

“ ‘He swore His Life was in Danger From Me’: The Attempted Kidnapping of Governor Simon Snyder”

Susan Branson
University of Texas at Dallas

On the evening of July 10, 1816, Pennsylvania Governor Simon Snyder received an urgent letter from his close friend, Philadelphia newspaper editor John Binns. The content of the note must have alarmed Snyder considerably when he read that,

A desperate attempt is planned to rescue Smith from jail. Measures are taken to prevent its success. It cannot succeed. So far I am quite satisfied. The unhappy man knows nothing of what is intended. The infernal Fiend who has caused the murder of her husband and the violent death of him she called her husband is raging with madness and has put all upon the cast of the die. She is now dressed in man's attire and has got three ruffians desperate as herself and she contemplates to seize your person and compel you to sign a Pardon for Smith.

Binns suggested that Snyder should leave his home at Selinsgrove and return to the capital in Harrisburg, urging him to “Do this or do anything else your judgement may direct to guard you against this enraged Tygress[sic]... I beseech you to guard against all the machinations of this Fiend of Hell for a little while and all will be over.”¹ The “Tygress” Binns warned his friend against was Ann Carson. Her rage had been provoked by the sentence of death imposed on Richard Smith, whom Carson had married bigamously in 1815. The circumstances surrounding the kidnapping attempt are dramatic, but if this crime is unique in Pennsylvania history, the circumstances of the crime and its aftermath are even more so. What follows is a recounting of these events, as told by potential victims, perpetrators, and contemporary newspapers.

Carson related her version of the kidnaping attempt in her memoir, which she published in an effort to vindicate herself. Though clearly a biased and decidedly anti-Snyder account, *The History of the Celebrated Ann Carson* (1822) does provide a plausible explanation for the desperate measures undertaken in July 1816. Carson's account of her arrest and trial for conspiracy illuminates tensions in Pennsylvania politics and demonstrates how Carson was able to manipulate her image, and that of the governor, to her advantage. In the struggle between rural politicians and a dominant Philadelphia constituency, the governor's decisions in criminal matters were often viewed more as politics than justice. These perceived biases aided Carson's efforts to portray herself as a helpless victim at the mercy of a cruel and cowardly Simon Snyder.

Carson was not the first American woman to make "crime pay". Rachel Wall's *Life, Last Words and Dying Confession* (1789) included her account of one of her more interesting "adventures." Wall knew that "the ever curious Public [was] anxious to know every particular circumstance of the Life and Character of a person in my unhappy situation."² Carson expressed similar sentiments to her readers, having, as she put it, "so long played the heroine, for the amusement of the public, gratis, it is time they should pay the piper."³ Given the long and colorful history of accounts such as Wall's, Carson knew her story would make a very "saleable book." She was no ordinary criminal, and her crime, which touched the highest offices in the state government, was certainly extraordinary. It also was controversial in its strong condemnation of the governor.⁴

Although female criminals were not rare in early nineteenth century America, the type of crime committed by Carson was. Women infrequently committed violent crimes. Most women were arrested for vagrancy, assault, fornication, or theft, crimes closely associated with impoverishment and limited economic opportunity. In the early nineteenth century, women represented one-third of all prison commitments for minor personal crimes, larceny, and assault and battery. Approximately twenty percent of all criminal court defendants were women.⁵ In contrast, Carson possessed firearms and conspired to commit a violent felony. No other woman or man in the state had perpetrated the type of crime Carson attempted. The most notorious Pennsylvania female criminal preceding her, Wall, was executed in 1789 for assaulting a woman on the public highway and stealing her bonnet. She was convicted of a capital offence because she was a habitual offender, having committed several other robberies, though none of them as violent as her last crime. Although women convicted of assault and battery did hit, kick, pull hair, and punch their victims, they did not, as Carson had, brandish dueling weapons. Carson's crime was exceptional, and the circumstances that led to its commission were equally so.⁶

