

Finding the Grimké's in Charleston: Using Feminist Historiographic and Archival Research Methods to Build Public Memory

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Abstract: *Developments in feminist historiographic and archival research methods have led to a stronger sense of Sarah and Angelina Grimké's rhetorical history in Charleston, essential to understanding their later ethos as public rhetors. Enoch and Jack (CE 2011) and Kirsch and Royster (CCC 2010) offer complementary meta-rhetorical stances that encourage an awareness of both how historical narratives are built and work upon the public and how the researcher's lived experience might enhance the process itself. Paired with a research narrative that culminates in a collaboration with the Charleston Museum to build a sense of public memory about the Grimké sisters, this article presents an expanded and more complex understanding of the Grimké's and the seeds of their rhetorical agency. Recovered through feminist rhetorical historiography, the Grimké sisters emerge from the skewed lens of historical tourism into clear focus as nascent social reformers.*

Keywords: *Grimké, Sarah Grimké, Angelina Grimké, public memory, Charleston, South Carolina, historiography, archive, archival research, rhetorical history, research narrative, rhetorical agency, feminist rhetorical historiography, historical tourism, social reformers, Kenneth Burke*

Sarah and Angelina Grimké, nineteenth century abolitionist agents and early women's rights activists, delivered nearly 100 speeches on their tour of New England, wrote public letters arguing for the right to speak out against the injustice of slavery, and lent their voices to the influential *American Slavery As It Is* (1839). While teaching women's rhetoric in South Carolina, I used Sarah's *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman* to show an early feminist statement on the social construction of gender and Angelina's "Speech in Pennsylvania Hall" to display rhetorical skill amidst the threat of mob violence. The more I taught with them, the more I wanted to know about what formed their character during childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood in Charleston, South Carolina. I became interested in uncovering what familial, social, religious, and educational influences contributed to the sisters' rhetorical agency as activists and reformers in the North. What was it about their early lives that influenced their thinking enough to leave all they knew and strike out alone? Diaries, letters, speeches, and essays provide

documentation of Sarah and Angelina's public lives in the North, after they had joined the Society of Friends in Philadelphia and later, when they worked with the American Anti-Slavery Society. Scholarly studies and biographies (Lerner, Lumpkin, Perry, Bushkovitch, Wilbanks, and Browne) contribute historical or rhetorical analyses of their time and work in the North, but there are few records of their early lives in the South.¹

In addition to reckoning with the paucity of primary material about the Grimké sisters' early lives, I was particularly disappointed to find that there had been almost no public acknowledgment of the Grimkés in their home town, a city famous for historical tourism. At the time I began my research, all I had found was their picture included in the Fort Sumter tour boat facility exhibit. Despite their role in history, or perhaps because of it, today, in this city of monuments, there is no monument to these women whose work helped to change the lives of all its citizens. Their widely circulated and influential anti-slavery appeals and their success as the first female anti-slavery agents gave them such notoriety that their pamphlets were burned, and they were warned never to return to Charleston.² The public opposition they faced during their lifetimes was followed over time by an erasure from Charleston public memory, remarkable in its completeness. Trying to locate young Sarah and Angelina in a time and place where women were mostly absent from public record, I read all I could find, researching archives and special collections and exploring historic sites. What I found was a silence so tenacious that it fueled my desire and subsequent efforts to insert the sisters into the public memory of Charleston, shifting my original goal of analyzing the sisters' early rhetorical influences to actually doing the rhetorical work of creating public memory.

1 Sarah's diary entries are dated from 1819-1836, when she was an adult, and detail her adult spiritual journey, rather than daily events or memories of childhood. A few remembrances of her childhood were written in 1827 (when she was 35), when she had been living in Philadelphia. Angelina burned some of her diaries, but in 2003 the University of South Carolina Press published her 1828-1835 diary entries (written when she was 23-30), which has proven helpful in understanding her intensely spiritual struggle as she made her decision to leave the south at the age of thirty. The limited knowledge of their youth that exists stems primarily from Catherine Birney's 1885 book, which does not document sources.

2 In *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Women's Rights and Abolition* (1967), Gerda Lerner claims that Appeal to the Christian Women of the Southern States (1836) "was publicly burned by the postmaster" and that the "Charleston police warned Mrs. Grimké that they had been instructed to prevent her daughter from ever visiting the city again. If she should attempt to come and elude the police, she would be arrested and imprisoned until she could be placed on a boat and sent North" (100).

This article tells the story of my work to find evidence of the Grimké sisters in eighteenth and nineteenth century Charleston in order to then build a sense of public memory about them and eventually collaborate with the Charleston Museum to create a display about the Grimké sisters in one of their family homes.

