

# The Half Life of Leah Jackson Wolford

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*Leah Jackson Wolford, an emerging scholar in folklore and English in the early twentieth century, died at the age of twenty-five, six days after delivering her only child. While the only book she published garnered scholarly praise for decades after her death, ensuring her scholarly legacy, her family knew only a few details about her life. With the discovery and preservation of a newly discovered archive, which contains Leah's personal papers and photographs, her descendants have begun to reframe their images of her as a family figure. Since family members knew very little about Leah prior to 2009, John Wolford and Katherine Finch conducted oral histories with them to determine what they knew or imagined of Leah's life up to that point. This initial documentation establishes how the family conceived of Leah Jackson Wolford before they were influenced by the information in her archive. Countering the iconic image that the family developed of her over the decades, this archive has begun to enable family members to both humanize and re-make their perceptions of her. This article uses oral history, folklore, narrative theory, and photographic analysis to arrive at an understanding of how the image of a nearly forgotten family member may be re-imagined by isolating the oral historical record of what the family thinks it knows of that person, and what the person reveals of herself through her archive.*

## The Half Life of Leah Jackson Wolford

The story of Leah Jackson Wolford, as the family has handed it down since 1918, is simple and devoid of narrative detail. Rather than having stories to use, the family heritage of this woman has always been constructed of facts, not "facts" in any theorized sense, but simple facts, as in documentary evidence: where she was born, dates of important events of her life, and so on. Leah was born in 1892 to a prosperous and religious family in rural Indiana and excelled in school. She graduated from high school and college, spending three years at both institutions, and soon thereafter wrote a master's thesis, which became a hallmark academic folklore book, *The Play-Party in Indiana*.<sup>1</sup> She married her college sweetheart,

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<sup>1</sup> Leah Jackson Wolford, *The Play-Party in Indiana* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Commission, 1916). Leah's study of play-parties was the first book-length study of this folklore genre. The play-party is a folklore genre identifying a type of social entertainment among young people, typically thirteen to twenty-two years of age, in which they sing traditional songs *a capello*, dance, and play games. These three forms are all combined into one activity and all have traditional

Leo, in 1916, and died tragically of septicemia from a burst appendix in 1918; the doctors mistook her enflamed appendix as “female complications” after delivering her only child. As the family story goes, she was a rising academic star, who was also a beautiful woman, a loving wife, and a paragon of virtue and American values. Her death at the young age of twenty-five thus deprived her of realizing her full potential.

That is pretty much all of the story that we have heard about Leah until recently. While short, her life was in fact, quite full, but her heritage has had only a half-life, a two dimensional life, since no one told her whole story after she died. Metaphorically, her life has been “reduced to half its initial value,” stripped of its humanizing elements.<sup>2</sup> The bare facts of her life created a skeleton that her descendants have since fleshed out with a great deal of romance. About the only individual *story* that has survived is one with little detail: While in Chicago earning her master’s degree, she stopped by a photography studio on a lark to have her photograph taken. That is the story. Because our family has copies of the photo (see Image 1 below), we have had something tangible with which to comprehend her. For decades, this photograph provided the family with its only visual evidence of Leah’s existence. The Chicago story, as fabricated, seems to be mostly a creative elaboration that I will discuss further along, but it is important to note that it adds to the idealized image that her family has created.

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antecedents, primarily in British but also in African American culture. Its performance roots are in frontier America in the nineteenth century, but it experienced revitalization in the early twentieth century when Leah was documenting the genre. This revitalization occurred primarily among conservative religious groups who did not condone dancing with musical instruments, although dancing to vocal song was acceptable.

<sup>2</sup> I am obviously using this term metaphorically, transferring the scientific definition to a cultural one. The metaphorical implications of half-life work on different levels: her life was cut short, dying young; her family knows only a partial story about her; she could only fulfil part of her scholarly or familial goals. Here is the full definition of half-life, as provided by answers.com: “The time required for the radioactivity of material taken in by a living organism to be reduced to half its initial value by a combination of biological elimination processes and radioactive decay.” “Half-life,” answers.com, <http://www.answers.com/topic/half-life>, last accessed on 10 October 2009.



Image 1. The “Classic” Photograph of Leah Jackson Wolford<sup>3</sup>

This all changed in 2008 when Thorp Wolford, Leah’s surviving son, gave me access to his private collection that included thousands of letters, papers, and photographs that had been exchanged between Leah and her husband Leo, and their extended family. Fortunately, in terms of understanding her emergent profile, Leah was a prolific writer of letters, and members of her extended family also wrote letters and hoarded all things familial. Thorp’s household is thus laden with box after crusted box of sources that provide extensive information about the Wolford/Jackson lives in the early part of the twentieth century. This vast collection, which also includes newspaper clippings, grocery store receipts, school notes and papers, authorial drafts and memorandums connected to *The Play-Party*, family papers, scribbles, doodles, studio photographs, and snapshots, provides a rich and detailed documentary history that animates the sparse family folklore about Leah Jackson Wolford. Additionally it allows us to add depth,

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<sup>3</sup> The original black and white version of this image is circa 1914-1915. The first tinted photograph emerged circa 1948 as a large framed image, origins unknown. This particular photograph is the one her son, Thorp Wolford, provided to each of Leah’s grandchildren around 1975. This image is from the private collection of Thorp L. Wolford, hereafter referred to as TLWA, Louisville, Kentucky.

texture, and personality to the romantic image of a woman the family could at best imagine, but has mostly dismissed. I was curious how the story of Leah, contained in these dusty boxes, correlated with that which emerges from her own writings and those of her contemporaries. I likewise was curious about how the “written” Leah would affect her descendants’ attitudes toward or impressions of her, whether her letters would in fact de-sanctify, or rather, humanize her. Seeing family members perk up at excerpts from the archive made me realize that they not only had an interest in Leah, but also in her archive itself. They wanted to know more.

I began to see a theoretical dimension to all of this. Could this archive prove to be a catalyst to future oral historical research about our family? Would we be able to obliterate the silences of the decades with stories reconstructed from her very words, from her letters and papers? How would the information from the archive affect the family’s romantic (or, in some cases, anti-romantic) vision of Leah? Beyond how this collection has affected their attitudes toward her, I have begun to wonder whether the sources are creating a new force that might affect their sense of themselves and of the family at large. I would surmise that this archival information is influencing all of us, since it is providing Leah with a voice in our family discourse.

To begin this project, we had to differentiate family perceptions of Leah before and after the archival discovery. To create a baseline profile of the pre-archival Leah, we interviewed people in Leah’s descended family. We developed a number of common topics for discussion, of which four emerged as dominant in the family narrative: family images of Leah; stories about the “classic” photograph of Leah; impressions of and characterizations of Leah’s book; and knowledge of Leah’s life history. Through these topics, we were able to ascertain what information current family members knew, what impressions they had, and what stories they told about her, prior to receiving any new information from the archive. After conducting our interviews with Leah’s descendants, we discovered that nearly every factual detail about her lay buried or muddled in distorted conceptions. Fairly uniformly, only those family descendants who had done a bit of background research on her had a deeper comprehension of Leah. So, from examining the character of stories that family members represent through their retention or non-retention of the Leah story, we hypothesize that exposure to this archival material will not only enliven and deepen (on individual bases) a sense of our family and history but also inform our future oral histories.

Hilda Kean, in *London Stories*, found herself the recipient and steward of her family’s papers and artifacts, just as I have. At first blush, she did not consider this inheritance to be much of a problem, in terms of organizing and rationalizing it. Delving into it, though, she realized that her forebears, from different

generations, had contributed to the collection, each addition providing a layered meaning and nuance to the whole. Coming to grips with the immensity of it all, she approached this archive as a family history structured by academic history and public history. She has mined this material for years, and it has led her to understand her own family better, have epiphanies of insight that transcend family, and locate multiple nexuses of understanding between the familial, the local, and the global.<sup>4</sup>

Almost exactly paralleling Kean, we are working with a deep and polyvalent family archive that dates back to the last decades of the nineteenth century. But while Kean could interview family members who had memories of this material, the items in our collection related to Leah are orphaned by silence, vast decades of a silence that disconnects her stories from our broader family stories. Leah's stories, for reasons only to be surmised, were suppressed. In exchange, her mythic family image, constructed from her accomplishments and her youthful death, developed. Our family's stories of Leah both do and do not correspond to the reality as it is emerging from the archival material, and it will be interesting to see how the archival material will affect the family's image of and storytelling about her over time, and how the mythic hero will metamorphose into a human personality.

### Some Theoretical Points

Annette Kuhn, in exploring her own family's secrets, observes that "[although] we take stories of childhood and family literally...our recourse to this past is a way of reaching for myth, for the story that is deep enough to express the profound feelings we have in the present."<sup>5</sup> Myth, as Kuhn uses it, evokes an understanding of family history that sanctifies the past, as opposed to the popular

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<sup>4</sup> Hilda Kean, *Personal Lives, Public Histories: Creating Personal and Public Histories of Working-Class London* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 2004), 1-7. Kean remarks on the multi-layered yet distanced aspects of her family's history: "The possessions hoarded reflected a coming together of lives of different generations and times into one place and moment. The existence of a world of hoarded bits and pieces, fragments and shards...were of a familial world into which I was born but which always seemed to be of a much earlier time." See Kean, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London: Verso, 1995), 1. This quote is an italicized preface to Kuhn's introductory chapter. She does not cite it, so I am presuming the wording is hers.

usage of myth as a suspect story.<sup>6</sup> While both Kuhn and Kean did have family stories at their disposal, a premise of this article is that even a family with vague or even absent family stories searches for some mythic past. Particularly, a story-poor family will search for the value-rich identity that a family hero may confer, so that members can seek models for themselves. In our family, the myth of Leah as an ideal mother, wife, scholar, and woman, based on just a few objectively verified details of her life (what I call her “facts”), enabled individual family members to imagine an image of Leah.<sup>7</sup> This imaginative process allows individuals to structure stories based on their own personal values. Interestingly, family members created, variably, positive, negative, or overtly dismissive personal images of Leah based on the little information that they knew, each person using the same facts but constructing a variety of images of this woman. The case itself is important for showing that the myth-making impulse to incorporate the past into the present exists even without known stories.<sup>8</sup>

The theoretical insight that the present intrinsically incorporates the past is crucial to this argument.<sup>9</sup> The case of Leah and her descendants invokes that premise. It recognizes that, even after decades of resting, paradoxically, both obscured and iconicized within family folklore, an ancestor can emerge as a fully realized, complicated woman through the discovery of revelatory family papers. The melding of the rich and deep details from the newly discovered papers with old and thin stories has invigorated our family’s history by integrating her into it. Her humanized story, revised from an iconic one, has the potential to help us, her descendants, make “sense of [ourselves] and [our] lives.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> I recognize the genre distinctions between “myth” and “legend,” where *myth* refers to an indeterminate past that references supernatural and ultimately unknowable forces in which belief plays a crucial role, and *legend* refers to a more rationalized past with knowable characters, although still with an element of negotiated reality. In terms of Leah, her presence in our family lore can be either legendary or mythic, depending on the information available and the person providing it. Popularly, people within the family refer to her in a mythic, sanctified way.