In her memoir, Carson placed the blame for her behavior on the Governor. According to Carson, it was Snyder's refusal to grant her husband, Richard Smith, a pardon for a capital crime that drove her to desperate measures. Smith had been convicted for the murder of Carson's first husband, Captain John Carson. Although there were extenuating circumstances that should have resulted in a manslaughter conviction, Smith received a first-degree murder sentence, punishable by death. The Governor refused to grant Smith a pardon. Carson and Smith arrived at this unhappy juncture in 1816 largely because of Carson's unhappy marriage with Captain John Carson. Ann's parents had suffered a crippling financial crisis in 1799, and to keep their financial responsibilities to a minimum, Ann married, at age fifteen, one of her father's fellow officers. She did not love him, but she had little alternative but to com-

ply with her parents' wishes. After years of bickering and domestic problems resulting from Captain Carson's alcoholism, the captain left Philadelphia on an overseas voyage. Since Ann had not heard from her husband for three years, she believed he was dead and married Richard Smith in October 1815. Smith was handsome, personable, and, although penniless at the time, he was the heir of a wealthy New Orleans businessman. Unfortunately for Ann and Smith, however, Captain Carson was alive. He returned to Philadelphia shortly after Ann's marriage, and began divorce proceedings against his wife in December 1815. Before legal action could be taken by any of the parties concerned, Richard Smith shot Captain Carson, but did not kill him instantly. The bullet hit Carson in the mouth, and lodged in the back of his throat. Smith was immediately arrested on a charge of assault. Carson lived, in excruciating pain (alleviated by opiates), for two weeks, dying on February 4, 1816. Ann was arrested after the funeral and indicted as an accessory to murder. The charge against Smith changed from assault to murder. Ann recalled that popular opinion against both her and Smith ran high. Sailors in the city seemed particularly provoked by the murder. According to *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*,

So violent was the popular prejudice against me that the most serious apprehensions were entertained for my safety from the fury of the mob; who, to the number of some thousands, had assembled to the funeral. Among these sailors were most vindictive against me; their irritable feelings sought for a victim on whom to wreak their vengeance, and fancying me an assistant in the death of Capt. C. forgot that generosity of character generally attributed to the sons of the ocean towards females, and it is reported, would have sacrificed me to appease the spirit of their late beloved commander and friend; their sanguinary disposition not being satisfied with one victim, nor willing to await the tardy decision of the law.⁷

Smith was tried for murder. Carson was tried separately as an accessory to murder, accused, like Lady Macbeth, of aiding and abetting "the murderous act, by expressions calculated to call forth the courage and the act which caused the fatal event." The prosecution alleged that Carson deliberately schemed to rid herself of Captain Carson by using Smith to commit the murder, and she "counseled this homicide, by suggesting to Richard Smith where he might procure the fatal instrument."⁸ No clear evidence surfaced to substantiate Carson's indictment. Because the prosecutor, Jared Ingersoll, a prominent Philadelphia attorney, and Judge Jacob Rush, advised the jury that there was insufficient evidence to warrant a conviction, Carson was acquitted. Judge Rush thought it appropriate to comment that, in his mind although she was found innocent, there was no question that Carson was "a bad woman."⁹ The

mitigating circumstances in Smith's situation, that Captain Carson threatened to kill Smith, and that Smith fired in self-defense, did not save Smith from a first-degree murder conviction, which carried a sentence of death.¹⁰ Witnesses' accounts indicate that the shooting may have been in self-defense, but the chances that the bigamous lover of a shooting victim's wife would be given the benefit of the doubt were slim. Carson blamed the ignorance and biases of the jurors for Smith's conviction. She claimed that the jurors "were men from the lowest grades of society, apparently ignorant and uninformed, consequently the slaves of prejudice."¹¹

Ann Carson immediately petitioned the governor to grant Smith a pardon, but Snyder refused. Even the jury members, of whom Carson held such a low opinion, petitioned for Smith, arguing that "their ignorance of the law" caused the jury to pronounce Smith guilty.¹²

Carson even suggested that Snyder and his associates conspired to ensure that Smith was executed, contending that,

I might indeed have ceased to abhor Simon Snyder's memory, could I believe that his motives for a refusal to sign Richard's pardon originated in a love of justice, and a desire to deter others from pursuing a line of conduct inimical to the good order of society; but I am too well convinced that no such feeling actuated him. No, no; Richard was sacrificed on the shrine of interest; from motives of policy he withheld a pardon which he feared would injure him in the estimation of the public.¹³

Carson also claimed that Smith's lawyer, Peter Brown, was barred from practicing law for a year because he defended Smith too vigorously and afterwards attempted to obtain a pardon.¹⁴ Whether Snyder did act from political motives is difficult to know, but the *Chronicle* made a point of informing its readers that Snyder "has been in the practice of granting pardons very liberally — and some six months ago he granted one, where the conviction was for the same crime as Smith's."¹⁵

