.[11] Analyzing the surviving sources reveals that Sharpe's roles as a sister and aunt were far more central to her identity and fulfillment than her roles as a daughter or friend.

Sharpe and other women like her were, as Emily Meigs Ripley argued in *Ladies' Home Journal* in March 1893, "somebody's spinster." This term did not mean that single women belonged to anyone, but rather that they were proudly claimed by, and recognized as irreplaceable and appreciated members of, their families. Ripley told the story of a gracious spinster whose actions, like those of many other single women, the public was "so prone to overlook."[12] Ripley clarified that single women, like Sharpe, were not homeless nor childless women as many skeptics claimed. Rather, they lived among family that loved and wanted their presence: "They cherish her unspeakably and will keep the trust of her influence as a precious heritage to hand down to their families for many generations…. Not many of our great men do more to lift the standard of citizenship than she."[13] Ripley joined the ongoing conversation surrounding single women's choices in the late nineteenth-century, but represented the view that women

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[11] Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, A Better Husband: Single Women in America: The Generations of 1780-1840* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 107.
[12] Emily Meigs Ripley, "Somebody's Spinster," *Ladies' Home Journal*, March 1893, 8.
[13] Ripley, "Somebody's Spinster," 8.

who chose to remain single, like Sharpe, were extremely valuable to the day-to-day functioning of their families. Sharpe adroitly navigated in a world that could view her either as a "spinster hermit" or as "somebody's spinster," but was uniformly preoccupied with evaluating her choices and her merits as a woman.

An examination of what Sharpe saw as her defining roles within her immediate family and close friendships, as well as what coming from elite family afforded her, helps reveal the life she was able to lead and how she chose to present herself. The exploration of her many intimate roles also put into context how indispensable Sharpe's commitment and contributions, albeit not monetary, were to her family and friends. Understanding these roles challenges the way we view the "spinsters" of the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth century. The exploration of this specific aspect of Sharpe's life, her roles within her intimate relationships, allows us to respond to the depiction of all single women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as pathetic and lonely "old maids" or "spinsters." Sharpe's own experiences show that single women in turn-of-the-century Indianapolis cannot be immediately categorized as burdens on their families or as being undesired. Sharpe was, as we will see, an indispensable member of her family and within her friendships and had more than one chance to take a husband if she had wanted to do so. Sharpe's marital status should not be a defining factor of her identity. Clarifying the reality of the life of a single woman like Sharpe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as was so brazenly offered up for discussion in newspapers and magazines alike, will work to invalidate the negative statements made about these women's lives as well as to offer insights into the reality of this choice for many women.

SECTION 1

A Charmed Life? The Relationship Between Economic and Marital Status

Sharpe did not need a marriage to sustain herself economically, socially, or emotionally, largely because of her relationships with her immediate family and close friends. Her family, specifically her father and then brother, supported her and her unmarried and separated sisters economically throughout their lives, so they never had to worry about taking a husband or, for that matter, a job.[14] Similarly, the social clout that Sharpe acquired because of her family's wealth and reputation as one of Indianapolis' earliest and most elite families allowed her to maintain an uncontested, and respected, stature as a single woman. Her "singleness," however, does not indicate that Sharpe led an unattached life. As a single woman, meaning she never married, Sharpe had a very specific role within her family dynamic, one which she understood and took seriously. Permanent singlehood, combined with the security of and roles within her elite family, provided Julia Graydon Sharpe with purpose.[15]

Although Sharpe certainly seemed to make a career out of her artistry in the late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, she never viewed her artwork as something to make money from, as, in the words of her late grand-nephew, Charles Latham, she "thought it wasn't lady-like to make money, [and she was being] supported by her brother and his wife."[16] Sharpe's dependency on her father and then brother financially throughout her

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[14] Sharpe's older sister, Ella, was separated from her husband, and her younger sister, Anna, never married.
[15] Christine Jacobson Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness: Unmarried Women in the Urban South, 1800-1865* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 7.
[16] Judith Vale Newton and Carol Ann Weiss, *Skirting the Issue: Stories of Indiana's Historical Women Artists* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Press, 2004), 191.

life should not skew the view of her as an independent person. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, single women often depended on family members to support them economically. Whether doing so was because they could not find suitable work (meaning acceptable and accessible to women at the time) or because they would not make enough money in the jobs they had, it was common practice for single women to depend on their families for both money and shelter.[17] Additionally, many single women living at home in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries sought out work to help pay for household expenses and turned over their entire earnings to their parents.[18] It is also worth noting that many women who entered the workforce between 1870 and 1920 did so in unskilled or semiskilled occupations with the expectation that they would work only until they found a husband.[19]

For her part, Sharpe was not concerned with searching for suitable work as a single woman because of her elite status and familial wealth. Her family had the means to support her (and her sisters) without requiring them to work, although Sharpe did, in effect, reciprocate by being a devoted and loyal sister, aunt, and daughter. To her family, her contributions in these roles were equal in relation to the monetary aid her father and brother provided her. Joseph, her brother, alluded to them in his will when he clarified his choice of leaving his sisters a trust with property and money: "for the further reason that my said sisters have devoted their life to their parents and have looked to me as their

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[17] Claudia Goldin, "The Work and Wages of Single Women, 1870-1920," *Journal of Economic History* 40, no. 1 (March 1980): 82.
[18] Goldin, "The Work and Wages," 83.
[19] Goldin, "The Work and Wages," 88.

brother for their support and assistance during the years thus given to their parents, as well as to myself, up to this time, and are doing so now."[20]

Sharpe did not seek employment to contribute to her household financially, but her decision explains neither her character nor worth as a member of the family. The contributions that she made to her family and friendships greatly outweighed any money she could have offered. It appears Sharpe knew the value in her contributions, and therefore never prioritized an occupation that provided a wage. Moreover, although her passion for and commitment to art were large parts of her identity and allowed her volatile income with the occasional commissioned painting, Sharpe saw her occupations and purpose in life as a devoted sister, aunt, daughter, and friend. Her adept execution of these roles ensured her of her social place and identity as a single woman in the elite class of Indianapolis between 1878 and 1939.[21]

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[20] Joseph Kinne Sharpe, Jr., Last Will and Testament, May 15, 1917, p. 3. Joseph Kinne Sharpe Papers, 1885-1922. Manuscript and Visual Collections Department, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society (hereafter, Joseph K. Sharpe papers, IHS).