<sup>7</sup> See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

<sup>8</sup> Authors from different disciplines have covered this theoretical point. See Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, *The Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge, 1990), for an historical treatment from Samuel’s famous History Workshop series; or for an influential folkloristic/anthropological treatment, see Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin, “Tradition, Genuine or Spurious,” *Journal of American Folklore* 97, 385 (July-September 1984), 273-290.

<sup>9</sup> According to Hilda Kean and Paul Ashton, people create “complex ways in which [they use] the past in making sense of themselves and their lives, as well as to negotiate the present and navigate the future.” See Kean and Ashton, “Introduction,” in *People and Their Pasts: Public History Today*, eds. Ashton and Kean (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 4.

<sup>10</sup> The literature on “the past in the present” is vast, extending well before Rosenzweig and Thelen’s seminal book, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). Scholars in oral history, folklore, and cultural anthropology, to name just three disciplines, have been discussing this concept for decades, at

According to folklorist Bruce Jackson: “Stories generate their own boundaries of acceptable reality: nothing worth mentioning happens before the stories begin, and nothing happens after they end.”<sup>11</sup> The information passed down about Leah qualifies as merely objective facts, or data, but what people in the family narrate are stories elaborated upon the facts. Furthermore, the narrations have generated stories about themselves, and they have, in turn, created their own boundaries. Since family members present the “stories” about Leah as ostensible facts coloured by impressions and mythologizing ideals, they have created a corpus that has drawn a fairly tight boundary around who this person was. They define her in terms of achievement and potential, real or unreal. In that sense, the family stories have idealized her as a woman of remarkable achievement who never realized her full potential, a woman who lived a “half-life,” and thus, a woman without truly humanizing stories of failure, emotion, or frailty. “Nothing happens after they end,” Jackson says of stories, and truly, in terms of Leah’s static image, nothing has happened. In fact, the silences that Leo, her husband, and other members of her contemporary family maintained created an impermeable barrier around the person she was; see the attached video link entitled Not Discussed Much (1).

Hilda Kean, voicing a sentiment with which a burgeoning number of public historians would agree, states that “while it is impossible to recreate the

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least since the 1940s; in fact, one could even see the seeds of this concept implicit in the founding of the professional disciplines of American anthropology in 1878 and American folklore in 1888. In history, the entire social history and cultural history movement beginning in the 1960s and 1970s based itself on this assumption: that a people’s everyday history reverberates in their present lives. Even T. S. Eliot, writing in 1920, spoke of how artists delude themselves when they claim they have no history and create art in a vacuum: “...the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity.” See Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920), 49. Raphael Samuel’s History Workshops of the 1970s proved to be a spur to the enterprise among British and Commonwealth scholars, as well as Americans, such as Michael Frisch, among many others. Many other important writers who focus on this subject include John Bodnar, David Glassberg, Paula Hamilton, among others. See the notes and bibliographies of Ashton and Kean, *People and Their Pasts*, and other works cited in this article for a more complete history of this approach.

<sup>11</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory, and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 12. Portelli references Bruce Jackson, “What People Like Us Are Saying,” in Jackson, *Disorderly Conduct* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 243.

past as it really was we can nevertheless create meaning, understanding, and, even, interest by drawing on the substance of past lives.”<sup>12</sup> Leah’s life, as recovered through this archive, has stirred interest within our family and generated a fuller understanding of her and her contemporaries. Knowing her through her letters and papers, members of our current family, each in individual ways, are able to co-create narratives of inclusion and exclusion with Leah. We can now establish a relationship with her that was impossible before, and in doing so, we may enrich the family history. Alessandro Portelli says that “[oral] history is basically the process of creating relationships: between narrators and narratees, between events in the past and dialogic narratives in the present. The historian must work on both the factual and the narrative planes, the referent and the signifier, the past and the present, and, most of all, on the space between all of them.”<sup>13</sup> Michael Frisch identifies the oral history relationship as being one where both the interviewer and the narrator co-create a primary document, the oral history itself.<sup>14</sup> Certainly, with this oral history project, we were doing just that: creating a relationship with Leah through snapshot impressions of her as an historical figure and as a family icon. With the archive, we are also creating a relationship with Leah as a mother, grandmother, and great grandmother. When we tell our family stories in the future, whether as oral histories or informally at gatherings, Leah will be present, thanks to this archive.

## Leah

In terms of her historical period in America, Leah was both representative of a category of girls growing to womanhood in the early twentieth century and exceptional as a person in that period. Leah graduated from high school in 1909 in a class of five girls.

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<sup>12</sup> Kean, *London Stories*, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out*, 15.

<sup>14</sup> Michel Frisch, *A Shared Authority* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990). This book republishes many of Frisch’s earlier seminal works in which he develops the idea of a shared authority in co-creating the oral historical document.



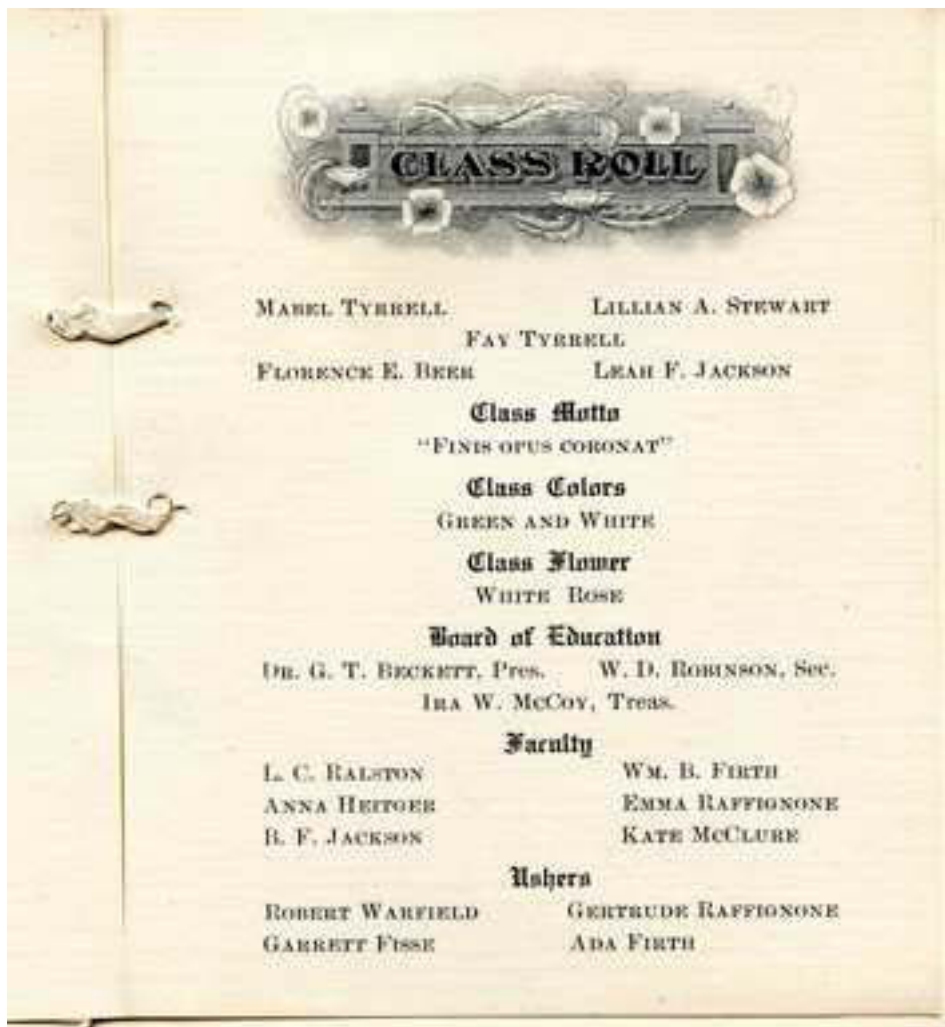


Image 2. Versailles High School Class Roll for 1909<sup>15</sup>

Since the 1880s, girls composed the majority of high school students and graduated in larger numbers than boys, so her class of graduating girls was not unusual.<sup>16</sup> Her decision to go on to college was not all that unusual for the time either. Women had been attending college in America since the 1830s,<sup>17</sup> but after

<sup>15</sup> This class roll is an excerpt from the 1909 program of ceremonies, TLWA, Louisville, Kentucky. (To view the program in its entirety please see the attached file entitled *Program*.)

<sup>16</sup> William J. Reese, *The Origins of the American High School* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 224.

<sup>17</sup> Margaret A. Nash, *Women's Education in the United States 1780-1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

the Civil War women began to attend in larger numbers, spurred in large part by the growing number of female high school graduates. It was during this period that women's rights developed increasing prominence, and women in co-educational colleges attended more as equals than as classmates who were admitted on the condition that they do domestic work as well. It was a gradual transition to intellectual parity: "...the percentage of women undergraduates continued to rise, increasing from about twenty-one percent in 1870 to thirty-two percent by 1880, to almost forty percent by 1910, and then to over forty-seven percent by 1920."<sup>18</sup> Leah's graduating class of 1912 at Franklin College listed sixteen women among the thirty-eight graduates, making the women undergraduates a very typical forty-one percent of the Franklin College graduating class of 1912.

Most of the undergraduate women in this fifty-year time period came from rural areas, as Leah did.<sup>19</sup> Leah's status upon graduation from Franklin College in 1912 represented the Progressive Age's signal respect for women in higher education: she was the class secretary of her senior class and was one of only four orators chosen to speak at the commencement. Prior to graduation, in April 1912, when she was just nineteen, her hometown hired her to become the incoming principal of Versailles High School.