Recent developments in feminist historiographic and archival research methods offered valuable approaches that helped me negotiate the obstacles inherent in such recovery work. In "Remembering Sappho: New Perspectives on Teaching (and Writing) Women's Rhetorical History" (2011), Jessica Enoch and Jordynn Jack build upon the work of Cheryl Glenn, Krista Ratcliffe, and others to describe and model a new methodological direction in women's rhetorical history which asks researchers to look to the absences and the silences, the places where there are questions, rather than the places with ready answers. They say that the question "is not so much whether these women are remembered or forgotten, but how they are remembered and forgotten" (534). Given the public opposition to the Grimké sisters in nineteenth century Charleston as well as their absence from public memory today, these women seem to have been "forgotten" on purpose and possibly remembered only hesitantly and awkwardly today. For instance, an early twentieth century request for information about the sisters from Louisa Poppenheim, publisher of the *Keystone*, a magazine for women's groups across South Carolina, was met with this response from A.S. Salley, the secretary of the Historical Commission of South Carolina: "Those women were unbalanced mentally, morally, and socially, and the capable historical or literary critic of to-day would anywhere regard it as a case of hysteria [sic] to see them put down as exponents of the best in the South." Poppenheim was urged to "[k]ill the myth if you can and stick a steel pen charged with your brightest sarcasm into its carcass if you cannot kill it." This vehement reaction from a public official charged with protecting and promoting South Carolina's history suggests that the suppression of connections between the Grimké sisters and the South was at one time purposeful on an institutional level, not merely an accident of history. If public memory is the way a society views its history – a set of beliefs that are constructed by that society to help it understand itself, it can be inferred that, collectively, Charleston and South Carolina do not see and/or do not present the full picture of their important history. Part of what I still seek to do, then, is present details that provide a fuller, richer picture of early nineteenth century Charleston, South Carolina and this particular family. A more accurate historical narrative can influence the public memory, celebrating the fact that this town produced women of principle, intelligence, eloquence, and bravery and acknowledging and remedying the suppression of those same qualities in memory and into the future.

This article presents these historical details within the structure of a research narrative informed by and infused with a rhetorical (Burkean, feminist) analysis of selected documents, historic sites, tours, museums, and memorials that inform the public memory or lack thereof. One general result is a more complex understanding of the Grimké and Charleston, which extends to a better understanding of this time in U.S. history and the abolition and women's rights movements as well as of the twentieth and twenty-first century commemorative culture of the city. More specifically, though, the journey itself – the research and the public memory work -- shows in Charleston a deeply entrenched historical and cultural narrative created and communicated with a sort of linguistic “blinder” that prevents the acknowledgement of the assignment of value to the women who step outside of it. Reformers and activists on behalf of slaves and women, educated, logical, spiritual, and outspoken in their devotion to justice, Sarah and Angelina ended up on the unpopular or unromantic side of popular southern history – something I seek to change. In the process, I hope this article joins the conversation about feminist historiographic and archival research methodology, offering evidence to support the meta-rhetorical stance of Enoch and Jack. And, as always with rhetoric, this work points to the power, responsibility, and potential that come with word-work.

Maintaining a reflexive stance during the research process adds a layer to the investigation that can prove insightful as well. Addressing the articulation of methodology in feminist rhetorical practice, Gesa Kirsch and Jacqueline Jones Royster promote the concept of inquiry-based exploration of women's texts. In “Feminist Rhetorical Practices: In Search of Excellence” (2010) they describe the act of writing about the process of investigating archives. The reflexive quality of this type of feminist research focuses attention to the act of researching and examining archives and insists “that we pay attention to how lived experience shapes our perspectives as researchers and those of our subjects. . . . It entails an open stance, strategic contemplation, and creating a space where we can see and hold contradictions without rushing to immediate closure” (664). Like many colonial era historic sites, Charleston is full of such contradictions. To fully explore the material and rhetorical context found in its archives, historic homes, churches, public buildings, forts, gardens, memorials, and museums requires holding an open stance, without rushing to a twenty-first century judgment that limits our view. This hyper-aware, metacognitive approach to work in feminist historiography opened pathways for me that have led to a nuanced understanding of the Grimké of South Carolina, that not only provided insight into their eventual roles as rhetors and activists, but also has the potential to change the narrative about women in the South.

The Grimké's in the Public Memory

I am not the first to seek to focus the general public's attention on the Grimké sisters. After Angelina's death in 1879, her husband and fellow activist Theodore Weld published a memorial book containing funeral addresses by notable attendees, such as abolitionist and suffragist Lucy Stone. "Printed only for private circulation," the hardbound book also contains remembrances of Sarah's life and work as well as funeral remarks after her death in 1873 by William Lloyd Garrison. In 1885 their friend Catherine Birney published a biography, *The Grimké Sisters, Sarah and Angelina Grimké; The First American Women Advocates of Abolition and Woman's Rights*, seeking to "pay what tribute I might to the memory of two of the noblest women of the country" (preface). They were forgotten for almost a century, when another biography, *The Emancipation of Angelina Grimké*, was published by Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin in 1974. But it was Gerda Lerner's 1967 *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Women's Rights and Abolition* that became the touchstone for academic research on the Grimké's. Over the next few decades, as feminists worked to recover silenced female voices in history and literature, the Grimké's slowly found their way into college-level anthologies and articles that establish their contribution to feminist thought and to the rhetorical tradition of women's writing, speaking, and activism. Recovering these women has created a stronger sense of our national history with respect not only to the abolition and women's rights reform movements, but also to the study of the writing and rhetorical practices of nineteenth century American women, the role of the Society of Friends in social and political movements, and a glimpse into aspects of both southern and northern culture, social, and family life. We see a broader picture of the time period, the intensity of its political, economic, and social issues, the genre conventions used by the Grimké's and their contemporaries, and we start to see connections to our own lives and thoughts and, for me at least, a sense of wonder at the temerity and the sisterhood that bolstered their decisions and efforts.

Still, on the book jacket of educator Mary Bushkovitch's 1992 *The Grimké's of Charleston*, she writes that she was shocked to have never heard of them and "resolved to write a book about them so that no student, black or white, could even again say, 'I grew up in South Carolina without ever having heard of Sarah and Angelina Grimké.'" Yet here in 2016 I am reporting that my own South Carolinian students, black and white, say that they had never heard of them before my class. Despite a direct treatment of slavery and native populations, the current South Carolina Academic Social Studies Standards (2011) do not include the Grimké's, when they do include other abolitionists and other

South Carolina historical figures, primarily male.³ The Grimké sisters are recovered to an extent in post-secondary education, but k-12 students only encounter the sisters when individual teachers choose to integrate them, keeping the general public largely ignorant of their considerable contribution to history. Though Sue Monk Kidd's recent fictional treatment of young Sarah in *The Invention of Wings* (2014) has raised awareness, the question remains, why has there not been a more enduring, consistent, and wide-spread understanding of these important figures? Why academic interest has not filtered into public schools and public memory in South Carolina and elsewhere deserves attention if it is to be remedied.