[21] This analysis begins with 1878 because Sharpe was then no longer a child, but a woman, and able to make the conscious decision to remain single; Sharpe died in 1939.

SECTION 2

Occupations: Sister, Aunt, Daughter, Friend

Embracing the role of a spinster sister, aunt, daughter, and friend in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America could afford single women fulfillment and importance, especially within their families. Leaning into these roles, then, also allowed for single and elite women like Sharpe to shape their family's and friends' perceptions of them as loved, needed, and appreciated women in the relationships.[22] Although her relationships with her father, brother, and fellow male artists had an effect on Sharpe's life, it was the close female relationships, both with family members and those not related, that were crucial to her maintaining a fulfilled and happy life as a single woman. The intimate relationships that Sharpe shared with other females in her life, specifically her sister Anna, mother Mary Ellen, and niece Josephine, also contributed to her ability to maintain a life of elite singlehood. These relationships appear to have provided her all the emotional support and love that she needed, and perhaps more than a marriage in the late 1800s could have afforded her. In 1975, historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg studied relations between nineteenth-century American women, and her research remains relevant today. Smith-Rosenberg provided a social and historical context for the relationships Sharpe had with other women, which Smith-Rosenberg referred to as "homosocial relationships," and the very distinct female world she operated within. Understanding these female relationships and Sharpe's role in them indicates how significant her distinct female relationships were to her identity as a single and elite woman.

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[22] Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness*, 66.

Sister

Smith-Rosenberg argued that there was, from at least the late nineteenth-century, a very distinct and structured female world. Within this world, varied female relationships emerged, ranging from "the supporting love of sisters, through the enthusiasms of adolescent girls, to sensual avowals of love by mature women."[23] These relationships between women in the Victorian Era cannot be understood by looking at them from a psychosexual perspective, which, as defined by the American Psychological Association, is the "classical psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud,…the step-by-step growth of sexual life as it affects personality development."[24] As Smith-Rosenberg noted, they must be examined within their own cultural and social setting which, in her study and in my study of Sharpe, was the mid-nineteenth to twentieth-century.[25] Smith-Rosenberg's findings are particularly applicable, in Sharpe's case, to the last third of the nineteenth century. These relationships emphasized general cultural patterns as well as the change in attitudes surrounding female behaviors. Attitudes shifted away from deviance and towards "defining configurations of legitimate behavioral normal and options" for women of the Victorian Era.[26] This aspect of Sharpe's life is crucial to an overall understanding of her as a single and elite woman because the intimate, strong, and devoted relationships with other women afforded her crucial love and support. Because

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[23] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 1-2.
[24] "Psychosexual Development," American Psychological Association, accessed April 12, 2020, https://dictionary.apa.org/psychosexual-development.
[25] Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World," 2.
[26] Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World," 3.

she had multiple women in her life with whom she maintained these relationships, it is very possible she felt no emotional need to take a husband.

Many of the intimate female relationships Sharpe maintained throughout her life developed or blossomed when she went East to New York City to attend the Art Students' League (and later the Chase School of Art) from 1896 to 1897. During this time, she wrote numerous letters home, the bulk of which were to her younger sister, Anna. In these letters, Sharpe expressed both her anxieties about and her successes in the new city. She talked about the difficult art courses in which she was enrolled, gossiped about classmates and other artists back in Indiana, and told funny anecdotes from her days. Although each letter written had a different story, Sharpe consistently conveyed her longing for her sister's company. The pain of separation that Sharpe felt in the year that she was away from her family, and especially her younger sister, was evident in these letters. Just a week after arriving in New York, she wrote home to Anna: "My dearest, dear Dove, if you were sitting in this little room of mine to-night—how happy I should be…. I feel a bit weary and would be most glad to see a familiar face to-night and hear a familiar voice—and I don't know of any that would fill the want as well as your own."[27] At the end of the letter, she concluded, "Goodnight sweetie—if you are lonely without me—just imagine what it is for me—away from you all…love to everybody—and especially to you my dear chum, room-mate, dress maker—and everything else."[28] Just a few weeks later at the close of another letter to Anna, Sharpe exclaimed "What wouldn't

[27] Julia Graydon Sharpe to Anna Trowbridge Sharpe, October 8, 1896. Julia G. Sharpe papers, IHS.
[28] Julia Graydon Sharpe to Anna Trowbridge Sharpe, October 8, 1896. Julia G. Sharpe papers, IHS.

I give see you this afternoon! All the Art in the world, I am afraid."[29] During this time it seems Anna became ill, which affected Sharpe greatly, as Sharpe mentioned her concern in multiple letters to Anna.[30]

Sharpe and her sister's relationship reflected what Smith-Rosenberg found in her study of Victorian Era female relationships and their importance and constancy in women's lives. Smith-Rosenberg detailed the frequency with which women of the Victorian Era spent their days within the confines of their extended family, thus developing deep-seated ties to female family members like mothers, aunts, and especially sisters. She noted that "a sister's absence for even a week or two could cause loneliness and depression and would be bridged by frequent letters."[31] Sharpe's frequent and emotional letters home to Anna during the year she spent in New York reflected how dependent Sharpe was on their relationship to fulfill her. What Sharpe and Anna's relationship also communicated is what historian Christine Jacobson Carter pointed out in her study of antebellum southern single women: that many single women in the nineteenth century felt such an attachment to and relied so heavily on their sisters that they would often forego marriage in order to retain their sacred bonds with one another.[32] Carter observed that it was "no wonder then that some who had ample resources, a reasonably supportive family, and an independent spirit chose to avoid the separation together."[33] Though she is speaking of sisters choices to remain single together in

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[29] Julia Graydon Sharpe to Anna Trowbridge Sharpe, October 19, 1896. Julia G. Sharpe papers, IHS.
[30] Julia Graydon Sharpe to Anna Trowbridge Sharpe, December 8, 1896. Julia G. Sharpe papers, IHS.
[31] Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World," 12.
[32] Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness*, 79.
[33] Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness*, 80.

antebellum Charleston (South Carolina) and Savannah, the observation seems true for Sharpe and Anna in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Indianapolis.

