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## Is There a Story in Those Notes?

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# Is There a Story in Those Notes?

Ann D. Gordon

**I**s there a story in those notes? Let me answer that in the affirmative. Drawing on the *Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, I can tell you that there are many, many stories in those notes. But I should explain the question. Certainly there are stories behind the notes: the serendipitous moments of discovery, the slogging through barren sources, or the comeuppance when a research strategy proves terribly wrong. Stories behind the notes also encompass stories that are left behind, chipped off or sanded away as the editor trims her knowledge down to precisely the kernel needed to explicate the text.

Stories in the notes are offered to the reader as aids in reading the texts well. Unlike the note that explicates an isolated reference or image, these notes weave and link together the edition's various narratives to complement its plot. Arising from the text, they reflect the editor's mastery of the documents and their context after it is filtered through the discipline of editing. While proofreading our third volume, I have been asking myself questions: what is it we do? why do we seem to have so many stories in our notes? are there patterns? why do our notes seem so bloody long even after I've whittled and whittled away at them? And those questions led me back to another puzzle I chewed on for awhile: how do historical editors get themselves caught between, on the one hand, the Jerry Georges of the world who say "the NHPRC will not fund scholarship," and, on the other hand, colleagues who regard editions as not scholarly enough? I rephrased the questions: how do I use historical research in annotation? To find balance between editorial restraint and good historical research, we need to articulate (or confess) activity that sounds anything but restrained and consider not only the dichotomy of restraint and temptation but also the dichotomy between restraint and superficiality. It is quite easy to keep the annotation in check if the editors don't know anything about their subject.

I suspect that many of my examples have parallels in other historical editions designed to different specifications, but for those of you unfamiliar with the Stanton and Anthony papers, let me define the context for my examples. Ours is, first of all, a selected edition—roughly 10%—that is being published after a comprehensive microfilm. Cross references to the microfilm are a standard feature. It is also an edition—whether selective or comprehensive—that rests on a very incomplete base; we could certainly list more papers we lack than we have. While we do not often waste space saying such-and-such is missing, we very often find ourselves researching those voids. Further, ours is an edition of the papers of two people—people whose lives were closely interwoven through work but, at the same time, rooted in their own extended families and often conducted in separate places: Stanton may be handling a crippling disease in her youngest son, while Anthony nurses a dying sister. Finally, and what I suspect distinguishes our annotation most of all, Stanton and Anthony are fully engaged with their world

and its ideas, public figures, and scandals, but they are not making the decisions at the center of their own story. Wanting to change the world, they engage with intellectuals and the powerful but always at a remove. Whether lobbying Congress or disputing Social Darwinism, they are on the fringe of the action, but it is that action—legislation or intellectual developments—that matters most to them. As a consequence, to take the prime example from volume 3, Congress and the national political parties become major characters in the plot but ones that by and large lie beyond the boundary of Stanton's or Anthony's papers.

One more characteristic of our edition is relevant to our practice. Out of this imperfect, bifurcated, and marginal record, we try to preserve a narrative (or more accurately, multiple narratives) rather than an omnibus of documents. To name a few narratives in the texts of volume 3: Stanton and Anthony work for suffrage planks in party platforms and a constitutional amendment from Congress. They manage their National Woman Suffrage Association, navigate the testy division between themselves and Lucy Stone of the American Woman Suffrage Association, lecture six or seven months of every year, and begin to write the multi-volume *History of Woman Suffrage*.

The nature of the sources combined with our goals can drive us into extreme notes in which we write an editorial note that falls between documents—a floater that we create only rarely to fill major holes in the narrative. We discovered the need for this device while editing 1840—the first year in our edition. With all extant letters in place, we had Elizabeth Cady on March 4 telling a cousin that she had broken off an engagement to Henry Stanton, and next in the sequence, we had Elizabeth Cady Stanton on June 25 writing American friends from her honeymoon in England. As the editorial note states in its opening line: “A significant turn of events occurred which no contemporary documents explain.” Because biographers of Stanton have been imagining ways to fill that gap for 100 years, it behooved documentary editors to present what documentary evidence exists about this turn of events: her own much later reminiscences, letters between Henry Stanton and Theodore Weld, Stanton and Gerrit Smith, Theodore Weld and Lewis Tappan, and church records from Johnstown, New York, where the marriage occurred.