Like other southern cities after the Civil War, Charleston experienced a long period of economic decline. Part of Charleston's effort to reverse this trend was to build a tourism industry, capitalizing on the city's history and architecture. In their study of the city's commemorative landscape and its indication of and implications for race relations, Ethan Kytle and Blain Roberts say that even more strongly than the design and placement of statues, designation of large portions of the city as an historic preservation district during the first half of the twentieth century allowed white, elite Charleston to control the way the city communicated its history and character (671-3). Preservation societies sought and received tax exemptions and federal funding for restoration of historically significant homes, and architectural review boards controlled specifications for improvements. "The private spaces of the white elite, in other words, became the sites of official public memory" (672). Kytle and Roberts describe this "historical erasure":

Keeping with the Colonial Revival fashion of their day, Charleston preservationists also emphasized the colonial and Revolutionary significance of the homes they guarded. . . . Not surprisingly, slavery was left out of the past these homes presented to visitors, despite the fact that slaves had built, lived in, and labored on the properties. . . . The promotional literature that accompanied this tourist boom featured a historical narrative that became—and essentially still is—the official history of Charleston. Guidebooks emphasized the opulence and social harmony of days gone by, while largely ignoring slavery. . . . By locating their historical memory in the built landscape of the city, and

3 When specific figures to be covered are included, abolitionists listed are: Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison and John Brown (fourth grade). South Carolina figures that are listed: John C. Calhoun, Francis Marion, Robert Smalls, Ben Tillman, Mary McLeod Bethune, and SC civil rights leaders Septima Poinsette Clark, Modjeska Monteith Simkins, and Matthew J. Perry (8th grade).

by teaching both locals and tourists how to navigate it, whites had removed the most troubling aspects of Charleston's past from its public spaces by the middle of the twentieth century. (672-3)

In essence, through its historic homes and buildings, whether private or made public for tours, and accompanying narratives found in books and heard on tours, Charleston has created a breathtakingly beautiful presentation of itself that, at best, glosses over its darker aspects, most notably slavery.

Today, Charleston's success in tourism is clear: *Condé Nast Traveler* named the city the top tourist destination in the world in 2012 and in the United States for the years 2011-2014. Citing the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture and the opening of the Old Slave Mart Museum in 2007, some journalists (Rothstein, Hambrick) speculate that the city is beginning to acknowledge its slave past, but they also point to its "long tradition of silence" and the need for "something more systematic" (Rothstein). In 2008 the Toni Morrison Foundation installed a Bench by the Road marker on nearby Sullivan's Island to mark the slave port of entry. Even the hotly contested Denmark Vesey monument broke ground, although in less central Hampton Park, rather than the more touristy Marion Square, as Kytte and Roberts remark.⁴ It is notable that following the publication of Kidd's novel, the Preservation Society of Charleston included an *Invention of Wings* tour in its fall tour of homes. While gratified over its popularity, tour guide Carol Ezell-Gilson worries that there won't be an enduring acknowledgment of the Grimké's. A Charleston native who went to school in the center of the historic district, Ezell-Gilson never heard of the Grimké sisters until one brief mention in the tour guide licensure study materials thirty years ago.⁵ And Kidd reports that she first learned of the sisters from a museum in New York and "was astonished to discover they were from Charleston, South Carolina, the same city in

4 Denmark Vesey was a free black man who planned a violent slave rebellion in Charleston in 1822. The plan failed and he and his followers were executed. Supporters of the monument portray him as a freedom fighter and opponents portray him as a terrorist. The project took eighteen years to complete and there were eruptions of public opposition at various stages in planning, securing the site, fundraising, unveiling, etc. Vesey historian Douglas Egerton remarks upon the "historical myopia" in Charleston that "bills itself as one of the nation's most historic cities" when unable to develop an understanding of the circumstances that lead people to attempt this violence. For an example of the two arguments, see Egerton, Douglas R. "Abolitionist or Terrorist?" *New York Times* 26 Feb. 2014. A25 and Hunter, Jack. "Denmark Vesey Was a Terrorist: Targeting innocent civilians is never justified, and shouldn't be honored" *Charleston City Paper* 10 Feb. 2010.

5 Ezell-Gilson, Carol, telephone conversation with author, January 9, 2015. Ezell-Gilson and her sister, Lee-Ann Bain created The Original Grimké Sisters Tour.

which I was then living" ("Conversation"). Time and again, those of us who stumble upon the story of these remarkable women and their family marvel at their absence from mainstream Charleston and South Carolina history. Most of the historic and tourist literature and landscape is still oddly silent on slavery as well, quite a feat for a city that saw the transport of 25 to 40 percent of the estimated 360,000-500,000 slaves that came to the United States (qtd. in Kytte and Roberts).