One function of Sharpe and Anna's very strong and loving relationship was to provide for one another a loving, devoted, and fulfilling constant in life. Like many women of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and even early-twentieth centuries, Sharpe did not look for these attributes in a man. The severe social restrictions on intimacy between men and women in the Victorian Era contributed to the creation of a world divided into distinct male and female spheres. These separate spheres fostered strong female relationships where women could confide in and relate to someone who understood them and their experiences. These gender-based realms subsequently placed men into an alien group whom women did not expect to fully understand outside of their vows of marriage. With that said, many women that formed these strong, devoted, and even sometimes intimate, female relationships still married men. Several of the women in Smith-Rosenberg's study married and she reported that often the women's relationships with one another intensified and sometimes even grew stronger after marriage.[34]

Conversely, it was also very common for these strong female relationships to suffer from the physical or emotional separation caused by marriage. Once married, the woman was expected to move away from the safety of her family and into the home of her new husband, who likely felt like a stranger to her. Marriage in the Victorian Era was seen as a part of life that naturally followed adolescence.[35] However, as Carter noted in her study of antebellum southern women, "given the pain associated with leaving family

[34] Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World," 9; 21-22; 14-15.
[35] Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World," 22.

behind in order to marry, it is not surprising that many women who remained unmarried did so along with a sister."[36] The choice to remain unmarried so to not risk separation from one another was reflected in Sharpe's and Anna's choices to remain single, but live together throughout their lives.[37] The fact that neither Sharpe nor Anna ever married not only prevented their relationship from suffering both physically (in terms of location) and emotionally, but also allowed them to fully embrace all that a solely female world had to offer: undivided love, support, and security. Retaining and fostering this type of life, and especially the relationship she had with Anna, were likely key reasons that Sharpe could remain unmarried her entire life.

The sisters may have led single lives, but they led them together. Sharpe and Anna used the leisure granted to them by both their singleness and wealth to lead busy social and philanthropic lives, belonging to many of the same organizations. Their involvement in society and philanthropy can be attributed to their mother, an active clubwoman named Mary Ellen Graydon Sharpe. Sharpe and Anna's involvement speaks to the fact that, during the nineteenth century, "women instilled the service ethic into their daughters, and they, in turn, to their daughters, just as women of privilege learned social and domestic skills in a sort of apprenticeship system."[38] One organization that the pair

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[36] Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness*, 80.
[37] "People," *Indianapolis City Directory* (Dallas: R.L. Polk & Co.), 1904-1940, https://archive.org/details/indianapolispubliclibrarycitydirectories (Accessed September 2019). I looked at *Indianapolis City Directories* between 1904 and 1940 to determine who was living in each of the Sharpe households. Sharpe and her sisters were not listed in the directories until 1904. Although their address changed a couple times, Sharpe and Anna were listed under the same address in the directories until Sharpe's death in 1939.
[38] Katherine Badertscher, "Social Life and Social Services in Indianapolis: Networks During the Gilded Age and Progressive Era," *Indiana Magazine of History* 114, no. 4 (December 2017): 280.

was involved in from its conception in 1876 was the Indianapolis Flower Mission, a philanthropic organization that began with a small group of female friends delivering flowers to the sick at City Hospital.[39]

Sharpe was a charter member of the Indianapolis Flower Mission with Anna, alongside Mrs. Hannah Chapman, Mrs. Victor Hendricks, Miss Ridenor, and the leader, Alice Wright.[40] All of these women were "from the middle- and upper- classes of Indianapolis" and "were leisured, white Protestants with a sense of religious duty, a desire for social interaction, and the time and money to pursue both by forming their own organization."[41] The sisters were involved in a multitude of fundraising efforts with the Flower Mission, including its Annual Flower Mission Ball and, through the 1890s, the annual fundraising fair.[42] Other organizations that Sharpe and Anna belonged to together included the Second Presbyterian Church, the Art Association of Indianapolis, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Portfolio Club.[43] Sharpe and her younger sister's involvement in these social and philanthropic organizations in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Indianapolis demonstrate what historian Katherine Badertscher has noted: that social and philanthropic work was often a family affair, especially for

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[39] Amanda Koch, "Not A 'Sentimental Charity': A History of the Indianapolis Flower Mission, 1876-1993" (Master's thesis, Indiana University, 2010), 10.
[40] Koch, "Not A 'Sentimental Charity,'" 33. If a woman's first name could not be located, she was referred to by the name as it appeared in the source (i.e.: Mrs. Victor Hendricks).
[41] Koch, "Not A 'Sentimental Charity,'" 33.
[42] Harriet B. Smith, "They Brought Flowers," March 5, 1955, Indianapolis Flower Mission Records, ca. 1884-1987. Manuscript and Visual Collections Department, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society.
[43] *The Red Book of Indianapolis* (Indianapolis: Holland Brothers Publishing Company, 1895-6), 70-71; *The Indianapolis Blue Book* (New York: DAU Publishing Company, 1911), 77.

women.[44] All of the Sharpes, save older sister Ella, were heavily involved in the social and philanthropic scene of turn-of-the-twentieth-century Indianapolis.[45]

The most ambiguous of all of Sharpe's familial relationships were those with her brother, Joseph Kinne Jr., and older sister, Ella. Although Joseph left all of his sisters, Sharpe included, property and money in a trust in after his death and sustained them economically while alive, there is not much else that speaks to their relationship.[46] Joseph was the benefactor of Sharpe's art education in New York, but she wrote only one letter home to Joseph that appears in her collection, talking mainly about how she was spending her money while at school: "After I had paid my laundry bill on Saturday and bought some stationery etc. I was again penniless—so that I shall have to draw some money this week to keep me going—but I shall guard it carefully."[47] What we can observe is that, outside of his monetary contributions that kept his sisters afloat, Joseph's relationship with Sharpe was cordial and respectful, but not necessarily emotionally fulfilling or sustaining. Perhaps more peculiar than her relationship with Joseph was the nature of her relationship with Ella; not a single letter survives in Sharpe's collection to or from her older sister.[48] In fact, the only mention of her in Sharpe's own words were in

