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HIST 102: *Friendship*

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Smith-Wallace Family Collection

A young love-struck Earl pled to family-friend, Marjorie Stewart, “The day of the Princeton-Harvard game being scheduled for November 7th (Saturday). Do you think that you can come? With me?”¹ He went on to explain how much fun it would be and, as a last ditch effort to assure that she would come, he clarified that his male friend and her female friend would also be in attendance. When Marjorie finally wrote back, approximately a day or two later, to tell him that she’d be there, Earl wasted no time and purchased tickets for the two of them. Any reader could tell that Earl certainly wanted this to be a double date, though he was afraid that if she knew this, then she might not have gone. Just a few days later, to his obvious dismay, Earl learned that she must bring along a chaperone and any chance at a moment alone with Marjorie was gone just like that.² Nevertheless, Earl Wallace’s struggle to have a moment physically alone with Marjorie Smith exemplifies the way in which society closely regulated friendship between men and women in the early 20th century.

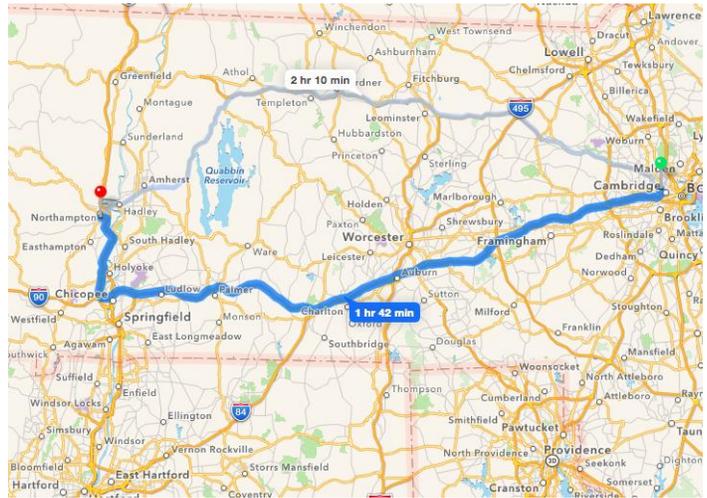
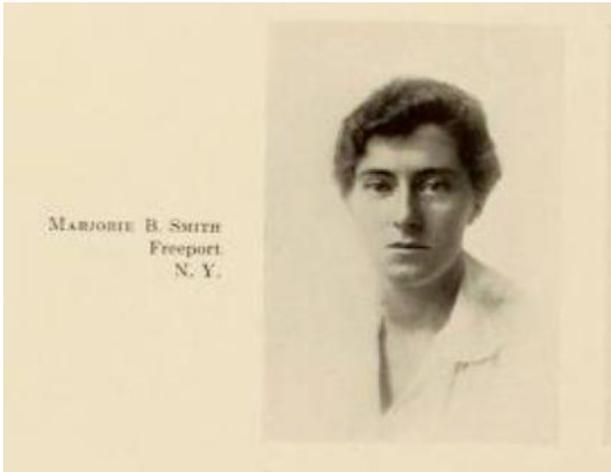
The scarce unaccompanied accessibility of young men to young women in the early 1900s made it near impossible to develop the heterosexual friendships that one sees everyday in 2015. Earl Wallace’s relationship with Marjorie Wallace, which began in 1914, is one that

¹ Hofstra Special Collections, Smith/ Wallace Family, Box #1, October 4th, 1914.

² Hofstra Special Collections, Smith/ Wallace Family, Box #1, October 14th, 1914.

captured the difficulties that young people of that generation faced in an attempt at co-ed friendships. The two met through their respective families, who co-owned and operated a bank in Freeport, New York, approximately nine years prior to the first correspondence. At nearly the same age, once both were in college, the two connected closely enough to remain in contact when they returned to their colleges; Marjorie was at Smith College, while Earl was attending Harvard Law School. Smith College is located in Northampton, Massachusetts, just under two hours away from Harvard. In today's society, where college students are nearly expected to travel about the country at their own will, in 1914, ideals greatly differed. Women did not travel about freely and as the above moment captures, young women were not simply allowed to visit a friend on the weekend without adult supervision. With young women on such a tight leash, it seems nearly impossible for heterosexual friendships to have had the chance to develop, unless there was a possible courtship. As Ellen Rothman writes in *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America*, "From its earliest beginnings, the ideology of romantic love made friendship between men and women into a consolation prize of sorts."³ In this particular case, Earl is surely upset with Marjorie's chaperone; however, he does seem gratified with her

³Rothman, Ellen. *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America*. Page 37.