From a Burkean perspective, the Grimké sisters' absence—and, by extension, the absence of the notion of abolitionist sentiment in the nineteenth century South—perpetuates a limited sense of the city's history, "directing the attention" of the public away from slavery, abolition, and women's rights and toward the genteel architectural and colonial character of Charleston. Charleston's efforts to pull itself out of decline by purposefully going about making the "south of broad" area historic has, in essence, "white-washed" much of Charleston's history for its visitors and, decades later, for its residents. By choosing one set of memories to preserve, it is neglecting another. This Burkean perspective, the recognition of a narrative's tendency to "direct the attention" through one terministic screen, when paired with the feminist historiographic stance of looking at the absences/silences, can, in fact, reveal what is hidden, forgotten, or ignored. By noting what is there, how it is presented, and why, we can then look to that-which-is-not presented. An awareness of the rhetorical nature of the cityscape and its accompanying narrative, then, can shift the attention and, in fact, point the researcher *back* to the people, places, events, facts, and artifacts from which the attention was directed. And an examination of the rhetorical acts of historic preservation and (re)presentation points to possible motives, causes us to ask questions, and offers ways to create a more inclusive presentation of history.



Figure 1. Heyward Washington House Signage.



Figure 2. Heyward Washington House, 87 Church St., Charleston. Sarah Grimké lived here as a young child.

In Search of the Grimkés in Charleston: Sites of Erasure

Filled with questions, I began searching for the Grimkés on trips to Charleston and the surrounding low country. Upon a visit to Magnolia Plantation, a property whose house did not survive the Civil War, but whose remarkable gardens did, I watched an introductory film about the Drayton family who still owns the property, and the Rev. John Grimké Drayton, who began the gardens in the nineteenth century. The film indicated that this Drayton was a nephew of Angelina and Sarah. After the tour I asked the interpreter about the family connection, and she said that the Grimké townhouse was on Church Street in Charleston. Later, walking up and down Church Street for any sort of historic marker, I found the Heyward-Washington House, one of several historic homes in the city open to the public. I took the tour, hoping to hear something about the Grimké sisters, but there was no mention of them. Built in 1772, the house, beautifully and painstakingly restored to reflect a colonial-era Charleston home, is on the National Register of Historic Places because it was owned by Declaration of Independence signer Thomas Heyward, Jr., and because George Washington stayed there on his tour of the southern states in 1791. Thinking I may have had the wrong house, after the tour I asked the interpreter if the Grimkés ever lived there. She said yes, they did live there, after the Heyward family. Later, I confirmed through the National Historic Register website that in 1794 the home was sold to “a Mr. Grimké.”⁶ Though buoyed by my successful sleuthing, I became irritated by how difficult it was to find information on Sarah and Angelina in Charleston. All I had found so far were indirect, incidental indications of their presence in the area, mostly brought about by my own questioning. Why was this the case? Shouldn't a historic site include as many significant aspects of its history as possible? Is it not possible that some of the artifacts found on the property belonged to

6 Sarah, born in 1792, would have lived in the house from its purchase in 1794 until the family moved to the more spacious 321 E. Bay Street. Purchased from William Blake, a wealthy planter, the Bay Street home (built in 1789) now contains a law practice and the Historic Charleston Foundation holds a protective covenant on it. As with the Church Street house, the historic marker on the Bay Street house made no mention of the Grimkés, simply calling it “The Blake House.” I was able to find the house through the direction of descendant Bill Grimké-Drayton. I had been directed to two different locations (one further south on Bay Street and one on Tradd Street) before finding Bill's blog and contacting him.

Sarah, her parents or her siblings? Was it the patriarchal lens of so much of our written history that eclipsed Sarah and Angelina in favor of Heyward and his presidential houseguest?

The relative silence surrounding the Grimké sisters seemed incredible to me, given other historic sites' efforts to present a more inclusive picture of history today. For instance, Historic Jamestowne, Virginia, the site of the first permanent English settlement in North America, presents its story as a "coming together of people from three continents: Native American, English, and African," with the park's introductory film discussing the colony from each perspective in the three different voices. Another notable example of a straightforward presentation of the darker, uncomfortable aspects of our nation's history is "Slavery at Jefferson's Monticello: Paradox of Liberty" at the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of American History in 2012, but now with the permanent exhibit at Monticello: "Landscape of Slavery: Mulberry Row at Monticello." Developed by the National Museum of African American History and Culture in conjunction with the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, it examines Jefferson's contradictions as a slave owner and shaper of our country's principles of liberty and equality, complicating and enriching our understanding of our American heritage. And while not integral to the primary house tours, it is notable that the major Charleston area plantations, such as Drayton Hall, have developed separate tours, exhibits, or educational programs about the experience of enslaved Africans.⁷ These are examples of historic sites whose managers, whether the National Park Service, historic society foundations, or private owners, have made the decision to present a fuller, albeit darker and more complex picture of history to the public, in essence shaping a public memory that not merely includes, but integrates the stories and perspectives of American Indians and enslaved Africans. Charleston has taken steps to include the African American experience, yet the story of the slave trade is not integrated into the fabric of the city today, as was the trade itself prior to the Civil War. The lives and contributions of women are blatantly absent and the

7 As of the writing of this article, Drayton Hall admissions now includes "Connections: Africa to America" program. Visitors may also see African American cemetery on site. Boone Hall admission now includes Black History In America Exhibit, The Slave Street and History Tour, and a seasonal program "Exploring The Gullah Culture." The "From Slavery to Freedom" tour is offered at an additional price at Magnolia Plantation, though regular admission price is lower than the others. Middleton Place admission includes "Beyond the Fields" walking tour.

absence of the Grimké sisters, in particular, deprives the public of strong female models for nonviolent resistance to slavery.⁸

Struck by these absences, I began to investigate in earnest this silence surrounding the Grimkés. Mindful of the ways humans use language to “direct the attention,” I began listening to as many people as possible. I threw myself into the city, listening to tour guides, tourists, librarians, archivists, and fellow researchers, always with the goal in mind to “find” the Grimkés in Charleston, to find rhetorical evidence of them. In particular, I listened for the language used to talk about them, when they were talked about.