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[44] Katherine Badertscher, "Evaline Holliday and the Work of Community Service," *Indiana Magazine of History* 112, no. 4 (December 2016): 338-339.
[45] This is not meant to be a comprehensive overview of Sharpe's involvement and contributions to these organizations as a single, elite woman: a few paragraphs would never suffice. An exploration of her strategic position, as a single and elite woman, to contribute to such organizations throughout her life merits further study.
[46] Joseph Kinne Sharpe, Jr, "Last Will and Testament," May 15, 1917, p. 3. Joseph K. Sharpe papers, IHS.
[47] Julia Graydon Sharpe to Joseph Kinne Sharpe, Jr., January 18, 1897. Julia G. Sharpe papers, IHS.
[48] I examined all available Sharpe family members' collections at the Indiana Historical Society for correspondence, which included her, her mother's, and her brother, Joseph's collections. My examination of letters (or lack thereof) written to Joseph and Ella are

her informal will where she left Ella some of her jewelry. In a telling contrast, Sharpe specified at the start: "I desire that my beloved sister—Anna T. Sharpe—who knows more about my affairs than anyone else—and who has been loving and steadfast and true to me always—shall have charge and make the general dispersion of my possessions."[49] It is clear that, at minimum, Sharpe had a stronger relationship with Anna than with her other siblings and, perhaps, had no real meaningful relationship with Ella, for whatever reason.[50]

Aunt

Neither of Sharpe's two sisters had children that survived to adulthood, but her brother Joseph and his wife, Alberta, had one girl named Josephine. Josephine provided Sharpe with one of her most valued roles—that of an aunt. In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, a change in attitude about the role of a mother in child rearing occurred and, as a result, elevated that of the maiden aunt. Previous beliefs that a mother's role in her child's life must be all-encompassing began to give way to fears that parenting in that way might lead to overindulgence, which would then result in spoiled,

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based on my findings in these collections. Just because these letters do not exist in these collections does not mean they did not, at one time, exist. However, there is something to be said about the letters that Sharpe, and then later her niece, Josephine Latham, and great-nephew, Charles Latham, chose to preserve.

[49] Julia Graydon Sharpe, "My Will," Julia G. Sharpe papers, IHS.

[50] Upon further investigation, it appears that Ella was not estranged just from Sharpe, but from the family in general. Raised staunchly Presbyterian—her ancestors were loyal founders of the Second Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis—Ella seemed to have chosen a different, and presumably unaccepted, religious path. In an October 1913 publication of the *Christian Science Journal*, Mrs. Ella Sharpe Duncan of 2111 North Delaware St., Indianapolis, is listed as a certified practitioner of Christian Science: a controversial form of Christianity focused on spiritual healing, founded by Mary Baker Eddy in 1879.

undisciplined children.[51] Secondary to this outcome was the concern that placing too much pressure on a woman's role as a mother could lead to her loss of identity and understanding of her other womanly roles, such as that of a wife.[52] The maiden aunt, unburdened by her own children and husband, possessed all of the maternal love needed to care for children and, more importantly, the time. She, therefore, was able to balance the level of child rearing so not to overindulge the child as a biological mother might, but still provide maternal love.[53] Margaret Coxe, a nineteenth-century advice author, urged single women "to take to your heart with fond affection, the offspring of your beloved brothers and sisters, and in their sweet caresses and tender love, experience a happiness only second to a mother's."[54] These sentiments permeated the literature of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century and so was likely the message Sharpe received. Since she was to remain single her whole life and not have children, she must then apply her maternal love to her brother's child so that she still fulfilled her womanly duty. Sharpe conformed to this image of the single woman as maiden aunt, and seemingly did so with pleasure. Her respect for and devotion to her role as an aunt was clear in her relationship with Josephine throughout her whole life.

From the time that Josephine was a child, Sharpe was quite enamored with her. She mentioned her multiple times in her letters home when she was in New York from 1896 to 1897. In one to Anna in March of 1897, Sharpe exclaimed: "Ever so many people

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[51] Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller, "'Woman is Born to Love': The Maiden Aunt as Maternal Figure in Ante-Bellum Literature," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 10, no. 1 (1988): 35.
[52] Chambers-Schiller, "Born to Love," 35.
[53] Chambers-Schiller, "Born to Love," 35.
[54] Margaret Coxe, *The Young Lady's Companion* (Columbus, OH: J. N. Whiting, 1839), 255.

have said that Josephine looks like me—particularly with the full face [like] Joe and I of course am pleased to death. I do hope she won't forget me."[55] Sharpe reiterated the fear of Josephine forgetting her in multiple letters, seemingly distraught over the possibility. Another common theme when mentioning Josephine in letters to family members was Sharpe's enjoyment in showing Josephine off, almost if she was her own daughter. She told Anna in a letter in December of 1896, "Josephine's drawings were the best I have seen. I opened my letter at the table and her masterpieces were passed all around the table to the delight of everyone."[56] In another to Anna in March of 1897, she mused "I think Josephine must be getting smarter than ever. I took all of her pictures and Joe's [her brother] too up to Winnie's yesterday and they were duly admired."[57] After she returned from New York City, Sharpe took Josephine along on sketching expeditions in the summers of the 1910s when the latter was a young girl. It was very clear that Josephine, though just a child, was an extremely important force in Sharpe's life. Being the only surviving child born to a sibling, Josephine was the sole being that provided Sharpe with one of her most cherished roles as a single woman—that of a maiden aunt.

Daughter

Though their sororal relationship provided the majority of Sharpe's ultimate fulfillment, Anna was not the only female with whom Sharpe retained a strong and

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[55] Julia Graydon Sharpe to Anna Trowbridge Sharpe, March 1, 1897. Julia G. Sharpe papers, IHS.
[56] Julia Graydon Sharpe to Anna Trowbridge Sharpe, December 8, 1896. Julia G. Sharpe papers, IHS.
[57] Julia Graydon Sharpe to Anna Trowbridge Sharpe, March 1, 1897. Julia G. Sharpe papers, IHS.