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<sup>18</sup> Christopher J. Lucas, *American Higher Education: A History* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1994), 206.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

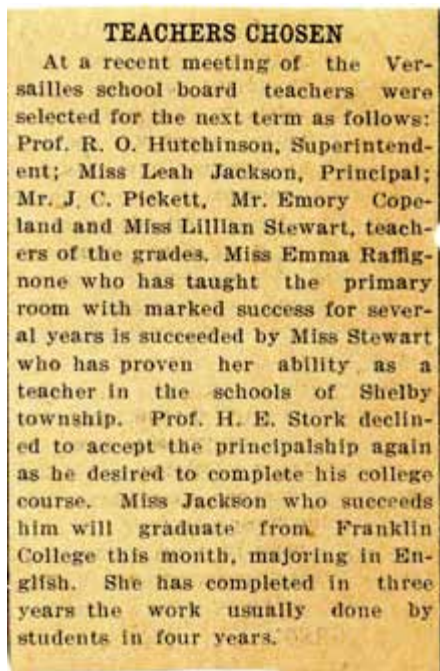


Image 3. "Teachers Chosen," probably from the *Versailles Republican* in June 1909<sup>20</sup>

She had plans to attend graduate school in English or Music, and enrolled at the University of Chicago in 1914, finishing her master's degree in English in 1915. Most college professors, such as her teachers at Franklin College, had a master's as their professional degree, so her accomplishments and aspirations (college degree, master's degree, self-supporting single woman, and so on) were both representative of the trends of the day, yet exceptional in the degree to which she was able to rise to the top in all of her endeavours.

Her achievements were also part and parcel of her heritage and traditional life. She grew up in a prosperous household and had the financial opportunity to attend college. Her natal home life supported her intellectual development. For instance, her father created a lending library of over two hundred books out of his own family's collection, since Versailles had no public library. Further, on a macro level, the transition from rural to urban life was accelerated in her lifetime, so rural youth, male and female, migrated to the cities to seek their fortune and develop their careers. Certainly both Leah and her fiancé entertained these thoughts, with plans ("schemes," as they wrote to each other) to move to Chicago, San Francisco, and the east coast peppered throughout their letters. Yet she still

<sup>20</sup> This newspaper article indicates that Leah Jackson would become the new principal of the high school, supervising a teaching staff of two men and one woman. Newspaper clipping from TLWA, Louisville, Kentucky.

carried with her the traditional rural and religious values of Versailles, so even as she advanced to the heights of educational achievement, she embraced her home-grown ideal of domesticity: getting married, becoming a mother, raising a family, joining the women's social clubs in town, even while taking on a teaching job and seizing an opportunity to become a published writer.

When Leah Jackson finished her master's thesis at the University of Chicago on play-party traditions and folklore, the Indiana Historical Commission picked it as one of only five publications to commemorate the 1916 Indiana statehood centennial. From 1915 through 1916 she revised it. Upon its 1916 publication, she became the first known Indiana folklorist,<sup>21</sup> one of only a handful of published women folklorists in the world, and the best-selling author of any of the centennial publications. Based on her research, she was a rising star in folklore, music, folksong, and folk dance. Cecil Sharp of England, whom she cited seven times in her book and whose lectures she attended at least once in Chicago, took notice of her work, and wrote her a letter asking to meet and possibly collaborate on some research about popular games and dances. The letter arrived ten days after she died. Sharp later wrote a letter of condolence to Leo. Her scholarship was cited for decades after her death, and her book went through

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<sup>21</sup> Jon Kay (Director, Traditional Arts Indiana) in discussion with John Welford, 25 October 2008. Jon Kay, the state folklorist in Indiana, said that he believes that she is the first published Indiana folklorist, not knowing of any other beforehand. At the 2009 Hoosier Folklore Society Conference in Nashville, Indiana, on 7 November 2009, a gathering that featured specialists on Indiana folklore historiography, members concurred that Leah must have been the first to publish a book on Indiana folklore.

two printings, a revision, and then a re-issued revision.<sup>22</sup> However, over time her achievements and insights began to fade within the discipline, as interest in her subject matter waned; within her descended family, Leah became a quaint, distant, yet idealized grandmother who had written a book, *The Play-Party of Indiana*, of interest only to an esoteric subset of academics.

So Leah embodied the aspirations, trends, and conflicts of the end of the Progressive Age. An obviously competent woman, her family, teachers, and fiancé encouraged her intellectual and professional development, which she maximized. An aspiring urbanite, she compromised, prioritizing married life in a small town over a life in a large city such as Chicago. Marrying her long-time fiancé, they came to live in New Albany, Indiana, in 1916. Yet even as a young wife, she obtained a position teaching English at New Albany High School in the fall of 1917, an unusual accomplishment in that time, since most school systems had a ban against hiring married women. In sum, Leah participated in dismantling the barriers previously erected against women while embracing a traditional domestic life.

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<sup>22</sup> Cecil J. Sharp to Mrs. L. T. Wolford, 23 January 1918, TLWA, Louisville, Kentucky; Cecil J. Sharp to Mr. Leo T. Wolford, 11 October 1918, TLWA, Louisville, Kentucky. Leah's work received quite a bit of academic attention for decades after her death. Just one year after it was published, William Chauncy Langdon reviewed her book in *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 5, 2 (September 1918), 232-233, as had A. T. Belknap earlier in the Franklin College Alumni Magazine in 1917. In a 1922 *Journal of American Folklore*, Albert H. Tolman and Mary O. Eddy cite Leah's book as "the fullest and most careful treatment of the play-party available. It was cordially praised by Mr. Cecil J. Sharp"; see Tolman and Eddy, "Traditional Texts and Tunes," *Journal of American Folklore* 35, 138 (1922), 431. Later, scholars of the play-party, such as Louise Pound, Benjamin Botkin, Vance Randolph, and Paul Brewster, all referenced Leah's book as an essential source. Play-parties as a social event continued at least through the 1950s in rural America, so accompanying scholarly interest in it persisted. Alan Spurgeon (2005) wrote a book on the play-party, interviewing people who participated in them in the 1930s through the 1950s, and he cites Leah's book frequently throughout, considering it "an outstanding study." *The Overland Review*, in its 2008 issue, published Andrea Kaffenberger's article on play-parties (called Shoe Tang, locally) featuring interviews of Arkansans who still participate in them. In terms of the history of the book itself, Leah completed the master's thesis, "The Play-Party in Ripley County, Indiana," in 1915. Revising the thesis to expand the content beyond Ripley County, she published *The Play-Party in Indiana* in 1916, which was distributed gratis to every "library, college, and normal school" in Indiana, according to the front matter. In 1938, the Indiana Historical Society re-issued a special facsimile edition of the book of only 500 copies, in blue cover rather than its original green. In 1959, W. Edson Richmond with William Tillson edited an expanded, rearranged, and more contextualized edition of Leah's book in a paperback version from the Indiana Historical Society. And in 1976, Arno Press, under the editorship of Bryan Sutton-Smith, published a facsimile edition of the Richmond/Tillson edition in hardcover.

## The Narrators

Quite apparent from the oral histories, family members knew virtually nothing of this background. Rather than having any great corpus of knowledge of Leah, they were much more interested in their own generation, or in family members whom they had known. In fact, when we mentioned that we intended to do a family oral history project on Leah, the typical response was: Why?

Katy and I assumed, when coming into this project, that Thorp Lanier Wolford, Leah's son, would know the most about her. He is the only person alive who can be said to have "met" Leah, although he was born only six days prior to her death. We thought that particularly his maternal grandmother, Allie Jackson, and possibly his father, Leo, and certainly other relatives would have regaled him with stories and facts about his mother's life, character, and accomplishments. However, Thorp, who has always had a remarkably sharp mind, especially for details, could not recall any relative ever telling him a detailed story about his mother. He was sure that they had told him some "facts" about her, but he could not recall any stories: "I don't know activities she was in, I just don't know very much about it, even. You're right, looks like they would have talked more about it but maybe they didn't"; and later: "I don't know why I am so blank about that. Looks like they would have."<sup>23</sup> Given Thorp's sharp memory, these lapses in Leah's history indicate how little the storytelling tradition of the family centred around her life in his youth, even immediately after she died. Thorp is known throughout our family as being a grand storyteller who relishes tales about the family, especially of his father's family, because he grew up with them and knew them intimately. This made his sparse repertoire on Leah all the more remarkable. Evelyn, Thorp's wife, knew the facts as related over the decades by Thorp, but obviously could know no more.

Of Thorp and Evelyn's children, only Stephen and I had a good grasp on the trajectory of Leah's life. Stephen and I had each, independently, done some research on her, I because of my professional interest in folklore and history, Stephen because of his interest in family history. Mary, an actress and theatre producer in Massachusetts, likewise had done some research, using Leah's play-party material to include in a play she produced. Of my other four siblings, they all had a glimmering of comprehension of Leah's life, although all of them configured the "facts" in ways that fit their own preferred image of Leah. Linda, who was given Leah's name as her middle name, considered being Leah's namesake a hard role to bear. Roger noted that the only things known about Leah were positives, never negatives. Beth's impulse was to reject the mythic image

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<sup>23</sup> Thorp L. Wolford, interview by John Wolford, Louisville, Kentucky, 2 January 2009.

and focus her attention on her mother's side of the family. While Richard, the supreme storyteller, knew little about Leah since there were few Leah stories to convey. So the Leah tradition became a family myth-building process, all of us constructing a mythic hero or anti-hero in our own image. The actual information was so weak, that the myth-making process was easy to develop, individually; see the attached video link entitled Impressions (2).