Seeking the Grimkés in the Archives

My first stop was the College of Charleston Special Collections. There, the archivist showed me the few items they had at the time that mentioned the Grimké family: an 1830 circular for a Bible society, of which favorite brother Thomas was chair, and a 1797 letter to the judge, their father.⁹ In the catalog there did not seem to be anything directly referencing any female family members. As I was reading through the two items, a young man came in to request some materials. As he sat down to read, he asked me what I was researching. When I told him, he said that he knew who they were, but they were notorious and not subjects that were brought up. He turned out to be a carriage driver who was doing research to help him answer questions on his tours. That a tour guide in Charleston knew about the Grimkés but knew not to acknowledge them implies that the Grimkés are, in fact, ignored on purpose. Stunned, I wondered whether this was about projecting a more pleasant version of history for tourism, about racism and sexism, or about a circle-the-wagons mentality that stubbornly resists uncomfortable truths.

As I continued to look through the limited resources, I noticed that the letter to the judge mentioned that he was a resident of both Charleston and Union District. Knowing he had at least two plantations elsewhere, I thought I would try to identify the location of his property in Union District, thinking that

8 A notable exception to the lack of memorials to women is civil rights activist and educator Septima Poinsette Clark. Among other public acknowledgments, U.S. Highway 17 in Charleston is named the Septima P. Clark Parkway.

9 Since that visit, the College of Charleston Special Collections acquired several boxes of Grimké family papers. Among the many papers spanning subsequent generations, there is a letter written by Mary Smith Grimké that affirms some events from Angelina's diary, a letter from Sarah on the occasion of her father's death, and a letter from Angelina, much later, on the occasion of Sarah's death.

it could provide some insight into Sarah, who recounts staying at a country home in her remembrances. The archivists helped me find an 1825 map of South Carolina and I was surprised to see how far into the piedmont Union District (now Union County) sits (easily 200 miles from Charleston). While I was taking pictures of this map, the archivist brought out a book she described as "historical fiction." I was going to discount it, supposing that I could not glean anything useful about real life from historical fiction, but given the limited resources available I decided to at least flip through it. This decision to remain open to possibilities, rather than stay rigid to only what seemed obviously relevant, was a good one. This book turned out to be the Mary Bushkovitch book, in which she decries the absence of the Grimké sisters from public education. Warmed by the discovery of a kindred spirit, yet distressed at the lack of impact her book made in this town, I pressed on.

The College of Charleston online catalog lists resources at other cooperating sites, such as the Charleston County Public Library and the South Carolina Historical Society. There were Grimké family files at the SCHS¹⁰, so I made it my next stop. Knowing that archives are organized differently than libraries, my plan was to rely both on what I knew was there from prior catalog searches and on the expertise of the archivist, who suggested related files. I was first handed files of loose papers, which were newspaper and magazine articles that told the story of the Grimké sisters for public consumption. There did not seem to be anything I did not already know from prior reading, so I turned to a stack of microfilm. After wrestling with film after film of the judge's Revolutionary War supply requisitions, thinking I had run into another dead end, I was just about to pack it in, but I took a second look at one of the folders that contained twentieth century newspaper and magazine articles about the family. In that folder, I found a reprinted article from an 1831 edition of *The Charleston Courier* describing a carriage accident. A public drain near Church and Tradd streets fell in and spooked the horse, which took off down Tradd, turned the corner at Bay but was blocked by other carriages, turned the corner at Broad too quickly, and then tipped the carriage and crashed. Who was in the carriage? Mary Smith Grimké, called by the Courier "the venerable relict of the late Judge Grimké." According to the article, the carriage was "broken literally into fragments":

A crowd gathered, and took Mrs. Grimke, who was alone in the carriage, and the driver, from under the ruins, having most providentially

10 While administrative offices remain at the Fireproof Building, the archives themselves were moved to the climate-controlled College of Charleston Adlestone Library Special Collections in late 2014 – early 2015.

escaped with their lives, although Mrs. Grimke received a severe concussion on the head, and we understand is otherwise seriously injured. The driver is said to be so much injured in the spine as to endangered [sic] his life. ("Serious Accident")

This was the first piece of information I had found that I had not encountered in any other source. The discovery of the newspaper article, the first direct reference I saw to a female Grimké, sent me back into the loose paper files in hopes that a second look would reveal a small detail that may shed light on the sisters or provide a reference to a connected person or place that I could research further. Other than the microfilm pictures of the father's war correspondence, none of these files held original documents, but I thought that the path to recovering these women might be an indirect one, so I proceeded. Right away, I found typed copies of several family wills, one of which was the 1838 will of Mary Smith Grimké, in which "All the Rest and Residue of my Estate, I leave to be divided among my Daughters, inproportion [sic] to the amounts each received from their Father's Estate, that is to say, the one who received most from the said Estate, is to receive least from my Estate; and the one who received least is to receive most" (Grimké Family History and Genealogy Research Files). In other words, after having paid her debts, given her sons some cash, and given her daughters and son Henry some special, personal gifts, she bequeathed the remainder to her daughters in inverse proportion to how the judge's will read. Looking, then, at his will (1818), he gave from oldest son to youngest son, then oldest daughter to youngest. She not only gave to the girls first, youngest to oldest, but also makes the point of *remarking* that her order is the opposite of her husband's order. This spirit, to go against convention to take care of her girls, to even things out after her own death, provides great insight into her personality, her relationship with her children, and especially her thoughts on how their gender affected their lives. Clearly, she created her will with a sense of purposefulness beyond the norm, exercising her sense of agency to influence the future in the one legal means available to her as an upper class woman in the nineteenth century.¹¹ Her will broadens our conception of the character of Mary Smith Grimké: she had great regard for her children, she recognized gender inequities in the law, and she acted on principle with respect to her children. Sarah and Angelina went against convention every time they spoke in public, and also in many other aspects of their lives. Like their mother, they used the means they felt