invaluable relationship. Her mother, Mary Ellen Graydon Sharpe, also instilled a strong and lasting impression on Sharpe. As a mother, Mary Ellen was the one who introduced Sharpe to the female world of the Victorian Era. Smith-Rosenberg emphasized that "an intimate mother-daughter relationship lay at the heart of this female world."[58] She also described an "apprenticeship system" for those girls that followed their mothers "in a life of traditional domesticity." In these cases, mothers trained their daughters from a very young age in the arts of housekeeping, motherhood, and of being a good wife.[59] Based on the family that Sharpe was raised in, one which was wealthy and with plenty of social clout, it would be assumed she would be raised in this way, following the tradition of other middle- to upper-class families. However, the lifestyle that Sharpe chose, one in which she was neither a mother nor a wife, suggests that her mother was not concerned with ensuring that her daughter adhere to these commonplace Victorian Era expectations placed upon women. This is not to say that Sharpe was not reared by her mother in other ways to be a proper lady of the time, seeing that she would be educated in all the ways of young ladyhood at the Chegaray Institute, one of the premier female academies for young women from the Midwest.[60]

When Sharpe was a young woman, probably sometime in the late 1860s to early 1870s, her parents sent her to the Chegaray Institute, a French female academy for girls, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. While at the Chegaray Institute, Sharpe was trained in the

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[58] Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World," 15.
[59] Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World," 16.
[60] Julia Graydon Sharpe, "Man from Syracuse," "Notebook of Famous Acquaintances," 131. Julia G. Sharpe papers, IHS.

arts of proper Victorian womanhood.[61] There, she took courses in art, literature, singing, and French. The purpose of this culture-focused training was to turn out literate, poised, and intelligent middle-and upper-class women. The hope was also that that these attributes would help women to find a suitable husband. This goal did not seem to be the case for Sharpe, who did not marry and was not focused on finding a husband, in her youth or adulthood, based on a reading of the letters and the full social life she maintained.[62]

The variation in Sharpe's choices indicated that, while she embraced Victorian womanhood in some ways, she rejected parts she did not agree with or those which did not align with the life she wanted to lead. More broadly, her choices indicated that, although young, elite women like her were set forth on all the proper routes to marriage and motherhood, some did in fact intentionally reject that lifestyle. The reasons behind these rejections could have been be numerous, but in the case of Sharpe, it was likely so she would be able to pursue a life dedicated to her art, social activities, friends, family, and community. It is probable that Sharpe's mother sent her to a female academy with the assumption that she would emerge prepared and perhaps even eager to take a husband. Sharpe's lack of mention of any external pressures by her mother or others to do so may indicate that she and her mother had a mutually understanding relationship, not one concerned with pressure and societal expectations. This lack of pressure, especially from

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[61] Julia Graydon Sharpe, "Madame Chegaray," "Notebook of Famous Acquaintances," 15. Julia G. Sharpe papers, IHS.
[62] This analysis is based on letters, photo albums, and scrapbooks in Sharpe's collection that document her activities and lack any mention of interest in romantic involvement.

the most important female force in a young girl's life, was likely a supportive factor in Sharpe's decision to remain single.

Regardless of the outcome of Sharpe's education at the Chegaray Institute, it is worth emphasizing that, although her family had the means to send her to a female academy, they decided to invest a portion of their capital in the education of a daughter in a time when female education was not necessarily encouraged.[63] Sharpe's parents understood the importance of an education for a young woman like Sharpe and seized the opportunity to send her for further training. Historian Mary Kelly has noted that thousands of women who had the resources to do so entered female academies and seminaries in post-Revolutionary and antebellum America.[64] Though Sharpe was not born until 1857, her mother, who came from a wealthy family and was a writer herself, likely understood the importance of educating her daughter because she, herself, had grown up educated in antebellum America. The education many young and elite women like Sharpe received at female academies and seminaries afforded them the tools and ability to actively participate in the expanding social space of nineteenth-century America, which included "tea tables and salons, institutions of sociability that along with male clubs, taverns, and coffeehouses, were dedicated to making public opinion."[65] Obtaining this type of education, focused on social graces and music, but also on subjects like history and literature, allowed young women from elite families a place at the table and, subsequently, more of a say in public opinion than their counterparts from lower

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[63] Mary Kelly, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 4.
[64] Kelly, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 5.
[65] Kelly, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 8.

classes experienced. Because her parents chose to send her to the Chegaray Institute as a young woman, Sharpe was well-equipped to survive on her own without a spouse. She was a learned and elite woman, and, therefore, had a say in public matters and in general, without having to voice her opinion through a man. Sharpe was never explicitly political, but it is clear she took advantage of the skills her education as a young woman afforded her in her writing, artwork, and activity in the clubs and societies of Indianapolis. Sharpe also took advantage of the legacy her mother forged in the club and society life of Indianapolis. Sharpe, her sister Anna, and her mother, Mary Ellen, were all longtime members of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Second Presbyterian Church, and the Flower Mission.[66]

Sharpe's relationships with both her mother and her father were also heavily affected by her being their caretaker at the end of their lives. When Sharpe returned from New York City in the spring of 1897, she found aging parents who needed to be cared for. While she was in New York City, her younger sister, Anna, presumably bore the responsibility. By the end of the 1800s, Sharpe's father's health had declined greatly, and she remained in state to help take care of him. In October of 1900, he died and left his three aging daughters to care for their mother.[67] Sharpe and her two sisters, Anna and Ella, lived in their parents' home at 2105 North Delaware (later recorded as 2111 North Delaware) with their mother until her death in 1914. Sharpe was forty-three years old, in

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[66] Though a member of the Flower Mission, Mary Ellen was not a charter member, nor as involved, as Sharpe was.

[67] In the 1894-1895 *Red Book of Indianapolis,* which listed the addresses and social clubs of Indianapolis' elite, Ella appears, under her married name, at 770 N. Pennsylvania Street—the same address that her parents, Sharpe, and sister, Anna, are listed at. Though listed under Duncan, her married name, Ella was residing with her parents by 1894, indicating her separation from her husband some time earlier.