Pictured: (Left) Marjorie's yearbook picture in 1915 and (Right) The distance between Smith College and Harvard Law School.

presence at all at the game.⁴ In another case, similar to that of Earl and Marjorie's, a young woman named Eliza Southgate was on a visit to Saratoga, New York when she met Henry Bowne. Eliza claimed that she was "deeply interested" in Henry however she would only approve him so far, while the decision must rest with her parents, their wishes were her law.⁵ Without the perception of romance in the future, it seems that U.S. society in the early 1900s did not offer much room for gender cohesive friendships to be built.

Social norms of the period limited contact between friends of any gender due to lack of convenience to constant interaction:

Correspondence was by far the most common form of personal writing, and letters exchanged between young women and men during courtship provide a remarkably full record of the ideas and experiences surrounding the transition to marriage. These letters are more than the artifacts of a relationship; in many cases, they were, for a time, the relationship itself."⁶

⁴ Hofstra Special Collections, Smith/ Wallace Family, Box #1, October 14th, 1914.

⁵ Rothman, Ellen. *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America*. Page 28.

⁶ Rothman, Ellen. *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America*. Page 8.

Author, Ellen Rothman wrote that in the time before cell phones, snail mail, or correspondences in the form of physical letters, was pretty much the base building “the transition to marriage.” Earl and Marjorie’s relationship began as family friends, but Earl’s persistence in writing to Marjorie over years apart at college acts as the transition into an eventual marriage. On April 5th, 1915 Earl wrote, “I wonder what in all this world of things and events, may induce you to write me a letter again. It is well over two months. I am sure since your last one came to me. And within that time I have written you twice.”⁷ On several occasions, Earl finds himself writing to Marjorie three or four times before receiving a single answer. Whatever the reason may have been for her lack of letters, this posed a general complication for college friends trying to remain involved in their friends’ lives. This also left room for misinterpretation between writings, just as confusion is often found in today’s texting and social media crazed world. “I am worried with the thought that one of them may have entailed some unpardonable offense – but for the life of me I cannot even suspect what that might have been,”⁸ Earl fretted on many instances. A significant difference between the early 1900s and today’s written communication is that a text message can be misread and corrected in a matter of seconds, while it could takes weeks to correct a single hand-written letter’s misconstrued wording. For these reasons, lack of daily communication made multi-located collegiate friendships a full-time job.

The way in which people first got to know one another in a social setting was much different in 1914 than it is today. Rothman found that by 1920, “(Collegiate students) rather than meeting at a lecture on public health or at a Bible class, men and women structured their social

⁷ Hofstra Special Collections, Smith/ Wallace Family, Box #1, April 5th, 1915.

⁸ Hofstra Special Collections, Smith/ Wallace Family, Box #1, April 12th, 1915.

lives around teas, smokers, dances and football games.”⁹ Thus up until approximately 1920, young people most often met in places like school lectures and Bible classes. For women, such as Marjorie Smith, whom attended an all-female college, classes did not provide any prospect to meet men. Marjorie met Earl through her family, which posed another popular option at the time to meet men, especially potential companions. Family and school lectures; these were the most common ways to meet friends of the opposite sex in the early 1900s.



⁹ Rothman, Ellen. *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America*. Page 212.

It's much *different* than the social culture today where bars and online dating are the norm.

According to *NY Daily News* in 2013, one-third of married couples in the United States met on online dating sites.¹⁰ The social culture has drastically changed in such a way that young people have the capability to meet anywhere at pretty much anytime. For Marjorie Smith, it was unacceptable in her parents' eyes for her to even be alone with a man that they already knew

Pictured: (Left) A Smith College classroom and (Right) the chemistry library in 1915 (<http://smithlibraries.org/digital/items/show/269>)

very well. This made male to female friendships a rare, special occurrence for those who were willing to work twice as hard to develop one.

Earl, luckily for Marjorie, was a determined young man, willing to work as much as necessary as he demonstrated throughout their two years of writing. On February 11th, 1915, he wrote: "I have been trying to make arrangements to come to Northampton, as you suggested, next week, but I find that I cannot get away at this time. The past two weeks the work has been pressing us harder and harder and I feel that I must stay by it until I can obtain a lead on it." He concluded however: "A week or two later, perhaps will be more convenient for you alas. How about a Saturday afternoon and evening there? Is that a convenient part of the week for you?"¹¹ Earl would be willing to make the two-hour trip to Northampton for a chaperoned afternoon and evening visit because it was this commitment that allowed their relationship to continue to build. This diminutive opportunity to socially meet and develop heterosexual friendships made their existence just as slight.