11 It is also interesting to note that along with her son Henry as executor, she also names her five daughters as "executrixes." The judge had been a proponent of naming women as executrixes of wills, naming his wife sole executrix of his will in 1818.

were available to them to have a voice. This newfound understanding of Mary, a scion of Charleston society aligned at least in this one way with her feminist daughters, could help change assumptions about the agency of women in the nineteenth century South if included in the historical narrative.

As it was closing time at the archives, I reluctantly gathered my materials and headed outside. I made my way to a shaded bench in Washington Square and just sat still and thought. Kirsch and Royster encourage us to engage the materiality of the archive, to notice the process, to sit and revel in it, contemplate, reflect, and give ourselves a chance to notice what has “been there all along but unnoticed” (658). That is what I had done, was doing. As I sat in the park lined with statues and memorials of male war heroes, I was mindful of the difficulty of finding that article and those wills. Given the dearth of primary documents by or about women in this time period and location, if I had kept a narrow focus and eliminated anything that didn’t mention Sarah and Angelina directly, I would have missed the newspaper article and possibly the wills, or the implication of what was in the wills. I could have safely drawn conclusions about the way women have been written out of history, but I would have missed evidence of Mary’s sense of purpose and agency on behalf of her daughters. I was grateful that day for the guidance from theorists and methodologists in feminist historiography and for whoever had donated or compiled those files, so that I could, indeed, notice what had been there, all along.¹²

Directing my attention from what was not there to what *was* there allowed me to experience the archive as heuristic, affirming for me the need to be open to discovery, rather than narrowly focused, and to allow discovery to lead to new questions or to the modification of the original line of inquiry. Moving beyond the archive as repository and allowing its structure to lead inquiry should remind twenty first century researchers of the need to set aside limiting mindsets, remaining aware of all variables and positions and holding in our hands and minds all perspectives in order to remain open to possibilities. Kirsch and Royster call this *critical imagination*. They ask:

When we study women of the past, especially those whose voices have rarely been heard or studied by rhetoricians, how do we render their work and lives meaningfully? How do we honor their traditions? How do we transport ourselves back to the time and context in which

12 I later learned that these files were compiled by Mabel Webber, a genealogist and an editor of the SC Historical Magazine in the early 20th century. Greene, Harlan, Head, Special Collections, College of Charleston Addlestone Library, email, May 19, 2015.

they lived, knowing full well that it is not possible to see things from their vantage point? (648)

Their answer involves a rhetorical listening, a repeated, reflective listening to and for the women in their contexts with “an *ethos* of humility, respect, and care,” without returning to “our assumptions and expectations” (649). Acknowledging the difficulty of this task when faced with beliefs, customs, or opinions with which we do not agree, such as slavery and sexism, they advise us “to attend to our own levels of comfort and discomfort, to withhold quick judgment, to read and reread texts and interpret artifacts within the context of the women’s chronologies, to interrogate the extent to which our own presence, values, and attitudes shape our interpretations of historical figures and periods” (652), not, I believe, in order to deny that subjectivity, but to acknowledge it systematically as an essential part of the research process. Despite her daughters’ campaign to convince her to free her slaves, Mary Smith Grimké remained a slave owner all her life. Yet we can still withhold judgment long enough to recognize in her an awareness of gender inequality and a desire to act against it, and to speculate about this influence on her daughters. Perhaps it is not a surprise to find a copy of the Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s Letters in the Grimké estate inventory (Inventory). Creating an authentic public memory of the Grimké sisters will mean rendering Mary Smith Grimké in her complexity: slave owner, church member, wife, mother, grandmother, nascent feminist.

Seeking the Grimkés in Tour Narratives

The next day, I found it more difficult to remain open and reserve judgment about the selective memory being presented in Charleston. When I took a popular two-hour walking tour of the city, there was almost no discussion of the role of slavery or the role of women; the tour highlighted churches, houses of architectural interest, evidence of the old city wall, and the harbor, and the discussion was, indeed, about Charleston at its economic and cultural peak, leading up to the Revolutionary War. Even though the slave trade was ubiquitous in the colonial era, I believe most people connect slavery with the antebellum period (ie *Gone with the Wind*). So, the tour I took purposefully focused the attention away from the unpleasantness of slavery, the guide beginning the walk with the admonishment, “If you think you are going to see *Gone with the Wind*, you are wrong. Charleston is a colonial city.”