All lawful means of saving Smith exhausted, Carson was determined to liberate Smith from the Walnut Street Jail. Aided by several men who later participated in the kidnaping plot, Carson schemed to bribe the prison guards and secure Smith's release. When bribery failed, Carson, "resolved to blow up the cells with gunpowder" to spare Smith the "ignominious death" of a public execution. In her despair, Carson determined to make one final effort to save her lover from the gallows, planning, "To make a prisoner of Simon Snyder, and holding him in custody till he signed Richard's pardon, and he was released from the walls that immured him." She was convinced that her scheme could work. Her back-up plan, in the event that Governor Snyder was unavailable, was to capture one of the governor's children. Failing that, Carson

planned to kidnap one of John Binns' children because "it was well known he had influence sufficient to induce Simon Snyder to pardon Richard Smith." Since Carson knew that Binns' children often freely roamed the streets of Philadelphia, they would be easy prey for Carson's men.¹⁶ Years later, Binns recounted how,

I had, at that time, a son, who had been christened Snyder, after the then governor. This boy was about five years old, and went daily to school.... [Ann Carson] determined to order those men to seize and secrete the above child, in the expectation that the governor would, from his attachment to me, grant a pardon for Smith, in order to insure the liberation of my child.

In contrast to Carson's account, Binns remembered that his child, not the governor, was the primary target of Carson's plan. Binns claimed that it was only after this first attempt failed that Carson decided to kidnap the governor. According to Binns, it was his refusal to help Carson obtain Smith's pardon that caused her to seek out his son:

She and her mother and other relations, called on me more than once, and labored, with singular earnestness, to enlist my feelings and induce me to use whatever influence I had with the governor, to step between Smith and death. As I could not be prevailed upon to give any satisfactory promise to that effect, it was resolved, by this desperate and devoted woman, to coerce me into her measures.¹⁷

In the more than thirty years between these events and his recounting of them in his autobiography, Binns seems to have mellowed considerably. No longer was Carson a "fiend from hell," but just a "desperate and devoted woman."

Kidnapping the governor did not appear to Carson as either extreme or unrealistic. She believed that she was excluded from "decent" society because of her trial and the circumstances of Captain Carson's death. Her reputation in tatters, she had nothing to lose. Carson was confident that Governor Snyder would agree to her demands once he was captured since, according to some of his friends, Snyder "would have suffered death rather than commit an act derogatory to his dignity as governor; but those persons, should have remembered that he was of mean spirit, and low origin." These were characteristics, supposedly, that would encourage Snyder to readily agree to Carson's demands. She assumed that the governor's fear for personal safety would overcome both his pride and sense of responsibility.¹⁸

Carson took personal command of the attempt. Otherwise, she feared, "the governor might either outbid me, or intimidate the men by threats of

future punishment.” Armed with the dueling pistol Smith had used to kill Captain Carson, accompanied by two recent penitentiary inmates, Henry Willis and Elijah Bowen, Carson rode by carriage from Philadelphia, through Harrisburg and on to Armstrong’s Inn, ten miles north of Harrisburg. Carson kept rough company. Both Willis and Bowen had recently served time in the penitentiary. A third man, Henry Way, traveled separately from Carson’s group, intending to meet up with them near Selinsgrove. But en route to Selinsgrove, Way robbed a drover. Way was immediately captured and taken to the Lancaster jail, where he escaped, nearly killing his jailor in the process. Way was never apprehended.¹⁹ With her two remaining accomplices, Carson planned to lay in wait for Snyder on the road to his home in Selinsgrove. Once kidnapped, Carson planned to take the governor by boat south on the Susquehanna into Maryland, and hold him there until he agreed to sign a pardon.²⁰ It was in Selinsgrove, as they waited for the governor to return, that authorities arrested them and returned them to Harrisburg. John Binns had successfully communicated his warning to Snyder that Carson was in the area. According to Carson, Binns learned of the plot through his friend, Rev. Hurly, a Catholic priest who had learned about it from one of his parishioners, Mary Comellen, who was present when Carson discussed her plans with Smith’s cousin, Mrs Campbell, in Philadelphia.²¹ Such a bold plan put too much at stake for many of those who knew of it; the sentence for conspiracy to kidnap a head of state was life at hard labor.