If my generation's information was weak, the next generation's was even weaker. We interviewed only three of Leah's fifteen great grandchildren. Bryan Jackson Carter, Linda's son and the oldest of his generation, had fond memories of Leo, but they were vague since he was only four when Leo died. While he did not share any stories about Leah, he did know that she had died in childbirth and that she had written the book; in fact, he owned the book and had thumbed through it, much like his uncles and aunts had. Katherine (Katy) Finch, Beth's daughter, grew up knowing virtually nothing about Leah, except that she had died in childbirth. Leah Elizabeth Wolford, Stephen's daughter and Leah's only other namesake, knew very little herself, and in fact grew up hating her name, because it was unusual for its time: "Early on, I hated my name. Because nobody else was a Leah. In fact, when my sister was born I made sure that she got a name that everybody would have. Which is good because again, she didn't get picked on as a kid, like, That's a Leah, what kind of a name is Leah? Leah the Flea-ah, and all sorts of horrible little taunts from little boys in the class."<sup>24</sup> Later on, she became more interested in her namesake, and happened upon *The Play-Party* at her undergraduate school, Hanover College, where she flipped through it. Leah has amassed some written material on her great grandmother, as well as on other family matters, but has a hard time keeping the material straight in her own memory. Interestingly, her grandfather, Thorp Wolford, took Leah on a private trip to Versailles around 1990, no doubt to familiarize her with her namesake's hometown and environs. When we interviewed her, she did not remember whether the town she visited was Versailles (Leah's hometown) or Linton (Leo's hometown), and did not remember much about it since she was only fourteen at the time.<sup>25</sup> As far as we know, Thorp has never taken another child or grandchild on a similar trip.

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<sup>24</sup> Leah Elizabeth Wolford, interview by John Wolford, Louisville, Kentucky, 3 January 2009.

<sup>25</sup> Bryan Jackson Carter, interview by John Wolford, Louisville, Kentucky, 31 December 2008; Katherine Finch, interview by John Wolford, Louisville, Kentucky, 30 December 2008; Leah Elizabeth Wolford, interview.

## Leah As The Family Constructs Her

All of Leah's grandchildren are in their 50s or 60s, and the three great grandchildren interviewed are in their 30s and 40s. These are prime ages for people to develop an interest in history, whether family history or otherwise. It is also a time when the memories of the past, reconstructed as memory always is, can conflict between family members, which often comes as a shock. Memory is famously inconsistent and inexact, and the added factor of family dynamics gives family memories the distinction of providing more profound drama to a person's life. Martha Langford notes that "flashbulb memory" arises from personalized collective experience where the "I" is central, whereas personal memory is less reliable, more embroidered, the basis for a "good story."<sup>26</sup> Because of this embroidery, rarely would two members of a family remember a personal event quite the same way, which can be cause for either disagreements or fights, depending on the relationship between family members. Within our family we tend to wrangle over the details in our personal memories, but generally can agree to disagree. As a result, we are developing a greater respect for the mutable character of memory, often walking away from family story sessions with far less faith in our own power to remember accurately. The following four sub-sections indicate the vagaries of family memory and varieties of family myth-making. These sub-sections range from constructed stories, whether based on an undocumented picture or created out of whole fabric, to individual recognition of our own dearth of knowledge of this direct ancestor's life, even of the amazing book that became a classic in its field. Coming to know Leah better has made us all realize how little we do truly know anything.

### *A. Family Image of Leah: "Like a Saint"*

The family's image of Leah is two-dimensional, flat and ideal, without the complications of a real person's life. Family members were quite eloquent on this point. Linda said, "I thought of her as very beautiful, timeless, very intelligent. She became our family saint, more or less. No one would ever become as wonderful as she was and my grandfather would never ever marry again because he would never get over her."<sup>27</sup> Evelyn said:

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<sup>26</sup> Martha Langford, *Scissors, Paper, Stone: Expressing Memory in Contemporary Photographic Art* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 251.

<sup>27</sup> Linda W. Carter, interview by John Wolford, Louisville, Kentucky, 31 December 2008.



I've become very cynical in my old age, but I've decided that once one dies, one gets a halo. So if you want a halo, don't do it the hard way. Leah obviously was a very fine person, and lots of fun, she had a sense of humour. And she was an excellent student, she was a teacher, a principal of a school, two schools I think, one in Versailles and one in Holton, which is a nearby town...And [pause] she also went up to Chicago and got her graduate degree, together with Leo before they were married. And I just get very favourable impressions of her. And of course the pictures are lovely.<sup>28</sup>

Roger is the one who explicitly stated that all the facts-as-transmitted are positive: "I think we all had a very positive feeling about her, although again, she wasn't discussed much. And maybe it's, I mean, if you think about what we know, we don't know very many negatives. What we know are positives."<sup>29</sup> When asked about her image within the family, or what traits they would ascribe to her, they came up with, in order of frequency: great writer, smart, a romantic ideal, tragic, a great or supportive wife, perfect, saintly, and fun; two responses each were garnered for beautiful, modest or uncomplaining, musically talented, timeless or eternally young, while one each arose for being goal-oriented, heroic, personable, a simple or good person, strong-willed, and having a sense of humour.

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<sup>28</sup> Evelyn C. Wolford, interview by John Wolford, Louisville, Kentucky, 6 January 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Roger Jackson Wolford, interview by John Wolford, Louisville, Kentucky, 2 January 2009.

	Thorp	Evelyn	Beth	Linda	Stephen	Richard	Mary	Roger	Bryan	Katy	Leah	
<b>The Play Party in Indiana</b>												
Has the book	YES	NO	maybe	maybe	YES	YES	YES	nm	YES	NO	NO	
Knows which copy owned or read	YES	NO	NO	NO	ALL	NO	YES	NA	NO	NA	NO	
Read the book	YES	some	NO	NO	some	YES	YES	some	some	NO	some	
Knew she wrote the book	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	
<b>Leah's Chronology</b>												
Birth date (September 7, 1892)	YES	nm	vague	nm	YES	nm	nm	NO	NO	NO	NO	
College dates (1909-1912)	YES	nm	vague	vague	YES	nm	ynd	YES	NO	NO	ynd	
MA finished (1915)	YES	ynd	ynd	NO	YES	nm	ynd	nm	NO	NO	ynd	
Play Party book: date (1916)	YES	nm	nm	NO	YES	nm	YES	nm	NO	NO	NO	
Marriage year (1916)	YES	nm	nm	NO	YES	nm	YES	YES	NO	NO	ynd	
Death date (January 14, 1918)	YES	nm	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	ynd	
Death date connected with Thorp's birth	YES	nm	YES	YES	YES	YES; but wrong date	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	
<b>Other</b>												
Born in Versailles	YES	nm	nm	NO	YES	nm	nm	YES	NO	NO	NO	
Grew up in Versailles	YES	nm	YES	NO	YES	nm	nm	YES	NO	NO	NO	
Teacher in Versailles	YES	ynd	nm	NO	YES	nm	nm	nm	NO	NO	NO	
Teacher in Holton	YES	ynd	nm	NO	vague	NO	nm	nm	NO	NO	NO	
Teacher in New Albany	YES	nm	YES	YES	YES	nm	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	
Principal at a southern Indiana school	YES	nm		NO	YES	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	YES	
loved to ride horses	YES	nm		YES	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	
was musical, or could play piano	YES	nm	YES	YES	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	
burial delayed because of frozen ground	YES	nm	nm	nm	nm	YES	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	
<b>Picture</b>												
Owns it	YES	nm	nm	nm	YES	nm	YES	YES	nm	NO	NO	
Knows where it is	NO	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	YES	nm	nm	NA	NA	
Displays it	YES	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	YES	nm	nm	NA	NA	
Knows the story, or a variation	YES	nm	nm	YES	nm	nm	YES	YES	nm	nm	NO	
Thorp gave it to people	NO	YES	nm	YES	YES	nm	YES	YES	nm	nm	nm	
Leo gave it to people	dk	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	
Don't know who gave it	YES	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	
<b>Image</b>												
great writer	YES	YES	YES	nm	nm	nm	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	8
smart	nm	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	nm	nm	nm	YES	7
romantic ideal	nm	nm	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	nm	nm	nm	YES	6
tragic	nm	nm	YES	nm	nm	nm	YES	YES	nm	YES	YES	5
great wife, supportive	nm	nm	YES	YES	YES	nm	nm	YES	nm	nm	nm	4
perfect	nm	YES	YES	YES	YES	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	4
saintly, idealized	nm	YES	YES	YES	YES	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	4
fun	nm	YES	nm	nm	nm	YES	nm	nm	nm	YES	nm	3
beautiful	nm	nm	nm	YES	nm	YES	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	2
modest, uncomplaining	nm	nm	nm	YES	nm	nm	nm	YES	nm	nm	nm	2
talented musician	YES	nm	YES	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	2
timeless, or eternally young	nm	nm	nm	YES	nm	YES	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	2
goal-oriented	nm	nm	nm	YES	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	1
heroic	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	YES	nm	nm	nm	1
personable	nm	nm	nm	YES	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	1
sense of humor	nm	YES	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	1
simple, good person	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	YES	nm	nm	nm	1
strong-willed	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	nm	YES	1

**Key:**  
 NM=Not Mentioned  
 YND: YES, but No Date  
 NA: Not Applicable  
 DK: Don't Know

Figure 1. Responses to Questions about Leah Jackson Wolford, by her descended family, December 2008 – February 2009<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> I devised this chart based on the responses from the oral histories and from the one email interview that we conducted with members of Leah's descended family. The chart illustrates the wide range of perceptions of both the events in Leah's life as well as what her personality may have been like. Uniformly, all responses indicated a positive image of this forebear, all based on the most elementary of facts.

Obviously, her positive image was fairly rock solid within the family. Yet there always seemed to be a sense of wanting to know more about her, especially mundane details, because family members generally recognize human personality as complex and conflicted. The interviews expressed a sense that Leah's life and personality had more to offer than a mythologizing image could give. For the most part, family members felt cheated, that they were never really allowed to know her. It was as if only half a life were available. As Beth said with laughter, "It's just, it's like a saint. It's like, you know, a graven image somewhere. It's beyond perfection." She paused to collect her thoughts. "Loving daughter, amazing wife, gave her life for her son, published this book, smart and educated and finished in three years, musician." She paused and then continued, "Reading these letters I've seen some personality...and that's nice. Because before that, you know, she could have had a halo and been hanging on the wall."<sup>31</sup> In fact, Beth did see her hanging on a wall, because Leah's photograph hung in the family dining room from 1948-1950, when Beth was a young girl. As Beth said, Leah was like an icon, hanging on the wall, a person unknown, unknowable, mysterious, yet to be revered; see the attached video link entitled Leah as Saint (3).

### *B. The "Classic" Picture*

Annette Kuhn writes, "[c]ultural theory tells us there is little that is really personal or private about either family photographs or the memories they evoke: they can mean only culturally."<sup>32</sup> The history of Leah's "photographic presence" is in and of itself fascinating because it reflects how her presence in the family developed as an unspoken cultural icon. Whatever information about the "classic picture" of Leah (see Image 1), the one family photograph we all knew, died with Leah and the people who had lived with her. What was left was the photograph alone, around which the family constructed cultural meanings. Langford notes how the process of taking or making a photograph is equivalent to collecting, in that one "[cuts] an image out of the mental pack" to store.<sup>33</sup> In just this way of cutting and storing, the "classic picture" of Leah came to be the stored image collected and treasured among family members, the only one bequeathed by family history.