¹⁰ "One-third of U.S. Marriages Start with Online Dating: Study." *NY Daily News*. June 4th, 2013.

¹¹ Hofstra Special Collections, Smith/ Wallace Family, Box #1, February 11th, 1915.

Though Earl and Marjorie were communicating in a much different style than today, communication has always remained key in a healthy relationship. The way in which young people have communicated for the last century or so is one of thing that doesn't seem to have drastically changed. Young people today flirt without even being mindful of doing so. Most young persons in today's society also seem to speak sarcasm as a second language; they don't mean this to be hurtful, but rather it's simply how friends chat. Well in fact, Earl Wallace spoke a sweet, but sarcastic language to Marjorie. On October 14, 1914, Earl wrote: "When letters cross, a balance is struck and the new account may be opened at either end of the correspondence. You owe me a letter just as much as I.O.U. I have been waiting two weeks to "receipt payment of the obligation- but no such luck," thus he concludes, "So now I am writing you as sort of a "dimmer"... I shall find more time to write- provided you write me in return."¹²

In a similar fashion in late January of 1915, Earl joked: "Again, our letters have crossed. But this time, because you were good enough to 'break the silence' last time, I shall be more prompt in writing you. I don't believe in being too stubborn anyway, do you? No, you do not. Nevertheless, we both believe in being a little stubborn, do we not? (Answer in chorus) 'Yep!!!'"¹³ He answered his own questions for her like he knew her better than she might know herself. Unless he was trying to assure she could sense the joking tone of the letter. Regardless, Earl wrote this way to Marjorie for much of the 1914 through 1915 correspondences. On October 24, 1915, Earl wrote in regard to the two months that Marjorie had not written back to him. He wrote: "You tell me your delay was occasioned by the fact that you were waiting for

¹² Hofstra Special Collections, Smith/ Wallace Family, Box #1, October 14th, 1914.

¹³ Hofstra Special Collections, Smith/ Wallace Family, Box #1, January 24th, 1915.

your ‘finals.’ Fess up and tell me truthfully that you failed to write because ‘you did not feel like it’ – as you’ve told me been.”¹⁴ The satirical tone of that ‘you did not feel like it,’ nearly jumps out of the letter. This tone of Earl’s writing leaps off the page epitomizing the tone of the 20th and 21st century friendships.

“Friendship provided boundaries within which men and women could test themselves and each other.”¹⁵ This is seen throughout much of Earl’s writing to Marjorie; there is a sense of hesitation and constant apologies for things that wouldn’t otherwise be an issue today.

Friendship shouldn’t be a constant guessing game and it doesn’t appear to be that way in true friendships today. However, in 1914, it seemed to play a large role in earlier development of heterosexual bonds.

To begin with, I appreciate your frank statement in regard to the candy and I am glad that you openly confess to me that they were not the best that you have ever tasted. I meant that they should be the best – but I feared that they would not be after it was too late to recall them.¹⁶

Earl wrote this on January 24, 1915 after only a few months of correspondences. A month later, after a letter about a visit in the making to Smith college, Earl wrote: “Any wonderment I may have for not having heard from you in the past decade is quickly dispelled upon reflection. For upon reflection, my last letter to you was brief and very hurriedly struck off.”¹⁷ As Ellen

¹⁴ Hofstra Special Collections, Smith/ Wallace Family, Box #1, October 24th, 1915.

¹⁵ Rothman, Ellen. *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America*. Page 37.

¹⁶ Hofstra Special Collections, Smith/ Wallace Family, Box #1, January 24th, 1915.

¹⁷ Hofstra Special Collections, Smith/ Wallace Family, Box #1, February 22nd, 1915.

Rothman found and history has supported, the idea of a friendship set boundaries for young people to test themselves especially with the potential of a future romantic courtship.¹⁸

A major concern, that is present even in today's social culture, is the ability for women to stand on equal ground with men. Females were not supposed to exude emotions at the same magnitude as men making for a rather extreme disadvantage at this time. For a woman to become emotionally invested in a friendship was wrong, but for a man, this emotional investment was almost necessary for life fulfillment. "The female sex was believed to lack the male ability to cultivate reason and to be therefore more easily led astray by feelings. To reject passion in favor of less volatile and absorbing emotions was an act of self-preservation."¹⁹ In Marjorie and Earl's relationship, one could sense Earl's more consistent effort and passion to remain in daily contact with Marjorie whereas the same is not initially reciprocated. On April 15th of 1915, Earl pled: "I wonder what in all this world of things and events, may induce you to write me a letter again. It is well over two months. I am sure since your last one came to me. And within that time I have written you twice."²⁰ Marjorie was going about her life at Smith College, working on herself and her future aspirations, while Earl fell deeper into this "friendship."