In our third volume, such editorial note solves a different kind of problem: to set up in an efficient way the story of a major occurrence that becomes the topic of a large body of documents. Near the end of volume 3, a year's worth of documents prepare for and then respond to the Republican National Convention of 1880 in Chicago. For a variety of reasons, that event produced no worthy texts to include: Anthony's diary for 1880 no longer exists; her occasional speeches—to a mass meeting of suffragists coinciding with the convention and to the Republican platform committee—were poorly reported by the press; most of the activity was lobbying—something poorly documented on any occasion; and important events were things that did not happen—the Republican executive committee's reversal on providing seats for woman suffrage delegates, the platform committee's refusal to poll its members on the suffrage plank, and the ways that internal divisions of the Republican party caused even their most ardent supporters to remain silent. We stopped and told the story—what they did and what response they met.

Most of our notes are the standard occurrence of quotations to be sourced (210 in this volume), people to be identified (750), street addresses (45), train routes, and the daily news (why

sailors are suddenly symbols of rebellion and protest). No doubt most of the routine notes will remain isolated items of fact even in the hands of the most creative reader, but some allow readers to pursue their own stories. Attentive readers and users of the index may notice the surprising trail we cut linking Stanton and Anthony to German-American radicals around Karl Heinzen. It began for us as an effort to understand a sequence of letters in 1875 (and by “understand,” I mean here: we did not have a clue what the letters were about) and led to our immersion in the history of two German-American groups called Radical Democracy and Freie Gemeinde, both of them seeking alliance with the National Woman Suffrage Association. Why else would we be reading Karl Heinzen, *What Is Real Democracy? Answered by an Exposition of the Constitution of the United States*, published in Indianapolis in 1871? Wherein, lo and behold, we recognized a pair of quotations that Stanton stuck into several texts.

There are many kinds of accidental stories in the notes—unanticipated by-products of what we thought were discrete identifications. Consider examples from the notes accompanying two segments of Anthony’s diaries selected for volume 3. One use we make of her diary is to capture Anthony’s remarkable schedule on the road as a lecturer; the diaries record her work to create a midwestern constituency for her cause, but they are also arguably the best source on the lyceum circuit in the postwar period—on its vitality, infrastructure, travel, and finances. An average entry reads like this from 13 March 1877:

Effingham—Ill— \$25— H. C. Painter

Left Robinson at 6.35 A.M.—but little good sleep—breakfasted at Marshall—  
[reached?] Effingham at 1 P.M— Mr & Mrs Painter & Mrs Kepler called at Etna  
Hotel to see— cold & cloudy—almost rain—very muddy—about 100 in my audi-  
ence—the very best—all 50 & 75 cts—so the young men Mr——Thompson,  
Painter & [blank]—paid expenses—

When we identified people in entries like this one, we found in town after town that the first name—the contact person—was a printer turned publisher and editor of the local newspaper, and that subsequent names invariably included the men and women who had recently organized the town’s literary association or lyceum. In this town, Mr. Painter published the paper while his wife was a leader in the lyceum. I think we can say at least that we have accidentally made the diaries even better sources for understanding the lyceum and somewhat undermined the historians’ conclusion that the age of the lyceum ended with the Civil War.

A different sort of story emerges from the identifications of people named in the entries while Anthony joined state and national activists in Michigan to campaign for a woman suffrage amendment sent to the voters in November 1874. In this case, she was moving among people connected statewide through a structure put in place to manage the campaign. We knew to look at the few primary sources there are about organizing that structure in order to indicate what role a person played: county organizer, state treasurer, etc. But we were also reading a great deal about the Woman’s Crusade in 1874, the national uprising of women against saloons that reached nine hundred towns that winter and spring, and two lines of research converged: we noticed that in Michigan, the Crusade and the campaign for woman suffrage were run by the same people—a discovery that reshaped the way we wrote each biography. To establish that connection affects histories of both the Crusade and the Michigan campaign, and it may also help to explain the defeat of woman suffrage in a state where beer-

brewing and -drinking immigrants made up a significant portion of the voters.

Lest it sound like stories just happen—accidental connections that inform—let me relate some stories that we have told intentionally. I can often argue that selection made me do it. One of the ongoing stories in the texts is the tension that divided woman suffragists from 1869 until 1890 between Stanton and Anthony on the one side, and Lucy Stone and her husband on the other. In December 1876, Susan B. ventured north to Boston, into Lucy Stone territory. From a private home in Chelsea, she wrote cattily to a friend in Hartford: “I am half inclined to look upon Lucy’s Saintly face this P.M.—as she is to address the W.S. Club of Chelsea at 3 Oclock—Do you think the radiance would dazzle my poor eyes?—” In its place in the volume, this passage is easily comprehended by readers without any assistance from an editor. However, were ours a comprehensive edition, readers could turn to the diary to learn what happened in the P.M. There, later on the same day, Anthony recorded that her hostess “asked Lucy Stone if it would be agreeable to have Miss Anthony invited to be present—Lucy said no—so I was left at Mrs Osgoods.” By giving voice to Lucy Stone in the notes, we made clear, I hope, that this was a duel.