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth W. Finch, interview by John Wolford, Louisville, Kentucky, 1 January 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Kuhn, *Family Secrets*, 14. An extensive and fascinating literature on cultural understandings of photography exists. Prominent commentators include, but certainly are not limited to, Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, Marlene Briggs, Colin Haring, Marianne Hirsch, Patricia Holland, Annette Kuhn, Martha Langford, Brian Lewis, Kirsten Emiko MacAllister, Rosy Martin, Susan Sontag, and Jo Spence. See Kuhn, *Family Secrets*, and Annette Kuhn and Kirsten Emiko MacAllister, *Locating Memory: Photographic Acts* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), for more bibliographic references.

<sup>33</sup> Langford, *Scissors, Paper, Stone*, 13.



Image 4. Leah Jackson Wolford, circa 1914-1915<sup>34</sup>

From 1948-1950, a large tinted copy of this photograph, in an oval frame, graced Thorp and Evelyn's dining room wall, which Beth, Linda, and Stephen viewed regularly. Much later, smaller tinted copies were given to all seven grandchildren, in individual frames. The actual reason for the gifting of these photographs is lost, since no one can agree either on who distributed them or why. The distribution of the photograph to the grandchildren in the hazy past (no one can agree when it happened, but it seems to have been distributed around 1975)<sup>35</sup> secured, with this tangible keepsake, Leah's image as a romantic, ideal ancestor.<sup>36</sup> The combination of shrouded, valorising information of an unknowable grandmother with a

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<sup>34</sup> This image actually originated from the University of Chicago, which it kept it in its records. See Letter from Mary O. Hoyt, Secretary, Board of Recommendations, University of Chicago, to Leo Thorp Wolford, 19 October 1920, in TLWA, Louisville, Kentucky. This original greyscale photograph of Leah serves as the frontispiece for Richmond and Tillson's revised edition of her book, copyright 1959.

<sup>35</sup> Letter from Roger Wolford to Thorp and Evelyn Wolford, 10 February 1975, 3, in TLWA, Louisville, Kentucky.

<sup>36</sup> Susan Pearce has written extensively and persuasively on the symbolic significance of collecting among Westerners. She suggests that people purposefully select elements of their past in order to valorise them, much as the Romantic period valorised the "authentic" folk as "essentially truthful and sincere." Susan Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995), 318. In much the same way, the photograph distributed in 1975 to the grandchildren and its subsequent continuous public display, enshrines Leah as an "authentic" ancestor representing values and ideals to which the family may aspire.

presumably ritualistic presentation of an idealized picture ensured that the grandchildren would all begin to construct personally validating cultural representations of Leah for themselves.

The classic photograph (see Image 1) is legion within the family, and family members have always treasured it as much for what they thought was its singularity as for whom it represented. It was as if the rarity of the picture paralleled Leah's distance from the family. However, this newly discovered archive has revealed nearly sixty photographs of Leah, taken both formally (in studios) and informally, from infancy to her last year, which now makes the classic photograph not so unique. This newly discovered studio photograph, see Image 5 below, is the one that several interviewees like the most, simply because, as they say, it shows some personality. Leah is staring directly into the camera and seems to be locking eyes with the viewer.



Image 5. Leah Jackson Wolford, circa 1916-1917<sup>37</sup>

She has a glimmer of a smile on her face, indicating a sense of humour, as Evelyn had noted. The classic picture, see Image 1, in contrast, is a beautiful photograph of a beautiful woman: calm, professional, modern, and unassailable. Like the iconic images of George Washington, the viewer gets little sense of who that person is. Viewing Image 1 and Image 5 at the same time, one can get a sense

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<sup>37</sup> Leah's dress is atypically elaborate, which makes members of the family think it may be a picture of Leah in her wedding dress. Since her face is a bit fuller than in other pictures and given that she was pregnant for nine of the sixteen months she lived in New Albany, family members have speculated she may have been pregnant here. Photograph of Leah Jackson Wolford, taken at the Riddle Studio, New Albany, Indiana, in TLWA, Louisville, Kentucky.

of the different messages being sent, whether by Leah herself, the photographer, or whoever might give the photograph as a gift: the classic photograph represents the idealized Leah of family tradition, while the other is the humanized Leah emergent from the archive.

Other formal photographs of Leah exist as well, studio shots where the intent would have been a representation of a formalized, proper woman of society. In the classic picture, taken around 1914-1915, this intent is obviously subverted, as Linda notes, by her very casual attire and her congenial, unblinking gaze. Being airbrushed and tinted in later years evinces an attempt by some unknown artist to memorialize her as an ideal, yet this ideal is of both domestic and independent womanhood. The other photograph presented above, in Image 5, is likewise a studio picture, taken in New Albany, presumably after she was married (she moved to New Albany immediately after her honeymoon). She obviously chose to come to the studio, frocked in an elaborate dress, to sit for an elite portraiture, all of which represent her as a woman cognizant of her class, and perhaps happily aware of her bright future. Yet it is her very intimate gaze that locks in the viewer in what could be a private joke. Though set in a studio, this picture could easily have been a snapshot. For her preparation, she did nothing to hide the puffiness of her eyes, nor did she pay particular attention to ensure her hair was perfect: strands fly off on the left side, and her braids are coiled haphazardly on top of her head. But again, it is her gaze that captivates the viewer. Family members declared that she looked playful, relaxed, disarming, fun, and even mischievous. The persona in the picture sits in contrast to the presumption of the sitting: a formal portraiture where she playfully disavows the formality. Not only is this a conflicted studio picture, its very existence is an anomaly. Why would the photographer take the picture? Once taken, why keep it? Once kept, why would Leah and/or Leo buy it and then keep it?

Another photograph below, (see Image 6) which must have been taken at this same sitting, given the same dress and appearance, is quite a formal picture.



Image 6. Leah Jackson Wolford, circa 1916-1917<sup>38</sup>

Many copies of Image 6 exist, packed in a now dusty envelope, apparently to distribute to family and friends. Perhaps many were distributed, but these are the ones that are left over. At Thorp Wolford's house, a framed desk-stand copy of Image 6 sits on a bureau, ostensibly once gracing a mantel or shelf in a relative's house. But only one copy of Image 5 exists, buried amidst papers in a dusty box. Why keep, and then hide for decades, Image 5, the Leah who looks at the viewer with a strong, straightforward, mischievous gaze? Why preference the more formal picture, Image 6, yet not distribute them all? Langford, citing Martha Keenan, notes that a photograph is "a potential site for remembering and forgetting. Remembrance dominates as long as memory's flow is continuous and associations are strong, while the rediscovery of an image whose content has been

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<sup>38</sup> Although obviously taken at the same sitting as Image 5, this presentation indicates a reserve appropriate to a studio photograph. Gone is the puffy face, the direct gaze, and the unkempt hair. While the hair still flies off, it is subsumed within the composure of the subject. Leah is indeed a "subject" here, rather than a person projecting a complex personality, as in Image 5. Photograph of Leah Jackson Wolford, taken at the Riddle Studio, New Albany, Indiana, TLWA, Louisville, Kentucky.

forgotten transforms photographic experiences into a crisis of memory – a mixture of self-doubt and mourning.”<sup>39</sup> Certainly, the storage, dispersal, lack of dispersal, and the privileging of one photograph over all others has created both an active effort at “remembering” the classic picture, Image 1, and “forgetting” all of the others.

However, when interviewed, family members discussed the classic picture, the only picture they commonly knew. The story of her getting her Chicago picture taken was the only data that descendants related to best, precisely because it was practically the only one where there was even a kernel of a story, whether true or totally fabricated, revealing a sense of humanity. Interestingly, in contrast to the typical data in the Leah corpus, where a fact may be known but no story exists, in this one, the facts really are not known. Rather, only a story is told. Thorp and Evelyn are the sources for this story. While Thorp remembers being told the story, neither he nor Evelyn were sure about the details. Linda said: “The story is that she just walked into the photographer’s one day. She was walking down the street and said: ‘Take my picture.’ Now I don’t know if it was for a special reason or not. But she was just wearing a white blouse with a Peter Pan collar and it’s very casual, but, a very beautiful picture”<sup>40</sup>; see the attached video link entitled *The Chicago Photograph* (4). Linda did not know whether Leah was alone or with someone, or even what city the picture was taken in. In contrast to the family story, the actual information behind that picture, as deduced from the archival records, is mundane: the picture was part of her University of Chicago records, possibly a picture she submitted to apply to Chicago (in which case it would have been shot in Versailles, not Chicago) or else a résumé picture for her job application files, which Chicago maintained. The university sent a letter with three copies of the picture to Leo Woldford in 1920, upon learning that Leah had died.<sup>41</sup> Knowing this now, and recognizing its possible function to promote Leah as a viable professional in the urban school systems of America, humanizes the icon, and in fact, makes the picture more understandable. It actually looks like a résumé picture. She may even have sent a copy of it to the Indiana Centennial Commission in her application to have her book published.

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<sup>39</sup> Langford, *Scissors, Paper, Stone*, 17, citing Catherine Keenan, “On the relationship between personal photographs and individual memory” in *History of Photography* 22, 1 (Spring 1998), 60-64.

<sup>40</sup> Linda W. Carter, interview,

<sup>41</sup> Letter from Mary O. Hoyt to Leo Thorp Woldford, TLWA, Louisville, Kentucky.