Some months later, in late October, Earl reached out to Marjorie at a delicate time: "I am wondering whether my note of last week to you went astray. I sent it off in time to have reached you before your letter was written. In any event it cannot be out of place for me to here again

¹⁸ Rothman, Ellen. *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America*. Page 37.

¹⁹ Rothman, Ellen. *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America*. Page 39.

²⁰ Hofstra Special Collections, Smith/ Wallace Family, Box #1, April 15th, 1915.

express my sympathy for the loss of little Betty. I am truly sorry for you ale. Her death must surely create an aching void in the experience of each of you.”²¹ Without Marjorie’s letters to piece together the circumstances, one can read that while Marjorie struggled through the loss of a friend, Earl was trying to be a support system that she was not really letting in. These instances depict the difficulties women faced to be entirely emotionally invested in the relationships around them.

Though more common throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the idea of arranged marriages has continued to have a place in heterosexual relationships and at times, it seems that this may be the case with Earl and Marjorie.

The tradition of arranged marriage is most commonly found in eastern-based cultures, including Indian, Japanese, and Chinese cultures. However, it was at one time equally popular in western culture. In the Elizabethan era, it was not uncommon for parents in high society to arrange marriages among their children to ensure that they maintained the economic status and bloodlines that they greatly valued.²²

Though it’s believed that it was not common in the 1900s, it is in fact still occurring in more traditional homes. At the visible upper levels of society, most marriages during the early 1900s were pragmatic, involving considerations of property and family alliance.²³ This could very much have been the situation in the case of Marjorie Smith and Earl Wallace. On December 15th, 1915, Earl wrote in response to Marjorie’s apparent dissatisfaction with him: “Nearly all the time

²¹ Hofstra Special Collections, Smith/ Wallace Family, Box #1, October 24th, 1915.

²² Ring Resources: *The Culture and History of Arranged Marriages*. Web.

²³ Soll, Lindsay. "History of Marriage." *History of Marriage*. N.p., 2003. Web. 02 May 2015.

I shall have there, I want to spend it explaining that I am not the schemer your letter calls me.”²⁴

A letter beforehand, Earl told Marjorie that he would be in Freeport for a few days hoping that he could see her. Though Marjorie’s written response is not available, it’s clear that she senses some falsity or as she put it, “scheming,” in his desired friendship with her.

What happens next begins the ultimate switch of Earl and Marjorie’s story from friendship to courtship. As noted above, Earl was heading over to Freeport, New York for a weekend with the hope that he would have some alone time with Marjorie. It seems that Marjorie was hinting at a sense of disapproval with Earl; perhaps because she might have sensed some “arrangements” made years before now catching up with Earl. The weekend must have gone well, however Earl still had a lot to say to Marjorie. On December 21, 1915, the following Tuesday, Earl spilled his heart out to Marjorie:

Tonight, at dinner you told me that you understand me better than I understand you and I know that you do. For I feel that you realize exactly where I stand toward you; while I – for the life of me – cannot know your position. I can but hope that it is as I would have it - I can but fear that it is not as I would have it.²⁵

Earl writes that he does not understand Marjorie nearly as well as she understands where he stands; this again epitomizes men having a much easier time emotionally expressing themselves than women. Earl goes on to voice the truth about the feelings he has felt towards Marjorie after all the years that their families have known each other. “Years ago – nine years ago we determined tonight, though it seems as yesterday, I first saw you – then a mere slip of a girl. I

²⁴ Hofstra Special Collections, Smith/ Wallace Family, Box #1, December 15th, 1915.

²⁵ Hofstra Special Collections, Smith/ Wallace Family, Box #1, December 21st, 1915.

was then but a youngster but I have carried that memory to this day. Should you ask me I would give you the picture in detail, I could even tell you what you wore that morning.”²⁶ Earl had a fascination for nearly a decade with Marjorie, which always seemed the case, though not clear to Marjorie. It’s also not clear that Marjorie ever reciprocated more than a friendship towards Earl.