Peopled mostly by northern tourists (I know this because the tour guide asked us to introduce ourselves before we began walking), it was when we reached White Point Gardens when a woman asked about race relations in Charleston. The guide, a forty-year resident of Charleston originally from Connecticut, said it was as good as it is anywhere. The tourist commented that

it seemed hard to believe, because of slavery. The guide then remarked that arrogant northern abolitionists would speak of slavery, but they had never been to the South. I pointed out that Sarah and Angelina Grimké were abolitionists from Charleston and *did* give witness to the horrors of slavery. Acknowledging the Grimké's, the guide quickly backed tracked and said she was responding to the original question about race relations today. Stumbling through this exchange, the guide was clearly uncomfortable discussing slavery and race. She made the point that the original slave traders were Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch and that the English began trading to avoid paying tariffs to foreign countries. It was almost as if this information was meant to defray blame, rather than acknowledge complicity. Again, I found myself wondering at this reticence to "look the thing in the face." Is it a desire to "get past" slavery, to not be defined by its slave past? As a southerner, I can recognize this perspective as I can also see the stubborn resistance to the insistence from outsiders that the South acknowledge and deal substantively with its past. Yet, as Lerner says, "Such collective forgetting of the dark side of events is hurtful to the individual as well as to the entire society, because one cannot heal nor can one make better decisions in the future, if one evades responsibility for the consequences of past actions" (52). The frank presentation of slavery in the Jamestown settlement, the Jefferson exhibit, and even the Old Slave Mart Museum in Charleston more inclusively reframes the collective memory, as would a frank acknowledgement of the Grimké sisters and abolition.

Capitalizing on these native daughters could be a good thing for Charleston. If Sarah and Angelina were featured more prominently at Magnolia Plantation, on walking tours, and especially at the Heyward-Washington House they would appear as a natural, expected, and valued part of the historical landscape in Charleston. Their very absence is more glaring than would be their inclusion: it is this glaring absence that communicates a lingering world view that still marginalizes women who step outside of their gender and class roles to exercise their voice in civic reform, especially on behalf of the slave. Telling the Grimké sisters' story as groundbreaking thinkers and reformers in the early years of our nation would reframe the public memory of the sisters and affirm Charleston's importance to United States history in a way that is consistent with and would add depth to the current narrative of Charleston as a city of influence and culture.

Building Public Memory of the Grimké's with the Museum of Charleston

In light of the silences I encountered around the Grimké's, I was compelled to do something in a tangible way to increase the public memory of the Grimké's.



Figure 3. Grimké sisters display, Heyward Washington House.

Since museums and monuments are sites for the construction of public memory, one way I could help insert the Grimké into the public memory in Charleston was to approach the museum that runs the Heyward-Washington House. Known as America's first museum, the Charleston Museum was established in 1773 by the Charleston Library Society. Today, it is comprised of its

main location on Meeting Street, where it houses collections emphasizing Charleston's and coastal South Carolina's natural and material culture, such as textiles, silver, Revolutionary and Civil War artifacts, and prehistoric animal skeletons. It also operates two historic houses that are National Historic Landmarks, one of which is the Heyward-Washington House. Concerned by the lack of public acknowledgment of these women in Charleston in particular and South Carolina in general, my goal was to convince the museum to create a display of some sort in the Heyward-Washington House.

First, I wrote a rhetorically well-crafted letter to the director of the museum, opening with my appreciation of the Heyward-Washington House, and transitioning to my mission, rationale, and request. I used much of what I knew about persuasion: a pleasant and respectful exordium to make my audience amenable to my message; an *ethos*-building statement of fact, giving my audience information needed prior to making a decision, including a quick, hard-hitting list of the Grimké sisters' achievements to emphasize their importance in history and to show the level of my own research; a clear request/call to action that I connected to the museum's mission statement; a humble and helpful closing that left the door open for further conversation. I followed up with a phone call to the director, during which we set up a meeting that was to take place a couple of months later, after the holidays. At the long-anticipated meeting, which was attended by the director, the assistant director, and the chief interpreter of historic houses, we discussed my findings, interesting connections with their own research, and then my proposal. Pointing out that the purpose of the house was to show colonial life and furniture, the director still agreed to a small display in the house because of the sisters' historical significance. Assuring the staff that I could, indeed, write concise copy for displays, I offered to help. In the space of a few months, we worked together to place

in one of the two front rooms a picture of the sisters with some words about their achievements and the family connection to the house. The copy reads:

Charleston natives Sarah Moore Grimké and Angelina Emily Grimké Weld became noted abolitionists and women's rights activists. Their parents, Mary Moore Smith and Judge John F. Grimké, purchased this house from Thomas Heyward, Jr., in 1794. Sarah, born in 1792, lived here until the family moved in 1803 to another townhouse, at 321 East Bay Street. Angelina was born in 1805. As adults, the sisters moved to Philadelphia, joined the Society of Friends, and became the first female anti-slavery agents. Sarah wrote public letters condemning slavery and defending the rights of women. Angelina, a gifted speaker, was the first woman to speak to a legislative body in the United States.

The display is small, approximately 12 x 12 inches, and it is placed in a glass-fronted display shelf along with miniatures of the Heyward family, silver and china associated with the Heywards, and pictures of the house as it appeared prior to its restoration. It was a small step, but an important intervention into public memory since its presence can prompt the interpreters to comment on the sisters at the beginning of the tour.¹³ In addition, the museum updated its webpage for the house to name the judge as subsequent owner and father to Sarah and Angelina, though regrettably it lists "Angeline" and calls them abolitionists and "suffragettes."

A few months after its installation, I was in Charleston for another research trip and I decided to visit the Heyward-Washington House to see the display in person and test whether or not it would prompt the interpreter to discuss Sarah and Angelina. In fact, the interpreter on duty that day did not mention them when we were in the front room. When she asked if there were any questions, I asked her about the Grimké sisters. Her response was to wrinkle up her nose and state that she didn't like that the display was in the house. At that point I had told her that I was responsible for it being there, so she did not tell me exactly what was behind her disdain, although I think it had something to do with their physical appearance. Showing the sisters toward the ends of their lives, the images are the only ones readily available for reproduction. They look stern, tired, and are dressed plainly, and in my experience in giving visual presentations about the sisters, their unattractiveness always

13 Since the project began in the classroom, I kept it connected to the classroom, using the entire project and also the letter itself to teach rhetorical theory, rhetorical strategies, and research methods and to model real-life applications that make a difference in our communities.