### *C. Leah's Book*

Uniformly, all of the members of our family mentioned that they had seen “the book” and had, at the very least, thumbed through it. Two of the three great grandchildren interviewed, Katy and Leah, indicated that they do not own a copy; and two of the seven grandchildren, Beth and Linda, indicated that they were unsure whether they had a copy, although they were sure it must be somewhere, since they knew someone had given it to them at some point. Six mentioned that they had read (or thumbed through) portions of it, while Mary, Richard, Stephen, Thorp, and I said that they had read the book in its entirety. Quite apparently, each individual’s interest in whatever the book might offer reflects only his or her own interest, paralleling the pattern of how each individual reconstructed, or dismissed, Leah as an ancestral figure. As noted above, Mary, the actor, director, and theatrical producer, said that she and her husband used the published book for supporting material for a play they had produced. Thorp WOLFORD, Leah’s son, read the original edition straight through, as a proud son might. His wife, Evelyn, who has a library science degree in children’s literature, had read through parts and had enjoyed the songs and games. Stephen, Leah’s grandson interested in various aspects of his family history, indicated that he had found the narrative part that Leah had written most interesting, since it deals with the historical and cultural background of the play-party, and thus, of the context in which the ancestral family lived. The rest of the family indicated that the book really was of little interest to them, since they were not deeply interested in children’s games, songs, and dance. Roger’s response was characteristic: “I have gone through it. I don’t know that I have read every bit of it; it was of very little interest to me... You get a little tired of the singsongs, right,” he said with laughter.<sup>42</sup> The family in general understood that the book is a scholarly publication, not a children’s book, and that its audience would be an esoteric group of academics interested in children’s games, songs, and dance; see the attached video link entitled *The Play Party* (5).

In a family that esteems writing skills, it would seem that the one forebear who achieved fame in whatever field would herself be esteemed, but that did not happen in our family’s estimation of Leah. While we each have devised our own writerly pursuits, we viewed her as a scholarly author in a field that did not interest us. Thorp crafted for himself, as Edson Richmond wrote, “perfectly united careers,” becoming the “law partner of his father and a teacher of English” at the

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<sup>42</sup> Roger Jackson WOLFORD, interview.

University of Louisville.<sup>43</sup> He could have added that Thorp also became a writer, publishing as early as his graduate school years in academic journals and winning fiction and poetry awards in writing competitions in Kentucky. The writing tradition has been passed down to several descendants, many of whom have published and won prizes. Of course, Leah's book is not the only evidence of creativity in the family, since Evelyn, Leo, and various in-laws have made names for themselves publishing and winning awards. Katy could relate to the writing tradition in the family, but not so much to Leah herself. Moreover, her feelings on writing are conflicted:

My father [Robert Finch] was an author and I think in a way I was you know in my childhood and teenage years it was almost a point of not being impressed. Because he was my dad and I did not want to be adulating my dad about his abilities. And I met a lot of authors and they would come to our house. And they always treated me like normal people and I guess I sort of, I liked that. And maybe, maybe there was some psychology behind the idea of, I didn't think it was special.<sup>44</sup>

She began writing as a child, but blossomed when publishing in online magazines in California in the early 1990s and writing her own zines. For Katy, as perhaps with the rest of us, writing was not about continuing a family tradition but about fulfilling a personal impulse. Nonetheless, she fully recognized the authorial traditions of the family, including the Wolford side, even being somewhat intimidated by it, saying:

I always had a very, you know, deep sense that the Wolfords in general were writers. Even at birthday parties and stuff there would be poems and jokes and you know written pieces that people would read all the time...Right, even the dinnertime banter would be intimidating...As a child I didn't, it felt like you needed to have something, you know, very witty, well-constructed. And I bet that started when you guys were kids and that may have been something that was happening with granddaddy, with Thorp, when he was young.<sup>45</sup>

Writing and being literary, then, had meaning to Katy, but she could relate it to Leah only as an afterthought, or moreso, upon being prompted. Katy is

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<sup>43</sup> W. Edson Richmond, "Preface," in *Leah Jackson Wolford's The Play-Party in Indiana*, eds. W. Edson Richmond and William Tillson (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1959), 104.

<sup>44</sup> Katy A. Finch, interview.

<sup>45</sup> Katy A. Finch, interview.

representative. Our family values the creative impulse in writing, we praise the creative spirits among ourselves, yet Leah-as-writer exists only as a facet of an icon, not as a genetic or cultural source for our own creativity.

#### *D. Knowing Leah's Life History*

That the family in general could not provide much information about Leah's writing, even though family members obviously respect writing ability, indicates how little the family cares about the substance or the quality of her writing. In fact, that only two people in the family, Thorp and Stephen, could provide even close to a full and correct chronology of Leah's life is a very telling indicator of the family's overall comprehension of Leah. Stephen was able to do this only after having done family history research through his adult years, whereas Thorp grew up with the details of her life. On only one point was everyone generally correct: the year she died, because they could connect it to Thorp's birth. Only two people were sure of her birth year (1892); no one was sure when she entered Franklin College (1909); most knew that she graduated with Leo, but only three knew the year (1912); and all were hazy on the years after her college graduation up to her death six years later. It must be noted that some did however know about a handful of general events: that she had taught somewhere; that she was a principal somewhere; that she obtained a master's degree from Chicago or somewhere at some time; that she had been married; and that she had died soon after childbirth. Notably, the chronology question elicited objective facts, and most family members were able to provide vague data (whether true or not) but bereft of a story. In general, the typical chronology as narrated floated her life ambiguously around Leo's, a person most interviewees knew personally: it incorporated her college and graduate years and the publication of the book, and was generally without any dates except for her death date, which was pinpointed only by Thorp's birth.<sup>46</sup>

Of course, the facts should be vague. As Michael Frisch notes about narrators trying to speak about their parents' experiences during the Great Depression: "Having never been well-connected to the history, memory continues to function as a creator of distance, not merely as an expression of it."<sup>47</sup> If there are stories, they help to bridge the gap: they bring people's lives into focus and make them vibrant, giving them something to which they may relate. The contrary thing about Leah's legacy is that people who knew her, who lived with her, played with her, courted her, and raised her, the people who lived with her and survived her, who quite overtly admired her, never told any stories about her after

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<sup>46</sup> See Figure 1.

<sup>47</sup> Frisch, 12.

she died. While many people in families have “vanished” from their family’s history and folklore because of a lack of stories, Leah’s case is different. Families typically tell stories about family members who have achieved beyond the family’s norm, as Leah had, yet no stories were told about her. While we may only surmise the reasons for this, no doubt her tragic death made recounting her life painful to those who had been close to her, so they chose silence. Her descendants had recourse to only two sources for her life story: stripped down objective facts of dates and places; and a silence pregnant with a sense that more had been known about her, but was never talked about. What our family members did was fill in the silence and elaborate on the skeletal facts, thus creating their own heroic saga of her life.

### **Leah Archived**

In the future, making connections between ancestors our family will come to know and the facts and stories of their lives will be one important outcome of the development of this archive. Wedded to the cultural meanings that we have traditionally ascribed to her one picture will be new stories that Leah herself provides, through the archive. As the family reads more of Leah’s letters, her personality and the events of her life assume a sense of immediacy to us. Just as we connect her death to Thorp’s life, or her life as a satellite around her husband’s, we will also begin to link her achievements and frustrations to the stories she tells in her letters. The act of reading the letters will integrate her life back into our family history. The letters that tie her to us in the most visceral ways will be the ones that evoke emotion, as a good story would.

On 13 January 1913, Leo’s father died. On that very day, Leah sat down and penned an amazing condolence letter to Leo.<sup>48</sup> He must have spoken to her by telephone or sent her a telegram to let her know the news. Her personal, literary, and religious references artfully interlaced into a composition that was comforting, spiritual, and yet also reassuringly mundane.

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<sup>48</sup> Letter from Leah Flo Jackson to Leo Thorp Welford, 13 January 1913, in TLWA, Louisville, Kentucky.

But dear, God would not have us think of the loss only. His greatest highest law is to offer up a life well spent. "For whosoever would be greatest among you let him be your minister; - Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." I believe that kind of work of helpfulness though at a great cost, will not die but be for all time, not only helpfulness, but honesty, perseverance, self-sacrifice. Browning wrote you know "There shall never be one lost good," and so I believe every one of those deeds lives and is growing and often transforming the lives of those whom we would never think of. Thus the promise "and so I am with you always, even (not till death) but unto the end of the world."

I can think something of what this means thought to you and the daring to undertake such responsibility the last two weeks warrants the name Leo or lion hearted.

Image 7. Excerpt from letter from Leah Flo Jackson to Leo Thorp Welford, 13 January 1913<sup>49</sup>

I know this note is useless for God alone can help in this need but dearest do not feel that you are left alone for to solve the problems. Also know that whatever comes I am as ever

Your friend and sister and Leah.

Image 8. Excerpt from Letter from Leah Flo Jackson to Leo Thorp Welford, 13 January 1913<sup>50</sup>

She even diverges at one point into a discourse on what she had done that day, simply showing that life goes on. When I showed this letter to Stephen, Mary, and Linda, the emotion, eloquence, and poignancy of the letter hooked them. Linda noted that Leo could have used the advice this letter provides as a template just five years and one day later, when Leah herself died.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Letter in TLWA, Louisville, Kentucky.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Yet her letters also showed a playful side, a character trait never suspected by the family. She teased Leo about a picture he had sent her (as yet undiscovered) of him sporting a moustache. She wrote, in response to a previous letter and a photograph from him:

Dearest Leo,

...Tantalizing? Well if burning a letter without letting anybody see it is that, what about shaving a mustache before letting it be seen. Really, according to the mustache you and Mather have pretty good prospects of becoming men sometime. You boys must be fed well. Why if you stand a little closer your cheeks would almost touch instead of your ears. Really those mustaches look fine at this distance (Holton-Chicago) but I suppose they are not so becoming at close range or you would have invited Faye and me for spring vacation.

Congratulations on your success in the [law] case. Say did the mustache do it? Or did you cut it off for that?

I'll behave. See if I don't....<sup>52</sup>

No different than any teenage or courting couple, they typically coded their letters, or wrote very privately; they would often, in fact, ask one another to “burn this letter,” as Leah apparently had asked Leo to do in the letter noted above. Occasionally, they did not honour that request, since some of these letters still exist. They likely were highly conscious of living in small towns where people would gossip, were they to find the letters. Beth figured out one of the codes. Frequently they would address or sign their letters as “O” or “Ah.” Beth quickly recognized that these were LeO and LeAH:

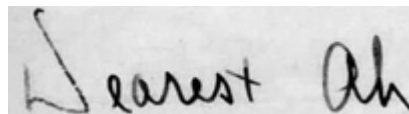
A close-up photograph of a handwritten salutation in cursive script. The word "Dearest" is written in a large, flowing cursive, followed by "Ah" in a slightly smaller, more compact cursive. The ink is dark on a light-colored paper background.