The evidence of Carson’s intended crime was overwhelming; she was apprehended in the vicinity of the governor’s residence, armed with pistols. She could claim that her actions were performed in the heat of the moment. But the “shrine of interest” that Carson accused the governor of pandering to when he refused to pardon Smith now worked to Carson’s advantage. As she and her fellow conspirators were transported back to the Harrisburg jail, a gentleman flagged down their carriage and asked to speak with Carson. He offered her some advice, suggesting that she not “submit to any private examination, but demand a public investigation of the affair; send for messrs. Elder and Fisher as your counsel, and communicate your business to none else.” Carson followed his instructions to the letter. When Carson appeared in the grand jury courtroom for her indictment, she discovered that this kind gentleman was none other than the judge in charge of the hearing, Joseph Carson (not related to Ann). The attorneys Carson chose (at the judge’s suggestion) were opposed to Governor Snyder’s administration, and they were happy to have the opportunity to place the governor in an uncomfortable situation.²²

Carson’s attorneys had little hope of refuting the allegation that she intended to commit a crime. Their defense strategy was to convince the jury not to take Carson’s plan seriously. To do this, they intended to assert that Snyder’s fear of bodily harm from Carson was not only unfounded, but absurd. Carson

herself was not above seeking a measure of revenge against Snyder, resolving, "to mortify him as far as my power extended." At the Harrisburg hearing, Carson's defense attorney, Mr. Godwin, asserted his client's right to demand that her accuser confront her in court. The judge, already favorably inclined to help Carson's case as much as he could, agreed to the request, "deciding that the governor must come into court in *propria persona*, and make the customary oath on such occasions, or I be liberated according to law."²³ According to Carson, "bets ran high on the occasion" among the citizens of Harrisburg, on whether Snyder would appear. As Carson sarcastically remarked, the question was whether or not, "Simon Snyder, the governor of Pennsylvania, and commander-in-chief of the state military, [would] come into public court and swear his life was in danger from a woman?" Furthermore, would the governor be willing to make this claim, Carson wondered, "in the face of the people of Harrisburg, the seat of government, surrounded by his friends and dependents?"²⁴

Carson and her attorneys relied on the assumption that, placed in such a situation, Snyder would deny that Carson's behavior was a serious threat to him rather than risk public humiliation. Carson also tried to garner sympathy from the court. When Snyder entered the room, she rose from her chair and cried out, "Oh! There is no hope for Richard Smith; that face has not one trace of humanity in it."²⁵

Ann Carson's account of the hearing and descriptions of the principal participants was colored by her dislike of Snyder. It also was written from a retrospective viewpoint. Snyder did force Carson to trial, and he did allow Smith to be executed. Not surprisingly, Carson's description of the governor was not flattering. She informed her readers that Snyder's "advantages, I had understood, were not mental." Nor did he possess "pleasing manners and prepossessing exterior." Instead, the governor had "hard features, thickly pox-marked, with a dark, austere, unbending brow, and a countenance that seemed as if it had never relaxed into a smile, nor melted to soft pity's throe."²⁶ Carson contrasted Governor Snyder's severity with the goodness and benevolence of Judge Carson. While Snyder's expression was "demonic," and full of "pride and malice, panting for revenge," her champion, on the other hand, "beamed with benevolence, intelligence, and humanity."²⁷ Carson clearly relied on the judge to weigh the evidence in her favor.

Snyder was required to read Binns' letter to the court as evidence of the conspiracy. Just as her attorneys hoped, the governor "swore his life was in danger from me." Snyder's admission produced "a general, but smothered laugh in the court."²⁸ But this strategy was only partially successful. Because of circumstantial evidence, the judge found sufficient reason to proceed with a trial. Carson, Willis, and Bowen were detained in Harrisburg for several weeks, and then transported back to Philadelphia. In the meantime, Carson received

two pieces of bad news: her mother had been arrested as an accessory to the conspiracy because she unknowingly carried a letter from Carson to Mrs. Campbell detailing the plan, and Richard Smith had been executed August 10th. Carson's efforts to save her lover were in vain. Worse, she learned that Smith had written a confession, which was distributed as a broadside in Philadelphia. Placing all the blame for his fate on Carson, he related that,

I will not describe the arts and intrigues which were practiced to induce me to take this evil woman to my bosom, a woman who is versed in all the wiles and machinations of that diabolical spirit which possessed the heart of the first of her race, and caused the fall of mankind.