Figure 4. Above: Front view of newly dedicated Blake Grimké House, 321 East Bay St. Both Sarah and Angelina lived here.

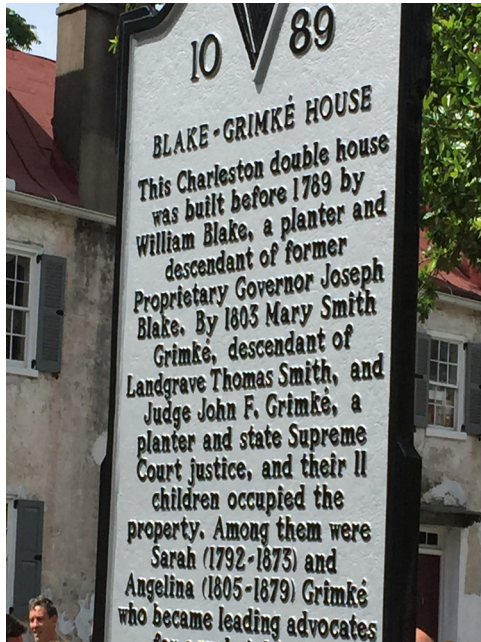


Figure 5. Right: Newly installed historical marker in front of the Blake-Grimké House.

gets a negative response that I feel I have to answer. My dander up, I said, "nevertheless, they are important to history, so it is important that they are in the house." I was crestfallen that they were not highlighted by the interpreter that day, whether because their appearance didn't match the beauty of the home or that their lives and vocation didn't match the narrative of the Southern lady. I learned that day that if something is not in the interpreters' notebook for the house, it isn't necessarily covered in the tour. If future steps involve asking that they be included in the notebook, how they are presented will be vital. Describing them as well-educated reformers, abolitionists, women's rights activists, daughters of a Revolutionary War patriot, and sisters of an educational reformer and unionist ties them to the narrative of the house as colonial, revolutionary, patriotic, and progressive. Yet, as with the Jefferson exhibit, it is also essential to deal with the clash of ideals of this family as slaveholders. Clearly, creating public memory is a multi-pronged, prolonged process involving a more sustained and comprehensive approach to promotion and education.

Conclusion: Seizing the Kairotic Moment

Capitalizing on the popularity of the Kidd novel, the Friends of the Library at the College of Charleston spearheaded an effort to erect a state historical marker at the Blake House, a later Grimké residence on Bay Street where much of the novel's action takes place. The dedication on May 5, 2015, coinciding nicely with the book's paperback release, was well-attended with remarks from Kidd and Mayor Riley. Yet, there is more work ahead. Seizing the kairotic moment could involve pursuing a similar acknowledgement at the Heyward-Washington House. Such permanent, visual sites infused with the authority of state and national agencies reframe the historic, civic, and tourist narrative in powerful ways, altering public memory over time. To have the Heyward-Washington House renamed the Heyward-Washington-Grimké House and to have the federal historic markers there corrected would help establish an enduring presence for the Grimkés in Charleston. This public legitimacy would do much to help the city present a rounder, more accurate, and more interesting picture of itself and whittle away at the sexism, classism, and racism that can be the only explanation for the rhetorical silent treatment that the Grimké sisters have suffered. Historical markers serve as interventions into the current narrative and can direct the attention toward women's contributions to history as well as to the power structure that undermined the sisters' agency at every turn – both important public acknowledgments.

Enoch and Jack say that the "rhetorical practice of remembering women can reshape ideas in the contemporary moment about who women have

been and who they might become" (534). We can reshape ideas today about the Grimké sisters by recovering Angelina and Sarah in Charleston: locating them in time, learning more about their lives and influences, and connecting these findings to who the sisters became and how they made their arguments. These were educated, reflective, spiritual, and spirited women who serve as examples of the best of this first generation of children born as United States citizens. Adding to our understanding of these women adds to our conception of women's rhetorical tradition in the United States and what is and has been possible for women.

In order to see more clearly this era of our collective history, we have to draw our attention to both the good and the bad and the Grimkés can be a vehicle for examining these contradictions. They were the offspring of a class of people in the South who kept other people enslaved, but at the same time fought for independence from Great Britain and shaped a new nation. Sarah and Angelina Grimké's early lives among these people, before they became public figures, is an important time period in which to flesh out their rhetorical history because their eventual position as Southerners within the abolitionist movement was so central to their success as rhetors. Their unique position as upper-class women from a slave-owning family, growing up in the thick of this society, allowed them to give first-hand accounts of punishments and degradations that other white abolitionists could not offer. Unable to deny the truth that they spoke, critics then attempted to dismiss their speeches on account of their gender, pointing to the audacity that women should speak in public at all. The characteristics, ideologies, inclinations, and talents that alienated them from family, home, and, later, the historical narrative of Charleston, were the very things that made them effective. In *Why History Matters: Life and Thought*, Gerda Lerner comments on women's relative absence from recorded history. She writes, "History is the archives of human experiences and of the thoughts of past generations; history is our collective memory" (52). When, however, "the history of women was . . . refracted through the lens of male observation and distorted through an interpretation based on patriarchal values," the result was an inaccurate, unbalanced picture of the past (53). The Grimké sisters, as seen through the skewed lens of historical tourism in Charleston, have been misfits – not fitting the colonial narrative emphasizing architecture, furniture, silver, cobblestone streets and old city walls. Shift that narrative to highlight the people who shaped our new nation, and the Grimké sisters come into clear focus.

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