Image 9. Salutation in letter from Leo Thorp Woldford to Leah Flo Jackson, 11 November 1911<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Letter from Leah Flo Jackson to Leo Thorp Woldford, Tuesday evening, 3 March 1914, based on the postmark of 6 March 1914, TLWA, Louisville, Kentucky.

<sup>53</sup> Salutation in a letter dated 11 November 1911, TLWA, Louisville, Kentucky.

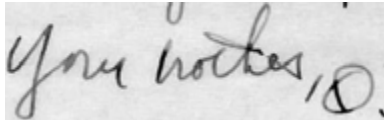
A close-up photograph of a handwritten sign-off in cursive script. The text reads "Your brother, O." with a small circle drawn around the letter "O" at the end of the sentence.

Image 10. Sign-off in letter from Leo Thorp Welford to Leah Flo Jackson, 11 November 1911<sup>54</sup>

Humanizing elements like these, as well as the brother-sister motif that reflects familial, religious, and friendship values, provides insights into the foundations of their relationship, and thus, of their characters. Further insights emerge in emotionally honest letters, such as when Leo admitted to being “blue” in August and September 1912, because he had to forgo Harvard Law School in order to stay home to work in the family’s store. These papers, revealing traits and facts that simply do not fit the family iconography, will have the effect, over time, of fleshing out both Leo and Leah. New facts, like Leah’s sudden but unnamed illness and hospitalization immediately after her college graduation (1912) will add more mystery until other facts are discovered. Mere verbal play from the letters will reveal the contours of her personality. In a letter she wrote Leo two months after that illness, she includes two pictures of herself during her hospitalization.

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<sup>54</sup> Note that Leo signs off as “Your brother, O.” Leo and Leah often referred to each other as brother and sister, which I interpret as deriving from their religious backgrounds, as well as their strong sense of family. Letter dated 11 November 1911, TLWA, Louisville, Kentucky.



Image 11. Picture of Leah Flo Jackson in a letter to Leo Thorp Wolford, 7 August 1912<sup>55</sup>

She obviously did not think much of those pictures, since she said “Take a pickle or a pill before looking at them and you can appreciate better the beautiful facial expression.”<sup>56</sup> In a letter her father wrote to her, Leah’s ability to become frustrated with, even “blue over,” writing her master’s thesis, springs forth:

I noticed in your letter that your Mamma received from you yesterday that you were a little blue over your work, your examinations, &ct [sic] and almost wished you were back home. Now of course we would be more than delighted to have you home but don’t want to think that my little girl is made of the kind of material that would give up at the 1<sup>st</sup> fall but with a brave heart face the problems of life feeling what others have done I can

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<sup>55</sup> In this letter, Leah states that she is standing outside the hospital in Madison, Indiana. Two brothers, both doctors surnamed Denny, apparently ran the “Denny hospital.” This hospital now survives as King’s Daughters’ Hospital in Madison. See letter dated 7 August 1912, TLWA, Louisville, Kentucky.

<sup>56</sup> Letter from Leah Flo Jackson to Leo Thorp Wolford, 7 August 1912, TLWA, Louisville, Kentucky.



do also. I know you can do so, and were it only in my power would so to speak stretch forth my hand and support you in final effort of reaching your desired goal. I have long since found out that but few of our ideals ever materialize and the long looked for and hoped for things of life often are missed but with a hope to beckon us on we try to forget the failures and only in so far as possible look back in the past to those things marked with success hiding the others if in all your school life and examinations this is the only failure that can effect so much I hope you will have before this learned to meet it with a brave and cheerful heart.<sup>57</sup>

More than pinpointing any tendency toward becoming overwhelmed by academic work, this letter as much identifies models of behaviour, relationships, and values that inhere within Leah's natal family: parental support, perseverance, the ability to confront issues to achieve goals, even while realizing that life cannot offer all that one might hope for.

Like the letter above from Leah's father, the archive offered up startling surprises occasionally. I discovered an odd musical score for instance. At first, I thought it was simply a score for one of the play-party songs, like the one of "Itiskit"; see the attached file entitled Musical Transcription and Research Notes.<sup>58</sup> But then I realized it was a literary oddity (see Image 12): a letter written on a musical score, called a musical rebus.<sup>59</sup> I sent it by email to members of the family to see if they could decode it. Family members were absolutely animated by the note. Eight family members wrote over forty emails discussing and decoding this letter. Externally, an ex-husband, a sister of a sister-in-law, a folklore specialist in library science and games, and a mayor of my nephew's town all got involved in trying to figure out what the letter said.

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<sup>57</sup> Letter from Newton Jackson to Leah Flo Jackson, 16 January 1915, TLWA, Louisville, Kentucky.

<sup>58</sup> This document contains the musical transcription and research notes for "Itiskit", a play-party song, circa 1914-1916, TLWA, Louisville, Kentucky.

<sup>59</sup> Letter from Leah Flo Jackson to Leo Thorp Welford, 26 December 1910, TLWA, Louisville, Kentucky. I discovered the term "musical rebus" from the SEM-L (Society for Ethnomusicology List) and MLA-L (Music Library Association List) discussion lists, when I posted a query 19 June 2009 about this musical letter. My thanks to the many respondents of that query.

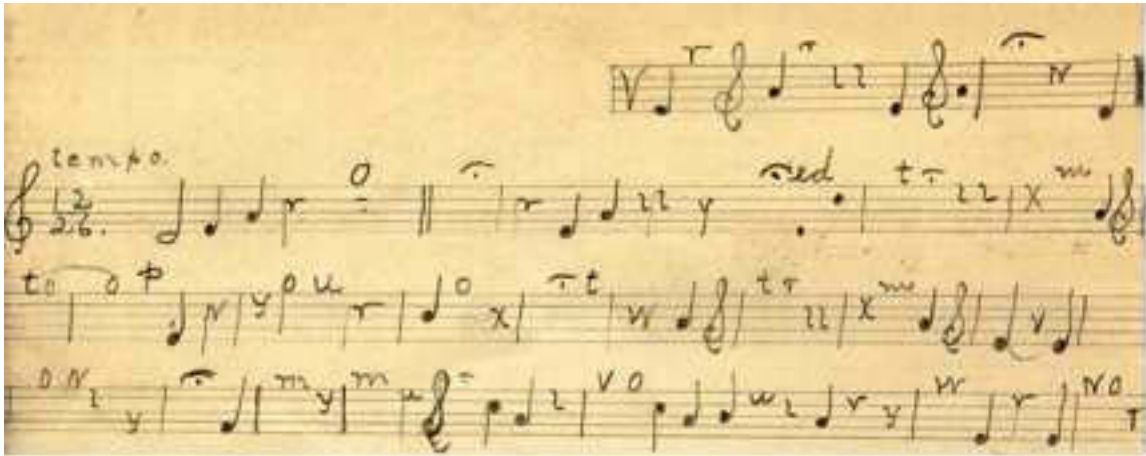


Image 12. Musical Rebus Letter from Leah Flo Jackson to Leo Thorp Wolford, 26 December 1910<sup>60</sup>

The rebus uses musical notes to represent letters and in some cases, rests: thus, the note “C” will be an alphabetic “c.” Leah uses musical rests to represent either “waiting” or a “vacation,” or even a symbol for the pronoun “I” simply because it looks like a human eye. Where there is no musical analogue to an alphabetic letter or a word, she simply inserts the letter. Deciphering the excerpt from the rebus here, the upper right bars spell out her town, “Versailles, Ind.,” the tempo is the date of the letter, “12/26,” and the first bar is her salutation, “Dear O.” The message follows from there.<sup>61</sup> Jackson, Roger’s sixteen-year-old son, was the first to decode the entire message. It ended up having a fairly mundane message, a thank you from Leah to Leo for a Christmas gift. Despite its quotidian message, the overwhelmingly enthusiastic response by the family to the creativity of the rebus was notable. This particular letter is remarkable, but the family’s response to it, and how that response has reshaped people’s perceptions of Leah, is indicative of how the materials from this archive will have a lasting effect not only on Leah’s image, but also on how they may alter their understanding of who they are and what they have inherited through her. An email from my sister Mary Arnault to me expresses this notion so well:

<sup>60</sup> These are the first three lines of the musical rebus eighteen-year-old Leah sent to her boyfriend, Leo. It represents her interests in music and in writing, as well as her creativity and her growing romantic involvement with him. Letter dated 26 December 1910, TLWA, Louisville, Kentucky.

<sup>61</sup> The transcription of this excerpted “score” is: “Versailles Indiana, 12/26, Dear O, I really waited till Xmas to open your box, it was till Xmas Eve. Only if my musical vocabulary were not” – and she finishes this thought with the next line: “So limited I could perhaps thank you better.” She goes on for another page and a half, signing it “Ah.” Letter dated 26 December 1910, TLWA, Louisville, Kentucky.

I would LOVE LOVE LOVE to see as many photos and read as much correspondence as possible. I, too, feel a better connection to them and how they lived – the kind of socializing, the importance of their studies, the importance and problems associated with travel and concerns like heating the house. How respect was paid according to generations – the kind of personalities that emerge. And I have only read a tiny fraction of what you have seen! I was so serious about being jealous of your proximity to all of this intimate family information and how I would love to be your assistant!<sup>62</sup>

So, Leah had stories. She lived a life worth talking about, as her letters and pictures reveal. She was not simply an angelic image. She played, she flirted, she consoled, and she was consoled. She got sick, she got blue. She was not necessarily pleased with the way that she looked. She taught Sunday School but would also skip church. She loved and studied both music and literature, so she wrote a letter as a musical rebus. My initial excursions into the archive have revealed this much. Certainly there is still a great deal of material in the archive that I need to mine, explore, and present. Hundreds of amazing letters between Leo and Leah exist, providing a window onto their daily lives, many day by day, between 1910 and 1916. Their letters frequently crossed in the mail; they often would write more than one letter a day. So the details of their lives, as well as their personal thoughts make this previously unknowable couple supremely knowable, as individuals and as a “case” (the 1910s slang for serious couples).<sup>63</sup> As I investigate more of these letters and other papers, Leah herself will emerge increasingly as a person to whom her descendants can claim not only genealogical, but also emotional kinship.

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<sup>62</sup> Email from Mary Walford Arnault to John Walford, 25 February 2009.

<sup>63</sup> *The Blue and Gold, 1912 Yearbook*, 202.