Such a note fills a gap created by selection. It is not absolutely essential for reading the text well, and every gap created by selection is not similarly bridged. We do not run two parallel selections—one in large type called text and another in small type called notes. There is, however, a tricky balance. We do work always with all the papers in view and then discipline ourselves to resist the urge to augment the notes.

We kept temptation in check with similar effect with a letter Anthony wrote to Stanton from Denver in October 1877. Anthony reported receipt of two packages containing various pamphlets that Stanton mailed from New York for Anthony to distribute to Colorado voters and mentioned another one that awaited her at the express office: “a package with \$7.80 charges on it—more than the cash value of the books— Still suppose I must pay it—rather than throw the tracts away— [and here she came back to insert above the line a pointed lesson] ↑It is a box & hence costs more—always than a paper package—remember—↓” We are especially alert to the rare clue about what Stanton and Anthony thought of each other and how they managed their differences, and thus we were susceptible to some intentional reinforcement of the story. We noted that Anthony also commented in her diary on the excessive freight charges, observing how like Mrs. Stanton it was not to know “the cost of things.”

Selection is an excuse for presenting only a portion of the intentional stories. The editor faces countless decisions about when and where to look outside the texts, whether the results of the research are necessary to the reader, and, if so, how little and how much to tell. In a literal sense, the decision can boil down to the decision whether to cite a source or to explicate what is said in that source. I stretched the boundaries in this example—again from Anthony’s diary. The events of the day—29 August 1876—began for Stanton and Anthony in Providence, Rhode Island, after a funeral; they ended on 40th Street in Manhattan at a residence occupied by Stanton’s brothers-in-law, where they found one at home: Samuel Wilkeson, a renowned wartime journalist and Jay Cooke’s right-hand man at the Northern Pacific Railroad.

Spent forenoon looking over Mrs Davis’ papers & letters—found but very little of any use to our history—marvelous how very little— Took 2 P.M. train & slept

at Dr Bayards—only Sam'l Wilkerson there— Hadn't seen him since he testified on the Beecher Tilton-scandal—& he acted ashamed—as he ought to feel—

There is sufficient context in the volume for readers to catch Anthony's reference and to inform her notion of "shame." Readers are well aware that Sam Wilkerson testified in Henry Ward Beecher's trial for adultery. Readers also know that his enthusiasm so overran his truthfulness that Beecher's lawyers had to rein in their witness and correct some of his imaginative stories. However, at no point had prior texts or notes even alluded to what Wilkerson said about Susan B. Anthony, something we discovered while reading his testimony for other notes. I give it to you as I compressed it to make a note:

Samuel Wilkerson testified at length against Theodore Tilton at the trial in 1875. Alleging to quote Tilton, he told the court that SBA "was a morbid old maid; that she was an old maid in whom the suppression of the sexual instinct had brought morbid disease of the imagination; that she had morbidly imagined what she said; that there was not a word of truth in it, and that it was wholly a fabrication of the imagination, wholly so."

I know perfectly well that I could have omitted that bit. But how much better the scene to know that Wilkerson's shame is not abstract but in his face. Moreover, it is a note that is interwoven with stories told in texts and notes, especially about what Stanton called "the holocaust of women" exacted by the Beecher-Tilton trials.

Resisting the temptation to add Wilkerson's testimony in the notes would not make a fundamental problem go away. Contexts throughout the volume far exceed what the texts articulate, and decisions must be made about where to let other voices speak. As I suggested when I began, the critical instance in our volumes is political history. The texts are written by women trying to change the minds and practice of political parties, voters, and members of Congress. How do we make evident that Congress actually responds? How do we contextualize anger? discouragement? hope?

I have come to think about this as a problem in unrequited love. For about three years after the Civil War, Susan B. Anthony had a crush on Anna Dickinson—the Joan of Arc of the Republican party, a young woman with remarkable speaking skills who became a popular lecturer and an indispensable asset to the Republican party. Many of Susan B.'s letters to Anna survive but not one reply in its original form survived. Susan's letters are intimate, corny, needy, full of the expectations and assumptions we can all recognize in the besotted individual. No one knows if she was making a fool of herself; no one knows if Anna encouraged, manipulated, or reciprocated her infatuation. The letters just exist without a context.