Smith claimed that Carson had "seduced" him into marriage. He cautioned readers to avoid his fate by shunning women like Carson, whose "ways are as 'the gates of hell, going down to the chambers of death.'"²⁹ Carson overlooked Smith's last-minute lapse in devotion; she made no mention of Smith's perfidy in her recounting of events.

Her trial for conspiracy began November 7, 1816, at the Mayor's Court, with Judge Jacob Reed, who had presided at her first trial. Unable to provide bail, set at \$5,000, she spent the months between her hearing and the trial in the Walnut Street Jail. Carson, Willis, and Carson's mother, Mrs. Baker, were present to answer the charges against them. Elijah Bowen had paid his bail and fled.³⁰ Though Carson's Harrisburg attorneys had failed to prevent her indictment for conspiracy, her Philadelphia defense team, consisting of Joseph R. Ingersol, the same lawyer who defended her at the murder trial, Z. Phillips, Thomas Armstrong, Benjamin Chew, and Joseph Loyd, planned a strategy similar to the one used in Harrisburg. Several circumstances worked in Carson's favor: the character of courtroom trials in the early nineteenth century, the trial's location in Philadelphia (where Snyder partisanship was much lower than in Harrisburg), and Carson's demeanor in the courtroom.

Court trials were part of the "grand, free, popular theater" in nineteenth-century urban America. Spectators eagerly awaited sensational trials (publicized well in advance by the press), especially criminal trials such as Carson's. In the crowded rooms of the Old State House, clients, witnesses, lawyers, and spectators crammed together. Much like a theater audience, the spectators booed or applauded, and even the attorneys sometimes played to the crowd with jokes and asides.³¹ Such had been the circumstances at Smith's trial and Carson's first trial as accessory to murder. Even hearings, usually conducted in the mayor's office, were occasions for the curious, sometimes requiring them to be moved to larger venues. Such was the case when Smith was arrested. Because the mayor's office proved "too small to contain the crowd of spectators," his examination took place in the Oyer and Terminer court room at City Hall.³²

Carson's lawyer summed up the evidence against her in an "able, rational, and humorous manner." More importantly, he did an ample job of discrediting the prosecution's witnesses (including the governor *in absentia*), by placing "the whole transaction in so contemptible a point of view, that the court was a scene of mirth and laughter."³³

Carson also had the advantage of being tried in Philadelphia rather than Harrisburg. In the tug-of-war between rural and urban politicians, Snyder's supporters dominated the western part of the state. But in Philadelphia, the opposite was true. Selecting jurors with an anti-Snyder sentiment was not difficult, nor would most of the spectators have disapproved of the defense attorney discrediting their head of state. John Binns acknowledged that this anti-Snyder "party prejudice" was responsible for the trial's outcome.³⁴

Finally, Carson's behavior played on the sympathies of the court and helped reinforce the idea that a conspiracy by a woman was ludicrous. When the prosecutor called Carson a liar for denying she planned a conspiracy, Carson responded in a way sure to evoke sympathy. "Stung to the soul" by the prosecutor's "rude attack on my veracity," Carson recounted that she involuntarily started from my seat, and gave vent to my resentment by observing that my sex alone hindered me from chastising his insolence, even in the court.... I, oppressed by feelings now indefinable, lost my fortitude, and gratified his malice by bursting into tears.³⁵

Carson well understood what she was doing. As she later recounted in her memoir, "Had I been the vilest, basest of my sex, a man would have shown more lenity to me for the sake of my being female." Her strategy worked. The three-day trial ended, "like a flash of gunpowder in smoke." Carson triumphantly proclaimed, "Thus the puissant governor and his coadjutor's malice were defeated by a verdict of *not guilty*." Carson, her mother, and Henry Willis were free.³⁶

Though acquitted of the conspiracy charge, Carson was still required to stand trial on bigamy charges. But wisely, perhaps, Carson immediately left the state for several months. When she returned, her continued involvement with Willis and other criminals set her on a downward spiral checkered by intrigue, betrayal, and more criminal acts, including house robbery and counterfeiting. Carson died after eight months in the Philadelphia prison in 1824. She was thirty-eight years old.³⁷

This sensational crime is barely evident in historical records. Periodically, since the early nineteenth century, chroniclers or journalists seeking a human interest story have revived Carson's bizarre criminal activities. Few of them, however, interpreted her story accurately. William C. Armor, a nineteenth-century biographer of Pennsylvania's governors, stated that Carson and her accomplices were all "given a home in the penitentiary."³⁸ Some writers, including an anonymous Carson family genealogist, glossed over the truth.