1900, but like many single women, she was first and foremost a daughter in her parents' eyes.[68] As Chambers-Schiller explained in her study of northern antebellum white, middle-class spinsters, "the task of maintaining a family's social connections continued to be the responsibility of adult spinsters."[69] When both of Sharpe's parents were living, and even after they passed, she still had a duty as a single woman from an elite family to maintain a certain social reputation. She also carried the responsibility, and potentially the guilt, of remaining close to her aging parents. Her duties as a maiden daughter then could explain why Sharpe remained a permanent resident of Indianapolis her whole life and traveled only as far as New York, where she attended art school, and Kansas City, where she visited friends that she presumably met during her time at Chegaray.[70]

Nothing that I have found suggests Sharpe felt in any way hindered by her responsibilities as a maiden daughter, but this lack of indication in the archival record does not mean that she was not affected by the societal expectations of maiden daughters. As a young artist in 1882, Sharpe wrote of her dream of traveling abroad to study art in "the old country" in a letter to William Forsyth, a former teacher and fellow Hoosier artist who was studying in Munich, Germany.[71] By 1885, she seemed to have lost hope of studying even in New York City, let alone Europe: "As for me, I am trying to forget that I ever had any aspirations that way. It has been impossible to do anything here, and quite

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[68] Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, A Better Husband,* 119.
[69] Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, A Better Husband*, 112.
[70] My understanding of her travels comes from her letters and "Notebook of Famous Acquaintances," both of which are in her collection at the William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society.
[71] Julia Graydon Sharpe to William Forsyth, June 14, 1882. William Forsyth Correspondence. Original letters. 1881-1885. William Forsyth Papers, 1863-1985. Manuscript and Visual Collections Department, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society (hereafter, William Forsyth papers, IHS).

as impossible for me to go elsewhere at present, and so I bow to the inevitable."[72] Her language in these letters indicated that, although she would study art in New York City at the Art Students' League a little over a decade later in 1896, something was inhibiting Sharpe from believing she would ever be able to do so. It was likely that money was a reason that Sharpe was unable to travel abroad, and that was because her father, the money maker, would not or could not support her art studies—be that monetarily or otherwise. As a single and unemployed young woman, Sharpe was totally dependent on her father for money and, subsequently, needed his approval and permission to spend money in any capacity. Although her father lived until 1900, it would be Sharpe's older brother, Joseph, and his wife, Alberta, who provided the financial support for Sharpe's New York studies in the 1890s.[73] Her brother's support suggests that Sharpe's parents, likely her father since he was the head of the household and breadwinner, would not pay for her artistic aspirations. It is possible that they did not have the money, but highly doubtful considering that in the 1890s the family had a family farm in Monroe County, a summer home in Harbor Springs, Michigan, and a maid.[74] In June of 1882, Sharpe went to her father's farm to sketch and later, in the nineteen-teens, she spent the summers at

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[72] Julia Graydon Sharpe to William Forsyth, August 14, 1885. William Forsyth papers, IHS.

[73] Julia Graydon Sharpe to Alberta Sharpe, November 25, 1896. Julia G. Sharpe papers, IHS. In this letter to Alberta, Sharpe commented that she "will accept no presents this year….[My] study in New York is Christmas enough for me for many years." In earlier letters when she first arrived in New York, she also provided instructions on how Joseph could send her money for her room and board and when she needed to pay it.

[74] Julia Graydon Sharpe to Mary Ellen Graydon Sharpe, May 7, 1897. Julia G. Sharpe papers, IHS. In this letter, Sharpe remarked to her mother on their move from Pennsylvania to Delaware Street, "Will your good girl go with you to the new home? I fear the servant problem will be more difficult than ever."

their Harbor Springs home sketching.[75] Sharpe was restricted in her choices because of her dependence on her father and brother for financial support as a single woman and never was able to fulfill all of the desires she had, especially in relation to her art.

Friend

Outside of her roles as a sister, aunt, and daughter, Sharpe was also a devoted friend to several women and, albeit fewer, men throughout her life.[76] In the surviving letters and notebooks, a few specific people appear to have been, at some point, important sources of friendship: Virginia Keep Clarke, Winnie Cooley, and William Forsyth. Sharpe had many acquaintances throughout her life, but outside of her family, these three people were mentioned most frequently, especially in her most socially and artistically active years at the turn-of-the-twentieth century.

Sharpe spent a lot of time with Clarke and Cooley while she was at the Art Students' League and Chase School of Art in New York City. Clarke, an Indianapolis native herself, studied art at the League as well. Sharpe made clear that, although Clarke also studied at the League, she did not perform nearly as well as she herself did: "All these romances about her do not help her and will only make it hard for her to live up to it—for people will expect too much of her. She is a talented girl—and doing nicely—but

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[75] Julia Graydon Sharpe to William Forsyth, June 14, 1882. William Forsyth papers, IHS. In this letter, Sharpe told Forsyth: "I am going the last of this week down on my father's farm in Monroe County to spend two weeks. The scenery is said to be wild and lovely and I am going to spend the entire time sketching."

[76] Other friends that will not be highlighted in this article, but warrant mention are; Susan Merrill Ketcham, Esther Griffin White, J.W. Love, William Merritt Chase, Booth Tarkington, James Whitcomb Riley, Roswell Fields, and General Herbert Slocum. Each of these people Sharpe either corresponded with or mentioned fondly in her "Notebook of Famous Acquaintances."

it is not considered phenomenal here. As for myself—I have the horror of being over-rated."[77] Two decades older than Clarke, Sharpe clearly saw herself a superior position as an elite, female artist and took advantage of that. The demeaning language she used to describe Clarke in her letters demonstrated Sharpe's continued pursuit of self-presentation, even as an adult at forty-years-old, in attempts to paint herself as an elite, and superior, female artist. These comments about Clarke, which were plentiful in Sharpe's letters home to Anna while in New York, not only served to knock Clarke's reputation as an artist, but also to heighten Sharpe's as an elite woman and artist. In another letter home to Anna in February 1897, Sharpe clarified that

> almost all of her [Clarke's] good times here have come through me—and as I have put myself out a good deal to do her a favor…. For instance she would not have visited a studio or met an artist but for me…. [As] I said before she is endebted [sic] to me for all her unusual times and I am sorry if her mother does not know it.[78]

Establishing her reputation as an elite and talented female artist, and the influence that reputation afforded her, were important to Sharpe as she helped her friend and fellow female artist. Sharpe may not have meant to hurt or spite Clarke in any way, but she seemed to have felt the mounting pressure, as an older unmarried woman, to prove herself and her place where she was. As was apparent in every aspect of her life and within each of her relationships, Sharpe was astutely aware of the way she was perceived, and it was likely she tried to overcompensate so as not to be regarded as a dependent,

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[77] Julia Graydon Sharpe to Anna Trowbridge Sharpe, January 23, 1897. Julia G. Sharpe papers, IHS. We can assume here that the "it" Sharpe referred to Clarke's living up to is the grandiose and, according to Sharpe, false, reputation that was being painted of Clarke.
[78] Julia Graydon Sharpe to Anna Trowbridge Sharpe, February 4, 1897. Julia G. Sharpe papers, IHS.

pathetic, old maid. The constant awareness and carefulness in which Sharpe presented herself as an elite and single woman must have been, at many times, exhausting.