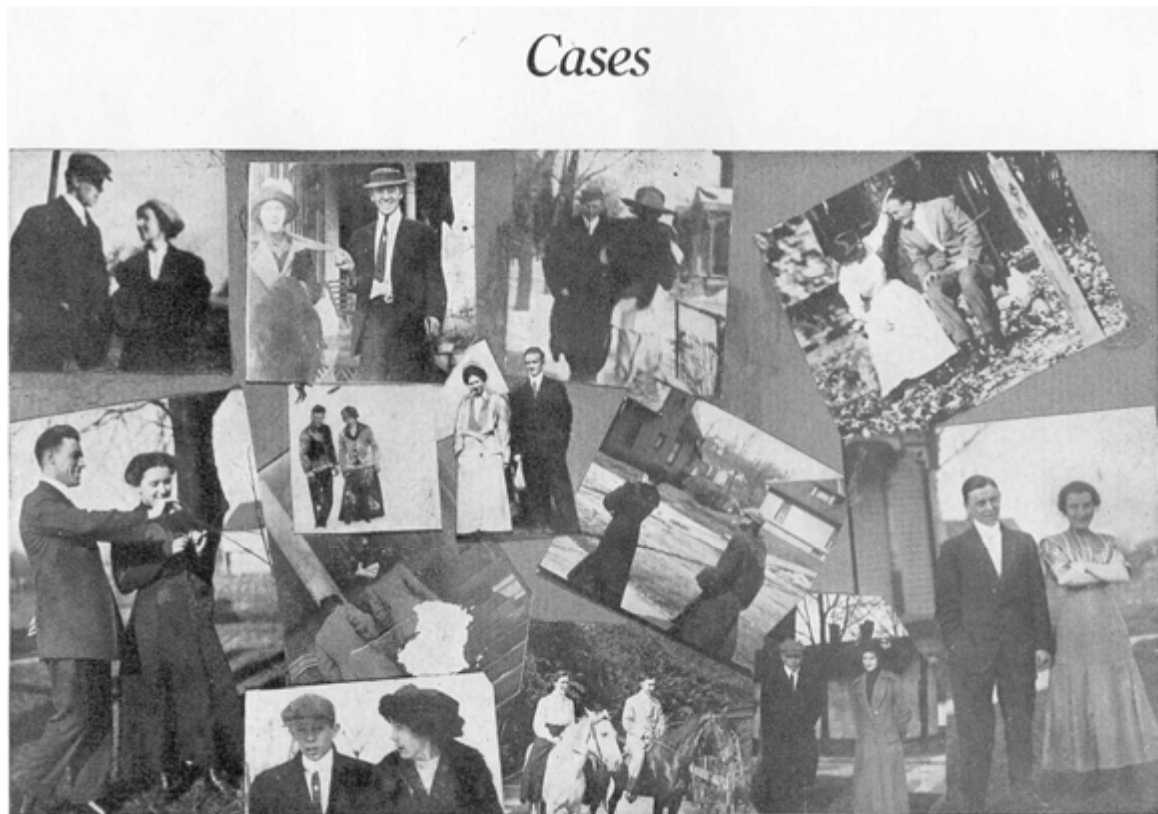


Image 13. Picture of “Cases” from Franklin College’s 1912 yearbook, *The Blue and Gold*<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.



Image 14. Leah and Leo riding horses in the Versailles, Indiana, area, circa 1911<sup>65</sup>

## Conclusion

Leah has been significantly unreal as a person for most of her descendants' lives. As such, her life has been a half-life: half real, half mythic. Annette Kuhn writes compellingly throughout *Family Secrets* on the unreality of a past life – in her case, her own as well as her family's – trying to understand herself by reconstructing “family secrets” through analyses of old photographs and memories of herself and of her family. Yet even with her own memories, she regards herself as a stranger.<sup>66</sup> The unreality of identity, furthermore, is perhaps even more striking in trying to understand historical people, people we have never met. In those cases, we are compelled to reconstruct the past simply to comprehend, as best we can, who those people were and what their importance to us might be.<sup>67</sup> For anyone living today, reconstructing Leah's life and determining whether it is significant to us is an ongoing project which the discovery of this archive enables. The fullness of her life, though celebrated briefly in her own time and for decades after by a scholarly community, has largely been lost because of a lack of familial stories about her. Portelli says that “[a] tradition is a process in

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Kuhn, 1995.

<sup>67</sup> Kean, *London Stories*; Mary Stewart, “Expanding the Archive: The Role of Family History in Exploring Connections Within a Setter's World,” in *People and Their Pasts*, 240-259.

which even mere repetition is crucial, a necessary task; every silence an irreparable tear in the delicate lace of memory.”<sup>68</sup> No one repeated Leah’s stories, so there has been no continuous tradition, the memory irreparably torn. The stories hidden about Leah’s life are not “family secrets,” stories that hide dysfunction and guilt, as Annette Kuhn delineates them. Rather, her husband and other family members hid Leah’s life story, as best as we can tell, because of the pain they felt over her youthful death. Perhaps they did not want her newborn son to inculcate any guilt for her death, as a young child might. Kuhn writes, “[s]ometimes family secrets are so deeply buried that they elude the conscious awareness of even those most closely involved.”<sup>69</sup> Perhaps that was the case with the family and friends Leah left behind. Perhaps they had no conscious intent in repressing her stories or hiding her pictures, but rather, intended to savour her memory personally. Whatever the reasons, the outcome was distinct: since they never transmitted her stories to later generations, her history was all but lost. The later generations simply took the skeletal facts provided to them and clothed them with an iconic image. What remains are individually elaborated facts, images, and impressions.

This article has incorporated excerpts from Leah Jackson Wolford’s papers and differentiated the written words of nearly a century ago with oral history narratives from today. Oral history serves neither as a supplement to history, nor as an enhancement, nor as a minor historical pursuit. Rather, in this initial foray into this particular period of the Wolford family’s history, oral history is the foundation for integrating the family’s idealized understanding of Leah with her newly discovered archive. The archival research will spur elaborations and modifications of any future oral histories by deepening the understanding of Leah as she presented herself. Through her own voice, she will help explicate her life, and the archive as a whole will deepen family members’ understanding of her life, and through her, of themselves.

The oral history/archival integration that has occurred here highlights the interplay of interpretive authority. Katherine Borland has written eloquently on the dynamics of interpretation of family history and folklore: Who has the authority to pronounce and define the history of a family? Borland struggled with the interpretive responsibilities that she shared with her grandmother, Bea, and was able to speak to her about them. Recalling her debates with her grandmother about feminism, she states:

Yet I would emphasize that Bea’s understanding and acceptance of feminism was not something that I could bestow on her, as I had initially and somewhat naively attempted to do. It was achieved through the

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<sup>68</sup> Portelli, 19.

<sup>69</sup> Kuhn, 2.

process of interpretive conflict and discussion, emerging as each of us granted the other interpretive space and stretched to understand the other's perspective.<sup>70</sup>

Creating the same sort of dialogic dynamic with an archive is more limited, since the archive cannot respond to inquiry or directly correct innuendo or interpretation. But the same principle applies: the materials in the archive themselves provide an interpretive competence that the researcher must respect, and this, coupled with correlating material from oral history and contemporary historical records, will create historical representations that will resonate with more nuanced meanings to family members and outsiders alike.<sup>71</sup>

Jon Newman, when discussing exhibits and curatorship, notes that the curator can exercise some control over what artifacts and information to display, but ultimately, the curator has no power to control how people view artifacts. People personalize the artifacts and relate them to their own lives. He cites Walter Benjamin, who had the insight that artifacts have the benefit of being arranged (and thus rationalized and understood) in the present, devoid of the swirl of the contemporaneous ambiguity of their time, production, or acquisition.<sup>72</sup> Mary Stewart, citing Tanselle, notes that "the historian must recognize that an archive of unpublished material is also shaped by human decisions: which documents to keep, where they are stored, and how they are catalogued," thus creating a curated archival collection.<sup>73</sup> Just like viewers of art at an exhibit, people who peruse and use materials from an archive interpret the materials in personal ways. How family members have understood Leah traditionally will influence how they understand the archival information that will emerge, and in a reciprocal way, the archival stories will alter the family member's extant image of Leah. Invoking

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<sup>70</sup> Katherine Borland, "'That's Not What I Said': Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research," in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson (London: Routledge, 1998), 331.

<sup>71</sup> Although this following point is not central enough to the subject of this article to be developed further here, it is important to note that the oral histories coupled with the materials unexplored in the archives dealing with the conceptualization, construction, and final multiple productions of Leah's work on Indiana play-party traditions will provide a parallel correction to her scholarly standing, deepening the understanding of her intentions, expectations, presumptions, even of her aesthetics in developing her original research than has ever been possible before.

<sup>72</sup> Jon Newman, "Memorial Culture, Memory, and Public Histories," in *People and Their Pasts*, 183-185.

<sup>73</sup> Stewart, "Expanding the Archive: The Role of Family History in Exploring Connections Within a Settler's World," in *People and Their Pasts*, 251, citing G. T. Tanselle, "The World as Archive," *Common Knowledge* 8, 2 (2002), 402-406, [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/common\\_knowledge/v008/8.2tanselle.pdf](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/common_knowledge/v008/8.2tanselle.pdf), last accessed on 9 June 2009.

Bruce Jackson's sense of a story's truth, Leah's stories will contribute to each family member's "truth of utterance." Jackson explains that the subjective truth is embedded in a person's mere utterance of a narrative: "Every story implies a theory about what – in the infinitude of detail that comprises any moment in time or is available to an artist imagining one – matters and what does not, what was going on and what wasn't going on."<sup>74</sup> Incorporating Leah's own stories and other materials from the archive will change the character of our contemporary narratives, and correspondingly, of the character of the truths uttered.

Leah's life and her legacy, her work and her family, are as intertwined decades after her death as they were in the frustrating, exhilarating, and mundane moments of her lived life. Although it will take years to fully organize and research the archive, its contents, in concert with the oral history interviews, are already filling in the character and history of Leah Jackson Wolford: her romance and relationship with her friend (then husband), Leo Thorp Wolford; her development from a middle-class country girl to an accomplished scholar, someone with whom the renowned Cecil Sharp wished to cultivate a scholarly collaboration; and her impact on later generations, both academic and familial. Through the archive, she now has a voice to tell her own stories, adding to and shaping, in subtle ways, the voices in her descendants' oral histories.

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<sup>74</sup> Bruce Jackson, *The Story is True* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), 4-5.