There is a reference to the marriage of Ann Baker and Captain John Carson, the birth of their children, and the captain's date of death, but no mention of the circumstances. Other writers embellished an already extraordinary tale. In 1902, the *Philadelphia Ledger* briefly summed up Carson's life, commenting that, "Indeed, female wantonness, in Philadelphia perhaps has never produced a more audacious specimen of depravity and beauty." The most recent mention of Carson appeared in another Philadelphia newspaper in 1961. In a column devoted to Philadelphia's colorful past, the headline referred to her as "The Gay Widow Carson."³⁹ Though the events of 1816 grew out of tragic circumstances, Ann Carson recovered sufficiently by 1822 to write a spirited account of her life. Rationalizing her behavior, Carson informed her readers that "nature did not create me for a non entity, so I became a heroine."⁴⁰

Notes

1. My thanks to John McWilliams for his helpful editing. Correspondence of Simon Snyder Case 76, vol.1 John Binns letter to Simon Snyder, Philadelphia, Wednesday, July 10, 1816. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

2. Daniel A. Cohen, *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace: New England Crime Literature and the Origins of American Popular Culture, 1674-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 121; Robert D. Bethke, "Chapbook 'Gallows-Literature' in Nineteenth-Century Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Folklife* 20 (1970), 2-15.

3. *The Memoirs of the Celebrated and Beautiful Mrs. Ann Carson, Daughter of an Officer of the US Navy and Wife of Another, Whose Life Terminated in the Philadelphia Prison* (Philadelphia, 1838, 2 vols.), II, 79. All quotations are taken from this edition.

4. When Carson's account appeared in January 1823, Binns used his position as editor of the *Democratic Press* to warn readers against it, asserting that it cast "wanton and malignant aspersion of the character and conduct" of Simon Snyder, and was "calculated injuriously to effect the morals of young people." *The Democratic Press*, January 25, 1823.

5. In late eighteenth-century Pennsylvania one-third of all women accused had committed crimes involving property. Theft was especially common in urban centers. In Philadelphia, between 1783-1789, 53 out of 84

cases involving women were theft (other categories were assault and fornication). G.S. Rowe, "Women's Crime and Criminal Administration in Pennsylvania, 1763- 1790," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 109 (1985), 335-424; Allen Steinberg, *The Transformation of Criminal Justice Philadelphia, 1800-1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 43.

6. Cohen, 121, 132.

7. *Memoirs* I, 174. The newspapers described the "immense concourse of citizens, who appeared deeply penetrated with sorrow for his untimely exit." Many of the mourners may have been fellow sailors. On the day before the funeral the papers announced, "The Captain's Society of the city of Philadelphia are particularly invited to attend." *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* and the *Philadelphia Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, February 7, 8, 1816.

8. Anonymous, *The Trials of Richard Smith... as Principal, and Ann Carson, alias Ann Smith, as accessory, for the Murder of Captain John Carson* (Philadelphia: Desilver, 1816), 229-230.

9. *Ibid.*, 236.

10. Smith's attorneys plead self-defense and asked for a manslaughter conviction. They also cited a precedent case, *Commonwealth vs. O'Harra*, 1797. *Trials* appendix, v-vi.

11. *Ibid.*, I, 180.