Another close New York friend, but one who did not rival Sharpe's status as an elite and female artist, was Winnie Cooley. From the little information presented in Sharpe's notebook and letters home that mentioned Cooley, it is clear that she was also an elite woman who was living in New York, but one who did not study art. Cooley was from Dubuque, Iowa, originally; she and Sharpe probably met at the Chegaray Institute in Philadelphia as young girls sometime in the 1860s to 1870s.[79] Prior to going to New York, likely sometime in the 1870s to 1880s based on Sharpe's recollection in her notebook, Sharpe and Cooley attended a ball together in Cleveland, Ohio, where they spent "most of the night with various polite young men – and then danced all night."[80] Once in New York, Sharpe spent many evenings dining and shopping with Cooley, as well as spending the holidays at her home.[81]

There is no evidence that there was ever any tension or competition between these two women. Sharpe's reputation was not threatened by her being friends with Cooley, but rather the exact opposite. Although their friendship did not seem to be as emotionally crucial as the relationship Sharpe maintained with her sister, Cooley and Sharpe's friendship demonstrated the lasting and dedicated manner in which many female friendships operated in the late nineteenth-century. Smith-Rosenberg highlighted

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[79] It is likely that Sharpe and Cooley met at Chegaray because it was the premier academy for young and elite women from the Midwest and therefore probable that Cooley's parents would have sent her there as well.
[80] Julia Graydon Sharpe, "Man from Syracuse," "Notebook of Famous Acquaintances," 131. Julia G. Sharpe papers, IHS.
[81] Julia Graydon Sharpe to Mary Ellen Graydon Sharpe, December 12, 1896. Julia G. Sharpe papers, IHS.

women's dedication to one another in her study of female friendships as well, noting that women who formed close bonds, but were not related, still went to great lengths to maintain their friendships over the years and miles.[82] Even though Sharpe did not seem to experience emotional distress when apart from Cooley, it is very apparent that their friendship served a very important function in her life from girlhood to adulthood. Cooley, then, was an important force who helped Sharpe reinforce her presentation of herself as a woman of a certain status who associated with other women of similar status.

When it came to the relationships with men outside of those with her father and brother, there were not many that Sharpe maintained throughout her life. Rather, there were various moments, some very short-lived, throughout Sharpe's life in which she developed close relationships with men. The longest friendship that Sharpe maintained with a man was with William Forsyth, a former teacher and fellow Hoosier artist. Their friendship started when the two were classmates at the Love and Gookins' First Indiana School of Art from 1878 to 1880. According to Indiana art historians, Judith Vale Newton and Carole Ann Weiss, Forsyth "admired her from afar since their days together there as students."[83] Although Sharpe did not seem to share in these romantic feelings, in 1881 she began writing to Forsyth, who was studying abroad in Munich, Germany, at the time, and continued to do so until 1885. In these letters, Sharpe confided in Forsyth about her art studies and issues she experienced related to art. She also communicated that she was very interested, as a young woman of only twenty-five, in learning what life was like for an artist who was able to study abroad: "I am interested in knowing the course a

[82] Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World," 14.
[83] Newton and Weiss, *Skirting the Issue*, 187.

student has abroad. We are told an artist must be in harmony with his surroundings—accordingly I imagine you ought to be heavily. It may be I over-estimate foreign scenery."[84] Sharpe, who at this point in her life, did not think she would ever be able to leave Indiana, let alone the country, to study art, was enamored with Forsyth's foreign adventures in art.[85] However, what is never communicated in the language of these letters to Forsyth between 1881 and 1885 was anything other than that of cordial and friendly musings. It is clear that Sharpe confided in Forsyth in ways which she could not with others related to her art aspirations, but that seems to be as deep as their friendship ran for her.

In the summer of 1896 just before Sharpe left for New York City, she and Forsyth spent the few months together painting in Corydon and Cedar Farm, Indiana, with other students and he "felt their relationship to be special."[86] By early 1897, Forsyth no longer "hid his feelings for the woman whose blue eyes dominated a face framed by reddish hair."[87] During this time, Sharpe was studying at the Art Students' League in New York City, and Forsyth wrote numerous poems to her professing his love. In one, he seems quite distressed:

How will it end? You asked – and since then

I have felt a terror creeping coldly round

My heart- remembering the dreadful sound

Of that strange question – asked me when

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[84] Julia Graydon Sharpe to William Forsyth, June 14, 1882. William Forsyth papers, IHS.
[85] Julia Graydon Sharpe to William Forsyth, June 14, 1882. William Forsyth papers, IHS.
[86] Newton and Weiss, *Skirting the Issue*, 189.
[87] Newton and Weiss, *Skirting the Issue*, 187.

I least expected it – and now again

I feel it like the frost upon a wound-

A nameless fear that strikes me to the ground

And leaves me weak & wretched among men

How will it end? My queen – why should it end?

Since if in end what pleasure is there more

In all the world for me? The love light gave

From life – I shall not care what fate may send

Of good and ill – as in the days of yore

When all the ways of life led to your trance.[88]

Although Sharpe wrote to Forsyth, no romantic letters from her appear in either of their collections. She mentioned him only in relation to art in letters to family members, and not necessarily in the most positive light. She remarked that, in New York City, some artists like William Merritt Chase regarded Forsyth's work positively, while

> some brilliant Indianapolis people…[specifically] one particularly cultured woman spoke of him repeatedly as 'that little, ugly, conceited man who calls himself an artist!' It was considered such a clever remark—that it was current among the like of Indianapolis and was supposed to have settled him.[89]

Just a few months later in the fall of 1897, Forsyth married another former classmate and student, Alice Atkinson. Sharpe seemed unfazed, as her "rigorous studies at the Art [Students'] League and at William Merritt Chase's School of Art, combined

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[88] Poem to Julia Graydon Sharpe from William Forsyth, ca. 1896. Julia G. Sharpe papers, IHS.
[89] Julia Graydon Sharpe to unidentified, January 5, 1897. Julia G. Sharpe papers, IHS.

with her active social life, dimmed whatever infatuation she may have had with her former teacher,"[90] noted Forsyth's biographer Rachel Berenson Perry. There seems, however, little-to-no evidence for the view that there was any infatuation on Sharpe's part. Because Perry's focus was on Forsyth, rather than Sharpe, it is possible that she misinterpreted the relationship. Just because Forsyth was infatuated with Sharpe did not mean that Sharpe was interested romantically in Forsyth. There is nothing in her surviving correspondence to him, in neither her collection nor his, that indicates that Sharpe saw Forsyth as anything other than a fellow Hoosier, artist, and friend.