Due to lack of about two years of correspondences from one side of the story, Earl and Marjorie’s friendship was difficult to decipher, in very similar fashion to what is seen in Seth Koven’s *The Match Girl and the Heiress*. Though the story of two young women, a poor match factory worker named Nellie Dowell and the daughter of a wealthy shipbuilder, Muriel Lester, only Nellie’s letters are presented. Readers can get a sense of romantic curiosity from Nellie; however, having brief inscriptions from only one person made it difficult to decipher Nellie’s true feelings as well as the uncertainty of Muriel’s possible sharing of said feelings.²⁷ Just like any impatient readers, Earl could not wait much longer to learn what Marjorie’s true manners towards him were. “But from all the chaos, Marjorie, there evolves one thing that stands out as an eternal certainty and that is what I have said you already well know. I want you, Marjorie – I have always wanted you and I shall never cease fighting for you until I have you forever. I will not discourage no matter what you answer. With love – Earl.”²⁸ This letter was written twice, edited once and then rewritten on a clean sheet of paper, as it’s no surprise that this was difficult for Earl to express quite possibly a decade of overwhelming emotions.

Without having access to Marjorie’s response, Earl’s next letter sets the tone for the rest of their lives. “I want you to think of me as a man of my word – a man of honor. You know,

²⁶ Hofstra Special Collections, Smith/ Wallace Family, Box #1, December 21st, 1915.

²⁷ Koven, Seth. *The Match Girl and the Heiress*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Print. March. 2015.

²⁸ Hofstra Special Collections, Smith/ Wallace Family, Box #1, December 21st, 1915.

Marjorie, among men of the type I most highly prize there is a code of honor. And by that code, in the suit for the hand of a lady the rule obtain that 'lets the best man win.' But there is a limitation to this rule beyond which none may go. When the lady has chosen – firing must cease,” concluding, “Forever yours, Earl.”²⁹ Earl and Marjorie’s relationship seemed to take a quick turn at this point far away from friendship. From then on, there becomes more urgency for the two to see each other than ever before. On January 4th, 1916, Earl wrote: Marjorie, are you, as you feared you would be, a “little scared” now that I am gone?³⁰ In all of 1914 through much of 1915, both Marjorie and Earl find it tough to get away from their studies and make the long trips to one another. In that same correspondence, Earl wrote: I want you to tell me of this when you write me. This stood out because it was a very dissimilar tone of voice than Earl previously showed. He was always careful about his words with Marjorie, but with the approval of Marjorie that their romantic relationship had begun, the tone made a more assertive switch.



Pictured: (Left) Earl and Marjorie’s engagement announcement and (Right) Marjorie holding her second child, Stewart Raynor Wallace.

²⁹ Hofstra Special Collections, Smith/ Wallace Family, Box #1, December 26th, 1915.

³⁰ Hofstra Special Collections, Smith/ Wallace Family, Box #1, January 4th, 1916.

Earl and Marjorie's life together moved forward rapidly from that letter in December of 1915. Approximately two months later, Marjorie and Earl's engagement announcement was published in the local papers. Though more uncommon today, according to the United States census in 1910, the average age for women to marry was 23, while for men it was 25;³¹ ironically Marjorie was 22 and Earl was 25 years old. On May 5, 1917, Earl and Marjorie were married and in that same year, Earl enlisted in the army. In less than a year, their first child, Henry William, was born and Earl went to serve a few months in France. When Earl returned to the United States, his brother-in-law's death earned him the family business of the First National Bank of Drayton. Thus, while working as a lawyer, Earl also became president of the bank. On March 31, 1919, Earl and Marjorie's family expanded with the birth of their second son, Stewart Raynor Wallace. With everything seemingly happening so swiftly, Earl's stress level must have boiled over and in September of 1921, he had a nervous breakdown. Just two short months later, Earl and Marjorie's time together came to an early end when Earl told his family that he was going to the barbershop and never returned home. Earl's body was not found until January of 1922. With closure, Marjorie decided to move with the children back to her hometown of Freeport, New York, where she became a teacher. Marjorie went on to live a long life, dying an elderly woman on March 14, 1992. After years of fascination and work to connect on another level with Marjorie, life ultimately defeated Earl. While their friendship lasted approximately a decade, their romantic relationship lasted only about half that time. Thus lingers the question of whether or not young people today would work nearly as hard as Earl worked for Marjorie in 1914 and whether or not their relationship began as nothing more than a friendship, as our society sees one today.

³¹ United States Decennial Census (1890-2000), "Age at First Marriage." *Marriage and Family Living* 8.4

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