12. *Ibid.*, 188.
13. *Ibid.*, I, 141-142.
14. *Ibid.*, I, 141-142; *The Chronicle or Harrisburg Visitor* (Harrisburg), August 26, 1816. My thanks to Katherine Elizabeth Thompson of Bucknell University for finding Harrisburg newspaper material for me.
15. *The Chronicle or Harrisburg Visitor* (Harrisburg), August 26, 1816.
16. *Memoirs* I, 195-196.
17. *Recollections of the Life of John Binns* (Philadelphia, 1854), 275. Binns was not the only individual to get the story wrong. Fifty-seven years after Carson's trial for conspiracy, one chronicler provided the following account: "During the administration of Governor Snyder a notorious woman, Ann Smith, alias Carson, formed a bold scheme for abducting the Governor's youngest son, then a lad at school, and for holding him until the pardon of her paramour, who was under sentence of death, should be secured. For this purpose she started from Philadelphia with two hired ruffians, armed to the teeth, and was making her way to Selinsgrove, on the Susquehanna, where the Governor's family resided. The Governor was secretly informed of their coming, and was prepared to receive them....they were all apprehended, and after a trial and conviction were given a home in the penitentiary." William C. Armor, *Lives of the Governors of Pennsylvania with the Incidental History of the State from 1609 to 1873* (Philadelphia: James K. Simon, 1873), 320.
18. *Memoirs* I, 201.
19. Frederic A. Goodcharles, *Chronicles of Central Pennsylvania*, (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1944), vol. VI:322.
20. *Memoirs* I, 197-198. Carson gave no reason for the necessity of conveying the governor across the state line into Maryland. Possibly she assumed such action would delay pursuit by Pennsylvania authorities. Binns asserted that Carson was dressed in men's clothing. No other evidence confirms this. Carson would have received a very different reception at the various inns they stopped at had she been cross-dressing.
21. *Ibid.*, I, 202; and Binns, 275. According to Binns, Campbell communicated directly with him. She had also been the person who warned Binns that Carson planned to kidnap his child.
22. *Ibid.*, I, 203-204; *The Chronicle or Harrisburg Visitor* (Harrisburg), July 29, 1816. Judge Joseph Carson was no relation to Ann Carson.
23. *Ibid.*, I, 208-210.
24. *Ibid.*, I, 210.
25. *Ibid.*, I, 210.
26. *Ibid.*, I, 211. She was equally scornful of the unnamed prosecuting attorney, "an Irish gentleman of some eminence at the bar," whom Carson claimed was drunk in the courtroom and falsely accused her of vicious crimes. "Perhaps Mr.— had his eye on a good fat office at the time he was abusing a woman he had never seen or known except by report." I, 209.
27. *Ibid.*, I, 211.
28. *Ibid.*, I, 212. The Harrisburg newspaper disapproved of this levity. "This case has assumed great importance. Some, however, make light of the matter; which we are by no means disposed to do." *The Chronicle or Harrisburg Visitor*, July 29, 1816.
29. *Confession of Lieutenant Richard Smith, Who is Now Under Sentence of Death for the Murder of Captain John Carson* (Philadelphia, 1816), Library Company of Philadelphia.
30. Here is the charge against Carson: "Charged on oath with having within the said city combined together and entered into a conspiracy for the purpose of obstructing the justice of the country and of releasing by fraud and force from prison Richard Smith then in confinement under sentence of death in the goal of the city and county of Philadelphia and further to compel the Governor of the Commonwealth to grant the said Richard Smith a pardon by seizing his person and restraining him of his liberty, and further by seizing a grandchild of the Governor and a child of John Binns and holding them in duress, etc.", Prisoners for Trial Docket (January 1816 - January 1818), Philadelphia City Archives.
31. Steinberg, *The Transformation of Criminal Justice Philadelphia, 1800-1880*, 18-20.
32. *Philadelphia Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, Monday, January 22, 1816.
33. *Memoir* II, 5.

34. Binns, *Recollections of the Life of John Binns*, 276.

35. *Memoir* II, 7.

36. *Ibid.*, II, 5-7.

37. All of this was related in the second edition of Carson's memoir, published posthumously in 1838 by the co-author of the first volume, Mary Clarke. Recent articles about Ann Carson's life include Susan Branson and Susan E. Klepp, "Private and Public Life of a Working Woman: The Autobiography of Ann Baker Carson" in *Life in Revolutionary Philadelphia: A Documentary History*, edited by Billy G. Smith, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995; for details about her criminal history, see Susan Branson, "Beyond Respectability: The Female World of Love and Crime in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 25 (1996), 245-264. The author is currently writing a monograph on Carson's challenges to the gender

conventions of her era.

38. Armor, *Lives of the Governors of Pennsylvania*, 320.

39. These newspaper articles and the list of marriages, births, and deaths are in a Carson family file in the Pennsylvania Genealogical Society collection at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. The "Gay Widow Carson" article is a clipping with no mention of the name of the paper. Struthers Burt, in *Philadelphia Holy Experiment* (New York: Doubleday, 1946), 309, also briefly mentioned Carson and added: "As for Philadelphia, it regretted her behavior and was puzzled, as it has been again and again in its history, that any Philadelphia girl could behave in such a fashion... Philadelphia has never yet admitted the obvious fact that a woman is a woman first and then a Philadelphian, and not the other way about."

40. *Memoir* I, 49.