Sharpe's relationship with Forsyth was not significant because he was in love with her, but rather because she appeared to be ambivalent to that love. He was a fellow artist, generally well regarded outside of Indianapolis in his time, yet she chose not to pursue the romance with him that he so clearly desired. Sharpe's disregard for any serious romantic relationship with Forsyth spoke to the identity she wanted to create for herself and the way that she wished to be presented in relation to her artistry: as a successful artist who did not need to depend on the clout and reputation of a male artist to be that. She was accepted into the Art Students' League's most advanced class, the life class, from an outside school with no preliminary life work, which was, according to Sharpe, unheard of at the time.[91] She was creating her own successful and powerful reputation as an elite, unmarried female who served in crucial roles as a sister, aunt,

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[90] Rachel Berenson Perry, *William J. Forsyth: The Life and Work of an Indiana Artist* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 37.
[91] Julia Graydon Sharpe to Anna Trowbridge Sharpe, January 23, 1897. Julia G. Sharpe papers, IHS.

daughter, and friend, and who also had a serious passion for art. She did not need a man to help her in any of these roles, cloud her judgement, or taint anyone's perception of her.

SECTION 3

"Singularly Content"

In June 1894, the year before Sallie Beatty's unfortunate death was announced in the *Indianapolis News*, an article in the *Ladies' Home Journal* entitled "Are Old Maids Unattractive?" explored the changes in the perception of single women over the years. The author, Junius Henri Browne, stated early on that "the prejudice which certainly still exists in the average mind against unmarried women must be of comparatively modern origin," and that "since the Reformation, especially during the last century…matrimony has been so much esteemed, notably by women, that it has come to be regarded as in some sort discreditable for them to remain single."[92] He went to highlight all the ways in which "old maids" and their chosen lifestyle were wrongly perceived. These errors included the beliefs that women who remained single were almost never attractive and that they were ill-tempered, rude, shrill, and remained single only because they failed at obtaining a husband.[93] Browne rejected the stereotypical views and perceptions of "old maids." He, instead, noted that "the real old maid is like any other woman…for the most part, singularly content, patient and serene—more so than many wives who have household duties and domestic cares to tire and trouble them."[94] Browne not only defended single women, but provided reasons as to why remaining single was such an attractive option for women, such as more time and fewer responsibilities to tend to. This

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[92] Junius Henri Browne, "Are Old Maids Attractive?" *Ladies' Home Journal*, June 1894, 12. Although it may read awkwardly, this is exact wording from the article. Browne indicated that it had become discreditable for women to choose to remain single, especially in comparison to marriage.
[93] Browne, "Old Maids," 12.
[94] Browne, "Old Maids," 12.

piece may be evidence that New York citizens, where *Ladies' Home Journal* was published at the time, were more open and accepting of single women's lifestyles in the nineteenth century than, apparently, were Indianapolis citizens. What this piece certainly implied was, regardless of the nature of the rhetoric, single women's lives were under close observation and routinely reported on.

An exploration of Julia Graydon Sharpe's life suggests that Sharpe saw remaining single as an elite woman an attractive option and, as a result, was able to pursue occupations as a devoted and loyal sister, aunt, daughter, and friend (as well as artist), and in these roles made herself indispensable. Her ability to pursue occupations in which she was not making money spoke to her privilege as an elite and single woman. Single women of lower classes, in contrast, would have been concerned with finding an occupation that provided them a living wage. Sharpe's family and friends provided her with the fulfillment and love that she otherwise might have sought out from a romantic partner. Those emotional ties, therefore, bolstered her choice to remain single her entire life. Sharpe's contributions to her intimate familial and non-familial relationships *and* their support of her lifestyle choice were not so atypical. A similarly mutually beneficial situation is apparent when looking at Sharpe's contributions to and roles within her community, specifically the elite community of Indianapolis, as a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Flower Mission, the Red Cross, and Second Presbyterian Church, a topic which warrants its own study.

The widespread and far-reaching effects of Sharpe's life as a single woman work to dismantle the visions of the pathetic, dependent, lonely "old maid" or "spinster hermit" of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These women owed no one an explanation of

their personal choices not to marry, yet members of the public were, and continue to be, perplexed by women that choose not to marry. It was for this reason that I embarked on this research endeavor and dove so deeply into Sharpe's life. It was not to expose her personal life or make assumptions about it, though I understand in many ways I did, but rather to show that single women like Sharpe were able to lead fulfilled and happy lives as contributing and indispensable members of their families, friendships, and communities. It was also to reveal the ways in which single and elite women like Sharpe were constantly aware of and concerned with the presentation of themselves, so as not to damage their own, or their family's, reputations, and how this preoccupation impacted their lives. Defining a woman based on her marital status limits our understanding of what she may have done or valued. Julia Graydon Sharpe's social standing allowed her to live in a different way than less-privileged unmarried women could, while her singleness permitted her options not always available to her married counterparts. The blend of her wealth and singleness allowed her the opportunity to fully embrace the most cherished aspects of her identity: those of a sister, aunt, daughter, and friend. At the end of her will, Sharpe left a special note that demonstrated her recognition of a single life well-lived: "To all my dearly loved family—I leave my love that cannot die—and my gratitude for all their sweetness and devotion. I beg they will feel no sadness when I am gone…and hope that I am where I may be able to realize things denied me here. Loving you—wherever I am—Julia Graydon Sharpe."[95]

[95] Julia Graydon Sharpe, "My Will," Julia G. Sharpe papers, IHS.

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