A bit of the same problem characterizes Anthony and Stanton's relationship with Congress, or it would if we did not expend energy and space to addressing the problem. For forty years Stanton and Anthony cajoled Congress to act on their demands, and it is vital to know, as for Anna Dickinson, whether Congress encouraged, manipulated, or reciprocated their attention. Unlike the case with Anna Dickinson, the other voices in this instance were not destroyed, but they do lie outside the range of our documents. We have to find a way to go out to that public record and bring into the edition the other side of an interaction that is central to the lives, the history, and the texts with which we work.

Here is a letter from Stanton to Anthony dated (we think) 14 January 1878, recounting events in Washington when Senator Aaron Sargent first introduced the woman suffrage

amendment and Stanton addressed the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections. In a longer narrative about Congress, later documents will refer and react to the events of January 1878.

Dear Susan:

I suppose you are impatiently waiting to hear about the convention. . . .

Thursday morning, Isabella Beecher Hooker had a Moody and Sankey [pr]ayer meeting in the ladies' reception room next the Senate Chamber. They [pr]ayed, sang "Hold the Fort," "Guide us, oh thou great Jehovah" and "The [Ba]ttle Hymn of the Republic," and made speeches from the tops of tables. [Se]nator Sargent said it was a regular mob. The corridors were crowded. And [al]l this while the senators were assembling for the first time after the [ho]llidays!

Mrs. Sargent and I did not attend the prayer meeting. As Jehovah[ha]s never taken a very active part in the Suffrage movement, I thought I [wo]uld stay at home and get ready to implore the committee, having more [fa]ith in their power to render us the desired aid.

At this same time a debate was precipitated in the Senate. Some[on]e rallied Senator Sargent on the mob character of his constituency. He [re]plied: "This is nothing to what you will see at this capitol, if these [wo]men's petitions are not heard." Altogether it was a week of constant agi[ta]tion, and I think the result (prayer meeting, mob and all) is good.

In treating the final paragraph about a Senate debate, we turned to the *Congressional Record* and measured Stanton's paraphrase against the report of Sargent's remarks. Although Sargent and Stanton used sarcasm very differently, Stanton reported well. We might have stopped there, adding only a citation to volume and page of the *Record*. Though efficient and restrained, that strategy would leave unanswered what precipitated a debate in the Senate: the introduction of a resolution usually consists of a motion and referral to committee. In fact the debate did not result from the introduction of S.R. 12 but from another proposal Sargent made that day for the National Woman Suffrage Association, one that roused all the usual suspects to an angry debate about woman suffrage. The note reads:

After his introduction of the resolution for a constitutional amendment on January 10, Aaron Sargent proposed that women who favored the amendment be heard before the full Senate. A lengthy debate about Senate rules and woman suffrage ensued, pitting George Edmunds, Allen Thurman, and Thomas Bayard against Sargent and George Hoar. Two roll call votes were taken, one on Edmunds's motion to adjourn before discussing Sargent's resolution and a second on Sargent's motion itself. Ten senators voted for adjournment, and thirty-three voted with Sargent. After more debate, the Senate rejected the motion to hear the women by thirteen yeas and thirty-one nays. ECS refers to an exchange during the debate, when Senator Thurman described suffragists as laying siege to the Senate. Sargent replied: "I predict that this is only the first of a series of such assaults upon legislative bodies, not only upon the Senate but upon the House of Representatives and upon the Legislatures of the various States. This movement is getting to be very troublesome. I am aware of it. It disturbs grave Senators in their deliberations; . . . It will be more and more troublesome year by year."

Because this occasion informed subsequent events in Congress and influenced suffragists' tone and tactics, we explained it in more detail than the one letter by Stanton in isolation required.

With regard to the classic polarity between long and short annotation, I am convinced that

we cannot and probably should not escape the moral (and governmental) imperative now imbedded in that dichotomy. Like our superego, it reminds us that the texts matter most of all, prods us to write concise history, and prompts us to question our style. It also provides editors with a convenient narrative of their own, suggesting an epic struggle between good and evil from which editors emerge—at least in their grant proposals or Camp Edit classes—as triumphant models of restraint and self-discipline. No other editorial persona is reputable, worthy of critical acclaim and financial stability.

That is a convenient narrative, but it is not a very efficacious one. What is said in church obscures the fundamental contest: that we are not long or short, restrained or indulgent, but rather historians in a perpetual struggle to configure our knowledge to meet the needs of readers of the—in my case—*Selected Papers of Stanton and Anthony*. When I sing the chorus that “no one will edit these documents again for a century,” I hear in it a responsibility placed on me because no one in that same span of time will have command of the material comparable to mine. It makes no sense in intellectual or fiscal terms to deny that advantage to readers.



